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PRINCIPAL CONTENTS

	PAGE
F. BERNHART <i>FREEMASONRY IN AUSTRIA</i>	1
G. Y. JOHNSON <i>DIVISION OF THE MASONIC PROVINCE OF YORKSHIRE</i>	9
W. G. FISHER <i>A CAVALCADE OF FREEMASONS IN 1732</i>	44
F. BERNHART AND E. B. BABLER <i>THE PILGRIM LODGE AND THE SCHROEDER RITUAL</i>	61
N. ROGERS <i>LANCASHIRE MILITARY LODGES</i>	101
THE REV. M. CLARKE <i>FOLKLORE INTO MASONRY</i> The Prestonian Lecture for 1963	147
COLOUR SUPPLEMENT: <i>FREEMASONS' HALL, LONDON</i>	81
 THE SUPPLEMENT—MISCELLANEA LATOMORUM	
H. CARR <i>THE LETTER G</i>	170
H. V. B. VOORHIS <i>THE "MORGAN AFFAIR"</i>	197
A. J. B. MILBORNE <i>SOME MASONIC FACTS AND FICTIONS</i>	203
A. MELLOR <i>CONTEMPORARY FRENCH FREEMASONRY</i>	208
H. CARR <i>MORE LIGHT ON THE ROYAL ARCH</i>	213
N. HACKNEY <i>THE TAW IN THE ROYAL ARCH</i>	218
(The late) REV. M. ROSENBAUM <i>HIRAM ABIF</i>	220

See full TABLE OF CONTENTS on p. iii

WHITHER ARE WE TRAVELLING?

BY M.W.BRO. DWIGHT L. SMITH,
P.G.M., and G.Sec. of the Grand Lodge of Indiana

[EDITORIAL NOTE: The paper that follows is composed of extracts from a series of articles by M.W.Bro. Dwight L. Smith, Past Grand Master, and now Grand Secretary of the Grand Lodge of Indiana, U.S.A., which appeared in 1962 in the *Indiana Freemason*. It provides an important and deeply interesting commentary on the American Freemasonry of today, and although many of the problems that appear between the lines have no parallel in British Freemasonry, the careful reader will find much food for thought in this forthright and stimulating statement. Needless to say, our publication is made with the author's fullest approval.]

THE Wailing Wall is crowded these days. Masonic leaders, great and small, are lined up, each awaiting his turn to lift his voice in lamentation. The figures show a falling off of membership. Attendance at Lodge meetings is not what it used to be. The thing to do is to adopt this project or that gimmick, and then all will be well. As might be expected, the projects and gimmicks are about as impossible as they are ridiculous.

For several years the bosom-beating has been going on. Firing with a shotgun rather than a rifle, our leadership has offered little of a constructive nature. Prescriptions for the most part have consisted merely of sales-talk for whatever pet scheme was being proposed. Only a few voices in the wilderness have made a mature and realistic appraisal.

FAULTY DIAGNOSIS

At the outset, I may as well precipitate an argument by disposing of the old favourites:—

(a) Whatever attendance troubles our Lodges may be having are not caused by television, nor the automobile, nor by bowling, nor togetherness, nor any of the other "busyness" in which our restless society is engaged. A multitude of activities may contribute to a decline in Lodge attendance, but they do not constitute the cause. When we complain of lack of attendance, what we really are saying is that *interest* is at a low ebb, for in any organization, if there is interest, there will be attendance. No amount of television or bowling or endless "busyness" can usurp the position of eminence a Lodge of Freemasons occupies in a man's loyalty if the Lodge is in a position to command his loyalty.

The ailment isn't quite that simple. We are looking at the symptoms—not the disease. The real source of the trouble is within ourselves.

(b) Such problems as we may have will not be solved by forcing men to memorize a set of questions and answers, nor by cramming books and lectures down their throats, nor by any Big Brother plan, nor by devoting our energies and resources to other organizations or movements, however worthy they may be.

The cure isn't that simple, either. The patient's indisposition will not be relieved by nostrums. The treatment, too, must come from within.

BASIC PREMISES

Next, may I offer what I consider to be three basic premises. Then we shall get down to cases.

First: The history of Freemasonry is one of ups and downs. If this brief period is one of the "downs", it is nothing compared to some of the crises through which our Fraternity has passed.

Second: In our membership decline we again see history repeating itself. It simply is a case of our sins catching up with us. We had a decade in which there was a membership influx that

was both unhealthy and unhappy. We ran a production line; we counted new members by the hundreds of thousands; but we could count new Masons only by the score. Now comes the pay-off.

Third: Whatever is wrong with Lodge attendance in 1962 was wrong 25 years ago, when I was Master of my Lodge. I doubt seriously whether Lodge attendance ever has been "what it used to be". I had to work my head off to sustain interest in 1937. Sometimes I succeeded; sometimes I didn't. The situation is no different to-day; tomorrow and the day after it will be the same.

