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THOS. J. LEMAY, EDITOR & PROPRIETOR.

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ADDRESS OF MR. BLACKMER.

DELIVERED

IN LEXINGTON, N. C.

ON THE

Anniversary of St. John the Baptist, 1849.

BROTHERS AND FRIENDS:

From the fierce turmoils and hot strifes of the passing day, I come at your bidding, to spend an hour with you in the interchange of quiet thoughts, returning on the morrow to my wonted sphere and calling. The object for which you have assembled is one of a high and noble import. You have assembled for the purpose of renewing your attachment and redoubling your zeal in behalf of the greatest and most worthy of all human institutions. Nor is it in this place alone that Freemasons have forsaken the study, the office, the counting-room, the work-shop and the plough; throughout the length and breadth of our land—from Maine to Mexico, from the Atlantic coast to the utmost verge of pioneer life—in every place where Masons dwell, they are seen, to-day, to throw aside the implements of their usual avocations, array themselves in the regalia of their order, and unite in commemorating the day we celebrate. Nor is this spectacle confined to our shores alone—in other lands, far across the waters, where our language is not spoken,—beside the old highways of Europe,—amid the mournful ruins of Asia, upon the torrid sands of Africa,—in the islands of the Sea, Oceania, Polynesia and Australia, Masons are to-day assembled, the King from his throne, the Peasant from his toil; all actuated by the same motives that actuate us. Search the annals of the world over, and tell me, where can you find a parallel to the spectacle which the votaries of Masonry this day exhibit? With all sectarian and partisan feelings laid aside, they assemble by thousands around one common altar, their hearts beating in unison, their thoughts, their wishes and their aspirations all the same.

St. JOHN THE BAPTIST, whose memory we this day commemorate, was the immediate herald of Christ, a zealous adherent of Masonry, and one of the most conspicuous exemplars of meekness and humility the world has ever produced. Such a man, to whom was given the sublime and holy mission of announcing to a fallen world the advent of an all-merciful Redeemer, thought it not unworthy the sanctity of his vocation to enroll himself among the sons of Masonry, to act with them an efficient part in alleviating the want and misery to which so large a portion of the human family have ever been subjected. What day, then, more appropriate for a Masonic Festival, than the anniversary of St. John the Baptist? Most institutions choose the anniversary of their origin for the season of public display and rejoicing. They can point with unerring certainty to the origin of their institutions, while ours is hidden by the mists of ages. We read in the mythological legends of olden time that MINERVA sprang into existence from the brain of JUPITER, full formed and beautiful;—so of Masonry; at the earliest account we have, it was in the pride of full maturity. If we attempt to find the origin of our institution, we will get bewildered and lost in the labyrinthian mazes of remote antiquity, for when Alexander took Babylon, Calisthenes, the philosopher who accompanied him thither, found the principles of Masonry interspersed throughout their astronomical tables and observations, which they had kept for 1963 years, carrying us back as far as the 115th year after the flood, and 15 years after the building of the Tower of Babel. And it is well that the sons of Masonry should thus assemble in peace and quietness, apart from the annoying scenes of life, to renew their vows of love and devotion to this venerable institution, which in the pride of its mature years beheld the earliest events of which an historical record has been preserved. It is well they should rejoice at its present prosperity; it is well they should consult together concerning the best measures for advancing its future glory.

It is not my intention to discuss the principles of Masonry at large, to lift the veil from one of those sacred mysteries that have come down to us from early time, or to say a word that shall in the least enlighten the most perceptive mind respecting the hidden things of our fraternity. Perhaps there are some persons before me who expect to hear some of the secrets of our order revealed. To such persons I would, in all kindness, say, that were I to make a revelation, purporting to be of the secrets of Masonry, you would not believe me;—you would reason at once, that one who could be so devoid of principle as to reveal a secret which he had obligated himself to retain inviolate, would not be worthy of credence;—and you would regard my pretended revelation in no other light than that of an idle tale, told for the mere gratification of an eager curiosity. Concerning the secrets of Masonry, I will only say,—there is but one place where they can be successfully communicated, and that is within the body of a just and lawfully constituted Lodge, by means of skillful and competent officers. There let those seek who wish to know what Masonry is;—if they are worthy, the doors will be readily and joyously opened for them; but if they are unworthy, let them rectify their course of life before they apply, for should there be any great impropriety in their character, they may rest assured that Masonry will continue to be a sealed book to them. I shall speak of some of the objections that have been raised against the order, and endeavor to show that they are unfounded,—and of some of the great cardinal virtues that are inculcated to all her votaries.

