

THE MASONIC WAY OF LIVING

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In Massachusetts

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In this, the first Quarterly Communication of your new administration, it seems fitting to give our attention to a general survey of the present situation in the Masonic world and to the definition of some general purposes and objectives rather than to look too closely at administrative details.

The significance of any event or institution is largely determined by its surroundings in time or place or history. That which would be trivial under some circumstances becomes momentous in other circumstances. The pressure of a finger on a trigger in a target gallery is of no great importance, but at Sarajevo in 1914 it unleashed the World War. A bag of sand has no great intrinsic value, but on the top of a flood-beleaguered levee it may become priceless.

So the significance of this meeting and of Freemasonry in general can best be determined by measuring them against the particular crisis through which the world is now passing.

Viewed in that light this meeting ceases to be a mere assembly of a few well-meaning individuals. It becomes a symbol of an unseen army of thousands and hundreds of thousands and of millions of men of like mind and purpose all over the world. No longer do we stand alone; we are reinforced and supported on every hand by a vast host of Brethren. No longer does Freemasonry stand as merely a fraternal order; it becomes a symbol of all the individuals and all the forces that have made for higher standards and better conditions in all ages and under all vicissitudes.

But Freemasonry is not simply another society in the congregation of worthwhile societies. It has its own peculiar savour. It fills a niche and performs a service that

are essentially unique. It has its own special contribution to make, which, if it fails, will be made by no other organization.

This is not a new role for the Order. Thus during the dark ages the Freemasonry of those days was almost the sole repository of the world's mathematical and architectural wisdom. By its courage and fidelity it withstood the insidious attacks of almost universal ignorance and lowered standards. Almost alone it preserved through those dark ages, and transmitted to the better ages that followed, the wisdom of the past not only in the arts of mathematics and architecture but also in the art of living. It required clarity of vision and tenacity of purpose and courage of convictions to withstand the ridicule and the persecution of intolerant majorities. That was a service both priceless and unique which, had Freemasonry failed, would never have been rendered.

In strikingly similar fashion, speculative Freemasonry in these days is called upon to make a unique contribution to the welfare of mankind. It has this exceptional opportunity because of the nature of the present world crisis and because of the extraordinarily apt way in which the teachings and practices of Freemasonry fit the needs of the crisis.

The world has been through crises before. The world wrung certain lessons from its blunderings and sufferings in those crises. Now in the greatest of all crises when the guidance of those hard-earned lessons is so desperately needed, every agency that can mobilize that wisdom should do its part. None is better equipped than is Freemasonry. In many respects none is so well equipped.

In the somewhat remote future men will look back in wonder at our inability to read the signs of the times, for then the major trends of the present will seem too obvious to be mistaken. Now, however, we are too close to events to appraise them in their proper perspectives. We may be on the brink of the destruction of all that heretofore has seemed precious, or we may be at the threshold of a comparative millennium. These trends and forces may be so colossal that one or the other outcome is inevitable regardless of what men do today. On the other hand, it may be that these opposing forces are so evenly deadlocked that either could prevail, and our action or inaction may be the decisive factor to determine the whole course of the future.

Such a balancing is no novelty in the experience of individuals or of Masons. In fact, history is sometimes regarded as merely a record of the impact of dynamic individual personalities on their contemporaries. Without doubt the impact of a dynamic Freemasonry on the affairs of the present could be a saving factor. Of a certainty the universal acceptance and practice of the Masonic Way of Living would afford a solid foundation for the solution of today's problems.

Whatever else the present crisis may be, it is clearly a period of transition. All the world is on the march. The present supremacy of the white races is being threatened by the other and more populous races of the earth. Within the white races there are terrific struggles for supremacy among contending forms of governmental and economic control and of religious beliefs and ethical standards. These and other major stresses are intensified and complicated by endless minor repercussions. Where we shall arrive or even whither we are tending is uncertain, but there can be no doubt that the new destination will be different from the point of departure. Whether it be worse or better it will not be the same. Whether it be worse or better we of the present cannot be forgiven for doing less than our best to lessen the evil and increase the good. Whether it be worse or better we of the present must accustom our thinking and our planning and our living to an era of transition.

During this era of transition we find a world strangely adrift in a sea of dislocated relationships, of confused thinking, of desperate anxieties. Perspectives are distorted. Vision is obscured. Frantic pressures crowd for hasty decisions. The lure of the new in discarding the old threatens to destroy the benefits of centuries of hard-won progress. The strident clamor of slogans and formulae drowns the voice of experience and caution. Civilization itself is a milling, leaderless mob on the verge of a stampede into suicidal warfare.

