

**REFLECTIONS OF A PAST DISTRICT DEPUTY GRAND MASTER**

by

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"Reflection" is an interesting word with several different meanings but the one to be considered in this talk is "The turning of thought back upon past experiences or ideas." In this sense the subject matter must be of a very personal nature and cannot in any way be interpreted as anything but a personal viewpoint.

The first part will be focused on my reactions to the responsibilities of the office and the relationships formed because of it. The second part will be concerned with observations made during my term of office.

Before going any further, I would like to establish the reference point on which this talk has been prepared and which I am convinced, should be the motivation in all our relationships within the craft and without. Masonry is a Religion. It has at its centre the Supreme Creator of the universe and admonishes us to seek for ourselves. His divine will is in the V.O.S.L. which lies open in our lodge rooms. The truths are often clothed in parables and in our rituals, veiled in allegory. But the seeking must be done, for, as we search, our characters will be strengthened and we will achieve a closer relationship with Him. I think this growth and development can be likened to that verse in Luke 2 verse 2: "And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature. and in favor with God and man." Let us not be carried away by the mechanics of the craft to a point where we lose sight of the glories to be found in its lessons. Let us not flit like a sparrow when we can soar like an eagle.

The appointment of the District Deputy Grand Master is made by the Grand Master, but you get the feeling long before the letter arrives that your hat may be in the ring. You look at the list of your predecessors and the eminence to which they have risen and you convince yourself that there is no way that you will receive the call. And then it happens. And then you do a real "P.R." job to convince yourself that everyone, even you, must have something to contribute, however small, and that if the Grand Master wants you, you will do all that you can to serve the office and Grand Lodge. to the best of your ability, hoping that what talent you may have will be acceptable to the Brethren and that you may maintain and preserve the dignity of the office for those who will follow.

The investiture at the Grand Lodge Convocation leaves you with the surrimer to ponder your folly and to contemplate on the busy year ahead. September comes and you are starting on one of the most wonderful experiences of your life.

9.

I believe that all of the joys and blessings to be found in our fraternity are bestowed on a brother in direct proportion to his active application of the tenets and principles inculcated in our ceremonies and lectures. Masonry is an active science. It is not enough to be knowledgeable, this knowledge must be applied to be effective.

As you begin your tour of visitations, of which the Installations of Lodge Officers require more than a little organization, you are called on to solicit a great deal of help from a large number of the brethren. It comes as a pleasant surprise to find this help so readily available. Most any of the brethren are

just waiting in the wings to give of their time and talent to help you fulfil your obligations and make your year happy and successful. So, while you are endeavoring to give something of yourself to the Craft, the Craft through these brethren is giving you infinitely more in return.

The Installations and Official visits are perhaps the jewels or show pieces of the D.D.G.M.'s year in office and the support provided to him and the lodges and officers by the visiting brethren of both Districts is inspiring. You cannot be oblivious to the spirit or atmosphere of well-being which exists on these occasions. You see the strength of the friendships between the brethren, built on mutual love and respect, secure in the knowledge of each other's integrity. You feel the warmth and sincerity in the handshakes. You sense the feeling of harmony and goodwill among the brethren. Every Installation was like a New Year's eve and indeed it should be. The brethren look back on the past year with many fond memories and new friendships and to the New Year with anticipation. The newly installed officers accept the challenge of new responsibilities with determination. The I.P.M. gives up his mantle of authority and looks back on a year filled with happy memories. He hasn't achieved all that he had hoped to accomplish but he knows it has been a rewarding year for him. He has grown in wisdom and stature and has seen Masonry at work in the lives of men and in relationships which have grown in the spirit of brotherly love, relief and truth. After trying to put this spirit into my own words, I found it was expressed beautifully and effectively in the lecture on the First Tracing Board in the ancient work which was given at our October meeting by Brother Peter Cockburn. It bears repeating for it is the basis on which the climate is created for the growth of the relationships which dominate our Fraternity:

"By the exercise of Brotherly Love we are taught to regard the whole human species as one family, the high and the low, the rich and the poor, who, created by one Almighty Parent and inhabitants of the same planet, are to aid, support and protect each other. On this principle, Freemasonry unites men of every country, sect and opinion, and conciliates true friendship among those who might otherwise have remained at a perpetual distance.

