WHY MASONRY LIVES

*PHILOSOPHY by a Past Grand Master – Masonic Square, Vancouver, Oct. 1921*

*Note: I have left this almost entirely in its original form/sentence structure as I believe he wanted it to be emphasized this way. HLS*

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Permanency and vitality are not necessarily characteristics of the good. Bad institutions have survived the wreck of empires, while the shores of Time are blackened with the ruins of what were once esteemed benevolent and philanthropic enterprises.

Why, then, has Freemasonry outlived almost every other organization contemporaneous with its beginning?

To those who have never crossed the threshold of the Freemasons’ Temple, and who, therefore, are unacquainted with its principles, and the method by which they are taught, this must, indeed, seem a mystery.

They observe that the Order does not go out into the highways and byways of life to gather in converts & swell its numbers; that its members do not proclaim its principles from the housetops, however zealous and enthusiastic they may be; that it rarely seeks aid outside the mystic circle of its own members; that it looks not for the praise or applause of men, but relies upon its record of good deeds quietly and without fanfare..

Freemasonry seeks not the “boast of heraldry or the pomp of power” to gather the fleeting fancy and attract the eye of the multitude. Yet, today, Freemasonry is a strong living body & moral power exercising an influence for good over the whole world, wherever there are intelligent minds to comprehend its beautiful principles. In view of its organization and mode of growth, that it should be so widespread and progressive, almost surpasses human comprehension.

Freemasonry, pursuing the even manner of its way, exists the same today as it did nearly two centuries ago, in all its essential principles. It has witnessed the rise, decay and fall of other institutions, professedly originated for the benefit of men, without a single shock to itself.

Governments, societies, doctrines and isms, have come and gone, and Freemasonry has survived them, still with class and a youthful vigour, as if yet in the budding manhood of its existence.

This wonderful vitality is the natural result of the moral and national principles which form the underlying base of its magnificent superstructure.

Freemasonry is founded upon the moral law, not upon a morality with a local habitation and a name, but upon principles everywhere self evident-the natural formulas and responses of human nature – so that among all good men of whatever nationality or clime, of whatever political or religious opinion, it may grow and flourish, a beautiful plant in the garden of the human soul.

This moral law, written in the hearts of men, upon which our institution is founded, is even more permanent than human nature itself.

History teaches us that gradually, through the ages, human nature has progressed, through the savage, the barbarous and civilized up to the enlightened state.

But the moral law, which is changeless as eternity itself, is the same for the wild bushman of Australia as for the learned Professor. Not that these men understand it the same way but that does not change the law. The moral law is the immutable & unchangeable in human nature.

It is not a codified law, hut those natural impulses which direct virtuous conduct.

Of this law, Cicero said: “It was not only older than nations and cities, but co-existent with that Divine Being, who sees and rules both Heaven and Earth.”

For the principle or law which impels to right conduct, springs out of the nature of things, and began to be law, not when it was first written, but when it originated.” Right and wrong are as eternal as the Deity”

They are not created existences, but the moral quality of created existences, and Freemasonry is the great interpreter of this law, for upon its immutable and universal basis, she has chosen to lay her corner-stone.

And she exerts her influence by example rather than by talk.

It is a maxim statement that deeds speak louder than words.

The force of example is not open to the charge of hypocrisy.

Words may be false, but deeds speak the truth.

Good deeds need no other praise than the acts themselves. It has been said that no good act should remain unpublished to the world. But it has also been said that every good deed has for itself a golden tongue, a language sweeter and more forcible than the silvery speech of a gifted orator.

Whether mankind be depraved or not!!!!

Freemasonry recognizes enough of a natural goodness in the human ruins upon which to build a noble superstructure.

She finds this remnant, this germ of immortality, in the longing of the human heart for a higher and a nobler existence, leaving the speculative question of depravity to the philosophers.

Freemasonry recognizes the fact that:

There is an unseen battlefield in every human breast,

Where two opposing forces meet, but where they seldom rest

It is this personal desire to be good that invokes virtue in a continual warfare against vice. There is no silence, no position of rest, except in the cowardly surrender of all that is manly, good and true. It is this desire for happiness, this longing for a beautiful life, that plunges human nature into the sea of unrest.

Human nature is ever seeking a higher plane of existence.

Nature itself has made it delightful to man to be good, and not so happy to him who is not wholly so.

It remains, even after the moral life has been wrecked upon the shoals of vice, sometimes to re-assert itself in the stings and pangs of self-accusing conscience.

Who would not rejoice with ineffable joy if he could this moment shake off the infirmities of his nature and rise at once to the true dignity of ideal manhood, erect and proud in the consciousness of perfect purity and uprightness of character?

Ideal manhood is the goal of Freemasonry.

It is the star of our hope, the beacon light upon the shore, to the mariner Mason tossed hither and thither upon the ocean of life.

But while the principles of our Institution are founded upon the immutable moral law, and the aspirations of our natures reach out toward this grand ideality of perfect manhood, our philosophy and history teach us that we have a rough and rugged road to travel, beset with many trials and difficulties, and experience and observation have shown us that many go faint and weary by the way.

Recognizing, as Freemasonry does, the natural infirmities of man and the mutual dependence of one upon the other, through the varying vicissitudes of life, for all the kind offices, which justice and mercy, require its members aid, sustain and uplift each other by their mutual pursuit of this ideal manhood.

