

A
VIEW

OF THE

O R I G I N,

OBJECTS AND UTILITY

OF

Free-Masonry.

EDINBURGH :

PUBLISHED BY STILLIES' BROTHERS, HIGH-STREET,
AND RICHARD GRIFFIN & CO. GLASGOW.

1830.

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O B J E C T S A N D U T I L I T Y

OF

Free-Masonry,

BY THE

W. SUBSTITUTE MASTER OF ST DAVID'S LODGE,

EDINBURGH.



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1830.

TO THE
BRETHREN
OF
ST DAVID'S LODGE, EDINBURGH,
THE
FOLLOWING REMARKS ON THE ORIGIN
AND
PRINCIPLES OF THEIR ORDER
ARE RESPECTFULLY INSCRIBED
BY
THE AUTHOR.

P R E F A C E.

THE following brief Dissertation was originally delivered as a LECTURE before ST DAVID'S LODGE, EDINBURGH, chiefly with a view to the instruction of the Junior Members, many of whom had manifested a strong desire to be further informed concerning the Nature, Origin, and Objects of the mysteries into which they had recently been initiated.

It is now published by the unanimous desire of the Brethren,* who have been pleased to consider, that the views of Free-Masonry therein exhibited, may not only prove interesting and instructive to the Craft generally, but may also

* Excerpt from the Minutes of St David's Lodge, Edinburgh.
(See end of Preface.)

assist in correcting many mistaken and absurd notions entertained concerning the Order, by the uninitiated public.

With regard to what are properly termed the *Mysteries* of Free-Masonry, the Public in general must of course remain in profound ignorance ; but to inform them concerning its nature and purposes, is a duty which Free-Masons owe to themselves, and to this information, every individual is undoubtedly entitled, before he is invited to participate in the rites of initiation.

In propounding the views of Free-Masonry, contained in the following pages, the Author may reasonably be asked, Why he has not quoted the respective authorities by which these views are supported, in so far as they are matters of History ? In reply to this, it may be stated in the *first* place, that formal quotations, particularly from the Ancient Classics, are in general unsuitable to the nature of a popular address, such as the composition in question, was originally intended to be : and, *secondly*, that the Author did not write with his authorities before him, but rather attempted to give the result of general impressions, derived at different periods of time from a variety of sources, to many of

which he had neither leisure nor opportunity particularly to refer.

The learned Masonic reader will, however, find in the following Authors, ample materials for forming his own opinions on the subject of Free-Masonry, viz. Herodotus, Strabo, Plutarch, Arrian in Epictet., Meursius in Eleus. Myst. The Article Eleusinia in the Encyclopædia Britannica; Josephus' Jewish Antiquities; Robertson's History of Ancient Greece, &c.

*EXCERPT from the Minutes of St David's Lodge, Edinburgh,
17th November 1829.*

“ The Worshipful Substitute Master read a Lecture on the Origin, Objects and Utility of Free-Masonry, which called forth the warmest praise, not only of the Brethren of the Lodge of Saint David's, but of the whole of the Right Worshipful Masters of Lodges, Heads of Deputations, and Visiting Brethren present. Whereupon, the unanimous thanks of the assembled Brethren were voted to the Worshipful Substitute Master for his able Lecture, and he was requested to allow it to be printed and circulated, as well for the instruction of the Craft, as for the information of the uninitiated.”

PRINTED BY ANDERSON & BRYCE.

LECTURE

ON THE

ORIGIN, &c. OF FREE-MASONRY.

IN treating of the purposes for which Free-Masonry was originally instituted, it is not my present intention either to sketch a history of the Order, or to quote formally from the various Ancient Authors whose works contain allusions to that subject. I shall rather attempt to convey general impressions, derived from such sources, with a view to answer a very natural and important question, frequently put, not only by the public, but by brethren, recently initiated into the Masonic mysteries—*What is the use of Free-Masonry?*

At the same time, I shall state nothing as fact, but what is well known to my more learned brethren, to be established by unequivocal testimony, and nothing as matter of opinion, but what may be legitimately derived by analogical deduction, from the facts under discussion.

Concerning the æra of Free-Masonry, history does not inform us; and as might be expected from the nature of such an Institution, no regular authentic history of it has come down to us.

That it can with truth lay claim to a very remote antiquity, is however altogether certain; and it may perhaps be sufficient for our present purpose to state, that it can be distinctly traced to the first century after the flood, by indications sometimes faint indeed, and few, and widely scattered, athwart the records of ancient time, but always too legible and distinct to be mistaken or misapprehended by those who are conversant with the true spirit of our sublime mysteries.

