

Masonic Education

**Address given by Bro. J.A. Evans, M.D., P.M., P.Z.
Before the Toronto Society for Masonic Study
and Research, September 20th, 1930.**

Progress is a necessary result of natural law. It has been well said, "that he who stands still goes backward", and this saying long antedates Einstein and his law of Relativity. However, it is true in a relative sense only for it can quite easily be imagined that, under some circumstances to stand still would be to advance relatively, provided that all the others fell back. In the main, the statement remains unaltered and can be accepted. However, in accepting it there is a danger that must be kept in mind. Progress means to go forward, and while it is generally understood that this forward movement is towards a goal that will bring beneficial results upon its attainment, nevertheless, circumstances may prove later that the results are distinctly disastrous. Movement is not always progress in the general acceptance of the term.

Progress, like efficiency, has become an obsession of the present age. The world flatters itself that it has improved greatly over past generations, and gives numerous undebatable examples to prove the contention. It may be true. It undoubtedly is true in some cases. But it may not be in all. In this connection, we know that every well-managed business concern, at stated periods, usually once a year, stops its operations for a brief period to do a little inward searching. This process is called "stock-taking" and it would prove of inestimable value if every person, institution and even the world itself, if such were possible, were to "take stock." The Craft is no exception. Freemasonry of to-day is not exactly what it was two centuries ago. This no person can deny. Has the change been a true advance or has it been a retrograde movement? Masonry should "take stock" and make an honest attempt to answer this question fairly and frankly, and then be guided accordingly. But before this Herculean task can be undertaken, there are certain factors and conditions that must be given due consideration.

There is evident, in all quarters, a psychology, a ruling psychology, one could actually say, of the effervescent political type. Catch words and expressions become slogans and as such direct men's actions, while at the same time meaning nothing, or worse still, being capable of interpretations of meaning within wide limits. The world to-day is dealing largely with superficialities and unimportant details. Man, in

general, has neither the time nor the inclination to dig beneath the surface and unearth the basic laws. So if this "stock-taking" in Masonry is to take place, who is going, to do it? In other words, what are the qualifications necessary in those who are to undertake it?

Efficiency experts can be dismissed before even entertaining their application for the job. No man can gain an adequate knowledge of any business unless he has spent years of patient study and consideration of the basic principles and details of *that business*. Efficiency experts will energize anything from farming to high finance, from preaching to "bootlegging," all by the same rule of thumb.

Then we have the specialists. These are the men who by dint of application have obtained a more intimate knowledge of details than is possible to a man of wider experience. Moreover, this increased knowledge is gained, not infrequently, at the expense of the perspective. Specialists are useful, but by virtue of their very training, they must not be permitted to lead; their activities must be directed and controlled by a governing hand. Specialism is rife to-day. We have specialists for this and specialists for that, specialists who were unknown a decade ago, and specialists who will be unknown when science changes the diurnal habits of the human race. We have specialists in name and specialists in fact, specialists who have graduated from their own school and those who have graduated from the schools of other specialists, and so the dance of specialization goes merrily on and the world, at large, signs of the dotted line – and pays. Specialism is the direct result of the superficial mental attitude of the day, or is it a cause? Unbridled specialization is a curse, though it may prove of untold value when properly directed. So let us beware how we handle the specialists whom we engage to assist in this study, and not let them get out of control. Specialists are like fire, good servants but poor masters.

How then can we approach this subject of "stock-taking" of Masonry? First, it must be definitely determined just what Freemasonry is to-day, its basic principles, its many and varied aspects. Second, it must be equally determined what Masonry was two centuries ago, at the time of the "revival" and the formation of the first Grand Lodge. Third, an honest endeavour must be made to ascertain the antecedents of Masonry, so that we may know the fundamental principles that it was intended to perpetuate in the new organization. The man who can fulfil these requirements must, first of all, be a Masonic student. But he must be more. He must be endowed by nature with the analytical and judicial faculties. He must have a broad viewpoint and a wide

experience in life to prevent him from being led astray by details. He must be able to separate the wheat from the chaff and be capable of directing his mind, uninfluenced by his emotions, his personal attractions or his antipathies. If not so endowed and trained, his conclusions will be tainted by his own feelings and opinions, as history so conclusively proves.

