

The Duty of the Master
In the
Government of a Masonic Lodge

A LECTURE
Delivered at the Lodge of Instruction

Held Under the Warrant of

The Victoria Lodge, No. IV.,
Dublin

On Monday, the 5th of January, 1857.

By the Right Worshipful
The Deputy Grand Master of Ireland
John Fitzhenry Townsend, LL.D.

Dublin:

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To
William Allen, Esq.

Secretary of the Victoria Lodge, No. IV.

My Dear Brother Allen,

In compliance with the request of our Brethren, I send you the manuscript of my Address to them. Were I to consult only my own wishes – I may say my own vanity – I would rather suppress it, for it was not intended for publicity beyond the limits in which my delegated authority is exercised. I had hoped, indeed, that it might be useful within the circle of our metropolitan Lodges; my Brethren think it may be so throughout a wider extent, and it is not for me to question their judgment. I think their kindness, often experienced and ever gratefully remembered by me, has induced them to overrate this production; but I am confident that neither they nor I need feel ashamed of the sentiments it expresses. It is to be hoped that whoever thinks it worth attention will remember, that I am neither the champion nor the apologist of our Society; and that my opinion of its merits is the less liable to the imputation of partiality that I do not attempt to conceal or palliate the defects it is our common object to correct.

Believe me, my dear Allen,

Most sincerely yours,

J.F. TOWNSEND.

16th January, 1857.

The Duty of the Master

In

The Government of a Masonic Lodge

BRETHREN – As this is the period of the year when the newly-elected officers of our several Lodges enter upon their official duties, this present meeting of your Lodge of Instruction appears to me to present a fitting occasion to offer to my less experienced brethren some observations on the nature of the duties of a Master in the government of his Lodge; and as the consideration of his duties will necessarily involve that of his rights, which are, correlatively, the duties of the Craft, I think the subject will be found interesting to us all. I do not intend to comment upon the charges which are contained in the book of Constitutions, and which are read to every Master at his installation: they are plain and precise, and require no elucidation: I mean rather to direct attention to those parts of the Master's duty with which the Constitutions presume that he is acquainted.

I have been induced to make this attempt at reviving the long-disused practice of giving Masonic Lectures, because I consider that a lecture is the easiest way by which those who desire information, but have not leisure for research, can obtain the benefit of the researches of others. An ordinary Lodge meeting would not be a fitting place for the experiment; Masonic disquisitions would be inexpressible tedious to those who find the chief charms of Masonry in its sociality; but as we are all met here for the express purpose of receiving and imparting information, I am induced to address you; though I do so rather with the hope of offering an example to others more competent, than with that of saying anything peculiarly novel, entertaining, or instructive. Your fraternal kindness will, I am sure, make due allowance for the imperfection of attempts made in the short intervals of professional duties, which afford little time for the study necessary to collect materials for an address, or for the more difficult task of condensing and arranging them when collected.

It has often occurred to me that the nature of the engagements, both expressed and implied, which are entered into by the Master of a Lodge, is, in general, but indifferently understood or appreciated. It is reasonable to presume that any man of ordinary understanding who has gone through the subordinate offices will, by the time he reaches the chair, be able to perform his part in the ceremonies of the Lodge with accuracy and propriety. If not, he must be a cipher – "if he can *do* nothing, but *say* nothing, he shall *be* nothing here." But we have a right to expect more than the getting by rote a few phrases. The Master should possess, and should be able to impart, some knowledge of the meaning and origin of our ceremonies, which, unless explained, may seem frivolous or tedious formalities. They are, it is true, calculated to awaken rational curiosity, and are fraught with meaning: Masonry still bearing the impress of its Asiatic origin, teaches its moral precepts by symbolical actions, But explanation is needed to convey that meaning,

and "The Master" is not only supposed to be a master of *men*, but a master of *work*. The vulgar and illiterate may stand amazed at what they cannot comprehend – but Masonry is not confined to the vulgar and illiterate; men of high intellectual acquirements are daily joining our Society, anxious not merely to share in its benefits, but to be instructed in the boasted philosophy which is "veiled in its allegories, and illustrated by its symbols. " Why, then, should we tolerate that ignorance which is the result of mere apathy?

