

Chapter 7

Hammers, Axes, Tools of Iron

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Hire press agents to tell the world, like Little Jack Horner, what great boys we are. Never mind actions; concentrate on words.

FOR MORE THAN seven years, Solomon's superb model of excellence was under construction on Mount Moriah. From the quarries came blocks of stone hewn, cut and squared ready to set in place, and transported with prodigious effort by the most primitive means of transportation. Tied together in great floats, majestic cedars from the forests of Lebanon came by sea to Joppa and thence slowly and laboriously overland to the Holy City. The designs were conceived by the Master Builder of the age, and from his skillful hands came masterpieces in gold, silver and brass. A widow's son he was, from out of Tyre.

Strange as it may seem, the craftsmen labored without envy, discord or confusion. Even the elements cooperated, for the legends of Josephus tell us there was no rainfall save at night in order that the work might proceed without delay. So near perfection was the finished Temple that it appeared to have been done not by human hands, but by the hands of the Great Architect Himself.

And it was all accomplished without the use of hammer, axe or any tool of iron!

Could it be done today?

Could our modern Speculative Craft engage in even the most simple of undertakings without the loud clash and clatter of attention-attracting devices?

Suppose a great temple is to be erected in mid-Twentieth Century on some American Mount Moriah. Can you not hear the discordant din and clamor of every advertising technique known to man as present-day craftsmen go forth to raise the funds ... to persuade Brethren to donate a cedar tree or a block of stone ... to obtain publicity in all the newspapers and TV stations from Dan to Beer-sheba ... to give King Hiram of Tyre the "hard sell"?

SOMETIMES I THINK the First Book of the Kings may be trying to convey more in the story of the tools than a mere recital of details of a building operation. Might it not contain a bit of allegory, as is true of so many of the episodes in Holy Writ? Could it be a gentle exhortation to quietness and modesty? Or perhaps a means of illustrating how beautiful the spiritual temple can be, and how much greater the achievement, when it is erected without the accompaniment of that which is loud and harsh and coarse?

Strange words, I daresay, to be coming from one who was trained as a newspaper man

to use one of the media of mass communication. But remember, I am speaking now as a seasoned Freemason. Remember also what I said in the opening article of this series: that the prescriptions offered by the Masonic Medicine Men are not all completely vicious. Many of them—yes, most of them— have certain elements of merit, and all of them appear innocent enough on the surface. Yet each is capable of setting in motion forces that could destroy American Freemasonry as we have known it.

NOW AT THE VERY OUTSET let us get the distinction between Masonic public relations and an all-out campaign for publicity on the airwaves or in the public press. The one we could not escape if we would; the other is a cheap and unseemly activity far beneath the dignity of our Fraternity, carried on by those who think the beginning and the end of public relations lies in filling the scrap-books.

When we have a story to tell that is newsworthy and in good taste, there is no reason why we should not tell it. But the building of favorable public relations is not measured by newspaper space. On the contrary, Freemasonry can be placed in a ridiculous position before the public by an ill-advised and all-consuming appetite for attention at any price.

I am one who believes that just such a situation can happen all too easily. Should we abandon our historic position of dignity and restraint and throw open the doors, it requires but little imagination to visualize what could happen. To control the quality of public information about the Fraternity is just as impossible as to control solicitation of membership, and the damage can be just as devastating.

WHY DO I VIEW with alarm? Let's see how the wind is blowing:

—In one Jurisdiction in the United States a Committee on "Public Relations" was created a few years ago. It sounded good. But when the committee made its first report to Grand Lodge it let the cat out of the bag, for all it had done in the way of "public relations" was to prepare canned releases for the press and TV stations.

—In another Jurisdiction a newly-formed Committee on "Public Relations" announced its real objective to Grand Lodge when it said: "We would like to see the Junior Warden of every Lodge act as the *publicity agent* for his Lodge during his term of office."

