

**Grand Lodge
Free & Accepted Masons
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**Grand Orator
John Nelles Young**

MOST WORSHIPFUL GRAND MASTER AND BRETHREN OF THE GRAND LODGE

The highest compliment we can pay to the universal intelligence of our Craft is to admit the existing difficulty of being original in the treatment of Freemasonry. As has been beautifully said by one recently preceding me in this difficult position: "Its external aspects, its methods and its objects, have been explained and illustrated in every language in which science and literature address the human race. Its history has been traced and its antiquity demonstrated, until it has been connected with the origin of established society and of systematic industry. Its principles, few and simple, have been broadly unfolded, and their practical effect in promoting the growth of civilization conspicuously exhibited. Its symbolism and its ritual have been described to the fullest extent compatible with the preservation of those deep and sacred mysteries which, while they attest its universality, insulate and protect its institutional structure. Its relation to those architectural monuments of all ages and countries, in which Wisdom conceived what Strength executed and Beauty adorned, has been amply proved and generally acknowledged. Its abandonment of its purely operative features and its concentration of its labors into those forms of action which, by way of contra-distinction, are termed speculative, are part of the records of modern times. On all these phases of its existence and of its influence, erudition and eloquence have flowed with luminous perspicuity and truth."

By these combined efforts of the most erudite in all nations, its various parts, brought together from remote and diverse times and places, have been fully illustrated and explained; and to-day, without there having been heard the sound of axe, hammer, or any tool of iron, a beautiful structure, complete in all its parts and magnificently grand in its vast proportions, stands before the world, an object of commendation by many, of unjust criticism by some, and a perplexing and indeterminate factor to others. It remains for me, therefore, on this occasion to invite your attention to a consideration of Freemasonry in this its aggregate capacity—to it as a vital force in the world—to its function in the Divine economy.

In treating of this subject, by reason of its breadth and scope, it will be both convenient and necessary for me to avail myself of the results of extended research by others, and thereby base my argument more upon authority than upon unsupported assertion. It is to be regretted, however, that these results have not always been uniform. Even the origin of Masonry is still obscured by the mists of antiquity. Many of its leading features are characterized by the peculiarities of widely different; ages and nations. There are those who maintain that it had its inception with the prosaic operative. Others, that it bears the stamp of Divinity and is coeval with] humanity. In its symbolism some see the relics of ancient heathenish mysteries: ' others, its divine origin, that being God's method of imparting truth.

Amid all these conflicting opinions, its devotees, now numbering millions of the very elite of every civilized nation on the face of the earth, having no perceptible visible head, but acting in that harmonious concert of who best can work and best agree, the subject becomes an object of wonder and amazement, and challenges alike the respect and admiration of the world. What is its function in the Divine economy? Who or what but Omniscience can encompass its mighty bounds?

These questions involve the solution of the great moral problem of the human race, the given factors being the active principle of the force employed, the constituent elements of the agency employing that force, and the character and quality of the object to be acted upon. By careful-calculations based upon these given data, we may approximate the resultant, at least so far as the same lies within the scope of human comprehension.

And, first, as to the character and quality of the subject to be acted upon. The practical tendency of the unaided human race is to moral degeneracy. This fact will be conceded by every

student of history. The moral decadence, from the creation of the world to NOAH'S flood, from NOAH'S flood to the Christian Era, and from the Christian Era through the Dark Ages, until the mollifying influences of reacting forces began to assert their sway, need but to be named to be fully recognized.