Surely it is worth while to know somewhat of a subject which engages the attention of so many estimable and intelligent persons. And the means of that knowledge are in our reach. Masonry has now broken through the restraint, which the timid jealousy of our predecessors had imposed upon it. We have shared in the irresistible progress of the age, and we now have Masonic treatises, magazines and journals, all devoted to the explanation of Masonic history, antiquities, and principles. We attract more attention than heretofore, as appears not only by the multiplicity of our authorized publications, but by the host of spurious and despicable rituals and pretended exposures, which feed the credulity of the vulgar. Here, in this city, our friends of the Victoria Lodge have entitled themselves to our lasting gratitude by reviving this Lodge of Instruction, where all who please may become practically conversant with Masonic rites and ceremonies. And, perhaps, we may look forward, at no distant period, to a regular system of lectures on different subjects connected with Masonry, by which the influences of literature, science, and taste, may be brought to aid in the diffusion of rational and intellectual improvement amongst us, and that in the easiest and pleasantest manner possible. Such, at least, is my hope. My ambition is to point out thus to others the way in which I do not pretend to follow.

To become Master of is Lodge is the legitimate object of every young brother who takes any interest in our Society. The very questionable policy of our present regulations seems to be, to open to each, in succession, the way to the Mastership – almost, if not altogether, as a matter of course. Now, my younger brethren may rest assured, that although, in deference to an usage which it is, perhaps, too late to abolish, we may place a careless or ignorant Mason in the chair, invest him with the badge of authority, and address him with the external forms of respect, we cannot command for him the deference and consideration which will be sure to follow the enlightened and expert. He will be like the figure-head of a ship – placed foremost and gaudily decorated, but, after all, it is a mere effigy, not contributing in the least to the management of the vessel. In small as in great things, *knowledge* is power – *intellectual superiority* is real re-eminence.

An ignorant Master may, however, find some charitable friend to prompt him – some expert craftsman to explain for him what he could not explain for himself. All that is but little creditable to the Master's ability, and cannot, one would think, be gratifying to his good opinion of himself, yet it is not necessarily injurious to the Order. But what shall we say of those who regard the office of Master of a Lodge as no more and no less than the presidency of a convivial club, which is to have no other effect upon our conduct in life, than as it may enable us to pass a pleasant evening occasionally in sociable company? This is not so uncommon a case. The prevalence of this notion of Masonry (especially among the higher classes of society) has paralyzed its powers of doing good,

consigned the Institution to ridicule and contempt in the eyes of many whose good opinion we would justly prize – and made it, at best, the faint and empty image of what it ought to be, and might be, if well understood and thoroughly practiced. We are often taunted with making too much of Masonry, but the truth is, we greatly underrate both its objects and capabilities, and are, therefore, too ready to admit men amongst us whom we can hardly expect to bestow a single thought upon Masonry. The avowed enemies of Masonry have striven hard – but in vain – to injure it. Our worst foes have been those of our own household, who have tarnished the brightness of Masonic purity, and lowered the standard of Masonic excellence. Let us hope, however, that juster notions are beginning to prevail; as they do, the office of Master will cease to be a mere name, and will resume its ancient utility and importance.

The Master's rights do not take effect until his installation. Once installed, his authority becomes absolute in his own Lodge, although due checks are provided by the constitution of the Order against the arbitrary exercise of it. It is presumed that his brethren have elected one in whom they may confide, and that his conduct will be neither capricious nor tyrannical; therefore, by the immemorial Masonic law, obedience is his right, and he must be obeyed accordingly. By electing him his brethren have given him, so far as they are concerned, an indefeasible right to preside in the Lodge during his term of office; therefore, they cannot remove, suspend, or censure him, nor vote him from the chair, nor prevent him from taking it. They cannot compel him to open, close, or adjourn the Lodge. He does all this at his own pleasure, as our ancient forms at opening and closing sufficiently prove; and here let me remark how practically useful are those ancient forms which we frequently hear hurried over as too familiar. Every Master should insist on their being strictly observed and accurately repeated in his Lodge, without abridgement or alteration. They remind each officer of his duty, and all of the due subordination which so peculiarly distinguishes the Society.

