

THE SECRET OF FREEMASONRY.

A KEY OF MODERN HISTORY.

(By F. Hugh O'Donnell, M.P. in the Dublin Freeman.)

THE Encyclical Letter of his Holiness Leo XIII on the Sect of Freemasons (*Beata Massonica Secta Massonum*) has recalled the attention of contemporary society to the repeated censures which the Holy See has directed against the most numerous, widely extended, and mysterious of secret societies, and has provoked on the part of the defenders (as well as the opponents of the condemned institution) many demands for an explanation of the Pontifical policy. It is true that the Encyclical "*Humannum Genus*" only repeats with the added experience of generations the warnings which have previously fallen from the Chair of the Supreme Pastor. It is also true that even writers habitually opposed to Catholicism and Catholics acknowledge that the action of Leo XIII. is fully justified on the simplest grounds of ordinary precaution. A leading Republican journal of France, the *Journal des Debats*, went the full length of this admission, and as a remarkable confirmation of the truth of the judgment expressed by the Holy See its declaration is highly significant.

"It is certain," says the *Journal des Debats* "that in denouncing and attacking Freemasonry the Pope is only using a right of legitimate defence. Whatever may have been the object of this vast association in other times, whatever may still be its organisation and discipline in other countries, it is certain that in France at the present day Masonry tends more and more to break every connection with the Christian religion, and indeed with all spiritual doctrine."

In the course of the following observations I shall treat both of what Freemasonry has been and of what it has become. I write from ascertained and indisputable historical documents. A society may be secret, but if it has existed a long time, if it has exercised a great influence over men and events in many countries, if it has excited the notice and provoked the supervision of thousands of able and skilful critics, clerical and lay, it may indeed continue secret, but its object cannot be unknown.

The elaborate mystery and multiplied formulas with which Masonry veils its portals and guards its thresholds, its passwords and its signs, its altar and its arch, its rites and its decrees, its tremendous oath of silence and fidelity, may awe while they fascinate the common herd of dupes and instruments. They may quicken the sense of enjoyment of what is most usually in these countries little more than a too convivial club. They may supply a useful screen for the baser intrigues of cunning and bigotry by which men plot against the commercial prosperity or professional advancement of their fellow citizens by utilising for private ends the obligations of a sworn membership. Such petty and contemptible objects may satisfy the personages who manipulate the appointments in the public offices and the Royal Irish Constabulary. But universal Masonry has been for upwards of three centuries a world-wide organisation, which has numbered its members—comparatively few of them indeed completely initiated—by tens of millions, and which has sought to present in every land of Christendom the alluring image of a New Temple and to weave the bond of a New Brotherhood. It is absolutely impossible that such an organisation should not have made itself thoroughly known both to the powers which it has sought to serve and to the powers which it has laboured to destroy. Its braggarts and its traitors—and Masonry has had them both—its desperadoes and its cowards, its theoreticians and its politicians, have in the course of centuries supplied to men of the Church and men of the State—to the Council of Ten of the Venetian Republic, to the Bavarian Electors, to the Chancery of the Holy Roman Empire, to the Russian Cabinet—always suspicious of mysterious associations, to the Kings of Spain and the Indies, above all to the Universal and all observant Church—the most complete, the most abundant, and the most repulsive details of the inner direction and the external action of the great secret society of the modern world.

I.—THE MASONIC POLICY OF LORD PALMERSTON—MASONIC EPOCHS AND EPOCH-MAKERS.

It is now many years ago since I heard from my lamented master and friend, the Rev. Sir Christopher Bellow, of the Society of Jesus, these impressive words. Speaking of the tireless machinations and ubiquitous influence of Lord Palmerston against the temporal independence of the Pope, Sir Christopher Bellow said—

"Lord Palmerston is much more than a hostile statesman. He would never have such influence on the Continent if he were only an English Cabinet Minister. But he is a Freemason, and one of the highest and greatest of Freemasons. It is he who sends what is called the Patriarchal Voice through the lodges of Europe. And to obtain that rank he must have given the most extreme proofs of his insatiable hatred to the Catholic Church."

Another illustration of the manner in which European events are moved by hidden currents was given me by the late Major-General Burnaby, M.P., a quiet and amiable soldier, who, though to all appearance one of the most unobtrusive of men, was employed in some of the most delicate and important work of British policy in the East. General Burnaby was commissioned to obtain and preserve the names and addresses of all the Italian members of the foreign legion enlisted for the British service in the Crimean War. This was in 1855 and 1856. After the war these men, mostly reckless and unscrupulous characters—"fearful scoundrels" General Burnaby called them—dispersed to their native provinces, but the clue to find them again was in General Burnaby's hands, and when a couple of years later Cavour and Palmerston, in conjunction with the Masonic lodges, considered the moment opportune to let loose the Italian Revolution, the list of the Italian foreign legion was communicated to the Sardinian Government and was placed in the hands of the Garibaldi Directory, who at once sought out most of the men. In this way several hundreds of "fearful scoundrels," who had learned military skill and discipline under the British flag, were supplied to Garibaldi to form the corps of his celebrated "Army of Emancipa-

tion" in the two Sicilies and the Roman States. While the British diplomatists at Turin and Naples carried on, under cover of their character as envoys, the dangerous portion of the Carbonist conspiracy, the taxpayers of Great Britain contributed in this manner to raise and train an army destined to confiscate the possessions of the Religious Orders and the Church in Italy, and, in its remoter operation, to assail, and, if possible, destroy the world-wide mission of the Holy Propaganda itself.

