

perished long ago, in company with other forgotten and outmoded clubs and organisations which arise, have their day and sink into oblivion. Freemasonry not only remains, but majestically marches forward to meet the future with the eternal wisdom of the past. It not only has vitality and life but indeed has them abundantly. Errors and fashions of thought come and pass, but Truth is everlasting.

A MASON LOOKS TO LAMBETH

THE attack which *Darkness Visible* makes on our Masonic clergy and Bishops in particular is not only utterly wide of the mark, but is ecclesiastically seditious, disloyal, and even disgusting. To accuse them of breaking their consecration vow for refusing to break their Masonic obligation shows a lack of honour and decency which we would expect from the author; the dilemma in which he arbitrarily thrusts them of failing to banish strange and erroneous doctrine by refusing to explain to him (monstrous impertinence!) the nature of the God they worship as Freemasons is utterly false and unworthy. If they feel that Anglicanism is inadequate and incomplete, they surely have a right to supplement it as they please. It is their own private concern, and no business of Mr. Hannah's. Everyone's religion is his own private concern. But Mr. Hannah appears to suffer from considerable personal pique and wounded vanity when his ecclesiastical superiors to whom he presumably swore loyalty snubbed him for not minding his own business. Indeed his whole case is ludicrous. One is rather amazed at the patience and charity of the solitary Bishop whom Mr. Hannah commends, who actually invited him to his Palace to reason with him; Bishops are busy people, however, and one feels that this one might have employed his time better than in appearing to give any sympathy or importance to such ridiculous nonsense as Mr. Hannah must have bored him with.

Let us, however, examine this attack in greater detail, and see precisely what is implied.

Mr. Hannah has actually inferred (not I admit by name) that the present Archbishop of Canterbury by being both a Freemason and a Bishop, is thereby in bad faith. Or alternatively (which is even more insulting to Dr. Fisher) that he cannot take the religious side of Freemasonry seriously. The fact that I regard Dr. Fisher as one of the greatest occupants of the Chair of St. Augustine of all time is irrelevant to the issue; the charge is in any case outrageous in the extreme.

Dr. Fisher, however, is not only a great and statesmanlike Archbishop, but he is also a brilliant scholar. He is surely far more conversant with the moral theology of oaths than is the author of *Darkness Visible*. Like the humblest Mason from the working classes, His Grace has quite deliberately and in the presence of God sworn the sacred and solemn Obligation of an Entered Apprentice Freemason on his bare left knee, with one hand resting on the Holy Bible which he kissed afterwards to render it binding on him in conscience so long as he should live. In this oath, like any other First Degree Mason, His Grace voluntarily accepted, without evasion, equivocation, or mental reservation of any kind, certain dire physical torments and penalties should he prove faithless. If the Archbishop of Canterbury, with his vastly superior knowledge, sees nothing un-Christian in this oath, who on earth is Mr. Hannah with his small band of yapping querulous critics to cavil at it? If His Grace remains

loyal to the Craft (and he publicly identified himself with it by appearing at the Installation in the Albert Hall of that true Christian gentleman and nobleman the Earl of Scarborough as Grand Master) how dare anyone even suggest that Freemasonry can be incompatible with true Christianity? If the head of the great Anglican communion can on that same auspicious occasion offer prayer to the Great Architect that according to well-established Masonic usage does not, in its greater universality of application, end with the name of Christ, is it not of the most fatuous impertinence for such prayer to be stigmatised, as in Mr. Hannah's poisonous book, as an act of apostasy? Is it conceivable that the Archbishop of Canterbury is a spiritual schizophrenic? In all decency as well as in loyalty to his own oaths of allegiance as a priest, Mr. Hannah should learn to curb his pen from such utterly fantastic accusations.

The Archbishop of Canterbury is in a difficult and unenviable position, and very greatly in need of prayers rather than of carping criticisms. Just as Caiaphas of old felt that his first duty was the preservation of the Jewish nation intact against the inroads of Roman imperialism, and found himself in a cruel dilemma with which even the most devout Christian must sympathise, so the Archbishop of Canterbury has as his first duty the preservation of the Establishment, not from the inroads of the State which today is as fully Christian as the Church, but from the bigotries of the extremists who would wreck it from within. This he has done with a

truly masterly statesmanship. I even venture to assert, in a Masonic context, with true craftsmanship.

As I hope I have made clear already, were Mr. Hannah's excessively exclusive and narrow interpretation of Christianity the true one, it would indeed be incompatible with the broader spirit of Freemasonry which sees truth in all religions and gives precedence to none in its religious observances. The fact that the Archbishop is a man of the highest integrity and is also a loyal Freemason would seem to prove conclusively, therefore, that comprehensiveness and not exclusiveness is the true basis of our British Christianity.

One realises the delicacy of the situation. Extremists on both wings are still sufficiently powerful to render the progress towards a truly fraternal liberalism and unity with other believers in an atmosphere cleared of restricting and unnecessary dogmas both halting and hazardous. Doubtless the Archbishop would like to proceed further on the foundations he has already laid than discretion and present circumstances render expedient. But much has been accomplished in a truly Masonic spirit. The approach to the Free Churches, particularly in the United Christian service and demonstration of unity in Hyde Park during the Festival of Britain, and the masterly progress made towards re-union in South India (where incidentally Freemasonry is powerful among the leaders both of Anglicanism and of the Free Churches) are cases in point. One could even wish for further progress in a

World Council of Faiths, so dear to the late Sir Francis Younghusband, and regular repetitions of the inspiring service of all religions at St. Paul's Cathedral in which worship was addressed to God alone in the language, prayers and symbolism of the various faiths of mankind, for Christianity has everything to gain, and nothing to lose save the shedding of its bigots, in a more brotherly association with other believers. Time is on our side, but apparently the time is not yet.

