SCROOGE

January 5, 2004

My Brothers,

So, here we are in the brand new year, resolutions all made; now what to do, what to do? Well, the first thing on our minds is recovery. Most of us probably deserve a grade of C- in Holiday Temperance, but things are going to settle down now and we can bring that grade up! By the way, let me be the first to tell you, officially, that the holidays are over. I know we're all eager to lose our new holiday spare tire and most of us are just as eager to be rid of the commercialized holiday spirit. That stretch from Thanksgiving to New Year’s Day can sure test our patience and our bank accounts, and the noise of carols and bells, the endless commercials, and all those holiday shows and movies can drive us nuts. We still have a few more commercials to get through, but it’s basically behind us now.

But, before we and our new comfort waistband stretch pants lumber forward into the New Year, I have a question. It’s about Charles Dickens’, "A Christmas Carol". We’ve all probably seen one or more movie adaptations with Scrooge and the Spirits. So here’s a Masonic question for us. Would Bob Cratchit have been a good candidate for Masonry?

Remember Bob? He’s the oppressed clerk in Scrooge’s office. In the story he seems to be a good man. He’s a solid worker; only late once a year by a minute or so. He loves his family and especially Tiny Tim. He believes in a Supreme Being. He even lives by the four Cardinal Virtues. He’s temperate, only “making a little bit merry” as he says, once a year. He certainly has fortitude, working for Scrooge on small wages and holding his family together despite Tiny Tim’s illness. He’s prudent in his relations and his lifestyle. He dots all the ‘Is’ and crosses all the ‘Ts’. And, he is a just man who will not allow ill to be spoken of Scrooge in his own house, in deference to Christmas and the Divine. Would you be his Top Line signer? Me too. Masonry is about making good men, better men.

What about Ebenezer Scrooge? No? Let’s look at him. The Hebrew name Ebenezer means ‘Stone of Help’. He is far from that! Scrooge is a grasping, miserly, cranky man who seems to believe in nothing but money. Scrooge never gives anything except in expectation of a bigger return. He turns his back on his partners and relations and slams the door on charities and beggars, alike. Scrooge is … Scrooge. He’s not the kind of man we’d Top Line for Masonry, is he? He should have some redeeming qualities, almost everyone does, but does Scrooge show any of the four Cardinal Virtues?

Well, Scrooge is temperate; he eats cold potato soup and cheese and is a teetotaler. He has fortitude; he sits in his cold office in the dead of winter and goes home alone to a cold, empty, but sometimes very noisy home. He is prudent; he is always at his post at the Exchange and he never acts in an incautious manner toward money or his fellow man. And he is just, as a “businessman” is just; he believes that a contract is a contract. And as for the poor, well, society made them and it is society’s business to take care of its own mistakes; doesn’t he pay taxes to run the poorhouses and the work farms? Yes, he has virtues of a sort, but Scrooge needs a whole lot of work. He just isn’t Masonic material, is he?

Now let’s look at Scrooge after his visit from the three Spirits, after his ‘enlightenment’. Dickens says about Scrooge then, “He became as good a man as Old London Towne had ever seen.” He looks after his family and workers, and his workers’ families. He gives freely to charity and helps the widows and orphans of London. He loves everyone, even Tiny Tim - and maybe especially Tiny Tim. His redemption and new 'goodness' brings a tear to every eye.

What is the difference between the old Scrooge and the new? Does he change just because the Spirits scared him, or, is it that the Spirits help Scrooge find something he has lost? We see the turning points in his life at the visit of each Spirit. These Spirits remind him of principles that they stand for and that he has lost sight of: the principle values in Brotherly Love, Relief, and Truth. Think about that; the story up until now is all about Scrooge's lost humanistic values. The Spirits show him that he carries these principles within him, but that he has buried them under his own loss and pain. The change in Scrooge is his joy in the rediscovery of these values and his dedication to be a living example of those tenets we Masons hold so dear. He is now what Dickens and Victorian England considered to be a “good man”. He has become his namesake, a ‘stone of help’, for all. Now do you Top Line Ebenezer Scrooge? Maybe so.

So, we come to the point of this education session. As always, we have a goal of bringing more good men into Masonry this year. My Brothers, how will we know a man to be a worthy candidate for Masonry? How will we tell a Bob Cratchit from an old Scrooge, or see a new Ebenezer shining out from the old? What principles and virtues will he have to show us to gain our Top Line signature? And, more importantly, as we are looking for the qualities of a Mason in him, what will we be showing him about ourselves and Masonry?

You see, in a book or movie, the best writers make us look at ourselves through the characters, but no matter how closely we look at those characters, they are never looking back at us. In the real world, life and living is two-way; as we look for virtues and principles in our Candidates, they will look for the same in us, and they never stop looking. As Masons, we are charged in the work of our lives to be guided by the four Cardinal Virtues, but those are not enough, alone, as we saw with the old Scrooge. Dickens reminds us that we are to live the Principles of Brotherly Love, Relief, and Truth every day, not just the holidays. And, like a ‘stone of help’, we will find joy in dedicating ourselves as living examples.

The good thing about being a Mason is that, unlike old Scrooge, we don’t need three Spirits to remind us.

Do we?

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