

# The Discoverer

The Monthly Newsletter of The Lodge of Discovery

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## Greetings Brethren,

The Lodge of Discovery are busily preparing for the forthcoming Installation meeting—the new Officers are hard at it learning their new roles which should make for an interesting year ahead.

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## Installation Ceremony—Past & Present

In writing about this subject, I refer to the Freemason's Guide and Compendium which differentiates the words Installation and Investiture. It goes on to say: "To 'install' is literally to put a person in a chair. A stall is a chair, or any seat of dignity, such as the seat in the choir or chancel of a church. Ordained priests were put into seats—that is installed in their churches. For 600 years, Knights of the Garter have been installed in the Chapel of St George at Windsor castle. Masonically, the word installation is thought not to go back earlier than 1723 when it occurs in the first edition of our Constitutions. Our Board of Installed Masters, a Master's Lodge, charged with the duty of Installing the Master Elect was not known by that name earlier than 1827 in which year there was a warranted lodge or board of Installed Masters.

The only officer installed is the Master when he is put into the Chair. All other officers, even the Wardens are not put into their chairs; instead they are clothed with the insignia of their office or 'to invest' them which originally signified the act of transferring title or even a power through the presentation of a particular symbol. Masonic custom perpetuates that old idea when the Master of a lodge hands the column and gavel, to a Warden, the Wand to a Deacon and the sword to the Tyler and the poniard to the IG, and in general when he places around the neck of an officer the collar which signifies the emblem of his office. The Lodge officer will therefore appreciate that his investiture is much more authority than receiving the clothing and symbol of his office; traditionally and symbolically, the conferment of the symbol endows him with a particular power.

*With acknowledgement to the Lodge of Fiji Cabletow*



## Membership e-mail address list

A list of current members and their e-mail addresses is available on request.

## HUMILITY

### The Forgotten Virtue

Of all the virtues and attributes propounded by Craft Masonry, the most obscure, overlooked, and yet all persuasive, is also one of the most vital and essential to our order. It is found as a continuing theme in the great religions of the world. It is basic to many of the other virtues, yet is for many people, one of the most difficult to apply. This virtue is Humility, and is dealt with as follows:

### Humility

Our rituals in Craft Masonry do not make direct reference to this virtue except in our attitudes to the G.A.O.T.U. It is not listed as one of the four cardinal virtues, or the three theological ones. In our relationship to each other, and as Masons, we are admonished about the essential nature of humility only once, in the General Charge to the brethren at installation; yet it must, of necessity, be presented in varying degrees throughout our work. It has been said, in fact, that the totality of our ceremonies is really a continuing lesson in humility, and therefore need not be expounded upon further in our allegories and mysteries.

The preparation of a candidate for our ceremonies is of itself a humbling experience. Divest a man of his normal apparel, deprive him of all signs of materialistic possessions – watches, rings, money – hoodwink him, lead him into unknown surroundings to hear unknown voices ask him personal questions about his fundamental beliefs; yes, it is truly a humbling experience.

Our lesson in humility has just begun. Throughout the course of the three degrees our candidates are told what to say, where to go, where to sit, when to stand, walk, sit and speak.

They are dressed in an inferior manner, presented with an unadorned apron, and treated generally as a neophyte in the counsel of the skilled and learned. Upon receiving their third degree, our candidates have earned the right to become an equal among equals. We have informed them that "he who is placed on the lowest spoke of fortune's wheel is equally entitled to our regard." The only distinctions within the lodge are merit and position, and the W Master might readily be a man of limited wealth, social position, and formal education. The laborer sits as an equal with the professional; the clerk with the judge, the scholar with the student. Each has the same voice in the affairs of the lodge.

Perhaps because it is not specifically emphasized in our lectures, or stressed in our instruction, all too often the lessons of humility are missed or forgotten. They are so veiled in our allegory that we devote little time or effort in bringing them out. Yet it becomes virtually impossible to practice true brotherly love without genuine humility, because only the true humble person has shed the trappings and motivations of self-interest. His concerns and feelings are for his fellow man, rather than for himself. He has been able to widen his sphere of interest, compassion, and action to encompass all with whom he comes in contact. This is not to say that he lacks strength of character or personality, that he has no personal pride or self-esteem.

