

Masonry's Participation in the Spiritual and Psychological Reconstruction of Those Serving and who Have Served in the Armed Forces.

by
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The pressure of congregational and ministerial duties is the writer's reason for absence from the 1944 Conference. My regret and disappointment are mitigated somewhat by the knowledge that you have a large and distinguished delegation from Manitoba and my presence would appear to be superfluous. The Conference may be assured of my interest in all its proceedings, though there will be over its sessions a shadow and throughout the fellowship an inescapable sense of loss occasioned by the sudden passing of our esteemed brother the Grand Secretary of British Columbia, Right Worshipful Brother Frank Summer McKee. He was a genial soul, a stalwart friend, a good workman and a greatly beloved Brother Mason. To this sorrow is added that sorrow which comes upon us by the passing of Mrs. Moore, the beloved wife of the Grand Secretary of Alberta, Most Worshipful Brother Geo. Moore. We recall her radiant personality as she greeted us all last year. The Conference does well in holding a Service of Memorial during its sessions. My great regret is that I cannot be with you on this occasion. We can say "Amen" to Milton's words:

Servant of God, Well done!
Well hast thou fought
The better fight.

and be comforted with the thought, that

Death has not taken all away.
These friends are with us still today:
Each of us still carried on
Something of those whose souls are gone.

May I be permitted to associate myself with the members of this 1944 Conference in your expressions of sympathy and love to the sorrowing ones in this lonely hour. May they be assured that we stand beside

them and lift our eyes to that bright morning star of hope that rises to usher in the new day when death and sorrow shall be no more.

The subject assigned to me is rather formidable and just a bit staggering at first glance. My efficient secretary is responsible for the phraseology and for the assignment. It would require a much more courageous man than I to waive aside his insistence and so I offer you my poor effort, performed amid many responsibilities in these busy days.

On August 12th. last, an article appeared in the Winnipeg Free Press, under the title, "When Daddy Comes Home." The writer, "J.H.G." ventures into a field to which few are turning their thoughts in these days. That field is the field of "Spiritual and Psychological Reconstruction," and my position taken in what I have to say is that this field is fundamental to every other field of endeavour. The article is so germane to our subject that I crave your indulgence while I present it to you,

"In all the planning for the post-war years that is being done the world over, planning that includes economic and political reconstruction, vast schemes for rehabilitation of the wounded and the demobilized, great plans for raising living and health standards; in all this nothing is being done about the greatest of post-war problems, the problem of intimate human relationships. Nothing is being done because nothing can be done, for it is a problem which only the individual concerned can work out.

No one who thinks beyond the smiling faces of the returning service men and their happy, reunited families can be unaware of this problem. This war has literally torn years from the family lives of our young people -- precious years -- formative years, years which can never be regained and which will condition the many more years which are to come.

To thousands of young Canadians -- and Americans and Russians and Britons too - Daddy is not somebody who comes home at night to supper, who fixes wagons, goes for walks, plays ball, reads stories aloud and occasionally administers a spanking. Daddy is a picture on the wall, on the table or on mother's bureau, He is a nice looking man in a fine uniform and someday he will come home again and it will be such fun!

Yes, he will come home again. There will be fun. That is for sure. But after the fun, after the happy reunion has been enjoyed to the limits there will come the period of adjustment. There will be a man in the house again after so many years and the effect upon the household, though it consist of a single room or a mansion, will be profound. What is more, it will be a strange man in the house. The ordeal of war will have changed him considerably, perhaps deeply; just as the ordeal of trying to be a father and a mother to growing children will have wrought profound changes in the personality of the mother. Family life cannot be picked up where it was dropped two, four or five years ago. The intrinsic nature of families, of life itself, makes that impossible. Instead a new life must be created; and for many it will be so very, very hard. There will be some heartbreaks, some disillusionment, but in the end there will be a new life for human nature is adaptable to near conditions and new surroundings.

