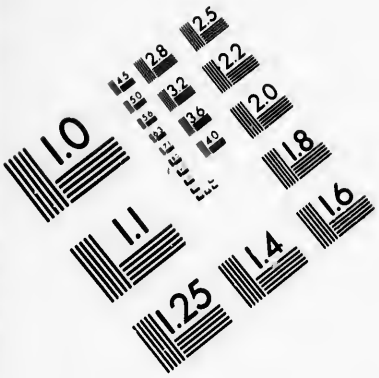



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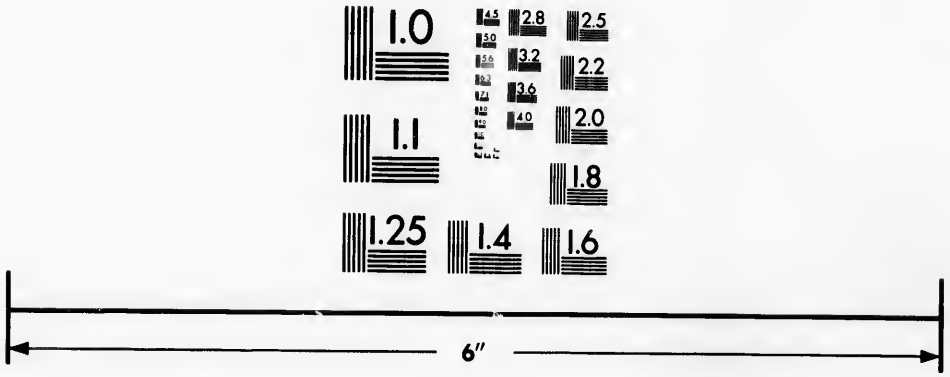



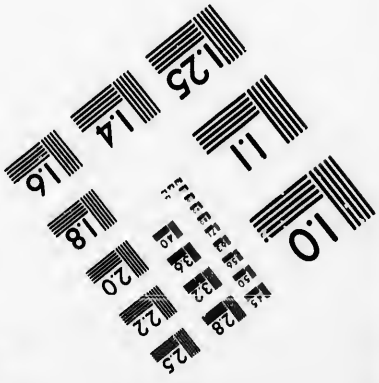

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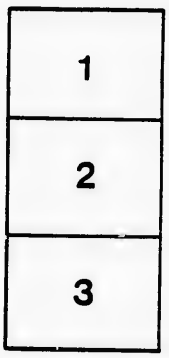

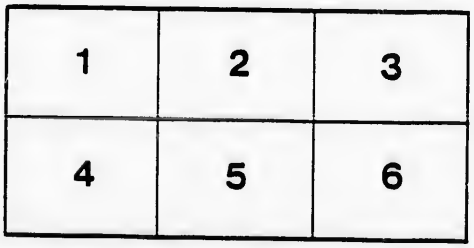



UNION FAVORABLE TO IMPROVEMENT.

A

SERMON

PREACHED BEFORE THE

UNITED FREE MASONS

IN THE

SCOTCH CHURCH

MONTREAL, DEC. 27, 1814;

BEING THE

ANNIVERSARY FESTIVAL

OF

ST. JOHN THE EVANGELIST.

BY THE REV. JAMES SOMERVILLE, G. C.

MONTREAL:
PRINTED BY NAHUM MOWER.
.....
1815.

MONTREAL, JANUARY 16, 1815.

To the Right Worshipful and Reverend Brother,
JAMES SOMERVILLE, Grand Chaplain
for the District of Montreal.

AGREEABLE to a vote passed unanimously, for requesting a copy of the Sermon, you preached on St. John's day last, it becomes my duty as Master of Union Lodge No. 8 to request, you will condescend to furnish me with the same, to be published for the use of the Lodge and our Brethren in general.

I am, Right Worshipful
Sir and Brother,
Your Obedient and
Very Humble Servant,
JACOB HALL.

UNION FAVORABLE TO IMPROVEMENT.

ISAIAH II. 13.—The envy also of Epraim shall depart, and the adversaries of Judah shall be cut off; Ephraim shall not envy Judah, and Judah shall not vex Ephraim.

