

# THE SEMI-WEEKLY IBERIAN.

VOLUME V

NEW IBERIA, LOUISIANA, WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 20, 1899.

NUMBER 2694

## Address

Delivered by the Hon. Chas. F. Buck on

Tuesday, 14th Inst., in the Opera House.

On the "Life and Character of George Washington."

This day,—he hundredth anniversary of that solemn one—when the "Father of his Country"—was laid to his eternal rest,—amid the hallowed peace of Mount Vernon,—our brethren from all the confines of the Republic,—pilgrimed to the foot of the simple impressive tomb to offer their incense of adoration and love to the memory of their patriot brother.

And throughout the country,—thousands more,—as we do—unable to kneel at the foot of his grave, in fact,—join hearts and spirits, in sympathy with their devotion.

What is the redeeming, the god-like inspiration of human effort? It is the consciousness that the good and the right must prevail, and the hope, that makes the heart indomitable in its faith for something always higher and better.

Mankind has struggled and toiled; suffered and enjoyed; gone forward and backward—upward in ambition and aim,—back again to degradation; but through all the trials, the human thought that the better must come, the upholding faith that the divine is part of us and must prevail has, survived. It lives through the decay of matter; it calms the violence of passion, and incarnates the immortality of hope. Through failure and success alike, the mightier hope survives, lifting perpetually upward the banner of human progress inlaid with the promise of the universal good.

This ennobling sentiment illumines the actions of man; it is present in the student and the warrior; the philosopher and the moralist; the subject and the ruler. It is the one imperishable, the one immortal thing.—Blot out the record of battles; of nations come and gone; of cities lost in the dust of ages; generations mouldered to ashes and to sightless bones; the work of the soul remains and we know that we have risen closer to our Maker; that we are rightly moving towards the one true end, the millennium of the soul's perfectness and the body's eternal rest.

What an evolution from Alexander to Washington! Alexander conceived the mighty thought of a universal empire; all the nations of the earth under one power united in one ambition. Had he lived he might have accomplished the fulfillment of his dream. But what then? The bond of his union was might; the loyalty of the subject, the obedience of the slave. Could that have lasted? Never. His empire such as it was was a structure made with hands held by the sword; and by hands and the sword it fell to pieces ere barely the breath of the great dictator had passed away.

And Washington? The empire of universal truth, the temple builded on the hope of the human heart and consecrated to the attainment of highest destiny.

We as Americans know what this means—for it requires no further elaboration. I will not yield to the temptation to flourish the Declaration of Independence. Its truths are part of our being; they live in our blood by inheritance and conviction: the freedom and equality of man is the fact of modern philosophy. The might of this fact and not the power of man will build the empires of the future. The American idea is the world-idea: the Gospel of our political faith is lifting the hopes of the people of the earth: it holds the one true principle of government before which the false faiths and

theories of kingcraft and divine selection must sooner or later vanish.

As the climax to the record of this growth from Macedon to the American Republic, there stands out the majestic figure of George Washington.

The resources of language have been exhausted in his praise; an ordinary tribute of words to him is mere affectation.

The greatest tribute we can render—one more agreeable to him, if his spirit have knowledge of our world—is to accept the ever-growing power of his example. Then our service is more a consecration than a homage.

And so it should be—the great past is ours; a heritage to endless time. Shall its lesson be forgotten? Its examples undeeded? The fruits of its achievement lost to mankind?

Those are problems which as Masons we propound to ourselves as we stand a hundred years after his death, at the foot of Washington's grave.

Mount Vernon! It is not sacrilege nor blasphemy to name thee with Calvary. There the Son of God suffered and died that man may have eternal life: from Mount Vernon, we reckon the life-struggle of man on earth: "ecce homo" may be inscribed on the majestic brow of its great tenant. The man of men radiant with the luster of the glories and triumphs of his age.—The one incorruptible figure that could never be swerved from truth or duty. Flattery could not move and power could not seduce him. Caesar, Cromwell, Napoleon—all intoxicated by the taste of power; Washington quaffed the dregs of the cup and remained sober; becoming for all time the model patriot and the exemplar of American citizenship.

