MASONIC ADDRESS,

DELIVERED AT THE

LAYING OF THE CORNER STONE

OF

ST. JOHN'S COLLEGE,

AT

OXFORD, NORTH CAROLINA,

ON

The Anniversary of the Nativity of St. John the Baptist,

A. D. 1855.

RALEIGH:
PRINTED AT THE "REGISTER" OFFICE.
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CORRESPONDENCE.

OXFORD, N. C., JUNE 25, 1855.

Rev. L. L. Smith:

DEAR SIR: At a meeting of the Board of Trustees of St. John's College, held to-day, the following resolution was unanimously adopted:

Resolved, That the thanks of the Board of Trustees of St. John's College are due, and are hereby tendered, to the Rev. LEONIDAS L. SMITH, for the able and instructive Address this day delivered by him at the laying of the Corner Stone of St. John's College; and that he be requested to furnish a copy of the same for publication.

The undersigned was appointed by the Board to communicate to you the foregoing resolution, and to ask your compliance with their wishes, by furnishing a copy of your Address referred to.

Very truly and fraternally,

JA. T. LITTLEJOHN.

WARRENTON, N. C.

Jas. T. Littlejohn, Esq.:

DEAR SIR: If, in the opinion of the Trustees of St. John's College, my Address is at all calculated to promote the cause of Masonry or the interests of the institution of learning which they are so worthily engaged in founding, I cheerfully comply with their request, believing that every member of the Fraternity is bound to contribute what he can, though it be but a mite, to so noble an object.

Yours, very truly,

L. L. SMITH.

ADDRESS.

On an occasion like that which has assembled us here to-day, and which is so illustrative of the spirit of Masonry, it is peculiarly appropriate that we should explain the principles of that body, to which we are to be indebted for the Institution of Learning, the corner-stone of which has just been laid.

But before we do this, it may be well to remove, in the outset, some prejudices that exist in the minds of many against the Fraternity—prejudices altogether unfounded, as can easily be shown, but which, we have reason to believe, have caused many to look with disfavor on an institution that deserves only their approbation.

In our estimation, the most serious charge that has ever been brought against Masonry is, "Its liability to be regarded, by very many of the Order, as a sufficient substitute for Christianity." Now, that it has been so regarded by many, we do not doubt; and this is owing to the rigid principles of morality which it inculcates. No one can fail to be a good man—I mean good, in the estimation of the world, who will practice the precepts which he hears continually in the Lodge, and which are enjoined on the candidate in every degree that he takes. Is it to be wondered at, then, that those who think that morality and religion are synonymous terms, should be satisfied with Masonry, and tempted to substitute it for Christianity? But is Masonry responsible for their error? Because some, through ignorance of the requirements of the Gospel, degrade it to the level of a human institution, is this institution to be condemned? Then, for the same reason, we should condemn morality itself; for, where one man sub-

stitutes Masonry for Christianity, ten thousand, we venture to affirm, put morality in its place: and, if they are strictly honest in their dealings with one another, and perform well all their civil and their social duties, they ask, with the confidence of the young ruler in the Gospel, "What lack I yet?"

But Masonry expressly disclaims the honor thus done it, by admitting into its fraternity Jews, Turks and Pagans, which it could not do, if it professed to be regulated by the principles of the Christian religion. This much we will say, however: there is nothing in Masonry contrary to the principles of the Christian religion. It requires nothing which this religion condemns. It only stops short, and, as a Christian minister, I will say, very far short, of the demands of the Gospel.

But is this an objection to it? If so, the same objection would be fatal to all the benevolent institutions of the day. Does the Foreign Missionary Society, which aims to send the ambassador of Christ to the heathen, and which has accomplished its object when it has procured suitable men and the funds to sustain them, demand as the test of membership a belief of all the articles of the Christian faith? On the contrary, all may become associated with it who will only furnish to its coffers a certain sum per annum. Or does the Bible Society, which aims to scatter the Word of God, in every language, throughout the world, make imperative on all its members the profession of their belief in the inspiration of this Word, and require them to take it as the only rule of faith and practice? So far from this, it is willing to receive into connection with itself all of every creed, who will contribute, of their means, the funds to sustain it. Like the institution first named, its only test of membership is a pecuniary one. So with the Tract Societies, the Sunday School Societies, the Temperance Societies; and very properly, too. They have each one leading object in view, and that object, in every instance, is a good one. Take the one last mentioned, for

