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Ecclesiastical Record of the Baptist
Church, South Reading, Mass.-1832

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
ECCLESIASTICAL

R E C O R D.

— "First pure, then peaceable," —

— "Follow after the things that make for peace."

BIBLE.

 This pamphlet contains one sheet.

3

ECCLESIASTICAL

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BIBLE.

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ECCLESIASTICAL RECORD.

THE Baptist Church in South Reading, from its organization, in A. D. 1804, enjoyed a good degree of internal peace and concord, till the disclosures, which, within a few years, have been made, relative to the institution of Free Masonry, induced several of its members to desire the Church to make some new regulations respecting their disfellowship of non-seceding Masons; while some members thought it unnecessary to discuss this subject in a church capacity; but in August, 1832, the Church voted to choose a joint committee from these two classes of its members, to make a report on this subject.

The resolves reported by this committee, were adopted by the Church, and they ap-

pointed said committee "to prefix such a Preamble as they shall deem proper, and publish it, together with the Resolutions, in a pamphlet form."

Pursuant to their appointment, the Committee met and prepared the following remarks.

When David was, by his brother, called to an account for his conduct, he replied, "Is there not a cause?"

It is alike the duty and privilege of rational beings to show the cause and reason of their doings; and it seems proper to notice some considerations, which were thought to furnish a reason for the appended resolutions.

We feel constrained to admit, that the testimony of seceding Masons, respecting the oaths and obligations of Free Masonry, which they have taken, is substantially correct, both from the number and respectability of the witnesses, and from their apparent want of motive to falsify in such a case.

We are aware that it is said, that persons who have confessedly contradicted themselves, cannot afterwards be credited.

But this, admitted in its extent, would excommunicate part of the Scriptures; for instance, the Apostle Peter, after denying his Master, and that too with an oath, repented and acknowledged him during his life, and his writings are now received as those of a good and true Apostle; and so a seceding Mason may, by his upright conduct, prove that his testimony is worthy of credence.

We are constrained to believe, that some of the published oaths and obligations of Free Masonry, are directly contrary to a Christian's religion and politics.

Without stopping to comment on the obligation to defend a brother Mason, "whether right or wrong," to conceal murder and treason at pleasure, to "derange the business" of an offending Mason, hold him up as a "vicious vagabond," "transfer this character after him," and "mete out vengeance to him" during the time of his natural life, (the very opposite of the forgiving precepts of the gospel,) we simply remark on the penalties which the initiated takes on himself—"No less a penalty than to have my throat cut across from ear to

ear, my tongue torn out by the roots, and my body buried in the rough sands of the sea."

And for what is this horrible penalty incurred?

Why, by the language of the oath, it may be for such a trivial offence as not conforming to the by-laws, rules, and regulations of the lodge; for not obeying a summons thrown to him, and that summons may be to aid in kidnapping and murdering a man, whom the laws of our country would acquit. Or it may be for merely mentioning to an uninitiated person, some puerile ceremony or token of the lodge-room.

And should a man soberly and deliberately stake his life in this way, and call on the Almighty to witness the transaction, and then excuse himself by saying, "O, I meant nothing, I was not in earnest—it was a mere ceremony?"

We believe that a man has no more right to say that he forfeits his life for a trifle, than another man has to take his life on such a pretext; because a man has no more right to commit suicide, than he has to murder his neighbour.

We believe that oaths and obligations, which thus trifle with human life, are profane and wicked, and ought to be at once abandoned.

We are by no means satisfied with the explanation, that these oaths and obligations are in figurative language, and that they *say* one thing and *mean* another.

A poet, by the license of his profession, may deliver his sentiments in the figures and flowers of Rhetoric, but who ever heard of a judge pronouncing sentence of death on a criminal in the unliteral tropes and figures of poetry?

Nor are we any better satisfied with the explanation, that the candidate for Masonry is assured, that no obligation shall be tendered to him inconsistent with his politics or religion, since he is afterwards required to take the oath "*without* the least equivocation, or mental reservation, or self-evasion of mind whatever."

A distinguished Mason has called the Masonic penalties "unmeaning oaths," but could the spirit of Morgan reply to this, would it not say, "nay, verily, I have felt that these oaths are full of fearful, fatal meaning!"

But, if indeed, as some contend, Masonic oaths and penalties are mere ceremonies, meant to be perfectly harmless, where is the harm of disowning them ?

The lighter the load, the easier to escape from under it.