I repeat, we have only to look at ourselves to discover the cause for whatever unhappy days have come upon us. Our troubles are of our own making. Such corrective measures as we take must go beyond the surface; they must go to the roots of the problem or be of no avail.

Then let's take an honest look at some of the conditions within our own house which may be contributing to a membership decline and a tapering off of interest.

SELF-EXAMINATION

1. Let's face it! Can we expect Freemasonry to retain its past glory and prestige unless the level of leadership is raised above its present position? On many an occasion in the past fourteen years, Masters and Secretaries have come into my office to ask my advice on what to do about lagging interest. Again and again I have said: "*There is nothing wrong with your Lodge, nor with Freemasonry, that good leadership will not cure.*" I believe that.

2. How well are we guarding the West Gate? Again, let's face it. We are permitting too many to pass who can pay the fee and little else. On every hand I hear the same whispered complaint: "We used to be getting petitions for the degrees from the good, substantial leaders in the community. Now we are getting . . ." Just what it is they are getting, you know as well as I.

3. Has Freemasonry become too easy to obtain? Fees for the degrees are ridiculously low¹; annual dues are far too low. Everything is geared to speed—getting through as fast as possible and on to something else. The Lodge demands little and gets little. It expects loyalty, but does almost nothing to put a claim on a man's loyalty. When we ourselves place a cheap value on Masonic membership, how can we expect petitioners and new members to prize it?

4. Are we not worshipping at the altar of bigness? Look it in the face: too few Lodges and most of them much too large. Instead of devoting our thoughts and energies to ways whereby a new Master Mason may find a sphere of activity within his Lodge, we let him get lost in the shuffle. Then we nag and harangue at him because he does not come to meetings to wander around with nothing to do. We are hard at work to make each Lodge so large that it becomes an impersonal aggregation of strangers—a closed corporation.

5. What can we expect when we have permitted Freemasonry to become subdivided into a score of organizations? Look at them. Each organization dependent upon the parent body for its existence, yet each jockeying for a position of supremacy, and each claiming to be the Pinnacle to which any Master Mason may aspire. We have spread ourselves thin, and Ancient Craft Masonry is the loser. Down-graded, the Symbolic Lodge is used only as a springboard. How short-sighted we have been to create in our beloved Fraternity a condition wherein the tail can, and may, wag the dog.

6. Has the American passion for bigness and efficiency dulled the spirit of Masonic charity? The "Box of Fraternal Assistance" which once occupied the central position in every Lodge room has been replaced by an annual *per capita* tax. That benevolence which, for ages, was one of the sweetest by-products of the teachings of our gentle Craft has, I fear, ceased to be a gift from the heart and has become the writing of a cheque. And unless the personal element is there, charity becomes as sounding brass and a tinkling cymbal.

7. Do we pay enough attention to the Festive Board? Should any reader have to ask what the Festive Board is, that in itself will serve to show how far we have strayed from the traditional path of Freemasonry. Certainly the Festive Board is not the wolfing of ham sandwiches, pie and coffee at the conclusion of a degree. It is the Hour of Refreshment in all its beauty and dignity; an occasion for inspiration and fellowship; a time when the noble old traditions of the Craft are preserved.

8. What has become of that "course of moral instruction, veiled in allegory and illustrated by symbols", that Freemasonry is supposed to be? If it is a course of instruction, then there should be teachers, and if ours is a progressive science, then the teaching of a Master Mason should not end when he is raised. I am not talking about dry, professorial lectures or sermons—

¹ In several American Masonic jurisdictions, the Constitutions prescribe separate Fees for each of the three degrees. The author informs me that in six out of the 49 jurisdictions it is customary to "ballot for each degree". (H.C.)

heavens, no! That is the kind of thing that makes Masonic education an anathema. Where are the parables and allegories? Alas, they have descended into booklets and stunts. No wonder interest is so hard to sustain.

9. Hasn't the so-called century of the common man contributed to making our Fraternity a little too common? We cannot expect to retain the prestige the Craft has enjoyed in the past if we continue without challenge to permit the standards of the picnic ground, the bowling alley, the private club and the golf links to be brought into the Lodge hall. Whether we like it or not, a general lowering of standards has left its mark on every Lodge in Indiana, large and small.

10. Are there not too many well-meaning Brethren who are working overtime to make Freemasonry something other than Freemasonry? It was an unhappy day when some eager beaver conceived the idea that our Craft should adopt the methods of the service club, or the luncheon group, or the civic league, or the playboy outfit. Whoever the eager beaver was, he lost sight of the fact that one of the reasons our Fraternity is prized so highly is that it does *not* operate like other organizations.

Let me give you fair warning. In the following essays I shall call a spade a spade. Some of my readers are not going to like it. But what I have to say I believe our Craft needs to hear, and it is only for the "good of the Order" that it is said.

