

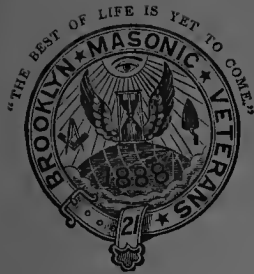
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# LETTER

FROM

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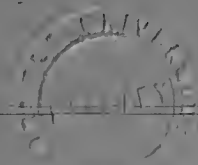
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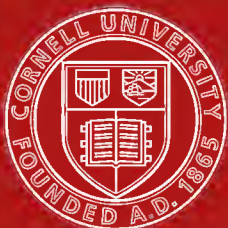
BROOKLYN MASONIC VETERANS,

WRITTEN BY

VEN. BRO. BENJAMIN LEWIS,

Feb. 8, 1897.





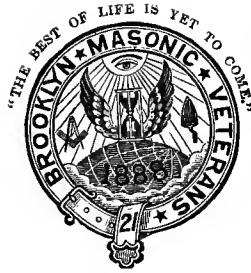
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BRO. MAHOMET ALI DAFLOUR,  
(A Learned Sheik.)



**Read at a Regular Meeting, held April 24, 1897.**

**Moved by Ven. Bro. Timothy H. Roberts, that the same be printed for distribution.**

**Motion adopted unanimously.**

ALGIERS, AFRICA, Feb. 8, 1897.

VENERABLE BRETHREN:

On leaving Brooklyn, the early part of December last, I promised our Venerable Secretary, Brother FRED'K L. JENKINS, that should I hear of anything which might prove interesting to our Venerable Brothers, I would most certainly write them, and think I have found material enough to fulfil and justify my promise.

I arrived at this place December 14th, and, like ISHMAEL of old, I became a wanderer among the Arab tribes, picking up what information I could among them, relating mostly to Masonic matter. To do this effectually, I enlisted in my cause a renowned Arab guide and interpreter, whose face was furrowed o'er with years, and hoary was his hair—meaning thereby his whiskers, for by a long and continuous custom adopted by his race, he had shorn himself of his head-gear, which prevented his meeting the fate of ABSALOM or becoming the prey to a scalping Indian, if one could be found. The guide was very friendly, too, and furnished much valuable information to the late Sir RICHARD BURTON, who resided for a long time at Algiers. He became so conversant with the Arabic language and dialects, as well as the Arab mode and manner of dressing, that he made a successful pilgrimage into Mecca, the birthplace of Mahomet, imitat-

ing the example of the faithful by walking seven times around the Kabaa, kissing the Black Stone on each round; after which he proceeded to Medina, the burial-place of the prophet, and like others doing homage at the tomb of the great Mussulman. This, remember, at the risk of his precious life; for had it been known that he was a Christian, he would have been torn to pieces, and the world would have lost a valuable historian and one of the best translators and compilers of the "Arabian Nights." I mention this incident in connection with my letter to show what confidence he had in the man who became my guide.

My first inquiry was as to the existence of a Masonic Lodge at Algiers. To this I received a negative reply; and the reason assigned was, that the English-speaking Masons at Algiers did not recognize the Grand Lodge of France as being legitimate, and therefore could not ask them to grant a charter or dispensation to enable them to form a Lodge. I found, however, a large number of English and Swedish Masons, who treated me very kindly and gave me whatever information relating to Masonic matters they could command. My greatest interest, however, was to ascertain to what extent, if any, Masonry existed among the Arabs and the followers of Mahomet. My guide took me to one KALID OMAR, one of the best-dressed merchants of Algiers, whose jewel and bric-a-brac store on the Boulevard de la Republic is the glory and admiration of all who visit it. This merchant, who is a pious Mussulman, claims to have been related to OMAR, the conqueror of Jerusalem in the 6th century, A.D., and who built the Mosque of Omar over the ruins of the once famous Temple of Solomon. This KALID OMAR is well learned in all that pertains to the Arabic religion and greatly opposed to secret societies. He knew of no Masonic Lodges in Algiers, but that he had heard of many prominent Arabs who had become Masons—notably, MAHOMET ALI DAFOUR, residing at Constantine. Concluding this information, he unlocked his fireproof safe, and taking therefrom a beautiful copy of the Koran, or Arabic Bible, wrapped up in a silk bag exquisitely marked. This book he placed upon a table and permitted me to examine the pages as he turned them over, but under no circumstances was I to approach nearer than three feet of the book, which was most beautifully written in violet ink, on parchment, 800 years ago. This book, he said, leads you to the throne of the prophet, where no Masonry exists, and where the faithful two hundred and fifty million Moslems, should they die to-morrow, shall find ALLAH and

