

## **CAFFE – Coffee And Freemasonry, Fair-trade & Ethics**

**An Address Given by WBro Kerry Nicholls, PGS, KL**

**Following His Installation as Master of the**

**Hawke's Bay Research Lodge No 305**

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### **Introduction ...**

My presentation this evening borders on an area that, as a Freemason, there is a duty upon me not to engage in discussion on matters of politics or religion, however my intention is not to approach my subject from this perspective. I intend to approach the subject from a factual and historical manner and I will use the material I have acquired from researches. This paper is a chapter devoted to a book I am authoring entitled:

*Freemasonry Working Miracles - transformations and transitions.*

Throughout this presentation I would like you to keep uppermost in your minds the following:

- a. When you next have a cup of coffee or tea, check to see if there is any evidence of the fair-trade symbol or advertising.
- b. When you are next shopping in the supermarket keep the fair-trade aspect in your minds.
- c. Remember the contribution made and the slings and arrows this Freemason, Bro Dekker (who some may question - was he?), suffered to bring about change to commercially viable world markets and products, that have endured and are rapidly gaining momentum in the world today.

Under the pseudonym *Multatuli*, Eduard Douwes Dekker, in 1860, wrote a book entitled *Max Havelaar*. Bro Dekker was born in Amsterdam, Holland, in 1820 and died in Nieder-Ingelheim, Germany, in 1887. Born and raised in a Baptist environment where his family took the true Christian message to the letter; they refused to carry weapons, to take an oath or take up any civic service. Often in those circles, "home-practices" were held where laymen would explain the bible to each other.

His future was mapped out for him at a very young age when he was sent to a Latin School with the intention of his destiny being that of a chaplain. Against this background we now have the foundation that sets the stage for a very interesting man and his life.

However, Dekker was also a Freemason, but with a difference - he was a staunch advocate of atheism in both his written works and speeches. In his novel *Max Havelaar* he denounced the abuses of colonialism in the colony of the Dutch East Indies (today's Indonesia). The novel has been translated into thirty-four languages, with the first English translation appearing in 1868, merely six years after the original.

Dekker wrote from his heart, at the expense of his career, and in his writings showed the moral courage of a man politically one hundred years ahead of his time.

### **Dekker - the Young Man ...**

At school, being impulsive, he did rather badly and got easily into fights. He was apparently not above stealing from his employer to help a friend and he was later addicted to gambling. He spent money in an irresponsible way and most of his life was in debt. He did not possess the ability to live well in the practical world.

His reckless nature included being sympathetic toward people suffering injustice and expressing outspoken rage at the oppression, exploitation and victimisation he witnessed in Java. He was equally enraged at the "blind eye" turned by the complacent Dutch authorities. From his heart Dekker wrote a stirring, but also amusing, novel about what he witnessed and felt as a Dutch administrative officer in the Javanese settlements.

It is claimed that his novel played a key role in actually shaping and modifying Dutch colonial policy in the Dutch East Indies during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. What any novel can do to change the political views of a society is to raise awareness. In the Netherlands, Max Havelaar certainly raised awareness that Dutch people were enjoying wealth as the result of exploitation and human suffering in colonies governed in their name. This awareness led to a new policy implemented soon after Dekker's early death in 1887.

The new policy of the Dutch government was based on ethical rather than purely entrepreneurial principles. They decided to repay their debt to their colonial subjects by providing education to some classes of the natives. This education, in turn, created a class of young, knowledgeable Indonesians who wanted to end Dutch rule and who joined a nationalist movement as leaders. This movement prevailed in the years following the Second World War.

By setting off this chain of events, *Max Havelaar* is seen by many as the book that killed Dutch colonialism. The end of Dutch colonialism in Asia, together with the end of British rule in India, started a process of decolonisation all over the world. *Max Havelaar* is credited with all that.

### **Eduard Douwes Dekker - the Man in Indonesia ...**

As a young man in Indonesia he was baptized a Roman Catholic, because he had fallen in love with a girl he had wished to marry. Caroline Versteegh, who as a Roman Catholic, wanted her husband to be one also, but Dekker's reputation as a gambler and a fighter ruined his plans to marry her.

In 1842, Dekker was appointed District Officer at Natal, a small place on the west coast of Sumatra. His stay there became a disaster. Because his bookkeeping wasn't correct, he was suspended by the Governor and spent a year in poverty. However, after that year, he was rehabilitated to Batavia (now Jakarta).

