



Catalog of Lodge Room Plays

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MASONIC LODGE ROOM PLAYS

In 1934 the Masonic Service Association issued the first of its twelve lodge room plays, all written by the late M. W. Bro. Carl H. Claudy. Rather hesitantly was published a little dramatic vehicle, different from anything before, because it required no stage, no costume, and no scenery.

Every lodge has a meeting place. In these plays the lodge hall is the scene of the action, the brethren on the benches "part of the scenery."

"The Greatest of These," the first playlet (it is scarcely more, taking but thirty-five minutes) achieved instant popularity. Casts were formed all over the nation. Audiences begged for more and more, until the demand for new lodge room plays became overwhelming. Thus was begun the series of plays of "Doric Lodge," all with many of the same characters, all laid in the same rural lodge.

The Doric Lodge plays, like their predecessor, "caught on." Casts in many Grand Jurisdictions go constantly from lodge to lodge with one or another of these plays. Grand Lodges have made places for them at annual meetings. One Grand Lodge has three times been called in Special Communication to see them. Thousands of letters attest to the pleasure of audiences seeing them.

PURPOSES

These plays are not merely a means by which a lodge may entertain, but attempt to satisfy a desire to understand the inner content of Freemasonry. They accomplish this purpose by drawing aside the veils of ritual, allegory and symbol that the truth behind may shine through. The plays make the power of prayer, the faith of brotherly love, the might of fraternalism manifest in a form which touches the hearts of men because they are portrayed in situations which any man might face.

The Masonic teachings of brotherly love, relief, truth, justice and mercy are genuine, but the ritual gives these teachings a body more abstract than concrete. The plays translate symbol and formal words to actualities, and bring them home in familiar language and the common actions of everyday. This way the audience sees Freemasonry not merely as a formal teaching of great truth, but as an actual example of daily life.

Evaluating the importance of this idea, or its ultimate effect upon the Fraternity, must be left for those who see these dramas. But it is idle to deny that there is an effect, in the face of the letters, some of them filled with gratitude, and thousands of them filled with praise, which have come from those who have

wept over the griefs and exulted over the good fortunes of the brethren of "Doric Lodge."

MECHANICS

Producing these plays is simple. A cast is selected and a director appointed. Copies of the script are distributed; the brethren learn their parts; and rehearsals are held. When everyone is perfect in his lines and in the simple action of the play, an announcement is made, and the brethren assemble to see it.

The Master of Ceremonies makes a short announcement; sometimes printed or mimeographed programs are distributed. The lights in the hall are lowered, and the actors take their places -- the Master, Secretary, Treasurer, a Warden, a Visitor, and so on. When the lights brighten, the play begins and the brethren are no longer in their own lodge, but members of, or visitors in "Doric Lodge, a town of Aaronton, somewhere in the Heartland of our Country."

End of one act and beginning of another is indicated by lights out and again lit. The plays are filled with familiar details; minutes are read, visitors introduced, motions discussed as in any lodge, but the commonplace actions are gilded with romance, as action centers around some dramatic happening.

The plays run from thirty-five minutes to an hour and ten minutes, and from one act to three acts.

DRAMATIC TALENT

Some plays are more difficult than others; experience has demonstrated none is beyond the capacity of the average group in an average lodge. Dramatic talent is often discovered in unexpected places. Business men, professional men, laborers, farmers, have taken part in these plays and surprised themselves, as they have certainly surprised their brethren, with their abilities. Each play has two or three parts which must be well done if the play is to be effective, but the majority of the characters are such that any brother may give an adequate performance.

EXPENSE

The cost of staging these plays is small. Scripts are sold at nominal cost. Some casts use the services of a professional make-up man. Some have programs printed; others put on the plays with no expenditure. Most of the properties are familiar; a cane, a newspaper, a flash light, a candle, a pocketbook, a picture frame. Costumes are required in only two of the plays; one Chinese costume in "To Entertain Strangers" and a clown's costume and tight rope walker's dress for the little girl in "The Hearts of the Fathers." The plays are all laid in the present time, so

that audience and players alike, dressed in usual clothing, are properly attired for these dramas. The two exceptions are "The Fight" and "After the Storm" which require colonial costumes as they depict events of the period.

