

MASSONIC OATHS NEITHER MORALLY NOR LEGALLY BINDING.

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AN

**ADDRESS,**

**DELIVERED**

**AT WEYMOUTH, SOUTH PARISH, JUNE 21,**

**AT**

**WORCESTER, JULY 5,**

**ON THE FIFTY-FOURTH ANNIVERSARY OF AMERICAN INDEPENDENCE;**

**AND**

**AT READING, JULY 12, 1830.**

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**BY MOSES THACHER,**

**PASTOR OF THE CHURCH AT NORTH WRENTHAM, MASS.**

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*BOSTON*

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*Weymouth, June 21, 1830.*

REV. AND DEAR SIR,

In behalf of the inhabitants of the South Parish of Weymouth, we tender you our thanks, for your very able and pertinent discourse, on Speculative Free Masonry, this day delivered, and request a copy for the press.

WILLIAM TYLER,  
APPLETON HOWE,  
NOAH TERREY,  
HARVEY REED,  
VINSON TIRRELL. } *Committee*

REV. MOSES THACHER.

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*Worcester, July 5, 1830.*

DEAR SIR,

The undersigned, a committee appointed pursuant to a resolve this day adopted, by a meeting of citizens from different parts of the County of Worcester, holden at Worthington's Hotel. in this town, respectfully request, for publication, a copy of your very interesting, able and patriotic address, this day delivered.

Accept, dear sir, assurance of our high respect and esteem.

ANSLOW PETERS,  
CALEB BURBANK,  
MARTIN WILDER. } *Committee.*

REV. MOSES THACHER.

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*Reading, July 12, 1830.*

DEAR SIR,

We, the undersigned, tender you the thanks of the Anti-Masonic Committee of this town, for your able and appropriate discourse, this day delivered, and in their name, request the favor of a copy for the press.

With much respect and esteem, your obliged friends,

JONAS PARKER,  
AMBROSE KINGMAN,  
AMOS EVANS. } *Delegation  
from said  
Committee*

REV. MOSES THACHER.

# ADDRESS.

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FELLOW CITIZENS,

THE science of Moral and Political Philosophy, is of incalculable importance to mankind. To learn our duty to God, to our country, to ourselves, and to our connexions and relatives in life, is one of the first things, which should be urged upon the understanding and conscience of every rational and moral being. Although theories, *in the abstract*, are useless, and no system, either of morality or of religion, can be of any avail, unless it is reduced to *practice*; yet, no person can be reasonably expected to *perform* his duty, unless he *understands* it. Ignorance is neither the mother of devotion, nor the mother of benevolent exertion. Although it is an old maxim, that "ignorance of the law excuses no man;" still we must take it for granted, that every man has it in his power to *know what the law is*, or he would not be a subject of either praise or blame, reward or punishment.

I advert, therefore, to the science of Moral and Political Philosophy, because it involves those first principles of civil and religious right, without a knowledge of which, we can be neither useful citizens, nor devoted Christians.

Deeply involved in this science, is the subject of OATHS and PROMISES. The question, "Why am I obliged to keep my word?" is one of the first which arises in a correct system of ethics; and the question, "When is an *oath* both morally and legally binding?" is one of no less importance in Political Philosophy. To set aside the sanctity of a lawful oath, is to subvert the foundation of civil right, destroy confidence between man and man, and to place the means of retributive justice entirely out of the reach of civil community. Let our citizens once lose a sense of moral obligation; let them cast off the fear of God, and become callous to the imposing influence of a solemn appeal to the Searcher of hearts, and the certainty of a future retribution; and the arm of the law is paralyzed at once—the strength of the civil power has fled, like that of Samson, when shorn of his locks, and the voice of authority is no better than "sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal."

It can be neither out of place nor out of season, therefore, on this occasion, to discuss the subject of OATHS; and endeavor, if possible, to make it bear upon the present state of civil and religious community. In order to set the subject in a clear and practical light, it is only necessary to lay down certain first principles of moral obligation, and to apply those principles to the question at issue. Here then, let it be observed,

*That no oath or promise can be morally binding, which con'ravenes any duty which we owe to God.* Our duty to God is antecedent, in the order of nature, to every thing else. It is contrary to the nature of things, therefore, for any oath or promise to be morally binding, which runs counter to any thing which God has either required or forbidden. If, for example, I should make oath that I would never again open my Bible, or appear in the house of God, in the exercise of public worship; it is evident that such an oath or promise could not be of any binding force whatever. For, it is impossible for any one to bind himself,

either by oath or otherwise, to neglect any known duty, or to disobey any command of God. The edict of Nebuchadnezzar, that whoever would not fall down and worship the golden image, which he had set up in the plain of Dura, should be cast the same hour—into a burning fiery furnace, could have no binding force whatever, either upon himself, or upon any of his subjects. For, such decree was in direct opposition to their allegiance and duty to the Most High God. So of the decree and proclamation of Darius, that no one should prefer any request or petition to any god or man, for the space of thirty days, except to the king. Such a law as this, was of no moral force whatever; because every moral being in his kingdom was under prior and indissoluble obligation to pray to God, day by day. The same would have been true, had Darius imposed the most solemn oath upon all his courtiers, and upon every subject in his realm. There was no law which he could enact, and no oath or promise which he could impose that ever would or could absolve even the meanest subject from his obligation to God. It is next to self-evident, therefore, that no man can impose an obligation either upon himself or upon others, which contravenes even the smallest duty which we owe to our Creator.