In 1846 he married Everdine Huberta van Wijnbergen (the "Tina" of *Max Havelaar*) and they had two children. Dekker rose steadily in rank although he did not hide his critical views on colonial rule.

In 1856 he was appointed Assistant Resident of Lebak, in West Java. After a few months there Dekker made accusations of corruption against the higher authorities in Lebak, but they were disregarded. He believed his predecessor had been poisoned by order of the Regent

When the Governor-General did not support him, Dekker resigned. He then spent another year in Java unsuccessfully trying to find a job before returning to Europe with his family. There he wandered from town to town, played his money at a casino, lived in poverty, and finally settled in Brussels. During this period Dekker started to write about his experiences in Java. He finished his most important novel, *Max Havelaar*, in the space of a few weeks in the autumn of 1859.

The political impact of the book, that was a bitter complaint against colonial policies, was enormous, and it is still discussed today. However, although Dekker was never rehabilitated as a colonial administrator, he enjoyed his celebrity as an author. Later, an official inquiry found that Dekker's allegations had been true.

### ***Max Havelaar* - the Novel ...**

The novel appeared in May 1860. The full title, translated into English, is *Max Havelaar: Or the Coffee Auctions of the Dutch Trading Company*. Most readers understood *Multatuli*, his pen name, because Latin was widely taught in schools at that time. *Multatuli* means, "I have suffered a lot".

The book touched a nerve and started selling rapidly. The parliamentarian, W R van Hoevell, said that, "the book sent a shiver through the whole nation". Although Dekker was unknown, newspapers published enthusiastic articles. "I want to be read" Dekker wrote at the close of his novel. He was certainly read.

In 1972, when it was translated into Indonesian, its translator, the Indonesian writer and literary historian Dr H B Jassin, stated that this novel belongs both to Indonesia and to the Netherlands. For Indonesians, *Multatuli* definitely was a Dutch colonialist. They also respect and admire him for his commitment to humanity and justice, and for his skill and honesty as a writer. He was the first to put an ordinary Javanese village boy, Saidjah, at the centre of a tragic story, portraying him as a human being with ideas, dreams and emotions, at a time when this was simply unheard of. The publication, though anti-colonial in nature, contains a humanitarian message.

### **Eduard Douwes Dekker - the Freemason ...**

When Eduard Dekker arrived in Batavia, Dirk Dak, a soldier, whom he had met in Amsterdam, befriended him. Dak worked in Eduard's first office, the audit office in Batavia. In that city there was active Freemasonry of which Dak was a member. After fourteen months, whilst on leave in Amsterdam, Eduard was initiated into Lodge Order and Diligence (*Orde en Vlijt*) on 24 April 1853. Dekker's initiation occurred under the guidance of his physician, Dr G J Pool, who was then the reigning Master (President) of the lodge. The lodge practiced the degrees of apprentice, journeyman and master. The events in 1859 and 1860, when the book *Max Havelaar* was released, had to prove that Freemasonry, as Dekker interpreted it, was an

organisation where the humanitarian principles were recognized along with his political agenda. Dekker in a short space of time became a Warden and was seen as a man of positive Christian principles. He was initiated on 23 March 1854 into “Concordia Vincit Animos” in Amsterdam, a Chapter of the Dutch Order of the High Degrees (the Dutch version of the French “Modern Rite”) in the Order of the Rose Croix Degree.

There are four documents in existence that relate to Dekker's Masonic background. The main one is an authentic archive contained in the records book of the lodge “Orde en Vlijt” in 1853 and 1854 where he obtained the degrees of apprentice, journeyman and master. Dekker mentions in a letter written on March 22, 1854, that Dr Pool was introducing him to some higher degrees.

The second is a letter dated September 13, 1859, in Brussels, where Dekker requests support for his attempts to sponsor his literary work to earn a living. The first sentence of it reads, “in March 1854 was the time I earned the distinction as a member of your order to be elevated to certain areas in freemasonry”. The letter is addressed to the lodge in which he was initiated.

The other two documents are letters written to his wife, Tina, the first on September 28, 1859, where Dekker outlines that his friendship with Dr Pool was more than a trust between that of a patient and his doctor. In the other letter to Tina, on July 29, 1863, Dekker had written, “Scottish knight, knights of East and West ... Finally I became a sovereign prince's pink cross ... Even I do not know where it is princely”. In this letter there is evidence of doubts developing in Dekker's thoughts on his Masonic ideals, but the question is - why?

