

HOLLY SPRINGS GAZETTE.

"VERITAS NIHIL VERETUR, NISI ABSCONDI."

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WEDNESDAY, JULY 28, 1841.

VOLUME I---NUMBER 1.

MASONRY—THE HANDMAID OF RELIGION: An Address delivered before the brethren of the HOLLY SPRINGS LODGE, on the Anniversary of the Patriarch, SAINT JOHN THE BAPTIST, A. D. 5841: by JOHN DELAFIELD, Esq.
A single emanation of the Divine Will, breathed into the element of Light. Before the Almighty adorned the planet with its present beauty, it floated through the regions of space a chaotic and fluid globe. "The God moved upon the face of its waters"—that spirit of the darkness and the light are both alike—which, past, and in all ages to come, hath and will ever pervade and sustain the universe. In the progress of his execution, He speaks the word, and at His fiat, the angelic hosts, with glowing cherubim and seraphim, amazed, a new created world,—confusion to order yields,—the separates from the waters—verdure clothes the field and herbs bedeck the mead,—the insect sparkles in the rays of the rising sun,—the loving cattle and every thing come forth from chaos—and, God saw that good, and blessed it. Creation there displayed the work of God,—and, when its wonders were crowned with the light of Light, the morning stars sang together, and the voice of God shouted for joy.

Also, in the moral, as in the physical world, hath God brought order out of chaos, and dispelled darkness by the light of truth. We do not here to paint the origin of society, nor to trace their sources the jarring elements which has inherent in the existence of our mortal nature. We do not here to dwell on the sad truth, that from his superiority over the elements, man has fallen through disobedience—into the peaceful bosom where first thought but charity existed, now dwells a mind harassed by anxiety, and distrust. We also know, that all was made enjoyment and happiness; and that, it is we ourselves who, by excess, dole that which otherwise were pure,—the fainting traveller may drink wholesome and red-emptive from the bubbling overflowing spring; but a rusher heedlessly therein he muddies the source, waters are those of impurity. The cause, however, of our chaos around us, it is not ours here to investigate, the Supreme Architect of the universe has placed us in the world, as humble Christians and upright Masons; to this end of us we are bound cheerfully and cordially to at all things to the natural mind, darkness is every where brooding the secrets of heaven in obscurity; yet, to benevolence of Almighty God hath granted to a nature bright luminaries, whose light is open to receive it, and the rays of which, darting from source of light and life itself, will lead the faithful through the intricacies of this life to the immediate aid of the Great and Glorious Ruler of Heaven.

When the mists of error before the Sun of Righteousness with healing on his wings. When "the blazing Bethlehem first led the wandering shepherds to the birth-place of the Son of God; then was the response echoed through the arches of Heaven, and there in the midst of the Doctors at the temple its celestial began to dawn upon this world. Brighter did they more radiant was their effulgence, when the apostles upon the earth in astonishment at His glorious mission. But at the night of the crucifixion, when darkness shrouded the earth, when the elements were when nature heaved convulsively at the throes of agony, and the "eye of God" seemed withdrawn from man; then the dawn of the brightest light ever shined upon this world was broken by—"It is finished!" The scourge has lacerated, has pierced, the bloody drops have coursed down of our Redeemer, the stony path has been trodden—the great sacrifice was offered!—"It is finished!" In celestial tongues of fire it de- clared on high, speaking to the troubled mind—pardon—to the prisoner, Freedom—Light of Heav- en ever since been shed upon the sincere and faith- ful—Light of Heaven, that has been committed to the arch, the Bride of Christ, and which points to us a path and unerring path to a better world.

Looking back over the history of the moral darkness, and the means displayed by Almighty God to reach our evil passions, and for dispensing to us an instruction and knowledge, we are struck with the simplicity and benevolence of the plan. There have been three means of communication of moral light and personal presence and authoritative command. The first is the imparted knowledge by personal con- tact. Witness the burning eloquence of His discourse out- rived with Job:—"To his chosen he appeared in the cloud and light."—To Moses, in majesty on Sinai: High Priest wisdom was vouchsafed by Urim and Thummim. Still later came the Messiah, "God manifest in the flesh,"—and, even now, His real presence, in fulfilment of promise, is vouchsafed to the Christian church, by the Holy volume of the Sacred Scriptures, of Life—the record of His sacred laws.

