

Freemasonry has had its assailants in past times; Freemasonry has its assailants to-day, even at this very hour; and there are many who openly object both to its actual position and its avowed principles. There are those, for instance, who think that Freemasonry should discard all the religious element from its lodges, and confine itself to philosophical teachings or cosmopolitan sympathies. There are those who complain that Freemasonry is not religious enough, and that by its professed universality it is a negation of a higher Creed. But, all such impugnors of our Order appear to us to forget, that Freemasonry is not Religion, never claims to be Religion, or to teach Religion to others. Freemasonry does claim to be a world-wide philanthropic sodality, based on the one great principle which pervades the divinest of all prayers—the recognition of the One Great Universal Father, Ruler and Architect of this world and of man. That there may be denominational difficulties felt by some in such a view as this, we do not affect to conceal, but Freemasonry quæ Freemasonry has nothing to do with denominational teaching, just as it has no concern with political opinions. Freemasonry leaves Religion to those, whose great mission is to announce its healing message to man, offering however a neutral ground, so to say, for men of contrasted views and conflicting opinions; a place of assembly where for a little time the voice of party may be hushed, and the contests of sectarian difference may be stilled. Freemasonry may be wrong or it may be right in the view it takes, the teaching it avows, and the course it adopts, but such it is, and we feel, that, as it is always better to avow our principles, to hoist our flag, there is no use whatever in at all hesitating to declare, what as we believe, the undoubted position and teaching of our great Order really are.

There may be many who take a very different view of what Masonic teaching is or should be, but it is undeniable in our opinion, that, whatever may have been the distinctive utterance of Freemasonry in other days, or at particular epochs, the one distinguishing feature of our present English Freemasonry is its Universality. And Freemasonry in inscribing this motto, so to say, on her graceful banner, is but proclaiming in our time and generation, the teaching of an earlier age, when Jewish and Tyrian Masons worked side by side in the building of the Temple of the most High. It may be perfectly true, that we may find less expansive views prevailing during a period of the last century, but whether for good or evil, the Universality of our Order has been the pervading characteristic of our teaching and our practice during this century; and the fact ought to be honestly admitted as alike the now deliberate position, and the un-failing characteristic of our English Freemasonry.

Freemasonry we believe has thus a sphere of usefulness and importance in the world, in that it serves to cement enduring sympathy between persons of very opposite feelings, and to conciliate firm friendships amongst those who might by birth, and education, and inherited traditions have for ever otherwise remained at a perpetual distance. And if it be here asked what does Freemasonry do after all for the general welfare of the world? we may fairly reply, it seeks to educate the young, and to aid the old, it endeavors to relieve distress and succour misery, with true if discriminating liberality, while it would administer on the highest principles of true-hearted charity, extensive relief to its suffering members and those nearest and dearest to them,