



NUGGET

The toast to Absent Brethren

Summary: The timing and content of the toast to Absent Brethren, with examples of the variations across the country.

The toast to Absent Brethren is often given at a Festive Board at a fixed time and is commonly known as *The Nine O'Clock Toast*. However, the timing of the toast is not always as it should be and invariably it has to fit in with the proceedings of the evening. As the hands of the clock at 9 o'clock represent an angle of 90°, it is another of those Masonic associations which we Masons like to make. However, I have known Brethren who, when they have been away from home, have drunk a toast at 9 o'clock in the evening to remember their colleagues at home and I have done the same myself.

Edward Still from Sussex advises that its antiquity is not really known; however, he points to a reference in the minutes of the Lodge of Antiquity No. 2 of 1759 in which it was recorded:

'...the health of our absent members was drunk.'

However, a 9 o'clock toast is not specifically mentioned. I understand that it was generally accepted that the toast 'Absent Brethren' actually came into prominence in England and Wales during the First World War, when so many of our Brethren were killed or injured in that terrible conflict.

In certain Provinces, the toast to Absent Brethren is accompanied by the singing of the hymn 'Eternal Father Strong to Save'. Only two verses of the hymn are sung, the first as here:

*Eternal Father, strong to save,
Whose arm hath bound the restless wave,
Who bidd'st the mighty ocean deep
Its own appointed limits keep;
Oh, hear us when we cry to Thee,
For those in peril on the sea.*

The toast is then given standing and 'To Absent Brethren'.





In many Ports and adjacent areas, it is given as *'To Absent and Seafaring Brethren'*. In the north of Lancashire and east Yorkshire, the toast is given at 10 o'clock, as many Lodges do not tile until 7.00 p.m. making it impractical to have a toast at nine. This is also given to *'Absent and Seafaring Brethren'*.

In Hampshire, at least one Lodge used to sing two verses of *'Architect, In Thy Great Mercy, Hear Our Anxious Prayer'* and in one East Midlands Province there is a Lodge which does toast Absent Brethren - but seated and in silence. Another variant of the toast which is sung in a London Lodge, is:

*Brethren, shall we pause a while and be of one accord,
To note those who are missing from this our Festive Board?
Shall we think of absent brethren and take a draught of wine,
And hope that they do likewise, at the very stroke of nine?*

There are several variations and even poems related to the toast which unfortunately are too long for a short paper such as this. Sadly, however, the use of the toast to Absent Brethren is not universal in England and Wales, which is unfortunate.

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Read by either a new or an experienced Mason with the minimum of preparation and practice; though ideally, they need to be read a few times beforehand.

Themed with the meeting or activity.

Used to initiate a discussion within a Lodge/Chapter, LOI/COI, or group.

Read at home and shared as a topic for a future discussion.

Used as a focus for an unplanned, informal discussion.

*Note: All biblical passages are taken from the Authorized King James version and any reference to ritual will be from Emulation unless otherwise specified.

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