

SOME DISTURBING REMINDERS
From The Era Of The Great Schism
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DISCUSSION

Primary sources for Masonic research are difficult to come by in Alberta. Therefore, this essay is based entirely on secondary sources - that is, well-known and respected Masonic historians whose integrity has never been suspect and whose well-researched writings may not be entirely free of honest error but are certainly worthy of serious consideration. This paper falls into two halves. The first part deals with the facts of history, and the source - except where otherwise specified - is culled from the findings of Brother H. L. Haywood, and which appear mainly in his volume, *The Newly-made mason*. The second part deals with the lessons emerging from this history and their possible application to conditions today. I have chosen to play the devil's advocate by stating the case for those Brethren who share the unsettling opinion that the Masons of North America run the risk of repeating some of our more unfortunate Masonic history. The paper is consciously provocative, with the intention to spark lively discussion.

PART ONE

Newly-made members of the Craft might not be familiar with that troubled period in the 17-hundreds referred to by Masons as "The Great Schism". At that time there occurred a deep division within the fraternity into opposing factions given the names of "The Moderns" and "The Antients". The subject has renewed pertinence because there are many concerned Masons on this continent, and right here in this jurisdiction of Alberta, who point to trends in our conduct and activities today that, if unchecked, could lead to a second or North American "Great Schism". In other words, they feel that unless we are alert to the symptoms, we may find Masonic history recurring. For it is a commonly accepted truism, that if we fail to heed the lessons of history, we may find ourselves obliged to repeat them.

To correctly summarize the events leading to the "Great Schism" and their consequences is no small challenge in itself. No less an author than Joseph Fort Newton found that the series of schisms within the Order which began in 1725 comprise a very complex period, and often prove both confusing and bewildering.⁽¹⁾ Certain myths and errors were long perpetuated and went largely unchallenged until more recent research put them to rest. Historian H. L. Haywood stated that the full facts, and hence their full significance, were not discovered until about 1900. Therefore, he warns, one must be wary of authorities relying on information prior to this date. ⁽²⁾

Our starting point in these matters is the formation of the First Grand Lodge in London in 1717 and the publication of Anderson's Constitutions shortly thereafter. It is well that we note that the founding of a Grand Lodge was not in any way out of step with established usage and custom for the time. It was not a sudden and arbitrary act dreamed up by a few enthusiasts, thereby leaving themselves open to accusation that they introduced innovation from the very (...) Newton stressed that nothing is clearer than that the initiative came from the heart of the order itself, and was in no sense imposed upon it from without ..." ⁽³⁾ He stated that the organization of the Grand Lodge, far from being an innovation much less a revolution - was simply a revival of older and well-established practices of quarterly and annual assembly, and he quoted Anderson of Constitutions fame to support his case "...it should meet Quarterly according to ancient Usage', tradition having by this time become authoritative in such matters." ⁽⁴⁾

Going back even further, Haywood stated that prior to about 1400's it was established custom for groups of Masons to gather and constitute themselves a local Lodge to deal with a particular situation; say, building a church or manor house; and then to disband when their business had been concluded. It was only in the fourteen-hundreds that in a few centres permanent Lodges, rather than just temporary, began to appear, with written charters. In the same manner the periodic assemblies of Lodges into a "Grand Lodge" evolved naturally into a permanent General Assembly in 1717 when it was found to be of some benefit.

Then as now, changes were indeed taking place with the march of civilization. But it is well to note that the changes were designed to reinforce timeless objectives, rather than to

1 Newton, *The Builders*, p. 198

2 Haywood, *The Newly-made mason*, p. 40

3 Newton, *op.cit.*, p. 172

4 *Ibid.*, p. 170

weaken them by the introduction of shallow and abstracting, and potentially dangerous, innovations.

In view of the later divisions within the Craft, it is perhaps worth noting the social status of the first Grand Lodge Officers. The incumbents of the offices of the first Grand Master and his two Wardens were described as simply "a gentleman, a carpenter, and a captain." According to Newton, beyond these three there is no record of the other individuals concerned. Nevertheless, we do know that, far from being an aristocratic body, the first Grand Lodge was democratic in the broadest sense. "... of the four Lodges known to have taken part (in its formation), only one - that meeting at the Rummer and Grape Tavern - had a majority of Accepted Masons in its membership; the other three being Operative Lodges, or largely so." (5)

It was stated, however, that the first Grand Master was to preside "...till they should have the Honour of a Noble Brother at their Head." (6) Haywood noted that the desire to have a "Noble Brother" at their head was not an act of snobbery but followed the custom of societies in the nation to have a sponsor of the ruling class to act as spokesman in high places. (In fact, about a hundred years later Queen Victoria herself was to be the Royal Sponsor of Freemasonry.) Nevertheless, herein lay the seed for future dissent!

As a handy reference for this period, *The Pocket History of Freemasonry* by Pick and Knight lacks the exhaustive detail of a more thorough volume of serious research. There is just not the space for hair-splitting argument and following up every clue and innuendo. At the same time, by its very brevity, this reference quickly sorts out the wheat from the chaff and underlines the key historical points. In discussing the causes of the "Great Schism", it states "These can be found partly in the slackness and weak administration of the original governing body at this time ... and partly in certain changes in custom and ritual which had been made, some deliberately." (7) Now, that might have been the understatement of the year, for those changes in custom and ritual were of such fundamental importance as to split the Craft asunder.

