

GRAND MASTER'S ADDRESS.

MW Bro Maurice Thompson, G.M.

The M.W.G.M., in his address to the brethren, said :-

M.W., R.W., V.W., AND W. BRET FIREN,—The fleeting months have hastened on the close of another year, and once again I stand before you to express my acknowledgement of your favour in electing me to the supreme position in G.L. I am gratified that you consider me a fit and proper person to assume the chair for a second year, in accordance with our custom. Need I say that it will be my earnest endeavour so to discharge my duties that I may finish my course with a good conscience and your approval ?

The reports of the various boards, the balance-sheets, and the mass of general information supplied by the G.Sec., are now in your hands, and it is quite unnecessary for me to remark upon them further than to observe in passing that the year has been a very successful one and that there is ample evidence that G.L. is keeping up to its traditions and doing good work in the community by seeking to build up strong individual character amongst its adherents.

I do not propose to analyse the figures of the reports or to discuss the various matters submitted for your deliberation. A longer time than usual has been set apart this year for that purpose, and I am sure they will receive careful and able treatment at your hands.

During the past year it has been my privilege to visit a fair number of our Lodges. Putting aside what may be termed local visits in the home districts of Otago and Southland—and they have been many and beneficial—I have been able to spend a short period in the Wellington and Taranaki districts, besides being present at the installation of the Prov.G.M. in our only Prov.G.L., Canterbury. These visits have given me a great deal of pleasure and satisfaction, and I take this opportunity of thanking those Lodges, and o the brethren, for their courteous attention and warm hospitality. My own observations, so far as they go, have impressed me with a sense of the strong vitality of the Craft throughout our territory, the grip it has upon our people, and its influence upon their personality. I shall hope during the coming year to visit the Hawkes Bay, West Coast, Nelson and Marlborough, and Canterbury Districts.

At the same time brethren will readily understand that these visits must be taken as to districts ; there can be no attempt to visit anything like a proportion of the individual Lodges.

The reports of the Prov.G.Ms., as usual, are fragrant with evidence of progress in many Lodges and steady work in all, and whilst the number of our Lodges is increasing we are assured that the material we are admitting is not suffering by increasing in quantity. This, we conclude, is owing to a great extent to the influence of the various Boards of Enquiry, which are now becoming very general, and in time will no doubt become universal. Provided these Boards are conducted upon wise and considerate lines, they cannot fail to do good work.

This leads me to a subject which must be ever before us as the ideal of our Craft, and to which I made passing reference last year. I refer to the principle that our Lodges should be a common meeting ground for good men of widely divergent ideas and different stations in life. I think we should guard against the danger of our Lodges assuming a local and temporary colouring from passing events or questions which at the time may appear to be of great importance. In ancient days religion was a fruitful cause of dissension amongst the people, leading to misery and persecution; therefore religion was wisely removed from the scope of our deliberations. Politics were an equal source of trouble and bloodshed; therefore politics were barred. Men of this generation can scarcely realise what evil was wrought by the extremists in these questions, at the time considered to be the most vital matters; and the misery suffered by all people, however free they endeavoured to keep themselves. Fortunately the days of persecution and bloodshed for difference of opinion are departed ; yet we still have our burning questions, the constant discussion of which produces great irritation, opposing man to man and class to class. I refer to such subjects as license or no-license, capital versus labour, and other social subjects which are constantly arising amongst a people of such fertile

imagination as the denizens of this country. These subjects are not barred by constitutional practice, as are religion and politics ; yet I think we are wise to keep them outside our borders. One cannot fail to see that there may be danger ahead for us in the future as in the past. One hears of Lodges being almost divided over the question of what liquid refreshments should be provided at the social board; and one hears of Lodges being proposed to cater for certain classes. Many of our Lodges are planted in small communities where the brethren are well known to each other, and these debateable matters cannot be introduced without the danger of hurting someone's feelings. Consider what effect such a course must necessarily have upon a small Lodge where every individual is well known to the others, and whose profession may be affected. The Lodge should be the one place where each brother may repair, certain that he shall leave behind him all vexed questions and spend a profitable hour amongst brethren who are agreed upon every subject which is brought forward and whose attitude is fraternal, an atmosphere quite apart, as it were, from the popular questions of the day.

Let us confine our efforts to the cultivation of those cardinal virtues which form the basis of our fraternity. Churches will look after religion, the Press caters for every shade of politician, temperance societies and the ballot will in time settle the license question, and a man's individual effort through life will decide the class he belongs to. These all leave to us a common ground upon which even the strenuous partisan of any of the questions referred to may meet without disagreement in the practice of our beautiful ceremonies and at our social board.

This, to my mind, is our real work. We do not profess to form character, for we ask that a man's character shall be already formed before we admit him, but we endeavour to develop what is best in him upon broad lines, leaving all narrowing influences and discussions outside our doors. To do this we must see that passing questions of debateable matter are rigidly excluded, as did our brethren of old.
