

OUR REAL PURPOSE

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Bro. President, distinguished visitors and brethren. My first duty I think should be to thank you, Mr. President, for your invitation or order, depending on how you look at these things, to be present this evening to give the opening address to the twenty-fifth Annual Banff Conference. My second duty is to thank you for the very flattering introduction you have given me, some of which of course, like most introductions, was true. It takes one's mind back rather forcibly to realize that you were present at the first of these conferences and you are now attending the twenty-fifth. I have not of course attended all the intervening ones or obviously I would not have been asked to be here tonight. Twenty-five years is a long time. In that time men are born, grow up, get married, have children and in the time since the first conference was held a whole new generation has grown up, not only in this country but across the world and I thought it might not be entirely out of place and of some interest to you, to hear a little about the beginnings of this institution and I think possibly you will agree we could call it an 'Institution'.

To give you that information I thought I could not do better than to read you something from the preamble of the first set of minutes of the first conference held in this town in September 1941. At that conference George Ellis, the Grand Master of Alberta was Chairman and Brother William Ireland who is now a Past Grand Master of Alberta was the Secretary. The next year and for sixteen years Brother George Ellis was the Secretary of the conference, and not only the Secretary but I think you could safely say he was the driving force. He was the man who kept it moving and made it move, arranged things for everybody, and took a great delight in it and like everything he did he did it with his whole being and it was a great loss to this Grand Jurisdiction and to this conference when he died after sixteen years in harness. The preamble reads like this:

"It will be remembered that at the instance of M.W. Bro. V. A. Bowes, then Grand Master of Alberta, a Conference of the Grand Masters, Deputy Grand Masters and Grand Secretaries of the Grand Lodges of British Columbia, Manitoba, Alberta and Saskatchewan, was called to meet in the City of Calgary, Alberta on May 9th and 10th, 1935. From the opinions expressed by those in attendance of the value of such a conference, it was hoped that it would become a regular Masonic fixture in the future.

It was not until September 14th, and 15th, 1940, however, that at an informal meeting of the Grand Masters of British Columbia and Alberta, with some of their officers, at Banff, that another conference was again suggested, as there appeared to be many matters on which general agreement would be desirable as between the four Grand Lodges. Correspondence was accordingly opened with Manitoba and Saskatchewan as to the advisability of holding a conference in 1941, if possible in April, and preferably at the town of Banff. The M.W. the Grand Master of the Grand Lodge of Alberta, M.W. Bro. Sam Harris, was requested to send out notices and make the necessary arrangements. It was found that an April meeting would hardly be successful from the point of attendance, and the duty fell to M.W. Bro. George F. Ellis as Grand Master of Alberta, who called the meeting for September 26th and 27th, 1941. A successful conference was held," and so on, and this is the final paragraph of the preamble. "Before dispersing for their homes in the early afternoon of Sunday, the brethren expressed their satisfaction at the successful results attained during the different sessions of the Conference, and it was the consensus of opinion

that a foundation had been laid for a continuation of similar annual conferences, which would be looked forward to with pleasurable anticipation by the officers of the four western Jurisdictions who had participated."

I think Brethren the fact that the Conference has met here every year since, and that we are here tonight, bears out the consensus of opinion that similar conferences would be looked forward to with pleasurable anticipation. So each year for twenty-five years the Craft from the four western provinces and some distinguished visitors have met here to discuss their problems and try and work out some solution, imbibe the glorious Banff air and in the fortunate years get some sunshine and see the mountains.

It might not be out of place for us to consider what the situation was in this world twenty-five years ago. You will remember that we had just finished in September 1941, the second year of the war. Many of our members, their sons and daughters, had joined the Forces and some of them, alas, had already given their lives. For almost a year after Dunkirk it was a matter of great pride to the people of Canada to know that the first Canadian Division was the only armed and equipped Military Unit in the British Isles and that Great Britain and the Commonwealth stood alone for twelve long months against the hordes of Hitler. Those were great days. We at home were busy with the Red Cross, War Savings, Veterans Guard, comforts for troops Overseas, in fact it would not be unfair to say that all of us to a greater or less degree were caught up in the war at that time. We did not know then, of course, the horrors that faced the world in the months ahead, we did not know about Auschwitz, Hiroshima, Dresden and the rest. At the Battle of Britain, which had been fought a year earlier, no one had any idea there that that marked the end of Hitler's hopes of invading the United Kingdom.

