

MASONIC ADDRESS

OF

JOHN GEDGE, M. W. G. M.

OF THE

LOUISIANA GRAND LODGE

OF

ANCIENT YORK MASONS:

DELIVERED AT

A Meeting held in the Masonic Hall, New Orleans,

FEBRUARY 8, 1849.

New Orleans:

PRINTED AT THE CRESCENT OFFICE.

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THE LOUISIANA GRAND LODGE

TO

OF

ANCIENT YORK MASONS.

BRETHREN OF THE GRAND LODGE—

It becomes my duty, in consequence of the high and important trust you have conferred on me, not only to bring to your notice, such measures as may more immediately regard the Fraternity under our jurisdiction, but also such as may have a material bearing upon the Institution in general; in short, all such as may exert an influence for good or evil upon Masonry.

In this view of my duties, I feel it incumbent upon me to bring to your notice a subject, that has long occupied my most anxious attention; one that I consider of vital importance to the Institution; and on the correct solution of which, I believe that we must hereafter base our hopes of working out that great object, for which Masonry was continued in its purely speculative form; and rest our expectations of respect and esteem from the world.

Masonry, as at present understood and practised, is a Science including a pure system of morality and virtue, based upon the practice of universal benevolence, and recognizing as the last and highest round of its moral ladder, Charity—that Heaven born quality, which beautifies and adds lustre to all other virtues. As Masons, in our private assemblies these principles are daily impressed upon our minds, and all our symbols and emblems are intended to enforce their practice more deeply upon our memories; and we are taught to feel, and do feel that without them, we are Masons but in name.

But with respect to our great cardinal virtue of *Charity*—of that universal benevolence, which consists not merely in giving alms, not merely in *relief*, but in promoting the happiness and welfare of the whole human family, as well as of our brethren—How does our practice cor-

respond with our professions? Where are the monuments to the good of our race that we have erected? Where, and in what permanent form is our contribution to the utility and benefit of mankind to be found exhibited? Where the fabric to claim the respect and confidence of the world, to ensure the esteem of future generations, and veneration of our children's children?

That individual charity and good have been among the fruits of our Institution, none who know it will pretend to deny; that bad men have been redeemed by it, the weak and wavering strengthened, and the good fortified in the right path, all will admit.

That the tears of the orphan have been dried, the widow's affliction solaced, the aged and distressed comforted and relieved, the sick healed, and the stranger sent rejoicing on his way, we all know from our personal experience. And none will controvert, that as individuals, Masons in general have been true to the practice of the precepts which our beloved Order inculcates.

But apart from the good that Masons, as individual members of the Institution have done, and its moral influence, Where, I again ask, is the great and permanent monument that our Order has erected to suffering humanity? Where, where are the practical results of its professions? We profess charity and universal benevolence; can we show one single great and permanent establishment devoted to carrying them into practical effect?

We inculcate the liberal Arts and Sciences as the requisites of a perfect Craftsman's education: What has the Institution contributed to their support, diffusion, improvement, or development?

The ordinary philanthropy of mankind has erected its institutions for the sick and desolate, provided asylums for the widow and orphan, erected schools and colleges for the instruction and cultivation of the mind, and provided means to foster and promote the Arts and Sciences.

But what has our Order as an Institution, contributed or created? What have we, the special professors of Charity, universal benevolence, brotherly love and relief, the avowed patrons of Art and Science, the great philanthropic and benevolent Society of the world, (by profession) dome of permanent good, of practical, tangible, apparent, substantial, and enduring utility? Where are our Hospitals, Asylums, Schools, Colleges, and Scientific Institutions? Where the great Artist, Philosopher, Scholar, Mechanic that has been indebted to our Institution for the means of his fame and usefulness? Alas, alas for us, they exist not! True indeed, it is, that in some few States of the Union, the Brethren

are turning their serious attention to one branch of the manifold duties of our Order, and are creating institutions for educating the children of our Brethren. May the Great Architect of the Universe speed them in their holy and benevolent purpose, and crown their efforts with complete success; the eye of the world is upon them, and the blessed satisfaction of their good deeds will be their present reward, the reverence of posterity their most enduring monument!

