



**Semper idem—Semper fidelis.**

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It contains the most interesting new relative to the craft, report of the Grand Lodges, &c., while the original articles coming as they do from the pens of Brothers of known ability, as Masonic writers, will, we trust, be found both interesting and instructive. All communications on Masonic subjects, jurisprudence, exchanges, &c., must be addressed to Dr. Cunynghame, Editor of the Canadian Freemason, and on all other matters connected with the journal to the publisher.

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**THE PRESENT STATE OF MASONIC SCIENCE IN GREAT BRITAIN.**

BY REV. GEORGE OLIVER, D.D.

(Continued from No. 5, Page 34.)

But the most distinguishing glory of Freemasonry is Charity; which, indeed, constitutes the peculiar characteristic of the age in which we live. Public institutions for benevolent purposes have sprung up in every metropolis and provincial town throughout the world; and there is no class of destitution which is now unprovided with a retreat, where their sorrows are assuaged and their wants supplied. The good Samaritan is everywhere at work. In this point of view, also, Freemasonry

must be regarded as the agent of unbounded good. To its male and female orphan schools, and fund of benevolence, which have long been in active and beneficial operation, we have added not only an asylum for the worthy aged and decayed members of the Fraternity, and an annuity fund for the benefit of the same class of destitute persons, but a projected establishment for the permanent support of the widows of indigent Freemasons has been mooted in Grand Lodge, with the best wishes of the Craft for its happy termination; and I do not entertain the slightest doubt but it will ultimately be accomplished. In addition to all these noble institutions, we have private Masonic funds for benevolent purposes in many of the Lodges both of the old and new world.

These details will clearly evince the claims which Masonry has on the community at large, and that the active part she has sustained in forwarding the benevolent enterprises by which the present age is distinguished, merits public approbation. We appear to be on the eve of some great and organic changes; whether for good or evil, the Great Architect of the Universe can only determine. But it behooves Freemasonry to take such steps in the great drama of life, as to secure, if it be possible, the predominance of good. She ought to occupy the foremost rank in the work of amelioration, to watch over the best interests of the public, and endeavor to prevent the inconsiderate and unwary from being misled by the false glitter of unsound theories on the one hand, and hollow professions on the other, which are sure to terminate in disappointment and disgrace, and perhaps in consequences of a much more serious nature.

If Freemasonry does not thus exert the influence she undoubtedly possesses for the benefit of humanity, her social claims will be nullified, and her pretensions pronounced to be an empty boast. It is quite clear, from a consideration of the uniform and gradual alterations and improvements in the details of Speculative Freemasonry by successive Grand Lodges, that it was never intended to be stationary. The science had no prescribed lectures before the revival in 1717, but every Master of a Lodge exhorted his brethren to the practice of moral virtue, in short and extemporaneous addresses, according to his own capacity, and adapted to the comprehension of the brethren and the state of the Lodge. An old Masonic manuscript of the tenth century, as is supposed which may be found in the Old Royal Library in the British Museum, contains ample directions for this purpose. It strongly recommends the brethren to offer up their prayers regularly to God through Christ; to do their duty each other, and

to be constant in their attendance on the divine services of the church. It concludes by advising,

Play thou not but with thy peres.  
Ny tell thou not al that thou heres.  
Dyskever thou not thyn owne dede.  
For no merye, ny for no mede:  
With fayr speche thou myght have thy wyll  
With hyt thou myght thy solven spylle.

Cryst then of hys hyc grace,  
Geve yow bothe wytte and spave,  
Wel thys boke to conne and rede  
Heven to have for yowre mede!  
Amen! Amen! So mote hyt be.  
Say we so alle per charyte

In the Lansdowne MS. in the British Museum—Burligh Papers, N. 98, Art. 38—we have another specimen of this moral teaching, which is of great antiquity. The Master is there directed, "in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, to be true to God and holy Church, and to use no error or heresy; to be a true liege man to the king, and to do to every brother as he would like to be done to himself. That he shall keep truly all the council of the Lodge or of the Chamber, be no thief; true to the Master; and call his fellows by no other name than brother. That he shall not injure or pollute his brother's wife or daughter; and shall honestly pay for everything he has."

The earliest authorized lectures which I have met with were compiled from such ancient documents as these, and arranged in a catechetical form by Desaguliers and Anderson, as early as 1720. And this form was adopted because it was considered to be more useful in assisting the memory, and affording an efficient remedy against forgetfulness and want of attention than any other plan. The questions and answers are short and comprehensive, and contain a brief digest of the general principles of the Craft, as it was understood at that period. The first lecture extended to the greatest length, but the replies were circumscribed within a very narrow compass. The second was shorter, and the third, called "The Master's Part," contained only seven questions, besides the explanations and examinations.

If, under such an imperfect system, Freemasonry had not been susceptible of improvement, it could not have stood its ground during the rapid progress of a taste for refined literature, and the accomplishments of civilized life which distinguished the beginning and middle of the eighteenth

\* The same paper contains many other charges for the regulation of conduct, most of which, however, may be found in the 16th Ed. of Preston, p. 71. and see F. Q. R. 1848, p. 142.