

THE JOB OF FREEMASONRY IN THE POST-WAR WORLD.

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Freemasonry has "subsisted from time immemorial", but organized Freemasonry as we know it today dates from the formation of the First Grand Lodge in London in 1717. It is thus 226 years of age. From that time until the present, Freemasonry has had to suffer the usual ups and downs which face such an order. With alternating periods of prosperity and growth, of depression and recession, its constant trend was an increasing strength and vitality which gave it force and influence to meet those denunciations, suspicions and persecutions which fell to its lot.

It is interesting to look back upon the period in which the First Grand Lodge was formed. In 1713 the war with Louis XIV was ended. He was the perfect example of a despot who had tried to dominate all Europe. His defeat was accomplished by John Churchill, Duke of Marlborough, a forbear of the present Winston Churchill. Then in 1723 were published the Constitutions, the noblest expression of the universality of the Order that we know Concerning God and Religion. This was a remarkable statement in a time of bitterest sectarian hatred and intolerance imaginable. The temper of the times was all for relentless partisanship both in religion and in politics. The noblest expression of this doctrine is to be found, a generation later, in the Philanthropy of Howard and the Humanity of Wilberforce.

In 1813 occurred the Act of Union of the rival Grand Lodges of these called "Moderns" and the so-called "Ancients". Open warfare came to a head about 1750 between the rival Grand Lodges. It appeared, for a long time, that the Order like religious, political and social institutions of the time was merely talking about a unity and a universality that it had neither the will nor the power to bring into existence. But at last Freemasonry overcame its own internal feuds and thus demonstrated that men can do such things if they have the mind. Let us remember that the Union occurred when Great Britain was fighting Napoleon who wished to dominate the world and who was finally defeated by Great Britain at Waterloo in 1815.

These outstanding events should, today, inspire every Mason to believe that Union is possible among men, however diverse they may be in interest, creed or race. More, they cheer and encourage because they demonstrate that it can be accomplished, and example is greater than precept. So long as Freemasonry has these outstanding triumphs to look back upon we need never lose hope for the ultimate unity of the whole Masonic World, and the whole Non-Masonic world. Union and Universality are not mere visions of poets.

However to understand the part Freemasonry might play in the post-war world might be well to enquire why the Masonic Order was one of the totalitarian states first victims. Some time ago the magazine "Mercury" had an article about a book, published by Adolph Hitler's own publishing house in 1938, under a title which translated means "Freemasonry - Its World View, Organization and Policies", wherein if the quotation carried in the article is accurate, those basic ideals seem to be well summarized in forty words, although breaks in two places show that the sentences from which the words are quoted may be considerably longer.

Here is the quotation-

"Masonic Lodges are associations of men who, closely bound together in a union employing symbolical usages, represent a supra-national spiritual movement, the ideas of Humanity.... a general association of mankind, without distinction of races, peoples, religious, social and political convictions".

Freemasonry, as each and everyone of us must know, and must have known since first, at its altar, we declared our trust 'in God' is founded in religion, but not in denominational religion. Freemasonry we know inculcates good citizenship not according to any particular governmental formula, but under whatever sovereignty the initiate may, then or thereafter, make his home. Freemasonry embraces men of every religious faith, except such as begin the institution, and men of every nationality excepting those who are forbidden to become members. Freemasonry, as so tersely stated by the German writer, makes no distinction, whatsoever, of races or peoples or religions or convictions. Thus, one of the undoubted elements of our strength, which tended, heretofore, to contribute to our universality, has become in recent years, if not an element of weakness, at least a mainspring for our present troubles. This it is, outstandingly wherein our institution runs counter to the thoughts, the plans, and the hopes of that ideology of government embraced within this term "totalitarianism".

The exact moment in history cannot be designated when any particular change or movement began. Just as the beginnings of Freemasonry must antedate by far its outward manifestation in the founding of the First Grand Lodge, so must the beginnings of totalitarianism antedate by far its first outward manifestation in the then tottering Russia. Unless its spread be arrested it will utterly destroy Freemasonry and all the basic ideals represented thereby, throughout the whole world.