In the advancement of a community from barbarism to civilization, the DIVISION OF LABOUR marks an important æra. It is chiefly from this point that arts and sciences, and a taste for what is not only convenient, but elegant and ornamental, begin to be cultivated. Among the various arts which naturally arise at this period, that of Architecture must, for obvious reasons, hold a prominent place, inasmuch as it involves an extent of general information, not necessary to a knowledge of any other of the arts of life. There seems to be no doubt that the laws of Perspective, Mechanical Philosophy, and Geometry, the essence of both, derived their birth from Architecture.

The first architects, therefore, were probably the most learned men of their times, and, as such, it is extremely natural to suppose, that they would form themselves into an association for their mutual benefit and improvement—to cultivate mutual friendship, and to instruct and be instructed in their common profession, and the sciences subservient to it.

Such was, in fact, the first simple origin of the venerable institution of Free-Masonry, an Institution, which, in its subsequent progress, extended itself over

the whole civilized world, which has come down to us through a long series of ages, and which will doubtless reach forward through all future time.

But though the study of Architecture, and those branches of science and art more immediately connected with it, was the primary object of Free-Masonry, it aspired even in its infancy to a far loftier and ampler range: Astronomy, and other branches of Natural Science, Ethics, Theology, Music, Sculpture, Poetry,—all the science, all the literature of the times, every department of human knowledge, became the subject of Masonic investigation.

The secrecy of Free-Masons in relation to the mysteries of their order, may be satisfactorily accounted for upon a variety of hypotheses. It was natural for men situated as the first Masons were, a light amidst the darkness of surrounding ignorance, to endeavour to confine to themselves, for their own benefit, that knowledge which they themselves had undergone the labour of acquiring. Nor was this sentiment so illiberal as we might at first be inclined to suppose, when we consider that they were ready to impart the same knowledge to every well qualified individual who sought regular admission into their order, by participating in their rites and ceremonies, and contributing his share towards the objects of the Institution. This, however, will scarcely be sufficient to account for the sanctions of peculiar awfulness by which these mysteries have ever been guarded. We will not require to go back to the records of antiquity to learn the fact, that amongst an ignorant and barbarous people, extraordinary mental endowments, and superior knowledge of the laws of nature, are always

dangerous, and often fatal to their possessor. There seems to be a natural tendency in ignorance to dread the power which it cannot comprehend, and of which it does not see the limits. And history testifies to the humiliating fact, that superior wisdom and virtue have often been mistaken for the operations of infernal agency, and visited with the frantic vengeance natural to superstition and barbarism.

From considerations of this nature, we may reasonably infer, that the solemn obligations of secrecy imposed by the first Masons, and those under which we ourselves have received the rites of initiation, were necessary, not only to the existence of Free-Masons as a body, but to their personal safety as individuals. But even these precautions of secrecy have frequently been followed by effects precisely opposite to those which were expected from them. Free-Masons have been persecuted under the suspicion or the imputation of being enemies to religion, and to the established political institutions of nations; they have been branded as atheists and blasphemers, as men guilty of strange and unnatural crimes, "who hate the light, because their deeds are dark," who, in their midnight assemblies, hold horrid mockery of God and sacred things, and practice all manner of revolting obscenity and damnable inversions of the order of nature. Even in our own country, and in this enlightened age, it is a solemn fact, that individuals are to be found uncharitable and credulous enough to accuse our mysteries of a connection with the occult sciences! A superstitious imagination believes it has discovered among the implements, the devices and the secrecies of Masonry, magic-wands,

unhallowed circles, and muttered spells of enchantment, for calling the spirits of darkness from “the vasty deep,” while it is whispered, strange unearthly sights are seen, and sounds heard of fearful omen, and the places of our assembling breathe of the sulphurous atmosphere of Pandemonium; and, finally, the FATHER OF INIQUITY himself, presides over our nocturnal orgies in visible imbodiment.

As it would be entirely foreign to my present purpose to enter at large into the various opinions which have been entertained of the Masonic mysteries, by those ignorant of their nature and tendency, I shall not pursue this digression farther.