BY-PRODUCTS

A by-product of interesting a dozen brethren in this lodge activity is a unity of feeling which spreads beyond the number engaged. Friendships are made and continued. Interlodge visits, begun by requests to "come and put the play on for my lodge," frequently result in continuing visits from year to year. This means of "setting the Craft to labor" not only results in "good and wholesome instruction" but in enthusiasm for Masonry. Many a brother who has come to lodge for the first time in years to witness one of these plays has thereby been won to regular attendance.

THE "DORIC LODGE" PLAYS

These plays are all concerned with the fortunes of Doric Lodge, a small country lodge in the town of Aaronton, off the main line, somewhere in the "Heartland of our country." The nearest large town is Bridgeville, five miles away. Lodge members are country people, farmers, and small town business men. To them Masonry is serious and to the best of their abilities they endeavor to live it. Doric Lodge has meant much to the town of Aaronton, supplementing the church, teaching high ideals, and promoting friendships.

A small lodge in an isolated community, Doric Lodge has a certain informality of procedure. If lacking at times in true Masonic dignity, it is touchingly confident of the friendliness which permits much give and take.

Endeavoring strictly to comply with Masonic law, Doric occasionally goes beyond it to settle problems in its own way. Those who find variations between the laws of their Grand Jurisdictions

and those of the Grand Jurisdiction under Doric Lodge are reminded that each of the forty-nine Grand Jurisdictions of the United States has its own code of laws.

While each of the ten Doric Lodge plays have one or more characters differing from the others, in general the same brethren appear; the Master, Secretary, Treasurer, the Past Masters, Billy Morton, Hiram Woodley and Chaplain Dr. Blair.

The Master is Amos Andrews, who has been in the Oriental Chair for so many years that he has but three living predecessors in the East. Andrews is a country store-keeper. He is a little slow of speech; while usually gentle and considerate, he can be forceful on occasion.

Beloved and trusted by his brethren, he remains modest and unassuming. He has a deep reverence of Masonry.

Secretary Jeffries has kept the books and managed the affairs of Doric for thirty years. He is fussily correct and resents criticism, especially from Billy Morton, with whom he has a good-natured feud.

Treasurer and Past Master Sneed is the town's banker. He is austere, thin-lipped, and very dignified and important, as becomes a banker. But he is a good Mason and like his fellow Past Masters, is solidly behind Amos Andrews without jealousy of his long term in office.

Past Masters Denby and Elliot are substantial citizens; Elliot, a lawyer, Denby a business man of Aaronton. They are middle-aged men with the sound common sense of the small town successful citizen and excellent balance wheels for the lodge. For either to be absent from any Communication is almost unheard of.

Brother William Morton—"Billy" to everyone) is stout, excitable, roly-poly and red-faced. He has had little schooling, but possesses a native wit and shrewdness which, coupled with a great heart, have kept him as Chairman of Doric Lodge's Charity Committee for many years. He takes himself, his position, his lodge and his Masonry very seriously, with the result that he is often funny without intention. Everyone loves Billy and all respect him in his special field, but outside of that his brethren do not pay too much attention to his vociferous arguments on any and every question.

Chaplain Dr. Blair has been pastor of his church for forty years or more. He is slender, not very strong and uses a cane. Gently aging, he is still full of the fire of his truly religious spirit. He is tolerant, broadminded, and beloved by the townspeople.

Hiram Woodley is a substantial citizen of Aaron-ton, a great friend of Billy Morton, but frequently at odds with him because Morton resents Woodley's attempt to "hold him down." Woodley has a logical mind and is usually on the right side of almost any question which comes up in lodge.