If Masons have been dealing in such dreadful oaths, in "fire-brands, arrows, and death," only "in sport," till the public are painfully alarmed at such pastime, is it not reasonable, that they should now give over such sporting ?

We are sensible, that it is said, that the oaths and obligations of Masonry can be so *qualified* and *explained*, as not to lead its members to any such outrages, as they committed in the kidnapping, if not murder, of Morgan.

But what is the utility of having oaths and obligations, that must be *contradicted* and *explained away*, to prevent their mischievous tendency ?

A person may keep a robber or assassin on his farm, so closely watched and guarded, as to prevent his doing harm ; but would not every wise man much rather have such

a dangerous nuisance banished from his premises ?

Of the embarrassing and injurious influence of Masonic oaths and obligations on witnesses in Court, we think any person may be easily satisfied, by perusing official reports of late judicial trials in the State of New York.

The testimony which proves that promises of political preference for men who are Masons, have been interpolated into the oaths of some Masonic Lodges, and administered to many candidates, we think shows distinctly, how easy it is for a *secret* Society to be exerting a dangerous influence over an unsuspecting public.

And a Society which can, at pleasure, and almost without end, form *new degrees* and clans, with which most of its members have no intercourse, furnishes remarkable facilities for ambitious and unprincipled aspirants to concert and execute mischievous designs against the free institutions of our country, while worthy members of the Fraternity, who are ignorant of such designs, are unintentionally and unconsciously lending the influence of their reputation

to shield these dangerous men from the detection and frowns of their fellow citizens.

Well said the great preacher of righteousness, "He that doeth truth, cometh to the light, that his deeds may be made manifest that they are wrought in God."

And well has the venerated Washington* admonished us of the "fatal tendency," of all "*combinations* and *associations*, under whatever *plausible character*," which "design to direct, control, counteract, or awe the regular deliberation and action of the constituted authorities."

And we shall be unworthy of our descent, if we neglect to guard with a watchful eye the civil immunities, the noble institutions, and the exalted privileges, which our fathers planned and purchased, at so vast an expense, and which we now enjoy in this heaven-favoured Republic.

Again, we have serious objections to what some have considered rather venial things in Free Masonry.

Not to mention the waste of time in attending its pompous processions, and pub-

* See President Washington's Farewell Address.

lic ceremonies, the delusive idea of the great and valuable secrets of antiquity, which this institution contains, we believe has induced not a few sober-minded people to receive its fabulous legends, as authentic history.

How can well informed and honest men, especially clergymen, who should be patterns of sincerity, in their Masonic discourses and orations countenance such imposition?

Notice the following extracts,* from a work on Masonry, by the Rev. James Anderson, D. D. enlarged by John Entick, M. A.

This work says of Seth, "This patriarch greatly profited in those noble sciences, [Masonry and Geometry] under the continual tuition of Adam, with whom he lived till the year of the world 930, and succeeded him then in the *grand direction* of the craft." This work dates the rise of Masonic signs and tokens, from the confusion of tongues at the building of the Tower of Babel. and says, "Nimrod—became *Grand*

* See Stone's "Letters on Masonry and Anti-Masonry."

Master of all *Masons*, after the general migration."

And Joseph was so well instructed by his father, "that he excelled the Egyptian *Masons* in knowledge, and was installed their *Grand Master*, by the command of Pharoah."

In their [the Israelites'] perigrination through Arabia to Canaan, God was pleased to inspire their *Grand Master*, Moses, Joshua, his *Deputy G. M.* and Aholiab and Bezaleel *Grand Wardens*, with wisdom of heart," &c.

"Moses excelled all *Grand Masters* before him."

"In after times, Ahibal, king of Tyre, repaired and beautified that city; and so did his son Hiram."

"Being himself a *Mason*, he took the direction of the craft upon himself, and became a sumptuous *Grand Master*," &c.

"During all this period, the Israelites, by their vicinity to the artists of Tyre and Sidon, had great opportunity of cultivating the *royal art*, which they failed not diligently to pursue, and at last attained a very high perfection, as well in operative *Ma-*

sonry, as in the regularity and discipline of their well formed *lodges*, WHICH, THROUGH ALL SUCCEEDING AGES, HAVE HITHERTO SUFFERED NO CHANGE."

True, some Masons of common sense and common honesty, have admitted that there is no authority for these assumptions, and have treated all such pretensions as idle and ridiculous.*

But while intelligent Masons may, with sufficient incredulity, smile at the tale of Adam and Seth, Moses and Aaron, Noah, Daniel and Job, David and Solomon, John the Baptist, and John the apostle, having been Free and Accepted Masons, many well meaning men, ignorant of history and accustomed to credit what is soberly rehearsed to them, believe in the verity of the whole account, with all the simple honesty of their hearts.

