

**HOW BEST CAN WE CREATE AND INCREASE THE INTEREST
AND ZEAL OF INDIVIDUAL MASONS IN THE LODGE
AND ALSO IN THE WIDER FIELD OF MASONIC ENDEAVOR.**

**R. W. Bro. Fred C. Hayes
D.G.M. of Saskatchewan**

There is nothing new in the first part of the subject and, if we could answer that satisfactorily, the second part would take care of itself. The problem of creating and maintaining the interest and zeal of the individual Mason in the Lodge is one that every Master has faced since 1717; there is, therefore, no lack of material on the subject, one indeed, would be extremely presumptuous to pretend to offer something new, but there can be no objection to repetition for emphasis and recollection. The only difficulty is, that this material never becomes known to a Master until after he has filled the Chair. The correct answer would, I believe, resolve every difficulty that presents itself in a Lodge. Unfortunately, the complete solution has not been found due, no doubt, to the fact that Masons are only human. The mere statement of the subject is a recognition of an unsatisfactory condition, which comes to the fore whenever the state of Masonry is considered, It has been quite fully dealt with under different headings by this conference in the last two years, directly by the address of M. W. Bro. Marchant on "The Problem of the Indifferent Member", and by the addresses of M. W. Bros. Fahrni and Branion on Masonic Education and Adult Education, respectively; also indirectly, but very forcibly by M.W. Bro. Dr.. Brown in his address on Freemasonry and the New Order.

I feel that there is no point in listing the ordinary catalogue of schemes for promoting interest in the Lodge; they are set out in Claudy's Master's Book. This was first published in 1935 so that most of the now Past Masters did not even have the benefit of that useful book. I have no idea how extensively it is used at the present time, but every Master should have a copy. It is by no means a complete answer, but it enables a Master to avoid the obvious pitfalls into which most of us fell. Since the subject recognizes a lack of interest and zeal on the part of many Masons, I will deal with the matter in a somewhat negative way by recalling your attention to some of the matters which destroy interest and zeal on then part of individual brethren, in the hope that some remedy may be found. I feel safe in saying that at the initiation of every Brother a zeal and interest in Masonry is created in every candidate; our beautiful ritual is sufficient in itself to do that; but, when that interest is allowed to lapse it is very difficult to recreate it. The problem is to develop that interest; this is the task of the craft in general and the Master in particular. It is our failure to keep that interest alive that creates the problem in question. M. W. Bro. Marchant points out that the responsibility for the indifferent member must lie with the member himself, or with the Lodge, or with Grand Lodge. I would excuse the individual in the first instance at any rate. The Lodge has the opportunity of satisfying itself that the member is good Masonic material before he is initiated. The Masonic system of morality with the innumerable lessons that may be derived from the symbols referred to throughout the work, provide a safe guide for the life-long conduct of all men. "Were every Brother a Mason in all that the name signifies, were the education that Masonry is capable of supplying thoroughly

comprehended by men and established as the universal system of ethical instruction for human guidance and conduct, the millennium would be in sight; this may be too much to hope for, but some progress could be made towards that goal." The system is sufficient for all our needs if we would but make use of it. The local and Grand Lodge must take responsibility for failing to so lead the individual Brother. The Masters duty is to employ and instruct the Brethren in Masonry. It is the lack of instruction to the initiate that is the beginning of his indifference. Is it reasonable for Grand Lodge to assume that every Master-elect is capable of ruling a Lodge and instructing his Brethren. in Masonry? Many Masters have never presided at a meeting before they are given the authority not only to preside but to rule a Lodge. The average Master has difficulty enough in conducting his meetings and putting on degrees without trying to point out the useful lessons contemplated by the work. Does not the conscientious Master have a twinge of conscience (and the Brethren a feeling of something like dishonesty) when he says to a Brother of two months standing: - "You were taught a useful lesson of natural equality and mutual dependence; to seek solace for your own distress by extending relief to your fellows; to view in every son of Adam a brother; to dedicate your heart to His Glory; just these are sufficient to show the way to a better life; the secrets of nature and principles of intellectual truth were unveiled to your view."

