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COMMUNICATION.

FOR THE STAR.

ON MASONRY.

Having heard many objections urged against Free Masonry by pious characters, and being convinced that those objections would cease to exist, if our brethren were acquainted with the constitution, principles and design of that order of people, I here venture, as a Christian and Mason, to advocate the cause, and show that there is nothing in masonry that will either directly or indirectly infringe the rights of christianity, or, in any degree, injure the morals of mankind. In order to prove this to be a fact, I will present to you the leading articles of the constitution of masonry, first with regard to God and religion. No man can be received as a member, who will deny the Bible as the true revelation of God. It is required of him to observe the moral law, which enjoins on him love to God and man. He is admonished to avoid backbiting and evil speaking, evil surmises and jealousy of brethren; forbidden to cheat or defraud one another; all species of fighting, quarrelling and intemperance is strictly forbidden; brother going to law with brother, and all manner of hostility against the government of the nation is discountenanced. It is required of a mason to labour industriously for his support, and the support of his family. It is the invariable doctrine of the masonic constitution, that its members should exercise charity and benevolence to each other, and all mankind. Although it does not profess to be a church, yet the institution cannot exist without the bible, as the grand foundation. Their meetings are opened and closed by prayer—no swearing, or any species of intemperance or discord is suffered within the walls—all is peace, harmony and mutual concord. There the minister of the gospel is at full liberty to lecture his brethren, and admonish them to reverence the name of God, to walk in the paths of virtue, and always be ready to perform acts of kindness to his brethren. The principles of masonry are faith, hope and charity—faith in God, hope in immortality, and charity to all mankind. The design of masonry is to improve Society. No man, according to the constitution, can be received as a member, who is a profligate, loose man. He must be of fair character, honest in his dealings, sober, discreet and temperate. If he is otherwise, after he is initiated, he subjects himself to censure; and, without reformation, to expulsion. Any man, whose character and conduct are derogatory to the above requisitions, upon the strictest principles of masonry, is unworthy to be received as a member; and should be faithfully admonished, if he acts contrary, to these principles, and if he does not reform, should be excluded from all masonic privileges: which frequently the case. These constitutions, principles and designs are calculated to improve society, and make men better citizens; although human nature is so depraved, that man cannot change his own heart; yet, by conforming in practice to masonic principles, his actions will be so changed, that his deportment will ever be worthy of imitation. In fact, masonry leads men, if its principles be attended to, to the threshold of the church—religion leads them within its inclosure, and unfolds its sublime mystery.

But objections are urged against masonry, because it is a secret. Answer. Such is the pride of the human understanding, that it has no great opinion of that it cannot fully comprehend. Whatever has any thing of mystery in it, is very likely to be slighted and treated with contempt, though it possesses all the characters of excellence, and all the commendations of utility; yet if it elude investigation, and have some secret qualities past finding out, doubts will be immediately entertained whether it be worthy of all acceptance; and opinions, hastily propagated, tending to lessen its character and deny its importance.

Prejudice is a judgment formed beforehand, without examination. How unreasonable and unjust must such a judgment be, and an invulnerable bar to all after information! For, if the mind be warped by prepossessions, free inquiry into the full merits of a cause, no matter how good, is prevented. Prejudice restrains all candid interpretations of motives or principles—it discolors every object, or represents it in a false light—it leads to a decision equally ungenerous and unfair—for it often presumes to consider the most slight and frivolous circumstances as satisfactory materials for confident assertions and copious sentences. It is the immediate and obvious source of evil surmises and unkind suspicions—it gives rise to a cavelling sensoriousness, unfair insinuations and sarcastic sneers.

Whenever there is a secret bias of mind previously formed, it will catch readily at every little incident and appearance to increase its own propensity, and turn every current of observation into its own corrupt channel. It perverts and misrepresents the very best things—turns honor into disgrace, merit into mischief, christianity into superstition, and virtue into vice. Cautioned and instructed by our subject, and the remarks which it has suggested, let us not form our opinions either of persons or things too hastily, and never proceed upon surmises and precarious conjectures. There is danger in making up a precipitate judgment. Hasty conclusions are the chief cause of all our mistakes and errors. Let us not forget to