It all began in London when a member of the British aristocracy was chosen Grand Master. On the surface this appears to have been not unusual and perhaps harmless, but as things were in British society at this time, a chain of consequences was thereby set up. The Grand Master, chosen from the nobility, naturally associated with his class equals and tended to fill his appointments to Grand Lodge with aristocrats.

The class structure of society was so inflexible at that time, that no man would set aside the rights and prerogatives of his nobility even as a Grand Master. (8) Discrimination on grounds of colour or race was less important than discrimination on grounds of rank. The end result was that "... the whole system of British aristocracy was imported into the Fraternity." (9) The introduction of that innovation led to further innovation. (By the way, the term "innovation" might encompass today many of those things some Brethren refer to as "gimmicks" and "novelties".)

5 Newton, loc.cit.

6 Haywood, op.cit., p. 27

7 Pick and Knight, *The Pocket History of Freemasonry*, p. 102

8 Haywood, op.cit., p. 31

9 Ibid.

Newton wrote that ... there was a fear, not unjustified by facts, that the ancient democracy of the order had been infringed upon by certain acts of the Grand Lodge of 1717 ... giving to the Grand Master power to appoint the Wardens...

Nor was that all. In 1735 it was resolved in the Grand Lodge "that in the future all Grand Officers (except Grand Master) shall be selected out of that body" - meaning the Past Grand Stewards. This act was amazing. Already the Craft had let go its power to elect the wardens, and now the choice of the Grand Master was narrowed to the ranks of an oligarchy in its worst form - a queer outcome of Masonic equality. ⁽¹⁰⁾

The Craft had been captured by a special-interest group, who introduced more innovation tailored to suit their own needs!

Pick and Knight refer to an abuse in the form of the illegal sale of constitutions by Lodges operating under the guidance of these innovators. They cite the example of a certain George Lodge, then No. 3, who saw fit to sell their regalia and "... Warrant for thirty guineas to 'some Honourable Gentlemen Newly Made'." ⁽¹¹⁾ a group whose membership appears to have been heavily larded with members of the aristocracy. Another evident bias toward the nobility is revealed by the action of the Committee of Charity which was charged with looking into this irregularity. Far from correcting the abuse, the Committee saw fit to legalize it with their ruling that " - . . . as a mark of high respect to his Grace the Duke of Beaufort and the other Noblemen and Honourable Gentlemen who meet under the name of the Lodge of Friendship ... the constitution of No. 3 should remain with them ... " ⁽¹²⁾

It is also noteworthy that a minority seemed to have an influence in other ways out of proportion to its numbers. Pick and Knight state that one of those "Honourable Gentlemen Newly Made" who purchased the Warrant for the new Lodge named Friendship - one Thomas French - was appointed Grand Secretary a short year after. A later examination of the records revealed that over a certain period, out of 20 Grand Wardens recently appointed, no fewer than 13 had come from the ranks of this same Lodge of Friendship." ⁽¹³⁾

These examples notwithstanding, Haywood's writings wade more boldly into the controversy by avoiding hang-ups over details while concentrating on the fundamental trends and on what he sees as their inevitable results: a deep split in the Craft between the innovators who came to be called "The Moderns" and a faction who wished to preserve our tenets and principles pure and unimpaired, calling themselves "The Antients". If any one individual stands out above the rest in the ensuing struggle, it would be the champion of the Antients, Laurence Dermott, who was Grand Secretary of the Antients from 1752 to 1771; approximately twenty years.

The History Of Masonry And Concordant Orders asserts that Dermott, more than any other, seemed to have been the moving spirit in sustaining this great schism, ⁽¹⁴⁾ is As might be expected, Dermott "... has been severely criticized by his opponents, and Laurie

10 Newton, pp. 198 & 199

11 Pick and Knight, op-cit., p. 113

12 Pick and Knight, op.cit., p. 114

13 Ibid., p. 113, footnote

14 History of masonry and Concordant orders, p. 554

charges him with unfairness in his proceedings against the Moderns, with treating them bitterly, with quackery, with being vainglorious of his own pretensions to superior knowledge. ⁽¹⁵⁾

Dr. Mackey, in his History Of Freemasonry, would seem to have partially agreed when he said "... I am afraid there is much truth in this estimate of Dermott's character. As a polemic, he was sarcastic, bitter, uncompromising, and not altogether sincere and veracious ... ⁽¹⁶⁾ (Dr. Mackey's writings, it might be pointed out, appeared well before the turn of the century and therefore, according to Haywood, are suspect.) If Mackey erred in his judgment of Dermott, he was in good company. No less a Masonic writer than R.F. Gould dismissed the man as little more than a house painter with little education. ⁽¹⁷⁾ But Haywood tells us that these descriptions were ill-considered, to say the least, "... because almost nothing was even known about Dermott when Gould wrote his history. ⁽¹⁸⁾

This writer cannot help but comment that any individual who today rises to defend the Craft against innovations and gimmicks risks attack by those who would hope to "modernize" the Order and change it to suit their own tastes. This is as true now as it was then! One may even suggest that Dermott's opponents were increasingly incensed as they gradually came to realize the "awful truth" that he was, after all, right!

