

I VOUCH FOR HIM

by: Unknown

To vouch for a Mason is, Masonically, to say to the brother to whom you are introducing the one you are vouching for: "I know that Brother J.D. (John Doe) is a Master Mason."

By implication it means (1) that the brother doing the vouching has sat in open lodge with the brother being vouched for: or (2) that the brother vouching has subjected the brother vouched for to a strict trial and due examination: or (3) that the brother vouching has received an avouchment of another brother he knows to be a Master Mason, that the brother now vouched for is known to "Him" as a Master Mason.

In some jurisdictions Grand Lodges have decided that no brother may undertake a private examination of any man representing himself as a brother without orders from the Worship Master of his lodge, or the Grand Master. In these Jurisdictions it is held that the Worshipful Master is solely responsible for the proper purging of his lodge, and that, in consequence, he and only he has the right to select the committee which shall examine a stranger. In such Jurisdictions only the Master (or the Grand Master) may decide who is competent and who is not competent to examine a visitor for entrance into his lodge. Some Jurisdictions have ruled that no "second-hand" avouchment is permissible - that "A" can vouch for "B" only if he has sat in open lodge with him, with the exception, of course, that the members of a properly qualified and appointed committee may vouch for the brother they have examined if he has proved himself to be a Master Mason. Avouchment is a very important matter; much more important than appears upon the surface. It demands, and should receive, the earnest thought of all officers of the lodge. The "good and wholesome instruction" which a Master is charged to give, or cause to be given to his brethren may be well concerned, occasionally, with this vital matter.

The number of men who have never taken the degrees who try to get into Masonic lodges is very small. Nevertheless, there have been, are, and doubtless will be such men; men without principle or honor; "eavesdroppers" who have heard what was not intended for their ears, or men who have become "book Masons" by the study of some of the exposes of Masonry which may still be found in some libraries, and which they deem to set forth the correct ritual.

However few in number these importers may be, they must be strictly guarded against. No such crook desires to work his way into a Masonic lodge for any other purpose than to obtain credit for being a Master Mason, and, later, to defraud some of the brethren with whom he thus hopes to sit in lodge.

Far more dangerous than the "eavesdropper" is the "cowan." In these modern days the "cowan" is the man who has been legally raised but who has been dropped N.P.D., or suspended or expelled after a Masonic trial; or he is an Entered Apprentice, or Fellowcraft, whose further advancement has been stopped for cause.

If such be evilly disposed he may - and has been known to - forge a good standing card to use as credentials. Or he may find a lost card

and assume the identity of the name upon it. Some brethren are so unwise as to keep their good standing cards from year to year as an interesting collection. If such a collection be stolen, it may be the innocent means of letting loose upon the Fraternity a whole flock of designing cowans, since dates upon such cards are changed with little difficulty. It is an excellent Masonic rule to destroy last year's card as soon as you new one arrives. Loss of a current card should be immediately reported to the Grand Secretary, as well as to the Master of the Lodge. The Grand Secretary will probably notify all constituent lodges to be on the lookout for any person presenting that lost card.

In many Jurisdictions Masters may not authorize the examination of any would-be visitor who cannot produce credentials. In other Jurisdictions it is considered sufficient if some known brother vouches for the credibility of the would-be visitor even if he has no credentials. Some Jurisdiction require Masters to assure themselves that the lodge from which the visitor purports to come is a "just and legally constituted lodge" under some recognized Grand Lodge. Particularly, Jurisdictions which are afflicted with clandestine Masons are apt to be strict in this regard. All Jurisdictions should be especially strict with putative brethren who hail from Jurisdictions where clandestine Masonry is know to flourish. Unless forbidden by Grand Lodge, "A" may accept the avouchment of "B" that he has sat in lodge with "C", and therefore knows "C" to be a Master Mason. But "A" is not obliged to accept this avouchment. "A" may have no Masonic confidence in "B". He may believe that "B" has not been to lodge for a decade and distrusts his memory as to his sitting in lodge with "C". No Masonic authority has the power to compel "A" to vouch for a brother because he has been vouched for to him by another. To vouch or not to vouch is matter of conscience and belief. Neither is under control of any law, secular or Masonic. Under no circumstances whatever should "A" ever accept an avouchment from "B" as to "C," unless all three be present together. "B" will call up "A" on the telephone: "I'm sending Brother "C" around to see you," he may say. "I vouch for him as a Master Mason. Will you see that he is properly introduced to our Tiler tonight?" (A's) proper answer is: "Not unless you bring him around and introduce him to me personally."

"A" has no Masonic means of knowing that the man who comes in and says: "I'm Brother "B," is really the "B" for whom "C" has vouched! For the same reasons, no avouchment by letter should ever be accepted, no matter what the circumstances - nay, not even if the letter contains a picture of the man it vouches for! Letters can be lost. Photographs may be changed. Even Lodge Seals may be imitated. Masonically, there is no such thing as vouching in absence. Masonic avouchment can only be accomplished in the presence of all three; the brother vouched for, the bother vouched to, and the brother doing the vouching. Any other is spurious, un-Masonic and should never be tolerated or accepted.

"B" does not receive "lawful Masonic information when "A" says to him: "I have been to the Chapter with "C."

