

**Spirituality in Freemasonry**  
**a lecture given at Canonbury Masonic Research Centre (London)**  
**on Wednesday 13 October 1999**  
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What follows this evening may turn out to be a small act of worship. I am not a scholarly person. I have no great depths of learning and a relatively shallow fund of knowledge. I write as I feel. And you, the audience, may be scholarly and widely-read, or you may be interested in the subject at some other level. I do not know. So let me start by saying that I speak from personal experience and observation.

I was born the son of an Anglican Clergyman of high-church persuasion. My church-going habits from an early age were extreme, to say the least. It was no unusual occurrence for us as children to go to mass once a day, five or more days a week. My spiritual imprint, for want of a better word, was therefore deep and well-defined. Those who have experienced the panoply and majesty of an Anglo-Catholic Mass in all its splendour will know that a near trance-like state can be induced by the time it has come to its magnificent and dramatic end. But after High Mass on Sundays, it was my father's custom, like many priests, to hurry to the back of the church to say a few words to the congregation as they left, and I have an abiding memory of him exchanging pleasantries with them, sometimes laughing and joking about this and that.

In my artless, childlike innocence, I found this disturbing, sensing that such flippant and trivial social behaviour interrupted the spiritual flow, the depth and richness of the spiritual experience to which I had, even as a small child, just been subjected. Did I say even as a small child? Perhaps I should say especially as a small child, since we are, as children, far better able to imbibe these things than we are as prejudiced or jaundiced adults.

Many years later, with my christian faith lying more or less in tatters, I was initiated into freemasonry in which, I had been led to believe, I could achieve some measure of spiritual fulfilment in a pantheistic way, within the bounds of a universal brotherhood but without the constraints of dogma and institutionalism. My initiation was conferred on me by my proposer who was Master of the lodge at the time, who was already a close friend, and it was a uniquely wonderful experience. At the end of the charge after initiation (a little boring, but not so boring as to mar the initiation itself), the deacon plonked me down in a seat next to a very well-meaning chap who introduced himself to me and I settled down. The next item on the summons was to approve the lodge accounts for the year, a contrast so brutal and banal, I nearly wept, and I was instantly reminded of the brutal contrast between the Sunday mass and the light banter at the church door afterwards.

As a freemason, I was quickly to discover how widespread was the flippancy and triviality with which the words of the ritual were treated. I was quickly to discover that freemasonry was treated by its members in ways that were far removed from the spiritual. True, there were great and good bonds of friendship in place, and I do not wish in any way to belittle these. I had ample evidence of a deep and real caring spirit that no other mutual benefit association could rival. But intermingled with it were other less worthy aspirations - the striving for higher rank, the political in-fighting, the banal sense of humour that sometimes surrounded speeches at the dinners, and the devotion to administrative matters which took precedence over the central truths; truth was sometimes nowhere to be seen.

I have persevered, through more than thirty years, because I have been able, almost unaided, to extract from freemasonry some elements which I have used for my own spiritual nourishment. Of the brethren who came into the lodge since my initiation and who have 'fallen off', I could read in their faces the disillusionment of those who had given up for want of a spiritual content.

Yet, as I point out in my article *Man, Know Thyself* in the current issue of *Freemasonry Today*, our craft contains many elements of spirituality which we seem almost wilfully intent on ignoring. Actually I take the title of this article from the German Schröder second-degree ritual, which I would like to share with you. The Entered Apprentices, who are usually passed to the second degree in pairs in Schröder, emphasizing the importance of companionship, are admitted to the lodge and are treated to a monologue by the Master about the importance of proceeding with the building of their own inner temple, ending with the following words:

Therefore, in order to impress ever more deeply on these brother Apprentices a lesson they learned in the first degree to encourage them to frequent and strict self-observation, direct their attention, Bro SW, to the west, and show them the source and the destination of all human wisdom.

