

United States existing by authority originally derived from the Grand Lodge of England. Their communication is respectful in tone and couched in familiar Masonic phraseology; it correctly states certain fundamental principles of masonry which the writers deem pertinent to their prayer; and breathes, throughout, the spirit of our Institution. Its burden is comprehended in its prayer, — that this M.W. Grand Lodge “devise some way whereby we (the writers of the letter) as true, tried and trusty Masons, having been regularly initiated, passed and raised, can be brought into communication with, and enjoy the fraternal confidence of the members of the Craft in this State.”

Inasmuch as the writers also urge that, as Afro-Americans, their claim to consideration is not less than that of the Kanaka, the Arab, the Egyptian or other races whom we freely recognize as brethren, there would be no impropriety in the Grand Lodge’s expressing what we have no doubt is the emphatic opinion of all its members: That Masonry is universal, and neither race nor color can legitimately be made a test of worthiness to share in its mysteries. But for the Grand Lodge to do this, and stop there, would be to give these petitioners a stone where they ask for bread; for what they really seek is recognition of the right of the bodies in which they were initiated to make Masons. In other words, they raise the large question of the legitimacy of the so-called “Negro Masonry” of the United States.

PRELIMINARY QUESTIONS

Your committee deemed it its first duty to ascertain who the petitioners were, and whether they were entitled to be call Masons, even from the standpoint of the Negro Lodges. We learned that both are reputable citizens of this State, residents of Seattle. Mr. Bailey was formerly a Justice of the Peace in King County, and Mr. Rideout is a practicing attorney. Mr. Bailey’s Masonic standing — from the standpoint of Negro bodies — is unexceptionable. He received the degrees in a Lodge chartered by the (colored) Grand Lodge of Illinois; the latter body was formed by Lodges chartered by the (colored) Grand Lodge of Ohio; and the latter by Lodges chartered by the (colored) Grand Lodge of Pennsylvania, a body which was formed in 1815 by Lodges existing by authority derived from PRINCE HALL, of whom we shall speak further, presently.

Mr. Rideout appears to have been initiated in a Lodge chartered by the (colored) Grand Lodge of Florida. The latter owed its origin to the “Hiram” Grand Lodge of Pennsylvania, which we shall mention later on.

Being satisfied that the petition comes from men who are acting in good faith, and is entitled to respectful consideration, your committee found themselves confronted at the outset by the question whether a Grand Lodge is the body to which this application should have been made. Without answering this question in the negative, and, indeed, not ignoring the fact that Grand Lodges have not infrequently appeared to consider themselves authorized to dispose of questions like those presented by this petition, your committee are inclined to doubt whether the question whether a particular man shall be recognized as a brother Mason does not fall to the Lodge rather than the Grand Lodge to decide — in the first instance, — if not to the individual Mason rather than to the Lodge. If a stranger applies to visit one of our Lodges, he is examined by a committee of two brethren; and, upon their judgement as to his standing, he is admitted, if admitted at all. And it is no uncommon experience for an individual Mason to be called upon to decide for himself whether a stranger who hails him has the right to claim the name of brother. Without pressing this question further, your committee would express a doubt whether a mere majority vote of the Grand Lodge upon what is largely a question of history and a matter of opinion, ought to bind each individual Mason of the Grand Jurisdiction either, on one hand, to spurn one who is in his judgement a true and lawful brother, or, on the other, to converse Masonically with one who he honestly believes to be a clandestine Mason.

The question of the legitimacy of the Lodges among the colored men of the United States is no new one. It has been warmly and ably discussed from time to time; and was quite fully examined over twenty years ago, when a proposal in the (white) Grand Lodge of Ohio — recommended by the Grand Master and favorably reported by the committee to which it had been referred — to recognize as a lawful body the negro Grand Lodge which has existed in that State since 1849, was defeated by a very slender majority. Hence your committee have not approached the subject as a new one, or as one with which we were unfamiliar. At our first conference, soon after our appointment, we discovered that all three of us were practically of the same opinion upon the principal question involved, as a result of previous study of the subject. Nevertheless, during the year we have refreshed our impressions by reviewing again the literature of the subject, and by further reflection.

ORIGIN OF THE NEGRO LODGES.

