

MAKING MASONRY MEANINGFUL

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Dedicated to

M. W. Bro. John R. C. Evans

**who exemplified
dedication
determination
and devotion
at their best.**

He was as fine a Mason as I have ever known.

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The Author.

INTRODUCTION

It should be very plain to anyone, in any organization concerned about membership, interest and attendance, that these problems will not easily be solved by meetings of "the faithful." Contact with those who do not attend is most essential. Personal contact by the right brother is the most desirable. This booklet has been prepared with the belief and hope that if it can be distributed and read seriously, it may help prepare the way to renewed interest and renewed desire to keep alive the greatest organization for brotherhood, right living and personal development ever devised by man.

The writer asks you to read carefully, accept what seems reasonable and, remembering your obligations, try to imagine what your just response could be, and should be.

Thank you.

PRELIMINARY THOUGHTS

"An honest man's the noblest work of God."
"As a man thinketh in his own heart so is he."

Every man has three characters

"The one he shows to the public
The one he really has
And the one he likes to think he has."

"it is not doing what we like to do but liking
what we have to do that makes life blessed."

"The world is too much with us
Late and soon, getting and spending
We lay waste our powers
Little we see in nature that is ours;
We have given our hearts away"

"Happy is the man that findeth wisdom and
the man that getteth understanding."

Wisdom is the principal thing therefore get wisdom and with all they
getting get understanding."

"Where there is a will, there is a way."

MAKING MASONRY MEANINGFUL

THREE - FIVE - SEVEN FORMULA

Decide to:

1. Put first things first.
2. Judge yourself as a Mason.
3. Practice brotherly love.

Resolve to:

1. Take pride in being known as a Mason.
2. Support your lodge with real enthusiasm.
3. Make Masonry a part of your community.
4. Support and encourage Masonic projects.
5. Take an active interest in at least one youth group.

Determine to:

1. Be more friendly.
2. Do one kind deed each day.
3. Contact at least one brother each day.
4. Make Masonry a part of your recreation. Golf, curl, bowl, hunt with brothers when possible.
5. Give Masonry a fair share of your time and thoughts.
6. Be interested in and give moral support to other fraternal groups.
7. Be your best self at home, at work, at lodge, at play.

The readers will note the 3, 5, 7, concession to traditional symbolism. The author hopes this will be a stimulus for many and a detriment to none.

MASONIC PROBLEMS - MASONIC SOLUTIONS

ATTENDANCE

Each lodge usually has 9 or 10 regular meetings per year, held at fixed monthly dates, therefore can any Mason honestly argue that he could not attend at least 75% of these meetings if he so desired?

ATTENDANCE is a **HABIT**, so pack up your excuses and your criticisms and decide to make an honest attempt to associate with your brothers at least once a month. You make commitments for regular dates for clubs, for games, for committees, etc., so why don't you give your lodge equal status? Why don't you arrange to call for and go to lodge with a brother? You will find it is an easier and more meaningful companionship. Surely you can't argue that there is not at least one brother you would like to be with for one meeting a month.

Your example, your support and your renewed interest will benefit the group, but more than all that, it will give you a real sense of worthwhile sharing and accomplishment. Have you the will power to decide to try it for just one year?

Do you remember your obligation* made at the altar?

"Plead thereto no excuse save sickness or the **PRESSING EMERGENCIES** of my public or private avocations."

Here lies the tragedy of our race.
Not that men are poor,
All men know something of poverty,
Not that men are wicked,
Who can claim to be good?
Not that men are ignorant,
Who can claim to be wise?
But **THAT MEN ARE STRANGERS.**

INTEREST

The German poet Goethe stated "it is not doing what we like to do but liking what we have to do that makes blessed."

Your attitude to life determines your happiness and satisfaction. How often do you point out the mistakes other people make just because of their attitude? Kindness, tact, cheerfulness, concern, unselfishness and friendliness are positive parts of each man's attitude. Is your attitude in daily life a positive one?

Remember the poet said, "Laugh and the world laughs with you, Weep and you weep alone. Be glad and your friends are many, Be sad and you lose them all."

