

Victoria Lodge of Education and Research
1971 - 3

MORE MASONRY INTO MEN

An Address by
Wor. Bro. A. Deans Peggs, P.D.G.W.(E.C.)

On the Occasion of his Installation as Master of the
Victoria Lodge of Education and Research
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There is concern and apprehension in the Masonic world over the fairly general decline in the number of men who have been made Masons. I understand that Canada is no exception from this general trend and that, here too there is a significant decrease in the number of Masons in the country.

One simple and obvious remedy for the decline would be to mount some sort of a recruiting drive to bring more men into Masonry and so to arrest the decline. It is not my opinion that this simple expedient would be the right answer. It is more likely to be counter-productive.

In the affairs of men it has often been demonstrated that there is not necessarily any virtue - certainly not lasting virtue - in mere numbers of members alone. Of much greater significance is the number of fully committed members. History has many examples of this fact. The most eloquent lies in the immense numbers of people embraced by the mighty Roman Empire compared with the spirit which imbued the small Christian minority which it persecuted and sought to exterminate.

This thought leads me to the proposition that our concern is not primarily - certainly not solely - with getting more men into Masonry. Much more to the point, we should be concerning ourselves with putting more Masonry into men. "More Masonry into Men"; the motto of the English Lodge of Research in Hong Kong to which I belong has suggested the topic of this paper.

First and foremost, we must be careful not to beg the question: "Can we put any "Masonry into men?" Is not the Masonic essence already there? Is not our endeavour to put before our Brother, from his first admission onwards, those thoughts which will awaken a response from his inner being and so expand his thinking that he may henceforth develop a deeper and broader understanding and outlook on life? Robert Browning got this point across much more effectively than I when he wrote:

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"Truth is within ourselves. It takes no rise from outward things what'er you may believe There is an inmost centre in ourselves ;where Truth abides in fullness: and to know rather consists in finding out a way whence the imprisoned splendour may escape than by effecting entrance for a light supposed to be without."

Let me then re-phrase my topic in the form of a question: "In what way can we further assist our Brethren in Freemasonry to live up to the great moral Truths that have been presented to them in the three degrees of Craft Masonry?"

This might seem to be a leading question which inescapably prompts the obvious answer: introduce them to the higher degrees.

However, I do not consider that the conferring of higher degrees is of itself the answer. I am indebted to one of our brethren here in Victoria for his outright rejection of the term "higher degrees." Further degrees, may be; but not higher, except perhaps in numbering only. There is no higher degree in

freemasonry, this brother contends, than the degree of Master Mason. And indeed what can be higher in moral values than the basic truths inculcated in Craft Masonry? In the further degrees what we have is the presentation of the same great principles veiled in other allegories and illustrated by different symbols.

What we are seeking are ways of helping our new-made brother in the Craft to make that daily advancement in Masonic knowledge with which we charged him at his initiation and which we hope will ultimately bring him, not only to a better realization of Masonic truth, but towards a perfect exemplification of it in his daily living. And we should make this our aim within our Craft Lodges. This involves a plea to all Brethren, no matter how senior you may be and especially Past Masters, never to forsake your Craft Lodge nor to slacken your efforts towards its well-being and its work.

Your Lodge has a right to look to you for support as long as your strength lasts. Therein are Masons made, therein were you made a Mason and there is where you can make your most effective contribution towards this aim of "More Masonry into Men.'

This line of thought automatically raises the matter of attendance at our meetings. Failure to keep up attendance is another problem that continually exercises concern in a number of sovereign jurisdictions as well as in individual lodges. Efforts are made, for example in the way of providing entertainment after lodge is closed. I have long believed that wholesome fellowship at the festive board makes an important contribution to Masonic Brotherhood. But it is of secondary importance and should not be offered as a prime inducement to attend.

Every Lodge and every Mason has often heard the remark: "'Oh! I got tired of the repetition." Having regard to the wealth of our ritual in the three Craft Degrees, coupled with the added variety of presentation which is available in Victoria as in Hong Kong, my first reaction to this complaint is to regard it as but a shallow excuse. There seems to me to be only one of two, possibly three, explanations. First - and this demands our earnest self-examination - the lodge has been unfortunate and possibly ill-advised and careless in admitting the brother as a candidate to the craft in the first instance for he has clearly taken very lightly his solemn obligation to obey all summonses and to plead no excuse. Masonic Lodges have ever been urged to "Be very cautious whom you recommend as a Candidate Great numbers are not always beneficial." (Dr. G. Oliver).