It is not within the power of the Craft to present any man with these desired natural qualities. But Masonry can give to her votaries an experience with men. Masonry can give, to a still greater degree, instruction, and it must be admitted frankly and fearlessly that in the one thing in which it is possible for Masonry to excel, it has failed, and failed dismally at that. This is not a pleasant thought but there is no use in playing ostrich, when there is work to be done. The whole argument boils down to one basic truth, *Masonry, to fulfil her mission, must educate here members.* We hear it said, on all sides, that the Craft is clamouring for instruction. Actual experience proves this to be scarcely in accordance with the facts. [In the not distant past, a special invitation was sent to the Master of each lodge in and around the city, to attend an instructive address to be given at this Society. Of the eighty Masters invited, a reply was received from but one, and he expressing his regrets at being unable to attend.] Masonry has succumbed to this baneful influence of the age and has become the servant of the times, instead of being, as it should, the master, or at least, a beacon to guide the traveller on his path. Masons are no more clamouring for instruction than is the average healthy schoolboy on a perfect summer's day when the fields, the old "swimmin' hole," and the ball games are irresistibly calling him. Most Masons, as far as instruction is concerned, must be treated in much the same manner as the schoolboy, taken by the ear and spoonfed with knowledge. Those who have no mental appetite or whose mental stomachs rebel against this nourishment are in the wrong place and would be better out, for Masonry can do little for them. From this it is easily seen from where the leadership and instruction should come, and this automatically brings us to the first step to be taken in the "stock-taking." *Every office should carry responsibilities,* as well as honour, and if those responsibilities are discharged honestly and efficiently, the officer becomes honourable, if not, the office is belittled, and besmirched.

Masons are not clamouring for instruction, but the necessity for instruction is being shouted from the housetops and he must indeed be deaf who does not hear it. The time has come when the term "officer" should really mean a man capable and willing to give instruction; the higher the office, the greater should be that capability

and willingness. Officers should be chosen for their mental qualifications and not the "glad hand" facility. Popularity does not mean ability and herein lies the fundamental weakness of democracy – and Masonry is a democracy.

Now what is that necessary capability, that instruction? In other words, what constitutes Masonic education? Let us pause briefly and "take stock." There are many words which, during the passing of time, change their meanings, so that in time they come to mean something quite different from the original purpose. Such a word is "education." This word comes to the English language from the Latin, rather from two Latin words, "e ducere," meaning "to lead out," and therefore meant "to lead out the individual from his personal or selfish contemplation to knowledge of his environment, family, clan, country, race; and as the process developed, to a knowledge of the universe." Consequently the more facts outside of himself with which man became acquainted and conversant, the better educated he was. It makes no difference how these facts were acquired, whether in an organized teaching institution or in the "university of personal experience." Merely passing the required examinations in a school, college or university does not constitute real education. Many a man has been well educated who never attended more than the lowest grades of school, and in a few cases, none at all, but by making the most of his opportunities has developed himself to a truly astonishing degree, and conversely there are those who have had excellent opportunities but leave college with the same narrow outlook and undeveloped mind with which they entered – wasted energy, and worse, for such always cast a stigma upon true education. Education, no matter what kind, should breed in the student a love of knowledge. Any system of instruction which does not engender this desire, fails utterly. How often we see the young man or woman leaving college, graduated, finished, with a distaste for study and a firm intention to never again open a text book. Such certainly has not proceeded far along the "leading out" path. It may be the system that is at fault, it may be the student, it may be the teacher, the result is the same in all cases – calamity.

Education should be a series of intellectual gymnastics by which the mind develops and grows stronger and bigger, so that with the training, the mind becomes capable of dealing with bigger and more difficult problems, in a more efficient manner. Father's millions and mother's social status can never give the conceited fop mental development. Personal effort is indeed necessary. "work and each tomorrow find us further than to-day." Masonry teaches this great

truth. The entire Masonic system is based upon it. Work is the duty of the Mason; he is presented with the working tools and he must use them. No one else can do it for him. And it depends upon how conscientiously he uses those implements, how perfectly he will shape his ashlar. The rough ashlar will forever remain a rough ashlar, if the Mason sits idly by and does not use those tools in the manner in which they are intended to be used. By no other means than by work can the Mason prepare his stone for the building. The most elaborate implements are useless without labour, and moreover, that labour must be prompted by perseverance. Knowledge, labour, perseverance, there is no symbolism in that. It is hard, cold, cruel fact. To take these tools symbolically is to be a Mason symbolically, and that is a travesty on the name which nothing can remove, be it rank or money, no, nor even morality.

