

What of Tomorrow

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June 25, 1994

*Tomorrow and tomorrow and tomorrow
Creeps in this petty pace from day to day
To the last syllable of recorded time.
- William Shakespeare*

Approximately 25 years ago, I developed the first presentation I ever gave in a Masonic Lodge titled, "What of Tomorrow." I began that talk with the statement: "My Brethren, Freemasonry is in trouble." At that time, my concern was the decline in membership numbers. Well, my Brethren, Freemasonry is still in trouble, but my concern today is not as much with the quantity of the Craft as it is with the quality of the Craft.

Granted, our numbers continue to decrease and must be considered a problem, and it does concern me greatly. If, however, quantity is lost, it can be regained. Lose quality, and it is probably lost forever. I have now titled this paper: "What of Tomorrow".

I speak to you today expressing my views and my opinions, and mine only. I speak for no Masonic Body and express the views of no Masonic Body. I do speak, however, as one who has spent thirty-two active years in Freemasonry, fifteen of them as professional. I speak to you as one who has made a concentrated effort to study and support this organization and as one convinced of the necessity of survival of the Craft to serve as a beacon the world of what is good and right in mankind.

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I recall a quotation I heard many years ago: "When you place your hand in a flowing stream, you touch the last that has gone before and the first that is yet to come." A man's relevant position in history and our position in Freemasonry is as that hand. We stand today as the hand in the flowing stream of Freemasonry touching the last that has gone before and the first that is yet to come. There is a distinctive difference, however, between the hand in the water and us. The hand has no power to change the ultimate destiny of the flow of the water. But we have the capacity and the power to change the ultimate destiny of Freemasonry.

Indeed, what we are doing today will determine where Freemasonry is in all of the tomorrows. For over two decades now, the best leadership we have been able to provide has been working to curb membership decline without success. Maybe it is time to examine more closely the cause of the decline.

We look at the present day with the loss in membership and interest and have the tendency to blame ourselves for what we deem a failure in our system and our leadership. My Brethren, I honestly do not believe that any difference in our system or our leadership would have shown results much different than they do today.

I do not feel that the loss of membership in Freemasonry is due solely to inadequacy of the leadership, and I certainly don't feel that we should lower our standards to fit a lesser system. Because society lowers its standards does not mean we must do the same to fit in. Indeed, we have an obligation to the future to lend the way to what is morally and ethically right, to be more than just average in society. In essence, to be what we have always been.

I feel strongly that we are looking at a sociological phenomenon which must run its course before we find a redevelopment of interest in the Craft. Perhaps it is time for us to realize that there may be no immediate spontaneous solution to the decline in numbers. We must acknowledge that this is a problem not localized to either area or organization.

Perhaps it is time for us to realize that our decrease in numbers is due to a sociological condition and not to our inability to cope with change.

I do not mean to imply that we should ignore the quantity problem. Quite the contrary. We cannot, however, afford to be blinded by number loss to the extent that we are willing to sacrifice the quality of the Craft. The quality man is out there. Our goal must be to educate him of the value of Freemasonry to him, to society and to the world. The world must know who we are and what we do.

The Boy Scouts of America might be regarded as a classic example in microcosm of what has happened in organizations which change basic precepts to fit changing society. For most of its history in the United States, the Boy Scouts of America has been a highly regarded quality organization maintaining high standards and setting lofty goals for the members not unlike the Masonic Fraternity. The Boy Scouts of America flourished. Then the leaders of the organization decided that it was out of step with present-day generations and social standards. Requirements were decreased to make it easier for achievement. Demands were lessened for recognition, and the Boy Scouts of America lost 50% of its membership. They required less, and that is exactly what they got.

They finally reverted to some of the basics which the Boy Scouts were known, and, although I am not familiar with the full impact of this reversal, the organization has increased its membership dramatically.

Freemasonry is an organization which developed its greatness for two primary reasons. First, it was probably the first, or one of the first, organizations that accepted, at least philosophically, members as equals regardless of their station in life. It provided an environment in a class society where men could join together as equals. Secondly, it attracted some of the greatest minds and thinkers of their time. Even in the earliest formed Lodges, leadership fell almost invariably upon the class of thinkers. Take away either, and this Craft would not have become what it has.

