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by
J. Martin Delany, Freemasonry, from
The Origin and Objects of Ancient
Freemasonry in the United States and Territories
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AMONG COLORED MEN IN THE UNITED STATES.

A. In the year 1787, a number of colored men in Boston, Massachusetts, applied to the proper source for a grant of Masonic privileges, which being denied them, by force of necessity they went to England, which, at that time not recognizing the Masonic fraternity of America, the then acting Grand Master, (recorded on the warrant as the Right Honorable, Henry Frederick, Duke of Cumberland) granted a warrant to the colored men to make Masons and establish Lodges, subject, of course, to the Grand Lodge of England. In course of time, their ties became absolved; not before it was preceded by the establishment of an independent Grand Lodge in Philadelphia, Pa., by colored men, and subsequently, a general Grand Lodge, known as the First Independent African Grand Lodge of North America.

In the year 1832, another Grand Lodge was established by a party of dissatisfied colored Masons in the city of Philadelphia, known as the "Hiram Grand Lodge of the

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State of Pennsylvania."* There was, also, for many years, a small faction who rather opposed the F. I. A. G. L. still adhering to what they conceived to be the most legitimate source—the old African Lodge of Boston; among whom was the colored Lodge of Boston, and a very respectable body in New York city, known as the "Boyer Lodge." In December, 1847, by a grand communication of a representative body of all the colored Lodges in the United States, held in the city of New York, the differences and wounds which long existed were all settled and healed, a complete union formed, and a National Grand Lodge established, by the choice and election, in duo Masonic form, of Past Master, John T. Hilton, of Boston, Mass. Most Worshipful Grand Master of the National Grand Lodge, and William E. Ambush, M. W. N. G. Secretary. This, perhaps, was the most important period in the history of colored Masons in the United States; and had I the power to do so, I would raise my voice in tones of thunder, but with the pathetic affections of a brother, and thrill the cord of every true Masonic heart throughout the country and the world; especially of colored men; in exhortations to stability and to Union. Without it, satisfied am I, that all our efforts, whether as men or Masons, must fail—utterly fail. "A house divided against itself, cannot stand"—the weak divided among themselves in the midst of the mighty, are thrice vanquished—conquered without a blow from the strong; the sturdy hand of the ruthless may

* This Grand Lodge dissolved in 1847, after an existence of fifteen years, becoming convinced that they had no just nor legal foundation for an independent existence; and none contributed more to the accomplishment of so desirable an end, than the then acting Grand Master of the Iiram Grand Lodge,—Mr. Samuel Van Brakle, an upright, intelligent, and excellent man.

shatter in pieces our column guidance, and leave the Virgin of Sympathy to weep through all coming time.

I have thus, as cursorily as possible, given you a faint history of the origin and objects of ancient Free Masonry; its introduction into this country among white and colored men; and he who rejects Masonry as an absurd and irreligious institution, must object to the Scriptures of eternal truth, and spurn the Bible as a book of mummeries.

But there have been serious objections urged against the legitimacy of Ancient Freemasonry among colored men of African descent or affinity in the United States, emanating at various times from different directions, of high Masonic authority in the Republic, and, consequently, received and adopted with a readiness as surprising as it was unkind and unjust by almost all of the Subordinate, and many of the Grand Lodges throughout the country, especially in the non-slaveholding States.*

2607 Among the earliest, and, peradventure, the first of these intended fratricidal assaults, was that of the Grand Lodge of Pennsylvania in the year 1847; a distinguished and talented ex-editor and present member of Congress, and Col.

*A fact worthy of remark, that there is no comparison between the feelings manifested toward colored, by Northern and Southern Masons. Northern Masons, notwithstanding Masonry knows no man by descent, origin, or color, seldom visit colored Masonic Lodges; and when they do, it is frequently done by *stealth*. While, to the contrary, Southern Masons recognize and fellowship colored men, as such, whenever they meet them as Masons. The writer has more than once set in Lodge in the city of C—, with some of the first gentlemen of Kentucky, where there have been present Col. A. a distinguished lawyer, Esquire L. one of the first Aldermen of the place, and Judge M. President of the Judges' Bench. This is a matter of no unfrequent occurrence, and many of our members have done the same.