Some bad persons may, and have, gained admission to the rights of Masonry; but such persons ever have, and ever will find themselves placed in the most uncomfortable position they could have chosen. Let him who thinks he can make Masonry a shield for crime beware how he enters those virtuous retreats, for from the moment his name is enrolled among the accepted ones, he is placed under obligations to live a life of rectitude which are paramount to all other earthly ones. My object will be to present Masonry to you as a great and moral institution—the alleviator of human misery in all its varied forms; the uncompromising enemy of vice in every shape, and the patron and friend of virtue and uprightness. It is, however, a difficult and delicate task to speak of Masonry before the uninitiated, for there is no community where it exists in which its violent enemies may not be found;—to such persons, no well informed Mason would presume to speak of its beauties; he would permit them to remain in the quiet enjoyment of their erroneous opinions, for no one should suffer his zeal for the institution to lead him into argument with those who through ignorance may ridicule it. The causes which induce people to become enemies of Masonry are various. Among the most violent are those who, through a desire of becoming members, have presented their petitions and have been so unfortunate as to have them rejected. Others object to it on the ground of its being a powerful engine which corrupt men may make subservient to their base schemes, thereby rendering Masons dangerous citizens; dangerous both to the moral and political welfare of the country. I have never known a Mason to be influenced in the least by such a motive, except it be to make him more stern in the discharge of his duty. But every one knows that Anti-Masonry has been a most successful humbug by which unprincipled political demagogues have elevated themselves to power. Many have present can recollect, and others of us have read, of the great excitement occasioned by the attempted disclosures of Morgan. I have heard of Anti-Masons in that day who permitted their prejudices to run so high as to refuse all intercourse with Masons;—to bring them to the crossed enemies of society and the country;

believing, or pretending to believe, that one Mason was bound by a horrid oath to support a brother for any office, and that when a Mason was arraigned before a court of justice to answer for the most daring felony, if he had a brother on the jury, he was safe,—for that brother was sworn to free him! Are such statements as these true, or are they mere conjectures, originating in the distorted fancy of some weak minded individual, who in his great simplicity believed that Masonry was a monster capable of annihilating nations by a single motion of its magic wand? Some enemies of the institution say it has a tendency to corrupt the morals of its members, and to foster a spirit of irreligion. This objection is as false as it is absurd. False, because no institution in the world inculcates a more strict course of moral rectitude, or a more implicit faith in God as the rewarder of virtue and the avenger of crime; absurd, because, in the first place, they know nothing about it, have no possible means of knowing, and in all probability they never will have the privilege of knowing; and in the second place, in bringing such an accusation against the institution, they charge many of our most exemplary christians with the vilest hypocrisy. Some say we make great pretensions to charity, but never exhibit any evidence of our willingness to bestow alms upon the needy and distressed of our order. What! shall an unfortunate brother, who goes, in his great need, before the Lodge and craves assistance, have his misfortunes and his want exposed to a gossiping world? Surely, that would not be charity; and for myself, I would sooner starve than accept of assistance from one who gave, as too many do give, only for the purpose of making it known to the world how very charitable he was. To such persons we say, read your Bibles, and there learn the spirit and essence of charity, of which you are yet ignorant; learn "not to give your alms before men to be seen of them," learn "to let your left hand know what your right hand doeth."

