

A Masonic Lodge is Not a Service Club

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Many of the Craft fail to properly differentiate between the objectives of Freemasonry and those of the popular modern service clubs. Each has a definite sphere of service; each is important-yet they follow separate paths. The timely article on this page clarifies the primary differences and points out the basic reasons why Freemasonry can never function as a service club.

Right Worshipful Brother Laurence Healey, the author, is a native of Ireland. He served as a captain of British infantry in World War I and subsequently in the Civil Service of his homeland. In 1922 he migrated to Canada, joined the Canadian Civil Service and presently holds an executive position in the Public Service, Vancouver, BC. For 26 years he has been a member of Southern Cross Lodge No. 44 at Vancouver and was its Master in 1932. He was District Deputy of the Grand Master in 1941; chairman of the Committee on Masonic Education and Research and editor of the Grand Lodge publication, "Masonic Bulletin," for eight years, and was elected Junior Grand Warden in 1949. He is a member of both Rites and of the Philalethes Society.

In the history of our time, the first half of the twentieth century will be noted for many things. World-shaking events have followed each other in such rapid succession as to over-shadow many of the trends and movements in the social order which accompanied them. Notable amongst the latter, on the North American continent, has been the phenomenal growth of organizations [dedicated] to humanity. The multiplicity of service clubs and similar associations which have been organized during the past twenty-five years in particular is somewhat remarkable. To the keen observer it would seem as if men (and women too), throughout the country during the years following World War I, had become intensely conscious of the vital import in the words of the Great Master who said: "Not everyone that sayeth unto me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter into the Kingdom, but he that doeth the will of My Father." The desire to be up and doing appeared to be the motivating force. Many of these organizations, whose names are household words, and whose activities are widely publicized, have great achievements to their credit. Vast sums of money have been collected and dedicated to human betterment. Untold hours of labour have been contributed by devoted members towards the advancement of the various projects which they had undertaken to support. Blessings of many kinds have come to countless thousands as the result of their activities are truly noble endeavours to translate principles into practices, ideas into realities, and faith into works, through the effort of doing.

The worthwhile accomplishments of these organizations, and the favourable publicity associated with their activities, have been disturbing factors in the life of Freemasonry during that same period. In discussions about their Craft and comparisons with these other institutions many of our members, from time to time, advocate a programme of similar activities, and evince a desire to copy their methods and introduce them into Freemasonry. In some instances even Masters and officers of lodges have endeavored to implement their ideas along these lines.

Sincere and enthusiastic brethren sometimes give expression to their feeling of disappointment at what they term as the failure of the Craft to put its principles into practice or to measure up to its ideals, when it apparently ignores the problems of the outer world which are crying for a solution such as Freemasonry could provide. They feel a sense of frustration like unto those in the parable, who stood idly in the market-place because no man had hired them, though there was much work to be done in the Master's vineyard. They are waiting for the Craft to send forth a clarion call to active service in some great cause, some worthwhile project that will capture the imagination and harness the enthusiasm of the members for spectacular action. It is claimed that Freemasonry is suffering by comparison with these other organizations operating in competition, that it is losing to them many of its keen, young members who are attracted by the more colourful activities associated with their operations, and that its influence for good must decline if it continues to remain within the cloistered walls of its lodges while outside the world bleeds.

As an indication of this trend of thought among freemasons we are reminded that a few years ago, when the Grand Lodge of British Columbia was celebrating its 75th anniversary, the idea was expressed that it would be a fitting occasion for the Grand Lodge to send forth a call to the Craft throughout the province to undertake some great project in public welfare, which might glorify the closing quarter of its century, and be worthy of its great inheritance of past years. A similar suggestion, but in the form of a definite recommendation, was placed before the Grand Lodge of Alberta about two years ago, which received wide publicity in the press at that time, concerning the problem of youth and the establishment of a masonic farm training centre in the province.

These trends of prevailing thought amongst freemasons present a very definite challenge to all those who are placed in positions of responsibility for the guidance of the Craft in these trying times, and the question under consideration here is, perhaps, the most important to be discussed by this Conference, or by any similar assembly of masonic leaders today. In the masonic design the major effort is directed toward the development of character and improvement of life and conduct in the individual man, who is mentally, morally and physically qualified to benefit from the teaching, and who has the avowed desire to learn and to improve. By a peculiar system of ritual and ceremonies great principles of morality and virtue are inculcated, which help to build him up into a better man and a better citizen.