It is equally obvious, that no oath or promise can be morally binding to do that, *which in itself is unlawful*. Every thing which is in itself unlawful, must necessarily contravene our duty to God. There are ten thousand things, however, in themselves sinful, which are not *specified* by any *particular* positive or moral *precept*. These things are so evident, that even nature itself teaches their moral turpitude. To such things, therefore, the rule which I have already considered, is in every respect pertinent and applicable. In respect to such acts of moral aberration, the “law of God is written in the heart;” or impressed upon the conscience; so that their commission evidently supposes direct disobedience to our Creator. If, for example, I

should swear, under the imprecation of the most severe and awful penalty, that I will set fire to my neighbor's buildings, or poison his cattle, or assassinate him at midnight,—it is self-evident, that I should not only be criminal in *taking the oath*, but unspeakably *more criminal if I kept it*. Of this nature was the oath of Saul, when he “abjured the people saying, *Cursed be the man that eateth any food this day.*” Such an oath as this, Saul had neither a legal nor a moral right to make. He had no right, either moral, or delegated by his regal authority, to deprive the people of that food, which was necessary to their health and comfort. When, therefore, he discovered his purpose to slay Jonathan, for “tasting a little honey,” in addition to the sin of an *unlawful oath*, he was guilty of a malignant and murderous disposition. On this ground, the people rescued Jonathan, and would not suffer the king to put his unrighteous and cruel oath in execution. Of a similar nature was the oath of Herod, when he promised to the daughter of Herodias, whatsoever she would ask, unto the half of his kingdom. He had no legal nor moral right to make such an unwarrantable and indiscriminate promise. The oath itself was *unlawful in its own nature*. When, therefore, for “his oath's sake,” “he sent an executioner” to behead John the Baptist; he was not only guilty of *swearing unlawfully*, but of *murder in addition*. When “more than forty men” of the Jews, “banded together,” and bound themselves “under a great curse, that they would neither eat nor drink until they had killed Paul; their oath was unlawful in its own nature, and they could not execute it, in *either of its conditions*, without being guilty of *murder* in the first degree. Had they succeeded in killing Paul, it must have been a most aggravated breach of the sixth commandment. Had they persevered in abstaining from food, they must have inevitably been guilty of suicide. There was no alternative for them therefore, in order to *do right*, but to *break their unlawful oath*; in taking which, they committed a great sin.

It is evident, therefore, that no oath or promise whatever, can bind any man to do that *which in itself is unlawful*; for that which in itself is unlawful, can never be made lawful either by the promiser or by the promisee.

The same principle will hold true, when an oath or promise contravenes a *previous engagement*. If I am bound by contract, oath or engagement, to any person, or body of men, common sense teaches, that I cannot destroy that previous obligation by any subsequent oath. If I am bound by oath of allegiance, to support the government of these United States, it is impossible for me to absolve myself from that obligation, merely by a subsequent oath of allegiance to a distinct and independent power. In this case my subsequent oath of allegiance is unlawful in its own nature; and, consequently, though I sinned in *taking it*, I do not sin in its violation. So of private contracts. Common sense, and common law teach, that the *previous obligation* must prevail, which renders the second, of a contrary tenor, null and void. If I leave the wife of my youth, whom I have sworn to love, cherish, protect and support; and bind myself, by the same contract, to another, while the first is living; it cannot be denied, that my marriage vows, in the second instance, *are void, in their own nature*. They are void, because they are, in themselves, *unlawful*, and because they must necessarily contravene the conditions of the first covenant. No matter how solemn the vow, or how imposing the ceremony, in the second instance: it cannot alter the conditions of my first marriage, nor bind me in any respect, to the second woman, by the bands of wedlock. The enormity of the act, in this instance, consists in entering into the second engagement: and not in treating it as destitute of any legal or moral force.

Conditional and promissory oaths cannot be binding *where the conditions either prove false, or remain unfulfilled on the part of the promisee*. In the marriage covenant, for example, the engagements are conditional, promissory and recip-

rocal. If a man marries a wife, on the supposition that she is chaste and virtuous, but afterward receives plenary evidence that she is and has been an infamous character, his marriage vows may be considered nugatory, and he is justly entitled to a divorce. Again, if his wife, though virtuous when married, becomes an infidel in her affections and conduct, violating the conditions of the marriage vow,—it is evident, that *his* obligation to love, cherish, protect and support her, is virtually nullified; and, so far as *moral right* is concerned, she has no just claim upon *his* maintenance as a husband. This is generally admitted, in reciprocal contracts and engagements, that where the conditions of one party are false, or remain unfulfilled, the other is discharged from the obligation.

The same, I conceive to be true, where the conditions of an oath or promise are found to be *impracticable*. No man is ever under moral obligation to perform impossibilities; and of course no man *can bind* himself, either by oath or promise, to perform impossibilities. If I go to a mechanic, and, by false representations, engage him to perform a certain piece of work, in a specified time: but on commencing the work, he finds it much greater than I had represented, and of course out of his power to accomplish in the time specified, he is certainly, of right, released from his obligation, and the *promise* he has made can be of no moral force whatever.

I might take up more time, in treating upon the nature of oaths and promises: but sufficient has already been said to answer my present purpose. I trust that the positions I have here laid down, will not be disputed, but commend themselves to every man's reason and conscience; and I am happy to find them in accordance with the opinions of Dr. PALEY, on the same subject.

“Promisory oaths,” says this distinguished Moral Philosopher, “are *not binding* where the promise itself would not be so.” He then directs the reader to see his “Chapter of Promises.” Under this head he says,



“1. Promises are not binding, where the performance is *impossible*.