Do you go to lodge determined to enjoy being with your brothers or do you go from a sense of duty and prepared to find fault and to criticize like a reluctant school boy? Just think how different it would be if you decided to enjoy the meetings, and to take an active part. Share your thoughts at refreshment and out of lodge, discuss the lodge activities with your fellow Masons, offer ideas and be prepared to help carry them out. Devote the same positive concern for Masonry that you give to your other community interests. Masonic groups are no different than other groups. Your brothers are human beings just like you and me. Masonic meetings need not be dull and monotonous. If they are, it is because the majority are content to sit on the side and contribute nothing or to stay home.

Your interest is your contribution to the lodge, to your brothers and to Masonry. You owe it to yourself to enjoy the rewards of doing your fair share. "As a man thinketh so is he."

"We are blind, until we see
That in the human plan,
Nothing is worth the making
If it does not make the man."

MASONIC REGENERATION

Your presence here on this significant occasion is proof of your devotion, dedication and desire to further the interests of our beloved craft as we seek to explore ways and means to re-vitalize Masonic interest, Masonic service and Masonic ideals.

Throughout his Masonic career the writer has been an outspoken critic, so much so that he has often been misunderstood. He has argued with conviction that the language of the ritual is badly outdated, he has complained of the monotonous repetition in degree work, he has questioned the needless and unexplainable constitutional road blocks and of the dull, uninteresting routine of lodge meetings, District meetings, Area meetings, Board of General Purposes meetings and last but not least, the Grand Lodge annual meetings in particular.

Brethren, these protests have achieved very little because one clashes head on with the "Masonic establishment," which argues weakly and without mature logic, that since our order has survived for 250 years this is infallible proof of the success of traditional practices and ensures Masonic immortality.

Perhaps, mellowed with the years, my resolve has been softened by battering my head against a stone wall of smug righteousness. Perhaps one has matured, perhaps gained some wisdom, perhaps come to understand human nature so that the writer now firmly and sincerely believes that the heart, the soul, the core, the main foundation of our order is to be found in the individual. Brethren, I am convinced that when we as individuals are satisfied that we are what we ought to be, then and probably then only, will we have the power to change the things that ought to be changed and to be a true fraternity of brothers.

Brethren, let us admit that most of us are not always true Masons, that we are members in body but not always in spirit. We who are here today represent a part of the 2,700 Masons who attend lodges in Manitoba, this is roughly 10-12% of our total membership. We give of our talents to the craft at about 10 meetings a year. A percentage of us attend district, Area and Grand Lodge sessions. Statistically, Brethren, it is not a very encouraging result.

Brethren, please reflect upon your own experience in this connection and one wonders if you will conclude, as many often do, "Well, I attend, I do what I am asked to do, I enjoy the contacts, occasionally I add to my circle of friends. I am helping to keep my lodge going - and if the officers don't come up with a solution to the decline in interest and attendance the future is not very bright."

That attitude, which is probably shared by many, makes one think of Pierre Berton's "Comfortable Pew." And by the way, more and more lodges are acquiring nicely padded seats. Brethren, the writer admits he is a member and not always a true Mason -- and he asks you to look back upon your Masonic experience and try to recall when Masonry ever demanded more than that from you, when Masonry ever challenged you to be different, when Masonry ever made it clear to you how you could "make daily advancement in masonic knowledge." Those who believe Masonic education and Masonic knowledge are one and the same miss the boat and paddle helplessly in eddies that neither go upstream or downstream. True Masonic knowledge is a growing awareness of how to be a better Mason and if we face the simple truth Brethren, it means how to be better men, how to live up to ideals, and how to make progress in personal development. Our ritual teaches that Masonry is "an institution which fosters and improves the best affection of our nature."

It is further stated, "Therefore, the utmost extension of fraternal feeling and affection which can exist between man and man is expected to be displayed amongst the brethren of our order in a Freemason's lodge, and then will be achieved the chief point in Freemasonry, namely, to endeavor to be happy ourselves and to communicate that happiness to others."

