

CHANGE

by

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The French philosopher tells us, "The more things change, the more they remain the same" (*Plus ca change, plus c'est la meme chose*). In closing a service at Heath, Massachusetts, Dr. Reinhold Niebuhr, the famous theologian, prayed:

God give us the grace to accept with serenity the things that cannot be changed, courage to change the things which should be changed, and the wisdom to distinguish the one from the other.

Between the two thoughts — one of the cynic and the other of the Christian realist — lies a vast gulf of thought on changes in our lives — thought that nonetheless characterizes our conduct and immobilizes our thought processes.

England's Glorious Revolution of 1688 established forever the concept of parliamentary government in the English-speaking world. Some thirty-odd years later, the Grand Lodge of England brought together our ancestral lodges and, from the old Charges, introduced to British social life the revolutionary idea that respectable men from all walks of life could lay aside the differences of caste and degree and meet on the level. And thus was propounded for the first time outside the operative Craft the concept that:

Although a Crown may adorn the head and a Scepter the hand, yet the blood that flows in his veins is no better than that of the humblest citizen.

What liberal ideas! What rebels these Masons were! What a change! Rational and egalitarian thought swept like a whirlwind not only through British Freemasonry but was exported to Europe and the New World. It was such Masonic

thought that led, in the face of grievances, to the solemn American Declaration that:

"We hold these truths to be self-evident; that all men are created equal; that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights; that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness."

And to the creation of the longest-lived Republic and freest nation on the face of this earth. And it will ever be a glory for the cause of Freemasonry that thoughts of liberty here and elsewhere grew from Masonic philosophy and Masonic practices. Small wonder that Masonic lodges and Freemasons contributed so much to our American Revolution, as well as to the more violent upheaval in France which likewise secured the blessings of liberty to that country. Indeed, it was such thoughts, brought back by young Russian officers from the Masonic lodges of Western Europe that animated the Decembrist patriots in the first serious attempt to overthrow the Czar and bring parliamentary government to Russia. Surely, these Masons did not fear change. They knew, with Francis, Lord Bacon, that:

He that will not apply new remedies must expect new evils, for time is the greatest innovator; and if time of course alters things to the worse, and wisdom and counsel shall not alter them to the better, what shall be the end?

We who revere Washington as our First Citizen and our First Mason, a man who, though President, was not too proud to meet in a plain lodge room with his brethren on the level and who would not, at their hands, accept a higher honor than Worshipful Master of his lodge — We Masonic leaders who understand and revere this giant's memory, as well as those of his

Masonic brethren, who were so instrumental in giving us this land of freedom, why have we turned our back on adaptation to the third century of our existence?

Repeatedly, I have heard a Grand Master declare that we faced many problems — of membership, attendance, finances, proficiency in the Masonic art, and with the standards of the Craft. He went on to declare that he had no solutions to these problems, but he did not want Masonry to change. He wanted it to be the same as when he was initiated forty years ago. And then he went outside, climbed into his air-conditioned, computer-controlled automobile, with its automatic features, went back to his air conditioned motel room, listened to the latest news on color television, took off his miracle-fabric suit, wrote a few notes with his roller-ball pen, and used his credit card to place an instantaneously connected call to the Grand Lodge in Richmond.

This man would never dream of farming again with horses; not using science in breeding cattle; keeping his books without at least a pocket calculator; or not urging the progressive education of his grandchildren. But his mind is shut when it comes to Masonry. And yet he remembers the days when annual returns to Grand Lodge were done by hand and the long hours of labor which he gave unstintingly to his lodge to see that these reports were tediously completed. And he marvels today that the Grand Lodge computer spews out that same list in a few minutes and he need only correct it and return it, for the task to be done. Why then is he — and so many like him, from Grand Lodge officer to Past Master — so fearful of change of any kind?

We must remember that we are not speaking of changing the principles of Freemasonry or doing away with those hallowed moral principles on which it has bedded its existence for these many years. We are simply talking about relatively slight alterations in methodology — communications, removing the secrecy which so often cloaks ignorance, letting our light shine from the mountain top, eliminating some of the

narrow, hypocritical beliefs that have gained the erroneous status of custom because they represent the oft bigoted views of some individual leader.

What those whom I represent wish to do is to require Masons to be Masons, to recognize our charitable duty to do good unto all, to bring more youth into the aegis of Masonic sponsorship, to approach worthy individuals neutrally, with carefully worded information on the Craft, that they may learn of its availability to them, if they wish to come of their own free will and accord; and, above all, to restore to the office of Master the luster with which it once was adorned by requiring that leader to know the ritual; to know the law; and to lead his lodge. These are hardly revolutionary matters.

Yet, some of my fellow Grand Lodge officers tell me that, if a carefully worded, neutral approach to a prospect is permitted, every drunk will be handing the proposed pamphlets out to his buddies in the local bar, and we'll have every bum in the state in our lodges. Well, I certainly can't speak for his lodge and its members, but I hardly think it much different from mine. And we have no drunks or bums who hang about in the local taverns. We do have investigating committees who do their jobs and ballot boxes which insure the quality of the applicant. One can always find excuses not to change by taking counsel of his fears and erecting the most speculative web of objections. But, in the end, it comes down to saying the same old thing in another way — "It's never been done before! We can't do that! That's not Masonry!"

In reality, at whatever level, it is ignorance and apathy that governs the day. The poet tells us, "A little learning is a dangerous thing; drink deeply or touch not the Pierian spring." Masonic knowledge ends for most with the catechisms; change might require us to do or to learn more. We are all familiar with the man who will serve as Master, but really seeks only to be a Past Master.

Most Worshipful Brother Don Robey has declared that there is not "one really strong

lodge" in our Grand Jurisdiction. But he went on to point out:

In the past we were blessed with great leaders in our Lodges as well as in our Grand Lodge, men who were devoted to the principles [in] which we believe. They weren't any smarter than the leaders we have today, **THEY JUST WORKED HARDER AT BEING LEADERS!**

Perhaps that could be the greatest change of all for Masonic leaders at all levels. To work harder; to set the Craft to work and to give it proper instruction; to cease wanting to be a Past Master and to prepare to be Master; to cease wanting to be a Past Grand Master and to prepare to face the challenges of being Grand Master of Masons in Virginia. As for myself, I repeat Doctor Niebuhr's lovely prayer and ask that God give me the grace to accept with serenity those things that cannot be changed, courage to change the things which should be changed, and the wisdom to know the difference.

We may not have it all together, brethren, but together we have it all.