When were all these principles instilled into the mind of the candidate? Our system contemplates that all this and more, but how much has actually been absorbed by the candidate. The average Master never succeeds in teaching these lessons, and no Master could do it in two months, how can a candidate learn these lessons when he is extending himself in learning the ritual? We can assume that candidates for Masonry are above the average in education and intelligence because they are seekers after knowledge and have a desire to render themselves more extensively serviceable to their fellow creatures, but the average Mason is not capable of fulfilling a Master's duty without a great deal of study and instruction.

The accepted requirements of a Master are that he be able to open and close the Lodge and recite the rituals he is then assumed to have the capacity to confer degrees. Most of the Masons in Saskatchewan are made in country or small town Lodges, where the selection for the office of Master is naturally limited by the small membership. Many Masons are made by Masters who have little, if any, conception of the fundamentals of Masonry and they are not entirely to blame. The district meetings which are the only schools of instruction for Masters are a great help but, for obvious reasons, cannot be thorough enough. Would it not be possible for a manual to be prepared covering, in considerable detail, the duties, privileges and opportunities of a Master, covering also in outline at least the teachings suggested in the ritual of the three degrees, also advice as to the way in which Lodge meetings should best be conducted? Such manual could be placed in the hands of every warden at his installation, and the Master elect should be examined as to his knowledge of the manual before being installed in the Master's chair. A master who has not the confidence given by capacity to govern a meeting, a thorough knowledge of the ritual, and an understanding of the symbolism of Masonry, cannot possibly make his Brethren feel at ease and render his Lodge a retreat of friendship and brotherly love.

The coaching of a candidate by a Master Mason who has received his degrees from an incompetent Master lessens the possibility of retaining the interest of the candidate - the blind leading the blind. Too often it is apparent from the words of the candidate that the mentor did not understand the meaning of some of the words, nor the punctuation of some of the sentences. One fellow craft stated positively that his Brethren received their wages without scruple and without dividends -perhaps he was right. The Master often is aware that the candidate is under the wrong impression or does not properly understand what is going on, but does not correct the situation for fear of becoming still more confused. It is true that Masonry has no educational test for these seeking membership but, having joined, they should be taught the literal meaning, at least, of the ritual and ancient charges.

The old lengthy opening , and closing with the holding of the step and sign of each degree was sufficient to stifle the interest of all but the most enthusiastic. This has been remedied to some extent in our own jurisdiction, but I hope that within the next twenty-five years the opening and closing proceedings will be again contracted so as to take only half the time as at present. The full form should not be discarded entirely, but reserved for unusual ceremonies and perhaps the two annual festive meetings.

Another cause of lack of zeal and interest in the individual Mason, or some of them, may be that the Lodge has received unworthy material which a more thorough investigation at the time of application would have revealed. I can understand how pleased a Grand Secretary feels when he can report an increase in membership, but surely one Mason true at heart is a greater asset than two Masons in name only. We should be glad to add to our numbers only when the material is worthy, but we should not fail to take in worthy material when available, nor neglect that material once it comes within our portals.

If we could instill into our Brethren the principles of the four cardinal virtues, or the principles of brotherly love, relief and truth, or more briefly charity which comprehends the whole, the question of maintaining interest in or out the Lodge would not arise.

I was unable to obtain a definition as to what is covered by "the wider field of Masonic endeavour", so I decided that for myself: it means the attitude and interest taken by the individual with respect to public questions or movements for the betterment of society as a whole, or some class or individuals in particular. The most obvious question at the present time, and one close to the heart of every Mason, is the rehabilitation of returned men and women, and the establishment of youth in the post war period. These particular problems interest every thoughtful citizen. In my opinion Masons can make their best contribution to matters of public interest by applying the lessons learned through the principles of the order. Every good Mason is a better citizen through the reasoning of the Order. With respect to rehabilitation our utmost personal contribution in time, care, and money would be poor in comparison with the sacrifices offered by those who have achieved victory

for us, surely we can offer no less. -- Our duty as citizens is to see that those returning to civil life receive the rewards due them generously, without hesitation and without restriction. Money will probably be the cheapest thing we have, personal interest referred to by Brother Pilkey.

