

SELF - EXAMINATION

By: PM Nelson King

Way back in the 60's one of my Masonic Hero's wrote the following. It is funny that no one seemed to listen to him, because we have many of the same problems today...please remember that this was written in the vernacular of 40 years ago...

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 14 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 low; annual dues are far too low. Everything is geared to speed getting through as fast as possible and onto 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, with those Lodges we do have 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 it. 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. Downgraded, the Symbolic Lodge is used only as a springboard. A shortsighted Craft 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 check. And unless the personal element is there, charity becomes as sounding brass and a tinkling cymbal.
7. ***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--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.

8. ***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.

9. ***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.