—Then there was the Grand Master whose statement I have repeated with horror on many occasions. "Masonry with its associated bodies has not been getting its *proper share of publicity* in the newspapers," he said.

—Another large American Jurisdiction displays its collection of newspaper clippings each year during the annual communication of Grand Lodge.

—The fact that at two of the last three Conferences of Grand Masters in North America the subject of more publicity has been discussed. Regional conferences of American Grand Lodges also have the bug; they are engaging in shop talk on how to set up publicity committees.

—A large American Jurisdiction launched a great humanitarian movement that was

looked upon with universal admiration, and then spoiled everything with a report to Grand Lodge which said that although its benevolent program did make a "significant contribution in service to all humanity (and) while many Masonic dollars had been spent in this activity, *the publicity value to Masonry was diluted*" because the work had been done in a number of locations.

—One Grand Master offered this argument for holding the Conference of Grand Masters in cities other than Washington, D.C.: "We come to this Conference ... we do not get much notice. You may as well toss a pebble down the well for all it is known in Washington, D.C., that we have been here . . . But take this Conference to one of our midwestern cities and it will have considerable impact upon the people in that community . . . The meeting will be publicized in the area."

(Incidentally, the Conference was moved to a midwestern city, but not one clipping could be taken home for the scrapbook—and it turned out to be one of the most fortunate things that ever happened to American Freemasonry that there was no news coverage.)

"NEVER MIND WHAT THEY SAY about me, just so they say something," a philosophical American politician is supposed to have remarked. That seems to have become the objective of a certain segment of our leadership. It frightens me to see that gnawing hunger for publicity that is being advocated openly today by so many in high places.

There is a fine line that divides legitimate news from that trivia known as publicity. It is when we cross that fine line that we stoop to a position beneath our dignity. Well-meaning Brethren who fancy themselves writers and correspondents but who know little or nothing about the usages and customs of the Craft can unwittingly do the Fraternity irreparable harm.

And where is that fine line? On a newspaper copy desk I learned what obviously is an oversimplified, yet often accurate, statement of the difference between news and publicity. It goes like this: Publicity is that which is of little or no interest, but which individuals seek mightily to get into print; news is that which is of great interest, but which individuals seek mightily to keep out of print.

LET ME INTERRUPT at this point to emphasize again that I am making a distinction between public relations activities and the craving for indiscriminate publicity. Our Craft maintained public relations of a sort for generations before the current name-in-print rage developed. My good friend, M.W. Jack F. Hewson, Past Grand Master of Masons in Indiana, said to me in a letter written early in 1962, "Whether it knows it or not, whether it likes it or not, the Grand Lodge (of Indiana) has had public relations since January 12, 1818. The relations have not always been good, and for the most part over the years they certainly have not been planned. But the fact remains that everything the public has learned or imagined about Freemasonry has affected the public's like or dislike of our order."

He is one hundred per cent right. And incidentally, the unrestrained use of hammers

and axes in American Freemasonry is just as distasteful to him as it is to me.

Then how can we guarantee that a Masonic publicity program will be restrained and in good taste? Alas, we cannot. An organized program to obtain Masonic publicity has small chance of being anything other than unseemly in character. Certainly it will be so if the Junior Warden is made *ex-officio* "publicity agent" for his Lodge. It takes more than a whispered pass word to make a perfect ashlar out of a rough ashlar; more than a communicated sign or grip to instill in a man a sense of the fitness of things.

THINK FOR A MOMENT on just three points:

1. One of the characteristics of Freemasonry that has appealed to men over the years has been its "peculiarity." By that I mean the simple fact that Masonry *does not* operate like other organizations. Men have deemed it an honor to be identified with an ancient Craft which does not sound the trumpets in an ostentatious effort to call attention to itself and what it fancies its "good works." It is a relief to be free of the clash of hammers and axes in at least one human experience. The late Carl H. Claudy, whom I always like to quote, was saying it this way more than thirty years ago:¹

Take from Freemasonry her reputation, and make of her an organization striving for notice, competing for publicity, members, attention, with all the hundred and one distractions of modern life, and she becomes just "one of a crowd." And then —she dies! Let her be silent, secret, reserved, dignified; keep her what she has always been, a mystery, a secret force for good in the world, an Order which men cannot join save they be worthy— and her power increases.