"The facts on which natural religion rests, and the intellectual power to derive the moral laws from the facts, have been in the possession of man from the beginning. Yet the whole history of man has exhibited a constant tendency to moral deterioration. This is proved by the fact that every people, not enlightened by revelation, consider the earliest period of their history as the period of their greatest moral purity. Then the Gods and men held frequent intercourse. That was the golden age; the subsequent ages have been those of brass or iron. The political history of man seems to teach the same lesson. The systems of religion of the heathen may be fairly considered as the legitimate result of all the moral forces which are in open action upon man, irrespective of revelation. They show us, not what man might have learned by the proper use of his faculties in the study of duty, but what he has always actually learned. Now these systems, so far from having any tendency to make man better, have a manifest tendency to make him worse. Their Gods were of the most profligate and demoralizing character. Their ethical systems made no converts from vice to virtue. From the era of which of the systems of ancient ethics can any reformation be dated? Where are their effects recorded in the moral history of man? Facts have abundantly proved them to be utterly destitute of any power over the conscience, or of any practical influence over the conduct. Nor can this failure be attributed to any want of intellectual cultivation. Eloquence, poetry, rhetoric—nay, some of the severer sciences, were studied with a success which has never since been surpassed. Yet what progress did the classic ages make in morals?"

Even the philosophy of the Ionian philosophers, so justly renowned for their genius and loftiness of character, and rightly classed among the greatest intellects of antiquity, was based upon assumptions and speculations as worthless as they were groundless. The theories of THALES and ANAXIMENES, of DIOGENES of CRETE, and HERACLITUS of EPHEBUS, followed by those of a still more materialistic age, resulted in atheism and a disbelief in the existence of the soul after death. "Without GOD and without a future, there was no stimulus to virtue and no foundation for anything. They said, 'Let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we die; the essence and spirit of all paganism."

I would not be understood as maintaining that this condition of degeneracy applies to the whole of the human race, or that, in the constitution of things under GOD'S moral government of the world as implied in his natural government, it is a legitimate or justifiable result. On the contrary, there have been in all ages of the world small minorities, taught "to view with reverence and admiration the glorious works of the creation," and thereby inspired with the most exalted ideas of the perfections of the great Creator, who, by their progressive moral, intellectual and religious elevation, under the same moral government provided by the same Common Ruler, have demonstrated to a degenerate world its own inexcusable condemnation.

In close accord with this lesson of speculative Masonry are the conclusions of BUTLER, one of the most profound of modern philosophers: "Upon the whole," says he, "there is a kind of moral government implied in GOD'S natural government; virtue and vice are naturally rewarded and punished as beneficial and mischievous to society, and rewarded and punished directly as virtue and vice. The notion, then, of a moral scheme of government, is not fictitious, but natural; for it is suggested to our thoughts by the constitution and course of nature."

The truth of this theory has been demonstrated in all ages. ENOCH, NOAH, ABRAHAM, MOSES, SOLOMON and DANIEL, BUDDHA, ZOROASTER and CONFUCIUS, SOCRATES, guided by a divine sign or supernatural voice, and PLATO, his chosen disciple, SAINT AUGUSTINE, MOHAMMED, and many others, were luminous exponents of the principles of this theory, and living witnesses attesting to the truth of the fact.

One of the chief causes of this failure of the human race to comprehend the laws of GOD'S moral government, as embodied in His natural government, arises from the fact that the principles of the former are only taught by inference from the latter, and the latter are only acquired by observation and experience. Each generation, therefore, must learn for itself, and consequently this acquired knowledge of these laws either comes too late or is uttered to those who are "fixed in the habit of violating them."

This is not the fault of the moral system provided, but arises from the want of system and proper methods on the part of man. The Creator has placed within our reach every thing necessary for our safety, our comfort, and our happiness. He has furnished the light, provided the delicate mechanism of vision, and left it optional with us to enjoy its benefits. He has supplied the invigorating atmosphere to all alike, and placed at our disposal ample facilities for its healthful appropriation and use; but if we choose to breathe it not, we must die. The same Divine economy pervades alike His physical, moral and spiritual realms. These principles are at once universal and axiomatic. How then and by what means is this almost universal degeneracy to be avoided? How is the human race to be educated up to that elevated standard of moral and intellectual observation from which "the heavens declare the glory of GOD, and the firmament showeth his handiwork?" This we believe is destined to be the great function of Freemasonry in the Divine economy.

