

PART OF THE PROBLEM AND PART OF THE ANSWER
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Except for one three-letter word, I would feel obliged to apologize for the use of an overworked subject. We are all familiar with the premise that we are a part of the problem or a part of the answer. I have chosen to substitute the conjunction "and" for the conjunction "or"- to discard the either or approach and to insist upon the both and approach.

In other words, I wish to advance the proposition that those of us who are interested in Masonic Education, if we are to retain our usefulness, must cease wringing our hands over the situation they have brought about, and we must become concerned with the situation we have brought about.

Now, to persuade leaders in our Masonic Education programs that they are indeed a part of the problem will not be an easy assignment, and I do not hope to "save" very many souls in 30 minutes. It will be enough merely to sow the seed. Quite naturally, we are flattered with the thought that we might play an important part in helping to lead Freemasonry through a difficult period, but we recoil from anything that suggests we may have contributed to the difficulty. It is easy enough to look in the mirror and see ourselves as part of the answer, but it is not until we look in the mirror and see ourselves as a part of the problem that we really begin to get somewhere.

Why do I insist that our Masonic Education programs may be a part of the problem as well as a part of the answer? Well, for one thing, the very fact that up to now we have engaged in little or no self-examination is in itself a danger signal. When we look upon our own pet programs as something well-nigh perfect to which all Masons should conform and never go out where the Brethren live to find out what they think about it, we are only singing ourselves to sleep.

Why am I insistent? Last spring I completed my twentieth annual review of the Proceedings of all English-speaking jurisdictions with which Indiana enjoys fraternal relations. Each year I have gone through the pages of 65 to 70 volumes. After 20 times, that adds up to no less than 1,300. Each time I review the Proceedings of a jurisdiction that has a Masonic Education program I take a quick glance to see whether there is anything that appeals to me as really challenging - or even different. Almost without exception there is not, My eyes have come to expect the usual bill of fare. As soon as I spot it, I turn the page and go on to something else.

Why- do I insist? About twelve years ago in the State of Indiana, the Governor appointed a Commission on the Aging. As chairman he selected a popular and capable man who had intelligence and energy and imagination. For a year or two there was great activity. Almost every week brought forth news of some conference or group meeting or workshop or public pronouncement.

After a while the chairman began to write to me and call me on the telephone to urge that I organize a meeting of Worshipful Masters and Secretaries to hear what he had to say about retirement homes and programs for senior citizens. Although I was unable to see how such a large-scale activity would fit into our Grand Lodge program in addition to the work in geriatrics we were already doing, I did not want to discourage the good Brother. One day I mentioned my problem to the Superintendent of the Indiana Masonic Home. He merely laughed at my concern. "Aw, forget it," he said. "Trouble with George is, he has a State job and he's running out of ideas. About all he has left to do is to pester this group and that group and try to get them to have meetings and listen to his pitch." That made a tremendous impact upon me, for Superintendent Dill had himself been chairman of the State Welfare Department, and he could recognize the symptoms of a movement that was running out of steam.

Perhaps it would not be accurate to say that our Masonic Education programs have run dry on ideas and have nothing left but to play the same old record over and over, but I am willing to risk the assertion that we are getting perilously close to that condition.

Do not look to me to provide a scientific diagnosis of our ills or to prescribe a cure. I can only scratch the surface in outlining the problem as I see it, and will go no farther than to offer two modest suggestions. It is up to us - each in his own jurisdiction -to find out what the problem is, and why, and where it exists, and what we must do to reverse the trend from a membership which couldn't care less to a membership which cares very much indeed. I am here only to plead that we, as leaders in the field of Masonic Education, do two things:

First, that we identify ourselves as part of the problem;

Second, that we identify ourselves as an exceedingly important unit in an overall program to find the answer.

If such a position identifies me as a "Masonic activist," then I am prepared to plead guilty. For I am strong in the conviction that our Masonic leadership long since reached the point that it should become operative rather than

speculative - at least until we can afford the luxury of speculating. In a period of economic stress President Grover Cleveland thrilled the entire nation when he declared, "It is a condition which confronts us, not a theory." Sometimes we have to be reminded of just that. It is all very well to ascend to the Mount of Transfiguration and to behold the glories of a heavenly vision, but to remain on the mountaintop singing endless Te Deums constitutes a wasteful dissipation of our energies. We must come down into the marketplace where men live and work.

