

FIDELITY

By WBro. R. N. Hind, PCID, Junior Warden.

An Address Delivered to the Hawke's Bay Research Lodge No.305 1st May 2000

"A grain of living FAITH (FIDELITY) though as small as a mustard-seed, is worth a thousand worlds." So wrote John Newton.

Do we, as Freemasons, attach as much importance as the word FIDELITY implies, to our activities within our Lodges and to our daily activities out in the everyday world?

Do we understand the implications of FIDELITY, which, as expressed in the Oxford Dictionary, are those of faithfulness, loyalty to, strict conformity to truth or fact, exact correspondence to the original?

The word FIDELITY comes from the Latin *Fidelitatum*, ~ Fidelis - faithful, from Fides - faith. Fides (a Roman Goddess) - the deification of good faith and honesty. Many of the oldest Roman deities were embodiments of high ideals. It was the function of FIDES to oversee the moral integrity of the Romans. In the late Roman period, she was called *FIDES PUBLICA* (public faith) and was considered the guardian of treaties and other state documents which were placed for safe keeping in her temple. Thus, the Latin *FIDES* gives meaning of inner attitude, conviction or trust relating man to a supreme God.

We come across the word FIDELITY very early in our Masonic lives. When, after the Obligation as an Entered Apprentice, the WM instructs the candidate thus: "As a pledge of your FIDELITY and to render this Obligation binding upon you, so long as you shall live, I call upon you to seal it on the V.S.L. once with your lips."

Indeed, that is a serious and important part of the First Degree when we seal our Obligation as a newly initiated Freemason.

This word FIDELITY is again used after the Obligation of the Second and Third Degrees as we acknowledge each of these Obligations. That is to say, we *ADMIT* to the truth to be something i.e., an Entered Apprentice, Fellowcraft and as a Master Mason.

In the ceremony of the First Degree, the attention of the candidate is again drawn to his vow of FIDELITY, when the words used are – "Your right heel was slip shod" - in allusion to an ancient biblical custom in the ratification of a bargain.

The more we study the question of the candidate's 'slipshodness', the more we are likely to believe that this item of the candidate's preparation was not casually introduced, but, on the contrary, possessed very great significance. Un-knotted garments and the unlatched shoe, or missing shoe, carried too much importance in ancient and medieval folklore for any other conclusion to be possible.

It is highly probable that the candidate's slipshod shoe came into masonry chiefly, but not perhaps entirely, from folklore and part of its original purpose was to avert danger from him. Danger of what?

We must assume it to be the danger, or risk, of his violating his Obligation, but we cannot entirely rule out 'that the risk in mind was that of the candidate' failing to be 'born again' into a state of true enlightenment. The slipshod condition is usually associated with two ancient Jewish traditions, the one providing the suggestion that the slipshod condition is a gesture of reverence and the other that it is the confirmation of covenant.

With regard to the first of these, the reference is to the well known story of Moses and the burning bush, when Moses received the command 'Draw not nigh hither, put off thy shoes from off thy feet, for whereon thou standest is holy ground' - Exodus :3 v 2.5.

The poet Elizabeth Barrett Browning, in her poem '*Aurora Leigh*', penned these words -

"Earth's crammed with heaven, and every common bush afire with God; But only he who sees takes off his shoes."

The second of the Jewish traditions is to be found in the Book of Ruth Chapt. IV v 7, which reads as follows:- *Now this was the manner in former time in Israel concerning redeeming and concerning changing, for to conform all things, a man plucked off his shoe and gave it to his neighbour, and this was a testimony in Israel.* Where we learn that to unloose the shoe and give it to another person, was a gesture of sincerity, of honest intention, a confirmation of a contract that had been made between two parties. The inference to be drawn from this, is that the candidates slipshod condition is in itself a token of fealty or FIDELITY.

At the closing of a Lodge, we again use the word FIDELITY in what I have always considered a very moving and special part of our ceremonies, when the IPM addresses the Brethren assembled, with the words "Brethren, nothing now remains but according to ancient custom, to lock up our s.s in the safe and sacred repository of our hearts, uniting in the act – FIDELITY, FIDELITY, FIDELITY - and may God preserve the Craft."

I believe in this part of the ceremony we are again reaffirming our Obligations to the Craft in general and also our commitment to God; to our neighbours and to ourselves, to maintain the sacred dictates of Truth, of Honour and of Virtue.

We, as members of a Research Lodge, should give very serious thought to maintaining our own FIDELITY with every aspect of Freemasonry and encourage in our respective Lodges (by our words and actions) all our Brethren, from the newly Initiated, to those Brethren of more senior years as Freemasons, to appreciate the value of FIDELITY to our great organisation as a means of adding strength and beauty to all the good works we are able to accomplish within our Lodges and out in the everyday world. Albert Pike, in his book *Morals and Dogma of the Ancient and Accepted Scottish Rite*, states "Everything that exists around us, every movement in nature, every counsel of Providence, centres upon one point - the FIDELITY of men."

