

Darkness Visible – Again!

Walton Hannah in his anti-Masonic expose entitled "Darkness Visible" claims, "...certainly in the third degree this Masonic Light shows beyond doubt not only its utter pagan incompatibility with the light which our Lord shed upon the grave, for we are told that "the light of a Master Mason is *darkness visible* serving only to express the gloom which rests on the prospect of futurity..." Perhaps Mr Hannah does protest too much; for recent TFTEM readers this phrase quoted by Hannah from our third degree ceremony can be found in John Milton's epic poem 'Paradise Lost' (1667) where Satan and his supporters are expelled from heaven;

Hurled headlong from ethereal sky
 With hideous ruin, and combustion, down
 To bottomless perdition, there to dwell
 In adamant chains and penal fire..

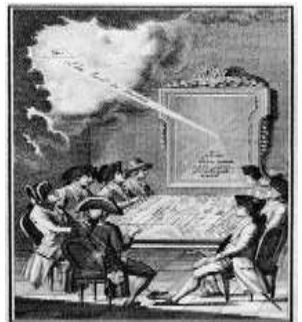
Satan looking around his new surrounds sees;

A Dungeon horrible, on all sides round
 As one great Furnace flamed, yet from those flames
 No light, but rather *darkness visible*
 Served only to discover sights of woe,
 Regions of sorrow, doleful shades, where peace
 And rest can never dwell, hope never comes
 That comes to all; but torture without end
 Still urges, and a fiery deluge, fed
 With ever-burning sulphur unconsumed



A vivid description of where the path of dishonour leads and the options are quite clear for a Master Mason of any faith. The phrase and concept of *Darkness Visible* also appeared in Alexander Pope's poem 'Dunciad' (1728), a work that in part is a parody of 'Paradise Lost', yet still contemporary with the foundation period of modern day Freemasonry;

YET, yet a moment, one dim ray of light
 Indulge; dread Chaos, and eternal Night!
 Of *darkness visible* so much be lent,
 As half to show, half veil the deep intent.



As WBro David Beagley succinctly stated in a previous TFTEM on this topic; "...Around the time of Anderson, Desaguliers and the other ritual writers, educated candidates would know immediately and exactly what the references meant because they were of popular culture...and to any reasonably learned 18th century person...they would...immediately convey...a familiar impression capturing the mood desired,.." See what happen when you quote things out of context, and Walton Hannah, and other such anti-Masonic writers, deliberately take references out of context to suit their own purpose – to denigrate Freemasonry by any means.

So what was meant by the ritual concept, that "the light of a Master Mason is *darkness visible* serving only to express the gloom which rests on the prospect of futurity..." On one level, that death is inevitable, so strive to ensure the preservation of you corporal and mental faculties in their fullest energy whilst there is still time.

Perhaps on another level *darkness visible* is the light of Truth, and the extent of our enlightenment is determined by our ability to recognize ignorance or error. "...If he can see the effects of malice, envy and self-seeking, the corroding influence of prejudice and intolerance, if his search for the Lost word serves increasingly to show how much he, himself, still has to learn, he will retain his enlightenment..." Maybe you have other thoughts?

(Further reading; - Some Thoughts on Masonic Light - paper by John W. Alexander, WM (Britannia Lodge No. 18) & Q and A - Master' and Past Masters' Lodge No. 130 pp.311-2 & TFTEM - March 2007)