I shall propose no bright new ideas—not one. All I am going to advocate is that Freemasonry remain Freemasonry; and if we have strayed from the traditional path, we had better be moving back to the main line while there is yet time to restore the prestige and respect, the interest and loyalty and devotion that once was ours.

THE LEVEL OF LEADERSHIP

Question 1: *Can we expect Freemasonry to retain its past glory and prestige unless the level of leadership is raised above its present position?*

A teacher in the public schools of a neighbouring State cherished a long-standing desire to become a Master Mason. His petition to the Lodge in the town where he resided was accepted. He presented himself for the Entered Apprentice degree, but never returned. The Brethren of the Lodge concluded, I am sure, that they had made a mistake in electing that Entered Apprentice because of his apparent lack of interest.

But it was not lack of interest that caused him to go out of the door, never to return. It was disappointment and disillusionment. The performance of the Master of that Lodge was such that it constituted an insult to the candidate's intelligence. Because the head of the Masonic Fraternity in that community was careless and sloppy and crude, because he was attempting to do something for which he was not prepared, because he was trying to give "good and wholesome instruction" on subjects he knew nothing about, a good man was lost to Freemasonry.

On first hearing, that story made a profound impression upon me. The more I have thought about it, and the more I have seen it duplicated, the more I am convinced that the main responsibility for any tapering off of membership, any lack of interest and attendance, rests squarely upon the shoulders of our Lodge leadership.

Yes, I know the subject is a touchy one. But in introducing it, I am only putting into print what has been whispered in the corridors these last ten years.

Take a long and thoughtful look at the names of the men who served our Lodges as Master 100 years ago—or even 50 years ago. Consider the positions of importance those men occupied in their respective communities. Then let us ask ourselves whether our present-day leadership is in the same league.

If we want our Lodges to regain the position they once occupied in the interest and loyalties of men, we had better gain a proper perspective; we had better sort things out in the order of their importance. To open the discussion, permit me to make three pertinent observations:—

1. We must pay more attention to proficiency in the East. We make a great to-do over proficiency of candidates.¹ We want to devise some method whereby new Master Masons may be forced to memorize a set of questions and answers. But we do little or nothing to ensure proficiency where it really counts.

A Master is expected to be *Master* of his Lodge—not a weakling to be pushed around. Theoretically, he "sets the Craft to work and gives them good and wholesome instruction". Yet what do we require for election as Master? Simply that a Brother serve as a Warden. That is all. There are no minimum requirements as to ritualistic proficiency; nothing regarding history,

¹ Proficiency Tests for each of the three degrees consist of a lengthy examination, in Question and Answer, covering the whole of the preceding ceremony. In many jurisdictions the Candidate is not entitled to all the privileges of membership until he has passed his Proficiency Test *after the Third Deg.* (H.C.)

symbolism, philosophy, ethics, law, tradition. Only a so-called degree for Past Masters¹ which, in far too many instances, is a farce. We elect a Master and expect him somehow to become a leader. It never occurs to us to require evidence of leadership first.

2. There is far more to being Master of a Lodge than the mere recitation of a ritual. We are paying the penalty of years of "mass production" practices, and a bitter penalty it is. When Masters of Lodges are so lacking in imagination and vision that they cannot conceive of a Masonic meeting unless a degree is to be conferred, then we need not expect a revival of interest and attendance, and we need not look for an upswing in membership short of war.

I would a thousand times rather see as Master of a Lodge a man who can provide real leadership, a man who can give "good and wholesome instruction", a man who comprehends what Freemasonry is all about, even if he cannot confer a single degree. There always are those who are eager and willing to do ritualistic work, but there are precious few who can provide inspired leadership.

It is high time we start enlisting the support of men who can lead. But, instead, we consider only those who come to Lodge, those who stick it out in the endurance contest. We "start in line" the man who is on hand whenever the door is open, regardless of whether he has even the most elementary qualities of leadership.

If the practice of automatic ladder promotion of officers must be discarded in order to obtain the kind of leadership we should have, then by all means let us discard the foolish custom.

If the so-called "line" of officers must be shortened to enable men of ability to serve their Lodges without devoting six or seven years to minor offices, then why not shorten the line? Is not good leadership for one year more important than keeping a seat warm for six?

3. If Freemasonry is to command respect in the community, then the man who wears the Master's hat² must be one who can command respect. The young teacher did not return for advancement because his entire conception of Freemasonry was coloured by what he saw and heard in the East. The Master of a Lodge is the symbol of Freemasonry in his community. If he is not a man upon whom intelligent people may look with admiration, then we need not expect to reap a harvest of petitions from intelligent men.

Make no mistake. Men judge Freemasonry by what they see wearing Masonic emblems.³ They judge a Lodge by the calibre of its leadership. If we persist, year after year, in putting our worse foot forward, then we can expect to continue getting just what we are getting now.

