

AN

ORATION,

DELIVERED IN THE BAPTIST CHURCH,

IN GEORGETOWN, (S. C.)

ON WEDNESDAY, the 24th of JUNE, 1818,

IN COMMEMORATION OF

St. John, the Baptist;

BY APPOINTMENT OF THE MEMBERS OF


Winyaw Lodge No. 69, Ancient Free Masons.

And published by request of the members,

By Brother THOMAS R. MITCHELL.

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MITCHELL'S

MASONIC ORATION.

*Worshipful Master—my brethren of the Lodge,
and you my fellow-citizens in general,*

NATURE exhibits on all sides a scene of unceasing change. Whether we contemplate the flower which blooms in the field, or pursue amid regions of immeasurable space the roving planet, we discover them both governed by this universal principle. *The one* progressing from seed to stem and from stem to blossom, after displaying its beauty and exhaling its fragrance, withers, dissolves and arises in some new form of matter—*the other* pursues its ceaseless round with a giddy and incalculable velocity presenting to the eye at every different point a different phase.

In contemplating the moral world, the same phenomenon occurs. If the statesman regards the polity of nations, he perceives the most firmly established, continually subject to the vicissitudes of circumstances. If the moralist regards the religions of mankind, he is equally struck with their mutability. *Altho' all*, from the Laplander who shivers under the pole to the enlightened American who enjoys nature in the plenitude of luxuriance and beauty, feel and adore *A great first cause*, yet the air which they breathe is scarcely more

changeable than the creeds which they profess. Where is now the splendid Mythology which supported the hopes of the pious Greek?—where are now the Naiads who sported in his streams, the graces who gave music to his groves, the Gods who ruled the movements of his universe?—Gone, forever gone! The Temple is supplanted by the Mosque and their airy and poetic phantoms by the grosser personages of Mahomed's Paradise.

Even Philosophy, with all her sobriety, is infected with this caprice. Every new age proposes a new theory, and succeeding sages commence by overturning the systems of their predecessors. Berkley demonstrates that *all* which we call matter is speech—Priestley that spirit no where exists, the powers of the soul being only qualities or modifications of matter. Ptolemy placed the earth at rest in the center, the sun and stars revolving around her, while Copernicus accounts for the phenomena of the heavens by ascribing motion to the earth and rest to the sun.

Nor is dissolution less a law of nature than change. Every moment of our lives—on whatsoever side we turn our eyes, we are witnesses to its melancholy progress. Nations separate and divide into tribes—cities are razed to the ground—the earth herself wanes, exhibiting after a few years all the rigidity and barrenness of old age. With what solemn emotions does the traveller visit the hallowed scite of Athens? The crumbling temple, the prostrate column, the choked aqueduct are

all that remain of her magnificence, and where the soul was once ravished with the enchantments of eloquence nought is now found but the dull monotony of her tutelary owl. And where oh Babylon? are thy towers of strength, thy hanging gardens, and thy palaces of gold! where the countless millions who fed on thy abundance? where the states which bowed, tributary, to thy power? Not a fragment remains to tell the traveller, *here was Babylon*.* So frail, so changeful are all earthly existences.

Whence is it, my brethren, that amid this desolation of being and when every thing is undergoing the changes of the chrysolis, masonry should have continued uniform and unchanged—that it should be the same art now which was practiced nearly 3000 years ago? From this simple cause, masonry is virtue; and virtue is unchangeably the same—masonry is charity, is justice, is fortitude, is friendship and these must be alike whether taught by Paul of Tarsus or Socrates of Athens.

It is on this principle that we account for its universal adoption by all nations. The world is a scene of misery—some blessings carry with them their appropriate curses. If the freezing blast of the Alps give health and liberty to the Swiss, they doom him to perpetual and unrequited toil—if under a cloudless sky the Nile rolls plenty over Egypt, its

* Even the place, on which Babylon stood, can only be *conjectured* by the reeds and marshes which cover a large District along the banks of the Euphrates above its junction with the Tigris. See S. S. Smith's Lectures, page 235.

wretched inhabitants pine with blindness and oppression. Place man where you please—give him poverty or wealth—obscurity or distinction—make him a Tecumseh or a Washington and he complains of life in the same tones of bitter lamentation. His wants call for charity—his oppressions for justice—his difficulties for fortitude—and his feebleness for friendship. A society therefore whose object is the promotion of these virtues, is accommodated to the conditions of all men, and must consequently be as durable in existence as it is universal in operation.

