

AN ORATION

By Bro. Wm. R. H. Fowler

DELIVERED AT THE CONSECRATION OF THE BANDS

OF THE

LODGE OF ENDEAVOUR

KINGS HEATH

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It is no small privilege to be allowed to share in this ceremony of dedication, and the responsibility also is by no means negligible when one is expected, by virtue of office, to put forward for your consideration some thoughts which may prove to be useful, both as an inspiration and encouragement to the Lodge, as also of sufficient significance to be recalled to mind when, in subsequent meetings, you look at your banner.

In the first place may I suggest a few points in respect to banners in general and those in masonic use in particular, craving the indulgence of W. Bro. the Deputy Prov. G. Master and those Brethren who heard them recently on a similar occasion.

Banners, in various forms, have been in use from time immemorial. In the age of chivalry the right to carry a banner was bestowed on a knight for distinguished conduct in the field, when he was created a "knight-banneret". In battle his banner was the rallying point for his retainers and friends. The monarch's banner became the Royal Standard. In other avenues banners have served to proclaim the unity and ideals of religious bodies, guilds, unions and so on, as well as to disseminate ideas and advertise party shibboleths and slogans.

From this brief summary four points emerge which are worthy of consideration today.

In the first place you will notice that the banner has its greatest significance when it is borne about by those who possess it. It loses much of its meaning when it hangs on a wall or is put out of the way in a corner. May I be permitted to make some suggestions? The banner should always be carried immediately before or after the W.M. in all his processions. It should hang freely and conspicuously from its staff near to the Chair; and, one might venture to propose that a useful purpose would be served if the banner accompanied the W.M. from labour to refreshment.

Again, the banner is a rallying point signifying the presence of the Master, around whom all his brethren will gather in affection and loyalty, jealous for his honour (the honour of the Lodge) obedient to his command (the purpose and work of the Lodge).

Complacency is one of the most insidious enemies of Masonry, and never more so than at the present time, when the Craft is popular and prosperous, lodges are increasing rapidly in number and waiting lists of prospective initiates are long. I shall be referring to this point later.

The fourth point is that the banner should proclaim an ideal. Surely the device on that banner proclaims a motto splendid and inspiring - "Fellowship in Adventurous Service".

You have chosen a grand name for your Lodge. The word 'endeavour' means 'to try' - 'to attempt'.

It suggests, first of all, "vision". Vision which looks upward and finds an ideal - vision which looks out and around and perceives opportunities to be grasped, needs to be served, vistas of splendid adventure. Vision which turns inward and sees in the individual spirit some measure of the faith which dares, the courage which will venture and the hope which sustains.

Again, the word suggests 'purpose', the direction and concentration of effort with a definite end in view. So many men are the slaves of circumstance, accepting passively the buffetings of life, avoiding rather than grasping the nettle. The G.A. gave us life that we should use it and count even life itself a price to be paid in endeavour to achieve something worth while.

"Most men eddy about

Hither and thither, here and there,
Gather and squander, are raised aloft,
Are hurled in the dust, striving blindly,
Achieving nothing

"But there are some whom a thirst

Ardent, unquenchable fires;
Not with the world to go round
In a purposeless eddy of dust -
Effort unmeaning and vain".

(With apologies to the memory of Chas. Kingsley for errors of omission and commission).

Endeavour also includes the idea of 'possible failure'. Well, what of that? Remember Bruce's spider! There is no disgrace when honest attempt fails. Nothing of great and far-reaching moment has ever been achieved without the preliminary of failure and sometimes eventual success is denied. Yet he who aims at the moon shoots higher than he who aims at a tree.

The word further implies a 'spirit of adventure'. In the V.S.L. is a story of twelve men in a boat. They saw their Master approaching, apparently walking on the water. One of the number rose, stepped over the side and began to walk towards the advancing Figure. Soon, however, the magnitude of his essay overcame his faith and he was ignominiously rescued by the Master and assisted to safety. No doubt his fellows, rather snugly secure and comfortable, derided his self-confidence or condemned his impulsiveness; nevertheless, he had found and took back into the boat something peculiarly his own which they could not share.

That staunch little ship of 370 tons and 22 guns, setting out in 1769, on the voyage which culminated in the discovery of New Zealand and then Australia, epitomises all these thoughts. It bears men of vision on an adventure the end of which they cannot foresee; but they have faith and hope and courage, and their eyes are strained always beyond the horizon. They may fail; they must and will willingly suffer hardship and privation; they may die; but they are out to do:- "Endeavour".

How beautiful is the prayer that we may give and not count the cost, fight and not heed the wounds, strive and ask for no reward save that of knowing that we do the G.A.'s will.

What is the Masonic significance of all this?

Masonic respectability is a valuable attribute and the Lodge should make every effort to perform the necessary round of initiating, passing and raising with proper decorum and fidelity to the traditions of the Craft, to the due impression of the candidates. But if this represents the total of the Lodge activity, have you not a situation which corresponds to that of the twelve men in the boat? The Temple rises, stone upon stone, out of the