The origin of Masonry among the negroes of the United States was as follows:

On March 6, 1775, an army Lodge, warranted by the Grand Lodge of England, and attached to one of the regiments stationed under General Gage, in Boston, Mass., initiated Prince Hall and fourteen other colored of Boston, into the mysteries of Freemasonry. From that beginning, with small additions from foreign countries, sprang the Masonry among the negroes of America. These fifteen brethren were probably authorized by the Lodge which made them — according to the custom of the day — to assemble as a Lodge. At least they did so, but it does not appear that they did any “work” until after they were regularly warranted. They applied to the Grand Lodge of England for a warrant, March 2, 1784. It was issued to them, as “African Lodge No. 459,” with Prince Hall as Master, September 29, 1784, but not received until May 2, 1787. The Lodge was organized under the warrant four days later. It remained upon the English registry — occasionally contributing to the grand Charity Fund — until, upon the amalgamation of the rival Grand Lodges of the “Moderns’ and the “Ancients” into the present United G.L. of England, in 1813, it and the other English Lodges in the United States were erased.

Brother Prince Hall, a man of exceptional ability, worked zealously in the cause of Masonry; and, from 1792 until his death in 1807, exercised all the functions of a Provincial Grand Master. In 1797 he issued a license to thirteen black men who had been made Masons in England to “assemble and work” as a Lodge in Philadelphia. Another Lodge was organized, by his authority, in Providence, Rhode Island. In 1806 these three Lodges joined in forming the “African Grand Lodge” of Boston — now the “Prince Hall Grand Lodge of Massachusetts” — and Masonry gradually spread over the land.

The second colored Grand Lodge, called the “First Independent African Grand Lodge of North America in and for the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania” was organized in 1815; and the third was the “Hiram Grand Lodge of Pennsylvania.” These three Grand Bodies fully recognized each other in 1847, by joining in forming a National Grand Lodge (now virtually extinct); and, as practically all the negro Lodges in the United States are descended from one or the other of these, we need pursue the history no further.

After this plain statement of universally admitted facts concerning the origin of the negro Lodges, brethren to whom the subject is a new one

will no doubt be surprised to learn that many excuses for denying their regularity have been given.

In our opinion, the conclusions and sentiments that influenced the action of the great majority of those American Masons who have decided against the negro Masons after investigating their claims, are accurately expressed — though with unusual frankness — in the following extracts from a letter by our late brother, General Albert Pike, in 1875. Brother Pike said:

“Prince Hall Lodge was as regular a Lodge as any Lodge created by competent authority, and had a perfect right (as other Lodges in Europe did) to establish other Lodges, and make itself a mother Lodge. That’s the way the Berlin Lodges, three Globes and Royal York, became Grand Lodges.

“I am not inclined to meddle in the matter. I took my obligations to white men, not negroes. When I have to accept negroes as Brothers or leave Masonry, I shall leave it.

“Better let the thing drift. *Après nous le deluge.*”

OBJECTIONS TO THEIR LEGITIMACY.

We have denominated the objections which have been urged against the regularity of the negro Lodges “excuses” rather than “reasons,” because, while some of them are plausible at first sight, or to those but slightly acquainted with the history and principles of Masonry, we do not think there is a single one of them that would have been seriously urged by well-informed brethren but for the existence of the race antipathy which has for generations caused the white man and the black to remain at a seemingly perpetual distance in all social matters, — that feeling which led Brother Pike, as we have seen, to refuse to be governed by the dictates of his own judgement as to their legitimacy.

It would be impossible, within the reasonable limits, to discuss all these objections. The literature of the subjects covers many hundreds of pages. It might suffice to say that, in the opinion of your committee, each objection has been fully met and completely answered, over and over again. Yet we deem it our duty to call the attention of the Grand Lodge to three of them which seem to be regarded as the most important by those who have opposed

recognition, and seem to us to be the only ones which would be seriously urged in our day.

VALIDITY OF THEIR CHARTERS.