It has already been shewn, that the first Lodges were schools or colleges of learning of a peculiar kind, and were probably depositories of all the literature and science of the times. With regard to the progress made by the primitive Masons, in the various departments of human knowledge which they cultivated, we cannot speak much with certainty. This much, however, we may consider as established, that to them we owe the discovery of the relations and properties of figures, constituting the sublime science of Geometry; and that their knowledge of Mechanical Philosophy, was far beyond any thing in that department which we can boast of in modern times. The Pyramids of Egypt, those sublime monuments of art, and wonders of the world, contain internal proof, legible to Free-Masons, of having been reared by individuals belonging to their fraternity. These stupendous fabrics consist of blocks of stone of such enormous magnitude, that no mechanical power, or system of powers with which we are acquainted in modern

times, would be capable of raising them from their quarry. And yet have these vast masses been swung high in mid-air like things of feathery lightness, and placed there aloft upon their airy beds with such exactness and apparent facility, as to remind us more of the labours of the famed Titans of old, than the operations of feeble mortals like ourselves. Reasoning from analogy, we may safely infer that these Free-Masons of the olden time were probably in possession of many other great secrets of nature, the knowledge of which is now lost to us, being swept away by the great flood of ages that has rolled between.

The benefits which ancient Free-Masonry, however, has conferred on mankind, are not to be estimated by any series of splendid discoveries such as have been reserved for later ages and times of more general enlightenment. We ought perhaps rather to look upon Free-Masons as having given to the world the first great rudiments of its knowledge in many of those arts and sciences which after ages have brought so much nearer to perfection. We are rather to consider the Masonic institutions, as having in a large degree contributed to keep alive the light of the human intellect, through a long succession of ages, over which the thick and palpable darkness of Egyptian night brooded almost universally. In these great depositories, rich treasures of human knowledge were preserved from age to age, which would otherwise have been swept away by the hand of the barbarian, or lost amid the revolutions of time, and the ruins of empires.

In treating of the rites and ceremonies of the Order,

my obligations as a Free-Mason forbid me to commit to writing any part of the Masonic mysteries. My remarks upon this part of my subject must for that reason be extremely general.

The acquisition and the communication of knowledge, were, as we have seen, the chief objects of the Masonic institutions. NATURE was one subject of constant investigation; but as there hangs a veil before the face of nature, which the hand of ignorance cannot withdraw, and which even the wisest amongst us can withdraw but very partially, so were the mysteries of Free-Masonry veiled from the uninitiated, and even from the more ignorant or weak members of the fraternity in profound allegory. The ceremonies of initiation were, as they still are, allegorical throughout; and though they might frequently be unintelligible to the individual undergoing them, and would, if disclosed to the world, be esteemed by such as could not penetrate them, mere pieces of mystical mummery, yet no word, no sign, no movement, not a single step in the whole process, but pointed through analogy to some great law of Nature, some religious sentiment, or some moral obligation, or tended, if rightly understood, to convey some solemn and salutary lesson to the heart.

This method of conveying instruction by means of analogy, has an extensive series of analogies connected with it which we cannot at present do more than glance at. There exists, for example, an analogy between *The early ages of the world*, *The period of youth in human life*, and *The dominions of the East*. The *first*, is the commencement of the world and of time; the *second*, is the commencement of human existence;

the *third*, is the commencement of the sun's apparent diurnal course through the heavens. The latter is also connected with the two former by another analogy. The East was the birth place of the human race, where its infancy was nourished, and its youth was reared—where the powers of the human intellect were first developed, and from which the germs of art and science have been carried to the regions of the West.

Instructing, reasoning, or illustrating by analogy, implies the exercise of a vigorous imagination. This faculty in the human mind is amongst the first to come to maturity, and is thus connected with *the period of youth* in which it usually predominates. If we then look back to *the early ages of the world*,—the boyhood of mankind, when time was in his youth, we find that almost all knowledge was wrapt up in mysterious allegory, and a highly imaginative poetry seems to have been the natural language of the human intellect. If we next turn our attention to the eastern nations of the present day, we find the same habits of thought still prevailing; analogy takes the place of reasoning, and a bold and figurative language is used as the vehicle of common thought. In China, the extremity of the East, we find this tendency prevailing in such an extraordinary degree, as to appear to us frequently ludicrous. Their hieroglyphical alphabet, which is literally their dictionary, is nothing else than a series of pictures, which, by a process of imagination, to Europeans almost incomprehensible, are made to represent ideas between which we can discover no traces of resemblance; the same words being at one time applied to

the most familiar objects in domestic life, at another, to the most abstract ideas in the public laws of the empire, or the doctrines of their strange mythology. The system of analogies, of which this is only a partial glimpse, gives strong proof, if indeed proof of that kind were required, that Free-Masonry, in which so much use is made of analogy, existed in the early ages of the world, and had its origin among the nations of the East.

