

With the Eloquence of Men of Angels

by Sir Knight Tom Lewis, Jr.

"If I speak with the eloquence of men and of angels but have no love, I become no more than blaring brass or a crashing cymbal. If I have the gift of foretelling the future and hold in my mind not only all human knowledge but the very secrets of God and if I also have that absolute faith which can move mountains but have no love, I amount to nothing at all. If I dispose of all that I possess, yes, even if I give my own body to be burned but have no love, I achieve precisely nothing." - I Corinthians 13:1-3

In 1823, Dr. Dalcho became involved in an unpleasant controversy with some of his Masonic associates as a consequence of difficulties and dissensions which at that time existed in the Ancient Rite. His feelings were so wounded by the un-Masonic spirit which seemed to actuate his antagonists and former friends that Dr. Dalcho resigned the office of Grand Chaplain of the Grand Lodge and Grand Commander of the Supreme Council and retired for the remainder of his life from all participation in the active duties of Masonry. At the end of the year, Dr. Dalcho withdrew his membership from the Grand Lodge, which marked the end of his Masonic career. In Dr. Dalcho's resignation letter to the Grand Lodge, he states in part the following:

"Every friend of the Masonic institution as well as every member of our order must have felt not only deeply interested but greatly grieved at the unhappy difference which, for a few weeks, has existed in the Grand Lodge. As an old Mason and particularly as a religious man, I confess that it produced in my mind the most painful sensations. Believing, as I conscientiously do, that genuine Freemasonry is a powerful auxiliary to the religion I profess, I cannot but be solicitous to see it practiced in its native purity and truth. That charity which covers a multitude of sins and that Brotherly-love which makes the friend of his species are fundamental principles of both. Where these principles are permitted to govern our feelings and our conduct; whether in the domestic and social circle, in the Lodges of the Fraternity, or the community in which we live; there peace and happiness, the types of celestial enjoyment, must necessarily reign." - Illustrious Brother Frederick Dalcho; Illustrious Brother McDonald Lawrence Burbidge, 33°; and Worshipful Brother Eric Andrew Meace, 32° K.C.C.H.

At a 2011 meeting of the Masters and Wardens Club of the 1st and 2nd Masonic Districts, I heard the newly-elected and installed Most Worshipful Grand Master say that he doesn't travel all over the state to hear first, second, and third degrees, he's heard them before, and they're always pretty much the same. He said that he goes to share a meal and fellowship with his brothers.

At a somewhat informal meeting of the Past Masters of my Lodge last November, while discussing the leadership the Lodge would be electing later that month, the question was raised as to why we don't have the turnout at Lodge meetings we enjoyed prior to the last few years. The opinion was voiced that the meals these days aren't as good as we had then. Another opinion was that we needed to practice more, because when our ritual recitation was more nearly perfect, we had more visitors. I don't know why, but these two things are always the things brothers grab onto when things aren't going as well as we'd like. Maybe that's because we don't want to address deeper issues.

Why do men choose Masonry from all the other fraternal orders? Certainly its antiquity is a drawing factor, aided by Dan Brown's books and other mentions in popular culture. Some read in exposés and on the internet and see on popular TV shows about arcane rituals which supposedly allow Masons access to sources of ancient power, but once they experience Masonry, why do they come back? Or conversely, why do they NOT come back? A man doesn't voluntarily withdraw from an organization he's put time, effort, and money into joining if he truly feels connected to it. Maya Angelou once said "I've learned that people will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel."

I believe in my heart that if they come back it's because they feel a sense of belonging, that we truly are a sacred band of friends and brothers, and that we have made them feel like one of us. They came back because they believed that the men they saw in the room when the blindfolds came off were just as committed to them as they themselves had just become to Masonry and that every other man there for the degree was there simply to help provide the proper initiatory experience for the initiate. Dr. Dalcho didn't withdraw from Masonry because the ritual recitation suddenly deteriorated or the quality of the meals went down. Brethren, he withdrew because the feeling of brotherhood was no longer present for him. It seems that even Masonic legends are not immune to being hurt by brothers they love and trust.

A brother who does not engage with others during dinner doesn't support a feeling of brotherhood. Reciting ritual as fast as possible so that no one is really sure what was said, least of all the candidates we are supposedly reciting the ritual for, doesn't support that feeling. A brother showing gross disrespect during meetings doesn't support that brotherly feeling. One brother berating another for having gotten a few words wrong or out of order in his recitation doesn't support that brotherly feeling. The Master of a lodge physically assaulting one of his officers in the lodge room after calling the lodge from labor to refreshment doesn't give the impression to the new brothers that we need them to have. Brothers who, after being elevated to a position of power, misuse that power in an autocratic, dictatorial manner do nothing to promote brotherly love, relief, and truth. I could go on, but hopefully I have made my point.

When I first began visiting Lodges in Charleston, South Carolina, I had no real intention of joining one of them. I was a life member of my mother Lodge in

Tennessee and as such was privileged to visit any Masonic Lodge in the world, and I no longer had to pay dues to maintain my membership. When I visited one particular Lodge in Charleston, there was a feeling of brotherhood there that I felt the need to be a part of. The very name "fraternity" means a brotherhood. Men come to a fraternity for fellowship, a sense of belonging, a feeling that the "brothers" they associate with are closer than mere friends, a fellowship that will stand with them when other lesser friends are nowhere to be found. If they were coming to Masonry to find people that will cheat them, betray them, and fight with them, they could save their money and go pick a fight in a bar. There are plenty of bars with plenty of untrustworthy people in them, and I have yet to find one that charges annual dues.

Brethren, if all that was needed to swell our ranks was a good meal beforehand, Lodges would still be meeting in the banquet rooms of restaurants and pubs like they did in the 1700s, and people who think Masonry begins and ends with correct ritual recitation miss the entire point of the ritual they claim to revere. The United States has not survived for nearly two hundred fifty years simply because the Constitution is beautifully worded but because of the principles the Constitution promotes. The more people try to circumvent the letter of the law while violating the spirit of the law, the worse our society becomes. Likewise, Masonry has not survived for centuries simply because it has beautiful ritual but because once upon a time when men put their hands on a Bible and swore to act in a particular way, they actually did it, not because of the several penalties of the obligations but because their given word was sacred to them. Masons learned the ritual to be sure they lived in accordance with it, and while it is true that as you go visiting in different places, the ritual will be worded differently and will even be in other languages, how those different words tell Masons to act is always, always the same. Masonry stands for the same morality and the same principles all over the world that it stood for when Masonic brothers were molding this country.

The world will judge a tree by its fruit, and Masonry is not bearing the fruit it once did. The problem is not Masonry. The problem is the members, members who pay lip service to Masonry but don't follow through with their actions. I have heard it said that to have friends, you must be a friend. Masonry may take good men and make them better but not without effort on their part, and it needs good men to start with. Men who are there just for a free meal or to network to get ahead in business are not what Masonry needs. Masonry needs men to whom personal honor is part of their character and not a quaint, anachronistic concept. Masonry needs men who don't have to suppress a chuckle or a grin when someone speaks of the love of God, family, and country. In short, Masonry needs men who care. Masonry is not just a lot of archaic words and outdated principles; it's a foundation on which to build a worthy character, but just paying lip service doesn't build character. No matter how many membership cards a man may carry, as long as Masonry is just words in his head and not alive in his heart, he is not really a Mason, he is just a Masonic member.

Have we properly used our working tools? None but those who do are worthy to be called Master Masons. Titles do not matter. Words do not matter. Riches do not matter. Pins on lapels and rings on hands do not matter. Chains of silver or gold around the neck do not matter. Actions matter. They are all that matters.

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