What, then, is the problem?

Well, first of all, I am going to shock you profoundly by saying that I do not consider our tapering membership curve to be one of our major concerns. Perhaps I should. Perhaps Freemasonry in the United States has descended to the level that it must depend upon numbers - and large numbers - for its very existence. If our Craft has reached that level, then our illness is more critical than I thought. But I am not ready to believe any such thing just yet.

Twenty-one years ago last February, when I was Grand Master of Masons in Indiana, I had the honor of delivering a paper before the Conference of Grand Masters. Many of the words of "wisdom" I inflicted upon the Brethren that year have come back to haunt me but not so with that paper I read in Washington in February, 1946. Here, in just one paragraph, is the crux of the problem that confronted us then and for which we are reaping the harvest today:

No single group of men in the United States today knows better what has been happening to our Fraternity. We have been passing through one of those unfortunate "boom" periods - and I use the word "unfortunate" advisedly. I take little pride in the fact that I am serving as Grand Master of a jurisdiction when its membership numerically is at its record peak, for I know the conditions under which too many of those members have received their introduction to Masonry . . .

That is why I do not regard the world-wide recession in Masonic membership as a factor of vital concern at this time. It was inevitable that after an unhealthy boom there should be a period of inactivity. In the rural Indiana community where I grew up we were taught that if we dance all night we must be prepared to pay the fiddler when morning comes.

Next, I am going to shock you even more, perhaps, by refusing to include poor attendance at lodge meetings as anything more than one of the symptoms of our indisposition. Any Mason who is losing sleep over non-attendance should read some of our Masonic publications of 75 to 100 years

ago. Attendance isn't what it used to be - and it never was. I do not regard lack of attendance in itself as a major problem, but I do regard the conditions which drive Masons away from the meetings of their lodges as a problem of serious proportions.

The simple fact is, I do not blame Masons for not attending the meetings of their lodges - and if a Grand Secretary feels that way, how do you suppose rank-and-file Brethren feel about it? There is no question as to how they feel - they stay away in droves. My concern is not over the empty benches; my concern is over what makes the benches empty - those conditions which we permit and even encourage.

Now we are getting down to brass tacks. What is the problem?

1. We are uncertain and confused in our sense of values. Sooner or later we are going to have to make up our minds what it is we have come here to do. Is our aim and purpose that of selecting a few good men - the best to be found in the community -and trying to make better men of them, or is it to appeal to the masses and keep our membership curve going upward? We must make up our minds which course we are going to take, because just about everything depends upon our decision. If we are going to continue to appeal to the masses, we must eventually be prepared to make drastic changes in our ritualistic work, for the mass mind simply will not comprehend what our work is all about. Even though the Symbolic Lodge may be only the stepping stone to what the mass mind is really seeking, in time even our symbolism will prove to be too deep to comprehend.
2. We suffer from hardening of the arteries; a rigidity that manifests itself in a vigorous unwillingness to adjust to new situations, or even to engage in self-examination and self-criticism. I have come to believe that many of our Brethren would prefer to see Freemasonry wither on the vine and pass into the limbo of useless things than to dispense with even one of the boresome, time-consuming practices that drive Masons away from anything resembling a lodge meeting.

Mr. John W. Gardner, Secretary of Health, Education and Welfare in the President's Cabinet, is the author of a challenging article in the October, 1965, issue of Harper's Magazine. Its title is, "How To Prevent Organizational Dry Rot." Although he is not a Freemason, Secretary Gardner writes as if he might be thinking of our Craft when he says:

Like people and plants, organizations have a life cycle. They have a green and supple youth, a time of flourishing strength and a gnarled old age. We have all seen organizations that are

still going through the diseases of childhood, and others so far gone in the rigidities of age that they ought to be pensioned off and sent to Florida to live out their days.