To relieve the distressed is a duty incumbent on all men, but particularly on Freemasons, who should be linked together by an indissoluble chain of sincere affection. To soothe the unhappy, to sympathize with their misfortunes, to compassionate their miseries and to restore peace to their troubled minds is the grand aim we have in view. On this basis we form our friendships and establish our connections.

Truth is a divine attribute and the foundation of every virtue. To be good and true is the first lesson we are taught in Freemasonry. On this theme we contemplate and by its dictates endeavour to regulate our conduct. Hence, while influenced by this principle, hypocrisy and deceit should be unknown among us, sincerity and plain dealing should distinguish us, and the heart and tongue should join in promoting each other's welfare and rejoicing in each other's prosperity."

Just as the I.P.M. leaves the office of W.M. Humble in the knowledge that, although he has spent a year in service to his lodge, the Craft has returned to him joys far in excess of his contribution, so the D.D.G.M. leaves his office knowing that his life has been enriched by the experience and that he has an obligation to the Fraternity which can never be repaid. I am sure that it is this sense of obligation which keeps so many of our Past D.D.G.M.'s in harness, not trying to relive past glories, but rather to

repay past joys and blessings.

10.

Supporting and being supported by R.W. Bro. Monty Jasper was an experience in itself, one which I will always remember with fond memories. The Installations of the officers in the Lodges of both districts, including the Victoria Lodge of Education and Research were highlights of the year's activities. But I think that the Installation of W.Bro. Joe Gayton at St. Andrew's Lodge has to be one of my happiest memories. The Lodge room was full to overflowing. The balcony was full, the stairs were full and brethren were standing in the corners. There were many visiting brethren from the mainland, Washington and up-island friends of Joe's came to share in his big night. Masonry to me is people, people practicing Masonic principles and that evening was a beautiful example of just that.

Being called on to make so many visitations in such a short time is a very broadening experience. You find yourself immersed in Masonry for a good part of your waking hours. You also have the opportunity of talking Masonry on many occasions with other D.D.G .M.s, the Grand Master and other Grand Lodge officers and Committee members. Talking with these very dedicated brethren gives you points of view not always available to every brother nor in such concentrated doses. I am not suggesting that these points of view are all acceptable or right for everyone but you learn something from listening to them whether you agree with them or not. You have the opportunity of seeing first-hand the strength and weaknesses of the Craft in Grand Lodge and the Constituent Lodges. I don't claim to have the wisdom to provide the solutions to the problems or, in fact even to identify the problems, but nevertheless I would like to make these observations..

One of the things that struck me most obviously in my visits throughout both districts (and I am referring now to those visits other than Installations, Official Visits or evenings on which something extra special was planned, was that you couldn't really tell by the number of brethren present whether it was a small lodge or a big lodge. The number in the porch book seemed to be about 40 or 50 give or take maybe 10. Why is the attendance so nearly the same regardless of the number of members on the roster? For want of a better reason I suggest to you that the activities incorporated in most lodges are only sufficient to keep this number actively involved. I believe; also that we are not in a position to compete effectively in the fields of entertainment, cocktail lounges or fine restaurants. But we do offer something of greater value and more lasting and that is the moral lessons and instruction inherent in the body of Freemasonry. We must therefore continue to involve our newly raised brethren in as many ways as possible in order that they can learn to appreciate these; values. There are several avenues to explore to resolve the low attendance figures.

There are fifteen lodges in the two Victoria Districts with approximately 3,200 members and an average monthly attendance of perhaps 550 per month. Just suppose that we had 30 lodges instead of 15 and the present 3,200 were redistributed among them. Our present attendance figures would indicate that we would have approximately twice as many attending regularly or 1000 active brethren. Activity breeds enthusiasm and these thirty lodges would. soon be growing in numbers. I believe that apathy is the greatest weakness in the Craft. Before you think the above illustration is for real and stop listening to this "Kook" let me assure you that I am not so naive as to think that we can start dividing lodges up piecemeal. But we can put into perspective the importance of starting new lodges, the nucleus of which should come from within the active members and perhaps some inactive members of the existing lodges.

The last lodge formed in Victoria was Haida No. 166 eighteen years ago. That is a long time between children. The responsibility of brethren to the Craft goes beyond their responsibilities to their lodge for, if the fraternity grows in strength, the constituent lodges can grow with it, but if the fraternity is weakened the lodges would be adversely affected.

