

MAKING A "REAL" MASON OF THE NEW INITIATE

(or "Wanted: An inexpensive book on the symbolism and history of Masonry")

from "Masonic Light" – May 5948 – by Charles Holmes

After the neophyte has been through the Apprentice's degree, during which he has been told that he must ever seek more light, that he must broaden his knowledge of Masonry, he is brought to the East where he is given a book of the G.'L.'. constitutions and a copy of the by-laws of the particular lodge to which he has been admitted. True, the Constitutions may give him an insight into what are our ancient landmarks and of the regulations of 1721 and the "old charges of 1722" - the whole in a very few pages and presented in a very unpalatable form, this is not enough to satisfy the enquiring mind of the thinking man who comes to us because of the preconceived good opinion he has of our Order.

If the newly-made Mason does read the few pages that are not devoted to the dryly expressed and often obscure regulations of the order, the knowledge he will thus have secured will be insufficient to make him realize what a wonderful institution Masonry really is.

He will then pass through his Craft, man's destiny - and again be admonished to seek more light, to make the illiberal arts and sciences his future study .. but where will he find the knowledge he is admonished to seek?

Finally he is raised to the sublime degree of a Master Mason, and is told that he is now a Master of our Arts. He is bewildered to realize that though he has absorbed, in the course of the ritualistic ceremonies he has undergone, a great deal of the legends on which Masonry, as we know it, is based. These ceremonies, impressive as they are, have failed to inform him completely as to the purposes and history of Masonry. If he goes no further in his quest for light, the new Master Mason will merely be a "new member" who will soon lose interest in our Order.

It has been the Custom, in some Lodges, to give to the newly-raised Mason, a nice, gilt-edged, leather, bound Bible, on the fly-leaf of which is inscribed the date on which he took each of his three basic degrees.

This is a nice gesture and the book is doubtless kept by the recipient as a pleasant memento of his admission to our Order, but, will it really help him to secure more knowledge of Masonry. Granted it contains the story of Solomon and the building of his Temple and a few scanty references to Hiram Abif and Hiram, King of Tyre.

He has doubtless already read it and it may be re-read with greater care, now that these stories have taken on (for him) a deeper meaning! Was it really necessary to present him with a V.S.L. to ensure this result? Is it not a probability, if not a certainty, that the new brother already had a Bible in his home in which he could have found those references that interest him as a Mason?

If, instead of presenting a Bible to the newly-made Master Mason, some concise book on Masonry, containing an outline of the history, philosophy and symbolism of Masonry, could be presented to him, would this not impart a new and deeper meaning to the ritualistic ceremonies he has been through and would be so frequently called upon to witness and take a part in, in the future?

Would not the knowledge of Masonry's wonderful philosophy and its history, reaching back so far in the past, inspire the new brother with a new zeal and admiration for the institution of which he has been made a part? In other words would it not, even more than the indispensable ritualistic ceremonies, make the new brother a real Mason?

While we have many books - and series of bulky tomes - on Masonry in general or some specific phase of Masonic study, we sadly lack a small, concise, almost elementary book on Masonry, sold at a modest price, which Lodges could present to their new members after they had taken their third degree.

I know of several books - the latest and one of the best being "The newly, made Mason" by Haywood - unfortunately these books are too costly for the average Lodge to be able to buy them for free distribution to new initiates - and, naturally, to the Lodge members as well.

In pre-war days it was possible to secure, in Great Britain, pocketbooks giving an outline of the symbolism and history of Masonry. These sold for a couple of shillings and, preferential tariffs aiding, such books could be delivered in Canada, transportation paid, for less than a dollar. Unfortunately, the war has destroyed so much printing equipment in the "old-country" and paper is still such a scarcity on the British market, it is, today, almost impossible to produce books with limited editions at anything near prewar prices. When, today, you write a British publisher for a book on some Masonic subject which you have seen in a Library or featured on the lists that frequently appear at the end of books printed before the war, you will generally be advised it is "out of print".

On this side of the pond, we knew of but one book that was within the price-range that would make it accessible to all. It was W. G. Sibley's "The Story of Freemasonry" published by The Lion's Paw Club of Ohio. 114 pages of text, written in a style remarkable for its simplicity of expression, that made it easily understandable to all, in contrast with most of our Masonic writers who seem to take a perverse delight in expressing themselves in a stilted, pedantic style that allows them to display their erudition at the cost of clarity and easy comprehension. Sibley's little book, had no less than four editions between 1904 and 1913, more than 35,000 copies being sold for one dollar (less in quantity lots) though the book was printed on heavy paper and bound in cloth.

There was a book that gave a bird's eye view of Masonry in all its aspects to the new initiate. After reading it, he would not need to seek explanations from older brethren, who generally could not give the required information. He would have a general idea of what Masonry was all about-and having once secured his knowledge from a book, he would logically rely on books to give him a deeper knowledge of any aspect of Masonry in which he sought further enlightenment.

Unfortunately, the copy right on Sibley's book has been put, chased by a publisher of Masonic books, who has not republished it. It is therefore no longer available.

It is so evident that once you can get a man to become sufficiently interested in a subject to read a book about it, he will soon wish to secure further knowledge by reading other books on the same subject, we wonder why some publisher of Masonic books, does not publish such a book as that of Sibley as a means of advertising the other - and more costly - books he publishes.

A large proportion of the cost of such a book could be charged up to promotion or advertising by the publisher and he could print it in a sufficiently large edition to sell it for a shilling or a quarter, the revenue thus produced covering the actual cost of production, the publisher relying on the sale of the larger and more expensive books he publishes and advertises in this concise book, to realize profits from his expenditure.

The publishing of a book such as that described would certainly not only promote a better understanding of Masonry and make better Masons of new initiates - but would actually further the cause of Masonic education among the older members of the order.

POTS

Freemasonry is an institution calculated to benefit mankind - Andrew Jackson

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Ed. The above 53 year old short piece of philosophy was sent to a website in Australia last week by Wor.Bro George Helmer from Edmonton, Province of Alberta, Canada.

To me, One wonders why this has not been done years ago. It seems to be part of a mentor system that has gone missing. Have we any members who would like to comment or even to take on the job of writing such a book as was proposed above?