First, admitting that Prince Hall Lodge, warranted by the Grand Lodge of England, was a regular Lodge, it is pointed out that it was only a Lodge, not a Grand Lodge; and it is claimed that, consequently, it or its Master could not authorize the formation of other Lodges. In answer to this we may say that it is by no means certain that Prince Hall was not 'de jure' as well as 'de facto' a Provincial Grand Master. Many circumstances indicate that he was; and, in the opinion of many, a stronger showing in that direction has been made out for him than for Henry Price of Massachusetts, through whom much of our own Masonry must be traced. But, without relying on that claim, we must remember that nineteenth century usages cannot always be safely applied as a test of the regularity of eighteenth century acts. As already intimated, instances are numerous where single Lodges developed into Mother Lodges; and cases are not wanting, in Europe and Asia, where individual Masons, on their own authority, set up Lodges which were afterwards universally accepted as legitimate. To give but a few illustrations out of many which might be collected:

In Scotland, Kilwinning Mother Lodge continued to warrant Lodges long after the Grand Lodge of Scotland was organized.

In 1747 the Grand Lodge of Scotland recognized Lodges formed in Turkey by one of her Past Grand Officers, on his own personal responsibility.

In the History of the Grand Lodge of Virginia, Brother John Dove says:

"We have also evidence from the records of Falmouth Lodge, in Stafford County, that in the absence of a warrant from any Grand Lodge, the competent number of Master Masons being met and agreed, acted under this immemorial usage, only asking the nearest Lodge in writing, and which document operated as their warrant, as will be seen by the records of Fredericksburg Lodge No. 4 in granting this privilege to the Masons in Falmouth. We are also justified in inferring that the military traveling Lodges may have in many instances imparted the degrees of Masonry to persons of respectability residing at or near their place of encampment, and on leaving gave

them a warrant to confer these degrees on others in lieu of a certificate of enrollment."

At the formation of the Grand Lodge of Virginia, this Fredericksburg Lodge was not able to claim a chartered existence prior to July 21, 1758; yet before that it had made George Washington a Mason in 1752, and had empowered five brethren to form Botetourt Lodge at Gloucester Court House. This Botetourt Lodge, which had no other warrant until 1773, joined in forming the Grand Lodge of Virginia, from which the Grand Lodge of Washington is descended.

In a letter dated in 1783, the Secretary of a Lodge at Halifax, Nova Scotia, advised a brother against forming a Lodge under an obsolete Army warrant, and to wait for a new warrant, adding:

"In the meantime I am ordered to acquaint you that you may at any time have from the Lodges here a dispensation which will answer all the ends of a warrant." In 1752, certain brethren in Boston, supposed to have been Scottish or "Ancient" Masons, finding themselves ignored by the "Moderns", formed a Lodge "upon the authority of immemorial usage prior to 1721," and without any external authority whatsoever. They received a charter from the Grand Lodge of Scotland in 1760, becoming the St. Andrews Lodge, but it is known that they made Masons in 1753 and 1758. This Lodge furnished to the Massachusetts Grand Lodge its first Provincial Grand Master, the ever-illustrious General Joseph Warren who fell at Bunker Hill.

Other instances might be cited, but we think we have given enough examples to show that usages prevailing a century ago — by which, of course, the validity of Prince Hall's acts must be tested — differed radically from those of today. It may be well to bear in mind, also, that every one of the Lodges in England which in 1752 formed the Grand Lodge of the so-called "Ancient Masons" — to which nearly every Grand Lodge in the United States except the negro Grand Lodge can trace its descent, in whole or in part — was formed in defiance of the regulation of 1721 which declared the Grand Master's warrant necessary to make a Lodge regular.

In fine, we think a recent writer — Brother George W. Speth, editor of 'Ars Quatuor Coronatorum', states an incontrovertible historical fact when he says:

"That throughout the last century, and well into this, lodges have been formed by British Masons without the previous consent or authority of

the Grand Lodge or of the Grand Master..... neither have the founders of such lodges ever been censured for their irregularity of conduct."

In brief, we do not think that a rule which is not immemorial but was slowly developed among the white Masons, can be successfully invoked, a century after the event, to overthrow Lodges formed by Prince Hall among people of another race.

INVASION OF JURISDICTION.

The second objection which we shall notice is, that the existence of Negro Lodges is in contravention of "the American Doctrine of Exclusive Grand Lodge Jurisdiction." But what if it is? The Grand Lodge of Washington has repeatedly expressed its adherence to that doctrine, — sometimes perhaps in stronger terms than it would now use, in view of the wider diffusion of knowledge of the details of Masonic History; but it has never asserted that the doctrine is a Landmark. Its very name — "the American doctrine" — shows that it is not. We might dismiss this objection with the remark that the notion that two regular Grand Lodges may not lawfully exist in the same State is a modern one which originated in this country at a comparatively late date, and has never been accepted in the British isles or on the continent of Europe; and, in the opinion of your committee, cannot justly be applied to test the regularity of bodies formed at a time when the doctrine was a novelty, and by a race who had not accepted it.

