

Jeffersonian Republican.

THE WHOLE ART OF GOVERNMENT CONSISTS IN THE ART OF BEING HONEST.—Jefferson.

VOL. 7.

STROUDSBURG, MONROE COUNTY, PA., THURSDAY, JANUARY 21, 1847.

No. 31.

ADDRESS TO THE FORT PENN LODGE OF I. O. OF O. F. BY R. E. WRIGHT, ESQ.

The following note was received from Mr. WRIGHT in reply to one addressed to him by the Committee of Arrangements, requesting a copy of his address, for publication:

Strodsburg, Jan. 14, 1847.

Gentlemen:

Enclosed you will receive, (as per request,) the address delivered by me before the citizens of Strodsburg, on the anniversary of the opening of Fort Penn Lodge of the I. O. of O. F. Thrown together as it was, on a very short notice, I feel that it contains some things that a careful revision might induce me to amend or alter, but as it would hardly be fair to the public, to print any thing different from what was delivered by me in the church, I herewith transmit the original, with all its imperfections, trusting with you that it may be the means of doing some little good to those in whose hands it may chance to fall.

Very truly yours,

R. E. WRIGHT.

G. H. MILLER,
B. S. SCHOONOVER, Esq., } Committee.
Rev. Wm. GRAY.

Ladies and Gentlemen:

It is a fact, intimately connected with the laws which regulate our being—a fact as well settled as existence itself and about as well understood, that most, if not all the pleasures which we are privileged to enjoy on earth, either arise, or are at least very much heightened by the mere force of contrast. That health for example, has not the same exquisite charm for the robust artisan, as for the pining invalid; and that things in themselves far from pleasant, may by the operation of this law, become (for a time at least,) sources of very great delight. The skilful painter avails himself of this law when he throws together his masses of "light and shade;" and the musician, too, when by his bars of "clashing discord" he heightens the brilliancy of some adjacent burst of harmony.

Whether or no the committee who arranged the exercises of this day were desirous of availing themselves of this same law of nature, and by arresting here the more imposing, and important ceremonies of the day, for the purpose of listening to what I may have to say on the subject of "Odd Fellowship" are thus by contrast endeavoring to increase the pleasures of this audience, I will not stop to inquire.—Suffice it to say, that by the force of circumstances which constituted as I am, could not be successfully resisted, I appear before you for the purpose of occupying a few minutes of your time, in discussing some appropriate topics connected with the association under whose direction this entertainment has been prepared.

As the scene presented to your eyes to-day is here at least somewhat novel—and to many perhaps quite unintelligible, it may not be improper if (before entering fully on the subject which has been selected for my present discourse) I advert briefly to the causes which have produced this result, which has drawn from that solitude and secrecy which they seem to love so much, the members of an Order who appear before you for the first time.

For as this is an unusual event, it will naturally be supposed to result from an unusual cause, and as men are apt to attach to every movement of an Order so secret and selfish as ours is supposed to be some hidden and mysterious meaning, it may be as well to cut off all conjecture, and declare at once, the object for which we are here assembled.

We have not assembled to celebrate the annual return of some day famous in the annals of our Order, or dedicated to some patron saint, for we have none of that description—nor to exhibit to public gaze the gorgeous regalia of our Order, that its splendor may attract the attention and win the boisterous plaudits of the noisy crowd, for we wear them now in obedience to a law which we did not enact and cannot control—but we have assembled here in this consecrated place with motives and feelings that have a holier source—that spring from a nobler foundation.

One year has rolled away since the corner stone of Fort Penn Lodge was laid—one year since the portals of a temple were opened in this place, within which many of your fellow-citizens have met together for purposes which carry with them, their own bright, glorious reward. They are men, FREEMEN, CHRISTIANS, with hearts that feel most deeply the blessings which they enjoy—that beat most warmly with gratitude to Him from whom they flow,—and with love to those who surround them, they have come up hither in this hallowed place to show the world that they know their duty towards God and man, and are neither ashamed nor afraid to do it.

As men, they would show that they know what they enjoy, and desire that others should become partakers with them—as freemen, that they do not fear thus publicly to announce their sentiments and principles, and as christians, that they know to whom all honor and praise is due, and when and where, and how it should be rendered.

This, then, is the object, and these the reasons for this assemblage of the members of Fort Penn, and in appealing to-day, as we purpose doing, in behalf of the objects and principles of the order, it will be proper to present, with some minuteness a view of the rise, progress, and organization of an association which makes such high pretensions, that you may know who they are, and what it is, that warrants their claims to popular encouragement and support.