It is however with most profound gratitude that I see the guidance of our beloved Church in such capable Masonic hands, and it is with pride in our ancient fraternity that I see our well-established fraternal ideals having their effective influence in high places. That is why the attack of *Darkness Visible* seems an irresponsible attempt to torpedo the spiritual welfare and progress of the Church. Mr. Hannah, however, seems to prefer the petrified stagnation of outworn formulas, to look on primitive creeds as binding statements of theological fact rather than as priceless symbols of ever-expanding consciousness of God in the light of an experience which is new, yet more ancient than the eternal hills. In attacking the Masonic Bishops Mr. Hannah is preferring darkness to light. The Masonic laity of the Church are already impatient with the narrowness which still prevails in her dogmatic outlook. Were far more Bishops and clergy to become initiated, who knows what rapid progress might not be made towards the conversion of England, and the Kingdom of God on earth?

A MASON'S FAITH.

Mr. Hannah is at great pains to prove that Freemasonry is a religion, and at the same time to prove that the Christian should have nothing to do with it. Speaking as a Chaplain of the Craft, and as a clergyman of the Church of England, I can confidently assert with my whole heart that he completely misunderstands the underlying principles of Freemasonry from beginning to end. Hence his views on this subject are both ignorant and worthless.

Certainly there is no reason why the outsider should understand Masonry, and it must be admitted that we do not go out of our way to publicise our activities. We prefer to do good by stealth. But we do not expect the outsider, knowing nothing about us, to proclaim his ignorance in a book, and then advertise that book by dubious methods into a best-seller. It is none of his business and we only ask to be left alone.

Yet accusations have been made and publicised, and must therefore be authoritatively answered and annihilated.

The Mason must agree with Mr. Hannah's quotation from Sir John Cockburn (*Freemasonry, What Why Whence Whither*) that the question of whether Masonry is, or is not, a religion is really battle of words. But Mr. Hannah goes on to demonstrate that Masonry is a rival religion, and incompatible with the Church of England. Here he is quite devastatingly wrong.

We come now to the core of the matter. What is the religion of Freemasonry?

It is the oldest of all religious systems, dating from time immemorial. It is not in itself a separate religion, and has never claimed to be one, but it embodies in itself the fundamental truths and ancient mysteries on which every religion is based. Taunts that it worships a "common denominator" God are rather wide of the mark if the phrase indicates any inadequacy or limitation in nature or title of the God we worship, for we worship and believe as a first principle in the fulness of the Godhead of which other religions see only in part. We worship God in the simplicity and purity of His absolute power, majesty, and fatherhood, untrammelled and unimpeded by hampering dogmas and man-made creeds which only tend to obscure the simplicity and truth of the Divine Nature.

As Masons, we believe in God, the Father, Almighty. As Christian Masons we may believe in a symbolical triune essence, and that Jesus Christ is His Son, Our Lord. As Moslem Masons we are equally entitled to believe that Mahomet is His prophet. With these subsidiary and secondary beliefs Masonry has nothing to do, giving her members a perfect liberty to interpret the Godhead as they please. And even the most devout Christian must surely admit that God comes first, and that the distinctively Christian creeds are secondary to this sublime first principle. It is quite false to maintain that Masonry teaches that all Gods are equal. It teaches nothing of the kind, and knows nothing of

"Gods" in the plural. It believes that God is one, unchanging and eternal, omnipotent omnipresent, and omniscient.

I am a Christian, and a minister of the Gospel, as well as a loyal Mason. I see no possibility of any inconsistency here. I am a Christian because I believe that Jesus Christ showed us, more than any other man who has ever lived, what God is like. Because I believe that his teaching, as enshrined in the Gospels and particularly in the Sermon on the Mount, is the finest expression of the truly Godlike life. I believe that he has indeed saved us from our sins by showing us a way to overcome them, and by resisting evil even unto death. I value the sacrament of Holy Communion as a perpetual reminder of that death, an everlasting witness to the fact that good is stronger than evil, that light must prevail over darkness.

Furthermore, I am convinced that Christ, the essence of goodness and the brother of all mankind, would feel more at home in the atmosphere of a Masonic Lodge with its fraternal love and fellowship than he would in many a Church professing to be Christian. Certainly more so than in any Church of which Mr. Hannah might be the vicar. Mr. Hannah, who has never attended a Lodge in his life, could hardly be expected to understand this, but there is hardly a sincere Mason who will not agree with me.

What nonsense it is, then, to pretend that true Christianity and Freemasonry could be incompatible! The key to the religious significance of Masonry lies

in the fact that it is a system of symbolism and allegory, not of creed or dogma. Hence it cannot conflict with any faith, but rather underlies and gives added meaning and richness to them all. Hiram the architect is not an independent demi-god nor even a historical figure, though he has a certain shadowy existence in the pages of the Old Testament. He is an allegory of the perpetual warfare between good and evil, between life and death, forever warning mankind that death is preferable to dishonour, and that the grave is not the end of our pilgrimage. As such, rightly understood, he is not a rival to Christ, or to Mahomet, nor to Vishnu, but a type and symbol of them all. Hence the ceremonies connected with his death can be undertaken by the loyal followers of any of these faiths without any incompatibility or disloyalty; rather the opposite, for they will bring to the teachings of any religion a fresh meaning and significance.

To witness a Third Degree ceremony for me, as a Christian priest, is to re-live Good Friday. I must not enter into details, for they are too secret and too sacred to be bandied about before the profane, but when I see the candidate for this mystic experience stripped of his outer garments in a state of humility being led around the darkened Lodge, I see the "darkness that overspread the earth until the third hour"; when he is beset by malefactors, I think of Herod, of Pontius Pilate, of Caiaphas. At a later stage of the ceremony I am reminded of St. Paul's injunction that we must die with Christ if we are to be risen with him. Here indeed in

the legend of Hiram is mystery, a mystery as old as time, which is both the anti-type and the symbol of every death-and-resurrection *motif* of every religion, Christianity included. How, then, can Freemasonry be at variance with the Christian faith, or indeed with any of the world's religions? In Freemasonry, as Sir John Cockburn wrote, all faiths can join without sacrificing a jot of their creeds.

