

# Choosing The Better Part

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Grand Orator

Like the GMHA viewing the temple to see if any improvement could be made either for strength or ornament, we assemble here annually from here and from afar to take stock of the affairs of the Order and to prepare for the Masonic labors ahead.

These are fruitful meetings well worth the sacrifice, for in this yearly assembly we enrich our knowledge in the affairs of the Craft by sharing each other's experience. The long agenda never becomes monotonous and the discomfort of this crowded hall is overlooked because in the end we take home not only the consciousness of a work well done but also pleasant memories of old and new faces we have met and warm hands we have clasped. Of course, there are also disappointments, but by and large we leave this hall feeling in our hearts that we have somehow advanced the good of the Order.

And yet, for all these, one may ask if we do not, in our concern for the material well-being of the Order, neglect the more important part. For let us not forget that Masonry's primary concern is not with material things but with intangibles of moral and spiritual value. To interchange their positions of relative importance is to miss completely the meaning of Freemasonry.

While Jesus and his friends were in the home of the sisters Mary and Martha, Martha was much perturbed

over the comfort of the visitors while Mary, sitting at the feet of Jesus, was completely absorbed in what the Teacher was saying. When Martha complained to Jesus of Mary's lack of cooperation, Jesus reminded her that Mary had chosen the better part — those things that cannot be taken away.

Sometimes I feel we are like Martha, overly concerned with transitory matters, forgetting the things that endure. Dr. Jose Rizal once said that we are like turtles — we are judged by our shells. Is this the reason why appearances are so important, why the superficial is emphasized over the essential?

In olden days the synagogues were full of people who made a big show of religiousness. Jesus denounced them because they had no real piety in their hearts. Modern churches also suffer from a surfeit of religious pretenders, and like churches, Masonic lodges have a similar problem. The only difference is that church pretenders are hypocrites, while their Masonic counterparts sincerely believe that Masonry is just being a member of a Masonic lodge.

In that belief lies precisely the weakness of Philippine Masonry. Here — and perhaps elsewhere too — the Order is just like a social or business club where attendance and payment of dues are about all that are required to be in good standing.

Incidentally, we, Masons, use the

phrase "in good standing" too loosely. Its conventional meaning is that a brother is up-to-date in his dues. The honor conferred seems too high for the achievement. A Mason should be termed in good standing only if so adjudged by standards more indicative of Masonic ideals. The tragic fact is that from time to time good men, worthy Masons, are dropped from lodge rolls because they can no longer pay their dues.

But it is not surprising that our concept of Masonry is so materialistic. After being raised to the sublime degree, a new brother is told that all is over and he is now a full fledged Mason. If he remembers some of the solemn charges and takes them to heart, the seeds of Masonry have not fallen on barren ground. But often — too often indeed — that is not the case, and the new-brother enters into the Fraternity conscious of no other obligation than to possess a fresh card every year and to be seen at stated meetings.

Masonry is perhaps the most idealistic and spiritual association in the world that is not a religious organization. It aims to make us "living stones" for that "house not made with hands eternal in the heavens." What that house is, Masonic philosophy, I presume, has volumes to say. For me, I am satisfied that it is a spiritual edifice in the form of a Brotherhood of all peoples under the Fatherhood of God, united by the bond of harmony and love. In order to fit into that structure as living stones, we must exert efforts to correct our defects, as stonemasons do with rough stones by the implements of their craft. If I do not misinterpret the message of Masonry, it is the message of Longfellow's "Excelsior" — to ascend to higher

and higher levels; the message of "The Chambered Nautilus" of Oliver Wendell Holmes — to build more stately mansions for our souls; the message of David's Psalms — to reach for the hand of God.

In other words, Masonry is constant striving for a better life toward perfection. Obviously, this is a task where we need Divine help and guidance. And it is here where Masonry and Religion meet. A good Mason is a religious man whatever his persuasion may be, because it is religion that steers him through dark uncertainties as he gropes for light and Truth. It is religion that sustains his faith in the lasting rewards of goodness and virtue.

