

BOOK REVIEW "Questions and Answers"

From the transactions of the Masters' and Past Masters' Lodge, No. 130.
Edited, Revised and Arranged by A. R. Chambers, P.G.W.

A few days ago I received a copy hot off the press, and because circumstances have rendered me temporarily immobile, I have been absorbed for hours in what I am sure will be, by no means my final study of or reference to a most valuable contribution to masonic education.

This collection of the Questions and Answers which during many years have appeared in the Transactions of the oldest of New Zealand's Research Lodges was edited and, where necessary, revised by the late R.W. Bro. Arthur R. Chambers, P.G.W. It is regretted by his host of friends that he died suddenly in August 1972 and so did not live to see in print, the volume to which he had given so much time. Here let it be added that from 1956 onwards he personally provided the answers to a large number of the questions, a task for which his life as a teacher and educationist and his conscientious approach to any matter had made him thoroughly competent to perform. Also, it is well to remember him as the author of "A Guide to Masters", published by Grand Lodge and recommended for presentation to every Master at his installation. (It is so presented in this district, and, I hope, in every other).

The book is an admirable and valuable one. The Brethren who had placed an order before publication will rejoice to have it on their shelves. Likewise, lodges will constantly refer to their copies and will find ample material for talks and lectures if there is lack of formal "work". I would go so far as to say that every lodge should have a copy and should use it whenever possible.

The features of the book which are printed in addition to the main text are equally welcome. The foreword written by R.W. Bro. Hepburn, P.G.W. is a model of conciseness and surveys the story of the preparation and publication; the "In Memoriam", also written by him, is a moving tribute. He and Arthur Chambers were not only fellow-members of 130; for 25 years they had worked together to further the purpose of a Research Lodge. They had built on the foundations, laid by eminent brethren before them, in a way that had earned the respect of masonic scholars in New Zealand and even overseas. So Ross Hepburn's tribute to a colleague and close friend is not only a fitting introduction but also one that will strike a responsive cord in the hearts of Arthur Chambers' friends. The latter's "Explanatory Note" also printed by way of introduction, reveals the depth of his masonic knowledge and his eagerness to share it with others, even though he is occasionally a little impatient with those who ask questions without attempting to refer to sources of information so easily available to all.

Even after a by no means thorough study, I am struck by the thoroughness and depth in every section of the book. One of the first queries that come to mind is the degree of authenticity of the information given, and to what extent the rulings on procedure, etc., are authoritative. The reader need have no worries; he will find the answer in the book's answers. Chapter and verse are given in all instances, and a whole page, 212, is devoted to the question of authority. In effect, the Editor says, "We don't trespass". Further, if a reader does not agree with an answer he can always do some research for himself or refer to constitutional authority, i.e., Grand Lodge, through the Board of General Purposes. I could give other instances of the tremendous scope of the answers, but, again, let the reader make his own discoveries.

A few comments, and they are not criticisms. In place of an index, i.e., one that follows the text, there is a most detailed Table of Contents, in seventeen named sections; in each of them the subject of the questions is given in alphabetical order. With respect, (that's nearly always a little suspect), may I suggest that in a reprint — I hope the demand compels one to be made — there be a conventional Table of Contents comprising the titles of the present sections, and an alphabetical index after the text. Much of the necessary classification already appears in the Contents, and there would be no great difficulty in listing the questions in one comprehensive index. I am tempted to wonder whether Arthur Chambers had that in mind. (See his explanatory note).

On page 316 the translation of "ne varietal." is given as "lest it be changed". That would be correct if the two words formed a negative clause of purpose. The two words, as one sentence, express a Latin negative command or prohibition, and mean "let it not be changed". The fact that the Latin words are no longer printed on the M.M.'s certificate does not remove my objection. (Did I hear something about a condemned school teacher?).

Years ago I contracted the disease of reading print when reading. In the book three typographical errors appear, but Heaven forbid that there be any suggestion of personal perfection! Some errors always get by, and a lot of them add to the world's humour.

Thanks and congratulations to those who completed the task after Arthur Chambers' untimely passing. I feel sure that their reward is the knowledge that in so doing they paid tribute to a friend.

And, finally, the last words of his explanatory note, "All concerned with this publication would wish that those using it will derive both pleasure and profit from its pages."

Shakespeare's words were used as an oratorical device. In the present circumstances they might be, "The good that men do lives after them".

S.I.J.