

"HOW BIG IS YOUR MASONRY?"

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As we go about our daily tasks and engage in the many activities of this modern day we are prone to take ourselves and the things around us quite for granted. The many blessings that we enjoy—life, liberty, the pursuit of happiness, friends, bounteous supplies of material things to satisfy our physical wants, and great religious, educational and social institutions to beautify and adorn our cultural life — all too often, by most of us, are given little thought or appreciation.

There are many aspects of this situation on which one could dwell but the topic I have chosen to discuss is, I hope, very pertinent to you and to this meeting. We have assembled in fraternal fellowship to review the accomplishments of the past year and to plan for the activities of another year. It is meet that we pause in these deliberations and indulge in a little self analysis wherein our Masonry is concerned.

Masonry is the oldest and the largest of our modern day societies—a great institution founded on the tenets of brotherly love, relief and truth, teaching the principles of the Brotherhood of Man, the Fatherhood of God and the Immortality of the Soul. It is social; our meetings may be held for degree work, business or pleasure—often a combination of all these features. There may be social pastimes, refreshments, informative programs or perhaps we just fraternize and get to know our brethren better. Masonry is charitable; from the very beginnings of Masonry aid, protection and service to a brother and his family has been inculcated in its teachings. It teaches great moral truths with the aid of mason's tools as symbols, an adherence to which, enables its members to 'live the good life' and to "shape themselves as living stones for that house not made with hands".

Now, brethren, I wish to profound in your minds a question. It is one that I am quite certain that many of us seldom consider and if we dismiss it as of little consequence. The question that I would have you consider with me is: *How BIG Is YOUR Masonry?* You will note that I have emphasized two words—"big" and "your"—not how big are you or how big is Masonry—but how BIG is YOUR Masonry?

Have you ever asked yourself that question? I am certain that when each of us can truthfully answer this question and find ourselves satisfied with the answer that then will "the honor, glory and reputation of the institution be firmly established and the world at

large convinced of its good effects". More important still is that then also will each of us labor diligently at shaping our lives according to the designs laid down on our earthly trestleboard by the Great Architect of the Universe.

Perhaps this all encompassing question cannot be answered in any definite way. I don't suppose that any one of us can fully determine in our minds just how big is our Masonry but I would have you consider it with me under three separate headings.

Let us call the first one INFORMATION or what do you know about Masonry? I am sure you will all agree with me that in order to be successful or accomplished in anything one must have some knowledge or skill in the field. Why then are so many men satisfied to be Masons without knowing very much about Masonry?

Now, obviously, I cannot expound on or enumerate to you all that one should know about Masonry. I merely wish to point out the need for Masonic Education. It is becoming increasingly apparent that many of our members do not have the proper knowledge and background in Masonry. This is of much concern in practically all of our Grand Jurisdictions and has been the subject of many meetings and conferences.

I would point out that knowledge in Masonry does not begin and end with the ritual. It is also important that we know something of the background of Masonry—a general knowledge of where, when, and how Masonry had its beginnings — in other words, know Masonic history. It is more important that we also know something of Masonic jurisprudence, that is, our lodge and the Grand Lodge is governed, what rights we have as individual members and as lodges, and what place custom and usage or the unwritten laws of Masonry have in the government of the craft—all very necessary information to help us to know and understand Masonry.

The very perpetuation of the craft depends on what we know and understand about Masonry. Masonry has evolved far from the ancient days when operative masons took an apprentice who worked for seven years to learn the arts and skills of the craft. Today much of the knowledge that is required to become a well informed Mason will "reveal itself to the candid inquirer"—yet it is essential that we create in the newly made Mason a desire for that knowledge and we cannot possibly do that without having a considerable amount of that knowledge ourselves. North Dakota and many other Grand Jurisdictions either have or are establishing the Mentor System and other

devices whereby well informed brethren instruct and teach the newly made Mason. Yes, my brother, what do you know about Masonry?

The second thought I want to bring to you is APPRECIATION, or what does Masonry mean to you? Is the lodge a place where we take a series of degrees and acquire a certain esteem that may be associated with them? Do the lessons taught by Masonry have little meaning in our associations outside the lodge room? These last two questions are admittedly of an extreme nature but the world judges us and the lodge by the interest and appreciation we show about Masonry to the world. Information and appreciation are very closely related. There can be little appreciation without information but the best informed Mason if he does not appreciate or value that for which Masonry stands is not a Mason in the true sense of the world.

The Mason who really appreciates his Masonry will attend lodge whenever possible, serve cheerfully on committees when asked, and generally conduct himself as an honorable, industrious, and useful citizen in the community.

