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What is Freemasonry?

by W Bro. George William Speth, 1893

Freemasonry is emphatically not a benefit society : no freemason can claim as his right, in return for the heavy initiation fees, yearly subscriptions, and constant contributions to the charities, any return whatever. A candidate joins Freemasonry, not for what he can get out of it, but to render himself more generally useful to others.

Freemasonry is in no sense a political Society. Men of the most opposite political views may be found seated together in any lodge in the country. And yet I am by no means sure that the Craft does not exert a very deep-seated and far-reaching political influence. The constant association, at lodge and banquet, of men of all classes and views, on a footing of perfect equality, each thus learning to appreciate the good points of every other, tends to awaken an enlightened liberalism ; whilst on the other hand, our own high antiquity as a society, and the respect for

old customs unconsciously inspired by our venerable ceremonies, produce a marked tone of conservative thought, and a dislike to change for change-sake.

Freemasonry is not a religion. It admits men of all religions. The candidate must be a believer in God. With his initiation commences his masonic instruction, and he is taught that this God is all-father, all-creator, omniscient, omnipresent, omnipotent, absolutely pure and good, of impartial justice and inexhaustible loving-kindness, the giver of all gifts, the preserver from all evil.

We are not a trades-organisation, as our name would imply, and yet we are the direct lineal descendants of the grandest corporation of artisans which ever existed: those glorious free-masons who built all our old cathedrals, churches, palaces, and castles.

Freemasonry is not a secret society. Secret societies are of



Founding member of the premier lodge of masonic research, Quatuor Coronati Lodge No. 2076, in London, and secretary for its first fourteen years, W Bro. William George Speth (30 April 1847 - 19 April 1901)—an accomplished musician and knowledgeable in numerous European languages—was author of several masonic compilations and thirty-five papers for *Ars Quatuor Coronatorum*. Published shortly before he died, his *A Masonic Curriculum* has been undeservedly long out of print.

two kinds: those whose members remain unknown, and those who conceal their purpose and aims, their means of action, and the time and place of their meetings.

Freemasons answer to none of the requirements of a secret society. They are known to their neighbours. Their aims and objects are no secret. Their principles have been printed over and over again, and their doors are never closed to a properly qualified candidate.

Freemasonry is no secret society, but it possesses secrets of its own, which is quite another thing. Our secrets are our own, but I will tell you this much: if our secrets could be of the slightest benefit to mankind in general, we should have made them public long ago.

Freemasonry is a society of men of all classes in the social scale, of all nations, races, colours, and creeds.

They must be believers in

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What is freemasonry?

from page one

one sole, personal God.

They must be of adequate means: that is, their income must be in excess of their actual necessities: we hold it a masonic crime to devote to the Craft what is required by one's family.

They must be of good repute or morals. This does not imply that every candidate shall be absolutely faultless; but what is known of him must be, on the whole, to his credit. The man of business whose smartness borders on dishonesty; the boon companion whose conviviality resolves itself into frequent excess; the man who is often seen in doubtful company; the hot-headed disputant whose violence of temperament leads him to forget the respect due to his adversary; these are not desirable members of the Craft, even though their good qualities exceed their bad ones. And yet, if carelessly admitted, there is a likelihood that the Craft and its lessons may do therein great good.

On the other hand, the inveterate liar, the unclean liver, the drunkard, the rowdy, the companion of rogues and vagabonds, the fraudulent bankrupt, the gambler, the spendthrift, the betrayer of innocence, the hypocrite, are under no circumstances fit and proper candidates for the privileges of Freemasonry.

They must be free. A man bound down in the chains of superstition, unable to take a free and manly view of matters in general, the bondsman of sectarianism, of social laws and prejudices, of his business avocations even, or a slave to his own passions, is not an associate for free men and freemasons.

A freemason must have a sound mind, capable of reasoning, of instruction, of appreciating the beauties of our ritual, of expressing himself

clearly, of discriminating between good and evil, the noble and the base.

They must be educated men. This does not imply a university career. The best and truest and most serviceable education is often acquired amongst one's fellow men in the battle of life. That they must be able to read and write is obvious. But they must have been educated to possess the most valuable attributes of a gentleman; a man who has learnt to be considerate to all men, of a kind and chivalrous nature, who avoids acts and words which pain his neighbours, honest in thought and deed, the support of the weak, the vindicator of the oppressed. Such a man is a noble man, a friend to be trusted, and will make a good freemason.