In the firmament first arose the sun, lighting the world with floods of golden light—a giant proud, ready to run his course. But what is all the splendour of the solar ray to the effulgence of the Sun of Righteousness—that sun which rose for the healing of the nations to dispel from them the mists of error, and effectually to banish the powers of darkness.—What, the brilliancy of the solar ray, to a sunbeam from the presence of God! What the power of the sun above our heads in comparison of His presence, a single emanation of whose will breathed it into existence, and without whose sustaining power, its elements would dissolve with fervent heat.

With gentler beams and milder rays the silvery moon first shed her lustre on the newly created world. So doth the sacred volume of God's law shed its mild and hallowed radiance upon the narrow path to life. This word is a light unto my feet, and a lamp about my paths. Silently and calmly do its solemn truths enlighten, purify, and improve the heart.

Then in the firmament twinkled the starry hosts of Heav- en through the realms of night. There is neither speech nor language amongst them, yet their voice is heard in an elo- quent and burning praise of God. So in the moral world amid the darkness of the natural mind, have we noticed gleaming scintillations of light in the various traditional lore of man.

Here and there sages and philosophers have explored the laws of nature, have investigated her phenomena, and have left us the traditions and philosophy of the schools.—And prophets and apostles through past ages have gleaned the doctrines and precepts of the Holy Church, and by tradition, have handed them down for our guidance. From various sources has traditional light been shed upon the moral world, and these may be aptly compared to the twinkling light of the starry spheres—dim, yet giving light—and in fact deriving all their brilliancy by reflection from, and conformity to the Divine Will whether expressed in nature or revelation.

Based upon the united foundation of the Real Presence of the Redeemer, the Holy Scriptures, and apostolic tradition, stands the Church, the Bride of Christ, our holy Mother,—She shines forth resplendent with an union of every degree of moral illumination ever vouchsafed to man.

At humble distance, without pretension, with one hand resting on the sacred volume, the other extended with charity towards mankind, and with the eye turned with hope towards Heaven, stands MASONRY—the handmaid of religion.—Her disciples receive illumination from the Holy Word, and from tradition. Two degrees of the moral light irradiate her path. While the Holy Church is a Divine institution established for the redemption of the world—Masonry has flourished, its handmaid, claiming however, only human authority for its origin. It commenced with Enoch before the flood. It flourished through the patriarchal ages, but was signally brought to its height of excellence by the wisdom of the mighty Solomon. From his era it has been handed to us a perfect science, founded on the united testimony of Holy Scripture and tradition. Prophets and apostles have been amongst its brightest sons. Sages and philosophers have drunk from its fountains. Almighty God has stamped the seal of approbation upon the institution by making it subservient to His purposes in the preservation of His holy word. Has any Christian present in this assembly learned what became of the Ark of the Covenant at the destruction of the first temple? When the Jews were carried in captivity to Babylon, what fate attended the sacred records, the Holy Law of God? All that it is permitted to state is that in His providence Jehovah com- mitted the preservation thereof to the Masonic fraternity—that during the captivity none but the "Eye of God" rested on those sacred deposits, and that at the rebuilding of the second temple by the Masonic Art they were again brought to light and restored to their wonted places in the house of God.

There is one feature in all the systems of moral science handed down from earlier days forming a singular contrast to the customs of the present age. I allude to the secrecy and mystery in which the various elements of instruction are im- parted. Amongst many of the good and virtuous, this has been in our day an objection to the Institution itself. It is be- lieved that all history will confirm the fact that, until about the fourth Century of the Christian Era, no system of instruc- tion was ever public. The schools of the philosophers were shrouded in mystery. The rites and ceremonies of worship in those days were veiled in mystery. At Eleusis, at Thebes, at the temples on the Indus, nay, at Rome itself, secrecy mark- ed the more important rites. The novice too, before he could become an hierophant was required to undergo a systematic preparation, and the steps from initiation to perfection were gradual and progressive. Even a system of writing was pecu- liar to the Priesthood in early ages, now handed down to us under the name "hieroglyphics" or "sacred sculptures."—But lest the antiquity of the custom, and the danger of remov- ing any ancient land mark, or of omitting any sure tradition properly delivered to the brethren, be not deemed a sufficient reason for the preservation of the mysteries as their ancestors did of old; allow me to refer to an analogy which may tend to disarm the scruples of any Christian. I allude to "THE DISCIPLINE OF THE SECRET" as practiced by the Apostolic Church during the first four Centuries to "the hidden terms in which the holy sacraments were alluded to, before mere catechumens or the uninitiated—and to the peculiar secrecy and progressive steps required of each disciple of the faith as he advanced to the perfect knowledge of the Christian faith.

