

Foreign Countries

I am sure you are all thinking I am going to talking about my visit to Scotland, AGAIN. Well you will be glad to hear that I am not. It is a different “Foreign Country I will be talking about tonight. That Foreign Country is Freemasonry. Symbolically, Freemasonry is a foreign country, different from the world around us. The title of the talk comes from a book by Carl H. Claudy who wrote many books on Freemasonry but also wrote books on many other subjects, a well rounded author. In the book he spoke about the thousands of American, but also Canadians and British troops who went to France during the war with a packet of cigarettes, and no knowledge of the country or language. His question was “did they learn about France”? Of course not. Likewise neither can a man, know all there is to know about Freemasonry after completing the three degrees. What he has obtained at that point is the maps to travel in this new foreign country he has now entered. In the outside world men have money, power and position. In Freemasonry all brethren are equal, their position and power in the outside world does not enter into the lodge. Of course “some of necessity, must rule and teach” but that is by the permission of the brethren. The outside world can be a cruel place at times, a dog eat dog world. Within the lodge we live by a different creed. Brotherly Love, charity, truth, mercy, virtue. These, in my opinion, make for a much-improved society, which if it could only be copied throughout the world, would change everything for the better.

In 1795 Robert Burns, a Mason, wrote;

Then let us pray that come it may
(As come it will for a’ that)
That sense and worth o’er a’ the earth
Shall bear the gree and a’ that
For a’ that an a’ that

It's comin yet for a' that
That man to man, the world o'er
Shall brithers be for a' that.

If only the world had listen to him at that time. For those not sure of what the meaning of “Shall bear the gree and a' that”, it means “have priority”.

So how can a new Mason learn to become a citizen of that Foreign Country he has just entered? He needs to study it, examine it, travel throughout it and learn the true meanings of the symbols and allegories and to draw aside the veil of the hidden mysteries. He has a right as a MM to travel to every corner of the foreign country. He has gained these privileges by asking for a petition, have a friend sponsor him, taken the obligations, worked hard to answer the questions required for advancement and finally he has reached his goal. It would be a terrible waste for him not to continue to “make a daily advancement in Masonic knowledge.” I believe he has a responsibility to himself to do so. But who else has a responsibility? Grand Lodge, his own lodge and every Brethren within the lodge and fraternity has a responsibility to assist him in his researches, assist him to travel throughout that foreign country. But the greatest responsibility is to himself.

In recent years Grand Lodge has produced some very good material to help, including two books on the First and Second Degrees, third degree to follow. Just this week I received two new educational tools one called “I Am a New Mason-What Now?” and “Opportunities for the Newly Raised Master Mason”. The first explaining many of the things WE may know, but a new mason wouldn't, the second to explain more about the workings of the lodge and where the new MM can fit in. There are many books available and tons of material on the Internet, all to guide you on your travels. Where I disagree with Claudy is that

he appears to think that this travelling in a foreign country is only for the “young Mason” and the older Masons, set in their ways and cannot travel in this foreign country of Freemasonry. I believe he is wrong. In the past month I have travelled the District stalking V. W. Bro Forbes. I have heard his presentation of Masonic Education and I have learned things I wasn't aware of or had not put a lot of thought into. He did an excellent presentation on which chapters of the Bible are open in each degree. Not just what they are, but where they are linked to the degrees. I am sure every Brother in this room can go home tonight and find something he didn't know before or was not sure of. And that can probably be done, just by reading “The Constitution” or the “Book of the Works”, and not having to find books on Masonry or searching the Internet.

What should travelling in this foreign country of Freemasonry do for all of you? It should challenge you, challenge you to study more, find a hidden gem that doesn't answer the entire question, but makes you ask more. Some of the things you ask, may come up with answers that are controversial but again asks of you, to search more. Travelling to foreign countries throughout the world is always an educational experience. Experiencing different cultures, trying different foods, these make travelling exciting and enjoyable. Well my Brethren you have a foreign country much nearer at hand and much easier to physically travel. If you travel it, I am sure you will experience as much pleasure as travelling in these others.

That is what the Grand Master has as one of his three themes; Masonic Education; the others being Communication and Condition of Masonry. Masonic education along with communication can only help in achieving the third. And these all help in the Grand Lodge Strategic Plan, which is named “Rebuilding the West Gate”. Like the building of ancient Cathedrals, it will take all Masons to complete this plan including E.A, FC. and M.M. Don't think that

only Grand Lodge is involved in this plan and all those Brethren sitting around here with all the Gold Braid are here only to supervise you. There is a saying that “It takes a village to raise a child”. Well it will take each Mason, each Lodge, each District and every member of Grand Lodge to “Rebuild the West Gate”. But in truth, it starts with you, the individual mason exploring that Foreign Country of Freemasonry to improve your own understanding of what it truly means, communicating it to others and finally as stated in the Strategic Plan “Ensuring the timeless Vitality of Freemasonry in Ontario”.

Thank you my Brethren