

A DISCOURSE

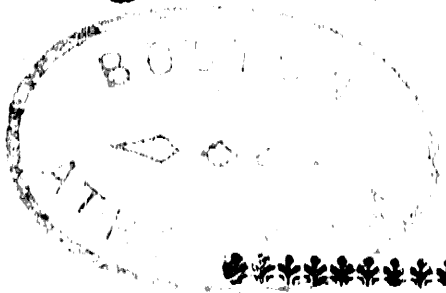
DELIVERED IN THE SCOTCH PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

OF CHARLESTON,

On the 27th December, 1815,

BEFORE

The Grand Lodge of South-Carolina,



By A. W. LELAND, D.D.

Grand Chaplain.

CHARLESTON, S. C.

PRINTED FOR THE GRAND LODGE OF SOUTH-CAROLINA,
BY J. HOFF, NO. 117, BROAD-STREET.

.....

1816.

GRAND LODGE OF SOUTH-CAROLINA,
December 27th, 5815.

On motion of R. W. Brother Cogdell, *Resolved unanimously*, That the thanks of this Grand Lodge be tendered to the R. W. Grand Chaplain, the Rev. Doctor Leland, for the able and eloquent address delivered by him this day to the Masonic Family, and that a copy be solicited for publication.

[Extract from the Minutes.]

J. H. MITCHELL,
Grand Secretary.

A DISCOURSE, &c.

WE are assembled in obedience to the ancient institutions of our order, which direct us to consecrate this day to the devout worship of Almighty God. Having already united in the public services of religion, and offered our praises and supplications to the Author of all good in the Mediator's name, it may not be improper that a few observations be made upon the principles and tendency of that Society, one of whose joyful festivals we this day celebrate.

In addressing such an audience, upon such a subject, the speaker must contend with numerous embarrassments. Not that I deem Free-Masonry a dry or sterile theme—No! on the contrary, the mystic order presents to its votaries, subjects ever new, ever delightful, rich with moral instruction, and ever worthy to employ their noblest faculties. It unfolds to their view all that is lovely in nature, all that is splendid in art, and all that is attractive in harmony and beauty.

It unlocks the stores of wisdom and knowledge collected in every clime and in every age: treasures rich with the spoils of antiquity, and polished by the hand of modern refinement, to whose variety and perfection every system of philosophy or morals, every form of government, every discovery of art, has contributed.

Therefore, to worthy Masons, this subject is ever interesting and animating. Having entered the vestibule of the mystic temple, they delight to survey its grand proportions, its lofty arches; to admire its noble columns crowned with Corinthian art, its massy monuments of ancient sculpture, its walls, decorated with the symbols of virtue and the emblems of wisdom, its hieroglyphick inscriptions; and the whole brilliantly illuminated by three great lights, Reason, Science and Revelation.

Were I therefore surrounded by none but Brethren, my present duty would be pleasant and easy. Enquiries of the deepest interest to every intellectual being—subjects at once the most important and the most attractive, calculated to gratify the best feelings and excite the happiest emotions in virtuous minds, would press upon us and delightfully engage our whole attention.

But now the oracle is silent, for she is encircled by those who despise or neglect her mysteries. Around these scenes of moral beauty she draws her impenetrable veil. The portals of her temple are closed. We can only survey its majestic exterior, walk around its bulwarks, tell its battlements and towers, and number the precious stones which adorn its foundation.

Thus called to discourse on a system whose principles I am not permitted to explain—whose ceremonies I may not illustrate, every candid hearer well perceives my embarrassments, and pardons my dullness and sterility.

The origin of our society is lost amid the clouds of the remotest antiquity. Its emblematic records pronounce it to have been coeval with the human family. As it is unquestionably the oldest of al

existing associations it is on this account entitled to veneration.

