

"A FRIEND AND A BROTHER."

A SERMON,

PREACHED IN THE

PARISH CHURCH OF STOKE-UPON-TRENT,

ON

TUESDAY, JULY 31st, 1855,

BEFORE THE

PROVINCIAL GRAND LODGE OF FREE AND ACCEPTED MASONS
OF STAFFORDSHIRE

BY BROTHER

REV. WILLIAM H. WRIGHT, B.A.,

Incumbent of St. James's Church, Hanley,

STAFFORDSHIRE;

PROVINCIAL GRAND CHAPLAIN.

S.W. MENTUM, LODGE AND CIRCULAR TO THE PÆNECIAN AND PORTLAND LODGES.

PUBLISHED BY REQUEST.



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BROTHER R. SPENCER, 314, HIGH HOLBORN.

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“A FRIEND AND A BROTHER.”

“*A friend loveth at all times, and a brother is born for adversity.*”—PROV. xvii. c. 17 v.

Solomon, the author of this saying, was brought much into contact with the Gentiles. His great prosperity, his vast dominion, his wide renown extended his intercourse with men far beyond the boundaries of Palestine; and furthermore in his grand work of building the Temple in Jerusalem to God's honour, his necessary employment of builders and artificers from other countries, and his procuring the materials for its construction from distant climes, all these causes tended to enlarge his charities towards the Gentiles. And it is not to be doubted that this friendship would be cemented by moral obligations. So that we are not surprised when we meet with a Gentile system of friendship and fraternity with which the name of the Royal Solomon is so intimately coupled up.

Solomon dwells largely in his writings upon the social duty of friendship, and we may suppose that he

availed himself of his extended intercourse with the human family to stop the progress of hatred and disaffection, and to recommend the universal cultivation of brotherly love.

Doubtless he would instruct all men within the sphere of his influence, to cultivate that duty which is so vividly and forcibly set forth in the language of the text, to cherish in their own nature and character, that which is described in the saying, "A friend loveth at all times, and a brother is born for adversity."

Let us consider (I) the man commended, viz. "a friend" and "a brother" and (II) the character which he manifests, he "loveth always" and "is born for adversity;" and may the benign influence of God's grace form the like character in each one of us.

The Royal Teacher who left us this instruction was an Israelite, and to Israelites the words were in the first instance addressed. Now there could be neither debate nor question that Israelite was bound to love and befriend Israelite. Enjoying the same revelation, partakers in the same common hope, worshippers at the same altar, there could be no doubt that it was to them a duty, even as it was to some a delight to realize in their mutual intercourse, that saying of their own Psalmist "behold how good and pleasant a thing it is for brethren to dwell together in unity."

Now the church of the Israelites had sprung out of that earlier form of worship which is designated the religion of the Patriarchs. Such for example as that of the pious Job, and the distinction between the two would be this, that the Israelite enjoyed a more ample privilege contained in a written revelation of the will of the Most High. And we may observe that in the more healthy period of the history of the Israelites, whilst Israelite felt that his religion bound him in love to the Israelite, it nevertheless did not diminish the love of the Israelite to the Gentile of the Patriarchal religion.

But when the church of Israel had become utterly corrupt, when tradition had glossed over and almost superseded revelation, then it was that brotherly love was restricted in its operation to those of the same nation, and even to those of the same religious persuasion. The duty of the Israelite to love God with all his heart was not disputed, for who God was could not be a matter of doubt, but the duty to love his neighbour as himself was only admitted in the abstract for the question on this subject, which was proposed to the Redeemer (as you well know) "and who is my neighbour."

The reply of Christ to the enquiry of the Israelite "who is my neighbour," was not "the Israelite is thy neighbour," that would admit of no debate: but the

revelation than any which preceded it, instead of destroying that love and good will which a man had previously cherished, as being the will of God, rather on account of the richer love which it announced from God to man was intended to sanctify the affections, to bring into a more active and vigorous existence the yearnings of a benevolent heart, so that whilst the christian is commanded to do good "*especially* unto them who are of the household of faith," still the especial restriction here arises out of the primary and fundamental duty to "do good unto all men," (Gal. vi. c. 10 v.) and he would come short of the christian standard, who although he should show kindness to his party, at the same time should neglect to "do good unto all men."

