

Festival of St Andrew Oration

"The 3 step guide to useful living; a Masonic perspective"

by

Bro. Dr. Wade A. Morgan

My talk this evening centers around three principles that may prove useful not only for ones becoming a better Mason, but may even contribute –if strictly followed - to becoming a better man! It may be summed up by the phrase: **Enter** into **Fellowship** and **Master** yourself

OUTLINE

1. Introduction
2. **Enter**
 - a. By the help of god, being free and of good report
 - b. In a state of darkness
 - c. Poor and penniless
3. **Fellow(ship)**
4. **Master** yourself
5. Conclusion

Introduction

"The most precious wealth in the world is that of established character. While not all of us can become famous leaders, each of us can be pure of heart and faithful to our principles."¹

On November 30 1955, a full 342 days before the day of my birth, Scottish Freemasonry in Jamaica saw it fit to revive a custom that had hitherto been "left undone" for nearly 200 years.

That year saw the celebration, once again, of the Festival of St. Andrew. The notice given for the occasion ended with the following words:

*"The company of all **regular Masons** (my emphasis) on the island will be very acceptable on the above occasion"*

As a relatively "young" mason (in Scottish years) I deem it a signal honor to be asked to deliver the oration on this the 50th anniversary of the revival of the celebration of the Festival of St. Andrew, and I hope that I will represent well the Brethren of my "generation" and live up to the model of exceptional dedication and service that has been the characteristic of those who have gone before me, and who have been anything but "regular Masons".

The thesis of this paper is the proposition that the essence of Freemasonry can be expressed in the words **"A place where The Brotherhood of Man is put into Practice"**

The following quote is taken from "A Pilgrim's Path - Freemasonry and the Religious Right" by John R. Robinson, and here I quote:

"Most important of all to an understanding of Freemasonry, perhaps, is an understanding of what its members believe and of their avowed purposes. It is, apparently, very confusing for non- Masons to learn that Freemasonry doesn't tell men what they are supposed to believe. Rather, the fraternity attracts men who already adhere to a set of beliefs about the nature of God, their relationship with Him, and the moral conduct their God requires."

¹ http://www.freemason.org/cfo/spring_2004/levitt_ethics3.htm (Jack R. Levitt PGM California)

In the 1980 printing of ***The Louisiana Monitor*** the following beautiful words are written:

"To the altar of Freemasonry all men bring their most votive² offerings. Around it all men, whether they have received their teachings from Confucius, Zoroaster, Moses, Mohammed or the founder of the Christian religion--just so long as they believe in the universality of the fatherhood of God and universality of the brotherhood of man--meet upon a common level. The Jew returns to his synagogue, the Mohammedan to his mosque and the Christian to his temple--each better prepared for the solemn duties of life by the associations in this universal brotherhood."

In the words of **Mark Twain**:

"The universal brotherhood of man is our most precious possession."

The importance of this belief is established by each Mason as he practices the three principal tenets of Masonry: Brotherly Love, Relief and Truth.

Brotherly Love - Manifestly, this means that we place on another man the highest possible valuation as a friend, a companion, an associate, a neighbour. By the exercise of Brotherly Love, we are taught to regard the whole human species as one family.

Relief - Freemasons are taught to practice charity, and to care, not only for their own, but also for the community as a whole, both by charitable giving, and by voluntary efforts as individuals. Any conception of Brotherhood must include a willingness to give necessary aid.

Truth - Freemasons strive for truth, requiring high moral standards and aiming to achieve them in their own lives. Truth is a divine attribute and the foundation of every virtue. In any permanent brotherhood, members must be truthful in character and habits, dependable, men of honour, on whom we can rely to be faithful fellows and loyal friends. Truth is a vital requirement if a brotherhood is to endure, and we therefore accept it as such.

How, then, do we put into practice these noble ideals? What serves as our guide? I will attempt to make use of the ceremonials of our degree work to illustrate a possible point of origin, a compass in our journey and sojourn through life.

1st or Entered Apprentice Degree

Our entrance into the light of Freemasonry can be characterized by many things, but I choose to focus on the following three-fold nature:

1. By the help of God, being free and of good report
2. In a state of darkness
3. Poor and penniless

By the help of god: here I have written the word "god" in lower case and the term symbolizes the essence of the being that we as Christians worship, By the help of god acknowledges that no man can be made a Freemason who does not accept the existence of a supreme being. Such a belief necessarily dictates a belief in the nature, character, attributes and perfections of the Deity which must surely influence our conduct towards Him, as our Father, Benefactor, and Moral Governor, as also in the proper discharge of the duties of social life.

Being Free: the GAOTU has imbued man with the attribute of free will. Therefore any fate that befalls him is as a consequence of a choice made. We create our experiences by the set of beliefs that we use as a guide to our daily living. Having chosen to become Freemasons, we have presented for our scrutiny and use, a set of principles and guidelines that, by the application of a faithful and appropriate attention, conduces to a knowledge of, and an influence upon, our conduct towards the Deity.

² Etymology: Latin *votivus*, from *votum* vow

1 : consisting of or expressing a vow, wish, or desire <a *votive* prayer>

2 : offered or performed in fulfillment of a vow or in gratitude or devotion

Of Good Report: Each person who enters Freemasonry does so not only of his own volition, but on the recommendation of two Brothers, and his application must be approved by dare I say the whole fraternity. His good works therefore set the stage for his entrance, but it is the word spoken by a Brother in the craft that opens the door. Literally speaking therefore, "of good report" is equivalent to being of good character or reputation, salient characteristics with which to firmly entrench oneself in a "brotherhood of man"! but with this stricture as advocated in the early 18th century rituals:

"That excellent key, a Freemason's. tongue, which should speak well of a Brother absent or present, but when unfortunately that cannot be done with honour and propriety, should adopt that excellent virtue of the Craft, which is Silence." -Mackey's Encyclopedia of Freemasonry

A State Of Darkness: Before our initiation, we were in darkness concerning much of Masonry, but later were partially enlightened, and in this sense light symbolizes discovery. Mental or spiritual blindness cuts off the individual from all that makes life worth living, but as light comes with increasing intensity he finds himself entering a new existence. Light has made this possible, but it remains for him to explore, to understand and to conform.