And the marvellous claims of the Institution to such antiquity and semi-divinity, we fear have led some to suppose, that if

* See a Masonic Oration of Rev. Dr. Dalcho, delivered by him, A. D. 1803, when he was Grand Master of South Carolina; and the noble minded De Witt Clinton, in one of his Masonic Addresses, was equally ingenuous.

they are acceptable Masons, they are good Christians, in a fair way to heaven, and thus have ensnared them in a most dangerous delusion.

Much has been said of the charitable aids and beneficence of Free Masonry; but in these it appears to be decidedly inferior, if not, indeed, opposed to the precepts of the gospel.

The New Testament enjoins, "As we have opportunity, let us do good unto *all men*"—not primarily to *Masons*; the speciality here added is toward "the *household of faith*."

To ask, how it has happened that some pious people, as well as statesmen of great integrity, have been connected with Free Masonry, and occasionally spoken in its favour, if it is not an excellent Institution, is somewhat like inquiring how such men as Thomas a Kempis, Massillon and the amiable Arch Bishop of Cambray, were found in the corrupt and persecuting papal church and its occasional advocates, if this were not the true gospel church, and its rites those of Christ and his apostles.

Some seceding Masons* have explained the cause of their attachment to the Masonic Institution; they were captivated by the fine-looking and well-sounding part of its pageantry, or lured forward by the illusive hope that there was something important and interesting in the higher degrees before them.

We consider that many worthy and pious people are yet in the Masonic Institution, and that God, who is long suffering, has been waiting for them to see some just and expedient way out of it.

We know that public opinion moves much slower than individual opinion.

A rill of water is readily made, but more than two hundred strong rivers flow hundreds of miles and unite their streams, to form the mighty, the resistless Amazon.

As much has been published, and light is still increasing on Free Masonry, we wish our brethren who desire to be informed, would patiently examine the unprejudiced evidence now extant on this subject.

*See disclosures of Rev. Messrs. Bradley and Bernard.

We would be fair and candid toward all in the exercise of that charity which "suffereth long and is kind," and while we would cautiously avoid all indiscriminate and sweeping censures against the advocates of Free Masonry, we wish to distinguish between wheat and chaff.

As to the good lessons which are said to be taught in Masonic Lodges, we doubt not there are many good principles and precepts, drawn from the Scriptures and common sense, inculcated in Masonic assemblies, but by leaving these Societies, no man need abandon these principles and precepts, any more than a papist need abandon the Bible by renouncing the errors, evil traditions and useless ceremonies, which the Romish Hierarchy have foisted in among the simple and holy sentiments of Christianity.

Cannot a man learn the most common sense maxims and plain moral principles some other way than through antiquated and mysterious lectures over broken arches, hammers, levels, squares and compasses?

By the favour of Providence, wisdom speaks in some other language beside Greek

and Latin, and it is no less certain that common sense speaks in some other places beside Masonic Halls.

Moral precepts and principles are no peculiar hidden secrets of Free Masonry—to pretend it, is to offer an insult to our understanding—they are as free as the air which we breathe.

Now, after the disclosures that have been made as to the unlawful nature and dangerous tendency of Masonic obligations, and all the light which for six years past, has been rising on this long secret and doubtful Institution, we think the time has arrived when Christian Churches are justified in expecting and requiring candidates for their fellowship to dissolve connexion with the Masonic Institution, and give the assurance, that they are no longer bound by such exceptionable obligations.

And in this we mean no disrespect toward our Elders in the ministry, or other brethren, who from comparatively innocent or laudable motives joined the Masonic Society ; but we wish them happily exempted from a burden of insipid and indelicate ceremonies and lawless oaths, through the

safe and honourable door which is now opened, and we hope they will confer with other counsellors than "flesh and blood," to ascertain their duty respecting leaving a Society, which, whatever it might once have been, now bids fair to do much more harm than good by its continuance.

We think the time has come, when this Church may take the above step in consistency with Christian forbearance and charity, and with this conviction, we think it is not material whether other Churches in our immediate connexion have gone quite so far on the subject or not—we are willing to bear either the honour or the reproach of doing what appears to be duty.