How, then, does Mr. Hannah profess to build up a case against our ancient and honourable fraternity?

He does so only by presenting a distorted and un-Christian interpretation of Christianity. He neither knows nor cares to know anything of comparative religion. Christianity, he says again and again, is an exclusive faith. Christ opened the only gate of heaven to man below. All prayer not offered in the name of Christ, he boldly proclaims, is idolatrous. He is our only mediator and advocate, and the only revelation of divine truth. In His name only is salvation to be found.

If Mr. Hannah is right, he has certainly proved his case. Given these premises, his logic is undoubtedly irrefutable. If true religion is thus to be narrowed down to salvation in no other name under heaven, and St. Paul's words to this effect be understood in a spirit of bigoted literalness, then any such "Christian" must indeed be straining his conscience to the breaking-point by accepting initiation into the broader and deeper mysteries of Freemasonry. I for one can never understand how anyone who takes an exclusive view of

Christ as the only complete revelation of God's truth can become a Freemason without suffering from spiritual schizophrenia.

It is perfectly true that "be a man's religion what it may, he is not debarred from our mysteries as long as he believes in the Glorious Architect . . ." It is not Masonry that debars the Catholic, but Catholicism which to its own discredit has outlawed Masonry. That Church regards itself as the sole custodian of faith and morals, and can brook no rival. If there are Anglicans and other Protestants who from a somewhat different angle hold the same view of Christianity, Masonry does not of course exclude them from her Lodges, but the really honest Mason who is capable of logical reasoning must realise that such a dual allegiance is difficult to reconcile with spiritual integrity. If that is conceding a point to Mr. Hannah, he is welcome to it. If it induces a few such Masons to resign, we can dispense with their membership. There have been Christian apologists for the Craft, who, doubtless with the worthiest intentions, have been inwardly disingenuous. Surely the time has come for openness and fearless honesty on these points.

If it is wrong for a Christian to pray together with the Jew or Moslem to the Great Architect, then it is undoubtedly wrong for him to become a Mason. If the Church is regarded as the sole custodian of faith and morals, then Initiation into Masonry is indeed vain. If God may only be addressed in certain terms and no other, the broader and more comprehensive name by

which He is addressed in the Holy Royal Arch is certainly indefensible. And, in passing, I wonder if Mr. Hannah realises how deeply and outrageously he has outraged the feelings of every devout Royal Arch Mason by the blasphemous photograph which forms the frontispiece to *Darkness Visible*—does he realise that a vulgar and public photograph of this most sacred symbol (whether or not he has got it right) is as profoundly shocking to us as a defilement of the Blessed Sacrament would be to him? Are there no depths to which he will not sink in his quest for lurid sensationalism?

Hence *Darkness Visible* only succeeds in condemning Freemasonry by presenting a distorted and bigoted interpretation of Christianity. Of course Mr. Hannah is not alone in his beliefs. The Church of Rome is noted for its narrow authoritarianism, with which, it must be again freely admitted, Masonry is wholly incompatible. The Eastern Orthodox Church, whose absurd condemnation is quoted at length, is even further steeped in obscurantism and fossilized superstition. There are Anglo-Catholics who likewise misunderstand Christ, and who imitate and admire both of these systems, to the detriment of pure religion and undefiled. And at the other extreme is a Protestantism which is even more narrow and exclusive in its emphasis on justification by faith in Christ alone. Mr. Hannah makes out what appears to be an impressive list of Churches which have condemned the Craft, but on investigation these will be found to be small and insignificant splinter-groups noted

for their intransigent intolerance. The English Methodists may seem to be an exception, but the disastrous Bradford condemnation which made them a laughing-stock and was long ago (thank God!) a dead letter was forced on them most injudiciously by the calumnious misrepresentations of Mr. Penney Hunt's *Menace of Freemasonry to the Christian Faith*. If several unimportant Presbyterian bodies have likewise condemned the Craft, the great Established Church of Scotland, like its sister south of the border, has always welcomed its influence, and appreciated the immense amount of good done by the Craft in spreading its leavening message of charity and toleration. Nor are American Lutherans noted in the States for any breadth of mind.

I can even add another Protestant body to Mr. Hannah's list that seems to have escaped his attention. The Dutch Reformed Church of South Africa passed a ludicrous and highly inaccurate measure of condemnation on Freemasonry. The racial intolerance and bigotry of this body is well known. Perhaps no more need be said than that Dr. Malan is one of its sacred ministers. There are indeed bodies whom the Grand Lodges of the world are prouder to have as enemies than as friends.

In attempting to align the Church of England with these obscurantist and dogmatic Christian bodies Mr. Hannah is doing the very greatest spiritual disservice possible to his Church. The Anglican Communion is justly proud of its tradition in Christendom for com-

prehensiveness and tolerance, and liberty in matters theological. These are the traditions for which Freemasonry in its even more universal tolerance stands four-square, and from which it cannot and will not budge. I will even go so far as to say that among the Anglican laity in particular Freemasonry has played no small part in establishing that tradition. In my own Lodge and outside I have heard on innumerable occasions Anglican Masons particularly those from extreme Anglo-Catholic or Evangelical parishes, declare how greatly the Craft has broadened their spiritual outlook and helped them to see Christianity in a truer perspective with relation to religion in the widest sense than they ever obtained in their Churches. Even some of my fellow-clergy have admitted this after initiation, often adding, alas! that they felt too outwardly bound by the outworn formalities of their Church to bear witness to this wider enlightenment publicly before more backward flocks. Yet Masonry is acting as the secret leaven which is surely having its effect in enlightening the Church.

Some there are who, not realising that time is on our side, lose patience with the Church altogether on receiving a broader Masonic enlightenment. One such, and typical of many to my personal knowledge, wrote to the *Sunday Pictorial* (June 29, 1952), "The Church has failed in its endeavours to propagate the Word of God and many like myself have forsaken their Churches and found solace in the rituals of Masonic teachings."