Nor are the wide extension and mighty influence, which this system early obtained, and has ever preserved, less worthy of observation. As men became divided by language, climate and customs, the principles of the royal art accompanied its votaries into every land and formed an universal bond of union. Masonry flourished in every clime, maintaining its ascendancy amid the rudest tribes; nor could the clouds of ignorance nor the blasts of depravity wholly extinguish its light or tarnish its beauty. It ever proved the brightest ornament of civilization, and even softened the ferocity of savage manners; diffused a spirit of kindness and benevolence; illumined the darkness of heathenism, and elevated the standard of moral virtue.

In ancient Egypt, Masonry displayed its powerful influence and rose to high perfection. Every historian well knows the vast improvements which were there made in the liberal arts and sciences, and the refinement of the intellectual and moral state of society. These appear in the discoveries in philosophy, and in those exquisite models of sculpture, and monuments of architecture, which have rendered Egypt the admiration of the world.

It is also well known that the sources of knowledge were concealed and the means of acquiring it wrapped in mystery. These treasures were collected by the fraternity and safely preserved. From Egypt they were carried by the descendants of Abraham to the land Canaan, where they produced all that refinement and splendour which adorned the reign of Solomon: and from Egypt also they were conveyed by Pythagoras and others to

the western nations; and so have descended to us, illustrated by the new lights of science and religion and enriched by the wisdom of every intervening age. Thus every age has received blessings from Masonry.

Many of the best and wisest of men have been its votaries. It has dispelled darkness, surmounted obstacles, and reared a noble structure of knowledge and virtue, of perfect symmetry of proportions, harmony of design, and perfection of execution, upon the ruins of ignorance, prejudice and barbarism. Its gentle current issued from a pure fountain of benevolence, at the very commencement of civil society. It has continued to flow, and receiving the tribute of every kindred stream, has widened to a mighty river, wafting refreshment and fertility to every age; and will maintain its course till time shall be no more.

Though the moral world is its great sphere of action, yet Masonry has applied its principles to the arts and ornaments of life with the happiest effect. Hence the grandeur and beauty of ancient architecture. Therefore rose noble fabrics, which have been the delight and admiration of every age, whether on the plains of Memphis, or on Mount Moriah, were monuments of masonic glory. By beautiful works of art, Masonry has had the nobler aim of exhibiting emblems of moral excellence. And while she has so admirably displayed the works of nature, it has been to increase the glory of nature's God. She has disclosed a beautiful analogy between the symmetry and grandeur of architecture and the beauty and perfection of virtue. From this analogy proceeds much of our emblematical instruction; and hence our application of geometrical principles to

subjects of morality. Masonry occupies a commanding eminence, and takes a comprehensive view of nature; discovering with a piercing eye her secret springs, and penetrating her most hidden recesses. The order, harmony and beauty thus discovered, are objects of her delightful contemplation. Whether she explores the exhaustless stores of the mineral kingdom; or surveys the fair face of this lower world, peopled with the countless tribes of animated nature; or exalts her views to the celestial orbs which roll in silent majesty above; in all she beholds the glory of the great Creator. But the moral effects which Masonry is calculated to produce upon its votaries are worthy of unmingled praise. Let them but reduce its principles to practice, be ever guided by its dictates, and regulated by its laws and they would be perfectly virtuous, benevolent and honourable. Indeed I can readily conceive that moral beings, who had no unholy tendencies, might attain, by the guidance of Masonry alone, the highest degree of excellence and felicity of which their nature was capable. Perhaps it may be asked, why then are not these effects produced, these fairy visions realized? why is perversity of heart and obliquity of conduct so discernible in many of the Fraternity? I reply, that this discrepancy between profession and practice results from two causes. One is found in the depravity of our nature, the unholiness of our tendencies, and the pollution of our passions. These present such obstacles to the perfection of human virtue, that no doctrines but those of Revelation, no influence but that of Omnipotence, can surmount them. The other cause is the assumption of the Masonic name by those who are wholly unworthy. And it may be observed

that the objections against Masonry arising from the inefficacy of its principles, or the inconsistency of its professors, may be urged with equal force against Christianity itself.

