

The following paper was delivered in United Masters Lodge No.167, Grand Lodge of New Zealand two years ago. It attracted a great deal of comment and critique, (which no doubt Bro Busfield intended). The members of the W.H.J. Mayers Lodge of Research are invited to forward their comments to the Editor, so that these can be conveyed to R. W Bro. Alaric W Wood, P.G.W., P.M and Secretary of the Lodge in Auckland .

WHY DON'T WE . . .??

by V.W Bro. A.H. Busfield, P. G. Lee., P.M.

THE NEED:

Why don't we wake up? How many of us would put time, money and effort into any business undertaking, even if it has been worldwide for more than two centuries offering a valuable product, when it has failed to react to market changes, has ignored the differing needs of modern man, when the support of civic and business leaders is fast dwindling, and it has no appeal or relevance to the vast majority in our communities. Certainly there are approaching five million nominally involved, but an overwhelming proportion are apathetic to the future or even present support. Even those actively involved either passively or consciously often resist any change to reverse the situation.

You may well argue that in recent years the Craft has woken up, but what do we do? We revive committees and form more, we make superficial changes but ignore or oppose any suggestion to attack the real problem. New Zealand is not alone in this. Other Constitutions concerned about the future seem to get side-tracked into matters of little real benefit. England for example, is being forthright in its detente for openness - a worthy objective to remove mistrust and antagonism, but incidental to the mission of Freemasonry. In 1964, (five years before I began speaking about the future of the Craft), our Board of General Purposes received a confidential H.N. Pyne report emphasizing 'the stagnation into which the Craft has drifted' and the tendency to cling too long to outworn practices and customs.' What action did the Board take? They decided to let it lie on the table!' Since then many concerned masons have spoken and pleaded for action, but where are they today'? Almost all have given up in desperation and turned their interest elsewhere.

Several attempts at revival made recently have failed to make an impact for reasons I will suggest later but there is much we can do now to provide the essential element of any revival - the interesting, worthwhile and happy lodge meeting. (My comments are based on New Zealand Constitution lodges in Auckland but other areas and Constitutions will find comparative situations).

THE LODGE MEETING: Let's look at a lodge meeting.

Why don't we have our business session before formally opening the lodge meeting? Is there any other organization you know where the announcement of a baby's arrival or a team's success at bowls is met with absolute silence? The more relaxed atmosphere would encourage more to participate. Why not distribute the minutes with notice papers, summarize the correspondence and have the Master well prepared for any actions to be taken? Our worthy secretary suggests as an alternative taking business at the third rising would ensure it would be too short to become boring.

Why don't we then open (and close) directly into the degree to be conferred? Do we really need to hear the Officers' duties every time (particularly those irrelevant today); the test questions can be heard in any degree and the ceremonial easily adjusted to accommodate the P... G..., etc.

Sharing the longer charges by several brethren would be of relief to busy officers and raise the interest of the members and candidate alike. (Many of us will remember the demonstration of the American 'branding iron' ceremony when one brother eloquently addressed the candidate for nearly 40 minutes, a magnificent performance but what earthly use to the recipient?)

Why don't we clear ourselves of the added 'lodge customs', time wasting so called perambulations, etc. *Why not* invite our visitors in from the start, welcome them together and please, no congratulating the hosts on their performance of the degree. All would benefit from a detached review of their own lodge meeting.

THE INSTALLATION: As for the Installation,

Why can't we get them back to what they were meant to be - the lodge's birthday party - not to be taken over by a large clutter of Grand Officers. (There used to be a time when we took pride in seeing our civic leaders walk in, but not today). Surely our hierarchy's time could be better spent involved with their own lodges than just occupying a seat at installations. And not spend interminable time standing, while visiting lodges enter for their Master and all Past Masters to be greeted individually (often with private repartee). And must all the jobs be done by the top brass - is it any less appropriate if given by Past Masters or even just a brother!

And why do Grand Lodge appear wearing collars when most are past and some have never performed the relevant office -

and why does our installation routine set poor examples for our lodges. (Saluting when not directly spoken to, reporting the lack of Fellowcrafts etc.). With identical odes and the same charges,

(*why not* a combined charge to all invested?), many an installation evening borders on tedium rather than the joyous occasion it should be. Folly years ago members presenting the tools often did so in their own words, thus adding some interest to the occasion.

On the other side of the coin,

why don't we formally invest our stewards, the first collar they will ever wear. Many smaller lodges find the cost a big strain while a more intimate occasion would be just as enjoyable.