They must be of a charitable disposition. Charitable in giving of their superabundance, charitable in sympathy with the distressed in body and mind, charitable in thinking no evil of friend or foe. To virtue ever kind, to faults a little blind.

Such should be the member of the Craft; this is the ideal which every lodge should strive to attain. That in many cases we fall lamentably short of this high ideal, must be attributed to the imperfections of our human nature.

WHY DO WE MEET?

We meet for the purpose of admitting new members to our fellowship, to instruct them in the lessons and principles to which I have already alluded, and to strengthen each other in adherence thereto.

We meet to hand down to succeeding generations the knowledge and practice of certain ceremonies which we ourselves have inherited from our masonic ancestors, and the analogues of which can be traced in the remotest antiquity.

These ceremonies typify great and immortal fundamental truths, and inculcate the teachings to

*Freemasonry,
embracing a
wider range,
and having
a nobler
object in view,
namely, the
cultivation and
improvement
of the human
mind.*

Richard Carlile [1790-1843]

which I have already called your attention. I do not claim that we alone are in possession of these truths: they are now common property, though they were not so always. I do assert that we are the only institution on earth which elucidates them in this particular manner, and that we have done so for ages past. Why this should be so, is one of the unsolved problems which attract the attention of archaeologists and antiquaries.

Lastly, we meet to practice our three Grand Principles of "Brotherly Love, Relief, and Truth." The two first have been already explained, they are included in Charity.

Truth signifies an unswerving honesty of thought and deed, towards ourselves, our neighbours, and our God. We are also taught to strive towards the attainment of the perfect, the absolute Truth, i.e., the perfect understanding of all things human and divine. To know our God, thoroughly,

perfectly, intimately, would be the acquisition of all truth; but this is impossible on this side of the grave, and so Freemasonry teaches us. Nevertheless, by faith and perseverance, we may continuously approach nearer and nearer to the truth, and such is the duty enjoined upon us in a freemasons' lodge.

THE VALUE OF FREEMASONRY

In the first place, it interests a vast number of men of different temperament for various reasons. To busy men it is a welcome relaxation. No current from the outside world ruffles the perfect harmony of that sacred asylum; no whisper of religious difference, of business cares, or carping envy, disturbs the profound peace of brotherly love. Though foe meet foe, at least for a few hours they are brothers; they may continue rivals but will probably never be enemies more. The beautiful words of our ritual fall as healing balm on the wounded spirit, the soul is elevated above the cankerous cares of the world, and our brother returns to his home, refreshed and comforted, and fitter to re-commence the inevitable struggle of the morrow. Good fellowship and noble thoughts have strengthened him for his daily toil. Surely such a haven of peace and comfort is worth preserving.

Others never weary of its old-world but sound philosophy; to them the well-known ritual is ever new, and they go forth more and more resolved to carry out its holy precepts.

Others find pleasure in the never ceasing of doing good, and to them the Craft affords a welcome opportunity of exercising themselves in the greatest of all virtues, charity. A society which evokes this spirit has a right to exist.

And lastly there is a class of members, curious and prying, to whom the Craft is one of the greatest enigmas of the day, and who devote their

leisure to studying it under every aspect, seeking to wrench from its closed lips the secret of its origin, and the meaning, imperfectly understood, of its symbols.

It will be conceded that an institution which satisfies so many minds has a right to exist: but I will put it higher, and attempt to show that it would be a calamity to the world should it decay. I will explain its utility to the community, the state, and to humanity at large.

To the Community: It is useless shutting our eyes to the fact that society is divided into different social strata, which seldom find the opportunity, by intimate intercourse, of learning to appreciate each other. But the lodge provides the opportunity. There all classes meet upon a footing of perfect equality, the only superiority being that of masonic rank. In the lodge all classes mix, and learn to know—and respect each other: the whole fabric of local society is inextricably interwoven, and the great doctrine of fraternity and equality are practically exemplified. Nothing more conducive to the harmony of the community could be devised.

To the State: Political rivalry easily degenerates into personal animosity; set class against class, and sooner or later, civil war ensues. But, bring the two parties together, convert bitter opponents into generous rivals, provide a common ground on which all can meet in loving kindness, and bitterness will cease. Teach each class to know and respect the other: then your revolutions will be reforms; your smouldering discontent will no longer blaze out into bloody revolt, but will, like a little leaven, leaven the mass: your possible rebels will become political leaders, and your opposing sects fellow workers. This is the mission the Craft performs in the state, and it is a blessed one.

