

WHAT MIGHT BE.

If we look over the written history of our fraternity, we shall find that very shortly after the revival of 1717 in London it was brought to this country, and, finding congenial soil, it took root and grew, slowly at first, as was but natural in a sparsely settled country, and more vigorously when the colonies had become a nation, so that Ben Franklin and his lodge, at the Hoop, in Water Street, Philadelphia, have grown into ten thousand lodges and more than half a million Masons. The end is not yet, for annually there is an increase in the number of the brethren and the family circles, called lodges, where they meet and transact business. During the period of little more than a century, in which the transformation from a handful to a vast army has taken place, we shall find that, apart from the mere routine, the reception of profanes, the making of laws and supervising their execution, the giving to the needy—of which we desire, in the spirit of the institution, to make no boast, rather wishing that, in so far as that particular branch of our labor is concerned, the right hand may not know what the left is doing—during this period we may say that we have devoted ourselves to growing. We have so cared for our stewardship that its roots have deeply penetrated the soil, and its leaves and branches have spread themselves abroad until in every estate of humanity we find it represented, and within its grasp a power not equally possessed by any other human association, for the reason that within our assemblies there is nothing to arouse the divisions and animosities among men that naturally grow out of their varying opinions on matters pertinent to this or the other world—to this in the scramble for wealth, position, power; the heart-burnings of rank and cast and station—to the other in that old battle between Armageddon, and the rest, in which, as a general rule, you can only go to heaven if you see your way through my spectacles, or, vice versa, you are sure to bring up in outer darkness if you look through your own. This at least then we have accomplished, that we have gathered together a half million of intelligent men, not one of whom has given up or been expected to give up an iota of his religious faith, or of his political convictions, but yet who see for themselves that it is possible for men to entertain the most thoroughly opposite ideas, and yet recognise the fact that they are still men, and may live in accord, and work happily together for good, notwithstanding that they vote different tickets, or take different roads to reach the final rest. That in reaching this result we have been the disciples and the exemplars of toleration in the largest and most beneficial way cannot be successfully contradicted, and this especially, because while we have no special faith to advocate, neither have we any to oppose, and so leaving everyone unmolested in the pursuit of what may be happiness to him, we are, so to speak, the custodians of a pleasant retreat, where men may forget for a time the world and its strife in the enjoyment of friendship and social communion unmarred by jarring incentives.

But the question presents itself, are we not capable as an organization of more extended usefulness? Are we, considering the material of which our association is composed, exercising our real weight in the community and demonstrating, as we might do, the real value of associated effort? Every thinking man will at once say No—decidedly No. Take an illustration. Masonry has a literature, as witness its thousands of published volumes, from the balderdash of the parrot up to the effusions of the scholar and philosopher, and yet, except the mere manuals and guides to the ceremonial, we doubt whether any Masonic author ever got as much for his labour as he could have earned with a shovel in the same length of time. No Masonic