P. an ex-Post Master, if I mistake not, being at the time among the Grand Officers, if not the Committee who visited and reported concerning the African Grand Lodge in Eleventh Street, Philadelphia. And I should not at this late day refer to the doings of those distinguished personages in this connection, but for the purpose of—as it never as yet has publicly been done—vindicating the above named First Independent African Grand Lodge of North America, against the aspersions of those multifarious outward forces which have so long been leveled against her Masonic ramparts. Lambparts, perhaps, would be a term far more appropriate; because our Masonic fathers have submitted really with the most lamb-like passiveness to the terrible and disparaging ordeal.

In this wise, the circumstance referred to happened. The question had long been mooted among the white members of the Fraternity, as to the legitimacy and *reality* of colored Masons; and, consequently, a Committee from the Grand Lodge of Pennsylvania (white) was appointed to visit the colored Grand Lodge then situated in Eleventh Street, (Phila.) to apply the Masonic *test*, and *prove* or disprove their capacity as recipients of the ancient and honorable rituals of the mystic order.

A Grand Communication being congregated for the purpose, at the appointed time, the Committee went. A Committee of Examination being sent out, who—instead of as they should have done, had there been in waiting St. John the Baptist, St. John the Evangelist, or St. Paul in his daring *altitude* as the chief Christian on the Isle of Malta; *examined* them—on seeing the gentlemen, all men of the first standing in the city of Philadelphia, who had often been seen in Masonic processions, and so far, *known*—

as they thought—to be Masons—an unwise conclusion to be sure; reported them to the Chair; when without a question—and entirely through deference—the Chair replied, “Admit them,” &c.—They entered; inspected, oversighted, and examined the work of the colored Masons, applying the scrutiny of a suspicious eye, and the test of plumb, level and square; all of which they pronounced to be good work, square, and just such work as was required to be done; but, for this act of *courtesy*, and undue *deference* on their part, they were denounced by the Grand Lodge of Pennsylvania, as being unworthy of the high privileges they possessed.

Had these gentlemen been half so generous as they were determined on being just, they could and would have readily excused the blunder made by the colored Masons, when considering the relative position in community of the two parties who then met as Committees; the one subservient to the other in all the relations of life. In all the social relations in which they had formerly met, the one was domestic and the other superior—the one ignorant and the other intelligent; in a word, the one master and the other servant.

But, I come not to plead in extenuation for the blunders—the palpable and reprehensible blunders of our colored Masonic brethren and fathers; may I not say that it served them right, and has done them good, since their too great deference for persons in certain relations of life in this country, has done us much injury in other respects than this. But that time is not *now*, neither are *we* those brethren; and they who now stand at the head of our Masonic jurisdiction, are competent and adequate to the task for which they have been selected; so that the same excuse

no longer exists for the Grand Lodge of Pennsylvania. Neither would I vindictively censure our fathers, as they did very well for their day and generation; and all that they did, was done for the best: they *meant* well, and that is all, at least, that I require at their hands. And now, in presence of this vast assemblage, before all the world, in the name of the Holy St. John—calling God to witness, I this day acquit them of all blame in the matter of that which they did, in admitting the Grand Lodge Visiting Committee, promising it will *never be done again!*

The second, and probably most formidable objection raised to colored Masons was, that they emanated from Grand Lodges, existing contrary to the general regulations of Masonry, in States where there were previously existing Grand Lodges.