The first lesson then taught the Mason is to feel and exercise charity towards his brother. But charity is not confined to the giving of alms. It is a sentiment of more complicated and expanded import. It is generosity ever ready to give—pity to console—liberality to excuse—and magnanimity to pardon. It is in fact that divine impulse of the soul, which, without regard to self, irresistably urges to the relief of others, no matter what their pressure or calamity may be. It was charity in the immortal Howard, when leaving his fortune and his family, he braved the heat and the cold—the pestilence and the ocean, to plunge into the abode of misery—to contemplate oppression in the forms of famine and captivity—and to console with his kindness the wretched expiring victims of loathsome disease. It was charity in the self-devoted Wallace, when in spite of her insults and degradations, he restored the liberties of

his treacherous sinking country—and it is charity in the tender mother, who, careless of health, watches the repose of her sleeping babe, or smiles with ecstatic delight as it draws from her bosom its rich exuberance.

It is this sacred feeling which unites us masons, men of all colours, of all religions and of all countries, in one common band of brotherhood. Are you poor—in a distant land—ignorant of the language—and the victim of disease—prove yourself a Mason and relief is immediately administered. Have you braved the storm of the battle and is the bloody bayonet about to pierce your sinking heart?—prove yourself a Mason and the blow of death is averted. Does bigotry or despotism persecute and bereave you?—repair to the Mason's Lodge and there amid the interchanges of friendship and the contemplation of a sublime morality, you will find consolation.

Justice is the foundation of social order. Without it, society would become chaos and man a brute. It consists in a rigid discharge of our duty to others. Stern and inflexible, it is enthroned in the head and not in the heart, and obedience to its dictates frequently requires superhuman fortitude. See the elder Brutus, with relentless agony, dooming to an ignominious but merited death his only son.—Of all virtues, my Brethren, it is most rarely practiced. Among the hosts of warriors, philosophers and orators, who covered the republics of Greece with glory, Aristides

alone acquired the sir-name of Just. In the exercise of every other good quality, personal gratification is a leading object. Benevolence rewards us with pleasing emotions—industry with gain—homage with success—and patriotism with applause. But justice, ever at war with self, inexorably demands a renunciation of the agreeable, by making us sacrifice our own interest to that of another.

It has, however, inestimable advantages. It renders us superior to the accidents of fortune?—Does a political event defeat the enterprize of the merchant, or do the winds of heaven blast with repeated desolation the hopes of the planter?—bankruptcy does not destroy them—they still stand erect. In the sympathies of society they find consolation and by its confidence are enabled to retrieve their losses.

The pageantries of wealth—the insignia of rank—the glory of achievement—and the power of despotism are lost in its effulgence. Cæsar, when he had attained the globe and its honors, sighed for the approbation of the inflexible Cato—and what mind is not more feelingly interested in the privations and fatigues of his little camp at Utica than in the triumphal entry of the dictator into the capitol of the world, with all the pomp of Asiatic ostentation, dignified by the homage of the Senate and the acclamations of the people?

All our liberal feelings, which otherwise insure the respect of society, when, unregulated by justice, become objects of odium or

ridicule. Is it generous to relieve a decrepit beggar at the expense of the tradesman who has labored for your accommodation?—Is it hospitable to spread the promiscuous banquet, when domestic comfort requires a rigid economy?—Is it manly to attain the distinctions of office by obscuring the worth of a rival competitor?—Or is it sympathetic to console an embarrassed brother by artfully exciting fallacious hopes?—No!—Do your duty to your neighbor before you indulge feelings, which, however pleasing, can neither be useful or ornamental, but when exercised under the restrictions of a severe and inexorable justice.