3. Our standards. Yes, I know we appeal to the highest and best in our ritualistic work and in our speeches and our published articles - but we are not appealing to the highest and best in such practical matters as the choice of our candidates, or the choice of our officers. I have a Masonic address on that very subject. Its title is, "The Race Is to the Swift." ('Please relax, for I am not going to deliver it today.) Just permit me to share this one paragraph with you:

Freemasonry does not and can not escape the influences at work in our society of today. I am not alarmed over poor attendance at lodge meetings. I do not panic at the sight of a tapering membership curve. What does give me concern is the leveling tendency in our Fraternity, the inevitable result of which is to dilute, to cheapen, to be content with less and less. The goal of our so-called Century of the Common Man may be to lift common men to uncommon heights, but the practical application is to pull down the standard of the uncommon to the level of the common.

4. Our hypocrisy in the matter of class lodges. Why do we stubbornly refuse to admit that we have class lodges when they are developing all around us at the rate that is alarming? I am not talking about the so-called silk stocking lodge - heavens no! - not the lodge made up of professional men, or highly intellectual men, or men of great cultural attainments. I am talking about the industrial lodge; the factory lodge; the lodge which once had a balanced membership, but which has so changed in character and makeup that any Mason who is not on the production line is not comfortable and does not feel at home.

The inevitable result of encouraging one type of class lodge and discouraging the formation of its counterpart is this: Masons who are professional men, men of intellectual attainments, men of refinement, become men without a country. They have no place to go. They do not attend the meetings of their lodge because there is little to interest them or to challenge them. They can not form lodges made up of kindred spirits because that is frowned upon as "undemocratic." And those who are not members of the Craft soon form the opinion that Freemasonry has little or nothing to offer them, for its membership is made up of men with whom they have little or nothing in common.

Don't tell me it can not happen, for it does happen. I have seen it happen to some fine old lodges which once operated in the finest of Masonic traditions. It has happened within the last 30 years right here in Indiana. It has happened in your jurisdiction, too, whether you are willing to admit it or not.

Will someone please give me a reason that will justify our Number One Masonic inconsistency - that the class lodge made up of men who wear blue shirts is one of the glories of our Craft, whereas the class lodge made up of men who wear white shirts is somehow a denial of the ideal of universality? Someday I hope American Freemasonry will overcome its foolish hypocrisy and recognize the fact that men who have common interests in office and classroom and laboratory deserve to enjoy each other's company as much as men who have common interests on the truck line and in the machine shop.

5. Our leadership. Whenever a lodge or a Grand Lodge looks the other way to avoid facing up to our time-tested standards, whenever it relaxes a bit here or compromises a point there, it is a foregone conclusion that the quality of our membership will suffer and that our leadership will suffer. I need not dwell on the decline of leadership, for every man in this room knows what has been happening over a period of many years.
6. And finally, I shall mention only briefly what I consider to be one of the most, if not the most critical, of all our problems. It is the economic squeeze. I could have devoted my entire time to a discussion of this subject alone, for I believe an economic reason may be found for most of our troubles. I shall mention only a few, and those briefly:
 - More and more of our lodges have found themselves saddled with the maintenance and upkeep of costly Temples growing more costly each year; they must let down the bars and reject as few petitioners as possible to keep income ahead of outgo.
 - Lodges fail increasingly to do the charitable and benevolent work they should be doing because they have to maintain their own physical plants.
 - Our life blood is in the formation of new lodges, but new lodges are discouraged by some of our ridiculous requirements as to physical properties, and new lodges are blackballed by existing lodges which fear they might lose a member or two.
 - The Fraternity faces increasing pressure to eliminate or relax the free will and accord rule, largely because of economic pressure. The solution usually is found in ignoring the rule altogether.
 - The threat of extermination by taxation is by no means academic, but very real for both lodges and Grand Lodges.

- Grand Lodges already are according quasi-recognition to organizations not Masonic out of gratitude for dollars and cents favors (through subsidized trips, entertainment, contributions to charitable programs, etc.)
- Grand Lodges that have Masonic Homes tend to view all questions of policy in the light of what will keep everyone happy so they will be generous in their contributions, and reluctant to take positive disciplinary action when it needs to be taken for fear of decreased financial support.
- Most serious of all, perhaps, is the imminent danger of Grand Lodges being forced to knuckle under to pressure from the State to set up standards of admission suitable to whatever policy the State may be pursuing at the moment, and to recognize so-called Grand Lodges that are admittedly irregular in return for promised subsidies paid out of public funds.