his Prophet Mahomet. He said that in the 10th century, A.D., Caliph HAROUN AL RACHID ordered the head of every Freemason to be cut off, which might be found between Bagdad and Balsors, two of the largest cities of Arabia. The reason for this massacre was, that he found his chief vizier, GAIFER, who was a Mason, in correspondence with the Knight Templars of St. John, at Jerusalem, for the recovery of the Holy Sepulchre. He, considering all Masons Christians and infidels, and as being opposed to Mahomet and his teachings, hence the order for their decapitation. And I am fully convinced, he said, that no Mason will ever enter the gates which lead to Paradise in the great hereafter. I then asked if he ever heard of SOLOMON, King of Israel, who was a Freemason, and what he knew about him? He replied that SOLOMON was a very great man, endowed with wisdom and knowledge; he constructed many temples and palaces, and with the assistance of the birds of the air, the fish of the sea, and the animal kingdom, he built the great temple which was afterwards destroyed, and the Mosque of Omar built over its ruins, and it stands to-day a monument of antiquity and the glory and admiration of every true Mussulman. I asked in what manner the birds of the air, etc., could assist in building temples, etc.? The birds of the air, he replied, inspired the men to open quarries, to fell timbers in the forest and convey them to Jerusalem; the fish, to bring the pearls from the bottom of the sea; the animal creation, to burrow into the bowels of the earth for the precious metals and stones—all of which was used to construct the great temple; and when it was finished, he inspired the whale to bring over the Queen of Sheba, who loved and adored him for his wisdom and thoughtfulness in sending for her, that she might do homage to the great king.

After making a small purchase of bric-a-brac, I bid my Arab merchant a friendly salaam—the Arabic for good-bye—and with my trusted guide, took the train for Constantine, about 147 miles from Algiers, and found residing therein MAHOMET ALI DAFOUR, a very wealthy man, a descendant of the prophet, and a learned sheik, or chief of an Arab tribe, and one of the greatest diplomats among them. He has rendered great service to the French Government, and is decorated with many Orders; notwithstanding his fourscore years, he is as active as a man of forty.

After an introduction to the chief, I made known the objects of my visit: that I had heard him spoken of as a man well up in all that pertains to Masonic



matters, and that I would esteem it a great privilege, as well as a personal favor, if he would give me any and all information he may be possessed of relating to the object of my call. He replied, that it would afford him great pleasure to do so; "but before proceeding, I desire that you accept the hospitality of my home, and remain for a few days, at least, as my guest." I compromised the matter by agreeing to remain over-night. He consigned me to a very nice room overlooking a magnificent orange grove, and after ordering a servant to remove my shoes and bathe my feet, I was brushed and perfumed with ottar-of-rose, and then invited to the dining-hall to partake of the principal meal of the day, consisting of boiled rice and mutton—all eaten with the fingers—and water for a beverage; after which, coffee was served and tobacco and pipes introduced. Not being a smoker, I begged to be excused from so good a luxury, but in time I would, no doubt, from the example set me by the Masonic Veterans of Brooklyn, be able to smoke the pipe of peace and tell a good story. This pleased him very much.

"Now to the object of your visit: I have been a Mason nearly fifty-five years, and bless ALLAH, and Mahomet, who is his prophet, for guiding and enlightening me in the teachings of so good a cause, which has enabled me to do so much good among my people. The Koran has been my great text-book, as it is to my countrymen; he reads it and has the same faith in it that you have in your Bible. On it we take our obligations, and we repeat the name of ALLAH, or GOD, five hundred times a-day. We wear an iron ring around our necks to teach us submission to the will and power of ALLAH. Our charity knows no limit, and the world is our Grand Lodge and Mahomet our Grand Master. Our terrestrial meetings are held in our houses, and during our pilgrimages are held on the desert.

"We have no emperor or king  
 To say where we shall roam;  
 We pitch our tent upon the sands,  
 The desert is our home;  
 "And here, within its tented folds,  
 Our knees we humbly bend,  
 And pray to ALLAH, GOD OF LOVE,  
 That mercy HE may send.

