

RAMSAY ORATION

The noble ardour which you., gentlemen, evince to enter into the most noble and very illustrious Order of Freemasons, is a certain proof that you already possess all the qualities necessary to become members, that is, humanity, pure morals, inviolable secrecy and a taste for the fine arts.

Lycurgus, Solon, Numa and all political legislators have failed to make their institutions lasting. However wise their laws may have been, they have not been able to spread through all countries and ages. As they only kept in view victories and conquests, military violence and the elevation of one people at the expense of another, they have not had the power to become universal, nor to make themselves acceptable to the taste, spirit and interest of all nations. Philanthropy was not their basis. Patriotism badly understood and pushed to excess, often destroyed in these warrior republics love and humanity in general. Mankind is not essentially distinguished by the tongues spoken, the clothes worn, the lands occupied or the dignities with which it is invested. The world is nothing but a huge republic, of which every nation is a family, every individual a child.

Our Society was at the outset established to revive and spread these essential maxims borrowed from the nature of man. We desire to reunite all men of enlightened minds, gentle manners and agreeable wit, not only by a love for the fine arts but, much more, by the grand principles of virtue, science and religion, where the interests of the Fraternity shall become those of the whole human race, whence all nations shall be enabled to draw useful knowledge and where the subjects of all kingdoms shall learn to cherish one another without renouncing their own country. Out ancestors, the Crusaders, gathered together from all parts of Christendom in the Holy Land, desired thus to reunite into one sole Fraternity the individuals of all nations. What obligations do we not owe to these superior men who, without gross selfish interests, without even listening to the inborn tendency to dominate, imagined such an institution, the sole aim of which is to unite minds and hearts in order to make them better, to form in the course of ages a spiritual empire where, without derogating from the various duties which different States exact, a new people shall be created, which, composed of many nations, shall in some sort cement them all into one by the tie of virtue and .science.

The second requisite of our Society is sound morals. The religious orders were established to make perfect Christians, military orders to inspire a love of true glory and the Order of Freemasons to make men lovable men, good citizens, good subjects, inviolable in their promises, faithful adorers of the God of Love, lovers rather of virtue than of reward.

Nevertheless, we do not confine ourselves to purely civic virtues. We have amongst us three kinds of brothers: Novices or Apprentices, Fellows or Professed Brothers, Masters or Perfected Brothers. To the first are explained the moral virtues; to the second the heroic virtues; to the last the Christian virtues; so that our Institution embraces the whole philosophy of sentiment and the complete theology of the heart.

Because a sad, savage and misanthropic philosophy disgusts virtuous men, our ancestors, the Crusaders, wished to render it lovable by attractions of innocent pleasures, agreeable music, pure joy and moderate gaiety, Our festivals are not what the profane world and the ignorant vulgar imagine. All the vices of heart and soul are banished there and irreligion, libertinage, incredulity and debauch are proscribed. our banquets resemble those virtuous *symposia* of Horace, where the conversation only touched what could enlighten the soul, discipline the heart and inspire a taste for the true, the good and the beautiful.

Thus the obligations imposed upon you by the Order, are to protect your Brothers by your authority,

to enlighten them by your knowledge, to edify them by your virtues, to succor them in their necessities, to sacrifice all personal resentment, to strive after all that may contribute to the peace

and unity of society.

We have secrets; they are figurative signs and sacred words, composing a language sometimes mute, sometimes very eloquent, in order to communicate with one another at the greatest distance, to recognize our Brothers of whatsoever tongue. These were words of war which the Crusaders gave each other in order to guarantee them from the surprises of the Saracens, who often crept in amongst them to kill them. These signs and words recall the remembrance either of some part of our science, of some moral virtue or of some mystery of the faith. That has happened to us which never befell any former Society. Our Lodges have been established, are spread in all civilized nations and, nevertheless, among this numerous multitude of men never has a Brother betrayed our secrets. Those natures most trivial, most indiscreet, least schooled to silence learn this great art on entering our Society. Such is the power over all natures of the idea of a fraternal bond! This inviolable secret contributes powerfully to unite the subjects of all nations, to render the communication of benefits easy and mutual between us. We have many examples in the annals of our Order. Our Brothers, traveling in divers lands, have only needed to make themselves known in our Lodges in order to be there immediately overwhelmed by all kinds of succor, even in time of the most bloody wars, while

