

From the commencement of the world we may trace the foundations of Masonry; ever since symmetry began, and harmony displayed her charms; we have reason to believe our order has had a being; during many ages and in many different countries it has flourished. No art, no science preceded it; in the dark periods of antiquity, when literature was in a low state, and the rude manners of our forefathers withheld from that knowledge we now so amply share, Masonry diffused its influence. This science unveiled, arts arose, civilization took place, and the progress of knowledge and philosophy gradually dispelled the gloom of ignorance and barbarism. Government being settled, authority was given to laws, and the assemblies of the Fraternity acquired the patronage of the great and good, while the tenets of the profession diffused unbounded philanthropy.

Abstracted from the pure pleasures which arise from friendships so wisely constituted as that which subsists among Masons, and which it is scarcely possible that any circumstance or occurrence can erase, Masonry is a science confined to no particular country, but extends over the whole terrestrial globe. Wherever arts flourish, it flourishes too. Add to this, that by secret and inviolable signs, carefully preserved among the Fraternity, it becomes an universal language. Hence many advantages are gained; the distant Chinese, the wild Arab, and the American savage will embrace a brother Briton, and know, that besides the common ties of humanity, there is still a stronger obligation to induce to kind and friendly offices. As all religions teach morality, if a brother be found to act the part of a truly honest man, his private speculative opinions are left to God and himself. This through the influence of masonry, which is reconcilable to the best policy, all those disputes which embitter life, and sour the tempers of men are avoided; while the common good, the general object, is zealously pursued.

From this view of our system, its utility must be sufficiently obvious. The universal principles of the art unite in one indissoluble bond of affection; men of the most opposite tenets, of the most distant countries, and of the most contradictory opinions; so that in every nation a Mason may find a friend and in every clime, a home. If the secrets of Masonry are replete with such advantage to mankind, it may be asked, why are they not divulged for the general good? To this it may be answered—were the privileges of Masonry to be indiscriminately dispensed, the purposes of the institution would not only be subverted, but our secrets, from being familiar like other important matters, would lose their value and sink into disregard.

It is a weakness in human nature, that men are generally more charmed with novelty than with the intrinsic value of things. Innumerable testimonies might be adduced to confirm this truth. Do we not find that the most wonderful operations of the Divine Artificer, however beautiful, magnificent, and useful, are overlooked, because common and familiar? The sun rises and sets, the sea ebbs and flows, rivers glide along their channels, trees and plants vegetate, mankind pass onward in their daily course, yet these being perpetually open to view are unnoticed. The most astonishing productions of Nature, for the same reason escape observation, and excite no emotion, either in admiration of the great cause or of gratitude for the blessing conferred. Even Virtue herself is not exempt from this unhappy bias of the human frame. Novelty influence all our actions and determinations. What is new, or difficult in the acquisition, however trifling or insignificant, readily captivates the imagination and ensures a

temporary admiration; while what is familiar or easily attained, however noble or eminent, is sure to be disregarded by the giddy and the unthinking.

Did the essence of Masonry consist in the knowledge of particular secrets or peculiar forms, it might, indeed be alleged that our pursuits were trifling and superficial. But this is not the case; they are only the Key to our treasures and having their use, are preserved; while from the recollection of the lessons they inculcate, the well informed Mason derives instruction; he draws them to a nearer inspection views them through a proper medium, adverts to the circumstances, which gave them rise, and dwells upon the tenets they convey. Finding them replete with useful information, he prizes them as sacred; and, being convinced of their propriety, estimates their value by their utility. Among the various societies of men, few, if any, are wholly exempt from censure, friendship however valuable in itself, and however universal may be its pretensions, has seldom operated so powerfully in general associations, as to promote, that sincere attachment to the welfare and prosperity of each other which is necessary to constitute true happiness.

This may be ascribed to sundry causes, but to none with more justice than to the reprehensible motives which too frequently lead men to a participation of social entertainments. If to pass an idle hour, to oblige a friend or probably to gratify an irregular indulgence, be the only inducement to mix in company, is it surprising that the important duties of society should be neglected, and that in the quick circulation of the cheerful glass, the noblest faculties should be sometimes buried in the cup of ebriety.

