

ADDRESS

Delivered by Dr. Bernard, R. W., Deputy Grand Master of the Grand Lodge of Canada, at the Masonic Celebration in Montpelier, Vt., on the 21th June, 1886.

Most Worshipful Grand Master, Sir Knights, Companions, and Brethren, ladies and gentlemen:—In accepting the invitation with which the Committee of Arrangements honored me, to deliver an address on this occasion, I was fully conscious of my inability happily to execute so important a duty; and this consciousness would have deterred me from appearing before you, had not considerations of another character induced me to do so. To these I may perhaps be permitted for one moment to advert. Placed by the fraternal kindness of the representatives of more than forty Masonic Lodges, scattered all over a country extending more than sixteen hundred miles in length, by an average breadth of more than two hundred miles, in the high and honorable position of Deputy Grand Master of the Grand Lodge of Canada; and the Masonry of Vermont having promptly and unanimously extended to us the right hand of fellowship, and cordially welcomed us into the great family of Masonic Grand Lodges; and, moreover, the kindly interchange of fraternal courtesies, the delightful social reunions, which took place on two different occasions, during the last winter, between some of the masons and their families, of Vermont and of Canada, contributed so largely to my own enjoyment, as well as to the happiness of many of my Canadian brethren and friends, that I could not, in justice, either to my own feelings and inclinations, or to the masons of Canada, deny myself the honor and the pleasure of participating with you in the ceremonies and festivities of this auspicious day. I therefore appear before you, a very plain unpretending man, of whose profession, public speaking forms no part, and possessing little to commend me to your favorable attention, except a heart most sincerely devoted to the true interests of our beneficent and time-honored institution,—an institution which I would gladly exhibit to-day, in all the symmetry and gracefulness of its real proportions; in all the beauty and loveliness of its truthful features. But this can not be done. Had I eloquence sufficient to make me the very Demosthenes of masonry, I could not do it. The attempt were as fruitless, indeed, as for a devotee of Flora, standing in a lovely garden in the sunny South, with flowers of every variety, from every clime, richly blooming in all their beauty and perfuming the surrounding atmosphere with their fragrance, to attempt to convey an adequate picture of his floral Paradise to his friends in the distant, icy north, by selecting here and there a flower and transmitting them in the form of an imperfectly-arranged bouquet. The fact is, Freemasonry affords a very great variety of topics, of deep interest to the true craftsman as well as to the thoughtful observer of human relations and human events, any one of which would require more than a discourse of a single hour, or even of many hours, properly to illustrate. The Committee of Arrangements, and also the Grand Master of Vermont, having modestly declined to suggest to me a subject, I have thought that to confine our remarks, on this occasion, to any one particular topic or point, would, perhaps, be less satisfactory and less productive of good results, than to indulge in a few general observations on some of the more prominent features, or distinguishing characteristics of our order; and, in doing this, I wish it to be understood that I speak, exclusively, of Ancient Craft Masonry.

In regard to the origin and antiquity of Freemasonry but little need be said, for although matters of interest to the curious enquirer, they are of little importance in determining the character and usefulness of the institution, as it exists in our day. Masonic writers of the greatest eminence, though, perhaps, a little over-anxious for the venerable character of the order, have pronounced it co-eval with the creation of the world; have traced it from the earliest period of human existence, through all the changing scenes of society; through all the tribes, the nations, and the countries of the earth; and have ascribed to it the preservation and prac-

tice of almost all that was valuable in either art, science, morals, or social principles and regulations during the earlier ages of the world's history. To masonry as an organized institution, combining the operative and the speculative, or symbolic features, based upon the science of geometry, cultivating the social and moral virtues and distinguished by many of the peculiarities which characterize it in our day, this class of writers ascribe the construction not only of those magnificent piles of architectural skill and beauty which adorn the cities of Christian Europe, many of which were erected for ecclesiastical purposes during the earlier ages of the Christian era; but, also, the splendid edifices of the pagan countries of the old world, the crumbling ruins and broken columns of which, are still regarded with interest and admiration by the traveller; as well as the temple of Solomon, the tabernacle of Israel, the Pyramids of Egypt, the Ark of Noah, and the cities which existed before the flood. Another class of writers ascribe to masonry a very remote antiquity, and attribute its origin to various sources, to Moses, to Solomon, to Pythagoras, Manes, &c., while others, again, who take pleasure in derogating from the honor justly due to Freemasonry, and in representing it as an institution of great pretensions with little merit, contend that it is of comparatively recent origin, having legitimate claim to an existence of but a few centuries. The truth undoubtedly is, that Freemasonry in its principles, is co-eval with human existence; and as an organized institution it certainly dates from an exceedingly remote period of antiquity. To say nothing of the Egyptian, or more ancient mysteries, the fraternity of Dionysian architects which flourished at the time, and probably long before the building of the first Temple at Jerusalem, was distinguished by many peculiarities which strikingly assimilate it to our order. And from that period, a thousand years or more anterior to the commencement of the Christian era, there is very little difficulty in distinctly tracing its history down the stream of time to the present day.

