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"RIGHTS AND RESPONSIBILITIES"

by

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Since the end of the war 35 years ago the world has been in a state of very rapid social and political evolution. East and west coexist because they must - there is little friendliness or trust between them. We have a grudging respect for each other, but it is not based on any mutual understanding of our cultures and achievements. It is based on fear of the destructive power that we possess.

New nations have emerged in Africa and Asia and they have built or are building new societies, which they hope will serve the aspirations of their peoples better than the old colonial orders ever did. Even in countries that have existed for centuries there have been major rearrangements of political power and social organization. These great changes are still going on today in many parts of the world.

The aspect of all these changes that I am concerned with now is the intense preoccupation with human rights that arose from the appalling abuses of those rights that led to the second world war, the Korean war, the long struggle in Viet Nam, and other conflicts.

About the middle of the nineteen fifties the activities of a number of societies dedicated to the protection of human rights began to attract attention and make news, and they continue to do so today. During the next twenty years their activities were almost daily fodder for the news media. Very soon there were many such societies. Some were local and had limited objectives, some were and are of national scope and influence, and some are international in their activities. The strongest and best of these organizations are still with us. They are dedicated to the extension, entrenchment, and protection of individual human rights. It is good that these organizations are alert to any attempt to infringe upon these rights, by government at any level. All governments love power, and all governments easily convince themselves that they know better than the people, what the people should have, despite the lack of any plausible evidence that they do know better.

Some of these societies had specialized objectives - for example, students rights, black rights, religious or quasi-religious rights - and so on and on. All of them were strident and vociferous, and often their arguments were illogical and even puerile, but on the whole they were law-abiding. Unfortunately, however, a few of these organizations chose to press their cases for whatever rights they were espousing, by violent and destructive demonstrations, and by ruthlessly trampling the rights of others in the dust.

Out of all the impassioned oratory, all the lobbying, all the demonstrations, and all the pressure exerted on governments, there have come

improvements in the lot of the individual. It may be that in the free countries of the world we are making progress, albeit slowly, toward real social and political justice.

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Most people today would agree that every child is endowed at birth with certain inalienable God-given rights, that cannot with justice be abridged or ignored by any society or government. In many lands other rights are added because society deems them to be essential to the dignity and independence of a free man.

Yet with all the attention and publicity that have been lavished on the safeguarding of human rights, I have serious misgivings that arise from two considerations. First, attention has been focused almost exclusively on the rights of the individual. The rights of the community, of society at large, have received a disproportionately small share of attention. The voices speaking out for THOSE rights have been too few, and often have been shouted down. Perhaps those who have fought so valiantly for individual rights assume that if they can make the rights of the individual unassailable, those of the community automatically will become equally unassailable. That: unfortunately, is an unsound assumption. From time to time in almost any major newspaper there is apt to be an account of the activities of some individual, who has exercised his rights, quite legally, to the detriment of some other person or of the community at large. Surely the rights of society at large are no less, or ought to be no less, than those of the individual?

The second major omission from the great campaign is even more disquieting. Which of all the human rights organizations has undertaken to remind the public that all rights are necessarily and always accompanied by duties, by responsibilities? Who speaks out for individual and community responsibilities? Who reminds us that for every right that is won a duty is acquired, that the more we demand the more we must give?

Now let us think about these matters in Masonic terms. What are the rights and responsibilities of Masons, and in what way, if any do they affect the community?

All Masons ought to know that every right is accompanied by a parallel duty. That is made abundantly clear in our ceremonies, lectures, and charges, yet we all know that too many Masons attach more importance to their Masonic rights than they do to their Masonic duties. In every free land Masons enjoy the same rights as do all their fellow citizens, and they also enjoy certain rights and privileges that are theirs because they are Masons. These special rights and privileges are purely Masonic, and they cannot possibly infringe upon the rights of non-Masons. Moreover, any or all of those rights can be exercised by any Mason without fear that by so doing he may run afoul of the law.

