

The Invisible Craft

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I have entitled this paper "The Invisible Craft", and it refers, of course, to our own venerable order, Freemasonry. To some extent I propose to play the role of Devil's advocate; that is not to say that I believe there is anything 'fundamentally' wrong with this ancient institution of ours - it still is the finest, most moral, most honourable institution of its kind in existence today. But it does appear to me that we, its members, are doing our best to smother it to death.

Masonry was not always the Invisible Craft. It was, in fact, during the era of Operative Masonry and indeed for most of its history, highly visible - and highly respected. Its charter was granted from the king, and gentlemen and members of the aristocracy deemed it a prestigious honour to be associated with it. A lodge was known by its achievements - the soaring cathedrals, stately mansions; the solid grandeur of the edifices which it erected. To be a Mason was to be known as a man of industry, honour, and integrity. To such an extent was the prestige of the Craft recognized, that its very language became enshrined in everyday usage, and several popular phrases still in use today owe their origins to this source - being a "past-master", being "on the level", having "square dealings", being "black-balled", and so on.

Unfortunately, this former prominence of Freemasonry has been, and is now being reduced to a mere shadow of its historical greatness, especially in our larger cities - and we, as Masons, are to blame. During the past quarter-century particularly, we seem to have done everything possible to obliterate our order as a viable, effective organization. We have veiled ourselves in a cloak of secrecy far heavier than required for the concealment of our esoteric teachings. As an institution we have shunned not only publicity, but recognition. We have done little or nothing in the name of Masonry to aid and assist any segment of our communities at large - the aged, the sick, the disabled, the indigent, the youth, the Arts, the Letters, or any of the other threads woven into the fabric of our society. We have become inward-looking to a fault. We have lost our identity in the eyes of the Public, and with it, our ability to perpetuate and revitalize ourselves by the attraction of new members. Indicative of our lack of public identity is an incident related to me about a woman and her daughter who recently visited a cemetery containing a Masonic-plot. They pondered the square and compasses on the headstones for some time, then finally concluded they were a plot for convicts! Those who swell the ranks of the uninformed label us everything from a bunch of eccentrics to a cult of devil-worshippers!

What has caused us to become so remote, so faceless, so unknown that these myths can permeate the very society in which we live and work? The answer is simple. Masonry as an organization is no longer visible. We have hidden our light under a bushel. We have become so protective of our secrets that almost our very existence is becoming a secret. We are becoming the Invisible Craft!

In what way do we as an institution display those qualities which we have propounded in our mysteries? Some twenty-five years ago a Grand Master solicited funds from individual Masons to furnish a new wing in a hospital. He then had a suitable engraved plaque mounted on the door, indicating the furnishings had been supplied by Masons - not a particular lodge, or particular Grand Lodge, but by Masons. The furor created over this apparent breach of Masonic propriety was such that the plaque was shortly thereafter removed. To this day it has never been replaced, and no Masons, either individually or collectively, have ever received public recognition for this benevolent act.

Our ritual indicates that a candidate for our mysteries must be "-unbiased by the 'improper solicitation' of friends -", NOT "-unbiased by the 'solicitation' of friends -". Yet, in our own inimitable way we have interpreted that phrase to imply that 'all' solicitation is improper. I would suggest that solicitation of a man possessing the

necessary qualifications for membership is entirely proper, and should be encouraged, provided it is done from pure motives and not without undue persuasion, coercion, or promise of financial, social, political, or other tangible gain. It is not, after all, reasonable or logical to assume that a rational and sincere man would attempt to join any organization about which he knows nothing, that he does not see at work in his community, whose achievements and accomplishments are hidden from view, and which he has not been invited to participate in or join. Nor is it reasonable or logical to assume that any man would or could have a preconceived opinion of our order, favourable or otherwise, if it is hidden from his view.

It is a well known psychological fact that one of man's most vitally important needs is recognition. Isolation and ostracism have been used for centuries to break down resistance and punish non-conformists. Lack of recognition - denial of the ego - have proven to be a kind of will-breaking, demoralizing torture which few men have been able to withstand over sustained periods. A parallel can be drawn with institutions and organizations, isolate them in their community, strip them of identity, deny them recognition, shroud their visibility - and surely in time they will wither into extinction. Throughout the centuries Masonry has been visible, masons have been the builders of society, and of society. They and the Craft were seen, recognized and known in their communities, through their work, their contribution, and their support. Wherever Masonry is flourishing today the same is still true. Can we, my brethren, say it is so in our jurisdiction? Are we flourishing? Are we "visible"? Or are we, in fact, becoming the Invisible Craft?

I would like to put forward the proposition that in some measure we are becoming sustained by those concurrent bodies who base their membership on Masonic Affiliation - bodies which, in our jurisdiction, we even have denied formal recognition. Some of these organizations have been highly visible, they have operated hospitals, built homes for the aged, encouraged education, supported charitable works. And, through people wishing to belong to these visible worthwhile organizations we have derived some members. In many cases, however, they are not active in our Blue Lodges, but do become deeply involved in the concurrent bodies where they feel they are making a worthwhile contribution.

There are a great many areas where we could be involved, and where our assistance is sorely needed - not just financially, but physically, emotionally, and morally. The old saw that such assistance is the responsibility of the individual mason solely, will no longer cut. If our Craft teaches relief and consolation to others, the Craft should be offering relief and consolation to others. If the Craft teaches universal beneficence and charity, the Craft should be taking the leadership in extending universal beneficence and charity. To do otherwise, or to fail as a group to conduct ourselves as we enjoin our individual members to conduct themselves is to be inconsistent with our own philosophical precepts.

What City Lodge in our jurisdiction in recent history has, as a Lodge, made any significant contribution to those around us? What Lodge has put on a concert for the aged? Taken patients for a stroll in the park? Attended a Job's Daughter's or DeMolay function? Delivered Meals on Wheels? Volunteered assistance during an emergency? Supported a Little Theatre Group? Helped a struggling artist? Helped shut-ins with shopping or personal care?

These are the things which can make us visible.

They give us identity and purpose. We don't have to wave banners, march through the streets, get into the press, or advertise our wares. We need not publicize our endeavours, but we do have to work! Out there - yes, in public, as an organization, doing what we profess to be all about. The alternative, Brethren, is clear. Unless we practice what we preach we will become an endangered species -- **THE INVISIBLE CRAFT.**

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