I am not suggesting however that there is not a better job to be done by some lodges in involving their brethren to a greater extent. There is an opportunity to expand the committees on ritual, education, sick visiting and finance. Have them meet more often and deal in a more expansive way with their responsibilities. A more active General Purposes Committee as a steering committee to provide

11.

an on-going directive force to the appointed committees. Keep the membership informed through regular reports in lodge and by mail. More fraternal visiting on a regular basis as, for example, is carried out by Vancouver and Quadra Lodge No. 2 and Mt. Newton Lodge No. 89. Visiting to capture the Traveling Totem, it isn't just the visit but the amount of involvement required to organize such a visit. Or how about a fraternal visit on a Ladies' Night. If certain fixed costs can be shared among many the financing can be much more easily accommodated.

Special programs such as lectures of an educational nature or entertainment at the festive board; an active committee representing the lodge to the Victoria Lodge of Education and Research; talk sessions on those evenings when there is no degree work. Put the lodge at ease and have buzz sessions or just an open session organized or not where Masonic subjects can be discussed, viewpoints given, questions asked. We call ourselves Free and Accepted or Speculative Masons. Mackey defines Speculative Masonry as: "The scientific application and the religious consecration of the rules and principles, the language, the implements and materials of operative Masonry to the veneration of God, the purification of the heart and the inculcation of the dogmas (Principles) of a religious philosophy" The dictionary defines Speculative as: "pertaining to contemplation or theorizing or reflective inquiring consideration." We have the direction given to us from our name and we have the material in the V.O.S.L. and in our rituals to research and on which to contemplate and reflect and I am suggesting that the informal talk session is one way of bringing the two together. It would also be interesting to the newer members to find that even the most distinguished of "the old guard" recognize their need for further knowledge and are still pursuing their search for the truth as avidly as ever. Let the committee on ritual or instruction or education and research be responsible for the program. But have an expediter lead the brethren into the discussion. I don't believe any one person can completely answer a question for someone else. Each must pursue his own course and make his own discoveries and an expediter simply keeps the discussion going, He does not act as the authoritative source for the answer.. One of our Masonic bodies asks the question: "What is the true word?" The reply "It is my secret, each must discover it for himself." We don't find our truths in neat little boxes clearly defined and catalogued. Each must diligently search for himself and as he applies himself so shall he be rewarded.

It is a sad commentary on our times that we all seem to be so wrapped up in our need for making a living that we can't find the time to live - that we are so involved with our work-a-day and play-a-day existence, we just don't have the time to pursue our own private thoughts. Our lodge rooms could become that place where, for a period of time, all of our thoughts could be directed in a contemplative way to the search for the meaning in our ritual and the V.O.S.L.,

and I mean in the fullest sense, not necessarily in just the literal. There are ever so many subjects which warrant the perusal and investigation and I am not prepared to go into these at this time but for a starter, how about "Why is the centre that point from which a Master Mason cannot err?"

I mentioned briefly earlier that small lodges were able to involve a far greater percentage of their members in lodge activities. When I was raised my Mother Lodge, Aurora No. 165, had about fifty members. We needed active members so badly that I just never had a chance to sit around on the side benches and get bored. It worries me how many of our newly-raised brethren do not get properly integrated into the work, activities and fellowship of the lodge. My proposer took me visiting, helped with my instruction, introduced me to the brethren of the lodge, made sure I was a part of the Fellowship of the lodge and awakened my interest in Masonry at large. Surely this is part of the responsibility of any brother who puts his name at the bottom of an application form. A small lodge makes it easier for a new member of the Craft to become integrated for almost every name on the roster can soon be matched to a familiar face. But there are disadvantages to belonging to a small lodge and they are primarily concerned with finances. However, I firmly believe that in the area of finances, which at first view appears to be a problem, lies a potential opportunity for strength. If I haven't already lost you in this rambling narrative up to now, I probably will with the points to follow.

In my book, the Finance Committee has a sacred responsibility to the brethren of the lodge not

12.