To Humanity at large: If

the influence of Freemasonry be good to the individual, the community and the state, you have but to spread its influence abroad to benefit humanity. But the greatest boon conferred by the Craft on humanity is its insistence on the holy doctrine of individual liberty.

Liberty, mark well, not license. Liberty to think our own thoughts, to believe our own creeds, to regulate our own lives; liberty to dissent, if we see fit, from the weight of authority; liberty to be men, not slaves. Liberty to think, speak, act as we please, provided we offend not our brother. It is this perfect freedom which is the charm of our society; this it is which is rubbing off the sharp corners of humanity, and making of the world one family. The work is not yet finished, we are but a little way on our road, but we are ever steadily pressing on to the goal. We English first won our own liberty, personal by *Magna Charta*, spiritual by the Reformation, and we have sent out Freemasonry, as a missionary into all lands to preach the sacred doctrine to all men. And until the millennium come, this mission of the Craft shall endure. ■

Lodge notes

This past 4th of July, **Burrard Lodge No. 50** marked its centenary with a special emergent meeting and, the following evening, a three-hour boat cruise on a clear evening over the appropriately named Burrard Inlet. It is unfortunate that health prevented the attendance of RW Bro. Donat Robert McMahon, at age 99 the senior member of the lodge, having joined in 1930.

This past August, brethren and their ladies from Victoria to Campbell River joined **Barclay Lodge No. 90** in Port Alberni for what promises to be their first annual Mill Workers'

Degree. Starting out with a parade from the lodgehall to the train station, complete with piper, the assembled boarded the steam train for the trip to the McLean Mill Historic Site, complete with obligatory train robbery *en route*.

At the mill, the ladies departed for a tour and wine tasting while the brethren opened lodge in a room especially prepared for the occasion, where the Northern Lights Degree Team conferred the Entered Apprentice degree on Mr. (now Bro.) Todd Hilker. Closing the lodge, all returned by train to Port Alberni where a fine salmon dinner followed.

Admiral Lodge No. 170, Saltspring, celebrated its Fiftieth Anniversary on 30 August, when the Grand Master, MW Bro. R. Glenn Allen, and his officers re-consecrated the lodge and re-installed the lodge officers. This was followed by a banquet and, the following morning, a Church Parade. ■

Dyslexia Centre

The Ancient and Accepted Scottish Rite of Freemasonry of British Columbia and Yukon officially opened the Scottish Rite British Columbia Learning Centre for Children with Dyslexia this past month in Vancouver.

Starting in London, Ontario, using a model developed in the United States, Scottish Rite Masons in Canada have established four Learning Centres where they help children with dyslexia to read.

The International Dyslexia Association defines dyslexia as a specific learning disability that is neurological in origin. It leads to problems in reading comprehension and reduced reading experience that can impede growth of vocabulary and background knowledge.

Learning Centres tutor children individually with the

SONGWRITERS



You are invited to the Songwriters Sing For the Children Benefit Concert presented by the Gizeh Shriners. All concert proceeds benefit the Shriners Transportation Fund in support of the Care Cruisers.

Sunday
5 October 2008
7:00 pm
Gizeh Shrine Centre
3550 Wayburne Drive
Burnaby.

ALL WELCOME, ADMISSION BY DONATION



Volunteer to drive a Cancer Car

+1-604-872-2034
+1-800-663-7892
+1-250-712-1101



Grand Masonic Day

Join us at the Vancouver and Fraser Valley Workshop in the Chilliwack Masonic Hall, 45905 Hocking Ave, on Saturday, October 4.

Inquiries:

VW Bro John Keirstead,
keirsteadjohn@netscape.net

Orton Gillingham Approach that accommodates their specific learning differences in a one-to-one setting. There is no cost to the child or family. The sessions are all after regular school hours ■

Hands across the border

Lynden Lodge No. 56 is honouring our Grand Master, MW Bro R. Glenn Allen, and MW Bro. Douglas E. Tucker, Grand Master of the Grand Lodge of Washington with their annual dinner and show on 4 October. Freemasons, ladies and guests are all welcome at the Fox Hall, Hampton Inn, located at 3985 Bennett Drive, Bellingham.

Entertainment will include the cello and the violin Celtic duo, Clea and Cayley, and the Langley Ukulele Ensemble, an extraordinary group composed of more than twenty young people from Langley, BC. The evening promises to be short on speeches and long on entertainment. Tickets are \$22 each or \$40 for a couple. Contact W Bro. Dick Decima at rhdecima@aol.com for reservations. ■

Fraternity within a fraternity

by Bro. Manly P. Hall

Take a few minutes and reflect from within. With a smile of paternal indulgence the venerable Master, who senses the true dignity of the mystic tie, should gravely incline the minds of the brethren towards the sublime issues of the Craft.