In our lodges we went ahead. Here in Alberta we had more than 10,000 members compared to nearly 20,000 today. We kept the lodges going, as you well know. There was very little growth. It was a more static proposition but we were able to raise substantial amounts of money which were forwarded to the United Grand Lodge of England and the Grand Lodge of Scotland to help them take care of the enormous burden they had assumed. As you probably know, they turned their Institutions and Hospitals over to the Government and maintained them out of their own funds. They were not maintained by the Government although the Government had the use of them. We did a little of that. After the war our men came back and we did what we could for them, most of them settled in fairly rapidly. Some of them had trouble and we tried to help them, but we got them all settled and within a year or two things were going along much as usual. The Conference kept meeting and it too went along much as usual. They met here. The delegates each year discussed their problems and tried to work out solutions.

The first subject on the agenda of the first Conference was "Masonic Education." The first subject on the agenda of this twenty-fifth Conference is "Masonic Education." Now that is not a coincidence because there is no subject that has appeared more regularly on the agenda of the Conference than Masonic education and no subject of greater importance to the Craft than Masonic Education because it is still the essential thing in any good lodge or any Grand Lodge because we have got to make our members understand what the institution is, why they are here, what they are supposed to be doing and in general what it is all about if we are ever going to get our lodges and this great Institution moving as we know it should. It is a painful process-and this is not an easy thing to do. Take our own children, we educate them through school and University so that they may be of some value to the world and of course to themselves. We hope that when they are through they will be able to do something useful and be an ornament to society. What do we do about our own members? what do we do about training them? Do we send them out into the world with

the kind of training that will make them a benefit to the world and a benefit to themselves? I ask you, do we brethren? I am very much afraid the answer that you have to give me honestly is No, we don't. For some reason, possibly laziness or lack of interest, we fail to give our members the real meat of Masonry, the guts of Masonry if you want to speak plainly. We fail to make them realize, that intelligent membership in any lodge can pay rich dividends, rich dividends in friendship, in knowledge and in opportunity. Now these facts were all true twenty-five years ago when this first conference was held and they are all true today.

This year in Alberta, Mr. President, we had an unusual experience. You, Sir, were an unusual Grand Master. You made us take a long hard look at ourselves and what we were doing and when you challenged us to take the action which you, and many more, regard as essential if this great institution of ours is to work and grow as it should. You gave us that challenge at Grand Lodge and in your addresses both within and without the Jurisdiction you repeated this and you pointed out the urgency of getting something done, of taking some action to restore vigor and drive to this institution. Possibly other Grand Lodges had similar experiences. Without more and better leadership this institution is doomed-without more and better leadership. Now that is not a pleasant thought but fact. It is a fact. We might just as well face it and we should also realize that the remedy, and there is a remedy for it, the remedy lies with ourselves.

Human nature does not change very much in essentials. There is no need to be surprised that this conference will deal with the same subjects that were dealt with in large measure at the first conference twenty-five years ago. There may not be any reason to be surprised about that, but there is a very good reason for us taking a long hard look at ourselves and making a firm resolution that we will do much more about these problems in the next quarter century than we have done in the past. What we lack today, what this institution lacks today, is what the whole world lacks, that is a sense of personal responsibility. We have got to make ourselves personally responsible for this institution and its members.