But another says there are some bad men among Masons. We confess it; there are those who do not conduct themselves as well as they might;—those who do not seem to be suitably impressed with the elevated position that Masonry confers upon them, and in some instances they degrade themselves, degrade their associates, and bring the Fraternity into disrepute. No one regrets such conduct as much as we; no one strives to work a reformation in such a man so much as his brothers. This objection, however, is of no weight with a reasonable person, for there has never been an institution on earth, either human or divine, to which vile, unprincipled men have not gained admission. Why don't you admit the ladies, asks another, if your institution be really so moral and pure? and in this objection, I am sorry to say, many of our fair friends join. Whatever receives the sanction of the ladies is sure of success, but a lawyer meets with opposition from them, has an almost insuperable obstacle to contend with. I wonder much that any gentleman should raise such an objection, since the ladies are excluded, or rather, I should say, believed, from participation in nearly all organized bodies in the world. For gentlemen, who raise such an objection against our institution, I have no answer; I will permit them to remain in the quiet enjoyment of their opinion; but the ladies I cannot treat so cavalierly. I must have a little talk with them, and endeavor to pacify them; even if I fail of convincing them that it is just as it should be. We would not wish you to think that the reason why you are not admitted to our Lodges is because we deem you incapable of keeping secrets;—you have no more secrets than I have in your bosom;—the secrets of our fraternity, but individual secrets, to permit us to entertain such an opinion. No person is solicited to join a Lodge; every Mason in the world has solicited a Lodge to grant him the favor of admitting him; and I very much doubt whether the ladies, who are so much accustomed to hear our prayers, would be willing to reverse the process and pray to us. Were you to ask me why you are not permitted to enlist as soldiers, and lead our armies to battle, I should say, because it is not proper; and the same answer I make for Masonry. If the ladies could properly appreciate Masonry, they would become its most zealous advocates, and make membership an indispensable requisite in every young gentleman who offers himself as a candidate for their smiles. Ladies, those of you who are so fortunate as to have relatives who are Masons,—to you, permit me to say, Masonry is your best friend. Should poverty and want ever be your lot, and a selfish world turn coldly from you and your sufferings, like the Priest and Levite, leaving you to perish from the intensity of your unavailing misery, you have only to make yourselves known to a Mason, and he will unhesitatingly and joyfully become the good Samaritan. Should one of you receive an injury, or an insult, a thousand generous hearts would espouse your cause, a thousand strong hands would strike in your defence. When Elizabeth ascended the throne of England she claimed the privilege enjoyed by the previous monarches; and as they had been Grand Masters of all the Masons in the realm, she claimed the right of becoming Grand Mistress, as a prerogative of royalty. But Masonry was placed on a firmer basis than her throne, and she found those brave barons, who were ever ready, during her long and glorious reign, to lead her invincible armies to the shock of battle, boldly defying her earliest mandate. Finding them resolute and unyielding in denying her claim for Masonic honor, she issued an oppressive edict against the whole order, making it a criminal offence for men to assemble in a secret manner. I hope there is no lady before me, who, if possessed of the power, would be so tyrannical. If there is, I would say to her that her mandate would be as harmless as was that of England's haughty Queen, who was compelled to humble herself before her nobles, revoke her mandate, and grant to them the right of managing the internal affairs of Masonry entirely independent of government. To those ladies who are so unfortunate as not to be connected with Masons, I would say, as others have said before me, lose no time in forming an alliance with the great brotherhood of Masons. The more violent enemies of the order have been so unkind as to charge it with being dangerous to our country's liberty. How foolish, how wilful a slander is this! In every strife of the American arms—on the stormy heights of Bunker's Hill, in the deadly charge at Landy's Lane—at the brilliant victory of New Orleans, and on each red field of Mexico, a Mason was ever found

"Where the danger was greatest, And our Country most needed a life."

The bravest defenders of "our country's flag of stars," on land or sea, have been of our brotherhood. And when, at Detroit, our national pride was humbled by the disgrace of her entrenchment, Masonry was enabled to say, with just pride, Hull was not a son of mine. I sent him not forth to conquer or to die. Had he been one of the chosen ones, whose patriotism had been taught to expand by the teachings given within my sacred precincts, he would never have sacrificed his country's honor. Let the noble, the sublime example of Warren and Montgomery; of Clay, Hardin and McKee; of Butler, Yell and Baxter; and of the thousands of other patriots whom Masonry has sent forth as her country's defenders, whose bones lie bleaching on every battle field from Lexington to the walls of Mexico, refute so vile a charge. But if other examples are wanting, we point with pride to our list of illustrious Presidents, among whom, all but two have their names written on the viewless tablets of our order. And if we turn to the old world, we find the kings of Prussia and Hanover, and the Emperor of Austria, Grand Masters of the order within their respective realms; while Princes and Barons and the titled Nobility of every land, have eagerly sought to lay aside the emblems

of their rank, and sit on terms of equality and brotherhood with those filling a humbler sphere.

