

## RAMSAY'S ORATION OF 1737

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 the 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 interests 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 of 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 knowledge and where subjects of all kingdoms shall learn to cherish one another without renouncing their own country. Our 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 lovable men, good citizens, good subjects, inviolable in their promises, faithful adorers of the God of Love, lovers rather of virtue than of reward.

*Polliciti servare fidem, sanctumque vereri  
Numen amicitiae, mores, non munera amare.*

*To faithfully keep a promise, to honour the holiness of friendship  
To love virtue, not its 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. This is why one of our brothers [Comte de Tressan] has said:

Freemason, illustrious Grand Master  
Receive my first transports,

In my heart the Order has given them birth,  
Happy I, if noble efforts  
Cause me to merit your esteem  
By elevating me to the sublime,  
The primeval Truth,  
To the Essence pure and divine,  
The celestial Origin of the soul  
The Source of life and love.

Because a sad, savage and misanthropic philosophy disgusts virtuous men, our ancestors, the Crusaders, wished to render it lovable by the 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.

*O noctes coenaeque Deum ...  
Sermo oritur, non de regnis domibusve alienis  
...sed quo magis ad nos  
Pertinet, et nescire malum est, agitamus; utrumne  
Divitiis homines, an sint virtute beati;  
Quidve ad amicitias usus rectumve trahat nos,  
Et quae sit natura boni, summumque quid ejus.*

*O nights, o divine repasts!  
Without troubling ourselves with things that do not matter  
But to dwell on those which concern us  
...and it would be bad to ignore:  
If wealth or virtue give happiness to Man  
What use do friendship or virtue bring us  
What is the nature of good, and what is the highest good.*

Horace, Satire VI Book II

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 succour 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 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, amongst 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 diverse lands, have only needed to make themselves known in our Lodges in order to be there immediately overwhelmed by all kinds of succour, even in the 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, according to those beautiful lines of Horace:

*Est et fidei tuta silencio  
Merces; vetabo qui Ceris sacrum  
Vulgarit Arcanum, sub iisdem  
Sit trabibus, fragilemque mecum  
Salvat Phaselum. ...*

*Loyal silence is surely rewarded  
But he who reveals the sacred secret of Ceres  
Him I will not allow to dwell under my roof  
Or to share my shallow skiff*

Horace, Odes, Book III

Yes, sirs, the famous festivals of Ceres at Eleusis, of Isis in Egypt, of Minerva at Athens, or 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 no 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, our 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 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 principle 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 skilful architects, desirous of consecrating their talents and good 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 our Order.

Every family, every republic, every Empire, of which the origin is lost in obscure history, 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 pretence of denying these origins, I pass on to matters less ancient. This, then, is a part 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 centre 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 the 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 after 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.

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 master of a Lodge at Kilwinning, in the West of Scotland, MCCLXXXVI, shortly after the death of Alexander III, King of Scotland, and one year before John Balliol mounted the throne. This lord received 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 amongst 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 the 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 the 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 and 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 the 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, 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 one of the most spiritual in Europe, will become the centre of the Order. She will clothe our work, our statutes, our customs with grace, delicacy and good taste, essential qualities of the Order, of which the basis is 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 nations. *Patria gentis humanae.*