The great Sir William Osler, than whom none greater has ever existed in his chosen profession, said, in speaking of education, "The master word is work"; his life exemplified it, and his success proved the truth of it. Listen to that mind noted for its beautiful thoughts, Robert Louis Stevenson, who says,

"Contend my soul, for moments and for hours,
Each is with service pregnant, each reclaimed
Is like a Kingdom conquered where to reign."

Masons must work, not merely symbolically but actually and in fact, if they are to be real Masons and not merely of the symbolic type. Candidates must be made to undergo real initiation not merely symbolic initiation as so many do, and which accounts for the long and growing list of suspensions and demits seen each year. The governing bodies are worried over this growing number of demissions, and well they might because it shows unequivocally the failure of initiation as practised. The cause is clear, the solution as definite, failure to accept and act accordingly will simply mean a continuance of the disease which is eating at the very vitals of the Fraternity. Banquets and song, platitudinous speeches and hurrahs never made anything, and cannot make Masonry. Work, and lots of it, work properly directed, work along educational lines, educate the membership, make Masonry really mean something and a new day will dawn. But to educate the members, educators must be found. Education, like charity, must begin at home, the uneducated officer cannot instruct the new initiate. There is an apt though trite saying, "To train a dog it is necessary to know more than the dog." And do not forget the old Latin proverb: "Ex nihilo, nihil fit."

There is another type of lost Mason about whom I wish to interject a few words at this point. His name is found generally amongst the demitted class, seldom amongst the suspensions. This type is usually a man of no mean parts, of some intellectual attainments, has had considerable experience in the world of men and who has given some consideration to the problems of life. He realizes the value of education and is willing to devote more or less energy to the search after knowledge and in the quest of wisdom. He is not expecting any magical gift of wisdom because he knows much better. Such a man comes to Masonry rightfully anticipating that he will find some assistance within the Craft, some direction to his researches. He comes up for initiation and is met by some ill-advised brother who tries to be witty by making some inane remark about what is going to take place in the approaching ceremony. This type of wag should he be guillotined and quartered as he has done more to ruin candidates than almost any other.

One of two things may now happen, or worse still, both. The ceremonies may be run through by officers whose elocution is, to say the least, faulty to an extreme, and as expressionless. The ceremonies, through pressure of time, are not given "in extenso," for the banquet waits. There are speeches to be made, toasts to be honoured and music, oh! shades of Epicurus and Demosthenes! what speeches; what music'. Our brother is attracted in spite of it all, and realizes dimly how beautiful it could be. On the other hand, the rendition may be excellent. The candidate is unquestionably impressed and he feels that there is a reasonable hope of his finding that of which he is in search. He gets up his work and is given the remainder of the degrees, usually rushed through at an emergency meeting. Still hope leads him on, he is willing to work. There is much work to be done that night, the sublime degree is rushed through and he is finished, graduated, a full fledged Master Mason, able to look after himself and left to his own devices, no instruction, no advice, no help given.

He flounders, he becomes discouraged, feels disillusioned and fails to attend the meetings. But at some later date we find this same brother a very active member of some other organization, devoting those same energies he would so gladly have devoted to Masonry. He should never have been lost, the fault is with the lodge. Many dozens are lost annually in this manner, the best types of men, the very men Masonry cannot afford to lose. These must be saved or else the Craft will slip still further down the broad highway with ever increasing speed. bring the character of the lodge meeting up to his level and he will stick,

.incidentally raising the tone of the lodge still higher. A little Masonic education given right at this time would act almost as a specific for this malady. Back slapping won't cure it.

There is one thing else needed, a little beside the point, but badly needed, and education will only partially help to supply the want, that is frankness, admittedly an archaic virtue that has no place in the twentieth century. We are living in an age of sham, intensive advertising and high pressure salesmanship; things are not what they seem, or rather what they are represented to be; extravagant speech, extravagant clothes, extravagant motor cars, and worse still, extravagant morals, any of which taken at one-tenth of their expressed value would mean to be defrauded. What the world needs, and Masonry is not exempted, is frankness, honesty and sincerity. But some say it does not pay to be frank, to be honest. Yes, it does; cast aside all pretensions, stand on your own worth. To do this will lessen the show to the world and you will have to increase your value by development, by education, and this is exactly what you should do.