2. Promises are not binding, where the performance is *unlawful*.

There are two cases of this : one, where the unlawfulness is known to the parties at the time of making the promise ; as where an assassin promises his employer to despatch his rival or his enemy ; a servant to betray his master ; a pimp to procure a mistress ; or a *friend* to give his assistance in a scheme of seduction. The parties in these cases are not obliged to perform what the promise requires, *because they were under a prior obligation to the contrary*. From which prior obligation what is there to discharge them ? Their promise—their own act and deed. But an obligation, from which a man can discharge himself by his own act, is no obligation at all. The guilt therefore of such promises lies in the making, not in the breaking of them ; and if, in the interval betwixt the promise and the performance, a man so far recover his reflection, as to repent of his engagements, he ought certainly to break through them.

“The other case is, where the unlawfulness did not exist, or was not known, at the time of making the promise ; as where a merchant promises his correspondent abroad, to send him a ship-load of corn at a time appointed, and before the time arrive, an embargo is laid upon the exportation of corn :—A woman gives a promise of marriage ; before the marriage, she discovers that her intended husband is too nearly related to her, or that he has a wife yet living.

“This rule,” continues the Doctor, “that promises are void, where the performance is unlawful,” extends also to imperfect obligations ; for the reason of the rule holds of all obligations. Thus, if you promise a man a place, or your vote, and he afterward render himself unfit to receive either, you are absolved from the obligation of your promise ; or, if a better candidate appear, and it be a case in which you

are bound by oath, or otherwise, to govern yourself by the qualification, the promise must be broken through." Again he says, that "promises are not binding, where they *contradict* a former *promise*; because the promise is then unlawful—which resolves this case into the last." On the same subject, he says, that "*erroneous* promises are not binding in certain cases; as,

1. Where the error proceeds from the mistake or misrepresentation of the promisee.

Because a promise evidently supposes the truth of the account, which the promisee relates in order to obtain it. A beggar solicits your charity by a story of the most pitiable distress; you promise to relieve him if he will call again:—in the interval, you discover his story to be made up of lies; this discovery, no doubt, releases you from your promise. One who wants your service, describes the business or office for which he would engage you;—you promise to undertake it: when you enter upon it, you find the profits less, the labor more, or some material circumstance different from the account he gave you:—in such case, you are not bound by your promise.

2. When the promise is understood by the promisee to proceed upon a certain supposition, or when the promiser apprehended it to be so understood, and that supposition turns out to be false; then the promise is not binding.

"This intricate rule will be best explained by an example. A father receives an account from abroad, of the death of his only son;—soon after which he promises his fortune to his nephew. The account turns out to be false. The father, we say, is released from his promise; not merely because he never would have made it, had he known the truth of the case,—for that alone will not do;—but because the nephew also understood the promise to proceed upon the supposition of his cousin's death; or, at least, his uncle thought he so understood it, and could not think otherwise. The promise proceeded upon this supposition in the promi-

ser's own apprehension, and, as he believed, in the apprehension of both parties; and this belief of his is the precise circumstance which sets him free. The foundation of this rule is plainly this: a man is bound only to satisfy the expectation which he intended to excite; whatever condition therefore he intended to subject that expectation to, becomes an essential condition of the promise." \*

Thus it appears, that Doctor Paley corroborates all that I have said on the subject of unlawful oaths, and brings it down to the apprehension of the lowest capacity.

I now proceed to apply what has been said, to the oaths and principles of the Masonic Institution, which I have had in my eye from the beginning.

As the whole masonic fabric rests upon its *oaths*, if these are found to be unlawful, or, in other words, to be neither legally nor morally binding,—then it will appear, that the building rests upon the sand; the conduct of seceders may be justified; the imputation of moral perjury can no longer rest upon their heads; and others may have no fear in bursting their bonds of mental degradation, and casting off the yoke by which they are held in perpetual slavery to this mystery of abominations.

Although it is difficult, if not impossible, to compare moral evils: yet, it appears, that the sin of keeping an *unlawful oath*, may be *as great*, if not more aggravated, than in *breaking* one, which is lawful and right. The sin of Herod, in keeping his wicked oath, was certainly a thousand fold greater, than if he had sworn to promote John the Baptist to great honor, and then broken his obligation. If then, it is found, that masonic oaths are *not binding*: all the members of the institution are under the most solemn and sacred obligation to come out and leave it. They have *no right* to keep an *unlawful oath*, any more than they had to *take* or *impose* it: and they had no more right to *take* or *impose* it, than Saul had to abjure the people, that they

\* See Paley's Moral Philosophy, Chapter on Oaths.

should not taste food that day ; than Herod to behead John the Baptist ; or than the Jews to band together, and swear, that they would neither eat nor drink, until they had killed Paul.

When therefore, I apply the foregoing rules to the case in hand, I cannot only consider myself absolved from the force of all masonic laws, but solemnly *bound*, by every thing sacred and divine, to abjure every vestige of masonic rites and obligations.

In the first place, masonic oaths contravene our duty and allegiance to God. Here is a direct application of the very first rule which we have considered. It cannot be denied, that God has given us existence, that he has made us for himself, and that we are bound, by primary and indissoluble obligations, to consecrate and devote our lives to his service. What legal or moral right, then, has any person, *to swear away* that life, which he is *previously bound* to devote to the services of God, and which God alone has the right to take ! Let the principle once be established, that a man has the moral right to *forfeit his life*, in any way, or on any occasion, *not required by the law of God*, and murder and suicide must cease to be criminal, and no security can be guaranteed to civil community, by any precept, either human or divine. On this principle we might easily find thousands, who would not hesitate to commit murder with the mere replication, that *they are ready to pay the forfeiture*. Established in this belief, they would have nothing to fear from a state of retribution, in having robbed either themselves or others of that life, which, by natural, moral, primary, and indissoluble ties, is to be devoted to the service of God. If, therefore, it is admitted, that any one has the right, on any occasion, prescribed by human authority, to swear away his life as a forfeit ; it must be admitted, that any one has the right to commit the highest degree of sacrilege, and to break through the strongest moral restraints, which can be imposed upon moral beings. In this view, therefore, masonic oaths must inevitably

