

MASONRY WITH A MESSAGE AND A MISSION

Some remarks on the history of Freemasonry in The Netherlands
Address to Internet Lodge, Kingston-upon-Hull, August 8, 2002

by

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It is my honour and pleasure to be allowed to address you here in Hull, at this meeting of Internet Lodge No. 9659, on the eve of your masonic expedition to Holland. It seems a fitting occasion to make some remarks on the history and character of Freemasonry in The Netherlands, all the more so since one of the remarkable aspects of your lodge seems to be a small but distinct and distinguished Dutch component in its membership, and indeed its leadership. In this particular respect, of course, you have been preceded by the Anglo-Dutch Lodge No. 5862 in London, constituted, significantly, in 1942. Your lodge, five years ago, emerged under much happier circumstances, when we are free to cross the North Sea as often as we like, just as you are going to do tonight. Anyhow, Anglo-Dutch relations, which through the centuries have varied between 'excellent' and 'somewhat less than excellent', are a most appropriate theme to dwell upon in this city, where we may be reminded of the poet Andrew Marvell, who grew up here and was in fact MP for the constituency of Kingston-upon-Hull for almost twenty years, starting from 1659. 'Holland' is a recurrent theme in his works and his thoughts. He knew the country, he visited it extensively a number of times. In 1653 he published a lengthy and devastating poem entitled *The Character of Holland* of which I will quote the first eight lines¹.

Holland, that scarce deserves the name of land,
As but the off-scouring² of the British sand;
And so much earth as was contributed
By English pilots when they heaved the lead;
Or what by the ocean's slow alluvion³ fell
Of shipwrecked cockle and the mussel shell
This indigested vomit of the sea
Fell to the Dutch by just propriety.

And so on and so forth. Familiarity breedeth contempt. Of course, this was written in the heat of the Anglo-Dutch naval wars. The Dutch and the English have been natural and sometimes fierce competitors, both being sea-faring and empire-building nations, both with their own East India Companies, for instance, competing more often than not for the same monopolies, the same trade routes, the same markets. Similar abodes on either side of the same sea, similar interests, occupations and experiences, it all makes for a strong resemblance between the two nations. Landlubbers may think of seas and other waterways as barriers between nations, but for shippers, fishermen, traders, merchant and military navies, they are on the contrary a connection, a bond and common ground. In fact, the English and Dutch have always been close neighbours.

It is this closeness which explains –if any explanation is due– why the first masonic lodge outside Great Britain, the first lodge on the European continent, in fact, was established in Rotterdam. Not in France, as everybody keeps on writing and saying, no, it was in The Netherlands, in Rotterdam, a city at the time emerging as the most important seaport of the country. We have circumstantial evidence, but convincing and conclusive evidence, that in 1721, a lodge was already in existence there, so it must have been established less than four years after the magic year 1717. The 'confraternity' consisted, says our source "of eight individuals, all of the English and Scottish nation"⁴. Small wonder, considering the large number of British merchants and traders that lived in that city. The Scots especially had a community of their own in Rotterdam, "on the Dike" right near the Scottish Church. This means that although obviously the lodge was in Holland, it was not a *Dutch* lodge. It was a foreign affair, a *British* lodge, i.e. an English or Scottish one, although even *that* cannot be said without qualification. These early days were the days of spontaneous proliferation: purely on the strength of having been made a mason oneself, one felt entitled to set up lodge, probably without any written authority at all; patents came later, warrants later still. Even though we don't know, I feel we can safely state that the Rotterdam lodge was not a lodge with an English *constitution*, or any other constitution for that matter. Anderson's *Constitutions* had not even been published. The British have a way of

making themselves feel at home in foreign places, which shows throughout their colonial and commercial history. One way of feeling at home is having a club, and one particular kind of club is the masonic lodge. There were no Dutchmen in that lodge, why would there be? They were at home already.

There is another masonic first on record for which the stage was set in Holland, in 1731, this time in The Hague. And just as in the Rotterdam case, it is an international affair, not really a Dutch one. In that year

“His royal Highness Francis Duke of Lorraine (now Grand Duke of Tuscany) at the Hague was made an Enter’d Prentice and Fellow Craft, by virtue of a Deputation for a Lodge there, consisting of Rev. Dr. Desaguliers Master, John Stanhope esq; Jn Holtzendorf, Esq; Grand Wardens and the other Brethren, viz. Philip Stanhope Earl of Chesterfield Lord Ambassador, – Strickland Esq; Nephew to the Bishop of Namur, Mr. Benjamin Hadley and an Hollandish Brother.”