It isn't a question of whether you like it or whether you don't. We are involved, tied up, we are involved with mankind, from birth to death. There is no escape, that is our fate. Too many not only within the Craft but outside it, fail to realize this and don't act up to it, but in this institution, when we receive a petition from an applicant that is a serious business. That petition comes to us with two member's names attached to it as sponsors. Now what these men don't realize is that when they sign that petition they assume a permanent responsibility for that petitioner and they are personally responsible for that man as long as he is a member of that lodge. He doesn't get the casual relationship; they take him over, or should. He is their personal responsibility and they should see that he is properly trained in the principles and practice of Masonry if we are ever going to have a lodge, a proper body of Masons here. Then the officers, they have a special responsibility, the Worshipful Master in particular, they have a special responsibility to the new man. They not only confer the degrees on him, and make him a Mason in the literal sense but they also should have a part and a real part in making him a Mason in the real sense, in the spiritual sense. For instance, after they get their degrees, when they come to lodge, their sponsors should be there to bring them in and explain to them all the furnishings there are, all the stuff about them because you well know, you remember very vividly your first entrance into the lodge after you received your degrees, the whole thing was strange, you hadn't any idea. This should be explained to them all sympathetically and they should be made to feel that they are brothers, given a warm welcome by everybody, not just let them stand by themselves in a corner as we see far too often, and they should also be made to feel that the lodge is proud to have them as members and so it should be or they never should have taken them. You

see it is all a question of doing something. We go through the mechanics of the thing but we have got to get heart into it brethren, we've got to get the heart into it.

There is no point here in me telling you about the demands on a man's time today you are already familiar with that, but what is not realized is that to be a Mason takes time, it demands time. It not only demands time but it demands energy and interest and thought, like any other worthwhile objective. If a man is not prepared to give a little time to Masonry he should never be an officer of the lodge, and going further than that, he never should be a member of the Craft. The outward appearance of a Mason is very easy to acquire but the inward conviction is hard. There are far too few of us, brethren, far too few of us, who enjoy the very real satisfaction of Masonic work well done, far too few, and that is a fault that rests on our shoulders.

I can remember in one of our older lodges they had a custom that whenever a petition was received in the lodge the two sponsors attended and stood up in the lodge and told the lodge why they wanted that man to be a member of their lodge. Now that, I think, was an admirable idea. For some reason, whether they didn't wish to assume responsibility or whatever else it might be, lack of interest, the custom dropped, which I think was a pity, because the closer you can identify any or all members of the lodge with a candidate the better lodge you are going to have. There is no question about that. Another point we should remember after the twenty-five years, after this increase in membership, it is not necessarily true that our lodges are better than they were twenty-five years ago. I don't say they are and I don't say they're not but if they're not better it reflects squarely on us because we were the nominal rulers of the Craft in that time. If our lodges are not better than they were twenty-five years ago we are the people who should be blamed. It may have changed, of course, and this is very simple and you have heard it often enough before that what we need of course is to put more Masonry into our members and have fewer members without Masonry and I make no apologies for repeating it, simple as it is. It is a simple enough remedy but not a simple one to put into effect and yet it is absolutely essential if we are going to bring this thing about. We have got to take more care, we have got to start at the beginning, we have to take more care in the selection of our members. Too many members, as you well know, you may have them in your own lodges .and in other lodges, you all know them, we have literally thousands of them in the Craft, who never should have been in the Craft at all under any circumstances. Not because they are not good men because most of them are, but simply because they have no interest whatever in what goes on in the lodge. They have no interest in Masonry, they have no interest in lodge work and whatever might have induced them in the first place to go in evaporates very quickly and that is it. We have far too many of them. Or we have the others that stay away from the lodge, they don't come at all and they are classed in about the same category, they are not doing any good to us. That is the gloomy side.

Now brethren it is not all gloomy. Let's look at the other angle for a while; let's look the other way for a while. Here is an institution of which we are all proud to be a part and remember that this institution has gone forward for nearly two hundred and fifty years all over the world, through good times and bad, peace and war, through depression and plenty and it is still going forward, now that proves conclusively if anything could, that this institution has something, it has something that men want, something that men will make an effort to get, something that many men would treasure when they've got it. That is what we have to build on and to have this spark, and we have it, is essential, but we need much more, we need some action, we need some work, we need to get our lodges moving. As our Grand Master told us last year, we've got to get things going. We've got to inspire these men with the grand design and we have to do our utmost to make ourselves and all our fellow members worthy of this great institution to which we all have the honor to belong.

