

PUNCTUALITY A MASONIC DUTY.



If brevity is the soul of wit, then most assuredly punctuality is the essential of good order, business, and discipline. The man who cannot be relied upon to be "on time" in response to due notice, or all appointment, is not only a thorn in the flesh and a hindrance to the proper conduct of affairs, but is also one who has little regard for the feelings and convenience of others. How does the above, which a clear analysis of character will show to be substantially correct and generally justified, fit in with the accepted qualifications of the true Freemason? Yet a vast number of the brethren are chronic sinners in this matter of unpunctuality in regard to Masonic affairs and fixtures. It is the rule, and not the exception, for the majority of the members of a Lodge to be late for its opening rites. Their summons to attend will have told them distinctly the hour at which the Lodge will be tyled. Their duty, of course, is to be in the anteroom ready to enter the Lodge just prior to the stated time, and before the W.M. takes his seat. This duty is calmly ignored. They arrive, it may be at the stated time, generally later, are not ready to go in, and subsequently have to be admitted in sections, each entrance causing all utterly unnecessary interruption of the ceremonial, and delaying the proceedings. Should by any chance the customary hour of opening be changed to a quarter of, or half, an hour earlier to suit the requirements of the W.M., so perfunctorily do they read their summonses that generally a perfect debacle is caused by the brethren being correspondingly a quarter of, or half, an hour or more later than usual, the excuse given being that they had not noticed the change of time. All this shows an extraordinary absence of appreciation of the seriousness of their Masonic duty, or a woeful callousness with regard to the non-observance of that duty. It is at the very earliest stage of his Masonic career that the brother is charged in the most solemn way to cultivate certain excellencies of character, among which is obedience. He is told, among other things, that his obedience will be seen by a "prompt" attention to all summonses. No amount of sophistry can disguise the fact that "prompt" in this connection means punctual as regards the attendance of the brother in response to the summons.

But let us regard the question from the standpoint of etiquette. Society knows no greater solecism than to be late in response to its invitations. No greater discourtesy can be shown to host or hostess. Is Masonry of so little account that brethren would treat their W.M. and their fellow Lodge members with less courtesy than they would show to the profane host or hostess? Have they ever realised the extreme incivility they by being habitually late are exhibiting to the visitors to their Lodges? A Masonic writer has recently said that "unpunctuality is an insult, to the visitors who have made it their business to be on time." This is rather plain speaking, and perhaps a trifle exaggerated in terms. But it contains a golden truth, which is that, apart from other things, brotherly courtesy demands that the brethren should be in attendance at the stated proper time to receive their visitors. Doubtless the late brother, or brethren, has, or have, erred from sheer carelessness, heedlessness, rather than from any desire or intention to be wanting in the fulfilment of a Masonic duty. If this is so, then, perhaps, it is not too much to hope that, their attention having been called to the matter as one not only of Masonic ethical interest, but also of great importance to the good order and progress of the Craft Lodges, there will be in the future a notable improvement as to punctuality shown by the brethren generally when attending Masonic functions. Naturally there are many instances in which good and valid excuse can be forthcoming for late attendance. In such cases sympathy will be felt for the brother who is the victim of adverse circumstances. The above remarks, however, apply to that large body of Lodge members who are habitually late, and have no reasonable excuse to offer, and more especially to the young Mason who is steadily acquiring time "late" habit. Upon all these it cannot too often, or too forcibly, be impressed that punctuality in Lodge attendance is distinctly a Masonic duty.