On you, my Brethren, this virtue is particularly imposed. Your first duty is to work by the square and the compass. No matter what your materials may be, whether of Pæcian marble or of the gold of Ophir; the fabric which you raise, will be useless; it will be destitute of beauty and strength, unless its parts be arranged by the lines of proportion.—In like manner, the most splendid talents or the most amiable feelings, without justice, will only make you criminal or weak—the objects of abhorrence or contempt.

Fortitude is the next virtue prescribed by our order. On its importance I need scarcely descant. Viewed by it, the mind becomes omnipotent. Unappalled by danger—unfatigued by embarrassment—unbroken by defeat—it acquires a new resource with every new exertion—falls only to rise with more powerful effect—and ultimately achieves what

enthusiasm dared not hope. Look at your illustrious Perry!—his ship a wreck—his squadron in confusion—the sea red with the blood of his countrymen—the shouts of victory resounding on all sides from the enemy; the day is lost!—Does *he* yield?—Does *he* despond?—he calmly surveys the bleeding ruin, and having resolved to succeed, descends amid a shower of shot into an open boat—turns the current of victory, and irradiates his country with immortal glory!!!

In private life, fortitude is of no less importance. Does poverty or disappointment assail you?—by manly resistance, you either remove the evil or become reconciled to its pressure!—does vice, with its enchantments, tempt?—fortitude will enable you to pursue, what reason commands. Does your soul pant for the distinctions of glory?—by it alone, can you undergo the solicitude, the toils, the self-denial indispensable to success. It gives solidity to character—constancy to pursuit—and elevation to the mind. Without it, you sink into insignificance, and with it, there is nothing which you may not attain.

Wretched indeed would be the pilgrimage of man without friendship. It is the Ararat which affords a resting place to the soul amid the whirlwinds of the deep—-it is the Pisga which beautifies and extends her horizon of happiness. Would you enjoy this blessing; be virtuous:—-for friendship is radical and durable, according to our confidence in the integrity of each other. Associations

founded on mutual convenience---leagues formed for lawless outrage---or the sickly intercourses of fashionables are unworthy of its name---they last only with the motives which suggested them.

Friendship is lovely to the eye, whether in tears of sympathy, it consoles the unfortunate, or with its smile of magic, it reconciles and animates the prosperous. When the minstrel of Israel relieved his country by the overthrow of Goliath*----we admire his valor---when he tunes his harp to strains of the divinest inspiration---we are ravished by his genius---but when, in an agony of grief, he embalms the memory of his friend with the tears of respect and affection, the warrior, the poet, and the prince are lost in our veneration of the man.

To you, my brethren, who have sensibility and worth---who have so often in your afflictions, felt the balm of this comfort, it is unnecessary further to dilate. The eloquent addresses, which are made you by the master on this subject, sufficiently prove its nature and value.

Surely then, an institution which teaches us to be liberal in dispensing to the relief of others---to be just in the discharge of our moral obligations---to be firm in resisting the evils of life---and to be assiduous in cultivating our amiable sensibilities, has a claim on your veneration and is entitled to the respect of mankind.

* 1st chapter, 2nd book of Kings.

Some, unacquainted with the principles of the craft, ridicule its mysteries. Why, say they, if the object be good---why conceal it from the public eye?---The object, we do not conceal. We openly avow it---we proudly avow it. It is a cultivation of the virtues, I have endeavored to describe. Its mysteries are no more than the dresses in which their virtues are arrayed. The whole is an allegory enforcing under the guise of symbolical figures the purest feelings. The sun, the moon, the bible, the square, the compass, the skeleton and the coffin---each conveys a moral, as sublime as impressive. These symbols, the most affecting objects of nature, prove to the man of taste and reflection that the ideas which they represent, can neither be trifling, nor unimportant. For who can contemplate yon sun, whose immensity the imagination cannot grasp and whose beneficence the meanest reptile feels and enjoys, and attach aught to it, but what is sacred and sublime?--- nothing so swells the heart as the stupendous works of nature---they tend to the Deity---they melt us with gratitude and devotion.

Hieroglyphical signs were used by the wisest of the Ancient nations. They form a universal language, surely more picturesque than any arbitrary combination of insignificant letters. They carry with them the impressiveness of poetry, which addresses itself to the fancy and the heart, by analogies between the moral sentiments and the sublime and beautiful of the material world.

