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Grand Lodge Bulletin

Editor: S. CARL HECKBERT, P.G.M., Vermilion, Alberta

MASONIC BABBITTRY

Dwight L. Smith in the Indiana Freemason

A little more than forty years ago Sinclair Lewis published a novel and immediately a noun was added to the American language. That noun was the title of the book: Babbitt. From that day forth the word Babbitt came to mean a person of the type depicted by George F. Babbitt, real estate dealer, who lived in a Dutch Colonial house in exclusive Floral Heights, in the city of Zenith—the fastest growing little burg in the Midwest, by golly.

George F. Babbitt has the "right connections." Professionally, spiritually, fraternally and politically, his Status Symbols were most impressive. He believed fervently in restricted immigration to "keep those blasted foreigners out", he had no racial prejudice, of course, but insisted that the Negro "stay in his place", he was certain the labor unions were inspired and controlled by alien influences, and he viewed with alarm the teachings of the "pinks" at the State University.

But of all his orthodox affiliations, he found the weekly luncheon group known as the Boosters' Club the most satisfying, and to it he paid homage. Local chapter of a national organization, its grand aim was the promotion of Sound Business and Friendliness among Regular Fellows.

FOR FOUR DECADES, Americans have chuckled over the superficialities of George Babbitt, squirmed as they saw themselves in the mirror . . . and faithfully followed in his footsteps. Babbitt has found its way into every area of American life, excepting none—and including Freemasonry. The great aim set forth in Freemasonry's Declaration of Principles is a lofty one indeed:

"Through the improvement and strengthening of the character of the individual man, Freemasonry seeks to improve the community."

But that is not enough for a restless, itchy, pragmatic America. It is not enough to endeavor to bring men to Light, nor to satisfy intellectual hunger, nor to minister to the inner needs of a confused people, nor to provide a moral bulwark for everyday struggles, nor to give men a foundation upon which to build a righteous life.

No, we must worship at the altar of Service to our Fellow Men. Our organizations must "do things"—that is, things which may be seen and heard, and felt; things which may be measured by dollars, and buildings, boards of directors, letterheads and intense "busyness." There must be some tangible endeavor, some material object to which we can point to "justify our existence." We must be able to show by local projects, by fund-raising activities, by annual contributions to a horde of organized charities, by some movement to eradicate one of the physical ills of the human race that we are indeed boosters, and Solid Citizens, and Civic Leaders Devoted to the Advancement of the Community.

NOW, at the very outset, let me make one point perfectly clear; That the Grand Secretary of Indiana (Dwight L. Smith) is not attacking service clubs. I shall repeat that statement before I have finished this article. In thirty years I have been affiliated with two such clubs; I am a Past President of one; I have nothing but admiration for them. In their field they are making a magnificent contribution to our American life. Their purpose is to engage in community service, and they are doing it admirably.

But that does not mean that Freemasonry should try to imitate them. It is the copycat school of thought within our Fraternity that I oppose. Masonic Babbitt is not Masonry, and I must part company with those who advocate it. By tradition, practice and temperament the clubs are not equipped to do the work of Freemasonry—and Masonry is not equipped to do the work of the clubs.

Anyone who knows anything at all about Freemasonry would suppose that our Craft would be the last place into which such philosophies and practices would penetrate. But herein lies the trouble. Over the last several decades we have conferred the degrees upon far too many men who could not comprehend the message of Freemasonry. Knowing little or nothing about the Fraternity, they have made no endeavor to find out. The weekly luncheon club was something they could comprehend; it required no effort on their part other than to meet, eat and pay; consequently, the service club idea and technique has left its mark upon our Craft. We may as well face it.

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EDITORIAL

In this issue of the Bulletin appears an article under the title of Masonic Babbitry; the article comes from the pen of Dwight L. Smith, Grand Secretary of the Grand Lodge of Indiana and a distinguished and well skilled member of the Fraternity of Freemasonry.

