

Our title is readily identified as part of the Middle Chamber lecture. This statement is intended to put the candidate "in tune" for the series of instructive and philosophical discourses he is about to hear. It contrasts the kind of "work" done by modern members of the Fraternity to the manual labors performed by stone-cutters, masons, and builders in the days of operative Masonry.

In the eighteenth century, when Speculative was first used in this monitorial expression, it had a rather clear and definite meaning for the average member. He certainly wasn't misled by the image of a man taking a chance in the stock market. Speculative doesn't "register" with candidates today as it did two hundred years ago. Consequently, the statement in our title often "falls flat" for twentieth-century Fellowcrafts.

This is regrettable, since the word is so often used to describe Freemasonry and has great value for preserving a tradition of Masonic development. We really can't do without the expression, Speculative Freemasonry, even though Symbolical Freemasonry might be a more descriptive term today.

The eighteenth century, in which that kind of Masonry was organized, is known as the Age of Reason, or the Age of Enlightenment. In England this was the period which saw the flowering of new ideas, new methods, and rediscovery of the ideas of the ancient classical world. Scientific investigation and invention became the leading activities of men of learning in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

The Royal Society was organized in 1660 to promote "Physico-Mathematicall Experimental Learning." The great architect of the Restoration, Sir Christopher Wren, was a member. The Rev. Dr. John T. Desaguliers, the "Father of modern Speculative Freemasonry" and third Grand Master of the Premier Grand Lodge in London, lectured in "Experimental Philosophy" at Oxford and Westminster. He studied the science of gunnery and is credited with inventing a sponging apparatus for a breech-loading "12 pounder" cannon. One of the most important functions of the Royal Society was the performance of experiments before the members. Scientific equipment in those days was referred to as "philosophical apparatus."

The studies and experiments of those investigators were referred to as "speculation." They were speculative men,

i.e., they observed, sought, examined, contemplated and meditated on new facts or knowledge by experimenting with what was already known. They exchanged that knowledge with each other. Freemasonry, therefore, originally meant an "experimental" search for Light, or Truth.

That characteristic was the new element which made the Fraternity different from what it had been before. Brotherly love, moral training, and relief had always been emphasized in the lodges of operative Craftsmen. Architectural knowledge had always been imparted to develop master workmen but as a Speculative Craft, Freemasonry in the eighteenth century placed its greatest emphasis on "experimental philosophy" and knowledge of the Truth to which all learning leads. Therefore, to be true to its origins, Freemasonry must be an educational institution in the broadest sense.

Much of Masonry's ritual and lectures are the result of William Preston's studies of existing rituals and ceremonies in Masonic lodges, and of his embellishment of these with the knowledge of classical art, mathematics, and philosophy which he had acquired by independent study. His famous Illustrations of Freemasonry appeared in London in 1772. It was the basis of much of the "work" produced in America by Thomas Smith Webb and Jeremy L. Cross.

To a self-made scholar like Preston, knowledge was the principal means for achieving wisdom and power. To him, working in Speculative Masonry was acquiring useful knowledge for self-improvement. For this reason he developed the lengthy lectures which characterize his writings. His was an age in which few men had the chance to acquire scholarly learning. He tried to make of Speculative Masonry a university for the common man.

"Without much instruction, and more exercise, no man can be skillful in any art in like manner, without an assiduous application to the various subjects treated in the different lectures of Masonry, no person can be sufficiently acquainted with the true value of the institution." Thus wrote William Preston.

In his day, the exercise of the speculative art was consciously practiced in Masonic lodges. It was not confined to demonstration by the officers in the conferring of degrees. All the members participated in discussions which grew out of questions and challenges.

Initiates were not excused or ignored. They

were drawn into the speculations by direct questions, not merely while the lodge was at labor, but also at refreshment the table lodge was an integral part of every meeting.

