

Non-payment of dues is not a Masonic crime

The action of the Grand Encampment, an organization, self allied to, but distinct from, ancient Craft Masonry, cannot well be accounted for to this day. The pre-requisite for entrance to the order which it control's was, prior to that period, the simple possession of the Royal Arch degree. When it enacted that the Royal Arch Mason, in order to qualify, should, in addition, be a dues-contributing member of a Royal Arch Chapter, it simply committed a breach of its own established custom and exhibited an unwarrantable interference in matters beyond its sphere. Grand Chapters, one after another, followed suit, unmindful of their violation of ancient usage. If they have been right in so acting for the past thirty or forty years, it must logically be assumed that in the old time before this enlightened era, they were wrong. Moreover, if the United States bodies, in this regard, are acting in accordance with Masonic usage as intended by the founders of the Craft, how is it that this most beneficent feature is unknown outside its confines?

Companion Kies further remarks, as do others:

"If a Companion is able to contribute his share towards the support of his Lodge, but refuses to do so, is he guilty of any Masonic offense, and should he be suspended, or should we continue to resort to that miserable pettifogging technical subterfuge known as 'striking from the roll'?"

To our view the Companion is not guilty of an offence against Masonry, but he is guilty of violation of contract with the lodge, membership privileges in which; he solicited and engaged to pay for. Failure to pay periodical dues may, by usual course, be punished by forfeiture of those lodge privileges, but not his standing in the fraternity, which, so long as he maintains the character which insured his admission originally, no man, or body of men, has the right to deprive him of. To punish non-payment of dues with deprivation of all Masonic rights is, to use the words of the late Companion Drummond of Maine, "a comparatively recent product of the inventive genius of the American mind." In this view he had the support of a host of his contemporaries. "Keep in mind," says one, "that there is a distinction between Masonic rights and Lodge rights, between Masonic crime and Lodge offence, or delinquency for non-payment of dues. . . . Non-payment of dues is not a Masonic crime, according to ancient Masonic usage."

To the meretricious allurements of latter-day organizations of the Jonah's gourd type, and the modern spirit of commercialism which provides the necessity, are to be attributed this and other introductions which have created such a fog of gloom and confusion that we are not only losing sight of the way from which we came, but our goal is enveloped in the growing mists of perplexity and doubt. Little wonder that out of the gathering darkness is heard an occasional appeal for light.

Comp. Kies does not like the phrase "struck from the roll" as the penalty for non-payment of dues, although it happens to be Connecticut's "miserable subterfuge." But, despite the weight of her patriarchal years, there are jurisdictions who could go her a few decades better and still do even as she does, not daring to encroach one hair's breadth upon ancient usage and established custom. May not Comp. Kies' "miserable subterfuge" be, after all, a misapplication?

Sources:

Proceedings of the Grand Chapter of Royal Arch Masons of Canada at the annual convocation, 1911 report on Foreign Correspondence - CONNECTICUT