As a Clergyman I naturally deplore this impatience, but as I look round and see the narrow un-Christian presentation of the Gospel as still preached from many a pulpit today, I cannot find it in my heart altogether to blame them. But I wonder if Mr. Hannah fully realises how his attack on Freemasonry will greatly increase these secessions, and alienate a faithful laity more enlightened than himself?

THE THEOLOGY OF EXCLUSIVENESS

LEST the hasty reader should come to the conclusion that I put Freemasonry first, and my sacred calling as a minister of the Gospel second, lest he should assume that my enthusiasm for the older mysteries has in any way weakened my allegiance to Jesus Christ, it may not be out of place if I discuss further the true nature of our English Christianity and its relationship to the teachings of the Craft.

The enlightened Christian cannot but admit that the principal reason for the Church's weakness today is her fatal policy, exemplified throughout the ages, of fighting a rearguard action with the zeal that springs from bigoted intransigence against almost every development and discovery of fresh truth both scientific and spiritual—and then beating a disastrous and far from strategic retreat. Time and time again has the Church lost the confidence and even earned the ridicule of thinking persons by this defeatist policy. Galileo was submitted to all the tortures of the Inquisition, yet the Pope himself admits today that the sun and not the earth is the centre of the solar system. The great spiritual and moral awakening of the Reformation was resisted by Catholic Christianity, with the result that Christendom became tragically divided. Further light on the true authorship and nature of the Scriptures discovered by the Higher Critics of the nineteenth century was for long

derided and scorned as blasphemy, yet it is accepted today as a commonplace. Darwinism was scoffed at and condemned, only to be received without question a generation later. Even the discovery of chloroform to alleviate the sufferings of childbirth was denounced by the Church as a contradiction of the curse of Genesis.

And today there are the same intransigent elements who would have the Church stand firm against the ever-rising tide of an enlightened non-dogmatic humanism which courageously strives for the moral and spiritual betterment of our standard of living. Mr. Hannah actually declares that humanism was a deadly enemy of the early Church which Freemasonry has made friends with today. Humanism, however, neither was nor ever could be the enemy of true religion, but only of much unenlightened superstition which passes for religion. Freemasonry has indeed made friends with it, and is proud of the friendship. And Freemasonry is *perfectly willing to be stigmatised as incompatible with any form of Christianity capable of talking such rubbish*, for the incompatibility is indeed glaring and obvious. Any influence which the Craft may exert, even subconsciously, through its members, particularly the laity and clergy of the Church of England (and such influence is probably stronger than is commonly realised) will surely be wholly beneficial if it helps the Church to move with the times, and avoid yet another disastrous retreat. For Freemasonry is a "religion"

(the inverted commas indicating that I use this word without prejudice) of good deeds, common-sense, of genuine spirituality and belief in God, not of a crude supernaturalism which is already on the decline in this age and generation. It is indeed the "religion" of many an Englishman whether he is a Freemason or not. And it is my firm conviction that the Church of England may yet be saved, and that the struggle to save it by every means and by every good influence that can be exerted is infinitely worth while. Mr. Hannah in company with other equally obscure opponents of Masonry talks sneeringly of "natural religion". But the religion which they profess to believe in, and which they think the Church should adhere to, is coming to be regarded by the common man as increasingly unnatural and unreal in its petrified dogmatism. The religion, pure and undefiled, of Jesus of Nazareth was surely the very essence of naturalness, reality, and simplicity.

As that great prophet and thinker Dr. Barnes of Birmingham, always ahead of the times, has written in *The Rise of Christianity* (p. 336) "There emerged in Galilee a peasant artisan, profoundly convinced of the truth of the prophets' message, who felt that he knew God and was called to serve Him. This man for a brief year or so taught in a remote district, speaking of God with an intimate and beautiful certainty. Finally, because of teaching which expressed his loyalty to God, he was executed as a common criminal."

"All memory of him ought rapidly to have vanished. But it would seem that his personality was so strong, his religious sureness so great, his moral and spiritual influence so powerful that his followers could not forget him. As they repeated his teaching they gained an unshakable certainty of his continuing presence. So a new religion grew up, ethical monotheism centred on Jesus the Christ.

"The new faith, like its founder, taught its adherents to lead clean, honourable, and kindly lives . . . after being persecuted for well-nigh three centuries by the authorities of an empire to whom its tenets were an affront, the Christian faith triumphed, and forthwith its adherents began to forsake their distinctive outlook on life. The salt lost its savour . . .

"Yet there remained—and remains—the memory of him whom men still call God's anointed, the Christ. The Spirit of Christ perturbs even the Churches which have largely forsaken his teaching. *Beyond the Churches his influence persists. Amid unpromising surroundings it repeatedly emerges with renewed strength in a way that confounds critics and joyfully surprises anxious followers of Jesus . . . After failure the search for religious reality begins anew.* Out of apparently dead formulae and empty ritual the Spirit of Christ emerges as buds in springtime appear on what seemed lifeless twigs."

The italics in this passage are mine and not the Bishop's. My interpretation of them may not be quite

what His Lordship had in mind, but in the dead days of Hanoverian luke-warmness in religion, when the Established Church had reached almost its lowest spiritual ebb, did not 1717, the date of the foundation of Grand Lodge, mark just such an emergence of the Spirit of Christ in a disguised and unexpected form, to play its part in saving the nation from spiritual death? As Masonry has multiplied its numbers many times since then, and particularly in the last thirty years many hundreds of clergy have joined its ranks, is there not hope that its influence may yet further permeate and save the Church?

Other epithets hurled at the Craft in *Darkest Visible* are indifference and syncretism. Both, in this context are technical terms of theological jargon. Indifference does not mean lukewarmness, but that there is no difference, that it doesn't matter what God is worshipped. Syncretism is a combination of the conceptions of God held by the various world faiths in one. This may sound an ugly charge, for like all really black lies it is a half truth. And as a faithful member of the Church of England and a faithful Mason, I have no wish to dodge the implications of the innuendo in investigating what it really means.