It certainly does pay to be honest, frank and sincere, that is, if you are conscientiously striving to fulfill your highest destiny of self development in the pursuit of the ideal. You will often be misunderstood and criticized by the undiscerning and even maligned by those actuated by selfish motives, but there need be no occasion for worry on this account as you are in excellent company, the very best possible. Galileo was persecuted by organized Christianity for displaying these virtues. On the other hand, *it does not pay* if you are merely seeking popularity for personal aggrandizement, for such necessitates pandering to the weaknesses of human nature, whether it be of the oligarchy or the populace. Herod chose the body of Salome and the head of John the Baptist.

It should be interesting to Masons, more than to all others, to see that education implies, in addition to the purely intellectual development, a moral growth, a lesser consideration of self with a greater consideration of others. This is what is meant by a liberal education. It would be more correct to say a liberating education, because it enables a man to "lead out" from the narrow confines of his own soul and to free himself sufficiently so that he can bask in the radiance of the universal spirit. Masonry realizes this great truth, and to the unfolding processes taught in the Craft there is added moral instruction. In fact, to so great an extent does Masonry appreciate this, that moral admonition is given prior to the more intellectual instruction of the Fellow Craft and Master. He who sees this

accompaniment or preparation only and thereby makes the Craft a system of morality and *nothing more* has missed the true spirit and central purpose of the Fraternity, no matter how beautiful that morality may be.

Moreover, there is a great danger to this restricted, and therefore incorrect conception of Masonry, a danger from which the Craft has suffered in no small measure, for no sooner is Masonry made merely a system of morality than it becomes an appendage, not to religion, but to any intolerant and bigoted sect whose members may unfortunately gain admission into Masonry. We have seen numerous examples of such. True morality is invaluable, but not that sickening, sob-sister type which is the outgrowth of ignorance and selfishness. Every religious (term used in ordinary acceptance and not the true, original sense) man should be moral but we know only too well that such is not the case. Every truly moral man is religious. (Term used in original sense). This statement will be met with vociferous contradiction, so let us examine it briefly. The word "moral" comes from the Latin word "mos" meaning "a custom, fashion, use or law." In the plural form "mores" it means "character, or behaviour." The character or behaviour may be either good or bad, but the word has come to be generally accepted in the sense of good behaviour, so that rather than say such a man has bad morals, the expression "no morals" is more frequently heard. Accepted in this sense, a moral man is one who lives in such a manner as to avoid injury to his fellows, that is unselfishly, and this is the very essence of true religion, irrespective of what the peculiar faith may consist. There are other more restricted meanings to this word but they are so obviously separated from the present subject as to require no consideration at this time. With this, the moral aspect of the question will be laid aside to take up the main issues and to which morality is but an accompaniment and a preparation, important though it may be.

What then is Masonic education? First of all, it should be a leading out process, an unfolding, a development; secondly, that development should be along lines indicated by the Craft teachings. The most cursory examination will disclose the fact that Masonry is basically founded upon just such an idea, because it is divided into stages or degrees, each stage being (or supposed to be) indicative of some developmental phase through which the neophyte is required to pass or attain. There is no royal road to learning, *knowledge is absolutely valueless to the individual until he has made it his personal property.* To do this means hard, consistent labour, and in the absence of this labour, the acquisition of knowledge is an absolute impossibility. Many

Masons appreciate the value of knowledge but lack the necessary energy to knuckle down to the hard work necessary to acquire it. These rush through degree after degree, hoping that by some magical means, supreme knowledge will be given to them as a gift from the gods, and thus enable them to reap the full benefits of knowledge without having to subject themselves to exertion of any kind. But the receiving of degrees does not necessarily mean development. True a man must be mentally poverty stricken if he does not receive some benefit from witnessing the beauty of the various degrees found in Masonry, but that is not real education because there is not sufficient effort put forth *by him* to give rise to any development. Such persons are mentally lazy. No man can become a champion boxer from merely reading a book on the gentle art. *Personal effort is necessary*, and that is just where people fail by the thousands, that is where the leadership has failed. *Masons must be compelled to put forth a personal effort* and any Mason who is unwilling to make this effort can never obtain any development. *This compulsion must come from the governing bodies*. They will become very unpopular, at least temporarily, but if any governing body is going to evade its duties on the plea of unpopularity, then that organization can immediately proceed to the Mortician and make arrangements for its own interment. The danger to Masonry is from within, a dry rot, not from outside sources. These latter need not cause us one moment's trepidation, but the former is a very real source of apprehension to every intelligent Mason. The results are already becoming unquestionably manifest.