For the returning service men, and of course for their families, it will be a new adventure. For many of the men one of life's greatest adventures - the early growth of a young family -- will have passed them by. But there will be compensations, very great compensations.

For the younger service men the problem of re-adjustment will be infinitely more difficult than for the older men. Many will come back to young wives and babies. After two, three and four years of having everything done for them, of having others worry about their welfare, they will suddenly find themselves on their own. Then they will not only have to worry about themselves but about their families as well. The test of responsibility will be thrust upon them. Thousands of them who went straight from school and college to the forces, will discover the new world of business and the task of making a living. What was once a life of great simplicity will become a life of vast complexity.

It is true that governments may help in these re-adjustments. There will be committees and organizations galore to help fit the service men back into civilian life. But none of these organizations can solve the problem of human relationships. This must be solved by the men and women and children themselves. They have got to work it out, almost hour by hour and day by day. The daddy who was once a picture on the wall must grow into the family in a sort of self-grafting operation. The organizations, the committees, the rehabilitation schemes will help only to provide the service men with an economic base from which to operate. But the ultimate happiness of all these human beings does not depend upon jobs or work.. It depends in the final analysis whether a happy home life can be achieved. Without that, work tends

to lose its meaning, to become merely drudgery, or at best, futility. With it work takes on new meaning and becomes a means to a greater ends. The orators have been saying that these returning service men will be the builders of a great new Canada. If they succeed only in building happy family lives for themselves and their wives and children a great new Canada will follow automatically."

The problem of intimate human relationships is, beyond peradventure of a doubt, the greatest of post-war problems - as it is at any time - but we must emphatically disagree with any suggestion that "nothing can be done, for it is a problem which only the individual concerned can work out." True enough the individual concerned must play his part for you cannot do much for a person who refuses to help himself. Nevertheless, here is the spiritual and psychological field, and this is exactly what we are interested in just now.

Let us at once recognize that not all the men in the armed services will look to government agencies for assistance when they return. No one will deny or fail to acknowledge the debt we owe to them. But there will be many who belong to that thrifty, independent class of folk who prefer to "paddle their own canoe", and are even now preparing for the opportunity to do just that. Scores of examples of such men could be given. This is the spirit of the pioneer which has made our country what it is. This is the spirit of thrifty initiative which will make the difficult days ahead easier for all of us in Canada. These are the men who present no problem. That should not relieve us of our responsibility in the field under discussion. We owe to all such sincerest encouragement, Canada would be a better and happier land if all of us would emulate their spirit of thrift and independence, and leaned less on the growing tendency to paternalism. They merit our praise and best cooperation.

But the vast majority of the sons of Canada who come back to us, and the loved ones whose men folk have paid the supreme sacrifice will present to the brethren of the Masonic fraternity a rousing challenge to prepare now for the tremendous task of reconstruction and rehabilitation, or suffer the sure consequences of irreparable loss. If no one in Canada is alive to the immediate and pressing task to minister effectively to discharged members of the Armed Forces, many of whom are already being returned to civilian life, we will be faced with a repetition of the tidal wave of sensuality, vulgarity and corruption that followed the last war.

Surely we must do all in our power to see to it that the stopping of this war is not worse than its prosecution. If men are to emerge from an existence dedicated to killing and the employment of brute force, it will be by the faith of individuals who believe that God intends men to be not only free but pure as well, our concern must be that they emerge from the present narrow existence into one of wider interests, sounder judgments, and equipped with materials - physical of course but spiritual as well - necessary to taking on mature roles in a democratic and Christian state.