The Independent Order of Odd Fellows, a portion of which is now before you, is an organized body of men, existing in almost every county, town and parish in the United States, England and on the Continent, each lodge or association of which is governed by its own by-laws, independent of each other, and the Grand Lodges of the State and Nation, except so far as they are bound by the constitution and laws of the Grand Lodges, enacted therein by the past chief officers and representatives of the several subordinate lodges. The first object of the order, as I understand it, is "mutual relief" in all the struggles incident to human life. And if it were not one of its most excellent features, to extend this relief to all who deserve it, throughout the length and breadth of the land, I do not know that there would be any necessary connection between subordinate lodges of the country, or between them and the Grand Lodges of the State or Nation—or for that secrecy and mystery which is so particularly painful to our female friends.

The date of its origin among men is not clearly known; but, without doubt, associations with similar objects in view have existed in some form or other, ever since sin.

"Brought death into the world and all our woe"

and men were prompted by their better natures to avert its consequences.

Our annals run back far into English History, but what hand planted the tree, that shelters so many thousands now, or when or where the seed was first sown which has produced and is still producing such beneficial results, is not, I apprehend, well, or generally known.

The truth is; something like it must have been coeval with society itself. Nay, the very first community that was ever founded on earth, had for its objects, a portion of the good which this order is endeavoring to attain for its members now.

That man was not made to live alone—that perfect independence of his fellow man, is not possible, that from the hour when his first faint wail is heard on earth, until the last farewell of all things earthly is taken, he stands in need daily, and hourly, of the aid of his fellow man, are facts which all will admit must and do exist even in the perfectly organized community. There never was a time since the creation of the world, when one man could say to his fellow "I have no need of thee," and consequently even in the earliest ages of the world men were thus associated together. As population increased, men's interests became diversified and these first associations could not conveniently include the whole family of man;—this gave rise in time to new subordinate associations, all of them designed to secure the benefits which the original association, or State, or Government, was intended to provide but which it could not so perfectly accomplish.

If the organization of civil society was perfect—if the laws of all countries were based on purely christian principles. If man had never fallen from his high estate, or had again attained that purity of life which would enable him to love the Lord with all his heart, and his neighbor as himself, and to square his actions by the golden rule. If sin and its attendant sorrow were banished from the earth; or the woe and woe of mankind more equally distributed. If the earth was neither cursed with the castle, or burdened with the hovel. If affluence did not pour its golden showers upon one portion of the sons of Adam, while others as good by nature, and often better by practice, are forced to drink the bitter dregs of poverty. If, in short, Eden was our home, or the bright day of millennial glory, and social equality had arrived, then, indeed, would all such associations be a burthen on the earth. But as we are at present, and as the world has ever been since sin first stained its unpolluted soil, it has been found to need them.

Hence in its infancy communities for mutual assistance and support were established, which afterwards grew into mighty Kingdoms, States and Empires, and hence, too, in these States and Empires the existence of numerous sub-associations, of which the Order of Odd Fellows is neither last nor least among the number.

The laws of this order, like those of other similar associations, are strictly conformable to the laws and institutions of the land. They provide merely for the election of the requisite number of officers—prescribe their term of service—the various duties—the conditions on which members are received, and if necessary relieved. By means of initiation fees graduated to the age and health of the applicant—monthly payments regulated by the will of the lodge and fines for non-payment of dues, or improper conduct in, or out of the lodge-room, (not calling for severe punishment,) a fund is created, the amount of which depends, of course, on the strength of the lodge; which fund invested in some safe and permanent security is devoted to the relief of the worthy contributing members of the order and their families, no matter where they hail from. Thus accomplishing in the most perfect manner their first great principle of mutual relief. But this is not the only object of the order, although daily and hourly called upon to minister in this way to the wants of the sick and suffering that are found within our borders; it has objects and aims that are even higher, purer and holier than this.

It does not limit its operations to the mere physical wants of man—it does not rest content with visiting the sick, relieving the distressed, burying the dead, and educating the orphan, but viewing man as an immortal being, it acts upon his nobler part and sways it for the common good.