I quote this from the second edition of Anderson’s *Book of Constitutions*, published 1738⁵, that is, seven years after the event. It is a passage from the ‘History of Masonry’, which had also appeared in the first edition, but was now completely rewritten and brought up to date. Anderson continues by describing how ‘Brother Lorraine’ was made a ‘Master-Mason’, in the same year, but this time in England, and it is interesting to notice in passing how this latter degree was conferred as a special honour, or as an afterthought, almost. The two usual degrees of those days Lorraine had already obtained in The Hague⁶.

Then there is also the concluding remark in Anderson’s report of the Duke’s initiations in Holland and England, a telling remark: “And ever since, both in the G[rand] Lodge and in particular Lodges, the Fraternity joyfully remember His Royal Highness in the proper Manner”. Well, we all know what ‘the proper manner’ is. At the Festive Board, a toast was proposed and they drank to his health, of course. It is as though the whole note about Lorraine’s initiations serves to explain this toast to a member of a foreign royal house, a man who grew up at the Hapsburg court in Vienna, who married the emperor’s daughter, Maria Theresa, and was destined to become emperor of the German Empire himself. And certainly Anderson’s remark about the toasts reveals the importance attached to Francis’s membership. He was the first royal personage to become a freemason. Remember that the first English royal freemason was not made before 1737, Frederick Lewis, Prince of Wales, also by Desaguliers⁷, who dedicated the second edition of Anderson’s to him. Lorraine was the first really big fish that Desaguliers was able to haul in, a great personal success for him and a great boon for Freemasonry. Remember how the four London lodges that created Grand Lodge in 1717, in fact resolved to “chuse a Grand Master from among themselves till they should have the Honour of a *Noble Brother* at their Head”⁸. Through the good offices of Desaguliers –who else?– that situation was obtained in 1721, the fifth Grand Master becoming John, the second Duke of Montagu, “the first of a continuous line of not less than noble and often royal Grand Masters of the English Craft”⁹. Clearly, Freemasonry from the outset was intended as a first class affair, and Desaguliers’s catch of the Duke of Lorraine fits perfectly in this picture. I think we would be mistaken if we, judging these matters from the viewpoint of our democratic age, would think of this as a conceited or snobbish craving for high class connections. I think it was sound thinking and calculated strategy. Freemasonry was a very novel sort of thing, a puzzling novelty, that would surely provoke not only laughter and satire, but also –far worse– suspicion and suppression. In the mildness of Hanoverian rule in England it was possible to create it, but it immediately took the precaution of wearing the guise of a ‘most ancient and right worshipful fraternity’¹⁰ with a history dating back to Adam himself, and it immediately sought the safety of the protection of noblemen, who would by their status guarantee its respectability. If this was a necessary precaution in Britain, how much the more so on the continent where absolute kings and princes ruled, where the Roman-Catholic clergy in many countries was extremely influential, and where things imported from England, especially immaterial things, at that particular era were looked upon with grave suspicion? If Freemasonry spread to the Continent, which it did spontaneously as we have already seen, if this tender sprig was to survive, something had to be done to protect it and rear it to a state of strength and stability.

This is exactly what Desaguliers was doing in The Hague, that evening toward the end of September 1731, at the house of the British ambassador, Lord Chesterfield, a Brother himself. Obviously, Desaguliers knew how to use an opportunity when it presented itself. This founding father of our Brotherhood was also an experimental philosopher, a pupil and follower of Isaac Newton, fellow and curator of the Royal Society, author of several books in the field of physics, books which were also translated into Dutch and published in Holland. In order to promote both newtonian physics and the sale of his books, he went on lecturing tours in The Netherlands, which proved to be very popular. His lessons were given in French, English or Latin, in “such a clear and comprehensive manner that people of any