Some few Masonic Charities also exist in England, and perhaps elsewhere; but useful and noble as they are in intention, their extent and means of utility are but small. Yet, after all, these instances are but evidences of individual conscientiousness of the momentous duties imposed upon us by our profession of Masonic principles; they are not the united efforts of the Institution at large, they are not founded upon that system, or the appliance of those means which are especially delegated to our Order, nor an evidence that it is at length aroused to the imperative necessity of reducing its professions to actual practice.

Brethren, we live in an utilitarian age; mere theories and vague speculations cease to be regarded by mankind; and professions that cannot be, or are not reduced to some practical purpose of utility, cease to excite the attention, and cannot command the esteem or respect of the world.

The time has come for action on the part of our Order, and Masonry, without ceasing to be a speculative moral science, must descend into the arena of actual life, and take its part in the great struggle for human improvement; exert its mighty, though now dormant energies, and put forth its combined and exhaustless resources to carry into practical effect the precepts it professes; and by united and energetic action, and systematic employment of its strength and resources, reconquer and resume that exalted position which it has forfeited through its own supineness, and failure to direct the means at its command, to those objects of permanent utility which not only benefits the present generation, but extend their beneficent influence to future ages and after generations, as a lasting and ever active legacy of good to our Brethren and mankind, and which are the true, legitimate, and only practical realization of the precepts and principles we inculcate.

And if we have failed, as it must be admitted we have most signally, in carrying out all those great measures of practical good and utility, which have so preëminently distinguished the ordinary philanthropy of man, and cast a shade upon our Institution, it has not been for want of means, but from misdirection—from misapplication of the resources

at our command. Great as is the amount of charitable contribution by our Lodges and individual members, yet we all know from our experience of every day, that it is always difficult, nay frequently impracticable to meet the demand upon us. This, in a great measure, is attributable to ourselves; wholly so, in most cases, to the Lodges themselves, and the necessary result of a system which I believe and feel is in practice throughout the world—a system which I most conscientiously believe to be founded in error and misapprehension, and one which I will never cease to combat with my feeble energies, until it be rooted out of practice.

I allude to the misapplication of the funds paid into the Lodges by the recipients of Degrees. It is the custom to treat these funds as the private and individual property of the Lodges receiving them; and to expend them on all occasions, when money is required for the purposes of the Lodge, no matter what may be the object.

Thus they are used for the purchase and fittings up of our Halls, for jewels, furniture, compensation to officers, rent, lighting, in short for the whole category of expenditure required, either for the necessities, comfort, pleasure, pride, or gratification of the members; and it is very rare indeed, that our treasures are not kept constantly drained to minister to such demands; so that when called upon to put into practice our professions of Charity and Relief, we constantly find that we have deprived ourselves of the means to do it from the funds of the Lodges, and are compelled to turn a deaf ear to the appeal made to our feelings and principles, or have recourse to our individual purses. True it is, that the latter rarely fails; but such a state of things shows clearly the inefficiency of our financial management, and is a heavy tax upon individual benevolence for an object that ought to be provided for by the Lodge itself, and might well be so if there were a proper administration of its funds. But I consider it is even worse than this; that it proves we are guilty of the breach of a sacred trust confided to us. I say this in all humility, with a full sense of the imperfection of my own judgment, with no desire to criminate or reproach, but with a deeply rooted conviction that it is the pure and unvarnished truth, however harsh and grating the assertion of it may be.

I know that in making this assertion, and the argument I am about to offer in support of it, I shall excite the feelings and prejudices, alarm the jealousies, perhaps (for although Masons, we are but men, and share in all the frailties of poor humanity,) arouse the selfishness and exclusiveness of many of the Fraternity; but such must always be the case

when we attack a deeply rooted evil, which from long practice and toleration has become to be in appearance, a part and parcel of our system itself. Yet should I be a craven to my own conscience and conviction, if I permitted aught like fear of consequences to deter me from what I consider to be a bounden duty, to the fulfilment of which, although but illy qualified, I find myself urged by an impulse I cannot control.

