

INCREASING LODGE ATTENDANCE

There are few more vexatious problems which the Worshipful Master has to meet than that of increasing the attendance in a Lodge in which the members have, to some extent at least, lost interest.

It is a fact no less true than sad, that, on the average, an attendance of ten per cent of the membership is looked upon as a "Good" turnout. Yet there are Lodges which have a greater number at almost every communication.

It is the natural and laudable desire of all Worshipful Masters to so conduct the affairs of the Lodge as to make all its meetings so interesting that members will desire to fill the benches.

As a general principle, the way to arouse interest is to do something different from what is normally done in Lodge. A Lodge which is overburdened with degree work can increase attendance by holding some special meetings for purely social and fraternal purposes. A Lodge in which a speaker from another Lodge - and better, another Grand Lodge Jurisdiction - is seldom heard, may increase its attendance by making such addresses a feature. A Lodge in which Masonic education is unknown and untried may increase attendance by the preparation and putting on of an educational program. A Lodge which has small interest for its members because it appears to be set off, isolated, from the life of the community, may increase not only attendance but stimulate the desire for membership among non-Masons by taking part in some civic activity.

The Worshipful Master is faced at the start of the preparation of any entertainment with two conflicting principles; the more of his own members he can persuade to work in and take part in the entertainment, the more interest he can arouse among them and their friends; the more he goes outside the lodge for amusement and instruction, the more he is apt to interest all its members, most of whom have seen or heard the home talent before.

In arranging for any program, whether it be one of entertainment or instruction, Masonic or otherwise, it is wise to put the entire affair in the hands of a competent chairman of a committee, give him plenty of assistance, and then let him run it without interference. Some Worshipful Masters, with the best intentions in the world, are so unwise as to appoint a chairman of a committee and then attempt to do his work, or dictate how it should be done. A chairman should be a willing worker, and in sympathy with the ideas of the worshipful Master, but unless he has some ideas and initiative of his own, he is not qualified to be a chairman; if he has ideas and initiative, he is not being properly used unless he is allowed to employ them.

As a general rule, a small committee is better than a large one; if the plans are elaborate, the committee may divide itself into sub-committees with a sub-chairman, who may call to their assistance all the help they may need. But a large central committee is unwieldy and difficult to

handle; there are too many ideas, and too many conflicting desires, to make such an organization a success.

Individual lodges differ largely, but as a rule an entertainment committee of three, or five at the most is sufficiently large. He is a well advised Worshipful Master who does not consider Masonic dignity and honors as the first requisite in an entertainment committee chairman. The senior Past Master has not necessarily the most original mind; the Senior Warden may be an excellent officer and a prospective Master of charm and ability, without being constituted by nature and training to be a good chairman of an educational committee. A wise Master doesn't hesitate to use the brains and enthusiasm of the younger members. It is easy to gain the cooperation of the older members, and of those the Lodge has honored, by asking them to give way to the young and untried that these may show their quality.

A few plans which have been tried and proved successful in increasing attendance are herewith suggested:

ONE A SURPRISE MEETING: Advertise to the membership that there is a surprise waiting for them. Tell them there will be "something doing" on the surprise night which they have never seen before. then arrange with a capable committee to exemplify during the meeting a dozen or so matters of law and behavior. Have a new brother deliberately cross the lodge room between the Altar and the East.

Call him down for it. Have a Past Master explain to the lodge why this is not good Masonic usage. During a ballot have a brother leave the room by the way of the West Gate. Declare the ballot illegal, and then take it over again. Have another Past Master explain why it was illegal. Let some brother move that the lodge adjourn. Have some one else, or another Past Master explain that parliamentary procedure which governs most assemblages cannot apply in a Masonic lodge because of the powers and prerogatives of the Worshipful Master, at whose pleasure alone the lodge convenes and is closed. Get a debate started on something, anything, and have a brother appeal from the decision of the Worshipful Master, to the lodge.

