

VICTORIA LODGE OF EDUCATION AND RESEARCH  
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### **DO WE NEED EDUCATION**

by

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The title is not a question but a statement of fact.

When we first became Masons we find that we must learn the answers to certain questions. So we do. Just why we have to learn the answers is seldom explained at that period. Nor do many ever ask why they are required to do so. Sometimes the ones that ask do not know, even though they are teaching those catechisms. All that can be given for an answer is that 'everyone has to do it'. It appears to be a part of the process of becoming a Mason -- so let's do it and be done with it.

Finally the job is done, the congratulations and handshakes over. He, the candidate, is now a Master Mason ready to 'travel to foreign countries, work and receive a Master's pay' Sounds good, doesn't it?

But what on earth does it all mean? Our new made 'Master' rises next morning, goes off to his usual job and does the same things in the same way as he did the day before. So far as the world about him is concerned, nothing has happened, nothing has changed. So what does all that stuff he spent so much time and effort on amount to?

After a few days pass the novelty has worn off, the strain of memorizing the catechisms is gone and he begins to take his new status as a matter of course.

Well -- why not? He goes to his new Lodge now as a regular member. He listens and bits and pieces come to mind, some as he heard them during the degrees and others were in those lectures he memorized, only just where those words fitted has already begun to slip from his memory.

What difference does it make anyway? Since he was raised no one has asked him any of those questions, so why bother about them. Now our new brother is well on his way to becoming a really full fledged Master Mason, 1987 model. All that remains now is to forget to attend Lodge and to hold off paying his dues, until he is warned that he is about to be suspended. Now he is just like so many of our membership today.

What is wrong with him, anyway? We didn't promise him instant success in business or public acclaim. Nobody told him that the world would roll over and play dead when he snapped his fingers. No fancy promises, so instant anything. In fact, when he passed through the doors of the Lodge, even for the first time, HE was the one who made promises! And each time he took an obligation he made still more promises.

Suppose, since he doesn't come to us, we go to him and find out something about his feelings. There is plenty to be learned because HE is manifesting his dissatisfaction, displeasure, disillusionment or

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other feelings in this one practically universal way-- that of not appearing at Lodge Meetings!

Some, of course, have good reasons. The nature and demands of their occupations make attendance impossible. Others will make excuses, but we do not want excuses! We want reasons and many will offer excuses, to cover up the real reasons which they do not wish to disclose, for fear of embarrassment. Some will come right out and lay it on the line and most of the answers will be the same, "What has Freemasonry done to let me know what it is all about?"

And --- what have we done? We spend less than three hours in conferring all three Degrees; We oblige them to put a lot of time into memorizing their lectures, mostly with instructors who go to great pains to see that their recital is letter perfect, but almost always with no explanation given as to their meaning. In fact, many Lodges assign their junior officers to that duty, since they are generally new members themselves, with the recollection of those lectures still fairly fresh in their minds. Unfortunately, they know no more about Freemasonry than their pupils. Still the Masters apparently believe, that by some sort of osmosis these officers will acquire a greater knowledge of the intricacies of the Craft by the monotonous repetition of the catechetical interrogations.

Now that we have followed the new Brother through his degrees and instruction, let us see what his lodge has in store for him.

Now is the time when he thinks he will really learn something. Does he get it? Wait and see. It being the month after he was raised, a First Degree is scheduled. He watches with interest because he now can see what he could not before. But it is still much the same as he remembered it. The next thing he knows, Lodge is closing. He has his share of the refreshments, a bit of chit chat, he asks someone why a certain thing was said or done. He gets some sort of vague answer, maybe two or three, all different and so he goes home. Next month, Second Degree. What is all that stuff about Columns, Architecture and all? He is not particularly interested in Doric, Ionic, and Corinthian. He gets bemused by Jephtha and his battles. He asks a question and is referred to the Grand Lodge Library. He consults the list of recommended books, orders one and when it arrives he reads it through. A fine book, well written, by a scholarly author who drew freely from the works of Roman, Greek and Hebrew writers, and rather than alter meanings by possibly faulty translations, quotes them in their original languages. Liberal quotations from contemporary French and German research records, also in the vernacular, all very helpful in clarifying certain murky statements.

Of course, anybody can read ancient Greek and Hebrew, it is mere child's play. The only trouble our friend has, is with the author's own English. He turns back to the title page in search of the publication date, to find that the book is nearly a century old! Written in a time when the more syllables a word contained the better. However, in those days, the reader, in the privacy of his own library, could tip-toe over to his Webster's unabridged extract the definition of a word that the author had dredged up from the Lord knows where and would later use it himself to impress his auditors with his own erudition. I will readily grant that the author's use of English was exquisitely correct but a large part of his expressions have gone out of present day use.

