

WHAT FREEMASONRY IS,
WHAT IT HAS BEEN,
AND
WHAT IT OUGHT TO BE.

BY
CHARLES BRADLAUGH.



LONDON:
FREETHOUGHT PUBLISHING COMPANY,
63, FLEET STREET, E.C .
1885.
—
PRICE TWOPENCE.

1885

24791.e.10.





LONDON:
PRINTED BY ANNIE BESANT AND CHARLES BRADLAUGH,
63, FLEET STREET, E.C.

WHAT FREEMASONRY IS, WHAT IT HAS BEEN, AND WHAT IT OUGHT TO BE.

IN a speech made in November, 1883, by his Royal Highness the Prince of Wales, as the Grand Master of the Grand Lodge of England, he declared that Freemasonry "must be religious," and that "as long as religion remains engrafted in the hearts of the craft in our country, the craft is certain to flourish; and be assured of this, brethren," he adds, "that when religion in it ceases, the craft will also lose its power and its stability". This is not at all the view of Freemasonry taken by the present Pope, as may be seen by reference to the encyclical letter of 20th April, 1884, in which he declares that by the jealousy of the devil the world is divided into two hostile camps, one for, and the other against, all virtue and truth. In the last-named the Pope puts all Freemasons. "In our time", he says, "the doers of evil appear to have coalesced, by an immense effort, prompted and aided by a wide-spread and strongly-organised society, 'the Freemasons'. These in effect do not give themselves the trouble to disguise their intent, and they rival each other in audacity against God's august majesty. Publicly and in the face of Heaven they undertake to ruin the holy church, in order, if it be possible, to completely rob Christian nations of the benefits owing to the Savior Jesus Christ." Pope Leo XIII. reminds the members of the Roman Catholic Church that his predecessor Clement XII., on 24th April, 1738, first denounced Freemasonry, and that this denunciation was confirmed by Benoit XIV., on the 18th May, 1751. For

nearly three-quarters of a century the occupants of the Papal chair were apparently silent; but in 1821 Pius VII. followed in the steps of Clement and Benoit. On the 13th March, 1825, Pope Leo XII., in the Apostolic constitution *Quo Graviora*, reiterated the acts and decrees of the before-mentioned Popes and confirmed them for ever. Pius VIII., by his encyclical letter of the 21st May, 1829; Gregory XII., by an encyclic of 15th August, 1832; and Pius IX., on the 9th November, 1846, the 25th September, 1865, and on other occasions, issued similar solemn and vigorous denunciations of Freemasonry. The Sacred Conclave "denounced publicly the sect of Freemasons as a criminal association, not less pernicious to the interests of Christianity than to those of civilised society; and it decreed, therefore, against Freemasons the gravest penalties with which the church strikes the guilty, and forbade anyone to join the Masonic body". Leo XIII. declares that in the past century and a half, Freemasonry has made an incredible advance. "Employing at the same time ruse and daring, it has invaded every rank of the social hierarchy, and has assumed in the head of modern states a power almost equal to sovereignty." The Pope affirms that: "It being the great interest of Freemasons to appear other than they are, they pretend to figure as friends of literature or philosophy, and to gather together in pursuit of science, and they speak solely of their zeal for civilisation and their love for the poor. To hear them, their only object is to ameliorate the condition of the masses and to extend to the greatest number of mankind the advantages of civil society." But this Leo XIII. declares to be all the merest pretence, and intended to hide the real objects of the Masonic body. The Pope further complains, that the Masonic body leaves to those who become initiated complete liberty of utterance either in affirming or denying the existence of deity, and that those who deny are as readily received as those who believe. Leo XIII. also complains that Freemasons make marriage a civil contract, which may be legally dissolved by a judicial tribunal, and that they maintain that there is no obligation to give religious instruction to children. He still further charges that Freemasons teach that the source of all sovereign power should be in a free people, and that those who exercise executive functions can only

do so lawfully by the popular consent. Nothing more perverse than this, says the Pope, can be possibly imagined. "In effect, to wish to destroy the religion and church established by God himself, and assured by him of his perpetual protection, to bring back amongst us, after eighteen centuries, the manners and institutions of the Pagans, is it not the fulness of madness and the most audacious impiety?" As the statements of the actual head of the Roman Catholic Church and of the present Grand Master of the Grand Lodge of England so absolutely conflict, it is proposed, as far as possible, to give citations from some authorities bearing upon the matter before expressing any independent opinion.

