

Dependent Membership - Innovation

M.E. Companion Matthias H. Henderson of the reviewing quintette again had Canada under his critical eye and closely scanned our proceedings for 1904 with his usual acumen and courtesy.

'The report on Correspondence is again written by Comp. George J. Bennett. He wields a vigorous pen and comments intelligently on such topics as meet his eye. We are in general agreement with him except on the subject of dependent membership, concerning which we fear that we must agree to disagree. He believes in independence, while we remain faithful to the Lodge, in which we were brought to Masonic light and which is still deserving of our affectionate and loyal support.'

We at once acquit Companion Henderson of intention, but underlying his words there is an implication which in justice to ourselves and to those who think with us, we must promptly resent. In love and loyalty to Lodge we take no second place and it is because of our fealty and abiding affection for the principles upon which it rests that we have ventured to express dissent and sorrow at a phase of legislation which must be regarded by all who are earnest enough to examine beneath the surface, as a deplorable innovation. If we are true to our Lodge we must first be true to what it is built upon. From time immemorial the Craft has welcomed those who come forward under the tongue of good report. But they come of their own free will. Freedom of inclination is their birthright as Masons, and it is not in the power of any man or body of men to deprive them of it. Advocates of dependent membership, however, go beyond the "Ancient Charges" which has it "Every brother ought to belong to some lodge," by substituting the mandatory "must." The Master Mason is enjoined to preserve the ancient landmarks "sacred and inviolable, and never suffer an infringement of our customs or a deviation from established usage."

No more radical departure from this sacred injunction was ever attempted and carried out than when the dependent membership enactment was grafted upon the statute books of some of the Grand Chapters. Most heartily do we subscribe to the old charge "every brother ought to belong to some lodge," the very tone of which suggests that even if he chooses not to do so he is still a "brother"; but the plan of Freemasonry never intended that a brother's free will was to be interfered with and that once within a lodge he was to be kept there by a persuasive club. On the contrary, one of the rights which he acquires under the ancient landmarks is that of non-affiliation. By his withdrawal he abandons the privileges which the lodge organization gives, but he is entitled to all his other rights as a Mason while he maintains the character which qualified him for admission.

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From a very beautiful "Conclusion" written by Companion Stockton Bates, and which we feel sure received the endorsement of his gifted colleagues, we submit the following extracts which may well apply to "progress" as exemplified in the modern "dependent membership" doctrine. No more fitting words could be written in support of those who appose and condemn the innovation.

"The ornate temple has replaced the humble tavern where Masons of old time met. The charities of Freemasonry have been extended, broadened and deepened. Its principles have been more widely disseminated but its animating spirit is the same and its mode of teaching can only be changed at the expense of the institution itself.

"Why talk of progress in Freemasonry? The march of progress is like that of a desolating army. The old things must pass away, be crushed out of its path, and before the new can arise, wreck and desolation must first come.

"Once sanction the inroads of progress (?), once let the landmarks be removed, who shall stay the hand until what was once known as Freemasonry is obliterated or its once magnificent simplicity become as that forlorn relic we have pictured."

Sources:

Proceedings of the Grand Chapter of Royal Arch Masons of Canada at the annual convocation, 1906, report on Foreign Correspondence - PHILADELPHIA