The second possible explanation is that the work of the Lodge is being poorly, unconvincingly, even shoddily carried out. As regards the calibre of work of the officers in conducting degrees, success will largely depend on the wise and careful selection of junior officers. There is a responsibility that calls for wise judgment as to the ability of the prospective officer, not simply to absorb and to regurgitate the ritual, but to give his delivery of it that degree of sincerity, without exaggerated or dramatic effect, that will impress candidates and all Brethren with the beauty and truth of what is being said.

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It is possible, however, for the best efforts of the officers to be counteracted by the general atmosphere prevailing in the Lodge room. I recall, without pleasure, attending a lodge where the general atmosphere during the ceremony was more appropriate to a social club and this stripped the officers' work of the dignity they were seeking to impart to it. "That could never happen in my Lodge", you say. Be very thankful for that assurance - but never-the- less be

ever on the alert. It can happen very easily and may originate in surprisingly unexpected quarters. To recover the proper decorum thereafter is much more difficult. It is, of course, highly desirable that the atmosphere at the festive board after Lodge should be much more relaxed but it is also my opinion that there is a limit beyond which 'letting one's hair down' detracts from the true calibre of Masonic Fellowship.

This problem of attendance is dealt with fully by R.W. Bro. Lyle Barr, our Junior Grand Warden, in the Masonic Bulletin for October 1971. His message suggests to me a third explanation which is new to my own experience, limited as my experience has been to small lodges. He writes: "New members should be kept as active as possible until they get the Masonic feeling. Once a member feels that he is an integral part of his Lodge he will become a more active member." This is easy in small Lodges where every member can quickly get to know every other member, where everyone is called on to help in getting the work done and where the Master can quite easily make a point of chatting in one evening with every member present. By contrast, it seems possible in large Lodges that a member especially the "retiring and quiet types" instanced by R.W. Bro. Barr - might have no opportunity of doing any work, might see no future prospect of ever doing any work, and where, worst of all, he might go home from Lodge feeling that his Brethren couldn't have cared less whether he was present or not.

Turning to the matter of Lodge business - much can be done by the Master in his conduct of the Lodge business by precise and deliberate action, wise control and guidance in debate, and strict impartiality at all times. Waste of time in discussions, needless discussion of trifling matters are a justifiable cause of complaint and a source of irritation to some of our best attenders especially when this results in unnecessarily long meetings.

There is one method of strengthening the bonds of Masonic Brotherhood in which, I have formed the impression, Lodges in Victoria excel. This is in the matter of Masonic visitation. I would identify three types of visit. One is the simple device of a telephone call - or even a brief word in a chance meeting in the street - to let a brother know that his absence from the last meeting did not go unnoticed and that his contribution to the fellowship of the Lodge was consequently missed. The second is the visiting of sick brethren -Masonic Brotherhood at its best. The third is an especially large and important job in Victoria - the visiting of elderly brethren who, by reason of infirmity or simply multitude of years, are no longer able to attend Lodge. Such a visit can be a real joy and bring a ray of light into an otherwise dull existence. Such a visit can also have a most salutary effect on the Brother who is making it.

I have not yet mentioned the importance of Lodges of Research and the contribution they can make towards more Masonry into men. To elaborate further on this point at this moment would be a matter of 'preaching to the converted.'

In concluding this talk on "More Masonry into Men", I should miss the main point if I did not stress where it all begins. To find the beginning just drop off the letter at the end: "Masonry into Me." I cannot express this nearly so forcefully as our Grand Master, M.W.. Bro. Harper Baikie, has done. He writes: "As Freemasons we should endeavour to practice first of all the small, simple basic niceties of life such as kindness, good manners, courtesy and friendliness. By making these attributes part of our very being and character the more difficult virtues will come to us much easier. Our conduct would then make a more favourable impression not only on our members but also the outside

world. The individual little realizes the power for good that lies in precept and example. One dedicated Freemason has an influence on the deeds of others far beyond his own realization. When you walk down the street in your community you could be someone's ideal of a Freemason."

8.

More Masonry into men must begin with "More Masonry into Me" And yet it is also true that my duty as a Mason begins with my Brother. Our Grand Master has a word for this too: "In our Order, as well as in Society in general, too many people have developed a sense of well-being where they are content to let others carry the responsibility. What could be worse than apathy in Freemasonry'? We must come up with an antidote to apathy before we lose concern for each other. IF YOU REMOVE CONCERN FOR OTHERS FROM MASONIC TEACHING WHAT HAVE YOU LEFT?

On this note, I shall end with three lines of verse I have carried with me for many, many years. I cannot give you their source probably someone very humble ... but surely inspired by the Great Architect:

" I sought myself; myself I could not see;
I sought my God; my God eluded me;
I sought my Brother; and I found all three."

Note: G.M. quote taken from Masonic Bulletin Sept. 1971

Hong Kong Lodge mentioned on page 1 Paul Chater Lodge of Installed Masters No. 5591 E.C.