

A Little Bit O'Allen

Richard E. Fletcher

Virginia Research Lodge #1777

Highland Springs, Virginia

June 28, 1997

To give you a little flavor of what Allen Roberts is all about let me quote from his book *The Mystic Tie*:

Not long after my book *House Undivided* was published, a Past Grand Master told me: "I thought about writing about the Civil War. I didn't because none of the big shots were Masons." That's True, I told him, but thousands of "little-shots" WERE Freemasons.

This quote typifies Allen Roberts and his thinking. He does not care for pomposity or self-importance and will quickly make you aware of that. He also is very supportive of Freemasons at the Blue Lodge level. His feeling is that those working in the trenches are the ones who truly make Freemasonry effective.

On a lighter note, Allen has never forgiven me for being a Past Grand Master although he does overlook it so we have been able to develop a marvelous working relationship.

Masonic Education has always been and continues to be foremost in Allen Roberts' mind. He preaches education to anyone who will listen and he has written about it in many of his books. Let me share with you what he said in the preface to his book *Key To Freemasonry's Growth*.

Freemasonry must not change, but the thinking of too many of its leaders must change. They must work at the job of being Masonic Leaders. They must devise ways and means of instilling in the hearts of their members the teachings of the Order. Once this is done, future leaders will strive to strengthen the foundation of the Organization, not weaken it, because they will understand what Freemasonry truly is.

In all of Allen's works, particularly *Key To Freemasonry's Growth*, *More Light In Masonry*, and *The Search For Leadership*, over, and over, and over he stresses the value of Masonic Education, leadership training, and planning.

Can Masons working together possibly make a difference? Let Allen tell you from his book *The Mystic Tie*. He says about Robert Burns, the Scottish Freemason and poet:

Before Robert Burns became a Freemason he was known to but few in Scotland. Great Britain, and the world, didn't know of his existence. This would change thanks to his Masonic brethren.

Burns was persuaded by Gavin Hamilton, the Master of Lodge Loudoun Kilwinning at Newmilns, to collect and publish his poems. He did. The edition was limited to 600, of which the members of St. John's Lodge of Kilmarnock took 350. In every respect this could be called a Masonic edition. Burns had no money, so his Brethren fully supported the enterprise. It was printed by John Wilson, an enthusiastic Mason. It was dedicated, naturally, to Gavin Hamilton. Still without funds, Burns decided to seek his fortune in Jamaica. But just before he was to leave he received a letter from a Dr. Blacklock. Burns was urged to go to Edinburgh to arrange for a second printing of his poems. This proved to be a turning point in his life. There he visited Canongate Kilwinning Lodge and met Lord Glencairn. Glencairn liked Burns and obtained a position for him in the Excise. Most important, Glencairn persuaded members of the nobility to subscribe to the works of Burns.

It was said of the Edinburgh editions of Burns's Poems: "Surely never, a book came out of a more Masonic laboratory." The author, printer, illustrator, and publisher were all Freemasons. Three years later, Lord Glencairn died, and Burns wrote his "Lament for James, Earl of Glencairn." Many consider the last verse of this elegy the finest Burns had ever written:

*The bridegroom may forget the bride
Was made his wedded wife yestreen;
The monarch may forget the crown
That on his head an hour has been;
The mother may forget the bairn
That smiles sae sweetly on her knee;
But I'll remember thee, Glencairn,
And a' that thou hast done for me!*

Please don't ever think Freemasons working together can't make a difference!

Allen has for many years written historical information about the Fraternity and he has so often said, "If we would only tell the facts and not have to embellish them. Freemasonry has such a great story to tell." One of Allen's pet peeves is to read that all of the members of the Boston Tea Party, all the signers of the Declaration of Independence, all of our first Governors, all of Washington's Generals were Freemasons. The statements are simply not true; yet, Freemasons keep repeating them.

To set the record straight and to give factual information about many historical events, Allen wrote a book entitled Masonic Trivia and Facts. In this book Allen Roberts has assembled 625 questions and answers about the Masonic Fraternity and the book is described as "from Aberdeen to the Ziegfeld Follies." The answers to hundreds of questions will be found.