"I have fed you with milk" saith St. Paul to the Church at Corinth (I. Cor. III. 3.) and not with meat for hitherto ye were not able to bear it, neither yet now are ye able." Then too, where in the sacred word do we find the faithful assemble? In preaching, the Apostles boldly addressed the multitudes in the streets, in the market places, at the Synagogues—in the Holy Temple.—But when to use the phrase of inspiration they assembled "to break bread"—or in other words to offer the Eucharistic oblation—the congregation met in "an upper chamber" or in the secret retreats of the mountains around Jerusalem. Nor was the peculiar nature of the mystery of the Lord's supper explained to the uninitiated. For four cen- turies was it preserved in strict obscurity—and to this truth both Christian and Pagan writers bear ample witness. The bitter persecutions were waged against the faithful—Mar- tyr after Martyr suffered at the stake. Effort after effort was

made by the Emperors and their officers, to extort from the suffering Christians the nature of their secret rites.—In vain did the pro-consul Pliny, the apostate Julian—or the learned and infidel Porphyry or Celsus urge their surmises as to what was the great Christian mystery. They never ascer- tained its holy truths. Far and wide was spread the vile slander that the faithful at each secret meeting killed an in- fant, covered it with paste or bread, and then cut its body and drank its blood. But altho' this was firmly met and denied at every martyrdom—at every persecution, still echoed the sacrilegious lie through Pagan ranks. None but the truly faithful, who had passed thro' the several degrees from initiation to perfection, were permitted to witness the most holy rites or understand their import. In the earliest liturgies we find that after all had assembled, the public prayers were of- fered, and the public instruction was communicated, but when the Bishop then pronounced the usual formula, "Sursum cor- da" ("Lift up your hearts") the Novitiate and Catechumens were dismissed with the words "Ite, missa est."—"So! you are dismissed"—and none but those who had undergone the requisite degree of instruction were permitted to remain.

If then the immediate disciples and successors of the in- spired Apostles adopted this then prevalent custom, still per- served by Masons, may it not be the subject of doubt whether a well founded objection can exist upon that account?

To return however to the principle features of Masonry. We have this day assembled to celebrate the Anniversary of the festival of St. John the Baptist—one of the Patron Saints of the fraternity. From the lesson of his holy life may be gathered the duties, and the aim of every true Mason. His was the task "to comfort the people of the Lord." to utter the voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord—Make straight in the desert an highway for our God.—Following in the footsteps of this Saint, came one whose shoe's latchet he was not worthy to unloose. So with this fraternal association. It comes the harbinger of a yet brighter light. Its lessons refine and purify the heart, while they prepare it for the reception of what is truly good and right. To the people of the Lord it doth speak comfort.—In the moral desert it doth make straight an highway for our God. Every valley of depression and distress is exalted by the compassion of the brethren for each others woes.—Every hill of difficulty and unjust oppression shall be made low by the sympathy and assistance of every worthy brother.—The crooked dealings of the unjust shall be made straight and the rough places of this world's adversity, smooth. But may we not draw a yet stronger analogy? "Mark the perfect man, and behold the upright for the end of that man is peace!" Let then the varied instructions of the MASONRY be communi- cated to "an attentive ear" and "a faithful breast," and the way is opened, even for "the grateful heart" to receive in the more sacred mysteries of the Holy Church, such peace as passeth the understanding of this world.