Pure Free Masonry, uncontaminated by unworthy votaries, is, in its original design, a beautiful system of benevolence. Its noble aim is to unite the wise and the good, by the most indissoluble ties, into one great association, whose influence should be co-extensive with human society. The purposes of this combination of virtuous and benevolent men, thus strengthened by union and by harmony of sentiment and design, are, to ameliorate the state of society, to cherish the useful and liberal arts, to resist the influence of evil example and licentious principles, to check the violence of tyranny and oppression, to lighten the burdens of misfortune, to plead the cause of innocence, to raise the fallen, to support the weak, and to assert and defend the eternal rights of justice and rectitude. These are the beneficent and glorious objects of the institution.

As the masonic body was thus designed to be an union of good men against the vicious, and as it was calculated to embrace the virtuous of every nation, regardless of special customs and opinions; it is founded upon those great essential principles of morality and justice, which are universally deemed necessary to the well being of Society. And as from its very nature the institution must meet with opposition from all the enemies of truth and order and virtue; and likewise from all the advocates of vice and the oppressors of men; who would use every effort to destroy its influence, subvert its design, or pollute its principles; it was necessary that some means should be devised to enable

Masons to exclude the unworthy, to detect imposition and to act in concert and with energy. Hence arose that admirable system of emblematic records, of hieroglyphical communication and mysterious symbols, which has defied the inquisitiveness, and excited the wonder of the world. This enables the fraternity to plan and execute the most extensive schemes of utility without the least interruption, to recognise a brother at a single glance, and to prevent the possibility of intrusion or imposition. This system has been carried to such perfection, as to supply the place, to Masons, of that great desideratum in literature, an universal language. It is certainly a fact that we possess a system of moral instruction accompanied by historic facts and elucidations, thus transmitted from the earliest ages, which has never been committed to writing. And it is also true that the same rules and obligations, the same course of instruction, and manner of operation, which bound and regulated the craft many centuries ago, and which not only cannot be reduced to writing, but which it is masonic sacrilege even to utter, except within the walls of a Lodge, are now preserved without variation. This emblematic language is an invaluable treasure. Mute, yet most eloquent is this mode of communicating thoughts and feelings. A Lodge composed of Masons from every quarter of the globe, of whom no two understood each others speech, would most strikingly display the perfection of this symbolic language. All masonic operations would be conducted in harmony and order. A mutual communication would be made of each other's pursuits and circumstances; lessons of moral instruction be given and every purpose for which language is necessary completely answered.

swered. Those grand masonic words, which are not found in any written language, are familiar to the craft through the world: the mystic tokens are as universally understood; every emblem has a signification perfectly familiar; and the symbols allude to principles and ceremonies "*which can never be forgotten and never remembered without the strongest emotions of the heart.*" Aided by these, masons, however dissimilar in mental cultivation, in customs, or in speech, may hold with each other the most intimate communion.

Nothing can be more unjust than to conclude that our mysteries are concealed because they are impious or hurtful. The fairest way of judging, as to the moral nature of what we conceal, is to examine what we profess and explain. We form our opinion of the qualities of a hidden fountain by the streams which flow from it. We judge of the concealed roots of a tree by its branches and fruit: in the same manner it is proper to judge of the secret principles of masonry by the general tendency of our professions and designs.

Whatever opinion may be formed of masons or their principles, they are certainly entitled to the praise of keeping their secrets inviolable, of knowing when to be silent as well as when to speak and what to conceal as well as what to disclose. That the mysteries of our order have never been disclosed, the very existence of the society for so many ages and in so many countries as a distinct community, must afford to every candid observer the most conclusive evidence. Nor let it be ignorantly said that we reveal nothing because we have nothing to reveal; for if we had not, if all our pretensions were fallacious, that fact would be secret most difficult to be concealed. Besides