It is part of the creed of a sect as devoted to principle, as exemplary in their conduct and as faithful as any other in the discharge of all the duties which distinguish the christian character, and elevate it above the world that love in its purest and most comprehensive sense, love to God the creator and man the creature, is the golden chain that encircles, encompasses and binds together the whole bright cluster of christian virtues and duties, and that man attains the brightest degree of holiness and happiness which he is capable of enjoying, when he approximates most nearly to the purity, the strength, and comprehensive nature of that feeling as it exists in its heavenly and unadulterated excellence. That God is love, and the free and bountiful giver of every good and perfect gift—that heaven his dwelling place, is full of this his highest attribute, a world in whose moral atmosphere selfishness cannot exist, while hell, on the other hand, is a place where love of self reigns supreme, that feeling in all its unrestrained hideousness being in fact the source of all the misery that is there experienced, that we who tread this lower earth, have while here the power of making it a prototype of one or the other of these future worlds by fostering the one or the other of these antagonistic principles, and that just in proportion as the love of others or the love of self predominates, just in the same proportion do we create around us an atmosphere pelucid and bright with the airs of heaven, or tainted and black with the vapours of hell.

Without stopping here to analyze this theory or ascertain its orthodoxy or heterodoxy theologically considered, I will merely observe that while it is one, the main features of which commend themselves to the hearts and understandings of our race, it is one also upon which is built much of the superstructure of that temple at whose shrine the order of Odd Fellows love to worship.

A belief in the free agency of man. A belief in the philosophy of cause and effect. A belief in the fact that there is within the reach of every man, enough to make him happy here and hereafter if he will but avail himself of it, and enough, too, to ruin him temporally and eternally if he will have it so,—that men can make or mar their own happiness and do so by the way in which they fasten or restrain their selfish or their benevolent impulses, are doctrines which whether taught by theologians or not, are part of the foundation of the order whose representatives are now before you.

For the proper restraint of the one, and the encouragement of the other of these existing and conflicting sentiments, the Order of Odd Fellows as I understand it, now exists, and whether it was commenced with these objects in view or not—whether the association which first bore our name, had before it the comparatively selfish object of the formation of a fund for the use of its contributing members in sickness, or the still more objectionable one of social conviviality (as has been said,) sure I am that at this present time, for the purpose of effecting the objects I have alluded to, it has no superior in all the long bright catalogue of good and beneficent institutions with which the world is blest. Another important doctrine is so blended with the existence of the Order as to be inseparable: one which it is a principal aim of the association to inculcate, as a fundamental doctrine among its members in their intercourse with one another and the world. I allude to the great doctrine of toleration, of the sacred principle of civil and religious liberty. Amidst the clashing discord of noisy sects and the wordy war of pot-house politicians, it is a pleasant thought to know that there is one retreat when they cannot enter, one sanctuary from which they are effectually and forever excluded.

Every new lodge that is instituted if composed of men who understand their duty and are ever faithful to discharge it, is the centre of a new circle among men, from which much of the evil that before annoyed it must soon pass away.—A spot from which the pure bright rays of true benevolence, of warm friendship, of truthful love, may radiate; and within the sphere of which, men are taught to imitate the conduct of him who while on earth went about doing good.

The man who connects himself with this order is taught at, and from the hour of his initiation that the "love of self" must yield to the "love of others" and that from that hour until time with him shall be no more, he must endeavor to do all the good he can for mankind without injuring himself or family. As the duties are solemn and important, his introduction into its bosom, is attended with certain appropriate, beautiful and impressive ceremonies which have for their object, the special instruction of the candidate. He is then and thereby reminded of what he is and what he ought to be—of his present condition—of the duty which he owes to his God—his country, his neighbour, and himself, and is told in a way which he never forgets, that in this path he must ever after walk.

These are the vows which he takes, these the duties which he voluntarily assumes, and from that time forward his honor is pledged for his fidelity. He must never rest satisfied while others as good by nature as himself are suffering, if he has it in his power to relieve them, and is solemnly pledged to visit the widows and fatherless in their affliction and (if possible,) to keep himself unspotted from the world. Once in the Order and obedient to its laws, the Argus eye of the Lodge never leaves him. Does he depart from the path of stern morality, does he violate any of the laws of the Lord, or trample under foot, the time-honored usages of Society. Are his business transactions tainted with fraud, or does he at any time forget to discharge the high and exalted duties which at his initiation he took upon himself to perform. With lightning speed, (if his lodge be faithful,) is his cause arrested, and punishment certain and severe, but proportioned to his offence is meted out to him. Sometimes by reprimand or fine. Sometimes by suspension from the rights and privileges of the Order, and sometimes by a disgraceful separation of the offending Brother from the Society which his conduct has dishonored. But on the other hand, is he afflicted with disease—is the hand of Providence laid hardly upon him—does the angel of death flap his sable pinions o'er a brother's couch—around and about it—and the unhealthy atmosphere of the sick chamber, committees of his Brethren wait with anxious care, night after night,—relieved by others according to a law of the Order, until their services are no longer needed; while the Treasury of the lodge is promptly and freely opened for their relief, and weekly payments which are his by right if he be a worthy member, sufficient for the support of himself and family, are laid down before him.