Among the sublime analogies used by the primitive Masons, HARMONY was the ruling principle. In Architecture they taught that the effect does not depend upon the isolated beauty of particular parts, the polish of a single stone, or the richness of a single entablature, but upon the just proportion and joint effect or HARMONY of the collective whole. They inculcated reverence for the Being or Beings whom they considered as wielding the destinies of men; they enjoined universal benevolence, as well as a strict regard to the eternal rules of justice in all their dealings with one another, and with mankind in general; they taught also by impressive symbols that it is necessary to keep the passions within due bounds, because, in their due regulation and subordination to reason, conjoined with the peace and purity of mind attendant on a conscientious regard to moral obligation and religious duty, they held the HARMONY of the human faculties to consist. They held stated Festivals, amidst whose temperate convivialities HARMONY ever reigned. They cultivated Music, which consists in the HARMONY of sounds. They cultivated Poetry, which involves the HARMONY of numbers. They studied Astronomy, which they held to consist

in the HARMONY of the spheres. Such was the original institution of Free-Masonry, about which such various and absurd opinions have been entertained in every age ; an association of men under the endearing appellation of Brethren, bound together by solemn obligations, for the high purposes of cultivating their moral and intellectual natures. Thus is the question answered with which I set out—*What is the use of Free-Masonry ?*

Let us now turn our attention very briefly to Free-Masonry as it exists among ourselves at the present time.

If we contrast Free-Masonry as it *is*, with Free-Masonry as it *was*, it must be acknowledged that in many points we suffer by the comparison. It is true we no longer hold our feasts to the honour of Bacchus, of Ceres, of Isis, or Osiris, as was done by Masons in the days of old, because the light of a pure and holy faith, of which they were ignorant, has shone in amongst us. It is true that we still practise mutual charity, and cultivate mutual friendship and affection, and, in the rites and ceremonies which we observe, we still recommend the practice of virtue. But what has become of all the other original objects of the Institution ? Where is the mutual Instruction ? Where is the Philosophy ? Where is the cultivation of the Arts and Sciences ? It must be acknowledged with regret, that there is little of this to be found among Scottish Masonry.

Our time will not permit us at present to inquire into the *cause* of this lamentable fact ; it will perhaps be more instructive to glance at some of its *effects*. One of these has obviously been to bring down Free-Masonry in the estimation of the public, who, gene-

nerally speaking, regard it as an Association chiefly or entirely, for convivial purposes. The prevalency of this opinion has occasioned an inundation of men into the order of the most irregular habits and indifferent characters, who have sought admission amongst us chiefly for the gratification of their social propensities. Such men in general, even after initiation, know little more of the true spirit of Masonry than the uninitiated public : they have found in it all that they expected, with the addition of a few ceremonies, of most of which perhaps they do not see the use, or clearly perceive the import, and they help to give currency to the public opinion that Masonry consists chiefly in conviviality. It is for this reason that we generally find men of grave minds and intellectual habits, after they arrive at that period of life when youthful ardour abates, and mere conviviality begins to lose its charms, cease altogether to frequent our assemblies ; and Free-Masonry is thus in danger of being left in the hands of young and half-enlightened practitioners, who, having little veneration for its rites and ceremonies, and bestowing small reflection upon their true meaning, perform them with a levity and indifference most unbecoming the solemnity of their character, and the high and holy lessons they are fitted to teach. It is thus that Masonry has degenerated amongst us, that its true principles are in danger of being lost or laid aside, and that the Institution seems threatening to sink at last into a mere convivial club, under a particular form and name. This is an alarming disease, but it is not without a remedy. My Brethren, it is in your power to bring back the golden age of Free-Masonry. Let moral and intellectual

pursuits be again assumed as chief objects of your associating together. Resume, as far as is consistent with the pure doctrines of Revelation, the ancient and impressive solemnities with which your ceremonies were performed. Appoint none to the high offices of your Lodges but such as are both able and willing to instruct their Brethren, and see that they do so accordingly. Admit none into your order but such as you believe to be either capable of imparting knowledge, or sincerely, and honestly desirous of acquiring it. Such regulations as these would soon work an astonishing reformation on Scottish Masonry. The mere *bon vivant* would no longer seek the rites of initiation ; and loose and disorderly characters of all descriptions who have unfortunately crept into our fraternity, would cease to contaminate our assemblies with their presence. Men of talent and attainments would then press into our Order, and their Masonic devotion, instead of passing away with their youth, would be confirmed and increased with the growing stability of their habits and increase of their years. Our Institution would thus be useful to ourselves, and respected by the public ; and the appellation of a SCOTTISH FREE-MASON would become but another name for a man whose leisure is chiefly devoted to pursuits which inform the understanding and improve the heart.