When I first read the article I did a little 'bristling' on my own, and perhaps other Masons, reading the article for the first time will find themselves in rather violent opposition to some of the statements of the writer. However a little study of the material in the article may produce some different thoughts and lead us to agree, to some extent at least, with Grand Secretary Smith, in his contention that Freemasonry would in no way serve itself or the extremely high ideals for which it stands by successfully aping the Service Clubs which have rightfully attained so high a standing in most of our communities.

I have in mind one or more fine men who have received the initial degree of Freemasonry and who never returned to the Lodge for the remaining degrees; and I have very specifically in mind one or more men of the highest calibre who have received all three degrees and who have not attended a single future meeting of the Craft. Through the years it has been my endeavor to ascertain just why such a condition should exist and, in practically every case, it appears that these men, who might have lent much strength to Freemasonry, failed to continue their active membership simply because they felt that Freemasonry had no particular objective which came readily to their understanding; in their eyes Freemasonry was not 'doing something' by way of assisting in community projects, was not, according to their lights, moving towards the betterment of conditions for under-privileged persons, was not accepting the altogether 'practical' aspects of the high ideals which were espoused to them during the conferring of the various degrees.

The great teachings of Masonry, once firmly implanted in our minds, and the landmarks of the Craft, taken into our hearts, lead us to believe that the mission of Freemasonry is to mould the material that comes unsought to us, in the person of the initiate, in such a manner that the individual will be uplifted and that in due course society as a whole will be improved in ideals and in capabilities to the point where perfection may be in some worth while measure achieved.

A great many members of the Masonic Order are ardent members of service clubs; not only do they welcome the opportunities offered by Freemasonry to serve their fellow men through study of the great tenets of the Craft, but they also welcome the opportunity through a genuine acceptance of the idealistic principles of the service clubs to serve—to serve in a different way, it is true, but to serve well, nevertheless.

—S.C.H.

PAST GRAND MASTER DIES



M. W. BRO. S. H. MIDDLETON

Members of the Masonic Fraternity in Western Canada have learned with deep regret of the passing of Most Worshipful Brother Samuel H. Middleton, D.D., B.Sc., C. of St. J., who passed to his reward on March 22nd at Claresholm, Alberta.

Archdeacon Middleton was for many years a leader in the Anglican Church in this Province and was Principal of St. Paul's Anglican School on the Blood Indian Reserve at Cardston for some forty years; he was rural dean of Lethbridge from 1924 to 1934, becoming Archdeacon of Lethbridge in 1934. His service in the various positions which he occupied was of an outstanding nature and his lengthy illness was a serious loss to the church.

Archdeacon Middleton was an ardent Mason, having been initiated, passed and raised in Alberta Lodge No. 3 at Fort Macleod, Alberta in 1916. He was Worshipful Master of this Lodge in 1920 and was honoured by Life Membership in June, 1953. He affiliated with Chief Mountain Lodge No. 58 at Cardston, Alberta in June, 1925.

Indicating interest in Grand Lodge this distinguished Mason soon became prominently as-

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AND IF YOU THINK I am exaggerating (there are those who feel I do), then I invite your attention to just a few items gleaned from here and there:

—A Lodge in one large American Jurisdiction asked the Grand Master for permission to offer a \$10.00 prize to the member having the "most perfect attendance" (whatever that is) during the year.

—A Grand Lodge in the United States created a study committee and asked it to give some consideration to "some worth while service project" that could be adopted.

—In one Canadian Jurisdiction the Grand Master was appalled at the use in Lodge meetings of large saucer-type identification badges, each bearing the nickname of the Master Mason wearing the badge.

—In another Jurisdiction an "Achievement Trophy" is awarded annually on the same kind of point system used by service clubs in their district competitions. Points are granted on the basis of degrees conferred, affiliations, re-instatements, net gain in membership, educational meetings, average attendance at district meetings and so on.

