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A VISIT ABROAD - MAURITIUS

The object of this paper is intended to cover a visit to Mauritius last year when I attended four meetings in two Masonic Lodges in the Island and obtained a copy of a report dealing with the History of Freemasonry on the island for over 200 years which I feel sure will be of interest to you.

The lodges visited were Lodge of Friendship 1690 E. C and Lodge of Friendship No. 439. S.C. To appreciate this more it has reference to travels masonically in Australia, Canada and other parts of the world.

Mauritius is a small island just over 700 square miles surrounded by coral reefs in the Indian Ocean about 1240 miles from Durban in S. Africa and 1120 miles from Hong Kong with a population of 800,000 of great diversity with 5 Communal divisions. Of these the Hindu have 52%, Muslim 17%, Creole 28%, Chinese 3%. The minority white group is included in the Creole Count.

You will see therefore that members of Lodges are drawn from a wide circle of races and beliefs. The E.C. members are mainly white and S.C. mixed colour. There is very friendly reciprocity between the two lodges which you will note when I read to you later some of the History of Freemasonry in Mauritius with special reference to lodge of Friendship No. 439, S.C. and which was given at the Harmony following Installation Ceremony on St. Andrews Night 1960, and covers some 200 years.

Let me give you a little of the history of the island which became independent in 1968 after being a member of the Commonwealth since 1810 when it was taken from the French by the British.

The island had been claimed by the French in 1722 and handed to the French crown in 1767 and was known as the L'île de France and was a place of call for ships of the French East India Co.

Prior to then, the Dutch East India Co. had established a minor base at Grand Port in 1638.

Sugar Cane was introduced from Batavia and valuable local ebony was exported to Amsterdam markets but the settlers left the island in 1710 due to labour troubles, insufficient food, cyclones, rats and insects pests.

For the next decade the island was the haunt of pirates who had swarmed into the Indian Ocean on the heels of the merchant fleets and operated from a base in Madagascar.

The belief still exists today that treasure lies buried around the shores of Mauritius.

Mauritius is an island of Volcanic origin in the S.W. Indian Ocean about 500 miles off the east coast of Madagascar, just within the Tropic of Capricorn.

The terrain of the island reminded me of the Hawaii islands with its saw tooth mountains and various crops like sugar cane. I understand that the beautiful fauns and flora are not necessarily identical. It was the home of the now extinct Dodo bird and of the Talipot tree which blooms once every 100 years, the blooms lasting 6 months and of the Cycas tree like a Palm tree which has been proved to be 350 million years old. There are two layers of lava which are penetrated for the soil. You can see heaps of volcanic stones and rock in the fields, some of geometrical formation and long lines of rock with the sugar cane growing in between.

The island is overpopulated with a large problem of unemployed.

Of the wild animals there is the deer, monkey, mongoose and the hare. There are only about 9 species of bird life left, mostly terns, ducks and pigeons.

It was also the landing place on the East coast of the lifeboat from the Trevissa after its epic drift across the Indian Ocean. There is a Cheshire home in the Tamarin area which was of some surprise.

I did not hear much of the depredation of the coral reefs by the Crown of Thorns starfish which is causing havoc in the Gt. Barrier reef off Australia, perhaps the Trumpet shell fish is doing its work to combat this.

The great joy and satisfaction of my Masonic life - it is 43 years since I was initiated, was to visit the two lodges in Mauritius.

In meandering across the world I found that I had lived in the spirit of the prolific writings of Rudyard Kipling, who as a Bro. Mason had portrayed such a visit in his book of the Seven Seas and in particular his Ballad of the Mother Lodge.

I must tell you that the kindly fraternal welcome and hospitality I received was something I will never forget, to sit in Lodge with my brethren, black, yellow and brown - there was only one other white brother present at my first visit and see the initiation ceremony of two coloured candidates with its beauty, sincerity and solemn ritual was truly a masonic treat, it will live in my memory.

They did not know of the Initiates song or the chain, they were most grateful for the explanation of the chain which I gave them together with the W.M.'s song.

The Chaplain and I.G. were Anglican Priests, I was invited to the Dedication of the Memorial Hall at St. Paul's Church Vacoas; by the Lord Bishop of Mauritius. A few days later I listened to My Lord Bishop of Mauritius playing Nellie Dean on the organ at the E.C lodge meeting. An organist of many parts.

