

GRAND SUPERINTENDENT'S ADDRESS. NOVEMBER 5th, 1955

It is with very great pleasure that I welcome on behalf of the Provincial Grand Chapter, so distinguished a body of guests as we entertain here today. Particularly we delight to find at our Provincial Grand Chapter Meeting E.Comps. G.J. Mackness, G.Supt.Notts., J.E. Grosvenor, G.Supt.Worcs., and J.C. Russell, Second Prov.G.Principal-in-Charge, Oxon., also the Second Prov. Princs. of Notts, Worcs, Northants and Hunts, and the Third Prov. Prins. Northants and Hunts.

I also rejoice that so many of the excellent companions and companions from near and far in the Province have made the journey to attend, and all of us most heartily express our gratitude and appreciation to the masons of Nuneaton for the arrangements made. Nuneaton has a standard of its own and a province with so sturdy a masonic bastion on its boundary is fortunate indeed.

This is a year which has been happily full of activity and the Royal Arch has continued to produce a group of chapters vying with one another - perhaps not too violently - to excel. I would like to pay a tribute to the Second Provincial Grand Principal for his continued help to me. Not only is he always accessible for advice, but he has shouldered a heavy programme of visiting and no-one's visits are more popular than his. We all congratulate him upon his decoration by Her Majesty. E.Comp. Garnett Hartley has proved a very mercy as he has sped round the province. To them both, to the Provincial Grand Scribe Extra, and to all the Provincial Grand officers of this year, I express affectionate and grateful thanks.

The outstanding event of the year has been the centenary celebrations of Howe Chapter, no.587. The Chapter has done me the honour of electing me to the First Principal's Chair for their centenary year, and the Installation, followed by the presentation of the Centenary Warrant by Sir Sydney White, Grand Scribe Ezra, were notable and satisfactory occasions.

My visits to Chapters during 1955 have been fewer than in 1954. I have wondered whether Grand Lodge and Supreme Grand Chapter in their decision to move towards the plan of combining Provincial Grand Masterhips and Grand Superintendencies in the same person, have remembered the warning we are given of the difficulty of serving two masters.

The craft this year has made very exacting demands upon my time and energies. Both selection of officers on my staff and the organisation of charity and its finance have required much consideration and many consultations. So far as charity is concerned it is of course as much an ornament of this Order as it is of the Craft. Nevertheless it is organised on the basis of the Craft and the Provincial Grand Secretary deals with it in a department of his office. Thus inevitably I have been drawn to the exercise of the office of Prov. Grand Master rather than that of Grand Superintendent. I am grateful for the patience and tolerance of Royal Archmasons and wish to assure them that their problems are far from having been forgotten.

Foremost amongst these are (i) those that arise from the new Regulations: (ii) the effect that they have upon the practice of our rites: and (iii) the problem of the shortage of exaltees. I entertain no dogmatic or certain views about these matters. What I say now is in the nature of an essay towards their solution, and I hope that Companions will consider what I say in that light. They shall have opportunities for discussion, both in the new advisory committee set up under our revised by-laws, and at the informal meeting of First Principals, now become an agreeable annual occasion.

I have felt for two years that the practice of ceremonial in our Chapters has left something to be desired. The abolition of salutes to persons has further complicated an already untidy situation. In these circumstances I have asked Excellent Companion Biddle to re-occupy the office of Provincial Grand Director of Ceremonies and with the enthusiastic readiness to serve which we have learned to associate with him, he has undertaken that arduous duty. I want Chapters not only, or not chiefly, to welcome him at Installations and to watch his tactics, but to use him as he is ready to be used in the part of a preceptor at what I would call ad hoc chapters of instruction, combined assemblies of the companions of three or four chapters meeting at a centre, who wish to improve their practice of the rites of the Royal Arch.

Perfection of ceremonial is essential to the good health of Royal Arch Masonry. The outward sign of genuine and decorous masonry is the sincerity and dignity with which ritual is performed. The consideration demands greater emphasis amongst us than among Craft masons. Their principles and tenets are moral and deal with personal standards and conduct. Those principles are external, dramatic and as an old prayer book said "easily understood of the people". Ours are more subtle, more metaphysical, more theological and very much further from the normal thoughts and ideals of our countrymen. If we are to attract brethren into our Order, we must be a great deal more aware than we are of the peculiar lessons inculcated by it. We claim to have at once the foundation and keystone of the whole masonic structure.

That is a noble phrase. I wonder how many companions could give either a simple and precise, or a profound and extended, account of what it means? I am going to submit to you a short definition. Whether it be simple or profound I leave you to judge. Craft masonry deals with standards of conduct, Royal Arch masonry deals with the values inherent in certain facts and ideas believed in by masons and accepted as governing their conduct.

The doctrines involved in these facts and ideas have been overlaid by detail and custom, some of it irrelevant. The genuine secrets which were lost for nearly 500 years have not, in my opinion, been completely disinterred from the debris of subsequent masonry under which they so long lay buried.

In hinting as I do at the necessity of distilling from our ritual something in the nature of a metaphysical of the Royal Arch, I am fully aware that this must be done at more than one level. All companions are not trained philosophers. There is a danger, not always avoided, of masons rashly trespassing in realms of thought which lie beyond the circle of their attainments. The result is invariably claptrap. It should be the object of a small group of competent experts among us to carry out the process of analysis I have suggested and afterwards to put their conclusions in as simple a form as possible for the benefit of eager but differently gifted companions. We might even undertake some such enterprise upon an inter-Provincial basis.

I have thrown out these comments upon the range of our masonic knowledge, because I believe that it is along the lines I have indicated future advance must come. What we do make of our Order depends upon the principles which inspire it, what on the other hand we can make, the point we can reach on our chosen path, depends upon the quality of the members who compose it. I cannot end my address without affirming alike my faith in our Order and in

the loyalty of the companions of this Province. I thank them for their friendliness, their loyalty and their co-operation.

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