The entered apprentices are then turned to face the west where stands an object concealed by a cloth. The Deacon unveils the object which is revealed as a mirror over which are inscribed the words *Mensch Erkenne Dich*, *Man Know Thyself*. Self-knowledge is, they are then told in a little lecture, the beginning and the end of all human wisdom.

Paradoxically perhaps, German society, which we have come to regard as overly materialistic, recognizes (at least their freemasons do) the need to 'penetrate the mystery of human nature' to discover themselves. When we talk in FM about 'the hidden mysteries of nature and science' I would wager that most FM's reading that would define nature in terms of flowers, trees, changes in the seasons, the structure of our small galaxy perhaps, and so on, not realizing that we attempt to plumb the depths of our own nature, of who I am, where I come from, the purpose of my existence.

If I may digress for a moment, I once knew a priest who often greeted you with the words 'Where are you?' (not, please note, 'how are you?'). I asked him why, and he reminded me that in Genesis, God looked for Adam, hiding in the Garden of Eden, with the words 'where are you?'. The interesting thing for me was that he asked 'where are you?' whereas most of us, reading the bible aloud, would have said 'where are you?'. He might instead have said 'who are you?' Do we know our true nature? Do we sometimes need to hide our true nature, and why?

The ancient mysteries, on which I am convinced the true principles of freemasonry are founded, were a way of seeing the world in a quite different way from that of scientific materialism. For the ancients, the world in which we lived was composed of all the material elements of which we are aware with our senses, but contained in addition, and for them more importantly, non-material realms which were not accessible to ordinary perception. I may be forgiven for quoting W. Kirk MacNulty:-

Events occurring within these non-material domains were considered to be governed by an extension of the same body of natural law which gave consistency to the world of ordinary experience, and those events were thought to have an important influence on the daily activity of human life . . . the content of the mysteries, that is the symbolic material which was used to convey their instruction, includes tales of men and women with remarkable powers [involving] astonishing adventures which are governed by arbitrary rules and occur in unlikely locations. All this sounds very abstract, more than a little superstitious, and quite irrelevant to our contemporary experience until we recognize that . . . the closest and most immediately available of these domains is the psyche. Each of us has similar adventures every time we dream, since the boundary of that inaccessible part is the threshold of our own consciousness.

And I might add, we all suspend our disbelief every time we read a novel, watch *Midsummer Night's Dream* on the stage, or watch *Star Trek* on television.

How does modern English freemasonry stack up against the concept of a non-material domain? Well, Mr Pat Streams, alias Bro Leo Zanelli, has written an article recently in which he says:

I am getting bored by the incessant suggestions . . . that freemasonry has some great message or meaning for us all . . . freemasons are not waiting for some great light to suddenly illuminate their life . . . they enjoy their masonry without any blinding revelations, in fact they don't need any . . . [nobody] is prepared to consider that freemasonry could have evolved purely as a social/insurance fraternity and the ritual just happened to grow in haphazard fashion as it went along.

Then again, a brother recently gave a talk in a lodge room in Gt. Queen Street, to which we were invited to bring our partners and wives. It was entitled *Masonic*

Symbolism so he then talked about the organisation of Grand Lodge, the role of the officers in the lodge and the difference between the regalia of a grand officer and that of a provincial grand officer and that of an ordinary Non-Commissioned Officer. When at the end he was asked by one of the wives why we had a rough and a perfect ashlar in the lodge, and what was the symbolism of that, there were mutterings from the East that 'we don't really have time for all that'.