I contend that all moneys paid by the recipient of Masonic Degrees, are paid to and received by the Lodges in trust and as a sacred deposit, to be applied only in support of those principles upon which our Institution is based, and carrying out the great objects of its existence. And that the Lodges have no right, either in fact or on principle, to appropriate or make use of the smallest portion for their own purposes, or expend one particle for any other object.

I contend, and on this point I fear no contradiction, that the money paid by a recipient of our Mysteries, has never been and never can be considered, either by himself or by the Fraternity, as an equivalent or consideration for the benefits then conferred upon him.

That the money so paid is and always must be regarded as his deposit in the great Savings' Bank of Masonry—as his contribution to that great fund of relief, to the benefits of which he, by his admission, becomes entitled. In no other light can we regard it; for every other view of the subject must of necessity lead to the monstrous conclusion, that the recipient *gives* for his Degrees; that they are given him as an equivalent for his money; in short that it is a bargain and sale—a *sale of Masonry!* the very thought of which must cause all true Masonic hearts to thrill with horror and indignation. And as every Mason, by the fact of his reception, has a claim upon the Brotherhood in all climes and nations, whithersoever dispersed, it follows as a corollary, that each of them, in like manner, has a similar claim upon him; and that the funds which he and they contributed on their entrance, are not and cannot be the private property of any one individual, or any one section of the Fraternity; but must of necessity belong to the great common treasury, since each and all have an equal right and claim upon it.

The Lodge which receives the contribution and confers the Degrees, contracts no special or particular obligation to the recipient, beyond that which, by admitting him, it imposes upon the whole Fraternity in his behalf.

Nor does he contract to it a duty more onerous than that which he then takes upon himself to the Brethren at large.

The Lodge can therefore have no more claim upon these funds, than

any other member or section of the Brethrenhood; it must be considered as receiving them for that purpose, and that purpose alone for which they could be exacted, and for which only they are paid; and in so doing constitutes itself the Trustee of the Order.

If we recognize this principle, and the more we examine the subject the more convinced we shall be of its truth, we at once find the cause of our failure, and the element of our future success in carrying out what must ever be regarded as the greatest object of our Institution.

But it is not sufficient for this purpose that we merely refrain from a misapplication of the resources we possess, it becomes equally a paramount duty to give to these resources such an application and direction that they shall work out the greatest possible amount of good! Our present practice is productive of but little actual good; we annually give away thousands, but the relief afforded is only temporary in its character, soon exhausted, and the recipient left in the same position as before. And it must ever be so, because the demands upon us are too numerous to permit us in justice to give constantly and permanently to a few, to the exclusion of others having equal claims; and our resources are not sufficient to supply permanent relief to each applicant separately and independently. Whereas, by a proper system, the same amount which we now disburse by dividing it into minute sums among a great many, and affording to each separately a mere temporary relief would, if concentrated and kept together, afford the means of permanent support to the same, and even a greater number, when united and supplied together in one Institution of relief. If each Lodge remain the trustee and special administrator of the funds received by it, and they be applied only on the principle I contend for, there can be no doubt but that an infinite deal more of good will be effected, than what results from our present system.

But human experience has shown that individual exertions and resources are wholly inadequate to carry out those great undertakings, which particularly characterize the present age; that however great the energy, talents, and wealth of one man, they are insufficient to compete with the combined resources of the many; hence the origin of corporations, companies, and societies; hence the mighty advance of enterprise and improvement, the greatness of conception, the certainty and rapidity of execution attending the undertakings of modern times—the realization of the maxim that “in union is strength”—that well proven motto of our country's power, equally to be realized by all who will adopt it.

To the union and combination, therefore, of our resources, and their systematic employment, must we specially direct our attention.

However grand might be the conception of concentrating the whole resources of our Order, it cannot be carried into practical effect, as must be apparent.