examine before we judge, and to understand before we decide. To ridicule things we never took pains to enquire into, would be unfair—to condemn practices, the grounds and foundation of which we never took pains to examine, and know nothing about, would be unjust and cruel. A discreet person will avoid being peremptory in his remarks, and decline hazarding an opinion upon that of which he is either totally ignorant, or but partially informed. He follows the prudent counsel of Solomon, the ancient wise man: "Blame not before thou hast examined the truth—understand first, and then rebuke—answer not before thou hast heard the cause, and strive not in a matter which concerneth thee not—he that answereth a matter before he heareth it, it is folly and shame unto him." Hear the apostle's solemn charge: "judge not, that ye be not judged. Who art thou, O man, that judgest another man's servant—to his own master he standeth or falleth." Upon the same principle of equity that maxim in common law; every man is presumed to be innocent, until he is proved to be guilty. No one is to be arraigned without evidence, nor condemned before he has made a plea of defence. A verdict is never passed upon a cause unheard.

It is a good rule in all doubtful matters, to suspend our opinion at least till positive proof is obtained, on which to found it. Until we have fully ascertained the state of a case, let us always be willing to put the fairest construction it will admit, and even to hope the best of a thing, where appearances are against it, and indulge that charity that believeth all things, hopeth all things, and covereth a multitude of faults, considering that him that is clear of sin may cast a stone. Where doubt hesitates, let candour prompt, and where justice balances, let mercy prevail. Even where we find ourselves obliged to blame the principles of a certain sect or party, let us not be so uncharitable as to confound all its adherents and followers under one general indiscriminate censure. Especially let us not charge them with such consequences of their tenets as they disavow.

One of the most popular objections urged against masonry, is the profound secrecy observed upon certain parts of the institution. It is inquired, how it is consistent with those principles of good will we profess, to conceal any thing from the world? Answer, that the principles and the privileges of the institution are open to all that are qualified to receive them; but of these qualifications we must reserve the power of judging for ourselves. To the wise and virtuous the mystery, under proper sanctions, are freely communicated; but to reveal them to the ignorant and vicious, would be prostituting their purpose, and profaning their sanctity. To divulge them in common, would be to annihilate the society, because they are its distinguishing features, the characteristics of the order, and the means of its preservation. Without them, therefore, it could not subsist. Besides, were all men acquainted with them, without regard to selection or desert, the peculiar obligation to good offices, arising from the institution, would revert back to the general duty of all mankind, and be subject to all those deductions it now meets with in the world at large, and against which it is our endeavour to guard. However, to have secrets, is not peculiar to free masonry—every trade—every art—every profession—has its secrets, not to be communicated but to such as have become proficient in the science connected with them—Nor then, without proper caution and restriction, and, oftentimes, under heavy guards and penalties. Charters of incorporation are granted by civil governments for their greater security, and patents for their encouragement. Nay, every government, every statesman, and every individual has secrets, which are concealed with prudent care, and confided only in the trusty and true.

We only claim a like indulgence—that of conducting ourselves by our own rules, and of admitting to a participation of our secrets and privileges such as choose to apply for them upon our own terms. So far from wishing to deprive any one of the light we enjoy, we sincerely wish all the race of men were qualified to receive; and, if so, our door shall never be shut against them; but our doors, our hearts, our souls shall be open to their reception. The secret is perfectly innocent in its nature, and affects no person but masons, and is that by which they are known to each other.

Nothing more, surely, need be said in apology for the mystery and concealment free masons profess. I will proceed to another objection, connected with the foregoing, which the lack of information also has surmised and prejudice propagated.

It is furthermore urged as an objection to the initiation of christians, that they venture to take a leap in the dark, and obligate themselves to keep that secret, which, perhaps, is evil in its nature. There would be some force in this objection, were the obligation in itself immoral, or the communications and requirements incompatible with the great laws of religion or civil society. The very reverse of which is the case.

The Masonic obligation is simply a covenant and promise, exacted previously to the divulging the specialties of the order and our means of recognizing each other, that they shall be kept from the knowledge of the world, lest their original intent should be destroyed, and their benevolent purpose prevented. Now, I ask, what harm can there be in this? As to taking a leap in the dark, this might be the case, were it not for a few circumstances, which I will name. The christian and others can read all masonic books, where they can see the constitution, design, principles and duty of masons. They also can discover among them great friendship and benevolence—the evidences of the value of the institution. Moreover, the christian that wishes to become a mason, can find a number of pious brethren, who are already members of that society. He can inquire of these characters, is there any evil in the mystery? His brother with whom he has full fellowship, tells him it is entirely innocent, and really valuable. How can he, on christian principles, doubt his veracity? Should he do this, would it not be cruel?