To be humble is not to be a mouse or a milquetoast, or to lack confidence in one's own abilities. We hope that those who join our fraternity do so for the right reason. We hope they accept a chair for the right reason and stand for an elected office in their own lodge, district, or Grand Lodge for the right reason.

We hope they will not be motivated by self-glorification – the largest and brightest apron, the power or prestige of the position or the accolades and attention that is accorded to rank. If their motivation is to serve the order and contribute to the advancement and well-being of our craft, then they will know that this virtue called “humility” has its own reward.

Let us then take heed of the General Charge and as we attempt to influence new members to our order, search out “the man, who, without courting applause is loved by all noble-minded men, respected by his superiors, revered by his subordinates; who never proclaims what he has done, will do, can do, but where need is will lay hold with dispassionate courage, circumspect resolution, indefatigable exertions, and a rare power of mind, and who will not cease until he has accomplished his work; but who then, without pretension retires into the multitude, because he did the good act, not for himself, but for the cause of good”.

### *The Educator*

### **The Builder**

An old man going along a lone highway  
Came at the evening, cold and gray  
To a chasm, vast, deep and wide  
Through which was flowing a sullen tide  
The old man crossed in the twilight dim  
But he turned when safe on the other side  
And built a bridge to span the tide.

Old man, said a fellow pilgrim near,  
You are wasting your strength in building here  
Your journey will end with the passing day  
And never again will you pass this way  
You've crossed the chasm, deep and wide  
Why build you this bridge at eventide ?

The builder lifted his gray, weary head  
Good friend, in the path I`ve come  
There followeth after me today  
A youth whose feet must pass this way  
This chasm that has been naught for me  
To that fair-haired youth may a pitfall be  
He too must cross in the twilight dim  
Good friend, I am building this bridge for him.

*By Will Allen Dromgoole.*

### **Free and Accepted**

Never a word was spoken –  
There was no common tongue we knew –  
But we shared a sign and a Token  
As Sons of Widows do.  
We had made the same Preparation,  
Each in his secret heart;  
We had sought our Initiation,  
And we'd made Advance in the Craft.  
We owned no link with each other  
of language, of race or of birth –  
But we each of us greeted a Brother  
From the opposite end of the earth.

Freemasonry has endured not because of its antiquity, its influence, or its social standing, but because there have been so many who have lived it. The effectiveness of Masonic teachings will always be the measure by which the outside world judges Freemasonry; the proof of Freemasonry is in our deeds and it is in our deeds that Freemasonry is made known to non-Masons. The only way that the Craft can be judged is by its product. The prestige of Freemasonry lies squarely on the shoulders of each of us.

**[BRO. G. WILBUR BEST]**

Lodge Birthday

Charles Kleiman 20 (J)

## LETTERING AND HALVING

The use of a lettering and halving procedure in connection with a certain part of Masonic communication goes back to ancient times. In by-gone days, it was employed, in particular, in religious matters, it being considered far more reverent to refer to sacred words, such as the name of the Supreme Being, in this manner than to give it in all its syllables or letters, as a full and continuous utterance. Lettering and halving were used in the earliest days of speculative Freemasonry although not in a consistent way in all workings. Masonically, the process is used to give a degree of traditional importance and significance, as well as protection, in relation to some of our highly-prized secrets.

## CANDLES

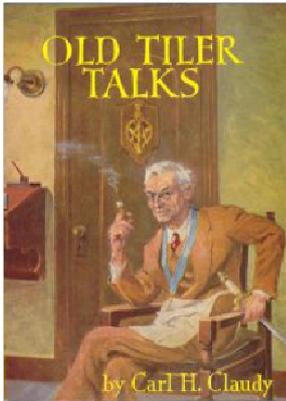
The three lesser lights in Freemasonry which are represented by electrical globes on the pillars of the Master and Wardens these days were in the form of candles in earlier times. Amongst the oldest details of the Craft ritual, the candles originally stood on candlesticks in the centre of the pavement arranged in the design of a triangle.

During the 18<sup>th</sup> century in England, there was difference of viewpoint in the two Grand Lodges as to whether the candles represented the three great lights or three lesser lights, and it was not until after the union in 1813 that the present representational practice was prescribed.