IN these words the inspired Prophet points out those causes which had proved so pernicious to the internal prosperity of the Israelites, and which had so often rendered them an easy prey to their ruthless and ambitious neighbours. By listening to the suggestions of envy, by taking a pleasure in vexing each other, they became divided, and consequently weak, and by this means were often reduced to a state of bondage under a foreign yoke. Instead of keeping in view that they were brethern sprung from a common source; and that however much they might differ in matters of small importance, still that they were equally interested in maintaining that constitution, by which alone their strength as a nation could be preserved; they gave way to those passions and to those feelings, which

were the occasion of their being visited with great calamities and of being frequently reduced to great distress. But whenever the eyes of the Israelites were opened by those evils which they suffered, so as to enable them to take a view of their true interest, they again became united, their efforts were properly directed, and they again became a great and powerful people. This is what the Prophet states in the words of the text. "The envy also of Ephraim shall depart, and the adversaries of Judah shall be cut off; Ephraim shall not envy Judah, and Judah shall not vex Ephraim.

What happened to the Israelites of old, we have seen again taking place in these our days, upon the largest scale, which perhaps the world ever saw. As long as the different nations continued to consult their own ease and convenience, and perhaps also the gratification of envious feeling, in witnessing the humiliation and downfal of their neighbours; they each of them in its turn felt the oppressor's rod; and in their hour of degradation had sadly to lament that misery which had come upon them by their want of firm and magnanimous principles.

But the shades of death and the terrors of darkness soon give way, when the sun of uni-

on rises in his power. The strength of the oppressor is wasted, and his terrific form vanishes away. The blessings of heaven begin again to descend upon the earth, reviving the hearts of men, and filling them with joy and gladness.

When contemplating these wonders which the Lord hath wrought in the earth, it may be allowed also to take notice of that union which we are this day met to celebrate. As that union has now been accomplished in such a way as cannot in any shape affect in the least the dignity, or the honour of the parties concerned; all that we have now to do, is to forget that there ever has been a time when this union did not exist; and let it be the aim of every one to shew, that he feels the value of that knowledge which he has acquired; and that he is aware of the worth of those sentiments by which he is actuated.

As our union now rests upon a community of knowledge, and of those sentiments which that knowledge inspires; let us attend to that improvement which this union of knowledge and of sentiment demands of us. This improvement will be promoted by keeping steadily in view the following particulars.

In the first place, our duty to our maker,

impressed with humility, and a sense of our dependence on him for all the blessings we possess. Remember that we are indebted to God for the gift of being, and for every thing which gives a value to that gift. It was not because he stood in need of the services of any created being, that he made the heavens bright with his glory, and that he filled the earth with his goodness. From eternity to eternity he is the unsearchable, the unchangeable God.—"Look unto the heavens and see, and behold the clouds which are higher than thou. If thou sinnest what doest thou against him? or if thy transgressions be multiplied, what doest thou unto him? or if thou be righteous what givest thou him? or what receiveth he of thine hand? Thy wickedness may hurt a man as thou art, and thy righteousness may profit the son of man."*

As the Almighty has been pleased to create the world, and all things that are therein, it becomes us well with humility and gratitude to contemplate what he has thus done for us.—It is impossible for any created being to comprehend the value of what has been conferred upon him. Betwixt being and not being; the dis-

*Job. 35. 5—8.

tance must be infinite: Betwixt the clod of the valley and intelligence, who can calculate the difference?

But in addition to the gift of being we have to consider that we are furnished with the means of making this gift increase in value and rise in dignity. We are not only endowed with powers and faculties, but we are also provided with the means of improving these powers and faculties. We have thus in our possession, the power of acquiring a knowledge of the Almighty Creator, and of the nature of that government which he exercises over his creatures.

The gift of being has been conferred upon us that we should enjoy it; and for this our Creator has amply provided. It is impossible to exhaust the sources of employment. We have within our reach, not only, what is necessary for our support, but we have also the means of gratifying our minds with the contemplation of the character of the deity; as that character is shewn in his works. As it pleased him to create the world, so he has given us the means by which the wonders of that world should be displayed to our view. He said, "Let there be light, and there was light, and "God saw the light that it was good."* The

*Gen. 1. 3. 4.

light of the sun makes cheerful the face of nature, and adds splendor and joy to the bounty of heaven. Through all the various forms in which we contemplate that provision which God has made for our comfort and happiness; well may we say;—"O Lord how manifold are "thy works; in wisdom hast thou made them "all: the earth is full of thy riches."* "When I consider thy heavens, the work of "thy fingers, the moon and the stars which "thou hast ordained, what is man that thou "art mindful of him? and the son of man, that "thou visitest him? For thou hast made him a "little lower than the Angels, and hast crowned "him with glory and honour; thou madest "him to have dominion over the works of thy "hand; thou hast put all things under his "feet."†

In the second place, our improvement will be promoted, by a careful attention to the situation in which we are placed with regard to each other.

