

Poor Fish

If I didn't love the old lodge so much I'd dimit and go to a live one!"

The New Brother spoke disgustedly to the Old Tiler. He laid down his sword, hitched in his chair and snorted. "S'matter with the old lodge now?" he asked belligerently.

"Oh, same old thing. Same old gang. No possible chance of doing anything different than we ever did. No pep. No costumes. No new expenditure for anything. We have died on the vine and don't know it!"

"Someone step on a resolution you offered?"

"Didn't offer any. Knew better. No use asking that bunch to do anything."

"Listen, brother, while I give you some advice. Look at an aquarium and consider the fishes."

"Huh?"

"Consider the fishes – the poor fishes. I asked the master of the aquarium what kept a bass in a glass pot full of water from eating up his small minnow companions. He told me he had trained the bass not to eat minnows. I asked him how he could do that. He said he put a plate glass partition in the aquarium, with the minnows on one side and the bass on the other. The bass made a nose dive after a mouthful of minnows and got a noseful of invisible plate glass. That made him pause for a moment but he soon returned. For three days that determined bass tried to dive through the glass he couldn't see. After the third day his nose was so sore he gave up. Decided, probably, that the minnows were ghost minnows and couldn't be eaten! He has lived with them a year since and never tried to eat one, even when it rubs against his nose.

"Now, brother, you consider the poor fish. He doesn't try anything because once he did and got a sore nose. You think the old lodge is dead because it won't spend money for costumes or stage an entertainment or buy a new temple or something. You are convinced it has withered on the vine, because it hasn't done anything progressive. Every brother in it talks the same way. Everyone wants to do something, but a few years ago a crowd of standpatters put a plate glass between the membership and any minnows of progress. The plate glass is long gone and the standpatters are a ring no more. But you and all the rest are afraid to offer constructive programs because you think the plate glass is still there. Between you and the bass, there's little difference in wealth."

"Wealth? I don't get you.

"I said wealth. You are both poor fish.

"That's handing it out pretty straight," commented the New Brother. "Now tell me, Old Tiler, why you think this old lodge doesn't spend money for anything except necessities and charity? You think it is a good lodge, a flourishing lodge, an old lodge!"

"Got any loose change in your pocket?" asked the Old Tiler.

"Sure, a handful," said the New Brother, pulling it out.

"Hold a dime in front of one eye and close the other. What do you see?" commanded the Old Tiler.

"Why, I sec a dime, of course!" was the surprised answer.

"Exactly. You see a dime. You don't see the \$1.87 on the chair. A dime is close so that you can't see \$1 a foot away. That's the idea of brethren who won't spend lodge money for anything they don't have to. They see the treasury full to bursting and investments piling up, then they try to look through a dime and are so scared to spend a dollar they don't dare read the treasurer's report aloud for fear someone will steal it!

"It was a fine lodge; now it is running on its reputation. It used to spend money wisely. Everything we needed we had. We had jamborees and smokers and entertainments; we had picnics and outings; we had educational lectures and a library; instructive talks were given new brethren and candidates. We spent what we took in and made better Masons by so doing. Gradually we began to look at the thin dimes so hard we couldn't see the success, progress, reputation, we had bought with dollars. So we stopped spending. Now we have money and a reputation of having died on the vine. What shall it profit a lodge if it lay up large numbers of dollars in the treasury, and lose its hold on its members? Where is the profit of penuriousness and lack of progress, even if we have money? What good is money unless you spend it? A million dollars at the North Pole isn't as valuable as one fur coat. All the money in the world on a desert island wouldn't buy one newspaper. You must spend money to get the good of it. You must spend money to make money. And you must spend money to keep your lodge alive and make your members better members and your Masons happy Masons. "

"I never thought of it that way, Brother.

"I think I'll start a public aquarium," continued the Old Tiler.

"What for?" the New Brother was unwise enough to ask.

"For the poor fish, of course," snapped the Old Tiler. "I've got one here to start with."

"Come on in that lodge room with me," commanded the New Brother firmly. "No Old Tiler can call me a poor fish and get away with it!"

"What are you going to do?" asked the Old Tiler.

"Offer a resolution to spend \$1,000 in the next six months in educational work among our members, and you are going to second it."

"There goes the start of a perfectly good aquarium," sighed the Old Tiler.