

CATHOLICS AND FREEMASONRY

THE reiterated denunciations of Freemasonry by the Holy See not unfrequently cause surprise to English Catholics, who regret that Freemasons of the English obedience, who usually deplore the anti-Christian warfare of their foreign brethren, should be included in one common condemnation. But the nature of the institution itself, apart from anything else, seems to be forgotten by those who take such a view.

The antiquity of the society is much disputed, and its origin is of little concern to those outside it, but during the last hundred and fifty years it has become a very widespread and powerful organization whose objects, membership, and action are studiously concealed. In England, at least, its ritual observances are greatly praised by some Freemasons as being of a religious nature; what is called "a good Mason" is, in theory at least, a theist, and they are said to praise Almighty God as "the grand Architect of the Universe," and His precepts under what Catholics call the natural law.

The object of the writer is not to make an attack upon the Craft, for he numbers amongst his friends and esteemed acquaintances a large

number of Freemasons, but to state some of the reasons for which the Church forbids Catholics to belong to the society, and why they should forego the undoubted temporal advantages which result from its membership.

How it is, then, that so large a number of estimable men are members of a society which has been so frequently condemned by many thoughtful non-Catholics as well as by the Holy See, belongs to the same category of mysteries as the two hundred and fifty religions professed in good faith by the majority of our fellow-countrymen, though logically it is obvious there can be but one which is true.

The objections to Freemasonry are chiefly and shortly as follows :—

(1) Christianity is unknown to Masonry, or rather is ignored by it. The neophyte is taught to see in the Master of the Lodge the "Sun of Justice," and humbly to beg of his new-made brethren "Masonic Light." What that light is it is not for the profane to determine; but it seems strange that any one believing, according to the Gospel, that Christ our Lord came as the Light of the World, should expect to find light and truth in a manner He never taught us to seek them, or that Masonry should be in possession of secret knowledge of anything conducive to the moral welfare of mankind and supplemental to His doctrine. Did it possess it, Freemasonry is morally bound to share it with others. Its secrecy is an implied admission that its morality is not of

universal application, or benefit to the State or mankind in general.

All belief in revelation, other than Masonic, in redemption and grace, has to be left by the neophyte at the door of the Lodge with his boots, and by illustrations in Hebrew symbolism he is transported to the time of Solomon and his Temple, but a temple in which all the prefiguration of the sacrifice of Calvary is absent.

The Gospel teaches us that all our prayers are to be offered in the name of the Divine Redeemer. Masonry deliberately ignores this precept, and this Holy Name is forbidden in the Masonic temple. It even rejects the Christian chronology. The religion of Masonry is universalism, or the religion of nature as contrasted with that of revelation. The prayers, or rather the praises, used in the Lodge are addressed to the Grand Architect of the Universe, the meaning of which term is variously interpreted by Freemasons. No prayer is offered through our Lord, by whom, according to the Gospel, "all things were made"; this would be "sectarian," and therefore un-Masonic. The Mason in Lodge has to treat Jesus Christ as a nonentity. Privately it is open to him to believe that He is the Word clothed in the garment of humanity, or a philanthropic visionary and a social failure, and still be "a good" Mason. An English Mason cannot, however, openly profess atheism without liability to impeachment of his orthodoxy. The Gospel sets before us Jesus Christ as the great example which all should strive to follow; the hero and exemplar

of Freemasonry is Hiram Abiff, the Master Mason at the building of Solomon's Temple. Our religion teaches that Jesus Christ is God and Man, equal in all things to the other two persons of the Adorable Trinity, and that the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom. The Christian Freemason, when in his temple, dares—by implication—to say, "Lord, I know you not"; elsewhere, "Lord, have mercy upon me." There is in this a certain fast-and-loose insolence towards the Divine Majesty which has no relation to wisdom and has some to blasphemy. Many clergymen of the Church of England are zealous Freemasons and, it is to be hoped, sincere believers in the Divinity of our Lord; but though outside the Lodge they teach "that by Him all things were made," inside they take their stand on the same religious platform as the Jew, the Atheist, or the Moslem, and deliberately ignore His existence.

It is difficult to consider such conduct consistent in professed teachers of the Christian religion, who claim officially to be ambassadors of the Christ whom they, on certain occasions, by order of their fellow-men, officially ignore. Some are even reported to hold Masonic services in a Christian church, in accordance with Masonic requirements, and therefore with the studied omissions which give such a painful shock to the "profane" Christian.

The clerical membership of the Craft is often adduced as a proof that English Freemasonry is something entirely different from foreign Free-

masonry. There is a difference, it is true, and it is this—the one ignores what the other hates; the English Freemason, clerical or otherwise, officially treats Christianity as sectarianism; the foreign, as a mischievous superstition. The unblinking eye of collective Freemasonry regards both views with equal indifference. In other respects Freemasonry is united and identical, or it could not be, as it is, an international and universal brotherhood.