Nevertheless, the principle may be so regulated as to produce nearly, if not quite as much actual result; we cannot expect perfection, but it is our duty to come as near to it as physical causes will permit. Taking for granted that the minimum of good only can be effected by that portion of the trust fund in the keeping of a single Lodge, it is apparent that its greatest development must depend upon the union of as many as can be combined within those physical limits necessary for harmony and concert of action. In this country, the territorial limits of each Grand Lodge, and the same rule probably in other countries, would satisfy this requirement and harmonise with the system of Grand Lodge jurisdiction.

If, therefore, the whole of the Lodges in each jurisdiction, were to pay into one common treasury in each jurisdiction, the trust fund received by each, each of these treasuries would, at the end of one year, be in possession of a very large sum; and if this sum were allowed to increase by the constant contributions flowing in from the same sources, the capital thus accumulated, would in a few years be sufficient to accomplish many, and ultimately the whole of the great objects which it is our bounden duty to effect.

In the meantime, the interest of this fund would, after a year or two, be amply sufficient, with economical management, for all the ordinary purposes of Masonic relief; and as it would augment in the same ratio with the capital, it would, in process of time, be more than necessary.

By the adoption of a system of this or a kindred character, the Order would have the control of its immense resources, be able to compete with and even surpass all other institutions, and in process of time become the great and leading benevolent institution of the world, the pride of its members, and admiration of mankind.

By this means we might create permanent and well endowed asylums for our aged and distressed Brethren, their widows and orphans, and provide for their support, maintenance, and education therein, with hospitals for our sick, and cemeteries for our dead. We may select from our Brethren and our Brethren's children, those whose talents are conspicuous, but lie dormant and uncultivated from the want of those means so necessary to call them into play; and by proper and timely

training and well directed assistance, produce from among them, bright ornaments to the Arts and Sciences, of which we are the avowed patrons and professors, but for the advancement of which we have done so little.

We may establish loan funds, from which an incalculable amount of good may be derived; for how often do we find a worthy Brother, or his child, struggling with adversity, although possessed of all the elements of success within himself; endowed with honesty, industry, capacity, and energy, but unable to advance for want of the first start in life—give him the means by loan from such a fund, and you add another useful member to society; open to him the road to competency, or perhaps wealth and honor, and in conferring a benefit upon him, confer one equally great upon the whole human family. Such loans will find a sure guarantee of repayment in the gratitude of the recipient, who will be induced not only to be faithful to his engagements, but to contribute liberally from the means he has thus been enabled to acquire, to the like necessities in his fellow men.

These and other measures of a like nature will be within our reach, all tending alike to the permanent good of our Brethren and fellow men, the fulfillment of our duties and professions, the satisfaction of our consciences, and glory and reputation of our Order. Shall we hesitate to accomplish them when the road lies so clearly before us, and the means of complete success are in our own hands? Shall we slumber at our posts when the schoolmaster is abroad? Shall we permit feelings of selfishness and exclusiveness, or narrow-minded views and prejudices to deter us from a great and mighty work? I can not believe it, and I will not harbor a doubt. Sure I am, that if it has not been done before, it is because attention has never been called to the subject, and that it only requires that attention to be aroused to enlist all hearts and all hands in the glorious work.

Be it your task, my Brethren of this Grand Lodge, the youngest member of the great Masonic family, to take the lead, and show, that though last in age, you are anxious and ready to be the first in good works; and to enable you to do so with effect, permit me to submit for your consideration the following plan.

Let three-fourths of all the funds received by the Lodges for Degrees, be placed in the hands of trustees or administrators, who shall be required to furnish ample security.

The other fourth to be retained by each Lodge.

Two-thirds of the funds in the hands of the trustees to be invested safely, so as to produce a good interest, and form a permanent fund;

the other third, with the accruing interest, to constitute a movable and contingent fund.

The fund retained by the Lodges to be applied to the especial relief of their own members, their widows and orphans, and for no other purpose whatever.