example. That aims to put down the single vice of intemperance—a vice condemned by the Bible, which declares that "no drunkard shall inherit the kingdom of God." But is it at variance with the Bible, because it does not occupy its whole ground? If it did occupy the whole ground, it would no longer be a simple Temperance Society, but would claim to be the Church itself. But, realizing the evils of intemperance, and thinking it easier to reclaim men from one vice, and that a most destructive one to the peace of society, than from all vices, it confines its operations to a single one, and wisely opens its arms to all, of whatever name or character, who will pledge themselves to abstain from the commission of that one sin.

Now, like all these societies, Masonry aims at a specific object, one highly commendable, and required by Christianity. It is capable of effecting great good, and, like the Temperance Society, reaches thousands whom the Gospel fails to convert. It does not, indeed, reach, or aim to reach, the root of sin, or appeal to the same principles as the Gospel. Neither does any other benevolent institution in the world. But its object is to alleviate human misery, and to increase the amount of human happiness. It is limited, too, in its operations, to this world, while Christianity looks chiefly to the future.

Were all men Christians, Masonry would, we acknowledge, be a useless institution. But so, likewise, would be every other institution designed to effect moral good. Even civil government might be dispensed with, in such a case; for it is, confessedly, only a necessary evil. If all men would do right without it, it would speedily be abolished as a needless expense. But so long as human nature remains what it is, we cannot afford to deprive ourselves of any means of contributing to the well-being of man upon earth. And one such means, pre-eminently, is Masonry. It is a Mutual Relief Society. Its members constitute one brotherhood, bound together by sacred bonds, pledged to sustain every worthy brother in the journey of life, and to

defend him against all dangers that may menace life or property. If a brother is sick, he is visited; if in distress, he is aided. If his family are left destitute, they are maintained, and his children educated.

Masons are bound, too, to watch over the morals of their fellow-members, and to check in them the first approaches to vice. And if friendly counsels will not do, they have it in their power to avail themselves of means far more effectual than any within the reach even of the civil authority. They may present an erring brother for trial in the Lodge of which he is a member, and for offences of which the laws of the land do not take cognizance; and the sentence to which such a one is liable is usually more dreaded than any civil pains or penalties. A Mason suspended or expelled is immediately reported to every Lodge throughout the Union; so that he is at once cut off from all Masonic fellowship. He is branded as an unworthy member, an outcast from the Order, and his name, as such, is enrolled on the published minutes of every Grand Lodge, and sent down to every subordinate Lodge in the country. And is this no check to vice? no aid to civil government? But if Masonry be so beneficial an institution, why, some may inquire, is there so much secrecy connected with it? I reply: Its secrecy is essentially its vitality. Masons are pledged to aid every worthy brother in distress, no matter to what nation he belongs. But how can they fulfil this pledge, if they have no means of recognizing one another? And this they can do by secret signs and tokens, or passwords. And of these there are appropriate ones belonging to every degree. A Mason can make himself known to another Mason, in the dark as well as in the light; at sea, afar off, as well as on land, and close at hand; and by signs as well as by words. He can give, in a variety of ways, satisfactory evidence of his being a member of the Order; and when he has done that, then, if not known to be an unworthy member, he may confidently look for any aid in the power of the brother to whom he applies, or of

the Lodge which he may visit for the purpose, to render him. If he be a stranger, away from home, and in want, he is sent on, at the expense of the Order, from Lodge to Lodge, until he reaches the place of his destination. Nor is he treated as a pauper, but as a brother. He is received cordially, and with open arms, wherever he goes.