Do not think for a moment that Allen is without controversy in many of his statements. Let me give you one example [Allen thinks highly of McClellan]:

Let me inject at this point that I must offer a defense of my statements in chapter nine concerning General George B. McClellan. I fully realize my admiration of him isn't shared by many historians (or so-called historians). Most people are convinced President Abraham Lincoln was infallible, always told the truth, and never could do anything wrong. Lincoln's apologists have seen to this.

This is not an opinion shared by many and the reason for including this quote is simply to impress upon you that Allen Roberts is not afraid to express his own opinion even when it differs from contemporary thinking.

Another man whom Allen Roberts greatly admired was Harry S. Truman and from his book *Brother Truman* Allen has this to say about that great man:

Within the realms of Freemasonry a handful of men have stood out as exceptional leaders. Each decade has produced only one or two since the Grand Lodge era began in 1717.

Among the thousands of great men who have been members of the Craft only a few have acknowledged their debt to the teachings of Freemasonry. One can read their autobiographies and biographies in vain to find any reference to Masonry. The few exceptions stand out vividly. One of these is Harry S. Truman.

Throughout his adult life Truman put into practice the principles taught within all Masonic Lodges. Perhaps it was because he learned the ritual of the Craft soon after he was initiated. But he went beyond the ritual; he learned and practiced what it meant. Above all, he didn't hesitate to help the Fraternity and those individuals within it. He didn't hide his membership; he spoke of it often — as you will find within the pages of this book, because much of it is written in his own words.

Friend and foe alike, for the most part, did admire and respect the principles of Truman. Many who did not share his views as a Senator and later as President have since learned he was right more often than wrong. I must honestly admit that I am one of these. I am sorry that I didn't know the man then whom now I have come to know and understand.

Allen has always been concerned that the true rule of the Masonic Fraternity in the history and development of our great nation never been properly told. Therefore, to correct this oversight he wrote a book *Freemasonry in American History*. Let me quote some of Allen's words from this book:

Historians have ignored the contributions of Freemasons and Freemasonry in their accounts of the happenings in the world. Even those men who were, or are, Freemasons haven't, for the most part, credited the part Freemasonry has played in their lives. This book is an attempt to bring the history of America and Freemasonry into focus.

History is made by men and women. Freemasonry is composed of men; women comprise some of its appendant bodies. Although it's impossible to relate the full influence the teachings of Masonry have had on the history makers, it has been considerable. In some instances this influence is related in this story by those involved. In other cases we can assume the work of many of those noted was favorably influenced by the teachings of the Craft.

Over the years millions upon millions of men have received the degrees as conferred in Masonic lodges throughout the free world. Many of these men have played vital roles in the history of the world. Only a few, too few, could be mentioned in a book of this size. As an example, William Denslow's *10,000 Famous Freemasons* measures over six inches deep; the books studied for this volume takes up over fifteen feet on my bookshelves. The Grand Lodge histories that have

been written measure more than four feet. Thousands of other volumes have been written on or about Freemasonry.

Even so, this is the first attempt to weave the history of the United States with that of Freemasonry. It is the first general history of Freemasonry in America. It is the basis on which some other Masonic historian can build.

Allen has written extensively about the American Civil War. Two volumes are titled *House Undivided* and *House Reunited*. The first talks about the war and the second about its aftermath. Concerning this terrible conflict Allen wrote about the many, many acts of kindness and charity shown by Masons from both sides to each other. From *House Undivided* let me share with you a brief section which occurs at the end of the War:

On the following day, the Grand Lodge of New Hampshire appropriated a sum "for the benefit of necessitous Lodges in the Southern States." Almost every other Grand Lodge and Chapter in the North, East, and West, did the same.

