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CHRISTIANITY AND MASONRY.

A SERMON, preached in the Parish Church of St. George's, Bermuda, by Bro. the Rev. G. Tucker, B. A., on the festival of St. John the Evangelist, December 28th, 1866, before the Freemasons.

"If ye fulfil the royal law according to the Scriptures, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself, ye do well."—JAMES II., 8.

What I am now about to offer to you, my brethren, will no doubt appear to many a strange sermon; but it will not, I trust, be considered inappropriate to the occasion that brings us together, or to the sacred house in which we are assembled.

It is too common an opinion among those who are not members of our craft, that masonry is antagonistic to christianity; that, in fact it aims to give unto men a secret tie of brotherhood stronger than that of the communion of saints, and a system of religion ignoring the Gospel of Christ. This opinion, although an unjust and unwarrantable assumption, is yet held by many sincerely good and pious persons, and has, doubtless, deterred many from becoming masons, who would otherwise have been ornaments of our craft and acquisitions to our brotherhood.

I propose then now, as briefly as possible, to consider this opinion, and, believing firmly myself that masonry maintains, and teaches nothing antagonistic to our holy religion, to do all that lies in my feeble power to confute it, and to reconcile the obligations of masonry with the far higher claims of christianity. And, my brethren, it is an important question, for if masonry does indeed contain anything contrary to the religion of Jesus, our plain duty is to say, "we will be masons no longer," but if on the other hand, we can prove it to be the handmaid of the Gospel, holding the same Faith, inculcating the same precepts, aiming only as a light of human kindling, not to eclipse but to guide men to that "true light which lighteth every man that cometh into the world," then let us endeavour to be both good christians and true Masons, feeling the one to be quite compatible with the other. And while we, as christians, look only to Christ as our Saviour and ground our hopes of salvation only on faith in him and his Gospel, let us, as Masons, trace in our symbolical teaching a lively representation of the working of God's providence with man, the story of creation, the primitive innocence of our race, the fall and consequent scenes of natural and moral evil, the plan of redemption; in a word the history of nature and grace, most beautifully allegorized; and recognize in our brotherhood the agency of that christian principle of charity, which "never faileth," but shall, after faith is lost in sight and hope ends in fruition, extend beyond the grave through the boundless realms of Eternity. Faith, hope and charity are the three rounds of the Masonic ladder, and so are they too the three steps of the christian's heavenward faith, "but the greatest of these is charity."

Let us now consider, with God's blessing, the two objections to Masonry I have mentioned, viz:—Its substitution for the christian communion of Saints another tie of brotherhood; and, secondly:—that it is a Deistical system, ignoring the Gospel of Christ.

(1.) The first objection I have alluded to is a specious one, but at the same time an unfair and unjust one. Masonry does not pretend to substitute its own tie of brotherhood for the great bond of christianity; it does not claim to be, solely or pre-eminently, a religious society promulgating a creed. It is indeed a universal system, extending where christianity has not yet established itself, embracing in its wide-spread arms the Christian, the Jew, the Mahomedan, the Hindoo, and even some of the tribes of Barbarism. Yet, with the former, the christian, its types and symbols, its graces and virtues, are no other than those given and explained in the Gospel, its link of brotherhood only that christian love without which christianity itself would be but a name. The Hindoo, the Mahomedan, the Barbarian, may not see in its symbols and ceremonies any connection with christianity. The christian alone can penetrate to the full meaning of the Masonic rite and allegory, but to all they teach the practice of morality, the leading of pure and virtuous lives. This even the barbarian may learn from them, and thus rise to a higher level of principle and action. And this is the great value of the Tie of Masonry that it can reach and influence men who, for a time at least, reject, or are dead to the Gospel, and thus creates a common interest, a means of access and intercourse between them and the christian, which may pave the way for the introduction of christianity. In such a case Masonry cannot supersede but only subserve the Gospel.

And even among professing christians themselves, how many are there who disregard the precepts of their religion, yet are influenced by such a system as that of Masonry? How many are there who in their conduct are selfish, cruel, dishonest, and would never perform a charitable deed or cherish one generous or sympathizing feeling, if the obligations of Masonry did not exert so great a power over them? It is very well to say that christianity should of itself be sufficient to enforce all this—that the common brotherhood in Christ Jesus should be strong enough to make all Christians moral, loving and charitable. No doubt, if God pleased, abstract christianity could do all this, could of itself by the irresistible operation of the Holy Spirit diffuse itself over the whole world, and bring all nations and individuals to the practice of its doctrines. But God deigns to employ earthly instruments, and any links of merely human forging that can aid in binding men to Christ, are useful and legitimate. If the bond of christian brotherhood alone be sufficient, if the obligations of abstract christianity can be made adequately binding upon all, why are oaths administered in courts of justice in addition to the commandment, "Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbour?" Why do we see in the Christian world pledges given to the intemperate, and so many societies of various names and objects, in which men unite to diffuse charity, or to propagate the Gospel, or to further some other laudable purpose, enjoined equally upon all by the Gospel? It is because with many men, the more general and comprehensive a bond of union and obligation, the vaguer and more intangible it becomes. It is because when men are brought together in an outward and tangible system of brotherhood, an appeal is made to them which they can perceive and understand, and the sphere of their offices of love is narrowed down to one, which their sympathies can embrace. I know that I am now