—Several years ago I had a friendly debate with a distinguished leader of another Jurisdiction on whether or not a Master Mason should be penalized for failure to attend meetings of his Lodge. (My friend thought fines should be assessed).

—The Grand Master of an American Jurisdiction in his address to his Grand Lodge inserted a long and wearisome recital of what he termed "Visitations of the Grand Master." Believe it or not, the list included visits to meetings of Rotary, Kiwanis and Lions Clubs, an organization of policemen, several PTA groups, numerous church and Sunday School societies, a social unit of an industrial organization, and chapel exercises at one of the State penal institutions.

I COULD CITE MANY, many more examples, for the Proceedings of our American Grand Lodges reveal all too clearly the trend towards less and less Freemasonry and more and more Babbitry.

Only rarely does a leader of any stature raise his voice to remind us that Masonic Lodges have their own particular job in the scheme of things; that they should do that job and nothing more. One of the most scholarly discussions on the subject was an article entitled "Freemasonry is not a Service Club", by Laurence Healey, Past Grand Master of Masons in British Columbia, published in the Indiana Freemason in March, 1951. It should be required reading for every Master Mason.

NOR IS MASONIC BABBITTRY confined to areas outside Indiana. My readers already know what I think of speakers who accept an invitation to address a Masonic gathering and then proceed to talk about everything under the sun except Freemasonry. One time at a great occasion in an Indiana Lodge I heard a speaker upon whom

our Fraternity had bestowed some of its choice honours actually belittle the conferring of the degrees of ancient Craft Freemasonry. He said to the members of that Lodge, in effect, that if they were going to do no more than to confer a few degrees they would be parasites in the community. On the contrary, he said, they should be contributing to this movement and subsidizing that group, working at a project here and doing a good deed there. He told them service is the rent we pay for the space we occupy. It was an excellent service club speech.

Well of course, I seethed as I listened and said to myself, There is exhibit A—just another example of the point I have insisted upon; That we have too many Masons who are hazy as to what Masonry is all about. Instead of familiarizing themselves with Freemasonry, they think the Fraternity should be made over to fit the pattern of the luncheon club with which they are familiar.

SHOULD THE TREND towards Masonic Babbitry continue at its present rate, we might as well prepare to shut up shop. For when we set out to imitate the service clubs, we have abandoned Freemasonry in the first place, and we shall do a sorry job of imitation in the second place. Their entire province is that of community projects. They are doing their work and doing it well. As Freemasons, our work is cut out for us; the way we do it is peculiarly our own. To discard one banner and attempt to hoist another would only mean our absorption; our Craft would become just another club.

Why in Heaven's name, do we overlook the fact that there is one thing and one thing only, that our Craft can give a worthy man that no other organization on the face of the earth can give him? That one thing is Freemasonry.

When we stick to our knitting the field is our own; we have no competition whatever. We can contribute something to society, something to humanity, something to the community in which we live that all the service clubs combined cannot touch. Why, then, should Master Masons become busybodies in areas where we do not belong?

My Brethren, we had better think it through. We had better reflect on the sobering fact that much of the appeal of Freemasonry lies in its unique character; in short, that it does not operate like other organizations.

SURELY NO MAN who loves Freemasonry could welcome the thought of tail twisting to secure a higher percentage of attendance, or a plaque in a hotel lobby announcing that Masons meet and eat on Mondays at 12:30, or that attendance competitions claim an important place in the scheme of things, or that members spend a good deal of their time in local promotions of various kinds.

Do I see someone all bristled, insisting that I am poking fun at the service clubs? If so, let

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Discussion and Dissension

The following article is taken from the Victorian Craftsman, Australia, and in view of the forthcoming Grand Lodge Communication, is recommended for reading and study at this time and in the hope that all attending the Grand Lodge sessions may feel free to voice their views on matters of moment and not content, merely, to take for granted every recommendation or suggestion of the Board of General Purposes.

