

A BUNCH OF KEYS

by

MW Bro. G. Roy Long
Past Grand Master of British Columbia

Long Centuries ago in a glowing moment of spiritual exaltation the Psalmist exclaimed:

Thou hast set my feet in a large room!

This evening this ancient statement seems contemporary, and singularly fitting and appropriate.

We are gathered in a vast amphitheatre, hewn by the march and retreat of giant glaciers; moulded by the melting flame of volcanic fires; and sculptured by titanic and elemental forces of wind and torrent, through countless centuries of time.

We are seated in a veritable Cathedral of Immensities, its roof fretted with golden fire the stars; The forget-me-nots of the angels sprinkled in the infinite meadows of heaven; its walls the towering and encompassing hills, rock-ribbed and ancient as the sun; its pillars those massive lime stone ledges whose shadows lean against the sky.

This is a time and place for high thinking, for reflection and for meditation. We keep here a rendezvous with Life, and, amid the sublimity and majesty of our surroundings, we may, I hope, be spiritually aware of:

A presence that disturbs us with the joy
Of elevated thoughts; a sense sublime
Of something far more deeply interfused,
Whose dwelling is the light of setting suns,
And the round ocean, and the living air,
And the blue sky, and in the mind of man.

Freemasonry speaks and teaches by symbols. Behind the thing is a thought, an idea, an ideal. Behind the seen and the visible, is the unseen and the invisible. In the beginning this building was first a plan and an idea in the builder's mind, which is now objectified in terms of wood and stone. A Freemason's Lodge is a symbol of the World, Its shape is an oblong square, representing the ancient Mediterranean Basin, the world known to the ancients, and symbolizes the universality of our Fraternity. Into this symbolic world a candidate enters, blind, destitute and helpless. He represents a pilgrim, on a mystical journey, in quest of intangible and unseen values, symbolized by Light, and the True word. Life is the Great Adventure. Man is the Adventurer, a Pilgrim of the Infinite, always roaming with a hungry heart, in quest of Knowledge, Beauty, Truth, Love and Life.

Tis Life whereof our nerves are scant,
Tis Life, not death, for which we pant;
More Life, and fuller, that we want.

In boyhood days we read, with kindling eye, the story of Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves. We saw him standing before the robber's cave. He speaks two magical words: Open, Sesame. The door swings open at this voice and the golden treasures are his for the taking. It is an enchanting story but it fiction, not fact. The great and beloved Dr. William Osler left a rich legacy to Canada and to the world. One of his most popular addresses was given to the University of Toronto entitled: The Master Word in Medicine. This master and potent word, said he, is one our letters: W-O-R-K. It is, in truth, one of the master keys to the treasure rooms in the spacious House of Life.

Some time ago I found this tribute to a wise teacher: He flung down to his pupils a bunch of keys. The doors of Life do not swing open in response to any magical word or formula. The wise teacher Euclid was obliged to remind his royal pupil that there was no royal road to Geometry. Struggle and effort is the law of life, for, is it not written In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat Bread? .

My Brethren, Freemasonry hands to those who enter her House of Light a Bunch of keys - with the inspiring but imperative challenge, Ask, and it shall be given unto you. Seek, and ye shall find. Knock, and it shall be opened unto you .

Let us now for a moment retrace our steps along the highway of the years to those climatic moments when, duly and truly prepared, we stood in silent expectancy before the door of the Preparation Room. We used our first key by giving three distinct knocks with our own hand. The key words are: Ask! Seek! Knock! Our first key is:

A SEEKING SOUL AND AN INQUIRING MIND.

All great living is set un the imperative mood. Each of these three words is a vital, dynamic and adventurous verb. Their symbol is the question mark = ?.

We are familiar (I hope) with Dr. Luke's Book of the Acts. Each of us is daily writing his Book of Acts, each thought, each act adding a word, a line, a paragraph to the irrevocable record. Great punctuation marks dot its pages. The note of exclamation most frequently appears as one faces the mystery and majesty of the universe in which we live. Hear again the Psalmist:

When I consider the heavens, the work of Thy fingers, the moon, and the stars which Thou has ordained. What is man, that Thou are mindful of him? And the son of man that Thou visitest him? Here, then, is the other dynamics of all research and discovery.

Man is the only creature in the vast universe who asks questions and, with a sirit of inquiry, wants to know. He is a questing as well as questioning spirit, and like Ulysses of old: strong in will to strive, to seek, to find, and not to yield . Inquiry and curiosity are the great dynamics of all research and discovery.