In England, from 1725 to 1813 there were always two Grand Lodges, and at times there were three or four. In Scotland there were for years a Grand Lodge and a Mother Lodge. In early Irish History we find two Grand Lodges. In Prussia alone there are now and long have been three, dwelling together most amicably; and in all Germany eight or nine. In New York there have been three; in South Carolina two. There were two in Massachusetts prior to 1792; — not to cite innumerable other instances. The doctrine appears to have originated — though in a much milder form than it is now put — in certain resolutions passed by one of the rival Grand Lodges in Massachusetts in 1782; and one of its most ardent advocates — Past Grand Master Gardner of Massachusetts — claimed that by that resolution "Massachusetts set the example of a revolution in masonic government."

Being then, not a landmark, but the result of a "revolution" from ancient usage, it seems evident to your committee that this doctrine

cannot be justly or logically applied to test the regularity of the negro bodies. But the colored men suggest the further argument, that as the white Grand Lodges have always ;practically confined their operations to the white race, and the colored Grand Lodges to the black, the law has not been broken, and there has been no real "invasion of jurisdiction." It must be admitted that, as used by the fathers, the term "Jurisdiction of a Grand Lodge" meant jurisdiction over its own Lodges and their members, — not jurisdiction over land.

"FREE" OR "FREEBORN".

The third and only other objection which your committee deem worthy of special notice relates to one of the practices of the Negro Lodges: They use the word "free" where we use the word "freeborn," in testing the qualifications of a candidate.

There is no written law of this jurisdiction requiring candidates to be "free-born"; nor do we know of any case where one of our Lodges has tested a candidate as to his status at birth. A single clause in our ritual contains our only allusion to the subject.

Your committee, both by their early training and by what appears, from the manuscript Constitutions, to have been the usage of the fathers for three centuries, are very strongly predisposed to the idea that only the freeborn should be made Masons. But it must be admitted that the earliest Masonic manuscript that has escaped the devouring tooth of time, the Halliwell or Regius poem, not only designates the qualification as "free," not "freeborn," but joins with its only rival, in point of age, in assigning for the rule a reason which applies to the former word only; namely, that if a slave should be made a Mason his master might come to the Lodge and demand his surrender, and dire consequence — even manslaughter — might ensue: for, as the regius MS. aptly observes,

"Gef yn the logge he were y-take,
"Muche desese hyt mygth there make,

"For alle the masonus that ben there
"Wol stonde togedur hol y-fere."

But not relying alone upon claims to be drawn from these ancient documents, our colored brethren are able to point to at least one notable champion of their practice. For in 1838 the Grand Lodge of

England struck the word "freeborn" from its list of qualifications of candidates and substituted the word "free."

In view of this action of the part of a jurisdiction which we regard with peculiar reverence and affection, he would be a hardy man who would denounce this practice of the negro Masons as placing them beyond the pale of Masonry.

And, whatever may be the true rule, even without the example of the Grand Lodge of England, we think our colored friends might successfully rely upon the plea that where one not possessed of the proper qualifications is initiated, he is nevertheless a Mason. Where women, or minors or maimed men have been initiated, this rule has not been universally acknowledged; but we think it the better one and the one supported by the weight of authority. But — and we take no pleasure in mentioning it — in the too common case of the initiation of men who are lacking in the internal — the moral and intellectual — qualities that fit a man to be made a Mason, the rule has been unquestioned.

Other objections to the legitimacy of the negro Lodges have been urged; but in the opinion of your committee they are all based upon erroneous ideas of fact or law, and have been refuted so often that the time of this Grand Lodge should not be consumed by a discussion of them in this report.

CONCLUSIONS AS TO THEIR LEGITIMACY.

What we have said has prepared the Grand Lodge for the statement that the opinion of this committee is that persons initiated in so-called Negro Lodges which can trace their origin to Prince Hall, or Prince hall Lodge, No. 459, are as fully entitled to the name of Masons and to brotherly recognition as any other Masons in the world.