contravene our duty and allegiance to God ; and therefore, must be considered, in every respect, unlawful and presumptuous. The candidate for free masonry is obliged to *swear away his life* at every step. This must be true, whether we give to the penalty of the obligation either an *active* or a *passive* signification. The most favorable construction which I have ever yet heard put upon the penalty of masonic obligations, is, that the candidate pledges himself to *lose his life, rather than violate his masonic engagements*. By this construction, we are obliged to consider the Entered Apprentice, as swearing, that, *rather than reveal any masonic secret, he will "have his throat cut across, his tongue torn out by the roots, and his body buried in the rough sands of the sea, at low water-mark, where the tide ebbs and flows twice in twenty-four hours."* The Fellow Craft swears, that, *rather than transgress any masonic law, he will have his left breast torn open, and his heart and vitals taken from thence, thrown over his left shoulder, and carried into the valley of Jehoshaphat, there to become a prey to the wild beasts of the field, and the vultures of the air.*" The Master Mason swears, that *rather than "prove wilfully guilty of violating any part of his oath, or obligation," he will have his "body severed in two in the midst, his bowels burnt to ashes, and the ashes scattered to the four winds of heaven."* The Mark Master Mason binds himself under no less penalty, "than to have his right ear smote off, that he may forever be unable to hear the word, and his right hand chopped off, as the penalty of an impostor." The Past Master obligates himself under the penalty of having his "tongue split from tip to root." The Most Excellent Master imprecates upon himself the penalty of having his "breast torn open, and his heart and vitals taken from thence, and exposed to rot on the dunghill." The Royal Arch Mason swears, under the penalty of having his "scull smote off, and his brains exposed to the scorching rays of the sun." Thus we see, that the candidate for free masonry does, to all intents, *swear away his life*, at every step,

up to the seventh degree, and that, even though we attach to masonic penalties a merely *passive signification*, this simple circumstance renders the masonic oath, to all intents and purposes, *null and void*. The candidate has no more moral right, in the sight of God, to swear that he will lose his life, rather than reveal masonic secrets, or violate masonic laws, than I have to swear, that I will “have my throat cut across, and my tongue torn out by the roots, *rather* than leave this place of worship, before I have finished delivering this address.”

In the second place, masonic oaths are, in their own nature, *unlawful*. Here is an application of our second rule, which is exactly in point. That they are unlawful in their own nature, is evident from what I have just stated. It is unlawful, in its own nature, for a man to swear away his life. It is unlawful, in its own nature to enter into any engagement which contravenes our duty to God. Besides, no person has a lawful right to make an indiscriminate and unconditional promise to keep secrets, or to sustain any institution, of which he is ignorant, at the time the promise is made. But this is precisely the case in the administration of masonic oaths.—The candidate is made to swear, indiscriminately and unconditionally, to that which he knows nothing about. The Entered Apprentice, while kneeling at the altar, is made to “promise and swear,” under no less penalty, than to have his “throat cut across, his tongue torn out by the roots, and his body buried in the rough sands of the sea,” that he “will always hail, ever conceal, and never reveal any part, or parts, art or arts, point or points, of the secrets, arts and mysteries of ancient Free Masonry, which he has received, is about to receive, or may hereafter be instructed in, to any person or persons in the known world, except it be to a true and lawful brother mason.” Now the candidate is entirely ignorant of that to which he swears, thus indiscriminately and unconditionally. He knows not whether the secrets, in which he is about to be instructed, are right or wrong, lawful or

unlawful. They may, it is true, be harmless in the abstract ; and they *may* require the head of John the Baptist ; or that he should keep the secrets of a brother in *all cases* except murder and treason ; and, a few steps farther in advance, not excepting even *them*. So in every degree. The novice is sworn to keep secrets, of which he is yet entirely ignorant, and of which as yet he has no possible means of knowing, that they are not in direct opposition to the laws of God and his country.

Now who can help discerning, that such oaths are of the same nature with that of Herod to the daughter of Herodias ? They are such as no moral being has a right to make, and, of course, are unlawful in their own nature. But, being unlawful, in their own nature, they are neither morally nor legally binding, and, consequently, ought to be broken. In this case, I think there is a precept directly in point, as written in the Levitical law. "If a soul swear, pronouncing with his lips to do evil or to do good, whatsoever it be that a man shall pronounce with an oath, and it be hid from him ; when he knoweth of it, *then he shall be guilty in one of these*. And it shall be, when he shall be guilty in one of these things, that he shall confess that he hath sinned in that thing ; and he shall bring his trespass offering unto the Lord, for his sin which he hath sinned :—and the priest shall make an atonement for him concerning his sin."

It is a matter no less evident, that our *third rule* will apply to masonic oaths, as contravening previous engagements. Every free born citizen of our country is under either a tacit or explicit engagement to support the Constitution of the United States, and the government of the State or commonwealth in which he may reside. He is under a prior and natural obligation to do this, from the protection he receives, in common with others, in all the rights and privileges of a free citizen. He is, therefore, under a previous engagement to devote his life to the service of his country, as well as to the service of God. Now what legal or moral right