In operative days, candles would have been required as a practical means of providing illumination on lodges. The provision of three, no doubt, related to the presence of three principal officers in each lodge. This symbolism carried on into speculative days. Some authorities, however, go further and see the use of candles as having had a religious basis as emblematical of spiritual light, going back many centuries.

## FELLOWCRAFT

A Fellowcraft Freemason is a brother who has been advanced to the 2<sup>nd</sup> degree in the order. The Fellowcraft, having received the basic lessons of morality and brotherly love at his initiation, is instructed in the 2<sup>nd</sup> degree in the necessity of extending his researches 'into the hidden mysteries of nature and science' or, in other words, of furthering his knowledge and enlarging his mind. His attention is drawn to the wonders of nature and art and he is led to view with reverence and admiration the glorious work of creation. It is a special feature of the Fellowcraft degree that the brother involved is informed, by means of the working tools charge, of the need for him to demonstrate square conduct, level steps and upright intentions as he progresses through life. In early speculative days, only 2 degrees were practiced and brethren who had been passed to the 2<sup>nd</sup> degree were given the ultimate title of Fellow of the Craft which equated with that bestowed on the experienced operative masons of those times who would normally have spent approximately 10 years in the craft of stonemasonry to reach that state.



## Old Tiler Talks— Country Lodge

"It was the funniest thing I ever saw!" "What was?" asked the Old Tiler of the New Brother. "That lodge meeting I attended in Hicksville. Listen, and I'll tell you!" "I'm listening. Anyone who can find a lodge meeting funny deserves to be listened to!" answered the Old Tiler.

"The lodge room was funny!" began the New Brother. "Lodge rooms ought to have leather-covered furniture and electric lights, a handsome painting in the east, an organ- be dignified, like ours. This lodge room was over the post office. There were two stoves in it. And every now and then the Junior Deacon put coal on! The Lesser Lights were kerosene lamps, and the Altar looked like an overgrown soap box! The benches were just chairs, and they didn't have any lantern or slides- just an old chart to point to in the lecture.

But it wasn't so much the room, it was the way they did their work. You'd have thought they were legislating for a world, not just having a lodge meeting. Such preciseness, such slow walking, such making every move and sign as if it were a drill team. There wasn't a smile cracked the whole evening and even at refreshment, there wasn't much talking or laughing. I'm glad to belong to a lodge where people are human!" "Yes," answered the Old Tiler, "I expect it is." "Expect what is?"

"Impossible for a New Brother to understand the work of a country lodge," answered the Old Tiler. "What you saw wasn't funny. Listen- it is you who are funny." "Me funny? Why, what do..." "I said for you to listen!" sternly cut in the Old Tiler. "I have never been to Hicksville, but I have visited in many country lodges and your description is accurate. But your interpretation is damnable!

"Masonry is beautiful, truthful, philosophical, strives to draw men closer to God, to make them love their fellow, to be better men. Is that funny? The more regard men have for outward symbols, the more apt they are to have regard for what is within. A man who won't clean his face and hands won't have a clean heart and mind. A man who is slovenly in dress is apt to be slovenly in his heart. A lodge which reveres the work probably reveres the meaning behind the work.

"You criticize the Hicksville Lodge because it is too precise. Would that our own was more so! The officers who have so deep a regard for appearances can only have learned it through a thoughtful appreciation of what the appearances stand for.

"You have been taught that it is not the externals but the internals which mark a man and Mason. What difference can it make whether a lodge seats its membership on leather benches or chairs, or the floor, or doesn't seat them at all? Our ancient brethren, so we are taught, met on hills and in valleys. Think you that they sat on leather benches, or the grass?

"It's good to have a fine hall to meet in. It's a joy to have an organ and electric lights and a stereopticon to show handsome slides. But all of these are merely easy ways of teaching the Masonic lesson. Doubtless Lincoln would have enjoyed electric lights to study by, instead of firelight. Doubtless he would have learned a little more in the same time had he had more books and better facilities. But he learned enough to make him live forever.

"We teach in a handsome hall, with beautiful accessories. If we teach as well as the poor country lodge with its chairs for benches, its kerosene lamps for Lesser Lights, its harmonium for organ, its chart for lantern slides, we can congratulate ourselves. When we look at the little lodge with its humble equipment, thank the Great Architect that there is so grand a system of philosophy, with so universal an appeal, as to make men content to study and practice it, regardless of external conditions.