Furthermore, much of what was then accepted as fact has since proven to be the assumptions of earlier writers, who have no solid basis in authenticated records, used their own imagination in an attempt to give Freemasonry an antiquity and a dignity for which it has no need.

Our inquiring brother, having wondered through a ponderous mass of

sesquipedalian verbiage and meaningless paragraphs printed in characters no more intelligible to him than Egyptian hieroglyphs, finally gave up and returned the book. Unfortunately, some of what he read stayed with him, leaving him with a mass of discredited information and an utter distaste for further investigation

He once more returns to the Lodge in the hope that closer attention will reveal something he has

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thus far missed. Month after month he goes listening to the ritual and learning nothing new. Finally, he does what so many other do. He just goes when the Master Mason Degree is to be worked. He, like his uncomprehending brothers, waits for that moment when the startled reaction of each candidate gives him a chance to laugh.

To laugh.' What a tragedy! To find amusement in the most solemn moment to be found in all the degrees Freemasonry has to offer. But--can we condemn him for it? Can we honestly criticize him when he has no comprehension of what was being portrayed? That the candidate, as he himself once did, represented the man who sacrificed his most precious possession rather than betray the trust bestowed on him?

Brethren, the man who laughed is not at fault. The real fault lies with those who know the lessons Freemasonry teaches. Those who know and remain silent! In the Fellowcraft Degree stress is placed on two lessons, Charity and Education. The true meaning of Charity is Love! It has nothing to do with dropping a dime in a blind man's cup. It more properly denotes the sharing of what we have in abundance, with those in want by supplying their needs, out of the fullness of our love for them. One of those things to be shared is Education. Education has a truly miraculous nature, one which material objects cannot possess. That miracle lies in the fact that we can give away all the knowledge we have to others and in the end have all we gave and often more. Education in Masonry is what thousands of our Brethren need. There are all too many in this world who wear with pride the insignia of our Craft and yet do not dare visit another Lodge because they could not qualify themselves for admission. This situation is intolerable, disgraceful. Freemasonry does not demand that all members be highly educated. A multifaceted organization, it is capable of serving the needs of men in every walk of life. In its origins, it was composed of largely illiterate men, education being reserved for the few in high places. Yet out of such as these came what eventually developed into our present institution

Our present weakness lies in too great a reliance on the instruction given during the working of the degrees, of which few men gain even the slightest amount. What we need will not be obtained overnight. First of all, an adequate system of instruction must be planned and this will not be easy. A course in the history of Masonry, starting with the first authentic records and a careful screening out of the many fables and falsities which have persisted for so many years, would be necessary. An account of the persons known to have made actual and valuable contributions to the development of the Craft, before and during the transitional period in which the Lodges abandoned the original form of a primitive trade union composed wholly of men employed in the various branches of the stone-worker's craft until it eventually became the purely speculative organization in which the stone-mason played no more important part than did a scientist or a shoemaker.

Sufficient records exist to show how these changes occurred and to tell of the men whose influence molded the Lodges into a semblance of their ultimate form. Then would come the names of the most outstanding persons whose vision perceived

the direction these independent transitional bodies must take to weld them into a society with a centralized governing authority with a uniform code of laws regulating procedures and behavior of Lodges and individual members.

The emergence of ritualistic teaching, the resultant tri-gradal system of advancement of the neophytes is a subject which would be difficult for many men to become interested in unless the symbolisms and philosophies were presented in a simple easily assimilated form in which the student who enjoyed these topics would be stimulated to proceed further on his own and yet leave the less ardent one with a good working knowledge.

Masonic Law, its differences from Civil Law and the causes of the differences; how the system of Masonic jurisprudence came into being, although closely related to Grand Lodge History, is a division which requires special attention as it affects in some way the conduct of every Mason.

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The foregoing paragraphs by no means sum up the entire story of our fascinating association. The task of concentrating the contents of each, rendering them palatable to the average man and making them so stimulating to his mind as to make a course worthwhile would, of itself, require a talented group to assemble and at its completion would be but the beginning. A team of dedicated brethren would have to learn all these things and be prepared to present them interestingly ready to answer correctly any questions that may be put to them. Places in which to hold these courses would be necessarily of great importance as the instructors would have to cover the entire jurisdiction.

The task of publicizing the plan would be monumental. To overcome the indifference of men who have become settled into their comfortable little ruts where they can go along in utter comfort, content with the feeling that for so long their ways of practicing Masonry has served them well, they would resist with vigor, any attempt to change them would require a persuasion akin to blasting powder. Certainly the process would be painfully slow.