This objection will easily be refuted, when it is considered that under the government of England, whence the general regulations of Masonry take their modern rise, for the sake of the craft, prompted by necessity, the establishment of a Grand Lodge was permitted in Scotland and Ireland; and at one time, for a short period, probably Wales; although the Grand Lodge of England extended her jurisdiction over all of these provinces.

At the time, the Scotch, Irish, and Welsh, all had certain domestic, social and political relations which seriously forbade their identity with the Grand Lodge of England; consequently, they severally established their own jurisdictions, all of which, were cordially acknowledged and sanctioned by the Grand Lodge of the British Empire. I may be mistaken about the Welsh; but as to the others, I am certain.*

*And even now, in consequence of the peculiar position and relations of the two places, there exists in the Canadas a Grand

And can there be a greater demand for an independent jurisdiction of Masonry among the Scotch and Irish than among the colored men of the United States? Certainly not. Nothing like so great; as among them, it was a matter of *choice*, not wishing, for reasons better known to themselves, to be subordinate to the Grand Lodge of England; while with us it was forced upon our fathers by *necessity*, they having applied to different Grand Lodges, at different times, in different States—as in Massachusetts and Pennsylvania—for warrants to work *under* them, and as often spurned and rejected. What could, what should, or what would they do but establish an independent jurisdiction? If they desired to be Masons, they must have done this; indeed, not to have done it, would have been to relinquish their rights as men, and certainly be less than Masons.

But we profess to be both men and Masons; and challenge the world, to try us, prove us, and disprove us, if they can.*

Lodge for the British Provinces of North America, extending over Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, Canada East, Canada West, and the Hudson Bay country; Sir Allen Napier Mac Nab, Knight Baronet, Right Worshipful Grand Master, with full power to grant warrants and establish Subordinate Lodges throughout British America. This Grand Lodge jurisdiction, was established not to suit the conveniency of the Most Worshipful Grand Lodge of England, but the conveniency and peculiar circumstances of the people of British North America, who demanded the right, which was readily conceded by the Most Worshipful Grand Lodge, thereby acknowledging the legality of such separate jurisdictions, all within the same political and Masonic dependencies.

* The late Chief Justice, John Gibson,—as Col. J. S. of this city, a high Mason, will bear witness—when Grand Master of Pennsylvania, was known to acknowledge that the colored Masons of Pennsylvania were as legal as the whites, but intimated

As the *ultimum et unicum remedium*—the last and only remedy—a resort has been made to prove that colored men in the United States are *ineligible* to Masonic privileges. And among the many who have made this attack, none stand forth with a bolder front than the honorable *Jacob Brinkerhoof*, of Ohio, ex-member of Congress, who, in an elaborate oration delivered before the Masonic Fraternity of that State in 1850 or '51, on an occasion of a Communication of the Grand Lodge, declared that no man who ever had been, or the descendant of any who had been a *slave*, could ever be a *Mason*. This, coming from such authority, on such an occasion, was eagerly seized hold of, and published in the news journals from Baslin's Bay to Behring's Straits. It may have been sport to him, but certainly was intended as death to us; and the honorable ex-member of Congress, may yet learn, that he is much

that it would be "bad policy" so to decide publicly. Bad policy! *Policy in Masonry!* and *wrong* to do *right!* Cherubim shrink back from the portals of Mercy, drooping their golden pinions in sorrow; and Justice casts down her balance, and cases her sword in despair!

In 1847, after the establishment of Star Lodge No. 18, in Carlisle, Pa. a Committee of white Masons from the white Lodge in Carlisle—working under the Grand Lodge of Pennsylvania—with the Worshipful Master at its head, visited a Committee from the colored Lodge; and after a satisfactory conference, decided that they were *legal* and worthy ancient York Masons, but never, as they *promised*, made a report. The writer has met with white Masons who have been frank enough to tell him that they had been *obligated* not to recognize nor fellowship a *colored Mason!* These were *Pennsylvania* Masons. But he is frank to say, that while they are timid about *visiting*, there are hundreds who readily recognize a colored Mason wherever they *find* him, and consider it contrary to Masonry to act otherwise.

more of an adept in legal than Masonic jurisprudence—much better adapted to State than Lodge government. How will this bear the test of intelligent inquiry? Let us examine.