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Freemasonry has been an attractive force for some of the greatest minds this world has ever seen, because it not only embraced high ideals and principles, but because it also nurtured those ideals and principles, developed the minds of the Members and stimulated aspirations for greatness. We remained great not only because we continued to attract great men, but also because we continued to support those great ideals and principles, and because we performed great acts.

Without the great men, we cannot support great ideals nor perform great acts. Today we tend to evaluate ourselves in terms of quantity instead of quality and, as a result, lament that we may not be as great as we once were simply because our numbers are not as high as they once were. This is an unfortunate appraisal of the Craft. Longfellow wrote: "Look not mournfully to the past. It comes not back again." But he continued: "wisely improve the present, it is thine." This we must do — improve the present. But, in improving the present, we must remember what it was that made our past so great. It was not how many of us there were, but how respected we were.

As I become more and more convinced that it would have made little difference who our leaders were in affecting the quantity of the Craft today, I am also just as convinced that what we are doing today which affects the quality of the Craft will have a monumental effect on our quantity in the future.

Freemasonry has never been a static organization in regard to its membership numbers. Historically, fluctuation has consistently occurred reaching highs and lows, and, in most cases, they were caused by sociological conditions of the day. In reviewing membership fluctuations in the Grand Lodge of Pennsylvania, I was struck by the almost parallel undulation of the increase in numbers followed by a concomitant decrease over an almost identical time frame following both World Wars. From 1930 to 1942 as a result of the Depression, membership in the Grand Lodge of Pennsylvania decreased by 44,000 members. The catastrophic decline in numbers during the Morgan Affair is another example of membership loss due to a prevailing atmosphere at the time.

I can find no evidence that our leadership found it necessary to make major procedural changes in our methods of operation to recover from membership loss. Even during the lowest periods in our history, changes which reduced quality of the membership was not an option. Today, however, we can observe changes taking place in Grand Lodge operations which will have a dramatic effect upon the quality of the Craft in the future. We seem to become so engrossed in this loss of numbers that we are willing to make almost any change to stop the loss and stimulate growth. We seem to be willing to sacrifice quality to regain quantity. We cannot let the changing environment cause us to lose sight of our purpose. We are the greatest organization ever conceived by the mind of man. To remain great, we must continue to attract great men, and great men are attracted to great organizations.

My last fourteen years in the field of education were spent in a highly respected private college for young women. When the enrollment began to decline, I watched that high-quality institution lower the requirements for admission and demand lesser performance of the student body. These requirements ranged from academic standards to dress codes. The school is no longer in existence, and it died a little-respected academic institution.

We have frequently heard expressed the need of long-term planning for the future of the Craft, and there can be no question of this need. We look at long term planning as to where we may be down the road five years, ten years, maybe twenty-five years from now. We must look at long term planning for Freemasonry, however, as to where we are going to be 100, 150, 200 years from now. We must prepare to bridge the sociological changes which will continue to occur in the future as they have in the past. We bridged the changes of the past by remaining firm on our quality and principles and retained an organization which attracted quality men.

We cannot hope to grow or even remain the same by lowering our standards. Our leadership must be more concerned with the future of Freemasonry than they are with their own image. Even back in the 1700's it was written that "the true Mason shuns the

self interested." Margaret Jacob wrote in *Living the Enlightenment*: "Once the passions and egotism could be excised, the of the Fraternity could be refined."

For some years some of our top leadership has been discussing the need to openly solicit membership. From my observations, I must conclude that if we wish to destroy the quality of the Craft that would be a great way to start. Few professional members will solicit, and eventually there will be no value to the membership. With that loss, so goes our best source of quality leadership. We cannot afford to promote what amounts to short-term survival and long -term doom.

Yet, Freemasonry does not exist in a vacuum. It became great because it was woven into the fabric of society. Freemasonry must remain sensitive to the changes of the society in which we live if it is to continue to exert its beneficial influence and attract qualified individuals into its ranks. This does not mean that as value of society declines that we must decline with it. Freemasonry must always serve as an example of what is better than that which is promoted by the social climate of the time.