ASLEEP AT THE WEST GATE

Question 2: *How well are we guarding the West Gate?*⁴

Down in Tennessee many years ago, I heard one of the old stalwarts express the conviction that unless a Lodge is rejecting at least 20 per cent. of its petitioners, it either is very fortunate or very careless. That striking statement has come to my mind many times in recent years. Unquestionably the good Brother had a point.

But 20 per cent., mind you, is one petitioner out of every five. (In Indiana we are rejecting about one petitioner in every twelve.) It is not difficult to visualize what would happen if an Indiana Lodge were to reject one petitioner in five. The Grand Lodge office would be besieged with delegations; the Grand Master would be implored to do something to stop the "epidemic" of blackballing.

Of course, the rejection of one petitioner in five might, in the long run, be the best thing that could possibly happen to a Lodge, but we are not interested in taking the long-term view. No, we want to get the new Temple paid for.

For years now I have heard the whispered complaint: "We used to be getting petitions for the degrees from the good, substantial leaders in the community. Now we are getting . . ."

Isn't it about time we stop our whispering and say some things out loud, even if they are unpleasant to hear?

One of the conditions causing dismay in more than one Lodge is the fact that the sons of its highly-respected members are not petitioning for the degrees. True, they may be busy getting ahead in the world; they may not have the money; they may not be interested. But that is not all. Why should intelligent young leaders in the community petition a Lodge if they have little or nothing in common with its members? If they cannot find in Freemasonry a social, intellectual and cultural atmosphere that is comfortable, they will find it elsewhere.

¹ A "qualifying" ceremony, unknown in English practice. (H.C.)

² A top-hat, in most U.S.A. jurisdictions. (H.C.)

³ Lapel-badges, for Craft and especially for the so-called "higher degrees" (happily rare in Britain), are very common in the U.S.A. (H.C.)

⁴ *i.e.*, admission into the Craft. (H.C.)

We cannot escape the fact that men judge Freemasonry by what they see walking down the street wearing Masonic emblems. And if what they see does not command their respect, then we need not expect them to seek our fellowship.

Let's face it. Thanks to two wars, inflation, the cost of building and maintaining expensive Temples, and a general lowering of standards, thousands of men have become Masons who should never have passed the ballot. The inevitable result, then, is that the Craft is not looked upon with the same degree of respect it once enjoyed.

How did it all come about?

1. Economic pressure, for one thing. A Lodge pays a heavy price for a new Temple so costly to maintain that membership must remain above a certain figure.

2. We have fallen into careless ways in the investigation of petitioners.

Whence came the idea that a man—almost any man—has an inherent right to become a Freemason? Is it not a privilege to be conferred upon the worthy?

And whose idea was it that if a petitioner is rejected, a grave injustice has been done the petitioner? Is no one interested in seeing that an injury is not done the Lodge and all Freemasonry by electing one whose worthiness may be in question?

Such an open door policy is not selectivity; it is come-one-come-all. And Freemasonry is a selective organization. It must be if it is to avoid the fate of a score of fraternal groups whose names are well nigh forgotten.

3. Lodges are not utilizing their most capable members for duty on investigating committees. In every Lodge there are Brethren of high standards who love the Fraternity and want to see its good name protected; men who would make more than a token investigation; men who would really stand guard at the West Gate.

All of us have seen Masters appoint investigating committees literally hundreds of times, but on how many occasions have we seen evidence of careful thought in the selection of personnel for those committees? Men of high calibre and ability are available. Why are we not using them? Is it for fear they might turn in an unfavourable report?

There simply is no substitute for quality. We are accepting too many petitioners who can pay the fee and little else; too many men who have no conception of what Freemasonry is or what it seeks to do, and who care not one whit about increasing their moral stature; too many men who look upon Ancient Craft Freemasonry with contempt—who are interested in using it only as a springboard from which to gain a prestige symbol.

And we had better start applying the brakes while there is yet time.

PEARL OF GREAT PRICE?

Question 3: *Has Freemasonry become too easy to obtain?*

A century ago it was not uncommon for men to pay what amounted to a month's wages to become a Mason. We know without challenge that today petitioners are paying a fee which represents a week's wages at the most—sometimes only two or three days'!

When we compare the nominal dues paid to a Lodge of Freemasons with those paid to a service club, a labour union, a trade or professional organization, or a country club, we begin to get a faint idea of the source of some of our troubles.

And when we compare the ridiculously low fees paid to an Ancient Craft Lodge with the aggregate fees paid to other Masonic bodies and appendant groups, we begin to see clearly what is wrong. Men are willing to pay for the privilege of Freemasonry, but we distribute the fee they should be paying to an Ancient Craft Lodge among all the relatives, the in-laws and the stepchildren.¹ We place such a cheap value on the basic degrees that it is no wonder newly-raised Masons end up having little or no respect for the Symbolic Lodge.