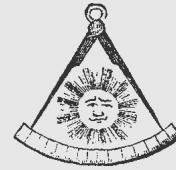
The officer who would serve his lodge most effectively must realize that he is of an order apart from other men, that he is the keeper of an awful

secret, that the chair upon which he sits is the seat of immortals, and that if he would be a worthy successor to those Master Masons of other ages, his thoughts must be measured by the profundity of Pythagoras and the lucidity of Plato.

Enthroned in the radiant East, the Worshipful Master is the "Light" of his lodge—the representative of the gods, one of that long line of hierophants who, through the blending of their rational powers with the reason of the Ineffable, have been accepted into the Great School. This high priest after an ancient order must realize that those before him are not merely a gathering of properly tested men, but the custodians of an eternal lore, the guardians of a sacred truth, the perpetuators of an ageless wisdom, the consecrated servants of a living God, the wardens of a Supreme Mystery.

A new day is dawning for Freemasonry. From the insufficiency of theology and the hopelessness of materialism, men are turning to seek the God of philosophy. In this new era wherein the old order of things is breaking down and the individual is rising triumphant above the monotony of the masses, there is much work to be accomplished.

The "Temple Builder" is needed as never before. A great reconstruction period is at hand; the debris of a fallen culture must be cleared away; the old footings must be found again that a new temple significant of a new revelation of law may be raised thereon. This is the peculiar work of the builder; this is the high duty for which he was called out of the world; this is the noble enterprise for which he was "raised" and given the tools of his Craft. By thus doing his part in the reorganization of society, the workman may earn his "wages" as all good freemasons should. A new light is breaking in the east, a more



GRAND MASTER'S ITINERARY OCTOBER 2008

1	Wed	District 28	Vimy Lodge No. 97	Port Coquitlam
2	Thu	Board of General Purposes, 11:00 am		Vancouver
2	Thu	Railway Night	Acacia Lodge No. 22	Vancouver
4	Sat	Grand Masonic Day		Chilliwack
4	Sat	Hands Across the Border		Bellingham
9	Thu	District 26	Dunbar Lodge No. 116	Vancouver
14	W-Th	Western Canada Conference		Canmore
17	Fri	Principal Officers Meeting		Fairmont
18	Sat	District 8	Cranbrook Lodge No. 34	Cranbrook
21	Tue	Installation	Mount Hermon Lodge No. 7	Vancouver
22	Wed	District 21	Confederation Lodge No. 116	Victoria
25	Sat	Howie Damron concert	District 27	Duncan
25	Sat	Supreme Queen Visit, Daughters of the Nile		Burnaby
26	Sun	90th Anniversary, Miriam Temple		Victoria

glorious day is at hand. The rule of the philosophic elect—the dream of the ages—will yet be realized and is not far distant. To her loyal sons, Freemasonry sends this clarion call: "Arise ye, the day of labour is at hand; the great work awaits completion, and the days of man's life are few."

Like the singing guildsman of bygone days, the craft of the builders marches victoriously down the broad avenues of time. Their song is of labour and glorious endeavour; their anthem is of toil and industry; they rejoice in their noble destiny, for they are the builders of cities, the hewers of worlds, the master craftsmen of the universe! ■

Excerpted from "Freemasonry—Fraternity within a Fraternity" (1950). Discuss amongst yourselves.

Anti-masonry

Anti-masonry, or at least the ignorance and fear that lies beneath it, is alive and well in Chilliwack—as one Past Grand Master discovered late this past August.

When MW Bro. Robert D.

McSween attempted to place an order with Elite Trophies & Awards Inc., he was told by an employee that freemasons were not Christians and *his* store would not do business with them. From all reports, the owner of the business concurs with this benighted policy.

While some brethren may prefer a more active or aggressive response, your editor suggests that we as consumers take Elite Trophies at their word, and take our business elsewhere. ■

Fiesta

Join the Grand Court of BC Order of Amaranth in chasing away those winter blues at their Winter Fiesta on 24 January 2009, to be held at Surrey Golf Club. With a no host bar opening at 6:00pm and a buffet dinner at 7:00pm, this will be an evening of fun with a silent auction, karaoke and entertainment. Tickets, available through Fran Wright at francesdan@shaw.ca, are \$48, single \$90 for couple, with partial proceeds to Diabetic Research. ■