has he, in the masonic institution to swear away that life, which he is under a *previous* obligation to devote to the service of his country? What right has he to swear, under any penalty whatever, that he will keep secret those things which he knows not but the public good will require him to disclose? What right has he to swear allegiance to a distinct and separate government, whose principles and laws *may*, to say the least, come in direct collision with the constitution and laws of the government, which he is under previous obligation to support? Yet, all this is done in the several oaths of the "Free and Accepted Mason." The Fellow Craft Mason obligates himself in the following words: "Furthermore do I promise and swear, that I will support the constitution of the Grand Lodge of the United States, and of the Grand Lodge of this State, under which this Lodge is held, and conform to all the by-laws, rules and regulations of this, or any other lodge, of which I may at any time hereafter become a member, so far as in my power." The Master Mason swears to the same, in very nearly the same words. The Mark Master, Past Master, Most Excellent Master and Royal Arch Mason severally promise and swear, that they will support the constitution of the General Grand Royal Arch Chapter of the United States of America, also the constitution of the Grand Royal Arch Chapter of the State, under which the lodge or chapter is held, in which they receive their degrees; and to conform to all the by-laws, rules and regulations of the same lodge, or chapter, or of any other, of which they may afterward become members. Now the candidate, at the time of taking his oath, is entirely *ignorant* of those constitutions, by-laws, rules and regulations, which he swears to support; and of course, it is impossible for him to tell that they are not, both in letter and spirit, in direct opposition to the constitution and laws of the civil government which he is under previous obligation to support. This swearing *ignorantly* and at *random*, therefore, renders the obligation nugatory; because the candi-



date is just as liable to swear to maintain that, which contravenes a previous engagement, as the daughter of Herodias, to ask the head of John the Baptist, in consequence of the presumptuous and foolish oath of Herod the Tetrarch.

In relation to a brother of the same degree, the Master Mason binds himself in the following words : “ Furthermore do I promise and swear, that I will not speak evil of a brother Master Mason, either behind his back or before his face, but will apprize him of all approaching danger, if in my power. Furthermore do I promise and swear, that a Master Mason’s secrets, given to me in charge as such, shall remain as secure and inviolable in my breast as in his own, when communicated to me, murder and treason excepted ; and they left to my own election.” The Mark Master swears to the same ; because he takes an oath in *addition* to all his former obligations. The oaths of the Past and Most Excellent Masters, incorporate the same language. The Royal Arch Mason obligates himself still further. “ Furthermore do I promise and swear, that I will aid and assist a companion Royal Arch Mason, when engaged in any difficulty, and espouse his cause, so far as to extricate him from the same, if in my power, whether he be right or wrong. Also, that I will promote a companion Royal Arch Mason’s political preferment in preference to another of equal qualifications. Furthermore do I promise and swear, that a companion Royal Arch Mason’s secrets, given me in charge as such, and I knowing them to be such, shall remain as secure and inviolable in my breast as in his own, *murder and treason not excepted* ;” or, as it is administered in some chapters, “ *all the secrets of a companion without exception.*” Now we will suppose a Royal Arch Mason seated upon the bench, or in the jury box, or called upon to testify, a companion of the same degree being on trial ; who does not see, that both the letter and spirit of his masonic, must contravene his civil oath : On the one hand, he has sworn to judge impartially between party and party, or to render a verdict according to law and

evidence, or to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth. On the other, he has bound himself under no less penalty, than to have his body severed in two, and his bowels burnt to ashes, or to have his scull struck off, that he will not speak evil of a brother mason, either before his face or behind his back ; that he will apprize him of all approaching danger, and extricate him from *any difficulty*, if in his power, whether he be right or wrong ; and that all the secrets of his companion, given in charge as such, shall remain inviolably concealed by himself, *not even excepting murder and treason ! !* No one can deny, that the masonic and the civil oath, in this case, come in diametrical opposition, and that the one or the other of them *must be broken !* Here is the strongest possible temptation to perjury ; and it cannot be denied, that the Royal Arch Mason is under a thousand fold stronger temptation to violate his civil than his masonic obligation. On the one hand, he has the bare possibility of being convicted, with the whole fraternity to defend him ; on the other, the direst vengeance of the brotherhood, with all the horrors of masonic wrath and masonic imprecations to return upon his head. Every principle of moral and political philosophy, however, must here justify the violation of his masonic, rather than of his civil oath, because his previous obligation to God and his country must render his masonic obligation nugatory. But if his masonic obligation is nugatory, in a given case, then it was always nugatory. For he had *never* any right to take an oath, which must, in a given case, contravene a previous obligation.

In this connexion, it may be remarked, that masonic oaths must necessarily come in collision with the prior and sacred duties of the family circle, There is no civil or social relation so *near*, and no obligation more binding and indissoluble, than that of husband and wife. This connexion is of such a nature, that what must interest one, must necessarily interest the other ; what is for the welfare of one, must neces-

sarily be for the welfare of the other ; what is to the disparagement or injury of one, must necessarily disparage the other ; and in what one possesses, either of knowledge or interest, the other has a natural, inherent and unalienable right. In these respects, we have the authority of divine inspiration that the husband and wife “are no more twain, but one flesh.” What an incongruity then, and how inconsistent with the marriage covenant, for the husband to have secrets, which he asserts to be of vast interest and importance, locked in his own breast, and which he will have his throat cut across, and his tongue torn out by the roots, rather than impart to the partner of his bosom ! He can leave his family, and the companion of his youth, to engage in business, every month, which *he says*, is of the utmost consequence, but *she* is never to know what that business is, or why it should excite in his bosom such vast interest. In this respect, I cannot but think, that free masonry violates the strongest and most endearing covenant which can be entered into in the family of man. In order to set the subject in a still stronger light, let us turn the tables, and see if any *man* would endure to be tantalized, as every mason is obliged, by his obligation, to mock and tantalize his wife. The laborer comes in from his field, the mechanic from his shop, the merchant from his store, or the attorney from his office, worn down, fatigued and perplexed with the business of the day, and inquires of his domestics “Where is my wife ?” He is answered, “She is gone away.” “Where ?” “We do not know ; she did not tell where she was going ; but we suppose she is gone to the lodge !” Gone to the lodge !— sighs the weary, perplexed and afflicted husband. Well ! he waits, and ruminates in silence, till somewhere near the hour of midnight, and his wife returns ; it may be, none too sober with the “refreshment” she has received, in the suspension of her “labor.” Where have you been, my dear ? O, I have been away, on *important business* ; I have been to the *lodge*. But what business, of such vast importance, as

