

TOLERATION

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Perhaps the most marvellous movement of modern times, that which has most thoroughly affected social, religious and political life, was the Reformation? Through its inspiration, dignity and power were given to the common people, and the mind of Europe was freed from the superstitions which had held control for a thousand years. The doctrine which made the Reformation under Luther acceptable to the people and thus a possibility, was the right of private interpretation of the Scriptures, which logically carried with it the great principle of toleration. Religious liberty involved liberty of thought, of speech, of person. When the people of France were listening in dread to the first murmurs of that political storm which ushered in the Constitutional government of France, Rosseau gave the rallying cry which awoke them to a consciousness of their own power and importance. " Liberty, fraternity, equality," were

magic words, and touched the hearts of all. Up to that time such words had been treason to the State and could only be voiced in secret. None the less was liberty a natural right of the people that had been lost for centuries to them though the tyranny of priests and kings. Their heritage was in unfriendly hands, and the people groaned, waiting for the day of redemption. During all the ages, liberty of thought was the natural birthright of every man. Now and again hold spirits enunciated the doctrine, and practiced the deductions from it in their intercourse with their fellow men, and sometimes these paid with their lives for their boldness. But the doctrines of liberty and toleration were fairly taught by allegory and illustrated by symbol long before the great political movements, for Masonry has always played an important part in all movements, looking toward the improvement of the

condition of the people, and has ever been a leader in emancipating those enslaved and oppressed.

As in the past, it is now the glory of Masonry that it teaches toleration, and thus encourages activity in all the regions of legitimate knowledge. Mental activity is stifled when the avenues of expression or belief are closed. To intimate that some phases of belief will be met with punishment or persecution is to give occasion for such concealment of personal views as will end ultimately either in hypocrisy or mental deadness. There can be no doubt enlightenment comes from investigation, not that intolerance will prevent inquiry. All the intellectual quickening of the ages can be traced to the struggles of mind dissatisfied with their environments, or unwilling to accept as final the conclusions of others without further investigation. The so-called "dark ages" were dark

because the opportunities for enlightenment were not within the reach of the multitude. When Europe awakened from its lethargy of centuries it soon demonstrated the fact that men were as capable of grappling with the problems of life as were the wisest of the worthies of the past. When the way to more perfect understanding was opened, and when it became possible for information to be widely diffused, the dark age passed away.

As we read the story of the intellectual awakening of Europe, we are struck with progress made where tolerance of new views was the rule, and equally are we struck by the slower developments where efforts were made to bind the people to the opinions and traditions of the ages gone before. To those who study the history of this present century, rejoicing at our marvelous advancement in scientific knowledge, the

query is constantly presented. Why did not the other centuries anticipate ours in these fields? Roger Bacon broadly hinted at some of our modern discoveries. Galileo opened the gateway to the true study of the heavens, and far back in the past the foundations of chemical science were laid, yet, until the present century, men had not fairly come into the heritage of power which has become ours through the marvellous discoveries lately made. Through all the centuries the resources of Nature were present. Chemical combinations were possible, the unharnessed forces were as potent, but the talisman necessary to make these things the obedient servants of man was not known. Why? Because ignorance and bigotry were afraid to permit the investigations which were essential to a right understanding of Nature.

Intolerance would not permit any study which might result in a shattering of old forms of belief. The prison, the scourge, the stake awaited those whose independent habits of thought led them to a free expression of opinions which antagonized the beliefs of the holders of power. It is to the glory of Masonry that since its first institution it has always taught toleration, and embodied in its system a practical illustration of reasonable freedom. Within the Lodge all are taught to meet upon the level - that there, however great and wise some may be, those of lowly estate and with but the rudiments of knowledge are entitled to consideration and protection. And yet Masonry has never encouraged ignorance. On the contrary, it has always incited to an endeavour to learn all the secrets of Nature possible to the human understanding, and much of its beautiful instruction has been given in order to create a strong impulse to

the pursuit of knowledge. "With all thy getting, get understanding " has ever been the charge to the neophyte. The beauty of wisdom, and the necessity of increased knowledge has been suggested. But, with the urgent invitation to mental cultivation, there has ever been a tenderness in dealing with those who were hindered from reaching large attainment. Ignorance has never been accounted a crime, and that toleration of different beliefs which is necessary to true brotherhood has been taught and practised. The peculiarities of mind have been understood by Masons, and, quick growth in all knowledge has not been expected. Time and training are requisite to development, and in nothing is this more true than in knowledge.

"Heaven is not reached at a single bound;
We build the ladder by which we rise

From the lonely earth to the vaulted skies,
And we mount to its summit round by round."

But this doctrine of toleration, as enunciated in Masonry and practiced by the members of the Fraternity, is not founded upon pity for ignorance, but upon a nobler principle of action. Even the wisest men are but relatively wise. The fields of knowledge are limitless, and though a long life be spent in gathering the flowers which grow therein, yet are there limitless fields unknown. The root of Masonic toleration is found in the noble doctrine or brotherhood. We are members of one family, and whatsoever our country, race, or kindred, we are brothers. As the outgrowth of this doctrine, and the feeling it inspires, we are compelled to grant a large amount of liberty to one another, and gradually this doctrine has reached such development that the Masonic Fraternity has set its

face unalterably against all forms of intolerance or bigotry, wheresoever the same may presume to manifest themselves. Masonry, then, stands for the liberty of the individual. It stands for that broad charity which can tolerate what it cannot accept. And this is one reason why Masonry has found arrayed against it all the societies which thrive on the intolerant dogma of past ages.

