

TOLERATION

BY BRO. WM. F. KUHN, P.G.M. MISSOURI

THE superficial thinker ascribes all intolerance in the world to religious creeds, and, ignorantly, thinks that the great day of universal toleration will be ushered in, when all creeds are torn down and destroyed. He fails to recognize the fact that it is not so much a question of creeds, but that intolerance is the natural product of a dwarfed and misshapen intellectuality, the adopted child of a sterile spirituality; that toleration is the offspring of a broad and comprehensive intellectual development and the legitimate heir of a virile, active and sympathetic spirituality.

Man is the only animal which has evolved the power of speech; speech implies words, or the sign of an idea; words are the precursors of thought. To think is to reason and to form a judgment; reason and judgment are the basis of a belief. Man is a believing being, because he thinks. Even a disbelief, however paradoxical it may seem, is, when reduced to its ultimate analysis, a belief.

A creed is but a systematized belief, whether such belief or beliefs refer to the physical, intellectual, or moral nature. It is impossible to conceive of a man, with his intellectual nature, without a belief, and it is equally impossible to conceive of a man with his spiritual nature, without a creed. If such a sentient being exists, he is either suffering from an intellectual, or a spiritual vacuity, or both. A man without an intellectual belief would be an intellectual monstrosity, and a man without a religious creed would be a spiritual idiot. It might be well to note the man, or any organization of men, who talk loud and long about dogmas and creeds, who rail at churches for their supposed intolerance, because, if you scratch such a man or such an organization, you will find under the epidermis a most intolerable bigot or bigots, and so full of creeds to bursting. An intellectual belief and a religious creed are a part of man; the two are so intimately interwoven in his two-fold nature that to divorce them would destroy the personality of the man. An intellectual or scientific belief is made up of the same material as a religious creed. If the science of Geology and Palaeontology can borrow millions of years, if the physical sciences demand an ion, if the science of evolution postulates a primordial cell, why should it be thought incredible or unscientific for our spiritual nature to postulate a God? No, it is neither incredible nor unscientific for the pilot-man to use his religious creed as the chart, his intellectual belief as the compass, that will enable

him to guide his ship by treacherous shoals, through the narrows, through the darkness and storm, into the sunlit harbor of a well rounded and successful life.

A belief in God and immortality is a great and universal fact; a fact that science and philosophy must recognize. The underlying truth and force of all religions, is man's belief in a God and a hope of eternal life. Religion did not give birth to this faith and hope, but this creed of a belief in God and a hope of eternal life gave birth to religion. That man is a religious being, is a universal phenomenon. This religious sentiment is "Like the finger of God writing upon the soul, age by age a new and ever renewing destiny." It is ever reaching out and endeavoring to comprehend a Supreme Intelligence, an Infinite Creator, a just, holy and benevolent Father. This effort of our spiritual nature is not derived from any of our physical senses; for no physical sensation can be transformed into hope, love, or faith. Man knows that his spiritual nature and the phenomena of his spiritual nature can not be described in the terms of the physical universe. A thought can not be measured by a rule. Spiritual pain or joy can not be weighed in a balance. Hope and love can not be solved by the binomial theorem, nor can our soul's desire be revealed by mystical numbers.

This belief in God and hope in eternal life has its root deep in the heart of humanity. The wise sage and the untutored savage have alike pondered the question, "If a man die, shall he live again?" The cradle asks the question, "Whence came I," and the coffin asks, "Whither go I?" Man is conscious of his duality, although he may be unacquainted with the simplest philosophical or metaphysical speculation. Primitive and childlike man, in the early history of the race, grasped in his feeble way that there is a God and that he was immortal. Even the barbarian may cry:--

"Whence this pleasing hope, this fond desire
This longing after immortality?
Or whence this secret dread
And inward horror of falling into naught?
Why shrinks the soul back on herself
And startles at destruction?
'Tis the Divinity that stirs within us,
'Tis Heaven itself that points an hereafter,
And intimates eternity to man."

Man, therefore, as he stands in the presence of his intellectual and spiritual nature, worships, and builds for himself a creed. Whether the creed that he erects is tolerant or intolerant depends, absolutely, on his conception of Deity. It might be said, as a man's God is, so is he. The early Hebraic creed considered God as a God of terror, of vengeance, and of wrath; that he was a tribal, racial, or national God only. About such a belief was built a self centered, intolerant creed. Intolerant because it was selfish, for selfishness is the mother of intolerance. But the belief as taught, especially, by the Prophet Isaiah, and which today shines with such an effulgent splendor in the life and teachings of Christ, is far different. It teaches that God is a God of love, a God of forgiveness; that the Kingdom of God is not an empty ceremonial or outward display, but it is in the hearts of men; that its fruits are justice, mercy and service; a kingdom not established by the sword and by race prejudice, but a kingdom of the Fatherhood of God and the Brotherhood man. Such a creed is free of selfishness; it is altogether altruistic. It is tolerant, because it bears within the Gospel of Love.

"Teach me to feel each other's woes,
Each other's burdens bear."

The Gospel of Love is the world's panacea for intolerance. Freemasonry has such a creed. It is even dogmatic and unchangeable. It is, "I believe in God, the Father Almighty." This does not mean a belief in some notion of a God, some abstract formula, some metaphysical or geometrical demonstration, but it means the God as revealed in the sacred volume on our Altar, as taught in that "Inestimable gift of God to an."

Freemasonry in this short creed has no quarrel, or is it intolerant to Jew, Gentile, Mohammedan or Hindu for their faith and trust as revealed in their Sacred Books. Freemasonry has no quarrel with the an who has no conception of Deity and who has no sacred Book from which to draw his inspiration and hope; but Freemasonry believes in God, the Father, and he who can not accept this simple creed must remain outside of our portals.