Returning service men, for the most part, are not problems to be solved. Rather, I suggest, we as members of society, are the main problem. Man's extremity is always God's opportunity, but the opportunity may be lost through our indifference - and blind selfishness. Many of these men - members of our families and our neighbors family have had a real and vital spiritual experience, the value of which we must not fail to capitalize upon. Many of the letters received from boys in the thick of the battle, reveal the fact that this experience has been as real as it is intense, and deeply moving. They are not coming back to us under any disillusionment. Many of these young chaps never had a job before. Society would find no place for them till war came, and many went into the service disillusioned. They went reluctantly and many of them cynically. Now that the disillusionment has gone, and under fire, and through the rigors of the campaign, they have come to a broad understanding of what freedom and faith mean, they have seen what the Nazis and the Japanese doctrines do to human personality. While they may not go for shibboleth and ballyhoo, and are auspicious of propaganda, they have come to believe in and appreciate the fundamental values of democracy and the Christian faith.

Folks often worry about the morals of their boys. Did it ever occur to you that these boys of yours worry about the morals of the people at home. The stories of strikes by labour unions, who exploit the national emergency for their own advantage, or of industrialists who lack any sense of fairness and justice, whose greed and selfishness have crushed out all humanitarian feeling these have given rise to much anger and bitterness. Stories of juvenile delinquency, in which they fear their own sweethearts and wives and children may be involved disturb them. They are equally angry at those who play the black markets or avoid their responsibilities in taxation or the buying of bonds. They express concern about any evidence of racial antagonism or religious persecution at a time when we are fighting systems which have flourished on bigotry. And they ask: "What are our great

institutions doing in the home front to combat these enemies of the cause for which we fight and die?"

The day of the geographic pioneer is gone forever: The day of the pioneer in personal friendships is upon us. We of the Masonic fraternity should be "labourers together" with the men who represent us at the battle front. They are "comrades with us" in the rebuilding process after long years of destruction. The task of Reconstruction is not solely a question of money and goods: that is already adequately planned for and provided. If these constitute the only help we can think of we have missed everything worth while. We dare not take our responsibility superficially. Let us face the high meaning of it all, get beyond human help and compassion, to the job of imparting to our returned brethren a faith that will give life meaning and content again, faith to restore their souls, and build into then something that is eternal. This is the important, yea essential job Freemasonry is qualified to undertake.

Brethren, it will not be easy. Give these men a farm, some stock and implements a job, an income, a home, write your cheque, pay your taxes, - these things are easily done. Let us not cheapen our task and responsibility into something easier. Let us not seek to escape the tension at this point. It is said by Yeats of Dante that he "set his chisel to the hardest stone" That might well be said as the word for us all in this day. May the Freemasons of Canada possess themselves of a conviction that if our fraternity starts doing things, big results will follow. Let us bring relief and help through the real spirit and art of Masonry - which is charity, or love - into the lives of mean. That can be accomplished only when we set out to gain and to hold their friendship and confidence, We must have confidence in ourselves and in the principles of our order. What an opportunity is before us! To mediate to others the art of right living through personality! The character and the role of Freemasonry in Canada for the next century will be determined by the manner in which Freemasons respond to this challenge. If ever there was a time when we ought to throw aside our smug respectability, our complacent conservatism, and our excessive caution it is now.

He shall never live long who serves only himself.
He shall never be great who thinks only of self
Though he grow to be gray
In his own narrow way,
He shall find that the gold
He has labored to hold

Is an empty reward for his long years of strife,
And too late he shall learn he has wasted his life.

He shall never be wise who thinks only of gain;
And toils for but what he, himself, may attain.
He shall sigh at the end,
For a smile of a friend,
And shall reap from his years
Only hated and sneers,
And alone he shall sit at the end of his days,
And wish he had travelled by kindlier ways.

He shall never be big who has never been kind
But shall always be little of soul and of mind,
He may scramble and fight
For everything in sight
And may get to the peak,
By destroying the weak,
But there he shall find that his conquests are spoiled,
And robbed of their charm by the may he has toiled.

The service worth while is the service men give
That others in sunshine and laughter may live..
The big men. are they
Who will pause on the way,
To play f or another
The role of a brother,
The great men are they who are gentle and kind;
They live when they die in the friends left behind.

John R. Rodgers.

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