The E.C. Lodge of Friendship is directly connected with G.L. of which I believe there are about 15 lodges as such. They do not receive P.G.L. honours as we know it but Overseas Grand Rank or O.G.R.

Incidentally our Provincial rank is not fully understood in some countries as the States in Australia and Canada have their own constitutions, the brethren go directly to Grand rank. I have sometimes been addressed as the P.W. V.W. & M.W. and distinguished brother from Overseas!

I was most impressed with the spirit of friendship I experienced inside and outside Freemasonry in Mauritius and concluded that this was due to the tenets of our ritual in endeavouring to unite in the grand design of communicating happiness to each other in our brotherhood. I found this among the rich and the poor.

The brethren were of many varying faiths in this lodge about 50% of the members were of the R.C. faith. They were bilingual in English and French language, had many candidates, at two special or emergency meetings they had two candidates at one - a Chinese and a French Mauritian and at the other an Indian and a Malayan.

Chatting with the D.C. he mentioned the reasons why some Constitutions are not recognised by U.G.L. as they had changed the first article in its constitution from "Belief in the Supreme Being" to "Absolute Liberty of Conscience" which could include Atheists and others, though this did not necessarily mean that members did not acknowledge the existence of a Supreme Being. This applied to the Grand Orient de France in 1869.

I mention this brethren to emphasise the importance of recognition by U.G.L. of lodge visiting a road to other constitutions with reference to the three great though emblematical lights in Freemasonry - the volume of the S. L. and the S. & C's.

I would like to say a word or two regarding the origin of lodges abroad. These can be traced to travelling or movable Warrants usually issued to Military Units to enable their lodges to operate whilst travelling from place to place with the regiments to which they were attached.

Military Lodges were established in the army at an early date. The earliest warrant creating a travelling or movable lodge was issued in 1732 by the Grand Lodge of Ireland, to the then First Foot now the Royal Scots Regiment.

In 1743 the Grand Lodge of Scotland established a Military Lodge in the 55th Foot and the last English Military Lodge formed was in 1750 and attached to the 31st Foot.

In England Military Lodges were regulated by special provisions of the Grand Lodge Constitution which permitted them to work according to the purpose for which such a warrant was issued, and no new lodges could be formed in a regiment without the permission of the C.O.

Should the Military body holding the warrant for such a lodge disband or be reduced in number, the warrant had to be returned or exchanged for a warrant for a civil lodge.

Military Lodges could not make Freemason's of any civilian nor any serviceman below the rank of Corporal, except as serving brothers or by dispensation and were forbidden to interfere with the Masonic tradition of the country wherever they may be.

We find Military Lodges operated in Europe, one such lodge operated at Berlin as far back as 1775 under the name of The Blazing Star, one notable member being Wadzeck the Masonic writer who was the Orator of the Lodge.

Travelling warrants were usually issued to an officer attached to the army also there was a small amount of Furniture, Jewels and Ornaments which were carried in a locker to be used when required.

Calls Masonic Encyclopedia informs us that travelling warrants were issued by the following countries, Germany 1739, Holland 1749, France 1756, Sweden 1761 or earlier, Russia 1761, Belgium 1832. Military Lodges were at their peak in the later part of the 18th Century and from then on the number declined.

There were also Sea or Naval Lodges, of these little can be said as only three examples of these are known and all warrants were issued by the Modern Grand Lodge of England.

One of these warrants was held by Thos. Dunkerley in 1760 aboard the British naval vessel Vanguard, the following year one was issued to the Prince and also one for the Caribaux. It is said that in 1878 Dunkerley as master revived the Vanguard Lodge which appears on the register of the Grand Lodge of London, as London Lodge number 108.

Through the aid of these warrants we find Freemasonry got its start in India.

In the year 1813 the 46th Regiment Light Infantry had a travelling warrant which was attached to the Lodge of Social & Military Virtues No. 227. I.C. and met regularly at Port Jackson. They no doubt conducted the first Masonic Ceremony in Australia. The 46th Regiment was succeeded by the 48th which also had a warrant attached to No. 218. I.C.

Records show this Lodge initiated a large number of members who petitioned for a charter and were granted a warrant, the name being Australia's Social Mother No. 260 I.C. now No. 1 on the register of New South Wales.

