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AN
ADDRESS

UPON THE

Solicitation and Selection of Candidates

FOR

FREEMASONRY.

BEING

THE SUBSTANCE OF A LECTURE DELIVERED TO THE NEWLY-MADE BRETHREN
OF THE LODGE OF HONOUR, No. 769, WOLVERHAMPTON,
OCTOBER, 1858.

BY

F. GOUGH, LL.B.

W.M. 769, & P.G.D.

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MDCCCLVIII.

Any Profits arising from this Publication will be given to Masonic Charities.



TO

Colonel G. J. Vernon,

PROVINCIAL GRAND MASTER OF STAFFORDSHIRE,

WHOSE

UNWEARIED EXERCISE OF THE NOBLEST PRECEPTS OF FREEMASONRY

HAS

CONFERRED INDELIBLE OBLIGATIONS UPON THE CRAFT,

AND

HIGHLY ENDEARED HIM TO ALL WITHIN THE SPHERE OF HIS INFLUENCE

THE FOLLOWING ADDRESS

(PUBLISHED BY REQUEST)

IS (BY PERMISSION) HUMBLLY DEDICATED

BY

HIS GRATEFUL AND DEVOTED SERVANT,


THE AUTHOR.

AN ADDRESS.

MASONRY is free, and requires a perfect freedom of inclination in every candidate for its mysteries.—E. A. ADDRESS.

Who are fit and proper persons to be made Masons ?

Just and upright men, free, of mature age, sound judgment, and strict morals.—F. C. EXAMINATION.

 RETHREN,—You have now been ceremonially admitted into Freemasonry. You have been obligated, enlightened, entrusted, and invested. It is my duty, therefore, to address you on some appropriate subject relative to your present situation ; and I have selected that of the Qualifications of Candidates, including a discussion of the important enquiry, whether it is constitutional or expedient to *solicit* any person to become a Mason.

The benevolent emotions of the human mind seldom display themselves more prominently, or operate with greater force, than when we have occasion to congratulate ourselves upon the attainment and possession of some good, the communication of which is calculated

not only to enhance the pleasures and mitigate the sorrows of others, but also to increase our own honour, and augment rather than detract from our acquisition.

Upon this principle it is that you who have recently been admitted into our Order, may feel a peculiar desire to raise others to the position which you have yourselves attained, in order that they may become partakers with you of those social, moral, and intellectual advantages with which the Masonic system abounds.

This feeling is natural to all good men, and worthy to be commended. It is also inculcated amongst our Masonic precepts; but like many other excellent principles of action, it is liable to run into excess, and produce evil results unless judiciously regulated.

There is one great Law amongst us which is—“Never improperly to solicit a man to become a Mason.” It is ordained by the Powers that be for wise and beneficent purposes, and constitutes well nigh the vital principle of our system; hence we have no right to test its validity, or deny its expediency. At the same time we are fully justified in examining the basis on which it rests, and expounding its limits and importance. In so doing we shall discover that this Law is not only in strict conformity with the dignity and freedom of the Craft, but that it is perfectly consistent with those benevolent emotions to which I have alluded. It may apparently confine their operations within a more limited sphere, though if so, it is within one where they serve the best purposes, namely, our own true and lasting honour, the further-

ance of our Masonic purposes, and the real interests of those whom we would introduce into our Order.

The enunciation of this Law often produces some degree of embarrassment to initiates into Masonry, and seals their lips when the "word in season" might be constitutionally and gracefully employed.

I am here bound to state that the question as to how far our remarks may consistently extend when conversing with an uninitiated person, is not very clearly or practically defined by our Masonic authorities; hence some may entertain slightly different views from my own upon minor points, yet in their entirety we must agree.

What I have last stated will also apply to the other question, which is inseparable from that of solicitation, namely, whom we are to select. Hence, in making my present remarks, I have no intention of dictating an unalterable series of regulations upon our subjects, but rather, as previously intimated, to supply, according to the extent of my own light and practice, such information to those who require it, as may sufficiently guide them in their selection and approval of candidates, and not only prevent any serious breach of discipline on the one hand, but also a blameable reserve and practical denial of the Craft on the other.

