

Costumes?

"THEY are having a hot discussion!" replied the New Brother to the Old Tiler's inquiry. "Jones is arguing that we ought to spend a thousand dollars or more to buy costumes for the degrees. Past Master Smith is marshalling all his forces to combat it."

"That's the way it would line up," agreed the Old Tiler. "Jones hopes to be Master in a couple of years and wants costumes, and Smith doesn't want his last year's record eclipsed."

"I'm against costumes," said the New Brother. "Looks like a waste of money to me."

"Why is it waste?"

"Why, we can confer the degrees just as well without them!"

"Yes, and we could confer the degrees just as well in a plain board building as in a fine Masonic Temple, with brethren seated on wooden boxes instead of on expensively upholstered leather settees; by candle light as well as by electric light?"

"Oh, well! Of course we want to be comfortable and to impress the candidate . . ."

"That is what costumes are for, to impress the candidate. The degrees are allegorical; they teach lessons of the present from happenings of the past. If costumes can make them more impressive, the lesson should be easier, and so better learned," countered the Old Tiler, but with an odd smile.

"You can't tell me . . ."

"Oh, yes, I can! I am telling you. The third degree in costume takes the candidate back to the building of the Temple. We show him characters dressed as Solomon's workmen dressed, He finds a reality in the story he cannot see when the actors are in modern clothes. The more real the story is, the more potent the impression. Costumes add largely to the degree's spectacular features."

"You are right, at that," answered the New Brother. "You argue well. I think I'll support Jones in his motion."

"Oh, I wouldn't say that!" The Old Tiler smiled broadly. "You haven't thought the question through."

"But you have just argued me into believing in costumes," answered the New Brother, bewildered.

"Oh, no, I haven't. I have told you what the costume proponents say of it. But there is another side. Masonry is a system of philosophy taught by allegories and symbols. We

are not really stone masons. We do not actually lay mortar or construct actual buildings. Our Masonry is speculative, not operative. But the legend of our third degree, when enacted in costume, is certainly an operative performance. The aprons we wear in lodge would not do for a real worker in stone; they are but imitations or symbols of a body protector and tool holder. Our lodge room does not look like the exterior of a temple, and the three gates exist only in imagination. Why put the actors in costumes and omit a stage and lights and scenery?"

"I don't know why not," said the New Brother, thoughtfully.

"There isn't any reason why not," answered the Old Tiler. "Some lodges do it that way. But the majority of lodges have no stages, costumes or real actors. Most lodges have earnest workers, who enact the degree with hope of instructing the candidate in one of life's greatest lessons; a lesson so great that it does not need costumes. When the minister in the pulpit reads the gospel, does he act the parts of those whose words he reads? There is but one Passion Play, but all Christianity knows the story. It needs no costumes to sink home to the heart.

"So it is with the Masonic story. It needs no trappings to be glorious, no yellow and blue robe to be effective. It has the dignity of its own impressiveness. To put a business man in a blue and green robe and tell him he is to act like a stone mason of the time of Solomon, without scenery or training, is not to add to the impressiveness of the degree, but to take away from it."

"I guess you are right," agreed the New Brother, thoughtfully. "I will back and uphold Brother Smith in his contention that we don't need the costumes."

"But we do need them!" countered the Old Tiler.

"But you have just argued me into thinking we should not buy them!"

"Not at all, not at all", was the smiling answer. "I have just quoted you the reasons some urge against them.

"But one side must be right and one side wrong!" protested the New Brother.

"It's not a matter of sides but of men. The degree neither needs costumes, nor needs to be put on without them. Some need costumes in which to work; others don't. The right answer is in the people who work the degree. A group of dramatic actors, who throw themselves into the story as if it were a play, will do better work if fiction is made real with costumes. Brethren who find the story an allegory rather than a play do better without them. Whether costumes or not depends on the men who do the work."

"I am going back in that lodge and vote whichever way the degree team votes!" announced the New Brother.

"You see, I did manage to tell you!" answered the Old Tiler.