

VICTORIA LODGE OF EDUCATION AND RESEARCH  
650 Fisgard Street, Victoria, B.C. V8W 1R6  
1989 - 6

#### **AFTER THE THIRD DEGREE**

by

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When your Junior Warden invited me to address this highly respected Lodge of Education and Research, I felt very honoured, but also I felt a concern that this topic might be somewhat controversial. However, after some thought, it occurred to me that all of you have ventured opinions pro and con on many subjects so all I have to do is present the facts and opinions and make the presentation interesting and informative. This topic originates as part of the duties of a District Deputy Grand Master. These

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duties as laid down in the Book of Constitutions, Section 74a read - "To exercise a general supervision of the Craft in his District, in Section 74b "To visit all the Constituent Lodges in his District and to see that such Lodges are working properly". It is my contention that these duties also cover concern for the welfare and well being of these Lodges. Your kind invitation offers a splendid opportunity to provoke your interest, and focus your attention on a problem, while at the same time present to you totally opposite opinions and points of view about the problem as the acts unfold. My general concern, and I am certain that many of you share the concern is our declining membership of the Craft, but with the emphasis on identifying some of the causes that lead to needless suspensions and demits, that we might better be able to develop remedies and possibly even solutions. Hence the title of this paper, "After the Third Degree" or to paraphrase a popular song of the early 1960's "Where have all the Master Masons Gone"? The situation is not yet out of control but it is reaching frightening proportions.

The research of material for this paper covered in detail the minutes of Victoria Columbia Lodge from January 1968 to January 1989, a period of 21 consecutive years, as well as the reports of the Secretary to the Lodge at the Annual Meetings for the same period. These statistics are factual. The Grand Secretary's report to Grand Lodge for the year 1988. The additional information is taken from my own observations and material offered by other Lodges. These statistics reveal that in the 21 year period referred to earlier there were 104 candidates raised and 85 brethren affiliated. The loss by deaths were 245, by demits 62 and by suspensions 41. The net loss to the Lodge was 131 members. The statistics for the year 1988 contained in the Grand Secretary's report indicates 343 raised, 58 reinstated and 250 were affiliated. There were 435 demits, 259 suspensions and 564 deaths. The net loss of 610 members. The comments of the Grand Secretary in his report are well worth repeating and I quote? "You will note particularly the number of demits, suspensions and deaths. We are an aging Fraternity, many are in the sere and yellow leaf of old age. The numbers of demits and suspensions demands our immediate attention. We cannot long survive a net loss of 610 members. To reverse this trend will require everyone's commitment and dedication. Each one of us has a part to play, but all is not dark." There are three new Lodges being constituted, No.189 in the Queen Charlotte Islands, No.190 Light of the Rockies in Tumbler Ridge and Dormer Lodge U.D, in Surrey. There is also a new group getting started in Aldergrove. However, now that we have examined some of the disturbing facts, it is very important that we keep a positive attitude, and maintain our enthusiasm while we seek and develop solutions.

We have all experienced the joy and exhilaration of being raised to the sublime degree of a Master Mason. The quiet dignity of the degree, and ritual, the Charge and the Traditional History are truly inspiring. The many handshakes and words of congratulation are warm. The relief of being able to ease up on the memory work and study sessions. The feeling that you have earned Masonic rights and privileges makes you proud to be a Mason. May I ask you to let me take you back to that most important evening in your Life or certainly in your Masonic life? What were your thoughts after your Raising? Did you have any idea what to expect or what might be expected of you? Did anyone in the Lodge inform you? Are your sponsors supposed to take over at this point and guide your footsteps into the proper paths? It would appear to be a responsibility of sponsorship, but far too often does not take place. In my own case I actually met and was slightly acquainted with one of my sponsors. He appeared at my final examination, and I also met him a few months later at a Ladies' Night, but to the best of my knowledge he has not been in Lodge since. I did not find out about my other sponsor until I came across the entry in the Minute Book while I was researching material for this paper. He passed away several years ago.

As for me, I picked up my shiny new apron and drove to the Temple for my first Communication. The Tyler led me to the Porch Book and showed me the routine. I entered the Lodge Room and in fear that I might make some blunder, slipped into a seat. It turned out to be a pretty dull evening. Two or three Brothers shook my hand, one of the Officers asked me what Lodge I belonged to and if I was enjoying my visit, an understandable mistake as I did not have a name tag as yet. To say the least - I felt deflated. I noticed that nearly every communication the Junior Warden would announce that he was seeking volunteers for various duties and to leave your name with him. Certainly we have all passed through similar experiences in our first few months. The logical questions that would occur to any newly raised

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Master Mason would be what do I do now? How do I go about it? Well how does a new Master Mason get a basic Masonic education? How important is it? It must be realized that neither the Lodge or the Master can order a member to become educated. Indeed it is every member's responsibility to secure the knowledge as he wants or as no needs. The study of the meanings and teachings contained in our rituals are not for every Mason. For many of our very faithful and valuable members, the fellowship, is all that they desire and require. From the point of view of the Lodge Members, do we continue to take interest after a Mason is raised? Are we truly interested in his progress? Without much doubt many of the best informed Freemasons are Masonically speaking, self-educated, but surely someone helped them over the first hurdle and set their feet on the proper path. It has been said many times "Seek and ye shall find", but how do we inspire the new Master Mason to WANT to seek in the first place? Do we provide the opportunity and some guidance for him, and if we do, then should this guidance be more formalized for the benefit of all?