This opinion is shared by a great many distinguished Masons who have studied the subject. It is evidently the opinion of Robert Freke Gould, who says, in his monumental 'History of Freemasonry':

"I am inclined to think that the claim of the Black Mason to be placed on a footing of equality with the White one, is destined to pass through a somewhat similar ordeal in America to that which has been (in part) undergone by the famous Jewish question in Germany."

It was the opinion of the German historian Findel, who became the representative in Europe of the negro Grand Lodges.

Brother Albert Pike's views we have already quoted.

Brother Theodore S. Parvin wrote, more than twenty years ago:

"My opinion is that the negroes can make as good a show for the legality of their Grand Lodges as the whites can... I think we had much better acknowledge them than to blend them into our organizations."

Grand Master Griswold of Minnesota uses these words:

"I am satisfied that the so-called irregularities attending the organization of the first colored Grand Lodge in this country were fewer in number and of less importance than those pertaining to some other American Grand Lodges — Grand Lodges now venerable with age, to who we look with feelings of reverence."

These quotations, from men who have stood high as Masonic Jurists, might be multiplied indefinitely; but we think we have cited enough to show that our views are not singular or novel.

We may add that some, at least, of the Negro Grand Lodges are recognized by many Grand Bodies in Europe; and that it is known that their "work" is identical with ours in all essential particulars; that they include many of the best men among our colored fellow-citizens; and that their contributions to Masonic literature are creditable, and in some instances, notable.

THEIR RIGHT TO VISIT.

Under these circumstances, we think the prayer of the petitioners should be granted, if practicable. The prayer is that the Grand Lodge "devise some way" whereby they may be "brought into communication" with their white brethren. We do not construe this prayer as asking that the harmony of our Lodges be disturbed by the admission of unwelcome members or visitors. If we did, we should not hesitate to say to the petitioners that the doctrine that "no Man can be enter'd a Brother in any particular Lodge, or admitted to be a Member thereof, without the unanimous consent of all the Members of that Lodge then present," is so well rooted in this jurisdiction, and, even when extended to the case of Masons desirous of visiting our Lodges,

has been found so productive of that Harmony which is the strength and support of all institutions, more especially this of ours, that we are satisfied that no proposal to dispense with the requirement of unanimous consent before Masons made in Negro Lodges shall be received, either as Members or visitors, would be tolerated in this Grand Lodge.

THE HARMONY OF THE CRAFT.

There is another question which, in our opinion, ought not to be overlooked in determining the matter under consideration; namely, would a recognition of the rights of these petitioners disturb the harmony of our Lodges, or that existing between us and other Grand Jurisdictions? Of course, none but prophets can do more than express an opinion on this point. Our opinion is that it would not. The experience of the last thirty-five years indicates that social intimacy is not desired by either race. The recognition of the equality before the law, of white men and black men has, if anything, diminished rather than increased their social intimacy; and we do not anticipate that recognition of their Masonic equality would reverse the manifest tendency of the two races to exist apart in friendly separation. The requirement of unanimous consent will bar each race from the Lodges of the other whenever objection exists; and, of course, no discord will arise where the desire for union is mutual and unanimous.

Nor do we think any friction with sister Grand Lodges is to be expected. A generation ago the situation was very different; but we think that if this Grand Lodge should refuse to longer ignore what seems to be plain facts of history and clear principles of Masonic law, at the present day its course would be universally applauded outside of the United States, and its right would not be seriously questioned in this country — particularly when we bear in mind that no proposal to enter into relations with the Negro Grand Lodge is involved. This belief is confirmed by recent events. Within the last few years five American Grand Lodges have accorded recognition to the Gran Dieta of Mexico, a body organized by men whose Masonic pedigree is not to be compared with that of the negro Masonry of the United States, and one which, at the time some of these recognitions were accorded, was tolerating practices which are almost universally held to be in conflict with Masonic Landmarks. Nevertheless, although the step thus taken by sister Grand Lodges have been viewed with sorrow and regret by an overwhelming majority of the Craft throughout the United States and throughout the world, yet in no single instance has any unfriendly

legislation against any of the five Grand Lodges been even suggested. And should this Grand Lodge — in a nobler cause, and on behalf of brethren who have a greater claim upon us — elect to take a step which would be as beneficent as it would be just to thirty thousand masons and eight million of our countrymen, we do not doubt that our Masonic right to do so will be unhesitatingly conceded, even by those who differ most widely from us in opinion.