Let us return to the exact words of Haywood based on the more recent evidence. Dermott was what Eighteenth Century men called a genius, a small class of great men of which Christopher Wren and William Shakespeare were more famous specimens ... He had many talents, and they were of high excellence; he was a learned man (he could read Ancient Hebrew), a forceful and even powerful writer as is proved by the Book of Constitutions which he wrote, a singer, an after-dinner speaker to hear whom men drove many miles, an organizer and administrator, a driving, daring, bold, tireless, ingenious, inventive, undiscouragable character, who withal had a great and an almost instinctive understanding of Freemasonry. Who were the greatest Masons (and as Masons) of that century? Desaguliers? Preston? The Duke of Sussex? Thomas Smith Webb? If so Dermott belongs to the list because he ranks second in achievement to none of these names. ⁽¹⁹⁾

Would that we had a Masonic leader of such stature today!

Leaving the matter of personalities, let us return to the abuses that led to the Great Schism. The results of introducing the innovations, according to Haywood, are briefly as follows:

They gave rise to attacks on the Masonic hierarchy by the lower classes because they identified the Craft with the special-interest group: the aristocracy. In reaction, the Grand Lodge curtailed its activities; withdrew from public exposure; kept a low profile; made alterations in its modes of recognition; permitted changes and emasculation of the ritual; tolerated the lapse of the dignified ceremonies of Grand Lodge installations; and generally diverted the objectives and activities of the Craft from its time-honoured purpose.

The cumulative result was the chasm opening between Masons of the so-called upper classes" and those of the "lower classes", a division down the middle between the majority

15 Loc.cit.

16 Loc.cit. (quoting Mackey)

17 Haywood,op. cit.,p. 40

18 Loc.cit,

19 Haywood, op.cit., p. 40

in the Craft and the minority of the special-interest group.

This "Great Schism" lasted some forty years while pressures built up against the innovations. The emasculation of the ritual meant a consequent lowering of its dignity, if nothing else. But Haywood said this had more fundamental import. In his words, A Newly Made Mason ought to note that any question about the Ritual is a question of what Freemasonry is or is not, because in one form or another, directly or by implication, literally or symbolically, the Ritual is a series of statements about what it is to be a Mason it is the means by which a Lodge "makes" a Mason. To omit something from the Ritual is to omit it from Freemasonry. ⁽²⁰⁾

When the Masonic offices were filled with aristocrats, the Lodges came to serve only the narrow considerations of a special-interest group. Many Lodges ceased to be Lodges and became purely social clubs, and the Freemasonry was replaced entirely with light-hearted conviviality. ⁽²¹⁾

The situation seemed to come to a head with the great Irish potato famines (1845 – 1852 ?? *rh*m) which saw some two to three million Irish migrating into England and other lands. Among the migrants to England were many good Masons who, on wishing to affiliate as was their right, found themselves blocked by those people who seemed to have captured much of the Craft. When they sought to visit they were turned back at the door and the reason why they were turned back was made abundantly clear, when they were told that too many of them were carpenters, plumbers, stone-masons, teamsters, and similar members of the lower classes. "These gentlemen were wearing a workingman's leather apron ... (and yet) could detect no self-contradiction in their refusing to sit with Masons in a Masonic Lodge if a Mason was a carpenter. Jesus of Nazareth could not have visited such a Lodge. This snobbishness was an extraordinary and fateful result of the 'modernizing' of the Fraternity which was being made." ⁽²²⁾

At this point it should suffice to relate that the immigrant Masons formed their own Lodges outside of the Grand Lodge of London. Meantime, to quote Haywood, During this same period a number of Lodges on the List of the Grand Lodge at London ... became so resentful at this new exclusiveness, and so violently disapproved of the innovations of which the Grand Lodge had become guilty, that they began to withdraw from it, and did so in such number that at a later time some 135 of them had been counted. By the end of the decade of 1740-1750 A.D., where one Irish Mason withdrew himself from the Grand Lodge at London, ten English Masons had done so. Along with them, and agreeing with them, were a hundred or so independent regular Lodges (called St. John's Lodges) which had never been on the Grand Lodge's Lists. This refusal to recognize the so-called "modernizing" of Freemasonry reached such a pitch at the last that the Grand Lodges of Ireland and Scotland withdrew recognition from the Grand Lodge at London. ⁽²³⁾

The struggle ensued for some two generations. With the Grand Lodges facing eye-ball to eye-ball for over forty-five years, it was the innovators who appear to have blinked first. In 1789 the Moderns were moved to appoint a committee which was to approach their rivals

20 Ibid., p. 41

21 Ibid., p. 33

22 Haywood, op.cit., p. 37

23 Loc. cit.

to see if they could achieve a reconciliation. But reconciliation was slow to come. Feelings had been running so high that members of one faction were forbidden even to visit Lodges of the other. ⁽²⁴⁾

Nevertheless, despite efforts to lock out rivals, there continued to be a certain flow of traffic across the picket lines from one body to the other. Indeed, Pick and Knight ⁽²⁵⁾ state that there were even cases of Brethren belonging to both the Moderns and the Antients at the same time. This is not to say that they saw no grounds for dispute. It is at least arguable that they understood the situation quite clearly but hoped to help bring about a remedy by working from within.