From time immemorial Masonry has been defined to be—"A system of morality veiled in allegory and teaching by symbols." WASHINGTON claimed that "The grand object of Masonry is to promote the happiness of the human race." LA FAYETTE said that "Freemasonry is an Order whose leading star is philanthropy, and whose principles inculcate an unceasing devotion to the cause of virtue and morality." The Rev. ERASTUS BURR wrote that "From its origin to the present hour, in all its vicissitudes. Masonry has been the steady, unvarying friend of man." After careful consideration and reflection, I would define it to be a system of moral instruction and action based upon natural and revealed law, prohibiting vice, enjoining morality, and inculcating the principles of true religion.

Its infallible trestle-board is the great book of nature and revelation; its creed, such a faith in GOD as induces a just sense of dependence upon Him and of personal responsibility to Him. It exacts no preliminary qualifications other than those of fair intelligence, a true heart, a good moral character, a desire for knowledge, and a sincere wish to be serviceable to mankind. It interferes with no duty to GOD, to country, to neighbor, to self. The very essence of its being is the conscious recognition of GOD by the influence of His power and in the works of His creation. It sees Him as well in the delicate grace and beauty of the tiniest flower as in the infinite sublimity of numberless worlds, at measureless intervals created and sustained throughout illimitable space. Its great light is the volume of the Sacred Law, accepted as the unerring standard of truth and justice, which, while it harmonizes with and irradiates natural religion, supplements it with new and additional truths, and teaches by direct declaration what could be acquired from natural law only by inference from close observation combined with inductive reasoning.

It encourages a generous study of the liberal arts and sciences, especially of geometry, by which it is said that "we discover the power, wisdom, and goodness of the Great Artificer of the Universe." To the superficial, this claim may seem more fanciful than real. To be able to demonstrate that the square described upon the hypotenuse of a right-angled triangle is equal to the sum of the squares described upon the sides containing the right angle, may not apparently show much of the power, wisdom, or goodness of the Great Artificer of the Universe; but, when we recollect that, in demonstrating the truth of this Masonic theorem, we are required to utilize the solutions and demonstrations of nearly all the preceding theorems and problems, and that all these complicated superstructures have been evolved and constructed from a few leading principles, denominated postulates and axioms; and when we further recollect that natural religion—one-half of the Masonic trestle-board—is based upon a knowledge of GOD'S moral government of this world as implied in His natural government, and that a knowledge of these principles is only acquired by close observation, inference, and inductive reasoning; then we shall be able more readily to understand that the study of "that science, which, most of any, develops these powers and faculties, becomes a very material aid in discovering the power, wisdom, and goodness of the Great Artificer of the Universe. By the diminution and loss of these powers the human race sank into moral degeneracy. Their restoration and development will be attended with a corresponding beneficial result. Freemasonry has therefore been aptly denominated "the science of humanity, the instrument of civilization." Its cardinal virtues—temperance, fortitude, prudence, and justice—are applicable in every country, in every clime, and to all conditions of men. Its ample shield of plighted faith raised for the protection of noble woman, whether she sustain the sacred and endearing relation of wife, daughter, sister, mother, or widow, preserving the image of GOD in honor and from dishonor, secures to man the greatest amount of good and

happiness, commands at once the approbation of Heaven, and ensures the ready assent and cheerful support of every true and honest heart.

That it is of divine and not of human origin we think is apparent from the nature of its constitution and the character and quality of its inherent principles. Its methods are not the methods of man. In the whole history of the human race what great moral or intellectual improvements, what national progress or reforms have ever been accomplished by man without oppression and tumult, strife and blood-shed? The antediluvian world was drenched with blood before it was inundated with water. Mighty Babylon, that proud head of gold, with its hanging gardens and invincible walls, its measureless prowess and inimitable beauty, has long since been the habitation of "the beasts of the desert" and the subject of speculative subterranean excavations. The resplendent silver of Medo-Persia, the polished brass of Grecia, and the obdurate iron of Rome have each in turn been melted away by the consuming heat of international contests and exterminating wars. And when we reflect that, in the majority of instances, these resulting improvements formed no part of the original design, but were the results of a combination of circumstances induced by a superintending Providence, such, for instance, as the wars of ALEXANDER, which led to the introduction of Grecian civilization into Asia and Egypt; those of the Romans, to the pacification of the world; those of the Saracens, to the acknowledgment of one GOD; those of CHARLES V, to the recognized necessity of a balance of power; those which grew out of the Reformation, to religious liberty; those of Louis XIV, which sowed the seeds of the French Revolution; those of England in India, which introduced the civilization of a Christian nation; or those of America, which secured liberty and union to this mighty people and demonstrated to the world that a popular government possesses the inherent ability to maintain its own perpetuity; we are still more forcibly impressed with the contrast between the methods of Masonry and of man. The direful effects of these methods of man, and the selfish and ignoble purposes of those who gave them inception, remain and characterize the general direction of all mere human action.

