

CONFUSION IS UPON US

M. W. Bro. H. B. Macdonald
Past Grand Master of Alberta.

I am deeply appreciative of the great honour you have conferred upon me in asking me to address you on this the opening of the Annual Inter-Provincial Conference of the Western Grand Lodges, A. F. & A.M.

This Conference is now assembling for its eleventh Session. During the period since its inception it has done much to cement the good feeling which prevails among all the Grand Lodges participating therein and it has become recognized as a valuable training ground for the Officers to fit them for the day when they will undertake the duties of Grand Master. It is most desirable that all persons, on assuming that office, have preparation and training so that, under their leadership, the Grand Lodge of their Jurisdiction may prosper and the Craft Lodges and Brethren receive the guidance so greatly needed in these trying times.

The attendance of Brethren from the United States has always added much to our Conference meetings and we are indeed happy tonight to have so many from South of the line. Their presence will bring inspiration to our Conference and broaden our fraternal relations.

Now, Bro. President, I know you have a most interesting agenda coming up for discussion but on the eve of our Conference activities I thought it well that we should pause for a brief moment to consider the world situation and the confusion which abounds in the minds and hearts of men everywhere. As we meet in this delightful retreat, surrounded by gigantic mountain peaks, may we be elevated in our thinking and inspired to deal with the problems which confront us.

Many of you, along with me, have enjoyed a span of life that covers quite a stretch of time. During that period greater progress has crystallized and more material benefits have been made available to Mankind than in the long period of all previously recorded history. In the last fifty years, immense strides have been made in scientific and technological development, in the expansion of industry and in all of the elements that make for material welfare. With the exception of dictator-controlled nations, the shackles have been struck from the mind as well as from the body of Mankind but today more than ever before we realize that, unless we solve the problems of human relations, the problems that arise between different ideologies, the problem of conflicting interest between labor and capital and all of the problems involving internal peace and international peace, our gains in knowledge and skill in the field of matter will be nought and we will be brought to the brink of a greater world disaster than humanity has ever known.

On the North American Continent, we are blessed with material gifts and by a way of life far superior to any other country in the world. For a time we thought we could live to ourselves alone - indifferent to the suffering of those in less fortunate parts of the earth, but alas, what an impossible dream, for by the evolution of time and scientific invention, the world has become so small we are all neighbours together and we must share each others problems.

In our time, the whole structure of human life is so intricately interrelated, men - no matter how varied their color, customs or habitats - are so interdependent, that the problem of cooperation has become - supremely - the crucial question of our day. The United States and Canada are in the world conflict today, whether we like it or not.

Let us now take a hurried look at the peoples of the earth. Roughly, the world has a population of two and one third billion souls. Over one and a half billion, or approximately two thirds live on the verge of starvation at all times and the average annual income among the different peoples is appalling in comparison. For example, in the United States of America, the production of new wealth each year is \$1453 for every man, woman and child. Our own Province of Alberta is in second place with \$1200. For those living in the British Isles, the figure is \$773; in New Zealand \$556. and in Sweden \$750. Russia stands about midway with \$308. In the lowest bracket are the Indonesians with \$25.00 a year and the Chinese are not far above this figure with only \$27.00. Little wonder there is unrest among the less favored nations.

We, in Canada, realize how fortunate we are, living in such close proximity to the wealthiest and the greatest industrial nation on earth - the United States of America - and our fortunes are closely linked with theirs. Our International Boundary, which extends over 3000 miles, is undefended by arms. However - in another sense - that Boundary Line is the most highly fortified one in the world fortified by bonds of love, trust, mutual esteem and brotherhood - and our Masonic Order has done more than any other organization in existence to strengthen those bonds of fellowship. Although a nation small in numbers, we, in Canada, have no fear of aggression from our friendly neighbour and - notwithstanding our great potential wealth - have no cause for alarm. How changed would be the picture if we had a nation of different ideals living at our door:

In Canada, we have only 3/4ths of 1% of the world's population. However, we produce:

- 77% of the world's nickel.
- 58% of the world's newsprint.
- 54% of the world's platinum metal.
- 45% of the world's asbestos.

It is also of interest to note that in our Dominion,

- 57% of Canada's homes are owner-occupied.
- 75% of the farms are operated by their owners.
- 78% of all homes have radio sets.
- 40% of all homes have telephones.
- 37% of all homes have automobiles.
- 51% of all homes have refrigerators.

In the United States of America the percentage is even higher. That country, with 7% of the world's population, has

72% of the automobiles.

49% of the telephones.

47% of the radios.

and other luxuries in proportion.

Verily, the people on this Continent live under the most favourable circumstances of any inhabitants of the earth.

