

FIRST  
INTERNATIONAL CONVENTION

OF

Reformed Presbyterian Churches.

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barriers to prevent a subject of the Pope from taking his seat upon it. It is time that this land, which bled and burned under the tyrant, and which prospered when it was and ever since it was delivered from him, should open its eyes to the dangers that now threaten us.

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Rev. Dr. Stevenson, Philadelphia, gave an address on

SECRET SOCIETIES.

The limits of this address will not permit the discussion of many most serious objections to the Secret Orders. Two objections only shall I present with any fulness.

The first relates to the very nature and principle of these organizations.

There are serious objections against these orders, based on characteristics which they voluntarily assume, but which are by no means inseparable from them, and of which they might divest themselves. The veil of secrecy is objectionable in the light of His example, who said: "In secret have I said nothing," and His commendation of those who "come to the light that their deeds may be made manifest that they are wrought in God." But a fraternal order might be formed which would not be secret, but as open to the light as the Church of Christ. We object to the oaths administered within these orders as extra-judicial and unwarrantable, and a profanation, therefore, of the holy ordinance. But the oath is not an indispensable feature, and our first objection is one which would remain even if no oath were required at the door of the lodge. We object to the charity of which they boast as a spurious and delusive charity, because they confine their membership to those classes who are least likely ever to have need of charity, and because of the dues paid in by their members, less than half being returned in the form of benefits, the rest being consumed in the expenses of the Order. No mutual insurance or beneficial society, with such a showing,

would be credited with good management even, to say nothing of charity. But these organizations might be made truly charitable without weakening the force of the radical and fundamental objection which lies against them. That objection is that *these orders are an attempt to form new and artificial social relations among men, and to make these relations the basis of moral obligations between man and man. They are, therefore, a presumptuous invasion of the prerogatives of the Creator.*

That we may better understand the nature and force of this objection, let us recall the fact that God, in creating man, determined man's relations and the duties growing out of these relations. All man's duties arise from and depend upon the relations which man sustains to God, or to his fellow-men. Our duties to God grow out of our relations to God, and our duties to man grow out of our relations to man. There are no relations which do not involve duties, and no duties which do not arise from the relations of man to man or of man to God. The attempt, therefore, to establish new and artificial relations among men—not organizations of specific and limited ends, but brotherhoods—is also an attempt to prescribe and to bind upon the consciences of men certain moral duties growing out of these relations. Love, sympathy, help: these are moral duties which, by the law of God, we owe to all our fellow-men in the various relations in which He has placed us. We owe them to our brothers and sisters, born of the same parents, and forming with ourselves one family. We owe them to our fellow-Christians, members with us of the body of Christ, to our fellow-countrymen or fellow-citizens, members of the same nation, and, in the widest sense, to all our fellow-men, members of the one family of mankind. All these are divinely established relations, and the duties we owe in these relations are part of our duty to God. But six brothers out of a family of ten have no right to organize an artificial brotherhood and to bind themselves

to be more to each other and to do more for each other than for the other four. Neither have a portion of the members of one Church, nor a part of the citizens of one nation, the right to organize into a narrower circle of brotherhood, for the practice towards each other in this narrower circle, of the virtues which they owe equally to all. To do so is not to promote but to restrict the exercise of these virtues, not to widen but to narrow the circle of their operation. When the Free Mason engages to help, favour, and assist a brother Mason in his labours, what of his brother-man, or his brother-Christian, to whom he owes equal obligations? What of other men's wives and daughters, when the Free Mason engages: "I will not violate the chastity of a Mason's wife or daughter, I knowing them to be such"? Could any more vivid illustration be afforded of the fact that Free Masonry, and all such artificial brotherhoods, cut across the lines of social relationship which God has drawn around men, and disturb the due and generous discharge of the social duties which men owe to their fellows? Their very purpose is to withdraw from the many, for the greater advantage of the few, the help and favour which are due from each to all. If all the ten brothers were to join the artificial brotherhood formed in the family, the motive for its existence would disappear. If all citizens in the State were to unite with any artificial brotherhood established within the State, the motive for its formation would cease to operate, and it would be replaced by some other form of organized selfishness.

The other objection which I present is closely related to this. It relates to Free Masonry and other fraternal brotherhoods as religious institutions. Every intelligent creature of God is under obligations to worship Him. The duty of worship rests upon the relation of the creature to the Creator. "O come, let us worship and bow down; let us kneel before the Lord our Maker." This applies to all Divine institutions—the family, the Church, and the State; and is the ultimate

ground, the social foundation, for family worship, for the worship of the sanctuary, and for national religion. By the same evidence, social organizations which God has not created are not required, and have no right to worship Him. To all such He says : "Who hath required this at your hand, to tread My courts?" What right have they to build temples, to establish a priesthood, to frame a ritual or order of worship, or to consecrate material emblems as signs of spiritual realities? Are lodges of artificial brotherhoods called in God's Word to worship Him? Are they promised the help of that Holy Spirit, without whose aid no true worship can be rendered, or an interest in that sacrifice, without which there can be no acceptance? We often argue against the worship of the lodge because it is Christless; but the acknowledgment of Christ would not make it legitimate worship. A spurious, artificial brotherhood has no right to acknowledge Christ or to pray to the Father. An adulterous or incestuous union of the sexes which God has not authorized and which is not a family has no right to set up a family altar; and to make the worship of that altar Christian would not mend its case. The worship is inherently and essentially a false worship because offered by a social body which God has not called to His service, and which has no more right to set up the worship of God than it has to lay moral obligations on the consciences of men.

It is not surprising that in Christian lands they have modelled this false worship closely after the forms and ordinances of the true, divinely-appointed worship of God. They have done this, it is true, in a most rude and ignorant way, without discrimination between Old Testament and New Testament institutions. The Oddfellows have introduced into their system of emblems "the lamb," saying : "It forcibly reminds us of the paschal lamb under the law, and of the Lamb of God who taketh away the sin of the world." In addition to this we have the rod of Moses, the brazen serpent, Aaron's



budded rod, the tables of the law, the altar of incense, the ark of the covenant, the breast-plate of the high priest, and the cherubim overshadowing the mercy seat. What Christian soul, with any understanding of the solemn and glorious significance of these holy emblems, does not shrink with horror or burn with indignation at the actual construction of such articles of furniture for a lodge of false worship, and their actual prostitution to such blasphemous purposes?

It is in perfect keeping with all that we have already seen that the religion of these orders is actually, in most cases, a Christless religion. This is true of the ritual of the Oddfellows and of all the regular degrees of Blue Lodge Masonry. Their forms of prayer, as they are published in their manuals, and as is known by all men well informed on the subject, omit systematically and carefully all mention of the name and mediation of Jesus Christ. And how can a Christian man join with those who deny his Lord in seeking access to God otherwise than through the one Mediator between God and man? And it is the crowning aspect of this argument against the religion taught and practiced in these institutions that it claims to be a saving religion—a religion to meet the great wants of the human soul in life and in death. The tools of a Mason are given to an entered apprentice in Masonry, that with them he may fashion himself into the model of a perfect man, and obedience to Masonic light and obligations is set forth in the ritual as the means of attaining the perfection of man's nature and eternal blessedness. To the same effect is the Masonic burial service, which dismisses the departed, as the reward of his fidelity to the obligations of the lodge, to the Grand Lodge above and the fellowship of the Supreme Architect of the Universe. Unless these words mean that Free Masonry offers itself as a religion which can save the soul, the language has no meaning. If such teaching be true, or such exercises be allowable, Jesus Christ died in vain.