How poor a concept then have we of Freemasonry when we regard it no better than a club or college fraternity! So long as we do not set aright that concept, Masonry will remain an idle dream never to be realized, while ignorant critics have an easy time distorting its image.

It is a sad irony that in the Philippines, a country that owes its freedom to the libertarian spirit and sacrifices of Freemasons, the latter are treated as a prescribed class by their own people. Today, Masonry is considered a liability in politics and a handicap for career men in government service. Only a few in public office are brave enough not to hide their membership in the Order. If some Filipino Masons are accepted in high society today, it is either because their membership is not known or their importance cannot be ignored. Hence Masonry in our country does not draw membership from the elite any more, as in the glorious days of Rizal and Del Pilar, or even in the time of Kalaw, Palma and Quezon.

Some years ago, the "Cabletow" referred to the case of a brother Mason who had for a dinner guest an important Masonic personage. Noting the absence of his daughter who was a student in a religious school and of whom he was very proud, he sent for her. To his surprise and embarrassment, the girl firmly declared in the face of the guest that she did not care to sit at table with a Mason.

Who was to blame? Certainly not the girl whose young mind was poisoned against Masonry. Not the school run by a sect well known for its implacable hatred toward our Order. The blame must fall on the father himself who did not take his Masonry seriously. Too many of us, like this father, because it is fashionable and we can afford it, send our children to schools and colleges where we are certain they will be indoctrinated against our Institution. On the other hand we keep members of our families out of our Masonic circle and associations. There is the Eastern Star and the Amaranth for our women folks, the De Molay for our boys, the Rainbow and Job's Daughters for our girls. How many of us bring our families to these fine Masonic organizations to expose them to their wholesome atmosphere and at the same time add another link to our family ties? We do not even talk to our families about the goodness of the Order. As a result, they are indifferent to Masonry and, as in the case of that girl, openly hostile to it. And so by being remiss in our duties to our Institution, we give aid and comfort to its detractors.

Hence the persistent question in the minds of many as to who of our leading Filipino Masons today can

assure us that when they die their widows and children will not treat us with disdain, or will deny to us even the duty of paying Masonic homage to the mortal remains of our brothers? What assurance have we that their families will not encourage claims of retraction however absurd? I have deep misgivings. But this let me say: What we experienced in the case of Brothers Tankiang, Camus, Carmona, and more recently General Aguinaldo, will be experienced again and again so long as we do not show in our lives that Masonry leads man along the paths of goodness, morality and virtue. To live Masonically is the best way to argue with those who would condemn the Order.

And so I say it is high time that we improve our perspective of Masonry.

One of the most famous architects of England was also a great Mason. I refer to Sir Christopher Wren whom we are told designed the City of London and constructed great edifices in Europe, among which was the famous Cathedral of St. Paul in London. In building this cathedral, it is said that Sir Christopher employed so many laborers and artisans that many of them did not even know him. One day, so the story goes, he walked among the stonecutters and addressed one of them thus, "My good man, what are you doing?" The man, without even looking up, answered, "I am cutting this stone just like the others." Sir Christopher moved on and asked another man doing the same work the same question. This second laborer smiled and said, "Sir, I am earning a few shillings a day." He walked on a little farther and asked a third man the self same question.

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This third man, however, stood up, thrust his breast out and proudly said, "Sir, I am helping Sir Christopher build this magnificent cathedral!" What difference in thinking and attitudes! No doubt they were reflected in the respective qualities of the men's work.