There are certain matters which the Master must decide on his own responsibility, and on which he should not put any question to the Lodge – namely, all points of order, ceremonial, Masonic law, and discipline, in which I include the arrangement of Lodge business. These he must determine according to his own conscientious notions of what is right, no matter how urgently he may be pressed to the contrary: if he does not, he is unworthy of his place. And his decision on such questions should be at once cheerfully submitted to. There must be no altercation, protesting, disputing, or remonstrating, between the Master and the Craftsmen. Even the ordinary marks of approbation or disapprobation, are unmasonic and irregular. As in a court of justice the opinion of the judge, though not always assented to as correct, is, invariably, treated with deference, and presumed to be right until it has been set right by superior authority, so it should be with the decisions of a Master in his Lodge. And it is for the common benefit of us all to uphold this authority unimpaired; because the temporary inconvenience which may result from an error of the Master's judgment, or even from an occasional abuse of his powers, is of far less moment than the preservation of the harmony and order, which it is one of our chief ends to attain – which our lectures illustrate when they point to the glories of the firmament; to the amazing structure of sun and planet, system and cluster, sweeping

along in deep and solemn silence, without speech or language; where neither obstacle, nor cessation, nor failure of design occurs in all the astounding plan.

But the Master is always amenable to the Grand Lodge, and any well-grounded complaint against him may be preferred there. Then, indeed, it becomes his duty to submit, with ready and cordial acquiescence, to the ultimate decision of the supreme Masonic power.

Some inexperienced brethren may think that no difficulty can ever arise in the decision of any Masonic questions, because they have never seen any such difficulty in our Society. It is true that mutual forbearance is so much inculcated, and good feeling so widely prevails amongst us, that in the hands of a judicious ruler, all goes on with easy and undeviating regularity. But I can assure them, that in a well-regulated Lodge there is a very ample scope for the exercise of intellect; and that the Master will soon find that he requires even more than a knowledge of Masonic laws and usages, to acquit himself creditably of his responsibility. He should know his own limits, so as not to encroach upon the rights of his brethren, of which, I candidly warn every young Master, he will find us not a little jealous. If he falls short of his own bounds, or oversteps them, he will find clear heads and keen tongues to remind him – respectfully, but unmistakably – of the fact. The Lodge will soon feel what sort of hand holds the helm; and, as they are bound to acquiesce in his opinion, as their Master, he must show equal deference to theirs, when the question is one to be settled by their votes. He may speak, and he may vote in the deliberations of the Lodge, but he must not let his conduct become liable to the imputation of partiality; for he is still entrusted with the duty of taking the result of a division, or of a ballot, and though a division or ballot often takes place on questions of no great moment, yet, we know it sometimes happens that the credit and character of individuals are vitally affected by the determination of a Lodge. Also the peace and harmony, as well as the dignity of his Lodge, are, to a great extent, in his keeping. Words may be spoken in the heat of debate which may provoke angry recrimination, even in the very temple of Concord and Peace, and create jealousy and temporary disunion even between close and sincere friends. The Master should be ever ready to heal dissension, and prevent the spread of disunion; and (which is no less important) he must be ever on the watch to check debate before it becomes strife, and to preserve, even in argument, the tone of deliberation; which he can always do, provided he never for a moment loses sight of his own position, or forgets the calmness of temper essential to command. It may be tried, occasionally; for there will be sometimes silly, and meddling, and impracticable people in a Lodge as in every other society: men like to display themselves, even in a narrow sphere, and to take a lead, even in the wrong direction; still, even petulance and folly in a member of the Lodge will not justify arbitrary conduct or insolence in the Master, whose real power consists only in the support of his brethren – support which he may be sure of obtaining while his motives are honourable, and his demeanour dignified and proper. Firmness and decision are perfectly compatible with good temper and courtesy. Most of us have seen an instance of this in the conduct of our Grand Master, whose amiable temper and conciliating manners place the most diffident at their ease, while his integrity of purpose commands the respect of us all; consequently, he is no less beloved than honoured amongst us, and Irish Masons hail with honest pride and complacency the name of the duke of Leinster.

