

Acting as Chaplain

I WAS embarrassed in lodge tonight!" announced the New Brother to the Old Tiler. "I don't think the Master ought to make me feel that way!"

"That's too bad," answered the Old Tiler, with ready sympathy. "Did he call you down for something?"

"Oh, no. The Chaplain was absent, and the Master asked me to act in his place."

"Why should that embarrass you?" asked the Old Tiler, still sympathetic.

"It embarrassed me horribly to say I wouldn't."

"Oh, you refused?"

"Of course I refused! My embarrassment was bad enough as it was, but to get up in front of the Altar and offer a prayer! Man, I couldn't do that!"

"You surprise me!" answered the Old Tiler. "But let that pass. Who did act as Chaplain?"

"The Master asked the speaker of the evening, some brother I never saw before. He made a beautiful prayer, too. I heard him tell the Master he didn't know the prayer in the ritual, but the Master said that didn't matter, which I thought rather odd."

"Can you remember what the stranger said?" asked the Old Tiler,

"Pretty well, I think" answered the New Brother. "It was not long. He went to the Altar and kneeled, and then said 'Almighty Architect of the Universe, we, as Master Masons, standing in a Masonic Lodge erected to Thy glory, humbly petition that Thou look with favor upon this assembly of Thy children. Open our hearts that the eternal Masonic truth may find ready entry that we be enabled to make ourselves square stones, fitting in Thy sight for the great Temple, eternal in Thy heavens. We ask it in the name of the All-Seeing Eye, Amen.'"

"That was a pretty prayer," responded the Old Tiler.

"But it wasn't the ritual prayer," objected the New Brother.

"No, nor it wasn't by the appointed Chaplain," retorted the Old Tiler. "What difference does it make to God whether we pray the same prayer at every lodge opening? It must be the sincerity and the thought behind the prayer which count in His sight, not the words. But in your refusal to act as Chaplain it seems to me you put yourself in an unfortunate position. You shave yourself, don't you?"

"Why, er, yes! What has that got to do with it?"

"Tomorrow morning, when you shave yourself, you'll look in the mirror and you'll say 'Hello, coward!' and that's not nice, is it?"

"Do you think I was a coward?" asked the New Brother, wistfully.

"Scared stiff!" smiled the Old Tiler. "So conceited, so filled with the idea of all your brethren admiring you, you couldn't bear to forget yourself, lest they falter in their admiration. Sure, that's cowardly. You ducked a duty because of conceit!"

"Old Tiler, you use strong words! It was not conceit. It was modesty. I didn't think I was able."

"Don't fool yourself! You told me you were embarrassed. Why is a man embarrassed in public? Because he is afraid he won't do well, won't make a good appearance, won't succeed, will be ridiculous. So you refused the pretty compliment the Master paid you, and refused your brethren the slight service of being their mouthpiece."

"But I never have prayed in public!"

"Neither has any other man ever prayed in public prior to his first public prayer!" grinned the Old Tiler. "But please tell me why a man should be embarrassed before God? We are taught that He knoweth all things. If we can't conceal anything from Him, He knows all about you! A man may be ashamed of himself, sorry for what he is and has been, but embarrassed, in prayer? As for being embarrassed before your brethren, that's conceited. Almost any man is a match for an army if he has God with him. The man on his feet who talks aloud to God has no need to consider men. If men laugh, shame to them. In all my many years as a Mason, I never yet saw any man smile or say a word of ridicule at any one's petition to Deity. I have heard Fellow Crafts offer up a petition to Deity out loud which touched the hearts of all present who admired their fearlessness in facing the Great Architect and saying what was in their hearts. I never heard a man laugh when a Chaplain, ordained or substitute, made a petition to Deity. Whether it was the petition in the ritual, or one which came from the heart, be sure the Great Architect understood it. As for asking a blessing in the name of the All Seeing Eye, what difference does it make to God by what name we call Him? That is a good Masonic name, sanctified by the reverent hearts of generations of men and Masons.

"For your own peace of mind, tell your Master you made a mistake and that you are sorry, and that if he will honor you by giving you an opportunity to pray for yourself and your brethren, you will, in the absence of the Chaplain, do your reverent best. And when you kneel before that Altar you will forget, as all Chaplains must who mean what they say, that any listen save the One to whom the prayer is addressed!"

"Old Tiler, I'll try to do it!" cried the New Mason.

"Humph!" grunted the Old Tiler.