Rank and Profession, and even Damsels, have attended his Lectures with great enthusiasm”. There were also additional lectures in astronomy “which promised to impart more knowledge than could be acquired ‘in a whole year of study with Books and the Common Globe’”. These are quotes from a promotional leaflet, probably written by Desaguliers himself¹¹. It so happened that he was on one of his lecturing tours, and it was planned that he would lecture in The Hague as from the 23rd September. It so happened that the Duke of Lorraine had been sent on a diplomatic mission by the emperor, a trip that took him to Brussels first –the Southern Netherlands or Belgium were under Austrian sway in those days–, where he remained rather longer than planned, diverted as he was by the jolliness of that city, once so charming. After Brussels he would continue to England, to see the King and others, but before he crossed the North Sea he went to see Lord Chesterfield in The Hague first, probably for the purpose of preparing the ground for his visit to England. Young Francis, only 23 at the time, knew Chesterfield’s reputation as a highly talented diplomat, and he must have admired the ambassador as he met him in person and was entertained by him. They became friendly very soon. Now was it Chesterfield who launched the plan? Or was it Desaguliers himself? Francis knew his great reputation as a scientist, and when he found out that Desaguliers was actually giving lectures in The Hague, he decided to attend some of these. Being a keen alchemist himself, he must have been eager for a chance to hear this famous figure teach the new science and to discuss chemical matters with him. We need not go into further detail, the picture is clear I think, the scene was set, and Francis must have been soon persuaded, must even have been honoured and thrilled to be admitted formally into a brotherhood with such eminent and admirable men as Chesterfield and Desaguliers. I am sure that when he left Vienna for his diplomatic trip, on his way to The Netherlands and England, he did not suspect that he was to return there as a freemason. He was taken by surprise... It must be said that Francis did not exactly turn out to be one of those stalwart protectors that Freemasonry needed, but that is another story¹².

Amongst the other Brethren present, you have heard me quote Anderson, was also ‘an Hollandish Brother’. You understood, of course, that I would jump at him and drag him into the limelight. I will, now. Although his name is not given, it is not very hard to make an educated guess. Chesterfield had a man in his service who fulfilled all the requirements, named Vincent la Chapelle. His name alone would seem enough to identify him as the usual French refugee, a Huguenot, like Desaguliers. He was born in France allright, but he was in fact a Roman-Catholic and cannot therefore have been a *réfugié* of the usual kind; let’s call him an *émigré*, an emigrant. He emigrated first to England, where he became a freemason¹³, and, probably around 1730, published, I was going to say a cookery book, but that would be inadequate. Rather it was a complete instruction for elegant dining, proposing the new trends of the times, ranging from recipes according to a new, refined cuisine where natural flavours were favoured instead of the then usual spiced meals, to table setting and table manners. Later, when in Holland, he published a French edition, entitled *La cuisine moderne* (1735). He was the sort of man that would be enrolled, as indeed he was, as *Chef de Cuisine* or rather *Maitre d’Hotel*, an important position in the household of a man of such stature and eminence as Lord Chesterfield in The Hague. La Chapelle came to The Hague accordingly, where he became the first Master of a lodge, which he took the initiative to establish, in 1734. Here we have another masonic first: at last something that was not merely happening in Holland, but this time a really Dutch event, in the sense that the establishment of this lodge started a tradition of Freemasonry that continues up to the present day. Vincent la Chapelle’s lodge is now Lodge Number One of The Netherlands, still in The Hague. It is true that the names of the oldest members read like a list of French *réfugiés* or *émigrés* again, no doubt mainly Huguenots, with some Walloons added. But in that it did not differ much from some notable lodges in London. Freemasonry owes a lot to French *émigrés*, think only of Desaguliers, think only of Vincent de la Chapelle.

The constitution of this lodge apparently went practically unnoticed. All the louder was the *fracas* caused by the second lodge to be established, one year later. Amongst the early members whose names we know, there are now some who are clearly Dutchmen. Interestingly, the first lodge is now sometimes referred to as ‘French lodge’, as opposed to the second one, which they call the ‘Dutch lodge’. This does not alter the fact that the first Master of this ‘Dutch’ lodge was a man named Louis Dagrán, a draper of Portuguese descent. Anyhow, it might have been more prudent, had he not, in his pride, placed an advertisement in an Amsterdam newspaper, reporting the solemn installation of his lodge, and giving away the name and quality of the Grand Master, Mr Johan Cornelis Radermacher¹⁴, Treasurer General of His Illustrious Highness the Prince of Orange. This was too much of a provocation perhaps. The Provincial States of Holland reacted promptly with a public ban on all assemblies of so-called Free Masons, accusing them of sedition and debauchery, and dispatching special orders to the cities and towns, imposing upon the burgomasters and aldermen to take care of any local lodges that might be found in their places and to proscribe and disband them. The cities duly put up printed proclamations to this effect, Rotterdam amongst them.