"I do not know Hicksville Lodge, but it would be an even bet that they saved up money to get better lodge furniture and spent it to send some sick brother South or West, or to provide an education for the orphans of some brother who couldn't do it for his children. In a country lodge you will get a sandwich and a cup of coffee after the meeting, in place of the elaborate banquet you may eat in the city; in the country lodge you will find few dress suits and not often a fine orator, but you will find a Masonic spirit, a feeling of genuine brotherly regard, which is too often absent in the larger, richer, city lodge.

"I find nothing 'funny' in the dignity and the seriousness of our country brethren. I find nothing of humor in poverty, nor anything but sweet Masonic service in the Junior Deacon putting coal on the fire. Would that we had a few brethren as serious, to put coal upon our Masonic fires, to warm us all."

"You've put coals of fire on my head!" answered the New Brother, "I deserved a kicking and got off with a lecture. I'm going back to Hicksville Lodge next week and tell them what they taught me through you."

"If you won't expect me to laugh, I'll go with you!" answered the Old Tyler, but his eyes smiled.

## You Mustn't Quit

When things go wrong, as they sometimes will,  
When the road you're trudging seems all uphill,  
When the funds are low and the debts are high  
And you want to smile, but you have to sigh,  
When care is pressing you down a bit,  
Rest! If you must -- but never quit.

Life is queer, with its twists and turns,  
As every one of us sometimes learns,  
And many a failure turns about  
When he might have won if he'd stuck it out;  
Stick to your task though the pace seems slow -  
You may succeed with one more blow.

Success is failure turned inside out --  
The silver tint of the clouds of doubt --  
And you never can tell how close you are,  
It may be near when it seems afar;  
So stick to the fight when you're hardest hit --  
It's when things seem worst that YOU MUSTN'T QUIT.

## The Final Toast

"Are your glasses charged in the West and South?" the Worshipful Master cries.  
"They're charged in the West, They're charged in the South" are the Wardens prompt replies.

Then to our final toast tonight your glasses fairly drain,  
Happy to meet-sorry to part - happy to meet again.

The Masons' social Brotherhood around the festive board,  
Reveal a wealth more precious far than selfish miser's hoard.  
They freely share the priceless store that generous hearts contain,  
Happy to meet - sorry to part - happy to meet again.

We work like masons free and true, and when our task is done,  
A merry song and cheering glass are not unduly won.  
And only at our farewell pledge is pleasure touched with pain,  
Happy to meet - sorry to part - happy to meet again.

Amidst our mirth we drink "To all poor Masons o'er the world"  
On every shore our flag of love is generously unfurled,  
We prize each Brother, fair or dark, who bears no moral stain,  
Happy to meet-sorry to part - happy to meet again.

The Mason feels the noble truth the Scottish peasant told,  
That rank is but the guinea's stamp, the man himself is the gold.  
With us the rich and poor unite, and equal rights maintain,  
Happy to meet - sorry to part - happy to meet again.

Dear Brethren of the mystic tie, the night is waning fast.  
Our duty's done, our feast is o'er, this toast must be our last,  
"Goodnight, Goodnight, once more, once more, repeat the farewell strain,  
Happy to meet - sorry to part - happy to meet again.

Brethren by command of the Worshipful Master I give you the Tyler's toast,  
"To all poor and distressed Freemasons where e'er dispersed,  
Over the face of earth, water or in the air,  
wishing them a speedy relief from all their suffering,  
and a safe return to their native land, Should they so desire".

## GREAT ARCHITECT OF THE UNIVERSE

Lodges are opened and closed in the 1<sup>st</sup> degree in the name of the Great Architect of the Universe. While other titles alluding to the Supreme Being are also included in the ritual, the one customarily used is the Great Architect of the Universe, often abbreviated as T.G.A.O.T.U. Men of many religions in many countries are brothers in Masonry and it is necessary, therefore, to have an all-embracing name covering the God of all religions. The use of the word 'architect' in the generally accepted title is appropriate in view of the fact that Masons believe the word to have been created in ordered form, and the prominence placed on the life of a particular architect in the presentation of the Masonic message.