Through the aid of travelling warrants we thus find Freemasonry founded in Australia, in India in 1760 in Canada 1749. When it was found that the G.L. of India Ritual and Installation Ceremony, a copy of which had been received by the Grand Sec. of Manitoba in Winnipeg, Canada, bears any resemblances to Canadian work as it is based largely on Emulation as is the work in this the James Watt Lodge. I was privileged to meet the P. Grand Master and P. Grand Sec. when in Winnipeg.

Of interest is the following taken from the special notes preceding the ritual of the G.L. of India which emphasises the universality of our order.

"Lodges shall arrange to keep all the five V's of S.L. namely the Bible, Gits, Koran, Granth and Zend Avesta on the altar - not on the Pedestal of the W.M. It is important that each V.S.L. should be placed separately and they should not be piled up one upon the other. The S & Cs. will ordinarily be placed on that book to which the W.M. gives his allegiance except on Installation nights when they will be placed on that Book on which the M.E. will take his Ob. The candidate for initiation passing and raising will take their Ob. on the book of their faith".

In Indian Lodges the Altar is placed immediately in front of the W.Ms. pedestal.

Here is again demonstrated the power of Freemasonry to "Unite with the virtuous of every persuasion in the firm and pleasing bonds of fraternal love".

The above is an extract from Masonry in Manitoba published by G.L. Vol. 23. Nov. 1967 No. 8 and in the previous No. 7 issue an article called "Widening our Co-operation" refers to a recommendation of the Board of General Purposes being adopted as follows:-

"That Freemasonry may work openly for the improvement of mankind in any area that will not raise controversy and that it supports co-operation between Freemasonry and Knights of Columbus and members of any other humanely motivated organisation carrying on such work".

I would mention that the G.Ms. of Manitoba are elected annually, the Lodges are scattered over a large area, in some the membership are great in number, well over the 300. The G.L. officers cover thousands of miles in flying to Installations for meetings. As in Australia where the nearest Lodge to Alice Springs is over 800 miles away, some Brethren travel over 1000 miles to attend meetings regularly.

In St. John's Lodge Winnipeg, 7 Brethren with over 50 years service received gold medals at one meeting with over 21 members in all over 50 years service. The Secretary of the Acadia Lodge No. 111 Winnipeg Bro. Dewar has over 55 years as Secretary and served 52 masters, only absent 5 times from Lodge on officers meetings due to sickness.

I will now read to you some notes on the History of Freemasonry in Mauritius with special reference to the Lodge of Friendship No. 439. S.C. which were read at the Harmony following Installation on St. Andrews Night 1960. They were given to me with the good wishes of the master and members of the Lodge by Bro. Tillay Appaveu at my request for Masonic information of interest to the members of my own Lodge. I have made one or two minor abbreviations which are of no importance from the original.

My thanks are due to Wor. Bro. V. Latimer O.G.R. Secretary Lodge of Friendship No. 1696 F.C. whose address was given me by U.G.L. and for his courtesy in introducing me to the Lodge of Friendship No. 439 S.C. the Secretary Bro. J.L. Davy P.M. the Master Bro. Phillippe Millate, the organist Bro. Freddy Yerriah and all the Brethren it was my privilege to meet.

On 18th December, 1778 Lieutenants de Vaisseau Perier de Salvart and Andre de la Serre and Surgeon-Major Lecoat, all three of the Marine Royale de France, duly delegated by the Grand Orient de France met some Freemasons who were already settled on this island and formally constituted the first regular Masonic Lodge of the then "Ile de France" under the distinctive name of "La Triple Esperance". On the 23rd December, 1778 met again in Port Louis and elected their first master.

On 25th December, the master and the office bearers were installed and thenceforth "La Triple Esperance" was to become the cradle of Freemasonry of this island.

In the following decade more than half a dozen were constituted - the "Lodge des 21" on 15th December, 1785 which later merged into Lodge "La Paix". The "Lodge des 15 Artistes" on 23rd December, 1786 and "La Sincere Amitie" on 7th November, 1787.

The latter was formed by French garrison officers, and on the departure of the regiment for Pondichery, the resident members of that lodge joined other Lodges existing here.