Things moved to a conclusion in 1809 when the Moderns Grand Lodge apparently took a second look at what they had done and resolved that "It is not necessary any longer to continue in force those Measures which were resorted to in or about 1739 respecting irregular Masons and do therefore enjoin the several Lodges to revert to the Antient Land Marks of the Society. ⁽²⁶⁾

In 1810 the Antients found it possible to make the following resolution: "...a Masonic Union on principles equal and honourable to both Grand Lodges, and preserving the Land Marks of the Ancient Craft, would be ... expedient and advantageous to both. ⁽²⁷⁾

This, briefly, is what has been recorded as "The Great Schism" in Craft Masonry: the period in which a minority in the Craft imposed upon the majority the innovations of class distinction, exclusiveness, restriction of Masonic offices, emasculation of the Ritual, replacement of Masonic teachings with purely social functions, etc., and until the majority could bring about a return to the fundamental objectives of the Order.

PART TWO

All that has been said so far was a simple re-telling of the facts of history. At this point we depart from the chronology of events and launch ourselves into an examination of the lessons to be learned and their possible application today.

No two people see things in exactly the same light. We are all different as individuals; we have different backgrounds, outlooks, experience in the Craft, and general knowledge, which influence our points of view.

There is plenty of room for difference of opinion in Craft Masonry and perhaps this essay will prompt a lively and interesting exchange of ideas.

In this writer's view, a clear lesson emerges. the lesson is this: innovations did occur, but correction was made and unity re- established when men of high principle and, indeed, whole Lodges stood up to be counted and demanded an end to tampering with the principles, practices and objectives of the Craft.

When we step back and examine the evidence from the vantage point of hindsight, the cause and results emerge more clearly, and it is here where many Masons in America today

24 Pick and Knight, op.cit., p. 109

25 Loc.cit.

26 Ibid., p.122

27 Ibid., p.123

point to what they feel is clear writing on the wall. They are concerned lest we on this Continent be led into making similar errors, by a minority of enthusiastic (but misguided) individuals who are working overtime to change the Craft to suit their personal tastes.

Historian Haywood described changes which were introduced into Freemasonry in the 17th century that led to the "Great Schism": ⁽²⁸⁾

- I. The Craft was divided by the introduction of innovations.
- II. The image of Masonry was changed in the eyes of the public.
- III. The forms and customs were altered; the ritual was emasculated; the Craft objectives were diverted.
- IV. The Lodges were changed into something they were never intended to be: straight social clubs.
- V. A minority special-interest group, the aristocracy, came to dominate much of the Craft.

We may now examine these points one at a time and in each case itemize some possible parallels in the Craft today. There is a vast amount of material available but this thesis shall be limited to little more than a series of examples. Because of the comparative brevity, the reader is asked to realize that each point can be much more thoroughly supported by argument and evidence than is given here.

POINT I – HAYWOOD INTIMATED THAT THE INNOVATORS OF THE 17-HUNDREDS DIVIDED THE CRAFT

ITEM: The activities of many concordant bodies in North America today are in direct competition with (and are thereby divisive) those of the parent body, the Craft Lodge, resulting in competition for a Brother's time, attention, interests, and energies. Brethren are increasingly put in a position where they are forced to choose where their loyalties lie. Would one consider this to be at all divisive?

ITEM: Mounting pressures to change the "free will and accord" rule are driving a wedge between those who adhere to the time-honoured tenet of no-solicitation and those who wish to bend this principle to fill the ranks of other organizations.

Can anyone deny that this sort of thing is happening? Does it seed disunity?

ITEM: Tensions between Brethren are being aggravated by a faction that asserts that no Mason is a "complete" Mason until he passes through ceremonies and degrees in certain appendant organizations which they misrepresent as being of a "higher" order.

ITEM: An invisible line has been drawn between the 80% of the Brethren in this jurisdiction who have chosen not to join a concordant body, and the 20% minority of enthusiasts who have joined. This tends to have a geographic aspect. That is, country versus city Lodges.

²⁸ The references to Haywood (op.cit., pp. 31-33) are approximations used by the author and do not necessarily correspond to Haywood's items 1-5. Item I is related to Haywood's 3, item II to 2, III to 5, and V to 1. There appears to be no link between IV and 4 (Ed.)

ITEM: A growing number of Masons are becoming less active in their Lodges and in the concordant bodies, because of their distress over changes being introduced into the Craft - innovations often advanced under the old argument that the Order should be "modernized" or "change with the times." (Perhaps better words here would be "familiarized" and "liberalized.")

ITEM: There seems to have emerged - small but ominous - a regrettable geographic polarization in this province (*of Alberta, Ed.*). A North-South rivalry that should never exist, let alone be allowed to grow, is even now being fanned by a small minority.

POINT II – IN THE 17-HUNDREDS THE IMAGE OF MASONRY WAS CHANGED IN THE EYES OF THE PUBLIC! PEOPLE JUDGED THE CRAFT BY THE ACTIVITIES & ATTITUDES OF A SPECIAL-INTEREST GROUP (AT THAT TIME, IT HAPPENED TO BE THE ARISTOCRACY)

Is Masonry's image in North America being distorted again today? Have those concerned Brethren any real grounds for their misgivings?

