

Chapter 2

Into the Highways and Hedges

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

ASSEMBLE IN ONE room a half-dozen Masonic leaders of any Jurisdiction, or any group of Jurisdictions, in the United States today. Get them to talking about Freemasonry, its present and its future. I am willing to place a small wager that within 15 minutes one of them will say, "Well, it seems to me that sooner or later Masonry is going to have to face up to reality and discard the foolish notion that a good man, highly esteemed in his community, may not be invited to petition for the degrees."

"You're exactly right," another will affirm. "Why, I know a man in my home city who undoubtedly is more highly respected than anyone I have known in my lifetime. I heard him say once that he always had had great admiration for Masonry, but he never had joined because no one had ever invited him."

"I can tell you one even better than that," Number Three will say. "I can show you a Grand Master who waited until he was past forty before he petitioned. He was wondering all the time why he had been invited to join numerous organizations in the city, but the Masons never had asked him."

"Of course I wouldn't be in favor of going all out with a campaign, or anything like that," Number One will assure us. "I just think there should be some dignified way whereby we could invite high type men to petition."

And so on, and so on, far into the night.

Never yet have I heard a Master Mason, however irresponsible he might be, advocate an outright membership campaign. (No one just yet proposes that the door be opened quite that wide). It would all be dignified, understand. Only top-flight men would be invited. And right away, almost, our numbers would increase and the prestige of the Fraternity would start upward.

It all seems so simple.

Well, it isn't simple. *We had better think it through.*

JUST HOW SERIOUS is this discussion about the desirability of diluting the safeguard which has placed our Craft head and shoulders above other fraternal organizations?

I should like to believe that such Masonic leaders are just talking to hear their heads roar, but I am afraid their talk cannot be brushed aside so easily. More and more, we are hearing expressions on the subject which would have been regarded with horror a half-century ago-and which, by the way, are regarded with horror *today* in the greater part of the Masonic world.

Here are just a few straws in the wind:

-The fact that the subject has even been discussed at four of the last eight Conferences of Grand Masters in North America.

-The Grand Master of an American Jurisdiction instructing his District Deputies that "dignified, intelligent approaches can be made to good men who would make good members," and that although "no direct, open solicitation is permitted or desirable, (yet) let us ever be alert to inquiries when they come.

-The Grand Master who encouraged each Lodge to have a "Booster Night," and when that appeared a little too obvious, altered the name of the rose to "Masonic Friendship Night." Technique is this: An open meeting at which men of high character (of course) are invited to hear a speaker describe what Freemasonry is. Questions are encouraged. A booklet is presented each guest, but no petition unless said guest should request it. Host is encouraged to follow up within a week or so to see whether booklet has been read. If guest has not read it within four weeks, his name is marked off as a prospect.

"Such meetings as these," we are assured, "serve the purpose of bringing to the attention of desirable men what our organization is and what it stands for. This is its only purpose and nothing should be done in notices or in any other manner to in any way savor of membership solicitation."

-The Grand Lodge committee reviewing the Booster-Friendship Night project treating free will and accord with something bordering on scorn: "Our Grand Master has been deeply influenced by the tradition which would suggest that a man must knock with bruised hands before the doors of Masonry would swing open," the committee says. "We all agree with him that there should be no indiscriminate appeal for members. However, we live in a different social situation. We can no longer 'fold our hands and wait' . . . To paraphrase his obvious restraint his advice might be, 'Present a strong right hand in fellowship but leave the left hand free to lift an application from the inside pocket.' "

ALL RIGHT, let's think about that Dignified-Intelligent-Approach-to-Good-Men theory for just a moment. Once we depart, or even stray, from the practice that has placed Freemasonry above the level of mine run societies, what forces are we setting in motion?

1. Well, in the first place, he who thinks a program of invitation could be controlled, discreet, dignified, so that only men of high caliber would be invited, is living in a fool's paradise. The late Senator Robert A. Taft of Ohio probably didn't say it, but at least he gets credit for the pungent remark that "a little inflation is like a little pregnancy; it keeps growing." Inelegant though it may be, that is an epigram worthy of *Poor Richard's Almanac*. And we can mark it down that a little inviting would be just about as discreet, just about as dignified and just about as capable of control as a little pregnancy.

Of course every responsible Master Mason thinks he would invite only the cream of the community to petition for the degrees. But what reason do we have for thinking that our membership at lar@e, representing all walks of life and all strata of society, would confine its efforts to the cream of the community?

The time-honored rule of no solicitation and no invitation; the principle of free will and accord these can be understood by any Mason. A diluted rule in which there would be just a *wee bit* of solicitation and a *wee bit* of invitation, and in which free will and accord would no longer mean what it says-that can be understood by no one.

Modify the old principle ever so little and every man becomes the judge of what is proper and what is improper; what is good taste and what is poor. Once the door is opened, however tiny the crack may be, who

is naive enough to think it can be closed again?