Rule him out of order, and then explain that the only appeal lies to the Grand Master and the Grand Lodge, and why this is so. Have some brother give the wrong salute on entering or leaving; correct him, and have someone make a short talk on the reasons for the salute on entering or leaving, and how the brother may always know by an examination of the Great Lights upon which degree the lodge is open on. Think up a half dozen more matters in which the customs, the etiquette or the law of Masonry may be violated, and have an explanation and an answer ready for each one. It is surprising, the interest which brethren take in a practical demonstration of this kind, and how simple and easy it is to arrange without any expense whatever.

TWO A MASONIC EXPERIENCE MEETING: In any lodge a certain number of brethren have had some pleasant, different, unusual experience of Masonry. One may have had to borrow money in a strange city and did through a Masonic connection. Another has discovered a Masonic impostor. A third has made a pleasant friend in another city through mutual Masonry. A fourth has had some odd experience of the manners, customs and usages of Masonry in a sister

Jurisdiction. Another has seen a funeral service in another Jurisdiction, quite different from that you use, etc. Get a committee to ascertain the names of a half dozen such brethren, and persuade them to give their experiences. Advertise it in the lodge Trestleboard and see the increase in attendance.

THREE A LODGE DEBATE: Choose some interesting Masonic subject on which opinion is divided, appoint two teams of debaters of two men each, and stage a contest between them. A Masonic debate should not run over forty minutes. A is given eight minutes for the affirmative, B eight minutes for the negative, following by C for eight minutes more of affirmative, and D eight minutes more for the negative. Each debater is then allowed 2 minutes for closing. The decision is to rest on a vote by the Lodge. A few suggested topics are: "Resolved, that Masonry would be more effective if all Lodges were limited in size;" "Resolved, that perpetual jurisdiction over rejected candidates is unjust;" "Resolved, that a Master's powers should be limited by a Lodge," etc., etc.

It should be carefully explained that these subjects are debated purely for the information such debates may bring out, and that there is no thought of attempting by Lodge action to alter existing law or practice. If desired, such a Lodge debate could be humorous in character rather than educational; such as, "Resolved, that golf should not interfere with business;" "Resolved, that the Worshipful Master should pay the Lodge a salary for his privilege," etc.,etc. If debaters are ready speakers, such simple entertainment can be made very effective and interesting.

FOUR PAST MASTER'S NIGHT: Fill all the officers chairs with Past Masters, in the order of seniority; for the conferring of a degree. If no candidate is available and there is no local regulation or edict against it, use a dummy candidate from among the members, or have the degree conferred upon the oldest Past Master. Those officers who have born the heat and burden of the day are usually very proud of the opportunity to get into harness again, and the membership is usually much interested in their performance.

FIVE "TELL US WHAT YOU THINK:" Have ten brethren, each with an idea, give four-minute talks on what the lodge needs. This does not mean what it requires in the way of a new hall, or new equipment, or more money; but, what it requires to be better, more alive, more interesting and more able. Such a discussion will bring out many ideas. Throw the meeting open to the members as soon as those who have been arranged for as speakers have finished; often these unprepared speeches will be the best and most illuminating of the evening.

SIX THE QUESTION BOX: Put a small box with a slot in the top somewhere in the ante-room of the lodge, and invite the brethren to submit questions regarding anything Masonic; assure them that as many of the questions as possible will be answered at the next meeting/ See that a half-dozen brethren, instructed in advance, drop questions in the box. The Worshipful Master will probably get a number for which he had not arranged, but these are his sheet anchor; he can then have prepared a half-dozen answers to the questions he had asked in this way, and these answers delivered to the lodge in five-minute addresses. Questions and answer both, or course, can be obtained from books. A sample list of some half-dozen questions, interesting to most Masons, is as follows:

"How old is Masonry, and how do we know its age?" "What are the ten most Masonic verses in the Bible, not including those quotations from the Great Light used in the Ritual?" "Who was William Morgan and what happened in the "Morgan Affair?" "In wearing a Masonic ring, should the points of the compass point to the wearer or toward his finger tips?" "What is the origin of the Masonic use of the word "Profane," meaning one not a member, and why are they so-called?" "England permits dual membership. What American Grand Jurisdictions permit it, and what are some of the arguments for and against it?" "What and where is the oldest Lodge in the world, in the United States, and in this State?"