ITEM: Freemasonry has traditionally been a modest organization with a consciously low public profile. Today, however, on this continent the public is increasingly exposed to the activities of Masons in their appendant organizations where they dress up in bright uniforms, parade, blow horns, etc., and behave in a generally outgoing and festive manner. Is it any wonder then that society tends to identify this image with Craft Masonry. The public borrows this image to fill the image vacuum left by the Craft, and - as in the past - one group tends to be equated with the other.

And they are not the same thing at all!

ITEM: The public activities of North American Masons are inviting public speculation; misinterpreted perhaps, but the impressions remain. These activities commonly are intended to display patriotism.

"But," protest the innovators, "is patriotism not a virtue?" The answer lies in the difference between the words "patriotism" and "loyalty."

"Patriotism" has a far more narrow connotation which often-times strays into dangerous nationalism. "Loyalty", on the other hand, may be a devotion or responsibility not to country alone, but to one's friends, one's wife and children, ones employer. Perhaps it is best put in the words of one concerned Mason, M.W.Bro. Jesse W. Gern, Past Grand Master of Colorado, who said:

Certainly patriotism can be a beautiful thing ... loyalty to one's own But too much loyalty can become an overwhelming obsession that verges on selfishness or pride, the deadliest of the Seven Medieval Sins. For this reason, Freemasonry does not put a primary emphasis on country. (29)

ITEM: A close examination of the proceedings from around the continent will reveal just how much the gimmick department of Masonry is extending itself in an obsessive search for novelties to entertain and distract rather than to educate and inspire. Some Lodges will

29 Copied by the author from an issue of the Grand Lodge of Colorado official publication.

go to any end to dream up some novelty or other to avoid tackling our task of building individual character.

For centuries our forefathers were obliged to meet in the operative Masons' buildings, or in the local inns. How fortunate they felt when the time came that they could have homes of their very own ... Lodgerooms or buildings constructed and furnished to their specific design and private use. But what is happening today? We seem to have laid off counting our blessings!

There is emerging a great urge for eager individuals to drag their Brethren out of their proper Lodgerooms to try to perform our dignified and serious ceremonies in abandoned quarries, barns, open fields, mountain tops, the decks of ships, etc., anywhere but in the dignified atmosphere of the formal Lodgeroom.

Is this progress? Is this what some people mean by "keeping up with the times?" When concerned Brethren call for a return to the ancient principles and practices, it is difficult to believe that they mean a return to the primitive facilities of our Masonic ancestors.

ITEM: Something our forefathers were spared in their day, were the eager-beaver propagandists of the Craft. Wherever one goes today, one meets those modernizing individuals who champion the cause of Masonic publicity campaigns. "Stop hiding our head beneath a bushel," is their rallying cry. "If only we inform the public of what good boys we are and what wonderful things we are doing," they seem to be saying, "all our problems would be solved." They might well add, "besides, our membership would soar, our Lodgerooms would be crowded, and our coffers would swell."

But is this really so? Masonry is not intended for everyone, but for the select few. Unless we first pull up our socks, a massive publicity campaign could backfire. Many of our wiser Brethren take a look at the low attendance in meetings, the preference of so many for the appendant bodies, the lowering of discipline and propriety to accommodate a permissive society; the general lack of understanding among so many of our Brethren of what Masonry is really all about; and the myriad of gimmicks and substitutes for the teachings of the lessons of the Craft, and are convinced that any form of publicity campaign could risk revealing the Order to be a rapidly emptying shell... a largely hollow drum just making a big noise. Or, to put it more bluntly - an Order of hypocrites who don't even try to practice what they preach.

Concerned Masons argue that if we return to the ancient practices and objectives of the Craft, there would be no need of publicity whatsoever. The alleged shortcomings would correct themselves and Freemasonry would have its proper image. They find nothing wrong with Freemasonry, only with so many Masons!

But the publicists keep up their pressure. Dwight Smith cited the example of one Grand Communication at which a recommendation was made that every Lodge Junior Warden was to be officially named the Publicity Agent, and publicity included as one of the laid down duties of his office.⁽³⁰⁾

ITEM: The practice of printing and distributing Masonic pamphlets or leaflets is widespread on this continent and even being urged upon our own jurisdiction. Ostensibly they are to be limited to prospective candidates and are offered as an explanation of what

30 Smith, Why This Confusion In the Temple?, p. 66

Masonry is all about. But in fact, they wind up being distributed to the public at large, and are even used as a straight recruiting device.

Opponents to the pamphlet idea note that the recipients may be left with the impression that the Brother who relies on a leaflet to explain Masonry, apparently doesn't know what it's all about himself, or just can't be bothered to explain in person. Either way they set a bad example.

Concerned Brethren are also worried about how those printed pamphlets have a tendency to appear in little piles on church pews and waiting rooms, or even are to be seen blowing about the streets.

ITEM: Masonic T-shirts have now made their appearance in Alberta another import. They are rather informal, flimsy things, but with some symbol or words of Freemasonry emblazoned across the front, to help give the Craft its "proper image", of course. So now we find Masonry's good name competing for public attention with all those other shirts sporting gags, racy slogans, and four-letter words. What is this doing to our image?