NAMES OF THE PLAYS

The titles of all the Claudy plays except "A Rose Upon the Altar" are quotations from the Great Light, as follows:

"THE GREATEST OF THESE" I Corinthians XIII-13. "And now abideth faith, hope, and charity, these three; but the greatest of these is charity."

"HE THAT BELIEVETH" John VI-47. "Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that believeth on me hath everlasting life."

"GREATER LOVE HATH NO MAN" John XV-13. "Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends."

"JUDGE NOT!" Matthew VIII-1. "Judge not, that ye be not judged."

"THE HEARTS OF THE FATHERS" Luke 1-17. "And he shall go before him in the spirit and power of Elias, to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children...."

"TO ENTERTAIN STRANGERS" Hebrews XIII-2. "Be not forgetful to entertain strangers, for thereby some have entertained angels unawares."

"A GIFT IN SECRET" Proverbs XXI-14. "A gift in secret pacifieth anger. . ."

"TREASURES OF DARKNESS" Isaiah XLV-3. "And I will give thee the treasures of darkness, and hidden riches of secret places..."

"HE WHICH IS ACCUSED" Acts XXV-16. "To whom I answered, It is not the manner of the Romans to deliver any man to die, before that he which is accused have the accusers face to face, and have license to answer for himself concerning the crime laid against him."

"IF A MAN DIE. . ." Job XIV-14. "If a man die, shall he live again? All the days of my appointed time will I wait, till my change come."

". . .AND NOT FORSAKE THEM" Isaiah XLII-16. "And I will bring the blind by a way that they know not; I will lead them in paths that they have not known: I will make darkness light before them, and crooked things straight. These things will do I unto them, and not forsake them."

Synopsis of the First Play

"THE GREATEST OF THESE." St. Anne's Lodge has a mortgage it cannot pay, expects to lose its temple, and thus faces the bitter necessity of surrendering its charter. A dramatic happening discovers within the lodge a valuable postage stamp on a letter written nearly a hundred years ago in gratitude for a kindly act of the lodge, thus solving the problem. The climax touches the emotions.

Synopsis of the Doric Lodge Plays

"HE THAT BELIEVETH." Happy plans for an initiation of the only son of Doric's most prominent and wealthy member are interrupted by tragic news. The second act sees the beloved member demand a dimit and deny his God because of the tragedy in his life. In a breath-taking scene Chaplain Blair's faith is justified and both tragedy and atheism are eliminated.

"GREATER LOVE HATH NO MAN." Doric Lodge makes a Mason of a dying man, regarded by all in the town of Aaronton as a hero and benefactor, the more so that he is poor, unlearned, humble. The circumstances of his raising, and the action of the Master in ordering it are such as to fly in the face of all Grand Lodge laws, regulations and customs, and seem to make certain he will be suspended or the lodge lose its charter. The reasons for the non-occurrence of these dreaded happenings and the strange but happy ending make this one of the most popular of the plays.

"A ROSE UPON THE ALTAR." The Master and the Chairman of the Charity Committee return to the empty lodge room at midnight to get the bank book and cash which the Master forgot. As they find it, a dim candle light appears. They hide behind the chairs in the East to hear the heart-broken voice of a brother all thought cold and emotionless, pleading with his God to bring him back the daughter he has cast off. Doric Lodge uses its charity fund in a new way and makes over three lives to learn the real meaning of "bread cast on the waters which returns after many days." The midnight scene by the dim light of a single candle, and that in which Squire Bentley demands and receives the truth, stir audiences to a high pitch of excitement and emotion.

"JUDGE NOT!" Tense with strained curiosity as to "what comes next." An honored and leading citizen is accused in open lodge of a dastardly crime, and the crime proved by an old document hidden between back and binding of the lodge Bible — a document which could not have been forged because "you cannot forge the jagged edge of a page torn from a book. . ." Doric Lodge hears

the shot with which their now disgraced member ends a life he could no longer endure, thus doing tardy justice to the man he falsely jailed for his son's theft.