is utterly incredible that many of the best and most benevolent men of every age, should have continued members and advocates of a system founded in imposture. If there be no secret principles in masonry, how can Masons, from nations the most distant, and of languages the most opposite, instantly recognise each other by signs, and enjoy free communication? Why has it been found utterly impossible, for impostors to impose upon the fraternity? And how is it possible to account for the fact, to which I challenge contradiction, that no man on earth, who has not been regularly initiated, has ever discovered the essential principles and ceremonies of the order? Indeed nothing can be more absurd than to deny that Free Masons do conceal their essential principles, with inviolable fidelity. An enquiry then naturally arises how it is possible, that, while it is notorious that so many weak men and so many wicked men are ~~Masons~~ Masons, the mysteries should not have been disclosed; that, while in the wandering mendicant, in the intemperate profligate, and even in the wild Maniac, we recognise members of the fraternity, the secrets are still kept inviolate? To this we reply, that this fidelity on the part of unworthy Masons results in some degree from the peculiar solemnities which attended their initiation, and the appalling penalties they would incur; and in a still greater degree from the nature of the masonic mysteries. To the disclosure of some of the most important of them it is requisite that an assembly of Masons should act in concert. To the communication of other parts, a course of instruction is necessary, which cannot be given, except within a Lodge, where the various emblems are kept, and the ceremonies performed. A mathematician

certainly knows many things which are wholly unknown to many other men: and yet he would find it a task, not easily accomplished, to communicate them. In the same manner, the secret principles of masonry are not to be unfolded in a moment; and therefore it is that drunkards or maniacs are incapable of the disclosure. But I readily confess that I have been more astonished, that the common words and signs of the order have not been discovered by the unworthy, than at any other fact which ever came to my certain knowledge. The moral treasures thus concealed are most interesting and valuable to the fraternity. They unite all good Masons by an invisible bond; enable them to act in complete concert, in executing schemes of most extensive benevolence; and preserve them from every species of fraud or imposture. The moral tendency of what we conceal may be best known by what we disclose. The nature of our secret principles must be tested by our masonic practice. The roots of a tree are wholly concealed; yet it is easy to know their qualities by its fruit. A hidden fountain is known by the streams. By a similar criterion we are willing that the nature of our mysteries should be judged. If it then appear that our principles bind us to a life of perfect rectitude, of the purest virtue, of the most active benevolence; if the grand objects of our order be the amelioration of the evils, and an increase and diffusion of the blessings of human life, to hush the storms of passion, to bind the iron hands of oppression and cruelty, to defend innocence and relieve distress; then it must be the decision of every unprejudiced mind, that a system tending to produce such effects must be essentially and fundamentally good.

Can there be a more interesting and delightful subject of contemplation to the philanthropic mind, than is presented by this fraternity. We behold a society, diffused throughout the habitable globe, embracing many millions of members; all professing the same principles—all harmoniously uniting in the same cause—possessing in their Lodges ten thousand schools of morality, where the same virtuous precepts are inculcated in all their different languages—the same rites solemnized—the same emblems used, and the same ceremonies employed. Can benevolence or philosophy contemplate a system so vast and yet so uniform, so powerful and yet so salutary, without emotions of the purest pleasure.

Masons possess an influence the most extensive and irresistible. Their energies can be exerted in complete concert. Their designs could never be detected, for they could be communicated and carried into execution, with the most complete secrecy. And yet this influence has never been exerted except for the diffusion of knowledge, harmony and peace. It has never raised the arm of rebellion, resisted the civil power, or interfered in the rites of religion. Its true votaries have ever been distinguished by a peaceable submission to law and order, by diligence and industry, by benevolence and usefulness.