Poor and Penniless: Before we depart from the festive board, the following toast is raised, and may take various forms depending on the Lodge or the Brother stating it:

"To all poor and distressed Masons, where ever dispersed over the face of earth, and water, wishing them a speedy relief from their sufferings, and a safe return to their native country, if they desire it."

The "distress" experienced by the candidate for initiation in the South East corner of the Lodge, serves a great and useful purpose; it points out the fact of our not being an island, not standing alone, but belonging to a greater community. The first of the beatitudes is taken from Matthew 5:3 and states:

"Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven". This refers not so much to the external condition of poverty i.e. not having monetary wealth, but to the absence of a haughty, self-assertive, and self-sufficient disposition fed by vanity and ego, a laying bare if you will, of the spirit or soul. It is in this state of having "no-thing" that the initiate enters into Freemasonry; it is the first experiential evidence of a Divine work of grace within the soul, and corresponds to the initial awakening of the prodigal in the far country.

2nd or Fellow of Craft Degree

(As an aside, one of the dictionary definitions of FELLOW is: adj. Being of the same kind, group, occupation, society, or locality; having in common certain characteristics or interests)

In the second degree there is the allusion to the seven liberal arts and sciences, viz.: Grammar, Rhetoric, Logic, Arithmetic, Geometry, Music, and Astronomy. Since we are all familiar with their several significations, I will not here dwell on them but only mention two.

GRAMMAR imparts that excellence of pronunciation and linguistic construction which enables us to speak and write a language with accuracy and precision. It is therefore the basis of good communication.

RHETORIC grants the skills with which to captivate the hearers by strength of argument and beauty of expression.

LOGIC teaches us to direct our inquiries after truth; as well for the instruction of others as for our own improvement.

ARITHMETIC teaches the powers and properties of numbers, the fundament and basis of the whole universe.

GEOMETRY is the science by which the Architect is able to execute his plans, and estimate his designs.

MUSIC inquires into the nature of concords and discord and enables us to determine a due proportion between them by numbers

ASTRONOMY is that Divine art by which we learn the use of the Globes, the system of the World, and the primary laws of Nature; and while we are employed in the study of this science, we may perceive unparalleled instances of wisdom and goodness, and on every hand may trace the Glorious Author by His works.

Taken together therefore, these seven arts build a framework for the good ordering of society and can be said to be the ingredients that constitute the cement that binds our brotherhood in particular, and mankind in general.

3rd or Master Mason Degree

Brethren, Freemasonry is a progressive science and every degree cannot be attained but by time, patience, and assiduity. In the First Degree, we are taught the duties we owe to God, to our neighbour, and to ourselves. In the Second Degree, we are admitted to participate in the mysteries of human science, and to trace the goodness and majesty of the Creator, by minutely analyzing His works. The Third Degree is the cement of the whole; it is calculated to bind men together by mystic points of fellowship, and by practicing out of the Lodge that which we are taught in it we shall convince the world that the principles of Masonry are pure and its requirements just. Thus armed with the tools of the foregoing degrees we are enabled to contemplate our lives and its ultimate logical conclusion, death.

T.R. Fehrenback, an editorial writer, observed that ethics is - *Do right if you can; above all do no harm; and if questionable, do not do it, whatever the law allows.*

Conclusion

It is quite fashionable nowadays to have programs of a number of steps for recovery from different maladies, such as 12 step programs for alcoholics etc. What I have formulated here, and it cannot be in any way termed original since it has existed since time immemorial, or at least since Masonic rituals have existed, is not a cure for a malady, for it is based on the commonly described maxim of Freemasonry contriving to make good men better. It makes the assumption that the conduct of each Master Mason is strictly his own responsibility.

Since Freemasons are urged to live by Masonic principles and thus, by precept and example, encourage others to emulate their actions, they must abide by their obligations and not palliate the offenses of their brethren. They must realize that the teachings of the Craft are designed to improve society as well as each member, just as Aristotle knew that though it is worthwhile to obtain the end merely for one man, it is fine and more Godlike to attain it for a nation.

I leave you with two things:

One is the words of Proverbs 1 verse 5 *"A wise man will hear, and will increase learning; and a man of understanding shall attain unto wise counsels."*

The second is a poem by Ella Wheeler Wilcox, that suggests not **what** we should do but **how**:

Solitude

Laugh, and the world laughs with you;
Weep, and you weep alone.
For the sad old earth must borrow its mirth,
But has trouble enough of its own.
Sing, and the hills will answer;
Sigh, it is lost on the air.
The echoes bound to a joyful sound,
But shrink from voicing care.

Rejoice, and men will seek you;
Grieve, and they turn and go.
They want full measure of all your pleasure,
But they do not need your woe.
Be glad, and your friends are many;
Be sad, and you lose them all.
There are none to decline your nectared wine,
But alone you must drink life's gall.

Feast, and your halls are crowded;
Fast, and the world goes by.
Succeed and give, and it helps you live,
But no man can help you die.
There is room in the halls of pleasure
For a long and lordly train,
But one by one we must all file on
Through the narrow aisles of pain.

Freemasons should **do** as the Emperor Marcus Aurelius suggested - no longer talk about the kind of man that a good man ought to be, but **be** such.