Every Mason ought to be well informed about his rights and privileges, and he ought to understand the duties and responsibilities that, as a Mason, he must accept. That is not so easy an undertaking as it sounds. Masons for generations have displayed a deep rooted reluctance to adopt lists or codes specifying duties or powers or privileges. So it is that in this jurisdiction, at least, even the powers of the Grand Master are largely unspecified. Some of his more important powers are set forth in our Constitution, but the last article of that particular section says, in effect, that nothing in that section shall be construed as limiting the powers of the Grand Master to those specified in the preceding paragraphs. The limit of his powers is determined, not by any legislative act of the Grand Lodge, but by ancient usage and custom, combined with his own good judgment and care for the well being of the Craft. We have no

list of ancient landmarks either, and certainly no code or description of the rights and privileges of a Mason

The Mason who wants to be fully informed about his rights and privileges must consult the ritual, the constitution, the ancient charges and the literature touching upon the ancient usages and customs of Masonry. Before he gets far along he learns that there is an important distinction that he must learn to make, and that is the distinction between rights and privileges.

A Mason acquires his Masonic rights gradually as he is entered, passed, and raised, and once they have been given him they cannot be taken away so long as he remains a Mason. Privileges, on the other hand are not necessarily permanent. For example, a Past Master has the right to be addressed as

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Worshipful Sir or Worshipful Brother, and he has the right to vote in Grand Lodge. He has the privilege (not the right) of sitting in the east when invited to do so, he has the privilege of serving in Grand Lodge office if the Grand Master offers an appointment, he has the right to accept nomination.

Our Brother also will learn as his research proceeds that he has not discovered a single right or privilege that is not attended by responsibility. If he yields to the temptation to list the right, privileges and duties, he will discover that the list of duties is the longest list, for our duties are indeed more numerous than our rights and privileges. The balancing of rights and duties reminds me of one of the fundamental laws of physics, Newton's third law of motion. The law says that for every action there is an equal and opposite reaction. Let me paraphrase that law in Masonic terms thus, FOR EVERY RIGHT THERE IS AN EQUAL AND PARALLEL DUTY. that ought to sound familiar to everyone here. It is clearly stated in the General Charge that is delivered annually at the conclusion of the ceremony of installation of the Worshipful Master, and investiture of the officers of a lodge.

It needs to be recognized that Masonic rights are of two kinds. There are legal rights that are set forth in the law of Masonry, that is, the Constitution or its equivalent, in any jurisdiction. There are also moral and ethical rights, which are laid down in the obligations and charges. These are especially interesting because they commonly are not directly stated. For example, every Mason may confide his troubles to a brother Mason and expect them to be held in complete confidence. The ritual does not say that directly. What it does say is "I will keep the secrets of a Master Mason when communicated to me as such." and so on. That is a characteristically Masonic approach --by laying upon us an obligation Masonry tells us what one of our rights is. If the obligations of all three degrees are considered in that light, it will be seen that most of the terms of those obligations tell us what some of our rights are by telling us what we must agree to do for other Masons.

Both the legal and the moral rights are attended by responsibilities -- the legal rights tend to be accompanied by legal requirements, and the moral and ethical rights by moral obligations.

Some of the rights of Masons are commonplace, and not at all unique to the Craft. A member of any fraternity, service club, church, or social organization has the right to participate in its business, to serve on committees, to serve as an officer, to vote on membership applications, and so forth. Because these rights are not uniquely ours, we may tend to under-use and under-value them. There are times when lodge members are absent because a communication is "only a business meeting", That is, perhaps, the member's choice, but when he makes that

choice he must be prepared to accept decisions in which he elected not to share, and which he may not like. It is not uncommon, for example, for some members to complain about increases in dues, after the fact. All too often they have not studied the lodge financial statements and did not attend the meeting at which the problem was debated and the decision made. Every brother has the right to be heard on all matters pertaining to his lodge, but it is his duty to read the summonses calling the meetings and to be properly informed. He is remiss when he leaves the duty of making decisions to his brethren, and he forfeits any right to complain by absenting himself, without just cause, from the lodge's deliberations.