Our conduct in this respect may be correctly based upon the following admitted principles:—Masonry is free, and requires a perfect freedom of inclination in every candidate for its mysteries. No person who is biassed by improper solicitation, or influenced by mercenary or any other unworthy motives, is admissible

to participate in our secrets ; and, again, before we recommend or countenance the admission of any candidate, it is necessary to be, so far as practicable, assured, that he is a just and upright man, discreet, of sound judgment, loyal, and an observer of the moral law.

It is almost needless to say, that in a society so widely extended as that of Freemasonry, which finds representatives in every habitable portion of the globe, occasional breaches of those and other important principles and regulations are inevitable, though of course they are not to be justified. Here we are reminded of those words—"Offences must needs come, but woe unto him through whom the offence cometh." We need not, unfortunately, depart from our own country in search of material evidence in support of this truth ; for we sometimes hear it remarked amongst Masons, that they are occasionally surprised and annoyed to observe a Brother visiting their Lodge, who is known to be unworthy, and at least whose life and conduct are inconsistent with the principles and professions of the Craft. Such an occurrence is, perhaps, the more noticed from the fact that we do not appear to possess definite power of refusing the admission of any Brother into our Lodge, if he produces, what I may term, the material evidences of his qualification ; and if such a power were given, its exercise would be both difficult and dangerous. And, further, because the Craft cannot, by any legitimate process, divest an unworthy Brother of any other of his Masonic powers and privileges, except by a formal act of the Grand Lodge, and

this involves great trouble, and generally originates disputes and scandal, all which are fatal to our best interests. And even a decree of that high tribunal must obviously fail in divesting such an one of all his power. Hence, from the case or example to which I have alluded, and considering that a great amount of reproach and discredit necessarily attaches to a Lodge, from whence an unworthy Brother may have obtained his credentials, we may infer that if we would preserve our reputation pure and unsullied, it should ever be our aim to enrol those, and those only, who, whether at home or in distant Lodges and Provinces, will gain the esteem and approbation of their fellows, and reflect honour on the prudence and judgment of those Brethren who originally selected and received them into the Order. Let me also remind you that the particular status and interests of a Lodge are elevated or depressed, according to the character of those whom its Members initiate or admit to join. The admission of an unfit or morally unqualified candidate not only ensures certain inexpressible, and often unintentional, slights and annoyances to himself, sometimes resulting in his disgust and retirement, but even his formal proposal is unjust and injurious to those Members of the Lodge, who, though they may disapprove of his admission, yet do not wish to create any ill feeling amongst the Brethren, by recording an unfavourable vote, and they prefer silently to resign. Similar results occur in other cases, on account of the just and proper rejection of such a candidate ; and I doubt not but that from a want of due caution in the admission, and even in the

formal proposal of candidates for initiation or joining, many prosperous Lodges have been dissolved, or have at least lost many of their most esteemed and talented Members.

Referring once more to the subject of the evils attendant upon the expulsion of a Brother, I would remark (assuming that such an one was originally admitted without due caution) that they are not confined to the Craft, nor do they simply reflect dishonour upon his first supporters. The fact of his formal expulsion from the Order, combined with its results, would probably cause him to plunge headlong into a more reckless and abandoned course of conduct, which may ultimately remove him to an irrecoverable distance beyond those limits where reformation takes place. Should this occur, the Craft will certainly inflict upon him a certain amount of injury, since he would have joined it in ignorance of its tenets and requirements; and at the same time it would cause his original supporters to ask themselves the somewhat serious question—Has not our indiscretion contributed somewhat to his ruin? This may be deemed a remote consequence, or an extreme view, but I think such a case very possible, and if so, its importance is a sufficient warrant for its introduction.

I now proceed to the discussion of another important part of our enquiry relating to the social position of a candidate for Freemasonry, for to this qualification I have not otherwise alluded. It is a question of considerable delicacy, but cannot be consistently omitted from an address like the present.

Let me, first, confirm your knowledge that our system has no respect for mere worldly rank or fortune ; that wealth and social position have no abstract claim to a participation in our secrets ; that we are all reminded in a manner too impressive to be easily forgotten, that—

The pride of heraldry, the pomp of power,
And all that beauty, all that wealth e'er gave,
Await alike the inevitable hour—
The path of glory leads but to the grave.