My old friend Arthur H. Strickland, of Kansas, recently wrote a thoughtful article for *The Philalethes*, entitled "Who Killed Cock Robin?" Calling attention to the old axiom that what is easy to get is not much appreciated, he observes that "we have done everything that we can think of to cheapen Masonry . . . We have cheapened the Fraternity to the point that it is seriously reacting against us."

Before we are in a position to tackle some of the difficulties that beset us, we must re-establish the premise that Freemasonry is a Pearl of Great Price, worth a great deal of effort, a great deal of sacrifice, a great deal of waiting to obtain. We need to do a little preaching, perhaps, with a certain New Testament passage as the text: "For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also."

Has Freemasonry become too easy to obtain? To me, the question is not even debatable. For example:—

¹ A reference to the series of "higher degrees", so popular in the U.S.A. (H.C.)

1. Our fees for the degrees are so low as to constitute an insult to the Fraternity. When I petitioned for the degrees in 1933 the fee was \$20. That was a good-sized chunk of anybody's money in 1933, but I would have paid three times that amount. Our economic standards of today can hardly be compared to 1933, yet the minimum fee in Indiana still is only \$30—and one Lodge in five charges the absolute minimum. There is not a Lodge in Indiana whose fee should not be at least twice its present amount.

For a long time I have had the uneasy suspicion that the period of accent on quantity rather than quality may have started during those cut-rate years of 1933 to 1944 when the minimum fee was only \$20.

2. Everything is geared to speed, as if a deadline had to be met. Freemasonry is no longer worth waiting for, nor working for, nor sacrificing for. Too often it is only a badge of respectability, a prestige symbol, to be obtained with the same hurry-up zeal that would be assumed in acquiring a Cadillac or a yacht. Candidate A must be rushed through the degrees before he leaves for service in the Armed Forces, (he has heard it might be helpful to him). Candidate B must be rushed through because he is about to move to a distant point to take a new job. Candidate C must hurry through so he can join a class in some other organization.

Proficiency? Nonsense! A friendly coach can take care of that. Comprehension of the underlying philosophy of Freemasonry, its symbolism and ethics and traditions, what it is and what it seeks to do? You know the answer to that question as well as I.

And we not only permit such a situation—we actually encourage it. How, in heaven's name, can we so cheapen Ancient Craft Freemasonry and expect anything other than contempt for the parent body?

3. The privilege of courtesy work has been so abused that it actually has become a detriment to all Freemasonry. What was once intended as an occasional pleasant arrangement for the benefit of a *Lodge* has been liberalized to the point that it now is only for the convenience of a *candidate*. Do you realize that a candidate for the three degrees may become a Master Mason without ever having attended a single meeting of the Lodge which has elected him? He can be initiated in one Jurisdiction, passed in another, raised in another. And yet we expect him to become a loyal and devoted Mason, with a strong sentimental attachment to a Lodge he knows nothing about, and which has done nothing for him except to elect him! We crave his faithful attendance, but we do about everything in our power to create a situation in which loyalty has no place.

The incident in Montana in which a Brother received his fifty-year button¹ without ever having attended a meeting of his own Lodge is not as far-fetched as we would like to think.

We can learn a great deal from our Mother Grand Lodge of England and from the Jurisdictions of Scotland and Ireland, Australia and Canada, where a candidate must receive the Entered Apprentice degree in the Lodge that elected him, and in no other. It was a sad day for Masonry in Indiana when that regulation was repealed.

4. One of the worst offenders in the cheapening process is the well-meaning father who is too eager for his son to become a Mason. Those are hard words, but I have seen the story repeated over and over again. Sonny must be pushed through because Pop wants him to join the class in another body; because Pop wants him to receive the degrees in Germany, or France, or South America. Sonny may not even have lived within the jurisdiction of the Lodge for years and years, but Pop wants him to join if the Lodge has to violate all the laws in the book to accomplish it.

So Pop comes to the Grand Lodge office with a plea that the residence laws be set aside; that the period of investigation be waived; that Sonny be advanced without regard to proficiency. You have known him; so have I. His name is legion.

What a contrast to the spirit of that great and good Past Master of an Indianapolis Lodge who waited years upon years to hear his son express the desire to become a Mason—and who, even then, did not offer to pay the son's initiation fee because he wanted the boy to appreciate what he was getting!

And then there are the ill-advised church parishioners who pay the fee for their minister. I have met quite a number of those ministers in my day, and have become rather cynical after working long hours trying to unravel their record of suspensions for NPD.² But I must not get started on that subject.

When we downgrade Ancient Craft Freemasonry, submit it to all sorts of indignities, look upon it with contempt, label it as something hardly worth mentioning, permit it to have only the crumbs that fall from the table, what can we expect if Master Masons no longer give to their Lodges their full measure of loyalty and devotion?

¹ The "Fifty-Year Button" is a lapel-badge presented by the U.S.A. Grand Lodges to Masons of fifty years' standing.

² Non-payment of dues.