The secret signs of Masonry are generally a sufficient guarantee against imposition. It is admitted, this may be practiced, notwithstanding all the guards and checks against it. But there was one Judas among the twelve Apostles of our Lord. And there are unworthy members in every church. But every precaution is taken to exclude such from admission into the Lodge. No one can be elected a member without the consent of all present at the election. A single negative vote may exclude a candidate for initiation. Nor can any one be elected in any Lodge, except in the place where he resides, and where his character is known. Nor can any one be received and initiated at the time his name is proposed as a member. A committee is appointed to ascertain his character, and report at the next regular meeting of the Lodge, at the interval of a month; except under very peculiar circumstances—of which the Lodge must decide—that may justify a departure from this rule. And before the election, every member must be notified of the application, that he may have the opportunity of being present, to reject the candidate, should he see fit, for good reason, to do so. And no one can pass on from degree to degree, without a separate election at every step, if any member of the Lodge demand it; so that, if any one should be admitted as an Entered Apprentice, owing to the unavoidable absence of a member whose vote would have excluded him, he may be prevented from passing on to the degree of Fellow Craft; or, if he has received this degree, he may yet fail to reach the dignity of Master. And if once rejected, he cannot apply again for admission within a shorter interval than six or twelve months, as the

It is not true that he is obliged to assist in the escape of a Mason, arraigned and tried before the tribunals of his country for a criminal offence; or that, when on a jury, he dare not bring in a verdict of "guilty" against a Masonic brother. There may, indeed, exist throughout the Fraternity a certain "*esprit du corps*," which may lead all to desire the acquittal of an accused brother; but no true Mason would ever wish, far less endeavor, to frustrate the ends of justice; or to advance one to political power, because he was a Mason, in opposition to another better able to serve his country, even if he did not belong to the Order. I do unhesitatingly affirm that the principles of Masonry are not only not at variance with, but are rather promotive of, all the duties we owe to society and to one another. "On earth, peace, good-will towards men," characterizes them all.

Masonry is a Mutual Life Insurance Society, with such signs as will enable its members to recognize one another, and such guards as will keep out unworthy persons; and no objection can be urged against it which is not equally valid against every other benevolent institution, except its secresy. That those who become attached to it are naturally led to form habits of dissipation, as by some has been affirmed, is an objection almost too puerile to be noticed; for no minor is ever permitted to enter the Lodge; and if a young man has not formed his character before he has reached the age of twenty-one, so as to be able to resist evil influences, the fault is in his parents and his instructors.

But what is there in Masonry to corrupt one's morals?—an institution which, some pretend to fear, will, by its members, be regarded as a sufficient substitute for Christianity! These opposite objections, surely, answer each other. If it be said improper associations will be formed at the Lodge, it is a sufficient reply, that, if the Lodge does its duty, no member of it can be an improper associate for any gentleman. If it be said, young men are kept out late at night, and often wind up their meetings with midnight suppers, the assertion is met with a positive denial. The regular meetings of Lodges occur but once a month, are always dismissed at seasonable hours, and are never, so far as my knowledge extends, followed by a supper. Certainly, this is no part of Masonry; and the Order is not responsible for what some of its members do, or may have done in times past.

But are there no advantages attending this Institution? May nothing be said in its favor? I have already mentioned some of the benefits of it, the importance of which cannot be denied. Is it nothing to be able to travel to any part of the globe and find a brother? Is it nothing to have around you defenders of your good name, who are bound to you by the strongest ties? Is it nothing to be watched over by valued friends and associates, who, you are assured, will never forsake you, so long as you are worthy? Is it nothing to know that, if you die pennyless, your family will be supported, and your children educated, and fitted to take care of themselves? "By their fruits shall ye know them," said our blessed Lord of the false prophets of His day.—And the remark is equally true of both good and bad institutions. Judge of Masonry, then, by this rule. And if you know nothing else that it has done, form your opinion of it by what you have seen to-day. We have just laid the corner-stone of a building designed for the gratuitous education of the sons of indigent Master Masons throughout the land; such an education as will open to them all the offices of honor and emolument in the country. Can there be any nobler charity than this? Without education, a man is dependent on the labor of his hands for support; and, in very rare cases, is able to accumulate a fortune. But, with a mind disciplined and filled with knowledge, he may, in this country, at least, aspire to the highest honors and occupy stations of trust and great profit, from which the ignorant must ever be debarred. No high wall, which even pre-eminent talents and acquirements can never scale, shuts him out from such stations, as is the case in monarch-

should characterize every one that would appropriate to himself the proud title of a 'workman that needeth not to be ashamed.'"