Who is there that will coolly and dispassionately contemplate the vast age of Masonry, the innumerable defeats of error and triumphs of truth which it has witnessed, and behold it still unchangedly the same as it existed on the hills of Judea and the plains of Shinar, without being compelled to admit that an institution which has survived the wrecks of so many thousand centuries, must embody many of the great principles of eternal, immutable truth. Other institutions that came into being ages after the full maturity of Masonry, have flourished for centuries and passed away. No institution which does not recognize many of the vital principles of the Christian Religion can be enduring. Had it been possible for Pagan Philosophy, by dint of unparalleled effort, to find the way of truth, the course of Time, would not, as it is, be strewn with ruins of mind. Masonry beheld the origin, on the plains of Judea, of a philosophy which has been honored with the experience of more than thirty centuries. Read the history of that philosophy, and mark its absorption of all institutions making pretensions to sober wisdom, the world has never beheld one more replete with gross absurdities than Oriental Philosophy; and yet, excepting this of ours, no human institution carries the mind back so far in the world's history. It flourished in youthful vigor while the Ark was yet seen resting on the cliffs of Ararat; it was seen on the plains of Shinar, and in the full maturity of its manhood it guided the wise men of the East to the city of David. Had it been the ephemeral creation of a modern novelist, its gross absurdities might be extenuated and palliated by the mental imbecility and vitiated taste of the author. But it springs not up as suddenly as Jonah's Gourd; it was the result of meditative ages; the work of strong minded men, whose bosoms, doubtless, throbbled with painful solicitude to penetrate the surrounding darkness and gaze upon the friendly features of truth. But the attempt was vain. How rich in foliage the vine they planted, how luxuriant its growth; how grand its size; but, alas, how destitute of fruit! Like an icicle, it could be formed only in a frigid atmosphere. It soon entwined itself for support around oriental idolatry, and both are now fast hastening to decay along the banks of the Ganges.

The philosophy of the refined and cunning Greek was like a finely conceived, but half polished statue; enough was complete to show what might have been the beauty of the whole; but, like his own Mythological Heavens, it was peopled with bright, but inaccessible deities. His unaided reason could not drive error from its favorite retreats, though his philosophy contained many of the principles of truth. Taking his elements from Egypt and India, with naive independence he created a philosophy of his own, and stamped it legibly, nay, indelibly, with the impress of his own strong inventive genius; and many brilliant and far piercing radiations of mind shot forth from his polished columns, and played around its spreading dome. But its beauty was the beauty of the midnight meteor, flying through the heavens, leaving no shining mark, and filling the earth with terror and dread. The structure he reared was as massive and grand as human reason could erect, and the oracles he uttered from it were heard with reverence in the porticoes of Rome, and obeyed in the learned monasteries of Europe. Yet a painful uncertainty enshrouded his conclusions, and in the dimness with which he felt himself invested he became lost in the dark mazes of wild speculation. His philosophy, like his name, is now a forgotten name; and most of the lavas by which he long swayed the intellectual world are now as silent as the Oracles of Delphi. Other systems, occupying in their time a large space in the world's thought, have had their origin, have flourished and passed away since the full maturity of Masonry; but the examples given, the most remarkable the world has ever produced, and the decay that has overtaken them, prove conclusively that the foundation of Masonry was laid in wiser principles than theirs.

We confess there is a painful uncertainty enshrouding the origin of our institution. Turning backward in the course of time, and partially lifting the veil from the eternity of the past, we behold her only luminary of benighted Europe in the middle ages; we recognize her emblems on the imperial purple of the eternal city; she dwelt amid the classic groves of Greece; and she beheld the Son of God suspended on the Cross. Her home was the seat of Empires, once the most august, now depopulated, and so utterly in ruins that scarce one stone remains upon another; amid generations who once regaled in the halls of pleasure, or were marshalled at the note of war, all borne from the scenes where now only rocks and rushes grow; scenes once enlivened by the glad shout of millions of voices, now hushed in a silence broken only by the wild bird's scream—

"Where once she dwelt,
All now is desolation cold.
The desert serpent dwells alone
Where grass o'er grows each mouldering stone,
And stones themselves, to ruin grown,
Are grey and death-like old!"