If we only open our eyes, we see that we form a part of those whom God has appointed to inhabit this world, and that we are all necessarily connected with each other by various ties.

* Psal: 104. 24. † Psal. 8—3—6—

Not a day passes over our heads, but we have occasion to know that we are connected with, and dependant on each other.—Such has been the case ever since man dwelt on the face of the earth. We are thus made to feel that no man can live unto himself; and should any one be so foolish as to make the selfish attempt; he would very soon feel, how much he has lost by his ignorance and perversity.

The laws which God has ordained for the preservation of the order and harmony of his works can neither be evaded nor transgressed with impunity. So forcibly has this truth struck the attention of the thinking part of mankind, that from the earliest ages they have been at pains to frame rules and laws for the guidance and direction of human conduct; which have been sanctioned by certain punishments, for those who should act contrary to those rules, and who should transgress those laws. Regulations of this nature are required for the well being of every society; and as mutual comfort and happiness; is the great reason why men associate together; it is necessary that all these rules and regulations should be strictly attended to, which serve most effectually to promote the general comfort and happiness.

In the third place; If we wish to attain to a high degree of improvement; we must go farther than has been pointed out or provided for by human laws: We must study to acquire those habits which indicate not only intellectual ability, but also, Moral Worth.

Experience has shewn that no laws, however salutary, will at all times secure the obedience of those who are placed under them. Ignorance or corruption will always prompt some men to act contrary to those laws which they are required to obey; and which a regard for their own happiness, as well as the happiness of others; should induce them strictly to observe.

But man in his present state does not attain to perfection. His knowledge is limited, his progress in the attainment of excellence is only gradual; and even this gradual progress is frequently counteracted by causes over which he has no controul.—When such is the case many from inability, and also many from want of inclination, will neither see, nor try to see, what means are most effectual for promoting the general good, peace, and harmony of society.—Accordingly it has been found, that men have often abused that power of which they had got

possession, and that when under the influence of passion; they have given way to those indulgences, which were highly injurious to the general order, peace, and welfare of society. Such persons are justly represented as preferring darkness to light; and wishing, if it were possible, to subvert that order which God has established in his works.

But what demands our particular attention is this; that in addition to those errors which men commit, from ignorance or depravity of character, and which we must condemn as bad the moment that we know of their existence; there are other errors in point of conduct against which no positive laws have been enacted; at least, laws, which admit of being enforced by human means. They are not cognizable at any human tribunal; and yet they are exceedingly pernicious to the peace and welfare of society. Independent of the evils which these errors produce in society, they debase and degrade the feelings and the understandings of those persons who are guilty of committing them. They produce deeds which are ashamed to see the light, they love darkness, and take refuge in the shades of night.—To this class of evil deeds, belong envy, ma-

lice, evil speaking, hatred, revenge, selfishness, and all the tribe of meaner vices.

These errors are so deeply rooted in the hearts of those who are depraved by them, that nothing short of having good principles implanted in the mind, and good moral qualities can counteract their influence. They cannot be checked in the same manner, as those crimes are, which more immediately affect the peace and welfare of society; because the evils which they occasion are not so apparent.—The injury which they do to society is of a slow though sure progress; and is attended with so much deceit, as not to be easily, or readily brought home upon those who occasioned it.

How then, it may be asked, is the enormity of such vices to be brought to the light? How is their deformity to be exposed; and how is the turpitude of such practices to be guarded against? The only way in which this is to be done, is to make it our business to acquire those habits which not only indicate intellectual ability, but also moral worth.

I appeal to your own hearts, and to the soundness of your judgment, that the doctrine which I now teach is true and correct. There is a conscious dignity arising from the possess-

ion of right principles, that will not stoop to any thing that is mean or base. Any advantage which deceit or knavery may hold forth, will by such a mind, be considered as no advantage; but on the contrary as a real evil; as it destroys that self respect which no man can have for himself, who is conscious of having done a mean or a base action.