He lived for his country and for his fellow-men; the one he created by his deeds; to the other, he remains the eternal prototype and example.

There is no false glamour in the scroll of Washington's fame. It is real, and therefore permanent. His is not the ephemeral glory of mere genius; a brilliant mind wrapped in its personal designs, pleasing itself with the consciousness of its power.

He had all of that, but in him it was subdued to the order of things; he was the embodiment of the genius of self-forgetfulness; justice and duty were the Gods to whose shrine he consecrated himself.

That for which the centuries had toiled was achieved for mankind under his guidance and leadership and the world will forever link the name and figure of George Washington with the climax of human struggle and enshrine him as the incarnation of its results.

Thus Washington—great in his individuality—greater in the cause he represents, will expand, as the centuries move down the abyss of time, into a dual being great enough to live through all time in his own merit, he will seem to grow greater and greater as his individuality merges into the thing he represents—the new man regenerated by the genius of liberty and uplifted by the humanity of universal brotherhood.

The true, the faithful historian, who seeks for that in the annals of man's achievements which produced and left good and benefit to mankind will linger with ever growing fervor over the record of Washington's career. More and more distinctly, more and more divinely perfect, will his image stand out as, the new order of things yet in its stages of experiment is maintained, confirmed and expanded.

He has himself laid down the rules of its life and the conditions of its development.

He has made part of himself the philosophy of its creation and being himself the perfect exemplar of its principles has left to posterity an infallible guide for their preservation and transmission.

The examples of subordination of himself to propriety and principle have become a part of our political faith, and woe to them who would violate or ignore the

mighty lesson.

The surrender of his commission as Commander in Chief of the Army; his retirement from public life when all cabals and intrigues and envious malice had been driven to the hiding holes of discomfited malevolence and mischief; when he knew himself to be the pride and idol of the people to whom he secured their liberty and their nationality; when he sat upon a throne such as had never been built up for human sovereign, the throne of universal love and worship, was an act of self-denial for which history furnishes no parallel.

There is proof to show that Washington was offered a "kingly crown"; it is probable. Remember how long the struggle was which involved the Declaration of Independence. Even after Lexington and Concord, after blood had been shed many of the best and wisest of our forefathers hoped for peace and reunion with the motherland. The sentiment of reverence for kings was deeply rooted and hard to extirpate.

The traditions of families, the pride of descent, the strength of English character, the pride of English nationality pleaded for the mother country and all that the children of the new land asked was justice and equality under her laws. It needed goading to extremes; it needed all the passion of Patrick Henry, the fervor of the mighty John Adams, the humanity of Franklin and the radicalism of Thomas Jefferson to at last break the tie and give to mankind the Declaration of Independence.

So when out of not over harmonious fragments of certain independent colonies now called States the experiment of a government based on the consent of the governed was about to be organized there were many, thoughtful and sincere, who were not prepared to accept so radical a departure from the experience of history, who believed a monarchy best and safest for the welfare of the people.

The army was with Washington the country exhausted and resourceless would have accepted his decision. He resisted the temptation and the Republic was established under a Constitution which has survived the greatest internal conflict which ever divided a household against itself, and is even now working out to completion the problem of human emancipation and liberty.

There is but one danger to our institutions and that lies in the passions and injustice of man. In themselves theoretically they are perfect. And here Washington leaves an example greater in itself and its effects than the refusal of a crown.

His retirement from the Presidency under the conditions given has set a standard which none dare violate and created a safeguard which will permit no innovation dangerous to the well-being of the Republic or the liberties of the people.

I could say more of George Washington, the theme is so grateful. We should worship at the shrine of his patriotism, drink from the fountain of his inexhaustible devotion, strengthen our hearts for labors of sacrifice in the examples of his unconscious consecration. But there are other relations in which I have to speak of him which are of first importance to us here to-night.

The meeting here to-night is in sympathetic response to a ceremony of worship and love celebrated at the tomb of our illustrious dead by our Masonic brethren.

