

LECTURE XIX.

THE RECEPTION.

“We can never be too careful, in the selection of members, as to a thorough knowledge of the character and circumstances of a candidate desirous of being initiated into the mystery of Freemasonry. Upon this depends the welfare or destruction of the Craft; for, as regularity, virtue, and concord are the only ornaments of human nature (which is too often prone to act in different capacities), so the happiness of life depends, in a great measure, on our own election, and a prudent choice of those whom we introduce as our companions.”—AHIMAN REZON.

“May every Brother who is lawfully and regularly entered into our Society, which is both ancient and honourable, be duly instructed in its true morality.”—SECTIONAL CHARGE.

A CERTAIN Masonic ceremony used during the process of initiation refers to the Scriptural triad of Ask—Seek—Knock; because every one that asketh with a sincere faith receiveth; he that diligently seeketh is sure to find; and to him that earnestly and with steady perseverance knocketh, without being discouraged because the first report or even the second remains unanswered, shall be admitted at the open door. Thus any one who wishes to participate in the secrets of the Craft must, as a preliminary preparation, seek in his mind, or in other words, examine himself carefully, that he may correctly ascertain whether his

desire proceeds merely from some volatile and hastily-formed whim, which is likely to be evanescent and vanish at the first moment of trial, should any trifling difficulty intervene to cast a damp upon his hopes and expectations. If such be the slight and feeble grounds of his determination, he would act wisely to abandon it at once, for his admission under such circumstances would neither be gratifying to himself nor beneficial to the Order.

But if his hope of admission be founded on a real desire of knowledge, and a favourable opinion of the institution previously entertained; if he be a lover of science, and desirous of augmenting his acquisitions, then he will possess all the elements of a good and worthy candidate, and promise to become a bright and expert Mason. Having thus sought in his mind, and feeling satisfied with the result of the examination, he asks of his friend, who is of course a member of the Lodge, freely stating his convictions, his principles, and his expectations, and places himself unreservedly in his hands as a sponsor, to adopt the usual means of introducing the new Member to his future Brethren. This is denominated the *internal* preparation; and is succeeded, after acceptance, by an external preparation according to a prescribed formula that never varies; and thus on knocking at the door of Masonry, and pronouncing the magic words—OPEN SESAME, the portal uncloses, and he is admitted to tread on the hallowed floor.

It will be impossible to say a word about the actual admission, but it may not be unimportant

to observe that the introductory ceremony is accompanied by an O.B., which was always considered a permanent Landmark, as appears from the 13th and two following points in the old York Constitutions ; and the fraternity were taught to believe that its omission would endanger the whole system. These are the words : “ Every Brother shall swear fealty, and if he violate his oath he shall not be succoured or assisted by any of the fraternity. He shall further make oath to keep secrets, to be steadfast and true to all the ordinances of Grand Lodge, to the king and Holy Church, and to all the several Points herein specified. And if any Brother break his oath he shall be committed to prison and forfeit his goods and chattels to the king.”

This O. B. is considered of so much importance that Quincy Adams, the great American Anti-Mason, on referring to it during the political persecution of Freemasonry in the United States, A.D. 1834, thus expressed himself : “ The whole cause between Masonry and Anti-Masonry, now upon trial before the tribunal of public opinion, is concentrated in a single act. Let a single Lodge resolve that they will cease to administer the oath, *and that Lodge is dissolved.* Let the whole Order resolve that this oath shall be no longer administered, *and the Order is dissolved ;* for the abolition of the oath necessarily imports the extinction of all other Landmarks.” Evidently meaning to imply that the O. B., being a principal Landmark, its removal would ruin and destroy the institution.