Is he away from home,—a stranger in a strange land, wandering on his weary way, without a friend's face or kindly look to cheer his heart. Has he in his wanderings been (as many have been,) unfortunate. And is he left far from his friends and his home, penniless, and friendless, unable to live where he is, and unable to return to those who know and love him.

If so, and he be a member of the Order,—if his past life has been such as to secure to him the confidence of his brethren at home; then is he in possession of a talisman, which like the magic ring of the Eastern romance, can, and will on the instant convert a host of total strangers, into warm, active, enthusiastic friends. Friends that will cluster around him, with warm hearts and eager hands and kindly looks, enquiring into his wants, that they may speedily relieve them. And who, when his business calls him to return, will furnish him fully and liberally with that which will take him rejoicing on his way.

Is he in the providence of God called to his long home—leaving (it may be,) behind him, a wife dear to his heart, and children that were the delight of his soul. Then is it that the usefulness of this Association is most manifest—and its charities shine the brightest.

From the hour that the brother falls by the hand of death, until his body is decently consigned to the tomb, the authorized agents of the Order may be seen engaged in the holy task of consoling the afflicted,—mingling their useful services unobtrusively among those of the nearer friends of the deceased—relieving them of many a painful duty, and much of the labour and expense, incident to such

events, showing thereby the strength of the ties which bound them together.

And thus through life and in death—morally and physically does this association cheerfully protect, restrain, and relieve all who in truth and love obey its precepts.

Nor is this all. Without and beyond the pale of the Lodge, wherever sorrow or suffering is found, there to the full extent of its means is the influence of the order when properly conducted, felt but not seen. Its officers on errands of mercy, go out through the highways and byways of our crowded towns and cities, relieving as far as possible, the wants of all who suffer without deserving it, yet telling to the world no tales of all the good they do.

Oh it seems to me that earth can show no nobler sight than this. No brighter example is set for us to imitate in that of him who "went about doing good." It was this bright trait in his earthly career that rendered him so attractive to the down-trodden masses of the age he lived in, and which was the surest evidence of his divine nature.

It was this that caused the religion which he came to teach to spread with such rapidity over the earth. It was this weeping with those who wept, this mourning with those who mourned, this watching over the temporal as well as the eternal interests of those around him, and relieving all their wants—this active untrusting benevolence before which the friends of the Synagogue—the pride of the portico—the doubts of the academy—the fables of the lecturer and the polished knaves of countless legions were subdued or swept away.

It is to the encouragement and existence of the principles and sentiments which this institution is designed to foster and promulgate, that we can look with any degree of confidence for the permanent melioration of the social and natural evils which surround us—that will elevate man to the high position which he occupied before the fall—which will tend to produce on earth that day of bright millennial glory, for which the church has long been sighing; and which alone can give us a real foretaste of that bright land "where the wicked cease from troubling, and the weary are at rest."

That the institution is faultless, is not true, for it is of earth—that all who bear our name are worthy, is not true, for they are men—"that it may be," and sometimes is perverted, is possible, for men are prone to error and wander from the right path,—but that rightly understood, and rightly practised, handed down to those who come after us, as pure as we received it, it is designed to produce, and will NOT FAIL to produce results most advantageous to our race.

If then these things are true, and that they are I pledge my honor as a man—the question that naturally arises is this. "Should not the Order of Odd Fellows receive the hearty encouragement of all who have the good of Society at heart?" The affirmative of the proposition is easily sustained, and your candid attention is requested while I briefly present the argument by which it may be demonstrated.