Freemasonry is unique amongst human institutions, for it is evident that its pattern was drawn under divine inspiration from the accumulated spiritual wisdom of the ages. Its lessons are derived from the powerful drama of life and death as portrayed in its allegories, where the ultimate meaning of life is interpreted in terms of moral and spiritual values which fortify the soul against the trials and vicissitudes of life. By keeping the great principles of Truth, Honour, Charity and Justice strong and active in the lives

of individuals, Freemasonry believes that goodness and honour in society must result from the presence within it of men who are actuated by these high principles, and whose desire shall be to mould the life of the world nearer to the masonic ideal. When every freemason carries over into his particular sphere in society the great precepts of the institution, an inevitable impact is made upon the whole life and transactions of mankind. Raise, and set in motion, the spiritual potential of Freemasonry, and a force is thereby generated that can transform the world.

Other organizations may find opportunities for service in seeking to ameliorate the sufferings and hardships which result from maladjustments of the social system the effect of wrong and evil in society. But Freemasonry seeks to apply its age old, tried and proven philosophy to the cause the sources from whence most of the ills of humanity spring. It deals in principles rather than in projects, in the dissemination of ideals rather than in programmes of self-advertisement. Men can agree on principles and ideals without necessarily agreeing upon the particular method by which they may be applied. to some specific problem. Rivalries and contentions over the merits of various projects, and the methods by which a plan of campaign might be undertaken, would sow the seeds of dissension in the body of the Craft, while it is the very essence of Freemasonry that unity of purpose in all essentials be preserved among its members, if the beauty and harmony of the structure is to be maintained.

A masonic lodge may be likened to a school, or university, where men who have passed the qualifying examination go through a course of study in science and are the scientific application of moral and spiritual truth to the art of right living. Its graduates, having learned that Freemasonry is a way of life, a quality of life to be lived day by day, go out into the world and give practical effect to the principles and ideals which they have acquired in their training as craftsmen. In the secular college or university, the student is taught principles of engineering, agriculture, law, medicine, and various other subjects, then, having graduated, he goes forth to apply his knowledge in the world to operations of commerce, industry, transportation, and the thousand and one other activities which make up our economic system. But no one puts forward the suggestion that the university itself should enter the field of engineering as a corporate body and proceed to develop some hydro-electric project, or set up its own factory for the manufacture of automobiles, or foster similar projects designed to carry into practical effect the principles which it teaches to its students. No one expects it to do so, neither could it undertake such activities without serious detriment to its usefulness as an institution of learning devoted to study and research and to the training of youth.

Why, then, expect the university or college of Freemasonry to sponsor projects, or embark upon adventures outside the scope of its organization, or beyond the design of its peculiar system? Why should its timeless glory, as an Institution dedicated to the teaching of moral and spiritual principles, be tarnished by the corroding influence of petty rivalries amongst contending claimants for its sponsorship of their particular projects, whether political, civil or religious. Surely it cannot be suggested that, like the Biblical Esau, it should sell its sublime inheritance in the eternal verities for the mere pottage of public acclaim at its transient success in the operation of some project, however laudable. Without inviting defeat, confusion, and ultimate decline, the Institution of Freemasonry cannot deviate from the great design on its trestleboard - the making of freemasons building the temple of living stones. Just as the university graduate carries his acquired skill, with the honour of his Alma Mater, into the world of commerce and industry, so the masonic graduate carries his skill, and the honor of his Ancient Craft, into the world of thought and ideas, of life and conduct, where men may see his good works and be inspired by his example. Thus masonic ideals and principles overflow into the life of the community, the city and the nation. And if our community and national life does not reflect that quality of higher idealism which should come from the presence therein of such a large body of freemasons, then the important task of the moment should be to so strengthen and improve the quality of lodge membership as to increase the power and influence of that overflow, rather than to dissipate our energies following a will-o-the-wisp of temporary schemes and projects.

Other institutions which are organized for service activities, and which play such a prominent part in public life, owe much of their success to the presence in their ranks of many keen and enthusiastic members who received their training in masonic lodges. In many cases the majority of those actively engaged are members of the Craft who adopt this method of putting their masonic ideals into practice. But there is no conflict of interests. There is no competition between these bodies and our Ancient Institution. Freemasonry was not designed for such a purpose, neither is it in the masonic scheme, nor in any part of its basic foundations.

Perhaps, a fitting conclusion to this presentation of the question for consideration may be a quotation from a recent address by one of the most distinguished Past Grand Masters of the Craft, His Majesty King George VI, when he said: "English Freemasonry has behind it the experience of nearly two and a half centuries of steadfast adherence to fundamental principles, and I believe that a determination to maintain the values which have been the rock upon which the Masonic structure has stood firm against the storms of the past, is the only policy that can be pursued in the future."

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