In various districts of the island, Lodges were set to work such as "L'Harmonie due Grand Port" in Grand Port "La Loge des Amis Cultivateurs" in Black River and in Moka.

On 7th September, 1790 Lodge "La Paix" was constituted. That Lodge is of Special interest as the first British Governor of the island Sir Robert Townsend Farquhar affiliated and of which he was the Senior Warden for sometime. All the Lodges of British Constitutions which were later set up in the island held their meetings in the Temple of "La Paix" and not at "La Triple Esperance" as is generally believed.

From the time of its introduction in the island and until the close of the last century Freemasonry was intimately connected with the major events of the islands national life, dance balls, prize distribution, lottery draws etc.

In 1810 through the fate of arms, the "Ile de France" was ceded to Britain and was renamed "Mauritius", after one Dutch who had named it after their ruler Prince Maurice of Nassau. With the establishment of British rule Freemasonry took a still more active part in the islands life to the extent of making public appearances.

The red letter day for Freemasonry in Mauritius, keeping in mind the islands Roman Catholic background and traditions was the 19th of August, 1813 when the foundation stone of the R.C. Cathedral Church of Port Louis was Masonically laid by Lord Moira, then Pro-Grand Master Mason of the G. of E. in England in the presence of Sir Robert T. Farquhar and of the Masonic Lodges operating in Mauritius. A large number of the islanders attended that official celebration and the ceremony was enhanced by the garrison troops and their band.

Quite a number of the public buildings of Port Louis had their foundation stones laid Masonically.

4th Dec.	1816	-	The New Quay
29th Sept.	1820	-	the "Salle des Spectacles"
8th Dec.	1834	-	the fortress known as "Citadelle" by his Excellency Sir William Nicolay
21st May,	1860	-	The Albion Dock

there were also many social events.

As we have seen the craft had so far patronised, one would say, our national life for such a small place as Mauritius, it may as well have influenced the course of our history.

In a book recently published, under the title "Islands in a forgotten sea" the author, T.V. Bulpin expressed surprise generally felt at the very lenient way in which the inhabitants of Mauritius were dealt with by the British Government after the Capitulation, although it is an undenied fact that, under French rule, this island had been a scourge to British trade and navigation in the Indian Ocean.

Sir Robert Farquhar in the words of the writer "left for England in 1818 on sick leave and also to answer certain charges brought against him among which that he had betrayed the interests of his government in order to gain popularity among the islanders". It appears that none of the charges were retained against Sir Robert who returned to the island and resumed office as Governor until 1823. Sir Robert had assumed duty as Governor of the island immediately after the Capitulation in 1810 and no doubt, upon him rested the responsibility of advising his Government in their decision regarding the fate of the islanders.

He was affiliated to Lodge "La Paix" of which he was the S.J. It is highly probable that he had discussed the situation with his legal adviser the Procureur "Procureur Imperial" as the head of the Parquet was then called and who was none else than Jean Francois Pepin, Master of "La Triple Esperance".

If Sir Robert prevailed upon his Government to show magnanimity to the islanders, we may assume that Brotherly Love had prevailed, and that momentous decision, made under the auspices of Freemasonry had the effect in the following 150 years or so of turning a French island into one of the staunchest British possessions of our hemisphere.

We have so far been hearing about French F.M. as it was not until many years after the establishment of British rule that British Lodges came to this island. In 1848 the Military Lodge "St. George" came to Mauritius with its Regiment followed by the Lodge "Kings Own Fourth Regiment". Ten years later that Lodge constituted the first two permanent British Lodges. The British Lodge No. 736 E.C. in Nov. 1858 whose membership was mainly civilian and the Military Lodge No. 235 I.C. in Dec. 1858. On the departure of the regiments with their Lodges, the resident members formed No. 235 I.C. No. 736 E.C. in its turn helped to found the "Mauritius Lodge of Harmony" No. 841 E.C. on 18th Jan. 1861.

At that stage, either the brethren of the Cons. working here thought that S.C. should be called in so that the U.K. might be fully represented or it may be that the only Irish Lodge of Mauritius finding that the other Cons. had at least two daughter Lodges at work on the island decided in the old spirit of celtic brotherhood to have a Scottish Lodge by their side. However it may be a petition dated July 1864 was laid before the G.M.M. of Scotland praying for a Charter of Cons. for a Lodge named "Friendship" to work at Port Louis under the laws of .G.L. of Scotland.

