

The Retrofit

Presented By:

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I feel the need to make a statement before I begin to speak. This paper is purely my thoughts, ideas and opinions. As the outgoing master I have the right to present a paper of my choosing. This topic is an idea I've been toying around with during my year as master. This position has allowed me to do a lot of reflection and thought. Some of those reflective thoughts were not always positive but, you would expect no less from me.

In freemasonry we take good men and make them better. It's a concept and a statement that is known to us all, whether it be an entered apprentice or the most worshipful the grand master himself. We know that the men who join our ranks are already good men and with our help and guidance we turn them into something more.

How we do this, is an allegorical process through stories and teachings which centre on the building of King Solomon's temple. It is a view shared by many, myself included that the temple in question, is an allegorical representation of us as men. Over the years we build this temple in our hearts, minds and souls to make ourselves better men but, the topic I wish to discuss today is - what was there before construction of the temple began?

Surely none of us were blank slates before we joined the craft? We were not children but rather full grown men; many of whom with considerable life experiences and accomplishments already in our past. Were we truly empty fields of unbroken ground just waiting for construction to begin? I don't think that is possible given what I know of many of you. I'd like to think that before the construction began on your temples, there were libraries, work shops or schools which resided in those bodies. However, this is only my speculation as the truth is between you and god.

It's with that in mind that as one of my last acts as worshipful master I wish to share something personal. In my year of self analyzing I came to an inescapable conclusion that the internal structure that existed in me before masonry was nothing so noble as a library or a school but was actually a fortress.

I would ask that you do not consider this a statement of bravado but, rather the exact opposite. It's not something I revel in but, rather something I regret. In my opinion a fortress is not an instrument of aggression but, rather a bastion of defence. A place where people hide, to be protected and where the main focus is survival rather than development. It is certainly not the temple we all strive to

create; that place where we can learn, grow and become so much more than what we are.

I'll be honest the more I thought about this concept the more I could apply it to my life. It allowed me to reflect on the way I act, think and function. The way I deal with situations of both a positive and negative nature.

As many of you know, I view the world as black and white. The areas of grey have never been a shade of the spectrum I could see clearly. I've always worked in right or wrong answers. Tell it to me straight, be honest and pull the band aid off! No matter how bad the news, I can take it. How is this any different than the purpose of a fortress? Is the enemy at the gates or are we at peace?

By the same token I take the direct approach when dealing with a situation; straight forward, looking outwards and focusing my energy at one place. I feel this mind set is what has allowed me excel at many aspects of my life and fail at others; I'll use ritual as an example. In the degree, in that moment, I can focus all my energy at the task at hand. I know what I have to accomplish and how to accomplish it - straight forward and direct as can be. The delivery is my goal and all my energy and effort is focused on it. The words are there, committed to

memory and in this moment all I need to do, is let them flow. In other words - charge the cannons, take aim and fire!

This same direct approach is what I feel makes me a weak master. To rule and direct the lodge is more than just ritual work as many of us know. I have trouble facing multiple problems and challenges at one time. Like a fortress I can face any challenge head on but, many issues from many angles cause fortifications to crack and walls to crumble. A temple has many entrances where fortresses do not. A temple can accept issues from many entry points and thus lessen the burden; a fortress has but one gate to stem the tide. That of course causes stress and weakens the structure.

However, to take a step back and focus on the positive I feel it important to mention that my fortress analogy is not completely negative. If that were the case then there is no reason why I should be standing in a Masonic lodge let alone wearing this collar. Although not a temple, a fortress does have its positive points as well. Albeit pragmatic by design they do possess certain inherent beauty which stands the test of time. One need only look at the castles of Europe to appreciate my logic. I would never be so foolish as to refer myself as beautiful although; some people do appreciate the unique views I have. Things such as honesty and

the direct approach are still appreciated in this world, as are loyalty and strength to ones convictions. In the world of “everyone gets a ribbon” some still appreciate cold hard truth.

Many fortresses as you are aware also contained chapels, libraries and hospitals. I have always valued my connection to the most high; I have always sought to catalogue the details and knowledge of life; and even at a young age, I always helped others. I hope my sponsors saw those qualities in me all those years ago and recognized them as something that could be developed.

It’s with that in mind that I choose the title of my paper. You see my brethren what I have been doing for the last decade in the craft is not building a temple from the ground up but rather retrofitting an existing structure. It has been a work and progress and one of the greatest gifts which the craft has given me. A figurative skill set which has allowed me over the years to conduct minor renovations on this edifice and improve it to the structure and man, I wish to be.

As previously stated it is an ongoing work in process. Ramparts don’t become archways over night. It’s not just a matter of being able to recognize my failings but, also having the skills to correct them. I need to accept that the desire for knowledge should far exceed my fear of looking stupid by asking questions;

that accepting help from others isn't a sign of weakness but, rather a sign of faith in your fellow man; and finally that anger is a powerful mortar for a stone wall but a poor glaze for a window.

I have been fortunate in my time in the craft to develop many great friendships. Unbeknownst to them, this skillful craftsman's have imparted advice and teachings which have allowed me to tear down a wall here and tile a floor there. This is no more evident than this last year in the east. As I leave the chair, I leave with a tracing board filled with designs and proposed projects for future remodeling. These will of course require patience and perseverance on my part as we know the first draft is never always a success. Fortunately as masons we are also aware that the construction of the temple never ends and neither will my desire to improve.