

First visit of Grand First Principal to New York

There was a "foreigner" also among the 'honored guests, and the Grand High Priest, in offering a wholehearted welcome to M. E. Comp. Fred W. Harcourt, Grand First Principal of the Grand Chapter of Canada, said:

"I can assure you from the bottom of my heart that this is an event in the Grand Chapter of this State long to be remembered. It is a history-making morning, for, as I understand it, this is the first time in the existence of the Grand Chapter of Royal Arch Masons of this State that it has ever had the honor, the pleasure and the privilege of receiving in this Tabernacle the Grand High Priest of the Grand Chapter of Canada.

"We are proud of the fact that the Grand Chapter of this great State is the largest in the world. We are proud of the fact that you have come to us from a foreign country, our friends and our neighbors, to be with us to-day, to demonstrate to the world at large that the same loyal spirit of Royal Arch Masonry that exists in this State and in this country exists across the border in our sister, our neighbors', country, Canada."

He closed by expressing his great pleasure in extending New York's Grand Chapter greetings and his own personal welcome. It is in no spirit of vanity nor because of any desire to "show up" the M. E. Companion that we are moved to reproduce his reply, but rather to let our Companions in the remote and "silent places" he refers to, note that when a Canadian is let loose among the brilliant and eloquent of a foreign land he can repay (hospitable welcome without overstraining his natural modesty and with no visible evidences of the diffidence and timidity proverbially associated with the legal profession..

M. E. Comp. Harcourt was received with the Grand Honors, and in response to the greeting he said:

"I assure you, Most Excellent Grand High Priest, that I have not words adequate to express my keen appreciation and satisfaction for the honor you have done me by inviting me to attend the Annual Convocation of this, the greatest Grand Chapter of the world; indeed, in the greatest State in the greatest Republic the world has ever seen. These words may seem common, as you have evidently heard them before, but nevertheless they are true. I come from a jurisdiction, comparatively speaking, young, small and unfinished, with only a membership of some sixteen thousand. I understand you have more than twice that number. You are holding your one hundred and sixteenth Annual Convocation. In a fortnight we will hold our fifty-fifth. Freemasonry has been in vogue in this great State as far back as it was in old England before this country was a Republic. It has flourished marvelously with you, as has everything else in this great country. With us, Royal Arch Masonry is endeavoring to find its feet. We are still in the prospective. We exceed you only in one respect, and that is in territorial jurisdiction.

Our Grand Chapter has the largest jurisdiction in the world. Its area is many times greater than any other, extending from the Ottawa River to the Pacific, and from your northern boundary up to the frozen North. In fact, too large to be satisfactorily visited. At the beginning of last year I received an invitation to visit, and was told that many of the Chapters had never seen a Grand First Principal. I thought I would devote some time to traveling around among the Chapters, which I did, traveling over that great waste, practically living in Pullmans, leaving the Chapter rooms at three, four and five in the morning, and boarding the train to keep my appointment. But I was royally received. They heaped too much of everything good upon me, save sleep. Notwithstanding, there are to-day in that great region many Chapters that have not yet seen a Grand First Principal, and some a Grand Superintendent. A Grand Superintendent traveled three successive days on a dog sled and visited three Chapters. A First Principal rode 160 miles. A Principal Sojourner walked 26 miles. That is carrying Masonry on under difficulties.

'But, Companions, in case you may go away with the idea that the whole of the jurisdiction is a vast wilderness, I had better tell you that one of the cities of my Province has a population of 425,000. The Masons of the Province of Ontario, which has a Grand Lodge of its own, recently raised one hundred thousand dollars to commemorate its fiftieth anniversary, the interest to be applied for the relief of needy widows and orphans of deceased Masons. Our respective countries lie side by side, from the Atlantic to the Pacific, over three thousand miles, and have more in common than any other two countries on the face of God's earth; a common language; almost similar customs; daily intercourse, trade and commerce. We simply must live together in peace. We cannot do otherwise. We have had

questions of difference, but those difficulties should be settled as are those between two citizens, in a pacific manner, and both parties should gracefully and cheerfully accept the result.

"Next year will mark the one hundredth anniversary of the continuance of unbroken peace between these two countries, and it is contemplated to give the event some marked attention. No doubt the Masons will do likewise. It will be the greatest occasion that will mark the century, and I submit that it rests with this Empire State to take the initiative.

"Citizens of the United States, you are our elder brother. We look to you for guidance and instruction, as the smaller boy looks to the older one. We know more about you than you do about us. We read your newspapers. I venture to say you never see ours. We imitate you more than you know, more than we are likely to admit we do. We likewise imitate your vices, a great deal more, probably, than we do your virtues. The responsibility, therefore, rests upon your shoulders, and you are in a large measure accountable for our actions. You are your brother's keeper.

"Companions, I did not come here to talk about my country, the jurisdiction which I represent, or about myself. I came here to listen and to learn. I apologize for taking up so much of your time. I know there are many Companions here who are anxious to get through with their duties and get to their homes. There is a story told about a woman who took a small child to church. During the sermon the baby began to cry so lustily that the mother got up and started to leave. As she was going down the aisle the preacher stopped talking and addressed the mother, saying, "Madam, the baby does not disturb me."The woman stopped and replied, in her native vernacular, "Well, if the baby isn't bothering you, you are bothering the baby."I ask your pardon for distracting your deliberations. Most Excellent Sir, I forgive you for bringing me here and making me so prominent. I am grateful to you from the bottom of my heart for the honor you have done me. I take it as a compliment and as a mark of your fraternal regard and esteem for the jurisdiction over which I have the honor to preside."

"At the conclusion of his address," the record says, "the 'distinguished Companion was greeted with hearty and long-continued applause," though without adding that it was probably because of discreet brevity. "Bowing his thanks, he said it was the first time he had ever received an encore in a Masonic body, and told a little story apropos of the occasion."

Sources:

Proceedings of the Grand Chapter of Royal Arch Masons of Canada at the annual convocation, 1914 report on Foreign Correspondence - NEW YORK