POINT III – THE INNOVATORS OF THE 17-HUNDREDS CHANGED OUR FORMS AND OUR CUSTOMS, EMASCULATED OUR RITUALS AND DIVERTED OUR CRAFT OBJECTIVES

ITEM: The Grand Lodge of Alberta recently undercut our traditional word of mouth method of teaching by issuing copies of our private Work to anyone who wants them (provided he is a M.M., Ed.). This change in custom (not yet universal, it is worth noting) has not only destroyed much of the invaluable Master-Apprentice relationship,, but has resulted in no appreciable improvement in the quality of the Work. Alert Brethren watch this "streamlining" of our practices and further introduction of technology: the printing press, the copy machine, the tape recorder, etc. All these things are supposed to make a man a better Mason, but they worry lest they become too impersonal, and serve simply to relieve the candidate of the necessity to make a little more effort on his own behalf. They ask, "Are we making it too easy? Are we passing the buck to machines? What has happened to the human element?"

ITEM: Increasing numbers of Lodges have capitulated to the social trends by lowering their standards of dress and dignity. First names and nicknames have replaced proper titles; turtleneck sweaters, etc., are worn by some officers instead of the customary, more formal attire of the Lodge. Off-colour and ethnic jokes are common and go unchallenged, and novelties are introduced without the traditional discipline and decorum.

ITEM: Outside ritualistic teams of all kinds are increasingly moving into Lodges to relieve the regular officers of their primary duties. And we wonder why we have so many inexperienced Past Masters walking our streets!

ITEM: The principle of modesty and unobtrusiveness in Craft Masonry is being strained by a modern tendency to advertise one's membership and rank to an uncomprehending public. The example of the Masonic bumper-stickers needs little comment.

Nevertheless, there seems to be a growing obsession on this continent with pins, buttons, badges and all those other external trappings used to advertise an individual's connections

and rank. The trend has not gone unnoticed. One can find in the proceedings of the North American Conference of Grand Masters the statement, "Our degrees - like our lapel pins and titles - come too easily and too often. (31)

Why does no one challenge those people who wear that lapel pin depicting a walking stick and spheres? This is a clear breach of a solemn oath against anything whatsoever that may be legible or intelligible to oneself or anyone else in the world. Even if just shrugged off as a rather cunning evasion of the exact wording, it remains a blatant breach of the spirit of that oath. Doesn't anybody care anymore? Are concerned Brethren justified in labelling this a change in form and custom?

ITEM: Last year a U.S. Masonic Jurisdiction faced loss of recognition by other jurisdictions when it introduced innovations aimed at grinding out new members en masse. An edict was issued that abolished the waiting period between degrees; removed the necessity for a candidate to prove up - between degrees; and permitted the initiation of candidates in large groups: one individual only, need take part in the ceremony while a crowd of other candidates simply looked on. This meant that with appropriate promotion and recruiting, any Lodge could conceivably run through 100 new members in a weekend.

Fortunately, wiser leaders in the Craft issued an ultimatum and the edict was rescinded. What is your reaction to this? Would you welcome visitors, so initiated, to your Lodge? Do you feel that such innovations tend to be schismatic? Some Masons do, Think about it. While thinking about it, ask yourself the question; "Is this issue really dead, or is it likely to reappear through the back door of the Craft?"

POINT IV – THE EARLY INNOVATORS THAT CAUSED THE GREAT SCHISM CHANGED LODGES INTO SOMETHING THEY WERE NEVER INTENDED TO BE! I.E., STRAIGHT, RESTRICTED SOCIAL CLUBS

ITEM: While fully acknowledging the benefits to be derived from social activities in a Lodge, many concerned Brethren worry lest we again go too far in these distractions and forget our true Masonic purpose. They cite the cases where Masonic programs are drastically curtailed or eliminated altogether because they may delay the party. "The ladies are waiting!" Sound familiar?

ITEM: There is a growing tendency for Lodges to put entertainment ahead of instruction in Lodge programs. Thus we see a drift to pass over interesting and informative Masonic speakers in favour of talks on such topics as pollution, breathalizers, or the drug problem ... anything at all, in fact, that can be found anywhere, except the one thing we can get nowhere else: Freemasonry.

ITEM: The practice of holding "open installations" is fairly widespread in the United States. While applauded by some, other Masons have profound misgivings. They realize that once such novelties are introduced, they are exceedingly difficult to eradicate. It is brought about, of course, in the interests of "modernizing" the Order, or again, to "change with the times."

31 Recorded by the author during the North American Conference of Grand Masters, Colorado Springs, CO., February, 1979.

An open installation is one in which family and friends are invited to participate. In the opinion of many, these affairs sometimes become nothing more than a restricted ego trip for the Grand Lodge officers rather than a dignified and traditional ceremony, attended by the Craft as a whole. There is again a tendency to shorten the ceremony by elimination of longer and more esoteric passages lest it bore the visitors ... A direct parallel to the emasculation of the ritual in the 17th century.

The real tragedy of some of these truncated ceremonies, however, is that they are turning a traditional Rite into a purely social event which fewer and fewer of the rank and file of Masons even bother to attend, their places having long since been filled with women and children, cousins and grandchildren, parents and in-laws, and all- manner of business connections.