We are also reminded that "kindness and brotherly love is to distinguish our conduct as men and as Freemasons." As Masons we are not what we should be, we are not what we could be and our contribution might be largely termed a passive one. Many of us take too literally the statement "the elected govern and are not governed by their electors."

For many of us, caught up in today's complex society, we give of ourselves at the meetings we are able to attend and the committees on which we are asked to serve but our contribution is but one of the many interests we have, most of which did not exist in the past when Masonry was perhaps able to make a greater impact.

One can express the doubt, if during the history of Freemasonry on this continent, that the order ever achieved, in a majority of its members, those qualities which are now so necessary for survival. Masonry, in general, needs a centralized project to satisfy our own pride of accomplishment and of equal importance to give us a positive image in the community. But, first and foremost, Masonry needs members who approach the ideal, who have the will, the courage, the desire and the vision to put into daily practice their very best, both at work and at recreation.

Many of us must revise our ideas of what it means to be Masonic brothers in the true sense and we must strive to attain true fraternal feeling and affection. We must endeavor to be Masonically and openly happy. We must demonstrate to those who no longer attend that Masonry can change our ways. Brethren, we need in a very real sense to imitate the dedication and will power of the members of Alcoholics Anonymous.

Personal responsibility, personal desire, personal dedication and personal practice can set a goal which will re-generate the order. Anything less will fail.

Brethren, our sick society, our whole world, desperately needs what Masonry has to offer. Our faltering Masonic society needs you and me.

May the most high give to each one of us the wisdom, the understanding and the courage to unite in this Masonic crusade.

"Why build these cities glorious
If man unbuilted goes.
In vain we build the work
Unless the builder also grows."

MASONRY IS A HABIT

To begin with let's agree that Masonry is a state of mind and there is no sure-fire set of directions every Mason can use to achieve that blessing.

One man's reaction to Masonry may be to another a pain in the periphrium -- another term for extreme boredom.

Some might define Masonry as "a state of mind in which our thinking is positive and pleasant a good share of the time." (Our ritual teaches us "to be happy ourselves and to communicate that happiness to others.") This definition is probably as good as any but, of course, not everyone will agree with it.

Regardless of what definition is used, there can't be any denial that Masonry is a state of mind. So the next thing to do is to figure out how to get and keep your mind in such a state, that is if you are interested in being a Mason.

That clause is added because most observations make one aware that many Masons do not want to be real Masons. Although they won't admit it - even to themselves, they enjoy finding fault and any attempt to show them the "way", to "educate" them meets with resistance. There are people who make a profession of finding fault and who specialize in having complaints and grievances for all occasions. There is no satisfying them because they are never satisfied until they find something to complain of. It could be said that most Masons are as truly Masons as they make up their minds to be.

So there are two aspects to keep in mind; firstly, true Masonry is a habit or way of life and, secondly, most Masons are as good as they make up their minds to be.

A lot of readers are going to say you can't make up your mind to be a good Mason in today's society. They are going to say its ridiculous to maintain that a person who is lonely, or who is bored and fed up with life in general, can snap out of it by just deciding to be a better Mason. That, however, is exactly what can be done -- provided the person isn't in extreme physical pain or suffering from an advanced case of mental illness.

A lot of Masons have the idea they don't deserve to be Masonically happy. They have some sort of guilt complex which convinces them they are not entitled to the gift Masonry can provide. To them, I say, it's time they did something to change their outlook.

It could be said that men are not Masons just because they are virtuous, instead they are virtuous because they are Masons. Masonic happiness is not the reward of virtue but is virtue itself. So don't think you have to be virtuous before you can be a practicing Mason.

When you start off the day in a happy Masonic state of mind but later find it turning sour, you will usually realize it was some petty annoyance or some injury to your ego, that ruined your happiness. Getting annoyed does no good and if you let it become a habit you have formed a bad habit.

So get the Masonic happiness habit, be positive and enjoy the rewards which await Masons who determine their own state of mind and actions and do not let the every day standards of the society in which they move force upon them the less rewarding ways of daily life.

Think positively, think Masonically, think happily.

"Whatsoever things are true
That whatsoever things are honest
That whatsoever things are just
That whatsoever things are pure
That whatsoever things are lovely
That whatsoever things are of good report

That if there be any virtue and if there be any praise Think on these things."

