

## VISITING

One of the more remarkable features of modern society is its mobility. Everyone seems to be on the move. A combination of affluence and rapid transportation has offered a whole generation the opportunity to tramp about half the world. With little hesitation entire families move across the town or across the nation. But in the process of compressing time and space, our perspectives have changed and human relations become more impersonal.

For example, we have become conscious of the value of seconds and fractions thereof, but we have lost the consciousness of the changing seasons; of phases of the moon . . . things of which our forefathers were acutely aware. Likewise, we all have friends in other cities or countries, yet so many of us in the city don't even know the name of the neighbor just across the street.

But, of course, there has not always been the case. Back in the Middle ages the majority of men did little visiting or traveling except in their own neighborhood. Workers tended to be organized into guilds or fraternities with each confined to its local area. While the modern workman is freed from any restrictions and able to come and go across the nation, a Medieval workman could not; he was tied to his own farm, village or town, and he made his friends there or nowhere at all. To men five miles away he was a stranger and a foreigner.

The Masonic historian H. L. Haywood states that to this general rule - as in so many other things - the Freemasons were an exception. Any Freemason could, and did, come from any other town and even from abroad. And nearly always they did come from a distance.

While traveling they could visit Freemasons or Lodges anywhere they chanced upon them, and not only could, but were expected to do so, because it was from the traveling Brethren that the news of the Craft was spread throughout the land.

When such a traveler arrived he was welcomed as a guest and treated to hospitality. If he was ill, he was nursed; if in need, he received relief. The only requirement was a familiarity with the modes of recognition - protected by his oath of secrecy - used to identify himself as a member of the Craft.

Haywood notes that "this freedom to travel and this right to visit were so necessary to Freemasons that without them they could not have carried on their work; being thus an essential, visiting became a Landmark, and has continued to be ever since."

Thus we find that the visiting of Freemasons among their Brethren is not

a mere neighborliness, a casual sociability, a polite reception of an acquaintance. It is on a far higher plane. It embodies both privileges and responsibilities that would be folly to neglect.

As Haywood says "In the moment of becoming a Mason, the candidate becomes a friend of thousands of men in his own community, and millions of men in the world who already are sworn to be in friendship with him. He has never met them; he is not acquainted with them; he does not know their names; but he has millions of acquaintances whom he has never seen. And whenever he meets a Mason and introduces himself as a Mason, he will find himself in a land of amicable fellowship which was already there before he came - for it to be there, is one of the things that is meant by being a Mason."

So we are reminded today that one of the fringe benefits of being a Mason - as in past centuries - is the privilege and the pleasure derived from visiting. Whether it be across the city, the province, or around the world, one is constantly mindful that the Craft is a universal organization, and that the Masonic fundamentals we share with others know no bounds of race, colour or creed, and that one is unfailingly received with the outstretched hand of welcome.

To visit overseas, of course, can almost be classed as high adventure, and if one can possibly spare the time from a busy itinerary, it is to be highly recommended. I once paid a visit in far away India . . . an experience I shall never forget to my dying day. Until that moment I felt a complete stranger in a land of some seven-hundred million people. But the moment I entered the Lodge I felt completely at home and was taken into the hearts and even the homes of Brothers in the Craft. There is just nothing quite like it! Incidentally, I was reminded of the universality of the Craft when I counted no less than five different Volumes of the sacred law on the altar!

For most of us, visiting Lodges in the city is particularly convenient because of the ample choice of Lodges and meeting nights, and the likely chance of meeting familiar friends in the Craft. On the other hand, the rewards from visiting around the province combines the best of both worlds . . . both a measure of convenience and the thrill of being made at home in an otherwise unfamiliar community. What a wonderful opportunity to renew old acquaintances and to make new ones!

Of course, there are many Brethren who have not discovered the pleasure

of visiting. Many of reserved or bashful disposition are somewhat timid and feel unsure when dropping in to a strange Lodge. They are due for a pleasant surprise. Others - and too many, I fear - hesitate lest they fail to pass an examination at the door. They are a little rusty about certain things, and with the passage of time have become shy about asking friends for guidance.

Basically, it's ever so simple. Don't be embarrassed about brushing up on your knowledge. Everyone else does it. If you look in the pages of Mackey's Encyclopedia under "Examination of Visitors," you will discover that the examiner is not supposed to ask any embarrassing "leading questions," or to prompt your memory in the direction of his own proficiency, but merely to ask you to prove that you are a member by "commencing at the beginning." Thus you need only impart the necessary knowledge you have in a normal order until the examiner is satisfied.

Bear in mind that the examination was never intended to be a test to "prove up" your proficiency or expertise. Nor is it to be an inquisition. The Brother is only trying to make sure that you are, indeed, what you claim to be. Once satisfied, the Brethren will receive you with open hands.

As a matter of fact, you will be doing a good service if you rise in your Lodge some evening and ask the Worshipful Master to instruct his Director of Ceremonies (or some other well-qualified Brother) to prepare and

hold periodic mini-practices in open Lodge to illustrate clearly to the newer Brethren what may be required for visiting. You'd be surprised at the number of older Brethren who would welcome such guidance. It can do nothing but help!

And while you're at it, see if you can't make each visit with a car full. It only takes a telephone call or two. Do things together . . . . and don't forget to always try to include a candidate or one of the newly-raised Brethren. There is no better opportunity to get to know him and to make him feel wanted in his Lodge. He'll welcome the chance to learn the ropes; it will broaden his experience; expand his knowledge of the craft; and provide ample proof that your offers of fellowship are not just empty words.

Remember, one of the greatest rewards of visiting is not so much the actual visit, but the fun of travelling together with your Brethren and cementing your friendships. Try it! Make it a habit! You'll never regret it!

As historian Haywood has said, "Visiting is a landmark. It is as if each and every Master Mason had a standing invitation from each Lodge in the world to be its guest. He does not need to seek their hospitality; their hospitality is seeking him."

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