THE REFECTORY The refectory at regular meetings is one aspect easy to make more enjoyable. Have you tried a social drink and chat before sitting down? (In my lodge we had to physically stop some who pushed aside barriers to head for a table position). Be innovative with the supper and table layouts - get rid of the top table. Drop all reference to masonic ranks. Even if they have to be used within the lodge room, we are all brothers at refreshment and need no such distinctions. Cut formalities to the minimum and try to provide some entertainment, (so popular in days gone by). The warmth of this time decides the success of the evening. Do you go home with something of interest to tell your wife or partner in the morning?

Can we not learn to treat our ladies more courteously? So often they dress attractively for the occasion, only to be directed into a sparse refectory, handed a glass of sherry, (to be sipped mostly in the company of strangers), and left to their own devices while we disappear, often for an intolerable length of time spent mostly on formalities. If ladies are to be present, *why not* complete any masonic requirement at some other time or make sure they are fully entertained in comfortable surroundings.

THE RITUAL: During any discussion concerning the future of the Craft, it is almost always automatically assumed the ritual cannot be changed.

Why not? The wording and phraseology may be dignified and impressive, but we are not presenting a Shakespearean play to entertain - by allegory and illustration we are endeavouring to instruct the candidate and remind each other of the principles by which we should live. Can we do this well, with obsolete wording, in some cases now different in meaning or intent,

Should we not eliminate or qualify incorrect statements and claims *in* our Charges. My own brother maintains Freemasonry can't be learnt, can't be taught, but must be absorbed! But surely the archaic long addresses destroy the concentration of the candidate and the attention of the brethren. Our aim should be to make our message clear. And please, can we discard altogether the word 'Ritual' which to most people suggests something sinister or evil.

After some prodding at the 1994 and 1995 Communications, a Ritual Committee apparently spent much time and effort to decide to change nothing!

A couple of years ago Pat Streams, then Editor of the English magazine *The Square*, reduced the first degree obligation to half its length, and almost universally readers agreed it was more intelligible and understandable than the original. We should be accepting every endeavour to make our teachings clear, but not to the extent that to define how honourable the Craft is we have to use ninety words! Incidentally, if the first obligation is to be taken literally, then masonic law has been broken by every one of us, and particularly by the writers of our ritual themselves.

And why, three obligations? Don't tell me each degree in the masonic world must have its own.

If we haven't impressed on the first degree candidate his responsibilities, then we have failed. While we might enjoy the excellent delivery of a charge and all of us appreciate a well-worked degree, the many demands of everyday life would be better suited by a concise, clear, crisp ceremony, giving more time to develop the fraternal friendships we all believe to be the heart of the Craft.

While on the subject of ceremonial revision, for the installation ceremony used in this area, it is, I suggest, ridiculous for the central figure used in our legend as an exemplar for all masters, to have exhibited in real life the opposite of the attributes we ascribe to him. There must be many more appropriate models in ancient history for us to emulate.

BENEVOLENCE: The Craft has always claimed we are not a service organization, but now seeks publicity for our charitable actions. Many masons give great service in the community but as a movement most benevolent activity is by monetary grants.

Why don't we actively involve our members on a continuing basis in some national community service? If we could sponsor say the Blood Donor scheme with nationwide and local advertising, the use of our lodge rooms and the attendance of members to assist the staff, not only would it be of great practical use but also publicly display the Craft as a caring active organization.

THE FUTURE?

I'm sure any concerned member could compile a similar list of matters to be addressed. We cannot continue as we are. During the last decade efforts to revive the Craft in our country have been made. The retreat at Flock House, a Mission Statement, Strategic Plan, and Renewal Programme amongst several area offensives, all have had worthwhile objectives and ideas, have received good support but little tangible results of benefit. Daylight and boutique lodges provide alternative styles, but to a great extent are remembered by already enthusiastic masons. We now have the Hutson scheme to support a new Strategic Plan shortly to be announced by the Board. Unfortunately history indicates this too will not achieve any worthwhile ongoing impact. In the past all initiatives have been recommended to individual lodges, who have been left to plan and control their own destiny. Almost without exception this has failed. I believe the only chance of success requires the formation of ginger groups empowered by each District Grand Master to encourage, advise, exhort and if necessary audit each lodge on a continuing basis, with the priority aim of happy meetings the members are keen to attend, refectories everyone is proud of and cordial relations with its district.

If these aims can be achieved, our other problems will disappear. If we continue to make other priorities, we will fail.

Why don't we wake up?