It is true that no man may become a Royal Arch Mason unless he is first a Master Mason. A Royal Arch Mason, therefore, may have at some time been a Master Mason. But "A" cannot know how well the Chapter in question guards its tiled door. For all he knows to the contrary, "C" held a forged Chapter card, had been expelled from his Blue Lodge and yet managed to get, or retain his Chapter card.

Doubtful? Probably!

What applies to the Chapter, of course, also applies to the Commandry, Council, Scottish Rite, Shrine, Grotto and Eastern Star - any body of Masonry the members of which must first be Master Masons.

Especially does it refer to the Masonic Club! The Masonic Club, worthy and valuable organization though it might be, is in no sense a Masonic organization. It is an organization of Masons. In some cities are Interchurch Men's Clubs, in which male members of all churches are welcome as members. But no one, the Men's Club least of all, would claim that such clubs are Churches! A Masonic club is made up of Master Masons, presumably in good standing, but it is not Masonically Tiled, it is not under direct control of a Grand Lodge, it is not Masonic, and it is not competent to judge for any Blue Lodge the genuineness of Masonic Membership. Therefore, the fact that "A" meets "B" in his Masonic club is not "lawful Masonic information" which "A" can pass on to his Tiler, saying: "I know "B" to be a Master Mason."

None of these cautions or restrictions can legitimately be considered to reflect upon the honesty of either the brother who desires to vouch, or the honor of the brother who wishes to be vouched for. Let us draw a parallel case and consider what "Avouchment" is in the business world.

"A" desires to borrow money from his bank. The bank knows and trust "A". But long experience has taught the bank that "one name paper" is at times not good paper. The bank, therefore, requires "A" to secure some additional name as an endorsement. "A" asks "B" to endorse his paper. Now "B" may know "A" as a good neighbor, a fellow club member, the owner of an adjoining pew in the church. "B" however, may know absolutely nothing of "A's" finances or credit rating. If "B" refuses to "vouch for" "A" at the bank, it does not mean, and is not taken to mean, that he distrusts "A", - merely that he knows nothing about his financial standing. Similarly even if "B" knows all about "A" and trusts him up to the hilt, the bank may not know "B" and therefore may be unwilling to take his "avouchment" - his endorsement of "A's" note. That does not mean that the bank distrusts "B": - merely that the bank has no knowledge of "B", one way or another.

Let us suppose "A" says to "B:" "I'm going to bring "C" around to see you. I've been to Shrine with him. I know him well. He says he's a member of Temple Lodge and I believe him. I'll vouch for him, although I haven't sat in lodge with him."

When "B" very properly refuses to take this avouchment, neither "A" or "C" have any cause to think that "B" feels any personal distrust of either. He simply has not received that "legal Masonic Information" which both "A" and "B" know - and "C" should know, if he really is a Master Mason - is essential to any proper avouchment. From these premises it necessarily follows that any avouchment predicated upon an examination other than that in Ancient Craft Masonry is of no value as "lawful Masonic information." "A" comes to the Tiler's door with "C" and asks for a committee to examine him that he may visit. "A" has a little talk with the Master. "C" is a Mason alright!" he assures the Master. "But he's rusty. He never comes to Blue Lodge; spends all his time in the Chapter. Appoint a couple of Chapter Members on the committee, will you, Worshipful? They'll soon

be satisfied!"

The Worshipful Master will do as he pleases, but he is well advised if he picks two brethren who are "Not" Chapter Masons. The brother who cannot satisfy a Blue Lodge Committee that has been regularly Entered, Passed and Raised in a lodge of Master Masons should not be permitted to enter the lodge - not if he is letter perfect in the Chapter work and can give all the signs, tokens, and words of the Scottish Rite - which are numerous.

No avouchment may be accepted from an Entered Apprentice or a Fellowcraft. A brother of the first or second degree may be absolutely sure that all those in the lodge in which he took his degrees were Master Masons, he cannot possess "lawful Masonic information" about Master Masons. Neither is he competent to vouch to a Tiler for any entered Apprentice or Fellowcraft he remembers as in lodge with him, as a Mason of the degree in which the lodge was then open on. The right to vouch is strictly a Master Mason's right' no brother of the first or second degree possesses it!

Vouching for a brother is a solemn undertaking. Before the lodge and the brethren the voucher puts his Masonic credit against the credibility of the brother he vouches for. No squeamishness of feeling should ever interfere. A Master Mason should not vouch for his blood brother unless he has sat in lodge with him, tested him for himself, or unless his brother has been vouched for to him. He may be morally sure his brother is a Mason but a lodge does not recognize such surety as "lawful Masonic information."

No brother should ever feel offended because a brother will not vouch for him. "A" may remember having sat in lodge with "B", yet "B" may have forgotten that they sat together in lodge. If "B" refuses to vouch for "A", "A" should be happy that "B" is so careful a Mason, not offended that "B" does not remember or because "he doesn't trust me."

The lodge is more important than the brother. The sanctity of the Tiled door is greater than the feelings of the individual. The Masonic honor of the brother doing the vouching should be of far greater worth to him than any consideration of expediency. The entire law and the prophets may be covered in one small commandment: "Never vouch unless you have lawful Masonic information."