The third point to which I would call your attention may be called CONSECRATION, or what do you do for Masonry? Consecration is a word, that I am convinced, many of us shy away from. We think of consecration only as binding us unequivocally to a sacred cause, but in a broader sense it is a devotion to any cause or course of action. It is putting into practice or earnestly working for and with that which we know and appreciate. Consecration is dependent on knowledge and appreciation for a proper course of action. The most consecrated without a thorough understanding may do any cause a great disservice.

What place does Masonry have in your life? Do we practice Masonry and Masonic principles to the extent that we are able? Perhaps I have conjured in your mind a picture of a most exemplary workman—one who knows all about Masonry and loves the fraternity wholeheartedly—one who devotes his life to and gives his all for Masonry.

It is well that we have a goal or an ideal but it is not my purpose to imply that we all should or could be a Preston, Mackey, Pike, Haywood or Claudy. I do want to impress on you that each of us can in our own way and to the extent of our abilities work for Masonry and that for which Masonry has always stood.

Albert Pike, the great American Masonic scholar of the nineteenth century, in an address before the Grand Lodge of Louisiana in

1858 made this statement which I believe applies to us here today just as truly as it did to those Masons a century ago. Listen to this:

"The true Mason . . . occupies himself with what is near at hand. Right here he finds enough to do. His Masonry is to live a true, honorable, upright, affectionate life, from the motive of a good man. He finds evils enough, near him and around him, to be corrected; evils in trade, evils in social life, neighborhood abuses; wrongs swarming everywhere, to be righted; follies crackling everywhere, to be annihilated. 'Masonry,' it has been well said, 'Cannot in our age, forsake the broad way of life. She must walk in the open street, appear in the crowded square, and teach men by her deeds, more eloquent than any lips.'"

When I was a boy, I read avidly all the books in the Tarzan series by Edgar Rice Burroughs that I could buy, beg or borrow. As you may know, these were more or less impossible adventure stories of a half civilized, half savage Englishman who had been reared in the jungles of Africa by a band of apes or gorillas. Of the many stories that I read, the only one I can now recall with any detail is one entitled, "Tarzan and the Jewels of Ophir." Ophir is a fabled city of antiquity where Solomon is said to have gotten the gold for the Temple, and is supposed by many to have been located deep in the heart of ancient Africa.

Tarzan, in one of his adventures came upon the ancient site. The civilization and the city that had once flourished so lavishly was in ruins—the only inhabitants a band of fierce, vicious, half human, half ape-like creatures ruled over by a white Goddess or priestess who, the reader was led to believe, was somehow a throwback physically and intellectually to the superior race who had many generations ago built the city.

The scene that I remember best was of a religious sacrificial rite where these beast-like creatures were gathered around an altar and being led in their ceremony by the priestess who was chanting a ritualistic service. These lowly creatures were responding in a language and by forms that had long since ceased to have any meaning for them and was far beyond their meager comprehension.

I don't know whether the author was being cynical or pointing with ridicule at some of the forms of our present day civilization but I do believe that there is something here that could well give us food for thought. We certainly, by no means, have descended to the depths of the scene just depicted but I wonder if we, to some

extent, are not losing sight of the real meaning of Masonry and the responsibilities that we have as members of this noble fraternity? Is not the real meaning of our ceremonies too often lost upon both the recipient and the participant? Is not the edification and instruction of our newer members in many instances being neglected and the service we owe to our brethren and to our fellowmen often times avoided or forgotten?

Brethren: These are serious and soul searching thoughts that I wish to leave with you. They are as vital to you as they are to me—in fact they are vital to the very existence and perpetuation of Masonry of today. Let us all give ourselves and our Masonry a thorough self-analysis and then resolve to go forth to work as this little poem by Past Master A. S. MacBride entitled, "The Working Tools", so aptly admonishes us to do:

THE WORKING TOOLS

Go, work on mind and matter now,
A Master raised to power art thou,
Impress on each and all you can
Wise Heaven's eternal Temple-plan.
As on a trestle-board portray
The great design from day to day,
And build in silence rever'n'tly,
The temple of Humanity.

Yes, my brethren: How BIG is YOUR Masonry?

WAITING FOR OPPORTUNITY

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and devotes himself heart and soul to the work of that office, can hardly fail to secure a tangible return for his efforts, in the form of a handsome total on his list.

This is the opportunity waiting for every brother alike—the initiate or the P.M.—for there is no limit to the number of brethren who may act as steward, and, unfortunately, no apparent limit to the number of worthy applicants for the benefits that are offered; and we are convinced that activity in this direction would not only prove a worthy outlet for ambition, but would be the stepping-stone to higher things.