The methods of Masonry, on the contrary, are more in accordance with the Divine plan—gradual development, silence, and symbols. It strives with no sect or organization, civil, political, or religions. It rivals none. It cooperates with all for the good of mankind. Coercion is foreign to its nature and policy. It obtrudes its benefits upon none. Fraternity and love are its weapons. Its charity is as broad as humanity, and extends into the boundless realms of eternity. It unites all nations, tongues, and kindreds in the great work of enlightening man by imparting to him a correct knowledge of nature's GOD from nature's laws and divine precepts, impressing him with a just sense of his duties and responsibilities in life, reminding him of the certainty of death, and encouraging him in the cheering hope of a blessed immortality beyond the grave.

Says one of my predecessors in this place, the W.'. Bro. JOHN B. FELTON: " few things are more remarkable in the history of man than that Masonry and civilization have had unity in purpose and result;" and another, the W.-. Bro. JOHN B. BUCKBEE: " Its tendency is to destroy individualism and to aggregate the world into unity and brotherhood;" and still another, the immortal Bro. THOMAS STARR KING in speaking of its influence, says: " For every country that influence is silently wholesome. In lands where the spirit of society does not recognize sufficiently the worth of man, but pays too much homage to rank and name, our Order quietly fosters the principle of the equality of privilege and responsibility under the laws of ever-lasting justice; and, without being revolutionary, it upholds the honor of human nature and patiently rebukes despotic arrogance."

It thus becomes the great conservative moral factor of the world, silently yet firmly reducing despotic arrogance to the level of justice and humanity, but gently ^{^^H} and kindly raising the good and true to higher and nobler walks in life. Strong ill ^{^^H} its manhood when the oldest empire in Christendom had its beginning, it teaches successive generations from the abundance of age and experience. And thus is conserved served a knowledge of the great mural principles which govern our being. With its advent to a position of controlling influence in the world, that bloodthirsty spirit of fanatical persecution which had previously sacrificed the lives of more than fifty millions of human beings as martyrs to principle, like the guilty serpent.

"Bach to the thicket slunk."

That the active principle of the force employed is the Might of His Power applied through the agency of this universal conservative element, under the immediate direction and supervision of

the Almighty Himself, is plainly indicated and defined by its necessity, its methods, its direction, and its results; and it thereby as clearly establishes the function of Freemasonry in the Divine economy. This function is still more clearly defined by its emerging from the gloomy mists of antiquity, worshiping God in His invisible spiritual personality. In all ages, out of the abundance of His care for the human race, God has preserved alive among men the remembrance of Himself.

To claim that Freemasonry originated in the heathenish mysteries of Egypt is to lose sight of the fact that two thousand years before the Christian era, on account of the idolatrous practices of the surrounding nations, and in order to preserve a knowledge of Himself among men, it became necessary for God to call ABRAHAM, of Ur of the Chaldees, to leave his native country and become a sojourner in a strange land; also, that it required, in addition to the nine preceding plagues, the death of all the first-born of Egypt to convince PHARAOH and his Satraps of the sovereignty of God, and to obtain from the King the command—

“Go, Satrap I Command that the captives be free:
Lest their God In fierce anger should smite even thee
On the crown of thy purple pride.”