At my raising I was invited to 'lift my eyes to that bright morning star, whose rising brings peace and salvation to the faithful and obedient of the human race'. I ask you to tell me, what more potently promising invitation could have been made? It is overwhelming, even without its christian overtones. Let me ask you another question; why is it that we very seldom hear the first degree tracing board lecture worked in regular lodges? Could it be that it is simply too rich in spirituality, is unsettling, that we are afraid of it? Some of the passages it contains may illustrate the point;

. . . the lodge is in length from east to west, in width between north and south, in depth from the surface of the earth to its centre, and even as high as the heavens [in other words, the lodge is a representation of the universe] . . . our lodges stand on holy ground - why? - because the first lodge was consecrated - why was it consecrated? - on account of three grand offerings thereon made, which met with divine approbation [which are then specified] . . . our lodges are situated due east and west - why? - because all places of divine worship are, or ought to be, so situated . . . our lodges are supported by three great pillars - they are called wisdom, strength and beauty - why? - wisdom to contrive, strength to support and beauty to adorn . . . the universe is the temple of the Deity whom we serve [we have already worked that out from the foregoing] - wisdom, strength and beauty are about His throne as pillars of His works, for His wisdom is infinite, His strength omnipotent and beauty shines through the whole of the creation in symmetry and order. The heavens He has stretched forth as a canopy; the earth He has planted as a footstool; He crowns his temple with stars, as with a diadem, and with his hand he extends the power and glory. The sun and moon are messengers of His will, and all His law is concord. The three great pillars supporting a freemasons' lodge are emblematic of those divine attributes . . . the covering of a freemasons' lodge is a celestial canopy of divers colours, even the heavens . . . in all regular, well-formed, constituted lodges there is a point within a circle round which the brethren cannot err; this circle is bounded between north and south by two grand parallel lines, one representing Moses, [who received the wisdom from God on high] the other King Solomon [who dispensed it downwards to mankind, a nice point of symmetry]; on the upper part of this circle rests the Volume of the Sacred Law, supporting Jacob's ladder, the top of which reaches to the heavens . . . in going round this circle, we must necessarily touch on both those parallel lines, likewise on the Sacred Volume; and while a mason keeps himself thus circumscribed, he cannot err . . .

I believe we have strayed too far from this, the true eighteenth century principles of freemasonry and we have little or no chance of returning within the structure of our present organisation. We do seem sometimes to offer the outer form, but without the content. I gladly acknowledge that there are exceptions to this in England - I have visited lodges who understood the importance of self-knowledge, but they themselves would agree that they are exceptions. My own two craft lodges are full of wonderful chaps who do understand these things, but outside them the only horizon consistently offered to me was a horizon filled with the prospect of climbing a ladder of office without knowing what those offices meant, the horizon of a dark blue collar and a lot of gongs.

But let me give you this thought - people often join organizations because of the companionship it offers. It follows that freemasonry, for instance, will attract those who may be in need of companionship. Sometimes, the need for companionship reveals a sense of loneliness or a lack in their lives, and (I tread carefully here) this may be engendered by low self-esteem. They may be seeking approbation, love even. A need to be loved may be present because they do not properly know themselves, know their own self-worth, their own uniqueness as God's special creation. Classical mysticism distinguished between the once-born and the twice-born; once born into the material world we only know ourselves as a material being in a material world, but if we have the good fortune to be twice-born we will know our own nature beyond the material, we will be spiritually awakened, we will know, esteem, and love ourselves, not in any narcissistic or egotistical way, but know ourselves as a part of the whole, thereby enabling us to love others, and to love God, in ourselves. I do not believe it is fanciful to say that freemasonry can enable us in that endeavour, indeed I believe that freemasonry is uniquely placed to deliver on such a promise. I will end with a quote from a letter I received from an acquaintance in Germany who had just returned from a visit to the Grand Temple in London, who wrote to me:

That evening, Mr Rees, was one of those days in one's life that one doesn't forget. I had the good fortune to stand, quite alone, in the middle of the Grand Temple, and it was as though I was standing at the centre of my own being - a very special feeling.

In my view, by accident or design, she had discovered herself, answered the question in the third degree, knew her true being, was at peace. I believe we all need to follow her example.

