

## **JRC Evans Memorial Lecture 2012/13**



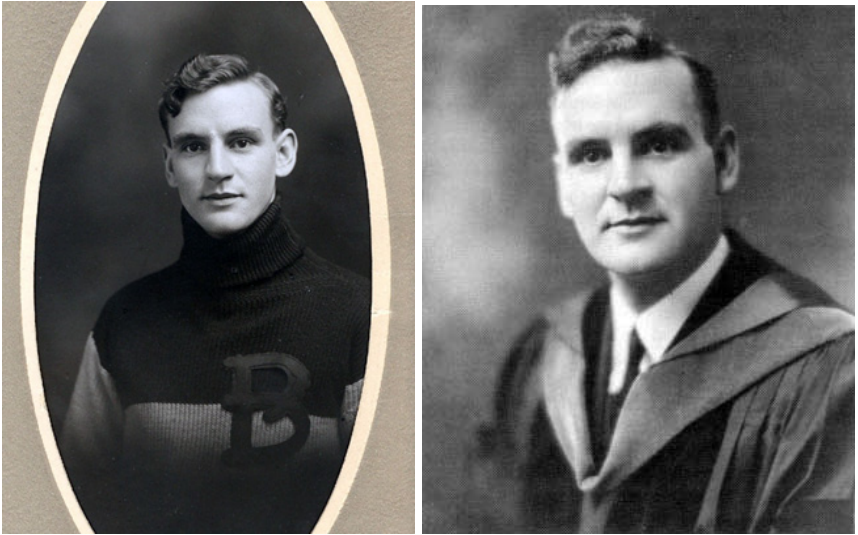
*Photo: Taken by Noelle Lacoursiere on a river in Cambodia*

### **“Whither Are You Directing Your Course”**

**By: R. W Bro Richard Lacoursiere**

**JRC Evans Lecturer 2012-2013**

## **MW Bro J.R.C. Evans**



This is the 45<sup>th</sup> year that the JRC Evans Memorial Lecture has been presented since being inaugurated in 1966.

Dr. John Robert Charles Evans was born in Nanaimo, B.C. on March 15, 1891. At the age of sixteen, Dr. Evans entered the Academic Department of Brandon College. He played an integral part at the College, participating in

academics, sports, and various other college functions and organizations. In his final year he was Senior Stick, the highest position in the Student Government.

In 1913, Dr. Evans graduated from Brandon College. Immediately upon graduation he was hired to teach Science and Academic Mathematics. In 1917, he became Principal of the Academic Department, while continuing to teach Mathematics and Science. Dr. Evans took leave in 1920 to do post graduate work at the University of Chicago where he received his Ph.D. in Geology.

He returned to Brandon College as Professor of Geology in 1923. He took over as College Dean in 1928 after the position became vacant. In September of 1928, Dr. Evans accepted the position of President of Brandon College, thus becoming its fifth president. Dr. Evans was head of the college at a very difficult time. He guided the College through the Depression and repeated threats of closure. Dr. Evans resurrected the Department of Theology and led the

reorganization of Brandon College into a non-denominational college in 1938 affiliated with the University of Manitoba.

On July 29, 1959, Dr. Evans died suddenly at his summer home in Robson, British Columbia. On his desk was the programme for the sod-turning ceremony for the new Arts and Library Building and Lecture Theatre. When it was completed, the Lecture Theatre was christened the Dr. J.R.C. Evans Lecture Theatre on behalf of the man who had made sure that it would be built. The Theatre had been his dream, a place to hold Chapel and Assemblies, as the student body grew in number.

Bro Evans was well known and highly respected throughout the country in the field of education and also the Masonic fraternity. His ability to inspire, convince and persuade was beyond comparison. Following his death in 1959 his good friend M.W. Bro Harry Donnelly; P.G.M. and Grand Librarian conceived the idea of perpetuating the

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memory of his dear friend and fellow mason through these memorial lectures.

It is at this time that I hope to some degree pay tribute to the memory of this outstanding man and fellow Freemason through the words that I am about to impart.

## **“Whither are You Directing Your Course?”**

Freemasonry, at all levels is a personal journey that each of us embark upon when from that convenient room adjoining the Lodge, we knock three times seeking admission into this astonishing brotherhood. As with any endeavour various tools are required to ensure that; we are able to overcome obstacles in order to arrive at our destination unharmed or in this circumstance enlightened.

My standing here before you, falls under the heading of ***“be careful of what you wish for, it may just come about.”*** It was while I was making coffee for my Lodge’s general purpose meeting that I was asked by

R W Bro (at the time) Allan Hadley if I would be the JRC Evans Memorial lecturer during his term as the Grand Master of Manitoba. It was only day’s earlier that I heard

that W Bro Gordon Greasley was the present lecturer and thus leaving me with huge shoes to fill. If anyone has heard Bro Greasley at work within the Scottish Rite or his JRC Evans presentation, you will understand my overwhelming concern.

I couldn't help but feel like one of the craftsmen in the quarry, lost amongst the massive walls of stone, knowing that I must seek out a suitable tablet with which to begin my task and render a work far more than something rudimentary in form to represent something comparable to that of a perfect ashlar, in this particular case pleasing to the ear from every angle.