In the midst of all this vast material and industrial wealth on the North American Continent, why then is there confusion and why are we so fearful we will lose the great privileges we now enjoy? Our forefathers well and truly laid great foundations, based on the principles of liberty, and it is fact that those great framers of the American Constitution wrote into that Declaration of Independence freedom and liberty for all citizens. Now that the United States of America is the leader among the free nations of the world she is striving to give the same freedom and liberty - to all - that she so dearly loves herself but - oft' times those motives are misunderstood by the oppressed and misinterpreted as aggression by the dictator-controlled countries.

However - notwithstanding all our exalted ideals - somewhere along the road since the early days of our founders, we have lost our way and confusion abounds, but, if we refer to history, we will find there have been many dark testing periods all down through the annals of recorded events. Freemasons well know the confusion which came upon the builders of King Solomon's Temple when the Master Architect was smitten. The building of the Temple was at a standstill. Disorder reigned among the Craftsmen but, in due course, a successor was found to take the place of the Master, the work was resumed and the Temple completed to the glory of God.

Arnold Toynbee, the eminent Historian, tells us in his book, "Civilization on Trial", that since the dawn of recorded history there have been twenty-one civilizations. Sixteen have come and gone - only remnants of their glory remain. The other five are now floundering in confusion and may well pass into oblivion as the others have done before them. It is for us to profit by the lessons of the past and prepare ourselves for the future so that our Western Civilization may yet be saved from destruction.

In the 4th Century B.C., the Chinese Philosopher, Mo Ti, had this to say:

"The mutual attack of state on state; the want of kindness on the part of the sovereign and loyalty on the part of the minister-are things injurious to the empire. All this has arisen from the want of mutual love. If but that one virtue could be made universal, the princes, loving one another, would have no battlefields; rulers and ministers would be gracious and loyal, brothers would be harmonious and easily reconciled. Men in general, loving one another, the strong would not make prey of the weak."

We all know of the confusion which resulted when Jesus, the Galilean., was crucified and his followers dispersed in confusion but, in due course, they recaptured the zeal of their leader and the dawn of the Christian Era began. Hope for Mankind was revived. All down through the Dark Ages the struggle went on and, eventually, our Western Christian Civilization emerged, becoming a mighty power and a great dynamic force for good in the world - not, however, without recurrent periods of doubt, despair and uncertainty.

One hundred and fifty years ago William Pitt, the great English Statesman, declared: "There is scarcely anything around us but ruin and despair."

In 1819 Lord Grey said: "Everything is tending to a convulsion."

The Duke of Wellington, on the eve of his death in 1851, thanked God he would "be spared from seeing the consummation of ruin that is gathering about us," and Disraeli said; "In industry, commerce and agriculture there is no hope.,

It was Lord Shaftesbury in 1848 who remarked; "Nothing can save the British Empire from shipwreck."

Daniel Webster, when addressing the United States Senate in 1818, declared: "There are people who constantly clamor. They complain of oppression, speculation and pernicious influence of accumulated wealth. They carry on mad hostility against all established institutions. In a country of unbounded liberty, they clamor against oppression. What can such men want? They can want nothing but to enjoy the fruits of other men's labor. They can mean nothing but disturbance and disorder."

In our own day, Winston Churchill, one of the great men of our time, uttered these momentous words; "During the last few years a sense of powerlessness must have come across those who have taken part in the triumphant exertions which the British Empire has made in the present century. Some spring seems to have been snapped in the national consciousness. There is a readiness to cast away all that has been won by measureless sacrifices and achievements. We seem to be the only great nation which dare not speak up for itself, which has lost confidence in its missions, which is ready to resign its hard won rights."

Just recently, a prominent American industrialist said: "We punish success and make a virtue of failure. We discourage thrift and invite inflation. We watch corruption and bribery spread throughout our national Capitol. We accept dishonesty as a necessary ingredient of politics. However, we did one thing and that was to prove that true security can never be fashioned out of slavery, injustice and corruption. Our great America is in danger. With each generation, each war, each local uprising, the situation grows worse. We ask, how long can it go on? How long can the increased rate of spending by governments continue? In the 152 years - from the time of George Washington's first inauguration in 1789, to the beginning of preparations for World War II in 1940, the United States Government spent \$167 Billions and - in the four fiscal years of peace time - 1946, '47, '48 and '49 - the overall expenditure of the United States Government was \$177 Billions. Still we continue to put our trust in material things rather than the higher values of life."

The story is told of an American tourist, visiting in Canada, who, upon leaving his hotel, was asked by the proprietor if he wanted a receipt for his account.

"Oh, no," replied the tourist. "I am in a hurry today. If God wills I'll be back in a week.

You can give me a receipt then."

"If God Willis?" said the hotel man. "You still believe in God?"