Another quotation from Bishop Barnes. "What was the quality of that Sonship? (i.e. of Christ). Had it a perfection given to none other? Is the faith centred on the Christ the supreme expression of religious truth? These questions each man must answer for himself . . . as he gropes for truth so will

he shape his life." Dr. Barnes here shows a reverent and truly Anglican reluctance from dogmatizing absolutely on the searching and absolutely vital question in this matter of indifference, whether it is essential for Christianity that it should claim to be the Absolute and Final Religion.

Freemasonry, too, refrains from dogmatizing on this or on any other religious question. Yet with equal reverence and equal truth, Freemasonry stands foursquare by the principle that God has revealed himself in many ways to many peoples. For, if a Christian and a Hindoo meet together in a Lodge, and pray together to God, it is surely axiomatic in this atmosphere of broad charity that the *Christian must acknowledge that the Hindoo's God is ultimately the same as his own*, for the prayers in the Masonic Ritual are not of course offered in the plural as to many Gods, but to one. Masonry is monotheistic, though wide differences in interpretation of God are of course allowed. It is important that all critics of Masonry, as well as Masons themselves, should thoroughly grasp this point.

Is such an attitude incompatible with Christianity? Again if it is, without doubt Masonry stands condemned. But properly understood, there is no incompatibility whatsoever.

And here again, narrowness and exclusiveness on this point is waging an obscurantist fight against the spirit of the age. There is a yearning towards unity among Christian people which must surely find its

fulfilment as emphasis on the dogmas which divide Christians recedes. The United Christian Witness in Hyde Park during the Festival of Britain has already been referred to as a case in point, along with the progress already made in South India. But the ugly forces of sacerdotal reaction raised their heads again. A certain Mr. Hugh Ross Williamson preached at and was instrumental in organizing, a protest demonstration in the Church of the Annunciation at Marble Arch. He too is enthusiastic, like Saul before his conversion, to wreck the forces of spiritual progress and light. He would like to align the Church of England with the blackest superstitions of Rome, and is undoubtedly one of the most truly sinister figures in the Anglican communion today. Unfortunately for the Church of England, however, he is unlikely to become a future Cardinal Manning, for he is married to a doubtless very charming wife. His hostility to Freemasonry is less well known, for the Dr. Jeckyl of this strange personality is a successful broadcaster, author and dramatist, an ornament, I am told, of the Savage Club, whose success obviously depends on his popularity. But behind every effort to torpedo fraternal relations with the Free Churches, behind every petition and *gravamen* in Convocation to that nefarious and un-Christian end, will be found the evil influence of this Wolsey-minded sacerdotalist.

But time, and the will of the majority, are undoubtedly on the side of the Angels, and of the Archbishop of Canterbury, in bringing into existence

the truly Christian and Masonic ideal of a United Church of Britain, or at least of full inter-communion of all Protestant Christian peoples who reject the spiritual slavery and superstitions of Rome. Mr. Hannah may call this indifferentism. Sensible Christians call it liberty and charity.

But, says *Darkness Visible*, there is a vast gulf, which Freemasonry ignores, between those who accept Our Lord, and those who do not, a vastly greater division than that which separates Christian people from each other. This, however, is the clap-trap of fanaticism. The liberal Christian has more in common with the liberal Jew or the liberal Buddhist than he has with the bigotries of either extreme Protestantism or extreme Catholicism, Anglo or Roman. As the world grows smaller with ever speedier communications, as the threat of communist Godlessness grows ever more rampant, the next century if not our own will see a movement for the consolidation and federation of all the enlightened religious traditions of mankind. One can only fervently pray that when that day dawns, the mantle of Dr. Fisher will continue to descend on the Archbishop of Canterbury, and that even the memory of Mr. Hannah, of Dr. Box and of Mr. Ross Williamson and all who are fighting a rearguard action against progress will be as dead as a bad dream on awakening.

Is this being disloyal to the Christian Faith?

The June, 1952, number of the *Modern Churchman*

(an Anglican review far more able and enlightened than Dr. Vidlers *Theology*) carried an interesting discussion on this very point. The question was asked (in the feature Brains Trust) whether Christianity can claim to be the absolute and final religion. There were several most interesting replies.

Dr. E. C. Dewick, for instance, states that "it is evident that there are many today who, while desirous to profess and call themselves Christians, fully convinced that in Jesus Christ we have the highest revelation of God, and in the Christian Religion the highest known religion, nevertheless hesitate to go beyond this, and affirm that Christianity is for all time and in all places the Final and Absolute Religion."

He gives three sound reasons for this hesitation. First, the study of comparative religion, which shows that many other faiths have also made untenable exclusive claims, that it is irrational to reject these, and yet make a similar claim for Christianity. Secondly, the course of history does not support such an assertion. Thirdly, "Above all, to students trained in the methods and principles of physical science, the claim to absolute finality is a serious stumbling-block. For they have been taught that it is of the essence of true science to be prepared to modify all theories, if fresh evidence requires this; and to observe caution in their affirmations, abstaining from 'assertions that outstrip the evidence' (Sir J. A. Thomson). Now a claim to absolute finality does, by its very nature, 'outstrip the evidence.' Christian theologians generally

admit this; but then they proceed to say, in effect, 'We shall not attempt to give reasons for this claim; we simply affirm that it is of the essence of the Christian Faith' (e.g. Dr. N. Micklem, in *What is Faith?* p. 45). Few students of science are likely to be satisfied with this."

He continues, "Certainly, in the sphere of medicine, a doctor does not need to claim that his science is perfect, before he goes out to bring help to his patients; and why should it be otherwise with physicians of the soul?"