What endless questions vex the thought of
Whence, and Whither, When and How?

Viewed from the physical aspect, Man seems insignificant. No language can adequately express his relative size among the cosmic magnitudes of a Universe, which the late Doctor Einstein calculated, has a diameter of 1296 plus 18 zeros of miles! But, Man is the questioner, and the Observer. He alone, is a living soul, made in the image of his Creator and endowed with reason and intellect. Astronomically speaking, man may be insignificant, but, astronomically speaking man IS the astronomer. Within this narrow cell, the head, lies the brain, the mysterious seat of thought. Man is the Thinker, and Space, and Time are not things but thoughts and concepts of the human mind. The only door that leads our to the external world is the door of human consciousness.

Our first key has worked, and our listening ears hear the gracious words: Let him enter, and be received . Upon our entry to the Lodge the next key-word is heard: Kneel and attend Prayer! The knock indicates respect, but the Kneel implies reverence. There are no gate crashers in Freemasonry or in the House of Life. This significant word :Kneel symbolizes our second Master-Key.

A HUMBLE AND REVERENT SPIRIT AND AN AFFIRMATIVE FAITH.

Immediately following our supplication from the Master of the Lodge comes a direct, incisive, and very personal question: In Whom, do You put Your trust? It demands an affirmation of one s own personal faith, and, in the personal pronoun Whom , postulates the existence of Someone beyond ourselves. The existence of God is the sole dogma of our Craft. The individual I affirms kinship with another I which transfigures I into We . I have just spoken of the relative physical insignificance of Man. Continuing this thought, we are told we live on what is but a mere mote floating in the reaches of illimitable space. The eminent English Astronomer and physicist, Sir James Jeans, has visualized the size of our earth compared to the staggering immensity of the Universe. If we represent the Universe, says he, by a sphere, the size of the earth, 25,000 miles in circumference, our earth, in comparison, shrinks to a diameter of one-ten-millionth of an inch. By way of parentheses someone has cynically remarked that our three major words are: Hurry, Worry and Bury. Perhaps it might be corrective for each one to ask himself: Little man, why all this haste, and fuss, and fume, and worry?

As the human mind considers these bewildering and incomprehensible mathematical figures, it seems more readily attuned to the pronoun *What* rather than to *Whom*. Says Emerson:

Things are in the saddle and ride mankind. But the impersonal *What* can never meet the soul's deepest need. No word but the personal *Whom* will satisfy our heart's desire. John Oxenham sounds for us the authentic note:

No *What*, but *Whom* I do believe
That in my darkest hour of need,
Hath comfort, that no mortal creed
To mortal man may give,
Not *What* I do believe
But *Whom!* Not *What*, but *Whom!*

The late Lord Tweedsmuir thus defined an atheist: A man who has no invisible means of support. No atheist possesses this great Master-Key of affirmative Faith, and therefore, cannot be made a Freemason. Man's ultimate search is to find invisible means of support. In order that any physical structure can stand stable and secure, more than material stone and steel and mortar is needed. The builder must recognize and obey the eternal and inexorable law of the Plumb Line. By a parity of reasoning, if our lives are to withstand the violent pressures that bear upon them, they require more than subjective reality, and with the eternal law of the moral Plumb Line which imperiously demands uprightness and righteousness.

We have now progressed along our pilgrim path and are ready for another step. Our second Master-key has guided us to the Centre of the Lodge. Here, at this sacred spot, is an Altar of Fellowship, fraternity and Faith, upon which rests the Great Lights of Freemasonry. Here we receive the benediction of Light, more Light, and further Light. We have knocked, and Knelt, and are now entitled to Know. The Key-Word is *SEE!*. The Master-Key is:

AN ENLIGHTENED EYE.

The lamp of the body is the eye, the great window of the mind. When we say *I see*, we mean *I understand*. Seeing is a complex physical and mental process. Our eyes, like hands, reach out and bring inside to the brain meaningless images. The brain sends them along an intricate nerve highway to the House of the Interpreter, where Memory and Experience preside, with the question - *What is this?* They decode, classify and identify; and when the brain gets its answer we see informatively. The organ of sight, and the faculty of vision are, therefore, quite different and distinct.

See is always revealing; what we see depends upon what we are. Do you remember the poem of childhood?

Pussy cat, Pussy cat, where have you been?
I've been to London to visit the Queen.
Pussy cat, Pussy cat, what saw you there?
I saw a little mousie right under her chair.