But if the antiquity of the institution---the routine of its duties----and the character of its symbols do not prove its purity, will not the example of the most illustrious men, be an advocate in its behalf? Who is that I see before me, decorated with the scarf and the jewels of a grand master?---See! his fame floats on the ascending gratitude of 3,000,000 of people---he rejects a proffered crown---and having given liberty, happiness and independence to an infant country. sheaths his sword---lays down his power---and retires to a simplicity of life, which would have made the Tibur blush in her age of purity!! It is the father of your country---your beloved **WASHINGTON**---the man in whom were centered the perfections of Greece and Rome ---who possessed the wisdom of Socrates---the self command of Fabius---the renown of Themistocles---the patriotism of Regulus:—who was always himself displaying the same equanimity at victory or defeat, that he did at his expiring moments, when, with his own hands, in the collectedness of conscious virtue, he closed his eyes on time—leaving a space which none hereafter shall fill!!—would he, devoted to the good of mankind, have to the last period of his existence, encouraged masonry, if it did not subserve the cause of virtue? But behold in the East, a contemporary chief—with the star of loyalty on his breast and the jewels of masonry glittering between the orders of the Eagle and the golden fleece. At the head of his veteran legions, he courses the

embattled plain---his sword encrusted with gore---his body worn down by fatigue---his mind intent on conquest!! See! under the influence of his indefatigable genius, a province expands to a kingdom ---a petty Prince becomes the arbiter of Europe!!----would *he*, Frederick of Prussia, as wily in counsel, as he was valiant in the field, have felt himself honored by the highest decorations of Masonry, if it were not founded on principles of general policy?----in fine, would all the governments of Europe, ancient or modern, have tolerated it, if it did not impose on its members the duties of patriotism and loyalty? Surely not. The examples of illustrious men are beacons in the strait of human life---which point out the difficulties of the passage---its rocks, its shoals and its whirlpools—and without which, poor giddy man would be infallibly wrecked. The natural propensity of the human heart is to respect them—what they sanction, we should honor and adopt. Presumptuously to reject them is to exercise the prudence of the mariner, who prematurely dismisses his pilot, or who, regardless of the storm hardily encounters the foaming reef.

An argument against masonry is drawn from the vicious characters of many of its votaries. *This* however, does not prove the institution bad, but merely that it is incapable, in all instances of correcting the errors and deformities of the human heart. And where is there an institution into which vice does not creep? In this temple—on this spot, dedica-

ted to the sacred services of religion, does not hypocrisy some times appear in weeds of weeping, trembling repentance?—do not pride, revenge, and all our hateful passions with sacrilegious step approach the altar?—and shall we defame the tenets of our religion, because her proselytes pervert her offices?—shall we say, because at one time she has been made the engine of ambition, and at another of avarice—because under the banners of the cross Asia has been pillaged and America depopulated—because the temple of God has been made a charnel house and the altar of the lamb a rack of torture—because the sacerdotal love has been a cover to the foulest debaucheries—the most effeminate indolence—the most unblushing deceptions and the bloodiest cruelty—because in fine, that which was intended as our greatest blessing, has been made our deadliest curse—shall we say, because of these things, that our religion, is not peace and loyalty?—Oh monstrous! Oh! sacrilegious conclusion!

Next to religion, political liberty is surely the most beneficial institution of man. If the *one* prepares us for happiness in the next world—the *other* secures it to us in this. It liberalizes the feelings—gives vigor and expansion to the understanding—excites and enriches enterprise—honors and protects virtue—restrains injustice—and diffuses every where order, comfort and cheerfulness. But is it not liable to abuse?—has it not been perverted to the worst designs?—did not a Marat—a Dan-

