

The Pope of Rome has repeatedly excommunicated the whole order of Freemasons by bell, brook and candle; and the Presbyterians, and some others of the Protestant sects have come as near excommunicating the order as they know how. The Church of England, and our own Church in this country, have never done anything of the sort; though once in a long while some individual Bishop or Priest—generally of Presbyterian antecedents—thinks it a great pity that we should not follow the example set in this matter by the Pope and the Presbyterians. But there is no danger of this ever being done. Too many of our Bishops, clergy and laity belong to the order, so that not even an attempt has ever been made—so far as I know—to pass any formal condemnation; and there is no part of our Church constitution or canons which would afford any basis at all for such action.

Years ago this state of facts made no small impression on my mind; and additional thought was provoked by the fact that the Scottish Rite stands so pre-eminent among the brethren of the Mystic Tie. Looking back to practical masonry, from which it all sprung, I was very much puzzled by this prominence of Scotland. Instead of being able to show cathedrals or churches or castles that could for a moment stand comparison with the vast mediæval masterpieces of England, France, Germany, Spain and Italy, Scotland made really the smallest and poorest show of any. The connection with practical masonry, therefore, utterly failed to give me any explanation.

At length, however, I struck upon the idea, which I think gives the true solution of the problem. It is to be found in the 'Free and Accepted' part of the business, which is quite modern; and not in practical masonry, which goes back into distant ages. The key of the whole position is this: Freemasonry is an instinctive attempt of right minded men in each country to get back those parts of the ancient and full heritage of the Catholic Church of which the dominant religion of that country deprives them. This fits the case of Scotland exactly. Nowhere else was the burden of Presbyterianism, and true-blue Calvinism, so hard and so heavy as in Scotland. And when by law not more than half a dozen Church people were allowed at any one time to worship out of the Prayer Book even in a private house, it is no wonder that Churchmen took refuge in the Masonic lodges; and there, protected by their oaths of secrecy, they introduced as much of Church principle and Church practice as they could.

Now let us examine a few of the details and see how far our theory will agree with the facts.

In the first place, there is the true idea of *Catholicity*, which is lost by every sect. Masonry restores it by a brotherhood which extends throughout the world.

Next, how do persons become real members of that body? Old Calvinism makes this to depend on the absolute decree of Almighty God as to each individual soul—a decree made before the fall of man. That is not the Church idea at all. The Church idea is that membership in the Body of Christ comes by Holy Baptism; and nobody can baptize himself. He must be baptized by some one else. So in Masonry, a man cannot become a Mason by simply desiring it, or feeling about it, or reading about it, or talking about it. He must be initiated by some one else who belongs to the order already, and has power to admit him.

Then as to the formation of a lodge. The sectarian idea is that any small number of believers—three, five, seven, or thereabouts—may at any time associate themselves together and make a new Church—a Church which is just as truly and really a valid Church as any other in the world. But you cannot make a new Masonic lodge that way! In order to have a new lodge, the idea of *historic continuity* is

never lost; and the new lodge must secure its proper charter from the duly authorized source, or it is no lodge at all.

Then among the Presbyterians, ministerial parity was the rigid rule. In Masonry they had various orders, one above another, till they ran it to an almost absurd extreme.

In the Presbyterian meeting they abjured everything like bright and beautiful vestments. In Masonry they had abundance of them of ever so many different kinds.

In the Presbyterian meeting they would have nothing to do with bright and beautiful colors,—black, the color of sin, death, and the devil, being the only thing tolerated. In Masonry they had all bright and beautiful colors, and silver and gold and jewels besides.

In the Presbyterian meeting they regarded lights as abominably Popish. In the lodge they knew better, and used them most significantly.

In the Presbyterian meeting they abhorred all symbolism, and tried to have everything as plain as a pike-staff. In the lodge every part of the service—the costumes, the decorations,—was deeply and beautifully symbolical; and the knowledge of the meaning of it all was a constant source of instruction, admiration and joy.

Now in all these things, and in some others that might be added, it was the *ancient Church ideas and practices* that were reproduced in the lodges, and in all their services they preserved the idea of a *written Liturgy*; while the rigid rule of the Presbyterian Meeting was long extemporary prayers, and still longer sermons which in the lodge were omitted altogether.