At this point I would like to dwell on the more controversial aspects of this discussion and present opinions gathered from several reliable sources. We acknowledge that there appear to be too many needless demits and suspensions, which loses beg the question - 'Why do members leave or become non-attendees?' The normal reasons are fairly straight forward such as moving to another locality, the rigors of old age and debilitating illness. For other cases, there are probably as many reasons as there are individuals. Several good attendees, good Masons for many years offered fundamentally the same reasons. They left the Craft because in their Lodges the people who ran things preached high principles, but did not practice them. Others claim because they were subjected to unduly prolonged and dreary business session. Still others complain we get

to the banquet table far too late. Several stated that at the refreshment table we are not providing genuine good fellowship but rather stuffy and stilted speeches. Many tell me that we do not have enough special events that our wives can enjoy with us. No doubt you can add to the litany of our omissions.

Finally, we are compelled to listen to dissenting opinions expressed many times over the years by members who are not as patient as some but have every right to be heard and certainly are vocal.

There are those who affirm that we need to concentrate on basics. We should stop worrying about those who do not attend, and start concerning ourselves about those who do. We spend far too much time devising programs to boost Lodge attendance and they rarely work because we are trying to get members into Lodge who should probably not have been made members in the first place.. They are not coming to Lodge because they do not want to come, and no program can be organized that is going to do anything to change this. Our membership should be restricted to those men who will participate. There is nothing wrong in finding out once a man has joined that he does not want to take part, but at least we should help him find this out. We are not being honest with him, or with ourselves if we continue taking his money for dues payments for something that is of no interest to him. Once we have cleaned house, those who remain can spend more time on study, and get back to treating Freemasonry the way it should be treated. Maybe these men will be more careful in investigating new applicants so that only those who will become active members, will be given membership..

We hear opinions from all sides. I would like to challenge this Lodge of Education and Research

to research this problem and right early and offer workable solutions. Who knows you could be a great force in planning the progress of the Craft in the foreseeable future. I would like to offer a dissertation taken from a bulletin printed more than fifteen years ago. I truly believe it would be of great value to a new Master Mason in aiding his search for light. It goes like this and I quote -"To sum up Free masonry is a way of life", and to inculcate this has been the main purpose of your progress through the three degrees. If you and I are better for our association with the Craft, then the ceremonies through which we have passed will not have been conducted in vain. If, through these rituals, we have been inspired to renew our dedication to the lofty ideas represented by the order and to practice both in private and in public life, the duties we

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have been taught in Freemasonry, then the high purpose of the Institution will have been fulfilled, and as a result the World will to that extent have become a better habitation for mankind. To achieve this is the fundamental aim of Freemasonry.

It is hoped that your recent experiences have helped to kindle within you a curiosity concerning the Craft, together with a determination to discover more about it, its History, its Meaning and it's purpose, so that eventually you may become known and accepted, not only as a Master Mason, but as a Master among Masons. The Worshipful Master, Officers and members of your Lodge bid you welcome to full status in the Fraternity. May you find in it that which you came to seek and may the genuine tenets of the Craft ever prove to be a source of refreshment and inspiration to you.

#### SUMMARY

Chartered Lodges	174	
Lodges Under dispensation	1	(1988)
	1	(May 1989)

Initiated	433	
Passed.	393	
Raised.	343	
Restore or reinstated	58	
Affiliated	250	
Demitted.		435
Suspended	259	
Died	564	
Expelled	3	
Rejected..	18	
Entered Apprentices	207	
Fellow Craft	139	
Master Masons	12,845	
Net Loss	610	

You will note particularly the number of suspensions, demits and deaths. We are an aging fraternity, many are in the sere and yellow leaf of old age, and about death we can do nothing. But the number of demits and suspensions demand immediate attention. We cannot long survive an annual net loss of 610. To reverse this trend will require everyone's commitment and dedication. Everyone has a part to play. Even you. As a celebrated Mason once said, "The buck stops here".

Vancouver Lodges in particular are suffering from declining membership, declining attendance and lack of candidates. The cost of housing is driving more and more young families to the near and distant suburbs but no lodge has shown an inclination to move its charter outside the city limits. Two lodges have decided to amalgamate. The union of Cascade Lodge #12 and Western Gate Lodge #48 will become effective in December.

Many Lodges have been late in filing Annual Returns which are due by the 1st of March in each year. Two Lodges are still delinquent. Many are carrying far too great a burden of unpaid dues.

But all is not dark. Queen Charlotte Islands Lodge No. 189 was constituted on September 24, 1988. Light of the Rockies U.D. at Tumbler Ridge has applied for its charter and all reports being favourable, its application should be granted. Dormer Lodge U.D. which meets in Surrey, was constituted on May 12, 1989. A group of concerned Masons has formed the Dogwood Square and Compasses Club with a view to seeking the institution of a lodge in Aldergrove.

During the past year bursaries, in the amount of \$31,642 were granted. The Board of Benevolence disbursed \$78,205.

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