

An Oration preached at the Consecration of Setantia Chapter, No. 7755,
on Tuesday, 30th November, 1976, by the Revd. H. Kirk-Smith, M.A., Ph.D.
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Claudius Ptolemaeus, the famous mathematician and geographer, who lived at Alexandria in the second century A.D., wrote that the Inhabitants of the country between Morecambe Bay and the range of hills which separated Lancashire from Yorkshire were called the Setantii or the Segantii. The word itself means "the dwellers in the country of the waters". This territory embraced what is now virtually the County Palatine of Lancaster. By the time the Romans had invaded Britain for the second time, the Setantii had become subordinate to the Brigantes, the most powerful nation in Britain, whose territory stretched from the Solway to the Mersey in the west and from the Tyne to the Humber in the east.

Their Deities were the furies, to whom they offered human sacrifice. They believed in the transmigration of souls, lived by hunting and on the fruits of trees, and were fierce warriors and courageous in battle.

No doubt, Companions, we have become more civilised than these warlike ancestors of ours, but in retaining the name Setantia for this Chapter (as, indeed, for the Lodge from which it sprang) we are preserving a link with Lancashire's rich and storied past.

How appropriate, too, is the name given to the Chapter, for it hopes to attract from every corner of the Province those who have held the highest office in their own Chapters, and whose interests it hopes to stimulate by lectures and demonstrations in Royal Arch Masonry.

The Roman maps are vague and ambiguous, but there is a reference on them to the "portus Setantiorum", the haven of the Setantii. Scholars differ from each other in stating where the Portus Setantiorum was, as judgment, local patriotism or inspired guesswork have full play. Some place it at or near the mouth of the Ribble, or the Wyre, or the Lune, or even as far south as the Mersey. But where it was is really immaterial, as this great Province of ours embraces all these places.

It is, however, the thought which lies behind the phrase "the haven of the Setantii", which is perhaps the most suggestive of all. For, in the troublesome years ahead, as the economic blizzard gathers fury, we shall need a haven to which we can return. Companions, in this field at least,

"I tell you nought for your comfort,
The sea, nought for your desire,
Save that the sky grows darker yet
And the sea rises higher."

But if this Chapter becomes a haven to which we can retire from the strains and stresses of the world outside, in order to recharge our spiritual batteries, and to fill our minds with further masonic knowledge, then we can return refreshed to our own Lodges and Chapters, where the real work is done. If this proves to be true, we shall this day be consecrating this Chapter, light such a beacon as will go on burning down the centuries to come.

But the stones with which we build in Freemasonry are the stones of our personal integrity. The pressures are always great on the man of principle to bend like a reed to the wind, and to allow his deepest convictions to be tainted by the eroding verdigris of compromise. As the Volume of the Sacred Law reminds us, we need to be clad with the whole armour of God if we are to survive - girt around with truth, protected by the breastplate of righteousness and the shield of faith, and fortified by the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit "for we wrestle not against flesh and

blood, but against principalities, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places". only with the help of the True and Living God Most High shall we survive the most deadly of all conflicts.

Will you allow me to share with you some words of Tennyson, to which I have returned time and time again over the years?

"Self-reverence, self-knowledge, self-control,
These three alone lead life to sovereign power,
Yet not for power (power of herself
Would come uncalled for), but to live by law.
Acting the law we live by without fear,
And, because right is right, to follow right
Were wisdom in the scorn of consequence".

Here we find no attempt to blur the distinction between right and wrong, no relative values, no advocacy of every man doing what seems right in his own eyes, which the Volume of the Sacred Law sees as the very nadir of moral turpitude and social chaos, but moral absolutes, the divine imperative, "because right is right to follow right".

So, Companions, today we raise another landmark in the history of Freemasonry in the Province. May it point the way both to our responsibilities here on earth, and also to the joy of the great Chapter above. But let us build deeply this day; let our foundations be secure, for as G.K. Chesterton so rightly says

"Well I wot if we scour not well,
Red rust shall grow on God's great bell
And grass in the streets of God".

H. KIRK-SMITH.

Nov. 30th 1976.