In surveying the character of St. John, we are struck with his perfect faith, his enduring hope, and his self mortifying charity. In these qualities, the true and upright Mason en- deavors to imitate him. MASONRY has for its sole aim the communication of such valuable instruction as shall the more fully perfect its disciples in these heavenly graces. Mark the distrust between man and man in every walk of life!—What mean the bars, and bolts, and locks on every door? What, the massive chests, and arched vaults? What, the guarded security between men in the business transactions of the world? Alas! Suspicion lurks in every breast, and man distrusts his fellow man. But let a Mason recognize a worthy brother—distrust vanishes, and perfect confidence takes its place. Whence this change? The active prin- ciples of this yet mystic science here achieve a moral wonder. One ray of light from above here points out a path unknown to the world at large. But faith ends not here. It exists in active exercise towards each other in the walks of life, joined with an unwavering confidence in the Supreme Ruler of Heaven and his perfect laws, whether displayed in the works of nature, or in the book of Revelation. To every man some hour will come when the brightness of prosperity shall be veiled; when anxiety shall cast a cloud over the future; when all seems to go wrong; when the most prudent and well dig- ested schemes have been disconnected; when fortune frowns; and when the darkness of night hangs like a funeral pall over the future. In that hour, Masonry echoes the voice of piety, and in still small accents whispers to her children "Look above." These are but the troubles of time—fleeting, transitory, and evanescent. She tells us that whether time blanches our locks or mows us down in early youth, still our immortal spirit shall not see death, but shall if worthy be transplanted to that happy temple where the wicked cease from troubling, where the weary are at rest, and where God shall wipe away all tears from our eyes.—At the last great day our works of wood and hay and stubble shall be con- sidered to their destined end, but even then Hope whispers "thou shalt be saved." Even now perchance the red- breast is warbling a melodious requiem over the graves of departed brethren, but hope tells us their spirits rest quietly awaiting the great consummation of all things in this world. "Requiescant in pace!" But "the greatest of these is chari- ty!"—Freely did our Patron go about doing good—preach- ing the coming of the Prince of peace. In the desert or in the market place his voice of instruction and warning was heard. His own comfort he regarded not in comparison of his mission of love to mankind.—Still is there some analo- gy. The lessons of Masonry point out the first great duty of her children to be fraternal love. Regarding no sect, nor any set form either in religion or philosophy,—she teaches us that we are brethren subject to like passions and equal in- firmities, and again echoes the accents of piety in the warn- ing "Bear ye each others burdens!"—Though various our pursuits in life, different our positions in society, the valuable lesson is still reiterated that we are one, and are dependent upon each other—and that the duties of life in all their rela- tions should be cordially and cheerfully practised. Follow me for instance to the bed of a dying brother. Around are his agonized wife,—his weeping relations,—and his uncon- scious children. The pulse is throbbing more and more slowly. The extremities are becoming cold. The eye loses its brilliancy and becomes fixed. Silently, then the spirit wails above and leaves its clay cold tenement to be re- solved into its primitive elements. Poverty and distress may

have been the lot of every previous month, but when that widow looks upon her orphan children, and their cry "dear mother, give us bread" now falls in plaintive accents on her ear, is she deserted? No! In every Mason she finds a brother and a protector. She is in the midst of those who sym- pathize in her distress, who feel her anguish, and who, at that trying hour, will stand by and support her in every trial. In every event of life, each brother of the mystic tie hears his sigh responded to in the sympathy of others. If chill poverty or fell disease assail him, a hand is always near to aid and alleviate his pain. No Levitical "passing by on the other side" is known to Masonry but here again a ray of Heavens own light irradiates the path of each true brother.

