

ON FINDING OUT

"I'm sore!" announced the New Brother to the Old Tiler.

"Where?" demanded the Old Tiler. "I'm no doctor, if it's your teeth or your back."

"It isn't. It's my feelings."

"That's different. As a soother of sore Masonic feelings I am the best doctor in captivity!" smiled the Old Tiler. "Pull out your symptoms and let's look at them."

"It's being jumped on, if you must know," began the New Brother. "I asked a friend to give me his petition to the lodge and Brother Smith heard it and walked all over me. How was I to know we didn't go around asking for petitions? At lunch a man I know made slighting remarks about Masonry and I defended it, and a brother took me to task afterwards and told me I shouldn't discuss Masonry with the profane. How was I to know it wasn't done in the best Masonic circles? Just this evening I answered the telephone and a feminine voice asked for Brother Jones and I said he wasn't here. The Master walked up and down my spine for giving out information as to who was and who wasn't present. How was I to know that was a secret?"

"How do you usually find things out?" asked the Old Tiler.

"But I think I ought to be told these things! I think I should be instructed what to do and what not to do. I think. . ."

"I don't think you think," interrupted the Old Tiler. "I think you think you think. Really, you just react. Now answer a few questions, like a good patient, and I'll cure your pimpled feelings, relieve the congestion in your inflamed emotions and reduce the swelling in your cranium and you'll feel a lot better. In the first place, what's your business?"

"Why, I am in the hardware business-I own the store at the corner of Main and Oak Streets-what's that got to do with it?"

"When you went into the hardware business, did you know all there was to know about it?"

"I'll say I didn't and don't now. But what. . ."

"I'm doing the question asking!" snapped the Old Tiler. "Did all the other hardware dealers of this town give you good advice? Did they all surround you day and night with counsel and assistance? Or did they let you paddle your own canoe?"

"Just that. I learned what I know by asking questions and reading, by listening to others who knew the game, by. . ."

"Exactly. You hung up a sign and launched out for yourself, and they accepted you at your own value-as a competitor, a man, a business agent, able to fight your own battles. That's what we do in the lodge. We make you a Master Mason. We give you instruction in Masonry. We make you one of us. Then we turn you loose and expect you to act as if you were a man and a Mason, not a school child. If we spent all our time telling every new brother all we know, we'd have no time to practice brotherhood. We expect you to open not only your ears but your mouth. There are seventy-six men in that lodge tonight, any one of whom will answer any question you ask, and if they don't know the answer they will find some one who does. But to expect the seventy-six to force information on you is unreasonable. They don't know what you know; they have natural reluctance to put themselves in the position of teachers, when they don't know if you want to learn or what you want to learn. Ask a question and you'll hear something. Stick around with your mouth shut and you won't.

"The fraternity has certain customs and usages. Those who denounce it in public can do it no harm, but denunciation can harm it. If a man gets up in public and says he thinks the public school is useless, the church is a bad influence, and the government a failure, banks a hindrance to business and the automobile a blot on civilization, do you defend the school, the church, the government, the bank, the automobile? Every thinking human being knows the public school has made this country what it is, that the church makes men and women better, that this is the best of all governments and that the automobile is the greatest of time savers. These things are self-evident. The man who denies them makes himself, not the thing he criticizes, ridiculous. Criticism of Masonry hurts the man who utters it, not the Craft."

"All that is true. I admit it, but I didn't know it!"

"No, and you didn't know you were not supposed to say whether Brother Jones was here or not. That's his business. But I'm telling you because you asked me. I thought you knew all this. How was I to know you didn't? You never told me you didn't!"

"Well, er-I thought-I mean-"

"You thought you thought but you thought wrong!" smiled the Old Tiler. "Just remember, don't do, don't say, don't think Masonry while you are new until you have asked. We are old, old; we have ideas, ways of doing and thinking, which have grown up through the years. You will learn them gradually as you attend lodge and talk with well-informed Masons. Don't be afraid to open your mouth. No one will laugh at you, all will help. But don't ask questions outside the lodge and don't talk outside the lodge until you know what you are talking about."

"I know one place outside the lodge where I can, do and shall talk! defended the New Brother.

"In spite of what I say?" demanded the Old Tiler, somewhat tartly.

"Yep, in spite of what you say! And that place is right here in the anteroom," smiled the New Brother. "And thank you."