One of the ancient privileges of the Masters of the Lodges, which in modern times has nearly been transferred from them to the Secretaries, is the right to summon "meetings of emergency." I think we have fallen too much into the habit of holding these special meetings for trifling occasions, or merely to suit the convenience of an individual. Those who regularly attend them are usually the best and most conscientious of the Order: the "dining Masons" are seldom found at a Lodge of Emergency. It is unfair to call men from their occupations and pursuits without good reason; and the goodness of the reason must be left to the Master's decision; certainly the Secretary has no right to convoke the Lodge on emergency at his own pleasure. But as the Master, as well as all the members, is bound by the By-laws, which always provide for the regular meetings, the Secretary need not obtain his permission to issue summonses for them. And I think that if the Master were to die, or be expelled, the Wardens might convoke the Lodge, since there would then be no Master, and they, as well as he, are intrusted with the government of it.

This three-fold system of government, which probably is coeval with the Order itself, is one of the proofs relied on by some learned men as establishing its great antiquity. I suppose it is known to all here that among the ancient nations of the world there were certain "Mysteries," that is, rites and doctrines connected with their religious worship, which, being kept secret from the mass of the community, and communicated only to a chosen few, were regarded with great veneration. Any profanation or disclosure of them was visited with universal abhorrence and with the severest punishment. Dr. Oliver, the great expositor of Masonic antiquities, informs us of the singular fact that, in the mysteries of Persia, India, and Greece, as likewise in those of the Celtic tribes of Britain, there were *three* principal officers, one of whom was of supreme authority, and personated the rising sun. The rites were generally of a funereal character, in which the violent death and subsequent restoration to life of some celebrated personage were represented; but the ceremonies were as various as the deities in whose honor they were celebrated. The mysteries were probably intended, originally, to teach the great doctrine of the unity of God, [Bishop Warburton's "Divine Legation," &c., book ii. Chap.4; Dr Oliver's "Star in the East," &c.] and to commemorate some traditions handed down from the patriarchal times [Leland's "Advantage and Necessity of the Christian Revelation," vol. I. Part i. Ch. 9; Rees's Cyclop., art. "Mystery"] – traditions frequently connected with the deluge and the original peopling of the earth; [See Dr. Oliver's curious work on "Initiation"] but whatever was their original intention, they became overlaid with gross and sensual idolatry, and rather fostered than overthrew the vulgar paganism they were, it is thought, intended to expose. The early Christian writers speak of the mysteries in terms of great abhorrence. These impurities were at length banished from the Roman world by the glorious light of the Gospel of Christ. They gradually fell into disrepute, and were prostituted for money to the lowest rabble. They were prohibited, with all the other rites of pagan superstition, by an edict – his last – of the Emperor Theodosius, A.D. 390, [Gibbon's "Decline and Fall," chap. XXviii.; Lawrie's "History of Masonry," 23.] which was enforced by his successors with great severity, and inflicted, says Gibbon, a deadly wound on all the superstitions of the pagans, although it was some time before they were totally suppressed.

The traces of resemblance between the mysteries and modern Freemasonry could not fail to attract the attention of Masons. Dr. Oliver, and those who adopt his views, contend that a secret system of Masonry – that is, of the knowledge and worship of the true God, united to the practice of strict and pure morality – was known in the earliest ages of the world, and was the original institution form which all the mysteries were derived, [Oliver’s “Signs and Symbols,” lect. i] diversified only by local and political circumstances. But a scarcely less eminent Masonic authority, Dr. Albert G. Mackay, of Charleston, U.S., whose “Lexicon of Freemasonry” is so valuable an acquisition to Masonic literature, while he admits that the instruction conveyed in the mysteries was an impure emanation from patriarchal theology, thinks that the connexion between them and Freemasonry, as we now understand the term, commenced at the building of the Temple. The Dionysiac artificers, an association connected with the Dionysian mysteries, which prevailed in Greece, Asia Minor, and Syria, had devoted themselves to the architectural pursuits, and were established as a community of temple-builders about one thousand years before the Christian era. They had their peculiar signs and tokens – used Masonic implements in their ceremonies, and were bound to relieve each others wants. [Lawrie’s Hist., p.29, where many authorities are quoted] Dr. Mackay thinks that Hiram the builder, who was sent by the king of Tyre to Solomon to aid in the works of the temple, was initiated by them, and that Hiram imparted the secrets and privileges of the society to the Jews, who, after the completion of the Temple, perpetuated the associations formed by him through the sects of the Kassideans and Essenes.

