

William O. Ware Lodge of Research

Book Review – January 2020

Observing the Craft ***The Pursuit of Excellence in Masonic Labour*** ***and Observance***

Andrew Hammer, President Masonic Restoration Foundation

Worshipful Brother Andrew Hammer's *Observing the Craft*, first published in 2010 by Mindhive Books, is unquestionably the most significant book of the 21st Century written for Freemasons. While the non-Mason may be able to gain some knowledge of Freemasonry from the book, it should be clearly understood that this book was written as a tool whereby Freemasons could assess their own understanding of Freemasonry and the extent to which their experience in Freemasonry has fulfilled their expectations. The best understanding of the book is found in its title, in the phrase, "the Pursuit of Excellence."

Many Freemasons have often been frustrated by their Lodge's failure to deliver anything more than monthly meetings where the reading of minutes, payment of bills and stumbling through opening and closing ritual ceremonies constitute the vast bulk of the activity. Such Masons are seeking to reconcile how it is that Freemasonry, which promises an extraordinary experience, has become an ordinary experience (or less). "Surely there must be something more than this," is the common refrain among such men.

In *Observing the Craft*, Andrew Hammer defines exactly what that "something" is, and demonstrates how, to our own detriment, we have been ignoring that "something" for decades. The missing "something" is the pursuit of excellence. Bro. Hammer points out that, within the context of Freemasonry, settling for anything less than excellence is to abandon our mission as Freemasons.

Bro. Hammer defines "observance" as follows:

"In Masonic terms, observance means seeing to it that certain methods and characteristics of Masonic labour are carried out to the highest standard that can possibly be attained by a Lodge."

In subsequent chapters on dress and ritual, Bro. Hammer reveals the extent to which careful attention to personal appearance and the execution of ritual is essential to the observant Mason. In both instances, Bro. Hammer illustrates that a casual approach to Masonry produces something less than Masonry.

Bro. Hammer's chapter on "Distractions" is especially telling. Reviewing the several appendant bodies, Bro. Hammer offers an incisive analysis as to whether involvement in any of them offers any enhancement to one's Masonic experience. Most tellingly, Bro. Hammer argues that a completely fulfilling and rewarding Masonic experience may be found entirely in the Symbolic Lodge. He forcefully makes the point that if the Symbolic Lodge was delivering on its promise to provide a truly extraordinary experience for its members, there would be no need for the appendant bodies.

Bro. Hammer's chapter on Festive Boards directs attention to an often-overlooked aspect of Freemasonry. The Festive Board adds greatly to the overall Masonic experience – offering an opportunity for fellowship as well as education. The Festive Board returns Freemasonry to its origins and connects men in Masonic brotherhood both in real time and across the centuries.

In plain language, Bro. Hammer describes the observant Lodge in this fashion, "An observant Lodge is a Lodge that seeks to uphold the highest standards of the Craft." Does this describe your Lodge? If so, how? If it does not, why doesn't it?

Ultimately, *Observing the Craft* is about one's understanding of the purpose of Freemasonry and one's vision for how the promise of Freemasonry is best delivered. It is a clarion call for engagement in the pursuit of excellence. Bro. Hammer's work forces the Mason to carefully examine his own commitment to the ideals and principles of the Order. It is impossible to read *Observing the Craft* without being confronted with the need to reevaluate one's own commitment to excellence.

Freemasonry is an individual journey. One Freemason, committed to excellence and possessing the will to journey alone, if necessary, can experience the transformational power in daily living that the Fraternity offers. When united with like-minded Brothers in an observant Lodge there is potential for exceptionalism in every respect. *Observing the Craft* reminds of that promise and calls us out of the ordinary into a genuinely extraordinary experience.

Observing the Craft is available through amazon.com or from other Masonic booksellers.

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