In the midst of this, however, we have to remember that good Masons, like many other men, are sometimes, nay, too often, through circumstances of unforeseen calamity and misfortune, reduced to the lowest depths of poverty and distress. Hence, notwithstanding the fact that our system inculcates the precepts of universal benevolence and natural equality, it must be admitted that worthy poor and distressed Masons, wheresoever scattered over the face of earth or water, have always the first or paramount claim upon our charity. Already there are great numbers of aged necessitous Masons dependent for support upon our general and special funds of benevolence, and these funds accordingly require to be constantly renewed from the liberal donations and subscriptions of their more fortunate Brethren. It is true that Masons, so relieved or admitted as Pensioners out of these funds, require to be well and worthily recommended, and hence none need fear but that their contributions will be faithfully and beneficially distributed. It is, however almost needless to say that these charitable funds

are limited in amount, and that their intention is to maintain those, who, in the pride and sunshine of early years identified themselves with the Craft, adhered to it through life, contributed in their day to its charities, and throughout their conduct evidenced their heartfelt knowledge and appreciation of Masonic precepts. Notwithstanding this, how are we to refuse our recommendation of any poor and distressed Brother, who may have been recently admitted amongst us? If we do so, or relief is not granted, we cause some amount of scandal in thus falling short of our Masonic professions, and we become sensible of an alloy in the general produce of our charity, when witnessing his unmitigated distress. On the other hand, were we to comply, we do an injury to those more worthy Masons, of whom I have before spoken, by diminishing the resources of the Board, through which our charity is dispensed. We also commit an injustice towards other Lodges, and the Craft at large, whose contributions were intended by them to be otherwise primarily employed. Were our resources unlimited, or their surplus sufficient after granting all proper applications, the case might stand otherwise; but, as it is not so, the conclusion that I would arrive at is obvious. Do not turn a deaf ear to the request of one who may be known to possess the indispensable Masonic qualifications of moral worth and patient industry, notwithstanding his stock of this world's goods may be so small, or, by unmerited misfortune, be so greatly reduced, as to exclude him from the ordinary social circle. At the same time do not forget that our comparatively limited

means of relief are more freely and fitly granted to Brethren who have grown grey in the service of the Craft, than to those, who, for whatever purpose, may wish to join us, after having become old or impoverished in the services of ordinary life, or, to say the least, whose period of probation, and whose contributions and services in aid of our Institution have comparatively been short and of little value. Here I must add that habits of industry and useful practical occupation are Masonic virtues, and deserving of much influence when concluding our judgment upon the expediency of any admission ; for as it is certain that the most promising prospects of worldly success are soon blighted by carelessness and sloth, so we observe that the before-mentioned habits generally preserve their possessor from any serious embarrassment.

I trust I have herein been sufficiently explicit for the guidance of my newly-made Brethren, and that the tenor of my remarks will, by others, be found consistent with the doctrines and discipline of the Craft.

In the absence of a knowledge of Masonic rules and principles some of the preceding observations may still seem to indicate that an application by any unfit or doubtful candidate ought to be peremptorily rejected, and that our system says, "He that is evil, let him be evil still." Considering the whole, however, it will be otherwise understood. Our law is, not only to serve the Brotherhood, but to do good to all men ; and if in this work of doing good we meet with one who voluntarily offers himself for enrolment amongst us, and

whose reformation and fitness for admission is probable or even reasonably possible, we can never spend our leisure hours more consistently with our duty than when striving to bring about those desirable results ; and this also is the most expedient course to be adopted.

