

Why This Confusion In The Temple?

Chapter I

INTRODUCING THE SHOCK TREATMENT

Applying a Shavian witticism to present-day Freemasonry, the author of "Whither Are We Traveling?" asserts that not only do Master Masons need to be shocked, but they need to be shocked pretty often.

ONCE UPON a time the labors of the Craft came to a standstill. There was confusion in the temple. A trestleboard, which long had displayed the designs of a master workman, was blank. Like sheep without a shepherd, the workmen wandered about idly. No longer was there a sense of direction; order had given way to chaos. A noble Tyrian in whose mind the designs had been conceived had been stricken down in the performance of duty – *not by enemies from without the temple, but by foes from within.*

The extent to which a legend may be repeating itself in American Freemasonry today may be open to dispute, but certainly no man can challenge the premise that the Craftsmen are not at their labors. And few, I daresay, will take issue when I suggest that there is indeed confusion in the temple.

Regrettably, the analogy ends there. Designs of a sort are on the trestleboard, but are they designs of master workmen? From where I view the scene they are not. Rather are they the faulty sketches of amateurs. All too often our idle workmen are confronted with patterns foreign to the style and purpose of the temple we are erecting. Sometimes I feel it would be far better if the trestleboard were entirely blank than to try to build a structure of beauty and majesty with plans that are fundamentally unsound.

AT THE RISK of offending some of my friends, I submit that in American Freemasonry today too many fertile minds are having too many bright ideas. And those bright ideas-if we can dignify them by calling them bright-bear little or no evidence of a sense of purpose or direction. It is as if each workman were attempting to take the place of the Master Builder, and making a sorry job of it.

Here and there may be heard an occasional voice calling for calm reasoning, pleading that we stay on the track. But too many of our leaders far too many-are running in all directions at once, advocating almost everything the human mind can conceive. "Lo, it is here!" cries one, while another proclaims, "Lo it is there!" And out of all the confusion there appear the inevitable nostrums as fantastic and incredible as they are prolific. If taken seriously and followed to their logical conclusion, they would indeed mark the beginning of the end of Speculative Freemasonry in the United States.

Only one panacea to my knowledge has not been advanced (and I am almost afraid to mention it) : Not yet have I heard a Masonic leader advocate a remodeling of the Ancient Landmarks so that

Women may be admitted!

WHAT DO I mean by all this scornful reference to bright ideas? Specifically, what am I talking about?

Two years ago I raised the question, *Whither are we traveling?* Over a twelve-month period I probed the body Masonic with a ruthlessness that caused some of my Brethren to wince. To their everlasting credit let it be said that by and large, Master Masons accepted the whiplashing with good grace. Even though not in agreement with all the conclusions Of that soul-searching, an amazing number of them observed that it was a refreshing interlude to leave off self-glorification for a season and engage in Some frank self-examination.

In the concluding chapter I pointed the finger of ridicule at the Masonic Gimmick Manufacturing Company, Unlimited, which, I said, is "working overtime devising stunts to 'modernize' Freemasonry, to put it in line with ten thousand other organizations that clamor for the attention of the Tribal American."

Of course I know now that "gimmicks" was not the proper word, for they are more than that. Perhaps I should have described them as Prescriptions of the Masonic Medicine Men. At any rate, here is the way I enumerated them:

L: Abandon the "free will and accord" rule which has placed our Craft far above the mine run of societies and permit outright solicitation.

L: Ape the service clubs. Get busy on "projects" galore in the best Babbitt fashion.

L : Go into the organized do-good business in a big way. Find an area of the human body that has not been exploited. Exploit it. Set a quota, have a kickoff dinner, ring the doorbells.

L : Subsidize other organizations right and left, and, in the doing, ignore, neglect and starve the parent body.

L : Feminize the Fraternity. Carry "togetherness" to even more ridiculous extremes than we have already.

