

**ODD FELLOWSHIP**

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**WHAT  
IS IT?**

This question has doubtless presented itself to many who know nothing of Odd Fellowship, except perchance from common report, or the vague suggestions of a morbid prejudice; hence, it is often condemned as an idle organization, characterized, as its name would seem to import, rather for levity than for fidelity to the noble object at which it professes so earnestly and exclusively to aim. To correct so common an error, to remove such unjust prejudices, and to secure for Odd Fellowship the approving sentiment it so well deserves, are the objects of this brief paper. In the confidence of conscious merit it courts a scrutiny into its principals and practices, with the assurance that an enlightened public opinion will render an impartial judgment on the standard of excellence which pervades the one and the practical benefits that flow from the other. Its name is affectionately cherished by its votaries because it has lived and moved and had a prolonged and useful being through the vast past, still lives in the teeming and novel present, and gives promise that it will survive through the distant and pregnant future. Odd Fellowship is a moral, not a religious organization. The religious world is divided into many sects; each intent upon the promotion of its peculiar plans and interest, and of consequence wanting in that unity of action so essential in every secular institution to the securement of those great results which illustrate the triumph of benevolence and charity. This want is in a good degree met by the employment of an agency not amenable to such a disability, and in which men of many sects and creeds may cordially cooperate and labor upon common ground for the relief of human suffering. Such an institution is Odd Fellowship. It does not array itself against the church nor presume to arrogate its functions or to supervise teachings. Its Lodges are not the council rooms of enmity to religious, civil, moral or social organizations. Far otherwise—all its oracles and instructions in relation to those grave subjects, find their warrant and authority in the divine law under the inspiration of which it proclaims the golden rule as the sublimest illustration of the law of love. In whatever circumstances men be placed in, there are none so destitute of friends as not sometimes to have the tenderest sympathies called into active exertion, in

ministering to a limited circle, by merely natural affections. But unhappily in the rugged journey of life it to often occurs that these kindlier sensibilities either become blunted by time causing the heart to contract as friend after friend is snatched away, or else that selfish pursuits absorb the mind which in the mistaken hope of finding solid happiness in them, forgets the sufferings, the interests, and sometimes even the rights of others. These things are the inevitable lot of human existence, no institution however admirable its contrivance, can hope to banish from society at large; for the noblest institution can exert but a circumscribed influence in comparison with the society amidst which it acts. Still by habits of closer association in objects of an enlarged and animating philanthropy, much may be done without risk of injury to individual fortunes to make men more useful to their kind, more helpful to the distressed, more regularly thoughtful of the happiness of those around them. Such is the aim of Odd Fellowship, and hence by enforcing an observance of social and human duties, we strive to re-animate those purely benevolent faculties which it has pleased an all wise providence to confer upon man. And the practice of which contribute so eminently to the elevation and happiness of all. Friendship is truly a noble sentiment and one that well deserves the exalted rank which Odd Fellowship assigns to it. Heathen nations even have not been strangers to its cultivation. That the Greeks held in high honor the information of ties of particular friendship among their braves and warriors is attested by their mythology as well as their history. The noblest of their poets whose immortal verse is still the chief wonder of all literature thought incomplete the mighty character of Achilles himself, until adorned with a devoted attachment to a temporary chieftain. In the times of prosperity it is easy to assume a friendly demeanor, mere professions of love and esteem may co-exist with the most hollow and superficial sentiment. But in the season of adversity the professed friend is called upon to show the depth of his attachment to abandon ease, to part with a portion of his goods, his money, or even to risk his life. Genuine friendship will endure this test, and when adversity comes it will abide the gathering storm and shine brightest in the darkest hour. By frequently meet-

ing together in friendly association the members of our fraternity become mutually interested in the welfare of each other. A kindly sentiment is thus enkindled in the breasts of all which expanding into generous sympathy is ever ready to relieve a brother when oppressed by affliction. Bound together by the ties of honor and morality as well as humanity, we encourage no secrecy as a cloak for evil; nor do we keep anything hidden except what is necessary to give efficacy to our works, and permanency to our order by preserving its unity and guarding it against imposition. The moral precepts which we would have all regulate their conduct are the laws of God. In all countries Odd Fellowship has flourished when nations prospered and where mind was free. In every land where learning and virtue have arisen superior to intolerance and fanaticism, it has been supported by the wise and patronized by the great. It has no mystery so sacred but that every honest and upright man may become the possessors of it. The doors of the order are now, and ever have been, open to all the good and the virtuous who now seek or who have sought, to be initiated into the mysteries of the order. To the base, the profligate, and the vicious only, are they closed. Millions have entered and I hope that millions yet may enter, nay more; I would to heaven that the whole world were one great brotherhood of Odd Fellows, practicing the precepts of our order. Then indeed would the lion and the lamb lie down together and nations know war no more. Our association is one for the cultivation of virtue and friendship and the works of charity. Are these pursuits such as men would advertise to the world? I know that in this age of philanthropic effort and modest refinement, men have learned to improve on the practice of the ancient Pharisee, and although they may not now as of old be found in acts of self adulation at the corners of our streets they are content to give only when their names are to be emblazoned in the public prints and they hearded forth to the world as the very buds and blossoms of charity. Not so with the true Odd Fellow; he calls no witnesses to admire the tenderness of his sympathies. Instead of seeking the gaping admiration of the multitude he looks for true recompense in the smiles of an approving conscience and in the favor of him who though seeks to be worshipped in secret, has promised to reward them who worship him openly. But after all what is there so obnoxious in the idea of a secret? Every individual bosom, as well as every family circle, is the repository of some secret which it would be