George Washington was a Free Mason. This fact the Masons recognize to-day, and as a class unite to give expression to the feelings which its memory calls forth. But not this alone: to do well our duty to our country and to our fellow-men is a Masonic principle and when Free Masons to-day gather together as we and others have done it is not for what would be an idle and trivial purpose, to merely proclaim the fact that George Washington was a member of this great order, but for the greater purpose of reaping the

fruits of the lessons of his life and rejoicing that that life so useful to man, so grand in all its manifestations, so perfect in being and conception embodied in its completeness the products of Masonic aim and philosophy.

As Americans we have shared enough in the glory of Washington and motive for all worship and praise. We need no accidental stimulus; yet as Masons we rejoice that the Masonic fraternity can point to him as one who has nourished at the fount of her humanity and wisdom and who practiced in all the stations of his life, the rules of conduct towards himself, his fellow-men, his Country and his God which are enucleated at the foot of our altar.

The ceremony has been made the subject of comment and criticism. We do not notice this Free Masonry has ever been content to rely on its intrinsic value as a factor in human evolution and avoids controversy conducted necessarily on lines extrinsic to its essence and purpose. If the enemies of Free Masonry would once concede the validity of certain fundamental truths, the discussion would end; Free Masonry would be accepted as a universal good; as there is no hope of such agreement on the premises on which our deductions are to be drawn, discussion is purposeless because it can never lead to a conclusion.

It has been boldly asserted that the whole story of Washington having been a Free Mason was a pure falsification; the indisputable records of Fredericksburg, Lodge No. 4, under the Grand Lodge of Virginia, has refuted this pretension and silenced the slander.

It is now asserted that though the records prove the fact that he was made a Mason he was not one at heart and never performed or recognized any Masonic duties after he became a Master Mason. Again the records of Fredericksburg and his own letters disprove this assertion. I quoted from these letters in an address delivered April 30th, 1889, on the occasion of the celebration of the One Hundredth Anniversary of Washington's first inauguration, published in the proceedings of the Grand Lodge of 1890.

But what if it were true that he took no active part in the affairs of the Lodge? Many good Masons do not concern themselves with the affairs of Lodge administration.

Once initiated, passed and raised to the sublime degree of Master Mason, Washington's great heart took in the full breath and significance of Masonry and while it is not susceptible of demonstration to what extent his character may have grown under their infinite suggestion, the fact remains that every incident of his career, private or public, is in harmony with the teachings of Masonry; he, if ever mortal man accomplished it, grasped the secret sublimity of moral perfection; he, if ever man or Mason solved it, felt the meaning of the lost word, and found it in the purity of his heart and in the rectitude of his mind; he, if ever mortal man sealed that height, stood enshrined on the summits of a godlike individuality knowing no service but duty, no interest but the welfare of his human brotherhood, no standard of action but justice, having no consciousness of self except as a part of God's universality of charity and love.

When we find these things in Freemasonry and when we find them exemplified in the life and character of a brother mason, what true friends of the human family will question her privilege to rejoice that such things are, or will deny us the right to recognize that they were embodied into a living activity for the welfare of all mankind, in the flesh and blood of George Washington.

Some may imagine that Free Masonry points to the fact that men like George Washington have been its votaries in vindication and defense. No one honest enough or tolerant enough to admit truth where he finds it would persist in such a pretense.

No, no one man can honor Free Masonry or presume to set himself

above it, not even Washington himself.

It was before him, is now and will ever be. Its essence consists in the fundamental faith in the unity of man under the guidance of God and its mission of achieving the universal brotherhood must be worked out on the lines of a perfection modelled on our conception of the infinite destiny.

No one human being can place himself above this level. He can conceive it as a possibility; he can carry it into his life work as a fact in the perception of mission and duty, but he cannot be independent of it or superior to it.

It is a favorite theme with me to say what I think the Masonic idea of human life has done towards the emancipation.