Moses, as before mentioned, of whom the highest encomium given, is said to have been *learned in all the wisdom* of the Egyptians, was not only the descendant of those who had been slaves, but of *slave parents*; and *himself, at the time that he was so taught and instructed in this wisdom, was a slave!* Will it be denied that the man who appeared before Pharaoh, and was able to perform *mystically* all that the wisest among the wise men of that mysteriously wise nation were capable of doing, was a Mason? Was not the man who became the *Prime Minister* and *High Priest of Ceremonies* among the wise men of Africa, a *Mason*? If so, will it be disputed that he was *legitimately* such? Are not we as Masons, and the world of mankind, to *him* the Egyptian slave—may I not add, the *fugitive* slave—indebted for a transmission to us of the Masonic Records—the Holy Bible, the Word of God? What says the honorable Jacob Brinkerhoof to this? Let a silent tongue answer the inquiry, and a listening ear give sanction to his condemnation.

But if this doctrine held good, according to the acceptance of the term *slave*, any one who has been deprived of his liberty, and thereby rendered politically and socially impotent, *is* a slave; and, consequently, Louis Kossuth, ex-Governor of Hungary, bound by the chains of Austria, in the city of Puteya, was, to all intents and purposes, according to this definition, a slave. And when he effected his escape to the United States, was (like Moses from Egypt) a fugitive slave from his masters in Austria, and,

therefore, by the decree of the honorable ex-member of Congress, *incapable* of ever becoming a Mason.

But Governor Kossuth was made a Mason in Cincinnati, Ohio, the resident State of Mr. Brinkerhoof, and, therefore, according to him, the Governor is *not* a Mason at all. *He has been a slave!* Is the Order prepared for this? Is Mr. Brinkerhoof prepared for it? No, he is not. Then what becomes of his vaunting against colored men? for towards such he intended his declarations to have a bearing. Let the deserved rebuke of silence answer.

But was the requisition, that men should be *free born*, or *free at the time* of making them Masons, intended, morally and logically, to apply to those who lost their liberty by any force of invasion and unjust superior power?

No such thing. In the days of King Solomon, as mentioned elsewhere, there were two classes of men denied Masonic privileges: he who lost his liberty by crime, and he who, like Esau, "sold his birthright for a mess of pottage"—a class who bartered away their liberty for a term of years, in consideration of a trifling pecuniary gain. These persons were the same in condition as the Coolies (so called) in China, and the Peons of Mexico, both of whom voluntarily surrendered their rights, at discretion, to another. These persons, and these alone, were provided against, in the wise regulations concerning freemen, as Masons.

Did they apply to any others, the patriot, sage, warrior, chieftain and hero—indeed, the only true *brave* and chivalric, the most worthy and best specimens of mankind—would be denied a privilege, which, it would seem, they should be the most legitimate heirs.

The North American Indians, too, have been enslaved; and yet there has not, to my knowledge, been a syllable

spoken or written against their legitimacy; and they, too, are Masons, or have Masonry among them, the facts of which are frequently referred to by white Masonic orators, with pleasurable approbation and pride.

But to deny to black men the privileges of Masonry, is to deny to a child the lineage of its own parentage. From whence sprung Masonry but from Ethiopia, Egypt, and Assyria—all settled and peopled by the children of Ham?

Does any one doubt the wisdom of Ethiopia? I have but to reply, that in the days of King Solomon's renown and splendor, she was capable of sending her *daughters* to prove him with hard questions. If this be true, what must have been her *sons*! A striking and important historical fact will be brought to bear, touching the truthfulness of this matter; and, discarding all profane and general, I shall take sacred history as our guide.