Hutchinson, in his "Spirit of Masonry", maintains that the worship of God "was the first, and corner, stone on which our originals thought it expedient to place the foundation of Masonry"; and Colonel Shadwell Clerk, the Grand Secretary of the Grand Lodge of England, writes: "The Grand Lodge of England holds, and has ever held, that a belief in God is the first great landmark of all true and genuine Masonry, without professing which, as the cardinal principle of its existence, no body can rightfully claim to inherit the traditions and practices of pure and ancient Masonry".

Kenneth R. H. Mackenzie, the learned honorary member of the Canongate Kilwinning Lodge, Scotland, in his "Royal Masonic Cyclopædia", whilst conceding that Atheism is "a state of mind which many of the wisest and best of men have for a time entertained", yet adds: "Very rightly no Atheist is admitted to the privileges of Freemasonry; but once balloted in, if he chooses to sign the candidates' book and to join in the ritual, there is nothing to exclude him; but in order to do this he must be either a hypocrite or a coward;" and in another place he writes: "Masonry is not an irreligious institution, but it assumes no special dogmatic form; it demands at the hands of its candidates a sincere and honest belief in a creative spirit ever attentive to the honorable aspirations of those who seek him in spirit and in truth, and it rejects with scorn those who would degrade the contriver into a part of the contrivance".

Freemasonry in the United States of America is the survival of the lodges originally established in the North

American colonies under the warrant of the Grand Lodge of England, and in Davis' "Freemason's Monitor" we find, following the old York Lodge constitution, under the head of "God and religion": "Whoever . . . desires to be a Mason . . . is firmly to believe in the existence of a Supreme Being, who will be the judge of our actions and reward us according to merit, to pay him that worship and veneration which is due to him, as the great architect of the universe"; and further: "a Mason . . . if he properly understands the fundamental rules of our order, he will never be an Atheist".

In the constitution, statutes, and general rules of the Rite Ecossais as promulgated in Belgium, it is declared that as religion is a duty of worship necessarily due to Almighty God, no person can be admitted who is not submitted to the duties of the religion of the country of which he is a native.

Monseigneur Dupanloup takes a very different view of what the Grand Orient of Belgium has been for the past twenty years, for—basing his accusation on the movement for secular education—he charges that body with drawing up a scheme of educational legislation, which he summarises as "a scheme of compulsory infidelity".

Clavel, in his work on "Freemasonry", quoted by Louis Blanc in the chapter on "Les Révolutionnaires Mystiques", says: "To believe in God was the only religious duty required from the accepted candidate. Therefore there was above the throne of the president of each lodge a shining delta, in the centre of which the name Jehovah was written in Hebrew letters."

In 1850 there was founded in London the Grand Lodge "des Philadelphes" by Masons foreigners to England, but belonging to various Masonic orders acknowledged in Europe. Amongst its members were Joseph Mazzini, Joseph Garibaldi, Louis Blanc, Ledru Rollin. The first article of its general statutes reads: "Freemasonry is an institution essentially philanthropical, philosophical, and progressive. It has for its object the amelioration of mankind without any distinction of class, color, or opinion, either philosophical, political, or religious; for its unchangeable motto: Liberty, Equality, Fraternity."

