

ADDRESS

Delivered before Oriental Lodge, No. 7, I. O. O. F., on the Evening of March 31, 1847.

BY BRO. E. G. JOHNSON.

NOBLE GRAND AND BROTHERS,—In accordance with your invitation, I propose to offer a few remarks this evening, more with the view to encourage so profitable an exercise in the Lodge, than with the hope of offering anything of sufficient interest to claim your attention. What I shall offer will therefore need apology for its want of method and polish, but will, I hope, find all necessary charity for its many deficiencies.

I have written entirely for home consumption, frankly, fluently, and perhaps too pointedly were I not addressing *brothers*, who are equally interested with myself in the common welfare of the Order, and the individual good of its members.

There are two principal features of the Order, of which I propose to speak briefly. First, its influence as a *moral agent*, and secondly, as a *social agent*; and of the duties of *Brothers* with reference to these features.

First, as a moral agent.

Nothing can be more pure—nothing more elevated and beautiful—than the *theory* of Odd Fellowship as a moral Institution. Its charges and its lessons are of the most elevated and excellent character, and eminently calculated when practically carried out, to make us better and happier; to lift us above the grovelling vices and debasing habits with which we are more or less liable to be tainted,—habits and vices of a comparatively unimportant character in the opinion of many, which we insensibly contract, and which are as difficult to eradicate as the effects of the shirt of Nepus.

* * * * *

I well remember how profoundly and favourably I was impressed with Odd Fellowship, when I was initiated. Amid some things that to me seemed idle and boyish, there seemed a *pure* and *benign* and *beautiful* influence to fall upon the soul, with a mild and winning effect which I had not expected, and which I then resolved to cherish to the utmost. It seemed a sort of healthful and practical medium between the superstitious dream of the fanatic on the one hand, and the selfish creed of the worldling on the other—where all those who wish to be better, and higher, and nobler in their aims, might meet, and mingle, and assist each other,

* * * * *

I said I was profoundly impressed with the genuine and beautiful morality of the Odd Fellow's creed, and while listening to the charges, resolved to make myself better, by endeavoring to imbibe their spirit; and with the enthusiasm of my temperament and the zeal of a new convert, I hoped and believed all shared the same feeling, and like a band of brothers in the exercise of the kindest feelings—in the reciprocity of the sweetest charities—we would go on improving and sustaining and strengthening each other, till we should all be better—till our characters should all strike deeper, and grow higher and broader, under the beneficent influence of *Odd Fellowship*.

Now, *Brothers*, has this been the result? Have we done this? That we might improve is too evident. That it is an imperative duty we owe the Institution as well as ourselves, is unquestionable; and, moreover, the Institution cannot, and will not, and ought not to be sustained by community, if its members permit themselves to disgrace

it by the practice of those vices even, which society would perhaps tolerate in those who are not Odd Fellows. There is a natural distrust of Secret Societies, and community ever eager to judge harshly—aye, eager for *scandal* as the vulture for his foul feast of carrion—will scrutinize the conduct of an Odd Fellow much more closely than they would the conduct of the same individual before he became an Odd Fellow; and if they can point to this man as a *drunkard*—that one as a *knave*—that one guilty of disgusting profanity—that one small and dishonest in his dealings—that one impure and unchaste in his intercourse with society—that one a *liar*—that one niggardly and mean and tricky and underhanded in his intercourse with the world—that one a hypocrite in his pretensions and professions—and all Odd Fellows in regular standing—with how tremendous a lever are they furnished to destroy the Order, and how unanswerable their attacks. *Brothers* we must look to this, and remember it is not only a glorious thing to make ourselves better, as a matter of individual profit, but that it is an indispensable thing to the welfare and prosperity of our beloved Order.

Independently of our duty to God—to ourselves, our families and community, we have no right to tolerate habitual vice and immorality in our midst; and each of us is in his own person the guardian of the interests of the Order in that particular; and our Institution, in a moral point of view, is worse than useless unless we live up to our duties. On the other hand, how glorious would it be, and from what a proud elevation would the Order look down upon the little controversies—the miserable bickerings, and degrading vices and follies of the world at its feet, like some lofty mountain whose base is enveloped in mists and fogs and storms, while its summit, serene above the tempest, is bathed in the glorious sunlight of heaven. If every Odd Fellow lived up to his moral duties as an Odd Fellow, how would the borders of our beloved Institution be enlarged, and what an incalculable benefit to mankind through generations yet unborn, would be the result. Like the pebble thrown in the glassy lake, its circles would grow broader and broader, till the whole earth was bathed in the beauty of its beneficence, and mankind were brothers indeed, as in theory. *Brothers*, have we lived up to our duties as we ought? Let each ask himself this question, and without scrutinizing others too closely, look into his own soul and say, as Nathan said to David, “Thou art the man who has been deficient.” *Brothers*, let him that is without fault throw the first stone for the past, and let us all hereafter take care that there is no occasion for stones to be thrown. Let us each remember that we are individually responsible for the common welfare of our beloved Order, and in our own persons the conservators of the common weal. I leave this part of the subject with one question, which the *brothers* can answer as they think best. Are we better than the same number of individuals selected from the same walks of life, in any community, and are we better in any respect, than we were before we joined the Order? If not, and if we are not likely to be, “the play is not worth the candle,” and as a matter of morals, we may as well close our doors and return to the “weak and beggarly elements of the world.”

But there is another feature of the Order which is eminently lovely and beautiful in theory. I love to look upon the Lodge as a social Institution—as a nursery of kindly feelings, of friendly sympathies and brotherly love.