

Obligations

RW Bro. R W. Thompson, Maple Leaf Lodge, No. 74

A Man for the first time approaches the Altar of Freemasonry. There, in due form, he has taken upon himself the solemn and weighty obligation which unites him to the Fraternity. Free from all material bonds he kneels at the Altar, still in utter darkness.

As he kneels, and waits anxiously for the Masonic Light, that he has so long desired, and which at last is about to dawn upon him, he hears a voice which addresses him through the darkness: "My Brother, for by that sacred appellation I now address you."

My Brother, what joy, pride and satisfaction comes to the heart of the newly-obligated Freemason when for the first time he hears himself thus addressed; if indeed he has been truly prepared in his heart; if the solemn truths that Freemasonry intends to impress upon the minds of its votaries, have been properly emphasized by dignified and serious rendering of the Ritual, the recently inducted Freemason feels that he is entering upon a new relationship towards men.

By the time the work of conferring the degree has been completed he looks on the world in a new light, and from a new standpoint. He leaves the Lodge Room filled with a great ambition to live to the principles of his profession. He is prepared to call all Freemasons Brethren, and to treat them as such. The good opinion of the Order that he had previously conceived has been strengthened. Since the idea that the Masonic Brotherhood is a real and blessed thing has been more firmly fixed in his mind by the careful preparation and the serious conferring of the degree, he goes out into the world expecting to find his new relationship a sacred trust. How quickly in many cases he is doomed to disappointment, how soon he finds that his conception is false. Generally after a few months of Masonic experience, the Freemason discovers that the term "My Brother," is not a sacred appellation, he learns that it is often nothing more than a ceremonial form of address. He sees in actual life that by far the greater proportion of Freemasons fail to put into practice those ideas that would make the Brotherhood a sacred reality.

He finds Freemasons taking advantage of Freemasons. He sees them preying upon each other, trying to injure one another, and often absolutely indifferent to another's welfare. His high opinion of Freemasonry as a sacred Brotherhood vanishes, and with it disappears his own high and laudable ambition. He watches the conduct of other Freemasons in the world. He governs himself accordingly, and the type of unbrotherly Freemason is perpetuated. The word Brotherhood implies obligations, rights and privileges, and our Brotherhood can only be sacred and real when its obligations are fulfilled, its rights granted and its privileges claimed.

There are two kinds of obligations, positive and negative; our Brotherhood lays upon us commands and prohibitions. It is not necessary to enumerate them, it suffices to say that whatever common humanity requires us to do or refrain from doing towards our fellow men, we are doubly bound to observe towards our Brother Freemasons, for in open Lodge we have bound ourselves so to do, and generally speaking most of us make some effort to fulfill these obligations. Every member of our Fraternity has certain claims upon us that are his by right. These are beautifully summed up in our ritual when it explains the five points of fellowship. I think that I am justified in saying that the majority of us are willing to grant to our Brother his rights upon demand. Our Brotherhood gives privileges, but the exercising of those privileges is a most delicate matter. It is here that the sacredness of Brotherhood lies, namely, in the exercise of the privileges it grants; it is here that Freemasons fail most completely, and as a result our Brother does not enjoy all his rights, and we only partially fulfill our obligation. Some of the Masonic privileges are well defined in our ritual: It is our privilege to whisper in the ear of a Brother good counsel, and remind him in the most tender manner of his faults.

But the privilege I wish to emphasize is an undefined one, and one that is not often exercised, it is our privilege under certain circumstances to enquire regarding our Brother's worldly welfare. How rarely we do this, and yet how often we know that our Brother must be in difficulties.

Times are hard. Business is bad. Work is scarce, our own observations tell us that our Brother's circumstances are straightened, we know he must find it hard to provide for those dependent on him, but so long as he refrains from appealing for help we show no interest in his affairs. We force him into the uncomfortable and degrading position of having to appeal to us before we give him his rights and fulfill our obligations. It is just here that the spirit of true brotherhood may shine most brightly, if we exercise the privilege I have named. We show our unfortunate Brother that we have a real interest in him, we make him feel that we are able to look beyond the petty difficulties of our own lives, and see the real troubles in the lives of others. To answer the call of our Brother for help is an obligation, and we dare not shut our ears when our Brother is forced to cry. To find out for ourselves if our Brother is in need, and to offer, before it is sought the promised assistance, is one of the grand privileges that makes Freemasonry a sacred Brotherhood.

But you say: How can I pry into my Brother's private affairs? If I make enquiries of this kind, he will, in all probability, be insulted, and tell me to mind my own business. Well, of course, there are different ways of exercising this privilege. A true man, when in difficulties does not care to advertise the fact; he withdraws into himself and tries to cover his position by a brave outward show. So will a distressed Brother. But if Brotherhood be to you a sacred thing, as Freemasonry intends it to be, its true spirit will be so apparent in you that it will soon penetrate the reserve of your unfortunate Brother, his suspicions will soon vanish, and you will be admitted into the sacred chamber of his inmost thoughts, and you, yourself, will be made to feel the blessedness of your Masonic privileges. And so, my Brethren, I ask you not for a more rigid observance of your obligation, nor yet for a more generous recognition of your Brother's rights. I plead for a more general exercise of fraternal privilege, so that the newly made Freemason may find the appellation, My Brother, means something real and sacred, and when he leaves the Lodge Room, full of enthusiastic hope, high ambition, and pride in his new relationship, and comes in contact with Freemasonry in the World, he may find that after all it is not a mere society, depending on the fulfillment of obligations, and the recognition of rights, but a sacred Brotherhood, where each seeks the welfare of others equally with his own, where no Brother's heart can ache without his Brethren's knowledge and sympathy, where kindness lives unbought, where disinterested counsel and wise admonitions come unsought, and where Brotherly hands proffer relief before the heart often distressed can formulate or his voice utter an appeal for aid.

Let us all be true and faithful to the sacred trust reposed in us. Let us ever keep before us the solemn obligations we have assumed, carrying out in our daily lives the beautiful lessons and excellent precepts constantly inculcated, performing faithfully the three great duties taught us on the very threshold of Freemasonry, and with all, Brethren, cultivating the cheery disposition and optimistic spirit.

Thus will we dispense pleasure and happiness all about us, and so fulfill one of the most important functions of our institution.