If the Grand Master were to go down and ask each one of us what we are doing here — in other words, why we became Masons — and if we will answer with candor, we will fall into three categories like Sir Christopher's stonemasons. For is it not true, my brethren, that some of us joined the Fraternity just because others did so, perhaps a father, a friend or an important personage, as did all of Quezon's bootlickers in his heyday — exactly the same reason given by the first stonemason? Then there are those who joined the Order for selfish reasons — a professional after a bigger clientele — a merchant looking for business connections — a nobody after some sort of distinction. They are like the second stonemason, motivated by personal gain.

Happily, there is a third group of brother Masons among us, exemplified by the third stonemason, who understand the grand design of Freemasonry to build for mankind a spiritual temple of love and harmony. They live as true Masons and do honor to the Fraternity. What we deplore is that this group is not larger. But it is pleasant to contemplate what a different society ours would be if we had more of their number.

What is the remedy? My Brethren, I have been stating the remedy in the presentation of the malady.

Nevertheless, suffer me in closing, to impose on you further one brief observation.

I have had the privilege to read proceedings of sister Grand Lodges all over the world. One significant thing I note is that Masonic Education is a major enterprise of many Grand Lodges. In some jurisdictions, institutes are held regularly not only for Worshipful Masters and Secretaries to be instructed in their technical duties, but also for Brothers who seek more light in Masonic usages, history, philosophy, traditions, and related subjects. They provide a well rounded education in the Craft. In the process they instill deeper respect for the Institution and consequently more serious observance of its charges. And while speaking of institutes or seminars, why not of Masonic spiritual retreats? Held periodically in different localities or Masonic districts and properly planned, these seminars and retreats should be educational and inspirational as well as enjoyable.

But above all, there is a crying need for our elders to lead the way by making themselves exemplary Masons — leading religious lives, walking on the level — true brothers to their fellowmen.

Yes, Brethren, it is high time that we re-examine our Masonry. The signs are disturbing. Pick up a newspaper any day and you have a crime sheet in your hand. It looks as if yesterday's delinquencies are the moral standards of today. And this seems to be true everywhere! We cannot dismiss this as the responsibility of the government, the churches, the schools and the homes, for

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Junior Warden	Sampeloc, Manila
Treasurer	Fortunato Ejercito
Secretary	Dominador Kiamzon Felix Gaviño Feliciano Torres

**APO KAHAY LODGE NO. 166**

Wor. Master	Narciso T. Reyes Co
Senior Warden	Tito Catedral
Junior Warden	Arturo S. Lugod
Treasurer	Reynaldo L. Fernandez
Secretary	Salvador L. Mercado 609 Guanzon Ext. Gingoog City

**GENERAL MANUEL TINIO LODGE NO. 167**

Wor. Master	Mariano Q. Tinio
Senior Warden	Felix C. Mateo
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Treasurer	Bonifacio U. Natividad
Secretary	Apolinario A. Tabinog Guimba, Nueva Ecija

**GENERAL LLANERA LODGE NO. 168**

Wor. Master	Narciso J. Martinez
Senior Warden	Marcelo Figuerba
Junior Warden	Emilio de la Rosa
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Secretary	Emiliano M. Ortiz 808 Gen. Tinio St. Cabanatuan City

**JUAN SUMULONG MEMORIAL LODGE NO. 169**

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Senior Warden (Actg.)	Eulogio S. Eusebio
Junior Warden	Virgilio J. Tamayo
Treasurer	German Esguerra, Jr.
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**KIDAPAWAN LODGE NO. 170**

Wor. Master	Buenaventura A. Sabulao
Senior Warden	Ceferino Villanueva
Junior Warden	Alfredo Lachica
Treasurer	William Louh
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Treasurer	Benjamin C. Thorner, PM
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there is no blinking the fact that this is a challenge to our Institution whose symbolic tools are precisely for building order and morality. I do not suggest that we sally forth into the field as crusaders, for Masonry's mission of moral reform begins at home; that is, with our own selves.

To perform that mission is not only to be true to our obligations as Masons but also to contribute effectively in hastening the realization of an orderly, harmonious world which Masonry envisions and for which all humanity yearns.