This simple dogmatic creed is the very fundamental principle of Freemasonry. It is the cleavage between belief and unbelief; upon it we build our beautiful system of morals; upon it we base our belief in the brotherhood of man. Freemasonry without its belief in God, the Father, and its imperative corollary, the Brotherhood of man, would be a sham and a sacrilegious pretense. Upon this creed Freemasonry must stand. If we

can not accept it, then let us take down our Charters, close the sacred Volume on our Altar, lock the doors of our halls and temples, and retire from the world's moral activities as a soulless and spiritless Fraternity.

Freemasonry is not a church. It does not design to establish a universal church, as some would foolishly believe, neither does it purpose to disestablish any church; it makes no war on church-creeds, but is tolerant toward every religious faith and belief; it respects and honors every genuine believer, whatever his individual or his church creed may be. No man who believes in the Fatherhood of God can be other than tolerant.

"There is a wideness in God's mercy
Like the wideness of the sea;
There's a kindness in his justice
Which is more than liberty.
For the love of God is broader
Than the measure of man's mind
And the heart of the Eternal
Is most wonderfully kind."

The most tolerant teacher that ever lived, was presaged by the Prophet when he said: "And his name shall be called Wonderful, the Prince of Peace." Why ? Because "He united love to God, with love to man; courage to caution, perfect freedom from form, and reverence for the substance in all forms, hatred for sin and love for the sinner." He turned duty into happiness, wrote the laws into the heart, helped us to walk in the spirit of love; for love begets toleration, and by it lifts the world to the highest plane of peace and good will. Listen to the great moral code that he gave to man :--

"Whatsoever ye would that men should do unto you, do ye also unto them."

Hear his dogmatic creed which amounts to a positive command:--

"Thou shalt love the Lord, thy God, with all thy heart, with all thy soul, with all thy strength, and thy neighbor as thyself."

"This commandment I give unto you, that ye love one another."

The following are the graces that flow from obedience to this creed:--

"Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy."

"Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friend."

"But the fruit of the spirit is love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith."

"Neither do I condemn you, go, sin no more."

"Father forgive them, for they know not what they do."

Are these intolerant words? They are old and may even sound trite, but they are the very soul of toleration, welling up from a deep, profound spirituality, and are ringing clearer, stronger, deeper and fuller as years roll into thousands of centuries.

This self same spirit of toleration should be the crowning glory of Freemasonry. To the critics of Freemasonry, the religious zealot, on the one hand, who denounces Freemasonry as Godless, and, on the other hand, to the dwarfed intellectual and spiritual concept that declares Freemasonry is intolerant because it demands a belief in "The one living and true God," we can but quote the words of the peace-loving Whittier:

"Who fathoms the eternal thought?
Who talks of schemes and plans?
The Lord is God. He needeth not
The poor device of man
I walk with bare, hushed feet the ground
Ye tread with boldness shod,
I dare not fix with mete and bound
The love and power of God."

Toleration should be written deep in the soul of every member of our Fraternity. For Freemasonry is out of necessity an aid to every agency that has for its end the amelioration of the human family. While it is not a church, it draws its inspiration from the same source and walks hand in hand with the church in the broad field of humanity's need. It can not from its very inception antagonize religion, because it stands today as the proud champion of religion and religious liberty; the foe of irreligion and irreligious liberty; for freedom, but not license; for tolerance, but not anarchy; for civil liberty, but not tyranny; for purity, but not shame; for patriotism, but not treason; for sobriety, but not intemperance; for hope, but not despair; for love, but not hate. Freemasonry knows no nationality, but its kingdom is in the hearts of men. Its power lies not in the sword on the field of battle, but in the silent, yet potent, force of the individuality of its members. It has

a foundation, tolerant, solid, eternal. Upon it we erect our moral temple and adorn it with the foliage and flowers of a life whose feet are swift to run on missions of love, whose knees are ever humble in the recognition of Divine favors, whose heart is expanding in charity, whose hand will raise the fallen, and whose lips will bring joy and gladness. It is altruistic, not egotistic. The spirit of Freemasonry is preeminently progressive, and while it not only inculcates moral truths, it also demands advancement along the line of scholastic development. It is the promoter and encourager of every art and science that has for its end the uplifting of man. It would appeal to the aesthetic, to the philosophic, and would surround the mind and heart with everything that can beautify and adorn man.

The spirit of Freemasonry is that which tuned the harp for the immortal strains of a Handel; a Haydn, and a Mendelssohn; that touched the deep and majestic tone of a Milton, the spiritual sweetness of a David, the genius of an Addison, a Whittier, a Longfellow, and a Tennyson; that sounded the depths of unlimited space and brought forth the music of countless worlds to the enchanted ear of a Kepler and a Newton; that descended into the earth and unfolded its pages, penned in the rocks of centuries, to a Gray and Agassiz; that touched the brush of a Raphael and the chisel of an Angelo and made canvas, fresco and rocks speak in living realities. That spirit that came like a gentle wind and dispersed the metaphysical fog of ancient philosophy, dethroned its selfishness and placed it upon the only sure foundation, that "I am my brother's keeper."

From such a creed will bloom into eternal freshness and renewing youth, that all prevailing sweetness, that calm reliance, that loving toleration as expressed by Whittier:

"No offering of my own I have,
Nor works my faith to prove;
I can but give the gifts He gave,
And plead his love for love.
And so beside the silent sea
I wait the muffled oar,
No harm from Him can come to me,
On ocean or on shore.
I know not where His islands lift
Their fronded palms in air;

I only know I can not drift
Beyond his love and care."