Without pretending to decide this question, I cannot help thinking, with reference to Dr. Oliver’s theory, that all the terms and legends of Masonry point plainly to a *Jewish* origin, and have reference to the favorite object of that people – the construction or the restoration of the Temple. With the most unfeigned respect for any opinion of Dr. Mackay, it seems difficult to suppose that a system so pure as Masonry should come of a stock so vile as the abominable and polluted Syrian mysteries. Moreover, the language of modern Masonry is manifestly derived (as are its oldest constitutions) from some association of actual, operative builders, which, so far as I can discover, the Essenes do not clearly appear to have been, though Scaliger contends, as Dr. Mackay and Lawrie tell us, that they sprung from the Kassideans, a pious fraternity, who devoted themselves particularly to repairing the Temple. The Essenes were a sect which for many centuries existed in Judea. The account given us of them by Josephus and Philo of Alexandria – both Jewish writers – presents many features resembling those of our own Society. They did not admit women to their community. They did not concern themselves with religious disputes or political factions. They consisted of two classes, one of which devoted themselves to a life of contemplation, the other to some handicraft, but they were all, theoretically, on a level, and had their goods in common. They were distinguished by a peculiar white garment given them on their adoption into the society, to which none were admitted but after taking two probationary steps, and being solemnly sworn not to reveal the secrets of the sect. Taylor, the editor of Calmet’s Dictionary of the Bible, gives many reasons for thinking that John the Baptist belonged to the Essenian sect; and it is supposed that the early Christians borrowed from them many of their opinions and customs. It is by no means improbable that the doctrinal part of Masonry was derived from them in the early ages of Christianity; but still I think it a matter of mere conjecture,

although Masonic writers of great eminence treat it as indubitable. Practically, the enquiry may not be worth pursuing; but it is certainly highly interesting to trace thus, in our modern forms and legends, relics of ancient associations of similar nature to our own, as the geologist finds in the rock the imbedded fragments, tokens there preserved of prior formations and existences, long since and for ever passed away. Thus, after the lapse of ages, some remains of primeval rites are found in our ceremonies: still, as of old, the Master sits enthroned in the East, typifying the Light of Truth irradiating the darkness of ignorance and superstition: -- still his commands are formally re-echoed by his Wardens, and still his duties and privileges are proclaimed at each meeting of our assemblies, in the hearing of all his brethren.

As it is not only the Master's privilege, but also his duty to rule the Lodge, none are permitted to enter it as visitors but by his permission, since he is responsible for the conduct of the assembly. At the very last communication of the United Grand Lodge of England, this subject was discussed, and the resolution unanimously passed, was -- "That it is the opinion of this Grand Lodge, that it is in the power of the W.M. and Wardens of any private Lodge, to refuse admission to any visitor of known bad character." [Freemason's Magazine, January, 1857.] But, irrespectively of character, whoever claims to be present at a Masonic meeting must, if a Mason, be perfectly well aware that he is bound to satisfy the Master and brethren as to his qualifications. The investigation into them cannot be too strict, and it should never be entrusted by to a sagacious as well as competent examiner. The Master has a right to demand *all* the evidences of a visitor's right to admission -- the production of his certificate -- the proof of his being what he asserts himself to be, and any other test that he can devise. I can speak confidently on this head, as the decision of our own Grand Lodge has recently settled the question, that the admission of a visitor is not a matter of right. It is, of course, disagreeable to reject any one professing to be a brother; but it is better (as Dr. Mackay well observes) that many true Masons should go away disappointed from our doors, than that one unauthorized person should gain admittance there.