**A DAILY ADVANCEMENT...**

*Canberra Lodge of Research and Instruction*

*November 1999*

**HISTORIC ASPECTS OF FREEMASONRY**

*An illustrated lecture for freemasons and friends presented at open meeting*

(\* indicates slide number which are unfortunately unavailable )

by WBro Yasha Beresiner WM

Quatuor Coronati Lodge #2076 UGLE

Worshipful Master, Ladies, Gentlemen and Brethren,

WHY

(\*1) Consider that this very moment, as we sit in this Hall, there are tens of thousands of masons meeting just like us along our meridian, stretching from Stockholm in Sweden to Cape Town in South Africa, men as diverse in intellect and culture as you can imagine. Judges and dustmen, bus drivers and city mayors, bakers, teachers, clergymen and royalty. Christians and Muslims, Jews and Buddhists. Black, coloured and white.

All surrounded by furniture and decor similar to that here in this beautiful Temple, all wearing aprons just like ours, all practising, in essence, the same ceremonies, sharing the same pleasure and pride.

WHY?

What is the magnetism in Freemasonry that draws such diversity of people to form one single world-wide compelling fraternity?

That is the question I should like to try to answer this evening.

RITUAL

It could be that we are bound to each other because each one of us has experienced the same initiation ceremony (\*2), a ceremony you have to participate in if you wish to witness it.

From the day of my initiation I have been fascinated by the thought that for 350 years or more great men of history have gone through a similar ceremony, just like me; including dozens of members of Royal families in Sweden, Belgium, Denmark, Germany, the Netherlands and England. (\*3).

H M King George the VI, who was initiated in 1919, accepted the Rank of Past Grand Master on his accession to the throne in 1937. Nearly 200 years earlier in 1752 (\*4) George Washington, first President of the United States of America, was made a freemason in Virginia. Twelve other Presidents have followed in his footsteps as well as .....Winston Churchill... Giosue Carducci and Salvatore Quasimodo, Nobel prize winning poets...Niccolo Paganini and Mozart...(\*5) Simon Bolivar..... Houdini... Lindbergh..... even Casanova...all masons having experienced the same initiation ceremony as myself.

The greatest fascination to me, however, has been to visualise the initiation in England of (\*7) Elias Ashmole. There is irrefutable evidence that he was initiated as a freemason at Warrington in Lancashire at 4.30 pm on 16 October 1646. We can be that precise because there is an entry in his diary (\*8) in his own handwriting, recording the event. Ashmole was a very prominent gentleman of the period. A Fellow of the prestigious Royal Society, an antiquarian, an astrologer and an alchemist...and it is definite that he had nothing whatsoever to do with stone masons in their operative or working sense. Thus the importance we place on his initiation as evidence of our own antiquity as an institution.

## ORIGINS

It may very well be that this fascination with our still unknown roots is the common factor between all of us freemasons across the world. There are innumerable theories and no final conclusion as to when, where and how freemasonry began. It would make sense to reach the conclusion that we are descended directly from operative, that is working, stone masons. Today we use as our own laws (\*9) the same ancient charges and regulations that applied to operative masons as far back as the late 14<sup>th</sup> century. This transition theory visualises a situation where the operative working masons involved in the building, say, of an ancient (\*10) cathedral invited non-masons to their ceremonies. These would be men of the clergy and finance who were directly involved in the building. Civics and other members of the community may have also

been invited to participate at the festive boards, which are known to have been held by the working masons in their Lodges.

On completion of the work, so the transition theory continues, the operative masons would have moved on to their next undertaking. Those who remained behind, who had participated over decades, perhaps, in pleasant and convivial ceremonies, may have decided to continue regular social meetings using, now symbolically, all the implements and ritual they had witnessed in practice among the operative masons. Thus may have been born the speculative or symbolic masonry we practice today. We don't know. What we do know beyond a shadow of a doubt is that on the 24<sup>th</sup> of June 1717 four Lodges in London met together at the (\*11) Goose and Gridiron Tavern in St Paul s Churchyard and formed the Grand Lodge of England, the first Grand Lodge anywhere in the world and the beginning of organised freemasonry.