ITEM: The socializers and innovators of today who work so enthusiastically to change Masonry's role, have introduced a twist never dreamed of by their predecessors who brought about the first "Great Schism". It came with the advent of the service club idea, and the modern efforts on this continent to divert Masonry's objectives into service club activities.

We are being urged daily to launch our Lodges into projects, campaigns, charity drives, and other highly visible community projects. The big shift is from our traditional emphasis on individual charity to institutional charity.

It should be apparent to the most blind that Masonic Lodges are no more equipped to do service club work than the service clubs are equipped to practice Masonry. Did our distinguished forefathers intend Freemasonry to be a service club? Are we getting off track? Some concerned Brethren feel we might be.

POINT V – HISTORIAN HAYWOOD STATED THAT THE FIRST "GREAT SCHISM" WAS HASTENED WHEN A MINORITY (AT THAT TIME THE ARISTOCRACY) CAME TO DOMINATE THE DIRECTION OF MUCH OF THE ORDER

ITEM: Many prominent Masons in America today feel that there is clear danger that history is about to repeat itself on this continent. Not the least among them is Dwight Smith, Past Grand Master of Indiana and probably the outstanding Masonic author in America today.

Bro. Smith and other serious-minded Masons are warning us that the tail is beginning to wag the dog; that a special interest minority of members (only some 20% in Alberta) continually seeks to advance the fortunes of other organizations at the expense of the Craft Lodges. Some of his fulminations are expressed in these words:

(But) I am getting good and tired of seeing Symbolic Freemasonry used primarily as a Sugar Daddy, as a benevolent old gentleman whose chief reason for existence is to provide funds and housing facilities and a stock pile for candidates. Especially do I see the when I see the parent body so blithely ignored, neglected and starved by those who drain off its resources with such profligacy. ⁽³²⁾

32 Smith, op.cit., p. 43

ITEM: Many dedicated Masons on this continent worry that our Craft meetings are being turned into sounding boards to promote and recruit for other organizations; each group, like the aristocrats of old, claiming to be of special importance and the peak of the Masonic society.

Thus we see such things as the so-called "Booster Nights" or "Family and Friends Nights," or panel discussion programs, when mixed bags of Masons and non-Masons are invited to dinner to hear representatives of concordant bodies deliver their public relations speeches. Many Brethren feel that instructing non-Masons about other organizations is hardly an adequate substitute for teaching Masons about Masonry. Would our ancestors have approved of this growing practice?

ITEM: Individuals who dare to speak out in defence of the Craft and adherence to our time-honoured practices and principles, find themselves the target of attacks by the innovators and modernizers. Their honest desire to protect our Order from innovation is rewarded by misrepresentation and pressure from both outside and inside the Craft, some of it subtle and some not so subtle. Regrettably, they have all too often felt obliged to withhold advice and participation in areas where their leadership is so desperately needed.

ITEM: How many of us have attended Lodges where the programs of Masonry are abandoned, while the ceremonies of other organizations are substituted? These often take the form of the rites of youth groups. Let it be made clear that the merits of youth organizations and the virtues of supporting youth activities are not at all in question. What is being questioned is why the Lodges are being asked to discriminate in favour of a particular group over any other.

Most youth groups have the sound support of individual Freemasons, and perhaps no better examples can be drawn than the DeMolay or the Boy Scouts, both of which derive leadership from enthusiastic Craft Masons. Nevertheless, it escapes many Masons exactly why Craft Lodges should be asked to concentrate on some 400 members of DeMolay for special consideration while the 35,000 Boy scouts of Alberta are ignored. Gentle critics complain that this is at least a distraction from our proper Masonic business. Less charitable censors wonder aloud whether the Lodges are not being used to turn out more Boy Shriners.

ITEM: Another area that causes misgivings among many Brethren, is that of membership. Not a worry over its possible decline, but a worry that we are becoming too concerned with quantity at the expense of quality: that we are turning out too many members, and too few real masons.

At one Banff Interprovincial Conference M.W. Bro. E.J. Lockhart of British Columbia put it this way:

... we should be very selective in the choice of men that we allow into the order ... this has a relation to membership and the retention of members. If we take in two or three that shouldn't be in, because we lower our standards, we are liable to lose five or six better prospects, and we might lose some members that we already have. ⁽³³⁾

In Britain, the birthplace of modern Masonry, many Lodges restrict membership to 100, and it seems to work just fine. One can get to know all his Brethren, and attendance is

33 Lockhart in Proceedings ... Baner, 1975

close to 100%.

ITEM: It is true that population shifts are making it difficult for some smaller rural Lodges. This is compensated for, to some extent, by the growth of city Lodges. For example, two Alberta Lodges (St. Mark's and Renfrew) alone initiated over 100 candidates in a single five-year period (1973-1978). Ten Alberta city Lodges alone initiated almost 400 in the same five years. In fact, some of those Lodges appear to do little else except initiate people.

Some concerned Brethren are left with the uneasy feeling that the big drive for membership comes largely from outside the Craft Lodges. It is perhaps noteworthy, by the way, that generally speaking, in Alberta, attendance at Lodge meetings is inversely proportional to the size of membership.