What is the problem? I have mentioned only a few of its many ramifications as I see them. You will perhaps attach importance to others I have not outlined.

The matter of greatest importance is not that we enumerate or catalog the difficulties in which Freemasonry finds itself, but that we are willing to identify ourselves as a part of the problem - to acknowledge the fact that we helped to create it - and then to accept our share of the responsibility in finding the answer.

And what is the answer? Ah, my Brethren, if I had the answer I would be the most sought-after Freemason in America today. I do not have it, but I am going to venture the assertion that there are two ways in which the answer may be found:

First, by ruthless re-appraisal, self-examination, self-criticism;

Second, by going to the Brethren themselves to find out what they think.

When I wrote the little booklet, *Why This Confusion in the Temple?* I may have shocked my Brethren a bit in one Paragraph. Referring to Masonic Education programs, I said. "Looking over the nation at all such standard products, I find little to set me on fire and much to leave me cold."

Here is what prompted me to say what I did: Those of you who grew up on a farm will recall that when you wished to a flock of sheep from one field to another, and the only means of access was through a narrow opening in the fence, you first had to persuade the bellwether to go through. When that

was done, the battle was won; every sheep and every lamb followed without question.

As I have reviewed the Proceedings of our American jurisdictions over a period of 20 years I have been reminded many times of my experience with sheep on an Indiana farm. Let one jurisdiction advance a bright idea, and watch the others literally trample over each other to follow as if they had no ideas of their own and were willing to try anything. Since 1947 I have watched the stampede through the opening in the fence over and over. It begins with the four instruction booklets for candidates . . . then motion picture films . . . then workshops or forums . . . then an Intender Plan or a Counsellor Plan or a Mentor Plan . . . then an officer training program with printed booklets to tell the Master and Wardens how to be a leader.

The weakness in all our plans and programs should be apparent: they are adopted too hastily, and they are used as stopgaps without any consideration as to how they might fit into an over-all program.

We should be willing to re-examine our theories, our plans, our programs - critically and with an open mind. If some of them are no longer useful and need to be discarded, why not discard them? I believe we should subject all of them to the merciless light of re-appraisal. Let us flatter ourselves if we must with the thought that the "Minnesota Plan" or the "Kansas Plan" or the "Indiana Plan" is the greatest thing that has happened to American Freemasonry. Then let us face up honestly to two questions:

1. To what extent is our pet plan or program a real and vital force and to what extent is it simply an idea that looks good on paper?
2. Is there any sound reason for supposing that a plan or program that may have attracted widespread attention like a meteor in the skies in the nineteen-fifties has anything to offer in the late nineteen-sixties?

My Brethren, I give you my considered opinion that Masonic Education in your jurisdiction and in mine will never really be a force as long as it is an activity of Masonic Education Committees as such. It must cease being an independent movement, running hither and yon in search of ideas, trying first this and then that, confining its efforts to the training of officers and the persuading of men to read booklets. Instead, I believe it must become a unit, a cog in the wheel - just one small phase of a large, comprehensive, over-all program of instruction and information which has scores of facets and embraces everything we are trying to do in Freemasonry.

It is because we are running in all directions at once, trying first booklets and then workshops, motion pictures and then Mentor Plans and then officers' manuals without any thought as to whether the program is integrated or synchronized with all Grand Lodge activities that we are accomplishing so little.

And finally, before we can become a part of the answer we must identify ourselves as a part of the problem, and before we can identify ourselves as a part of the problem we need to go to the Brethren themselves and find out what the problem really is.

What happens when a manufacturer discovers his product is not "going over"? Does he go on stubbornly offering the same product in the same unattractive package? You can bet your life he does not. He goes to the customer who does the buying: he finds out what is wrong and what it will take to reverse the trend. I am not suggesting that Freemasonry "popularize" itself to the extent of bending with every wind that blows; I am suggesting only that we do the sensible and logical thing and find out what rank-and-file Master Masons are thinking.