## SUCCESS

If the success of an organisation can be judged by the opposition to its existence then freemasonry began as a successful institution long before its formal launch. In 1698, nearly two decades before Grand Lodge was formed, a (\*12) pamphlet was distributed warning Londoners ..of the Mischiefs and Evils practised in the sight of God by those called Freed Masons...They are the Anti Christ....

Could this then be the secret as to what has kept freemasonry a strong and successful fraternal organisation through the centuries? Those same criticisms that began three centuries ago continue today in almost identical form and wording but have never been backed by fact.

(\*13) Their arguments and criticism fail to mention that Freemasonry supports religion and there is nothing in a Freemason s obligations that can be considered to cause conflict with public duty. It is, however, always sensational articles and books claiming to reveal all the secrets of the Freemasons.

The fascination to me is that these authors are unaware of the fact that they are mimicking (\*14)Samuel Prichard, who in 1730, more than 250 years ago, had made exactly the same claim about revealing the secrets of the Freemasons, in his book *Masonry Dissected*. Prichard claimed to belong to a recently constituted Lodge though there is no evidence that he ever was a freemason. The only common denominator between Prichard and the modern authors of anti-masonic literature is the reason for their respective publications: monetary gain.



## BLESSING IN DISGUISE

In Prichard's case, however, his exposure - as these publications disclosing Masonic ritual came to be known - is a blessing in disguise for the student of freemasonry today. The only available contemporary Grand Lodge information is to be found in (\*15) Anderson's *Constitutions of the Free-Masons* published in 1723. As a source of historical information, it is considered to be quite unreliable. The (\*16) frontispiece, however, is possibly the only totally reliable information in the entire publication.

It depicts the Constitutions being passed by the Duke of Montagu to the new Grand Master the Duke of Wharton. They are surrounded by identified freemasons of prominence in the premier Grand Lodge of England. We also have an insight to the costumes and aprons of the period.

In the body of the Constitutions there is certainly no information about ritual. It is here that Prichard's *Masonry Dissected* serves a useful purpose to the historian. It gives us a detailed account of the ceremonies practised in England in the 1730s.

*Masonry Dissected* was an exceptionally successful book. It went into three editions in eleven days, which is quite remarkable, considering that this was a period when much of the populace was illiterate and Freemasonry only one of numerous fraternal organisations.

Why the success of this particular book?

The inevitable conclusion is that Freemasons themselves purchased the exposure because it gave them an opportunity to better learn their ritual for which there was no other written source available at the time.

The irony of this situation is that there is probably equal truth with regard to the recent publications by those attacking freemasonry. The limited success of their books can be attributable to Freemasons purchasing volumes for their libraries whilst the public in general remains oblivious or even bored by the subject!

## EUROPE

Prichard's success coincided with the spread of freemasonry into Europe where many similar exposures soon began to appear. In Italy in 17?? the exposure (17\*) *I segreti dei Franchi Muratori* was intended to allow non-masons access to masonic lodges by telling them the

secret words and signs by which they would be admitted. The illustrations in the book show the (18\*)'Preparazione al ricevimento di un novizio and the text details the procedure in (19\*)Articolo III showing (20\*)*Lo Strano Apparato della Loggia* another illustration gives us an insight to (21\*)*La Loggia e Il Maestro*.

In France we have more fascinating illustrations (\*22), often derogatory, as in the case of the exposure first published in 1745 entitled *Les Francs-Maçons Ecrases* (The Freemason crashed) by the Abbe Larudan. The Master of the Lodge in the foreground is seen in a state of disarray whilst the building, symbolic of freemasonry, is collapsing and masons are falling to the ground. In the background, a group of lay onlookers are cheering and clapping.

The first illustration we have of a Lodge in session was published in Germany (\*23) just three years earlier, in 1742. The eight illustrations are known as the Gabanon prints, because they are dedicated to Louis Travenol, the author of another French exposure entitled *Le Catechisme des Francs-Maçons* and whose pseudonym was Leonard Gabanon.

Whilst the (\*24) first seven plates are all illustrative of Masonic ceremony, the last (\*25) is intended to be offensive, depicting masons of the French aristocracy as animals.

