

THE POPE AND THE FREEMASONS.

The Freemasons of Herefordshire held their Provincial Grand Lodge at the Feathers Hotel, Ledbury, yesterday. A vote of condolence was passed to the Worshipful Grand Master of England, the Earl of Zetland, on the loss his lordship had sustained in the death of the Countess of Zetland, and after the transaction of business connected with the province, a large body of brethren from the Herefordshire, Worcestershire, and Gloucestershire lodges partook of a sumptuous banquet.

The Provincial Grand Master (the Rev. Dr. Bowles), in reply to the toast of his health, said: I esteem it a privilege to once more meet you in Grand Lodge, and at this social board, and that privilege is enhanced by the cheering conviction that I can at all times depend upon receiving from you that support, encouragement, and co-operation, without which my efforts to promote the interest of Masonry in this province would be in vain—(loud cheers). Your kindness and your sympathy, brethren, seem to bring back that freshness of early feeling which quickens the spring-time of our being, and causes me to forget, for a while, how near I am to the entrance of that dark valley, through whose shadow all good Masons pass into the full effulgence of that uncreated light more precious than the sun's—(enthusiastic applause). Brethren, I have no intention of making a long speech, because on occasions like the present you will pass the time more pleasantly in social converse with each other than in listening to me—"No, no"—but I think I ought not to sit down without saying a word or two about the sentence of excommunication, which has recently been fulminated against Freemasons by the Pope of Rome. In the allocution, as it is called, or former address delivered in the secret consistory, or assembly of Cardinals and Prelates, the Pope has excommunicated all Freemasons—those in France, Belgium, Germany, Italy, Spain, and Portugal alone amounting to upwards of two millions. His Holiness consigns us all to perdition, and says that "we are a wicked association of men, full of snares and frauds—that our pretended charity is a delusion, that we are the enemies of the Church and of God—dangerous even to the security of kingdoms." He further says that if we do not give up our wicked assemblies we must expect to be hurried along into the abyss of eternal ruin; that our acts are heinous and criminal, and our errors monstrous; that he will strike and lacerate with a sentence of excommunication as with a sword, a sect breathing crime and attacking civil and sacred life; and that nothing can exhibit so intense iniquity in a stronger manner than that we have survived former excommunications and still show ourselves everywhere with impunity, and with a most audacious front. He ends by bestowing upon us most emphatically his apostolic curse—(laughter and derisive cheers). Is it not a pitiable sight, brethren, to behold in the nineteenth century, this venerable Hip-Van-Winkle of the Vatican, stone-blind alike to the storied past and the pregnant future, groping his way amid the darkness of by-gone ages in search of obsolete weapons with which to assault freedom of thought and speech, destroy the rights of the human mind, and fasten an iron yoke on the necks of the people—(loud applause). Is it not pitiable to behold a fallible aged man, unconscious of the dark omens which are gathering round him, clutching with trembling fingers the Papal thunderbolts, in the vain attempt to make men religious and virtuous by paralysing their minds through terror, and depriving them of that freedom which is essential to the intellectual, moral, and religious progress of human nature? I am shocked by the dishonour which this allocution casts on God and virtue by its debasing conceptions of our moral nature and of the Divine, by its cruel disruption of the ties of human and Christian brotherhood, by its virulent attack on an ancient and honourable community, which flourished when Popes were not, and shall continue to flourish in undecaying vigour when they are not, which possesses within itself so many institutions consecrated to humanity, which endeavours to realise the character of *Brethren*, and to give its full effect to that sublime invocation in which we are taught to address the Maker of us all as "Our Father" (loud and protracted cheering.) You see, brethren, by this allocution that the spirit of intolerance and persecution is the same in all ages; it has been compelled to forego the branding iron and the rack, the faggot and the stake, but it still breathes venom from its lips, and attempts to impose upon us the dreams and fictions of men for the everlasting truth of God. In pleasing contrast to the Allocution of the Pope, let me call your attention to a speech delivered the other day in one of the principal lodges in France by Abd-el-Kader. He said—"In the persons here present I thank Freemasonry in every country. I consider Freemasonry as the first institution in the world. In my opinion every man who does not profess Freemasonry is an incomplete man. I hope that one day all the principles of Freemasonry will prevail throughout the whole world, and from that day forward all the nations will be at peace." Now it seems to me that Abd-el-Kader, infidel and musulman though he be, is in spirit a much better Christian than the Pope—(loud applause).