

Gold and Iron

OLD TILER, why are not more Masons, Masons?" asked the New Brother in the anteroom.

"For the same reasons that not more friends are friends, or hot dogs, sausages, I guess," answered the Old Tiler. "You tell me the answer."

"It seems mighty queer to me that we can't make more lodge members feel the inner spirit of Freemasonry, answered the New Brother. "I can't understand it."

"That shows you haven't a very observing pair of eyes or a great understanding of human nature," smiled the Old Tiler. "If this was a perfect world made up of perfect men there would be no need of Freemasonry!"

"Maybe not. But if you can see what I can't, and understand what is hidden from me, tell me, won't you?"

"I'll try, answered the Old Tiler. "A great many years ago there was a great leader of men on earth; I don't know whether it was Guatama Buddha, or Mohammed, or Brahma. No matter what his name was, this great leader and teacher of men wandered in a sparsely settled part of the back country near the sea, hungry and tired and footsore. He had asked several of the country people for aid and shelter but while they were not unkind they also were poor and offered him nothing, thinking him one of themselves.

"At last, however, he found a poor peasant who took him in. The peasant gave him some dry clothes, for his were wet from storm, and shared his crust of bread and his humble cottage. In the morning he gave the wanderer breakfast and a staff to help him on his way.

" 'What can I do to repay you?' asked the great leader of his host.

" 'I need no payment. I, too, have been a wanderer and you have both my sympathy and my aid for love only,' answered the peasant.

" 'Then the great leader told him who he was. 'And because I have power, I will reward you in any way you wish,' he said. 'Choose what you will have.'

" 'If it is indeed so, oh, my Lord,' answered the peasant, give me gold; gold, that I may buy clothes and food and women and wine; gold, that I may have power and place and prominence and happiness.'

'Gold I can give you, but it would be a poor gift' answered the great leader. 'Who has gold without earning it ears of the tree of misery. And because you have been kind to me I will not give you such a curse. Gold you shall have, but a task you shall do to earn it.

You wear an iron bracelet. On the shore of the sea, among many, is a pebble, which if you touch it to iron will turn it to gold. Find it, and all iron will be your gold.'

"Hardly stopping to thank his benefactor, the peasant ran to the seashore to pick up pebbles and touch them to his bracelet to see if it would turn to gold. All morning he ran, picking up pebbles, touching the iron, and then, so that he wouldn't pick up the wrong pebble twice, he tossed the useless pebbles, which were not the magic stone, into the Sea.

"After a while the task became monotonous; pick up pebble, touch it to iron, throw it in the sea – over and over again. So he amused himself with visions of what he would do when he should have won the great wealth. He planned his harem and his wine cellar, pictured the great banquets he would give, thought of the slaves he would purchase and how he would be recognized by all as a rich and powerful noble. Meanwhile, of course, he was busy picking up pebbles, touching them to his bracelet and throwing them into the sea.

"The day wore on. The visions became more and more entrancing, the task more and more mechanical. And at last, just as the sun was going down, the peasant looked at his bracelet – and behold! It was ruddy yellow gold! Some one of the thousands of pebbles he had touched to the iron was the lucky one, the magic one, and because he had been thinking of something else, doing his task mechanically, he had cast it into the sea."

The Old Tiler stopped, thoughtfully puffing at his cigar.

"That's a very nice fable," observed the New Brother. "But what has it to do with the matter under discussion?"

"Much," answered the Old Tiler. "In Masonry we are too much like the peasant. We take the pebbles of the beach, the many who apply to us, touch them to the iron of our Freemasonry and cast them out into the sea of life. Or we take the touchstone which is Freemasonry and touch it to the iron which is a man, and let him throw it away. Work the simile how you will, what we do is to neglect the newly made Mason; we give him only perfunctory attention. We do our work mechanically. We are letter perfect in our degrees, and too often without the spirit of them. We have ritualists who can dot every I and cross every T, who have every word in place and no wrong words, but who have no knowledge of what they say. I once knew a Grand Master who didn't know what a hecatomb was, and plenty of Masons cannot tell you if the two pillars on the porch were supports for a loafing place or whether they have a spiritual meaning not at all concerned with porches.

"The reason more Masons do not deserve the title is not altogether their fault. It's our fault! We don't know enough ourselves to teach them; we don't care enough about it to teach them. A good balance in the bank, a growing membership, a free feed, 'nice' degrees – and we call ourselves a successful lodge. But we make only ten men real Masons for every hundred to whom we give the degrees, and the fault is ours, not theirs; my fault, your fault, our fault

because we don't study, don't learn, don't care to learn the real secrets of Freemasonry, and so cannot teach them."

"There is one who teaches in this lodge," answered the New Brother, slowly, "and one who tries to learn."

"Yes?" answered the Old Tiler. "Who are they?"

"You, who reach, and I, who try to learn, " answered the New Brother.

"Humph," grunted the Old Tiler, but his eyes smiled, well pleased.