Man is at strife with man. Nations are arming not only against other nations, but against unnamed fears that greed and ambition have conjured up to lash and drive them. Liberty is at war with absolutism on a thousand fronts. Ideologies, manufactured and colored by propaganda, are striving against each other. Labor is struggling not alone with capital but with internal conflict. Even those who serve the Prince of Peace bicker and clash over the form of their sacrifices and the names of the altars on which to lay them.

Man is at strife with himself. Harassed and driven, confused, discouraged, and beaten down by the pressures and uncertainties of these terrible times, men break under the strain, or throw up their hands and look to others or to the government to carry their burdens. Others seek release in a reckless throw for sudden wealth or in the abandon of artificial amusement.

Man is adrift from his God. In this, the most baffling and dangerous era of all recorded history, half the world is worshiping at the shrine of some form of state absolutism, deifying the forceful seizure of power by ruthless individuals. Others are muddling in the disbelief of superficial science. Others are so enmeshed in the material that they have ceased to grope for the spiritual. Still others are so obsessed with the idea that all is change that they can discern no eternal principles of right and wrong and no abiding foundations for a faith that looks beyond the transient values of the moment.

In such a transition era there is an imperative need for some sure landmarks.

In all the physical universe that we of the northern hemisphere can see there is but a single fixed point - a tiny gleam of light which we call the North Star. All the world appears to revolve around that point. To be sure, even that star is itself moving and is not quite at the central axis of our universe, but to the mariner it always represents a fixed and immovable point, and always, however our universe may revolve, the compass points in the direction of the North Star.

Are there in human affairs any sure landmarks, any stars or compasses?

The variety of human complications can scarcely exceed in number the myriad of aspects of the physical universe, yet the research of our scientific laboratories is gradually marshaling those physical aspects into certain universal and immutable laws of nature.

The laboratories of human living are older and more universal than the laboratories of science. Two billions of humans at this very moment are experimenting with the art of living under all conceivable conditions. For age on age other billions have experimented and passed along to their posterity the results of their experiences. Can we not from all this practical research discern any fixed laws, any sure

landmarks? Since human life began there has been a continual succession of transition eras. Have they yielded no charts for this latest one?

There seems good reason to believe that in all ages and in every race there have been groups of men who have sought to learn the art of living and teach it to their juniors. Usually they were of a religious nature but their object was to teach selected individuals how to live. These partially legendary groups were strikingly similar to modern Freemasonry and can be traced more or less continuously down through the Roman lodges and into the N-fiddle Ages when Operative Masonry emerged with a combination of practical structural arts and religious and ethical teachings and general wisdom in the art of living.

When the rituals of modern speculative Freemasonry were written two centuries ago, they culled the gems of wisdom from the best of all previous schools of religion and philosophy and practical living as transmitted by internal tradition and by available history.

Modern Freemasonry may therefore claim to be the world's oldest laboratory- for practical and experimental research in the Art of Living. Its ritual is designed to be a symbolical representation of the course of a man through his life, leading him step by step from birth through manhood to old age and leaving him with a hope of immortality.

With that background, has Freemasonry- no help for mankind at strife with mankind, for individual men at strife with themselves, and for a world adrift from God?

It has such help, both in the manner of its approach and in the nature of its message.

Although in remote antiquity it was affiliated with various religions, it has long since ceased to be a religion. It is essentially the practical application of a philosophy of life or way of living. It has no creed. It does not purport to have been inspired or to be an exclusive compendium of all wisdom. It has no propaganda. It does not proselyte. If any man seeks membership it must be solely on his own initiative, for no one will ever be solicited to join. Its approach therefore is not that of a volunteer meddler in the affairs of others.

Not being the product of any one race or system of government or economics or philosophy or religion, Freemasonry welcomes men of every race and creed if they have sufficient integrity of character to become good Masons and if they believe in Deity. Instead of trying to be a religion Freemasonry deliberately seeks to provide a common meeting place where men of every religion can remain true to their own religions and yet, submerging their differences, can work together in harmony to manifest the finest fruits of all religions. Its approach is not only modest but it is cooperative and conciliatory.

And what is its message to its own members and to such of the world as are interested? What are its conclusions as to the business of living, arrived at not as a matter of inspired revelation, or ethical theory, but on the basis of the proven results of ages of study and experimenting in the Art of Living?