Some may deem that such an one should be admitted in order that the peculiar moral obligation and the influence of the system may effect the desired change ; but whatever degree of confidence may be derived from this probability it is counterbalanced by our knowledge, that though admission, if approved, is simple, expulsion is a most serious matter, whether as regards the individual or ourselves ; also that it is dangerous, or, to say the least, highly inexpedient, to trust the power of Masonry into improper hands, especially where we have only a comparatively slight and presumptive guarantee. I would add that postponement by the Brethren for a due period of probation is not only the most expedient mode, but a duty we owe to a candidate of whose qualifications we may entertain some reasonable doubts. This course would not in any way diminish but rather increase our influence over his mind, for if he be truly desirous of joining our Order, he will esteem that privilege more highly on account of our prudence and discretion, and feel a strong inducement to regulate his conduct in conformity with the tenets and principles of the Craft. Again : it may be generally observed that anything which men obtain easily and at little cost seldom commands their esteem, and by a parity of reasoning or otherwise we may infer that if the object of a doubtful candidate were allowed

to be obtained merely on account of our speculative conclusion, that he would thereafter be led to prove himself a true and worthy Brother ; the great incentive to an altered life would be much weakened if not altogether removed.

Let me here observe, that although we deem our system the pride of all human institutions, we do not claim for its professors that degree of perfection which was arrogated by the members of some ancient philosophical sects—such a claim would stultify all human experience, and excite rather the contempt than the admiration of mankind. Everywhere in Nature we perceive the lights and shades, the heaviness and joy ; we find that every part of Nature is characterised by a certain proportionate admixture of good and evil, each constantly operating, and each constantly exercising a countervailing tendency against the other, in the most stupendous as well as the most trifling affairs and subjects of life and thought. We see that it is not from (humanly speaking) the impossible absence of one or other of these constant agencies or principles, but from the proportions of their admixture that we pronounce a man worthy or unworthy, a system moral or immoral, and so forth. In fact, it is by this relative mode of reasoning alone that we are enabled to conclude our estimate concerning any thing which forms the subject of human thought or experience. You may be aware that this teaching is verified and illustrated by the floor cloth of our Lodge, which is furnished with dark squares as well as light ones. Hence, then, as the truth is, we admit that there are

amongst Masons some unworthy professors ; but we also assert that there is such a large proportion of good and worthy Brethren, whose lives and conduct shed a lustre on the system, that the faults and follies of the former are comparatively lost in the general estimate. What we have to dread and to strive against is lest the evil principle, which is the seed of discord and dissolution, should gain the ascendancy. This striving, in order to be effectual, must, as we have seen, be universal and incessant. No error should be lightly esteemed, and nothing countenanced which may possess a tendency to subvert the harmony and well-being of our system. The golden moment once allowed to pass is gone for ever, and we are left to account. In a word, let each Mason strive to act in conformity with the tenets of the Order, and take especial care that none are admitted to participate in our secrets who will not, upon all human calculation, emulate his example, and our Institution will ever be the glory of its professors and the admiration of the world.

Probably some of my senior Brethren might add other suggestions upon this part of the subject ; but if we are satisfied that the interests of the Craft, the existence of our Lodge, and our individual honour and self-approval, depend upon the selection of fit and proper persons only to participate in our mysteries, I deem that sufficient has been advanced.

Assuming this, and that our business, or rather social, occupations lead us into frequent communion with friends calculated to honour our choice, how is

it fitting that we should regulate our conduct and language so as to serve their interests and those of the Craft? I have before alluded to this question, and could scarcely fail in so doing from its connection with the former. It contains, however, several distinct points, and to them I will briefly direct your notice.

You will first be aware that Freemasonry is strong on account of its numbers, and the intellectual, social, and moral status of its professors, and that without a constant renewal or accession it would in course of time waste away like a plant for want of nourishment. Again : that no man can, by mere intuition, become aware that such an Institution exists, much less can he, by such method, become aware of any of its objects, or by whom or by what class of men it is patronised. The same rule applies in all respects to any Lodge in particular, as the aggregate of Lodges constitutes principally the Craft, and in the case of a particular Lodge the reasoning becomes more apparent. Hence, whilst we say that all applications to join our ranks must be voluntary, and that undue solicitation is highly unbecoming and derogatory, as well as a great breach of discipline, I entertain serious doubts whether a total reserve upon every occasion is not subversive of our interests, and contrary to any intentions expressed or implied by our Masonic Laws. There are none of our precepts or principles of which we need be ashamed—in fact they are the boast of all good men. I deem, however, that no Mason requires advice not to deny his union with the Craft, as no one of us esteems the badge otherwise than as his glory and his pride.

The only advice or caution which I here conceive to be necessary is, lest any Brother should make it his boast in improper society or out of season.