But I observe more particularly in the fourth place, that what tends most effectually to promote our improvement as intelligent and rational beings, is the exercise of those principles which are founded in sentiments of benevolence and goodwill to our fellow men: to those whom we call our brethren, as being formed by the same Creator, and as being protected and provided for by the same wise and bountiful Providence.

It hath pleased God for wise purposes to endow men with different abilities, and to place them in very different circumstances. We are all of us exposed to casualties, which no human sagacity or power can foresee or prevent. This affords room for the exercise of those principles, and for the employment of those virtues which confer a lustre upon human nature, which ennoble the mind, and make us feel the dignity

of acting as becomes rational and intelligent beings. When men act in this manner, the only distinction which they acknowledge is that which arises from superior intellectual endowments, and from superior moral worth. Those other distinctions which necessarily arise from the various circumstances in which men are placed, are not regarded farther, than as they affect the character; and give an opportunity for the more extensive exercise of those virtues which confer a dignity upon human conduct; and indicate that mode of acting which is really entitled to be called praise worthy.

It is perfectly evident that when the mind is thus constituted from the possession of those principles which rectitude and truth supply; and the exercise of which is guided by a really benevolent spirit; then nothing will be more disgusting; nothing will be more disagreeable to it than what is base and mean.

Hence it obviously follows, that the possession of those principles which are founded in sentiments of benevolence and good will is highly conducive to the peace, welfare, and happiness of society; as it will tend directly to do away all those mean practices which are so prejudicial to that order and harmony which should always prevail among brethren.

The possession of these principles is highly valuable in this other point of view, that they can at all times be brought into exercise. Their operation is not confined to country or climate, but is acknowledged wherever man is to be found. The duties which they inculcate are not circumscribed by those bounds, which divide kingdoms and nations; but they extend throughout the world, and teach us, that in every situation, in all circumstances, and in every difficulty; we should know that we are brethren; and feel and act a brother's part.

I have thus taken occasion to notice to you that the causes which create division and weakness among a people, arise from the influence of the mean and low vices, and that the best way of guarding again this most pernicious influence is to observe all those means which our maker has provided for our improvement. I have also noticed that a state of union seems particularly favourable for attending to those means of improvement which we have within our reach. I stated particularly that our improvement, will be promoted by keeping steadily in view the duty which we owe to our maker, with humility and a sense of our dependence on him. That with the same view we should

attend to the situation in which we are placed with regard to each other, that we should make it our care to display those habits which indicate not only intellectual ability, but also moral worth; and that in an especial manner, we should attend to the influence of those principles which are founded in sentiments of benevolence and good will to our fellow men.

Before I conclude, allow me, my brethren, to recommend to you, this serious consideration; whence have we derived our being, and all those benefits which constitute the happiness of rational and intelligent creatures? Often think of the place which you fill in the creation of Almighty God: when he rendered you capable of becoming acquainted with his perfections, and when he enabled you to perceive and observe; the order and beauty and harmony which he has established in his works. Consider the gratitude that you ought to feel, think on the humility with which you should be impressed: Reflect on the obligations under which you are placed to act as it becomes those who have been so highly favoured. Let it be your care to ascertain the nature of those principles by which you are really actuated; and also whether the sentiments of benevolence and good-will are in

you, an active principle disposing you to cultivate and to exercise those virtues; which at the same time that they add a conscious dignity to your mode of acting, will shew that you feel towards each other such sentiments as become brethren.

Be assured that superior attainments in point of knowledge are of little avail without moral worth of character, for where they do not accompany each other, then it may be truly said, that the light that is in thee is darkness. It is such a knowledge as may beget and nourish self-conceit and vanity; but it will never lead to that conduct which displays benevolence of principle, goodness of heart, or that disposition which really takes an interest in the welfare of others.

Be just to those principles, the exercise of which will most assuredly ennoble, but can never debase. Never let conscious meanness tinge your cheek with a blush, in the presence of superior worth. Be disposed at all times to act that part which will shew the correctness of your principles, and which will put to silence the mouths of those who may wish to have an opportunity to speak evil of you. For this purpose always bear in mind what was said by him; who displayed in his conduct the value of those

principles which we profess to esteem; "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven.*" AMEN.

* Matt. 5. 16.

FINIS.

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