SEVEN THE SONGS OF MASONRY: Good Masonic poetry is scarce. But there is enough of it to furnish a pleasant and interesting hour or so of instruction and entertainment. Pick out a half-dozen of the best known Masonic poems, and a half-dozen brethren who will memorize them and prepare a little talk on them. Let these brethren recite the poem of their choice, and then comment upon it, its meaning and significance. An anthology of Masonic Poems is in Volume Twenty of the Little Masonic Library. Good poems for an evening of this kind are: Kipling's "The Palace" and "Mother Lodge," Burn's "Masonic Farewell," Goethe's "Mason Lodge" Leigh Hunt's "About Ben Adhem," Carruth's "Each In His Own Tongue," Burn's "On The Apron," Meredith's "Ebony Staff of Solomon," Bowman's "Voice of America," and Malloch's "Father's Lodge."

EIGHT It is often possible to awaken interest in a Lodge by the formation of some Lodge organization; a glee club, a dramatic club, a study club, a Fellowcraft team, etc. These are good ways to increase attendance.

NINE A little stunt which always holds the attention of the members is having some part of the Masonic Ritual - it may be the charge to a candidate in one of the degrees, a section from the Middle Chamber Lecture, or perhaps the prayer from the Third degree - committed by a half-dozen brethren. These brethren then deliver the same work to the lodge, in order to show how different the appeal of it may be, as done in different ways. Naturally, the parts selected should be short. If the brethren are willing to sacrifice themselves for the good of the evening, a prize may be put up for the most effective rendition, the decision, of course, will be by the lodge. The vote on the best rendition should be by paper ballot. But do not do this unless the brethren have been previously consulted and are willing to enter into the spirit of the little contest.

TEN In a lodge which has much work and much business, the Worshipful Master will add to the interest and the attendance if he runs the business meeting with dispatch. The dragging business meeting, with a great deal of "Hot Air" from well-meaning brethren who really have little to say, is often sufficiently boring to keep members away. It is not suggested that the Master shut off debate arbitrarily, or to rap a brother down. But it is perfectly possible to run the first part of the business meeting snappily, have a prepared speech or so, very short and interesting, and then have a couple of "planted" brethren comment on the shortness and snappiness. The round hand of applause which such comments usually draw will keep the prolix and the long-winded off their feet!

ELEVEN It adds to the interest and, therefore, to the attendance, if the Master always has something to tell his lodge. "Give Them Good and Wholesome Instruction" means what it says.

A five-minute talk by the Master upon some matter of interest to the particular lodge, or to Masons generally, will often prove an interesting feature of business meetings. Of course, it means some work for the Worshipful Master to get up some twenty little addresses during his year, but Worshipful Masters expect to work - or else they are much surprised brethren when they get in the East!

The Master who is a ready speaker has a great advantage over the slow of tongue - different speeches to different Past Masters as they are welcomed, a different set of remarks to every visitor. Keep the membership keyed up wondering what the Master will say next! To call brother after brother to his feet and say only "It gives me much pleasure to welcome you to this communication of your own lodge, you are cordially invited to seat in the East," is not thrilling, and is monotonous. On the other hand, the Master must be careful not to "talk the interest to death." Nor should he ever be witty at the expense of his members or visitors, unless it is that kindly wit which compliments at the same time it brings a smile.

TWELVE Finally, the Worshipful Master may largely increase interest in his meetings by departing from the custom of many previous Masters and doing what they didn't do! This does not mean a criticism of previous Masters; what they did may also have been interesting and different. But the new is always interesting, and that which is interesting usually stimulates attendance. With good reason, depart from the usual order of business; it is a Master's privilege. Have some brother, the more obscure the better, who has done something, anything; escorted to the Altar and thank him, congratulate him, or comment on his work; the more unexpected this is the more interesting to the membership. Extend a special welcome to the oldest Past Master, or more beloved brother; if you have no regularly appointed chaplain, or if he is absent, call some other brother - different brother every time - to take over the simple duties of lodge chaplain. Encourage debate; ask for comments on any question which comes up on which no one voluntarily has anything to offer; the more members getting on their feet, the greater interest there is in the meeting; always providing they are not long-winded about it!