ITEM: The Grand Secretary of Indiana took the time to examine various Grand Lodge proceedings and to note the visitations by Grand Masters. He found the results astounding. For example, one Grand Master reported 79 visitations, but 45 were to appendant organizations. Another Grand Master made 69 visitations, of which only 11 were to Symbolic Lodges, and of these six were to one Lodge. So much for his interest in the Craft Lodges. Still another Grand Master showed where his loyalties lay when he made 66 visitations and of these 62 were to concordant orders.⁽³⁴⁾

Many concerned Brethren are asking how long Freemasonry on this continent can survive such neglect of its basic units. No wonder many Brethren are concerned that Craft Masonry on this continent is getting short shrift, and is in need of some major readjustment back to its traditional place of respect.

To quote Bro. Dwight Smith again:

What can we expect when we have permitted' Freemasonry to become subdivided into a score of organizations? Look at it. Each organization dependent upon the parent body for its existence, yet each jockeying for a position of supremacy, and each claiming to be the Pinnacle to which any Master Mason may aspire. We have spread ourselves thin, and Ancient Craft Masonry is the loser. Downgraded, the Symbolic Lodge is used only as a springboard. A short-sighted Craft we have been to create in our beloved Fraternity a condition wherein the tail can, and may, wag the dog. ⁽³⁵⁾

Those are the five of the major changes introduced into Freemasonry which historian Haywood stated caused the "Great Schism" of the 17- hundreds, plus a few of the parallels which some Masons fear are being reintroduced today.

Undoubtedly there are those who feel that their Brethren are unnecessarily concerned, that they overstate the case, that they exaggerate the dangers, that the trends are not well-enough established to be of real concern, or simply, that the innovations we witness today bring as much virtue as vice. If that is the reader's opinion, then he need not be disturbed. He need only watch complacently as the trends unfold. If, however, he is among the ranks of the disturbed, he may be on the side of those who wish to bring the Craft back on course before it again splits asunder.

34 Smith, op.cit, p. 44

35 Smith, Whither Are We Traveling?, p. 10

The critics of the current trends put their case more in sorrow than in anger. They feel sure that the innovators act with sincerity and with no ulterior motives, regardless of the fact that they sometimes open a veritable Pandora's Box-of potential Masonic evils. As historian Haywood said about the first "Great Schism :

(The whole process) ... was a gradual one; neither the Grand Lodge itself nor any of its Lodges had any intention of undermining the foundations of the Fraternity... and their intentions, such as they had, were in their own eyes completely innocent ... ⁽³⁶⁾

The great tragedy is that Freemasonry in North America seems to be entering a new era, not as a universal and unchanging faith, but as a patchwork of independent social or service clubs, basted together with a few shaky stitches of tradition.

Ill-considered innovations so innocently but so easily introduced, may prove exceedingly difficult to eradicate. Their removal puts further strains on the Craft. Their elimination often times leaves behind an unfortunate trail of recriminations, acrimony, and disharmony that can take years to dissipate.

Only with difficulty, and with great self-discipline can an unfortunate innovation be eradicated, and even then, in the picturesque language of Brother Heron Lepper, a former librarian of the Grand Lodge of England, 'In vanishing from human ken, like the fiend of folklore, it left behind a nauseous stench to remind men that something unholy has passed that way.' ⁽³⁷⁾

Let this essay be concluded with one last comment from the depths of the swamp. In those immortal words of POGO, "We have met the enemy, and he is us.

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DISCUSSION

(excerpted from the minutes) Brother Aspeslet talked on the value of both history and

³⁶ Haywood, OP-cit., p. 33

³⁷ Pick and Knight, op.cit., p. 115

opinion for stimulating good discussion and expressed sincere hope that no schism is created in our time. Brother Fox spoke of the necessity of maintaining harmony and working together to meet the principles of Masonry. He demonstrated how the Research Lodge has broken geographical boundaries with the simple dedication of working for the Craft. Brother Borland supported the views expressed in the paper, and hoped that the "innovations" seen elsewhere would not pervade the Craft in Alberta. He was interested in the statistics of involvement of members of appendant orders in their Craft Lodges. Brother Love stated supporting figures to answer Brother Borland, and also expanded on the changes which had been made in rituals. Brother Juthner raised the problem of who were the good and bad in the Antient/Modern conflict, casting some doubt on the Antients' purity of purpose.

Brother Laycraft felt this was a most provocative paper; he noted the concerns raised but pointed out that some of the strongest supporters of concordant bodies are also heavily involved in their Craft Lodges. Brother Senn noted that there was a basic need for belonging, and that some Brethren move into appendant bodies for this reason alone. He also stated that the opinions of today are frequently used as the facts of tomorrow, as any history text will show. Brother Borland commented that perhaps the answer would be for appendant bodies to sever the link with Craft Masonry and stand as independent bodies. Brother Lusk complimented the speaker but warned against tunnel vision which restricts our opportunities to grow as people. Other organizations have something to offer and do not steal the person who does not wish to leave. He stated that "you do not increase the light of your candle by putting out those around you." Working together is the answer. Brother Jendyk stressed the importance of retaining the Landmarks and not adopting changes that are not required. We are looking at symptoms and not causes: we need more research!

Brother Love closed the discussion by stating that his essay was intended to stimulate discussion and, apparently, he had been successful.

End of 'Some Disturbing Reminders' by William Neil Love