The history of Freemasonry is of sufficient interest and importance to demand more than a mere passing notice; and yet I fear this is nearly all which we shall be justified in bestowing upon it on this occasion. To the learning and research, the genius and labors of a Preston and an Oliver, not to mention other distinguished names, is the Craft and the world immensely indebted, for the light which they have poured upon this great subject.

Without entering at all upon the consideration of what has been designated the conjectural, or supposititious history of Masonry; we may observe that very many features of most striking resemblance are readily traced between many of the ancient institutions, such as the Manichean, the Essenian, the Pythagorean, the Dionysian, and the Eleusinian systems and that of Freemasonry. Whether these marks of resemblance in connection with other considerations, are sufficiently strong to identify Masonry with any, or with all of these societies, is a question upon which a difference of opinion exists; but which has been decided affirmatively by authorities in competition with which I am not disposed to venture my own opinion.

In the British Islands and on the Continent of Europe, we are enabled to discover a perfectly connected history of our fraternity, extending to a period far remote, which shows it to have been characterized, like all other institutions of human organization, by alternate seasons of prosperity and adversity; of advancement and decay. At one period enjoying the greatest possible immunities; at another, subjected to the most intolerable persecutions. Now protected by government, patronized by princes, and fostered by the church; and then, proscribed by the civil power, and consigned to inquisitorial tortures by ecclesiastical authority. When, during the Middle and somewhat earlier Ages of the Christian era, the services of the craft were required in the construction of religious edifices, (for it must be borne in mind that, until a comparatively recent period, Freemasonry

was more particularly an operative system, engaged in the construction of material edifices. For many ages the fraternity enjoyed a monopoly in the construction of religious and other public edifices in some of the countries of Europe. They travelled from place to place in companies; built Lodges or huts in the vicinity of the work they were about to engage in, and were free, or exempt from taxation and the operation of the laws of the countries in which they were employed. When the services of the craft were required in the construction of churches, cathedrals, monasteries, &c., it was endowed by the church with almost plenary indulgence, and the privileges and blessings of pontifical favor were freely and richly showered upon it; but when by practical skill in the arts, the cultivation of the sciences, and, perhaps, more than all, the exemplification of the principles of social and moral virtue upon the broad basis of a common humanity, instead of the narrow limits of an exclusive sectarianism, it had excited the admiration and planted itself deeply in the affections of the enlightened portion of mankind, and had acquired an almost immeasurable degree of popularity throughout all the countries of Christendom, the envy and the jealousy of the ecclesiastical hierarchy were excited against it, and its anathemas were loudly enunciated to crush and destroy the very institution which had constructed its cathedrals, built its churches and its altars, and created for it that grandeur by which its pride and vanity were so largely inflated; and to this day Freemasonry, to which Christendom is indebted, not less, perhaps, for the preservation, during the dark ages, of the soundest theological dogmas and the purest principles and maxims of social and moral virtue, than for the construction of the numerous stupendous architectural edifices which are still the pride of Europe and the admiration of the world,—to this day, Freemasonry is proscribed by Papal authority in every Catholic country upon the face of the globe. In 1793, a most formidable Bull was thundered against the masons, followed, in 1799, by a cruel edict against not only freemasons themselves, but also against all those who gave them the least countenance, promoted or favored their cause, or were in any respect connected with them; and this, too, notwithstanding they were confessedly a set of men against a single individual of whom the slightest charge of either moral or political offence was never made. It was merely stated that the fraternity had spread far and wide, was daily and rapidly increasing, admitted men of every religion who bound themselves to preserve with inviolable secrecy the mysteries of the order, and therefore they must be enemies to the tranquility of the state, and dangerous to the spiritual interests of souls. A fine of one thousand crowns in gold, the servitude of the galleys, and the tortures of the rack were, therefore, the penalties denounced against all those who were daring enough to breathe the infectious atmosphere of a masonic assembly; and these penalties, together with death in its most cruel forms, have frequently been inflicted upon men for the crime of being freemasons. Nor has the ecclesiastical denunciation of freemasonry been exclusively confined to Papal authority. Even in Protestant Scotland, only about one century since, in 1753, the Associate Synod directed all their kirk sessions strictly to examine every person at all suspected of being a freemason. A list of questions in relation to masonic ceremonies and the administration of masonic affairs was prepared, to which the most implicit answers were demanded, on pain of exclusion from all the ordinances and privileges of religion. This disposition wanted only the power, which happily it was never able to acquire, to produce an active and cruel persecution. The same disposition has been manifested in some other Protestant countries, especially in some of the German States; and, if I mistake not, has also been evinced, and since the commencement of the nineteenth century too, by one or more anti-papal sects even in this, your own, enlightened, liberty-loving country. But here we must leave the subject of masonic history in connection with ecclesiastical doings.