to detain you till this late hour? The wife replies, "My business you can *never know*; though of vast importance, it is of *such a nature* that it must forever be concealed within my own breast; I am sworn never to divulge the secrets of masonry!" Now, I ask, if there is one man in *ten thousand*, who would *endure* to be thus treated by his wife; or who would not consider such conduct a most flagrant violation of the marriage vow! I leave the question to address itself to every man's reason and conscience in the sight of God.

I cannot but here advert to one other point in the Master's obligation, which, while it illustrates the topic now under discussion, at the same time exhibits the licentiousness of masonic morality. "Furthermore, do I promise and swear, that I will not violate the chastity of a Master Mason's wife, mother, sister, or daughter, *I knowing them to be such*, nor suffer it to be done by others, if in my power to prevent it." Here the question naturally arises, By what authority either human or divine, has the masonic institution, or masonic morality, restricted the force and extent of the seventh commandment, *to the first degree of consanguinity*? Shame!—to such an outrage upon the purity, beauty and excellence of the Divine Law. I will not insult the fairer and better part of my audience, by dwelling upon this subject. But, surely, it can be but little credit to the female connexions of free masons, if they need *such* security, as this *moral* clause in the Master's oath; and it must be the most flagrant outrage and insult upon the virtue and dignity of others, to be considered the *lawful game of masonic concupiscence*.

Another ground on which masonic oaths can be neither morally nor legally binding, is the substance of our fourth rule; that conditional and promissory oaths cannot be binding, where the conditions either prove false or remain unfulfilled on the part of the promisee. In the masonic institution, Free masonry is the promisee, and the candidate is the promiser. He is made to believe, that the institution

possesses *great advantages*. That it is *moral, scientific and charitable*. That if he pays his money and conforms to the rules and principles of the order, he shall find an equivalent. He takes it for granted, that an institution, which has existed time out of mind, as this is said to have done, *must* be something beside an empty sound. Upon such conditions, he enters, pays his money, and binds himself by the most horrid, barbarous and blasphemous oath, which ingenuity and barbarism united could invent. But, instead of finding an equivalent, he finds *nothing like it*. The institution is neither ancient, moral, scientific nor charitable; but the contrary. The conditions, therefore, on the part of the promisee, are altogether *false*; and the candidate, of course, is justly released from his obligation.

The same doctrine holds true, in the application of another rule, that no oath or promise is binding, where the condition or performance is *impracticable*. This holds true of many points in masonic oaths. Such is the case in the following clauses, in the Master Mason's oath. "Furthermore do I promise and swear, that I will go on a Master Mason's errand, whenever required, even should I have to go barefoot and bareheaded, if within the length of my cable tow. Furthermore do I promise and swear, that I will always remember a brother Master Mason, when on my knees, offering up my devotions to Almighty God." In respect to the first of these engagements, the candidate swears, that he will go on a Master Mason's errand, *whenever required*, even if he has to go bareheaded and barefoot, if within the length of his cable tow; that is, mystically, the distance of *three miles*: within which he is bound to go, or to obey a summons. Now suppose he is required, in the dead of winter, in the situation above described, to go this distance, on a Master Mason's errand; who does not see that he has sworn to perform an impossibility? The same is true, in respect to always remembering a brother Master Mason, in the exercises of devotion. Every rational man

will consider that *such* an oath must inevitably be violated. Perhaps, however, those who framed this part of the master's oath took into consideration, that a vast majority of masons *never pray at all*; and therefore, could be in no danger of violating this conditional engagement.

It is important to remark, that the *circumstances*, under which the masonic oaths are administered, are such as to render the obligations nugatory: the candidate is thrown into the most embarrassing situation. One of the principal secrets, is, to embarrass and perplex him as much as possible. To effect this, he is divested of his wearing apparel; clad in a ridiculous costume; hoodwinked, and led into the lodge with a rope round his neck. Having been led several times about in the lodge, he is caused to kneel at the altar, on his naked left knee; when the oath is administered to him, word by word, and sentence by sentence, as children are sometimes taught the alphabet. The oath, also, is one of which he is entirely ignorant. It is intended to be kept a secret from every candidate, that there is an oath, until the moment he is placed in a situation to receive it at the altar. In this situation, the candidate is generally frightened, embarrassed and greatly perplexed. He has a rope about his neck, and is blindfolded; so that he knows resistance is vain. He is constrained to go forward, and make the best of it. When he gets through, he knows very little more about his obligation, than when he began.

Now it is easy to see, that any oath, administered under such circumstances, is in a great measure compulsory. But a *compulsory* oath or promise, can certainly be neither morally nor legally binding.

The oaths of free masonry can be neither morally nor legally binding; because the greatest good of the public requires that the imposition should be exposed. Extensive frauds are always an extensive public evil. But never was there a greater cheat imposed upon the community than the masonic institution. Its pretensions are all false and ridicu-

lous. Although it boasts of its antiquity, science, charity and moral virtue, it is in all these respects a perfect charlatan. It is every way calculated to gull young men of their money, without an equivalent; to make tools of them, for the service of ambitious demagogues; and to impose pretended valuable services upon community, while at the same time it is sucking the very life-blood from the body politic.

