

a large and well-established connection, and blessed with a rising and most promising family—what had he to “conspire” about? The party a little in the background was a Dissenter of irreproachable character, and tenets strict even to sternness. Moreover, on no subject did he dilate, publicly as well as privately, with greater earnestness and unction than on the incalculable evils arising from war, and the duty of every Christian state, at any sacrifice, to avoid it. What! *he* “a conspirator!” Fronting the vicar was the banker of our little community. And to him I fancied nothing would be less agreeable than “a run” upon his small but flourishing firm in Quay Street. And yet “runs” severe—repeated—exhausting “runs,” would inevitably result from any widely-spread and successful conspiracy. The banker’s supporter was a little mirthful-eyed man—a bachelor—who held a light and eligible appointment under government, and looked as if he had never known a care in all his life. He perplexed me more than all the rest. He of all created beings, a conspirator! Marvelous!

The spokesman of the party began his story. He said, in substance, that a new lodge being about to be opened within a mile and a half of Fairstream, it was the wish of the brethren (the more firmly to engraft on the noble tree this new Masonic scion) to go in procession to church, and there listen to a sermon from a clerical brother. In this arrangement he, in the name of the lodge, represented by the parties then in his presence, most respectfully requested the vicar’s concurrence.

That reverend personage, with a most distant and forbidding air, replied, that he could sanction no such proceedings.

Perplexed by this response, which was equally unpalatable and unexpected, the deputation, with deference, demanded my incumbent’s reasons for refusal.

“They are many and various,” replied he; “but resolve themselves mainly into these four. First: *There is nothing Church about you!*”

The deputation stared.

“I repeat, that of Freemasons as a body the Church knows nothing. You admit into you fellowship men of all creeds. Your principles and intentions may be pure and praiseworthy; and such I trust they are. But the Church is not privy to them. The Church is in ignorance respecting them. The Church does not recognize them. And, therefore, as a ministering servant of the Church, I must decline affording you any countenance or support.”

The banker here submitted to the vicar, that in works of charity—in supporting an infirmary, a dispensary, a clothing club, a stranger’s friend society—identity of creed was not essential. Men of different shades of religious belief could harmoniously and advantageously combine in carrying out a benevolent project. And one of the leading principles of Freemasonry was active, and untiring, and widely-spread benevolence. Could success crown any charitable project, any scheme of philanthropy, any plan for succoring the suffering and the necessitous (*the operation of which was to be extended, and not partial*), if no assistance was accepted save from those who held one and the same religious creed? “Charity,” he contended, “*knew no creed*. No shackles, forged by human opinions, could or ought to trammel her. He was no friend to his species who would seek to impose them.”

The vicar shook his head repeatedly, in token of vehement dissent from these observations, and proceeded:

“Next I object to you because you are friendly to processions; and I am given to understand, purpose advancing to church in long and elaborate array. All processions, all symbols, I abominate. Such accessories are, in the sanctuary, absolutely indecent; I will not call them unholy: I term them downright profane. What has a thinking being—particularly when proceeding, for the purpose of worship, to the temple of his Creator—what has *he* to do with processions? They are, one and all, abominations.”

The little placeman here briskly stepped forward and said, that “in that Book, with which he was sure the vicar was better acquainted than any one of them, processions were repeatedly mentioned, and never condemned. They occur in all parts of the sacred volume, and in a *very* early portion of it. A procession of no ordinary description followed Jacob’s remains when, with filial love, Joseph brought them out of Egypt into Canaan. A procession, long and elaborately arranged, attended the removal of the Ark from its temporary sojourn in the house of Obed Edom. A procession, glorious and imposing, preceded the dedication of Solomon’s temple. A procession—”

“Pray,” said the Vicar sharply, “do you mean to contend that any one of these processions was at all the counterpart of a Masonic procession?”

“I do not; I disclaim all such irreverent intention,” returned the other gravely: “my object was simply to show that, by the **VERY HIGHEST** authority which man can produce, processions are not forbidden. Usage sanctions their adoption among ourselves. They form a part of our most august ceremonies. When the peers present an address to the sovereign on his escape from the hands of an assassin, on the birth of