Amongst our excellent precepts you learn that we are on all occasions bound to observe not only secrecy in regard to our mysteries, but fidelity in our principles and discretion in our conversation. Thus we should never countenance discussion or remarks respecting the nature or objects of our Order at times and in places where it cannot be conducted with proper decorum and respect. Any degree of levity or trifling conversation regarding the Craft, its Members, or its Ordinances, is culpable in itself, and is sure to reflect discredit, whilst it will prevent all just and sober-minded men from estimating the solemnity and worth of our system, and from subscribing allegiance to its laws. Herein expediency and reason coincide with positive enactment. There are always to be found fitting times and places for admitting or stating our union with the Craft, or for giving a reply to those who sincerely ask us, saying—"Are you a Mason? Is the Institution moral? Is the system one with which a man, with social and moral distinction, might become identified without detriment to his civil or religious duties?" And such similar questions as are sometimes put to Masons by those who meditate admission into the Order.

This brings us directly upon the subject of solicitation, and how far it may be employed consistently with our duty as Masons. Let me, first, remind you of the terms of that preliminary declaration to which I first

alluded, and of which you have a two-fold recollection from the night of your initiation, since each candidate whom you may hereafter introduce into Masonry will be required to act and speak precisely as you then did. I will now, for example, assume that you are acquainted with such a person as I have before described, one who of your own knowledge you have ample reason to believe will ultimately reflect honour on our choice. I do not deem that your duty will be exceeded should you casually intimate any of the facts :—That you are a Mason ; that the institution is open to him if he be sincerely desirous of joining it ; that saving the belief in a Supreme Being, the system is free from all matters relating to sect or party, whether in politics or religion, and that such questions are not even allowed to be discussed in our Lodge ; that it is a system of ethics, and not only calculated to elevate and improve the intellectual and moral character of its professors, but to diminish the vice and ameliorate the condition of mankind. Concurrently with any of these remarks (or replies, as the case may be) particular care should be observed that he is fully impressed with the fact that when he requires admittance he must seek it freely and of his own accord ; and, above all, he must be informed, as the truth is, that his acceptance will confer no honor upon the Craft, but, on the contrary, much honor upon him. I consider this amount of latitude allowable, subject to the before-mentioned restrictions, and also that it is amply sufficient for our purposes. To proceed further would probably involve a positive breach of Masonic law, and would also be in many

respects inexpedient. To illustrate this I may remark, in the human mind there is scarcely a more potent principle of action than what we term curiosity, or the desire of obtaining a certain knowledge. It is manifested in an endless variety of ways, which we need not attempt to recount. It is an incessant and ever-increasing principle, always craving yet never satisfied ; universally operating from the first moments of our existence, varied in our progress through life according to our individual knowledge and mental capacity, and stimulated by the amount of trouble and difficulty attending its gratification. Further, as the acquisition of wealth and power resulting from continued toil always leaves a vacancy to be supplied by a stronger ambition, so curiosity, when gratified, strongly impels us to seek for something higher and worthier of our advanced knowledge. I only speak here of curiosity in its lawful and commendable operation, and as an intellectual principle of action distinguished from desire and those passions, feelings, and instincts which regulate what I may term the natural impulses of our nature. Connecting this with the consideration that the individual seeking admission has become cognizant of the existence of Freemasonry, and of some of the before-mentioned particulars as to its nature and general principles, I think we may safely conclude that he will form a higher estimate of our Institution and its beneficent tendencies, be more stimulated to penetrate its mysteries, and when initiated become a better and more zealous Mason, if left to follow his own inclination, than he would if any direct personal solicitation

had been employed. If any one should properly enquire from me why I became a Mason, my reply would simply be that seeing the Institution had existed in its integrity from time immemorial, that the names of the wisest, the greatest, and the best of men had ever been associated with it, that its members appeared to be held together by a firm yet mysterious tie, and capable of becoming known to each other in all times and places ;—these considerations, superadded to the operation of the before-mentioned principle, rendered me most anxious to become possessed of a knowledge of the ceremonies, secrets, and traditions, preserved amongst Masons. If a similar question were proposed to any of our newly-initiated or even of my senior Brethren, I deem that they would give a somewhat similar reply, leaving the enquirer to act as he pleased.