## He Who Serves

He has not served who gathers gold,  
Nor has he served, whose life is told  
In selfish battles he has won,  
Or deeds of skill that he has done;  
But he has served who now and then  
Has helped along his fellow men.  
The world needs many men today;  
Red-blooded men along life's way,  
With cheerful smiles and helping hands,  
And with the faith that understands  
The beauty of the simple deed  
Which serves another's hour of need.

Strong men to stand beside the weak,  
Kind men to hear what others speak;  
True men to keep our country's laws  
And guard its honor and its cause;  
Men who will bravely play life's game  
Nor ask rewards of gold and fame.

Teach me to do the best I can  
To help and cheer our fellow man;  
Teach me to lose my selfish need  
And glory in the larger deed  
Which smoothes the road, and lights the day  
For all who chance to come my way.

### Many writers and thinkers have tried to define Freemasonry

Many writers and thinkers have tried to define Freemasonry but it really defeats definition. It is too complex, too profound in conception, to easily expressed in words. Perhaps the simplest and best definition of all is the phrase "the brotherhood of man under the fatherhood of God." Our Masonic forefathers had an understanding of human needs and human aspirations. They may never have dreamed of the mindless computer which governs our lives, or the fission of matter which threatens our lives, but they understood human nature and what motivates the spirit of man. Thus from a simple process of using stone and mortar for building they progressed to the most important of life's functions, the building of character.—**Louis L. Williams**

## RESEARCH

Research is such a funny thing --  
I marvel at it daily.  
Some do it, oh!, so grudgingly  
While others do it gaily.

Some spend days, or weeks, or years  
Donating hours freely  
While others will not turn a leaf  
Without demanding, "Pay me!"

Some think that Research starts and ends  
With, say, a dictionary.  
While others hoard on their own shelves  
A bursting library.

These are they who fondle tomes  
With reverence, and gently;  
Not those who only read a book  
As oft as Comet Halley.

Some there are for whom archives  
Are sweet as any daisy;  
While others think that musty books  
Smell more than slightly gamey.

So let them watch their football bowls,  
Or bowl in their alley.  
We'll talk about our own Research,  
Or search for what is, is really.  
And if we don't always agree  
Upon each cherished theory,  
Well, intellectual debate  
Can still be quite a melee!

*(For The New Mexico Masonic Lodge Of  
Research) by Owen Lorion)*

## Famous Freemasons—HARRY HOUDINI



As the famed magician was shackled and then lowered upside down into the water-filled Chinese Torture Cell, gazing through the glass front illusion at the immersed man, the audience sat transfixed knowing that unless escape was possible within precious minutes certain death by drowning would result.

His very name conjures up visions of magical miracles, thrilling escapes, death defying stunts and a mysterious persona capable of the impossible. While he died three quarters of a century ago, the average person still thinks of Houdini when asked to name a famous magician. What aura of greatness, mystique, and depth of charisma encompassed this man, rising from humble beginnings to the rarefied pinnacle of glory, to have left such an indelible imprint on the pages of history. In truth, there were two Houdinis; the performer as the world saw him, and Eric Weiss the man and Freemason, a personality obscured from view by the public persona. Born Erich Weiss in Budapest on March 24, 1874 [the usually cited date is April 6 of that year in Appleton, Wisconsin, the date his mother had claimed].

If the date and location have been the subject of confusion, recent research clearly indicates the Budapest origin. Circumstances surrounding the family's departure for America remain cloudy, although anti-Semitism undoubtedly played a major role. Harry Houdini was a complex personality, a romantic ever willing to embellish his rather mundane and plain beginnings. Throughout his life, there are clear instances where he invented and/or "embroidered" events to enhance both his personal and professional image, having an incessant need to "colour" events that there might be an aura of mystery and glamour involved. With Hungarian friends in Appleton, Houdini's father had accepted a Rabbi's position there.

Unfortunately, being old world conservative, he was unable to adapt to more liberal American ideas and the family relocated, first to Milwaukee, and then to New York. The family always in need of money, young Eric took a variety of odd jobs to help out. With virtually no formal education, he left home at age 12 to "make his fortune" but after a year or two eventually relocated to New York where his family now lived.