Also we think such a step may have a favourable effect on some members of Churches, who are halting between two opinions, respecting leaving the Masonic Institution, and waiting for more, and more decisive public opinion to be expressed, in favour of dissolving their Masonic connexion. We shall thus furnish these with a new motive and new excuse for abstaining from Free Masonry, when this is neces-

sary in order for them to walk in good fellowship with their Christian brethren.

And can a pious person be long in determining on his duty, whether to refrain from a human Institution, and one at best, of doubtful utility, or separate himself from the Church and ordinances of God's own appointment?

Well said the devout Psalmist, "Let my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth if I *prefer* not Jerusalem above my chief joy."

One learned Mason* has said of Free Masonry, "I am satisfied the evils of keeping up the Institution hereafter, will more than counterbalance any good, which in this country can possibly be effected by it, and this has determined me, for the purpose of quieting the alarms of the community, and preserving the peace of neighbourhoods as well as to prevent divisions in the Church of our divine Master, to recommend that Masons should submit to the reasonable demands of the public to cease

* Hon. Chancellor Walworth. See also to the same purpose, Letters of Judge W. B. Rochester, and Gen. P. B. Porter.

their meetings, and that the Lodges surrender up their charters.”*

And another eminent Mason,† as much distinguished for his candour as his intellect, has emphatically said of Free Masonry, “its character, its usefulness and its respectability are *gone*, and its officers and members throughout the Union would act wisely to bury all their tools and implements, and inscribe the name ICHABOD, on the capstone.”

* Ere long may such be the sentiments and practice of every Mason, from Maine to Mississippi.

What an eligible and easy method is this for Masons to terminate the unprofitable discussions and disagreeable excitement about the worn out subjects of Masonry and Anti-masonry, and enable us with renewed cordiality to extend our hands and breathe our sentiments of friendship and confidence toward all our long-known and long-esteemed acquaintance, whether Masons or Anti-masons.

Yes, let the names of Free Mason and Anti-Free Mason be buried in oblivion, and entirely supplanted by the transcendantly more honourable names of American, Republican, Patriot, Fellow Citizen and Christian, that saints of every denomination may be left at leisure to pursue the great duties of their high and holy vocation as now gloriously unfolding in the present eventful century.

† Col. Wm. L. Stone. See “Letters on Masonry and Anti-masonry” addressed to Hon. John Q. Adams.

And again, after enumerating a catalogue of reasons for the abolition of Free Masonry, he adds, "these reasons, to my mind are abundantly sufficient to sustain my position, but if there be any who think otherwise, there are other reasons at hand of infinitely higher moment, not only rendering such a measure proper in itself, but DEMANDING the DISSOLUTION of the INSTITUTION in a VOICE POTENT AS THUNDER."

Thus our views are, in several respects, corroborated by the united testimony of persons who have left the Masonic Institution, and of some who still remain in it; and, in the opinion of the undersigned, the time has come, when a patient and impartial view of the whole subject, as well as due respect to the feelings of many of our Church Members who have long been grieved and burdened with the same, justifies this Church in the appended acts.

JONAS EVANS,
JACOB EATON,
NATH'L C. WRIGHT,
OLIVER BURNHAM,
LOEL SWEETSER,
ZENAS EATON,
WARREN WILEY,

*Church
Committee.*

RESOLUTIONS

PASSED BY THE BAPTIST CHURCH,
IN SOUTH READING, MASS.

August, 1832.

Resolved, That we do not fellowship the oaths and penal obligations of Free Masonry, as being either scriptural, lawful, or moral.

Resolved, That we consider it the duty of all professors of Christianity, to dissolve their connexion with the Institution of Free Masonry.

Resolved, That it is contrary to the sentiments and wishes of this Church, to receive to Church Membership, any candidates who are non-seceding Masons, or to admit any such to our communion from sister Churches.

Resolved, That we consider nothing less than an explicit and open denial of being bound to obey the peculiar signs, summons, oaths and obligations of Free Masonry, as a secession from the Institution.

Resolved, That as each Church of our denomination is an independent body, irresponsible to us for its minor regulations and decisions, we do not wish to break our connexion with other Churches of the Salem Association, which do not yet feel ready to adopt all the measures relative to Free Masonry that we do, and that we do not think it necessary to discipline any of our members, who may feel disposed to commune with any Churches of our denomination.

. Having passed the foregoing Resolves, and appointed a Committee to prefix an explanatory preface to them, the Church voted to dismiss the discussion of subjects relating to Free Masonry, from their meetings, and are now in a desirable state of union and harmony.





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