I will now ask my readers to fix in their minds the following Masonic events and Masonic leaders, forming, as it were, the framework and cardinal points of Masonic history since its commencement.

1. The Convention of Vicenza, in Italy, in the year 1547, which opens what may be called the incubatory stage of Freemasonry.
2. The English period from about the year 1640.
3. The inauguration of the Grand Lodge of London 1717, which forms the special point of departure of the immense number of Masonic associations which henceforward penetrated the Continent from England.
4. The Apostolic letter of Pope Clement XII, dated May, 1738, denouncing to the vigilance of all Christian pastors and powers "the contagion" of the society of *liberi muratori* or Freemasons "who bind themselves by a rigorous oath upon the Bible and under the most terrible penalties, to keep concealed the secret practices of their association," and inflicting the guilt of major excommunication upon all Catholics who should enter the condemned society.
5. The Ascendency of Voltaire and Destruction of the Joint Missions.
6. The Convention of Wilhelmsbad, near Hannan, in Germany, in the year 1781, and the adoption of Black Masonry by a great representative assembly of delegates from lodges throughout the world. The Convention of Wilhelmsbad opens the modern periods of Masonry.
7. The Convention of Paris in September, 1877, when the assembled delegates of the lodges of the Grand Orient of France extinguished from the statutes of French Freemasonry the last remnant of a less black or more hypocritical time—namely, the declaration that "the Masonic Order is based upon the existence of God, the immortality of the soul, and the love of humanity." The Atheistic decision of the Grand Orient has been generally embraced by the lodges of Germany, Italy, Spain, Belgium, Hungary, and the Continent in General. Upon the Continent the Masonic evolution is complete.

Among the names of personages who have done most in the establishment and extension of Masonry should be remembered Faustus Socinus (1539-1604), the true founder of the sect; Voltaire the professional enemy of the Church; Pombal, Aranda, Choiseul and Tanucci, the Portuguese, Spanish, French, and Neapolitan politicians who carried out the Masonic policy of the destruction of the Jesuit missions; Adam Weishaupt, the organiser of the Black Convention of Wilhelmsbad; Mirabeau, who introduced Weishaupt's Masonry into the French Lodge of the "Lovers of Truth"; Mazzini, Palmerston, Proudhon, Gambetta.

II.—FAUSTUS SOCINUS AND THE FOUNDATION OF MASONRY.

The Masonic publications are full of pompous and ridiculous fables, which pretend to connect the institution with the Knights Templars, the builders of the Temple of Solomon, the builders of the Tower of Babel, and similar mythical founders and organisers. Sober research can only recognise as the first institution of an organisation that can be followed step by step down to the Masonry of the present day, the association of Rationalists and Unitarians which assembled at Vicenza in the years 1546 and 1547 under the dominating influence of Laelius Socinus or Sozzino of Siena, uncle of the future founder of the secret society of the Polish Brethren, successively known as United Brethren, Brethren of the Congregation, and Freemasons. Along with Laelius Socinus were Gentilis, Ochino, Trevisano, De Rufo, and several others to the number of 40 who had adopted the tenets of the Reformation, just then spreading over Northern Europe, and had come to the conclusion that reformed Christianity, like modern Unitarianism, required the abolition of the Divinity of Christ, together with the general rejection of the other dogmas of the Church. The decisions of a secret Convention of the society of Vicenza, in 1547, were not so secret, however, that they could escape the knowledge of the Venetian authorities. The spies of the Council of Ten discovered the principal members. Trevisano and De Rufo were arrested and executed as conspirators against Church and State. The rest fled abroad. Laelius Socinus passed into Hungary and Poland, where he prepared the way for the subsequent activity of his nephew Faustus.

The Convention of Vicenza was far from being the regular assembly of an order or league. It remained to Faustus Socinus, a man of rare organising ability, at once to take up the doctrinal views of his uncle, and to mould his following into a secret association or league of associations, which quickly obtained the mastery among the Polish Protestants, directed them in a regular enterprise for the acquisition of civil supremacy that was nearly successful, and by its virulent and subtle hostility to the Catholic majority of the kingdom spread and envenomed the disunion that within a century broke up the dominions of Sobieski among the partitioning Powers. The ruin of Catholic Poland was the first fruit of the Socinian policy. When Faustus Socinus died on the 3rd of March, 1604, he had amply deserved throughout wide regions of Northern Europe the boasting epitaph over his grave at Lucavie, that—"Though Luther had destroyed the roofs of Babylon, and Calvin its walls, Socinus had uprooted its foundations." By Babylon was meant the Catholic Church. The principal writings of Faustus Socinus are published in the *Bibliotheca Fratrum Polonorum*.

Of course we are still far from the complex organisation, elaborate ceremonial, and multiplied grades of modern Masonry. But the substance of the thing was there, as may be easily seen in the description of the Socinian system given by an acute observer, the learned Abbe Lefranc, who with so many thousands of other innocent victims perished under the knives and hatchets of the revolutionary assassins in the massacre in the prisons of Paris in September, 1792.