At age 17, he was captivated by the memoirs of the great French magician Jean Eugene Robert-Houdin and it's perhaps not surprising he was drawn to what he believed to be the glamorous world of entertainment and magic where he might find fame and fortune. He was so impressed by Houdin's life that when a stage name became necessary he simply added an "i" to Houdin becoming Houdini.

Houdini and his brother Theo began a magic act playing grubby beer halls, lodge banquets, dime museums and any other bookings they could obtain, but the early years were a struggle. In the famous Coney Island, N.Y. amusement park, for example, they worked for coins thrown into a hat and in the 1892 Chicago World Columbia Exposition, Harry gave 20 shows daily at a sideshow for \$12 a week. During his early years, working carnivals and similar venues, he gained a world of information and experience in show business. As an adult, Houdini was somewhat shorter than average, about 5'4", with blue eyes, dark curly hair and with a rather careless appearance, yet his face seemed to project a burning handsome intensity. Immensely strong both in mind and body, through exercise and balanced living, he developed his physical state to an amazing degree of fitness with literally muscles of steel and a determination of mind to match.

An outstanding swimmer, he also developed an extended underwater breath control technique which, together with his superb physical condition, would prove so essential in later years as an escape artist. Different versions surround Houdini's meeting of and marriage to Wilhelmina Beatrice Rahner, or "Bess," and separating fact from fiction, like much of Houdini's life, is a difficult task. What is certain is that the Houdinis always celebrated June 22, 1894, as their anniversary. A match between rigidly Catholic and Jewish families might seem improbable, but it proved both successful and enduring for the Houdinis'. After the marriage, Bess replaced Theo in the act becoming the principal assistant. Success was still a fleeting entity, however, and they continued working traditional areas such as sideshows, circuses, beer halls, etc., often working ten to twenty shows daily.

At one point, in Nova Scotia in 1896, with no funds left for a room, they were forced to sleep in a hallway and Houdini even considered giving up show business. It was in 1895, looking for something different from other entertainers, that he thought of a challenge to local police stations on his ability to escape from their handcuffs and jail cells. By 1898-99, primarily as a result of these successful escapes, his reputation began to spread, better bookings followed, and after years of struggle things began looking up. Then, booked into a large vaudeville circuit by an important impresario, the turning point arrived. Big-time vaudeville was then the most popular form of entertainment, the fledgling motion picture industry not yet the phenomenon it would eventually become. For the Houdinis, it was their "breakthrough" and an end to one-night stands and burlesque days.

Houdini spent years learning the mechanics of locks and handcuffs until he was one of the world's experts in the field. A master of opening secure devices of all types, he possessed a skill the likes of which has not been seen since and likely never will again. Additionally, Houdini had an amazing ability and brought charisma and sheer magnetism to his presentations, mesmerizing audiences until they "believed" in his miracles, a rare talent indeed. There was also the publicity he created to enhance his image. He developed not only into a performer of unsurpassed ability, he could almost be said to be the creator of the modern "hard sell" so extravagant were his methods and claims. The great showman Barnum touted his circus acts-Houdini touted himself. Its possible no greater exponent of self exploitation and advertising has ever lived. If "Chutzpah" were a marketable commodity, Houdini would have been worth billions!

The French conjurer Robert-Houdin wrote: "A magician is not a juggler. He is an actor playing a role--the role of a sorcerer." Houdini played the role to magnificent perfection. So baffling were his methods considered, some even attributed his legendary escapes to occult or supernatural powers. No less a respected individual than Sir Arthur Conan Doyle believed Houdini had the power to dematerialize himself in one place and reappear in another.

If a modest success was being achieved, it was not yet total success for Houdini. Thus, in 1900 he and Bess sailed for England where other American magicians had done well, a gesture of immense confidence since he had no English bookings. London was not initially a "pearl" in his oyster. However, through perseverance, a bit of luck, an escape from Scotland Yard's cuffs and a trial appearance at London's famed Alhambra Theatre he was on his way.

In time and with helpful publicity, successful engagements followed in France, Holland, Germany and Russia and he and Bess would spend the next five years enjoying their European success. As his fame grew, he broke all existing attendance records in city after city becoming the most outstanding, sought after, and highest paid vaudeville entertainer on the Continent and British Isles.