"THE HEARTS OF THE FATHERS." A curious contrast between apparent comedy and actual tragedy. A circus clown in costume comes to lodge, there to attempt to interest a father in a disowned baby girl. The contrast between costume and tragic

speech, added to the breathlessness which comes when the clown brings in the sleeping five-year-old, tired out from her circus act, produces a scene never to be forgotten. No climax in any of the plays is more of a "tear jerker" than this. (Requires two costumes.)

"...TO ENTERTAIN STRANGERS." A profane is asked to come to lodge while it is at refreshment to testify as to the happenings incident to the fire which destroyed an important war plant. A Chinese visitor requests permission to ask a few questions. In a smashing climax, in which a dark lodge room and a flashlight play important roles, the guilty one is discovered and the innocent freed. (Requires one costume.)

"A GIFT IN SECRET." An interesting FBI exposition of the art of determining what typewriter wrote a specific document. Doric Lodge has received several anonymous letters, all sending donations for general or special charitable purposes. An odd clue to the sender comes into the possession of the Master, who, by arranging for this demonstration and proving his point, rights an ancient injustice and changes the heart of a good but opinionated member of the lodge.

"TREASURES OF DARKNESS." A play built around a curious cryptogram which no method of science or art seems able to solve. The lodge member considered least likely to be of help discovers the key and in a dramatic and sustained climax not only reads the cipher, but finds a lost bequest to the lodge which fills a charitable need in the nick of time.

"HE WHICH IS ACCUSED." A story of the last days of the war. A German-American brother of Doric Lodge is accused, apparently upon undeniable evidence, of willingly serving in the German army. His father and a friend vigorously deny it; the friend insists that the whole is a plot by a family enemy against the suspect. In an emotion-arousing scene, the father pleads the cause of the son; in spite of his moving words, circumstances look bad for the accused, when the brother supposed to be at the bottom of the "plot" brings in the evidence needed to exonerate the accused.

"IF A MAN DIE. . ." A Masonic fantasy in dramatic form concerned with the age old problem and dearest hope of mankind: "If a man die, shall he live again?" The action is simple, but few can sit through the heart-break of the father who denies his God because of the death of his son in battle, and witness his change of heart without a tear of sympathy and an upsurge of man's immortal hope.

"AND NOT FORSAKE THEM." A tender little story of a widow with two small children left penniless in an unfriendly town, and the brotherly way in which members of the lodge of her late husband solve her problem without a call on lodge resources greater than they can bear or injury to her pride. (Requires a stage and one interior scene.)

SYNOPSIS OF THE PLAY

"THE FIGHT." *By M. W. Ralph J. Pollard, Maine.* A short one-act play depicting a quarrel between Colonial and Loyalist Brothers at an after-lodge supper. It clarifies the conflict of ideas which caused the Revolution, but emphasizes the Masonic ideals of harmony and brotherly love. Actors to be costumed in Colonial dress.

"AFTER THE STORM." *By Richard Shanda, PM.* A short one-act play. A sequel to "The Fight" using most of the same characters. The scene takes place in lodge after the Revolution pointing out the "healing process" for old wounds.

PERMISSION TO USE

Any regular Masonic lodge or other Masonic body may put on any of these plays provided these simple terms are accepted. The plays must be acted only before Master Masons and behind tiled doors (except "And Not Forsake Them..." "The Fight" and "After the Storm"). Any money derived from their production must be committed to a charitable or Masonic purpose; the plays must not be commercialized.

The Association sometimes is asked by a group if it may not, by changing actions, present a play before a mixed audience.

PRICES

These plays were a gift to the Fraternity. The authors received no royalty. The Association asks no production fee. Scripts are sold at nominal cost; price, \$2.00 each.

Scripts cannot be sent on approval and we do request remittance with orders.