2. Any relaxation of the free will and accord rule would serve to cheapen the Fraternity. I am old enough now that I enjoy reading the newspaper columns telling what happened 25 and 50 years ago. Just a few months ago I came across a paragraph that gave me a jolt, because I remembered the incident well. The District Deputy of a fraternal organization had won the trophy offered by the governing body of the State for having secured the most new members during a specified period. That was the beginning of the end for that fraternal society. It is not yet completely defunct, but it might as well be.

Yes, and I remember the time when as a young newspaper man I covered a great wing-ding at which a prominent political figure was initiated. The gathering attracted men by the hundreds. The privilege of staging the initiation was the "prize" offered the local chapter which could secure the greatest increase in membership. The chapter which was in the limelight that night has not been heard from in years, and the VIP, after a year or two, was suspended for non-payment of dues.

If we abhor the thought of Freemasonry exhibiting similar poor taste, we had better not unleash the very forces which bring about just such exhibitions.

3. Has no one considered the fact that an invitational system for Freemasonry would be unfair to the man so invited? Twenty-five years ago Carl H. Claudy was saying the same thing in a Short Talk Bulletin which all of us need to read and re-read: (MSA: "Seek and Ye Shall Find"; Sept. 1939.)

"To ask a man to become a member of the Fraternity is not only a violation of one of the unwritten laws, but a positive injustice to the man. He who joins a Lodge, not because he wants, but because another wants him to, necessarily misses, for life, something in the Ancient Craft which other men possess and hold dear. It is human to value that for which we labor, try, strive, get by our own efforts. It is also human to hold as of little value and small worth that which comes unsought, which is easy to get, which requires no effort.

"With the most loving intentions and highest hopes, many a father has laid a petition to his Lodge, together with the required fee, at the breakfast plate of his son when the young man reached his twenty-first birthday. And many a father has seen those high hopes dashed, when his son took little interest, gradually lost touch and finally demitted or was dropped NPD. It is one of the tragedies in the lives of ardent Freemasons-without intending it, they killed that which they loved the best!"

4. All the rituals of Craft Freemasonry that I know anything about would have to be discarded. Let the Brother who wants a "discriminating appeal" go to his Craft Lodge some night when the Entered Apprentice degree is being conferred. Let him listen carefully, and mark down every phrase that would cease to apply if the candidate no longer came of his own free will and accord. Let the restless Brother go back for the Fellow Craft degree; for the Sublime Degree. Then let him ask himself, "When the time-hallowed rule of free will and accord no longer means what it says, what will be left of Speculative Freemasonry?"

5. Thus, to abandon our historic position, or even to relax it, would mark the beginning of the end for Speculative Freemasonry as we have known it. Once we renounce our ancient principles and practices, our beloved Craft becomes just another organization, of which there are hundreds. Once we compromise with expediency, once we disregard the future to gain the immediate good, we might as well adopt the old French proverb, "After us, the deluge!"

For come the deluge will. As the late Carl H. Claudy observed, mushroom growth dies like the mushroom; what is quickly built is jerry built. We have only to recall the circus tent evangelist to know how rapidly the

backsliders can equal the conversions. Most of us can remember how the Ku Klux Klan rose like a meteor in the American firmament -and how quickly it collapsed. (MSA: "Seek and Ye Shall Find"; Sept. 1939.)

"Yes, we can increase our numbers in Masonry," says Grand Master LaMoine Langston of New Mex. ico, "*but we may lose Masonry while we are doing it!*"

PICTURE IF YOU CAN the utter inconsistency of the Booster-Friendship Night in which Master Masons are expected to tell desirable men "*what our organization is and what it stands for.*" Why, the very fact that an appeal, however discerning, is going on at all is ample evidence that far too many Master Masons have no clear conception of what our ancient Craft is and what it stands for. It still is true that "if the blind lead the blind, both shall fall into the ditch."

In 1943, when Freemasonry had been through years that were really lean, a Grand Master of California was pointing out the fallacies in the tiny-bit-of-solicitation theory. Reasons advanced for solicitation, he said, are three: (1) To get the men who, through ignorance, wait to be asked, and never being asked, are lost to the Fraternity; (2) To get outstanding men of ability who know they will never be asked, but who think they are too busy to become Masons; (3) To insure a membership increase.

Numbers One and Two, Grand Master Smith declared, are directed at a relatively minor group and offer no assurance of success. "Merely to ask does not guarantee acceptance on the part of the other person," he said, "and in this case, *rejecting of the invitation would prove worse than failure to apply under our established system.*" Number Three he termed "so obviously an evil as to merit no serious consideration."

THERE SHOULD BE NO "indiscriminate appeal" for members, the label on the Soothing Syrup bottle says.

No, of course not. The appeal must be thoroughly discriminate but an appeal it is nevertheless.

Whence comes all this talk about "dignified, intelligent approaches"? Is it Ancient Craft Freemasonry which advocates a relaxation of the very standard which has made it great? It doesn't sound that way to me. The voice may be the voice of Jacob, but the hands are the hands of Esau! (See Genesis 27: 22.)

And we had better be getting back on the main track-back to our Symbolic Lodge-becoming acquainted again with its usages and customs, refreshing ourselves with its ageless wisdom. For once the Craft Lodge departs from its moorings, all Freemasonry will pay the penalty.