2. If we are interested in a favorable "image" for the Fraternity, then Little Jack Horner is not the man for the job. The thought of telling all the world about our "good works"

1 MSA: "Masonry and Publicity," May 1929.

and moulding public opinion so the praises of Freemasonry will be sung in one endless anthem constitutes a tempting apple indeed. But whenever our Craft adopts the methods of Little Jack Horner, every man becomes the judge of what is proper and what is not. And believe me, I know Brethren by the hundreds whom I would not want to trust to publicize the activities of Freemasonry—and some of them are news writers. Many a time I have winced over the product of a Masonic press agent. To embrace 1964-model publicity methods and clothe them with the garments of respectability is to turn loose those who, well-meaning though they may be, are lacking in responsibility and discrimination.

I remember all too well how, some ten years ago, American Grand Masters literally fell over each other to be photographed for the cover page of a magazine of national circulation—and I remember the tongue-in-cheek manner in which the writer of the feature article dealt with our Craft. That is only one example to illustrate the wisdom of our historic position of quiet dignity.

3. And remember, a publicity campaign can backfire. We think we would publicize only the so-called "good works," but when we descend to the level of all other publicity-hungry groups we must be prepared to pay the penalty of having public attention called to the dirt under the rugs within our own house.

No amount of prepared publicity can repair the damage if a Freemason or his dependent is in distress and the Lodge looks the other way.

Little Jack Homer's loud protestations will not be very convincing if the Masonic Temple is run down and seedy in appearance.

Reams and reams of mimeographed news releases will be to no avail if the Lodge officers whose names appear in the newspaper are not men who can command respect in the community.

All the press agents in the business cannot erase the distasteful image created by an obnoxious publication claiming to be "Masonic," or a Lodge trestleboard that is immature and undignified.

It will take more than newspaper space to wipe out the memory of a careless and slipshod funeral service ... or if the Brethren perform their public ceremonies like awkward bumpkins ... or go to Lodge in bowling league attire ... or allow their aprons to be anything other than white and spotless ... or if the Chaplain is one whom the community has reason to know is not on speaking terms with the God to whom he recites his prayers.

LIKE ALL OTHER prescriptions offered by the Masonic Medicine Men, *this is one we had better think through.* We are conducting our Masonic public relations program every hour of every day, as our distinguished Past Grand Master of Indiana said so very well. We are going to "get publicity" of a sort, also—and it can be a publicity that is ruinous.

Let Freemasonry stay out of the business of "managed news." We do not belong there; such activity is repugnant to everything our Craft stands for. Once we forsake our traditional gentility we are unleashing forces as capable of damage as an untrained layman attempting to perform a surgical operation, or practice law, or build a bridge, or teach school.

Legitimate news pertaining to the Fraternity there must and should be, but the man who presumes to speak for our Craft should be one who knows that some things are done and some things simply *are not done* in Freemasonry. Publicity for the sake of publicity should never even be considered. Let Freemasons be the last men on earth to imitate Little Jack Horner!

We do not need to *create* a favorable "image;" we need only to use what we have. A good "image" before the public can be maintained if we have it, or established if we do not, and there is but one certain way to do it. That is to do the work of Freemasonry as it should be done—all the time—and always in the best of Masonic traditions.

When we do the work that Freemasons are expected to do and as they are expected to do it, we are conducting the best possible public relations program. If the leaders of our American Grand Lodges will but forget their scrapbooks and concentrate on providing inspired leadership in the true Masonic tradition, our Lodges will respond and follow, and the "image" will take care of itself.