

CRYSTAL GAZING

In 1974, The Conference of Grand Secretaries in North America, presented a series of papers entitled "Is Freemasonry Prepared to Serve Man in the New Century Ahead?" The paper presented by M.W. Bro. Robert A. Hinshaw, PGM Grand Secretary Ohio bears repeating, and has been adapted for this short Talk Bulletin.

Looking at several Fraternal Reviews that were printed just as the last century closed, here are a few of the things United States Freemasonry was concerned about: Indiana and Kentucky: unauthorized cipher rituals .

Ohio: spurious groups (Cerneau Masonry). Frequent reference is made to Masonic Homes, per capita, taxes, Grievance Committee reports.

Many Grand Lodges were concerned about the problem of non-payment of dues, both about how to reduce the number and what should be the penalty for failure to pay: suspension, removal from record, or what?

Most Grand Lodges were enjoying a modest increase in membership, chartering new Lodges and erecting new Temples.

In sweeping generalities, one could conclude that by and large, the Fraternal Reports of the various Grand Lodges written prior to the turn of the century were not drastically different from those being written today. Many of the problems and concerns of 90 and 100 years ago are the concerns of our Grand Lodges today. Perhaps the magnitude of the problem is not quite the same, perhaps the locale of the problem has changed.

Point two, then, is that if one were to draw a picture of Freemasonry at the turn of the century in broad brush strokes only, the picture could reasonably well substitute for today's picture. Most of Freemasonry's problems did then and do now result from the nature of man and his basic failings.

But this is not unexpected.

If one were to scan the newspapers and magazines of the 1890's he would find basically the same news items in print then as today: murder, robbery, vandalism, extortion, crimes of passion, narcotics, drunkenness, forgery, arson, corruption in public office, a search for a higher standard of living through technological progress, etc.

Actually, many of the stories in the Bible recount the same type of behavior, a behavior reported earlier by other writers who predated the Bible by many centuries.

Man's basic nature has changed little from that of Adam and Eve, Cain and Abel. His environment and surroundings have changed continuously and dramatically, but the human animal remains almost a carbon copy, at least psychologically or behaviorally.

Finally, we come to the question at hand: Is Freemasonry prepared to serve man in the new century ahead?

Let us ask ourselves, What will we find in the new century ahead?

First, a continuing technological advance with the following striking advances, and more:

(a) In the field of communication, the ability to communicate via thought transference will be developed, we call it ESP or mental telepathy today; in the next century it will include not only personal "one-on-one" communication with Aunt Minnie in Kansas City, but mass communication as well.

(b) In the field of transportation, we will easily travel at speeds approaching or exceeding that of light. Personal "energy packs" for local airborne transportation will be common. It will probably be possible near the end of the next century to transport objects (and perhaps people) by first converting them (or it) to energy "waves" and then reconstructing the object at the final terminal by means of a sophisticated computer controlled reconstruction apparatus.

(c) Energy will not be transmitted by wire or pipe, but by waves. Solar energy will have come and gone as an economical energy source, likewise gravitational energy. The exotic energy sources that will be in vogue are too fantastic to even guess at in terms of today's technology.

(d) We will probably again receive visitors to our planet from outer space, perhaps from our galaxy, perhaps from beyond. In turn, we will be sending expeditions regularly to other planets. We will have long ago colonized the moon (Lunar Lodge No. 1 ?) and countless space satellites will circle our globe. We will not comment at length on the use of the word "again" in the first sentence other than to say it means what it says a repeat occurrence of an event that has already taken place.

(e) Probably the most dramatic progress will occur in the field of medicine. During the next century almost any organ will be capable of transplant not only transplant, but "manufacture," as well. Human bodies will be reconditioned much as we now recondition or remanufacture automobile parts. We will know a great deal more about the power of the body to regenerate lost parts. The life span will be greatly extended with little aging process accompanying it, and as a result we will be faced with the moral problem of who will and who will not be permitted to continue on this planet, which by the way will almost certainly be under one government, if for no other reason than to effectively deal with other worlds.

The most striking development of all to occur in the field of medicine, and the one that will have the greatest effect on Freemasonry, will be the great advances that are just over the horizon in man's ability to understand and to alter the human brain, and hence, to control the human personality.

Here, properly used, will be man's first(?) capability of "programming" himself. We say "first" but it will not really be a first, for each of us has had the capability all along to live in god's image, but few chose to make the necessary sacrifices to do so, to practice the self-discipline required to lead a moral life. What we should, therefore, say is that now man will have the first easy way to program himself, to become near-perfect. Unless our basic human imperfection again gets in our way and in our greed we program our fellow man for greater lust, greater personal gain, for greater material gain, we stand during the next century to make a significant improvement in man's development.

We might well see in the coming century the emergence of man's capacity to affect his behavior in a positive direction, either through surgery, chemistry, or controlled breeding probably a combination of the first two.

We don't think that we as Freemasons are "ready" for this today, any more than Rotarians, Presbyterians, Baptists, Republicans, males, Ohioans, or any other group is "ready." In fact, many in this audience probably aren't even ready to believe the possibility of this exists. As Freemasons, however, we can adapt with time and be ready probably to serve man's needs on the short-term scale, just as we have done successfully for 250 years.

And what are man's needs that cause him to seek Masonry?

- (a) A need to be appreciated and respected.
- (b) A need to be associated with a status group.
- (c) A need for companionship.
- (d) A need to be "needed."

These are a few of the major reasons and not too dissimilar from the reasons man joins any other voluntary group. So long as Freemasonry offers an opportunity for an individual to gain self-respect and the respect of his peers, and at the same time offers him an opportunity to be a contributing part of the group, Freemasonry will survive and will continue to serve.

Freemasonry will however, have to be a little like a football team on any given Saturday. While no great team knows precisely what it will face this Saturday, or next Saturday (and certainly not in the next century) it meets each game in its turn, scouting the opposition as thoroughly as it can, coaching its players to the best of their abilities, stressing a well-balanced offense and a rugged defense, having what is called a strong, effective "game plan," and then once in the game remaining alert to the opposition and receptive to changes.

So with Freemasonry, We must:

- (a) Scout the opposition (man's disinclination to become a Mason, or a member's potential to become a "drop out", active antagonism by outside groups, etc.). How do we answer a man's needs to make him want to become a member and to remain in good standing?

(b) Coach the players (members) to the best of their abilities. This means to educate the members, stress good ritual, demand attractive temples, admit only respected members. We need to make Masonic membership "sought after" rather than "thrust upon one." Keep the standards high, get the members involved, develop leaders.

(c) Develop a well-balanced offense and rugged defense. In other words develop a program that will permit Freemasonry to meet the needs it can and should meet, still retaining its basic fundamentals that characterize us as Freemasons.

(d) Finally, remain "loose," i.e., creatively responsive to change within our basically accepted framework so that we avoid vacillating to every whim and wind and like a chameleon change into something entirely and totally unrecognizable.

"But," you say, "isn't this essentially what Freemasonry has been doing for 250 years?" To which we would answer, "Yes, and with a pretty good record of achievement. Freemasonry has weathered many a storm. It has been effective in adapting itself within reason to changing times, still retaining almost all of its basic foundation stones and ancient charges intact."

And with dedication, determination, self-denial and self-discipline, there is no reason why Freemasonry cannot continue to field a winning team at any given time. The team we have today might not be able to win the game played in 2074, but it will acquit itself with glory this year. And by taking each year in turn, we will be ready to take the field, in 2074.