

P.S.

“REMEMBER going to fraternal as a young man. I used to come out feeling ten feet tall!”. These were the words of a middle-aged brother in a fraternal talk of his own. His point was that nowadays he rarely seems to feel that way. He wonders what has happened, whether to fraternal or to him. He questions whether something has gone wrong.

Do you recognise the thought? Are fraternal as good as they used to be? And if not, why not? You may think that they are, in which case there is no need to read this. If the ‘ten feet tall’ effect still applies to you, then fantastic! But for others it may not be like that. Given what has happened to fraternal attendance over the last fifteen years or so, and given anecdotal evidence, it would seem to be worth at least asking some questions.

Of course, it may simply be nostalgia. Were those good times of bygone years really so different from today? And, in the light of Ecclesiastes 7:10, is it right to dwell on the matter even if they were? There is certainly a relevant warning to proceed cautiously; lots of things may have seemed better in the past, but there is very little that can be done about it. Perhaps the enthusiasm of youth has more to do with it—the rose-tinted glasses of retrospection.

But at a personal level there is a most relevant point. Is it fraternal that have changed, or is it me? Am I less eager to go now, and am I less enthusiastic? Am I really not that worried whether I see my brothers and sisters from neighbouring ecclesias or whether I don’t? Do I really not care all that much whether or not I hear difficult or challenging parts of the Bible expounded and whether I understand His Word better? Would I prefer not to be exhorted to change my life, because I’m rather happy with it the way it is? If any of these points are true of me (and I know that in my weaker moments at least some of them are) then I need to change. My need to meet with my brothers and sisters and be uplifted from God’s Word is all the greater. I may have changed for the worse more than I would like to admit.

Some might argue that the problem is that the fraternal is no longer a relevant institution for the modern-day Brotherhood. It doesn’t meet

Ten feet tall

the needs of different age groups, it might be claimed, or it fails to give opportunity for more interactivity and discussion. There are points here that are worth considering further, though I believe quite strongly that, whatever else we choose to arrange, the concept of Bible-based talks at gatherings for Christadelphians from different ecclesias to meet and share fellowship is thoroughly good and as relevant as ever.

Could the problem be that the standard of talks has gone down? It is very hard to be objective about this; opinions will vary widely and be strongly held. There might be a danger, for instance, that modern-day business practices have led to more brethren being *technically* competent to give talks but that some of the passion has gone, and perhaps some of the depth of Bible study.

Speakers must ask themselves whether they are really doing their best. In a pressured and busy world, if brethren and sisters are to give up time to sit for ninety minutes or so of talks on a Saturday, in addition to their regular Sunday commitments, then speakers owe it to them—not to say to the Lord, which is far more important—to put hard work into the study, the organisation, and the presentation of their material. I have been guilty, as I’m sure have others, of saying, “That’s good enough and will have to do”, when I could have done better.

Finally, there is the matter of attendance. Although in principle a fraternal attended by twenty ought to be as uplifting as one attended by two hundred, people being what they are, in practice it rarely is. When there are two hundred brethren and sisters in a locale, to get twenty at a fraternal or study day is scarcely good enough. It is a vicious circle; fewer people come, the fraternal feels less uplifting, and, as the years go by, even fewer people come.

If we want to feel ten feet tall from our fellowship then we have to be there. At every level, whether (from the perspective of the effort made by the speaker) in terms of personal preparation and desire, or with respect to attendance, it all comes back to personal responsibility. The institutions of our community are what we make of them.

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