

A TOAST TO AN INITIATE

Read on behalf of Bro. J.A.H. Reid.

BRETHREN: The R.W.M. has entrusted me with the pleasing duty of sponsoring the toast to our initiated Brother.

The fact can hardly lend itself to any contradiction "that wherever men congregate there is a natural tendency to intermix and establish an association of ideas". Without that association and interchange of views any organisation with which they are concerned must become sterile and develop a hopelessness of outlook which must inevitably lead to disruption and decay.

We feel that truth applies equally to Freemasonry. Masonry thrives because it is founded on a firm set of principles which afford an opportunity for a free play of emotion and mutual interest. It thrives also because its constitution allows for the introduction of new blood into its membership. Were it not for this infusion of new blood from time to time, the body politic of Freemasonry would become stale, the ideas and impressions of the older members of the Craft would become stultified and a period of rot would set in which might easily prejudice the whole future of the organisation.

In welcoming our new Brother into the Craft as the essential new blood in the present instance, we do so feeling assured that he will make an ardent contribution to the welfare of his Mother Lodge and to the principles of Freemasonry.

In proposing a toast of this character it is most essential that we should tell our initiate something of the nature of Freemasonry.

The ceremony through which you have passed is partly of a religious nature but it does not militate against your own particular faith or religion or that of any of us as it is in the nature of a beautiful universal unifying creed which we all instinctively share in common, the creed of the Fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man. That is because to any man who seeks and is willing to learn, Freemasonry is a philosophy of life. We do not fatuously claim that all Freemasons regard it in that profoundly exalted light and so profit by it spiritually. Unfortunately, some despite their long years of association with the Craft are somehow incapable of ever soaring up to its lofty ideal.

In the true spirit of Masonic charity and tolerance, we make no complaints, but we simply feel sorry that these brethren lacked the vision, the imagination and the impulse to glean the best that could be gathered out of the philosophy of Freemasonry. Most of these brethren are really good fellows and make splendid club mates but they just cannot realise that a Masonic Lodge is not a club, that Freemasonry demands of its adherents something different from club meeting, something infinitely more than that in order to fulfil the purposes of the simple, forceful and soul-stirring word "Brotherhood", soul-stirring and soul-thrilling when it is properly analysed and its implications sedulously put to practice in daily life. All the fine ritual you have heard has a symbolism which you will appreciate more and more as you advance in your knowledge of the Craft.

Your Masonic education has only just started. You have still a long road to travel and let me tell you that progress is not dependent solely on one's intelligence according to the directions of the brains but vitally so on the normal functioning and forceful urge of a clean, healthy, discerning, contemplative and responsive heart. In the pursuit of your Masonic study you would do well to bear in mind these words of John Ruskin "Let every dawn of morning be to you as the beginning of life and every setting sun as its close. Then let everyone of these short lives leave its sure record of some kindly thing done for others, some goodly strength or knowledge gained for yourself". So at the close of each daily life we should ask ourselves what has Masonry gained by our membership. We have been permitted to enjoy its privileges and drink at the fountain of knowledge it has provided us. What have we given in return? How many human hearts have been rendered happier through some good action performed by us in the spirit of masonry.

Bro. Reid has been a Freemason for 30 years and is looked upon today as an experienced Preceptor, yet he is a humble learner and you may be surprised to know that he learns a lot of useful things in daily life even from the very juniors who seek his instructions.

One of the valuable lessons we have learnt in Freemasonry is not to underrate the intelligence and usefulness of inferiors, in fact, not to look down on any man as an inferior through we may decently regard him as a subordinate or junior. In his inferiority he may possess some special knowledge, some technical skill, some noble trait, some praiseworthy characteristic which we do not possess and which in a sense makes him our superior and by the harmonious association or pooling or blending of our ideas we can all get richer with the wealth of wisdom, tact and what we may describe as neutralising solvent needed to serve humanity in the way Freemasonry expects us to do.

Another valuable lesson we have learnt is not to regard humility as an inferiority complex, as some do, but rather the other way about. Arrogance or snobbishness on the one hand and cringing servility on the other are however two distinct types of that complex. Arrogance seeks to cloak an inferiority complex with the flimsy raiment of an artificial superiority, while cringing servility is invariably insincere and to our mind constitutes a loathsome degradation of common human rights, worth and value, which are unquestionably the birthright of every man as a creature of the one infallible Creator.

Bro. Reid's sentiments generally coincide with those of Robert Burns, affectionately designated Scotland's immortal poet who incidentally was a Freemason, as expressed by him in the following lines :-

"A prince can make a belted knight,  
A marquis, duke and a' that,  
But an honest man's aboon his might,  
Gude faith he mauna for that.  
For a' that, and a' that,  
Their dignities and a' that,  
The pith of sense and pride of worth,  
Are higher rank than a' that".

Also consider these beautiful lines by Burns :-

"Then gently scan thy brother man,  
Still gentlier sister woman,  
Though they may gang a kenning wrang,  
To step aside is human,  
One thing must be forever dark,  
The reason why they do it,  
And just as lamely can ye mark,  
How far perhaps they rue it,  
Who made the heart, 'tis He alone  
Decidedly can try us;  
He knows each chord, its various tone,  
Each spring, its various bias.  
Then at the balance let's be mute,  
We can never adjust it;  
What's done we partly may compute,  
But know not what's resisted".

The most valuable lesson we have learnt however is to understand Freemasonry, to understand it differently from the superficial manner in which we understood it at the earlier stage of our Masonic life.

This understanding has come to Bro. Reid not merely by witnessing degree ceremonies but by associating in the Lodge with different types of people, by carrying out a sort of human analysis of human nature in an appropriate environment; by, to express it in Masonic phraseology, observing what is praiseworthy in some and imitating them, by attending in himself that in others may appear defective, by making a close study of interesting Masonic publications, by doggedly probing into the whys and wherefores of various points and facts set out in our ritual ceremonies and by applying deductions to common incidents in daily life. It is truly amazing after doing all that to discover the close affinity existing between Freemasonry and every incident in life.

So briefly Brother, Masonry is fundamentally a guide to morality, with symbols to light the pathway of our common life as men, as fellow workers in the vast Divine plan and as brothers. It is an earnest exponent of the Golden Rule which is the common heritage of every religion "Do unto others as you would they should do unto you". Brotherhood is what the word implies but it involves a sacred and intimate responsibility of me to you and you to me, a responsibility which we as Masons and men of honour are pledged to fulfil scrupulously and as Masons and men of honour we are also expected to refrain from taking advantage of exploiting and abusing. Brotherhood embraces toleration, equity, justice, benevolence, charity - in fact, all these virtues which men can display towards each other to make life a sweeter and nobler thing and the world a happier and easier one in which to sojourn peacefully and contentedly during our brief span of life.

BRETHREN. I now ask you to rise and drink to the health of our Initiated Brother wishing him all happiness and success in his Masonic life.