

Compulsory Membership unmasonic

To M. E. Companion Haines we are again indebted for a delightfully instructive review of the Grand Chapters and are in agreement with his expressed regret that there are occasions, infrequent it must be admitted, when our opinions diverge. For instance, he delicately hints that on the question of compulsory membership our opposition is upheld by "skillful sophistry," whereas we have mainly relied upon incontestible cold fact to support the contentions put forward, and there was no occasion to take any but the direct road. We have no desire now to repeat any of these at length, because they have not escaped his keen memory and are equally familiar to our Companions, yet they furnish complete and satisfactory answer to the question on which he now invites argument. "How ancient or how modern?" We confess it was with something more than amused surprise we observed his use of a hackneyed quotation, the dernier resort of so many who grow weary in defending a thing that cannot defend itself.

"While the lamp holds out to burn, The vilest sinner may return."

In our statement that compulsory membership, which he dignifies with the term "principle," is of modern birth and growth, we have relied upon the records as well as having the assurance of acknowledged Masonic students of the American "world" for, as the "principle" is unknown apart from the United States one naturally infers that when Comp. Haines speaks of the "world," it is that section of the Masonic universe he refers to. Recognizing the awful effect of example, he will surely pardon a lapse into quotation if, as we believe, its interpellation just here may be relevant. Quite recently we read a thoughtful review by a studious member of the Tyler-Keystone staff of Ann Arbor, Mich., of an English publication entitled "Masonic Jurisprudence," its author, the Rev. John T. Lawrence, being a writer of some repute and well known in Craft circles. The reviewer stated that "the Jurisprudence is compiled from the decisions and laws of the Grand Lodge of England, together with comment on the legal Masonic practice in other countries," and proceeded :

"Numerous references to American Masonic law are made, but the chief value of the work is that it is distinctly British, and so affords a fine setting upon which we can review our own law and practice. On many points, some of them those which we are pleased to consider of the greatest importance, the English law is quite different from that in general usage in America, and when we consider that England, as the parent of our Masonry, ought to know what is right, it is only natural that we should pause and wonder where we got our dictatorial habits of saying that thus and so is right, other practice wrong."

There we have the "thoughtful" expression of a reading unit of the Masonic "world" given to us through the medium of the American Masonic press, a channel not lightly considered by writers endorsed even in New Jersey.

The application of the coercive "principle" has never, so far as our researches have gone, been suggested, or even thought of, by the generations of English Masons who have legislated for the Craft since Anderson's Constitution first saw the light. That being so, there can be no manner of gainsaying that it would be superlative flattery to ally the word "ancient" to a "doctrine" that had its origin in the new world under circumstances within the memory of many still in the flesh. The binding relationship decreed by the Articles of Union he very ingeniously utilizes to do duty as a plea of dependence to support the American "principle," but which England's dictum plainly intended to convey a meaning associated only with traditional continuity and ending. There are many, even to-day, who contend that our English brethren of a century ago erred grievously when that bond was not further emphasized by placing the Royal Arch with the symbolic degrees under one and the same government. They did not, however, and notwithstanding the admitted consanguinity inseparably knitting the Master Mason to the Royal Arch, the latter was continued under distinct laws and regulations. Here was the opportunity to introduce the "principle" but no! the word above others cherished by the English Mason, then, as of yore and ever since, was "freedom." To every brother his "free will" was his birthright, his inalienable possession and no legislation that would dare encroach upon that sacred claim, has since been attempted in the early home of the Craft.

The interpretation of "pure antient Masonry" by the United Grand Lodge in 1813 is clearly an unalterable expression of the necessary linking of the unfinished legend of the Master Mason with the logical continuation and culmination of the story in the Royal Arch, and nothing whatever, be it prolific of instruction or attractively meritricious, has been

suffered to come between them. Why? Because alleged degrees (?) are regarded as chronological absurdities, unnecessary breaks in the intended close union, hence superfluous and out of place. A refuge has been found for them and the seeker after mystery is free to acquire them if he chooses.

By the American "principle" it means that the lodge member is "free" to seek the completion of his knowledge in the Chapter, but should he neglect to pay dues to his lodge he is "not free" to continue his quest. The "principle," sugar-coat it how you will, is another word for dollars and cents, nothing more nor less. No sophistry concealed there. Is there? Probably there was none either in the reply of the lad who was asked for his definition of money.

"An article which may be used as a universal passport to everywhere, except Heaven, and as a universal provider of everything except happiness."

Companion Haines may defend the "principle" on the basis of expediency. It is undoubtedly practical and as has been proved, feasible, but with all due respect for his abundant reasoning powers we still maintain it is not Masonic. Rather is it the kind of fraternity with which its thousand and one copyists bolster up their mushroom ventures and which has, unfortunately for the Craft, been introduced from probably such a source. We oppose it because of its unmasonic character, and not because of its being a barrier to the climber.

To the English Masonic mind nothing can be more repugnant than to seek to deprive a brother of even an iota of the freedom he brought with him, the possession of which he solemnly declares before admission, and his title to which he not only reiterates, but its preservation and maintenance are inculcated, as he advances.

Plain convictions, expressed thus in plain language, and dressed in plain type may be vile sinning of ebon hue, but if Companion Haines should recall the words of "The Bard of Avon" he may even extend a kindly forbearance to the impenitent one who can see only in the feeble flickering of his lamp an ominous warning.

"For naught so vile that on the earth doth live But to the earth some special good doth give."

We thank him for his correction in regard to the "volume," an acquaintance with which we had confessed ignorance. It was perhaps a hasty confession, in the absence of the title, for it has been within arm reach for many years. Once upon a time an incident compelled a reference, but alas it was only another case of misplaced confidence, and the great nineteenth century masterpiece was thereafter respected for the names it bore, but a pardonable hesitation in accepting it as a faultless authority, remained.

Sources:

Proceedings of the Grand Chapter of Royal Arch Masons of Canada at the annual convocation, 1913 report on Foreign Correspondence - NEW JERSEY