True it is he is commanded that he "love not the world, neither the things of the world;" but the world in that command cannot be understood as other than the openly profane and profligate world; and certainly the first blasphemy, the first impiety, the first oath which he hears should at all times be to the christian a signal to quit the company he is in, but if he should fall into company with men who have not the same high views of divine truth which he has learned, but still, according to the light that is in them, "act as wise and moral men," I contend that that christian has learned nothing of the loving, winning spirit of his Lord, who would turn his back upon such society, saying "stand by me for I am holier than thou."

True it is he may say that he may be more edified in other company, but the question is whether the present company ought not to receive edification from him; for truth gains way by contact with truth, and "none of us liveth unto himself."

No, the enjoyment of the privilege of a more ample revelation from God, by no means cancels that world-wide brotherly love which ought to have existed under a more limited revelation. No professed sanctimoniousness can absolve a man from this duty, for as the great apostle St. John says "if any man say I love God and hateth his brother, he is a liar." "if any man love not his brother he is a liar," a liar to God and his own heart, a hypocrite and a dissembler before men.

II. We now proceed to our second topic, viz.: the character which is manifested by a friend and a brother; "he loveth at all times, and is born for adversity." He loveth because God loveth him, he loveth at all times, because God's regard for him never ceaseth for a moment. God has created him wonderfully, has given him life and made him to enjoy that life. God has surrounded him with blessings and comforts, giving him health and strength of mind and body, "filling his heart with food and gladness."

Had God hated him he would have filled his life with misery, every sound would have been made a

discord, every object a deformity. But God has not done so, on the contrary, in furnishing the world with all that can charm the eye, and building creation with all the skill that delights the mind, and supplying the man with all that can rejoice the soul of the man. God thus demonstrates to man his love. Nay, more, God has had pity upon us in our low and fallen estate by sin, and determining to lift up our souls from the grovelling degradation of iniquity and crime; he "so loved the world" that he freely gave his son for the sins of men that he might bear their sorrows, die their death, be unto them an ensample of godly life, and as a merciful and faithful High Priest, make for them a constant and availing intercession, praying their prayers, being ever touched with the feeling of their infirmities. God *so* loved the world that he sent forth the Holy Spirit from on high, that Spirit who moved upon the waters of primeval chaos, to spread his gentle wings dove-like over the troubled sea of human passions, and move them to a calm serene. He sent his spirit to sanctify, to renew man's heart as a sacred temple, to elevate man's desires above the perishable, and fit his soul for its high and eternal destiny.

God *so* loved the world that he gave his word to guide, his ambassadors to instruct, his ordinances to cherish, his promises to animate, gave them we say "for the perfecting of the Saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ." And

to say that a man has lovingly, faithfully, and experimentally enjoyed this love of God in his own soul, is to say that he is a man who faithfully and experimentally loveth his brother even as himself. For "he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love," and by consequence be loved by "God whom he hath not seen."

And as this love of God was bestowed upon him in his sinfulness and opposition to God's will, so the man extends to all men love *as* unqualified, loving against hope, loving against even a natural inclination, loving where there is no attraction to love, for so in like manner in free grace God loved him.

And as the love of God is to him always the same, so he loveth his brother "at all times." If for one single moment God were to withdraw his watchful inspection from over us, even in the matter of the drawing of a breath, or the beating of a pulse "we should die, and be turned again to our dust," if for one single moment he withdraw from us the help of his grace in Christ Jesus "all our days are gone, we bring our years to an end like a tale that is told." But no, God loveth his servant unchangingly, unceasingly, and therefore the servant of God in his dealings with his brother in the flesh, not only loveth, but "loveth at all times." He "walks in wisdom towards them that are without redeeming the time," but as

“the fear of God is the beginning of wisdom,” it conducts him to that love to God and his neighbour which is the consummation of wisdom. Wisdom is the substance of the law, and “all the law is fulfilled in one word, even in this, thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.” Yes, love is the fulfilling of the law, love forms the object, the motive and the animating principle in our duty towards God, and is it not the same also in our duty to our neighbour? what is the law which relates to our duty to our fellow creature? is it not the prohibition of those things which directly or indirectly bring sorrow and misery: and is it not love to prevent misery as the law only does.

