

*Editorial . . .*

## THE SECRETS OF MASONRY

One of the things about Freemasonry that intrigues non-Masons is the secrets of the Order. Because of these secrets, hostile critics denounce it as a secret society, ascribing evil designs to it.

These critics ignore the fact that churches have private conclaves, businesses have trade secrets, and that every important association or corporation has closed sessions, not open to the public. They also disregard the fact that the Ma- have numerous public functions in and out of their Lodge halls. Further, they fail to consider that many of the world's greatest and most honored men were Masons and that the Fraternity flourishes in all enlightened countries. Only where the authorities cannot stand freedom of thought and expression and the independent quest for Truth is our Order suppressed. It is, therefore, unreasonable for anyone to resent the fact that Masonic Lodge meetings are for Masons, any more than they would criticize other associations or clubs for being exclusive.

But what are the secrets of Masonry? They are the modes of recognition. All else about the Order, its teachings, tenets, principles and history can be found in every encyclopedia, in hundreds of books authored by members of the Order; and its rules and regulations, edicts, activities, membership, officers and even its finances are printed in numerous organs or publications of Grand Lodges and of individual Lodges. All these are available for perusal by any interested person.

The privacy of Masonic initiations is related to the adoption of secret signs and passwords, a brief discussion of which will here be presented.

Freemasonry has come down to us from antiquity almost untouched by changes in time, tradition and customs. Most

of what it is today have been transmitted from the past including its symbolisms and secrets venerated by the years.

The fraternities of old were associations of craftsmen called guilds that were largely protective in nature. There were guilds for various trades such as those of tailors, shoemakers, metal workers and carpenters, who enjoyed privileges given by kings to practice their trades under laws peculiar to them. For the perpetuation of their associations, all of them had provisions for the introduction into their guilds of youths who were instructed by Masters and who had to go through periods of preparation as Apprentices.

By the nature of their work, however, Masons were different from members of other guilds. Shoemakers, for instance, worked in the place where they resided, and they had work brought to them. They knew each other well and, because of this intimacy, they needed no safeguards against impostors or invaders from other places. On the other hand, Masons had to go to their work. Their activities were not confined to the locality where they lived. Many times they had to travel to erect buildings in distant lands. Large edifices usually required Masons exceeding in number those who were available locally, and workers had to be secured from other places. Because it was a highly specialized craft, caution was necessary to prevent the admission of Masons who were not qualified for employment — impostors without the necessary skill in the art or who had not passed through the apprenticeship as prescribed by the rules of the Fraternity. Writing was almost wholly unknown and Masons then did not have, as we do now, the convenience of carrying letters of introduction or written certifications of proficiency when travelling to engage in their profession. Hence the necessity for adopting modes of recognition, and for this purpose they adopted secret signs and passwords. Thus, the cumbersome and tedious process of examining prospective workers for proofs of their skill were obviated, and in this way, too, legitimate Masons were enabled to recognize easily each other and accord hospitality and necessary assistance to one another.

The secrecy of present day initiations and conferral of

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degrees also has a historical background. In ancient times the craft was divided into classes or degrees. While initiations do not differ much in all the degrees, a marked advance in skill was required to attain a higher one because of the differences in the respective wages earned. Consequently, the sign and password of Master Masons were different from those of Fellowcrafts; and Apprentices had their own. For this reason, the ceremonies of initiating and advancing members were protected from prying eyes even of Masons whose degrees did not entitle them to witness the particular proceedings.

All these have been preserved with relatively minor mutations from the hands of time, making the Order one of truly great antiquity. Even its transition from Operative to Speculative Masonry did not produce significant changes; and so to this day Masons keep most of the traditional practices of their predecessors — symbolisms, secrecy and all — even though they no longer work on stones but “build temples in the hearts of men” because they are not only time-honored but also time-tested in the work of converting Rough Ashlars into Perfect ones.

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