

FREEMASORY IS PRIMARY

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In recent years I have become more of a student of Freemasonry than I was in the past, and, although I still hesitate to think of myself as a Masonic scholar, there are those who tend to put me into that category. Whether I have become a student or a scholar of the Craft is not as significant as is my recognition of the great dearth of Masonic students and scholars in present-day Freemasonry as compared with the past. I doubt whether any would deny that one of the greatest problems facing Freemasonry today is the lack of knowledge of what it truly is, and this includes both the Mason as well as the non-Mason. We simply have far too great a percentage of our Membership unwilling to make the effort to understand the true philosophy and meaning of our Fraternity.

A story is told of an old French doctor who devoted his life to his patients giving much of himself and requiring little in return. If they could not afford to pay, he made no charge. When the day approached that the old doctor could no longer continue in his profession, his patients wanted to give something to the old man in return for the devotion and unselfish contributions he made to their lives. However, they were too poor to give the old doctor the type of recognition which they felt he deserved. Each, however, produced wine for his own use. They decided that each would make a contribution of one pitcher of wine and they would present the doctor with a barrel of wine from which he could draw as he relaxed following retirement.

When the inevitable day came and the speeches of recognition and gratitude were completed, the old doctor accepted the wine from those he served so long and so well, and he returned to his home. He drew a glass from the vat of wine and sat down in a chair to relax. When he tasted the wine, however, it tasted like water. Thinking that something must be wrong, he took a second glass, but it also tasted like water, and sadly the truth was revealed.

Each one of his patients felt that he had too little for his own use and that he could not afford to contribute to the doctor. Each reasoned that since so many others were giving, his small contribution would not be missed.

How sad, and yet how true, that this analogy can also be applied to our Fraternity today. So many feel that their little contribution will not be missed, and as a result Freemasonry, like the old doctor, who meant so much to so many, experiences the disappointment.

The more familiar I become with this organization, the more impressed I become with the magnitude of the impact that it has made on the world as we know it today. There can be no doubt that without Freemasonry the civilized world, in its present form, probably would not exist. But, we are tending to become a passive Fraternity as non-involvement becomes more of a part of our lives. Each of us probably takes great pride in

being able to point to so many great men who have been part of Freemasonry, yet this tendency to point to the great men has led us to ignore the greatness of the Craft. It is the greatness of the Organization with its philosophies and precepts which attracted the great men to begin with, and which made the world what it is today. Freemasonry is primary; membership is secondary. Without the greatness of the Craft, its composition would have been irrelevant. Yet at the same time, it was the contribution of the membership which made the philosophy of the Craft work.

We should never cease to be proud of our past; but we can ill-afford to dwell upon it, if it causes us to lose sight of the present. Every single contribution, regardless of how small, is a contribution to the perpetuation of an ideal — perhaps the greatest ideal — that the mind of man has conceived. In an age which continues to see the world's major conflicts taking place in the name of God and religion, the philosophy of toleration is still as desperately needed as it was in the past. We find no organization today espousing a similar philosophy. We can continue to express our lovely platitudes and make no contribution; or we can be what we say we are, and practice what we preach.

There can be little doubt, however, that if we continue to fail to know what we are, we will continue to fail to be what we were. Probably the greatest challenge facing Masonic leadership today is the education of the membership of the true meaning of Freemasonry. Pennsylvania has been extremely fortunate in the field of Masonic education. We have had, and continue to have, one of the greatest Masonic education programs in operation in any Grand Lodge in the world. But, as has been said many times, you cannot run 20,000 volts through a non-conductor and, unfortunately, too many of our members today have become non-conductors by choice. If we don't understand the Craft, how can we ever hope for those outside to understand us. If we continue to think that our little contribution will not be missed, then like the old doctor, an organization which has greatly impacted this world for close to 300 years during the evolution of civilization is like him — doomed to be disappointed. Think about it, my Brothers. Your contribution, no matter how small, is significant.

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