

SEEK - AND YE SHALL FIND

Freemasonry is greater than any man; she is to be sought; she never seeks.

Four men sat in the smoking room of a Pullman. Three wore Masonic pins, and, as was natural, fell into easy conversation regarding their affiliations.

After a while one turned to the fourth and asked "Are you a Mason?"

"No" came the slow answer. "I'm not, I'm sorry to say. My father was ... but he never asked me to join. Many, of my friends are - but none of them ever asked me. I have often wondered why - what I am or do or say, that the), don't want me

There was a moment's silence. Then: "Well, you have a tongue in your head, why not ask?"

And then, of course, the non-member was instructed that Masonry never seeks; it must be sought. A man must come to the Order "of his own free will and accord." The strength of the Fraternity is in its voluntary association. Presumably, he whose father had never asked his soil, he whose friends had never invited him to become a member of their Lodges, went to his home and requested a petition from a friend.

How many good men and true have failed to be Masons because of this unwritten law in Freemasonry can never be known. Undoubtedly Freemasonry could become, for a little while, a Fraternity double, triple, and even quadruple her present size. If in some miraculous way the unwritten law could be repealed and all Lodge members "put on a drive" for membership, what armies of initiates would crowd Lodge rooms! What sudden, if temporary, prosperity would follow in Lodge and Grand Lodge bank accounts!

But the increase in size would be only for a little while and the prosperity would soon fade, to be succeeded by an interminable period of depression. Once Freemasonry departs from her ancient principles and practices, she becomes just another organization - of which there are hundreds - and loses, probably never to regain it, that dignity and importance necessarily associated with that which is desirable yet unattainable without effort.

To ask a man to become a member of the Fraternity is not only a violation of one of the unwritten laws, but a positive injustice to the man. He who joins a Lodge, not because he wants, but because another wants him to, necessarily misses, for life, something in the Ancient Craft which other men possess and hold dear. It is human to value that for which we labor, try, strive, get by our own efforts. It is also human to hold as of little value and small worth that which comes unsought, which is easy to get, which requires no effort.

With the most loving intentions and highest hopes, many a father has laid a petition to his Blue Lodge, together with the required fee, at the breakfast plate of his son when the young man reached his twenty-first birthday. And many a father has seen those high hopes dashed, when the son took

little interest, gradually lost touch and finally dimitted or was dropped N.P.D. It is one of the tragedies in the lives of ardent Freemasons - without intending it, they killed that which they loved the best!

Freemasonry is greater than any man, or any set of men. In the hearts of thousands of men it shares devotion to family, country, church. Naturally Freemasons who find a deep and inward satisfaction in the blessings of fellowship with their kind, who find meeting on the level and parting on the square with all kinds and degrees of men an ennobling experience, want their friends to share it with them. Yet if the desire to have the friend of one's heart a fellow Lodge member - no matter how unselfish - is satisfied by breaking the law and proselyting, injury is done both to him who asks, to him who is asked, and to the Fraternity.

In these troubled times the Masonic Lodge is about the only place in which may gather in peace and harmony men of every shade of political opinion, of every religious belief, of every race. It is not possible to estimate now the profound effect which such association may have upon the world's history. It has had a profound effect before, and history attests the fact. One need go no further back than the Revolution for proof ... not only was the idea of a union of the Colonies first proposed by Daniel Coxe, Provincial Grand Master (New Jersey) but a majority of the signers of and the delegates who adopted the Constitution, were Freemasons. How much a part the Freemasonry which bulked so large in the lives of Washington and Franklin played in that convention cannot be estimated - but he need be no deep student to find Masonic principles set forth at length in the fundamental documents of Americanism and liberty.

Thirteen different sovereign states, each filled with jealous citizens, anxious each to assert its own specific needs and rights, yet joined in a common cause - how much had Freemasonry to do with it? It is on record how much Washington trusted his Masonic generals, and that it was this meeting on the level and parting oil the square which largely helped, if it did not wholly create, the unity of action which resulted in thirteen Colonies becoming one nation.

Had those Masons asked others, non-Masons, to become members, could that fellowship have existed?

Today we compromise with expediency, disregard the future to gain the immediate good. It is seen in all walks of life; in churches which "compete" for attention with movies and radio and sports by adopting the methods of commerce; in "drives" for membership in this, that and the other special association "for" or "against" something; in government actions which count the immediate present of more importance than the far future. "After me, the deluge" is the motto of too many!

And the deluge will come! Mushroom growth dies like the mushroom. What is quickly built is jerry built. Circus stunt "evangelists" have converted multiplied thousands by mass psychology and theatrical appeal - and in a short time the "backsliders" equaled the conversions. Within the memories of all but the youngest Freemason is the meteroic rise and the collapse of the Ku Klux Klan, which grew by leaps and bounds and fell of its own weight.