The cat had gone up to the greatest city in the world, the City of St. Paul's, of Westminster Abbey, and of Buckingham Palace for the express purpose to see the Queen. On her return she had but one marvel to relate. She saw a mouse! Why? Simply because she was a cat. What we see determines what we see. There is a revealing phrase in one of the letters of St. Paul: the eyes of your heart being enlightened. This suggests other eyes, - a seeing heart - with spiritual insight and discernment. We are reminded of the snow-white Beatitude: Blessed are the pure in heart for they shall see God. Again say he: we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen; for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things that are not seen are eternal.

In the Book of the Kings there is an old and familiar story. The Prophet Elisha had incurred the anger and enmity of the King of Syria, who, with his army had pursued the Prophet to the hill town of Dothan. The City was surrounded and his capture seemed inevitable, without any possibility of escape. His servant, in fear and desperation, cries: Alas, my Master, what shall we do? Then Elisha fell on his knees and prayed: Lord, open his eyes, that he may see! The young man's eyes were opened and he saw! And behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire around and about Elisha. The servant saw only the seen and visible and was blind to the encircling ministries of Heaven. Elizabeth Barrett Browning voices this idea of a spiritual vision in oft quoted lines:

Earth crammed with heaven
And every common bush afire with God;
But only he who sees takes off his shoes.

Many of us fail to see and fully understand, because we look at persons and things and not in or through them. Isaac Newton looked and saw a falling apple. But he also looked through it and discovered the universal law that binds the entire universe into one coherent unity.

Some weeks ago in my duties as solicitor to an estate, I went to the Bank with a client to open his late wife's Safety-deposit box. We inventoried its contents; jewelry, bonds and a miscellany of papers. From the back of the box, the bank official drew out two wrinkled and discoloured baby shoes. Although of no intrinsic value, they had been treasured with loving care for almost a generation. When my client saw them, tears filled his eyes, as he told us of a lovely boy that had gone from their home over thirty years before. I looked at two baby things, faded, and valueless from my point of view. But a father saw them with his heart and through them, in mind's eye, a happy home, a youthful wife, a laughing boy, and then the sudden impact of an agonizing loss.

Few of us as seers. Ignorance, intolerance, prejudice, cynicism, envy, and doubt are hood-winks that blind the eyes of human hearts. One of the chief perils of our time is a mental and moral blindness which refuses to see spiritual verities, and divine significances in people and in things. Twenty centuries ago One walked this earth with a seeing heart. He looked on all life with an enlightened eye. He invested all life with a halo. Nothing was to Him commonplace or unclean. He walked the earth with reverent foot, and with a sense of awe and wonder. He came to see, to seek and to save the least, the last and the lost. Freemasonry teaches us not merely to see, but to see more than we see, with the insight of the illumined eye.

A Curve in the road and a hillside
Clear-cut against the sky,
A tall tree tossed by an Autumn wind,
And a white cloud riding high;
Ten men went along that road
And all but one passed by.
He saw the road, the tree, and the cloud
With an artist's mind and eye.
He put them down on canvas
For the other nine to buy.

My Brethren, are we not often brother to those nine unseeing men as we travel along Life's broad and scenic highway? We have been brought to Light, and much has been revealed to us and gained entrance through the eye-gate. But there is yet another portal through which we enter the treasuries of Truth - the Key-word is Listen! He that hath ear to hear, let him hear! The Master-key is:

AN ATTENTIVE EAR

An open, sensitive, and hearing ear is of supreme value and significance. Biologically, the animal, who survives the red law of the Jungle, is the one who is attentive to his environment and listens. To be unheeding and indifferent brings sudden death. Hearing, then, is demanding and urgent. It is of primary importance to pay attention, and lend an eye and an ear to what is going on about us.

