

"And Give Them Proper Instruction"

By Alphonse Cerza

We are again indebted to Worshipful Brother Cerza for providing a thought-provoking paper. This is one he wrote many years ago, but which bears the stress of time.

The Worshipful Master is constantly being reminded by the ritual that he has a solemn duty "to set the Craft to work and give them proper instruction." The two key words "work" and "instruction" naturally go together. In recent years, unfortunately, the word "work" has been applied only to the ritualistic work of the Craft. In its broadest sense it really means all types of Masonic work.

The aim of Freemasonry is to teach men to live uprightly, do good in the community," and by their work to set a good example. Since the word "mason" implies work and Freemasonry glorifies the dignity of work, we can reasonably assume that the Craft should devote its attention to the kind of work which will help fulfill this aim.

There is no question that the Masonic ritual is the foundation of the Craft. In it we find the message that Freemasonry has for the candidate, its philosophy, and its moral teachings. If one knows these lessons fully and completely, he is indeed a wise man. Too many of us are concerned more with perfection of the words rather than securing a full understanding of the spirit and the meaning of the ritual.

Let us not make the mistake of believing that the ceremony of initiation makes a man a Mason. True, this ceremony is vital and necessary, but unless the lessons of the ceremony and the spirit of the ritual is understood it is nothing. For example, for hundreds of years in the ancient world there were a number of associations that we now call the Ancient Mysteries. These organizations had a number of things in common. One element stands out above all others: the belief that the ceremony of the Mystery purified the candidate. This basic belief more than any other factor brought these organizations to an end. Let us learn one lesson from this page of history: The ceremonies of the three degrees are of no value unless they are understood by the candidate and are grafted into everyday life.

An informed and enlightened membership is a better and more successful one. This is not idle talk. Brother William H. Knutt, in 1952, at the Mid-West Conference on Masonic Education,

gave a report in which it was clearly shown that when the great depression of the thirties came along, the jurisdictions in which the Craft had been offering educational programs lost the least number of members.

The Craft should be put to WORK. That there be perfection in the ritual, that members receive instruction in the ceremonies of the Craft, and that our degree work be retained is of vital importance. No fault can be found with the ritualistic work for it is the foundation of our Order. Fault should be found with the view that we stop our efforts with the conferring of the degrees. We are amiss in our duty to the Craft when we do not properly prepare our candidates and then abandon the newly-made Mason to his own devices. Lodges that devote their entire time to conferring degrees will soon find that quantity is not a substitute for quality. The quality of the membership is determined not only by the careful screening of applicants for the degrees but also in making the new member Mason in fact. This can be done by putting the new Mason to work.

What his work shall be must be determined by the Worshipful Master. While the new member is receiving his degrees someone should try to ascertain his likes, his dislikes, his hobbies, his aptitudes, and his inclinations. If he has a fondness for ritualistic work, by all means put him to work in that field. If he likes to read introduce him to Masonic literature. If he likes to speak why not encourage him to become a Masonic speaker? All this effort will help make this member a better Mason for he will be doing what he likes. And the Craft will profit thereby.

One method of discovering the talents of a member is a questionnaire. Each member is asked to answer certain questions so that the lodge may have information on his hobbies, whether he plays a musical instrument, likes to sing, is interested in amateur theatricals or has other interests. Thus the aptitudes, the likes, the inclinations of the members are ascertained. A resourceful Worshipful Master, by the use of the cards, can put practically every member to work at some time or other on a project to his liking. (A sample form can be found in the M.S.A. Digest, "Think Tank for Junior Wardens.")

The matter of giving the Craft "proper instruction" can take many forms. Each method should be used to make sure that the Craft does receive proper instruction.

Investigation Committee. Masonic instruction can start with the investigation committee. The applicant for the degrees can be told about our Masonic homes, about our Masonic charitable activities, and he should be given a booklet explaining the fundamental principles of the Craft. (See STB, May/83)

Candidate Booklet. Many Grand Lodges have prepared a series of booklets for the use of the lodges while the candidate is taking the degrees. These booklets can serve a useful purpose if they are placed in the hands of the candidates and meetings are held to discuss the material; in this manner it can be ascertained if the new member is reading the booklets. It will also give him an opportunity to ask questions that have arisen in his mind.

Posting the Candidate. The member who posts the candidate performs a most important function. He can render a real service if he will also discuss with the candidate the booklet he is supposed to be reading at that particular time.

Discussion Groups. Discussion groups may be organized on the District level. They should be established primarily for the candidates, but all members should be encouraged to take part. The group could meet at different lodges in the district in accordance with a pre-arranged schedule. This would also help to encourage more attendance by members and will bring the lodges in the District closer together.

Speakers. A list of speakers should be developed in each District so that they may be available for the lodges in the District as occasions arise. It may be discovered that there is among the members a real student who can from time to time make some valuable contributions to Masonic thinking.

Book Clubs. Where there is a group of Masons that like to read, one inexpensive way to read Masonic books is to have each member of the group buy a book and then exchange books. In this way each member, for the price of one book, will have the opportunity to read as many books as there are members in the group.

Study Clubs. If we can have successful ritualistic clubs, why can't we have successful Masonic study clubs? That the ritualistic clubs have done much to perfect the ritualistic work of many members is well known. The same could be done with groups that are desirous of studying Masonic literature, history, and other subjects .

Research Lodges. There are a number of research lodges in the United States. The name is somewhat misleading. These lodges are really Masonic literary societies. Their main purpose is to study the history of the Craft and to issue reports on various phases of Freemasonry. (A listing of U.S. Research Lodges is available from M.S.A.)

Undoubtedly, there are many ways of setting the Craft to work and giving them proper instruction. Only a few of these are discussed here.

The ancient ceremonies of the Craft should not be set aside. The basic laws of the Craft should not be changed. The times, however, call for a re-evaluation of the procedures of the Craft in fulfilling its part of the life of the community. What we need is more wellinformed Masons. This can be done by proper instruction and by putting every member to work at a task that pleases him.

Worshipful Brother Cerza resides at 237 Millbridge Road, Riverside, Illinois 60546.

STB - March 1984