The movable and contingent fund to furnish relief to all sojourners, and those not entitled to the special Lodge fund.

At the end of each year, whatever may remain from the movable and contingent fund, and from the special Lodge funds, to be carried into and invested with the permanent fund.

So soon as the permanent fund shall be sufficiently large, let it be gradually invested in the erection of an asylum for aged and destitute Masons, their widows and orphans, care being taken not to withdraw too much for that purpose, so that what remains may be sufficient for the purpose of supporting the Institution so created. Time will enable us to increase it, so as to meet all demands; and also to add to it an hospital and cemetery, and make provision within its walls for primary education. The admirable institutions of our State for public education, relieve us from anxiety on this head, and will enable us to apply the means we ought otherwise to direct to that object, to other purposes.

These objects effected on a liberal scale, we should next set aside a part of the permanent fund for the purpose of making loans to such of our Brethren, their widows, and children, as with good characters, ability, industry, and energy, may stand in need of the *first helping hand*, to make a start in life or business. These loans should be made with due circumspection, under good recommendation, in moderate sums, and for terms limited, according to circumstances; with such limitation we may safely anticipate that little or no loss will ever be sustained by the fund; it may even be augmented, for we may safely conclude, that each one who receives its benefits, and is thereby enabled to achieve prosperity, will not only faithfully restore the principal, but also add interest to it as a mark of gratitude, and to increase its utility.

The next object should be the appropriation of a part of the fund to the advancement of the Arts and Sciences, by the fostering and cultivation of conspicuous talent and ability in any of our Brethren or their children, and in the encouragement of scientific pursuits, and the creation of good taste by lectures, exhibitions, and discussions, and the establishment of libraries. Here we may safely stop for the present, and these things fulfilled, leave to our children the completion of the system.

The Board of Administrators ought to be elected annually at each grand communication, from among the Brethren at large, to administer the fund, which ought to be deposited in Bank until permanently invested; and the contingent fund should be constantly kept in Bank, and checked for as required by the administrators.

All applications for relief from the contingent fund should be made to the Board; and whenever an application is made to a Lodge in a place where the Board is not located, for relief that ought to be furnished by the contingent fund, the Lodge should refer the applicant to the Board; or if the case be urgent, give an order upon the Board for the amount necessary; or supply the amount itself and obtain reimbursement from the Board, or be allowed credit for the amount in the settlement of its accounts for the funds it receives. Should the special funds of any Lodge be inadequate to meet the demand upon it from its members and those having a special claim upon it, the Lodge shall in like manner be entitled to draw upon the Board for such sums as may be needed, or credited with the same in settlement.

The Administrators shall be required to keep correct books, and present to the Grand Lodge at each grand communication, a detailed statement of the condition of the fund, with their proceedings and accounts with the vouchers, and also such suggestions as their experience may dictate. And each Lodge should furnish them with a full account of the state of its special fund, and a general statement of the whole amount received for Degrees.

The Lodges should make their returns and payments to the Administrators every three months.

The Grand Officers and each Lodge by Delegate, should have the right to inspect the Administrators' accounts whenever required. Should this or any similar plan meet your approbation, the details for carrying it out can easily be supplied, the one suggested pretends to be nothing more than a basis on which to erect a perfect superstructure.

Let us for a moment consider what would be the result of such a system during a couple of years.

We may, from past experience, calculate that during that period one thousand Master Masons would be made, which would give a sum of fifty thousand dollars, of this twenty-five thousand would be permanently invested, producing a revenue of at least two thousand dollars. The fund at the disposal of the Lodges would be twelve thousand five hundred dollars, and a similar sum would form the contingent fund, with the addition of the interest accruing from the invested permanent fund.

It is highly probable that neither the Lodge or contingent funds would be exhausted, and that there would be a surplus from those sources to carry into the permanent fund. At any rate, we might in all human probability, have a sum of twenty thousand dollars at the end of two years, with which to commence our operations; this would amply suffice for a beginning, and would rapidly increase to an amount that would enable us to carry out our views to the fullest extent.