In regions darkened by ignorance, where Revelation never diffused its glorious light, masonry has produced effects which speak its highest praise. There it has taught the great principles of morality, and reared a conspicuous and attractive standard of virtue. It has cherished the kind affections in savage bosoms, and taught them to glow with benevolent feelings; and chastened the raging passions

of uncivilized man. And in those happier climes, illumined by Zion's Sun, though its light is dimmed by the brighter beams of heavenly truth, yet it gives not less striking proofs of the purity of its nature, and the excellence of its tendency. Far from rising in opposition against revealed truth, or attempting a rivalry, all its efforts are in corroboration of christian doctrine. And it is the highest praise of masonry, that its practical precepts and rules of life are in unison with those of the gospel. So that a Hindoo Mason and an American Christian, who should strictly obey the laws of their respective systems, would, in their *outward conduct*, closely resemble each other. Both would be just, honest and honorable; both affectionate, faithful, and charitable.

But here two objections present themselves, which deserve serious consideration. The first is founded on the fact, that the actual effects of masonry do not correspond with the statements I have been making as to its nature and tendency. With pain and mortification, it must be confessed that objection is just. It is a most lamentable fact that our fraternity is stained with the foul disgrace of admitting and retaining worthless and licentious members. Our enemies may point the finger of scorn at the drunkard and the debauchee, and sneeringly tell us, "*these are your brethren,*" Hinc illae lachrymae. And it is also too painfully true, that the masonic assemblies are sometimes converted from their noble objects, to purposes of intemperate mirth and conviviality. These abuses cover with sackcloth the Genius of Free-Masonry. Over them every good Mason mourns with heart-felt sorrow. Hence have originated all the causes of declen-

sion and disgrace to our order. Hence many good and worthy brethren have withdrawn from the masonic assemblies: and hence the low estimation, in which our system is held, by many of the virtuous and pious. But while we confess and lament these disgraceful facts, we contend, that to infer, from the abuses of our system, and from the unworthiness of some of our members, that our principles are pernicious, is manifestly absurd. The best things are susceptible of the vilest corruptions. If it be correct to judge of a system by the characters of its votaries, what conclusion should we draw relative to christianity itself, when the darkest pages of the history of human depravity are blackened by the crimes of those who have borne the christian name. No! it is not the fault of masonry that its sanctuary has been polluted, and its privileges prostituted, by the admission of the unworthy; and it is not the fault of masonry that the unworthy when admitted, have most sacrilegiously trampled upon our solemn obligations. Masonry is pure from this crimson guilt. The fault is yours, Masons, who are the guardians of our mysteries, to preserve them from all unhallowed approach. It was your duty to guard with vigilance the avenue of your temple. It was your duty to scrutinize every applicant, and promptly to reject the vicious and presumptuous intruder. What has been your conduct? You have admitted the vicious, the profane, the intemperate, the dishonourable. As the fault of these evils is in you, Masons, the remedy is also in your power. Reform these abuses; reject all improper applications; enforce your salutary laws; examine your Lodges; devolve your heavy penalties upon the heads of the unworthy; say to them as the Ro-

man orator said of the disturbers of the City. *secedant improbi, secernant se a bonis, muro denique secernantur a nobis.*

Never can your Lodges flourish, while they are polluted by one Drunkard, one Libertine, or one base dishonorable man. Let this be your conduct, and these disgraceful evils will disappear, and Masonry again arise in all her purity and glory.

The other objection anticipated is still more formidable, and strikes a very fatal blow at the vital principles of our Institution. It rests upon the belief that our system is hostile to revealed Religion, and tends to the diffusion of infidelity. That our Society embraces multitudes who are destitute of piety, and many who are hostile to the gospel is too painfully evident to be denied. As it prevades both pagan lands and the cheerless regions of Islamism, as well as Christendom; it can only require a profession of the great principles of natural Religion previous to admission. The enemies of the gospel, thus admitted into the fraternity, have endeavored to array Masonry in hostility to Revelation. But the attempt is utterly vain. There is nothing in our principles or ceremonies which is at all inconsistent with, or subversive of Christianity. Nothing can be more absurd or impious than to attempt to run a parallel between Masonry and Christianity: and nothing more false than the opinion of those who teach that if a man be a good mason, he needs no other Religion. Masonry rejects all such honors. She does not claim a divine origin: she does not pretend, like the Ephesian Goddess, to have fallen down from Heaven. The system she teaches is confessedly and essentially deficient in the most impor-

