

Take Me As I Take You

By Harold Grainger

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This Short Talk Bulletin has been adapted from an inspirational speech which Worshipful Brother Grainger delivered to a District of Columbia Lodge.

Let us talk about hands, and their importance to man and Masons. A man's hands are often a true indication of the crafts and skills of their owner. Long tapered fingers are found on an artist or a musician. Big expansive hands are found on a blacksmith or a metalsmith. There are those who believe that the past and the future can be read in the skin folds of the palm of the hand. Inasmuch as the feet have just as many lines, if not more, it gives us cause to wonder why the lines of the hands reveal more than the lines in the feet. To be legal, a signature must be in a man's own hand. Our ancient brethren could not write and many documents were affixed by one of two methods: 1) he made his mark an "X" or a thumb-print, or he imprinted the parchment with his teeth. Another manner of binding a contract is taught in the first degree to confirm all things and yet another method was the exchanging of a coin. This latter method is still used when we read "in consideration of the dollar in hand, receipt of which is hereby acknowledged, etc." In daily life we use such expressions as "Hand delivered" "To learn first hand" "I bought it secondhand" a clock has "Hands" rather than pointers.

The small boy closes his fist and firmly states, "That's the truth by Golly!" Unknowingly he has sworn by "The Gol" or the hand, which was anciently the promise of a willingness to forfeit the hand if the owner was not telling the truth.

A runner wins a race "Handily" (not footily); a race horse is "Handicapped" and we at once know what has happened to the horse. This usage derives from the ancient games when a wrestler who was stronger or larger than his opponent, had one hand tied or capped.

We "Lend a hand" even when our help is only the loaning of some money.

In the era of uncivilized man, the upraised open hand was a sign that no weapon was being concealed and was therefore a sign of "peace." Still later, and in a similar vein, when knights wore armor, to remove a gauntlet and extend a bare hand was a sign that though the knight was dressed for battle he came in peace. Even today we remove a glove to shake hands. though we

may never have known the reason for this display of etiquette, we are stating by action rather than by words, "I won't hurt you. "- "I will gladly take your hand because I trust you. "

In Babylonia it was the custom of the king during the festivities of the New Year to grasp the hands of the statue of Marduk, the principal God. This act was to symbolize the transfer of power from their deity to the king. So important and persuasive was this act, that when the Assyrians defeated the Babylonians and occupied their land, they, too, felt compelled to submit to this ritual. It was the king's duty to pass a sense of divinely acquired security on to his people.

This custom became embedded in English kings and the legal system called "Hand girth" (anyone who stood under the king's protection or "Hand girth") was under the king's hand. This fell down to the use on medieval feudal estates (where it was customary for all the tenants to swear fidelity to a new lord and master). During the ceremony of swearing, the new lord clasped tightly the hands of his tenants by covering their hands with his. There was more to this custom than the mere transference of power. It was by clasping the hands, it prevented the tenant from drawing a weapon, and that was a safeguard for the master. This system was obviously the result of a bitter lesson learned in even earlier times. Those of you who were compelled to study the Greek classics will remember the story Ovid related, how the mother of Hercules, a woman named Alomena, was forced to suffer in childbirth for seven days because her enemies sat before her house with their hands tightly clasped. Pliny the Elder, in his writing, warned against interlacing your fingers anywhere near a pregnant woman or near a sick man who was being given medicine. Polynesian natives ostracize anyone who has handled a corpse with their bare hands.

Ancient Greeks in order to prevent the ghost of a suicide victim from haunting would cut off the dead person's hands and bury them separate from the body. It was thought that without hands, a ghost could not navigate in the dark of night.

There are pleasant thoughts relating to hands also such as the Eskimo tradition of carving a mask for the hunt ceremony. On the mask was depicted two hands and a hole was drilled through the hands. This symbolized the need to allow some of the hunted game a chance to pass "Through the hands" to insure future generations the opportunity of the hunt.

Since kings hands have in all times been symbolic, it is fitting that they, too, have special powers. In 18th century England, the disease known as scrofula (now called tuberculosis) was called the "King's evil" and it was claimed this malady could be cured by the king's touch.

During the reign of Charles I, he is said to have "cured" 100,000 cases. William of Orange who followed the Charles Stuart kings to the throne of England scoffed at the practice and is said to have admonished one of his subjects who asked for the "Hand girth" or the laying on of hands "God gives you better health and more sense." Curiously, there is another macabre use of the hand-this is called the "Hand of Glory" and its powers were legion. This "Hand of Glory" was a hand cut from a man hung on the gallows. Nursing mothers would gladly bring their babies to

the public execution so that the hangman could stroke their infant with the dead man's hand. There was always a ready market for such hands as the burglars of the day believed that a hanged man's hand could stupefy every sleeper in a house so that the intruder might go about his underhanded work undisturbed.

While most of us may not know how to play a game called "Morra, " we have seen it played. This game was a favorite sport in Roman times. Two players would hold their hand clenched and at a count of three would throw it open. A number of fingers one would call odd and one would call even. You probably recognize the game. It was said that a truly honest man was he who would play Morra in the dark.

With all this importance in all areas of the world and in all times, it seems only fitting that "Hands" were used with significance in Freemasonry from its earliest times. Indeed our ancient Brethren, the operative Mason, made his living with his Hand Tools. Can we be surprised then at the use of "Hand to back" or of the E.A. being instructed that our sign of fidelity was two right hands joined or by two fingers supporting each other by the right hand? Fidelity has its own sign. We use it when we pledge allegiance to the flag and in many Jurisdictions when we are at prayer.

Your hand can work for Freemasonry when you take the time to call another Brother on the telephone, be he sick or well; be his need great or small. Reach out and touch his life. Touch is universal.

Touch is the expression of love. A vase of priceless beauty and value was once a lump of clay moulded by two hands. We are enthralled by our nation's accomplishments in space. These vast space machines were assembled by human hands. "The strong grip of a Master Mason" can accomplish many things. Shake the hand of your Brother with pride. Be proud of your Lodge. Be proud of Freemasonry. Don't lose your grip. You have earned the right to take me as I take you.

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A Brother's Hand

By George B. Staff

When you're feeling all downhearted,
And life's hard to understand,
Say, it's fine to feel the pressure
Of a brother's friendly hand.

Just to know he sympathizes,
Though he doesn't say a word;
How it starts your courage climbing,
As your heart is touched and stirred.

With an arm across your shoulders.
And a grip you love to find,
How it makes you feel the bounding
Of the hearts of humankind.

It is just a little token
Of an evergrowing band,
For there's faith and hope and courage
In a brother's friendly hand!

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