That previous duty which every citizen owes to his country, therefore, requires the violation of masonic oaths, by the exposure of an imposition, which has threatened the extinction of all our civil and religious privileges.

Another thing concealed by the oaths of the masonic institution, is, its *profaneness*. Here is another circumstance, which renders the obligation neither morally nor legally binding. No person *can* lawfully bind himself to conceal that, which dishonors God, and injuriously affects the morals of community. But that this is true, in relation to the masonic institution, ought neither to be denied nor concealed. The oaths themselves are in a very high degree shocking and profane. To make an appeal to Almighty God, on occasions so trifling, and under such circumstances as those, in which the candidate is sworn, with the imprecation of such horrid and barbarous penalties as are annexed to masonic oaths, I am obliged to consider a most flagrant breach of the third commandment. I know not how any one, who justifies masonic oaths, can lift up his head in presence of that Being, who has said, "Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain;" and especially, when he has added, "Swear not at all; neither by heaven, for it is God's throne, nor by the earth, for it is his footstool, nor by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great King: neither shalt thou swear by thy head, because thou canst not make one hair white or black." Surely, if our Divine Lord here intended to make an exception in favor of civil oaths; no one can rationally think, that he intended to make

an exception in favour of those horrid extra-judicial oaths, which are administered in the masonic institution. But, the multiplication of those blasphemous obligations, in the masonic order, must certainly have an immoral effect, in weakening if not destroying the force of civil obligations; and must present the strongest temptation to perjury, to those who feel themselves bound by their masonic engagements. It has been the opinion of the most able jurists, and the most distinguished moral philosophers, that the multiplication even of civil oaths, is a very great evil, and calculated injuriously to affect the morals of civil community. Dr. Paley says, in relation to oaths, under the government of Great Britain, that "the obscure and elliptical form of the oath, together with the frequency and levity with which it is administered, has brought about a general inadvertency to the obligation of oaths; which, both in a religious and political view, is much to be lamented: and it merits public consideration, whether the requiring of oaths on so many frivolous occasions, especially in the customs, and in the qualification for petty offices, has any other effect, than to make them cheap in the minds of the people. A pound of tea cannot travel regularly from the ship to the consumer, without costing half a dozen oaths at the least; and the same security for the due discharge of their office, namely, that of an oath, is required from a church-warden and an archbishop, from a petty constable and the chief justice in England. Let the law continue its own sanctions, if they be thought requisite; but let it spare the solemnity of an oath. And where, from the want of something better to depend upon, it is necessary to accept men's own word or own account, let it annex to prevarication penalties proportioned to the public mischief of the offence." \*

But the profaneness of masonic oaths themselves, is not *all the evil* which lies beneath them. The Holy Scriptures are *degraded* to a level with the common working tools of

\* Paley's Moral and Political Philosophy; subject of Oaths.



an operative mechanic. The word of God is *perverted, profaned*, applied to *mean and secular objects*, and used with the most shocking familiarity, on the most trifling and ludicrous occasions, and intermingled with the most profane and ridiculous ceremonies. The names and attributes of Jehovah himself, are used as pass-words, mock miracles are wrought as signs, and even a personification of the Deity is attempted in the burning bush! In short, every obligation, and every rite, in the masonic institution, is directly calculated to bring sacred things into contempt, and to lead on, step by step, into absolute skepticism. There can be no doubt, from the history which has been given of the institution, by the Abbe Barruel, Robison, Bernard and others, that the order begins in Theism, and ends in Atheism. It expunges the name of Christ, in the first degrees, from all its formulas, and blots out the name and existence of Israel's God, in the last. It begins, by overcoming some of the minor prejudices, and more puritanical customs of the family circle; and ends by "*crushing the head of a serpent, which WE (the order) detest as an idol that is adored by the idiot and vulgar under the name of RELIGION!!!*" I appeal to my hearers, if *any oath* can be either morally or legally binding, which conceals such wickedness and blasphemy merely from the gaze of community at large: while it ensnares and tolls along the unwary youth, step by step, into the labyrinth of infidelity, and fits him for interminable ruin, by a systematic and organized scheme of moral pollution?

It is an alarming consideration, that masonic obligations require *the concealment of crime!* Every masonic secret, short of murder and treason, is to be kept inviolable, in the breast of the Master Mason, whenever it is given him in charge; and even these two proscribed enormities are to find a "*sanctum sanctorum,*" beneath the covert of the "*Holy Royal Arch.*" Now when we consider, that there may be in our country, at this moment, from two hundred

thousaud to three hundred thousand, who have sworn to conceal every thing short of murder and treason, when committed by a brother; and that a very large proportion have obligated themselves to conceal even *those enormities*; we may well inquire, "Where is the **INDEPENDENCE**, for which our fathers fought, and bled, and died, and which has been our *boast*, and *story*, and *song*, for more than half a century? Where is our boasted trial by *jury*, to enjoy the privilege of which, in our *native land*, our sires girded on their armor, and marched to the field of battle and of carnage, against the roaring and thunders of the British Lion? Where is the boasted right of private judgment, the liberty of speech, and the freedom of the press; when the first one, who dares to utter a syllable, or lift a hand, or wield a pen, even to *inquire*, whether the institution is good or bad, is singled out as a victim for masonic vengeance; and is proscribed, at once, as an outlaw, an "unworthy and vicious vagabond," to be pursued, and hunted till the day of his death? If such things as these, and the barbarous oaths by which they are sanctioned, are not to be looked out of countenance by a "nation of freemen;" then let no longer the tales of "olden time" be told in the ears of our children. Let the valour of Republicans be buried in oblivion. Let "the straights of Thermopylae," and "the heights of Charlestown" be eternally forgotten. Let the story of British wrongs never again be lisped by an American tongue. Let the Eagle and the Motto of our Union be blotted from our national banner, with the tears of weeping liberty; and let us inscribe in their stead, in bold relief, a death's head and cross bones, with the following oath of the Thrice Illustrious Knight:—"You further swear, that, should you know another to violate any essential point of this obligation, you will use your most decided endeavors, by the blessing of God, to bring such person to the strictest and most condign punishment, agreeably to the rules and usages of our ancient fraternity; and this by pointing him out to