LET US FACE FACTS

If you are proud of your Masonic privileges, if you value the opportunities for fellowship, if you respect Masonic principles, if you are fair-minded, reasonable and conscientious, then you may want to read this article.

WHAT IS GRAND LODGE?

Throughout my Masonic career, one has been constantly and sadly aware of the misinformation, false conclusions and genuine prejudice often encountered whenever and wherever "Grand Lodge" is mentioned, particularly in lodges in some of the districts remote from Winnipeg.

As Masons, as lodge brothers, we, of all people, should not be ill informed or biased regarding our own fraternity.

Our democratic system of Masonic government does not discriminate, it does not separate us into groups, it does not favor sectionalism, it does not divide city from country. Each lodge has the opportunity for equal representation regardless of size or location. Why? Because the voting members of Grand Lodge are the Master, the two Wardens and the past masters of each lodge. Thus, except for variations in the number of resident past masters, the smallest lodge and the largest lodge are equally represented.

The records plainly show that the great majority of lodges are situated outside greater Winnipeg and further that the voting strength at the June communication has always had a "country" majority. Brethren, these are facts, whether you are aware of them or not.

It necessarily follows, then, that when some of us criticize Grand Lodge, we are merely criticizing our own elected representatives.

All Grand Lodge decisions are decided by motion and open vote. There is no evidence of sectional voting power or undue influence. For example, the decision to unite with some of the greater Winnipeg lodges to build a Memorial Temple was supported by the country vote.

Brethren, the government of Masonry in our province, through Grand Lodge and its Board of General Purposes (elected by the voters) is representative of all lodges in Manitoba and, contrary to some critics, the Board does not have a Winnipeg majority and very, very rarely is there an issue which might involve a sectional difference of any significance.

Let us fact the facts, let us keep things in their true perspective, let us practise brotherly love, brotherly trust, brotherly tolerance and be fairminded, reasonable and generous -as we endeavor to be happy as Masons and to communicate that happiness to others.

THE BRASS

While we re in a soul searching mood, let us be honest and examine another idea which seems to get unwarranted and unnecessary attention, namely the tendency to blame "the brass" when motions are defeated, to criticize "the brass" when things do not suit some individuals and to regard "the brass" as dictatorial and even unmasonic.

"The Brass" are our D.D.G.M.s and our Grand Lodge Officers – our chosen and elected representatives.

Unless you are one who is against all forms of government, then surely it is obvious that those who are elected are in duty bound to govern. The government of the whole jurisdiction is just an extension of the government of the individual lodge. "The Brass" is made up of Masons from each of the 13 districts and any seeming sectional differences merely reflect the negligence of the voters involved.

One should not have to remind the brethren that facts always disprove false assumptions. Let us look briefly at one phase of the topic of this discussion, and make reference to the position of Grand Master (by constitution the position alternates between Greater Winnipeg and the "Country" lodges to avoid any attempted discrimination).

What are the facts, well the last 4 "Country Brass" Grand Masters represent 4 separate districts having a combined total of 42 lodges, i.e., slightly over 1/3 of all lodges. These 42 lodges have a total membership of 3,462, just less than 22% of our total membership. Further, the 4 individual lodges which the Grand Master's represent have a combined membership of only 461, just less than 3% of the total membership. These facts speak for themselves, the democratic expression of the voice of the voters. In other words, the voters choice consists of Masons thought worthy by a majority to be entrusted to govern and as a symbol of office they are entitled to wear regalia which puts them in the category of "The Brass".

Most, if not nearly all lodges, have some connection with the so-called "Brass", because most districts favor the alternating choice system in their selection of district deputies. Therefore, in theory at least, we are all involved, or we all should be, and all of us are responsible for the selection of our leaders.