For convenience they may be grouped around a man's relationship with himself, with his fellow men, and with his God. What counsel does Masonry offer to the individual in the management of his relationship with himself?

As suggested by the symbol of the twenty-four inch gauge, the Masonic life should be an orderly life with emphasis first on the spiritual side of living. It should be a public-spirited life devoted in reasonable measure to the service of God and of mankind. It should be an industrious life in the pursuit of one's usual vocations. It should be a physically sane life with due regard to refreshment and bodily health. A sound body, orderly industry, public spirit, but primarily the building of character-these emerge as major laws of successful living.

Purity of heart, sincerity, truthfulness, fidelity to duty, and similar qualities are emphasized over and over as necessary internal qualifications. The attainment of wisdom, prudence, temperance, justice, reason, self-reliance, strength, and beauty are practical objectives. Self-restraint, upright conduct, and morality are worthy means toward the accomplishment of those objectives. These are typical of the Masonic philosophy.

In an era such as the present, Freemasonry counsels individual men to adhere with fortitude to the old virtues of self-reliance and industry and upright living and unselfish service. With the overwhelming authority of all the experience of the past it proclaims the eternal and unchanging supremacy of character. There is no substitute. There is no short cut. But neither is there failure or uncertainty in these universal laws, for in all ages, in all crises, these have been the surest foundations for the building of individual lives.

What is Freemasonry's counsel as to the wisest relations of man with his fellows?

The entire structure and philosophy of the Order are based on harmony between man and man. Not only is the individual taught to practice self-restraint so as not to trespass upon others, not only should he seek to dwell at peace with others, but he should insure that peace and that harmony by just and straightforward dealing and by active friendship and tolerance and brotherly love. When he can be serviceable

lie is admonished to be ever ready to assist the worthy- and the needy, to sympathize with their misfortunes, and to be generous in encouragement. Both the square and the compass are among the most ancient of human symbols and each is a symbolical representation of the golden rule.

In a world of selfish greed, of nations struggling with nations, and of class warring with class, Freemasonry both by precept and in practice reminds us that there is a better way, a way of friendship and love and peace.

And what has Freemasonry to say about man's relationship with his God?

In its every aspect Freemasonry is reverent. It is not dogmatic or superstitious. Taking the Bible as its rule and guide it pays rational homage to the Supreme Architect of the Universe. Seeking God often in prayer it teaches faith and hope. It advocates a life devoted to the highest spiritual aspirations. It suggests an approach to that great spiritual reservoir which has ever been able to sustain and inspire those who have successfully established contact with it. Having no quarrel with

science or with disbelievers it still asserts that, in an era when mankind is adrift from God, men should turn again in reverence for Divine guidance.

Thus, in a world of greed and force Freemasonry teaches self-restraint and reason.

In a world permeated with the spirit of selfish rivalry it teaches universal brotherhood.

In a world of intolerance and bigotry it teaches tolerance and kindness.

In a world of cynical disbelief it teaches reverence for Deity. In a world floundering in the depths of a great moral and spiritual depression it teaches industry and self-reliance and temperance and integrity. Its emphasis is always on the nobler point of view, the finer choice of conduct.

In a changing and superficial world it points to the eternal and fundamental principles that have emerged unchanged from every transition era, even as the eternal mountains emerge from the drifting clouds that temporarily obscure them.

It aids and comforts and reassures and inspires individuals. It leaps the barriers of race and space to draw together the finest aspirations of all men and unite them in a universal brotherhood.

However complacent or indifferent Freemasonry might justifiably be in settled times, it has no right to be supine in an era which desperately needs the guidance of these proven laws.

But the mission of Freemasonry goes far beyond the enunciation of abstract principles, however lofty or true.

It must somehow weave its pattern into the minds and the hearts and the daily living of mankind.

Just as it is no part of the function of the mariner's compass to chart the course or stoke the boilers, so it is no part of the function of Freemasonry to become a partisan in the application of its philosophy to particular issues of the day. Whatever the confusion of storm or fog the compass always points to the north; but it would speedily lose its value if instead it tried to point the way it might think the ship ought to go. It is no less important that Freemasonry should adhere strictly to its function of pointing to the eternal principles of its philosophy rather than to attempt as an organization to interpret those principles in terms of specific policies of government or economics or ethics. The recent experience of other countries points to the likelihood that there will be increasing pressure here to make this and all other organizations take sides for or against Communism or Fascism, or in defence of democracy or any of several other issues. However insidious the temptation, however powerful the pressure, that danger must be avoided. Our individual members ought to play their part as their respective consciences may direct but as an organization we must hold fast to our true functions.

