

tion I believe that you will agree with me in the opinion, that any discussion on the subject here would be injudicious; but at the same time, it is of great importance that the views and opinions of those who have really studied the question, and who believe that they are in a position to throw more light upon it, should receive due consideration. Those views and opinions can be submitted to the Standing Committee on Ritual, who will at all times be ready to receive, and most respectfully and carefully to consider, any suggestions which may be laid before them. In my address of last year, in referring to this subject, I used the expression, that "I regarded with much apprehension any attempt at innovation or change in the *lex non scripta* of Masonry," and I have reason to believe that my views on this subject, as then expressed, were not very clearly understood by some, while by others they were entirely misapprehended. The Ritual is not to be considered as a landmark in Masonry: many parts of it are not essential; they have been changed and may be changed again, though as a learned and reliable writer remarks, such changes should be made with great caution, and perhaps had better not be made at all; but, adds he, on the other hand, there are portions of the Ritual, and large portions, too, which do constitute landmarks, which never have been changed, and never can be changed without a destruction of the very identity of Freemasonry. The beautiful lectures which form so important a feature in our system, are most useful; but, as the same author remarks, they are not essential, neither are they to be considered as constituting landmarks, for before the year 1717 no such system existed. Many changes, some of them, doubtless, decided improvements, while others were very much the reverse, have since been introduced, which proves conclusively that they have no claim to be regarded as landmarks of the Order. Time will not permit me, at present, to dwell at greater length upon this very interesting topic, and I must therefore make my remarks as brief as possible.

MASONIC CONSERVATISM.

It is not difficult to account for the variations which we occasionally find in the working of some of our Lodges. The Master, though retaining all the essentials, may slightly deviate in some parts of the phraseology of the details: in course of time these changes become as it were established, and after a few years are regarded as almost landmarks of that lodge, a departure from which would be considered as a dangerous innovation. Now the remedy for all this is so to be found in the Book of Constitution, under the head "of Private Lodges," sec. 21:—"All Lodges are particularly bound to observe the same usages and customs. Any deviation, therefore, from the established mode of working is highly improper and cannot be justified or countenanced; and in order to preserve this uniformity, and to cultivate a good understanding among Free Masons, some members of every lodge should be deputed to visit the other lodges as often as may be convenient." In any action which the Grand Lodge may, in its wisdom, consider it prudent and necessary to take, with reference to this most important matter, I can only express my earnest hope that you may at all times be guided by a wise conservatism: and in using the term, I do not wish to be understood as expressing merely the desire or effort to preserve what is estab-

lished; but I wish you to receive it in its larger and more Masonic sense, which implies that there is no blind and superstitious respect for things established, simply because they are so. Precedents with us says a learned and thoughtful brother, have no authority unless they are founded upon principle, and on the other hand, changes have no support unless they are prompted by necessity and guided by reason. It is to such conservatism as this that our gratitude is due for that steady and healthy progress which Masonry is now making, which gives it a standing and character among the institutions of the age, which is rendering it daily more and more worthy of cultivation by men of intellect, and which must bestow upon it, as a science and a system of philosophy, a perpetuity and prosperity which its merely social and charitable character could never have secured. This kind of conservatism is the sheet-anchor on which the safety of Masonry mainly depends.

FINANCES

From the accounts submitted by that most efficient and trustworthy officer, your Grand Treasurer, it is gratifying to find that our funds are in a most prosperous and satisfactory condition. The whole amount of funds, as appears by his books, is \$28,064 90, which belongs to the following accounts, viz.:

General Fund.....	\$18,359 15
Current for Benevolence.....	543 25
Invested for do	8,625 14
To credit of Asylum Fund	537 36
	\$28,064 90

Which funds are invested as follows:—

In Gore Bank Agency at Simcoe	\$ 2,464 90
In Middlesex Debentures.....	1,600 00
In Provincial do	16,000 00
In Dominion Stock.....	8,000 00
	\$28,064 90

I would again suggest it as desirable that the whole of the Asylum Fund should appear in the books of the Grand Treasurer, so that his report should show all the funds belonging to this Grand Lodge. This arrangement would not interfere with the entire control of that fund by the Asylum Committee.

CONCLUSION.

And now, my brethren, in conclusion, I have to apologize for the very crude and unpolished manner in which these hastily written remarks are laid before you. The pressure of new duties, and a very recent attack of sickness, left me but a few hours in which to carry out the practice, initiated by myself, at the commencement of our career as a Grand Lodge, of preparing something in the form of an address with which to open our Annual Communication. In once more resigning into your hands the office and position with which you so often have honored me, and in requesting you now to relieve me from its cares and responsibilities, I would I had the power and ability to express even a tithe of the fraternal love and affection I entertain for you and for Masonry. No language at my command can convey it, I shall therefore not make the attempt.

"The temple of our purest thoughts is—silence"

May Masonry continue to flourish in all parts of the