How does he leap in the dark, when he has the books to read—the good fruits of masonry to behold—the veracity of his brethren pledged? And, as to its being opposed because it is a secret, do you not all, when you have any thing of a private nature, which you are willing to confide in a particular friend, before you tell him what it is, demand a solemn promise of secrecy? And is there not the utmost propriety in knowing whether your friend is determined to conceal your secret before you presume to reveal it? The answer will confute this cavil.

It is also frequently argued against Freemasonry that some of those who belong to it are intemperate, profligate and vicious. But nothing can be more unfair or unjust than to depreciate or condemn any institution, good in itself, on account of the faults of those who pretend to adhere to it. The abuse of a thing is no valid objection to its inherent goodness. Worthless characters are to be found occasionally in the very best christian institutions upon earth. If the unworthiness of a professor casts a reflection upon the profession, it may be inferred, by a parity of reason, that the misconduct of a christian is an argument against christianity. But this is a conclusion which, I presume, no man will allow; and yet it is no more than what he must subscribe who is so unreasonable as to insist on the other. Nor is it any evidence that civil laws and political institutions are corrupt or unserviceable, because they are corrupt citizens and disorderly members of a community. The fact is, the best things may be abused. The bread of Heaven grew corrupt when used indiscreetly by the Israelites. The common blessings of life are turned into curses, if misapplied and abused.

When you see base and unworthy men among masons, rest you assured the fault is not in the institution, but in themselves. They have deviated from the principles of the society. They have counteracted their professions, and are as bad Masons as men. The greatest precautions are used to prevent the admission of unworthy characters; but if, from the want of proper information, or from too charitable constructions, such are introduced, we deeply regret the mistake, and use every proper method to remedy the evil. Nor do we pretend to say that those only in whom we were deceived bring discredit on the institution. There may be in masonry, as there has been in christianity, a falling away, or a fading in the once famed goodness of many of its members. Some there are, who have been admitted with the best proofs of a good, a faithful, and a well substantiated character. Their name was beauty, and their actions praise—their families were happy, their neighborhood satisfied, and the community honored by their virtues and their worth; and Masonry itself boasted the uprightness, constancy, and integrity with which they were distinguished. But now, alas! all have reasons to lament, that the fine gold has become dim, and the most fine gold changed. Such defections, you must be sensible, are not unfrequent in all societies; for, in this fallen world, societies are formed of men, and men are fallible, imperfect and frail. But, whether such disasters, such apostasy, should reasonably disgrace the institution, or be thought proofs of its immorality, "judge ye, but judge righteous judgment."

We do not hesitate to appeal to the world, in justification of the purity of our moral system. Our constitutions are well known—we have submitted them freely to public investigation, & if there should be any who have not read them, it is because they have not tried to obtain them. Therefore, let no man exclaim before he reads. We solemnly avouch them as the principles by which we are governed, the foundation on which we build, and the rules by which we work. We challenge the most severe critic—the most precise moralist—the most perfect christian—to point out any thing in them inconsistent with good manners, fair morals or pure religion. We feel assured that every one who will take pains to consult the book, must be convinced that the institution is friendly to the interests of mankind, well calculated to meliorate the disposition and improve the character, and to adorn its faithful adherents with every natural, social, and moral virtue.

Lastly, we will show what Freemasonry really is. It is a moral order of enlightened men, founded on a sublime, rational, and manly piety, and pure and active virtue, with the praise-worthy design of recalling to our remembrance the most interesting truths in the midst of the most social and innocent enjoyments, and of promoting, without sustentation or hope of reward, the most diffusive benevolence, the most generous and extensive philanthropy, and the most warm and affectionate brotherly love, that nature can acquire. The members are united together by bonds of the strongest friendship, and acquainted with a language, which has been preserved with inviolable secrecy from remotest ages. They were originally adopted in order to distinguish one another with ease and certainly from the rest of the world, that impostors might not intrude upon their confidence and brotherly affection, nor intercept the fruits of their beneficence. They became an universal language, which, notwithstanding the confusion of foreign tongues, and the forbidding alienation of custom, draws from the heart of a stranger, the acknowledgment of a brother, with all its attending endearments. It collects men of all nations and opinions into one amiable and permanent human association, and binds them, by new and irreparable obligation, to the discharge of every relative and moral duty; and thus becomes an effectual support and bright ornament of social life, and opens a wide channel for the current of benevolent affection, and a new source to human happiness. Its laws are reason and equity; its principles, benevolence and love; its aim is purity and truth; its intention is peace on earth; and its disposition, good will towards men.