It is true that much of the business that comes before a regular meeting is routine and unlikely to spark scintillating discussion. Nevertheless it is important, and the Worshipful Master must see that it is properly and promptly done. It is the member's duty to be in lodge to support and assist him. All members should be familiar with one of the ancient charges, which says, in part, "From ancient times no master or fellow would be absent from his lodge when warned to appear at it". Furthermore, we are required by our obligations to obey all summonses if within the length of the cabletow. Some brethren apparently have exceedingly short cabletows.

One of the certainties in Masonry is that when a brother is newly entered some older member will tell him that he is now a Mason, and that he now has the right to visit any other lodge in the jurisdiction, or, if he really gets carried away, in the world. Probably this right of visitation is really a right - many

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Masonic authorities say it is - but to me it is at best a qualified right. A Mason certainly can visit any lodge he chooses, provided that lodge is in a jurisdiction recognized by his own Grand Lodge, that he can prove that he is a Mason in good standing, AND THAT THE MASTER OF THAT LODGE IS WILLING TO RECEIVE HIM. The Worshipful Master of any Lodge has a duty to maintain harmony therein, and if he has reason to believe that the presence of any particular visitor might tend to impair that harmony he can, indeed he ought, to decline to receive him. A wise Master would exercise that power only after discussing his reservations with the would-be visitor in private. The point is that the right of visitation can be exercised in his Lodge only with his consent.

Two of the most valuable rights enjoyed by Masons are complementary, and consideration of one inevitably leads to the other. They are the right to sponsor candidates and the right to ballot. These rights are attended by especially compelling responsibilities.

A Mason is told at his initiation that he must be particularly careful not to recommend any person unless he is convinced that person will accept and abide by our rules. So far as it goes, that is good guidance because it tells the new member that he should be careful about sponsoring any person. Assuming that he knows that the prospective petitioner is a good citizen, a good husband and father (or a respectable bachelor), he needs to consider several other questions. Does he get on well with his neighbors? Is he a joiner? How many organizations does he already belong to, and what does he do about them? if anything? Is he an indiscreet talker? Does he have high moral standards? Does he want to join the Craft because he knows some Masons including, perhaps male relatives? Why does he want to join? Is there any reason why he should become a Mason? Can he do anything for Masonry and is he likely to benefit from it? Is there any reason why he should not be made a Mason? Does he, perhaps, see

joining a lodge simply as something he must do before he can do something else that he wants to do? There is only one way to find the answers to these and other questions and that is for the Mason to discuss them openly and frankly with the prospective petitioner, whether he be relative, friend, or acquaintance, and to be satisfied with the answers, before he agrees to be his sponsor.

Balloting on petitions presents a different situation. No Mason, particularly in a city Lodge, can know all those who submit petitions. When the ballot is called, therefore, the members must rely on the judgment of the sponsors and the investigating committee. That brings us back to the two imperatives to the avoidance of errors; first, the duty of the sponsor to exercise his right with care for the well being of the lodge in particular and the Craft in general, and second, the absolute necessity for the committee to do its work carefully and thoroughly.

Where the right to sponsor and the right to ballot are concerned the Mason must always try to be completely objective and to base his decisions on the well being of Masonry.

Any Mason has the right to hold any office to which he may be elected or appointed, in accordance with the Bylaws of his Lodge and the Constitution of the Grand Lodge. It should not be necessary to remind Masons that acceptance of any office involves the acceptance of expanded responsibilities. No Mason has any right to accept an office and occupy it at his own convenience or pleasure. It is the duty of every officer to support his fellow officers, and especially the Master, in the work of the lodge and apply himself assiduously to the duties that are especially his. Appointment or election to any office is the gift of an opportunity to SERVE the lodge and the Craft. It is the duty of every officer to try to achieve perfection in his work. It is an unattainable objective, but the brother who sets easy targets will achieve nothing to the credit of Masonry, his Lodge, or himself.

