

A PHILOSOPHER LOOKS AT MASONRY AND LIFE

By Wor Bro. H. Golby

Whenever opportunity arises I take great pleasure in attending the Victoria Lodge of Education and Research. In Lake Cowichan the other night, this Lodge's 1760 "Antient" Initiation team illustrated points in Masonry that were really striking. It was a night to remember; and I know for I spoke to many of the brethren present. Don Burchill and his crew really did a wonderful job.

This talk deals with the philosophy of masonry as I see it. I have headed it "A Philosopher Looks at Masonry and Life". I start with this thought: "What is a life.?" This is a deep question which goes through everybody's life, from birth to death, and involves us in so many ways. What is a life? I think the answer that all of us come to realize is that a life is a man. A Life is a Man. Every man is so different. They are so different in so many ways. I think of men as instruments. Various religions of the world refer to men as Instruments of God. I think of men as instruments in the musical sense. To me it is an ever-recurring miracle to see a group of musical instruments on the stage during a recess period of the orchestra. They are mute - there is really nothing there. Then the musicians take up those instruments and under the direction of the conductor, they make tremendous music. It all comes out when those instruments are properly played-upon by master musicians.

We do this in masonry, with men. Every lodge, in every corner of the world, in most languages on earth, take in men and the wonderful spirit that is masonry brings out what is in each man. All of us have seen men strike some spark within the lodge which leads to something grand. The other night at Lake Cowichan the Worshipful Master called upon a remarkable singer whom I had never heard of before. He was a tremendous addition to the team. He made a wonderful contribution. This Lodge of Research gave him the opportunity to be that remarkable man that he was that night. It is not that each person is going to become a philosopher, or a scholar, or a master in the craft. He may not become Grand Master. But each can be developed within his own capacity and he does develop even when he sits and watches. My mother had a very fine saying: "Never fail to be a guest' There can be no education without a class. There can be no entertainment without a guest. So don't fail even if your contribution is simply your presence. If you contribute your presence then the entertainment, the education, the concert can go on.

Some time ago I came upon an old, old farm on an almost inaccessible country lane. There were some fine old log cabins and log barns - wonderful old buildings - and a very ancient caretaker. As we wandered through one old shed there was an old piano that had been taken there years ago by some long-forgotten settler. Of course, it had all fallen to pieces. All the veneer, the glue, all the keys had come unstuck and it lay in mute testimony to long-past hopes that someone would make use of it. Now it was too late - no one could make music with it any more. This is a lesson we can learn in our lodges. Don't wait forever to ask the young man, the older man, or any man to make the contribution that he has within him and is prepared to make.

I remember a brother who never missed our lodge. He never missed, but he never took part. At one meeting we had a floor members' night and I asked him if he would like to take the Chaplain's chair. I had been to services in his church where he was a sidesman and I knew he was interested. Now he had a very bad

heart which was one reason why he had never taken part but he said, "I think I would like to do that". While he didn't have more to do than the opening and closing prayers, he was very pleased. I too was pleased because he felt he had made a contribution and was recognized. Within a few months he had a further heart attack and he passed away. I recall with gratification that on that particular night; we took
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a man from out of the ranks and discovered him in that small capacity. So, we develop the man. We are in a way sculptors. The material is so fine that each man brings. It only needs encouragement. The finest tool we have is encouragement. Just give them a chance. Give them a little boost. Pat them on the back. When they make mistakes, laugh with them. Help them and they will come forward and do wonders for you and the lodge.

When a man comes into our lodge, we ask him a question: "What induced you to become such?" Each one of us comes to masonry in different ways. I often look around the room in any lodge - sometimes in Grand Lodge where there are thousands - pick out a brother and try to imagine "What made him become a mason?" I asked myself this question after I became more or less familiar with the lodge and found that I liked masonry and was happy in the lodge. I finally came to the conclusion that I was a mason before I knew anything of masonry because masonry is, if you like, the Christian life. Having had a very fortunate childhood and very gifted parents in the sense that they were very friendly people, I found that actually I had the masonic principles already. The ritual, I didn't have. When I put those two together I knew then what induced me to become such. I already had, you might say, the tendency towards masonry in myself. Man is so infinite in his variety and life is so complex, so far-reaching that it is remarkable that we can spread masonry over all the variations of life - education, race, colour, religion - and come up with an ever-satisfactory answer that masonry provides.

Man is truly infinite. I was reading about a tribe of aborigines in South Africa. They lived on the edge of the desert. But they could cross that desert. It struck me that we, with all our modern civilization, could go into that desert with automotive equipment that would break down and become full of sand, we would have to take supplies, and if we got into trouble, we would have to radio for help and have air-drops of food and water and fuel to get us out. Yet here was a simple primitive man who could cross that desert. It was a great mystery to the people who first studied that problem. They would go in the morning until the sun came to a certain height. Then, taking their cue from the desert animals, they liberally burrowed into the sand. They scooped out, in effect, a shallow grave and with a simple piece of palm cloth spread over their bodies, they rested in a state of near hibernation where the breathing is very slow and all the body processes are slowed down. Thus, they would conserve their energy. When the heat of the sun had passed toward evening, they would go on again. In this way they went across seemingly impassable desert. Here you might say, is the bottom of the scale (but who is to say how the scale is graduated?) Yet this primitive man, without any of the facilities we regard as essential, has that tremendous ability to survive. He has the ingenuity to contrive, to think, to find ways and means of living within the means of his environment. Every man in his own way has something to tell us. If we will only listen and look and learn we will find out how even primitive people can teach us something

There was a set of monks who founded a monastery on a rocky island off the coast of Ireland because of religious persecution. It was a bleak granite rock. They

lived by fishing and they had nothing to bless themselves with but their own inner strength. Then-it is odd how sometimes things fit together - the masons came. These were operative masons. They didn't come to found a lodge. They came to cut the fine granite and the island became a quarry. The stone was taken away in sailing ships which had to come in ballast. They bagged it and then just dumped it over the side. The monks realized that here was something that they put a tremendous value on because they had no soil. They carried it in hand-woven wicker baskets up into the stone quarries. Over many generations, even centuries, they built themselves a beautiful valley and they built their little houses from the stones not fit for the builders' use. In their pattern of life all the components were so basic; there were no frills. These dedicated monks were there to improve their minds, to copy books, to go in their little hand-made boats to the mainland shores to tend the sick and to help those less fortunate than themselves. These simple components illustrate what I'm trying to tell you - that it doesn't have to be a big earth-shaking thing.