tant requisites in a religion for fallen man. It merely unfolds the nature and obligation of our social duties, and most forcibly recommends temperance, integrity and benevolence, as the best guardians of temporal felicity. But all its pretensions are limited to this state of existence. It has no light to pierce the glooms of death. It cannot "lead one step beyond the grave." Demand of the Masonic Oracle whether man be destined to immortality—how a sinful being can be rescued from the divine displeasure, and obtain the divine mercy—how moral guilt may be expiated and moral pollution purified; no response is returned; all is mute as the silence of death. Unable to comprehend the destinies of immortal man, conscious of the total insufficiency of her maxims and principles, Masonry points to the Sun of Righteousness as the only source of spiritual illumination, and proclaims that no doctrines but those of the Gospel, no purification but that of atoning blood, no influence but that of the Holy Spirit, can sanctify human nature and assimilate it to the image of God. Far from rising into opposition against revealed truth, all her efforts are in corroboration of Christian doctrine, and she is even found a disciple at the feet of the Redeemer. Thus completely unfounded is this objection, against genuine Free-Masonry, which asserts that it is hostile to Christianity.

We have thus given some illustrations, as to the nature and design of our venerable institution, and briefly replied to the most common objections which ignorance and prejudice have urged against it. With these views, can any candid mind withhold its admiration of a system so benevolent in its design, so pure in its principles, so perfect in its

organization, so extensive and and so salutary in its influence. Can that association be otherwise than excellent whose constant aim is to lighten the burden of human sorrows, and to unite men by the endearing bonds of kindness and philanthropy. Yet such is the design of Masonry. It expands the heart of benevolence, it opens the hand of charity. It sends the message of joy to the dark abodes of poverty; it surrounds the dying couch of the stranger with sympathetic friends. Thus it soothes the wounds it cannot heal, and alleviates the miseries it cannot terminate.

Masonry tends to soften and refine the human character. Though it cannot extinguish the unholy passions of men, yet its effect is to repress and chasten them. It abates their violence and takes away their ferocity. It sheds upon the human character

“A bright, humane and amiable grace,
“And brightens all the ornaments of man.”

Amid the terrors and calamities of war, Masonry appears in its gentlest, most amiable form; repressing the vindictive passions, and preventing as far as possible the woes and crimes of national hostility. It cheers the gloom of war by the mild rays of humanity; converts the stern, inexorable, savage chieftain, into the humane, honorable soldier; teaches the victor to spare the vanquished, and to encircle, in the arms of kindness, the wounded and the captive foe. By the fate of war the mason becomes a prisoner; he is immediately surrounded by brethren.* He falls

* This was signally verified during the late war. A number of American Masons were captured and carried into Jamaica. There were American vessels coming as Cartels to the United

into the hands of the remorseless Corsair, who loads him with irons and consigns him to the dungeon: let the mystic sign meet the masonic eye among the victors, instantly the fetters fall, the prison opens, and liberty and kindness cheer his sinking heart.

With these views, masonic brethren, are you not proud of the Fraternity to which you belong? Do you not feel yourselves ennobled by the principles and tendencies and effects of your Institution? Does it not give new motives to virtue and adorn the path of usefulness and benevolence with new attractions? Does it not tend to enlarge the mind, refine the sentiments, break down the barriers of selfishness and interest, and unite all men of all countries and conditions in one indissoluble union? Then support and cherish it with a constant affection. Unappalled by the arguments and denunciations of prejudice, unaffected by the sneers of ignorance, steadily pursue the dignified and holy path marked out by the laws and maxims of your Order. Cover with confusion the calumniators of Masonry, by the universal display of that moral beauty and purity and benevolence, which are at once its essence and its glory.

States, by which these distressed men hoped to return home; but being destitute of money, they were inhumanly neglected by their own countrymen. The Masons of Jamaica came forward and paid all their expenses and sent them joyful to their native land.