

"INSIDE THE BROTHERHOOD"

"Further Secrets of the Freemasons"

For the Brethren who have not read Martin Short's "Inside the Brotherhood" it was published in 1998, and berates English Freemasonry for over 500 pages. In order to fully appreciate what author Short is up to, one has to have read "The Brotherhood," "The Secret World of Freemasons" by the late Stephen Knight which was published in 1984. Knight's book while claiming the author had no bias (which was not true) was viciously critical of English Freemasonry. Unfortunately for the United Grand Lodge of England (UGLE) the book became a National bestseller. Most of the English news media jumped on the bandwagon and declared "Open Season" on the Craft in England. The book didn't do bad in the United States but fortunately it failed to ignite the anti-Masonic rhetoric to the frenzied level experienced by the UGLE.

Stephen Knight's medical problems began in 1977, with epileptic attacks. In 1980, a brain scan revealed a cerebral tumor, a malignant cancer. He died in 1985, at age thirty-three, eighteen months after "The Brotherhood" was published.

According to Short, upon interviewing several Freemasons in connection with the death of Knight, none of them expressed any grief over it and some even suggested justice had been served. The fact that none of the members of the Craft he encountered mourned Knight's passing, caused Short to pursue a course to determine if foul play was the cause of Knight's death. Short then tells the reader that Knight's brain tumor was anything but normal, and then speculates whether a natural brain tumor can be induced by unnatural means but not recognized as such! He appears to drop the subject at that point. But his next paragraph begins as follows, "Murder and vengeance form the centerpiece of some of Freemasonry's most evocative ritual, so it is hardly surprising that one recurring feature of anti-Freemasonry is the claim that Masons really go around killing people to protect their secrets and avenge injuries to their reputation." So much for objectivity.

Short's technique is subtle, but effective. He does not directly accuse the Freemasons of causing the death of Knight, but deftly structures his writing so the reader might unwittingly do it for him.

The publisher of "Inside The Brotherhood" stated that the secrecy that surrounds Freemasonry has traditionally been its greatest strength, but today it has become its greatest enemy. In today's society a great many people feel they have to know everything about everybody, and privacy to the extent it exists is equated with secrecy and usually given a negative connotation. So one is inclined to agree with the editor.

Stephen Knight considered his book "THE BROTHERHOOD" an expose of Freemasonry in England with an occasional negative reference to the Craft in the United States. He saw no redeeming features of this "secret society."

The success of "The Brotherhood" as a national bestseller did not go unnoticed by Martin Short. He tells the reader that his book "INSIDE THE BROTHERHOOD" is a sequel to Knight's "THE BROTHERHOOD" which Knight would have written if he had lived. This is true to the extent that Knight indicated in his book he was collecting material to update his book. This provided Short with a ready-made justification to produce his own book exposing the Craft in England.

If Knight created a best seller by being severely critical of Freemasonry in England, why couldn't Short take advantage of this "feeding frenzy" by expanding on Knight's work, label it a sequel, and produce his own bestseller? Short's plan to cash-in by further bashing the Craft never materialized...his book never came close to approaching the volume of sales that Knight's book did.

After reading both Short and Knight's books it becomes very obvious that neither was unbiased. It doesn't require a Sherlock Holmes or a Doctor Watson to detect the bias of both authors. The question is, which one had the greatest bias against the Craft in England?

One thing both authors have in common is to condemn the Craft as a whole whenever they learned of a member who was involved in un-Masonic conduct...Short makes a career out of criticizing the Craft whenever he was able to report on a fallen brother. Freemasons helping one another is a practice which both authors vigorously condemn because they always portray such actions as being done at the expense of non-Masons.

One can't help wondering if Short who claims to be an investigative reporter would be so quick to condemn his colleagues in the media for unprofessional conduct or helping certain members while leaving others out?

A major point both authors dwell on is that irrespective of claims made by Freemasons that the Craft is not a secret society, it is just that. The position taken by some Freemasons that Freemasonry is not a secret society, but has some secrets is totally rejected by Short and Knight. The authors also claim that Freemasons don't practice what they preach. And that the high moral and ethical standards which Freemasons claim to espouse is something presented to members and non-members, but rarely practiced by many Freemasons. Both authors don't fail to tell the reader that Freemasonry is not compatible with Christianity.

In essence, Martin Short's "INSIDE THE BROTHERHOOD" is a very strong anti-Masonic book. But it should not be dismissed merely as the work of an author attempting to cash-in on the British public's desire to know what Freemasonry is all about. If anything Short's book is more damning than Knight's book. A non-Mason reading Short's book or Knight's book and not reading anything else about the Craft, can very easily be swayed to agree with them, at least as it concerns English Freemasonry.

Whether we Freemasons like it or not, and find such books grossly unfair to the Craft, the fact remains that these books and books like them are read and do great harm to Freemasonry. Knight's book created such a furor that is served as a wake-up call for the UGLE. England learned that silence in the face of sharp criticism, was no longer acceptable in present day society. This practice of 50 years standing was no longer a viable option for the Craft in England.

The UGLE learned that the most effective way to deal with the criticism from the media was to "talk" directly to the public...not only to the media.

Although Short's book did not remotely create the uproar that Knight's did, it maintains a steady drum-beat of anti-Masonry even to the extent of portraying some aspects of the Craft as being on a par with the Mafia and the Triads. Pretty strong stuff and repulsive to Freemasons, but nevertheless in print and available for anyone to read.

In the case of the print and TV news media when dealing with Freemasonry, privacy for the most part equates with secrecy and secrecy as everyone knows is the way a conspiracy is concealed. The media and some of the vociferous critics of the Craft would never equate privacy with secrecy when applied to their own affairs. The standard which Freemasonry is faced with is entirely different. For the media, if it is considered by them to be private it is perfectly acceptable. But if it is a private matter that deals with the Craft, it is a secret, and we can't have secrets. Therefore it is suspect and unacceptable.

Has anyone ever heard of an investigative reporter divulging the source of his or her information no matter how critical it may be? Is such a practice of protecting one's source of information a private matter, or an acceptable secret? Do I sense a double standard?

Double standard or not we no longer have the luxury of ignoring substantive criticism, nor can we maintain a measure of privacy that engenders severe suspicion that we have something explosively delicate which we must conceal.

This is not to suggest that we compromise our tenets to satisfy our critics. We all recognize that considering what some of our critics espouse, we certainly have no desire to please them. I am not suggesting that we morph Freemasonry into a social club or a service club. I am suggesting that we can make some changes in "form" without compromising "substance" and one should not be confused with the other.

But most importantly, we must take the initiative and act, not just react.

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