

Chapter 6

Ruffles on the Apron

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

THE PICTURE ON THE front cover of a women's magazine of national circulation¹ tells the story. The baby is splashing in his little red bathtub on top of the kitchen sink. Daddy is clothed in a dainty, frilly little apron, shirt sleeves rolled up, bath towel thrown over one shoulder. To the wall above the sink there is fastened a note in feminine handwriting. It reads:

"Darling—(1) Test water. (2) Not too much soap. (3) Dry and powder everywhere. Back at 8:30."

When my good friend Paul W. Grossenbach, Grand Secretary of Wisconsin, was called upon to discuss frankly some of the problems that face present-day American Freemasonry at the Conference of Grand Secretaries in North America in 1959, why did he use that magazine cover as the "text" for his address? Simply because he had been keen enough to observe trends that many other Masonic leaders either had missed or ignored.

Because my friend from Wisconsin is a gentleman, he spoke only of "togetherness" in the home and outside the Lodge hall as a factor affecting Freemasonry. Because I am *not* a gentleman, I am going to be bold enough to point my index finger at "togetherness" *within* Freemasonry as a factor which I believe is affecting our Craft, and affecting it adversely.

LET ME HASTEN TO SAY that I am a member and Past Patron of the Order of the Eastern Star, and proud of it. I am realistic enough to know that many and many a Lodge hall in Indiana would look like a dreary, barren, unsightly second floor warehouse were it not for the Chapter of the Eastern Star which shares the meeting place.

Yes, and I love the ladies as much as anyone. Years ago I was advocating that each Lodge have a ladies' night once a year, and that certain Lodge and Grand Lodge ceremonies be open to the ladies. I was not prepared for what happened, although perhaps I should have been. Despite my familiarity with the American practice of moving from one extreme to another, it did not occur to me that our Brethren would go to such preposterous lengths; that we would approach the place wherein a Lodge of Freemasons is scarcely able to turn a wheel unless the ladies are present!

What happened to bring about the movement towards feminization of the Fraternity?

Well, far be it from me to attempt a scientific analysis of trends in our American society. Others have done a far better job than I could do—and what they say about the American male is none too flattering. From where I view the scene, I simply would observe that it is difficult to tell these days which sex is putting forth the greater effort—the women to be more like men, or the men to be more like women.

Any way you look at it, the performance is absurd. The American male probably needed to be civilized, but certainly not feminized; the American woman needed to discard her baby doll role, but there was no call for her to go overboard and become an uncouth, swaggering, pants-wearing showoff.

BUT TO GET BACK to feminization: H. L. Haywood, in his classic book, *The Newly-Made Mason*, advances one of the most interesting theories I have ever encountered.² Describing what he terms the "Masonic Community" of the Middle Ages, he tells how the operative craftsmen lived together as a group and worked together as a body. The quarter in which they resided, within the shadow of a cathedral, perhaps, was called the Masonic Community.

In such a community it was only natural that men should develop the spirit of fraternalism, fellowship, charity, religion and thought, for, as he points out, "men who live together as well as work together have everything in common . . . They could not be indifferent to each other if they wished, because whether at home or at work they were kept continually together . . . There is no mystery as to why they left so much fraternalism to us Speculative Freemasons because the first Lodges of Speculative Masons inherited not the old Operative *Lodges* only, but the whole Masonic community. Wives, families, children, widows, orphans, relatives and friends were in the circle of the Fraternity from the beginning ..."

Then Haywood goes on to tell how one of the most unfortunate consequences of the anti-Masonic movement of the eighteen-thirties and 'forties came with a radical swing of the pendulum. For its own protection, perhaps, Freemasonry became a *secret* society in the most narrow and isolated sense. The inevitable reaction after many years was the formation of "all manner of growths, good and bad, which under a wise leadership would have had a normal growth inside the Fraternity itself."