Dr. Major's reply to the query is as follows:—"We should not use the terms 'absolute and final' to describe the Christian Religion although we believe in its essential truth. The Christian Religion, besides being for us the Religion of the Historic Jesus Christ, is also the Religion of the Holy Spirit. It is therefore evolutionary, and not until that spiritual and moral evolution is completed is it possible to speak of the Christian Religion, as we know it, as final. The guidance into all the Truth—and in the Fourth Gospel the Truth means the Religion of Jesus—demands incessant development, not only in the understanding of all that religion involves but also constant development in its adherents."

Here, then, is scholarly Anglican testimony, based on irrefutable logic, that Christianity as we know it today is not to be regarded as absolute and final, but is ever capable of further development. Nor is this conception confined to the Church of England;

Cardinal Newman's greatest contribution to theology was perhaps his work on the Development of Christian Doctrine.

If, then, the possibility is entertained that succeeding generations, in the light of fresh spiritual experience of the awareness of God, discover new religious truths, it is surely only logical to assume that other people belonging to other faiths may at different times discover the same new religious truths. Or even to assume that in some particulars they have already discovered them, in which case Christian awareness of these truths, new perhaps to them, but already familiar to another religion, can only bring those religions into a greater measure of unity with Christianity.

Freemasonry, although of immemorial antiquity, is undoubtedly ahead of Christianity in recognizing the validity and worshipfulness of the One God, the Great Architect of the Universe, the True and Living God most high, who has manifested himself in many ways and under many forms to His children of various races and climes, yet remains eternally one. Christianity, which I firmly believe to be the highest and most truly spiritual of these manifestations of God, although hindered in her majestic progress by petty dogmatists and obscurantists, is steadily moving, particularly in the English-speaking world, towards a realization of this supreme fact. In course of time it will doubtless realise more fully the implications of that supreme fact, and with true Christian courage and charity

accept the implications and act on them. It is for the Christian Freemason who understands and loves both his Christianity and his Masonry to exert his influence and to be yet more instant in prayer that in God's good time this consummation of Divine Unity, heralded and foreshadowed symbolically by a certain Word revealed to him in the Holy Royal Arch may indeed be realised for the spiritual healing of the nations of the earth.

THE VALUE OF SYMBOLISM

There is hardly a religion known to the world that does not make use of some system of symbolism, of greater or less elaborateness. Very occasional exceptions might be found in a few extremely puritan Christian bodies, notably the Quakers, and in purely ethical cults with next to no supernatural basis, but almost universally, divine and moral truths have been expressed through the sacramentalism of symbols. The *crux ansata* of the Egyptians, the lotus flower of the Buddhists, the crescent of the Moslems, the cross, the bread, the wine, and the baptismal waters of the Christian are all endeavours to express intangible truths in a tangible and concrete form. "An outward and visible sign," says the Catechism of the Book of Common Prayer, "of an inward and spiritual grace."

Symbolism, then, bridges the gulf between matter and spirit, between the finite and the infinite. It enables the purely numinous to be apprehended in physical form by the senses. As long as we are confined in physical bodies, in a material world, the finite human brain finds it difficult if not impossible to comprehend infinity unless the abstract is presented in terms of the concrete. It has been found in all ages that visible emblems, symbols, and sacraments which express great truths appeal to the mind more strongly and are better remembered and understood than words, a fact which is becoming better understood by those responsible for teaching the young.

Thus far Freemasonry is on common ground with all the great faiths though quantitatively it is more lavishly and richly "illustrated by symbols" than any other system. Yet there is a difference between the symbolism of Masonry and that of other religious systems and ways of life which is more than quantitative. It is a difference which marks the distinction between Masonry and any specific religion. A difference which our opponents totally fail to understand or appreciate, yet one which helps us, I think, to see at least partially and from one angle the true answer to the question as to whether Freemasonry is in itself a religion.

As this answer can only be understood fully by the Freemason, I have set myself a difficult task in trying to explain it to those outside as well. Yet this answer is perhaps the truest and most potent refutation of the thesis of *Darkness Visible* that Freemasonry is a form of paganism incompatible with Christianity, therefore I must attempt to make it clear, as far as may be done without revealing what may not lawfully be disclosed.

The symbols utilized by the various religions of the world stand for specific truths, and have well-defined meanings. The cross, for instance, in its various forms—swastika, tau, as well as the so-called Latin cross, has been used as a symbol in many religions, and has born many meanings. Yet to the Christian it has but one; because Christ died thereon it is the emblem of our redemption and the symbol of self-sacrifice. Slight variations and varieties of interpretations can be read

into it, to be sure. It may be explained as representing the "I" crossed out, the sacrifice of self. Fundamentally, however, the meaning of the cross is one and the same for the Christian believer. To see a cross surmounting the spire or gable of a building is to mark that building as a Christian Church.

In Masonry, however, it is different. Symbolism is far more highly developed than in Christianity or in any other religion, and yet the meanings of her symbols and emblems are less dogmatically defined, and have a far broader interpretation.

True, she has certain symbols that are distinctively her own. To see the familiar emblem of the Square and Compasses on a building is to mark it as a Masonic Temple, for instance, and yet Masons, according to their background and credal affiliations, may legitimately vary enormously in their interpretation as to what these symbols mean. The Ritual of course gives certain moral lessons to be learned from these symbols, and the thoughtful spiritually-minded Brother may well discover others as he keeps these things and ponders them in his heart. He accepts the rudimental lessons of actions on the square, and the necessity for keeping within the bounds of the compass. But the inner meaning of them, as apart from the moral lessons to be drawn therefrom, is nowhere authoritatively declared nor officially interpreted. Bro. J. S. M. Ward, for instance, sees in the lozenge formed by this emblem a representation of the ancient *vesica piscis*.

Indeed many volumes have been written in inter-

pretation of Masonic symbolism, its origins, its history, its meanings, its incidence among primitive tribes and primeval religious systems. No explanation is authoritative, official, or binding. The religions of the world are composed of dogmas and credal facts of which their symbols are but the outward and visual expression. Freemasonry, having no background of credal dogmas, is a system of allegory and symbolism, universal in its breadth of interpretation, into which the Brethren can read any aspect of the universal religious truth which they represent. This gives to Masonic symbolism a richness and depth, as well as breadth of meaning which makes Freemasonry unique in its value as a meeting-place of the religions, where all can meet together in harmony without sacrificing a jot of their distinctive creeds.