But with all this *Churchliness*, there was still another point in which the lodges gave a lesson to the sects which the sects were never willing to learn. Notwithstanding all these Churchly things, the Masons never dreamed of pretending to commission anyone to preach the Gospel—*never!* They knew that that business belonged to the Church which Christ had established; and they never for a moment claimed to be that Church.

And as it was in Scotland, so it has been, measurably, in other Protestant countries. In England, when the Church was coldest in her tone, the lodges were the warmest, making up somewhat for her deficiencies. And in the U.S. the general prevalence of the Masonic order (and other orders patterned more or less after them) has been a very important element in toning up the religious sympathies of vast bodies of Protestants, who are as yet too bitterly prejudiced to learn anything directly from us. When one sees a great gathering of Knights Templar, and finds that in many places banners are swung across the streets along which they are to march, and that every banner bears on it a cross and a crown; and notices that every Knight has a cross on his cap, and a red cross at that; and knows that a great majority of the men are Presbyterians, Methodists, Baptists, and what not; and then examine their Office for the Burial of the Dead and finds there no less than three distinct prayers for the departed (in which their Office is more distinctly Catholic than our own); and besides all this sees that their standard of Faith, used constantly in their services, is the unmitigated *Apostles' Creed*—what shall we say? Is it not clear that they are doing the Church's work with great numbers who would not, as yet, learn the same things from us? If the Church required people to wear red crosses in their caps, and to pray for the departed, a howl would be raised that would re-echo loudly from Dan to Bersheba. But the Knights Templar are doing this work for us, and before long they will find out that the proper home of people who do such Churchly things is—THE CHURCH. They are helping us without knowing it. But they will find out when the time comes, and then the gathering in will be all the easier.

But there is another side to all this, and one

which at first sight seems radically opposed to it, although on examination we shall see that it only embodies the same general principle. How is it that on the continent of Europe, especially in Popish countries, the tone of Freemasonry is so different? Instead of showing any tendency towards the beauties of the unbroken Catholic Church, we find here, almost universally, tendencies towards liberalism, if not infidelity, in religion, and toward rebellion in politics. How is it that there is such a vast difference in tone?

Remember, the tone in Scotland and other Protestant countries was a reaction against Presbyterianism and the religious errors and poverty of all sorts of Protestant sectarianism. That decided the tone which the reaction should take. In Papal countries the religion and the government err in an opposite direction. There is in Church matters, in those lands, a rich and ornate system, indeed, but indissolubly united with an absolute despotism, which leaves no trace of the earlier liberty bestowed as a permanent heritage upon the children of God. And this is generally leagued with an equal despotism in political matters. The natural reaction against both these makes the lodges, in such countries, the natural headquarters of all who are struggling for the restoration of civil and religious liberty. That some, under the pressure of a double and terrible tyranny, should be disposed to go too far, and venture on crazy extremes in both civil and religious directions, is no wonder!

It is easy to see, in this way of looking at the whole question, the reasons for what we know to be the facts. The Pope excommunicates the Freemasons, because he knows they are against him and his tyrannies, and there never can be peace between them. The Presbyterians and other sects condemn the Freemasons also, but not so furiously, indeed, but still for something of the same reason, because the general tone of the whole order is against them, and they know it. But the Church never has said or done anything against them, because they are really doing our work for us. They are familiarizing their people with ever so many good and beautiful things that belong to the old and full-blooded Church system, in which we are laboring for the Union of all Christendom. And we are not fools enough to oppose and abuse any who are helping in so noble a work, whether they know it or not. The more completely they do that work, the better we shall like it.

What all Freemasons need to do, in order to make that work complete, is to remember that they never have set themselves up to be a *Church*, as all the sects have; that they have always recognized the superior position and authority of the Church, in its own sphere, outside of their order. They never have pretended to commission anybody to preach the Word and minister the Sacraments. By thus acknowledging the superior authority of the Church, they really acknowledge an obligation on their own part to belong to it. And in making that personal union, to whom should our Freemasons go? To the Pope, who has cursed them over and over again, even in refusing to a Mason the right of being buried in consecrated ground? Or to the sects who have denounced 'secret societies' with equal vehemence? No. They will, if they are sensible, unite with the Church which loves all their devotion to beauty, art, symbolism, wide-hearted charity, and staunch love of liberty, and where—and where only—they will truly be *at home*.—J. H. HOPKINS in *Church Review*.

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