

“FAITH WHICH WORKETH BY LOVE.”

A S E R M O N

PREACHED BEFORE THE

Provincial Grand Lodge of Freemasons
of Worcestershire,

IN

THE WORCESTER CATHEDRAL,

On Tuesday, June 22nd, 1875,

BY THE

REV. W. RLYNER COSENS, D.D.,

Provincial Grand Chaplain, Vicar of Dudley.

PUBLISHED BY REQUEST OF THE PROVINCE.

STOURBRIDGE:

ERD. R. BRÖOMHALL, PRINTER AND BOOKSELLER, HIGH STREET.

1875.

To Bro.

C. Carrington 286

With the P.G.S.O. Fraternal Regards.

Stourbridge,

July, 1875.

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GALATIANS v. 6.

“ Faith which worketh by Love.”

WORSHIPPING to-day in this grand and beautiful temple of God,

“ Whose ancient pillars rear their marble heads
To bear aloft its arched and pendent roof,
By its own weight, made steadfast and immoveable—
Looking tranquility.”

our thoughts travel back to far distant centuries ; they rest awhile with Oswald in the tenth century, and with those masons, operative and free, who laboured around him. Or, they wander back to those more distant days when the monks built their first Cathedral Church of S. Peter here on the banks of the Severn ; at a period of time when the Anglo-Saxon Church was gifted with such good and learned men as Bede and Egbert ; and when to that church was given the missionary zeal, under Winfrith and Willebrord, to christianise Germany and the Netherlands.

But, while the very beauty of such a structure as this, inspires us with heavenly thoughts ; and, with

“the pillared arches over our head, and beneath our feet the bones of the dead,” we lift up our hearts to the awful Being, who, though He dwelleth not in temples made with hands, yet deigns to be worshipped in them : we are reminded of the one great principle which has for four thousand years dignified the worship of the great Architect of the Universe, by bringing to that worship rich offerings in wood and stone, with gold and silver and jewelled beauties : thus offering to Him who hath freely given to us all things,—our own works of art, and the labour of our own hands. Permitted thus to intensify the beauties of His own creation by the labour of the craftsman and the mason ; and glorifying Him, who hath granted to us earthly things richly to enjoy, by sanctifying art and labour in dedicating them to Him.

The great principle which was the ruling power in the older church,—the church of the tabernacle and the temple—has ever been the very life and centre of religious thought in the christian church ; and it is this, “Faith which worketh by love.” From the simple memorial stone of Jacob, at Bethel, where he, the solitary traveller, awoke trembling and afraid, to exclaim, “Surely the Lord is in this place, and I knew it not ; how dreadful is this place ! This is none other but the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven :” to the consecration of the magnificent shrine of Solomon, at Jerusalem ; the building of houses of prayer and praise has been one great feature of faith.

True, idolatrous polytheism had, as its gods many, so its altars many ; but gorgeous as were many heathen temples, their magnificence paled before the wondrous house of the true God,—when, every beam already cut and squared, every stone already hewn and bevelled, “Like some tall palm the noiseless fabric sprung.”

Stirring are the associations which that rocky platform,—once the threshing floor of Araunah the Jebusite,—gathers around it.

Here, consecrated by David’s sacrifice of expiation, Solomon’s majestic Temple rose. A House of God, immortalised, not only by the grand dedication by its founder, and by the magnificent service and minute ceremonial ordered by the Almighty ; but, a House, in its restored state under Zerubbabel, gifted with a glory greater than that of the former, because of Him who walketh its courts, who taught daily there, and who cleansed it from pollution.

Let us remember that the plan and the whole model of this structure was laid by the same Divine Architect, who constructed the Tabernacle, namely, God Himself. We are distinctly told this in the 12th verse of II. Chronicles, xxviii. But it was the faith of David, who truly loved God, which led him to gather together materials in abundance, and “offerings rich and rare” for the house his son should build.

“Faith working by love” wrought mightily in Solomon, when he sent to Hiram, King of Tyre,

saying, "I purpose to build an house unto the name of The Lord my God."

Faith wrought mightily in Solomon, and in Hiram Abif, the widow's son of the tribe of Naphtali,—as the great work silently progressed ;—until from the outer porch, with its two wondrous pillars of brass, surmounted by their magnificently carved capitals,—on to the Holy Place, with its wainscot of cedar overlaid with pure gold,—and so on to the Holy of Holies, separated by the rich veil of brightest colours : there was one vast offering of Oriental wealth, and startling splendour, at the shrine of the true God.

The prodigious value of gold and silver, so lavishly expended on the first temple, startles us by its amount, but proves that faith counted not the cost that love should sacrifice to its God.

In tracing out the histories of ancient dynasties, the lover of Art is assured of this, that Architecture and Civilization have gone hand-in-hand together.

The five Orders of Architecture, from the simple Tuscan to the elaborate Composite, are in themselves a history of the progress of civilisation ; and, clustering around them, painting and sculpture have made the beautiful science of architecture all the more comely, by illuminating it with all the fair graces and virtues which adorn the race of man.

But we, my brethren, as Freemasons, see Architecture and Religion blended together in a wondrous harmony.

Freemasonry enjoys the privilege of retaining and ennobling this harmony of thought. True it is that Freemasonry is speculative, rather than operative; philosophical and metaphysical, rather than practical; but we must not forget that to Freemasons has been granted the fame of having erected those stately churches and noble cathedrals which abound on the continent; while, nearer home, we cannot disassociate our Ancient Order from such works as Austin's Abbey of Canterbury; the Island Church, at Lindisfarne; Bishop's Wearmouth, Ripon, and Glastonbury.