In further confirmation of the expediency of our law, let me remark that where a man is urged or personally solicited by others to do any particular act, even though stated and understood to be for his own advantage, he seldom considers himself under an obligation to them, even if he complies with their wishes, but, on the contrary, he will be apt not only to forget his own immediate volition, but altogether to blame them if he fail in reaping from his acquiescence a comparatively unreasonable amount of pleasure and gratification. Thus it is with us, if a special or personal request is made to any man to become a Mason, he may allow his name to be proposed from personal motives, or on account of such solicitations ; but, when he has been admitted, he will see our system divested of its para-

mount attributes, and be indifferent to its moral and scientific beauties; for he will have come biassed by the conviction that he has conferred an honour on the Craft; and certainly it will never occur to him, nor could he be easily persuaded that any honour has been conferred upon him.

Again, a Brother so admitted will not be duly prepared for the exercise of that subordination which our Masonic Laws demand; nor will he readily submit to the powers that be with those feelings of respect and esteem which are essential to his own gratification and to the prosperity and well being of his Lodge. Of such a Brother I do not think it is going too far to state, that had no such Masonic errors been committed at the commencement, and he had joined us freely and voluntarily, pursuant to the dictates of his own judgment, he might have proved a worthy Brother, and, if not, we could have remonstrated with him, and demanded his strict adherence to our laws with that degree of heartfelt authority which we may otherwise utter, but cannot feel. A Brother induced to join in the manner first mentioned has always a ready answer to our admonitions, or at least one which is calculated to lessen their influence, namely, "It was not I who sought you, but you who sought after me."

In concluding this part of our subject, I would observe that it is plainly impossible to prescribe any special form of words which may be legitimately employed under the circumstances already mentioned; and it would be inexpedient to attempt to do so, because so much depends upon the peculiar disposition and

character of the candidate. The particular time and place may also exercise some influence, so that it is more than probable any set form of words or statements would operate prejudicially rather than otherwise.

Fidelity and discretion are, therefore, the best guides of a courteous independence; and, if they be strictly attended to, we may be properly impressed with the pleasurable duty of introducing candidates who will augment their own happiness, and prove a credit to the Fraternity, and at the same time we shall avoid the transgression of those bounds where improper solicitation begins and proper solicitude ends.

In conclusion, I feel bound to mention one most important inference which is to be deduced from what I have before stated. It is, that habitual consistency of conduct amongst Masons is the best recommendation which the Craft can possess. I have elsewhere said that our system is not only speculative, but practical; that it is equally calculated to engage the deepest interests of a philosophic and reflective mind, as it is to guide and regulate our conduct in all the active pursuits of life. Freemasonry every where teaches that example is superior to precept. Thus many of you have heard the solemn injunction given to Rulers of the Craft to charge their Brethren to *practise* out of Lodge those excellent precepts they are taught within it, so that, when any man is said to be a Mason, the world may *know* that he is one to whom the burdened heart may pour forth its sorrows—to whom the distressed may prefer their suit—whose heart is guided by justice—whose hand is extended by

benevolence. And I will add, that in this view we are confirmed by all human experience. “*See* how those Christians love” was a most potent recommendation of that system of whose professors the words were spoken. Men always esteem demonstrative or ocular evidence in preference to the ablest argument. The latter may confound or satisfy the reason, but the former will convince the heart, and be better calculated to produce useful practical results. This inference or teaching applies to any system or theory to which our mere assent or approbation is required, and when any extent of personal persuasion and explanation is allowed. Hence is obviously supplied, what I may term, an *a fortiori* argument in favour of selection and solicitation per force of our own example. You will, doubtless feel this to be a most important consideration—and so it is ; but, notwithstanding, I will not here enlarge upon it, as, beyond referring to it as the best species of solicitation, I think it properly belongs to another address, which it will be my duty to deliver to you upon the subject of “Masonic Duties and Obligations.” Moreover, my only intention on the present occasion has been to explain generally the limits and expediency of those rules which are given for our guidance when acting in an official capacity as the responsible guardians of our Masonic system. Having so done, I can only say, that if you consider our evening to have been usefully employed, my labours have received their reward.