"Not one of these extramural, or extra-curricular, or quasi-Masonic associations would ever have been constituted," he says; "in no instance would any need have been felt for one of them, had we in the United States kept firm hold of the ancient and fundamental fact that it is the Masonic Community as a whole, and not the Lodge only, which is the basic unit of the Fraternity in any local jurisdiction."

It would appear, then, that the original damage may have been the work of our Masonic forbears of the Nineteenth Century. But if we continue to permit the pendulum to swing in the opposite direction to an extreme even more ridiculous than isolationism, *then that is our own fault, here and now, in this mid-Twentieth Century.*

AM I MAKING A MOUNTAIN out of a molehill, perhaps? Well, let's take a quick

look at a few things that are going on:

—In one American Jurisdiction, Master Masons tried to persuade Grand Lodge to change the time of year for installation of Lodge officers in order that the Lodges might have joint installation ceremonies with the Eastern Star. (It was voted down.)

—In another Jurisdiction, a Grand Lodge committee commended the Grand Master highly for having made 24 appearances before Eastern Star groups during the year. I believe my memory is correct when I say that about one visitation in three was to an O.E.S. Chapter.

—I remember the occasion when a Lodge wrote to say it was purchasing a lighted emblematic sign

for its Temple and wanted to know which emblem should come uppermost—that of the O.E.S. or the Square and Compass.

—Yes, and I haven't forgotten the angry Brother who wrote one vitriolic letter after another because it seems the Brethren would not display a photograph of the head of a ladies' organization in the Lodge hall!

—Then there was the time when a Lodge was determined to make alterations in the script of one of Carl H. Claudy's Masonic plays so it could be presented at a ladies' affair—and was not interested in presenting any play at all unless it could be "coeducational."

—There was the Jurisdiction, too, in which a *Master Mason*, mind you, acting on behalf of a ladies' organization, conducted a campaign to place in every Lodge hall an emblem which completely denies the basic universal quality of Freemasonry. The emblems were installed, and nothing was done about it.

—Every year I review between 70 and 75 addresses of Grand Masters to their Grand Lodges. Out of the 49 Jurisdictions in the United States, about one Grand Master out of every five feels compelled to outdo all predecessors in paying compliments to the *Little Woman* and publicizing all her activities. Several years ago I came across one that reminded me of a gushy Valentine Day message. It was so sissified in content as to be downright mawkish. To top it off, the Grand Master concluded with home-made verses that were asinine beyond description. Interestingly enough, *it is only in the United States that such things occur.*

—Then there was a Grand Master who went so far in his address as to assert that "if it were not with the approval and co-operation of our ladies, a Masonic Lodge *could not exist.*" And I recall the utter disgust with which a Reviewer in British Columbia read that statement, and how it did not have a leg to stand upon when he got through!

DO I HEAR SOMEONE protesting that I have cited only a few exaggerated examples, and that they are not typical? All it takes is eyes to see and ears to hear.

Have you noticed who is participating in the installation of Lodge officers these days? I can show you a newspaper clipping describing an installation at which "the Eastern Star gave the procession, response and song." Just where a procession, response and song by a ladies' organization can be introduced with propriety into the ceremony for the installation of Lodge officers, I do not know.

Have you detected what has been happening in the observance of Past Masters' Night? I was utterly appalled the first time I learned a Past Masters' Night, *of all occasions*, was to be a ladies' affair.

Have you observed what is going on in the presentation of the Award of Gold for 50 years a Mason ?

Have you taken note of the reluctance with which some Lodges have accepted the Table Lodge tradition in observing the Feast of St. John the Evangelist? (You see, the Table Lodge is a tyled Lodge open only to Masons!)

Have you seen how difficult it is to persuade some Lodges to attend divine services in a body and as a Lodge on the Feast of St. John the Baptist and to keep it a *Masonic* occasion?