It is an obvious truth that the privileges of Masonry have sometimes been prostituted for unworthy considerations, and hence their good effects have been less conspicuous. Many have enrolled their names in our records for the mere purposes of conviviety, without inquiring into the nature of the particular engagements to which they are subjected by becoming Masons. Several have been prompted by motives of interest, and many introduced to gratify an idle curiosity, or to please as jolly companions. A general odium, or at least a careless indifference, must be the result of such conduct. But the evil stops not here, persons of this description ignorant, of the true nature of the institution, probably without any real defect in their own morals are induced to recommend others of the same cast to join the society for the same purpose. Hence the true knowledge of the art decreases with the increase of its members and the most valuable part of the institution is turned into ridicule; while the dissipations of luxury and intemperance bury in oblivion principles which might have dignified the most exalted characters. But if some do transgress, no wise man will thence argue against the institution or condemn the whole Fraternity for the errors of a few misguided individuals. Were the wicked lives of men admitted as an argument against the religion which they profess, the wisest and most judicious establishments might be exposed to censure. It may be averred in favor of Masonry, that, whatever imperfections are found among its professors, the institution countenances no deviation from the rules of right reason. Those who violate the laws, or intinge on good order are kindly admonished by secret monitors; where these means have not the intended effect, public reprobation becomes necessary; and, at last, where every mild endeavour to effect a reformation in their conduct is of no avail they are expelled from the lodge, as unfit members of the society. Vain, therefore is each idle surmise against the plan of our government, while the laws of the Craft are properly supported, they will be proof against every attack. Men are not aware, that by decrying any laudable institution, they derogate from the dignity of human nature itself, and from that good order, and wise disposition of things, which the Almighty Author of the world has framed for the government of mankind, and established as the basis of the moral system. Friendship and social delights can never be the object of reproach;

nor can that wisdom which hoary Time has sanctified, be a subject for ridicule. Whoever attempts to censure what he does not comprehend, degrades himself; and the generous heart will pity the mistakes of such ignorant presumption.

Charity is the chief of all the social virtues, and the distinguishing characteristic of Masons. This virtue includes a supreme degree of love to the great Creator and Governor of the universe and an unlimited affection, to the beings of his creation, of all character and of every denomination.

Beings who partake of one common nature ought to be actuated by the same motives and interests. Hence to soothe the unhappy, by sympathizing with their misfortunes and to restore peace and tranquility to agitated spirits, constitutes the general and great ends of the Masonic System. This humane, this generous disposition, fires the breast with manly feelings, and enlivens that spirit of compassion which is the glory of the human frame, and which not only rivals, but outshines, every other pleasure that the mind is capable of enjoying.

All human passions, when directed by the superior principle of reason, tend to promote some useful purpose; but compassion toward proper objects is the most beneficial of all the affections, and excites more lasting degrees of happiness; as it extends to greater numbers, and alleviates the infirmities and evils which are incident to human existence. Possessed of this amiable, this godlike disposition, Masons are shocked at misery under every form and appearance. When they behold an object pining under a distressed body and mind, the healing accents, which flow from the tongue mitigate the pain of the unhappy sufferer, and make even adversity in its dismal state, look gay. When pity is excited, the Mason will assuage grief, and cheerfully relieve distress. If a Brother be in want, every heart is moved; when he is hungry, we feed him; when he is naked, we clothe him; when he is in trouble we fly to his relief. Thus we confirm the propriety of the title we bear; and convince the world at large, that Brother, among Masons, is more than the name.

Though our ears are always open to the distress of the deserving poor, yet charity is not to be dispensed with a profuse liberality on impostors. The parents of a numerous offspring, who, through age, sickness, infirmity, on any unforeseen accident in life, may be reduced to want, particularly claim our attention, and seldom fail to experience the happy effects of our friendly associations. To such objects, whose situation is more easy to be conceived than expressed, we are induced liberally to extend relief. Hence we give convincing proofs of wisdom and discernment; for though our benevolence like our laws be limited, yet our hearts glow principally with affection toward the deserving part of mankind.

As useful knowledge is the great object of our desires, the good Mason diligently applies himself to the practice which it inculcates, and does not permit the difficulties that he has to encounter check his progress, or damp his zeal; but at all times strives to recollect, that the ways of wisdom are beautiful, and lead to pleasure. Knowledge is attained by degrees and cannot everywhere be found. Wisdom seeks the secret shade, the lonely cell, designed for contemplation. There enthroned she sits, delivering her sacred oracles. There let all seek her, and pursue the real bliss. Though the passage be difficult, the further we trace it, the easier it will become.

Union and harmony constitute the essence of Freemasonry; while we enlist under that banner, the society must flourish, and private animosities give place to peace, and good fellowship. Uniting in one design, let it be our aim to be happy, ourselves, and contribute to the happiness of others. Let us mark our superiority and distinction among men, by the sincerity of our profession as Masons; let us cultivate the moral virtues, and improve in all that is good and amiable; let the Genius of Masonry preside over our conduct, and under her sway let us perform our part with becoming dignity; let us preserve an elevation of understanding, a politeness of manner, and an evenness of temper, let our recreations be in