

Illustrations of Masonry

Book 1 - The Excellency of Masonry Displayed

Sect. 1 - Reflections on the symmetry and proportion in the works of Nature, and on the harmony and affection among the various species of beings.

Whoever attentively observes the objects which surround him, will find abundant reason to admire the works of Nature, and to adore the Being who directs such astonishing operations: he will be convinced, that infinite wisdom could alone design, and infinite power finish, such amazing works.

Were a man placed in a beautiful garden, would not his mind be affected with exquisite delight on a calm survey of its rich collection? Would not the groves, the grottoes, the artful wilds, the flowery parterres, the opening vistas, the lofty cascades, the winding streams, the whole variegated scene, awaken his sensibility; and inspire his soul with the most exalted ideas? When he observed the delicate order, the nice symmetry, and the beautiful disposition of every part, seemingly complete in itself, yet reflecting new beauties on the other, and all contributing to make one perfect whole, would not his mind be agitated with the most bewitching sensations; and would not the view of the delightful scene naturally lead him to admire and venerate the happy genius who contrived it?

If the productions of art so forcibly impress the mind with admiration, with how much greater astonishment and reverence, with how much greater astonishment and reverence must we behold the operations of Nature, which presents to view unbounded scenes of utility and delight, in which divine wisdom is most strikingly conspicuous? These scenes are indeed too expanded for the narrow capacity of man to comprehend; yet whoever contemplates the general system, from the uniformity of the plan must naturally be directed to the original source, the supreme governor of the world, the one perfect and unsullied beauty!

Beside all the pleasing prospects that everywhere surround us, and with which our senses are every moment gratified; beside the symmetry, good order, and proportion, which appear in all the works of creation, something further attracts the reflecting mind, and draws its attention nearer to the Divinity - the universal harmony and affection among the different species of beings of every rank and denomination. These are the cements of the rational world, and by these alone it subsists. When they

cease, nature must be dissolved, and man, the image of his Maker and the chief of his works, be overwhelmed in the general chaos.

In the whole order of beings, for the seraph which adores and burns, down to the meanest insect, all, according to their rank in the scale of existence, have, more or less, implanted in them, the principle of association with others of the same species. Even the most inconsiderable animals are formed into different ranks and societies, for mutual benefit and protection. Need we name the careful ant, or the industrious bee; insects which the wisest of men has recommended as patterns of unwearied industry and prudent foresight? When we extend our ideas, we shall find, that the innate principle of friendship increases in proportion to the extension of our intellectual faculties; and the only criterion by which a judgement can be formed respecting the superiority of one part of the animal creation above the other, is by observing the degrees of kindness and good-natured in which it excels.

Such are the general principles which pervade the whole system of creation; who forcibly then must such lessons predominate in our assemblies, where civilisation and virtue are most zealously cherished, under the sanction of science and the arts?

Sect. 2 - The advantages resulting from friendship.

No subject can more properly engage the attention, than the benevolent dispositions which indulgent Nature has bestowed upon the rational species. These are replete with the happiest effects, and afford to the mind, the most agreeable reflections. The breast which is inspired with tender feelings, is naturally prompted to a reciprocal intercourse of kind and generous actions, as human nature rises in the scale of beings, the social affections likewise arise. Where friendship is unknown, jealousy and suspicion prevail; but where that virtue is the cement, true happiness subsists. In every breast there is a propensity to friendly acts, which being exerted to effect sweetens every temporal enjoyment; and although it does not remove the disquietudes, it tends at least to allay the calamities of life.

Friendship is traced through the circle of private connexions to the grand system of universal benevolence, which no limits can circumscribe, as its influence extends to every branch of the human race. Actuated by this sentiment, each individual connects his happiness with the happiness of his neighbour, and a fixed and permanent union is established among men.

Nevertheless, though friendship, considered as the source of universal benevolence, be unlimited, it exerts its influence more or less powerfully, as the objects it favours are near or more remote. Hence the love of friends and of country takes the lead in our affections and gives rise to that true patriotism, which fires the soul with the most generous flame, creates the best and most disinterested virtue, and inspires that public spirit and heroic ardour which enable us to support a good cause, and risk our lives in its defence.

This commendable virtue crowns the lover of his country with unfading laurels, gives a lustre to his actions, and consecrates his name in later ages. The warrior's glory may consist in murder, and the rude ravage of the desolating sword; but the blood of thousands will not stain the hands of his country's friend. His virtues are open, and of the noblest kind. Conscious integrity supports him against the arm of power; and should he bleed by tyrant hands, he gloriously dies a martyr in the cause of liberty, and leaves to posterity an everlasting monument of the greatness of his soul.