L : Hire press agents to tell the world, like Little Jack Horner, what great boys we are. ("Masonry is not getting its *proper share* of publicity," complains one Grand Master.) Never mind actions; concentrate on words.

L: Imitate Hollywood. Stage an extravaganza. Bring in all the groups that ever fancied themselves remotely related to Freemasonry. Form the parade, blow the bugle, beat the drums, and cheapen the Fraternity.

L : Let Freemasonry "take a position" on public issues of the day. Stand up and be counted (assum-

ing, of course, that the position our Craft takes is in line with our own pet prejudices).

L: Go all out for materialism. Raise money; spend it. Build temples, institutions. Subsidize; endow. Whatever can be had by writing a check, get it.

L: Centralize, centralize, centralize. Pattern Freemasonry after Washington bureaucracy. Let nothing be done modestly by an individual or a Lodge; do everything on state or national level the super-duper way. Make a great to-do about local self-government, but accept no local self-responsibility.

AT THE VERY outset, may I hazard two guesses:

First, that every Masonic leader of any stature in the United States today has heard all ten prescriptions advocated in one form or another, and,

Second, that an appalling number of readers, finding in that list a cherished idea, will bristle and inquire, "Well, what's wrong with that?"

One time several years ago I was engaged in small-talk with a friend on some of the food combinations we had observed that to us seemed rather odd. We mentioned sugar on sliced tomatoes, the peanut butter and ketchup sandwich, custard pie smeared over with mustard. Then I recalled with a shudder the time I had seen a man pile an ample helping of strawberry preserves on top a curdling mass of cottage cheese.

"Well, what's wrong with that?" my friend countered in a flash. We both laughed. It was plain to each of us what we had been doing. We had been in complete rapport until I had poked fun at one of his own concoctions.

Thus, the confusion in the temple is compounded by the fact that many present-day prescriptions have some degree of merit. Not all of them are completely vicious, ill advised though they may be. It is not a situation wherein all is black or all white. In many instances the shades are gray.

But the trouble with all the prescriptions is this: On the surface they may appear innocent enough, but each is fraught with grave dangers; each is capable of setting in motion forces that would destroy American Freemasonry as we have known it. *And what shall it profit us if we gain new members by the thousands - whole regiments and armies of them and lose the soul of Freemasonry in the doing?*

IN THE NEXT several chapters I hope to examine all prescriptions here outlined and subject them to the acid test. And with me the acid test is not whether a prescription will add new members or whether it will give occasion for newspaper and TV publicity. To me the acid test always must be, *Does the prescription comply with the fundamental usages, customs, philosophy and purpose of Ancient Craft Freemasonry, or would it necessitate a change in the character of our Craft which would make it something other than Freemasonry?*

By now I daresay you have suspected that I am not going to "buy" any of the prescriptions, for I do not believe them to be sound. In experimenting with nostrums there is always the possibility that the "cure" may be worse than the illness.

My position on each bright idea may be stated in advance and with utter simplicity: *We had better think it through.* There are no signs on the horizon that any of them have been thought through just yet. The very fact that immature and irresponsible schemes are advanced at all is evidence of our lack of thoughtful consideration.

Sadly enough, in excitable America one who challenges Sacred Cows or questions pet theories must run the risk of having his motives misunderstood. It is possible that I may be labeled a tool of Soviet Russia before I am through, since that is one of our favorite methods of disposing of all who point out our weaknesses. But I trust there will be a few level-headed Brethren who will appreciate my deep concern for the future of our Craft and at least give me credit for sincerity.

What a shame George Bernard Shaw was not an American and a Freemason! His razor-sharp wit could have worked wonders for us just now. It was Shaw the Inimitable who, without knowing it, advocated the only sensible treatment I have seen for Freemasonry's first trip to the clinic. Hearken unto the wisdom of GBS: *"The plain working truth is that it is not only good for people to be shocked occasionally, but absolutely necessary to the progress of society that they be shocked pretty often!"*