In consequence of a decision in 1877 by the Grand Orient of France, erasing from its procedure all references

to the Grand Architect of the Universe, the Grand Lodge of England practically excommunicated the Grand Orient of France by a resolution supported by the following statement: "Regarding the belief in the existence of the Grand Architect of the Universe as one of the principles upon which Freemasonry is founded, we cannot allow an express negation of this principle to pass, and we cannot recognise (as Freemasons) those who deny it".

In 1884 the Assembly General of the Grand Orient of France, in its revised constitution, says: "Freemasonry has for principles, mutual toleration, self-respect and respect for others, absolute liberty of conscience. Considering metaphysical concepts as belonging exclusively to the domain of the individual appreciation of each member, it refuses to make any dogmatic affirmation."

In 1877 the Grand Orient declared: "Freemasonry has for principles absolute liberty of conscience and human solidarity. It excludes no man for his beliefs."

In an official circular, issued by the Grand Orient of France in 1877, immediately after the alteration, it is stated: "Nothing is changed either in Masonic principles or practices. French Freemasonry remains, what it has always been, a fraternal and tolerant association. Respect—the religious and political convictions of its adepts, it leaves to each in these delicate questions the fullest liberty of conscience. Working for the moral and intellectual improvement and well-being of mankind, it only asks from those who are admitted into its midst those sentiments of honesty and love of virtue which will permit them to co-operate usefully in the work of progress and civilisation."

Dr. Louis Aimable, the orator of the General Assembly of the Grand Orient of France for the Session of 1884, in his closing address of the Convent says: "In inscribing amongst our principles mutual tolerance, respect for others and self-respect, we innovate only in form, for we have already recognised and practised these principles. But it was well that they should be printed at the head of our constitution, for they are characteristics common to universal Freemasonry in the midst of varieties arising from differences of organisation and diversities of social condition. And this too takes away henceforth all pretext for the disastrous misconception which, following the vote of 1877,

transformed into a profession of Atheism the suppression of the Deistic affirmation which had been introduced into our fundamental law only 25 years before. None can now in good faith consider us as negators when, whilst reserving the individual convictions of each, we simply refuse as a collective body to affirm concepts which cannot be possibly verified by any process of scientific investigation—that is to say either by observation or experience.”

On the 8th February, 1885, the Roman Catholic Bishop of Nottingham issued a pastoral letter “to the clergy and faithful” of his diocese, in which he declares that English Freemasonry is equally to be condemned with that of France. He writes: “The Society is one and universal, and a common responsibility is assumed by all who join it. The Papal condemnation and the Papal excommunication fall on all such equally. There are abundant proofs that the English and Scotch Masons are one with those of the continent”; and then, referring to the action of the Grand Lodge of England already recited, the Roman Catholic Bishop proceeds: “It is much insisted on, indeed, that the English lodges have disowned those of France since the latter refused to make the acknowledgment of God a condition of membership and erased the mention of God from their formularies. It seems to us to matter little whether they acknowledge or did not acknowledge ‘a grand architect of the universe’, for in saying architect they already implicitly deny the true God, who is the creator of heaven and earth. Let us suppose, however, that the recent refusal to communicate with the Grand Orient of France was intended as an act of homage to God. But are not the English Freemasons who are Christians thereby judged and condemned out of their own mouths? If to erase and omit all mention of God be an insult to God, why is not the omission of all mention of Christ in their own lodges an insult to Christ? If they will not communicate in their rites and ceremonies with an avowed Atheist, why do they so readily and freely communicate in them with avowed anti-Christians, such as Jews, Turks, and infidels?” “In very truth”, adds the Roman Catholic Bishop of Nottingham, “Freemasonry is an anti-Christian institution”.

Is Freemasonry an institution Atheistic and revolutionary in its tendencies, such as is painted from the Vatican? or as denounced by the Roman Catholic Bishop of Nottingham?

or is it fairly represented as an almost orthodox Christian fraternity, as by the declarations and practices of the Grand Lodge of England? or is there one Freemasonry of England and the English Colonies and another of the European Continent? and if it be true that there is difference of doctrine and of practice in any of the great Masonic bodies, then which of these represents the truer Freemasonry?