In the period between these two letters a dispute over copyright between Dekker and Jacob van Lennep, following his publication of *Max Havelaar*, had evolved. It is known that Dekker's dealings with van Lennep were tainted with resentment, not only between the two freemasons, but spread to include Freemasonry as well. Realising its explosive nature, van Lennep heavily edited the manuscript and replaced well-known names and dates with dots. Van Lennep held the copyright to the Dutch text and it was not until after his death that Dekker was able to get rid of “the pestilential dots”, as he called them.

The consequences were that the relationship between Dekker and van Lennep became strained. Dekker took out legal proceedings against him, but lost the case and a subsequent appeal. The interesting part was that all the judges involved in both the initial case and the three judges in the appeal process were all active Freemasons, as was van Lennep.

From 1864 Dekker developed into a freethinker with radical ideas. He became a member of “Post Nubila Lux”, a lodge that was not recognised, because they were not following “international” rules. Its exclusivity was contrary to the essence of Freemasonry: the members were seen as freethinkers who tended towards atheism.

Dekker received moral and active support from the freethinker movement. The atheistic chairman of the order of “Society De Dageraad” (d'Ablaing) became his personal friend and, for a few years, his publisher. In 1865, *Multatuli* (Dekker) was completely broke and d'Ablaing let him use his attic. A group of freethinking carpenters made it habitable. In 1865 Dekker, after giving a speech to the movement, was presented with the famous golden pencil with the inscription, “To Multatuli - Society De Dageraad, March 29th 1865. A token of mutual appreciation in the wake of the fierce paper war Dekker has fought against the Christians and for Free Thought”.

After his wife died, Dekker married Mimi Hamminck Schepel with whom he had lived in The Hague and in Germany. In 1879 he was given a house in Nieder-Ingelheim, near Wiesbaden, Germany. Dekker died there on February 19, 1887, and was cremated (the first Dutchman to be disposed of in this manner). However he was, at the time of his death, a financial member of a recognized Masonic Lodge.

The “Multatuli Association” (Multatuli Genootschap) was founded in 1910 and a Multatuli Hotel, a Multatuli brand of coffee, and a Multatuli travel agency have also been established.

### **Fair-trade ...**

Fair-trade is an international business strategy that gives farmers and artisans, in the developing world, a system to enter their products into the global marketplace. *Max Havelaar* is often cited as the pioneer of “Fair-Trade” certification. His book and the character, Max Havelaar, are still popular in the Netherlands with the name used as a symbolic gesture of the first “Fair-Trade” organization, established in the Netherlands in 1988. The Max Havelaar name has become synonymous with Fair-Trade in much of Europe.

The Fair-Trade Labelling Organization (FLO), an international organization, came together in 1997 as an umbrella organization for Fair-Trade in many countries. Certification ensures that farmers, craftsman and artisans receive a fair price for their goods and labour, are working in safe conditions, help maintain sustainable environmental practices and are able to participate in the global economy by giving them the tools and education necessary to get their products purchased and exported.

### **Summary ...**

The universal theme of the book, that is a condemnation of oppression, is still relevant. We live in an ethically conscious era and from a Masonic point of view this is extremely relevant in all our undertakings, both within and without the confines of Freemasonry. We are encouraged not to engage in political or religious discussion however, from this research, it is obvious that the corrosive effect it had on a man, Freemasonry and Freemasons, still exists.

Dekker, in one of his final writings, was to state: "... I fear that God perhaps really begins when we say the word with which Multatuli finishes his Prayer of an "Unbeliever" *Oh God there is no God*. That God of the clergymen, he is for me as dead as a doornail. But am I an atheist for all that?"

From a Rose Croix perspective, one has to profess to be a Christian, however could Dekker be considered to qualify. There has to be some doubt in this area. It can be said he was very critical in relation to Freemasonry, however he was a member till his death and could claim many friends of his as being members of the fraternity.

The final word from this research is left to the Reverend John George Gibson in his book, *The Masonic Problem*, published in 1912 (nearly a century ago). On page 196 he writes, "Freemasonry is never, and can never be, a party in political or ecclesiastical fields. We do not estimate its value, as the Parliamentary Whips do, with the force and potentialities of particular groups of portions. And yet freemasonry is a force in all parties, a fact in all progress, and a dominant feature in all social life".

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