Brethren, let us be honest with ourselves and with each other. Let us all resolve to become better informed (a little study of the constitution would clear up many questions). Let us ask our local "brass" to explain what may appear puzzling to us as individuals. Let us be positive in our approach and be truly Masonic. Let us remember the inspiring and thought provoking lecture of the installation ceremony (too few of us hear it given once a year.) Let me quote just a little of it:

"The brethren elected and appointed to assist in the government of the Lodge are too well acquainted with the principles of Freemasonry and the rules of propriety to exceed the power with which they are entrusted and you are of too generous a nature to envy them their preferment. I, therefore, trust that we will have but one aim -- to please each other and to unite in the grand design of being happy and communicating happiness."

The new age stands as yet.
Half built against the sky.
Open to every threat of storms
That clamor by.
Scaffolding veils the walls
and dim dust floats and falls
As moving to and fro,
Their tasks the Masons Ply.

FREEMASONRY - YESTERDAY & TODAY

Freemasonry is the oldest, the most universal and one of the most openly accessible fraternal organization ever created by man. It possesses a moral and ethical code which emphasizes the simple time tested virtues and stresses the moral and social values, which if practiced

universally, would bring about the long sought goals of peace and world brotherhood. Its aim "to be happy ourselves and to communicate that happiness to others" focuses attention upon the practical aspect of the truly Masonic life. The mandatory injunction to refrain from any topic which might cause difference of opinion establishes a firm foundation for peace, harmony and happiness.

The lodge is a temple in the true sense, a sanctuary set apart from the varied and hectic social existence. To this temple members return once or twice monthly to renew the ties of brotherhood, to relax in its atmosphere of harmony, to refresh their souls and strengthen their wills to practice out of the lodge those Masonic virtues which have stood the test of time and have meant so much to all who truly appreciate the order.

Such is Freemasonry after two hundred and fifty years of organized existence. It has a proud history and a record unequalled by any other order. All members recognize this fact and emphasize it with just pride but, therein lies the danger, for a glorious past is no guarantee of continued existence, and Freemasonry must meet the challenge of today.

The fundamental law of nature "adapt or perish" applies to our man made organization and the specialists of social behaviour would be unanimous in affirming that Freemasonry must change. They would point to groups with an older history, the church, the school and the university, which have already undergone rapid change and are going to have to change still more to survive and meet the demands of modern society.

This writer believes that the most pressing need and the most significant change is and should be in endeavouring to make our brotherhood a more practical one. Freemasonry has survived because of its high ideals but much if not most of our individual satisfaction has been in terms of personal contacts which have been and are incidental to the accepted ritual teachings and practices of the various jurisdictions.

In this age when all ideals are being challenged, as never before in the history of mankind and particularly in Masonic history, this basic foundation of our order is being seriously threatened and our only remaining support or justification for existence will be on the personal level, that is practical brotherhood.

Masonry must, then, become more practical and more effective and to that end Masons must become more involved. This will require some restructuring, a different emphasis and intelligent planning. In a very real sense Masonry must not "teach us how to die" but how to live. If we can work out a practical means of instruction for new candidates and encourage all our members to seek the very real satisfactions and rewards our fraternity offers, then, and then only, will we fulfill our true role. Then we will be happy ourselves and be able to communicate that happiness to others.

To this high goal, to this great objective all Masons must aspire to and strive toward, for in a very real sense the time has come to practice what we preach, if we are to perform our Masonic duty and fulfill our destiny as dedicated members of this great fraternity.

"Brethren banded together,
Hand in Hand for Good,
Joined for Mankind's uplift,
United in Brotherhood.
Each of the band a builder
Faces turned from the sod,
Some folks call it Masonry,
And others call it God".

BELIEFS AND ACTIONS

"O wad some Pow'r the giftie gie us
To see oursels as others see us!
Robert Burns

Brethren:

This topic is one which involves everyone of us from the time we learn to think until the time when we no longer need to worry about our actions here on earth.

What we believe to be true with respect to our philosophy, our code of living, our personal rules, our ideals, our Masonic teachings and our Masonic goals, these collective beliefs determine what we are. They form the pattern which makes us individuals and our actions then, as individuals, necessarily depends upon our beliefs. This should be a reasonable and acceptable statement, one which reflects simple cause and effect, one which creates no problems, one which enables us to live our daily lives and fit into our community life easily and comfortably. If this is true, then for all who profess to be Masons, there should be no problem. However, if we are honest we will have to admit that there are problems. The fact that our fraternity appears to be declining in numbers, in dedication and in public respect, must reflect weaknesses which have developed with changing times.