Hugh Stephens, the former Mayor of Victoria, once exclaimed to me, "People are magnificent" Keep that in mind that people aren't just a nuisance. Within every one of them there is something wonderful. We meet them every day, every hour - all kinds of people and every type of person in every

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capacity of life. But the more people we meet in today's world the fewer people we know. There really isn't time today for the old friendships there used to be. We are just so busy! It's hard to spend those hours together. It is very difficult to find time to examine the fundamental Question: "Who am I?"

For years the daily press and television have poured into us so much information that we cannot appreciate. We don't get down to the simple basic joys of living. The more complex the world gets, the more it divides us. As I walk down the corridor in my building I realize that every office contains a story that I haven't got time to ask about. As we go down the street walking we don't ring or knock or wave and sometimes not even smile. And it really is a great pity. So the complexity of life divides us but masonry provides a path. It really binds us. It is the common bond, the mortar. When we have a group of men who meet with no intention other than enjoying one another's company then we have the basic tie that makes masonry so wonderful for all of us. Masonry is not something that somebody invented. We were talking during the recess about the TV programme, "Chariot of the Gods"; about the prehistoric tracing in this earth of the achievements of men, long before recorded time, of which there is no explanation. Out of all these experiences has come masonry. I don't think there is a moment in the ritual of any lodge which isn't actually a portion of the Book of God.

I sometimes think of masonic ritual as being a form of native art, We are all familiar with the art and culture that were developed among our West Coast Indian people. They took all the native animals, the native trees, the water, the wind, the tundra and they worked them into their culture. Over the centuries it became as it were, a ritual with them. The art became stylized. The beaver wasn't a photograph of the beaver; it was a stylized representation. The whale, the eagle, the raven; all were in stylized form. We in the masonic lodge, regardless of what ritual we do, are really performing a version of stylized living. Our ritual, you might say is a capsule form that takes the pertinent points of living and puts them together in allegory. I don't think that any serious mason, who sees a degree well presented, fails to realize that the several points of which the ritual is composed correspond to common experiences in every day life. They fit; they always fit because masonry is life.

My favourite lodge is really the Lodge of Life. It has no charter, it has no ritual, but it has a great many members. The outer door is always slightly open but it is tyled and "the tylers who prevent us from joining the Lodge of Life are fear and doubt." When you have confidence to go through that outer door you have overcome your fear and doubt. The password at that outer door, I have found to be such a simple password, I call it human touch. It's the speaking of one human being to another followed by the other's response without any side or show. When somebody takes you by the hand at that lodge door and says, "Hello Joe ! that is masonry; that is the password of human touch,

The inner door is more difficult. It is closed but, brethren, I assure you it isn't locked. Many don't really devote themselves to going through that inner door. They try too hard; or they don't try hard enough. What baffles them is that the password changes every hour, for every circumstance. To get through that second door in the Lodge of Life you have to be a keen student of humanity. Here again, I always revert to simplicity. I never try to push my way in. That is a bad way to get to know your fellow man. Getting through this second door, where you really know the other person rather than simply have an acquaintance with him. Passwords I have used at this door are "Trust them." Pretty hard to turn away a fellow who is implicitly saying he trusts you! Or you can say, "Trust me." We all come to a time when we need help. We may need spiritual help, financial help, physical help, or maybe we need guidance. It is a remarkable feeling if you have so made your own peace with the world, that you can look a fellow man in the eye and say, "Trust me."

Sometimes I use a single word like "give". People have a tendency though, to associate "give" with something of material value. You don't expect to appear at the inner door to make a permanent friendship by offering a material gift. The only gift you have is yourself. You give of yourself. Another password you must remember is "receive". It is difficult for some of us to allow ourselves to be helped; and it is so important for the person who wants to help not to be rebuffed. So, when the shoe is on the other

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foot, receive gracefully we can't always give. People bring they are not the right colour for her room, she doesn't like them in the room. But she will put them there until they drop because she realizes it is so essential to the giver to know that they were received. The Lodge of Life is peculiar in having no ritual and no set officers. Some days you are on the outside knocking to get in, trying passwords, and you are making progress or you are not making progress. Another day you might be guarding flowers to my wife, a charming lady very fond of flowers. She has a funny little thing in her head that if the outer door or the inner door, searching for the answers that will admit another. When the roles change in the Lodge of Life, we must change with them quickly.

Brethren, I like to think of this wonderful lodge as being the place where we all would like to spend the evening of our lives. As I have gone through life and through masonry, I have learned to appreciate my association with Past Masters in the Lodge of Life. There are many in this district. We had two 80 plus members performing on the stage at Lake Cowichan the other evening - Past Masters in the Lodge of Life. They had swung the door of that Lodge open so many times that they are now convinced it need never be shut. They regard the hinges of heart and hand to be all that are necessary. The Lodge of Life for Past Masters, and those who would achieve that status, is always open. The password is "fulfillment".

Brethren, that is the way I see it. It is part of the philosophy that I have brought to you tonight and I hope it has given you some things to think about.