With respect to what part Masons as such can take in the "wider field" I hesitate to say with any degree of certainty. Perhaps my outlook is narrow and therefore would not ask any Brother to agree with me. I do not believe that Masonry has to take public or mass action to justify its existence in order to continue its place in society; in fact I think public action is one of the few things that might destroy it. Masonry is a progressive science; its progress, however, does not involve the changing of its fundamental principles, but rather a continual search for, and the development of, the deeper lessons and ideals hidden in the signs and symbols. We are prohibited from introducing in the Lodge any religious or political controversy and from taking part as Masons in any such controversy outside the Lodge. "Political Controversy" is nearly as broad as the subject of this paper, there is no limit as to what could be brought under this heading, even the policy as to the rehabilitation of returned man might become controversial as between political parties. Does not the express warning about political controversy imply that any public action as Masons is highly dangerous? A Lodge is not a service club but a retreat where all meet as brothers, differences of race, nationality, politics, religion, rank, and fortune are excluded as we meet on the level. If Masons took part in public matters as Masons it would change the nature of the fellowship, lower the prestige and dignity of the order, violate the guarantee to the individual brother and invite destruction from both within and without. Masonry has, no doubt, in the last two hundred and twenty-five years, by a strict adherence to its ancient landmarks, passed through times that were relatively as world-shaking as the present, thereby demonstrating the wisdom and stability of its principles. The warning to every Mason not to be an enthusiast is particularly applicable when times and people alike are abnormal. Sober judgment is what is needed. It is interesting to reflect that even in the olden days there were "over-enthusiasts". As citizens, and as good Masons, we have a great duty and responsibility towards making our country fit for our heroes, but I am not convinced that Masons as a body should take part in any general reorganization. We, of course, have our own Brethren and their dependents as our special care; there can be no limit to our efforts on their behalf.

In effect then, I submit that the best way to create and maintain the interest and zeal of individual Masons in the Lodge is to see that they receive and understand the teachings of Masonry. The failure to provide efficiently for such teaching is chargeable to Grand Loge and the Worshipful Master. The Grand Lodge should make more convenient proper instructions for the Master, and the Master should in truth instruct the Brethren in Masonry. Could we not devise means whereby instruction could more effectively be given? One of the difficulties of Masters is lack of experience. Would a year in the East as Deputy Master help? Is it feasible to prepare a manual of instruction? Would a term longer than one year as Master be practical? Should not the time between the degrees be greatly extended? Let me quote R. W. Bro. J. Johnson, of the Grand Lodge of England: "It would be an

advantage if the conferment of degrees could be at longer intervals, so as to ensure the candidate getting steeped in the inner meaning of each degree he takes. His entrance into the Lodge in darkness and the processes by which he emerges into the light are so laden with meaning to the spiritually-minded and devout soul, that it is a pity when the utmost is not done to bring home to his mind and heart their obscure teaching".

With respect to interest and zeal in the wider fields, whatever they may be, I feel that if a brother rightly understands his duty as a Mason and keeps in mind the ideal Freemason as portrayed in the general charge at installation, he will not be found wanting in any good work no matter how narrow or wide the scope. He will work, not as a Mason, but as a citizen who is able better to do his art as a citizen because he is a Mason. He will, in a word, convince the world that merit is his title to our privileges and that on him our favors have not been undeservedly bestowed.

Now we admit that there is a great deal of lack of interest and zeal in our individual members, we are not doing our duty or, justifying this Conference if we don't do something about it, even if it is only deciding that, the problem is too much for us. Can we not educate our Masters? Is a Manual impractical? Is a year long enough for a Master to do his duty to his Lodge? Is a month long enough within which the candidate can absorb the lessons intended by the degrees? Could we not require that Masons understand the first three degrees before they may be solicited for other degrees? How far can we go in taking action as Masons in public affairs? These are all questions that should be answered.

*Conference of the
Grand Lodge Officers
Of the
Four Western (Canadian) Jurisdictions
Banff, Alberta – 1944*