Other Masons all over the world are concerned with this, perhaps just as much as we are. A few weeks ago in Ontario, M.W. Bro. Irvine addressing the Grand Lodge of Canada in the Province of Ontario, said that the Masonic Order was heading into difficulties because the Order is failing to provide new ideas in a changing world-because the Order is failing to provide new ideas in a changing world. Now brethren, with due respect, I submit that that is not the case. There is nothing wrong with our ideas, our ideas are sound, there is nothing wrong with that, but what is wrong is we have got to put something behind them, we have got to do some work about them and put them into operation and stop doing nothing more than paying lip service to them. That will get us nowhere, but the ideas are there and the ideas are sound. What we want, what we need, are more good Masons and lots of them, that's what we want. The raw material we have, the raw material is just the side-bencher in your own or any other lodge it's there, or alternatively the other group who have come in in earlier years and get fed up with what they see. There is nothing there they want and they drop away. These are the men we have to get. We've got to go for these men. We've got to talk to them and we have got to teach them and we have got to do our utmost to imbue them with some interest in Masonry if we are ever going to get this institution moving. Mind you that's hard work. It can be very disappointing because for every ten members you talk to if you get two or even one you are going to do well, but that's how you are going to do it.

Most of us here have long years of membership which has been of very great value to us but I doubt if there is any man here who can't tell us of some member of his own lodge or other lodge, some Master Mason at home, whose practice of Masonry isn't superior to his own. I would just like to give you two instances that I know to illustrate that point. First from my own lodge and the second is far afield. Some years ago an old friend came to me and asked how he would go about joining a Masonic lodge. He was a man approaching seventy. He had a grown family and he had worked desperately hard for many years on his farm and I asked him just why he wanted to join and he said: "I would like to help people, I think if I joined the lodge I would be able to help people." So he joined the lodge and he did help people and he also helped me and a number of other old sweats around there to do a little on their own to help people and he is still, I'm happy to say, an active and valued member of our lodge. The other instance comes from far away, in the Far East. In Singapore they had a huge prison camp in the exhibition grounds there. I saw pictures taken in the place of the conditions and the people in there and it was a pretty harrowing experience for all concerned. It was a very large camp with several thousand men and, as you would expect, there were quite a number of Masons there and they made themselves known to each other as we do and they got together some equipment out of scraps of wood and metal and canvas and exemplified degrees for instruction and they sometimes had nearly a hundred at a meeting in the camp. After the war one of the members who was there wrote to the Grand Lodge of Scotland and explained all this and how they got along and I should like to read you what he said about them when he detailed what had happened. This is what he said at the end: "I have given you a very short account of what Freemasonry meant to us, shut off from all outside communication and living as it were in a world of our own. From a Masonic standpoint it was a most interesting time and I am more than ever convinced that our training and teaching lays the foundation of life, no matter what form life may take, and I can safely say that every brother I met, no matter from what Constitution behaved and acted up to the best principles of the Craft. I am glad and thankful to have been associated with them," and who wouldn't. That is quality and that is Masonry.

It's not new ideas that are going to carry this institution forward, Brethren, the ideas are sound, with due respect to M.W. Bro. Irvine, but what we need is a clearer realization of the ideas on which the order is founded but apparently we lack sufficient desire or sufficient energy to put these ideas to work. Surely with our knowledge and our interest and our energy we can do better than we are doing today. If we go away from this conference without inspiration, without hope and without a definite determination to work harder for Masonry we will have wasted our time, but if we go away from this conference with renewed enthusiasm, revived interest, a deeper conviction to do more for Freemasonry, it will have justified its twenty-five years of existence and the time and work this group of men have put into it. The choice is ours brethren. It's up to us. Are we real Masons after all or do we just pay lip-service to the Craft? That is the question. Tomorrow we get down to work, let us see to it that that work is worthwhile and that Masonry in Western Canada is given new inspiration, clearer direction and more powerful drive. That's what we are here for brethren. The next two days will tell the story.