

GOLDEN SENTENCES

THE CRAFTSMAN - 1866

From an address by De Witt Clinton, before Holland Lodge, the evening of his installation, Dec. 24, 1793

HIS DEFINITION OF FREEMASONRY.

It is well known that our Order was at first composed of scientific and ingenious men who assembled to improve the arts and sciences, and cultivate a pure and sublime system of morality. Knowledge at that time, was restricted to a chosen few; but when the invention of printing had opened the means of instruction to all ranks of people, then the generous cultivators of Masonry communicated with cheerfulness to the world those secrets of the arts and sciences which had been transmitted and improved from the foundation of the institutions then our Fraternity bent their principal attention to the cultivation of morality. And Masonry may now be defined as a moral institution, intended to promote individual and social happiness.

THE EQUALITY OF MASONRY.

Our institution asserts, in language not to be misunderstood, the natural equality of mankind. It declares that all brethren are upon a level, and it throws open its hospitable doors to all men of all nations. It admits of no rank, except the priority of merit, and its only aristocracy is the nobility of virtue.

THE ONEROUS CARES OF THE MASTER.

Sensible I am that neither my age, experience nor abilities entitle me to fill this place. Sensible I am that it is surrounded with difficulties and embarrassments; that it requires promptitude of expression, quickness of thought and presence of mind, and that it demands conciliatory manners and instantaneous perception of character, and a considerable knowledge of mankind.

THE BENEFICENT WORK OF MASONRY.

How often has it showered down its golden gifts into the seemingly inaccessible dungeons of misery! How often has it radiated with its beneficent rays the glooms of affliction, and converted its horrors of despair into the meridian splendor of unexpected joy! How often has it, with its philanthropic voice, recalled the unhappy wanderer into the paths of felicity, and with its powerful arm, protected from the grasp of malice and oppression the forlorn outcast of society! Let the widow, the orphan, the prisoner, the debtor, the unfortunate, witness its beneficent deeds, and in a symphony of gratitude, declare that on the flight of all the other virtues, charity as well as hope remained to bless mankind.

THE DUTIES OF A MASON TO HIS BROTHER.

A Mason is bound to consult the happiness and to promote the interests of his brother; to avoid everything offensive to his feelings; to abstain from reproach censure and unjust suspicions; to warn him of the machinations of his enemies; to advise him of his errors; to advance the welfare and reputation of his family; to protect the chastity of his house; to defend his life, his property, and what is dearer to a man of honor, his character, against unjust attacks; to relieve his wants and his distress; to instill into his mind proper ideas of conduct in the department of life which he is called to fill; and, let me add, to foster his schemes of interest and promotion, if compatible with the paramount duties a man owes to the community. If such are the obligations which a man owes to brother, they are precisely the duties that one freemason ought to perform to another. Our Order enjoins them as rules from which nothing can justify a deviation, and considers their infraction a violation of honor; conscience and religion; a prostitution of all that is deemed sacred and venerable among men. But Masonry does not confine the benignity of her precepts to her followers; she rises higher in the scale of excellence, and enjoins the observance of honor, honesty and good faith to all men; she espouses the cause of universal benevolence and virtue; she declares as unworthy of her patronage those who violate the laws of rectitude, and her votaries exemplify in their lives the truth of the remark that, although there are vicious men in the fraternity, yet they are better, than if they were not Masons.

THE RELIGION OF MASONRY.

As Christian Masons, acknowledging the divinity of Christ, we have introduced the Bible into our Lodges, to manifest our belief in the doctrines which it inculcates. In like manner the followers of Moses, Mahomet and Burmah may introduce into their Masonic assemblies their Pentateuch, their Alcoran, and their Vedan; and yet the unity of Masonry would remain - the essential principles on which she moves would be the same; she would still declare to her votaries, I regard not to what sect you attach yourselves; venerate the popular religion of your respective countries; follow the light of your understanding; forget not, however, the doctrines of the religion of nature; adore the Great Architect of the Universe, acknowledge the immortal soul, and look forward to a state of future retribution when the virtuous of all religions and countries shall meet together, and enjoy never fading bliss.