In this pursuit by Freemasons, nothing should distract their attention from the common goal.

The sordid passions of unworthy ambition, hatred and revenge, should find no place for existence or growth in our Order. Masonic soil should afford no fertility for such passions; they are the greatest infirmities of our nature.

Freemasonry, recognizing this fact, has, by most impressive symbolic lessons, taught the Mason to keep his passions within due bounds. This lesson does not mean that the passions are to be destroyed, because they are as essential to human happiness as the nerves, veins and arteries are essential to life.

As has been beautifully said,

“The passions are the gales that swell our mental bark as it sails over the sea of life.

Like the wind itself, they are engines of high importance and mighty power.”

Kept within due bounds, they are the fountains of benevolence, the springs of joy and life, “left loose and at random, they distract and ruin us.”

It is this injunction concerning the control of the passions and the unity of Masonic aspiration, which keeps discord out of the beautiful Temple of Masonry.

Here, then, is the strength of our Fraternity.

The man who enters the portals of the Masonic Temple, has a right to expect that he is seeking a place where he will be free from the dissentions and the wrangles of life, begotten by uncontrolled passions. Here let him find that freedom, beneath the shelter of an Institution that has been the shadow of rest to many of earth’s noblest minds.

Here let him find a home for the soul free from the factious opposition of the world, where no contention should exist, “but rather a nobler emulation of who best can work and best agree.”

It is thus that men are brought together by Freemasonry, in to the closest and holiest bonds of friendship – a friendship stripped of the false coverings of flattery, disrobed of the cloak of hypocrisy.

Wealth, station and rank yet rule the world.

For this reason, Freemasonry creates a secret, sacred and holy friendship of its own, controlled and directed by the moral law, which is written on the tablets of eternity. In Freemasonry, friendship is world wide. It knows no nationality, no clime, no creed, no profession and no belief, except in God, and the immortality of the soul.

Cicero, in speaking of friendship, said, “What can be more delightful than to have one to whom you can speak on all subjects, just as to yourself.”

How aptly this language describes Masonic intercourse!

Man naturally longs for a closer union with his fellow than that which could be called ordinary and creates a more permanent identity of interest and a more intense reciprocation of feeling.

Temperance, fortitude, prudence and justice, these principles should ever he kept in view in the daily transactions of life.

They lead to happiness and usefulness, here & now, and to a bright immortality hereafter.

No man can lay up a store of happiness and utility here or hereafter without adhering to these principles. It is for these reasons that Freemasonry has had such an extended influence in the world. It must necessarily have had a wonderful effect upon the organization and reformation of society. Born in the past, when caste and rank marked the divisions among men, its work was to cause them to meet upon the common level of true manhood and to eradicate from their hearts the warring, envy, jealousy and strife of creed and clan.

But we should all have more Masonic education;

Its cardinal principals, in all their bearings, should be better understood and more thoroughly impressed. In order to properly appreciate our noble Institution, and to awaken within ourselves that enthusiasm it deserves, there must be thorough education, not only in its ritual, but in its philosophy and history.

Some one has said that Masonic intelligence is the key to the prosperity and perpetuity of Freemasonry.

It has also been said by another, that, “the character of the Institution is elevated in the mind of every Mason just in proportion to the amount of his knowledge of its ritual and symbolism, philosophy and history.”

Masonry declares truth to be a Divine attribute, and the foundation of every virtue.

But how find it unless we educate ourselves?

And what a noble pursuit is this search after truth!

There is none greater. It lies just before our vision, awaiting discovery; but it will not reveal itself without an effort on our part.

This effort should be to us our highest pleasure.

‘Ye are taught to work faithfully in the quarries of truth and knowledge’, but this implies that we have the tools whereby we can work.

Education is the skill of the craftsman.

“As our information increases, the sphere of our mental and moral vision enlarges.”

Knowledge furnishes eyes to the understanding, and enables us to comprehend the mystic meaning of Masonic symbolism.

This, understood, points to the life everlasting, and enables the Mason to lift the veil of the future and behold the haven of rest and peace, which lies beyond.

With our minds awakened by a Masonic education to an intelligent appreciation of the great principles on which Freemasonry is founded, we need have no fear of its perpetuity or prosperity.

Then, I say, let in some masonic light!

It will not engender strife or contention, for Freemasonry has no war to make on other institutions.

Freemasonry has lived through the ages past, because it is founded upon the moral law, embodying those eternal principles of right and wrong. It lives in the present, because human hearts everywhere enthusiastically respond, as with an electric touch, to its beautiful lessons on human life.

Teaching by example rather than by precept, it has a vital power far greater than any mere professions of creeds and doctrines.

Silent and unseen, the stream of Masonic influence flows down the channels of Time into the great ocean of Eternity.

It flows because friendship is its object, true manhood its goal, mutual assistance its inculcated duty, brotherly love its ruling passion, temperance, fortitude, prudence and justice its cardinal principles.

Thus founded, it will continue to live and grow until the end of earthly existence, when, as a result of its sublime teachings, it is to be hoped it will have done its proportionate share in regenerating humanity, and will present to the Great Architect of the Universe its full measure of fashioned materials, polished and fitted for their appropriate positions in the Eternal Temple.