The social duties of man are debts, the fulfilment of which is imposed upon him by the law of God. The State and the family are the two organisms which claim obedience to lawful commands by virtue of Divine authority. Leaving aside the precepts relating to the family, let us see how Masonry aids its subjects in the fulfilment of their duties to the State. Masonry is in reality a state within a state, a universal and international association which recognizes no distinction of race or country. The State can command by Divine right, in all things lawful to it. Whence does Masonry derive its right to command? How is the virtue of patriotism aided by adhesion to a universal, non-national society which may often, and must at times, import a conflict of duties? Though patriotism is supposed of course always to triumph at the expense of Masonry, the conflict is inevitable. This point is more fully explained later.

(2) The Oath. An oath may be defined as a solemn calling on Almighty God to witness the

truth of a statement, or to make the fulfilment of a promise binding under a more solemn obligation. The Divine law forbids all oaths not taken with judgment and for a grave cause. The Masonic oath is, in the words of the Catechism, "rash and unnecessary." The neophyte swears with eyes blindfolded to keep secret he knows not what ; and fidelity to the precepts of a world-wide society of which he previously knows nothing ; furthermore, he invokes destruction on himself by his brethren if he should violate it. He empowers them to murder him, in short, in the interest of a society which can show no right whatever to any of the powers of the State. The State is the sole power on earth which possesses by Divine authority the power to kill, or "the power of the sword," for adequate cause. Were this not so the soldier or public executioner would be hired assassins or murderers. Mere expediency can give no right to take human life ; self defence is the only other permissible cause : to argue otherwise is to claim that the end can justify the means. By what right does Freemasonry claim it ? The sort of answer given is : "What, regard the distinguished men you know to be Masons as possible murderers ? Do you consider yourself morally superior to them, and criticize the ancient oath which they, and thousands like them, have taken without scruple ?" Such answers are quite beside the point ; let him who has taken it be left to the judgement of his own conscience, the proposition may not have presented itself to him in its true light. But no Catholic can regard the

Masonic oath, when considered seriously, otherwise than as blasphemous, contrary to right reason as blind and unknown, and contrary to the good of the State. By way of practical illustration that Masonry will not allow itself to be trifled with, the neophyte, having taken the oath and his eyes being unbandaged, sees swords in the hands of his now revealed brethren pointed to his breast, a rather grim pleasantry if it means nothing. Who gave Masonry the right to threaten with the sword? If it does not claim the right of private assassination, why this solemn mockery of a terrible power and punishment?

A Mason may ridicule these illustrations of the argument and say that the self-constituted justice or revenge of Freemasonry does not proceed to such extremities; but he cannot deny, unless he be an atheist, that it is a serious thing to take the name of God in vain; nor that for a Mason seriously to offend the Craft would result in consequences which may be euphemistically described as "unpleasant."

Treachery is odious, but it is the despicable crime of an individual; private war is a far greater evil. The carpet of the Lodge may not be stained with blood, nor its walls contain an *oubliette*, but Masonry can, and on occasions does, cause the ruin or decay in fortune of men who for conscientious motives have merely abandoned it, without attempting to cause injury or annoyance to their former associates, or to reveal its secrets, which, it may be observed, the Church never requires them to divulge.

From time to time one hears how in war an individual enemy has been spared or befriended because of Masonry. The duty of a faithful subject of a State at war is to kill, disable or capture his country's enemy ; war exists for this end. By what right does he forego his country's interest at the call of Masonry? It may be said that individual action is unimportant, but in certain cases it may prove of very great importance. Take the simile of an analyst, and into the test-tube of duty pour the solution called "in lawful war a man's first duty is to his country," then add the Masonic solution of "Masonic duty" and a cloudy discolouration ensues, which remains until one or other ingredient falls to the bottom. Under given circumstances the bayonet should find its billet in the body of an enemy. The Masonic bayonet must not touch the Masonic enemy. Whence does the right to make so effective an appeal emanate? what title or claim to respect can it show?

The following extract from an English newspaper is instructive :

"FREEMASONRY AT THE FRONT.

"The practical value of Freemasonry in time of need has been proved over and over again. A contributor writes as follows :

"During the present war, the tie of the Brotherhood has been recognized both by Boer and Englishman. A colonel of a Canadian regiment at the Modder River, on a Sunday morning stroll, strayed too far from his camp, when he suddenly

found himself covered by the rifle of a Boer. By a fortunate impulse he made the customary sign, and cried out : " Don't shoot."—The Boer immediately threw down his rifle and hurried to the colonel, informing him that he belonged to ' de Broederband in Pretoria,' and was a member of General Cronje's staff. He begged him to return at once to his camp, and made him accept a valuable coin as a souvenir of his escape.

