

WHAT DOES MASONRY MEAN?

BY

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Recently, a newly initiated Entered Apprentice reported that he did not wish to continue in the degrees and wanted to be released from his obligations to the fraternity. The reason for his dissatisfaction was that he had the thought that becoming a Mason would give him access to members whom he might solicit as customers for his business. This is typical of the mistaken opinion of many potential candidates for the degrees.

Dennis Chornensky, of the Masonic Restoration Foundation, was quoted as stating, "Much of our dilemma arises from the fact that too many men who join are not properly educated about the fraternity. Rather than coming to an understanding of the Craft based on diligent study and thinking, new candidates tend to form their opinions based on the behavior of fellow Masons, who are, themselves poorly educated about the fraternity's history and philosophy."

Some of the questions that arise in new candidates can be answered during the investigation process, before the Petition is received. The Intender Program has a pamphlet entitled, "On The Threshold" which will answer many of these questions. This pamphlet should be given to the potential candidate by the Investigating Committee.

The noted Masonic researcher and author, Albert Gallatin Mackey, dealt with this issue in his book entitled, "Masonry Defined, A Liberal Masonic Education". In the Introduction to the book, the question is stated thus, "The average Mason, after taking his degrees in Masonry, immediately asks himself, what it all means".

Mackey is of the opinion that only a few Masons have, or will take the time to make an exhaustive study of Masonry. In his book, "The Lodge and the Craft", the author, Rollin C. Blackmer reports that at the time the book was written, there were more than 100,000 brethren in the State of Missouri. Of these, Blackmer states that there were only 75 of this number who had taken the time to make a study of the history, philosophy, and symbolism of the fraternity, so as to awaken within themselves the desire to learn what it really takes to be a Mason.

It is to the new brother who goes into the brotherhood in the belief "that there is really something to it", that a desire to be well informed is kindled. This article is not meant to make the new brother a Masonic scholar. Indeed, there are a relative few, who take the time to become really informed about our fraternity.

There are literally thousands of books published about Freemasonry. Mackey states that no Mason can acquire in a few days or months all there is to know about Masonry. Indeed, two of the most notable of Masonic scholars, Albert Gallatin Mackey, himself, and General Albert Pike, spent their entire lives in the study of Freemasonry. In today's society, where the demands of earning a living and supporting their families, it is most difficult for our brethren to find the time to spend in such Masonic endeavors.

In our own State of Illinois, the Grand Lodge directory lists 29 brethren as Grand Lodge Instructors. These worthy brethren are also certified as Grand Lecturers. 96 brethren are certified by our Grand Lodge as Grand Lecturers. An additional four of our members are Certified Lecturers, awaiting only to rise to the East in their lodges to gain Grand Lecturer status. These foregoing brethren have demonstrated their ability to be proficient in the ritual and floor work of all three degrees. In addition, 100 brethren are certified by our Grand Lodge as lodge instructors, proficient in the ritual and work of

the first section of all three degrees, opening and closing the lodge, and the reception of the District Deputy Grand Master.

These Masons have spent countless hours in memorization of the ritual and floor work so that they can pass a strict examination by our Board of Grand Examiners. The question that must be asked of these praiseworthy brethren is, "given that you are proficient in memorization, how familiar are you in the meaning of the words that you have labored so long to learn." "What do you know of the history of our brotherhood." "What do you know of the philosophy of our brotherhood." In other words, why are you a Mason? Mackey's book states that these brethren who are so proficient in the ritual, but are not knowledgeable of the meaning of the words is like having a child learn his A, B, C's, and calling him a scholar. Learning the ritual and floor work is like the rough ashlar, it is a building block that needs to be finished into the perfect ashlar that makes the building blocks of our Masonic house.

Mackey states that "Masonry would die out in five years if it had to depend on about 85 per cent of the membership." He goes on to state that it is only a small minority of really interested Masons that have enabled our fraternity to last of almost 300 years. It is this small minority of our members that aspire to a place in the line of officers. It is this small minority of our members that are willing to spend the time necessary to keep Freemasonry alive. Our lodges would cease to exist if all of its members simply paid their dues and rarely, if ever attended a meeting of his lodge.

Ask yourself, what do you want from Freemasonry if you are only a member. How many of you are proud to say, "O yes, I am a Mason", but I haven't attended lodge in years. Mackey asks, "What benefit does Masonry give to this man". What benefit does this brother get from his membership in our brotherhood? If this brother had taken the time to learn something of Freemasonry, he would have become more than just a Mason in name only.

There is much to our fraternity. Being a Mason is truly a fine experience. Learning, for example, the meaning of the legend of the third degree, will add significantly to the life experience of being a man and a Mason. I am not suggesting than every brother become a Masonic scholar. I am only stating that taking the time to learn something of the history, philosophy, and symbolism of our degrees will add to the desire to attend lodge and get something out of the ritual. Become more that a Mason in name only.