Though friendship appears divine when employed in preserving the liberties of our country, it shines with equal splendour in more tranquil scenes. Before it rises into the noble flame of patriotism, aiming destruction at the heads of tyrants, thundering for liberty, and courting danger in defence of rights; we behold it calm and moderate, burning with an even glow, improving the soft hours of peace, and heightening the relish for virtue. In those happy moments contracts are formed, societies are instituted, and vacant hours of life are employed in the cultivation of social and polished manners.

On this ground plan the universality of our system is established. Were friendship confined to the spot of our nativity, its operation would be partial, and imply a kind of enmity to other nations. Where the interests of one country interfere with those of another, nature dictates an adherence to the welfare of our own immediate connexions; but such interference apart, the true mason is a citizen of the world, and his philanthropy extends to all the human race. Uninfluenced by local prejudices, he knows no preference in virtue but according to its degree, from whatever clime it may spring.

Sect. 3 - Origin of Masonry, and its general advantages.

From the commencement of the world, we may trace the foundation of Masonry. Ever since symmetry began, and harmony displayed her charms, our Order has had a being. During many ages, and in many different countries, it has flourished. No art, no science preceded it. In the dark periods of antiquity, when literature was in a low state, and the rude manners of our forefathers withheld from them that knowledge we now so amply share, Masonry diffused its influence. This science unveiled, arts arose, civilization took place, and the progress of knowledge and philosophy gradually dispelled the gloom of ignorance and barbarism. Government being settled, authority was given to laws, and the assemblies of the fraternity acquired the patronage of the great and the good, while the tenets of the profession diffused unbounded utility.

Abstracting from the pure pleasures which arise from friendship so widely constituted as that which subsists among masons, and which is scarcely possible that any circumstance or occurrence can erase, masonry is a science confined to no particular country but extends over the whole terrestrial globe. Wherever arts flourish, there it flourishes too. Add to this, that by secret and inviolable signs, carefully preserved among the fraternity, it becomes an universal language. Hence many advantages are gained. The distant Chinese, the wild Arab, the American savage, will embrace a brother Briton; and will know, that beside the common ties of humanity, there is still a stronger obligation to induce him to kind and friendly offices. The spirit of the fulminating priest will be tamed; and a moral brother, though of a different persuasion, engage his esteem; for mutual toleration in religious opinions is one of the most distinguishing and most valuable characteristics of the Craft. As all religions teach morality, if a brother be found to act the part of a truly honest man, his private speculative opinions are left to God and himself. Thus, through the influence of Masonry, which is reconcilable to the best policy, all those disputes which embitter life, and sour the tempers of men are avoided; while the common good, the general object, is zealously pursued.

From this view of our system, its utility is sufficiently obvious. The universal principles of the art unite, in one indissoluble bond of affection, men of the most opposite tenets, of the most distant countries, and of the most contradictory opinions; hence in every nation a Mason may find a friend, and in every climate a home.

Such is the nature of the institution, that in a Lodge, union is cemented by sincere attachment, and pleasure reciprocally communicated in the cheerful observances of every obliging office. Virtue, the grand object in view, luminous as the meridian sun, shines resurgent on the mind, enlivens the heart, and heightens cool approbation into warm sympathy and cordial attention.

Sect. 4 - Masonry considered under two denominations.

Masonry passes under two denominations, operative and speculative. By the former, we allude to a proper application of the useful rules of architecture, whence a structure derives figure, strength, and beauty, and whence result a due proportion and a just correspondence in all its parts. By the latter we learn to subdue passions, act upon the square, keep a tongue of good report, maintain secrecy, and practise charity. Speculative Masonry is so far interwoven with religion, as to lay us under the strongest obligations to pay that rational homage to the Deity, which at once constitutes our duty and our happiness. It leads to the contemplative to view with reverence and admiration the glorious works of creation, and inspires them with the most exalted ideas of the perfection of the divine Creator, Operative Masonry furnishes us with dwellings, and convenient shelters from the inclemencies of seasons; and while it displays the effects of human wisdom, as well in the choice as in the arrangement of the materials of which an edifice is composed, it demonstrates what a fund of science and industry is implanted in man for the best, most salutary, and beneficent purposes.

The lapse of time, the ruthless hand of ignorance, and the devastations of war, have laid waste and destroyed many valuable monuments of antiquity, on which the utmost exertions of human genius have been employed. Even the temple of Solomon, so spacious and magnificent, and constructed by so many celebrated artists, escaped not the unsparing ravages of barbarous forces. Freemasonry, notwithstanding, has still survived. The attentive ear receives the sound of the instructive tongue, and the sacred mysteries are safely lodged in the repository of faithful breasts. Tools and implements of architecture, symbols the most expressive, are selected by the fraternity, to imprint on the memory serious truths; and thus the excellent tenets of the institution are transmitted unimpaired, under circumstances precarious and adverse, through the succession of ages.