Is Freemasonry real in England as an institution on the whole fairly charitable, but specially noteworthy for its lodge dinners and social gatherings, and its high aristocracy of office? or is it real as in France, Italy, Belgium, as an institution in which equality is advocated and sought in fraternity by the education of the ignorant, the enfranchisement of the enslaved, the strengthening of the weak?

It is impossible to answer without looking to the history of Freemasonry as well as to its official declarations. Louis Blanc in his “Histoire de la Révolution Française”, book 1, cap. 3, says: “On the eve of the French Revolution Freemasonry found that it had secured an immense development. Spread through the whole of Europe it seconded the meditative genius of Germany, silently agitated France, and everywhere presented the picture of a society founded on principles the opposite of those prevalent in civil society. In the Masonic lodges the pretensions of hereditary pride were disregarded, and the privileges of birth set on one side. When the candidate for initiation entered into the chamber for reflexion, he read upon the walls hung with black and covered with funereal emblems the following characteristic inscription: ‘If you hold to class distinctions go away; there are none known here’. From the discourse of the orator on reception the new comer learned that the object of Freemasonry was to efface the distinctions of color, rank, and country; to extirpate national hatreds. . . . Thus, by the sole fact of its constitutive basis, Freemasonry tended to decry the institutions and ideas of the external world. . . . In the bosom of the lodge rich and poor, noble and plebeian, were bound to recognise each other as equal, to call each ‘brother’.”

In truth there are two Masonic currents drifting in very opposite directions. For more than two hundred and fifty years there has been in Europe a royalist and a democratic

Freemasonry. In England, Scotland, and Ireland, when the Stuart power was first broken by the Commonwealth, the Cavaliers almost monopolised the lodges. In 1688, when James II. fled to France, the aristocratic exiles established lodges in that country which were purely associations in which the royalist conspirators encouraged one another, and by communication with their brethren in England kept alive the Jacobite spirit. It is said that there was a chapter founded at Arras by the Pretender, Charles Edward, of which the father of Robespierre was Master.

In England and Scotland the spirit of the Stuart and Jacobite period has survived in Masonic circles, and there is not in any British Masonic lodge any other tendency than to support Royalism and respectability. This was so recognised in England that when, in the Tory reaction of 1819, sweeping enactments of harsh and oppressive character were passed against nearly all kinds of associations, the Freemasons were specially exempted from the penalties imposed against bodies who used secret signs and passwords, and exacted oaths or pledges of secrecy from those who became members.

In 1772, when Philippe Egalité was Grand Master of the Grand Orient of France, French Freemasonry really adopted the democratic basis which, despite the various troubles it has had to struggle against, it has preserved to the present day.

A recent letter by the *Times* Paris correspondent shows that he regards Freemasonry in France as a vital political force, one capable of giving and, as he thinks, actually now giving, important support to M. Henri Brisson, the new Prime Minister.

In the United States, American Freemasons for a long time excluded all colored men, and there are still, I believe, lodges where this prohibition is maintained, but I have been present in a New England lodge at the same time with the colored King of the Hawaiian Islands, and with Joshua Smith, the devoted friend of Sumner, born a slave, and afterwards Senator of the State of Massachusetts.

In England, since the cessation of Jacobite plots, the carefully guarded forms, signs, and pass words, have concealed nothing that all the world, enemies and friends, might not have known: they were as the elaborate letter