It may, indeed, be said with truth, that one of the greatest evidences of vitality in a church, is the effort to erect, or to restore, or to beautify, the houses of God in the land. And even now, amid sounds of variance,—which are, probably, rather more wordy than real,—we behold cathedrals upon which peers and high ecclesiastical dignitaries have bestowed of the wealth wherewith God has blessed them: while our large towns show what commercial prosperity, actuated by a loving faith, will do for God; and the squires, the farmers, and the peasantry, love and seek to beautify the village church where their fathers knelt. There can be no doubt that “faith working by love” is never content to dwell in ceiled houses while the temple of God lies waste.

And in our own day, and in this Province, Freemasons have been found ready to aid in beautifying this house of God, with stained glass;—in giving

their presence and their alms at the re-opening of their cathedral; and, more recently still, in laying the Corner Stone of a New Church in the Black Country. Surely, "faith working by love" has thus been exercising its influence.

It matters not to us, brethren, here in England, what an aged Prelate in Italy may write of our Body. Thank God, honest and true men believe intensely in the principles and the work of our Order. The highest and noblest gentleman of our kingdom, has not thought it otherwise than an honour to be called on to rule over our whole Body. Nor is there in Freemasonry any practice or theory derogatory to that purer form of faith which the great mass of us possess, as christians.

There is, I believe, great truth in the words,—
 "reduce Freemasonry to the limits of any particular religious institution, and you, *de facto*, annihilate its usefulness as a common bond of humanity. Declare it to be, in its maxims, rites and ceremonies, exclusive in its character, and you, *a priori*, debase it to that anti-social position wherein the most rancorous passions of the human heart have raged, to enkindle wrath, envy, hatred, and discord among mankind."

For, what is this "faith which worketh by love?" Is it not that which moistens the dry soil of our hardened hearts,—enlightens and cleanses our dark habitations,—turns the vast wheels of our complex social system; and so deepens our shallow thoughts,

widens our narrow sympathies, sweetens our bitter controversies, and freshens our stagnant indolence.

Faith is defined among Masons to be "The foundation of justice, the bond of amity, and the chief support of civil society; we live and walk by faith; by it we have a hope and acknowledgment in the existence of a Supreme Being, are justified, accepted and finally received." While *Charity*, or love, is one of the brightest gems that can adorn our masonic profession, is the best test and surest proof of the sincerity of our religion."

Now, Is not the very first duty written down in the revealed law of God, the duty including all others, just this very one. "Thou shalt love." How completely this proves to us, even on the shewing of the world's philosophers, that this law, which we call God's law, reveals duties, of which man, without it, would know nothing;—that it is something not belonging to, not springing out of, our present imperfect state—not invented by men, but sent down by the holy Author of our being.

How satisfactorily it shews us that the purpose of that law was not merely to set a rule for our actions, not merely to restrain our words, nor to govern our thoughts, but to raise us above our present fallen state.

My Brethren, let us cultivate more and more this faith which worketh by love. Let us remember that

love is a circle whose affections stream from God, the centre. God is Love.

Regard all men as the circumference of that circle.

What our ancestors have done, in works of architecture and beauty, to the glory of God, let us in our measure, and our time, imitate. This earth on which we live presents many weird spots upon which "faith working by love" may labour,—turning the world's wilderness into a garden of roses, and to become fragrant as cinnamon.

When you wish to measure what that love shall be, as it goes forth from that heart of thine toward thy fellow man, because of thy God, then remember that the love that God bespeaks, is that very feeling which makes you hurry back to your home from a journey, and encroach upon the night hour, that you may write that letter which is the communion of the absent, and thrill with a joy which cannot deceive, when you casually meet, eye to eye, and heart to heart, one from whom years and lands, and all, save thoughts, have divided you,—and which makes you weep bitter tears at the grave of him whom you have lost. Love toward God, as towards man, *for God*, is a wondrous thing. Faith never dissevers these two: they must not be divorced. The first of all the commandments is, "Hear, Oh Israel, the Lord our God is One Lord: and thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind."

The second is like unto it, "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself."

On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.

My Brethren, let us live a life of Faith and Love. Believe in God's great purposes towards the human race. Believe in the mighty power of truth and love. Believe in the capacities and greatness of human nature. Carry to your work a trustful spirit. Do not waste your breath in wailing over the times. Strive to make them better. Do not be disheartened by evils. Feel through your whole soul that evil is not the mightiest power in the universe, that it is permitted, only to call forth the energy of love and prayer for its removal.

Understand that this is the greatest power which God gives to man—the power of acting generously on the soul of his brother,—of communicating to others a divine spirit, of awakening in others a heavenly light, which is to outlive the stars.

Then, let each of us be careful to perform our allotted task while it is yet day; inspired with a holy confidence that the Lord of Life will enable us to trample the King of Terrors beneath our feet; and let us lift our eyes to that bright morning star, whose rising shall bring true fruition of that "faith which

worketh by love" to the faithful and obedient of the human race. And

"Here, where the end of earthly things,
Lays heroes, patriots, bards, and kings ;
Where stiff the hand, and still the tongue,
Of those who fought, and spoke, and sung,
Here, where the fretted aisles prolong
The distant notes of holy song,
As if some angel spoke again,
BE PEACE ON EARTH, GOOD WILL TO MEN."