For too many years Masons have laid aside the emblems of Craft Masonry in favor of those of the so-called "higher degrees". What I have to say here is not intended as a criticism of those bodies. They do play important roles in bringing Masonry before the eyes of the world. By their peculiar relation to the Symbolic Lodges, they are enabled to do many things that could not otherwise be possible. Their humanitarian activities do nothing but enhance all Masonry in the regard and respect of a world that knows nothing at all of Freemasonry, other than that it is a 'secret' society. With all the Hospitals, the funds for the treatment of many diseases, the assurance that these services are open to children of all races, colours and creeds and without cost to their parents is undeniable even by Masonry's severest critics. But, to the average member of the Craft, the gain is something else. The lessons taught in all their degrees and orders have already been presented in some parts of the first three degrees, but to the uninstructed or poorly taught Masons, they are unperceived and when those same lessons are presented in the collateral degree they still fail to make a lasting impression. To the man who understands the lessons of his first three degrees, the later presentation of them, in a different guise perhaps, proves to be a pleasant and enlightening experience. Simply put, all these higher degrees are variations on the themes which were first played out in the Lodges as the original composers wrote them. But how is the average Mason to discover these facts without being told? That question brings us right back to the beginning of this discussion. Are we to go over same ground again? Yet again? Or should we stop talking and DO something about it?

Anyone can tell that a project of this size will cost a lot-- in money, planning and action. It will take many men, dedicated to the purpose and willing to put all their available time into it. It will not be like the rod of Aaron, that is said to have budded, blossomed and brought forth fruit in a day. More it will resemble the effort of a small harbour tug butting her nose against the side of a vessel many times her size. For a time it seemingly has no effect, but, relentlessly driving, confident that it can be done, the huge mass begins to turn, slowly accelerating until the great ship is headed for the open sea and a new destination.

There is much in this simile which compares with the situation of Freemasonry today. Like the ship, Masonry has tremendous power within itself. Tremendous inertia! Newton defined the two opposite attributes of inertia; of a body at rest to remain at rest; and of a body in action to remain in motion. In either state, the greater the mass the greater the resistance to change. But as the persistent effort of the tug-boat finally imparts its motion to the ship, so can the persistence of a comparatively few earnest men Overcome the resistance of complacent Masons to efforts to shake them out of their suspended animation; to make them realize that there is far, far more to being a Mason than wearing a lapel button and having a paid up dues card in their wallet.

We need so that are lacking, beyond the need for education. In British Columbia, what are our brethren in the eastern part of the province doing? What is going on in the Lodges in Revelstoke, Prince George, Stewart or even those of our own District? We have no easy way of knowing. There are

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Jurisdictions in our country where monthly papers of one sort or another are published, giving to all the news of what is being done in Lodges or in Districts, tying all the Masonic bodies into one large family where the prosperity of one is the happiness of all.

What are we Masons doing in this same time? Such few as get out to Lodge at all gather there quietly, almost furtively. We meet behind closed doors, go through all the necessary motions and go home. Who besides our selves even knew we held a meeting? Or even cared? We never advertise our activities, do we? Are we ashamed to let the world know that we exist? Why do we not let the world know about us? We have nothing to hide.

Oh! Here it is again! You do not know what to say? You do not know what is to be kept secret and what is not? A properly informed Mason could keep a group of non-Masons interested by the hour, telling them about Masonry, and never give away one little secret. So why be so cautious, so mysterious? Well, here once more appears the need of education. When we know what to avoid and know something of the aims and purposes of Freemasonry we can pull the Craft out of the shadows and into the light where it can be seen in all its beauty.

No matter how we twist and turn we come face to face with the fact that we need an education; an education in Masonry. Not just to be able to mouth the lines of ritual work, that can be done--- and often is--- by anyone and without comprehension.

Maybe it was easier, two centuries and more ago, when men grew in Masonic knowledge as Masonry itself grew. But even now with all the growing done, we can do it without strain. Since none of us can claim to know all there is to know on the subject, a frank admission "I do not know," backed up by convincing proof that other questions can and will be answered correctly, can do no harm and may even help convince a possible member that there is a place for him in

the ranks of Freemasonry.

(Speaker's note: This lecture was taken from a book published in 1983, in Bremen, Maine, U.S.A, Written by Worshipful Brother Louis Cameron King, entitled - "CLAP AND CHEER" I have modified it slightly to suit Our own particular Jurisdiction. Rt. Worshipful Brother W. Earle Taylor, Britannia Lodge No. 73.) B.C.R.)  
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