Moses was quite a young man—and, consequently, could not have been endowed with *wisdom*—when, seeing the maltreatment of an Israelite by the Egyptian, he slew him, burying his body in the sand; when, immediately after, the circumstance having become known to Pharaoh, he fled into Midian, a kingdom of Ethiopia.

He here sought the family of *Jethro*, the Ethiopian prince and Priest of Midian, in whose sight, after a short residence, he found favor, and married his daughter *Zipporah*. *Zipporah*, being a princess, was a shepherdess and priestess, as all priests were shepherds;* and Moses, con-

* It is frequently referred to by modern writers, as an evidence of the reverses of circumstances in the life of man, who, with some degree of surprise, tell us that king David was once a shepherd, and attended flocks. This is no strange matter, when it is remembered that all princes in those days were *priests*; and all

sequently, became a shepherd, keeping the flocks of *Jethro* his father-in law, watching them by day and by night, on hill and in valley. Here Moses continued to dwell, until called by the message of the Lord, to sue before Pharaoh for the deliverance of Israel.

From whence could Moses—ho leaving Egypt when young—have derived his wisdom, if not from the Ethiopians? Is it not a reasonable, nay, the only just conclusion to infer, that his deep seated knowledge was received from them, and that his learned wife *Zipporah*, who accompanied him by day and by night, through hills and vales, contributed not a little to his acquirements? Certainly, this must have been so; for the Egyptians were a colony from Ethiopia, and derived their first training from them; the former, as the country filled up, moving and spreading farther down the Nile, until, at length, becoming very numerous, they separated the kingdom, establishing an independent nation, occupying the delta at the mouths of the river.

Where could there a place, so appropriate be found, for

priests, as a necessary part of their education, had to be *shepherds*. As we may reasonably infer, there were two objects in view in the establishment of this singular mythological ordinance. The first was, that the shepherd, by continually looking out for a change of weather, and thereby gazing up to the heavens, might keep his mind more fixed upon the high calling that awaited him—administering at the altar—and thus assimilate the person of his deity; and the second, that by attending the sheep, he might be impressed with their *innocence*, and thereby learn the true character that should distinguish him before the gaze of the inquisitive eye. Of the seven *daughters of Midian*, the children of *Jethro*, all, as will be seen, were shepherdesses, and, consequently, all priestesses. Ex. 2 c.

the study of those mysteries as upon the *highest hills* and in the *deepest valleys*? Is it not thus that the mysteries originated, the habits of the shepherds with their flocks, leading them to the hills and valleys?

It was also in Ethiopia where God appeared to Moses in a *burning bush*; and here where he told him, "Put off thy shoes from off thy feet; for the place whereon thou standest is *holy ground*." And this "holy ground" was in Ethiopia or Midian, the true ancient Africa. Truly, if the African race have no legitimate claims to Masonry, then is it illegitimate to all the rest of mankind.

Upon this topic I shall not farther descant, as I believe it is a settled and acknowledged fact, conceded by all *intelligent* writers and speakers, that to Africa is the ~~world~~ indebted for its knowledge of the mysteries of Ancient Freemasonry. Had Moses, nor the Israelites, never lived in Africa, the mysteries of the wise men of the East had never been handed down to us.

Was it not Africa that gave birth to Euclid, the master geometrician of the world? and was it not in consequence of a twenty-five years' residence in Africa, that the great Pythagorus was enabled to discover that key problem in geometry—the forty-seventh problem of Euclid—without which Masonry would be incomplete? Must I hesitate to tell the world that, as applied to Masonry, the word—*Eureka*—was first exclaimed in Africa? But—there! I have revealed the Masonic *secret*, and *must stop!*

Masons, Brethren, Companions and Sir Knights, hoping that for this disclosure, by a slip of the tongue, you will forgive me—as I may have made the world much wiser—I now commit you and our cause into the care and keeping of the Grand Master of the Universe.