

## SPEAK NO EVIL

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Much has been written and preached upon the virtues of bridling the human tongue as one of the main causes from which can arise, when untutored, much misery and even tragedy in man's relations with his fellow-creatures.

"See. no evil! Hear no evil! Speak no evil!" though popularised by the pictorial representation of apes from the Far East. and by all accepted as embodying the most profound philosophy of life and the secret of human happiness, has almost acquired that triteness which affects so many great sayings and renders them, alas, but familiar expressions possessing no longer their erstwhile warning, and become relegated into the limbo of one's inner consciousness instead of being kept writ large before our eyes as a daily rule of conduct of life.

A Mason's pledge not to injure a brother or knowingly cause or suffer others so to do, if in his power to prevent it, but boldly to repel the slanderer of his good name, is one never intended to be interpreted in the narrow parochial sense. or else its merit as a human virtue is as hollow and worthless of purpose as it is of teaching.

Yet, not infrequently, even within the Brotherhood, may the evil be found, taking at times the cloak of compassion of "shedding a tear of sympathy over the failings of a brother," and thus becoming the more pernicious in its insidiousness and results. Often only personal envy is its first seed, from which become magnified and even distorted, intentions often innocently conceived, but misunderstood.

As wrote in that excellent study of Masonic principles, the "Spirit of Masonry." nearly two centuries ago, the late William Hutchinson, of Durham. in the course of examining these various aspects, it is prompted at times by "an itch of talking of affairs which do not concern us," for as he says—

"Some love to mingle themselves in all business and are loath to seem ignorant of such important news as the faults and follies of men; therefore with great care they Pick up ill stories to entertain the next company they meet, not perhaps out of malice, but for want of something better to talk of."

Yet, as he aptly points out. how **cheap**, in the sense of "easy to achieve," a kindness it is to speak well, or at least not to speak ill of others, for he adds: "A good word is an easy obligation, but not to speak ill requires only our silence:' Let every man lay his hand upon his heart and consider "**What thou wouldst have no man do to thee, that do thou to no man.**"

Finally, he offers as helpful rules to observe:

"Never say any evil of another, but what you certainly know."

"Whenever you positively accuse a man of any crime, though it be in private and among friends, speak as if you were upon your oath, because God sees and hears you. This not only charity but justice demands of us. He that easily credits a false report is almost as culpable as the first inventor of it. Therefore, never speak evil of any upon common fame, which for the most part is false but almost always uncertain."

"Let us accustom ourselves to be truly sorry for the faults of men. and then we shall take no pleasure in publishing them, Common humanity requires this of us, considering the great infirmities of our nature, and also that we are liable to be tempted; considering likewise how severe a punishment every crime is to itself, how terribly it exposeth man to the wrath of God, both here and hereafter."

"Whenever we hear evil spoken of any man, if we have heard any good of him, let us say **that**. It is always more humane and more honourable to vindicate others than to accuse them. Where it is necessary that a man should he evil spoken of, his good and bad qualities should be represented together, otherwise he may be strangely misrepresented, and an indifferent man may be made a monster."

"They that will observe nothing in a wise man but his oversights and follies; nothing in a good one but his failings and infirmities, may render both despicable. Should we heap together all the passionate speeches, all

the imprudent actions of the best man, and present them all at one view, concealing his virtues. he, in disguise, would look like a madman or fury; and yet, if his life were fairly represented in the manner it was led, he would appear to all the world to be an amiable and excellent person. But how numerous soever any man's ill qualities are, it is but just that he should have due praise of his few real virtues."

"That you will not speak ill, do not delight in hearing it of any. Give no countenance to busy bodies: if you cannot decently reprove them because of their quality, divert the discourse some other way: or by seeming not to mind it, signify that you do not like it."

"Let every man mind his own duty and concern. Do but endeavour in good earnest to mend yourself, and it will be work enough, and leave you little time to talk of others."

And he concludes: "May all, therefore, contemplate the nature and consequences of this abominable sin, and so as to become worthy men and Masons, let them pray with the royal Psalmist **"Set a watch, O Lord, before my mouth, keep Thou the door of my lips"** (Psalm CXLI), being assured for their encouragement that **"He who backbiteth not with his tongue, nor doth evil to his neighbour, nor taketh up a reproach against his neighbour, shall abide in the tabernacle of the Lord, and shall dwell in His holy hill."**

Despite the quaint bluntness of many of these observations they echo at the distance of the years with no less force in our days, and whilst they touch mainly on the open evil of ill report, even when not deliberate and only thoughtless, they must serve to put us ever on our guard against the too easy temptation of uncharitable or hasty judgment upon our fellow-men, remembering the words of Ecclesiastes VIII, 20, which applies to all but do not justify our own failings: **"For there is not a just man upon earth, that doeth good, and sinneth not."**

—"The Freemasons' Chronicle."