

WHAT IS MASONRY?

An interesting controversy has taken place in Wanganui on the subject of Masonry. At the consecration of a new Masonic Hall, the Rev. W. B. Harvey, head master of the Church of England Trust School in that town, performed the duties of Presiding Officer, and took the opportunity in a portion of the ceremony when the general public were present, to enlighten "the world" as to what was Masonry. Reporters were present, and his speech appeared next day in the papers. A well-known Freethinker was present as a Mason, and one of the papers commented, from the theological side, on the anomaly of one Mason carrying a large Bible, and another marching in the procession who on Sunday evenings joined in "scoffing" (the usual term of abuse for criticising) at the same book. In reply to the Rev. Mr. Harvey's attack appeared a letter in the 'Wanganui Herald' which created a small sensation among the Craft, and, we believe, has been extensively circulated in other parts of the colony. As our friends are likely to find the subject interesting, we publish the attack and reply:—

THE REV. W. B. HARVEY ON MASONRY.

Worshipful Masters, Wardens, and Brethren,—In accordance with your prayer, and by virtue of the Dispensation granted to me by the District and Provincial Grand Lodges, I have solemnly dedicated this lodge to the purposes of Freemasonry in the name of the Most High God. Before resigning my seat to the W. M., by whom the lodge will be duly closed, I would in a few words invite you to reflect on the meaning of the ceremonial in which we have been engaged. You, brethren, will not need to be reminded that religion is the very foundation stone of our ancient institution. You have too often been called upon to avow your faith and your trust in the ever watchful providence of God, your reverence for his holy word, to be left in any doubt on the point. You know that as Masons you are required, first and above all things, to be religious, God-fearing men. True, we pay no heed, within these walls, to those distinctions by which unhappily, the believers' camp is rent asunder. Our rules will not suffer us here to speak of names that too often act not as bonds of union in a common cause, but as the battle cries of opposing factions. But we ignore them, not as excluding any, rather as including all: not as slighting and condemning any, but as holding all in brotherly esteem and love. We are ready to extend the right hand of fellowship to all good men and true, who bow with us before the throne of the Great Architect and Ruler of the Universe and recognise with us the Volume of the Sacred Law as the only sure basis of morality, the only sure teacher of our duty to God, to our neighbour, and to ourselves. But, as Masons, we can have no fellowship with men who are seeking to destroy the faith on which we have built all our present confidences, all our future hope. We do not judge them; to God and not to us they are responsible; to Him their account must be rendered. But our aims and theirs are as opposite as light and darkness. We have nothing in common with them; we cannot wish them "God speed." The duty of Masons in this respect was clearly marked when the Grand Lodge of England refused any longer to recognise the Grand Orient Lodge of France, on the ground that they had removed the name of the Deity from their ritual. You, brethren, are far too well instructed and too loyal to our order to need thus to be reminded of the principles you have so often vowed to uphold. But I hail with satisfaction the opportunity given us to-day of proclaiming those principles to the world. At a time when faith in God and God's revealed will is openly scoffed at by so many, it is well that all should know that Masons are not among those who would remove the ancient landmarks; that Masons steadfastly believe in one true God, who made heaven and earth; that Masons hold in the utmost reverence the sacred Book in which He has revealed Himself to man; that Masons seek His aid in all their lawful undertakings, and confidently expect His succour in every time of danger and distress. The service in which we have been engaged bears emphatic witness to the first principle of Freemasonry. It remains for us, brethren, to bear still more emphatic witness to them in our lives. Let us make it then our earnest study not only to prove but to commend our faith by displaying in ourselves the virtues that should adorn every true Mason; especially that most God-like of all virtues, Charity. May mutual love ever reign within these walls, and shine forth, as from a centre of light and warmth, on all the world around. May the name of Mason ever be associated in this town with the thought of a good and upright man—one whose word is never broken whose heart and hand are ever ready to succour the needy and distressed. Most heartily do we congratulate the Worthy Masters, Wardens, Officers, and Brethren of the two lodges that have united to build this house. We trust the zeal you have displayed in this good work will indeed meet with the approval and blessing of the Great Master Builder. May peace be within these walls, and the voice of joy and praise resound therein continually. May all your undertakings here be prosperous as this has been, and may your earthly happiness be crowned with the Supreme bliss of heaven!

[REPLY.]

WHAT IS MASONRY?

BY A MASTER MASON.