This statement is not an idle fear if we consider the events of slightly more than twenty years following the advent of Bolshevism. Commencing in 1917, what seems to be an inevitable conflict began. The conflict opened up when sharp distinctions began to develop and to secure governmental strength, not at the beginning with references to races or peoples or religions, but to social and political convictions. One placing a trust in God or having a concept of distinction between right and wrong, or having tolerance, even the slightest, for opposing political views, became suspects. The Lodges in which Freemasons might congregate

together, were dissolved. Commencing in Russia in 1917, the trend to a totalitarian outlawing of Freemasonry became constantly an increasing one. In 1919 Bela Kun proclaimed a dictatorship in Hungary and ordered dissolution of all Masonic Lodges. His overthrow did not bring their restoration. In 1924 Mussolini decreed that Fascists, who were Masons, must abandon one of the two organizations and in 1925 he dissolved Freemasonry in Italy. In 1925 General Primo de Rivera, established a dictatorship in Spain and he abolished the institution. In 1934 when the Nazis took over Germany, one of their first official statements was that there was 'no place for Freemasonry in National Socialist Germany'. Thus it stood when appeasement was born. Freemasonry by the edict of dictators, regardless of the will of its members, or of the peoples to which its members belonged had ceased to have valid legal existence in Russia, Hungary, Italy and in the German Reich. Appeasement, which furthered the aggrandisement of totalitarianism and particularly the Axis of Hitler and Mussolini., by concession after concession, made to secure a world peace which was never achieved, eliminated Freemasonry in the additional nations of Austria and Czechoslovakia. All this before the advent of total war.

The short space of time which elapsed from the invasion of Poland, Denmark, Norway, Holland, Belgium .and France spelled the end of Freemasonry in these countries. Later it was prohibited in Rumania, in Bulgaria, and in Yugoslavia in fear of the conqueror coming to abate it. The outcome of the "Battle of Britain" determined not only the fate of the British Commonwealth of Nations, but also of the Freemasonry now there existing. Freemasonry has become 'verboden' in all of Europe except Sweden, Switzerland and the British Isles.

I do consider therefore, that the part Freemasonry should play in the Post World should embrace the following among others which totalitarianism has tried to wipe out:

1. Freedom of Religious Opinion.

This is in accordance with "The Charges of a Freemasons etc. A Mason is obliged by his tenure to obey the moral law, and if he rightly understand the art, he will never be a stupid atheist, nor an irreligious libertine. But though in ancient times Masons were charged in every country to be of the religion of that country or nation whatever it was, yet it is now thought more expedient only to oblige them to that religion in which all men agree, leaving their particular opinions to themselves, that is, to Good Men and True, or Men of Honor and Honesty by whatever Denomination or Persuasion they may be distinguished; whereby Masonry becomes the centre of Union, and the means of conciliating true Friendship among persons that must have remained at a perpetual distance.

This remarkable statement, written many years ago, needs to be practised today. Its teachings are something which totalitarian rulers cannot understand and so they destroyed Freemasonry in their lands.

2. Freemasonry is the best argument for the coming unity among men in the post-war world. Men of all races, of all colors, of almost every creed, tongue, nation and location are now, as an actual fact, Masons, and therefore bound to all the rest of us, however far away we may be in all those particulars, by a tie that is stronger every year. Masonry teaches brotherhood and benevolence. The Nazis and Fascists dream of a Master Class of slaves and of human clods of earth. Hence Masonry and totalitarianism cannot co-exist. It is a case of 'We or They' and because they controlled the power of the mailed fist, Masonry was abolished. Thus Masonry can make a contribution to the future by holding fast to its ideals, by binding men together with bonds of friendship and fellowship.

3. Tolerance.

Truth knows no national boundaries. Tolerance is the virtue by which liberated minds make a conquest by bigotry and hatred. Tolerance is the positive and cordial effort to understand another's beliefs, practices and habits without necessarily accepting them. Tolerance militantly protects the rights of an opponent. Voltaire's famous aphorism "I disapprove of what you say, but I will defend to the death your right to say it" is for all ages the perfect utterance of the tolerant ideal. Tolerance does not mean moral laxity. We become intolerant when we attempt to force our neighbor to conform to our opinions. Viewed in this way tolerance becomes the bulwark of social and individual liberty and the chief element in any cultural advance that a society may expect to make. We need but a glance at Italy or Germany to realize how precious the virtue of tolerance has become to us, and how desperately we must struggle to keep it alive. Our free press, our privileges of free assembly and religious worship, our very form of democratic government are supported by the dikes of tolerance, laboriously built and held by the individual. For when we fail to practise tolerance in our individual lives, we jeopardize the structure of all. Democracy is the principle of tolerance extended into the sphere of politics. Tolerance preserves minorities. Take away, tolerance, as in Germany, Italy, and our democracy would not survive. Let Freemasons be on their guard against religious and racial persecution else we may witness in this country an outbreak of ante-Semitic atrocities so common in Europe. Of all the Commandments, 'Love thy neighbor' is the least enforceable and the most voluntary. But to break it brings penalties that are not less severe because they are self-inflicted. The lesson of tolerance as taught in Freemasonry can help rebuild the world.

4. Helping to rebuild Masonic Lodges in European Countries.

Our King, George VI, referred to this at the installation of his brother-in-law, the Earl of Harewood, as Grand Master of the United Grand Lodge of England. We, in Canada, must be prepared to dip down into our pockets to raise funds for the rehabilitation of Freemasonry in European countries, and in China. Our charity in this matter should know no bounds.