His ego was of monstrous proportions, however, suffering few imitators. He had "arrived" and believed he was the best! As a consequence, he was fiercely jealous, not only of any contemporaries who also performed escapes, but indeed competitors of any kind. Through the years, he devoted much time and effort "fighting" against those who either "attacked" his act or who he felt debased the escape art through the use of trick or "gaffed" items quietly failing to mention his own use of similar hidden methods. Needless to say, he garnered tremendous publicity in the process.

Amazingly generous and thoughtful of retired or destitute magicians or their families, he carried his largess to such measures he often paid their rent or otherwise extended aid. He also gave benefit performances at charity hospitals and orphanages. His generosity, while often kept in the shadows, was legion. Possibly he felt he, too, would someday be in need, possibly he was simply implementing the Masonic tenets of Brotherly Love, Relief and Charity, or perhaps it was a bit of both.

The Houdinis never had a home life or settled down in the conventional sense of the word, spending much of their life "on the road" performing at one venue or another, their residence a series of rooming houses and hotels. Their life was the theatre, the circus, or wherever they happened to be performing. While he bought a twenty-six room New York townhouse and moved his mother there, it was little more than a storehouse of magic and a place he occasionally visited.

The years were rolling by and Houdini realized he could not always dangle upside down high above the ground freeing himself from a strait jacket. He needed new worlds to conquer and so in 1919 he moved into movies, first in a "cliff-hanger" serial and then "cliff-hanger" feature films. He would invariably be chained, roped, or otherwise immobilized by villains in sequences which required his imminent release to escape death and rescue the heroine from an equally perilous situation. Needless to say, he always prevailed.

WW-I naturally put a stop to his European appearances and fiercely patriotic he tried to enlist in 1917 but at age 43 was rejected as being too old. Not to be derailed, for the next two years he performed at military benefits, canteens and training camps usually at his own expense, often working with stars such as Will Rogers, Tom Mix, and Jim Corbett. Also active in selling "Liberty Bonds," he chalked up sales of \$1,000,000 virtually single handedly.

Interestingly, while he later began to expose spiritual charlatans, he had himself followed the same path and had given psychic presentations early in his career, spiritualism then in vogue. In time, he became embarrassed at the gullibility of his audiences and revised the act to emphasize magic and escapes rather than spiritualism. Could mediums communicate with the Netherworld? While keeping an open mind on the subject, he developed a total aversion to psychic fraud, spending years both studying and lecturing on the issue and became a fervent crusader in exposing fraudulent mediums.

A member of the Craft, Houdini was not alone among Masonic magicians, a group which included such notables as Harry Keller, Howard Thurston, and Harry Blackstone. Initiated in St. Cecile Lodge, N.Y., July 17, 1923, he was Passed and Raised July 31 and August 21 and in 1924 he entered the Consistory. Immensely proud of his Masonic affiliation, he gave a benefit performance for the Valley of New York, filling the 4,000 seat Scottish Rite Cathedral and raising thousands of dollars for needy Masons.

In October 1926, just weeks prior to his untimely death, he became a Shriner in N.Y.'s Mecca Temple.

On October 22, 1926, during an engagement at the Princess Theatre in Montreal, a first-year college student asked permission to test the entertainer's abdominal muscle control and strike the magician, a part of Houdini's act. Houdini, accepting the challenge, mumbled his assent, whereupon the student struck before the necessary muscles could be tensed, obviously a critical requirement. Houdini ignored later stomach pains in the tradition of "the show must go on."

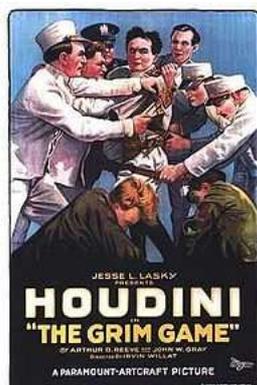
Arriving in Detroit the next day, he was diagnosed with acute appendicitis but again insisted on performing. Finally, with a temperature of 104, he was taken to Grace Hospital where a ruptured gangrenous appendix was removed but peritonitis had unfortunately set in. Despite medical predictions of imminent death, his strong will to live was such he held on almost a week, finally succumbing the afternoon of October 31, 1926, at the age of 52, Halloween Day.

