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THE WORLD WE LIVE IN.

THOUGH Freemasons of necessity have a robust and abiding faith in the ultimate progress of mankind, and in the fulfilment of the divine purpose in human life, it cannot be denied that world events at the present time are such as to provide a severe testing period for those who look forward to that orderly and harmonious progress of human affairs that is implicit in Masonic thought and teaching. Progress is indeed disappointingly slow today. While we all know more or less clearly that there have been periods of stagnation in human affairs in past ages, just as there seems to be today, what has happened long ago does not strike us in the same vivid way as the impact of current events.

Everywhere we notice the material and Psychological aftermath of many years of conflict, nervous and irritable psychoses, mental and moral weariness induced by years of strife, and, worse than these things, no evidence that they represent but a passing phase. Ultimately conditions will be all right again, but just what does "ultimately" stand for as far as the aims and aspirations of the present generation of mankind are concerned? Men today, like the Bourbons of old, seem to have learned nothing and forgotten nothing.

One renowned world statesman, Field-Marshal Smuts, noted for his optimistic outlook in face of discouraging conditions, has described mankind as on the march to new destinations." This view must, in the light of fact, be accepted, we reluctantly suggest, with a measure of reserve. It seems indeed more as though mankind is staggering darkly to nowhere in particular along the edge of a precipice. While this view probably goes to the other extreme from that taken by the distinguished African statesman, there is much in contemporary life to make it plausible.

There never was a time when men had more machinery for international co-operation, and perhaps there never was a time when the actual prospects for such co-operation looked less promising. Unless the underlying spirit of goodwill is present, then machinery will fail to achieve the desired end. Statesmen meet and mingle unofficially in an atmosphere of effusive cordiality, but is the right hand a sure pledge of brotherhood? It is questions of this kind that are disturbing the world today. It is in circumstances such as these that it behoves Freemasons to keep firmly in their minds, and place in the forefront of their civic thought and conduct, the basic Masonic principles of the Fatherhood of God and the Brotherhood of man, that are so much in abeyance at the present time.

Freemasonry is universal and consequently international in its outlook. The Craftsman is a patriotic citizen of his own country, but at the same time he recognises the wider interests of humanity as a whole. He should deplore narrow sectional national outlooks, he should look to the common interests of mankind, and foster them, in the well-founded belief that only thus, in the long run, will the true interests of his own country be promoted and secured. The position has recently been put well in an Australian Masonic journal, which we quote as follows:

"The object of Freemasonry is, first of all, to perfect the individual and to guide mankind towards better and more harmonic development. It teaches that the first duty of mankind is to dedicate itself to the welfare of human society and to sacrifice itself if necessary. It searches for the sentiments common to all men, in order to unite the nations, and pursues the object of destroying the prejudices which are the source of enmity between the nations. It strives to bring these principles into effect in social life, and gives support and help wherever efforts are being made to further the welfare of mankind on the same fundamental basis."

It would hardly be possible to phrase the international and social outlook of Freemasonry in truer terms than these. Speaking recently at Auckland, General Carpenter, world head of the Salvation Army, confirmed the masonic standpoint in the following utterance:

"One of the elements that produced the great conflict we have been deploring has been the spirit of narrow nationalism. . . . The only way by which the world can rightly function is to recognise the interdependence of all peoples of the earth, to recognise that we are the children of a common Father, to recognise the brotherhood of man."

Whether the General is a member of our order or not we do not know, but undoubtedly he has in this statement voiced the basic principles of Freemasonry. The world will not recover and go on to progress until it is clearly recognised that the common good of humanity as a whole must take precedence over merely sectional aspirations, and until this principle is carried out in practice and not merely accorded formal and apathetic lip service.

Freemasons cannot as such come out and campaign in the community on any party basis; but they can, as far as their personal influence extends, do what they are able to promote the international spirit in an age when the lamp of common humanity is burning but dimly; and wait with patience, even in the midst of discouraging indications, for that resumption of human progress which is ultimately Certain, even though events move with disappointing slowness in the meantime.