THE CLOSED CORPORATION

Question 4: *Are we not worshipping at the altar of bigness?*

I

One of the most serious trends in American Freemasonry is the development of the oversized, impersonal Lodge. Even though such a condition is utterly foreign to all the traditions of Freemasonry, little or nothing is being done to correct it. On the contrary, Lodges are encouraged and expected to become even larger. What the result will be, no one knows. It may require a crisis of the first order to bring us to our senses.

The entire philosophy of Freemasonry is built around the individual—the erection of a moral edifice within the heart of a man. All its symbolism is individual symbolism; all its tradition and practice is aimed at making individuals wiser, better and, consequently, happier. Mass movements simply have no place in Freemasonry, and never have had.

Then why do we worship at the altar of bigness? For one thing, we are Americans. We measure civilization in terms of automobiles, TV sets and bathtubs. We count the number of gadgets as shown in the census reports and assume that that means we are more civilized.

In the United States the average membership of Masonic Lodges is about 252; in Canada's nine Jurisdictions, 166; in the seven of Australasia, 117; in Puerto Rico, 92; in Scotland, 85; in England, 80; in Mexico, 70; in Germany, 53.

Interestingly enough, the small Lodges overseas have little or no attendance problem. The Brethren receive a *summons* to attend their Lodge, and they attend because it is worth attending, and because the membership is small enough that there is a congenial, closely-knit unit—a community of interest, if you please. And certainly no one can accuse the overseas Lodges of not "doing things". In their benevolent work and in their impact on community life, they put us to shame.

In the 49 Jurisdictions of the United States, average membership ranges from a high of 482 in the District of Columbia to a low of 115 in North Dakota. There is even a Lodge in Kansas with some 5,700 members. (I almost hesitate to mention the fact for fear some of our Brethren will set out to exceed that record of doubtful distinction.)

Only nine Jurisdictions have a higher average membership per Lodge than Indiana's 336. They are all in densely-populated States. (It will give us grave concern, I am sure, to know we are tenth instead of at the top.)

Is all this talk just some curious notion the Grand Secretary has all by himself? Not at all. Some of the best minds in American Freemasonry are deeply concerned. Past Grand Master Ralph J. Pollard, of Maine, observes: "This problem is probably inherent in our American system of large Lodges and relatively low dues. It is one of the prices we pay for bigness and cheapness . . . Probably the best long-range cure will be found in more and smaller Lodges where more Brethren can be put to work, and where a warmer and more intimate fraternal spirit can develop."

In February, 1962, Dr. Thomas S. Roy, Past Grand Master of Massachusetts, observed: "If we permit our Lodges to increase in membership to a size inconsistent with a close fellowship, then we have created the conditions for non-attendance. The Grand Lodge of England is chartering new Lodges in England at the rate of over twenty-five a year.¹ It is of some significance that, according to the latest figures, the average membership of all Lodges under the Grand Lodge of England is roughly eighty."

II

What happens when we worship at the altar of bigness?

1. In the first place, our annual waste of leadership is nothing short of a sin. Every year our Lodges welcome into Masonic membership hundreds of men with a great potential for inspired, dedicated leadership—and then we make certain they will have no opportunity to exercise it. Only one Master can serve in a given Lodge per year. We close the door on the best we have because we are too short-sighted, too solicitous of numbers and bank accounts to divide our membership into smaller units and utilize the manpower that is going to waste.

2. We provide too few opportunities for new members to use their talents, and then wonder why they lose interest and drift away. Lodge officers complain bitterly about new members coming once, twice, three times, and then no more. But why should they come when there is nothing for them to do except listen to the minutes and allow the bills?² There is no place for them; worst of all, no one seems to care.

¹ The author quotes Dr. Roy's statement as it was made, but there is an error here. The Grand Lodge of England is chartering about a hundred Lodges each year, *i.e.*, sixteen hundred new Lodge since 1946. (H.C.)

² The accounts for each meeting are usually approved before the Lodge is closed. (H.C.)

3. The fellowship of Freemasonry does not thrive in the mass. When will we ever learn that fellowship, that sweet and precious jewel of our Brotherhood, is an intimate thing not shared with great numbers? Some of the most priceless memories of my 28 years as a Mason centre around individual contacts with just a few of my Brethren in the Lodge room and about the table—those times when we were doing things together, rejoicing in prosperity, standing steady in adversity—*but always together*. Thank God there weren't a thousand of us. If there had been, I daresay my interest in Freemasonry would have withered on the vine years ago.

What must be the feelings of the newly-raised member when he discovers that his Lodge, which promised him fellowship and intimate friendships, is but a huge, impersonal aggregation of strangers—a closed corporation!

And we wonder why the membership curve goes downward, and why Masons do not attend meetings of their Lodges!

III

What are we doing about it? Just making certain that no new Lodges will be formed, that's all. Then why aren't we at work on a long-range, patient effort to correct a serious condition?