My experience of living and becoming a Mason has caused me to face up to a fact which is a real blow to my pride. I confess that my actions as a Mason, are not what they could be if I were to put my professed beliefs into their proper place. This conclusion leads to another uncomfortable admission, namely, that I must not really believe what I openly accept as true, in my associations with my fellow Masons. Of course, this problem is not just a Masonic problem because it can be and is equally true in any part of our lives. Nevertheless, as Masons, we profess to accept only "good men" into the fraternity and we affirm that our Masonic teachings make good men "better men."

Why, then, as a Mason must I admit, if I am honest, that I AM a member, but not a Mason in the real sense? This is a problem I have wrestled with for years and no adequate excuses, no unalterable conditions, and no satisfactory reasons can relieve my conscience, if I am honest with myself. Why should this be true? I believe the answer is that we are group centered in our daily living and very few of us have the determination, the dedication and the courage to be what

we would really like to be. We have become accustomed to accepting the standards of the environment we live in whether it be at work or recreation. This is natural and instinctive and is common to all group associations. We want to belong, we want to be accepted, we want to keep things on a comfortable basis. This necessarily results in group acceptance of degrees or grading of moral issues - degrees of honesty, degrees of goodness, degrees of kindness, degrees of charity and degrees of morality.

It is an accepted fact that group behavior is nearly always a compromise between what is best and what is not acceptable. We all know and agree, if we are honest, that in many situations we are uncomfortable and sometimes embarrassed but rarely do we speak up and express our feelings-. We very easily slip into the habit of accepting the fact that if we are better than some people and as good as the majority then we are able to "fit in" as it were, and living presents no problems and our conscience goes into a sort of dormant state which persists most of the time. Occasionally a soul searching sermon or talk in lodge will temporarily awaken us from passive acceptance; but habit soon guides us back to the accustomed path and as Masons our advancement in "the Masonic life" continues at its very slow, imperceptible pace.

I believe that if we are really honest we would have to admit that most, if not all, of our activities get this same treatment. We do not seem to have any heartfelt appreciation of or dedication to the ideals we outwardly profess. It may well be that we assume that our elected officers are responsible for Masonic advancement, our minister is responsible for our church advancement, our service club leaders are responsible for the club's image.

How often have you been aware of the impact of some Worshipful Masters for their term of office. Their enthusiasm, their devotion and their determination is evident for a year, then, all too often they slip back into the group, and after their perfunctory year as immediate Past Masters they may even become irregular in attendance. Personal responsibility, apparently, is expected of office holders and passive acceptance of their efforts seems to be the normal pattern for the groups they serve.

It can easily be admitted then, that most of us are not better men because we are Masons but rather that most of us think and believe that we are Masons because we are better men. This, of course, means that we feel no great need to be better than we are in most instances. I believe this to be basic cause of all our Masonic problems and until we, as individuals, accept an active role and determine to make our Freemasonry a part of our daily life and to actively promote its ideals, the present trend will continue.

The problem, then, is how can we as members be awakened to our responsibilities? How can we grasp the fact that life itself has quality? We can live on a low level, an intermediate level or a high level. Most of us choose the middle road and live what we regard as a normal life. Of course, we all agree that society would be better if everyone practiced the "Golden Rule" more effectively. Life would be easier, better, more just and kindness, consideration and respect would be much more in evidence.

Thus, my fellow Masons, we continue on our life journey, mostly contented, rarely stirred to more positive action, dimly aware of what might be but not really concerned that it is our responsibility to share in the task of encouraging ourselves and others to express the ideals of our craft in daily living.

Until we as individuals are willing to prove to ourselves that the degree of satisfaction and the depth of our happiness depends directly upon our ability to express each belief and each ideal with sincerity, conviction and determination, then the fate of Freemasonry will necessarily depend upon the changing society.

