

Every profession, every art, every trade, has its secrets. Empires and states have their secrets. Families and churches have their secrets, and I doubt much if there is a heart in this assembly but what is the repository of some secret. Secrecy is observed in every condition of society. And yet, we don't think of speaking of secret empires, secret states, secret churches, and secret families. Why, then, charge Odd-Fellowship with the crime of being a secret society? It observes the secret principle, but we have yet to learn that it is more sinful for our Order to seal its letters, than it is for a church or state to do the same.

This secrecy is no novel doctrine. The Egyptians veiled their religion and politics under its impenetrable mask. Lycurgus, among his constitutional laws, required that every one keep secret whatever was done or said. The duty of secrecy is taught and enjoined in the Scriptures.—Solomon forbade drunkenness in a King, because it is an enemy to secrecy—and added, “He that discovereth secrets is a traitor, and he that conceals them is a faithful brother.” A wise man also said—“Whosoever discovereth secrets loses his credit.”

The first Christians were accustomed to pledge themselves to one another by a solemn declaration similar to the covenant among Odd-Fellows. Pliny who wrote in the first century, reports to the Emperor Trajan, that “the Christians were wont to meet together in the night and bind themselves to secrecy,”—that though they might recognize each other in the multitude, they should not be known as associates by the world.

Tertullian, a Presbyter of Carthage, who died about A. D. 216, says, “None are admitted to religious mysteries without having secrecy enjoined.” Minacius Felix, who wrote a learned and eloquent defence of the Christian religion, which Lardner thinks was published in A. D. 210, states that “the Christians *know one another by secret signs, and love one another* almost before they are acquainted.”

The Master of Christians enjoined secrecy upon his followers, and thereby recognized the principle for which we are contending. “When,” said Christ, (Matt. 6, 3) “thou doest thine alms, let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doeth; that thine alms may be in secret.”

If the secrecy we enjoin is beyond this, it is only to protect our funds from imposition, that we may be able to do “alms”; but it is further objected that the privileges of the Order are conferred upon the worthless and immoral. We desire not to receive such, until they shall have reformed. But, we may be deceived. We cannot see the motives of every individual. We are sometimes imposed upon, no doubt. If we are deceived, the Institution ought not to be censured, but those who are guilty of the deception. It is unjust to blame any society, for the evil conduct of its members, unless the society sanctions, or is blind to that ill conduct.—The best things may be abused. Our holy religion has been perverted to base ends. Have ye not seen hypocrisy and sin in the church—at the altar of God? Have ye not seen wrangling and strife on account of a slight difference in creeds? But christianity is not to blame for these abuses. They furnish no argument against christianity; nor should the immoral conduct of a member, be attributed to Odd-Fellowship.

It has been objected further, that our Order requires the time of its members, and that females are not permitted to enter our Lodges. But if it be a useful institution, if its privileges are invaluable, it must of course