We need to put our faith in more than God, to our wife and family, to our employer or employees, to our friends, to our Brethren and to the Craft in general. In today's weary world, we need to use this virtue more often to reduce the break up of families and the stresses of daily life. The leading lesson should be FIDELITY to obligation, constancy and perseverance under difficulties and discouragements.

Masonry is engaged in a crusade against ignorance, intolerance, fanaticism, superstition, uncharitable deeds and error. Masonry does not sail a smooth calm sea with a steady breeze, but must meet and overcome many opposing currents, baffling winds and dead calms.

The chief obstacles to the success of Freemasonry are the apathy and faithlessness of her own members and the indifference of the world. We as Freemasons, must strive to change this apathy and faithlessness within ourselves, so that we can unite in our Lodges to make Freemasonry a stronger and more viable force for good in our communities and throughout this land. We can do this by re-assessing our commitment to our FAITH and FIDELITY to the cause of Freemasonry.

There are many symbols of FIDELITY used in Masonic Lodges.

The Wands carried by the Deacons are symbols of FIDELITY. The Rod, Mace, Staff or Wand has been traditionally carried as an emblem of high rank or office and was carried by Judges, Heralds and others in authority. The French word for staff or rod is *verge*, from which is derived the name of a church officer, the Verger, who carried and often still does carry, the Wand of Office preceding a church dignitary. In the Middle Ages, tenants who held their land *by the verge*, were required, when they came before their lord, to make *or* renew their tenancy, to approach him holding in their hands a rod as a token of their FIDELITY.

Candles are symbols of FIDELITY. They are symbols with a long and attractive history. Their physical light is the emblem of the spiritual. The burning candle at the medieval altar and shrine carried with it the idea of consecration, of *ME MAKING AND KEEPING OF VOWS*, of gratitude for mercies which had been vouchsafed. It is easy to see that the lodge custom of burning three candles - particularly three - is originally

of religious significance and has come from church and guild, whatever the modern masonic interpretation may or may not be. May they remain as symbols of FIDELITY.

The colour *blue* also has a symbolism with the word FIDELITY. Universally blue denotes immortality, eternity, chastity, FIDELITY. Pale blue, in particular, represents prudence and goodness.

The rough Ashlar, which is placed at the north-east corner of the lodge-room where the apprentice freemason is given the charge in the north-east and where his feet are placed touching the stone, could be associated with the ancient folk-lore belief, associating the virtue of FIDELITY with certain stones.

At the ceremony of consecrating a new lodge, the consecrating officer and those assisting, to the accompaniment of suitable prayers, scripture readings and addresses, scatters corn (the symbol of plenty), pours wine (the symbol of peace and unanimity) and sprinkles salt (the symbol of FIDELITY and friendship).

You can see from the foregoing that FIDELITY plays a very important part in our masonic life.

It is interesting to note some legal implications of FIDELITY.

FIDELITY BONDS are written to cover the obligee, usually an employer, against loss from dishonest acts of employees. FIDELITY BONDS are usually written on a continuous basis - that is, they are effective until cancelled and have no expiration date. The penalty of the bond, that is, the maximum amount payable for any one loss, is unchanged from year to year. Major types of surety bonds (FIDELITY BONDS) are Contract Construction bonds, which are written to guarantee the performance of contractors on building projects. Bonds are particularly important in this field, because of the general practice of awarding commercial building contracts to the lowest bidder, who may promise more than can actually be performed.

Defender of the faith - Latin *FIDELIE DEFENSOR* - a title belonging to the Sovereign of England. The title was first conferred by Pope Leo X on Henry VIII (October 11, 1521). This was deprived when Henry broke with the papacy. Parliament restored it to the King in 1544 and it is still used. Coinage is still marked FID DEF, or letters FD and has been so from George I's time.

During the Second World War, Winston Spencer Churchill as P.M., called on all British people to have Faith (FIDELITY) in their cause in the fight against the common enemy and his were very stirring calls which inspired the whole nation to stand fast in the faith, that they would indeed win against terrible odds.

In a speech given at a Civic Reception in Wellington in 1957 by the then Governor General, Lord Cobham, entitled *Loyalty is the Cardinal Virtue*, in which he mentions the link between his Home County of Worcestershire with New Zealand, forged by his great grandfather. He notes the Worcester motto - SEMPER FIDELIS - being one that could well sit proudly among the four stars that compose our national flag. Faithful in peace and in war, in good times and bad, on land, sea and air.

Let us have FAITH that right makes might and in that FAITH let us to the end dare to do our duty as we understand it - *Abraham Lincoln*.

FAITH makes the discords of the present the harmonies of the future. - *Robert Cutler*.