lock to the empty iron chest. In France and in Italy the lodge doors served as shields to the proscribed; the grip and word often sufficed to denote and guarantee the imperilled brother struggling for human redemption under conditions always of great difficulty, and sometimes of serious danger. In England an advertisement card or signboard showed that the brethren expected commercial preferences. On the Continent the help given was to the fraternal worker for human freedom. The spirit of modern Freemasonry is not unfairly stated by Dr. Louis Aimable, speaking in his official capacity as Orator General of the Grand Orient of France, in the closing speech of the Assembly General. Declaring that Freemasonry works for the moral and material amelioration, and intellectual and social perfection of humankind, he adds: "This means that we co-operate to prepare mankind, to the best of our strength and means, for the solution of the many and complex questions which together make up what is called the social question: that is to say, that lamentable question of misery and suffering which has endured under various forms from the very earliest ages. We mean that these questions shall be solved, not by violence, nor by predetermined systems, but by the progressive application of our principles, so as to more and more diminish the number of disinherited and to render them less and less miserable. In preparing such solutions we work for the common happiness, social peace, and progress of the country".

True Freemasonry should be of no religion. The Scotch Chaplain who, in his printed speech, points to the Bible used in the lodges and accepted as the word of God, forgets that this cannot be true for such Jews as are brethren—at any rate as far as the New Testament is concerned—nor for the Mahommedan brother. Yet there are most certainly hundreds of Jewish and Mahommedan Freemasons. In Constantinople, in Odessa, in Cairo, as in Paris, Berlin, and London; in Ceylon and the Hawaiian Islands, as in Italy and Spain, there are Masonic temples where those who are ranged to either pillar, as well as the illustrious seated in the east, are avowedly of distinct and often of opposing faiths. But under the temple roof the strife of creeds should be hushed, work should be the only worship: work for the redemption of long-suffering humankind.

PAMPHLETS BY CHARLES BRADLAUGH.

The True Story of my Parliamentary Struggle. Contain- ing a Verbatim Report of the proceedings before the Select Committee of the House of Commons; Mr. Bradlaugh's Three Speeches at the Bar of the House, etc., etc.	..	0	6
Fourth Speech at the Bar of the House of Commons.	..	0	1
May the House of Commons Commit Treason? ..	..	0	$\frac{1}{2}$
Correspondence with Sir Stafford Northcote, M.P.	..	0	2
John Churchill, Duke of Marlborough, "Mob, Seum, and Dregs" ..	..	0	2
A Cardinal's Broken Oath ..	..	0	1
Perpetual Pensions. Fortieth thousand ..	..	0	2
Civil Lists and Grants to Royal Family ..	..	0	1
A Radical Programme ..	..	0	2
Real Representation of the People ..	..	0	2
How are we to Abolish the Lords? ..	..	0	1
Objections to Socialism ..	..	0	1
England's Balance-Sheet ..	..	0	1
Why do Men Starve? ..	..	0	1
Jesus, Shelley, and Malthus: an Essay on the Population Question ..	..	0	2
Poverty and its effect upon the People ..	..	0	1
Labor's Prayer ..	..	0	1
The Land, the People, and the Coming Struggle ..	..	0	2
India. A lecture ..	..	0	1
Five Dead Men whom I knew when living. Sketches of Robert Owen, Joseph Mazzini, John Stuart Mill, Charles Sumner, and Ledru Rollin ..	..	0	4
Cromwell and Washington: a Contrast ..	..	0	6
Anthropology. In neat wrapper ..	..	0	4
When were our Gospels Written? ..	..	0	6
Plea for Atheism ..	..	0	3
Has Man a Soul? ..	..	0	2
Is there a God? ..	..	0	1
Who was Jesus Christ? ..	..	0	1
What did Jesus Teach? ..	..	0	1
The Twelve Apostles ..	..	0	1
The Atonement ..	..	0	1
Life of David ..	..	0	2
Life of Jacob ..	..	0	1
Life of Abraham ..	..	0	1
Life of Moses ..	..	0	1
Life of Jonah ..	..	0	1
A Few Words about the Devil ..	..	0	1
Were Adam and Eve our First Parents? ..	..	0	1
Heresy; its Morality and Utility. A Plea and a Justifica- tion ..	..	0	9
The Laws Relating to Blasphemy and Heresy ..	..	0	6