For example, a new member might be asked to explain the symbolism of the tyler's sword, not because he was expected to give a "correct" answer, but to afford him a chance to exercise his speculative power, his ability to give expression to the symbolic meanings he saw in a particular Masonic tool or implement. At the same time, it gave opportunity to his fellows to make sure that he realized that in Masonry the sword is always a defensive, not an offensive weapon. In this way they could help him to improve his speculative skills and Masonic understanding. Such discussions extended to all sorts of questions about art, life, manners, morals, etc.

This kind of intellectual "give and take" was one of the "images" of Freemasonry which attracted outstanding men into its ranks in the eighteenth century. Benjamin Franklin modelled his Junto Club on this activity he wanted to associate with speculative men who liked to pursue knowledge and discuss it dispassionately "for the good of mankind."

Our "ancient brethren" of that era were much more inclined to such activities than we are. They "practiced" more. They observed certain "rules of the game." They didn't shout down the opposition. They didn't resent disagreement they provoked and encouraged it. They looked forward to the exchange of ideas that brought them a different point of view. They delighted in the clever and well-reasoned rebuttal.

For one thing, they had more time. For another, they really tried to subdue their passions, especially the prejudices which offended their brethren. They were genuinely interested in the pursuit of Truth - the truths of fact and demonstrated experience - the truth for its own sake, regardless of whom it might prove right or wrong.

Speculative Masons really tried to observe, to see and to describe the moral principles which the working tools of Masonry symbolize to ponder their applications and uses in their individual intellectual, moral, and spiritual activities to acquire moral and spiritual knowledge through study and contemplation - i.e., to speculate on ways to establish genuine brotherhood and to seek the Light.

As suggested by one slight example above, the Masons of Preston's day were generally

interested in the "give and take" of intellectual exercise. They saw to it that initiates and new members were drawn into that activity. They worked in Speculative Masonry.

How often, one might ask, is a present day initiate asked a question to stimulate his speculative power? At the end of the third degree, he may be invited to say a few words to explain his reactions to his initiatory experiences. After a long evening of degree work, however, most of the brethren hope he is "speculative" enough to realize that a few words of appreciation will be more than adequate.

This leads us to a broader question for which there is no complete or "correct" answer, but which may stimulate some speculation among us. Are we really working in Speculative Masonry?

There will be those who point out that we still adhere to the Ancient Charges and that we continue to perform the ceremonies of the Craft in the rituals that have come down to us through the centuries. We have preserved the ancient landmarks. We teach the lessons of the degrees. We work hard to transmit the wise and serious truths of Freemasonry unimpaired.

But, conceding that all this is done skilfully, "letter perfect," completely, let this question also be asked. "In the way we are doing all these things, are we working speculatively, or merely in due form?" In the ceremonies of primitive tribes, repeated over and over again, without questioning, without change, the ceremonial actions were rigidly maintained, but their significance forgotten. When Masonic teaching becomes a stylized performance in which words are repeated over and over again without speculation, without questioning, the "labors" of our lodges became boring performances which intelligent men avoid.

Does every newly-made Mason really speculate after receiving the three degrees? If the answer is yes, what evidence is there that the reply is substantially true? What speculative activity, not including degree work or ritual rehearsals, goes on in the lodge? Undoubtedly you have speculated silently about Masonic symbols and ceremonies but when did you last speculate on those things with another Brother, or a group of them?

As Masons we recognize the fact that one man glimpses the truth but partially. But by speculating with others, we can see more

aspects of the truth of any situation if we will listen with unbiased respect and eager curiosity to hear another's point of view. Consequently, there are no final answers to the questions raised above.

But in the speculative spirit, be challenged by our question. Gather together your speculative Brethren and ask each one to answer the question, "Do we really work in Speculative Masonry?"

POTS

Masonry is an art, useful and extensive, which comprehends within its circle every branch of useful knowledge and learning, and stamps an indelible mark of preeminence on its genuine professors, which neither chance, power, nor fortune can bestow. - PRESTON.

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