All Masons have the right to redress of Masonic error. Any brother who feels that he has become the victim of such error can appeal to Grand Lodge. It is his responsibility, however, to appear when summoned, to state his case truthfully and dispassionately, and to accept the decision of Grand Lodge with equanimity.

Masons have other rights, but there is no need to examine all of them. The essential commensal relationship between responsibilities and rights is clear. It might be well now, however, to examine two or three examples of certain assumed rights, simply because it needs to be understood that they are not rights.

No Mason has conferred on him the right, by virtue of his having been made a Mason, to join any concordant body. The Craft does not and cannot confer any such right on anyone, and to suggest that it does or can would be an intrusion into the affairs of the concordant bodies. They alone decide who shall be permitted to join their ranks. We object to any encroachment on our authority, and we must not be guilty of encroachment on that of other sodalities.

Membership in the craft should never be conceived to carry any claim to preferment in business or under the law. No Mason is required to do business with another, no Mason has the right to assume or expect that the custom of other Masons will fall to him

Every Mason is expected to respect and obey the law, and should look for nothing more than fair treatment equal, but only equal, to that accorded all citizens.

No Mason has the right to engage in Masonic communication with a brother or a lodge in another jurisdiction without the knowledge and consent of both Grand Masters. Indeed, such communication is specifically forbidden in this and most other jurisdictions. There is a good reason for this prohibition. Grand Masters are not just Grand Masters of Grand Lodges, although they are often thought of in that way. They are Grand Masters of Masons. The Grand Master governs every Mason in his jurisdiction, including those in good standing but not affiliated with any of HIS lodges. It is his duty and his right to know what correspondence is going on between any of his Masons and Masons in another jurisdiction. Masonic law is not exactly the same in all jurisdictions, nor, for that matter, is usage and custom. That is one reason why Grand Masters must know of such correspondence and what purpose it is intended to serve. Further, Masonic courtesy demands that any brother wanting to correspond with a mason or a Lodge in another jurisdiction seek the consent of his own Grand Master and, through normal channels, the consent of the Grand Master of the other Jurisdiction.

I have said very little about the privileges we all enjoy simply because that subject is too extensive to add to a long commentary on rights and responsibilities. Brethren, I have not exhausted my subject, but I have said enough to make my point, which is that there is no free lunch in Masonry. There is no right that is free of duty. I know that for me to speak to you, the delegates to the Banff Conference and its guests, about the duties and responsibilities of Masons is a clear case of carrying coals to Newcastle. I have told you only what you already know, and you are entitled to wonder why I have done so. My answer is simply this; there has been far too much concern among Masons in recent years with rights and privileges, honors and rewards, jewels and decorations, with image making, with surreptitious recruiting and other questionable ideas, and far too little concern with the idea of service to our brethren, and the daily application of the great moral and ethical philosophies of the craft. It is the great responsibility and privilege of Grand Masters and their officers to lead the craft along the paths of Masonry, to correct Masonic error and commend success, and to diffuse light and instruction to their brethren. That is also the duty of the officers of a lodge. It is the leadership of Masonry, at the lodge and Grand Lodge levels alike, that must arouse in Masons a full awareness of the right gifts Masonry has for them, and the responsibilities they must meet if they are to deserve those gifts. The task is yours brethren, and nothing you can do for Masonry is more important than the dissemination of the message that DUTY MUST BE SERVED IF RIGHTS ARE TO BE PRESERVED. I have said that we must pursue perfection but I do not suffer the delusion that we can achieve it. Perfection is beyond the grasp of we mortals. Even so, we can gain much and lose nothing by reaching out for it and striving toward it. Our efforts will be most effective if we exercise our rights with restraint, and embrace our duties with enthusiasm and determination, never forgetting that our great aim is to secure the power and reputation of our Ancient and honorable Craft