It is hardly necessary, I hope, to remind any one, however inexperienced, that the Master is as much Master during the entertainments of the Lodge as at any other time; and is bound accordingly to check any irregularity, and to prevent any abuse. For this reason, I think, it is advisable that our entertainments should take place "in Lodge," as it is called; for the Master can thus exercise a salutary restraint over the meeting; and the closing of the Lodge (which should always take place at an early hour) is a signal for the members to retire. One of the charges, to the observance of which each Master solemnly pledges himself at his installation, is to guard against all manner of intemperance and excess. Now, of all the charges brought against Masonry by its opponents, none is more frequently made than that of its leading to intemperance. That charge has been too often made justly, I do not pretend to deny: I am not here to flatter, but to teach; I do not attempt to excuse what it would be my grave duty to reprove and reform. Yet, in justice to my brethren, I must say that I have no reason to think our Lodges in this city are degraded by that vice. I certainly have not seen, during my experience as Deputy Grand Master, any instance of such misconduct. Yet I know that some cases have occurred

where individuals have brought discredit on the Masonic order, by indulging, at our social meetings, propensities which they certainly never acquired from our precepts, nor from the example of those we most look up to and respect. The world will not, however, draw these nice exculpatory distinctions: it will judge of us, not by the conduct of the many, who retire from the Lodge festival, as from a private party, early, and after temperate and harmless enjoyment, but by the conduct of that of the few, who, in defiance of our principles and in spite of our example, will remain at table after the Lodge has closed, and the meeting lost its Masonic character. This is an evil, and one which we cannot always prevent. We cannot turn men's hearts – we may advise, and we may act upon our own principles – but advice is not like medicine, which will produce an effect whether taken voluntarily or forced down a man's throat. We may point to the Sacred Law, that Great Light which should be the guide of the Mason's path in life, and remind our brethren of its precepts; but, surely, we cannot expect that Masonry will effect what Christianity has not been able yet to accomplish. People say – why do you suffer such person to disgrace your Society? – why do you not rather expel them? Simply because we cannot set up an inquisition to punish men because they want common sense or common prudence, or because we cannot get them to adopt our views of propriety. If Masons will insist on introducing amongst us persons who see no good in our Society but its occasions for eating and drinking, and if they go on thus to make our Lodges, instead of schools of temperance and prudence, mere congregations of sots, and if they thus pervert Masonry to an evil and mischievous end – of course every man of sense will laugh in their faces at their cant of fraternity, benevolence, and morality, and will answer their vindications with the unassailable facts of neglected families, ruined business, shattered health, and impaired reputation. If we could convict any Lodge of being such a hotbed of vice and dissipation, our first duty would be to withdraw its warrant and renounce all intercourse with its members; and all who are conversant with the business of the Grand Lodge must likewise know, that any well-founded complaint of individual misconduct is invariably punished with the only penalties in our power to inflict – suspension from the benefits of the Society, or even total expulsion from it. But though the world often unjustly imputes to Masonry the faults of individual Masons, for that very reason let each Master – each Mason be vigilant. Let each sweep before his own door – the street will soon be clean. Excess, in even allowable things, is transgression. “Moderation,” says the excellent Bishop Hall, “is the silken thread running through the pearl-chain of all virtues.”

We have seen that the brethren must, in all lawful things, obey their Master. He, on his part, should have no object but the advantage, welfare, and comfort of his brethren. We may teach him our forms, explain to him their meaning, stimulate his ambition to discharge his duties creditably, but, after all, we must leave him to look within his own heart for instruction, and to be guided by his own good sense and good feeling in his general conduct. But although particular rules will not avail to supply the want of good sense and discretion, yet there are two general maxims of which the Master should never lose sight – first, to be *serious* – secondly, to be *strict* in observing what are called the landmarks of the Craft.

I am happy to be able to bear testimony that in this metropolis our ceremonies are uniformly conducted with propriety, and that the example spread throughout the land by our P.G. Masters and P.G. Lodges has put an end to the levity and rudeness too often tolerated in some country places. Every man who intrusts himself into our hands does so confiding in our honour and our professions, and this alone should render him sacred from all disrespect and insult. And, moreover, we should never forget with what solemnity our Lodges are opened: even in the name at which the adoring Hosts of Heaven bow down in reverential we. There is no real distinction between open profanity and the mockery of first making a solemn appeal and prayer to our Creator, and then degenerating into levity, of (what is more usual, though scarcely less reprehensible) indifference and inattention. This we must reform altogether.