To consider the question more in detail, the education which every Mason should acquire need not be purely Masonic, it is better not, but it is the Masonic branch that concerns us more particularly here. Our ceremonies tell us along what lines the Mason should direct his education, along what lines he should develop himself as a Mason.

Morality, this has already been dealt with but there is another aspect that is worthy of consideration. Whilst repeated admonitions to practise morality are not only advisable but necessary, nevertheless, it must be granted that there is no moral instruction given in a Masonic lodge that cannot be obtained elsewhere. It would even be safe to say that there is no moral instruction given to any candidate in this jurisdiction, but what has been given to him under more ideal circumstances, and at a more impressionable age, that at his mother's knee. To make Masonry *merely* a school of moral teaching, is to make the Craft absolutely a superfluity. Imagine a group of grown men dressing themselves up in fancy regalia, observing meticulously elaborate ceremonies merely to tell the candidate that he must obey

the moral law. Such information he already has. Imagine it; did I say grown men? What a horrible waste of time, money and energy to pander to the vanity of those who wish for personal elevation over their fellows. No; ten thousand times no. *Masonry has a greater value for the true initiate.* But morality is necessary, because if the knowledge that it is possible to obtain in Masonry, were to be used for ulterior and selfish purposes, great harm would result. Knowledge is power and power must be given only to those who will use it aright. How much better the world would have been if the expert chemical knowledge had never fallen into the hands of the war lords; how many lives, how much human suffering would have been saved. By all means practise morality. This is the first step in Masonic development.

Having proved himself worthy by the practice of morality, the Mason is now permitted to extend his researches into the hidden mysteries of nature and science. This is where the true intellectual education should begin. The Mason must unfold himself, lead himself out and acquire a knowledge of the universe, its phenomena, its laws. Any chosen path may be followed, but a general knowledge is first advisable before specialization, otherwise the general relationships will be disturbed and details given undue importance, thus spoiling the concept and leading to narrow-mindedness, intolerance and bigotry. In this connection, the Mason should devote a certain amount of labour to the study of purely Masonic subjects, Masonic history in general as well as that of his own Grand Lodge and Lodge. History is a most valuable study, if undertaken properly. To know how men acted under certain circumstances in the past is to know pretty well how they will act under the same circumstances in the future. Herein lies the practical value of history.

Symbolism, that wonderfully rich field of thought, there is no limit to the possibilities of this study and the many absorbingly interesting bypaths into which the student is led. . No better commencement can be made in symbolism than a careful and detailed study of our ceremonies. The possibilities here are unlimited and the pleasure untold. But the Mason should not confine his attention to purely Masonic subjects. He should endeavour to gain as much information regarding human activities in other walks of life as is possible. This will increase his general store of knowledge, his mind will develop; his viewpoint will become broader, and in direct ratio, the danger of his falling into those destructive vices of intolerance and bigotry lessen.

In order to discharge his Masonic duties properly, he should know something of law in general, our Constitution in particular. He should

have a skeletal knowledge of the principles of government and governmental institutions so that he can become an intelligent citizen.

Then having, through the practice of morality, justified his possession of knowledge, and by labour having acquired such knowledge, the Mason is now in a position to enter upon the greatest study of man, philosophy, that science which deals with the ultimate and first cause. This field is difficult, years of preparation are necessary, honest hard labour alone will qualify a man to enter upon this rich but treacherous study. But if the Mason has followed the lessons given him in the practice of morality, and has conscientiously made his researches in the hidden mysteries of nature and science, then he can approach the final instruction without the least misgiving. If he has failed to live up to the requirements of the preceding stages, then he had better go no further, the fruits are not for such as he. Nor, even now, is the reward handed out freely, only the road is indicated, the labours must continue. He who labours for reward never gets it. The reward, that is the development, resides in the labour itself, so the mentally lazy who chases after magic words, open sesames and superhuman wisdom, finds nothing but ashes in the Sanctum Sanctorum. This is his own fault, nature cannot be defrauded of her due.

***Address given before
the Toronto Society for Masonic Study and Research
September 20th, 1930.***