How then shall we meet our responsibilities in these trying times?

As an organization we must use especial care to maintain the quality of our membership. Although there is strength in numbers, it is the very essence of Freemasonry to seek quality rather than numbers. We seek to promote no civil or religious program. We feel no mission to force our views on others. We seek to mind our own business. But that business involves the maintenance of high standards of membership. We must be vigilant in maintaining the quality of our membership.

As an organization we must at all times be sure that our Grand Lodge and our particular Lodges fulfill every obligation whether financial or ethical, and that our methods square in all respects with our high professions.

As an organization we must seek every opportunity to cooperate with the rest of the Masonic world. Historically we have developed in separate Grand Lodge units. Some means might well be sought whereby, without sacrificing individual independence, we could federate for certain purposes. The forces that tend to disintegrate our civilization are not troubled by state boundaries. The forces that tend to safeguard our civilization might well seek means of cooperation.

As an organization we must improve our means of educating our members and the world at large in the purposes and philosophy of Freemasonry.

But the real contribution of Freemasonry will only incidentally be collective.

The real contribution of Freemasonry will be in the quality of the individual lives of its members. In the warfare of olden days the standard bearers were not numerous. They carried no weapons. But they were invaluable as rallying points for entire armies. The lighthouses occupy but a few tiny spots in the vast expanse of the ocean. But they point the way to safe harbors. Even so a single upright character may be the rallying point, the beacon and guide, of a whole community. A single courageous word of truth may set the standard for a business or a government.

These are heroic times. How splendid if we could do some great heroic act that would free men from their difficulties. But we are called to a far more difficult task. We must think clearly and justly. We must forego the urge to intolerance. We must renounce the lure of special privilege or easy gains. We must hold to our own inner standards even if we stand alone. Day by day we must be industrious and self-reliant and clean and wholesome and upright. We must be public spirited and help to carry other burdens than our own. We must be brave and kindly and steadfast. And somehow we must strive to keep alive a reverence for the Great Architect and a faith in His ultimate plans.

But, my Brethren, there is one more tenet of our institution. However high our aims they are not morose or sombre. Interwoven throughout the history of Freemasonry is the wise tradition of wholesome, buoyant, joyous comradeship. In this room, in every Masonic gathering, there are assembled true friends and royal good fellows. Let us always practice the art of clean good fellowship. Let us begin here in this meeting where we have assembled some of the finest men from every corner of the commonwealth. Make it your business in this and in every Masonic meeting to get acquainted with as many Brethren as possible before the day is over. As you give, so will you receive, a friendly smile and an encouraging word. On such tiny morsels great friendships are nourished.

Thus we stand in the midst of the world's greatest transition era when, as never before, men need the guiding, steady influence of infallible landmarks.

We are the custodians of what we believe to be such infallible landmarks in the form of wisdom tested and verified by previous transition eras and by universal experience.

We believe that the practice of that wisdom, the Masonic Way of Living, would tend to enrich our own individual lives and would afford a standard around which to rally the wavering forces of righteousness.

We believe that the voice of Freemasonry should confidently be raised above the counsels of avarice and confusion and despair to guide and reassure a baffled humanity.

We believe that out of the present discord may come the harmony of a great symphony if we can sound one true note to set the key.

No one can do for us what we fail to do for ourselves. Our tools are not propaganda or stratagem or force. They are not heroic or spectacular. They are only incidentally collective. In the last analysis they consist of individual living, of loyalty to high ideals, of indomitable purpose to surmount the defeats that shame us and to outgrow the limitations that keep us small. They consist of reverence and faith and kindness and integrity and wholesome good fellowship.

Say not the struggle naught availeth,

The labor and the wounds are vain,

The enemy faints not nor faileth,
And as things have been they remain.

If hopes were dupes, fears may be liars;
It may be, in yon smoke concealed,
Your comrades chase e'en now the fliers,
And, but for you, possess the field.

For while the tired waves, vainly breaking,
Seem here no painful inch to gain,
Far back, through creeks and inlets making,
Comes silent flooding in, the main.

And not by eastern windows only,
When daylight comes, comes in the light;
In front, the sun climbs slowly, how slowly,
But westward, look, the land is bright. [Arthur Hugh Clough]