

Laughter

IF I HAD my way about it," began the New Brother, sitting beside the Old Tiler, "I'd make it a Masonic offense to laugh in a lodge room. We are not as serious about our Masonry as we should be."

Someone laughed at you, or you are taking yourself very seriously!" answered the Old Tiler.

"I am not!" cried the New Brother. "I take Masonry seriously! What we do in tile lodge room has the sacredness of a religious ceremony. I can see no difference between the sacredness of the Altar of Masonry and the altar of a church, and when I go and see the beautiful windows, and hear the music and watch the choir boys come up the aisle, and hear the minister give out the solemn text – well, you know how inspiring it is. I feel the same way in lodge sometimes, during the more solemn parts of the degrees. But we have a business meeting first and someone cracks a joke and everyone laughs, and some brethren misinterpret and giggle sometimes in the degrees, and there is some ritual which isn't awe-inspiring and – and I think it should be changed!"

"Well, go ahead and change it!" cried the Old Tiler. "I don't believe that absence of solemnity is a Masonic landmark which can't be changed."

"Of course it isn't, but how can I change it?"

"That's your problem!" smiled the Old Tiler. "You are the reformer, not I. But before I wasted much good gray matter, I'd ask myself a few questions. You seem to like things serious, so this should come easy to you. Then I'd talk to the Chaplain. David is young, but he has common sense.

"It would do you good to go to his church. You would find it as solemn and beautiful as any other during the service. But if you went to a vestry meeting you'd see David grin, and maybe someone would tell a ministerial joke. I can't imagine God being displeased about it. Seems to me if he hadn't wanted people to laugh he wouldn't have made so many brethren to laugh at!

"Brother David would tell you that there was a time to be reverent and a time to be happy, and that a church in which people couldn't be happy wasn't much of a church. Ever go to a wedding? Ever see people grin and kiss the bride when it was over? Ever go to a church social? Ever go to the boys' club in a red-blooded church?

"It didn't hurt the church in your eyes, did it? Then why should it disconcert you to have a lodge room treated the same way? Get it out of your head that Masonry or religion is bound up in a room, or a building. It doesn't hurt so long as we don't laugh at the wrong time! It doesn't hurt the solemnity of the Masonic degree that our lodge room is first but a business meeting hall and afterwards maybe a dining room. It is the spirit in which we do

our work which counts, not the letter; it is the temple in our hearts which must be kept sacred, not the mere physical confines of brick and stone in which we meet.

"There should be no cause for laughter during the degrees. But to say that we can't laugh in a lodge room is to get the dog by the wrong tail!

"Masonry, my son, is joyful, not mournful. It should be filled with the laughter of little children, the happy smiles of contented women, the loveliness of faithful friendship, the joy of flowers and music and song. To make it too serious for smiles, too solemn for happiness, perverts it. If God made sunshine and children and flowers, don't you suppose He wanted the one to dance with the other in the third? If He made happiness and human hearts, don't you suppose He wanted the one in the other?

"Masonry is an attempt to live the brotherhood of man under the Fatherhood of God. The best of all human fathers can but touch the skirts of the Being who is the All Father. But did you ever see a human father worth his salt who didn't want his children laughing and happy?

"There is a time for work and a time for play. There is a time for degrees and a time for refreshment. There is a time for business meetings and a time for ritual. There is a time for laughter and for joy as well as a time of solemnity and reverence. The one is as important as the other."

"I wish just once," said the New Brother, "I could start something with you which I could finish!"

"Try offering me a cigar!" suggested the Old Tiler.