You may be surprised to hear that the petition was recommended to the most favourable consideration of the G.M.M. by Lodge "La Paix" of Port Louis holding of the Grand Orient of France.

The Lodge of Friendship No. 439 S.C. was inaugurated on St. Andrews day in 1866. In 1877 the Mauritius Lodge of Harmony helped to constitute her sister the Lodge of Friendship No. 1696 E.C.

The various Lodges of the island although of different constitutions were in complete harmony with each other which was strikingly exemplified on the occasion of a funeral Lodge at "La Triple Esperance" on 17th March, 1863 in honour of the W.M. who had been M. 14 times.

The golden age of Freemasonry in Mauritius came to its close in the second half of the last century. The first blow came from the R.C. Bishop of Port Louis who in 1854 forbade all connections with Freemasonry to the R.Cs of his diocese.

The prohibition was tightened to the extent of refusal of church funeral service to members of the Craft who died without having severed their connections with the order. The result of the Bishop's interference was to estrange a large number of the members of the French Lodges as they were R.Cs. The very keen interest in Freemasonry hitherto shown by the intellectual classes of the island dropped to the level of indifference. To make things worse the Grand Orient de France in 1869 changed the first article of its Constitutions which had hitherto been "Belief in the Supreme Being" as the basis of French Freemasonry into "Absolute Liberty of Conscience". By removing one of the most sacred landmarks of the order from its constitutions the G.O. of France had placed itself beyond the pale of Ancient Freemasonry. The harmony that had so long existed between the Masonic Lodges of this island was broken.

Following the events which had certainly some bearing on its life and apparently also through lack of memberships Lodge Friendship No. 439 S.C. went dormant in 1896 until 1907 when it was resuscitated. The W.M. was re-installed and continued in office for six consecutive years.

During the second period of activity the Lodge has worked up an entirely Mauritian membership.

In 1930 the Lodge No. 439 went dormant for a second time and was resuscitated on 4th May, 1939. Its first regular meeting was held in 30th May, 1940 with an attendance of only eight members in temple of "Triple Esperance". A year later the Lodge moved into St. Mary's Hall graciously lent by Bro. The Rt. Rev. Lord Bishop of Mauritius, Dr. Hugh Otter-Barry.

After the second period of activity (1907-1930) only two masters were surviving in 1940 when the Lodge was re-opened.

In the death of Bro. Picot the W.M. the situation seemed hopeless. The Lodge had no P.M. to fill its chair or to install a new Master.

The only surviving Lodge of a Sister Constitution was the Lodge of Friendship E.C. No. 1696. During that critical period the I.P.M. of that Lodge Bro. F. Rountree happened to be in daily contact with Bro. P. Orioux of this Lodge and thus became acquainted with the situation of our Lodge.

In the old spirit of true fellowship that had prevailed among the Lodges of Mauritius, No. 1696 E.C. saw to the installation of the Master with the use of its Temple.

For that opportunity of setting the Lodge to work again under conditions more conducive to solemnity and more in accord with its past, we are indebted to the fine spirit of fellowship shown by the English P.Ms who had, unhesitatingly responded to our call for help although our two Lodges had lost sight of each other for nearly a quarter of a century.

With the installation of Br. Eugene d'Espagnac in Nov. 1948 as Master by a Board of Installed Masters of the E.C. our present period of activity opens.

That concludes the paper W.M. and brethren, I hope that my travels from West to East in search of further light will stimulate your interest to make a further advancement in Masonic knowledge.

In compiling this paper from the notes I had made abroad, I have been able to prepare others which cover the origin of Lodge visiting and meaning of words such as Cowan and Tyler which you may come to hear at some future date.

I would like to say that on my departure from Mauritius I was invited to put a note in an autograph book belonging to Bro. Appavou the ships Chandler of Port Louis, who had the most remarkable collection of autographs in all languages from all parts of the world.

In all sincerity my few words which you will appreciate were as follows:-

"Oh, Mauritius"

For me a double link in the chain of true Friendship.

J. E. Mason R.P.I.G.W.

J. E. MASON

February 1971

Former James Watt Lodge No 5546.

*For. Men. Bro. Grounsell.
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