The Rev. B. W. Harvey, as Presiding Officer, took the opportunity at the consecration of the new Masonic Hall to put forth publicly certain views on Masonry which have provoked some notice among the Craft and in the public Press. That he departed widely from the central principles of Masonry I have no doubt whatsoever. For that universality and comprehensiveness which distinguish our ancient Order, we have had placed in the foreground the doctrines of a sect, the theology and polemics of priestcraft, with what looks very like an attack on individual Masons whose theological and speculative opinions have not been cut according to the sectarian pattern. "As Masons" (said the Presiding Officer) "we can have no fellowship with men who are seeking to destroy the faith on which we have built all our present confidences, all our future hope. We do not judge them; to God and not to us they are responsible; to Him their account must be rendered. But our aims and theirs are as opposite as light and darkness. We have nothing in common with them; we cannot wish them God speed. The duty of Masons in this respect was clearly marked when the Grand Lodge of England refused any longer to recognise the Grand Orient Lodge of France, on the ground that they had removed the name of the Deity from the ritual." The speaker went on to say that he had taken the opportunity of the occasion of proclaiming his principles to the world. If it is well that the world should know the views of a Mason and a theologian, it is also well the world should know that there are Masons who are not theologians who do not hold the same views of Masonry.

Now I desire to take my stand on the same ritual, and to profess as deep a reverence for the ancient landmarks as the Rev. Mr. Harvey. Fortunately there is no Pope in Masonry. If anyone, moreover, is to blame for what may seem a religious discussion, I think the Presiding Officer is called upon to render an account for introducing the polemic on an occasion when polemics are forbidden. The first question then that has to be answered is, What is the "faith" to which he referred as binding on a Mason? Clearly it is not the Christian faith. Mr. Harvey was well aware that that faith is no part of Masonry—that it has been excluded by the most careful process of elimination. If it were included, Jews could not be members of the Order; yet some of the most distinguished members of the Craft belong to the Jewish faith. And as Jews reject the New Testament as the result of imposture, it cannot be an essential or any part of the "faith" of a Mason. But is the "faith" of a Mason acceptance of the Old Testament minus the New? If so, then all Masons are simply Jews in religion—professors of Judaism. But leaving out the logical dilemma in which all Christians would be placed by such a theory, is the Rev. Mr. Harvey prepared to deny that Freemasonry may and does exist among Mahomedans, Brahmans, and other peoples who do not acknowledge any part of the Jewish or Christian scriptures? No well-informed Mason would take such a stand.

Then is the "faith" a simple Deism? To this position Mr. Harvey is logically forced, and we do not care to deny him all the advantage it gives him. He stands precisely on the same platform as Thomas Paine, who wrote: (Age of Reason, page 1), "I believe in one God, and no more, and I hope for happiness beyond this life," and added, "I believe in the equality of man; and I believe that religious duties consist in doing justice, loving mercy, and endeavoring to make our fellow creatures happy." This practical religion some Masons think superior to theological systems. To sum up this part of my argument: The Christian faith is not a tenet of Masonry, or all reference to Christ would not be carefully excluded, and Jews could not be Masons. Judaism, again, cannot be a tenet, or Hindoos could not be Masons. And Deism itself (which I have conceded for Mr. Harvey's consolation), is not thought an essential part of Masonry by the great body of French Masons.

In the reference to the Grand Orient, Mr. Harvey is extremely illogical. He speaks in the name of all Masons, yet immediately states that the Grand Lodge of England "refused to recognise the Grand Orient." If he had been as cautious as he ought to have been in the presence of so many brethren, he would have simply stated the fact that one body of Masons had refused to continue to hold communication with another body independent in its jurisdiction. In the same way he would have had to admit that the Grand Lodge of England had refused to recognise the Grand Lodge of Victoria and the Grand Lodge of New South Wales (no harm being done by the non-recognition), while nearly every Grand Lodge in America had extended the right hand of fellowship. To confound Masonry in its universal character with the actions of one Constitution, argues an artificial knowledge of the Order or a defective reasoning power not creditable to anyone who assumed the authority to lecture Masons.

And now let me pursue in as brief terms as possible the enquiry, What is Masonry? What are the great central principles which, apart from the emblems, allegory, and symbols, distinguish and inspire all true Masons the world over? I have attempted to show what Masonry is not, and if I am followed, it will not be difficult to discover what it is. In the first place it is a system of morality. This is the great central fact which few Masons will hesitate to accept. The relation of the Bible to that vital truth is emblematical, allegorical, and symbolical. But there are other emblems and symbols of equal authority. Every Mason will apprehend what I mean, and find the warrant for the statement in the ritual. Is this system of morality enforced and illustrated? Undoubtedly; and the chief corner stone, or rather the foundation, of the system is—Brotherly Love, Relief, and Truth. This is the universal religion which appeals to all humanity, to the world, and gives the Order its sanctity, authority, and charm with all worthy members. While theologians are quibbling and distressing their narrow circles with