

LEARNING THE WORK

"It seems to me," began the New Brother, offering a cigar to the Old Tiler, "that we make unnecessary demands on a candidate."

"Thanks," answered the Old Tiler. "Such as what, for instance?"

"A candidate who has received the Entered Apprentice degree must perfect himself in it before he gets his Fellowcraft. After he is a Fellowcraft he must learn that ritual before he can become a Master Mason. I can see the reason why all brethren must understand them and be able to tell about degrees, but I don't see why we must learn word for word and letter for letter. Last meeting we turned back a young fellow because he had not learned his Entered Apprentice degree. If he didn't learn it because he didn't want to he wasn't worth having, but it seems he just couldn't. Refusing him was an injustice. He's only one-third a Mason, and not likely to get any farther."

"You sure think of a lot of things Masonic to find fault with!" countered the Old Tiler. "But we would get along faster if you didn't mix your questions."

"How do you mean, mix them?"

"In one breath you want to know why Masonry requires learning degrees by heart, and don't I think it was an injustice to a certain young fellow because we wouldn't admit him to full membership when he couldn't or didn't, only you don't think it an injustice but a righteousness if he could and didn't. You agree that one of the safeguards of Masonry which keep it pure is what we call the ancient landmarks?"

"I agree."

"And you know one of the landmarks is that Masonry is secret?"

"Of course."

"If we printed the work would it be secret?"

"Certainly not. But you don't have to print it."

"No? But if we can't print it and won't learn it, how are we to give it to our sons?"

"Oh!" The New Brother saw a great light. "We all learn the work and so know when mistakes are made and correct them in the workers, and our sons hear the same work we did and learn it and transmit it. But wouldn't it be enough if only a few men learned the work- those well qualified and with good memories? How would that do?"

"It is good Masonry and good Americanism that the majority rules. Masonry is not a despotism but a democracy. If a favored few were the custodians of the work would not

the favored few soon become the rulers of Masonry, just as the favored few have always ruled the lazy, the ignorant, and the stupid?"

"If that happened we'd just put them out of office."

"And put in men who didn't know the work? Then what becomes of your landmark?"

"You are too many for me," laughed the New Brother. "I guess there is a reason why we have to learn the work. But I still think we might make an occasional exception when a man just can't memorize."

"If you read the Bible, you know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump. One bad egg will spoil an omelette. The man who won't learn is not fit to be a Mason, since he is not willing to tread the path all his brethren have trod. The man who can't learn the work hasn't control enough of his brain to enable him to appreciate Masonic blessings. This is no question of education. A brother of this lodge has had so little education that he barely reads and write. His grammar is fearful and his knowledge of science so full of things that are not so that it is funny when it isn't pathetic. But he is a good Mason for all that, and bright as a dollar at learning the work. It's only the stupid, the lazy, the indifferent and dull-witted, the selfish and foolish man who can't learn or won't learn Masonry. They add nothing to it; it is better they are kept out. To make an exception merely would be to leaven our lump with sour leaven."

"But, Old Tiler, many who learned it once have forgotten it now."

"Of course they have! You can't do a quadratic equation or tell me the principle cities in Greenland, or bound Poland, or do a Latin declination. You learned it and forgot it. But you had the mental training. If I told you a quadratic was worked with an adding machine, that Poland was in china, or that hocus-pocus meant Caesar's lives, you'd know I was wrong. Same way with ritual; leaning it is Masonic training, and though we often forget it we never lose it entirely, and through the whole of us it is preserved to posterity."

"Oh, all right! I learned mine, any way. Have another cigar, won't you?"

"Thanks," answered the Old Tiler. "You have learned rather well, I'll admit, that I like your cigars!"