

The Sermon

preached in Worcester Cathedral
on October 9th, 1940

at the

Commemoration of the 150th Anniversary
of the Foundation of the

Worcester Lodge No. 280

by the

DEAN OF HEREFORD

The Very Reverend R. Waterfield, P.G.C. and Rt. Wor.
Provincial Grand Master for the Masonic Province of
Herefordshire.

Hebrews X, 24. "And let us consider one another to provoke unto love and good works."

A sermon was preached from that text on the occasion of the consecration of this Lodge a hundred and fifty years ago. A hundred and fifty years after the foundation of this Lodge I give the same message to its Brethren. That, thank God, is still the watchword of Freemasonry in England and I hope I may add, wherever the English language is spoken. Love and good works, love among the Brethren of the Craft, good works done to one another, as often as there is need, and good works reaching out from the Craft and its individual members to the outside world, these are still, may they always be, the characteristic activities of English Freemasons. In other countries the order has been criticised, arraigned, condemned, as mischievous, disloyal, revolutionary; it has been suppressed and forbidden. It is not for me to express an opinion, which could be of no value, on the merits and demerits of Freemasonry as practised in other countries. I know I am justified in claiming that Freemasonry in this free country of ours is loyal to the Throne and to the constitution, that it is an organisation working peacefully, methodically, and beneficently, for the good of its own members directly, and indirectly for the community at large. For its object is to pledge the Brethren as men of honour, and to teach and train them through the medium of a symbolic ritual, so to bear themselves in the inner community of the order into which they are initiated as to fit themselves to be at all times and in all emergencies loyal in duty and faithful in service to the larger communities of which they will be members wherever at any time their lot in life may be cast.

For one hundred and fifty years this Lodge, to which most of those whom I am addressing are proud to belong, has been inculcating the same principles and doing the same good work on the same high level of religious faith and moral endeavour from generation to generation. A hundred and fifty years! It is a long time over which to cast our thoughts. Three spans of half a century. And across one of them your W.M. looks

back to the celebration of the centenary of the Lodge when he was as now your W.M. A noble record, a happy retrospect. But when we look back further to the year when the Lodge was founded the effort will suggest more sad than cheerful reflections.

A hundred and fifty years ago, William Wilberforce was gathering strength in his great campaign for the abolition of the slave trade. Two years before, encouraged by his friend William Pitt, he had brought a bill before Parliament, which, in spite of the ardent support of his great leader, failed. But since then he had been supported by other great parliamentary champions, among them Burke and Fox, in resolutions which, though unfruitful for the moment, were destined to lead to the abolition of the traffic in slaves and eventually to the emancipation of all its victims. A hundred and fifty years later we find ourselves engaged in a mortal struggle with a mightier tyrant than the slave-trader of the days of Wilberforce, pledged to fight on until we have secured the emancipation of half a dozen nations, whose lot is little better, in their own native lands, than that of the negroes who were dragged in chains from their homes and shipped across the seas.

Again, a hundred and fifty years ago, in this very month of October, Edmund Burke published his "Reflections" on that mighty upheaval, the French Revolution, which had struck terror to the heart of Europe eighteen months before. In a speech delivered earlier in the year, he had cried in Parliament: "The French have shown themselves the ablest architects of ruin who have hitherto existed in the world. In a short space of time they have pulled to the ground their army, their navy, their commerce, their arts and their manufactures." Burke's "Reflections on the French Revolution" has been called "the most magnificent political prophecy ever given to the world." It had an enormous effect, all over Europe, in rousing opposition to the revolutionists, and in preparing the way for that great clash of nations which culminated in the triumphs and then the downfall of Napoleon. In opposition to many of his contemporaries, notably Charles Fox, until then his ardent friend but his friend no more, who saw in the French Revolution by far

the greatest thing that had ever happened in the world and by far the best, Burke constituted himself the champion of an order of things as old as the centuries and till then thought to be indestructible. A lover of liberty, he said that he "loved liberty "only in the guise of order," and he contemplated chaos with horror and dismay. He saw so clearly the hideous ruin with which the shattered fabric of the French constitution was threatened that he was blind to the rottenness pervading the doomed structure which rendered that ruin inevitable.

We, who a few weeks ago were dumb-founded by the sudden collapse of the armies and the estate of France, are now told that to those who had the eyes to discern it that dissolution was as certain as was the fate of the Bourbon Monarchy and the French nobility a hundred and fifty years before.

If we were asked today, in the words of Edmund Burke, who are the ablest architects of ruin that have hitherto existed in the world, we should name no other people than the French. And yet we could not but allow that they, or those who claim, all unworthily, to represent the mind of France, have had a large share in being once again the architects of their own ruin. While Burke was luminating with torrential eloquence against the overthrow of an ancient order, Wilberforce was pleading as loudly and no less persuasively, for the abolition of a social system sanctioned by the unrebuked consent of many more centuries than the Bourbon Monarchy had known. He lived to be assured of the success of his beneficent revolution when the tyrant offspring of the other, Napoleon Buonaparte, was at the height of his baleful and sanguinary career.

What lessons may we draw from these reflections upon the movements fraught with destiny for mankind which were stirring when your Lodge was founded a hundred and fifty years ago? We Freemasons are the heirs of traditions that are lost in the night of vanished years. We build the structure of our constitution, and we found the principles that we profess, upon a great ideal which visited the minds of men thousands of years ago, the ideal of building a temple to the glory of God,

and, when the forces of evil had destroyed that temple, of building another of which the glory should be greater than of the former. The aims of those whom we call the first Freemasons are the aims of us their successors to-day. We inherit their traditions, and the single purpose from which their traditions sprang, the purpose of building in the world a temple to the glory of God. We inherit the spirit which animated their successors many generations later, when the powers of evil had for a time prevailed and the first glory was departed, to raise another temple whose glory should be greater than that of the one destroyed. To be ever building, and rebuilding, in the faith and in the power of the Great Architect of the Universe, to kindle new hopes and call out fresh endeavour, to restore fallen fortunes, to raise new and better edifices on the ruins of the old—always to the glory of God and to the confusion of His enemies, this must now and for ever be the work of all who are initiated into the mysteries and claim the privileges of Freemasonry. And along with the arduous task of building goes always for Freemasons the gentle practice of bringing succour to those who are in distress. Never before in all our history have we been called upon as now to prepare the foundations and bring together the materials for rebuilding the fabric of a shattered world. Before that can be done we have to beat into submission the enemies who have wrought and continue to work destruction. And when the task of restoration can at long last begin, then, with the building of a new, a happier, and a better world, we shall with no less joy than that which cheered the heart of Wilberforce a hundred and fifty years ago, strike the shackles from men and nations brutally enslaved and bid them, in the name of God their Saviour, be free and live again.