

ON KNOWING NAMES

"I've been watching you for half an hour and you haven't missed calling a brother by name," said the New Brother to the Old Tiler. "How do you do it?"

"Remembering names is my business. As Tiler I am supposed to know all the brethren of this lodge. I get paid for being a Tiler. If I didn't know my job I would be taking money under false pretenses."

"How did you learn names? I have been a member of this lodge for nearly a year. And I don't know more than a dozen men by name. How do you do it?"

"How do you not do it?" countered the Old Tiler. "Don't you ever know anyone by name in any organization you belong to?"

"Well, er- I- "

"I visited in one lodge once," interrupted the Old Tiler, "where they used the scheme developed in so many luncheon clubs. The Master started an automatic roll call, in which each brother stood, gave his name, address and business and sat down. It smacked a little of the commercial to me. To hear a chap say, 'My name is Bill Jones, agent for the Speedemup car, in business at 1567 Main Street,' may be very informing to the brother who doesn't know it, but it seems like advertising. I presume the scheme worked; everyone in that lodge got to know everyone else by name in time.

"In another lodge every brother wears a big, round celluloid name plate with his name printed on it in big letters. The Tiler, poor chap, has charge of a rack and is supposed to see that every brother entering the room has his button on and that none wears it home! This scheme works; you can read a brother's name and call him by it, and probably remember it next time.

"Ready-made brotherhood is the dream of the professional Mason; ready-made acquaintance is the thing he strives for with his announcements and his celluloid buttons.

"I don't regard the use of a name as essential. It is pleasant to be called by name, and nice to be able to remember them. But a name, after all, is an artificial distinction, conferred on us by our parents as a matter of convenience. A rose smells just as sweet if you call it a sunflower, and a man is the same whether you call him Jim or Jones. Not very long ago a man said to me: 'I don't know your name but you are Tiler of my lodge. My uncle in the country has just sent me a crate of strawberries. I can't see 'em all and I'd like to give you some. Will you write your name and address on a card so I can send them?'

If he had known my name he could have sent them without asking for the card. But would they have tasted any better? I had a warm feeling at my heart; my brother had remembered my face and who I was, and wanted me to share his good luck. That he didn't know my name didn't seem to matter. He knew me.

"It's friendly to call a man by his name. We are all more or less egocentric. (Doc Palmer tells me that the word means that we revolve about ourselves!) When people remember our names we think we have made an impression. It tickles our vanity. Half a dozen members in this lodge come only once a year. When I call them by name they swell up like poisoned pups. But they wouldn't if they knew my system. One of them has prominent ears; so has a jackass. A jackass eats thistles. This man's name is Nettleton. Another chap has a nose that looks as if it grew on a Brobdingnagian face. His name is Beekman. It's no trick to remember them, because of the impression they make of ugliness. I remember your name as an earnest young brother trying to learn. I remember the Past Masters by remembering their services,. I know John and Jim and George and Elly and Harry and Joe and Frank and the rest because I know the men, know what they do, how they do it, what they stand for in the lodge and in Masonry; in other words, it's the brother I know first, and in my mind I tack a name to him. To remember a name and tack a face to it is the trick accomplished by the celluloid button, the automatic roll call, by all schemes to make men know each other's names with the idea that the name and not the man is important.

"You have been here nearly a year and know a dozen men by name. If you know a hundred by sight to speak to, you have accomplished something more important than filling your memory with names. But if you know only your dozen by sight and name, and no others either by sight or name, then there is something the matter with your idea of fellowship.

"In lodge, brothers learn to know each other; if they learn each other's names in the process, well and good. But if they learn to know each other as human beings with friendly faces, it does make little difference whether they have good or poor memories for names.

"Our Master is a fine, lovable man. Every dog he meets on the street wags its tail and speaks to him, and he speaks to them all. I doubt if he knows their names. He has a poor memory for names, yet he never forgets a face. I know names and faces because it's my job, but I'd make a poor Master."

"I'm not so sure about your being a poor Master!"

"Well, I am! Don't confuse a good memory, a good Mason and a good Master. I try to have the first and be the second!"