

## FREEMASONRY IN THE 21st CENTURY AND... BEYOND? (PART II)

"Whither Are We Traveling?"

HOW WELL ARE WE GUARDING THE WEST GATE? The survival of Freemasonry in the 21st Century has been a topic of discussion and concern and rightly so. The latest issue of *The Philalethes*, Volume LIX, October 2006 has a great article that cuts straight to the heart of the matter. Presented by the Knights of the North, the feature reprints a series of 1960 articles by Dwight Smith, Past Grand Master and at the time Grand Secretary of the Grand Lodge of Indiana.

I will use parts of it to highlight this extremely critical issue within this short article and the next.

I would like to dive in and highlight chapter three in the writings of P.G.M. Smith. Chapter three is entitled "Asleep at the West Gate." This chapter discusses: the investigation process and quality versus quantity of perspective petitioners. The chapter begins on how poor a job Masonic Lodges are doing in assigning the most important assignment ever made in a Lodge. That assignment being the proper choosing of an investigating committee. The assignment was being compared as follows: "It was being done with no more thought than would be given to who shall turn out the lights."

Let's face it. Thousands of men have become Masons who should never have passed the ballot. The result—the Craft is not looked upon with the same degree of respect it once enjoyed.

Maybe the Open Door Policy is not a selective policy; it is a come-one-come-all policy. Isn't Freemasonry a selective organization? Where did the idea come from that a man—almost any man—has an inherent right to become a Freemason? Is this not a privilege to be conferred upon the worthy? It should be if Freemasonry is to avoid the fate of a score of fraternal groups whose names are well forgotten and faded with time.

We cannot escape the fact that men judge Freemasonry by what they see. And if what they see does not command their respect, then we need not expect them to seek our fellowship.

Are Lodges utilizing their most capable members for duty on investigating committees? Some argue no. In every Lodge there are brethren of high standards who love the Fraternity and want to see its good name protected, men who would really stand guard at the West Gate.

P.G.M. Smith continues to point out some very interesting views about letting our guard down when accepting petitions. He goes on to say the following...There is simply no substitute for quality. We are accepting too many petitioners who can pay the fee and little else. Too many men who have no conception of what Freemasonry is or what it seeks to do, and who don't care one bit about increasing their moral stature; too many men who look upon the Craft with contempt and are interested in using it only as a springboard from which to gain a prestige symbol. Pretty powerful words from PGM Smith don't you think? Are they true?

Are there better and more thorough methods in helping us choose men of character? Here are further suggestions to consider for investigating petitioners:

1. Provide stronger guidelines to Lodges for meeting with potential candidates.
2. Meet him more than once and at least one time at his home.
3. Have him come to the Lodge and meet some of the brethren at a meeting prior to his petition being read.
4. Have him provide a written statement on why he seeks to be part of this organization. What he seeks to gain from this fraternity. How does he see Freemasonry improving his life?

Are these suggestions out of the question? What we must remember is that Masonry is a very serious subject. Ours is not a club, not a Rotary or Lions with aprons.

One of the conditions causing concern is the fact that successful young men are not petitioning for membership. True, they maybe busy getting ahead in this world or they may not have the money or they may not be interested. But consider this. Why should intelligent young leaders in the community petition a Lodge if they have little or nothing in common with its members?

If they cannot find Freemasonry a social, intellectual and cultural atmosphere that is comfortable; they will find it elsewhere.

My brothers, until the next article.

Bro. George Weil

1 Dwight L. Smith, P.G.M., Whither Are We Traveling, pamphlet, 1962, Internet