The universal history of the race refutes the presumption that from such heathenish rights and ceremonies the pure Theism of Masonry could ever have been evolved. It is more in accordance with recent discoveries, and with the well established principles of human tendency, to presume that, for many years after the time of MENES, the Egyptians were in possession of a correct knowledge of the true God, which was perpetuated by appropriate forms, ceremonies, and symbols; but which, during the long period of the succeeding three hundred and thirty sovereigns, became meaningless to the great majority of even the initiated. They saw the ceremony and the symbol, but lost sight of the living principles represented. The priests and a few of the most enlightened still retained a proper knowledge of their significance, so that MOSES, who was instructed "in all the wisdom of the Egyptians," when he met the true faith in God as it came to him from ABRAHAM, found no difficulty in rightly applying it to that knowledge which he had so acquired among the Egyptians. Thus rehabilitated, its descent to SOLOMON was as easy and natural as was the transmission of the decalogue or the deep significance of the symbolic parts and functions of the model Tabernacle and the Ark of the Covenant.

The careful student of Masonic history needs not to be reminded that the Divine methods of teaching by allegory and symbol were well understood by the priesthood and practiced by the esoteric few, as an exact science, for ages anterior to the time of SOLOMON. It remained for SOLOMON at Jerusalem, and NUMA at Rome, to bring it down to the level of the more advanced of the masses. The artisans of that age composed a numerous and intelligent class whose powers of observation, being largely developed by the nature of their employment, fitted them to understand the great principles of the Craft as taught by nature and revelation, allegory and symbol; and among them was begun, and to them, to some extent, was committed the great operative work of reclaiming the human race from their ignorance of God and of the laws of His moral government.

The Workmen from the Temple and the "Collegia Artificium" of Numa, as represented by the "traveling Freemasons of the Middle Ages," and their successors of to-day, all live in the same great design and purpose of the Almighty, cemented and firm in their fraternity, uniform in their methods, universal in their habitations, but united and one in their faith in God and in their work for humanity.

In this its great faith and work, what HOMER and AESOXYLUS, SOPHOCLES and EURIPIDES, VIRGIL, DANTE, SHAKESPEAKE, GOETHE, and MILTON, were to poetry; what PHIDIAS and LEONARDO DA VINCI, MICHAEL ANGELO and RAPHAEL, HANDEL, MOZART, and BEETHOVEN, were to art; what PYTHAGORAS and SOCRATES, PLATO and ARISTOTLE, BACON and DESCARTES, LOCKE and HUME, have been to philosophy; what HERODOTUS and THUCYDIDES, DEMOSTHENES and CICERO, TACITUS and PLUTARCH, MONTESQUIEU and GIBBON were to history; what HIPPOCRATES and ARCHIMEDES, COPERNICUS and KEPLER, GALILEO and HARVEY, NEWTON and CUVIER were to science; Masonry has been, and even more, to all these, to humanity and to religion. The potency of its influence in the civilized world of to-day is beyond the probability of correct comprehension, and far exceeds the most extravagant estimates ever made by the Craft.

But, with increased intensity of light there ever follows increased severity of shadow. The close observer of the science of history may forecast the moral and intellectual future of the human race with almost as much certainty as history records the events of the past. The contrast between the virtuous, the pure, and the good, and the vicious, the impure, and the bad, will continue to deepen and widen until the threatening shadow of the degenerate masses whom neither the Church nor Masonry will ever reclaim or control, with stifling thickness, shall settle like a pall upon the very borders of God's elect. When there shall be a marshaling of fiendish forces against principles of purity and right, to oppress and to destroy, then, and not till then, will the vicious profane duly realize, or our twin sister, the Church, fully appreciate, the great function of Freemasonry in the Divine economy. Confronted with this invincible conservative force, clothed in the soft raiment of infinite Charity, but panoplied with the eternal principles of Truth and Justice, casting its ample shield of protection about the pure and the good, the aggressive fiends up-looking will behold their "mounted scales aloft, and fleeing, with them flee the shades of night." Then, and not till then, will our venerable Craft clearly discover the continuity of intelligent design controlling its destinies through all the ages of the past; and then, for the first time, will it fully appreciate the importance and dignity of its great function in the Divine economy.

" Oh, favorable spirit, propitious guest,
Well hast thou taught the way that might direct
Our knowledge, 'and the scale of nature set
From center to circumference; whereon,
In contemplation of created things,
By steps we may ascend to God."