

sustentation of what they thought the right and the true, even though it were opposed to our holy religion, yet since the bright shining light has illumined their minds and kindled their hearts, and enabled them to bow themselves in humble adoration to the great and glorious Architect of the Universe rather than to the universe itself, then let prejudice give place to justice, and respect those who "love the Brotherhood, fear God and honor the King."

We pass now from the birth and early life of the Baptist to his public ministry. This commenced at the 30th year of his age, the period established by God for the entrance of a priest on his service in the tabernacle. The New Testament narratives of St. John are very meagre. "In those days came John the Baptist, preaching in the wilderness of Judea and saying 'Repent ye for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand.'" "The word of the Lord came to John the son of Zacharias in the wilderness, and he came into all the country about Jordan, preaching the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins." His supernatural birth, his hard ascetic life, his reputation for extraordinary sanctity and the prevailing expectation that some great one was about to appear—these causes without the aid of miraculous power, for John did no miracles, (John X, 41) were sufficient to attract to him a great multitude from every quarter. There is very little said about his preaching, but the sum of it all is repentance, a change of heart and life. He used Baptism merely as a sign or symbol of his doctrine, just as the Jews had been in the habit of using it upon the proselytes they had won from the heathenism around them. The prophet Isaiah had called him a "voice," but he was much more than a "voice," for Jesus pronounced him a "burning and a shining light." There was light and heat in his ministry. Urging reformation of life, a renewal of the heart, a fervent charity, a scrupulous honesty, an imposing of self-restraint, and an all-pervading sense of justice his doctrine is one which it is good to learn, to practice and to inculcate. Surely if such is the character and doctrine which the Masonic brotherhood delights to place in one of the prominent niches of its temple, to blazon forth to the uninitiated world its faith, its love and its object, it is very unreasonable and unjust that our beloved order should be stigmatized (as it often unfortunately is) as irreligious, infidel, and atheistic.

It is not a great while ago, since I myself heard a clergyman assert—surely through ignorance, for he could not have known anything certainly about the Order, its secrets, its signs, its aims, as he had never been initiated into its mysteries—that Freemasonry was nothing but a pure Deism, and therefore a Christian ought not to join it or belong to it. Now "Deism," according to Webster, "is

the belief or system of religious opinions of those who acknowledge the existence of one God, but deny revelation; or Deism is the belief in natural religion only, or those truths in doctrine and practice which man is to discover by the light of reason independent and exclusive of any revelation from God. Hence Deism implies infidelity or a disbelief of the Divine origin of the Scriptures." Then I may surely tell that Christian brother he was never more mistaken. All our Lodges, not one of which can be furnished without the Bible and its pedestal, not one of which can be declared open unless the Bible is opened at its appropriate place—all hurl back the slander, and pity the bigotry that can malign what it knows nothing about, simply because it chooses to be ignorant.

In reference to this charge, I quote from a sermon delivered many years ago by a rev. brother, long since gone to his rest—"How the charge brought against our Order of being an encourager of infidelity can be sustained is to me inexplicable; or how any of the initiated can hold views subversive of revelation, or practice vices destructive of peace and happiness, both social and civil, is beyond my comprehension. For at every step we take we are reminded of our duty to God, and of the efficacious intercession of our adorable Redeemer; we are taught the necessity of the pure heart as the work of the renewing spirit, and as the condition on which alone eternal life can be secured; wherever we turn our eyes we behold the fundamental truths of the gospel strikingly represented by various significant emblems; we are directed to the star which led the wise men to Bethlehem, proclaiming to mankind the nativity of the Son of God, and here conducting our spiritual progress to the offer of redemption; the uncertainty of life, with its chequered scenes is ever before us; we are reminded there is no escape from the piercing arrows of death; to-day, the sun of prosperity and joy may shine upon our persons and families, health and strength may invigorate our frame, and we only feel the sorrow of another's woe; but to-morrow, perhaps this day closes its light some friendly heart may sigh over our breathless corpse—'Alas, my brother!' The coffin lies before us, the skull and bones are presented to our view, and though the solemn thought of death without revelation is dark and gloomy yet the Christian is suddenly revived by the evergreen and ever living sprig of faith in the merits of the Lion of the tribe of Judah which strengthens him with confidence to a blessed immortality. The precepts of industry and fidelity to God and man, the virtues of fortitude, temperance, justice and prudence are constantly inculcated. Now what is there in all this, in the remotest degree to encourage infidel opinions, or propagate immorality?" Rather is