All great findings of Science have come, not to the casual observer, but to him who intelligently and faithfully Looks and Listens. Such folk are members of a great aristocracy - the aristocracy of the attentive. We are living in a noisy clamorous age. It is an age of communication, of radio, of television. Our sensitive ears, are continually bombarded by the sounding brass of propaganda and the clanging of cymbals of commercials. A multitude of voices exert their pressure on the human eardrum. All these influences are part of a modern money-making culture marked by great technical expertness. The old street peddler has left the door-step and is now in our living room with the invitation to buy, buy, buy. Much of what is supposed to be appealing is, in truth, appalling. We face a new and deadly peril - the making of the mass mind. Fred Allen, of radio fame, has warned that our agencies of communication have so much to catch the eye and ear and so little to appeal to the mind, there is danger the next generation may

be born with brains the size of a split pea and eyes and ears bulging like cantaloupes. Truly, we need in our day to cultivate the fine art of selective, as well as attentive, hearing. We need to hear and heed significant voices; the voice of History, which proclaims through the ages - as a man and a nation sow, so shall they reap. Toynbee, the historian, records that twenty-one civilizations have gone the way of Nineveh and Tyre. Are we listening to the golden voices of Literature? Of Art? Of Music? To those dead, but sceptered sovereigns of the mind, who still rule our spirits from their urns? Can we attune our mental and moral ears to sounds more significant than noise? To the voice within, which, with its Judgements on what is right or wrong, reminds and exhorts us to walk uprightly before God and man; to the still sad music of humanity an appealing voice, proclaiming the basic reality of brotherhood in human living; and to the voice Above: Do Justice, love Mercy, and walk humbly with thy God.

Let us remember that the greatest voices are quiet and subdued, and therefore often unheeded by the unthinking. Recall that incident in the life of the Prophet Elijah. The wind, earthquake, and fire were spectacular and awe-inspiring; but the revelation came not in any of these, but in the still small voice, Life, growth, and the cosmic pull of gravitation are all muted voices. They are unseen by resistless in their force.

The innocent Moon, that nothing does but shine,
Moves all the labouring surges of the world .

Freemasonry in its working tools, and in their symbolic teaching, admonishes us to heed these whispering but governing voices of the Universe.

I need not shout my Faith. Thrice eloquent
are quiet trees, and the green listening sod.
Hushed are the stars, whose power is never spent,
The hills are mute; Yet how they speak of God!?

Are we listening?

My Brethren, we have Knocked, Knelt, and now Know some of the secrets of Freemasonry. At once comes the solemn injunction Keep! Forever conceal and never reveal! The Key-Word is Fidelity. We discover our fifth Master-Key:

A FAITHFUL BREAST

Our world is upheld by the integrity and veracity of good people. A good man is a man who keeps his word. As we used to say: his word is as good as his bond. The primary problem is political, economic, domestic, and all human relationships is to recover a sense of moral order and of personal trustworthiness. Integrity is the cement of society, and, when it crumbles, civilization collapses.

It has been aptly said that the best way to illustrate an idea is to wrap it up in a person. The legend of Hiram, the Widow's Son, personalizes this ideal of Fidelity. His memory is forever a part of the rich spiritual heritage of our Craft.

The American Declaration of Independence affirms certain so-called inalienable rights: Life, Liberty, etc. But to the heroic Hiram his right to life was not absolute nor inalienable. It was a relative right, only, and was limited and determined by his relationship and responsibility to his two royal associates. His profound sense of moral obligation, and the must of the Moral Imperative, saved him from listening to the counsel of cowardice and thus meriting the poet's scorn.

Tis man's perdition to be safe,
When for the Truth he ought to die!

To the presumptuous demands and threats of the recreant Fellow Craft he replied in words that are immortal. My Life you can have, my Integrity never! He refused to be disintegrated emotionally or spiritually, and won immortality in one crowded hour of glorious life. His sovereign loyalty to his Master companions was the centre of reference which kept him throughout an integrated person. Reverence for persons is always the ultimate basis of all morality. Persons, not things, are sacred in this world of moral order, meaning, and purpose. Falsity and the breaking of a promise is disloyalty, and a moral wrong to the person who trusts us.

Lord Moulton, eminent English Jurist, calls this type of response in a crisis The obedience of the unenforceable. He illustrates the idea by reference to the unwritten code of the sea in time of disaster: Women and children first! Under the duress of the moment, Hiram could excusably have complied with the ruffian's demands. There was no written law compelling him to keep faith and silence in the face of such emergency. But there was an unwritten law, the moral sanctions of Truth and Fidelity. Therefore he stood fast, unmovable, loyal to the royal within himself, even unto death.

There is a closely parallel scene in Pilgrims Progress, when, in the Valley of Humiliation, Pilgrim meets the foul fiend: Then Apollyon straddled quite over the whole breadth of the way and said: Prepare thyself to die, here will I spill thy soul! Had Hiram yielded in those agonizing moments, he might have saved his life, but he would have spilled his soul!