What wise Champollion will decipher from the illegible hieroglyphics of the past, the era that gave birth to Masonry? Who will produce that record of primeval Time, and give to us the name of him who conceived the vast and comprehensive design, and designate that portion of the earth from whence she was sent forth to exert so conspicuous an influence upon the destiny of universal man? Let him who craves the meed of immortality accomplish the task, and his name will be as enduring as Time. The mind reels in its attempt to solve these problems—it staggers like a drunken man, and oppressed with the exhalation of that which has baffled the most zealous inquiry, it retires from the labyrinth of useless investigation, speculating upon the possibility of a divine origin for an institution that has survived the wrecks of so many thousand centuries.

Much more might be said, perhaps with propriety, about the history of our order, and its more marked peculiarities. But from further comment I abstain, and turn with pleasure to different topics, on which I can speak more explicitly. It is universally known that Masonry inculcates a refined and pure system of morality—that it ever frowns upon vice and smiles upon virtue. But our enemies meet us here with the objection, that if such are the teachings of our fraternity, very many portions come short of exemplifying those teachings in that portion of their conduct which is subject to the scrutiny of the world. That some of our members come short of living up to their high privilege, I am pained to say, is true. But were the person who urges such an objection a member of a Christian Church, and were I disposed to retaliate, I might point him to examples there that would silence forever his objection. Christ chose twelve Apostles to be instructed in the principles of that salvation which his ignominious death was to seal; and among that number, small as it was, one Judas was found. An objection raised against an institution because vile men sometimes gain admission, and make their membership a cloak for their iniquities, is very unkind. The frailty of human nature should be taken into consideration, and the difficulty any body of men must experience in scanning the character of those who present themselves for membership. Still such objections, uncharitable as they are, have been, and will be, raised against our order, so long as the fault-finder can detect the slightest blemish in the character of her sons.—This should induce you to adopt the most rigid course of moral rectitude, remembering that

for every deficiency on your part, you bring disgrace upon the institution and all her members. You occupy a critical position, and it becomes your bounden duty to set well your part. Show the world that in your lofty, high-minded career, you are like him who strove to climb to the Eagle's Eyrie, while those less bold were catching Linnets at the foot of the precipice. The eyes of the world are upon you, for every one knows that Masonry takes her members only from the most respectable part of community. To be a Mason is, therefore, prima facie evidence of being a gentleman; and those slight deviations, from the path of rectitude which, in the lower grades of society pass by unnoticed, in you are subject to the severest scrutiny. Let a habitual drunkard enter a grog shop, and no one deems it an event worth noticing; but let the clergyman of the parish, or some other exemplar of virtue enter the same place and call for a dram, in one short hour every individual in town will have heard of it.

In order that you may the more fully appreciate the relations you occupy to the world at large, I wish you to accompany me in a few reflections upon the position of our country in the era in which you live marks your position in the scale of being as one of thrilling interest and awful responsibility. A few short months since, and the whole world was agitated with wars and rumors of wars. Our country has retired from the list of field where nation strives against nation, and the Olive branch now waves from the dome of her Capitol. But in other lands it is not so. Nearly all Europe is in commotion; the political cauldron is boiling most vehemently, and its bubblings portend a frightful commotion of the elements. Germany is agitated from centre to circumference, and in all her provinces the spirit of insurrection is life. The armies of France are thundering at the gates of Rome, and we shall soon behold the troops of Republican France fraternizing with the minions of the most detestable tyrant in Europe to crush a people struggling for the rights of self government. The Hungarian war is assuming an aspect of intense interest.—Imperial Austria, the mightiest power in Europe, when the more vigorous sons of Rodolph wielded her sceptre, now lies humbled, at the mercy of one of her revolted provinces. To preserve her existence, she has been forced into a degrading alliance with the Autocrat of the North, whose warlike legions are now pouring into the revolted province in such numbers as to vie with the irruption of the Goths and Vandals of the middle ages. This "irruption of Northern Barbarians" has called forth the opposition of England and France, which, if followed by vigorous measures, will lead to a war as general as when the powers of Europe combined to crush that mighty power which had cast its shadow over all their thrones. If you turn your attention for a moment from those warlike commotions, other and more heart rending spectacles will present themselves. Behold the starving men and women of the western island Erin! Erin, rich in her legends and traditions, rich in her Poets and Orators, but most rich in the great heart of her nation; that land, the gem of the ocean, has long been wasted with famine. Glorious Tom Moore, as he took the Harp of his country, sung

