

MASONRY IN FRANCE TODAY

Address given to the Masonic Service Association by the M.W. Grand Master of the French National Grand Lodge, at Washington, 25th February, 1960.

M.W. Brother Chairman, M. W. Grand Masters and Brethren,

First of all, I wish to take this opportunity to thank you for the cordial and fraternal welcome you have extended to myself and to the Brethren who accompanied me on our visit to the States.

I feel that the friendly spirit which prevails in your reception is a mark of sympathy and fraternal fellowship to all Brethren of the French National Grand Lodge, the only Grand Lodge in France recognized by all fifty Grand Lodges in the United States and by all but one of the Grand Lodges in Canada. Of course we, and we only in France are recognized by the Mother Grand Lodge, the United Grand Lodge of England.

Our Grand Lodge had and still has from time to time the privilege and the pleasure of granting Charters to many Lodges formed by Military Service personnel on duty in France.

A large proportion of these Brethren come from the United States, but we also have Brethren from Canada, Holland, Iran, Greece and Great Britain, and this happily demonstrates the universality of Freemasonry. It also proves that the guiding principles of our Grand Lodge are and will ever remain Belief in God, the Three Great Lights and strict adherence to the Ancient Landmarks of the Order.

Grand Lodges throughout the world inquire from us about the situa-

tion of Freemasonry in France. We must admit that the situation is rather confused but I shall make an attempt in order to summarize the present position.

In France, the *Grand Orient of France* is the largest body and there are some 17,000 to 18,000 members. They have struck out from their Constitutions all reference to the Great Architect of the Universe or to the Holy Bible and have substituted as guiding principles:

The equality between Brethren
Mutual Tolerance

Absolute freedom of conscience.

Many of their members are atheists and it is estimated that some 10 to 15% are communists.

They encourage the discussion in Lodge of political and like topics

On such a basis, the *Grand Orient of France* must be considered as irregular and clandestine.

At its annual convention in 1953, the *Grand Lodge of France*, second in France by its membership, passed a resolution by some two thirds majority making the presence of the Holy Bible compulsory in their Lodges.

However we are told, that still quite recent in some of their Lodges remain a majority of the members of the *Grand Lodge of France* who have not been obligated upon the Holy Bible.

It must be kept in mind that, in the past, candidates were not required to profess a belief in the Su-

preme Being, and therefore the question arises as to how many members of this Grand Lodge subscribe to this essential belief?

Their resolution of 1953 must however, be considered as a first step in an effort towards regularity and we are glad to say so. In September 1959, the Grand Lodge of France took another step forward in suspending, by a majority vote of some 70%, correspondence, agreements and inter-obedience relations with the Grand Orient of France.

Together with other Regular Grand Lodges, we welcome this further effort.

It is true that *administrative* relations between the two governing bodies have been suspended, BUT INTERVISITATION BY INDIVIDUAL MEMBERS CONTINUES AS BEFORE.

Members of the Grand Lodge of France are welcome in Lodges of the Grand Orient of France, and Members of the Grand Orient Lodges visit Lodges of the Grand Lodge of France.

Furthermore, no instructions have yet been issued to our knowledge by the Grand Lodge of France in order to forbid its members from affiliating with Lodges of the Grand Orient or obliging those who are already members of the Grand Orient to sever their dual membership.

We will gladly acknowledge the efforts made by the G.M. Dupuy in order to bring a majority in his Grand Lodge to more regular practice. We will welcome the time when the Grand Lodge of France can claim recognition as a Regular Grand Lodge but we must regretfully conclude that, while the first steps have been taken, such time has not yet come.

Our Obedience, the *French National Grand Lodge* is small in number, its membership is not more than 4,000, but all the principles of regularity are maintained and strictly applied in all its Lodges.

It is our mission in Freemasonry to hold out a helping hand to all persons of goodwill and to play our part in bringing into effect what we all desire, that is to say, Unity between Obediences.

Brothers, however, must realize that Freemasonry cannot exist unless it is based upon a sincere belief in God.

Our Masonic symbols remind us of our dependence upon Him, but the GREAT ARCHITECT HIMSELF IS NOT A SYMBOL FOR WE CANNOT WORK TO THE GLORY OF A SYMBOL.

There is not doubt that, in France, there is amongst irregular Masons a sincere desire to return to regularity and you may rest assured that our Grand Lodge will do everything within its power to ensure that this desire is brought to a fruitful conclusion.

We must, however, by very careful and build only on permanency on the rock of regularity. Any hasty action would only delay our common goal.

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