Free Masonry is the republic of equality and toleration. It attacks no living institution, questions no faith, concerns itself with no forms of government but teaches respect of all, and obedience to that to which we belong. But outside and above these conditions of human society—rests on a moral structure wherein are combined to harmonious action those loftier qualities of man which are eternal and universal—which are the theme of that worship which in the name of the one living God proclaims the brotherhood of man.

This philosophy at once invests the man with a dignity which in the physical and material world is not accorded to him. It strips the mighty of their power—the privileged of their superiority—the distinguished of their distinction and lays them all equal on the level of their common humanity.

But the established order of things must not be disturbed by rude contention. Free Masonry teaches these high ideals as rules and principles for individual culture and expressly abstains from any interference in the affairs of religion or government.

Its immediate aim is to elevate and make perfect the individual man and thus create in the external world an agency which in the name of the right and truth consecrate itself to progress and the welfare of nations and of mankind. This is what Ephraim Lessing, a Free Mason, a man of this clearest and most penetrating intellect, meant, when a century and a half ago answering the self-proposed question—"What are the deeds of Free Masonry?"—he wrote:—"But this I will say: the real deeds of Free Masonry are so great that centuries may pass ere one can say, 'this has it accomplished'; and yet it has worked on all the good that is in the world, and it will continue to labor on and for the good that ever will exist in the world."

It does its good work through the good which it implants in the human heart; it accomplishes its great mission by the magic of a new consciousness of freedom, dignity and tolerance, with which it encircles the brow of its votaries.

I will not detain you by drawing the picture of that gradual, that suffering toil,—that perpetual struggle of the human race running all down the centuries which at last fixed the record of the new epoch, in the declaration of man's equality and the assertion of his inherent right: some day a historian will come candid and brave enough to say that from the Masonic Lodge spread out that philosophy of life which levels all ranks and like death it self lays the shepherd's crook beside the sceptre."

This fundamental truth in the plan of creation constituting the very foundation of the body of Free Masonry has in all times, since there are any records, held many of the best and greatest of mankind to the bonds of the order.—More than half of the signers of the Declaration of Independence were Free Masons: Franklin and Lafayette and Peyton Randolph, first president of the Continental Congress, were among them. Chancellor Robert R. Livingston was Grand Master of Masons in New York when on April 30th, 1789 he administered to Washington the oath of office as first President of the United States.

And so the principles of Free Masonry working through the ambitious and hopes of individual brethren fulfill the mission and accomplish the good that is in them.

And what are we to-day and what is our duty?—The truths of Free Masonry are the accepted facts of our political constitution. Their principles have worked out their inevitable results.

We have only to preserve what has been handed down to us; to better it and transmit it to those who come after us.

Easily said; but the struggle is as hard, as fierce as ever, and the issue never certain.—New conditions produce unexpected complications; increased privileges make new duties and responsibilities.

The science of government which involves that of jurisprudence and the administration of law is the highest expression of the products of human civilization. That purely moral, philosophic and aesthetic side of the human character mingles itself in the individual and produces its great abstractions independent of physical development or even under conditions of restraint and oppression.—The philosopher, the artist, the master of literature of both ancient and modern times, live in and create worlds of their own which our fancy and our imagination love to follow, receiving there from infinite pleasure and comfort.

But the "toiling masses" receive little satisfaction from these things.

We look up to a Homer, a Dante, a Shakespeare and a Goethe as to the inspired of God; but when in solemn judgment we pass on the merits of men the light of their practical service and usefulness, the civilized acclaim goes up to the jurist and the soldier, the philosopher and the legislator, the inventor and the reformer, as the pillars on which the temples of development are erected. Behold Solon and Leonidas; Gutenberg and Martin Luther; Franklin and Washington.

The nations move forward only by means of the rules and conditions of life which they impose upon themselves, and taken thus the progress and happiness of man is a question of government and social order.

Some of the simplest things in us are most difficult to define even as infinity eludes the grasp of conception though we know that time and space are limitless.

We conceive that inherently considered man is an absolutely free agent with no human right or power anywhere to restrain him, yet we know that the exercise of the freedom is not only absolutely impossible but utterly inconsistent with the best impulses of his being.

