

A CHARGE TO THE MASONS.

Rev. J. D. Bull Gives Counsel by Which All People May Profit.

On Sunday, January 1, 1916, at the Presbyterian church Rev H D Bull delivered a special sermon to the Masons of Kingstree. It was the day set aside for the lodge for the annual sermon. We have been requested by members of the lodge to publish Mr Bull's sermon, the full text of which follows:

Psalm 78:35—"And they remembered that God was their strength; and that the high God was their redeemer."

I feel it very much of an honor to be allowed to address you today, my brothers. I have no hope of being able to instruct you in Masonry. This will in no sense be a monitory lecture—that task must be left to one more learned than myself. We are not to treat today of the history of Masonry, as long and glorious as that history is. Nor yet of the moral teaching of the craft, as high and exalted, as pure and inspiring as that moral teaching is. Nor have we to do with the ritual—the symbolism—of Masonry, as beautiful and instructive as we all know it to be. But rather let us inquire into those permanent elements of Masonry, those things which make Masonry endure. One can often judge of the principles of an order by its outward characteristics. Now, to the initiate, as well as to the uninitiated, there are apparent certain striking and invariable characteristics. For instance, the order is characterized by a certain sort of dignity, a sense of the solemnity of Masonry itself, which is the admiration of those who observe it. Again, there is in the very air of Masonry a sort of permanentness, a sense of lastingness, the consciousness of having endured, and the promise of a long future. And in the third place, there is the invariable characteristic of democracy, a sort of democratic humanness which belongs almost to Masonry alone.

Now, these things are not in themselves principles, but are merely the outward appearances, the expressions, of deep underlying principles, and let us discuss today these principles, which are well known to you, as they must be to every true Mason. I take it that Masonry has endured, and promises to endure, because it has that rare quality of timelessness, that thing which makes Masonry not a creature of our present age, not belonging to any particular race or clime, but a thing which might appear on any page in history. Let us see now what we mean by this timeless quality. Perhaps we can understand it best by illustration. The ten commandments, delivered though they were thousands of years ago in a different age, unto a different race of mankind, under long past conditions, can it be said that we have outgrown them? Not so, my brothers, we are yet teaching the ten commandments. Can it be said that we have outgrown the sermon on the mount because a new world and a new age have dawned upon us? Far from it, it would be truer to say that we have not yet grown up to it. In the political sphere, has the time come when this country has outgrown the Declaration of Independence—that document which a European scholar has called the noblest document ever framed by the brain of man? We know that it is not so.

Now, these things of which we have spoken have that quality of timelessness. They represent certain human principles which make their appeal to the very heart of humanity. The first principle of Masonry which we may speak of as timeless is a belief in God. As you well know, a belief in God is required of all who become Masons. What sort of a belief in God is required? And what do we mean by a belief in God? If we were to approach most any man on the streets today and ask him if he believed in the existence of God, almost certainly he would assent. Atheism and agnosticism are comparatively rare. We who believe that God exists are scarcely ever called upon to defend our faith, rather the burden of proof has shifted to him who does not believe, we require him to make out his case. But is an assent of this kind in itself sufficient? Of what value has an intellectual assent? For instance, if we were asked if we believe that Cuba is an island, we should certainly reply that we do. If we were asked to assent to the statement that Shakespeare was the greatest dramatist of all time, we should probably do so, for after all it matters little to us what Cuba may be, or what Shakespeare's particular rank is, it has no effect on our common every-day lives. Ah, here is the crux of the question. Professor Stout says: "All belief involves objective control of subjective activity." This sounds involved enough, but in real-

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The above quotations give a vague glimpse of the correspondence we have had with Mrs. Tanner since 1899. Our files, which cover twenty-five years, include many similar correspondents.

ity it means only that a belief which is vital, which is worthy a name, is one which has its positive influence upon our being. Applying this test to ourselves, is the belief in God which we, as Masons, hold, having an effect on our lives? Here, my brothers, is the lesson for Masonry to teach, not only one to another but to mankind—the abiding presence of Almighty God. For today men are forgetting that presence, they are blind to it. They have relegated God and confined Him to the church, to the pulpit and to the altar. They see His hand in the sky as it touches and illumines with an almost unearthly glow the dying day. They hear His voice in the restless moan of the eternal seas. They know that He decks the lily and marks the sparrow's fall, yet they forget His abiding presence in the heart of man. Do you remember, my brethren, that most wonderful picture in the book of Genesis where our first forefather, having sinned, fled away that he might hide himself from God? What mattered all the glories of Eden, what mattered all the joy of life, if God could read his guilty heart? Francis Thompson, a young English poet, in "The Hound of Heaven", described how he journeyed day and night, night and day, over hill and beyond the valley, seeking always to escape the One who ever pursued. At last, wearied of his flight, he discovered that the Presence that was ever with him, that unescapable Presence, was the Almighty, the loving God, his Father. Let us verily so live as though we know, we do know, we are day by day, year by year, ever in His presence.

"And that the high God was their redeemer." We have read in that same book to which we have just referred how that God created man in His own image, the image of the Divine. God is spirit, man created in His image is spirit. Man, earthly and material as he is, clad in a most perishable garb, yet has that about him, that imperishable quality—the spirit of the Divine. Will you ever forget, my brethren, the lesson of the third degree—I know that you never will—that solemn and unforgettable lesson? Most vital and most solemn, for it teaches the freedom of the spirit. It teaches that man is mortal and yet imperishable.

"They remembered." If one is ever tempted to over-exaggerate the individual side of religion—not that religion is not an individual thing, for surely it is—let him read of God's dealing with His people, Israel. Let him understand something of the religious solidarity of the people Israel, and let him learn from that something of the solidarity of the human race. Let him study democracy. For since God is our creator and we are His children, the brotherhood of man is not a phrase, but a fact. Man has been long learning this lesson. There have been men who have learned it, and who have sought to teach it to their brothers—figures who stand out above the flow of humanity. Men like Savonarola and Francis of Assisi and that yet more tragic figure of our own day, Tolstoi. It is an age-long lesson, that the spirit of man is imperishable, that the spirits of men are imperishable, that all souls are valuable in God's sight. It is the democracy of the spirit.

My brothers, Masonry seeks to stamp its impress upon you that you can never forget the lessons you have learned. Men will judge Masonry, its vitality, its principles, by your lives. If your life has been influenced permanently, you have learned the lesson. Ask yourself these questions: Have you heard with the ear and not with the soul? Have you spoken with the lips and not from the heart? Let us not merely acclaim the brotherhood, let us not merely exalt it, but let us live it. Let us know that when the body of man trails the dust, the spirit soars to the throne of the eternal God. Let us live in the daily knowledge, in the daily realization of the abiding presence of God—then shall it be said of us, as we would have it said, that "they remembered that God was their strength, and that the high God was their redeemer."

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