Freemasonry is guarded against this danger by her strict law that no Freemason indulge in proselyting. It is not Masonic to ask our friends to join our Lodges, for the good and sufficient

reason that unless a man seek the good in Freemasonry, he can neither benefit from it himself, nor help the Ancient Craft to help others.

There are those - and some in high places in the Fraternity - who have succumbed to the temptation of the times; to consider the immediate good, rather than the long range program. There are those who honestly believe that the old idea is outworn; that changing conditions demand changing ideals, and that what was wise a hundred, two hundred years ago, is not necessarily so now. And, indeed, it is a commonplace of modern thought that many ideas of one and two hundred years ago are out of date; what was good enough for our forefathers is by no means good enough for moderns, and rightly so.

But those who apply this argument to the ancient practices of Freemasonry, confuse ideals with ideas. It was an ancient idea to meet in taverns, or even on high hills and low vales. It is the modern idea to meet in a great Masonic temple, with every convenience of central heating, modern ventilation, electric light, elevators etc. It was an ancient idea to meet about a table and to fine members who indulged in too much strong drink; it is the modern idea to hold the banquet before or after Lodge and have no strong drink whatever.

But neither of these, nor a hundred others, are ideals.

It is an ideal of Freemasonry that it teach the Fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man. It is not possible to conceive of a Freemasonry not so based. This ideal has stood, must forever stand, unchanged and unchangeable.

It is an ideal of Freemasonry that brotherhood means help for the helpless, succor for the suffering, a hand stretched out to the fatherless and the widow. It is as strong today as it ever was, and one cannot think of a Freemasonry which is not charitable, patient, forbearing, mutually helpful.

And it is an ideal of Freemasonry that a man must come to it not by persuasion, not by threats, not by pressure, not even by invitation, but of a man's own motion, his own desire, his own free will and accord; "unbiased by friends, uninfluenced by mercenary motives, lie freely and voluntarily offers himself as a candidate for the Mysteries of Masonry, etc."

This ideal can no more be laid aside, and yet Freemasonry remain Freemasonry, than can the Volume of the Sacred Law be taken from the Altar, meetings be held in the public square, elections for candidates decided by majority vote.

With this as a foundation, let it be chronicled that many, brethren lean over backward in an endeavor to stand upright! While we do not go about the world proclaiming vociferously, "You cannot be a Freemason unless you ask it", there is nothing in any law, written or unwritten, which prevents a brother giving legitimate information to him who seeks it. The man in the smoking compartment did not ask to become a Freemason yet he Indicated his desire, and told why he was not. There was nothing improper in his acquaintances informing him, as long as he had initiated the matter.

Just how far to go is a problem each brother must settle for himself. There is no fear of his going too far if he thoroughly understands the reasons for reticence. A case in point: To Brother A came a

letter from Brother B in a far state. Brother B had been not only Masonic but blood brother to Brother C, who had died. The dearest wish of Brother C had been to have his son become a Freemason. Brother B thought that the son did not know this. So Brother B asked Brother A if he could do anything in the premises.

Brother A called on the young man and read him the letter, saying "Masonry seeks no man. But Masonry, tries to help its brethren. I do not seek you as a candidate for my, or any Lodge, but because I feel that your dead father's desire should be made known to you, I pass on to you your uncle's letter."

This was not proselyting; it was, so Brother A believed, a brotherly act.

When any one expresses any interest in becoming a Freemason, even if in the most general terms, it is legitimate to pursue the subject as long, but no longer. as he who has initiated it desires. Thus, the man who says "I've thought of becoming a Freemason, but I just don't know how to go about it" can be told "just how to go about it." But he should not be urged to "go about it."

To the Editor of these pages once came a Naval officer, a learned gentleman of scholarly education.

"I know nothing about Freemasonry" he said. "I ought to know. I want to know. But I don't want you to think I want to join, because I don't. Is it legitimate for you to tell me anything?"

The Editor told him much, gave him books to read, all the information he desired. But the Editor never said "join my Lodge" or offered a petition. It was a month after that the officer came to ask for a petition "of his own free will and accord."

It is no more possible to make rules for the guidance of those who honestly are in doubt as to how far they can go, how much they may legitimately say to a non-Mason about becoming one, than it is to make a rule to follow in how far to go, how much to say, in a kind act. But any such rule should include this; follow, do not lead or initiate the conversation. Tell what you may when asked, but do not offer facts which by any interpretation could be considered proselyting. Remember always that Freemasonry does not seek - she must be sought, not only for her sake, but for the sake of those who do become members.

Let him who is asked be not too full of rules and dignity and ancient custom! To him who says "I'd like to become a Freemason, tell me how," it is perfectly proper to offer a petition, so be it one knows the inquirer as a good man and true.

Let this chat end with the words which began It, that all may know and heed:

"Freemasonry is greater than any man; she is to be sought; she never seeks."

[back to top](#)