

Illustrations of Masonry

Book 1 - Sect. 8 - Charity the distinguishing characteristic of Masons.

Charity is the chief of every social virtue, and the distinguishing characteristic of the Order. This virtue includes a supreme degree of love to the great Creator and Governor of the universe, and an unlimited affection to the beings of his creation, of all characters and of every denomination. This last duty is forcibly inculcated by the example of the Deity himself, who liberally dispenses his beneficence to unnumbered worlds.

It is not particularly our province to enter into disquisition of every branch of the amiable virtue; we shall only briefly state the happy effects of a benevolent disposition toward mankind, and show that charity, exerted on proper objects, is the greatest pleasure man can possibly enjoy.

The bounds of the greatest nation, or the most extensive empire, cannot circumscribe the generosity of a liberal mind. Men, in whatever situation they are placed, are still, in a great measure, the same. They are exposed to similar dangers and misfortunes. They have not wisdom to foresee, or power to prevent, the evils incident to human nature. They hang as it were, in perpetual suspense between hope and fear, sickness and health, plenty and want. A mutual chain of dependence subsists throughout the animal creation. The whole human species are therefore proper objects for the exercise of charity.

Beings, who partake of one common nature, ought to be actuated by the same motives and interests. Hence, to soothe the unhappy, by sympathizing with their misfortunes, and to restore peace and tranquillity to agitated spirits, constitute the general and great ends of the Masonic institution. This humane, this generous disposition fires the breast with manly feelings, and enlivens that spirit of compassion, which is the glory of the human frame, and not only rivals, but outshines, every other pleasure the mind is capable of enjoying.

All human passions, when directed by the superior principle of reason, promote some useful purpose; but compassion towards proper objects is the most beneficial of all the affections, as it extends to greater numbers, and tends to alleviate the infirmities and evils which are incident to human existence.

Possessed of this amiable, this godlike disposition, Masons are shocked at misery under every form and appearance. When we behold an object pining under the miseries of a distressed body or mind, the healing accents which flow from the tongue, mitigate the pain of the unhappy sufferer, and make even adversity, in its dismal state, look gay. When our pity is excited, we assuage grief, and cheerfully relieve distress. If a brother be in want, every heart is moved; when he is hungry, we feed him; when he is naked, we clothe him; when he is in trouble, we fly to his relief. Thus we confirm the propriety of the title we bear, and convince the world at large, that BROTHER among Masons is something more than a name.

Sect. 9 - The discernment displayed by Masons in the choice of objects of charity.

The most inveterate enemies of Masonry must acknowledge, that no society is more remarkable for the practice of charity, or any association of men more famed for disinterested liberality. It cannot be said that Masons indulge in convivial mirth, while the poor and needy pine for relief. Our quarterly contributions, exclusive of private subscriptions to relieve distress, prove that we are ever ready with cheerfulness, in proportion to our circumstances, to contribute to alleviate the misfortunes of our fellow-creatures. Considering, however, the variety of object, whose distress the dictates of Nature as well as the ties of Masonry incline us to relieve, we find it necessary sometimes to inquire into the cause of misfortunes; lest a misconceived tenderness of disposition, or an impolitic generosity of heart, might prevent us from making a proper distinction in the choice of objects. Though our ears are always open to the distresses of the deserving poor, yet our charity is not to be dispensed with a profuse liberality on impostors. The parents of a numerous offspring, who, through age, sickness, infirmity, or any unforeseen accident in life, are reduced, to want, particularly claim our attention, and seldom fail to experience the happy effects of our friendly association. To such objects, whose situation is more easy to be conceived than expressed, we are induced liberally to extend our bounty. Hence we give convincing proofs of wisdom and discernment; for though our benevolence, like our laws, be unlimited, yet our hearts glow principally with affection toward the deserving part of mankind.

From this view of the advantages which result from the practice and profession of Masonry, every candid and impartial mind must acknowledge its utility and

importance to the state; and surely, if the picture here drawn be just, it must be no trifling acquisition to any government, to have under its jurisdiction, a society of men, who are not only true patriots and loyal subject, but the patrons of science and the friends of mankind.

Sect. 10 - Friendly admonitions.

Having explained the principles of the Order, and endeavoured to demonstrate the excellence and utility of the institution, I shall conclude my observations with a few friendly admonitions to my brethren.

As useful knowledge is the great object of our desire, let us steadily adhere to the principles it inculcates, check our progress, or damp our zeal; but let us recollect, that the ways of wisdom are beautiful, and lead to pleasure. Knowledge is attained by degrees, and cannot every where be found. Wisdom seeks the secret shade, the lonely cell designed for contemplation. There enthroned she sits, delivering her sacred oracles. There let us seek her, and pursue the real bliss. Though the passage be difficult, the farther we trace it, the easier it will become.

Union and harmony constitute the essence of Freemasonry: while we enlist under that banner, the society must flourish, and private animosities give place to peace and good fellowship. Uniting in one design let it be our aim to be happy ourselves, and contribute to the happiness of others. Let us make our superiority and distinction among men, by the sincerity of our profession as Masons; let us cultivate the moral virtues, and improve in all that is good and amiable; let the Genius of Masonry preside over our conduct, and under her sway let us perform our part with becoming dignity. Let us preserve an elevation of understanding, with a politeness of manner, and an evenness of temper. Let our recreations be innocent, and pursued with moderation; and never let irregular indulgences lead to the subversion of our system, by impairing our faculties, and exposing our character to derision. But, in conformity to our precepts, as patterns worthy of imitation let the respectability of our lives be supported by the regularity of our conduct, and the uniformity of our deportment. Thus, as citizens of the world, as friends to every clime, we shall be living examples of virtue and benevolence, equally zealous to merit as to obtain universal approbation.