Brethren, let us have "done with lesser things." Let us resolve to give to our Masonry the quality, the loyalty and the devotion it merits. Brotherhood is a cooperative, group reaction. To achieve it each Mason must make a positive contribution to the whole. The Bible upon our altar stresses wisdom and understanding.

Brethren, let us strive to get Masonic wisdom and Masonic understanding and let us also remember the words of the poet who said, "Give all thou cans't. High Heaven rejects the lore of nicely calculated less or more."

"Money and fame and health alone
Are not enough for a man to own;
For healthy men are heard to sigh
And men of wealth go frowning by,
And one with fame may play his part
With a troubled mind and a heavy heart.
If these three treasures no joy possess,
How shall a man find happiness?"

"I fancy the joy which men strive to win
Is born of something which lies within,
A strain of courage no care can break,
A love for beauty no thief can take.
For they are the happiest souls of earth
Who gather the treasures of gentle worth
The pride of neighbors, the faith of friends,
And a mind at peace when the sun descends.

A FREEMASON

A Freemason is a builder, he builds CHARACTER. He builds his own character and by his example, inspires others to imitate that character. If he does not build toward this end then, I contend, he is not a Freemason and is unworthy of the honor that has been conferred upon him.

From the memorable night when he first knocked for admittance at the door of the Lodge, standing there blindfolded, neither naked nor clad, barefoot nor shod and devoid of all metals, he was allowed to enter and in the darkness and stillness of the lodge room (which he could not see) he knelt and heard a prayer given on his behalf, which contained these beautiful closing lines -- "Endure him with the competency of Thy Divine Wisdom that assisted by the secrets of this our Masonic Art he may be the better enabled to display the beauties of true Godliness To The Honour and Glory of Thy Holy Name." From that time on he had set his feet upon the winding stairs that lead upward to the Masonic goal. How he climbs and how far he climbs depends upon his sincerity of purpose, for the teachings of our craft are a beautiful system which any man can understand, any man can appreciate and any man can follow. So we repeat -- how far he climbs depends upon himself. In the courts of our land it is said "ignorance of the law is no excuse."

No one who takes the three degrees and attends lodge even infrequently, can ever after plead ignorance.

But while the responsibility must, in the final analysis rest with the individual, as Brother Masons we cannot and must not be ignorant of the part we play and of our share of responsibility in our Brother's progress.

We know full well that the average man measures up to what seems to be necessary and acceptable in any group, be it in a club, in a church, in a social gathering, or in a fraternal organization. What the group stands for what it sets as standards - that to a large extent determines how far the new member will climb.

Freemasonry takes pride in its **EQUALITY** we proudly affirm "even monarchs themselves have been promoters of the art, have not thought it derogatory from their dignity to exchange the sceptre for the gavel, have patronized our mysteries and joined our assemblies." We are all equals in the lodge and for that we can be justly proud in that fact lies one of the basic strengths of our brotherhood.

But there is another and important sense in which we are all equals and that is in the various elements that go together to make a man. Ideas and ideals, dreams and ambitions, passions and hopes, likes and dislikes, love and hatred, envy, prejudice and greed, etc. are the stuff of which life is made and out of it all man with a character is formed. We all possess the same basic building materials and strangely enough most of us do not build consistently nor do not build as we should. We excuse ourselves by saying, "We are only human."

One writer has said, "it is natural for men to be small, mean, envious, deceitful, selfish and licentious, at least in thought, if not in action."

Nature provides the lesson that weeds, thistles and worthless underbrush flourishes apart from human effort. There is an old saying, "What a man needs not, nor sows, most abundantly grows." The necessities of life can only be produced by ceaseless toil and care.

This is equally true of human nature. The worthless, noxious and harmful elements easily take root and flourish. Character of a worthwhile nature must be cultivated. The task is ceaseless, unending. If we relax at all, we find that we cannot rest where we are, instead we slip back. This seems to be a fundamental law of Nature. We either climb the winding stairs or we slip back - there is no neutral position in life.

Each man knows in his own heart that he seems to have two natures. The one is his better self, the other he cares not to name. The average Mason, I think, keeps the better self in control most of the **TIME**. But he must be ever vigilant. The passions of anger, hatred, prejudice and sex are ever present and if we give them an innings our other self comes to the surface.