Perhaps a symbolically magical date for his final curtain. His body was taken to New York with funeral services held at the W. 43rd St. Elks Lodge Ballroom with some 2,000 in attendance. The impressive service included eulogies by Rabbis, a Broken Wand Ceremony by the Society of American Magicians, tributes from the National Vaudeville Artists and Jewish Theatrical Guild, rites by the Mt. Zion Congregation, the Elks, and Masonic Rites by St. Cecile Lodge. Burial was then in Machpelah Cemetery, Brooklyn, a site Houdini had personally selected. The Literary Digest called Houdini "the greatest necromancer of the age-perhaps of all time." Be that as it may, before Houdini died he said he would send a message to his wife from beyond the grave if it were possible. Many séance attempts have been made to bring Houdini's spirit back but none have succeeded. In the Middle Ages, Houdini would likely have been burned at the stake by the Church as being a "sorcerer" in the same manner Protestants were burned, charged by the Church as being "heretics." By the beginning of the 20th Century, however, history had moved on and in today's world the magical arts enjoy unprecedented prestige.

There is little doubt Houdini presented his "death defying" escapes in a dazzling manner, one peculiar to his own personality and to the era in which he lived. He was, after all, a showman first and foremost, a product of a particular era, an era ready to "believe," and perhaps in some respects an era unworldly and naive by comparison with today's technological wonders.

As Sherlock Holmes said: "We reach. We grasp. And what is left in our hands at the end? A shadow?" Sometimes, however, in lieu of fading, the shadow endures and becomes an all- pervasive reminder of a unique figure whose larger than life persona lingers on. Houdini's shadow not only endures, but his name has entered into the hallowed realm of legend.

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*With acknowledgement to SRA 76*



## Humour

I just took a leaflet out of my mailbox, informing me that I can have sex at 75. I'm so happy, because I live at number 81. So it's not too far to walk home afterwards. And it's the same side of the street. I don't even have to cross the road!

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Answering machine message, "I am not available right now, but thank you for caring enough to call. I am making some changes in my life. Please leave a message after the beep. If I do not return your call, you are one of the changes."

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Aspire to inspire before you expire.

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My wife and I had words, but I didn't get to use mine.

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Frustration is trying to find your glasses without your glasses.

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Blessed are those who can give without remembering and take without forgetting.

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The irony of life is that, by the time you're old enough to know your way around, you're not going anywhere.

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God made man before woman so as to give him time to think of an answer for her first question.

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I was always taught to respect my elders, but it keeps getting harder to find one.

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Every morning is the dawn of a new error.

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The quote of the month is by Jay Leno:

"With hurricanes, tornados, fires out of control, mud slides, flooding, severe thunderstorms tearing up the country from one end to another, and with the threat of bird flu and terrorist attacks, are we sure this is a good time to take God out of the Pledge of Allegiance?"

Q: How many Masons does it take to screw in a light bulb?

A: Three. One to screw it in, one to read the minutes of the previous light bulb replacement, and one to sit on the sidelines and complain about the way they USED to screw in light bulbs.

A little old lady was walking down the street dragging two large plastic garbage bags behind her. One of the bags was ripped and every once in a while a \$20 bill fell out onto the sidewalk.

Noticing this, a policeman stopped her and said, "Ma'am, there are \$20 bills falling out of that bag."

"Oh, really? Darn it!" said the little old lady. "I'd better go back and see if I can find them. Thanks for telling me, officer." "Well, now, not so fast," said the cop. "Where did you get all that money? You didn't steal it, did you?" "Oh, no, no", said the old lady. "You see, my backyard is next to a golf course. A lot of golfers come and pee through a knothole in my fence, right into my flower garden. It used to really tick me off... kills the flowers, you know. Then I thought, 'Why not make the best of it? 'So, now, I stand behind the fence by the knothole, real quiet, with my hedge clippers and every time some guy sticks his thing through my fence, I grab hold of it and say, 'OK, buddy! Give me \$20 or off it comes.'" "That seems only fair," said the cop, laughing. "OK. Good luck! Oh, by the way, what's in the other bag?"

"Not everybody pays."