But although I have freely admitted that Free-Masonry has partially degenerated amongst us, inasmuch as we have neglected some of its most important objects, I am far from being disposed to join either in the clamours of the public against it, or the scoffs of ignorant Brethren, who have never entered

into the true spirit of the sublime mysteries into which they have been initiated. They talk of our festivals forsooth, as if conviviality were a crime! But what is conviviality if rightly understood, and properly practised? I hold it is not a crime, but a duty—a duty which no man whose circumstances will permit it, is at liberty to neglect. It is a means of bringing man into more intimate, and kind, and brotherly contact with his fellow, whom he is commanded by the highest authority to love as himself; and what is more, it is a natural expression of thankfulness to the Great Benefactor of mankind, who giveth us all these things “richly to enjoy.” And is it nothing, that in our assemblies all the artificial distinctions of Society are for a while forgotten, and men of all ranks mingle together with looks and with feelings of kindness and affection? Is it nothing that millions of men of all tongues and colours, scattered over the wide surface of this earth, are united together by ties of Brotherhood, strong, though mysterious, and bound by most solemn obligations to assist and support each other in seasons of difficulty and distress? Is it nothing, that, in point of fact, out of our funds every day the hungry are fed, the naked clothed, and the distressed stranger relieved and comforted? Is it nothing that the Free-Mason carries about with him a universal language, by means of which, wander where he will, throughout all the civilized nations of the earth, he is sure to be recognised and embraced by a brother and a friend? It is maintained that all this is something, and something too which places a Free-Mason on an elevation where he may safely despise all the ignorant malice of the enemies of his Order. But

even if all this were nothing, surely the very antiquity of our Institution is much more naturally fitted to command respect and reverence, even from those who understand not our mysteries, than provoke ridicule or contempt. Surely an Institution so widely spread, and so long enduring, must be something else than a system of foolish ceremonies, conjoined with dissipation. From its antiquity alone, if we knew nothing more of the matter, we are entitled to conclude that it must have an extremely firm hold of the human heart, and must consequently be based deeply in some of its best and strongest feelings and principles. What revolutions have taken place in all other human affairs since Free-Masonry was first established! Generation after generation, in long succession, has emerged into existence, and peopled alternately the dwellings of the living and the dead. Empires have begun and ended. Nations have arisen, and flourished, and declined, whose histories, with their heroes, are now buried in the dust of oblivion. Where now is the Jewish nation, the favoured of God, that rose to such a stupendous elevation, above all the nations of the earth? She has now no country; her children are scattered athwart the whole world, persecuted of all people, with no home on earth but the grave. Where is their far-famed temple, in which the glory of the Divine presence was manifested in visible effulgence? Alas! there is *not now one stone of it left upon another*. Where is Babylon the great, with her magnificent palaces, her sumptuous gardens, and her lofty walls? She contains not now in all her once crowded streets a single human inhabitant; but the serpent hisses among the grass of her walls, and

the owl hoots amid her crumbling palaces. Where are Persepolis and Palmyra? Where is Thebes with her hundred gates? The relics of their magnificence moulder amid the dust of the desert, and whisper in melancholy language to the passing traveller an unceasing lesson of the vanity of earthly greatness, and the vicissitudes of sublunary things. Even Eternal Nature herself has been undergoing a silent, yet ceaseless change. Rocks of flint have crumbled into dust: seas have retired from their beds: rivers have dried up at their sources: regions once fertile have withered into deserts. Yet, amidst all these tremendous revolutions, which have strewed the wide earth with wrecks and ruins, the fabric of Free-Masonry has remained unshaken, as if it alone were indestructible of all earthly institutions and things. Time, the universal destroyer, seems to have spared it for his own peculiar resting place, on whose hoary battlements, at the termination of his course, he may plant his foot, and look down on the wide-extended ruin which his hands have wrought—on the humiliation of all that once was proud—on the change of all that was esteemed immutable—on the final destruction of all that was deemed stable and enduring among the works of mortal men.

FINIS.

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