Love is the opposite to hatred. Hatred whispers to the unrenewed heart “steal, kill, lust, covet, rebel.” Love whispers to the sanctified conscience “thou shalt not be so cruel, so unkind to thy neighbour as to hurt his estate by stealing, to hurt his body by killing or wounding, to hurt his character by detraction, to hurt his fame, his usefulness, his comfort, and self-respect by thy gross lust.” And what is God’s law, the second table, the duty of man to man but a summary of these loving prohibitions. This portion of the law would prevent sorrow, which the violation of its commands would certainly entail, and herein we see most clearly that “God’s commandments are not grievous,” but joyous, that love is the sum and substance of every statute, that love is the cause why sins are forbidden

and duties enjoined, that in a word "love is the fulfilling of the law," and he comes short of the law who is not a friend and a brother such as we have described. The greater the light, the higher the revelation, the greater the love of God received, so much the greater will be the love extended, especially towards all those who worship Jehovah.

The friend and the brother spoken of in the text, he finds that the extending of kindness towards men in their prosperity is easy enough, but as an exploit he regards it as being beneath the notice of his prowess to be satisfied with, let that neighbour or acquaintance be in affliction, "his joy darkened, his mirth gone," let sorrow and calamity gather gloom over his habitation, let pinching poverty put out the fire and bare the board, let there be no attraction, but on the contrary everything repulsive to sense in his sad abode, then is the time when the man of grace proves himself a friend, who can help, "a friend who is better than a brother" yes, the kedge for still water, but the sheet anchor for the storm, then we say is the time, the time of a brother's distress, when like a ministering angel he hastens to him to realize the saying of our Grand Master "a friend loveth at all times, and a brother is born for adversity."

We think brethren that you must have gone with us in the two reasonable propositions, viz: that the

obligation of mutual love arising from an early revelation is not cancelled by a more complete revelation of God's will; and that the effect of receiving the higher revelation is manifestly to increase the love of its recipient towards all those who are worshippers of the one true God. If you admit these propositions as reasonable, as being in accordance with the mind and will of God, you cannot but admit also that any method or plan which is intended systematically to promote the discharge of this duty is worthy of support. We are so constituted that there is not a quality, there is not a virtue which may not be encouraged by means of human institutions. *Such an institution is Freemasonry.* Some regard it as a privilege to embrace its system, but it is not merely a privilege, in their case it is also a duty, so that they who embrace it as a privilege should likewise be zealous to support it as a duty also.

We have no sympathy with the complacency which can say "my high revelation enables me to love the man of an inferior creed, or a lesser religious experience, and therefore I have no personal concern whether or no he reciprocates my regard, and accordingly I regard no such system." Such a mode of reasoning defeats its own purpose. It may be very noble and refined to extend gratuitous love, but it is far more noble and refined to call forth in its recipient those sentiments which shall make him also happy, noble, and refined, by returning good to you if you should ever need it,

or if you should never require it, then, on your account to do good unto others. You do a good action. We will say that in some way you lift up the fallen or help the distressed. It is true that you cheer his heart, but we misapprehend your character, if in that very act, your own heart is not far more cheered by the consciousness of doing good. Cultivate in that man the recipient of your kindness, cultivate in him a disposition, when he shall have the opportunity, to seek the like happiness in relieving others, which you found in relieving him, and we contend that you place him under a ten-fold obligation, for you not only improve his circumstances, but you also elevate his moral nature, you place him under obligation, without diminishing his self respect.

Such you have found to be the spirit, and such the definite tendency of Freemasonry. The tone of genuine Freemasonry is in harmony with the tone of genuine Christianity. The sun which lights the moon by night, pours also its illumination upon the other planets around us, and whether we esteem them greater or lesser lights, reflecting the same brilliance, they shine in harmony the gems of the night. So the spirit which pervades the church, pervades also the lodge. Let both extend harmoniously their gentle influence, and the dark abodes of sorrowing humanity, touched by the brightness, shall wake up to joy and singing.

“Brotherly love, relief and truth,” be these my brethren your animating principles, promote them habitually, promote them systematically, promote them as a bounden duty of universal obligation, and whilst maintaining thus the honor of the craft, the description of Solomon, in the words of the text shall apply to you “a friend loveth at all times, and a brother is born for adversity.”