Life is much more than mere biological existence. Its essential values are qualitative not quantitative. As Freemasons, we are inheritors of the unconquerable spirit and example of the inflexible Tyrian. He kept the faith, and by his sacrifice taught us the secret of the victorious life and all great living; the consciousness that I am being trusted therefore I will be trustworthy.

Were we too attempt a fitting epitaph, we might appropriately adopt the tribute paid to Captain Oates, of the ill-fated Scott Polar Expedition, who walked out into the white immensities of the Antarctic wilderness to die as a voluntary sacrifice to save his companions: Here Died a Very Gallant Gentleman!

On my visit to those Safety Deposit vaults, I found the seed-thought for our next and final Master-key. It is the Golden Key to the House of Fellowship, Friendship, Brotherly Love and Truth. I noticed that neither my client nor the bank official could individually gain access to the deposit box. Each in tum had to insert his key in the lock. It was a co-operative, not an individual affair. Each helped the other, and together they succeeded where singly each would have failed. The Key Words are: Be Kind! Help! Give! Serve! And the Master key is:

THE HELPING HAND OF BROTHERHOOD

Someone has written: History sits by the roadside of Life and writes down the things that happen. But History never uses the first personal pronoun. There is no I on the cosmic typewriter man suffer from I as well as eye trouble, with too much ego in their cosmos. I is exclusive and individualistic. We and Our are inclusive and co-operative. Adopting with amendment the thought in Paul s sublime hymn to Love: Though I Have the Inquiring Mind, the Reverent Spirit, and Know all the signs, words, tokens and mysteries of Freemasonry; and though I have a Seeing Eye, a Hearing Ear, and a Faithful Breast, and have unlocked all doors of Knowledge, and have not Love for my fellow man, I am and have nothing. There is but one intrinsic value in the universe-human personality. This is the essential message and meaning of the Cross, and of that sublime and epochal event on Calvary, the giant agony of the world . Freemasonry faces a great spiritual task of building a Temple of Human Brotherhood, and making brotherhood a living reality.

Almost twenty centuries ago a casual question elicited a dramatic story which will live as long as human history. Its setting was the road between Jerusalem and Jericho. A traveller had been attacked, beaten, robbed, and left to die. Three men came by. Two saw ham with their eyes only, and pre-occupied with their own business, passed by. Each of these was an exponent of religion and represented a long and noble religious tradition. But, in their view, religion belonged to the area of the Temple in Jerusalem and had not use or function on the highway. The victim might probably have died had not an alien and heretic Samaritan happened by. He saw the injured man with the enlightened eye of his heart. No law, or code, or custom required him to help this wounded man who was an ancestral enemy of his race. But this nameless man, like the Widow s son, moved in the realm of unenforceable obligation, and by his brotherly act won a glorious immortality of fame.

So Many Gods, so many creed,
So many paths that wind and wind
When all this old world sadly needs
Is just the art of being Kind.

Let Bruce Barton speak to us our final word. There are two seas in Palestine. One is fresh and fish are in it. Splashes of green adorn its banks. Trees spread their branches over it and stretch out their thirsty roots to sip of its healing waters.

Along its shores the children play as children played when He was there. He loved it. He could look, across its silver surface when He spoke His parables. And on a rolling plain not far away he fed five thousand people.

The River Jordan makes this sea with sparkling water from the hills. So it laughs in the sunshine. And men build their houses near to it and birds their nests and every kind of life is happier because it is there. The River Jordan flows on south into another sea.

Here is no splash of fish, no fluttering leaf, no song of birds, no children s laughter. Travellers choose another route, unless on urgent business. The air hangs heavy above its waters, and neither man nor beast nor fowl will drink.

What makes this mighty difference in these neighbour seas? Not the River Jordan. It empties the same good river water into both. Not the soil in which they lie, nor the country round about. This is the difference. The Sea of Galilee receives but does not keep the River Jordan. For every drop that flows into it, another drop flows out. The giving and receiving go on in equal measure. The other sea is shrewder, hoarding its income jealously. It will not be tempted into any generous impulse. Every drop it gets, it keeps.

The Sea of Galilee gives and lives. The other sea gives nothing. It is name the Dead. There are two kinds of people in the world. There are two seas in Palestine.

We make a Living by what we Get.

We make a Life by what we Give.

FREEMASONRY GIVES AND LIVES!

.....

*Address delivered at the
Conference of the Grand Lodge Officers
of the Four Western Masonic Jurisdictions
held at Banff, Alberta
on September 8th, 9th and 10th, 1955.*

====

1999-03-01