illustrious prisoners have found Brothers where they only expected to meet enemies. Should any fail in the solemn promises which bind us, you know, gentlemen, that the penalties which we impose upon him are remorse of conscience, shame at his perfidy and exclusion from our Society.

Yes, sirs, the famous festivals of Ceres at Eleusis, of Isis in Egypt, of Minerva at Athens, of Urania amongst the Phoenicians, of Diana in Scythia were connected with ours. In those places mysteries were celebrated which concealed many vestiges of the ancient religion of Noah and the Patriarchs. They concluded with banquets and libations when neither that intemperance nor excess were known into which the heathen gradually fell. The source of these infamies was the admission to the nocturnal assemblies of persons of both sexes in contravention of the primitive usages. It is in order to prevent similar abuses that women are excluded from our Order. We are not so unjust as to regard the fair sex as incapable of keeping a secret. But their presence might insensibly corrupt the purity of our maxims and manners.

The fourth quality required in our Order is the taste for useful sciences and the liberal arts. Thus, the Order exacts of each of you to contribute, by his protection, liberality or labour, to a vast work for which no academy can suffice, because all these societies being composed of a very small number of men, their work cannot embrace an object so extended. All the Grand Masters in Germany, England, Italy and elsewhere, exhort all the learned men and all the artisans of the Fraternity to unite to furnish the materials for a Universal Dictionary of the liberal arts and useful sciences, excepting only theology and politics. [This proposed Dictionary is a curious *crux* - it is possible that the Royal Society may have formed some such idea? But at least Ramsay's express exclusion of theology and politics should have shielded him from the accusation of wishing to employ Freemasonry for Jesuitical and Jacobite purposes. With the exception of the constant harping on the Crusades, there is so far nothing in the speech of which to complain.]

The work has already been commenced in London and, by means of the union of our Brothers; it may be carried to a conclusion in a few years. Not only are technical words and their etymology explained, but the history of each art and science, its principles and operations, are described. By this means the lights of all nations will be

united in one single work, which will be a universal library of all that is beautiful, great, luminous, solid and useful in all the sciences and in all noble arts. This work will augment in each century, according to the increase of knowledge, it will spread everywhere emulation and the taste for things of beauty and utility.

The word Freemason must therefore not be taken in a literal, gross and material sense, as if our founders had been simple workers in stone, or merely curious geniuses who wished to perfect the arts. They were not only skillful architects, desirous of consecrating their talents and goods to the construction of material temples; but also religious and warrior princes who designed to enlighten, edify and protect the living Temples of the Most High. This I will demonstrate by developing the history or rather the renewal of the Order.

Every family, every Republic, every Empire, of which the origin is lost in obscure antiquity, has its fable and its truth, its legend and its history. Some ascribe our institution to Solomon, some to Moses, some to Abraham, some to Noah, some to Enoch, who built the first city, or even to Adam. Without any pretense of denying these origins, I pass on to matters less ancient. This, then, is apart of what I have gathered in the annals of Great Britain, in the Acts of Parliament, which speak often of our privileges and in the living traditions of the English people, which has been the center of our Society since the eleventh century.