"Yes," said the man, "Don't you?"

"No. I gave that up long ago."

"Well," returned the tourist, "in that case, I'll take my receipt now."

What he was saying was that when spiritual qualities of justice, freedom and truth are flouted and ignored, then gentlemen's agreements and solemn covenants are torn to shreds. It is impossible to deal with individuals or with nations who do not believe in God or in the sanctity of a promise and, that, after all, is the real reason why there is confusion in the world today.

To quote an outstanding divine, Dr. Harry Fosdick: "Our forefathers who have sacrificed before us may well surround us like a crowd of spectators to watch our contest, for we have in our hands the spoiling or the fulfilment of their hard won gains. It is idle to suppose that civilization's gains cannot be lost. History is the narrative of one civilization after another that began with promise, rose to its climax, and, failing to learn the lessons of righteousness, fell on ruin. God does not guarantee the perpetuity of our blessings: Only vigilance, devotion, self-sacrifice, righteousness, obedience to the law of God, can assure us the retention of present gains and the achievement of new advances."

Our glorious heritage was bequeathed to us by the unselfish devotion of our forefathers but, in the scramble for material gain, we have lost our way and have become confused. However, we must never - for a moment - despair. We must never - for a moment - forget the ringing imperious call of our time - that we capture again the spirit and the zeal of the great founders of our nation.

I will not take time to mention other periods in the world's history when doubt and confusion dwelt in the hearts and minds of men, when they were sorely tried by uncertainty and doubt. You can recall many such events in the long history of Mankind. However, in all recorded history, I do feel that perhaps there has never been a period of more confusion than the one which is now upon us. The great potential and industrial wealth of the North American Continent cannot save us. The world has become so small we are all concerned with the fate of each other. The central fact running through every days news is that the underprivileged, the underfed, the under-housed of the world are in revolt against those they blame for their misery. The seeds of rebellion sprout in the soil of human misery and were there long before the Lenins and the Trotskys and the Maos took command. They were in pre-Revolutionary Russia. And when World War I ended in victory for the Allies, it left behind new and increasing areas of undernourishment and growing unemployment. By the time World War II came up unrest and confusion had burrowed their way into every place on the surface of the earth where men had wearied of corrupt masters and of starvation. Unrest and starvation are never defeated and dispersed by guns or by religious intolerance. I would like to emphasize that if we plunge into World War III - and win - we shall not have solved the problem. We shall have strengthened it.

Unrest will always be present as long as there are underfed and underprivileged inhabitants of the earth. Any solution that we, in North America, are to find for the ills of the world must be based on the fact that all people must have food, clothing and shelter. Even though we be armed to the teeth, even though we be fortified by atomic bombs, the Great Riddle of Life will still remain to be solved. Mankind must be placed above material wealth, armaments and industrial power. What we need today is the adoption of the Principles for which Freemasonry stands so that all peoples will be given equal opportunity to share in the liberty and freedom with which a Benign Providence has so freely endowed the world. We must remove fear and distrust and establish in their place confidence, the Brotherhood of Man, based on the Fatherhood of God. Our Western civilization is in danger and this will last as long as men continue to put their trust in material things.

We are meeting here as Brother Masons, in comfort and security, but we cannot be unmindful of the world situation nor of our duty to Mankind. As Freemasons, we should lead the way and show the world that not by material wealth but by placing our trust in the Great Architect of the Universe and going forward to combat the evil forces which would destroy our civilization can we again become freed from confusion and establish the worth and dignity of man.

Freemasons should lead the way in restoring confidence, in dispelling confusion and in giving hope and security to our own people and to those downtrodden multitudes who live in hopeless bondage under the iron heel of despotism. As Freemasons, let us return to the humble tenets and teachings of our beloved Fraternity, to a faith in the Great Architect of the Universe. We have a mighty task to do in strengthening the hearts and hands of our Brethren and of those who control destinies of the world.

If we, on the North American Continent, are indifferent to the situation prevailing in the world our civilization may well pass away and the dark ages again envelop Mankind. No one knows when the world situation may explode but, Brother Masons, at this time, what an opportunity for men of good will to give constructive leadership in the Community and in the Nation.

I trust this Conference, by its deliberations, will help to dispel the confusion which reigns, push back the foothills of life, enlarge the vistas of our horizon, and recapture the spirit of those luminous figures - our Forefathers - who enlightened and inspired, not only the people of their day, but those of us who believe, as they did, in the ultimate triumph of good.

In the words of Owen Seaman, let us dedicate ourselves

"To steel our souls against the lust of ease;
To find our welfare in the general good
To hold together, merging all degrees
In one wide brotherhood.

"To teach that he who saves himself is lost;
To spend ourselves, and never count the cost,
For others greater need."