

FREEMASONRY.

Has the Prince of Wales been made a freemason? "Who can tell?" is the burden of a ballad being warbled in many a fashionable drawing-room just now, and "who can tell?" is the answer given by English freemasons when asked the meaning of a little paragraph now going the round of the newspapers:—"Before leaving Stockholm (says a despatch from that capital), the Prince of Wales was made a Knight of the Freemasons of Charles XIII., after having successively received the six inferior orders." Such is the announcement which has set the "blue," that is the orthodox, Masons of England wondering. What are the six inferior orders? What is a "Knight of the Freemasons of Charles XIII.?" are questions repeated in every masonic lodge in the country, and the manner in which they are received and the profound bewilderment of those propounding them would be conclusive as to the spuriousness of the paragraph if it were not for one embarrassing fact, an irregular freemasonry exists. Unrecognised by the Grand Lodge of England, its insignia tabooed, and its distinctions and orders of merit forbidden to be worn in regular lodges, it yet includes in its ranks some of the most distinguished masonic experts in the world, who proclaim the beauty of its ritual and ceremonies with an enthusiasm which is evidently sincere. But to the Freemason proper there is no such thing as a Knight of Charles XIII.; no such thing as six inferior degrees. The title touches him no more than that of Perpetual Grand of the Glorious Apollon, so gracefully worn by Mr. Richard Swiviller, or the sounding nomenclature of the Odd Fellows, the Foresters, or the Ancient Druids. It is superfluous to add that a Free and Accepted Mason has nothing in common with these, and that the order he glories in differs fundamentally in spirit and aim from all of them. This must be thoroughly understood at starting. Freemasonry is not a benefit society; its members are not allowed to canvass for recruits: and it holds out no specific material advantages to those joining it. A general desire of knowledge, and a sincere wish to be more extensively serviceable to his fellow-creatures, must be at least the professed motives of every candidate for initiation into its mysteries. The enthusiastic Mason rather resents the assumption that his brotherhood is convivial. Mr. Flowers, the police magistrate at Bow-street, in declining the other day to look at the masonic certificate of the Scotch ex-soldier brought before him on a charge of drunkenness, was guilty of a moral outrage upon fraternal susceptibilities. The remark that he did not doubt the drouthy-looking toper's avowal, was, with the significant look accompanying it, as a dagger in the heart of every Freemason present. That eating and drinking are the subordinate circumstances of lodge-meetings, and that the real business transacted is æsthetic, learned, and occult, is the only basis upon which a Freemason, with a proper sense of dignity, will condescend to argue as to the usefulness and merits of the craft.

Mr. Flowers: "I dare say you are one, I don't at all doubt you—there are many members of the order!" implied that drunkenness and Freemasonry were not incompatible, and that the bench's estimate of the craft was rather familiar than respectful. Yet, a few paces from where Mr. Flowers sat—in Great Queen-street, Lincoln's-inn—whole libraries of moral and religious books may be purchased which are devoted to the exposition of Freemasonry, which the uninitiated may read legitimately, and which prove conclusively that the cardinal virtues were kept alive by the order through the darkest times, that it was not only flourishing when King Solomon was admitted into it, afterwards to become its Grand Master, and that the denizens of other worlds than this practical the mysteries of the craft with the greatest benefit to themselves. The voluminous works of the learned Dr. Oliver, a venerable clergyman who only died the other day, set these things forth with great distinctness, and merit the attention of all students anxious to acquaint themselves with Freemasonry from outside its pale.