1. Well, first of all, remember, we are Americans, and in all areas of life we worship at the altar of bigness.

Two men came to my office to talk over what had to be done to form a Lodge in a rapidly-growing community. Let us call the community Suburbia. One of the Brethren made a significant statement that has been ringing in my ears from that day to this. "In my Lodge of more than 1,500 members," he said, "I haven't a ghost of a chance to ever go through the chairs. A new Lodge at least would give me the chance." That Lodge was never organized, because a neighbouring Lodge sent a committee to serve notice on the Brethren that "*We regard Suburbia as a stock pile for our Lodge.*"

2. Then, we are not at work organizing new Lodges because a new Lodge might cause some inconvenience to a horde of organizations now occupying quarters in our Temples. Scores of Masonic Temples in Indiana have room for one or two additional Lodges, but house only one. Instead of encouraging Lodges of Ancient Craft Masonry, which should be occupying our Temples, we shut the door on them in favour of groups which have attached themselves to Freemasonry's coat-tails. Isn't that statesmanlike thinking?

I am not worried over Lodges that are too small and too weak. That condition eventually will take care of itself. What disturbs me is the increasing number of Lodges that are too large—and that condition is *not* taking care of itself. What possible reason is there for boasting that Brotherly Love Lodge is the largest Lodge in the city, or in the State? That should be cause for apology rather than rejoicing. Brotherly Love Lodge should be devoting its energies to the extension of its influence in other areas—but you can bet your bottom dollar that Brotherly Love Lodge will do nothing of the sort. It might lose a dozen members.

Scores of Indiana cities and towns could use another Lodge, or two or three, to the good of all Freemasonry. The population is here, and in most instances facilities could be made available. But first we must get over our foolish idea that in order to be effective a Lodge must be large, and wealthy, and own a lush Temple in which five per cent. of its membership or less can huddle together on meeting nights.

What happens when an institution designed to be simple becomes complex, when units meant to be small become oversize and unwieldy, when work intended for many is restricted to a handful, when something that should be intimate becomes impersonal?

What happens? Look around. Exhibit A is all about us.

SUBDIVIDED WE STAND

Question 5: *What can we expect when we have permitted Freemasonry to become subdivided into a score of organizations?*

Back in my newspaper days I used to get a great deal of unwholesome amusement out of the power struggle between four church congregations in a town of less than 400 inhabitants. All four churches were of the same denominational family and bore the same name. Each claimed to be the Real Thing. The membership of each was convinced that all others were heretics, and, as such, were condemned to eternal damnation.

What must a newly-raised Master Mason who takes his Freemasonry seriously think of our subdivisions? Are they just as baffling to him as the four churches of the same name in a town of 400 were to me? Sometimes I wonder.

What must he think when he discovers that no fewer than 70 organizations have attached themselves to our ancient brotherhood—and that the end is not in sight? What is the reaction of the man who came into Freemasonry of his own free will and accord when he finds that a subdivision can solicit him almost as soon as he leaves the altar in the Entered Apprentice degree? And how does he feel when his beloved Lodge is referred to as the “Blue Lodge” with a rather patronizing air, and when the so-called “Blue Lodge Mason” is looked upon as something inferior, as if his neck and ears were not quite clean?

If we are interested in exploring possible causes for a decline in membership and for a slackening of interest and attendance, we had better look to our subdivisions. Of course, he who introduces the subject invites bitter criticism, but I stand firm on my conviction that in the United States we are spreading ourselves so thin that the basic unit—the Ancient Craft Lodge—is the loser. We may not end up by killing the goose that laid the golden egg, but certainly we are bleeding her white.

Yes, I am a member of many of the subdivisions. All of them have contributed much to my understanding and appreciation of Freemasonry, and I do not believe any of them can question my loyalty. *“It is not that I love Caesar less, but that I love Rome more.”*

And I am not the only one who is concerned—not by a great deal. Authorities by the dozen might be quoted. As long ago as 1924 the eminent English Masonic student, Sir Alfred Robins, was writing that “this sponge-like growth is spreading in American Masonry, and is threatening certain of the best interests of the Craft”. One of the most forthright and statesmanlike pronouncements comes from Bro. Noah J. Frey, 33°, Scottish Rite Deputy for Wisconsin, in an address before the Grand Lodge of Wisconsin in 1961. “Sometimes,” he said, “I wish that Masonry were not as divisive as it is, because we are all Blue Lodge members, and I fear that we lose sight of that fact and divide ourselves into smaller groups and thereby increase our inefficiency.”

And certainly Dr. Thomas S. Roy, Past Grand Master of Massachusetts, cannot be accused of hostility to any Masonic body, yet in an eloquent address before the Conference of Grand Secretaries in North America in February, 1962, he was forced to declare: “If we permit the proliferation of Masonry into rites, and the ‘57 Varieties’ of bodies whose membership is dependent upon ours, let us face the fact that the attendance that goes to them belongs to us. There is a sense in which it can be said that this success is our failure. I am not passing judgment on them. I am a good member of some of them and have done my share of work in them. But they all must face the fact that they must pour some of their strength back into the Symbolic Lodge. For any weakness we develop must sooner or later communicate itself to them.”