Next, we must be careful to preserve uniformity, and to hand down unaltered to our successors what we have ourselves received. Masonry is universal – it knows no limit of country, or language, or time; therefore, its essential points must be strictly observed; if not, it will lose its universality, and, to the same extent, its utility. Ceremonies must indeed change from time to time, and from country to country, but the essentials of the Order, its universal language and reciprocal obligations, must be carefully preserved from all addition or diminution: we must adhere to the form in which we have learned them: we have no right to change even their antiquated phraseology to please the fastidiousness of modern taste. It was well said, “you may polish an old coin, to make it more legible; but if you go n polishing it will soon be a coin no longer.” And the Master should take care that every newly-admitted or newly-raised brother shall be fully instructed in all the essentials of the degree he has received – that he shall know to whom and to what he is bound. He has come to seek the light of knowledge, and it is his right to receive it, full and pure, from him whose duty it is to impart it – the Master in the chair.

I also strongly recommend to each Master to give or have given, an explanation of the Masonic rites. I have seen some leave our assemblies with feelings not merely of disappointment, but of some degree of indignation, as if we had been merely jesting at their expense, at their first coming amongst us. Such feelings would naturally lead a man of sense and spirit to despise the ceremony and the Institution which sanctioned it; but I never saw anything of the sort when the ceremony was explained as it ought to be, beginning with the first lesson which teaches the aspirant to leave without the Masonic temple the tokens of worldly wealth and distinction, and the soil and stain of earthly feelings, and to seek, humbly as a brother of the earth, subject to like wants and weaknesses with ourselves, admission to a society in which personal merit alone confers a claim to distinction. At each step of the Masonic rite some grave moral truth is to be impressed – some interesting historical association elucidated: the explanation will at once enlighten those who hear and him who gives it. But, it may be said few have capacity for lecturing on these matters. It is not so; a man who understands his subject will never want words to explain it; no set form is requisite nor even recommendable for that purpose.

But it is not by learned researches – by groping in the darkness of the past – that we can best serve the Order, and do good in our own generation. It matters little to us whether the rites of Masonry can be traced to patriarchal times; to the exploded mysteries of heathenism; to the Jewish temple-builders; or, as some suppose, merely to the artificers whose labours covered Europe during the middle ages with such wonderful monuments of skill and perseverance. It is with the *morality* of the Order, not with its history – it is with the *utility* of the Order, not with its literary curiosities, what we have essentially to do. It professes to be founded on the two simple and sublime precepts, “Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thine heart, and thy neighbour as thyself.” Masonry may be older or newer – we know not, and shall probably never know to a certainty when it originated, or how: but these were the laws prescribed by the All-wise and All-merciful for the rational creatures of His hand, before the foundations of the world were laid. These were announced as the THE TWO GREAT COMMANDMENTS by the divine lips of Him who spake as never man spake. Throughout all the globe we inhabit – throughout the vast immensity of creation, obedience to these commands, universal as the presence of Him who has ordained them, constitutes the moral happiness of rational beings. Mankind, evil and consequently miserable as they are, have not so utterly lost the traces of the image in which they were made, as to be altogether insensible to the glory and beauty of piety and benevolence, thought they daily offend against both. Living Faith and Active Benevolence are the real foundations of our Institution. Keep that fact in the view of your brethren, all you who preside over them; your words and style may be rude and unpolished, but if your heart be in them they will awaken admiration and sympathy. The most elegant homily against those vices for which the preacher is distinguished falls dead upon the ear: the most graceful eulogy of virtue is but disgusting in the lips of a man whose conduct gives the lie direct to his words. But he who teaches good by example will ever be listened to with respect.