The greatest fascination that outsiders have with freemasonry seems to be connected to our initiation ceremony. Because we state that we treat our ceremonies as private, there have been many extraordinary insinuations as to how a mason is initiated. In 1721 the anonymous Hudibrastic Poem was published with clever though highly offensive insinuations of the activities of freemasons. This led in the 1760s (\*26) to some satirical illustrations depicting candidates being branded with the letters FM on their posterior. Such caricatures continued well into the 19<sup>th</sup> century (\*27).

## SATIRE & FUN

Not all of the satirical depiction of freemasons show them in a negative light. The most famous engraver of the eighteenth century, William Hogarth, himself a freemason, depicted (\*28) in a print published in 1738 the Master of his Lodge, drunk after an obviously successful meeting, being escorted home by the tyler. The print is entitled *Night* and is one of a series of four known as 'The Times Of Day'. They are a wonderful reflection of freemasonry of the period. The Master has been identified as Thomas de Veil, a local magistrate, known not to be in total amity with Hogarth. That is why the content of the chamber pot is being poured onto his head. Lawson Wood also drew a series of masons in his well known (\*29) Gran pop series.

We now come to the cross-roads in English Masonic history - which appears such a coincidental precedent to the history that is in the making here in Italy now, this very decade. Laurence Dermott, (\*30) has been described as the most extraordinary Masonic personality of any generation. Under his auspices a competing Grand Lodge was formed in England in 1751 styling itself as the Antients. It successfully dubbed the Premier and older Grand Lodge as the Moderns. The competition between the two was fierce and continued for over half a century.

It was only by the grace of (\*31) the Duke of Sussex that a union between the two rivals was finally achieved in 1813. That is why today we are known as the United Grand Lodge of England.

So we come back to my original question. What is it that has made freemasonry such a successful and long lasting institution world-wide? Is it its antiquity? Its resilience? or maybe its exclusiveness or the air of secrecy associated with it.

Its universal appeal may lie in every man being able to find within freemasonry some satisfaction in his own field of interest, be it ritual, history, theatricals, mysticism or just plain social contact. There is no simple answer.

If you were to ask me now the straightforward question: what is freemasonry? I would reply in one single word: Charity.

Not merely the charity of our pockets, as important as that is, but the charity of our hearts: the genuine and sincere shared sentiments of brotherly love, relief and truth.

FAREWELL

To end, I will quote one short paragraph from the closing ceremony as practised in most of our in England and here in Italy. It states:

...you are now about to quit this safe and sacred retreat of peace and friendship and mix again with the busy world. Midst all its cares and employment forget not the sacred duties which have been so frequently inculcated and strongly recommended in this Lodge.....that by diligence and fidelity to the duties of your respective vocations, by liberal beneficence and diffusive charity, by constancy and sincerity in your friendship, by uniformly kind, just, amiable and virtuous deportment, prove to the world the happy and beneficent effects of our ancient and honourable Institution.

How wonderful this world would be if we could all put into practice such splendid sentiments.

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Why the success of this particular book?

The inevitable conclusion is that Freemasons themselves purchased the exposure because it gave them an opportunity to better learn their ritual for which there was no other written source available at the time.

The irony of this situation is that there is probably equal truth with regard to the recent publications by those attacking freemasonry. The limited success of their books can be attributable to Freemasons purchasing volumes for their libraries whilst the public in general remains oblivious or even bored by the subject!

## EUROPE

Prichard's success coincided with the spread of freemasonry into Europe where many similar exposures soon began to appear. In Italy in 17?? the exposure (17\*) *I segreti dei Franchi Muratori* was intended to allow non-masons access to masonic lodges by telling them the



secret words and signs by which they would be admitted. The illustrations in the book show the (18\*) 'Preparazione al ricevimento di un novizio' and the text details the procedure in (19\*) 'Articolo III' showing (20\*) *Lo Strano Apparato della Loggia* another illustration gives us an insight to (21\*) *La Loggia e Il Maestro*.

