

TRULY PREPARED

by: Unknown

Why do so many Masons lose interest in Masonry and drift away from the Lodge? Why do the majority retain only a nominal relation to the Craft? Why is it that hardly 10 percent ever attend any meeting of the lodge, and a still smaller number take an active part in its affairs? What is the meaning of these facts, and how can the problem which they raise be solved?

Such questions are much in the minds of the leaders of the Craft everywhere. It is a condition, and not a theory, that confronts us. The influx of members during the Great War, and in the years following it, has subsided. In some states the number of initiates has fallen below pre-war days. The vast mass of those who came in on the impulse of war-time are now numbered among the casual Masons. The feeling grows that something is wrong, and that we must seek to set it right, if we are to have an alert and active Masonry.

Just now The Masonic Service Association is working on this problem with the leaders of the Grand Lodge of Massachusetts, and we beg to give here the findings arrived at, both as to the meaning of the fact and the method of dealing with it. Clearly we have failed "to set the Craft to work and give them proper instruction," or else they would not drop out of our membership, or regard Masonry as merely another Order to "belong to" and nothing more. To that end, we must begin at the beginning and lay the basis of a real Masonic life.

What is needed is extra-ritualistic preparation of the man applying for the Degrees before, during and after his reception into the Lodge. Of the three the first, if not the most vital, is surely profoundly important, and it has been almost entirely neglected. Let any man recall, if he can, his state of mind regarding the Craft when he knocked at its door, and he will realize that he had but the faintest idea of what Masonry is and of what it meant to be initiated into it. The method now proposed takes account of that fact, and takes him in hand as soon as he has expressed a desire to join the Lodge, and even before he has made his application for the Degrees.

In this way, by making strict inquiry of an aspirant for the Degrees to see if he has in him the stuff of which a Mason may be made, no end of embarrassment may be avoided, and the Craft Strengthened or protected accordingly. The first duty of the committee, as well as the last, is to see whether or not the man before them has the qualities of character which will enable him to add to the good name and integrity of the Craft, and also whether he will actually make such a contribution. In short, is he in his daily life and acts going to be a Mason, in fact, or in name only?

Such information or impression can be obtained by examining him as to his attitude toward Masonry. Why is he applying? What induced him to take this step? What is his

opinion of Masonry and upon what does his opinion rest? It should be emphasized, in plain terms, that his privilege of membership in the Craft carries with it certain obligations that will rest upon him toward the Craft. It must be explained to the applicant that it is the business of Masonry to teach the virtues of the moral life - chastity, charity and service - and his known attitude in regard to these matters ought to determine whether he is a man fit for the fellowship of the Fraternity.

Also, care must be taken to impress upon the applicant the fact that the moral life obtains its sanction and authority from Spiritual Faith. He ought to be asked, not obtrusively but candidly and earnestly, his ideas regarding God. If he has not clearly confronted his mind with the Supreme Reality, he ought to be asked to do so. No man who is uncertain about God, or who treats the idea of God as a piece of Lodge furniture, has any place in a Masonic Lodge.

It is important that an applicant should know what duties devolve upon him as a member of a Lodge. Such as acquaintance with the ritual and other items of Masonic information. Attendance upon the Lodge as a duty, and whether or not he is in a position to attend. Whether he is willing to assist in the work of the Lodge, by serving on Committees or otherwise. As to his financial obligation - can he afford what it will be necessary for him to spend?

When his petition has been voted upon, along with his notice of election the applicant ought to receive a copy of the pamphlet entitled "Preparation," with the request that he read it carefully. After he has received the entered Apprentice Degree he should be given a birds-eye view of Masonry, so to put it, showing geographical distribution in Grand Lodges, both at home and abroad. He will realize that Masonry encircles the earth, but is strongest in America, where three-fourths of the Craft live and toil. He ought to be told of the leading men in the State and the Nation who are and have been Masons, if only to let him see what kind and quality of men the Craft attracts and develops.

It is not an accident that Masonry lures strong men and makes them stronger. Its teachings are the basic principles of civilized society, the very ground-work of Church, State and Home. Every man needs to realize that the truths of Masonry are not secret, but only the method and symbols by which they are taught. The parts of our ceremonies which are secret ought to be pointed out, and the candidate cautioned about disclosing what he has received.

Those who "Post" the candidate on the "Work" of the Degree ought to tell him something of what it means, after the manner of the "Intenders" in the old Lodges of Scotland. Such a book as "The Symbolism of the Three Degrees," by Street, is useful for this purpose, not that it should be read to the candidate, but its facts told him as he goes along. He should know the use of the Tools of the Craft, the meaning of the Great Lights - especially the Great Light; its teachings about Brotherly Love, Relief, and Faith; its cardinal virtues of Temperance, Fortitude, Prudence and Justice.

As in the Scottish Lodges, the obligation should be explained, particularly the figurative character of its penalty, and the fashion in which the oath was sealed and why. He ought to know the Due-Guard and Sign of the Degree, and when and how they are to be used in the Lodge. It is not enough to tell him these facts. He ought to be fully clothed, and asked to enter and retired from the Lodge in the proper manner. A candidate is in novel surroundings, and while he does not remember all that is told him, it is not easy for him to forget what he acts out.

In a like manner, the Second degree is to be studied, showing in what ways it differs from the First, in the greater inclusiveness of the obligation, as well as in its emphasis upon the arts and sciences, with particular reference to Geometry and its meaning and use by the Craft. The initiate is asked to read The Masonic Service Association Bulletin 3-5-7 before taking the third degree. It is a pity that neither the ritual nor the lecture tells us the meaning of the Great Degree, which has in it the sublime secret of Masonry and of life itself. All effort must be made to get the initiate to grasp the truth with which it deals - the truth of the Eternal Life.

Having received the Degrees of Masonry, an initiate needs to know something of the regulations of the Craft, its constitution, its Landmarks; and the nature and authority of the Grand Lodge under whose obedience he lives. It is only fair to tell him the relation of the Blue Lodge to other Masonic Bodies, both York Rite and Scottish Rite; and in a way to emphasize the supremacy of Craft Masonry. It will be useful for him to know that the Shrine, the Grotto and other such organizations, while made up of Masons, are not Masonic any more than any club made up of Masons is Masonic. More important still is the etiquette of the Craft, in the Lodge and outside, and the discretion necessary in making himself known as a Mason, or in responding to the advances of others.

Such simple things about Masonry and how to use it ought to be taught every Mason in the Lodge; and such extra-ritualistic instruction the Grand Lodge of Massachusetts proposes to give the men who enter its fellowship - using the literature and other helps prepared by The Masonic Service association. It is hoped that other Grand Lodges will take up the plan, or some other equally good, in simple fairness to men who are made Masons - that they may be duly and truly prepared for the better appreciation and service of the Craft. Some of us, looking back, wish very much that we had been thus set to work and taught the meaning and uses of our tools.

The adoption of such a plan by an old and great Grand Lodge marks a long step in the right direction - a new epoch in Masonic education, of which we have heard so much and seen so little result. It is like a dream come true, the full meaning of which few can realize save those who have worked and planned for years to see it become a fact. Such things we can do together, each borrowing from the wisdom of the other. Those of us who had to wait long and work hard for information about Masonry which should have been taught us by our mother Lodge, look with envy upon the young men of the Old Bay State.