That the Prince of Wales should have been made a freemason at Stockholm is possible, but if he has we can promise the royal highness that no decoration pertaining to his possible brotherhood will be allowed to be worn in the lodges of his native land. The imagination can conceive few things more terribly subversive of the proprieties than that an irregular degree should be permitted to flaunt itself in high masonic places; and we incline to dwell upon the position which the Grand Master, the Earl of Zetland, and the Deputy Grand Master, the Lord Grey and Ripon, would feel bound to take up, if the Prince of Wales presented himself before them in the fancy garb of an apocryphal degree. There are but three degrees in the only Freemasonry recognised by the Book of Constitutions; the third degree being for convenience divided into two, and the second part of it only administered after twelve months waiting, and to those anxious to take it. The whole machinery of the order here is supported by these degrees, those belonging to them administering some of the finest and most efficient charities in the world; disposing of large revenues, and assisting the afflicted and distressed in a spirit and to an extent little dreamt of by the uninitiated. The great evil of English charity is that it is always ready—often too ready—to put its hand into its pockets; but that it stubbornly refuses to give up its time. It is the ill distribution, not the vast amount of the millions given away annually which does harm. It is the glory of Freemasonry that it combats with this abuse successfully. Boards and committees sit regularly at the Freemasons' Hall, composed of men—often eminent, always capable—who devote hours to the driest business drudgery, simply that the donations and subscriptions of the brethren may achieve their maximum of good. The Freemasons' Girls' School on Wandsworth-common, and the Freemasons' Boys' School at Tottenham, are model institutions—because their house committees, their school visitors, and their respective secretaries work

true, mingle in debate four times a year, but the chances of attaining rank or position there are far more remote than they would be to an energetic member of St. Stephen's. This is, as it seems, unavoidable, but the effect is that the men who are the most energetic up to the time of their passing the chairs of their respective lodges become comparatively supine when that honour has been achieved. Their career terminates then and there, and as they have all subscribed to the charities, there is no masonic opening to them, except to subscribe again. This, to do them justice, they generally do, but the man who hits upon a method of keeping alive in the great body of masonic Pastmasters the zeal which has given them their rank will deserve better of the order than any dignitary since King Solomon. It has long been the hope of English Freemasons that the Prince of Wales should become one of them; and if his royal highness has really joined the craft in Sweden he will be heartily and loyally welcomed by the brotherhood here. The "knight of Charles XIII." is a thing for "book-believers" to believe in and uphold—the thousands of experienced "workers" whose very title is unknown will be content to greet his royal highness as a craftswoman, preliminary to hailing him as the order.

attribute to their mystic bond of union, and which are assuredly wanting in the management of too many institutions of the kind. Several thousands per annum are subscribed to each of these schools, and some two hundred of the sons and daughters of indigent Freemasons are clothed, educated, and fitted for the business of life in them. The Asylum for Aged Freemasons and their Widows provides, as its name implies, for a limited number of those beaten in the world, and is another instance of efficient and omnipresent management.

It is well known that an elaborate course of study has to be gone through before masonic proficiency is attained. Into the usefulness of the knowledge gained, or the value of the secrets laboriously imparted, this is not the place to inquire. But that the Freemasons themselves take an absorbing interest in them is certain, and the value of this practical testimony may be judged by the position and accomplishments of some of the foremost members of the order. The philosophers Locke and Sir Isaac Newton were accomplished freemasons; the Sir Christopher Wren held lodges in St. Paul's Cathedral throughout his building, and that some of the most learned, as well as the most powerful men the world has seen, have given time and labour to mastering the mysteries of the craft are facts as much beyond dispute, as that it includes some of the foremost living celebrities in its ranks. The present President of the Council could not have acquired his well-known proficiency in masonry without giving up to it many laborious days and nights; and to those who remember the conscientious masonic energy and advanced masonic opinions publicly displayed by the Earl of Carnarvon a few years since, there have been few things more welcome than his lordship's acceptance of the provincial grandmastership we recorded two days ago. Perhaps a defect of the order may be some day found in the exuberant wealth of human material at its disposal. There are so many good and active spirits ready to give up time and money to the cause that its principal honours are almost necessarily confined to those immediately known to the Grand Master and his advisers. The result is that the energetic mason finds his circle of usefulness and distinction confined to the lodge or coterie in which he works; and that he, as a rule, becomes less actively zealous when the highest honours of his lodge have been earned. A Pastmaster, who has filled his chair satisfactorily, will, as a rule, fold his robe and fall with decency—in other words, contents himself with the passive performance of the almost nominal duties left him. As a permanent member of Grand Lodge—the parliament of the craft—he may, it is