The appreciation of such kind acts was noted by all of the recipients. The comments of Grand Master Wilson Williams of Alabama, whose grand lodge had received some \$3,500 by December 2, 1867, is symbolic:

Just emerging from a long and disastrous civil strife, in which clouds and darkness were round about us, with the war echoes and their wail of woe still tingling in our ears, and longing for peace and tranquility, we gathered our clans of scattered craftsmen to comfort those that mourned, and give aid to the destitute; we could not give aid to the afflicted, for *they* mourned those that were not, and exhausted our means ere the work of relief was well begun. Thus, powerless to succor, the voice of cheer comes to us from our northern brethren - enemies in war, in peace, friends - and the hand of charity is extended to a fallen foe. They bid us welcome to their hearts and give of their substance to relieve our necessities. We accept, with grateful hearts, the aid thus tendered, and in these acts of fraternal sympathy we recognize the influence of that noble tenet of our time-honored order — "Brotherly love, relief and truth." By it the gulf of strife is bridged over, and we

enter a land of peace and harmony, where our feet tread the sacred pavement of the Lodge. Would that Masonry were universal; then would all enemies be subdued, and the nations learn war no more...

This foreword has touched on some of the stories contained in the book. It was done to show the reader not only how important the book is, but also how interesting and informative the pages really are. If, when you are reading the book, you come to a statement with which you disagree, and you are taking the author to task for his conclusion, do not be surprised if over your shoulder you hear a little chuckle. That will be Allen chuckling because now he knows he has got you thinking and that, my dear friend and reader, is what Allen Roberts is about. His greatest gift to the Masonic Fraternity is his ability to make you think. It is a rare gift, and we should be very proud of Allen sharing it with us.

Why are men like Allen Roberts so important? Let me bring to the current day and tie together what Allen Roberts has been able to accomplish and what we at the Masonic Information Center are trying to do.

One area from which Freemasonry is constantly under attack that of the religious extremists. Comfortable in their own interpretation of the Bible, they feel perfectly at ease in condemning members of the Masonic Fraternity and other Masonic related organizations.

Their greatest enemy is a man like Allen Roberts because, above all else, he encourages people to think and if you are Pat Robertson, the last person on earth you want around you is someone willing to think. So, from that perspective religious extremists will always look upon Freemasonry as an enemy.

That is why people who are willing to speak their mind and take a solid position, are so vital to Freemasonry. It is because of men like Allen that our Fraternity has survived the test of time and become such an important part of our society.

What Allen Roberts has been doing for years is exactly what the Masonic Information Center is continuing to do and that is to get good information into the hands of Freemasons so that they will be more comfortable in defending the Fraternity against these vicious attacks.

One of our biggest problems in the Masonic Fraternity, quite frankly, is our appalling lack of knowledge about our own Fraternity. Every Freemason should make it a number one priority to see that factual and informative information about Freemasonry is made available to everyone within our reach. That includes not only our members but also our prospective members, members of the community, members of our family, all who make up what we call the general public.

We also need a very positive attitude about Freemasonry. An attitude such as the one I am going to share with you from William Manchester's book *Controversy*. He writes about the Marines saying:

"That Marines are cocky is no news to anyone who has observed a stiff neck rising insolently from a standing blue collar. What is not understood is that to them attitude is a weapon."

Because he was convinced that he was still a tough old bird, General Archibald Henderson, aged seventy-four, could saunter up to a Baltimore street mob's cannon in 1857 and scornfully turn the muzzle aside, giving the Marines behind him a chance to overrun the gun.

Because he held Spanish marksmanship in contempt, Sgt. John Quick could climb a ridge at Guantanamo Bay in the Spanish-American War, turn his broad back to enemy fire, and wigwag artillery signals to American gunboats.

And "Chesty" Puller, because he was a swashbuck could lead the First Marines through six attacking Chinese divisions after sweeping the frozen landscape with his field glasses at Chosin and announcing loudly, "Well, we've got the enemy on our right flank, our left in front of us, and behind us. They won't get away this time."

*Help me live in a house
By the side of the road
Where the race of men go by
Some that are good
Some that are bad
Even as you and I*

*I would not sit in the scorner's seat
Nor hurl the cyries ban
Let me live in a house
By the side of the road
And be a friend to man!*

For those of us in the Masonic Fraternity and for those of us who tire part of the Masonic Fraternity through other organizations or family members, all of us need the attitude expressed by William Manchester but just as importantly all of us also need "A Little Bit O'Allen".