

PROVINCIAL GRAND CHAPTER 1986

Companions:

I would hope that by now you have all had time to recover from the surprise and sense of shock which recent attacks on freemasonry may have induced, particularly those from sources we have every right to feel should at least be sympathetic to our ideals. Many of those who have joined in them may have been well-meaning according to their lights; none have been misinformed and some, I fear, have been deliberately misleading, not always without ulterior motive. There has even at times been an air of gloating in some quarters where one might have expected understanding or at least compassion. For our part, we have tried to meet our detractors with reason and explanation and, may I say, with a charity they have not always extended to us; we can reasonably feel that we have answered their questions even if they have elected not to hear. Now it is time to take stock and look ahead.

I think that we at least have learnt something from all the fuss. We have been forced to look dispassionately at a part of our lives which has meant, and does mean much to each of us and, I believe, come to the conclusion that we have nothing of importance for which to reproach ourselves other than perhaps too great a tendency to be reticent about our membership of the Craft and about its aims and principles, -something which arises from our wish to enjoy the privacy normally extended to private clubs and gatherings. Perhaps our own reticence has indeed been one reason why some of our critics may have felt that we have something discreditable to hide.

In some matters such as the penalties and that of the second word in our own Order it may be expedient to take some action. But now I believe it is time for us to put these things behind us in order to think and plan constructively for the future, though remembering with gratitude the work done by our leaders who have laboured so hard on our behalf, and encouraging them to continue with their efforts. We can safely leave to them matters of high policy such as public relations and do our part by acting according to the tenets of our Craft. Nevertheless, while taking stock it will

be as well to think about basic principles and each of us should
make ^{quite} certain that he is quite clear in his own mind about what
those principles are, with particular reference in our case to
this Order.

On what basis then are we to build our future as a
fraternity? Surely on that which over so many years has brought
the message of brotherly love, relief and truth to us all. In
that respect nothing has changed, except perhaps that we have
rightly checked any tendency there may have been to blur the
boundaries between freemasonry and religion about which I spoke to
you at our Convocation last year.

We stand firm then, on our basic principles; never interfering
with a Brother's religious beliefs but refusing to admit to our
fraternity anyone who does not confess a belief in a Supreme
Being; requiring a high standard of morality from every Brother;
inculcating the virtues of compassion, benevolence and charity
towards not only our own members but all mankind; dropping the
veil of sympathy over the failings of a Brother and pouring the
healing balm of consolation into the bosom of the afflicted.

But for Companions of this Order there is more. We are

reminded every time we enter a Royal Arch Chapter of the framework in which the teachings of the Order are set, because there, in the centre of the Temple, stands the altar on which is the Ineffable Name of God which is the first word of a Royal Arch mason, placed on the emblem of eternity. Our detractors have pointed to the existence of an altar as evidence of the practice of a religion, once again misunderstanding us, either wilfully or through ignorance. It is of course no such thing, it is a reminder to each of us that a Royal Arch Companion views the lessons of the Craft in the light of eternity rather than of this worldly existence; that he is taught therefore to reverence his God and practise his religion. What name other than altar should we give to that which upholds the Ineffable Name, a Name which as you and our critics well know is derived from the Bible?

The very shape of the altar has this message for us. It represents a double cube of wrought stone, that is, a perfect ashlar; for it is not only a stone of which each side is a square that can be a perfect ashlar, the term applies to any stone which has been worked and smoothed ready for its place in the building.

We are all familiar with the words used in the Lectures and in the

Explanation of the First Tracing Board to describe it,--'a stone of a true die or square, fit only to be tried by the square and compasses'. So to the speculative mason the perfect ashlar represents, in the words of the ritual, 'a regular well-spent life in acts of piety and virtue', since the square represents morality while the compasses remind us of the justice of TGAOTU.

Only on such a stone, and on the emblem of eternity, can we presume to place the Ineffable Name; and we show our respect and reverence by gestures which seal our fidelity to the teachings of our Creator in whatever form we worship Him, while humbly acknowledging that we are not worthy to look upon Him.

The altar, then, epitomizes the difference between the Craft and the Royal Arch, at once united in the Master Mason's degree yet separated by that which marks the difference between brother and companion, our insistence that every part of our earthly pilgrimage is conditioned and governed by the eternity in which it is framed. And so it is, that as in life you do not choose your brother but do select your friend, so in 'pure Antient Masonry', though you come into a fraternity where you may not know all the brethren of the Lodge you enter, and you certainly will have little

Knowledge of what to expect, you are admitted into a Chapter among companions you will already know, and with a basic knowledge of Freemasonry. We as Companions of this Order are of course anxious to bring brethren into its companionship. We must however be sure that those whom we would seek to introduce will in due time appreciate the serious side of its teachings. Many a brother will come forward for exaltation because the sense of loss and failure which are endemic in the Third Degree - the loss of the genuine secrets and the death of Hiram - leave him with a feeling of dissatisfaction, and because he is told that the genuine secrets are to be learnt in the Chapter. He will only remain to learn the deeper meaning of our teaching if he finds himself truly accepted as a Companion and in a happy gathering. We do have a serious message in the Royal Arch, but we can still learn from the Craft and strive to unite in the grand design of being happy and communicating happiness, - and remember, Companions, that you cannot achieve the one without the other. As I have often said to you before, enjoy your Masonry, by doing so you will be helping others not only to enjoy, but also to understand it, both in the Craft and the Royal Arch.

Now, Companions, - and what a privilege it is to address you
by that name - now nothing remains before we close this meeting
but on behalf of all three Principals and my Deputy to wish you
God-speed on your journey home and a happy and successful time in
your Chapters in the coming session.

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