ton—a Robbespiere, its self-created champions, banish from France, individual security and social happiness?—with liberty and equality on their lips and the rights of man in their hands—was there any folly too extravagant—any crime too enormous for their commission?—Did not that rich and cheerful country exhibit one vast arena of misery, in which nothing were to be seen but prisons gorged with victims—gillotines streaming with blood—villages wrapt in flames—and splendid mansions desolate and untenanted?—In which the tears of the mother mixed with the blood of her son, and the groans of the expiring youth were lost in the shrieks of his frantic mistress?—in which the altars of the living God were polluted—his temples torn down—and his worship addressed to impious and abandoned prostitutes?—If political liberty has been productive of these horrors *there*, it has influenced our country like an April sun, mild but powerful, which gives life and beauty to vegetation—tunes the groves with the music of gladness—kindles the skies with the softest and richest tints—diffusing a blissful serenity, and presenting to man a residence in which he every where beholds the power, the goodness, the glory, of him who created it.

Such is our nature that our wisest and best establishments are exposed to the worst perversions. Then do not conclude Masonry either frivolous or criminal because that is common with all the institutions of man, its

principles are some times perverted and some times abandoned.

But it may be said, if a society be thus dedicated to the purposes of charity and benevolence, why exclude from it the fair sex? For this, Masonry assigns two reasons—first, because Women are more virtuous than men. Charity is indeed the characteristic of the sex. They require no symbols, no mystic rites to create or increase feelings, with which Heaven has so lavishly blest their bosoms:—benevolence in them is nature----in us alas! it is only education.

Secondly, because their charms by exciting jealousy might produce dissensions among us. And surely no rule can be founded in greater wisdom. Whatever may be the solemnities of our obligations----and however they may restrain from the indulgence of ordinary passions, they would form but feeble barriers against the all-powerful influence of female beauty and address. The history of our race proves our weakness and subjection in this respect. Our great progenitor Adam, in primeval perfection----the companion of Angels----with heaven open to his view----*disobeyed his God* and sacrificed immortality to gratify his lovely Eve. The strength of Samson—the piety of David—the beauty of Absalom—the wisdom of Solomon—what are they, but proofs that the proudest qualities of the human character afford us no protection and that man in his best estate is but the willing captive of their charms. Do not say that

these are partial examples, drawn from a remote age, and from a people of peculiar habit. In the era of Roman ambition and refinement, we see Anthony, one of her hardiest soldiers and a consummate statesman, abandoning the empire of the west for the conversion of Cleopatra. And in our own times, the Warrior of the World, the unfortunate Napoleon, who conquered more kingdoms than the heroes of Greece gained battles—who did not, like Alexander, contend against the effeminate inhabitants of Persia and the Indies: nor like Cæsar against the barbarous and divided Gauls:—nor like Wellington against the rude and unprovided soldiery of Portugal and Spain:—but against veteran armies, nurtured in camps and improved in all the arts of modern warfare—we have seen this unparalleled man at the acme of human power, and crowned with a blaze of inextinguishable glory, for which, in one age he would have been deified and in another cannonized, at the toilette of Maria Louisa, like Samson, asleep on the lap of Delilah, blasting forever the laurels which he had gathered in the fields of Lodi, Jena, Eckmühl and Austerlitz. It was surely then wise in the masters of our sublime art to exclude from our lodges those who command our feelings with such predominating influence, and who, though innocent themselves as the purity of heaven, might disturb our harmony by the bitterest and most malignant jealousies.

And now, my brethren, let me congratu-

late you on the return of our Ancient Festival: and while we renew our vows of brotherly love, let us resolve to adhere to the precepts of Masonry—let us remember that a richly endowed mind without charity to soften,—justice to direct—fortitude to restrain, and friendship to socialize its powers,—is a sword in the hands of madness—a besom of destruction—a comet fearful and glaring which appears only to disturb the harmonies of nature. And oh my brethren! forget not your beloved country. Remember that patriotism is a union and expansion of the virtues of your order—that it is an enlargement of charity from a part to the whole—an increase of justice and fortitude, from the struggles and temptations of private life, to the great catastrophes of national concern—an exaltation of friendship from local and individual interests to the extensive relations of unknown millions. Turn your eyes to the example of your deceased brother the illustrious Washington—contemplate his glory and remember that while on the rolls of your society he stood *first* as a Mason, in the annals of the world, he stands *first* as a patriot.

FINIS.

