

# **Whither Are We Traveling?**

Chapter Nine – Bread or a Stone?

By

Dwight L. Smith, P.G.M.

Grand Lodge of Indiana



## **Bread or a Stone?**

*Question 8: What has become of that “course of moral instruction, veiled in allegory and illustrated by symbols,” that Freemasonry is supposed to be?*

A young man in his late twenties had just been elected Master of his Lodge. Determined to take the admonition to give “good and wholesome instruction” seriously, he ordered a copy of Carl H. Claudy’s *The Master’s Book*. It became his “volume of sacred law”; he literally slept with it under his pillow. These three sentences in the little book impressed him so much he underlined them in red ink.

“One thing and only one thing a Masonic Lodge can give its members which they can get nowhere else in the world. *That one thing is Masonry...* The Master whose instruction program is strictly Masonic has to send to the basement for extra chairs for most of his meetings.”

The young fellow tried it, and it worked. It was a thrilling experience for him to see Masons who hadn’t been in Lodge for years coming back regularly for Light and more Light and further Light. Nothing in 25 years has changed his conviction that the Claudy formula will fill the benches with regularity. He is still around, by the way, though not quite so youthful. I see him every morning in the mirror when I shave.

Now, no one could have known less about adult education. All the equipment I had was a little imagination and a resolute purpose to avoid schoolroom methods. Remembering the impact of teaching by means of symbols, parables, allegories and legends, we ruled out long-winded lectures; we did not lure the Brethren with stunts or vaudeville entertainment; we did not take advantage of a captive audience because the audience was not captive – the Brethren came because they wanted to. And we had to send out for extra chairs, just as Claudy said we would.

Come to think about it, has not the Master of every Lodge an obligation to give the Craft good and wholesome instruction?

Let us proceed on the assumption that every candidate for the degrees sincerely desires the Light Freemasonry has to offer him, and expects to receive it. What happens?

Well, first, we recite, recite, recite until there is nothing left to recite. Then we try to persuade the new Brother to recite also, and if memorizing and reciting do not appeal to him, we have nothing further to offer. We wash our hands of him. Disappointed, he hears that other organizations elaborate on the three degrees, and he turns to them to obtain a substitute for that which his Lodge should have provided.

He asks for bread; we give him a stone.

Admittedly there is a weakness somewhere. But where?

Respectfully I suggest we are weak: (1) in Form, and (2) in Substance.

And just as respectfully I submit that we fall short (1) at the Grand Lodge level where the designs are placed on the trestleboard, and (2) at the Lodge level where the designs are executed.

Obviously the ramifications of the subject are too great to discuss at length. I can only plant the seed.

## I. In The Sanctum Sanctorum

Let's face it, then:

1. **The Word.** The very term Masonic Education is a liability – a frightening word suggestive of impractical theories and dull abstractions. What a blessing it would be if some creative soul could coin another: Masonic Light, or Advancement, or Instruction would be an improvement.
2. **Our Designs.** There are too many systems too hastily conceived, too much running wildly hither and yon in search of bright ideas. We pursue Masonic educational systems in the same manner that teen-agers pursue fads. Let a bright idea be advanced in one Jurisdiction and a score of Grand Masters will cry, “Lo, it is here!” Like sheep they rush to follow the bellwether. And why? If Freemasonry is universal, do we need “57 Varieties” of instruction programs? After all, Master Masons respond in much the same manner the nation over.
3. **Our Architects.** They are too amateurish. An effective program for further Light can not be designed by whoever happen to be officers of a Grand Lodge in a given year. It is a job for men with special talents. Always there should be one or two men with down-to-earth experience in adult education; a public relations man to interpret human likes and dislikes; a newspaper man to tell the story in everyday English. And all should be thoroughly grounded in the fundamentals of Freemasonry.
4. **Our Working Tools.** One of the marks of an amateur writer or speaker is that he attempts to tell everything he knows each time he writes or speaks. With rare exceptions, the printed materials for Masonic education programs are like that. They insist on telling everything. Forbidding in length and appalling in scope, they are too ponderous, too dull, too windy. Ever hear of the Tractarians? We could well emulate their example.

## II. In The Quarries

Again, let's face it:

1. **Our Unfinished Labors.** By and large, instruction is not a part of the program in the average Lodge. Such efforts as may be made are sporadic, conceived as an afterthought, treated as a stepchild. We have not caught fire with the possibilities, for we are so obsessed with question-and-answer memory work that we think all instruction begins and ends in a catechism. Nothing could be further from the truth.
2. **Many Are Exceedingly Anxious.** We know not the meaning of patience. When we do attempt to provide good and wholesome instruction, we try to do too much too rapidly. A first-grader is not handed a set of books which will tell him all he needs to know for a high school diploma. Rarely is a young Mason a Ninety-Day Wonder, yet when we instruct at all, we give him huge doses, without regard to his needs, likes or dislikes, and we expect them to do the work of a Vitamin B-12 shot. It isn't that simple.
3. **Rubbish In The Temple.** Regrettably, too many of our programs are tied to stunts and cheap entertainment used as bait. Masonic teaching must be Masonic or it is of no avail. We defeat the purpose when we insult the intelligence of the man who seeks.

## III. Winding Stairs

Then where do we start?

1. **Most important of all, Masonic Light must come from the East.** Instruction provided by a teacher who knows less than his pupil is neither good nor wholesome. "If the blind lead the blind, both shall fall in the ditch."

It has long been my contention that the place to insist upon proficiency is in the man who wears the hat and holds the gavel. If that means minimum standards, training courses, written and oral examinations, then let's have them. I would have made a much better Master if I had had that kind of preparation.

2. **Our approach must be an intelligent one.** The program must have diversity, the doses must be small, and it must avoid dullness as a plague. Men of high intellectual attainments should have study clubs; those of limited academic training should have "capsules," and for those in the wide range in between, the possibilities are unlimited.

3. **Instruction must be lifted to a place of honor and respectability in Lodge affairs.** Above all, it should be geared to the Hour of Refreshment – not to the lecture room nor the graduate seminar. Let self-improvement become a privilege to be enjoyed, and not a chore to be endured.
4. **We need to discard about nine-tenths of our curriculum materials.** Masonic authors whose works are authoritative and have human interest appeal could be numbered almost on the fingers of one hand. With profound apologies to local writers and compilers in every State, I maintain we could do better to stick to the classics.
5. **Any program of further Light must be pursued continuously and with infinite patience.** The parable of the Sower always should be the theme. Even though great quantities of seed will be wasted, some will take root and bear fruit – and that some is worth all the effort.
6. **And then, humbly begging pardon of the Sacred Cows, if Plans and Programs and Systems there must be, there is only one which has stood the test of time.** It is that which is carried on within the framework of the Lodge, inside its four walls, by its authority, under its control and responsible to it. Nothing should be left to whim or fancy of individuals who may be ill prepared, inaccurate or irresponsible. Textbooks, manuals, short courses, schools, forums – these should not operate as substitutes for the work of a Lodge. We can only hope that such tools may assist and inspire. But the stones must be hewn and squared in the quarries where they are raised.

Visionary? Impossible of attainment? Of course it is. The Temple within the hearts of men is never finished. No one has suggested that the building of human character is a quick and easy job.

Who among us has faith to “lay his course by a star which he has never seen, to dig by the divining rod for springs he may never reach?”