

## ON INVESTIGATING A PETITIONER

"An odd question was asked of me today," began the New Brother to the Old Tiler. "Chap who just received his Master Mason degree was assigned to his first committee on a petition. He asked me, 'What do you try to find out about this fellow?' Wasn't that a bird of a question?"

"I should like to hear what sort of animal your reply was," answered the Old Tiler. "So I ask you the same question. What do you try to find out about a petitioner when you are on his committee?"

"Oh, I take the duty very seriously, I assure you," answered the New Brother. "I go to see him and find out if he has all his arms and legs; no maimed man is going to get in if I know it! I size him up, and see what sort of a chap he is, and if I think he's all right I report so. If I have any cause to doubt anything, I talk to his employer."

"I thought so!" answered the Old Tiler. "You regard him as perfectly innocent until he is proved guilty, and satisfy yourself that he has two legs and arms. If he looks like a good fellow, you tell the lodge he is one, and I dare say if he has a dirty face and frayed pair of trousers you say he isn't ready to be a Master Mason!"

"Well, what's the matter with that? Isn't that what we are supposed to do?"

"Only partly," answered the Old Tiler. "Do you know Gus, of this lodge?"

"Everyone knows Gus! Chap who limps!"

"Do you think he is a good Mason?"

"As far as I can see, why?"

"Gus only has one leg, you know. He lost it after he became a Master Mason."

"Yes, I know. What's that got to do with it?"

"It seems to indicate that the least important part of your duties is to find out whether a man has the correct number of members! I know it's law; we do not admit the one-footed or the one-handed. Sometimes I think it is a cruel law. But when the law is stretched to say that a man with a finger or a toe missing, or one eye, or one ear, or a humped back, or a clubfoot, cannot become a Mason, then I think there should be a higher law than this one!"

"It seems to me that your method of looking into the merits of an applicant leaves something to be desired. You say, 'If I think he's all right.' You have no business to think he's all right. You can't tell him from a criminal by sizing him up. You may be a

remarkable judge of appearances, but the lodge doesn't appoint you on a petitioner's committee for your ability to 'size someone up.' It appoints you to go out and dig.

"You 'size a man up' by his appearance and his speech. Many a good Mason has been made out of a man whose clothing was not fashionable and whose speech was rough. It is not the outward appearance which counts; it's the man under the coat. You can't discover the man under the coat by looking at the coat.

"It's good American doctrine that a man is innocent until he is proved guilty, but that doctrine presupposes that some power has accused the man. The applicant for Masonic degrees is not accused of anything. He is asking a favor. When a man asks a favor he should prove that he is worthy of having it granted. You regard him as unfit for the favor until he is proved fit. You have the same right to regard an applicant as unfit for the degrees of Masonry until he shows you that he is.

"When I investigate a petitioner I see him in his home. If he is married I want to see him with his wife. If he has a child or children, I want to know whether they hang around Daddy's neck or cower away from him. I once went to see a man and waited for him, talking to his wife and children. They were a gay little pair and she a nice woman. All three looked often out the window, anxiously. After a while Mother saw the man coming. 'Hush, babies,' she said, 'be very quiet now, here comes Daddy.' They hushed. The man didn't speak to them when he came in, and just nodded to his wife.

"I didn't stop there. I gave him every chance. I talked with his employers, and his fellow employees. I discovered an egotist, a self-seeker, a selfish and hard man. I turned him down with joy; he wasn't of Masonic calibre.

"No man can pass me who cannot explain why he wants to be a Mason. He has to argue that question with me at length. If I find it's because he thinks it will help him in business or he thinks the lodge will care for him or his if he loses his job, or because he is curious, he doesn't get in.

"I want to know of a man, does he pay his debts? If he is married, is he insured? If not, why not? If it's because he can't afford to be, he can't afford to be a Mason. I would not willingly allow an uninsured married man to join my lodge, because he has not the conception of the protection of dependent loved ones which marks a man as a man. I won't let a man pass who isn't trusted by his fellows. I have reported favorably on men who couldn't get in a business man's club or a fashionable church."

"I better hunt up the brother who asked me what I thought an odd question and give him a better answer!" said the New Brother.

"You just didn't think!" answered the Old Tiler.

"No, I didn't. But I'm right pleased with the conversation," added the New Brother.

"How so?" asked the Old Tiler

"Because I remember you were on my committee!"