During the above-mentioned persecution of Ma-

sorry it was held to be sound law that Masonic oaths are illegal and not binding on the conscience. Thus in a work published by the Hon. W. Sullivan, of Boston, he says that "all oaths which the public laws do not require are in themselves criminal." Judge Morton of the Supreme Court of Massachusetts declared on the bench at New Bedford, that "the officers of a Lodge have no power to administer oaths." And an eminent lawyer in New York, of the name of Hopkins, asserted that "the fact of taking or administering Masonic oaths is a misdemeanour at common law. The candidates taking the oath, the presiding Master, and every member of the Lodge willingly assisting, are equally liable to indictment and punishment." And in corroboration of these extreme opinions, an Act was passed by the legislature of Rhode Island, condemnatory of the Masonic O. B. in the following words: "An Act in relation to extra-judicial oaths. Sec. 1. Be it enacted by the General Assembly, and by the authority thereof it is enacted, that hereafter if any person in this State, &c., shall administer to any person or persons any oath, affirmation, or obligation, in the nature of an oath, not authorized by law, or if any person shall knowingly or willingly permit or suffer any such oath, affirmation, or obligation in the nature of an oath, to be administered to, or taken by him or them, every such person so offending shall forfeit the sum of a hundred dollars for the first offence, to be sued for, &c." The Roman Catholics oppose the progress of Freemasonry on the ground that the third Council of Lateran prohibited all

oaths which might be considered adverse to the interests of the Church.

In England the O.B. is admittedly legal ; and Paley, in his "Moral Philosophy" (Book III., Part 1, c. 21), speaking of the members of ancient societies being obliged to swear to the observance of their respective statutes, pronounces the oath valid, "even though its observance is in some cases unlawful, in others impracticable, in others useless, and in others inconvenient." It would indeed be impossible to deny that the O.B. has always been and is still considered an indispensable Landmark of Masonry. Originally, however, it was an isolated affair ; for only one oath was imposed for all the degrees of Craft Masonry, if indeed there existed in those times more than one degree, which is somewhat doubtful.

Is it an easy matter, I would here ask, for a candidate to recall the feelings which overpowered his mind when he first set his foot on the resplendent ornaments of a Mason's Lodge, which are the depositories of such invaluable lessons of practical morality ? The impressions on his fancy, whatever they might be, no one else can tell. They were the effects of solitude, silence, and unaided reflection. And it would be difficult, if not impossible, to describe the intensity of feeling which distinguished that very brief period of every Brother's Masonic experience. With what various sensations was the mind imbued at that anxious moment. Curiosity might be predominant, but the hope of knowledge, the expected mysterious communications which none could truly

anticipate, divided the current of thought, and prevented the prevalence of any dominant impression. What candidate is able to describe his feelings during that agitating ceremony? Let him try, and perhaps he may find more difficulty in the process than he imagines. He may, or he may not, accomplish the task to his own satisfaction. The chances, however, are against him. Some brethren, with iron nerves, may have been sufficiently self-possessed for such an undertaking, but I doubt much whether others could do it effectually. The situation was embarrassing and confused—they felt it; new ideas continually routed and displaced old ones, and when the reality burst upon them it drove away and obliterated every vestige of the conflicting reflections which had previously passed in rapid succession across the panorama of their mind. Do the candidate's thoughts unconsciously take their character from the variegated emblems which his eye passes over,—light or darkness, hopeful or desponding, now bursting forth with a flood of light, like the glorious central star, and now more mild and gentle, like the tessellated border representing the genial illumination of the planets in their uniform course round the god of day; or are they hazy, indistinct, and illusory, in realization of the physical state of nothingness to which his external preparation has reduced him? Did he feel beneath his feet a carpet of the softest velvet? Did he fancy himself wandering through sounding halls and passages, or through a long series of funeral vaults? or did he feel as in a bewildered dream under the influence of ephialtes? Was he in eager expecta-

tion that a new page in the world's wonders was about to be unfolded? What were his hopes? What were his fears? Can he tell you? It is to be doubted whether a candidate is sufficiently collected to be able to combine his thoughts and reduce them to any real or tangible consistency.