So there is no period of known time where or when he insisted on this freedom of power of action. He yields it, not absolutely it is true, but relatively, in the social compact which saves to him entirely all his natural rights upon two conditions only namely, that we should so exercise them as not to injure or affect the rights of others and that the whole thus created is obligated to protect each component individual in the possession and enjoyment of all his rights and liberties, not inconsistent with the first condition.

These things seem self-evident and as abstract truths; there is no time when they were denied; as practice they had no existence until the American Republic built up its self-created government on the consent of the governed.

"*Tantum molis erat Romanam condere gentem.*"

So great work it was to found Rome. It was the struggle of fifty centuries to establish the American Republic.

Five thousand years the conflict was waged between vanity and passion on one side and reason and justice on the other.

Brother Masons, let us ever know that Masonry and the principles of Masonry played a star-part in the evolution of this denouement.

It has taught man from time immemorial that the human family is a brotherhood with no distinctions and privileges but such as are founded on merit and are recognized for the common good.

Free Masonry constituted the Republic of the world before human government recognized the equality of man. Its philosophy traversed the seas and lifted itself to the

heavens; it overleaps the barriers of national boundaries and ranks above distinctions of religions and creeds. Its trust is in God; its creed is the brotherhood of man and it emphasizes this fundamental essence by the meditation and practice of every virtue.

It is solemn with the rigor of justice; it smiles with the gifts of benevolence; it exalts itself in the divine administrations of charity and love without abating one jot of the fealty we owe to our country, our families and our God; it generalizes our duties to ourselves and our fellow-men to the high plain of universal equality.

Who can be better and more faithful citizens of this temporal republic than those who have laid in to their hearts the might and power of such a conception of man's unity interdependence and ultimate destiny?

As Free Masons we must be good citizens. The rules of conduct defined by masonic teachings which make the true mason, make the faithful and devoted citizen. We should be devoid of selfish ambition; we should be generous and charitable in our judgment upon our neighbors; we should seek harmony and peace and avoid needless contention and passionate discords. Our emblems and our symbols are designed to constantly remind us of the absolute harmony and order which prevail in God's physical world. The square and compass, the level and the plumb the circle and the triangle, suggest so many elements of perfection and subordination in visible creation and are intended to admonish us by ever present example to make our moral being equally perfect and harmonious. I wish to express and transmit the conviction that Free Masonry as an institution in this country is in harmonious co-operation with every influence dedicated to the welfare of the people and the preservation of the Republic.

The strifes of passion, the contentions of conflicting interests which have shaken our very being will arise again and again to test the stability of government by and for the people. In such trials the conservative force of Masonic character will assert itself and develop some of that good which grows without men seeing it and some of that uplifting progress which enlarges the heart without our being able to say whence it comes. Free Masons as such—nor Masonic bodies,—take no part in human contention. Active partisanship would be inconsistent with its very essence and destructive of its universality. It is a world factor not a national factor, and its influence and power for good apart from the benefits peculiar to the members, manifests itself in the production and perpetual reproduction of a tremendous moral force which through all the moods of personal or political strife insists on the supreme condition of justice as the one indisputable factor in the maintenance of peace and the preservation of liberty.

Such being the intimate relation of Free Masonry to the State, not from any active participation of Masons as a body in State matters, but by reason of the fact that the principles of Free Masonry and the purposes and aims of the order are absolutely one with the objects for which our free government is established in so far as organized society aims to advance the welfare of the individual man, is any further or other reason desired or expected why as Masons we should to-day render honor to the memory of a brother who ranks above all Masons and all men for what he did, for what he was and for what he will ever represent to his countrymen and to all the nations in the coming of the consummation of the ages, the perfect peace and happiness of mankind?

Brother of Aurora Lodge, No! Not only every brother Mason in the State of Louisiana, but every good citizen unites with you in the sentiments which the occasion suggests and joins you in this sense of duty and consecration. The honors and benefits are reflected back upon ourselves. We can not kneel at the foot of Washington's sepulchre without rising