This point becomes of great importance when we consider the true meaning of those symbols that superficially appear to have been adopted into Freemasonry from certain specific religions. Some have a Christian origin, many more have not. It is these latter that Mr. Hannah wilfully perverts, and indeed the whole case presented in *Darkness Visible* appears to rest on a complete misunderstanding of the interpretation of Masonic symbolism.

Who is Hiram? Mr. Hannah sees in him any dying pagan vegetation-god, and he is right. He is Osiris, Persephone, Bacchus, Orpheus, Tammuz, or Mithra. But quite legitimately he is also Christ, a fact which our critics blindly overlook.

Even more important, to Mr. Hannah at least, are certain symbolical expressions and teachings in the Royal Arch. It is true, perhaps, but supremely irrelevant to the issue, that a certain triangular arrangement of candlesticks representing the Lesser Lights of this supreme Degree are explained in language and terminology more familiar to the Hindoo than to the Jew, the Moslem, or the Christian in its definition of the nature of the True and Living God most high. But this does not mean that the Hindoo trinity of Brahma, Vishnu, and Shiva are *alone* symbolised, but the "trine essence of the Deity"—a concept of complete Christian orthodoxy, as every orthodox Christian Mason is well aware.

Certain further symbols of the Godhead which are reverently and solemnly pronounced by the Principals in the Chapter are too secret and too sacred to discuss at length or in detail. The value and the reasons for that secrecy are indeed evident when our calumnious detractors, in professing to strip it away, blasphemously misunderstand, pervert, and ridicule what they profess to reveal. Something, however, must be guardedly and cautiously said in defence of this sacred symbol of the Name of God Himself.

Certain symbolical words are employed, two syllables of which certainly refer to concepts of God in ancient religions other than the Christian one. Therefore, say our detractors, Freemasonry worships pagan Gods, or at least places them on an equality with the Hebrew and Christian God. But in saying so they

ignore the meaning of symbolism as interpreted by the Freemason. A symbol in itself has no worth, validity, or meaning apart from the thing symbolised. We Christians do not worship a material cross of wood or brass, we reverence it as an emblem of the death of Christ. We do not (except for the ignorant and superstitious) worship the symbols of bread and wine in the Holy Communion; we partake of them reverently as signs of Christ's abiding spiritual presence in the world. The Christian who is at all versed in primitive mythology and comparative religion will be aware, too, that the cross has been a symbol of faiths other than that of Christ. It has symbolised the hammer, and therefor Thor, and in its swastika form, the sun, to mention but two instances. Bread and wine, and the sacrificial meal, are by no means peculiar to Christianity, though Christianity has crystallised these symbols and given them Christian meanings only, to the exclusion of all other interpretations.

Hence our calumniators who have been brought up in this restricted Christian tradition are totally and in some cases sincerely unable to understand that in Freemasonry this is not so. A certain emblematic syllable of the Sacred Word may indeed be drawn from the name of a pagan deity; to the Freemason it does not necessarily or even probably imply that that particular pagan god is thus revered. That name is merely a symbol of certain divine attributes originally associated in particular with that specific God, but attributes which are no less applicable to the Universal

God of all religions. The Moslem would certainly believe Allah to be Lord and Powerful, and to be the Father of All. The Jew would claim the same for Jehovah, and the Christian of the Holy Trinity, and they feel no incompatibility in applying a symbolism which may indeed be primitive and pagan in origin to the Gods of their respective faiths, who after all are but different phases or different forms of approach to, the Universal God.

To indicate, therefore, that because one of these symbolic syllables making up the Mysterious Name in the Royal Arch can be identified with an aspect and a title of the Godhead which was antipathetic to the Jews of the Old Testament, being that of their political enemies, it should therefore be antipathetic to the Christian or even to the Jew of today, is both to be beside the point, and to be incredibly narrow-minded. It is tantamount to limiting the infinity of God to our own particular sectarian ideas of His nature, and limiting the terminology by which we address Him to the standardised formulas of that system of belief and devotion in which we happened to be reared.

Freemasonry has much to teach us. The Craft Degrees imparted to me many and valuable moral lessons, and opened by eyes to the true meaning of that lovely word, brotherhood. The Royal Arch, "at once the foundation and keystone of the whole Masonic structure . . . so intimately blended with all that is nearest and dearest to us in another state of existence, in which Divine and human affairs are so

awfully and minutely interwoven in all its disquisitions" has in the depth and spirituality of its lessons and symbolism taught me even more; that God is infinitely vaster and more universal than is the concept of him held by any one of the world's faiths, and yet embraces them all. If there is any religion in Freemasonry, that is surely it.

THE MASON AND THE BIBLE

UNDOUBTEDLY there is some legitimate difference of opinion within the Brotherhood as to what, in precise terms, are the Landmarks of Masonry. Various lists, long and short, have been drawn up by different authorities, and the subject is of absorbing interest to the Freemason, but so far there has been no authoritative list of definition. There is an analogy here, I think, with the infallible utterances of the Pope of Rome; chief among the errors of that fallen and intolerant communion is the allegation that the Pope is, in certain circumstances, infallible, but the number of these utterances has never been precisely defined.

Whatever list of landmarks (which for the benefit of the non-Masonic reader may be roughly defined as unalterable principles of the Craft) may be adopted, there is and can be no doubt whatsoever that the presence of the Volume of the Sacred Law open in the Lodge is among the foremost landmarks which would appear on any such list. It is of supreme and paramount importance in Freemasonry. Indeed it is absolutely essential to any properly constituted Lodge. Even the Church itself can pay no greater regard and reverence to the Word of God.