Here, then, let me once more ask whether Masonry doth not accomplish a task analogous to that of the Patron Saint whose festival we this day celebrate? He went forth prepar- ing mankind for the reception of the Son of God and His holy doctrines. Doth not this mystic art sow in the heart the seed of faith, hope and charity, there to spring up, and bring forth fruit abundantly whenever the Holy Spirit shall send down the dew of His grace to nourish it? Is she not an handmaid to the Bride of Christ? Her aim is the relief of the fatherless and the widow, and the preservation of her children from the contamination of this world. The Chris- tian church offers the means of grace, and is the only appointed channel of salvation. Masonry points the way whereby the heart may be enlightened so as to recognize that glorious approach to Heaven, and hail its holy rites dispensing mercy and pardon to mankind. The Church of Christ shall live throughout eternity—whilst masonry, however, can conduct us no farther than this transient life. But shall we reject this lesser light? What have been its results? What its duration? When "darkness covered the earth, and gross darkness the people, when war and pestilence brooded over the earth, where was masonry? Busy in the ranks on the battle field, averting the point of the sword and spear, and at her in- stance have millions of lives been spared. Busy at the couch of the sick and poor, when death was raging round about. Busy in the halls of princes and judges, shielding the feeble and weak from high-handed oppression and tyranny. Busy on the wide spread ocean, aiding the distressed and worn out mariner. Busy at the savage council fire spreading protection around the doomed victim at the stake. Busy even at the martyr's dungeon, loosing his shackles and setting him at lib- erty, or conveying to him the consolation and sympathy of others—even amongst his oppressors. In point of duration kingdoms and empires have dwindled and gone into de- cay, thrones have risen and set, principalities and powers have gone to destruction, while Masonry has marked their rise, their progress and their fall. She maintains her prin- ciple purity amid all the changes of this mutable world. As of old, far ahead in every clime, she clings to every ancient land mark; still teaches the same salutary truths, and still practices through her members the same virtues. At a re- verent distance, yet in her proper place, she maintains her position, the handmaid of religion in conveying moral illu- mination to mankind. With the church of Christ, outliving the powers of this world, she sheds her gentler ray on earth, soothing its cares, alleviating its distresses, and combat- ing its evil principles. Whilst thus existing amongst men, ever devoted to the propagation of religion and piety, twice has it reared an holy temple to Almighty God upon the Mount Moriah. By the Masonic Art, elevated to its present science under the wise and mighty Solomon, the first stupen- dous fabric was raised and dedicated; but, Judea fell—Israel's thrones were humbled in the dust,—hence brooded o'er her plains desolate became her cities; captive wept her children. Even, then, when the power of the Chaldeans overcame Judea and all seemed doomed to inevitable ruin, Almighty God, in His providence, committed to this fraternity the preservation of his sacred law—and the Ark of the Covenant. Well was the sacred trust guarded,—in still silence and perfect security did the deposit rest,—but, again did the temple rise from its former ruins. Under Zerubbabel, the towers of God's house, once more shone upon Mount Moriah. The Ark of the Covenant and the Sacred Law were again brought to light by the art of Masonry and were restored to their wonted places in the house of God—Jerusalem then resounded once more with anthems to the Great Jehovah; but the veil of that temple was rent in twain on the fatal night that saw the agonizing death of the Son of God; and, in a few more years, in fulfilment of the blessed Redeemer's prophecy, not one stone of the second temple rested on another. In the provi- dence of God, his once chosen people have become outcasts and wanderers in all lands; affording us, in this our day, the witness of a stupendous miracle, to wit: The perpetuity of a distinct race scattered over all the earth, free from intermix- ture with the nations amongst whom they live—existing without a leader, without political organization—and, yet, a nation distinctive in its features, with marked and unerring characteristics peculiar to themselves.

But greater things are looked for in this our age. Judea, there is reason to believe, is once more free. Jews, by thousands, are now travelling thither; and without too ardent a flight of fancy, we may be permitted to hope that the time is rapidly approaching when, "in the fulness of the Jews, shall the gentiles be gathered in."

Brethren of the Masonic fraternity! If by our mystic art there has been twice erected upon Mount Moriah an holy temple to the Great Jehovah, how far may we, although scat- tered over the earth, contribute at this time to the erection of a third and more glorious temple in honor of the holy, blessed and glorious trinity—"three persons but one God?" In honor of God, the father, the author of all things, who led his people of old to that chosen spot and instructed them how to build His temple: in honor of God, the son, who there sealed our redemption with his blood—and in honor of the Holy Ghost, who there first descended in tongues of celest' fire to enkindle the flame of true piety through all ages to come. May we dare to hope this great work is reserved to us? It so, may Heaven speed the day! Masons! what a theme!—Would that a coal from heaven could touch the speaker's lips, and enable him to impress every heart and thrill every nerve with the ennobling subject! Masonry has, heretofore, been a humble instrument in the hands of God in the preservation of true religion. It has survived the
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