The church which permits no independent thought in its schools, which brands as heresy any departure from a statement of doctrine formulated a thousand years ago, which tortures the body upon the pretence of saving the soul-such a church can see in Masonry nothing of good. The church is right in its opposition to Masonry if it purposes to bind the people in the unquestioning submission of the past, for it is the purpose of Masonry to free mankind from whatever

prevents the full development of all our powers. The far-seeing hierarchy of Rome sees the true tendency of Masonic teaching, and knows that where the people come under its influence they are quickened to a new life - a life where the freedom of the individual soul and personal accountability to the Creator must affect all human relations. Whenever the individual conscience has learned that it is directly and not mediately responsible to God, the power of ecclesiasticism over that conscience is forever broken. This is what ecclesiastical fulminations against Masonry mean. They recognize the fact that Masonry seeks to emancipate the world from all forms of slavery, and though the hierarchy would be unwilling to acknowledge unquestioning and blind obedience to priesthood to be a form of slavery, yet by whatever name the condition of mind which leads to this result may be called, in the final analysis it is found to be

slavery. But it may be asked, Does this hierarchy now demand the blind obedience of the middle ages? If this were the year 1274, and the decree of Innocent IV. that "All translation of the Scriptures into the vulgar tongue of any country should be given to the flames," we might say the ignorance of the middle ages is at fault, but when Rome places upon its index expurgatorius the translations of the Gospels into French made in the year 1887, and approved by the Pope himself, what shall we say? What shall we call the action of the hierarchy when, on 19th December, 1887, it proscribed and damned the very book which but a short time before had received the approval of the Pope? And remember, too, that this translation was not made by a protestant, but by a devout member of the Roman Church, whose work had been approved by a great number of bishops, priests and pious laymen. Why, then, was this done?

The secret of the whole matter was that a critical examination of the translation disclosed the fact that some of the renderings of Greek words were not in accordance with the dogmas of the Romish Church. Although the whole French people were longing for such living translation of God's Word as it is, they were denied, because above all things the dogmatic treatment of the Scriptures favored by Rome must not be endangered. It is not the truth which the hierarchy is anxious to save, but the power which comes from a particular interpretation of Scripture. It matters not whether that interpretation be right or wrong, it is the interpretation of the church, and as such it must stand though all the progress of the world be stopped. Is it to be wondered at, then, that from the same source are sent out from time to time bulls denouncing Masonry?

Let Masonry rejoice that the issue is so clearly defined, and that it is the recognized friend of human liberty, the champion of spiritual and mental emancipation? Until all forms of bigotry are ended, until man is free in all righteous senses of the term, until the day of perfect enlightenment, Masonry has a mission. It is in the world because the world needs its unwavering testimony to human rights and brotherhood, and it will continue on its beneficent way unchecked by any opposition based upon selfishness or upon a desire to perpetuate spiritual bondage. So long as ignorance abounds, so long as oppression causes tears to flow, so long as vice lifts up its head, just so long will Masonry strive for the betterment of humanity. Its challenge is to all that tends to degrade men, or to prevent the accomplishment of the great possibilities with which all are gifted. And if in this it meets opposition, it will still march on as in years gone by, knowing that truth

is mighty and will prevail. Toleration in beliefs is, then, a cardinal doctrine of Masonry, and one of its chief sources of its wonderful hold upon the intelligence of the age. Liberty of thought is essential to perfect individual growth, and whatever prevents or seeks to check the free action of the human mind, is an enemy to human progress. Threats and compulsions are checks to the free expression of thought, and to the proper government of free men. Recognizing this fact, Masonry plants itself firmly on the doctrine of toleration, and seeks to inspire men with such a lofty conception of humanity as will secure true regard for the rights of the individual. If Masonry accomplishes only this much for our race it blesses the world and brightens human life. And this is a part of its mission. Men of different beliefs, of different races, of peculiar mental organization, all come within the broad sweep of its tolerant spirit, and learn to

measure each other, not by the narrow rules of class or sect, but by the divine principle of a common brotherhood, and thus measured and with the consciousness of personal imperfection, they learn to look with charity upon what seem to be the serious imperfections of others. In this land of freedom where all men stand in equality under common laws, receiving equal privilege and protection, we can rejoice at what has been accomplished through the general acceptance of our Masonic principle, but, with the feeling of satisfaction which we have, there should also be ever present the strong determination that our principles shall continue to guide to the complete realization of the Masonic ideal. That has not yet been reached: the day is not yet when we can rejoice at the universal acceptance of our teaching. Bigotry still lifts up its voice, and at times we hear the echo of past ages in the anathemas directed against us and against

toleration and liberty, but as in the past so in the future, we shall press forward undaunted to our highest ideals. What are those ideals? We answer in words spoken twenty-five centuries ago:

" Fearlessness, singleness of soul the will

Always to strive for wisdom, open hand,

And governed appetites, and piety,

And love of study; humbleness,

Uprightness, slowness to wrath, a mind

That lightly letteth go what others prize;

And tolerance and charity

Which spieth no man's faults; and tenderness

Towards all that suffer;

A contented heart; a hearing mind,

Modest, and rave, with manhood nobly mixed

With patience, fortitude and purity;

*An unrevengeful spirit, never given
To rate itself too high - such be the signs
Of him whose feet are set - O.' Indian Prince
On that fair path that leads to heavenly Bliss."*

-- Voice of Masonry..

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