In France we have more fascinating illustrations (\*22), often derogatory, as in the case of the exposure first published in 1745 entitled *Les Francs-Maçons Ecrases* (The Freemason crashed) by the Abbe Larudan. The Master of the Lodge in the foreground is seen in a state of disarray whilst the building, symbolic of freemasonry, is collapsing and masons are falling to the ground. In the background, a group of lay onlookers are cheering and clapping.

The first illustration we have of a Lodge in session was published in Germany (\*23) just three years earlier, in 1742. The eight illustrations are known as the Gabanon prints, because they are dedicated to Louis Travenol, the author of another French exposure entitled *Le Catechisme des Francs-Maçons* and whose pseudonym was Leonard Gabanon.

Whilst the (\*24) first seven plates are all illustrative of Masonic ceremony, the last (\*25) is intended to be offensive, depicting masons of the French aristocracy as animals.

The greatest fascination that outsiders have with freemasonry seems to be connected to our initiation ceremony. Because we state that we treat our ceremonies as private, there have been many extraordinary insinuations as to how a mason is initiated. In 1721 the anonymous Hudibrastic Poem was published with clever though highly offensive insinuations of the activities of freemasons. This led in the 1760s (\*26) to some satirical illustrations depicting candidates being branded with the letters FM on their posterior. Such caricatures continued well into the 19<sup>th</sup> century (\*27).

## SATIRE & FUN

Not all of the satirical depiction of freemasons show them in a negative light. The most famous engraver of the eighteenth century, William Hogarth, himself a freemason, depicted (\*28) in a print published in 1738 the Master of his Lodge, drunk after an obviously successful meeting, being escorted home by the tyler. The print is entitled *Night* and is one of a series of four known as 'The Times Of Day'. They are a wonderful reflection of freemasonry of the period. The Master has been identified as Thomas de Veil, a local magistrate, known not to be in total amity with Hogarth. That is why the content of the chamber pot is being poured onto his head. Lawson Wood also drew a series of masons in his well known (\*29) Gran pop series.

We now come to the cross-roads in English Masonic history - which appears such a coincidental precedent to the history that is in the making here in Italy now, this very decade. Laurence Dermott, (\*30) has been described as the most extraordinary Masonic personality of any generation. Under his auspices a competing Grand Lodge was formed in England in 1751 styling itself as the Antients. It successfully dubbed the Premier and older Grand Lodge as the Moderns. The competition between the two was fierce and continued for over half a century.

It was only by the grace of (\*31) the Duke of Sussex that a union between the two rivals was finally achieved in 1813. That is why today we are known as the United Grand Lodge of England.

So we come back to my original question. What is it that has made freemasonry such a successful and long lasting institution world-wide? Is it its antiquity? Its resilience? or maybe its exclusiveness or the air of secrecy associated with it.

Its universal appeal may lie in every man being able to find within freemasonry some satisfaction in his own field of interest, be it ritual, history, theatricals, mysticism or just plain social contact. There is no simple answer.

If you were to ask me now the straightforward question: what is freemasonry? I would reply in one single word: Charity.

Not merely the charity of our pockets, as important as that is, but the charity of our hearts: the genuine and sincere shared sentiments of brotherly love, relief and truth.

FAREWELL

To end, I will quote one short paragraph from the closing ceremony as practised in most of our in England and here in Italy. It states:

...you are now about to quit this safe and sacred retreat of peace and friendship and mix again with the busy world. Midst all its cares and employment forget not the sacred duties which have been so frequently inculcated and strongly recommended in this Lodge.....that by diligence and fidelity to the duties of your respective vocations, by liberal beneficence and diffusive charity, by constancy and sincerity in your friendship, by uniformly kind, just, amiable and virtuous deportment, prove to the world the happy and beneficent effects of our ancient and honourable Institution.

How wonderful this world would be if we could all put into practice such splendid sentiments.