This paper is an assemblage of my thoughts, those of others, quotes and readings, the combination of which will provide the essence of this dissertation.

The purpose of this document is to incite you and hopefully if need be, rekindle ones interest in our craft and ensure that each of us appreciate the influence Freemasonry has on can each and every one of us. It will be structured in such a way as to show that faithfulness and the performance of our word of promise will ensure the fulfillment of the duties we consented to engage in during the ceremonies of the Craft in which we first obligated ourselves. Secondly, to be able to answer internally when asked, "***Whither are you directing your course?***"

Each of us within the Craft must have at one time or another asked himself why Freemasonry appeals to him. What is it that draws him and anchors him within the fraternity? Many of us, in fact are constantly asking ourselves this question and formulating answers that touch only the periphery of the question.



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To begin with, let us take the individual who has recently been made a member of our fraternity after due inquiry. This man comes with an inquiring heart, receptive mind, and a lifetime of useable skills. His talents are immediately showcased in his preparation for advancement in each of the craft degrees. Rather than parroting every word as written centuries ago, it is desirable that he also come with an inquiring mind, something to motivate him to seek the hidden truths and real meanings that are cleverly concealed in the allegories and symbolism of the work. We must provide them with the environment and atmosphere not only to recite the required work, but also to question, digest and deliberate upon it. We must make it a priority to ensure that each new member is engaged, that they feel that they are an essential part of the Lodge, that we welcome them and that we assist them in their education

and put them to **WORK**. Without this, we provide them with a reason to lose interest. Simply stated, we will have failed to provide them with an opportunity to **THINK!** It is at this point in time that senior members of the craft have a tremendous responsibility to install this thought in the minds of new members.

Three ships sail through our Lodges each night, namely, **Leadership, Membership and Mentorship**. As with any sea going vessel making its way through uncharted waters, it takes experience, guidance and a team effort to ensure the ship is safely navigated towards shore and out of harm's way. We only have to look back to January 2012 when the cruise ship '**Costa Concordia**' tore a huge gash through her hull and ran aground off the western coast of Italy, to be reminded that without proper leadership and a team effort we too will find ourselves run aground with

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numerous casualties inundated with the debris. We all must do our individual and collective part to ensure that each of us receive their just due. Freemasonry must not consist of going to Lodge once or twice a month only to hear the minutes of the last general-purpose meeting, only to ensure that the Lodges finances are in order. I ask of you, are we not builders? If so, let us build our future. We must then lift our sights to greater things and ensure that each of our Masonic journeys is not only dynamic but also purposeful and fulfilling.

It has been suggested that falling membership and poor attendance may be linked to the level of quality of our Lodges. If I came to your lodge or you to mine, would we leave with further light and knowledge or would we be distressed at the thought that we would never be able to get those few hours back.

Is not one of the purposes of freemasonry the development of character, making good men better? Not knowing when our time here will come to an earthly end, it then becomes important that we take each opportunity to build our own character and of those around us, those with whom we associate in our daily avocations, by performing our daily tasks honestly and to the best of our ability.

Sometime ago I read Paulo Coelho's acclaimed book "The Alchemist", about a young man being led by different forces in the search of his personal legend, only to find that it was exactly where he first began his excursion. Life's journey is a full circle, something of which we allude to through our three craft degrees. **Birth- Life-Death.** We all happen upon life's journey in search of fulfillment; our own personal legend. **Is this enlightenment or is it Destiny?** When man stumbles towards his presumed destiny, often he

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is forced to yield and change direction as forces around him are usually more powerful and in turn, alter the direction of his original course. I believe this simply to be part of one's apprenticeship.

In the "Alchemist", the young man was provided with an opportunity to change his course in life from one of being a shepherd wondering the country seeking food, water and shelter for his flock; to a path of seeking out his true destiny. What would his answer be if asked "**Whither are you directing your course?**"

What would your answer be if asked today, "**Whither are you directing your course?**"

During the Lodge opening in the Canadian work the Worshipful Master asks the Senior Warden "**Whither are you directing your course?**" Has it occurred to anyone of

us that the Worshipful Master is indirectly asking the same of each of us? Is it not then appropriate that we give to this question serious thought and its just due? I believe that each of us must answer from the far reaches of the heart, for is this not where we all were first prepared to be made a Free Mason. Is this not the place that the real summit of yours and my Masonic journey can be found?

I have not been a member of this fraternity all that long; long enough however to know that each and every one of us interpret the meanings and set a course in Freemasonry according to the amount of light that has been provided him. **NO** man has the right or wisdom to claim that one interpretation is true and another is false.

It is the wise Freemason who on a continual basis searches out his heart and finds answers to the many questions that arise from the craft degrees. Free Masonry

teaches us that it is the man in us that has the strongest appeal to other members of society who desire a sense of belonging and aspire to become a member of this incredible fraternity. We have all accepted the same obligations and what I expect from you as a brother mason, you are equally justified in expecting from me. It is this connection where we will always find men of rare qualities of heart and mind, the type of man who will always travel that second mile and give far more than what is basically required.