"The English Rising Sun Lodge was allowed to meet at Bloemfontein throughout the war."

Alison, in his *History of Europe*, Vol. x., Chap. xlvi., gives two somewhat similar instances of masonic treachery, one by a Russian, the other by an American officer. A few years ago a masonic battlefield deliverance during the Franco-German war was worked up into a short story in one of the English Masonic newspapers, for the glorification—not, alas ! the shame—of Freemasonry. Four English officers are said to have owed their lives to the use of Masonic signs during the battle of Waterloo. Freemasonry praises such conduct. The unsophisticated patriot reprobates it. Put the case the other way and suppose the Canadian officer to have been Christian De Wet, who is said to be a Freemason. The "profane" Englishman would have ignored his Masonic gesticulations and have shot him, or taken him prisoner without a moment's hesitation. The Masonic Englishman, if duly challenged, must have responded to the sign, and acted much as the traitorous Boer

did—sacrifice the interest of his country at the call of Freemasonry, or act contrary to the precepts of the Craft.

Similar problems arise in trials before civil and criminal tribunals and courts martial. Masonic signs are not made in courts of justice merely to signify "How do you do? good morning," but to obtain, or to try to obtain, secret advantage. If the judge is not a Mason and the jury are, such signs are a contempt of court or an insult to their honour by implying that they may, under pressure of the private oath, decide in contravention of the public one; or an absurdity, if the signs are mere futile gesticulations. If both the judge and jury are Masons, the Masonic signs are again an insult or an absurdity, or an attempt to interfere with the course of justice. The alternatives are not pleasant for a non-Mason to contemplate, and Masonry expects to be taken seriously.

It is within the writer's knowledge that an English judge responded to the Masonic signs of a litigant in whose favour he gave his verdict; though it is fair to state, this was not contrary to the weight of very confused evidence. Another case, known to the writer, is that of a murderer who escaped the halter on the plea of insanity which those best qualified to judge regarded as utterly unproved, thanks to Freemasonry; for the jury of Freemasons recognized the "distress" of brother Mason in the dock, and saved him from due retribution of justice for the innocent blood he had shed. No daily newspaper in England dare publish the faintest criticism of the Craft,

still less expose a Masonic scandal ; it is hopeless to attempt to produce proper evidence of the abuses concealed behind the veil of Masonic "light," and their extent must necessarily remain a matter of conjecture.

In matters of place and patronage, the first duty of the patron is clearly to secure the services of the applicant best fitted to serve the State or his neighbour. The Masonic patron is sworn to aid his brethren. In justice to other considerations, favour can only be shown to a brother Mason if his qualifications are in no way inferior to those of the "profane" competitor. Without imputing bad motives to our Masonic friends it must be admitted that Masonic light is apt to blur the vision in such cases. In short, it is impossible to believe that all this enormous expenditure of time and money is undertaken merely to befriend the widow and orphan, to practise an esoteric ritual, and to furnish a pretext for fraternal conviviality, and that it does not offer great facilities and temptations to brethren of the middle and lower social grades to favouritism, jobbery and protection to minor forms of rascality, which seeks concealment by means of it, behind the august figure-heads who publicly represent the Craft. There may be matter for praise in the moral teaching suggested by Masonic ritual. On the other hand members of the fraternity do not find themselves debarred from its official honours by table excesses or impurity of life. Masons indeed rarely pretend that their motives in joining the Craft were other than those of personal gain

or social advancement, or to escape the disadvantage of remaining a member of the diminishing section of their "profane" fellow-countrymen. Society groans under the complications of its present organization, which Masonry cannot alleviate and tends still more to confound.

(3) Charity is a word derived from "caritas," which originally meant scarcity or want. It took a new meaning with the spread of Christianity, and now, in the Christian sense, means the love of God and of one's fellow-men for His sake, according to the precept of Jesus Christ, the Redeemer of the human race. Almsgiving is one of the necessary manifestations of such love. As a Christian word Masonry would repudiate it, had it not of late come to be used indiscriminately for philanthropy; a noble virtue, though of the natural order only. But even philanthropy cannot be claimed as having any special connection with Freemasonry, for Masonry undertakes no universal duties towards mankind, and concerns itself solely with the benefit and support of the fraternity. It deliberately excludes from its membership the poor and needy, though it generously supports worthy brethren overtaken by adversity, and their widows and orphans. But the object of charity and philanthropy is suffering humanity; Masonic benevolence is applied only to its own members, and more akin to the sick and superannuation funds of trades' unions and similar associations for mutual advancement and benefit.