Little is said about this in *Darkness Visible*, which follows the usual custom of unscrupulous controversy in ignoring facts which favour the other side. But no one can obtain a true and balance view of the real

nature of Freemasonry who does not understand that it is solidly based on Holy Scripture. As the Church is also founded on Holy Writ, it will be seen again how fantastic and utterly groundless is any theory that the two could ever be compatible.

There is, however, a certain difference in emphasis and interpretation of the Word of God between the Church and the Craft. This difference, however, is steadily and significantly lessening, as the Church, in the light of much knowledge gained from higher criticism and from an increasing breadth of outlook is moving steadily away from her earlier and now untenable position of looking on the Bible as literal fact and history, and is moving towards the broader and more ancient and Masonic outlook of regarding the Volume of the Sacred Law as the repository of symbolic truth, itself a symbol of the truth of God. The Church still has a long way to go, but the gap is steadily narrowing. The Christian Freemason, consciously or unconsciously, has a part to play here in leavening the Church where it has been strangled by the letter of its formularies by breathing into it the spirit of more ancient truths and mysteries. It was Our Lord himself who said that the letter killeth, but the spirit bringeth life, and Masonry is, in the truest sense of the word, Christlike.

Darkness Visible finds fault with Freemasonry because one of her basic allegories, although set in an Old Testament setting, is not actually found in all its detail in the Bible. The accusation, coming from a

clergyman, is ludicrous. Where, in the New Testament, is there a scrap of sound evidence for many of the doctrines with which the Church has obscured the pure and simple faith of Jesus of Nazareth? Where is the alleged perpetual virginity of his mother? Where, except by wresting texts from their context, are the fearful and morally irresponsible dogmas of predestination and justification by faith alone? Where is the sacramentalism of the Catholic and High Churchman?

And in the field of Christian allegory, where is St. Veronica's napkin and the three falls of Our Lord on the way to Calvary? In the allegorical representations of the birth of Christ in the ever-popular nativity plays imaginative symbolism runs riot. Where in the Bible, for instance, does it even suggest that the Wise Men from the East were three in number, or were possessed of kingly rank? As Freemasonry claims direct descent from the Magi or wise men of ancient Egypt, and certainly has a considerable affinity with their mysteries, a different interpretation is possible indicating a far earlier and closer affinity between Christianity and the Craft than exists in the Church of England today.

In this connection a humorous and I believe a true story shrieks to be told. Many years ago, Mr. Hannah wrote and produced a nativity play, before *Darkness Visible* was even contemplated, in the theological college chapel of Oberlin, Ohio. The question of costumes presented difficulties on a limited budget, and the local Catholic Church refused to lend the traditional

copies for the three kings. A Protestant minister and Freemason, however, came to the rescue by borrowing royal robes used in a certain Higher Degree from a nearby Masonic Temple, an offering which Mr. Hannah gratefully accepted! The symbolism was, I think, truer than he then recognised.

But to return to Freemasonry and the Bible.

The Volume of the Sacred Law is first of the Great Symbolic Lights of Masonry. On it every Candidate is obligated; he is told that "the Sacred Writings are to regulate our faith". "As a Freemason," the Worshipful Master later charges him, "let me recommend to your most serious contemplation the Volume of the Sacred Law, charging you to consider it as the unerring standard of truth and justice, and to regulate your actions by the divine precepts it contains. Therein you will be taught the important duties you owe to God, to your neighbour, and to yourself." Elsewhere it is referred to as the "spiritual tracing-board of the Great Architect of the Universe, in which are laid down such Divine Laws and Moral plans, that were we conversant therein, and adherent thereto, would bring us to an Ethereal Mansion not made with hands, eternal in the Heavens. In the Royal Arch, which contains certain readings from the Bible, it is referred to as the "record of God's revealed will" and a "precious treasure," but indeed the whole symbolism of this Supreme Degree breathes Masonic reverence for Holy Writ, and commemorates its preservation and re-discovery by the Freemasons of old. Reticence forbids me to say more.

Masonry, then, can hardly be charged with lagging behind the Church in its regard for the Word of God.

Yet it is undeniably true that Masonry, "a peculiar system of morality, veiled in allegory, and illustrated by symbols," treats the written word of God symbolically rather than historically, though this surely infers no lesser reverence for it, but rather more. The Volume of the Sacred Law is of course for the Christian Mason the Bible, and is found as such in at least 99% of our English Lodges. Yet the Sacred Volume, being itself a symbol, can equally be the Pentateuch in an exclusively Jewish Lodge, or the Koran in a Moslem Lodge. Grand Lodge is strictly non-sectarian, and as long as the Mason recognises that God has revealed his holy will to the world, Masonry as such refuses to distinguish, or to confine the divine revelation exclusively to the tenets or writings of any one particular faith, realizing that all contain elements of vital truth. Each Mason swears his oath on that revealed word of God which seems to him the most satisfactory and the most complete; each respects the convictions of others who may prefer a different Volume of the Sacred Law containing a different interpretation of that same revealed will. God is one and the same, everywhere and from all eternity. But man's approach has differed in various times and in divers countries, following the teachings of different prophets, teachers, and messiahs. Each is entitled to regard his version of religion as the truest. As a Christian clergyman, none of this conflicts with my own firm conviction that in Christ Jesus, and

in our Bible, we have the most perfect picture of what God is like, and the finest moral instruction for leading our lives according to His holy will, thereby leading us to a mansion eternal prepared for us in the Heavens, not made with hands. But that does not blind me to the truths found in other religions, nor even, perhaps, to the desirability of enriching and enlarging of our own Church worship by including occasional readings from the sacred writings of other faiths.

Many years ago my religion was more intolerant and, fresh from the rather narrow teachings of my theological college I did not feel thus. But after kneeling in a state of darkness before the Open Bible, I was "restored to light" — ceremonially sudden, spiritually the beginning of a long process of enlightenment. God said, let there be light, and there was light.

Lord, open our eyes, that we may see.