

opinions, we shall steer between them, and thus, doubtless, arrive at a more just estimate. Viewed merely as an eleemosynary association, its generous benefactions are worthy of all honor; but its aims and purposes are said to be more than these: it not only ministers to the necessities of suffering humanity, but its system of symbolism—a science that has ever been closely allied with poetry and religion—is replete with significance, teaching such lessons of morality and ethics as must win approval.

Freemasonry, in its theory, regards mankind as a common brotherhood, irrespective of color, clime, condition, creed. It does not, therefore, reject from its fellowship any but the atheist, or those who are found to be deficient in personal morality, while all of an opposite character, whether Jew, Mohammedan, or Christian, are regarded as equally admissible to its privileges. Although it professes to derive its creed and code from the Bible—which is said to be ever found upon its altars—yet, since it thus liberally groups together men of such diversity of creeds, all cannot, of course, strictly be called *Christians*, although many Christians are among its supporters. Freemasonry is to be regarded as an institution of human devising—whose principal design is to conserve the bodily well-being of men; while Christianity—of divine origin—has to do with their spiritual welfare. They can never, of course, become identical; all that need be desired, perhaps, is that they come not into antagonistic conflict. Claiming, as it does, to be established upon the immutable principles of virtue, truth, and charity, it need not surprise us that under thegis of these good genii, its historic annals should be replete with glorious memories, and while these guardian angels keep watch and ward over its works and ways, the world can scarcely afford to dispense with its philanthropic service.

Man being essentially a gregarious and social being, these have ever existed in all civilized communities, associations of men, for the purpose of mutual profit and protection. Each department of human industry has, consequently, had its appropriate representatives among the various societies and guilds of science, literature, and in the arts of life. Hence, among other benevolent institutions, that of Freemasonry took its rise; and wider in the range and sphere of its benefactions than most others, it has lived through centuries, to bless mankind. Wherever the foot of the adventurous traveller may stray—from the thrilling regions of thick ribbed ice to the savannas of the sunny south, in the far-off east or remotest west—there the friendly greeting and aid of a Mason may, by a mystic sign, be secured by any brother in need.

Franklin thus speaks of Freemasonry: "It has secrets peculiar to itself, but of what do these principally consist? They consist of signs and tokens which serve as testimonials of character and qualification, which are conferred after due instruction and examination. These are of no small value; they speak a universal language, and are a passport to the support and attention of the world. They cannot be lost so long as memory retains her power. Let the possessors of them be expatriated, shipwrecked or imprisoned; let them be stripped of everything they have in the world, still their credentials remain, and are available for use, as circumstances may require. The good effects which they have produced are established by the incontestable facts of history. They have stayed the uplifted hand of the destroyer, they have subdued the rancor of malevolence, and broken down the barriers of political animosity and sectarian alienation."

Many traditions are held as to the origin of the institution, but they are generally regarded as merely mythical and legendary. According to some writers, it took its rise from a band of Craftsmen in Tyre, who went to Jerusalem to assist in the erection of Solomon's Temple; hence the great prominence given in the ritual and symbols of the Order to that memorable edifice. By others it has been traced to the ancient Egypt, and again to the times of the Crusades, and the Masons of Strasburg, in 1275. Some bard has thus put the legend in verse:

"They're traced on lines in the Parthenon,
Inscribed by the subtle Greek,
And Roman legions have carved them on
Walls, roads, and arches antique.
Long ere the Goth, with a vandal hand,
Gave scope to his envy dark,
The honored Craft in many a land,
Had graven its Mason-mark.

"The obelisks old, and the pyramids,
Around which mystery clings—
The hieroglyphs on the coffin-lids
Of weird Egyptian kings.
Carthage, Syria, Pompeii—
Buried and strewn and stark,