This society keeps their poor from the parish, while every other permits them to be an encumbrance to the state. This band of benevolent brethren will pity the indigent brother on his way, and alleviate his grief, while feigned christianity will let him grope his way in the dark and pass unnoticed. Can this be the unfruitful works of darkness? Why should a Christian object to such laws and regulations? Why should he fear to trust his brother christian among this people—this be-

nevolent people? Is there any ground, on which lawful jealousy can be founded? The christian can trust his brother to travel day and night among all kinds of people, barter and trade with fellow-men, be sworn and act as jurors, join agricultural, philanthropic and dialectic societies, enter into copartnership with the unconverted in merchandise, and into covenant with the unconverted in marriage, and such like things, without breaking christian fellowship; but if he becomes a member with the Free Masons, he is censured. Ask the offended, why his feelings are injured, his answer is, because he has joined the masons. Ask what harm he has done, he cannot tell, only he has joined the masons. Has he forsaken the Church, or the duties of religion? No. Has he committed any open sin? No. Has it altered any part of his christian conduct? No. Do you know what masonry is? No. Then, why do you condemn him because he is a mason? Can you prove he has violated the law of God? No, nor without I know what masonry is. Strange, my christian friends, that you should suffer your feelings to be injured with a brother, unless you can prove him guilty of a crime. Let me beseech you, for the sake of religion, good sense and decency, to desist from hardness towards those brethren against whom you cannot bring a well founded charge; but rather encourage every institution that is calculated to improve society, and alleviate the distresses of the indigent. This will add to the dignity of your character, to the peace and harmony of society in general, and endear you to the hearts of your brethren, whom you have grieved by unlawful censure. PHILLO PACIFICUS.

Newspapers are the best and surest civilizers of a country. They contain within themselves not only the elements of knowledge, but the inducements to learn. There is no one so instructed, no one so ignorant, as not to learn from them something. It seems impossible that any people, within whose reach good newspapers can be brought, can resist the temptation to letters. In America, where alone the thing has been tried, a native, unable to read, cannot be found.\* It is thus that the miscellaneous character of a newspaper makes it more valuable than if it contained political occurrences and political dissertations. The understandings of its readers are led on, by degrees, from the simplest domestic occurrences to those which affect their remotest interest or appeal to their noblest sympathies; from the overturning of a coach to the overturning of an empire. It is impossible that a man, however narrow may be his views, can cast about in such a mass of information, for that which particularly concerns his own objects or pursuits, without stumbling on something which enlarges his ideas, or exercises his reason. It is necessary to have seen a people among whom newspapers have not penetrated, to know the mass of mischievous prejudices which these productions instantly and necessarily dissipate. We may instance the belief in witchcraft, and the rage which, on the approach of scarcity, was formerly directed against all the dealers in provisions. No man, accustomed to watch the state of crops and markets, the speculations on the adequacy or deficiency of supply, can, for a moment, suppose that scarcity or plenty depends upon the bakers or millers of his district, or that violence towards them can produce any other than a bad effect. This is an example of the general effect of newspapers. The instruction is conveyed, not by the direct inculcation of opinions, but by the habit of looking beyond the narrow circle of a man's personal observation to the results of a more enlarged view. A newspaper is, in fact, the instrument which enables an individual to avail himself of the experience of the whole community. Westminster Review.

\* This, we believe, is not literally true, though perhaps sufficiently so for the purpose of argument. One thing is certain; that, in the portions of country where the grossest ignorance of public concerns is to be found, newspapers have the least access.

A VOYAGE ROUND THE WORLD.

