

Duty to the returned soldier

To the Officers and Companions of the Grand Chapter of Canada Royal Arch Masons. Companions: —

I have the honour to welcome you to the Sixtieth Annual Convocation of our Grand Chapter and I do so with mingled feelings of pleasure and sorrow. Pleasure because the affairs of the Grand Chapter are in such excellent condition; our membership is increasing; our finances are affluent and our relations with all our Sister Grand Jurisdictions are of the most friendly nature. The enthusiasm of our Companions, under present adverse conditions, exemplifies the good results of their tuition as Royal Arch Masons and is an evidence of undiminished zeal in the interest of the Royal Craft. From every portion of the Grand Jurisdiction reports of earnest activity have been received. The energy of our Companions is an evidence that their love of Freemasonry has been in no wise diminished under the great trial through which we are now passing. I feel sorrowful because of the great affliction through which our Nation is now passing and every subject of the British Empire cannot but look with feeling of great grief upon the trying events which are now making the History of the World. Through the kind disposition of beneficent Providence our Country has been spared the horror of War and we are practically untouched, in a material sense. This does not lessen, but rather increases, our mourning for those who have so gallantly laid down their lives upon the field of battle in defence of Justice, Truth and National Honour. At other previous Convocations we had drawn to our attention the fact that the virile manhood of our Country was being assembled under arms to proceed overseas, to fight in the battles of the Empire, and to participate in this World's armament, and nobly have they done so, as the casualty lists after Ypres, St. Elois, Festubert, Passchendaele and Vimy Ridge so amply testify. The Glory won by our boys in those battles will never fade from the History of the Nation, and the memory of their heroic deeds will be as laurels and coronets to our children forever.

At this Convocation I wish to invite your attention to the reverse side of the picture. Not only are we continuing still to send our sons overseas to satisfy the insatiable god of War, but we are now receiving back into our arms those whom Providence has permitted to return; the maimed, the halt, the blind, the grievously disfigured and wounded heroes who have passed through this veritable hell upon earth. It is not the custom of these men to enlarge upon their deeds. It is exceedingly difficult to have them relate what took place upon the battle line, but each and every one bear testimony of the terrible stress to which they have been subjected, and their very trials should give us pause and open our hearts to a generous consideration of their immediate future. It is true that the Government of our Country is making a noble effort to in some way recompense our Soldiers for their great sacrifice, but official action is not all that is required. It is a duty which devolves upon each and every man that is left behind, to take a personal interest in the returned soldiers. The Military Hospital Commission Command has done glorious work in looking after those who have returned, and many noble men and women throughout the country have ably seconded their efforts to prove that the sacrifices of our men are appreciated and not forgotten. To those of you who are over military age, or who are physically unfit for overseas services, or for any other reason which prevents your serving with the colours, there is a duty laid of assisting in a second line of defense, namely, an energetic and sustained support of our patriotic societies such as the Red Cross who provide for the different branches of our Hospitals, for the Imperial Order of the Daughters of the Empire whose duty it is to provide comfort for our men in the trenches and, for the other patriotic societies who are carrying on patriotic work, but there still remains one great obligation, and that is to the returned soldier himself.

Let me appeal to those of you who are employers of labor, in whatever form it may be, clerical, mechanical, scientific and farming, to deal generously with our returned men when they ask for that which is their proper due, namely, the right to work and to maintain themselves in this country for which they have so generously shed their blood. Remember that these men have passed through years of terrible struggle which has unfitted them for more peaceful walks of life and that many of them will have to learn new occupations and employments. I regret to state that I have had cases quoted to me where employers have ascertained that the returned soldier is in receipt of a pension and have endeavored to reduce his wages in proportion to the amount of the pension received. I am pleased to say that only a few cases of this kind have come to my knowledge, but those few are sufficiently disgraceful to have me mention them in my address with the hope that it may in some small way help to check what is a grave injustice. If as citizens of this country we owe a duty to the returned soldiers who are not of the "Household of the Faithful" how

much greater than is our obligation to those of our brethren who have claims upon us. If there is any time in the history of the Royal Craft when tangible evidence of Masonic Brotherhood should be manifested now is the time. A sincere interest in our returned brother and actual help in his endeavors to rearrange his unsettled affairs, a real effort in endeavoring to place him in a position whereby he will again be on an equality with his fellows will be the best evidence that our protestations of brotherly love are an actuality. My Companions remember the lessons which have been taught you at our altars and exemplify in your actions that those lessons have borne fruit and are a real force in your business lives.

Sources:

Proceedings of the Grand Chapter of Royal Arch Masons of Canada at the annual convocation, 1918 Address of the Grand First Principal, A. S. Gorrell