Freemasonry's goal has always been to start with the best we can find and, through the teachings of our moral lessons, improve that best. Its simplest and greatest definition is that it is a "**Brotherhood of Man under the Fatherhood of God.**" This definition, out of necessity, implies selectivity — selectivity to the extent that we begin with good men. It is a natural instinctive desire to associate with those of similar kind. This is why we find in nature flocks, herds, schools, etc., of animals, and it is no less true of man. This is why in Freemasonry we find Lodges of good men.

Our Craft has been a unique organization in that it has been able to take men from all walks of life socially, economically, culturally, etc., and provide an environment wherein the similarities of good are far more important than differences of type. I suspect the quality of the man is perhaps the major intangible force which, though unseen to the world outside the Craft, is what brings and holds us together.

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When we evolved from a Fraternity of the practitioner to the Fraternity of the idealist, we forged the character of an organization that was idealistic. What is happening to that idealism, that noble philosophical precept of the Craft today, when we no longer believe that if we are great we do not have to ask others to be join with us? Gotthold Lessing, in the 1770's, argued that "If we know a Freemason by his deeds, then he must leave his mark on the world." Is the mark of Freemasons today not enough to encourage others or do we no longer wish to leave a mark?

There was a time when membership was ardently sought. Anyone wishing to succeed saw an organization of successful men. If we are to survive, we must remain an organization of successful men. We do have to acknowledge, however, that sociologically our modern way of life regrettably is depriving the Fraternity of the opportunity of performing those Brotherly acts which cemented us together as easily as in the past. We must make more effort to accomplish what was natural years ago.

I fear that one of our greatest weaknesses is our inclination to point out to others, Members who have been known for their greatness and not nearly enough to the greatness of the organization itself. We become blinded by the glory of the individuals who comprise it. We are the classic example of the old cliché that we can't see the forest for the trees. There have been many great men who have been Freemasons, and great men who are Masons are a noted asset to the Craft, but great Masons are our future, and great Masons are formed from potentially great men. Great men who have been Freemasons may be counted in the thousands, but great men who are also great Freemasons can be counted in the hundreds. We need great men, but we also need great Masons.

We must prepare today for the quality of the Craft of tomorrow. If we choose to ignore our tomorrows, they eventually, for us, will never arrive. This world, perhaps more than any time in the past, needs Freemasonry. We must make sure the world knows.

I became extremely frustrated in my last few years of teaching because it was no longer possible to justify right as right and wrong as wrong, simply for moral and ethical reasons. I watched young people abandon accepted standards of behavior and rebelling against all that we thought and accepted as right and good. Self-centeredness was becoming a way of life.

I also watched those same young people thirsting for guidance, hungering for examples of strength, desperately crying for someone to guide them, and we were not there.

We have lost access to probably two generations of our youth. In acknowledging that loss, we should look to where we failed. I suggest – strongly – that we failed through our willingness to give much and require little, and this is exactly what we are attempting to do in Freemasonry today. We must continue to be a beacon to the youth of what is great and good. It certainly is being provided by precious few other social groups, and it cannot be taught through a methodology of lowering standards of quality and responsibility. We must pull them up to meet with us — not climb down to meet with them.

During all of the low points in Masonic history, no decisions were made which affected the basic precepts and philosophies of the Craft, nor was there a sacrifice of quality to retain quantity.

A major reason why men have chosen to remain with Freemasonry in the past was the value placed upon being a Member of an organization which espoused the quality of the man. Lack of interest today must be directly related to lack of assessed value, and lack of value is directly related to what we expect and require of the Craft. I am convinced that we have created one of Freemasonry's greatest problems by making it too easily obtainable and retainable. Yet much effort today is geared to exactly that. We must realize that responsibility is part of being a Member. Anyone who shows neither willingness nor capability is of little value to any quality organization.

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We must be concerned with the quantity of the Craft. We must have functional programs to increase the quantity. We must also make certain that it is a quality quantity.

We became what we are because of selectivity. We will remain what we are by retaining selectivity. We will leave a legacy to be passed through generations so long as the Craft lives.

What kind of legacy we leave is dependent upon our actions today. They will determine the quality of the Craft, and the quality of the Craft will determine the quantity. They will determine tomorrow.