There is in the garden of every life the flowers of virtue and the weeds of vice. Man himself is the gardener. He cultivates, he sows, he reaps. He can learn to control the weeds or vices but he can never entirely be free of them. Man has all the material he needs to become a saint or a devil and life demands that he be one or the other. That is an unalterable law of nature.

Every virtue has its counterpart in a vice and in our nature one or the other must triumph. Each battle must be fought singly and every day brings its challenges. That is why I stated a few minutes ago "most of us do not build consistently nor do not build as we should."

It is also man's nature to be a creature of habit. Each of us has little peculiar habits or mannerisms - of which we are usually unaware but our friends know them and sometimes it gives them cause for amusement.

We are so constituted that we find it easiest to do things the way we are accustomed to do them. This ability to form habits allows us to set up defenses or habits in dealing with our temptations and vices.

Let us consider for a moment, the failing common to all of us - that of becoming angry. We are all aware of it and know how close to the surface it hovers. Each of us has his own method of control, for some it may be the time honored advice to count to ten. We vary, I say, and yet all of us know that whenever we have let this passion loose we have felt silly and foolish afterward. Of course we say we had a reason and the situation demanded it but deep down we know there was a better way and we resolve to try not to let it happen again. "A soft answer turneth away wrath."

There is another failing from which no man is ever entirely free and that is that ugly vice of prejudice. That vice that plays such a big part in the troubles of men and nations. What does it mean? Pre means before, and Judicem, to judge. To judge before. Before what - before learning the facts, before letting reason consider the case. However, or wherever, we get them we have our prejudices. Some hate the Jew, the so-called foreigner, the Communist, the Metis or Indian, and so on down the list. Maybe we can come...closer to home - how do you react to the man who insists that the ritual and the work must be word perfect and who makes an issue of it. How do you like the man who is always right and insists that his way is the only way? No one of us is free of prejudice but what do we do about it? Many do nothing and few realize how

it spoils their nature and hinders the climb upward. Perhaps you will permit me to quote a part of a lecture which seems appropriate to this.

"Let us be just, then in judging other men's motives. We know but little of the real merits or demerits of any fellow creature. We can rarely say with certainty that this man is more guilty than that, or even that this man is very good or very wicked. Often the basest persons leave behind them excellent reputations. Every one of us can look back and shuddering, see the time when our feet stood on the slippery crags that over hung the abyss of guilt; and when if temptation had been a little more urgent, or a little longer continued, if penury had pressed us a little harder, or a little more wine had further disturbed our intellect, dethroned our judgment or inflamed our passions, our feet would have slipped and we should have fallen never to rise again. When we pity the fallen how do we know that, tempted like him, we should not have fallen like him, as soon and perhaps with less resistance? How can we know what we would do if we were out of employment, famine crouching, gaunt and hungry on our fireless hearth and our children wailing for bread. We fall not because we are not enough tempted. He that hath fallen may be at heart as honest as we. We shall, therefore, be just in judging of other men only when we are charitable."

Jesus said "Let he who is without sin cast the first stone." We know what happened then and what would happen now. "Judge not, that thou mayest not be judged: for whatsoever judgment thou Tenderest against others even that shall God pronounce against thee." We need to remind ourselves of this much oftener that we do.

The men who prepared our degrees and the work of our craft were wise in Man's ways and made full use of them in the ritual.

The fixtures common to every lodge room, the repetition of the opening and closing and the fixed degree ceremonies create a common environment and we find it easy to be good Masons while we are in that familiar setting. It becomes a habit. A habit of working together in harmony discarding prejudices, avoiding topics which tend to cause differences. This could also become a habit outside of the lodge. But does it?

But Masonry does more than just give us a sanctuary where we are good. It keeps ever before us its teachings, its ideals and its working tools. Those aids and tests by which the true Mason erects his structure of character and measures its perfection. Brethren, "it may not take much of a man to be a Mason but it takes all there is of him."

"To thine own self be true
It follows, then, as night the day,,
Thou can't not be false to any man."

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