It is not basic loyalty that is at stake; it is not unity of purpose that we lack. Nor can we gloss over our shortcomings with talk about money, and benevolences, and good works. *These are not the issues.* We have never faced up to the real issues, which are:—

- (a) The weakening of the basic unit of Freemasonry by too great an emphasis on our subdivisions, and
- (b) The unsound premise that the child is more important than the parent.

Let's stand before the mirror and take an honest look at ourselves.

1. Masonic bodies and appendant organizations are actually competing for the time, the attendance, the interest, the substance, the devotion of Master Masons. I am sick and tired of all the talk about TV, and the automobile, and bowling leagues as competing influences. It is time we look in our own house to see where the competition comes from.

Like the four churches of the same name, each Masonic organization poses as the Real Thing. Each claims to have That Which Was Lost. Each is the true wrinkle if we want to appear before the world as a Big Mason—one with a collection of degrees, exclusive and affluent.

2. Our subdivisions have encouraged the mental attitude that when a Master Mason gains membership in another body, he then and there has outgrown the Ancient Craft Lodge.

Several months after I became a Mason, I was solicited by a worker in one of the recognized bodies. But I had mental reservations. “Why is it,” I asked him, “that Masons who belong to the other bodies place such a stress on those affiliations and seem to care so little about their Lodge?” Just what answer he gave me doesn't matter too much, for the question never has been answered to my satisfaction.

Years later, when I received the degrees in another Masonic body, I overheard a past presiding officer say: “Now here, in this body, you will find the cream of Masonry.” From that day to this, I have resented such artificial class distinction.

The obituary in my files which states that the deceased “was a member of 17 organizations, 10 of them Masonic groups”, and then proceeds to list everything that could be bought with

money, is a case in point. To be a Master Mason was not enough ; actually, that was of little or no importance.

And what about the vanishing emblem ? What is wrong with the square and compasses ? Even Grand Masters have discarded it. Is it no longer a badge of honour ? Must something else replace it to set the wearer apart and place him in the aristocracy ?

A young man of my acquaintance was interested in petitioning for the degrees. He was interested, that is, until a Master Mason gave him the old superiority sales-talk, something like this: "Sure, I'm a member of Brotherly Love Lodge, but only because I have to be. The Blue Lodge, it doesn't mean a thing to me. What I'm after is what gives me the prestige and helps me in my business!"

And we wonder why attendance is poor, why interest is lax, why the membership curve goes downward!

3. Then there are those subdivisions which foster the attitude that, within their place of refuge, the standards of Ancient Craft Freemasonry do not apply. Herein lies a situation that is more than alarming ; it is downright vicious. Scarcely a Jurisdiction in the United States is free of headaches brought on by some group restricting its membership to Masons, but considering itself exempt from Masonic standards.¹ A few Jurisdictions have met the issue head on, to the good of all Freemasonry. Others have looked in the other direction, and thereby have damaged the entire Fraternity.

One of these days Masonic leadership had better come to grips with the issue. The winking attitude which says, in effect, "It's none of our business as long as you are not wearing an apron", is unthinkingly dealing a body blow to our beloved Craft. A serious-minded young friend of mine expressed interest in Masonry until a Past Master gave him a lurid description of the antics and the carousals he enjoyed in his favourite appendant organization. That ended his interest. Mark it down. *The public makes no distinction between the Master Mason who wears an apron and the Master Mason who wears some other kind of garb.*

4. When the leadership of Ancient Craft Masonry neglects the parent body to smile upon everything which claims a relationship to Freemasonry, however remote, that leadership is not contributing to a solution of our problem ; it is only aggravating it. In a single year, not so long ago, two American Grand Masters actually visited more appendant bodies than Symbolic Lodges in their respective terms of office.

Elsewhere in the U.S.A., Grand Masters are going up and down their Jurisdictions like itinerant peddlars, promoting everything under the sun except plain, unadulterated Symbolic Freemasonry. They go to Washington to attend what used to be the Grand Masters' Conference, and find that it has become "Masonic Week" with the side-shows taking over. Truly, the tail has begun to wag the dog. And we wonder what is wrong!

Subdivided we stand, and subdivided, I fear, we shall fall.

I am preaching a gospel of fundamentals. I am calling on our Symbolic Lodges to do a better job of upgrading themselves. And I am challenging the other Masonic organizations and appendant groups to put a stop to the downgrading of the Symbolic Lodge ; to acknowledge by actions, rather than words, that the Lodge is the fountainhead of all Freemasonry ; to put first things first ; to look unto the rock whence they are hewn.

¹ This is a reference to some of the "playboy" organizations, happily unknown in Britain. (H.C.)