This is one area in which the troops can make an estimate of the situation better than the generals. You do not really know why Masons have lost interest in Masonry in your jurisdiction;

I do not really know why they are so apathetic in Indiana. You have theories; I have theories, but what do the Brethren really think? We do not know, and we are making no effort to find out.

We can find out if we will. We can find out if we are big enough to turn the job over to the men who can do it with intelligence and know-how. Grand Lodge Officers can not get the information as to what the troops are thinking; Past Grand Masters can not get it; District Deputies can not get it; Committees on Masonic Education can not get it. These are the ones, perhaps, who should help evaluate the information after it is obtained, but not to ask the pointed questions.

My Brethren, in the United States we have close to four million Masons. In that number we have some of the best minds in the nation; we have men who are not daunted in the least at the thought of tackling the impossible. We have a tremendous reservoir of talent and energy and loyalty and devotion - and we let it go to waste while we parrot such inane slogans as "Plan your work and work your plan."

We have the manpower, the brains, the capacity. The fact that we permit the top intellectual echelon of our membership to do nothing but pay annual dues is no less than sinful. Why do we not recruit them and put them to work? Why do we not take them into our confidence. tell them of Masonry's problems and ask them - for the first time, perhaps - to do something for Freemasonry? I shall venture the prediction that they can find some answers for us in a surprisingly short time and with amazing accuracy.

Why have Masons lost interest in Masonry? The way to find out is for a Mason who used to be disinterested to ask a Mason who still has no interest.

What else can we learn if we have the courage to ask the questions?

- Whether newly raised Masons were solicited, directly or indirectly, to petition for the degrees.
- Why the disinterested Mason became disinterested.
- What the Brother expected and hoped to find in Masonry; whether he found it.
- Whether the Brother has been disappointed or disillusioned in his Masonic experience, and if so, in what manner.
- Whether the officers of the lodge "got through" to him when the degrees were conferred.
- Whether his intelligence was insulted by the manner in which the ritualistic work was presented.
- Whether the degrees of Symbolic Freemasonry impress him as challenging, or meaningless, or somewhere in between.
- If the jurisdiction in which he was made a Mason has a so-called Intender Plan or Counselor Plan, was it able to contribute to his enlightenment as a candidate? How did it actually operate (not on paper, but in actual practice)? Or did it operate at all?
- Whether the officers and Brethren conferred the degrees upon him and then showed no further interest in him except at dues paying time.
- Whether he ever had an unfortunate experience in the "inquisition" so often conducted when a Mason seeks to visit another lodge.

- Whether he is bored by our ritualistic work, or by the meetings of his lodge in general, and why.
- Does he feel that Freemasonry has become anachronistic; i.e., something that does not belong to the times in which we live?
- Has he ever been called upon to do anything for his lodge - anything that was really challenging, that is?
- Would he enjoy performing a service for his lodge? - What can his lodge do to regain his interest?
- What does he think about the quality of Masonic membership, particularly in his own lodge?
- What does he think of the quality of leadership in his lodge? - Does he feel comfortable when attending a meeting of his lodge?
- Does he have anything in common with the membership? - Does his lodge provide a source of fellowship that is satisfying?
- In his mind, what kind of image does Freemasonry have?
- What is the image of Freemasonry in the circle of his acquaintance?
- If the public image of Freemasonry in his circle of acquaintance is good, why is it good" If poor, why is it poor?
- What does Freemasonry mean to him? If it should cease to be of any force in his community and nation. would he miss it?
- Is he proud to be a Mason?

My Brethren, there comes a day when we need to sort things out and re-arrange them in the order of their importance. It is my firm conviction that the day has dawned - a day when first things must be put first. Those of us who are leaders in the field of Masonic Education can make this a time of greatness if we are honest enough to identify ourselves as a part of the problem; courageous enough to search for the cause regardless of what the cause may prove to be; unselfish enough to abandon some of our pet projects if need be and give of ourselves, so that we become in truth a part of the answer. (Applause)

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