But even were this not so, we do not doubt the determination of this Grand Lodge to “judge with candor;” and, at any cost, “our ancient landmarks, and the ancient usages and customs of the Fraternity to preserve sacred and inviolable.”

Hence, in the opinion of your committee, but one other subject remains to be considered: It is reasonable to expect that in the near future our colored brethren will desire to have Lodges in this great and growing commonwealth of Washington. If so, is it for the best interest of the Fraternity that their Lodges should be under the jurisdiction of this Grand Lodge or not?

Everything considered, your committee incline to believe that the time is not yet ripe for the union of our Lodges and theirs, under one Grand Lodge. But your committee are very clearly of the opinion that if this Grand Lodge does not desire to grant charters to Masons made in the Negro Lodges, their right to procure charters elsewhere and set up a Grand Lodge on their own should be recognized; and that such a Grand Lodge, if we practically force our colored brethren to establish it, ought — so long as it limits its jurisdiction to men of the colored race — to be fraternally recognized by this Grand Lodge as a legitimate body, within that limit.

RECOMMENDATIONS.

Having thus set forth our views upon the important subject submitted to us, your committee now submit to this M.W. Grand Lodge four resolutions, and recommend that they be adopted, to-wit:

RESOLVED. That, in the opinion of this Grand Lodge, Masonry is universal: and, without doubt, neither race nor color are among the tests proper to be applied to determine the fitness of a candidate for the degrees of Masonry.

RESOLVED. That in view of recognized laws of the Masonic Institution, and of facts of history apparently well authenticated and worthy of full credence, this Grand Lodge does not see its way clear to deny or question the right of its constituent Lodges, or of the members thereof, to recognize as brother Masons, negroes who have been initiated in Lodges which can trace their origin to Prince Hall Lodge, No. 459, organized under the warrant of our R.W. Brother Thomas Howard, Earl of Effingham, Acting Grand Master, under the authority of H.R.H. Henry Frederick, Duke of Cumberland, etc., Grand Master of the Most Ancient and Honourable Society of F. & A. Masons in England, bearing date September 29, A.L. 5784, or to our R.W. Brother Prince Hall, Master of said Lodge; and, in the opinion of this Grand Lodge, for the purpose of tracing such origin, the African Grand Lodge, Boston, organized in 1808 — subsequently known as the Prince Hall Grand Lodge of Massachusetts, the first African Grand Lodge of North America in and for the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, organized in 1815, and the Hiram Grand Lodge of Pennsylvania may justly be regarded as legitimate Masonic Grand Lodges.

RESOLVED. That while this Grand Lodge recognizes no difference between brethren based on race or color, yet it is not unmindful of the fact that the white and colored races in the United States have in many ways shown a preference to remain, in purely social matters, separate and apart. In view of this inclination of the two races — Masonry being pre-eminently a social Institution, — this Grand Lodge deems it to the best interest of Masonry to declare that if regular Masons of African descent desire to establish, within the State of Washington, Lodges confined wholly or chiefly to brethren of their race, and shall establish such Lodges strictly in accordance with the Landmarks of Masonry, and in accordance with Masonic Law as heretofore interpreted by Masonic tribunals of their own race, and if such Lodges shall in due time see fit in like manner to erect a Grand Lodge for the better administration of their affairs, this Grand Lodge, having more regard for the good of Masonry than for any mere technicality, will not regard the establishment of such Lodges or Grand Lodge as an invasion of its jurisdiction, but as evincing a disposition to conform to its own ideas as to the best interests of the Craft under peculiar circumstances; and will ever extend to our colored brethren its sincere sympathy in every effort to promote the welfare of the Craft or inculcate the pure principles of our Art.

RESOLVED. That the Grand Secretary be instructed to acknowledge receipt of the communication from Gideon S. Bailey and Con A. Rideout, and forward to them a copy of the printed Proceedings of this

annual communication of the Grand Lodge, as a response to said communication.

Fraternally submitted,
Thomas M. Reed
Wm. H. Upton
J.E. Edmiston

Committee.

***M.W. Grand Lodge of
F. and A. Masons of Washington
1898***