

assistance and encouragement in times when masons and architects wandered from country to country seeking employment in building castles for nobles and cathedrals for princes of the Church. However that may be, Freemasonry as it is now known, with a ritual substantially the same as that now used, was established in England in the year 1717. In that year four lodges of Ancient Craft Masons formed the Grand Lodge of England, and Anderson and Desaguliers elaborated the ritual.

Its enemies have charged that Freemasonry is an enemy to religion, or at least to Christianity. The charge is false. An irreligious man cannot be a good Freemason. The postulant must acknowledge his belief in a Supreme Being, who rules and governs all things; who is all-wise, all-powerful and merciful; who will reward virtue and punish vice. And though a Jew or even a heathen may be a Freemason, he will learn in the lodge or among Masons nothing which will encourage him in his opposition to Christianity, while the Christian will learn nothing to shake the least important tenet of his faith.

Freemasonry is not a religion. It is a system of morals, not interfering with religion, but commending and enforcing the moral virtues—charity, prudence, caution, temperance, chastity, brotherly love, and the large charity based on the fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man. To relieve the distressed, to help the weak, to comfort the needy, to counsel those in need of it, to dispel ignorance and superstition, to raise the lowly and curb the proud—these are the lessons of Freemasonry.

We are told that it is a secret order, and that that which is secret must be wicked. Those who are mainly active in preferring that charge belong themselves to the most secret of all oath-bound societies that ever existed on earth. Freemasonry *is* a secret organization. When the old Freemasonry first became general, secrecy was an absolute necessity for two reasons—

first, that its members wandering from land to land might have means of making themselves known to their brethren, and which would be useless unless kept secret among themselves; and secondly, that they might concert among themselves for their welfare. In those days kings blasphemously assumed to rule by divine right over the bodies of men, and priests more blasphemously assumed to rule over their consciences. The timid trembled lest their most secret thoughts should tremble out upon the air and bring them into trouble; the daring boldly proclaimed their belief in the right of men to be free and to think for themselves, but they paid for their temerity with their lives upon the headsman's block or at the stake. In silence and in fear Masons crept to secluded valleys or lonely mountain tops to whisper the great truths, which have now become the common property of the world, and to impart the words and signs by which they might recognize each other.

In these happier days the necessity for that secrecy has passed away; but it is imbedded in the genius and the traditions of the Order and interwoven into its ritual, and it cannot easily be displaced. Therefore it is continued, and not because there is anything done behind the tiled door which might not be proclaimed from the housetops. The defense of Masonry is that its whole work is a work of charity. It is not only that it gives aid to those who are in need, though that aid is widespread, far-reaching and vast in its proportions, but that its charity is absolutely catholic. It teaches the loftiest lessons of good-will, love, forbearance and peace; and with enmity toward none, with charity for all, it strives only to practice true benevolence. It is widespread as the human race. The soldier with hand raised to strike down his country's foe catches a sign and turns aside the blow. The shipwrecked sailor, cast naked on a foreign shore, makes a mute appeal to men who cannot understand a word he speaks, and straightway an unknown friend springs