We must always remember that each of us has made a solemn promise in the presence of the G.A.O.T.U, as well as dedicating ourselves not only to a life; but also to the practise of brotherly love. It is then fundamental that each of us exemplify this great virtue in the course of our journey, making our obligations a lifelong commitment rather than that of sheer deception.

Again I ask you "***Whither are you directing your course?***"

As we look about our craft, it is unfortunate that it is commonplace to see signs which would make us aware that many obligations did not find a proper reception; that while spoken with lips, a true response from the heart was scarce. Let us be consistent, if we make a promise let us honour it with enthusiasm.

We have been charged to take only men of good character into our midst and provide them with examples and instruction that will make them better before God and ourselves. Sadly, we don't always live up to our obligations; it is only we who can improve upon the state of Freemasonry in Manitoba and within our own Lodges. To do so we must take seriously our obligations. Freemasonry is a



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way of life, one that is meant to make its members, wiser, better, and an example to all.

In order to secure the safety and future of our institution, each of us must not only take our responsibility seriously, but also hold ourselves accountable when it comes to guarding **the West Gate**. I believe that in many cases we are letting fear, the fear of dwindling membership, the fear of a loss of revenue rule the safeguard our fraternity. No one should operate out of fear as people are known to do things much differently out of trepidation.

If I may, I would like to awaken some memories for you by reminding you that your decision to become a Freemason was prompted by a favourable belief fashioned by you, not after but prior to your initiation and also that it was your desire for knowledge and enlightenment along

with a firm intention to be of real service not only to members of your lodge but also to your Fellowman.

If you and I travelled back in time to our earlier petitions, did we not also promise to full obedience to and strict compliance to the established rules, regulations and customs of our fraternity. This is the tool kit to which a Freemason must carry as a preliminary guide to the ultimate attainment of the Sublime Degree and having attained that high rank, it is then up to him to chart his course accordingly. One must make use of the landmarks set out before him and to the obligations solemnly undertaken.

As one dives into the numerous volumes of Masonic history and education, one soon learns that freemasonry has not changed all that much over the centuries, but rather we have changed. The ritual is basically the same, technology

and science and the ever pressing needs and desires of today's world have changed us.

It is because we have changed that we find so many evidences of indifference within our lodges of today. If the craft is faced with one problem more important than that of another, it is imperative that the lodge leadership helps in the guidance and the direction the steps of which the brethren are expected to travel and become a standard bearer for Freemasonry.

It was while perusing through the Grand Lodge resource center that I happened upon a small aged book, authored by Major Arthur Powell and published in the year 1924, titled "The Magic of Freemasonry". Major Powell writes that the world away from Lodge consists of turmoil, hurry, hustle and bustle with so much pushing, self-assertion with little or no consideration for others, so little

true dignity. He continues on to write that it is a wonderful tonic for nerves strained by the tension of ordinary life to come into the precincts of a Masonic Lodge, where all is quiet, orderly, and peaceful, where every officer and every Brother has his allotted place and his prescribed duty, where none encroaches on another, where all co-operate in harmony.

Again I ask you "***Whither are you directing your course?"***"

We, ourselves have much to learn about Freemasonry, for we are still travellers along the road of life and within the craft There are many obstacles to overcome, burdens to bare, it is the challenge from each that bares asking the Worshipful master's question.

***"Whither are you directing your course?"***

Tonight I have not tried to lay out a course to which you should travel, my purpose will be better served if some of you retrace your steps and in the days to follow and take up the responsibility that as a brother mason; you obligated yourself too. We all know our qualifications far better than anyone else; we all realize from the present state of our beloved fraternity that there is work that requires doing and I am positive that each of us will discover those plans that lay out upon our own Trestle Board. We all approached a door in a convenient room adjoining the Lodge and issued those three knocks to which Free Masonry answered; let us ask ourselves, **ARE WE DOING OUR PART?**

It is not always easy to uphold the fundamental principles of **Brotherly Love, Relief** and **Truth** or to practise the time honoured and timely values as **Faith, Hope, Charity, Temperance, Fortitude, Prudence** and

**Justice.** Yet these should not be mere words devoid of meaning. The final charge in the Ceremony of Installation tells us that they must be carried into active operation. In ensuring that they are kept strong and pure, we must be determined and persistent. Here then is a challenge to each of us, if every member lives accordingly to the principles of his faith towards the Craft, only then will we ensure our brilliant fraternities survival. This challenge requires **ACTION** and it requires Action now!

Are you content simply belonging as many are, in name only, or are you courageous enough to meet the challenges of yours and my Masonic obligations.

Initiation alone never did, nor ever can, make a man a true Mason; it gives the key, but mere possession of the key does not constitute ownership of the treasure; it sows the seed, but unless the soil be good and carefully cultivated,

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fruit will not be produced; it opens the portal, but unless the road be traversed, the goal cannot be attained; it lays the foundation, but without labour the construction cannot be raised.

In conclusion it is thus my brothers, that we are bound together in one indivisible chain of sincere affection, lawful support. Relief, fidelity, and truth, as I ask you one more time, "***Whither are you directing your course?***"

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