*the world as an unworthy vagabond; by opposing his interest, by deranging his business, by transferring his character after him wherever he may go, and by exposing him to the contempt of the whole fraternity and the world, but of our illustrious order more especially, during his whole natural life."*

Another thing which demands our attention, in relation to this subject, is, the incentive and encouragement of masonic oaths, in the commission of crime. Let a gang of freebooters be disposed to combine for the purpose of *rapine, forgery, arson*, or any other purpose, which comes within the jurisdiction of knaves and rogues; and what can be better fitted for the constitution of their club, than the oath of the *masters, or Royal Arch degree*? "Furthermore, do I promise and swear, that I will not speak evil of a brother Master Mason, either behind his back, or before his face, but will apprise him of all approaching danger, if in my power. Furthermore do I promise and swear, that a Master Mason's secrets, given to me in charge as such, and I knowing them to be such, shall remain as secure and inviolable in my breast as in his own, when communicated to me, *murder and treason* excepted; and *they* left to my own election." "Furthermore do I promise and swear, that I will aid and assist a companion Royal Arch Mason, when engaged in any difficulty; and espouse his cause, so far as to extricate him from the same, if in my power, whether he be right or wrong. Furthermore do I promise and swear, that a companion Royal Arch Mason's secrets, given me in charge as such, and I knowing them to be such, shall remain as secure and inviolable in my breast as in his own, *murder and treason not excepted.*" Now common sense must teach, that *honest men* have no need of such obligations, but that they are exactly fitted for a covert to *rogues and villains*. Let any person also, be encouraged with the assurance, that, having committed a crime, he can cast himself upon a brother or companion for protection, who has sworn to keep

his secrets, espouse his cause, and, if possible, to extricate him from any difficulty,—and it is difficult to conceive what greater inducement can be given him to pursue his depredations. When, therefore, we consider the spread of free masonry, in our own country, for a few years past, we need no longer be astonished at the hitherto *unaccountable and unparalleled increase of crime*. Nor need we, again, be at all surprised, that, on certain occasions, it has been so extremely difficult to obtain an impartial retribution in our courts of justice. Had I a case in court, to be submitted to a jury of Master or Royal Arch Masons, especially where my antagonist was a mason, in fellowship with the institution,—I would not give a pin for my prospect of obtaining justice, however clear the evidence or explicit the law, on my side of the question.

But, it is unnecessary for me, further to draw *inferences* for enlightened and intelligent citizens. The facts are before you; the natural consequences are plain as the light of the sun; and you can arrive at the result as easily, and as certainly, as by an arithmetical process.

You see, then, fellow citizens, some of the inherent and consequential evils of the masonic institution. The question, therefore, naturally arises, *What is to be done*, in order to effect a cure of this great moral and political disorder?

One of the first and principal remedies, which presents itself, is, *the diffusion of light*. The subject presents before us a very great and alarming *national evil*; one that threatens to subvert our independence, and to eradicate all our civil and religious privileges. It is the imperious duty of every citizen, therefore, by every laudable endeavor, to elicit facts, and diffuse information.

Watchmen in Zion should awake, and sound the alarm. The evil is one which threatens to overwhelm the church. Those very principles of illuminism, which flooded France and Germany with infidelity, and deluged one of the fairest portions of the globe with human blood, have taken deep and

extensive root in this country. They have already shot forth their branches, with the greatest luxuriance, and yielded the "clusters of Sodom and the grapes of Gomorrah," in the greatest abundance. Those principles are inherent in the masonic institution; and it is altogether unphilosophical to suppose, that the same causes will not produce the same effects here, as at other times, and in other lands.

Let every citizen, therefore, in every station and relation in life, be persuaded to *do his duty*. Let every one pursue the subject with *calm, deliberate, and persevering investigation*. The only way for any man to act *consistently and effectually*, is to act *understandingly*.

Having *informed themselves*, on this vastly important subject, let every citizen use the *prerogative* of citizens and of *republicans*. It becomes all persons, whose duty it is, to guard our civil and religious rights, deliberately to devise and pursue those measures, which, in their wisdom and prudence they may judge necessary to effect a remedy for existing maladies.

Freemen have the undoubted right to judge, and it is their imperious *duty* to judge, what qualifies and what disqualifies a man for office, whether *executive, legislative, or judicial*; and especially, whether the oaths of the Master and Royal Arch Mason can be consistent with those required by law of *judges, jurors and witnesses*.

The administration of *extra-judicial* oaths should be discouraged, and, if possible, *prevented*. They have a most pernicious effect upon the moral sense; and frequently present the strongest temptations to perjury.

Our *young men* are the glory, strength and hope of the nation. Every laudable exertion, therefore, should be used with them, to prevent their being swallowed in the vortex of infidelity, concealed beneath the oaths and mystical rites of masonry.

In fine, we should never forget to implore the Divine benediction and guidance, in this great and unparalleled na-

tional struggle. He, whose eyes are like a flame of fire, searching every depth, and every mystery of iniquity, is able to bring to light and defeat every hidden abomination. May He, who nerved the arm of our fathers in battle, and gave them wisdom in their national councils, give us, also, that wisdom and strength which we need, to preserve that independence which was purchased with their blood.