At the time of the Crusades in Palestine many princes, lords and citizens associated themselves and vowed to restore the Temple of the Christians in the Holy Land, to employ themselves in bringing back their architecture to its first institution. They agreed upon several ancient signs and symbolic words drawn from the well of religion in order to recognize themselves amongst the heathen and Saracens. These signs and words were only communicated to those who promised solemnly, even sometimes at the foot of the altar, never to reveal them. This sacred promise was therefore not an execrable oath, as it has been called, but a respectable bond to unite Christians of all nationalities in one confraternity. Some time afterwards our Order formed an intimate union with the Knights of St. John of Jerusalem. From that time our Lodges took the name of Lodges of St. John. This union was made after the example set by the Israelites when they erected the second Temple who, whilst they handled the trowel and mortar with one hand, in the other held the sword and buckler. [This idea forms the groundwork of all subsequent Scots grades: Knightly Scotch Masons who, in the old Temple, rediscovered the Sacred Name, the trowel in one hand, the sword in the other. Ramsay's allusion, it will be observed, is not to any existing Degree of his day, but an innocent allegory in illustration of his thesis.]

Our Order, therefore, must not be considered a revival of the Bacchanals, but as an Order founded in remote antiquity, renewed in the Holy Land by our ancestors in order to recall the memory of the most sublime truths amidst the pleasures of society. The kings, princes, and lords returned from Palestine to their own lands and there established divers Lodges. At the time of the last Crusades many Lodges were already erected in Germany, Italy, Spain, France and, from thence, in Scotland, because of the close alliance between the French and the Scotch. James, Lord Steward of Scotland, was Grand Master of a Lodge established at Kilwinning, in the West of Scotland, MCCLXXXVI [this passage has been seized upon by the inventors of Scots rites, all pretending to hail from Heredom Killwinning, asserting the superiority in point of antiquity and pure tenets of the Grand Lodge held there - which body, it is almost unnecessary to say, never existed], shortly after the death of Alexander III, King of Scotland, and one year before John Baliol mounted the throne.. This lord received as Freemasons into his Lodge the Earls of Gloucester and Ulster, the one English, the other Irish.

By degrees Our Lodges and our Rites were neglected in most places. This is why

of so many historians only those of Great Britain speak of our Order. Nevertheless it preserved its splendour among those Scotsmen of whom the Kings of France confided during many centuries the safeguard of their royal persons.

After the deplorable mishaps in the Crusades, the perishing of the Christian armies and the triumph of Bendocdar, Sultan of Egypt, during the eighth and last Crusade, that great Prince

Edward, son of Henry III, King of England, seeing there was no longer any safety for his Brethren in th Holy Land, whence the Christian troops were retiring, brought them all back and this colony of Brothers was established in England. As this prince was endowed with all heroic qualities, he loved the fine arts, declared himself protector of our Order, conceded to it new privileges and then the members of this Fraternity took the name of Freemasons after the example set by their ancestors.

Since that time Great Britain became the seat of our Order, the conservator of our laws and the depository of our secrets. The fatal religious discords which embarrassed and tore Europe in the sixteenth century caused our Order to degenerate from the nobility of its origin. Many of our Rites and usages which were contrary to the prejudices of the times were changed, disguised, suppressed. Thus it was that many of our Brothers forgot, like the ancient Jews, the spirit of our laws and retained only the letter and shell. The beginnings of a remedy have already been made. It is necessary only to continue and, at last, to bring everything back to its original institution. This work cannot be difficult in a State where religion and Government can only be favourable to our laws.

From the British Isles the Royal Art is now repassing into France, under the reign of the most amiable of Kings, whose humanity animates all his virtues and under the ministry of a Mentor [evidently Cardinal Fleury}, who has realized all that could be imagined most fabulous. In this happy age when love of peace has become the virtue of heroes, this nation [France] one of the most spiritual of Europe, will become the center of the Order. She will clothe our work, our statutes, and our customs with grace, delicacy and good taste, essential qualities of the Order, of which the basis is the wisdom, strength and beauty of genius. It is in future in our Lodges, as it were in public schools, that Frenchmen shall learn, without traveling, the characters of all nations and that strangers shall experience that France is the home of all peoples.