With such a beginning and such objects in actual execution, the fund would be augmented from other sources. Many of our Brethren, possessed of fortune, and animated with the desire to aid their fellow men, would make voluntary donations, or testamentary bequests in behalf of an establishment of a permanent character, which they are now deterred from doing for want of a specific object to which to direct their bounty.

Many philanthropic individuals not Masons, would also doubtless make similar contributions.

We must remember that men are often prevented from doing good, from fear that their bounties may be misapplied, and that so soon as a proper object presents itself they cheerfully support it.

No great undertaking for the good of our race, that is founded upon proper principles and conducted with order and system, can fail to insure the respect and command the support of the generous and enlightened; and we may safely rely upon both to carry out such a project.

The question may be asked, if these funds are taken from the Lodges, how are they to be supported? To this I reply, firstly, that they have no right to make use of them for that purpose, and ought therefore never to rely upon them for it: and next, that they levy dues or monthly contributions upon their members, which are evidently intended for that purpose, and if used with economy, will be found sufficient. Men, and more especially Masons, have no right to let their expenditure exceed their income.

Display and luxury are not necessary for the practice of our rites, nor the efficiency of our work, our Ancient Brethren knew nothing of these things, and if we in modern times desire to eclipse them and indulge in any thing that is not strictly necessary, we are bound to do it at our own expense, and not from means which we receive and hold in trust for other purposes. If our ordinary contributions be not sufficient, they must be increased, and they will even then be less onerous to us as individuals, than the continuance of our present system, which engenders extravagance in our expenditures, exhausts our funds, and then

forces us in redemption of our pledges when applied to for relief, to have recourse to individual contributions, which greatly exceed the amount that we should have to pay for increased dues, and from which we should be entirely exempt, since the funds set apart for that purpose would be amply sufficient.

I am aware that this proposition I make to you will meet with opposition, for it will upset old and preconceived notions, and disturb what, from long abuse, have come to be considered vested rights; it will for the time create jealousy, excite suspicion, and mayhap arouse those feelings of selfishness and exclusiveness, that are inherent to bodies as well as individuals.

I deeply regret that I have not the ability, as well as the desire, to develop the principles I advocate, in all their force and beauty. But I feel, deeply feel, that the cause I plead is founded upon those immutable principles of truth and justice, which must ultimately prevail; and that feeble though the effort be, it will perhaps suffice to bring this subject to the attention of my Brethren; and if that attention be once aroused, I feel assured, that the sentiments I have uttered, and the principles which gave them birth will find a ready response in every bosom; and that all will unite, heart and hand, to carry out an undertaking so glorious to ourselves, so beneficial to our Brethren and fellow men, which will give a new life and being to our beloved Institution; rescue it from apathy and oblivion and elevate it to a pitch of grandeur and usefulness, which is its true and legitimate place among the institutions of the earth, command for it the admiration and respect, and insure the eternal gratitude of the whole human family.

May the humble seed thus cast on the wide field of the universal benevolence of our Order, produce this goodly fruit.

Let us be just, just to ourselves, just to our Brethren, and true to our principles, and success is certain and inevitable.

JOHN GEDDIE, Grand Master.

EXTRACT

From the Minutes of the Proceedings of the Louisiana Grand Lodge of Ancient York Masons, held February 8, 1849.

The M. W. Grand Master delivered the preceding Address, which, on motion of Brother COLEMAN, was referred to the Committee of Five, appointed at this meeting, to revise the Constitution.

Brother CARROLL offered the following resolution:

Resolved, That the Address of the M. W. Grand Master, be published with the printed proceedings of this Grand Lodge, which was, on motion, adopted.

Brother PERKINS offered the following resolution:

Resolved, That the Grand Secretary be directed to have one thousand copies of the M. W. Grand Master's Address, published in pamphlet form, for the use of the members of this Grand Lodge, and those of the Lodges subordinate to this Grand Lodge, which was, on motion, unanimously adopted.

W. H. HOWARD, Grand Secretary.