One of the aspects of Masonic procedures that is frequently criticized is the lack of discussion of Lodge affairs by Master Masons (or members of Grand Lodge) and an apparent reluctance to question proposals or state their views in open meeting. This is sometimes attributed to lack of interest, sometimes perhaps to a subconscious realization that very little time is available for discussion and therefore recommendations from Committees or from the Board of General Purposes are generally accepted out of hand, which is doubtless a compliment to the sanity of such Committees.

This in turn gives rise to the feeling that Lodges are under the domination of the officers. This has sufficient semblance of truth to gain a measure of acceptance, yet is so far removed from the essentials in Freemasonry as to make it a grave misconstruction.

The most important reason why the detail of discussion generally rests with the Committees is the difficulty in conducting discussion without arousing dissension, the arch-enemy of Freemasonry. Members should all take an active interest and an intelligent interest in what goes on and should be encouraged so to do. But there is no point in rising to express agreement with what is suggested, but if members are in complete agreement, they can so signify by casting their vote in favor of the recommendation.

When members are opposed to recommendations and have valid reasons for such opposition it is most desirable that the views be expressed for the benefit of all concerned and with the possibility of amendment where this is deemed desirable and in the best interests of the Order. If more information is desired on a subject, certainly it should be requested and if alternative proposals seem to present an advantage they should be mentioned in the spirit of searching for truth, rather than in dogmatic vein. Too many of us, perhaps, are slow to learn that the dangers we were warned of at initiation are not nearly such potent destroyers of Masonic happiness as the over-emphasis of personal inclinations. The whole purpose of Freemasonry is to produce concord and agreement and to abhor discord and violent argument. Desires and opinions should be advanced not as the ultimate, but as a preferred ingredient in the brew of the fruits of wisdom from which may be distilled the brotherly spirit

that produces progress plus happiness, rather than hard feelings. Let us have full and intelligent discussion of matters affecting the Fraternity when we meet shortly for that very purpose.

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my outraged Brother relax. The service clubs, blessings on 'em are acquitting themselves nobly. It is just that I love our ancient Craft too much to want to see practices and philosophies introduced into it which would make a travesty on Freemasonry; I do not want to see our Fraternity embrace ways and methods other than our own. I hope the Great Architect spares me the anguish of seeing our beloved Craft watered down to the point that Master Masons become no more than Rotarians wearing aprons.

THEN WHAT is our job if it is not Service to our Fellow Men? Is it a Master Mason who raises the question? Doubtless it is.

LONG BEFORE service clubs were ever dreamed of Freemasonry was rendering service to our fellow men in a multitude of ways, without fanfare. Service, benevolence, charity, loyalty to country and to flag, responsible citizenship community betterment—these are the fruits of its teachings, rather than the reason for its existence.

Then what do Freemasons contribute to humanity, to the improvement of country and community, to serving the needs of our fellow men? What is our purpose?

The answer, my Brother, is one you might discover for yourself with profit both to yourself and the Fraternity. Try finding out what Freemasonry is and what it is not, and leave off chafing over what you think it should be. Seek and ye shall find; knock, and the door shall be opened unto you! Adapted

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sociated with the work of the senior body and was elected as Grand Chaplain for the years 1921 and 1922, elevated to the position of Junior Grand Warden in 1926 and proceeded to become Grand Master in 1929. His contribution to the welfare of the Fraternity during his term of office and for many years succeeding the completion of his term was a splendid one and he will long be remembered for his kindly and friendly association.

M. W. Bro. Middleton was deeply beloved by his Indian friends who showed their love and respect by making him an active Chief of the tribe, a post which was dear to his heart.

Archdeacon Middleton is survived by a son, Charles, Fort Macleod and two daughters, Mrs. Sophie Allison, Pincher Creek and Mrs. Verdun Hunt of Newtown, Pennsylvania, having been predeceased by his wife in 1958.

General regret will be felt among our membership in the passing of this outstanding Mason and sympathy goes to his survivors.