Furthermore, the precepts and obligations of Freemasonry as regards almsgiving are in flat contradiction to those of Christianity. We are told by our Lord to avoid publicity in almsgiving; Freemasonry decorates a generous brother with a "jewel." St. Paul commands us to do good to all men, but where a distinction has to be shown it must be to a fellow-Christian. As Masonry ignores the precepts of Christianity, the Christian Mason, like the Christian soldier, is liable to be placed in an awkward dilemma, for which he has only himself to thank. Some principle has to go to the wall. Which is it to be, the Christian obligation or the Masonic? Is public advertisement or secrecy in almsgiving commendable or the reverse? Would our Lord have decorated the almsgiving hypocrite with a medal, and did He commend the trumpet-blowing with which he celebrated his own benevolence in the synagogue? ¹ As between Mason and non-Mason, is the starving Christian or the starving Mahomedan to have the only remaining loaf? the drowning Christian or the drowning Buddhist the last life-belt? the wounded Masonic enemy or the non-Masonic compatriot to receive first aid on the battle-field? The precepts of Christianity and those of Freemasonry are, in many important respects, perfectly explicit and absolutely contradictory. To which is preference to be given?

Such are the principal reasons why the Church condemns Freemasonry, and why Freemasonry

¹ St. Matt. vi. 2.

is at enmity with the Church. They uphold ideals and standards of conduct which in some ways are directly opposed to one another, and remind us of St. Simeon's prophecy that Jesus Christ was a sign that should be contradicted.

These observations being intended only for Catholics, the writer exhorts them to remember that while it is their duty to think kindly of their Masonic friends, they are bound to respect and uphold the solemn and reiterated condemnations of Freemasonry by the Church. The Catholic must remember that to join the Society is to incur excommunication, that its oaths are—for him—a renunciation of his faith; that at his death-bed the fraternity will endeavour to hinder his reconciliation with Almighty God, and the reception of the Sacraments he has treated with contempt, and leave him to die "unhousel'd, disappointed, unaneled"; that as a traitor to his faith he will be expected to show a zeal for the Craft which he will probably find most distasteful; that the Mason who does not "work" is of little account, while only those who are energetic in promoting the objects of the Craft have much chance in the scramble for the good things of this life which are its only reward. While most people like to choose their friends, he will find that he has contracted fraternal relations with an international crew previously unknown to him, with many of whom he would shrink from associating, but who will, notwithstanding, have a call upon his time, his influence, and his purse.

Catholics in discussing Freemasonry are bound

in charity to be most careful to discriminate between the members and the principles of the Craft, remembering what scandal the detestable conduct of some Catholics causes to their holy religion, and what credit the good conduct of many Freemasons brings to their society, which so many of them seem able honestly to regard as innocent and even praiseworthy. They should avoid rash and positive statements concerning Masonic ritual or secrets, which will probably recoil upon them, like the "Diana Vaughan" disclosures, with ridicule. Let them adhere to the simple and easily proved principle that all societies, whatever their name and objects, which require secret oaths and exact compliance by secret exercise of unlawfully constituted power and authority are condemned and forbidden alike by the Natural and Divine Law; and that the smiles of royalty and the adhesion of patriots and philanthropists cannot reverse the reprobation of the most respectable and illustrious of them.

The average Englishman loathes the abstract in argument or principle, and adores the merely practical. It is scarcely an exaggeration to say that but few seem capable of mastering an abstract argument at all, or are conscious of the intellectual atrophy which hinders the attempt. They seem to set no value on endeavouring to see the absurdity of the hazy notion by which so many are obsessed, that because an opinion, no matter how acquired, relating to morals or religion, is honestly held, it becomes in some

inexplicable manner objectively true ; that what is thought to be true, is somehow thereby made true, for the thinker. They fail to comprehend that full excuse for intellectual error does not in the least degree mitigate its objective evil. Another object of the contempt of the average Englishman is casuistry, or the science of deciding points of conscience when conflicts of duty and interest occur. He is apt to deny that there is such a science at all, and to believe, if not to say, that half-educated common sense is capable of satisfactorily disposing of such questions. From the writer's acquaintance with Freemasons he has not found, even in the most "illuminated," evidence of the special intellectual outfit required to expound and to solve the problems of conscience, which, for those who can appreciate them, must be constantly raised by membership of the Craft.

The writer has endeavoured to state the case with clearness and justice: should any Mason read it he begs him to give him credit for deep regret that their ideals are so far widely different, that the obligations of the Christian faith forbid their agreement, and that Freemasonry should practise such solemn secrecy, which is ludicrously unnecessary for the furtherance of legitimate ends, and for which only gross tyranny and persecution could afford an excuse.