“Our forms and ceremonies are very simple, and our mode of initiation a little different to yours. We follow, as near as possible, the ancient rites, and stand by the landmarks that our fathers set up before us. We make no charge for initiation. All we require is, that a man should be a freeman, sound and disposing mind, a good character, self-sustaining, and not a burden upon his kinsmen, and his charity, like the mercy of GOD, or ALLAH, be universal and unbounded.”

I then asked what relation the Koran had towards Masonry?

“The same relation,” he replied, “as your Bible. The Koran teaches morality, sobriety, industry and charity. If the stranger comes to our tent, we are charged to wash his feet and have him partake of our hospitality, and treat him as a brother; and when he is ready to resume his journey, we are to accompany him a little way and see that he leaves us rejoicing, knowing then that his heart is not heavy with the burden of inhospitality. We are also instructed to give, with a lavish hand, to the widow and orphan, and protect them from every danger that may surround them. This we believe to be true Masonry and humanity, and all who practise it shall be blessed and receive his reward from ALLAH and Mahomet, who is his prophet.”

At this point he introduced me to his wives, four in number and closely veiled. He asked me which one I liked the best. The question took all my courage away. I told him, no doubt one was just as beautiful as the other, but as their faces were closely veiled I must have him answer the question for me, as it was an impossibility for me to judge of their beauty with their veils on, and custom forbid the removal of the same before man other than their husband.

“Well,” he said, “ZORA, the youngest, is the most beautiful.”

“May I ask her age?”

He replied, “14. I married her for her beauty, and knowing her to be much more active than my other wives, that she could nurse and look after me much better, in my declining years, than the others. I took her to my household, and when it shall please ALLAH to call me to Paradise, where my kinsman

Mahomet awaits my coming, I want ZORA to be near me and close my mortal eyes."

I asked him in what manner Mahomet was related to him, and if there were other descendants of the prophet living?

He replied that "Mahomet had ten wives; the first was named FATMA, the last and youngest named AYSHA. I mention these two because they were his favorite wives. The others were also good women, and bore him children as well as the others; and at the time of his death, in the year 662, A.D., there were no male issue living, but several daughters, and I am one of the many descendants now living. Some can be found in Egypt, Arabia, Persia and elsewhere, while a few wandered to Europe and America during the past two hundred years."

I asked him how he knew some were in America.

"Why," he replied, "through the medium of my Celestial Globe, which was brought by the Angel GABRIEL from Mahomet when he entered Paradise. It was found by one of his kinsmen on the desert, and has been handed down from one descendant to another until I received it, about fifty years ago, while on a pilgrimage to Mecca."

With this he brought from an inner room a beautiful olivewood box about 12 inches long and 10 inches wide and 7 inches deep, lined with the finest camel's-hair. In the centre nestled a large pure white crystal. This he took out, and placing it upon an inlaid table, invited me to look into it. Having seen at Prospect Park the Camera Obscura, I concluded I was going to see something similar, but could see nothing except what looked like moving sand. When I told him what I saw, he said, "You see the sands of our desert home. Had you been one of the faithful, and a descendant of the prophet, it would reveal to you all your living kinsmen."

I then asked him if he could locate any of his descendants in America, more particularly in New York State?

After peering into the globe a few minutes, he said, "I locate one in Rochester and one in BROOKLYN."

With this I became greatly excited, and eagerly asked in what part of Brooklyn he saw him, and his name?

He said, "Yes, he is a man large in frame and stature; he has a beard which seems to be cut away on his chin, which was not the custom of his forefathers, whose name was MUSTAPHA SOULIAMAN before he became a wanderer from his desert home. The one I see has not taken his ancestor's name. He has filled many places of honor with great credit, and from what I can see he is destined to fill other stations in life, and become a still greater man. I see him in a large building, surrounded by many venerable-looking men of high character, who seem to be smoking their pipes of peace with an ease and contentment seldom found in other gatherings. One of them is addressing my kinsman, who rejoices in and answers to the name of

"MOST VEN. BRO. S. B. DUTCHER."

When I told him I knew Most Venerable Brother DUTCHER, he embraced me most affectionately, and going into an inner room, he brought out the enclosed picture of himself [the photo-engraving on first page is a reduced copy of the picture], and asked me to accept the same as a memento of my visit.

Bidding a fraternal farewell to my kind, hospitable host, I returned to Algiers to write my promised letter, and now take pleasure in presenting to the Masonic Veterans of Brooklyn the picture I received from my Arab brother.

Fraternally yours,

VEN. BRO. BENJAMIN LEWIS.

To the  
MASONIC VETERANS,  
Brooklyn, N. Y.





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