It is generally thought, by those who do not object to Masonry as a positive evil, that it is at best a harmless charitable association; but, in truth, the real spirit of Masonry is not confined to the relief of a brother's physical wants, or the preservation of a brother's life in peril – of which we have all heard many interesting instances. Such occasions seldom occur; but every day affords opportunity to promote our brother's temporal good by lawful and honourable means; to help him, by enabling him to help himself; to extend our sympathy to his troubles, and or charity to his failings and imperfections; to make peace between friends; to warn one of his danger, another of his errors – to be patient, tolerant, and forgiving towards all. And it is because Masonry brings into exercise qualities, of which all acknowledge the excellence, that it has its vitality, universality, and importance – I say, *importance*, nor is it my assertion only, or that of its friends, that it is important. In a recent number of a Dublin journal, supposed to have much influence with those whose opinions it assumes to represent, an article appeared in which the writer, avowing his uncompromising hostility to our Order, asks as follows:-- “Who has sanctioned this combination, that is should be thus permitted to overspread the world, and act as it listeth, at all seasons and in all places? It may exist in the government, or the seat of justice, in the jury-box, in the legislature, in the army, in the navy, and even among our dependents; it may plot or cabal against us or for us; we are powerless in its meshes; they may, in

spite of us, plot together against us. How insignificant is the power of the confessional when compared to this!”

It is pleasant to think that, so far as regards the diffusion of our Society, this anxious alarmist is perfectly right. The meshes, as he calls them, of Masonry do, in truth, envelop the world. From St. Petersburg to Tasmania, from Hong Kong to Dublin, from Peru and La Plata to California and Canada, they include men of all estates and conditions; and whether you go to ask a favour from a prince, or to get a horse shod by the blacksmith, you may find a “Brother of the Mystic Tie” in him you seek. So mote it ever be! Yet, I do not see, and I do not believe, that any one is a whit the worse for Masonic plots and cabals – plans for infernal machines have never, that I know of, been submitted to the Board of General Purposes, nor does any one suspect any of “The Three Grand Masters” of having issued his mandate to some scientific brother to compound a cunningly-devised prescription of strychnine for the indignant journalist I have quoted. Indeed, I believe that most of us have the honour not to know that we had so formidable an enemy. But this vast fraternity, powerful as it is, is so only for good. It is powerless for evil. Direct it to a good end – then every true Mason will lend his aid; the arms of the Society will stretch over the globe to assist you, and the “meshes” of the network will

“Feel in each thread, and live along the line.”

But try to turn it to evil – the strong chain of brotherhood snaps short – it ceases to infold the evil-doer, while it re-unites more firmly than ever round the rest. Other associations have died away in thousands, in all ages, because their ends were evil, and their purposes narrow; but Masonry, though cursed and denounced, ridiculed, reviled and persecuted, and, alas! Too often perverted, abused, degraded, and prostituted, is still founded on Truth and the Immutable Laws of the Sovereign Architect of the Universe; and, therefore, it is still the bond of a great and powerful Association, spread over the whole habitable world, honoured and protected by princes and statesmen; and, what is of far greater importance to us, cultivated and cherished by a multitude of wise and pious, conscientious and honourable men – the approbation of a single one of whom outweighs the discredit of a whole prisonful of drunkards, swindlers, and imposters.

I hope that even from this slight and imperfect sketch, some, at least, of my brethren who are to rule the Lodges of this great city, during my coming year, may form some higher notions than they previously had of their own duties, and of the character of the Order we come here to study. If I thought Masonry to be a mere pretence for displaying childish vanity, by dressing ourselves in ribbons and tinsel and trinkets, assuredly I would not be here to recommend it to your attention. I enjoy and appreciate the social meetings, which have made me acquainted with many whose friendship I highly prize, but if I thought Masonry a mere club, I would leave the eulogy of the Institution to those respectable persons whose business it is to provide entertainments. If it were a mischievous conspiracy, I humbly hope that those who know me will do me the honour to believe that for prudence, if not for conscience’ sake, I would not meddle with it. I take part in Masonry because I have experimentally found it can do good, and because I think that if it fails to do so, the fault is in ourselves, not in it. I ask you to aid me to turn its

capabilities for good to account, and to check its tendencies to evil, because both you and I are alike accountable to our Creator for the use we make of this, as of every other opportunity afforded us to serve our fellow-men. If I have too long trespassed on your attention, I trust the importance of my design will sufficiently plead my apology.

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