

Whither Are We Traveling?

Chapter Eleven – Let's Try Freemasonry

By

Dwight L. Smith, P.G.M.

Grand Lodge of Indiana



Let's Try Freemasonry

Question 10: Are there not too many well-meaning Brethren who are working overtime to make Freemasonry something other than Freemasonry?

“Whither are we traveling?” was my anxious query ten months ago, and there followed ten searching questions on subjects that have disturbed me increasingly in recent years. With the promise of a series of articles in which each subject would be explored, I added:

“I shall propose no bright new ideas – not one. All I am going to advocate is that Freemasonry remain Freemasonry; and if we have strayed from the traditional path, we had better be moving back to the main line while there is yet time to restore the prestige and respect, the loyalty and devotion that once was ours.”

Thus was notice served at the outset that I would not be found aligned with anyone who seeks to make Freemasonry over and bring it up-to-date that it will be out-of-date tomorrow.

I

In all the land there is weeping and wailing and gnashing of teeth. The Masonic Gimmick Manufacturing Company, Unlimited, is working overtime to devise stunts to “modernize” Freemasonry, to put it in line with ten thousand other organizations that clamor for the attention of the Tribal American. Among its many products we are urged to try these:

- ?? Abandon the “free will and accord” rule which has placed our Craft far above the mine run of societies, and permit outright solicitation.
- ?? Ape the service clubs. Get busy on “projects” galore in the best Babbitt fashion.
- ?? 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 kick-off dinner, ring the doorbells.
- ?? Subsidize other organizations right and left, and, in the doing, ignore, neglect and starve the parent body.
- ?? Feminize the Fraternity. Carry “togetherness” to even more ridiculous extremes than we have already.
- ?? 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.
- ?? 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.
- ?? Let Freemasonry “take a position” on public issues of the day. Stand up and be counted (assuming, of course, that the position the Craft takes is in line with our own pet prejudices.)
- ?? Go all out for materialism. Raise money; spend it. Build temples, institutions. Subsidize; endow. Whatever can be had by writing a check, get it.

?? 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.

Why does not someone suggest that we try Freemasonry?

Certainly we haven't been trying it these many years. We have experimented with just about everything the mind of man (and of woman) can imagine. Why not get back to our knitting?

II

Looking at the overall picture of American Masonry candidly and thoughtfully, it seems to me the greatest single need of our Craft today is a membership with a better understanding of what our Fraternity is and especially of what it is not.

Few indeed are the Master Masons who know what Freemasonry really is; even more rare is the species with a comprehension of what Freemasonry is not. Seniority and rank seem to have little relationship to our ignorance. The number of Masters, Past Masters and Grand Masters who are hazy as to what our Craft is all about is appalling.

What has happened?

Well, we seem to assume that Freemasonry is a fly-by-night fad of the mid-Twentieth Century; something to be tossed hither and yon by every wind that blows. In the restless, superficial age in which we live, we are impatient unless our organized bodies have slogans, and carry banners, and make official pronouncements on every subject under the sun, however trivial. We want them to follow the conventional pattern; to maintain lobbies, to publish aims and objectives, conduct drives and campaigns, strive to get into the headlines and on the airwaves, write checks to everything that sounds benevolent and has a board of directors, and, in general, to have a finger in every pie.

Freemasonry does none of these.

Strange, is it not, that our ancient Craft should have gained for itself such a preeminent position of honor and prestige when it does almost nothing in the conventional manner!

III

Then *what is this Freemasonry* to which I urge our Brethren to return? What are its aims and objectives? What does it do?

Perhaps the last place we would expect to find an answer would be in the First Book of Kings, and even then the answer will come as something of a disappointment, for it is all so different from the ways to which we have become accustomed.

Elijah was languishing in his cave on Mount Horeb in the conviction that of all God's children only he had remained faithful to his trust. By divine command, Elijah went forth and stood upon the mountain, and the prophet tells us what happened:

"And behold, the Lord passed by, and a great and strong wind rent the mountains, and brake in pieces the rocks before the Lord; but the Lord was not in the wind: and after the wind an earthquake; but the Lord was not in the earthquake: and after the earthquake a fire; but the Lord was not in the fire: and after the fire a still small voice."

What does this mean to us this day? It means that Freemasonry erects its temples within the hearts of men. Even though we may not understand what we are saying, we sound forth our purpose in trumpet tones when, in our own Declaration of Principles, we proclaim,

"Through the improvement and strengthening of the character of the individual man, Freemasonry seeks to improve the community."

And we tell the candidate for the degrees of Masonry the same thing in words striking in their simplicity. "*The design of the Masonic Institution,*" we say to him, "*is to make its votaries wiser, better, and consequently happier.*" Not a word about mass action, nor pressure groups, nor resolutions on matters of state policy. No "pro" this or "anti" that. No sales talk for any pet scheme. No great undertakings to cure the ills of the world by making everyone over to fit a pattern of our own design. No running about like chickens with their heads cut off in search of a do-good project with which to gain favorable notice. No restless biting of the nails to compete with a service club or a civic league. No endless "busyness" which loses sight of the objective.

The message of Freemasonry? Just this: that the Lord is not to be found in the wind, nor in the earthquake, nor in the fire, but in the still, small voice!

The purpose of Freemasonry? Its purpose is the same as it has been since the day when the stones for King Solomon's Temple were hewn, squared and numbered in the quarries where they were raised. It is to take an individual – just one man at a time, mind you, and as good a man as possible – and try to make a better man out of him. That is all. How desperately the world needs just that! And if that technique is outmoded, then the experience of two thousand years is all wrong; the Parable of the Mustard Seed is horse-and-buggy philosophy; the Leaven in the Loaf is a cruel hoax.

The mere fact that men do not comprehend its purpose does not mean that Freemasonry has no purpose, nor that its purpose is outmoded – it only means that the stones are not being well hewn and squared in the quarries where they are raised.

Freemasonry has not been tried in the balance and found wanting: it has been found difficult and not tried.

More than anything else today, the world yearns for that same kind of gentle, healing influence at work in the hearts of men. The Masonic Institution, which is sometimes looked upon with scorn because it does not operate in the conventional manner, is prepared to bear witness to the fact that the conventional way of our age leaves much to be desired, and to stand upon its own majestic affirmation that the way to change human systems is to change human lives.

The wise and venerable Dean Roscoe Pound has seen more of life than most of us, and views history with greater philosophical calm, perhaps, than any of us. Here is his message to the Brethren of the Craft: “*Freemasonry has more to offer the Twentieth Century than the Twentieth Century has to offer Freemasonry.*”

Whither, then, are we traveling?

I come to the conclusion of this series of exploratory articles with my faith in the basic worth of our ancient Craft unshaken, convinced that *the solution to Freemasonry's problems is Freemasonry.*

Why do we not try it?