

following what may be called a low line of argument, but we must take men as they are in the world, and not theorize about them, as if they were, or should be, all saints, sensitively alive to all spiritual influences. If a stone is thrown in the water, the circles that are formed are at first small and distinct, but as they widen, they gradually grow fainter, until at last they entirely disappear. So with the circles of men's sympathies. With many of them the bond of christian fellowship is so vast and indistinct as to influence them but little. They in a vague manner, call all men brethren, but the poor neighbour is too often "past by on the other side." But in a society such as ours the claims of the brotherhood are studiously and easily kept before the mind; means are devised and officers appointed for the prompt discovery of the distressed, and the most effectual relief of their wants; the virtues of religion are enforced, so as not to be overlooked or forgotten; charity becomes active and practical, and the common tie, entirely subservient to the cause of christianity, links men together in the practice of good and holy deeds.

"But," says the objector, "your Society differs from others; your bond is a secret one; you pretend to mysteries; you hold your meetings with closed and guarded doors." But what is there wrong in all this? If secrecy itself be a crime, are not all men guilty; for has not every one in his heart a closed and guarded chamber, in which he jealously hides from mortal gaze some cherished feeling, some buried hope, some strong ambition, some ideal perfection, some secret, *known but to himself and perhaps a valued friend*? We give to the whole world a sufficient knowledge of our system to assure any unprejudiced person that there is nothing in Masonry but what is pure and good. We do not love the darkness of secrecy because our deeds are evil. We only confine to ourselves what we have a right to retain, what is necessary to link us together in a brotherhood. A certain amount of secrecy is essential to the very life of Masonry, which occupies a position very different from that of any other Society. It dates its existence almost from time immemorial, and has established itself in many countries inhabited by peoples of entirely different races, languages and religions. It lays claim to the possession of certain secrets, dating from that ancient time and known to all the Lodges of the world. It has also signs and grips, by which one brother may distinguish another of any nation or language, by day or night, near or afar off. But strip Masonry of all this, supposing it could be done for the sake of the argument. Divulge its secrets, make known its signs, and what remains? It ceases to be a society linking together men of *different* creeds, languages and nations. It ceases to be of any practical value except to those of *kindred* language and feelings, who may value and be governed by the rules and obligations of a society founded on the principles of charity and benevolence. A member of an English society, for instance, would have but little influence over a member of a similar society in another country, if there was no common knowledge, no common language between them; but let the two be Freemasons, even though one be an Englishman and the other an Arabian or African, and a single motion of the hand makes them brothers, bound to mutual support and defence. In all this, surely, there is nothing so very contrary to the genius of christianity. The Gospel is, indeed, open to all,

shrinking from no investigation, courting the strictest scrutiny and severest criticism; but in its early youth the christian church itself bore very much the appearance of a secret society. When persecution arose, it hid itself from men. It held its services in obscure places with closed doors. It had its secret means of communication. The creed was its symbolum, the cross its sign. And this banding together was often made a cause of reproach by the scoffing heathen. If secret union and hidden knowledge were so great a crime, even danger such as that could not justify their adoption.

But we do not deny to any worthy person an entrance into our lodges. We carefully guard our secrets from the uninitiated, but we would willingly extend the right hand of fellowship to all. We say to all, "come, be of us." We do indeed claim to have certain knowledge veiled in symbol and allegory, but the withholding this from the uninitiated does not constitute a crime. We will give it to all if they perform the necessary condition of joining us; but if they will not do this, they can certainly have "neither part nor lot in this matter." It is this knowledge that forms that close and mystic tie which binds the masons of the whole world into one brotherhood. We do not claim that the possession of this knowledge is in any way essential to happiness or salvation; but only that, if known and acted upon, it can make men better, more zealous in the discharge of "faith, hope and charity," morality and piety.

"But," urges the objector again, "You confine your charities to your own society." Do not all societies the same with their public charities? The Masonic obligation binds Masons to be charitable to brother Masons, to love and help them, to do their utmost to keep them in the right path and to deter them from the wrong; but it does not limit their private charities to this circle. It does not say, so far shalt thou be charitable and no further. A Mason **MUST** be charitable to a Brother, but he **MAY** be, and is expected to be charitable, to all. And in this, charity is like fire. As long as fuel is near enough it will not expire nor confine itself to one spot, but will grow stronger and spread wider and wider. Being charitable to those of our own society, we cherish the divine principle, and are far more likely afterward to extend the circle of our sympathies and do good unto all men, thus fulfilling the royal law. In all this, certainly, Masonry is subserving the Gospel and adding new links to the golden chain of christian love.*

(2.) And now let us turn to the second objection, that:—"Masonry is a deistical system, ignoring the Gospel of Christ." Of course this can be said with any appearance of truth only of the three *lower* degrees of Masonry, which alone constitute ancient Masonry. Royal Arch Masonry and many of the higher degrees are essentially christian. In the Degrees of Ancient Masonry, indeed, no direct mention is made of our Saviour or his Gospel: the prayers at their opening and their closing are not made expressly in His name. But as these degrees came down to us from a time *antecedent* to the birth of Christ, it would be inconsistent to expect to find in them any such direct mention. But all the

* I did not deem it necessary in the Sermon to call attention to the fact that Secrecy is in itself a powerful means of attracting and retaining the regard of men. No doubt, the mystery of Freemasonry, its claim to the possession of hidden knowledge, its means of secret communication, and the importance which Masons consequently acquire in the eyes of themselves and others, have induced many of the younger and more thoughtless, to join us.