only to be accountable for the expenses which tells you where you have been, so to speak, but to provide a reasonably accurate budget for the next year and an estimate or trend budget for the next three to five years. This should be made available to the brethren in an Annual Report with recommendations as to the sources of revenue, basically dues. It stands to reason that fees coming from affiliations or initiations should not be considered as part of the revenue of the lodge for each is an uncontrollable factor. It is easy to grow into a life style which can become increasingly expensive and even dangerous particularly in highly inflationary times such as we are now experiencing. With fully informed brethren the lodge can decide what is really important enough to be maintained and what can be reduced or done away with. A real good look should be taken at the need for expensive banquets at lodge installations. Is it because we always have been keeping up with the Joneses, so to speak, or ego trips of our own making? Once we have established what our costs are going to be it isn't too difficult to establish what our dues must be. Discussions and deciding dues is never a particularly happy occasion but it has its own reward. For if it is entered into and conducted in the right manner, it brings us face to face with the question:- "Just how important is the Craft to you and just how important is the Craft to our society?" Particularly at this point in time when we see so many attacks on the moral fibre of the people in our communities. Can you envisage our country or the world without the influence and support of our churches or our Craft? Or from a personal point of view, can you envisage your own way of life without the joys to be found within its portals? I really don't believe that our lodges place a true monetary value on its worth to its members. For those brethren who don't attend it must be an aggravation to be faced with rising dues. These members are made up of those who through frailties are unable to attend, those who are beyond the length of their cable tow and others who have no acceptable reason. We should consider each in purely Masonic manner when we are establishing dues. The active members should be carrying the brunt of the budget for they are receiving the greatest benefits. Otherwise they are being subsidized by those who can't attend. The reward I promised you is that

you have now had the opportunity of evaluating the importance the Craft has in your life and must have come to the same conclusions as I have. In terms of its influence on me, the friendships I enjoy and the joys which it brings to me doesn't cost very much. Compared to my donations to my church, it doesn't cost very much. In comparison to my charitable donations, it doesn't cost very much, Considering its potential influence on our community through you and me, it doesn't cost very much. Masonry is cheap my brethren and I say to you in the strongest of terms, it is too cheap.

I have one more observation to make before closing and I expect it will meet with strong feelings both for and against. It is a subject often presented to the lodge when dues and finances are being discussed: Bar Facilities. My personal views are against having bar open at lodge meetings, not because I am teetotal because I am not, but rather because they are unnecessary, divisive and usually introduced for the wrong reasons. Have you ever given much thought to how astute our early brethren must have been? They took from the V.O.S.L. and other religious volumes those tenets and principles which would bind our members into a fraternity where brotherly love could flourish without any divisive characteristics, regardless of religion, nationality or color. One commitment only to the Supreme Creator and a sincere wish to render ourselves more serviceable to our fellow creatures. Those concepts which divide the creatures of the world into religious groups and sects, nations, colors etc., are not to be found in our rituals. They showed the wisdom that we should be seeking for the Craft brings men together in brotherly love and the need for any kind of artificial stimulant is to me, incongruous and unnecessary. If however any particular lodge endorses a bar facility, it should do so for the proper motives. It should not be done to subsidize the operating expenditures of the lodge. Let the bar profits be used to extend the charitable work of the lodge or other worthy causes. Have the bar open before lodge convenes or after the Tyler's toast at the close of the festive board. In this way those members who come to lodge for the true purpose of Masonry are not being delayed unnecessarily by those who wish to enjoy the facility of the bar.

Finally, we joined the Craft to make ourselves more serviceable to our fellow creatures. Surely at this point in time the challenge couldn't be greater. The decadence of the world's people must be happening at a greater rate than ever before in recorded history. Our neighbors to the south have been rocked by the scandal of Watergate. In Canada we are threatened by divisive regional loyalties.

13.

The third world countries are rattling their sabres on the strength of their new found resources and economic strength and the fourth world "Have Nots" are becoming even further removed from the poorest of the "Have" countries. Closer to home, in our own communities further moral deterioration is indicated by an increase in crime, alcoholism, drug addiction, mental disorders and family breakdown. What is even worse is a growing apathy and sense of indifference to those basic principles, work, faith, integrity which we as Freemasons express over and over again in our Ritual. To sit meekly by and accept it or perhaps even be swayed by it is not good enough, for the lessons of the Craft are locked into the traditions of our ancient brethren and while traditions can be changed, changes should only be made after a great deal of meditation and soul searching.

G.K. Chesterton expressed it this way: "Tradition means giving votes to that obscurest of classes, our ancestors. It is the democracy of the dead. Tradition refuses to surrender to the arrogant oligarchy of those who merely happen to be walking around."

Our beloved institution provides us with the means to a joyful co-existence with God and man. But in order to fulfill our obligation we must accept a greater responsibility for our fellow creatures who have not as yet shared the lessons of the Craft.

I will close with a benediction used frequently by our Minister and which could easily be a part of our Masonic Ritual - "Go out into the world in peace, to the place where God has given you responsibilities. Love Him, trust Him and serve His people."