New York, April 12. The ship Jupiter, Capt. David Leslie, just arrived at New York, after sailing from New York in June, 1822, visited several of the principal ports on the east side of South America, then doubled Cape Horn, coasted along the Western shore of South and North America, stopping at a number of ports, and proceeded up the Gulf of California as far as civilization or commerce extended. Capt. L. afterwards crossed the Pacific Ocean several times, each time by a different route, and returned home by the Cape of Good Hope, so circumnavigating the earth. He has determined the position of several islands not delineated on any of our charts; corrected the position of some, and ascertained the non-existence of others. Though absent nearly three years, he has scarcely had a man sick during the voyage, & has lost but one man, (Henry Stewart, of Aberdeen,) who was devoured by wild beasts in the Gulf of California. Captain Leslie has follow-

ed the seas almost constantly for thirty years, and commanded a ship about twenty years of that time, always in foreign trade, and, except one man who died with the small pox in Europe, there never was a person belonging to the vessel with him who came to his death by sickness. While he was in Manila, in October last, that city was for a number of days, dreadfully convulsed with earthquakes; many of the stone houses, together with a large church and the great stone bridge, were destroyed.—There was scarcely a stone house which was not much rent and injured. On feeling the first shocks, which were light, every one fled from the stone houses and slept in tents and bamboo houses, and in boats on the water, so that few lives were lost; but even there they were not safe, for the night of the 30th of that month brought with it the most severe Typhoon or hurricane that had been known for many years. The bamboo houses were in their turn destroyed. Six sail of square-rigged vessels, besides a number of coasters, were driven ashore high and dry—a passage boat, with about 20 passengers, was lost, and scarcely a vessel which was not driven from their anchors. The Jupiter was almost the only vessel that did not drag, for which she was indebted to her excellent chain cables, manufactured by Messrs. Tucker & Carter, of this city. A French brig had drifted afloat of the Jupiter, and lay athwart her hawse in the height of the gale, which gave her chains a very severe proof.—Capt. Leslie left in Manila, a French frigate and a corvette, on a voyage of science and discovery, under the command of Com. Bougainville, son of the celebrated circumnavigator of that name. He seemed to possess all the talents and assiduity of his father. As is usual in French national ships on discovery, they were well appointed with officers proficient in the various departments of science. Whilst at Manila, some were surveying the adjacent coasts, some exploring the forests and mountains for rare animals, plants, and minerals, and drawing or painting the most interesting subjects of nature & art; the commander himself was employed in making astronomical and philosophical observations; the corvette lost her mainmast in the hurricane. They were bound to China and Cochin China, thence across the Pacific. In Nov. the Colombian ship of war Gen. St. Andero, lately the Kensington of Philadelphia, arrived at Manila, and was given up to the Spaniards by her crew, who had mutinied. After the mutiny, Green, of Salem, assumed the command, but the crew finding that he was neither seaman nor navigator, & having nothing to recommend him but his having been chief mutineer, he was put in irons, and the command given to Frederick Bergman, formerly an apprentice to Capt. Charles Wooster, in New York, who had been a midshipman on board before the mutiny. The ship was condemned as unworthy, and her crew, like those of the Bedgman, (who went there under similar circumstances,) had got nothing for their disaffection.—Merc. Adv.

POLITICS OF THE TWO AMERICAS.

From the National Gazette. The official Gazette of Bogota, of the 27th February, contains an article (which is ascribed to the Colombian Secretary of Foreign Affairs) on the intended Amphictyonic Congress at Panama, which we mentioned yesterday. The objects of this Congress are affirmed to be twofold—some affecting belligerents exclusively, and others common to belligerents and neutrals. They are thus stated:

- Objects for the belligerents exclusively. 1. To form, or renovate in the most solemn manner, the perpetual close league between all the new American states against Spain. 2. To issue a manifesto on the justice of their cause, and their system of policy towards the other Powers of Christendom. 3. To enter into a Convention of Navigation and Commerce between them all as allies and confederates. 4. To decide, with respect to the islands of Cuba and Porto Rico, whether all should combine in liberating them from the Spanish yoke; and, in such case, what military and pecuniary contingent each should furnish. 5. To take measures for carrying the war in concert to the seas and coasts of Spain. 6. To determine whether those measures should be extended to the Canary and Philippine isles. Objects common to belligerents and neutrals. 1. To take into consideration the means of rendering effectual the declarations of the President of the United States concerning any future designs of colonization on this continent, and of resisting every attempt at interference in our domestic concerns. 2. To settle, in concert, disputed principles of fit