I do not think that Freemasonry has gone under in the countries where it has been abolished, by government decree. While assembly is prohibited, yet the teachings and the ideals of Freemasonry are so implanted in the hearts and minds of its members, that when opportunity offers, it will thrive and spread its beneficent teachings as before. The Light of Freemasonry must not be allowed to be dimmed. That light symbolizes all that is worth while living for. Above all it shows us the path that leads to the Fatherhood of God and the Brotherhood of man, it illumines the great truth that we serve best ourselves, by being of service to others; it guides us to the all important tenets of freedom of thought and action.

The Masonic Fraternity must assume grave responsibilities in the prosecution of the War and the greater responsibility we assume to bring this dreadful slaughter to a close the greater will be our influence to establish Peace and the only Peace - Peace founded upon God as the Creator and Preserver of Mankind and the principle. that each one of us has at the altar of Freemasonry, before God sworn to observe.

Though the cause of evil prosper
Yet 'tis truth alone is strong;
Though her portion be the scaffold,
And upon the throne be wrong.
Yet that scaffold sways the future,
And behind the dim unknown,
Standeth God within the shadow,
Keeping watch above His own.

(James Russell Lowell)

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Closely allied to this matter of secrecy and of recognition of visitors which I mentioned a moment ago, is the custom of 'vouching'. In some places there has carne to be attached to 'vouching' the meaning of 'taking responsibility'. This is not the proper meaning of the word. A Mason is allowed to vouch for another with whom he has sat in open lodge on an occasion which the brother remembers so that he recalls both the occasion and the person. Moreover, the vouching for the visitor should be as of the date of the occasion remembered. If the occasion be not recent the vouching can hardly cover the matter of present good standing. I am not pleading for unbending rigidity but I believe that this is a matter in which some looseness of practice exists and in which care is necessary.

There is one matter of lodge practice which has a secret within a secret. That is the matter of balloting. Not only is it lodge business, the very existence of which an outsider has no right to know. In addition it involves a secret which to locked up in the heart of the one who ballots, even in respect to his brethren. It is doubly secret.

Now let me turn to what is not secret about Masonry. My general statement was that its general principles are not secret. This, I think, is where there is, among Masons at large, the greatest need for instruction and I believe that attention to this matter would be of great benefit to the Craft. These general principles have been stated again and again for all the world by the Grand Lodge of England and other Grand Lodges. As late as 1938 the Grand Lodge of England put out a statement. It appeared in Saskatchewan Grand Lodge Proceedings of 1939. In one of Saskatchewan's Masonic Study papers for 1940 a summary or tabulation of it was set out as follows;

A MASON MUST

1. Believe in a Supreme Being.
2. Believe that there is a revelation of Divine will in a sacred volume.
3. Be loyal to the government of the land in which he lives.
4. Preserve his freedom of opinion and speech as a citizen.

GRAND LODGE WILL

1. Assert that it is sovereign and independent in its practice of Freemasonry.
2. Practice Freemasonry only within the three degrees.
3. Encourage men to form their own opinions on all important affairs and to be courageous in the support thereof.
4. Encourage the inculcation in all lodges of the purest principles of virtue and morality and the practice outside the lodge of Brotherly love, relief and truth, Recognize as fraternal bodies other Grand Lodges which have professed and do profess and practice the principles herein set out.

A MASON MUST NOT

1. Within a lodge introduce any religious or theological controversy.
2. Outside of lodge in any such controversy take part as a mason,
3. Within a lodge introduce any political controversy
4. Outside of lodge take part in any political controversy as a mason.
5. Foment or share in any disturbance of the peace or of good order.

GRAND LODGE WILL NOT

1. Admit that in its practice of masonry it is subject to any control or exercise of authority by any organization, special national or international.
2. Support either a mason or a non-mason in any theological or political controversy,
3. Express any opinion as to:
 - (a) Merits of any political party.
 - (b) Any government domestic policy.
 - (c) Any government foreign policy.
 - (d) Any theory or plan of government,
 - (e) Any international question.
4. Be represented in any petition or request to any government.
5. Recognize as Masonic any organization which departs from these principles,

The statement that Masons are loyal and preserve their freedom of opinion and speech as citizens, and yet Masonry will never enter into any religious or political procedure or contest, has at times been found obscure and difficult. It involves recognition of the fact that often a Mason as a man or as a citizen can and should do things which he should not do as a Mason. Failure to recognize this distinction leads to the idea that there is something secret about a Mason's religion or a Mason's politics, and the situation is confused with an idea of secrecy which both within and without Masonry is harmful. Masonry does not enjoin any member to make his religion or his politics secret from the world. It lays no restraint on him in those respects. It urges him to be true to himself.

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