"Dear Harp of my country, in darkness I found thee,
The cold chain of silence had hung o'er thee long."

What shall the future bard sing as he takes the national Harp of Ireland? What strain too mournful to tell of this withering famine and this raving pestilence? And yet the tale of American charity to the passing armistice, the daily scenes of relief and alleviating scenes which Ireland has witnessed, are soon to be surpassed by those of greater horror and misery than any she has yet suffered.

"Unhappy Ireland needs no tongue to tell
The rankling woe that in her bosom swells;
They speak through oft too thickly peopled lanes,
And tell of poverty, servitude and toil."

We who have the enviable privilege of enjoying the blessings of liberty and plenty in the New World, should look with the eyes of philanthropy to the suffering millions of the Old. The beacon fires, that burn so brightly on our shores, have cast their light across the waters, to dissipate the darkness of Eastern Despotism. Thousands of those oppressed people are annually seeking our shores to hew down our forests, to make the wilderness smile, and to become good citizens of our common country; while those who remain behind are striving to better their condition by forming a government after the model of our own. It becomes your duty then, to furnish those who remain at home such an example of moral and civil virtue as will enable them to achieve their liberation from the thralldom of tyrants;—and for those who make America their home, let such happiness be in store as will not permit them to be "homeless for their native land." And more than this—the recent startling achievements of mind have almost added an impetus to nature; and still its career is onward, its gaze is upward, its aspirations ever yearning with a passionate fondness towards some distant, bright ideal, a more lovely Egeria than the woodland apparition of Numa. How shall I define this centre, towards which the gigantic energies of mind are rapidly converging? I may only present it to your consciousness, the effort to clothe it in a formula of words is baffled. All must feel that there is a fitness and harmony of things which may be reached, far transcending their present discords and collisions;—that there is a language of Nature and common Humanity, which, when listened to aright, is recognized as the voice of universal Truth; that there is a pervading spirit, which, when permitted to rule, will unite, by the electric charm of sympathy and love, earth to man, man to mind, mind to Heaven, and all to God. The illumination of this truth, as afforded in the progress of mind, is startlingly sublime. We gaze upon the ideal forms of beauty as they crowd the canvases, or awake the marble. From the deserts of Palmyra, the tombs of Egypt, the groves of Greece and the imperial hills of her who was the stern and haughty spoiler of them all;—from the banks of the Arno, the galleries of the Louvre, the Escorial and Windsor, and even from the humble studios of our own forest land, how gorgeous the train that sweeps before the eye of Fancy! And yet these, the proudest triumphs of imagination, all fall of reaching that perfection to which mind will ere long attain. The mighty energies for the accomplishment of this object are at work; their influence is every where perceptible. Improvement so soon succeeds invention that we seem rapidly approaching a state of perfection. The world feels the influence of the great physical powers recently developed, the strength and velocity of which have almost challenged spirit itself, and each seems treading onward like a giant in the greatness of its power. With a course which winds and waves scarcely rebuke, they bear the vessel over the sea; with a rapidity surpassing the Eagle in its flight, they hurry our produce from the inland field to the ocean strand; and seizing our thoughts in the moment of utterance, they transfer them in an instant to the extremities of the nation. Ocean murmurs her allegiance to man, Earth bows her rugged front in obedience to his mandate, and even the air will not long gambol and shout in derision of his mastery.

In such an age as this it is yours to live, it is yours to act.—Strive that you be not unworthy of your privileges, your country, your generation, and above all, of the venerable institution to which you belong. Think not, because your position may be comparatively humble, your influence is not to be felt. The world's greatest benefactors have come, not from palaces and titled ances-

Dr. P. Thomson
referred