If what has been already said in reference to the origin, objects and practical operation of the association be true (and the burthen of proof is now on those who deny it) its claims to encouragement are, I apprehend, already fully established; and consequently all successful opposition must be based on faults inherent in the order—which exist in connection with all this purity of purpose, and all this excellence of practice, and to which I have not as yet adverted. That we have our faults, it would be dishonest to deny—that we are in common with all the sons of Adam all far below that degree of goodness that we should all endeavor to attain, is a truth which we sorrowfully admit. But that there is in the order of Odd Fellows as it now is, any thing inimical to virtue and religion, any thing that can without the most atrocious perversion do any, even the slightest injury to society, religion, or sound morality—or that there is any thing wrong regarding in the numberless frivolous and captious objections that are so often urged against it, we do most solemnly and unhesitatingly deny. Come let us reason together. Let us examine your objections ye who without knowing any thing of us, oppose our progress, ye who only oppose us because ye know nothing about us—some of whom, I fear, will never know any thing about us (though the information may be had almost for asking) in order that they may continue to oppose us. Come let us reason together, on this theme. A wise man has said, that he who will not reason is a bigot, he who cannot reason is a fool, and he who dare not reason is a slave. There are surely no such characters here to-day. In this land of toleration, bigotry and prejudice must be unknown. In this intelligent community there are surely none who deserve the name applied to the second class—and here, where civil and religious freedom reigns there can be no such slaves. Believing and knowing this to be so, we will with your permission proceed to reason the matter with you and leave the decision to those who hear us. It is really astonishing some times to hear what trilling objections are made by those who feel called upon to oppose us. We cannot advert to all that have ever been made, but intend to notice all that occur to our minds, the simple as well as the serious.

The first stumbling block then is our NAME. A great many well meaning men never get over it. To them it seems utterly amazing that any sensible, well informed man should ever consent to act with an association, so queerly and so ridiculously named. They see it done every day, but are lost in attempting to account for it. Well, this is rather a serious objection because it is one that is not very likely to be removed, and one which cannot very conveniently be concealed. If it sounds foolishly we are sorry for it, but it cannot now be helped. Although we have very high authority for believing that

"A rose by any other name would smell as sweet."

Ours cannot be altered now, and what is worst of all until you join us, we cannot tell you the reason why. But it is really so very awful. Is there less euphony and meaning in it, than in the word Methodist, Presbyterian, Antinomian, Lutheran, or in the names of the thousand other sects and societies that cover the earth. If we who know its origin, and its meaning, are content to keep it, should not our simple wish to do so, be enough for all reasonable men? Besides this, we who compose the association to-day take the name of our society, as we took our own individual names, to wit: from those who went before us, and who doubtless thought as little of consulting our wishes in the one case as in the other. But enough of this. The men who urge this as a serious objection, would object just as strongly, if all the power of language had been strained, to furnish us with the most beautifully musical name, that the tongue of mortal can pronounce.

But again. The names of our officers are sometimes urged as an objection. Our N. G., P. G. and various other combinations of initial letters are again termed foolish and unintelligible. Why have such officers at all—or if we must have them why array them in such fantastic regalia, with collars, and aprons, and sashes of such gaudily colored silk and gold. How can men of sense consent to sit together surrounded by all this flummery and so on.

This is a compound objection, but is generally made in this way, and must be answered as it is offered. If we have an association for any useful purpose we must have laws to govern it. If laws, then must we have officers to enforce and execute them, and if officers, they must have names or titles to distinguish them one from another.

Now we happen to have all these things. We have a society with laws, and officers with titles, and if it be possible for any association to exist with any degree of comfort or usefulness without them, we shall be glad to know how it is done.

When we have occasion to name these officers, we use of course his proper title, and sometimes for the sake of brevity (particularly in writing) we use the initial letters only, and we have yet to learn that we have not as much right to the services of an out side sentinel as one of our military companies has to an orderly sergeant; or that the letters O. S. when applied to either of them is a violation of the decalogue.

And then as to the regalia. It is true that our members while on duty, wear white collars and aprons—and that our officers are during our sessions sometimes very superbly arrayed, in obedience to a well known law of the order in the United States. But where the wrong or nonsense of all this lies, I am at a loss to know. We know what they mean, and only use them because they have their appropriate meaning. Look to your Military, examine their regalia—Look at the fringes and feathers, and strange looking ornaments which they hang round their persons. Turn to their officers, is there nothing to distinguish them one from another, and designate the officers which they fill or the rank they hold among their fellows. Are not your Major Generals arrayed in one way—your Brigadiers in another. Your Colonels and Majors, your Captains, and Sergeants and Corporals each in a dress regulated by law, and adopted to the station which he holds. Why I make no doubt if this truth were known, that many a man could be found urging this very objection with all his might, who on every battalion training could be seen glittering in gold lace, and colored feathers, at the head of a column almost as gaudy as himself, and wondering at the same time perhaps how any man of common sense can think of arraying himself in the regalia of this order. Indeed I know one or two myself. It may be said that the Military are regulated by law, and their regalia is established by government. Admit it, still the objection is not strengthened. It can hardly be wrong for one set of men to do voluntarily what a sound and wholesome law enjoins on others.