Perhaps one who is a Masonic speaker can detect what is happening more clearly than anyone else. Time was when I received countless invitations to speak at *Masonic* gatherings; rarely do I receive an invitation today for any kind of function other than one open to ladies—oftentimes the children as well. And the Brethren expect a "Masonic" speech under such conditions! I have developed several different ways of saying no.

WHEREIN LIES THE FAULT? Shall I be chivalrous and blame only Master Masons? Shall I be a first class boor and blame the ladies? Or shall it be a little of both?

Sadly enough, I cannot let the ladies go scot-free, for I have observed too many incidents over too long a period of time to ignore what is plain as day. Never can I forget the outraged lady who flounced into my office to protest the action of a Lodge in rejecting her son's petition for the degrees. When she left her temperature still was above normal, for while she was there I gave her a brutally frank lecture on Master Masons who talk too much and Master Masons' wives who are unable to mind their own business.

On many and many an occasion I have talked with Worshipful Masters so browbeaten that they literally had to get down on their knees and beg for the use of the Masonic hall for Lodge purposes . . . and with building committees trying to erect or remodel a Temple to conform to Masonic purposes and stay within the limits of their resources when the ladies were calling the shots.

I am not prepared to say it is common occurrence for the ladies to meddle in Lodge policy matters, but I can say it happens too often. Even once in a hundred years would be too often.

The all-time record, I believe, was reached when I heard the spouse of a distinguished

Mason tell a story about something that had happened "when we received the thirty-third degree!"

NOTWITHSTANDING the fact that there are far too many women trying to behave like men, I am convinced that the trend towards feminization of the Fraternity is not primarily the fault of the ladies, nor of the ladies' organizations. Our own Brethren—far too many of them—have become so thoroughly indoctrinated with "momism" that they live and breathe "togetherness." We have not yet overthrown the Ancient Landmarks so that women may be admitted officially, nor have we revised the ritual for their accommodation. Not yet. But I shall not be surprised any day to find a Lodge in which the Brethren have ruffles on their aprons.

In every community, I suppose, there are a few mannish females who by sheer aggressiveness and avoirdupois seek to push their way into groups in which they do not belong, and to dominate them. But they are the exception. I am convinced that, by and large, the ladies do not wish to feminize Freemasonry, nor to manage its affairs, nor to have a voice in its councils, nor to determine its policies. They are content to maintain a dignified auxiliary relationship. They are proud of that relationship, and they would be proud to see their husbands and fathers and sons and brothers enjoying the fellowship of the "Men's House."

But the menfolk—poor, cowering creatures—are insecure. They are reluctant to venture out to the "Men's House" unless they are safely attached to Mom's apron strings!

As a result, the movement in our Lodges in the direction of "togetherness" has long since passed the point of being ridiculous. How long American Freemasonry can remain Freemasonry in the face of such a trend, I do not know. This much I do know, however: our leadership has literally abdicated in favor of the "family" idea, and Masonic fellowship has been one of the casualties.

THEN where do we go from here? I wish I knew.

Really, now, wouldn't it be for the good of all Freemasonry to get back on the main line and bring this silly move towards feminization to a screeching halt?

My dear Brethren, can we not confine our all-consuming zeal for "togetherness" to the bridge clubs and the bowling leagues? Even the service clubs manage to get along with only four ladies' nights a year, and to keep functioning in the meantime when the ladies aren't there!

Honestly, don't you think the ladies would love and respect us just as much if we were to go our own way, as we are expected to do, and to keep Freemasonry the great institution of men banded together by a common tie and for a common purpose that it is expected to be?

For my part, I believe the ladies will like us even more if we are just ourselves—just men, if you please, without the effeminate fussiness which seeks to make everything co-educational. Ruffles on the apron will add nothing to our dignity nor to our effectiveness!

1 Ladies Home Journal, February 1959.

2 Quotations by permission of the Masonic History Company, publisher, 2300 S. Michigan Ave., Chicago, 111.