There are many questions here and I will ask them on your behalf.

–Was there really a Grand Master so early on? –Yes, there was. We will come back to that point.

–What was so provocative about this Grand Master being treasurer to the Prince of Orange? I thought the Dutch loved the Oranges! –They did, and do, as stadtholders or as kings and queens, but there have been some spells of heavy weather, too. I will explain presently.

–What about the sedition and the debauchery? –Well, nothing much. What they thought of as sedition has to do with the Prince of Orange, and the debauchery, well, it was thought of as very strange that this peculiar and novel society would assemble behind closed doors with no apparent purpose, assemblies from which –so much was clear– women were expressly excluded. Now, by coincidence, just about this period there had been a few police actions arresting people on the accusation of ‘sodomy’, homosexual behaviour, which was considered a serious and even capital crime. These razzias had caused much publicity and excitement, and no doubt the word ‘debauchery’ was used to suggest the worst possibility, and to underline the necessity and justification of harsh measures. It was simply aggravating calumny.

By the end of the year the news of the measures against the freemasons had travelled to London, where a pamphlet could be bought for three pennies, and I will read you part of it for free. It is dated [The] Hague, December 30th, 1735.

[...] The leading Men at this Place, [...] unmindful of the great Blessings delivered down to them by the illustrious Heroes of the House of Nassaw [*alternatively termed* House of Orange, EK], fearing that something might be undertaken in Favour of His Most Serene Highness the present Prince of Orange, in whom are centr'd all the Virtues of his Glorious Ancestors; have issued strict Orders, whereby all Assemblies, and private Meetings whatsoever are forbid, under the severest Penalties, lest Parties might be form'd, to remove the Power, which they Exercise in a most arbitrary Manner, out of their Hands, and invest it [in] the Prince, who has given the greatest Proofs of a Prudent, Mild, Just and Able Governor, in those Provinces, which have already gratefully, chosen Him their Stadtholder. The true Reason that oblig'd them to break up, was an Order coming from the State of [= to? EK] Mynheer Malliatte, at whose House they met, not to Suffer them to meet there again, on Pain of their Hogen Mogen's highest Displeasure; the other being groundless, for the Brethren that composed the Lodge, were Persons of Honour, and of unblemisht Reputation.¹⁵

It is not until the end of the long paragraph I read that we find that the assemblies and meetings are indeed lodge meetings. We hear of a ‘groundless’ reason for these meetings to be discontinued, the political one, the fear that a takeover of power was afoot, and what the author calls the real one. Poor Bro. Maillet, the inn-keeper at the Lion d’Or (the Golden Lion), who had been made a mason in order to facilitate his services at the Festive Board, and to secure his silence on what he might otherwise have gossiped about. Poor Bro. Maillet had to appear before the Magistrate and was ordered flatly never again to accommodate the freemasons, which he was made to promise solemnly. Scant comfort that in this treatment he was democratically put on the same footing as the Grand Master aforementioned and his Deputy, who both had to appear likewise and to promise not to attend or summon any more masonic meetings.

You have also gathered that somehow Holland had spurned the Prince of Orange. The Republic of the United Provinces of The Netherlands of those days must be thought of as a sort of confederacy of seven separate and independent miniature states, the Provinces. In the 16th century these states had collectively renounced the authority of their legal and rightful head of state, the Spanish king Philip II. The head of state had traditionally been represented, in each of the Provinces, by a stadtholder, or ‘place keeper’, which is what that word literally means. This was a deputy head of state. Now, since the Dutch abolished the institution of the head of state, they simply continued with the stadtholders –except that these were now holding nobody’s place and simply acted of their own authority. It was customary, but not necessary, that the stadtholdership of each of the Seven Provinces was offered to the hereditary Prince of Orange; but it happened often enough that some Provinces would have a different person as stadtholder for some time. Also, there have been two periods in the history of Holland, the largest and richest of the seven, when it was thought that if we could do without a head of state, we could also do without a stadtholder altogether. All the masonic events we have discussed so far, in Rotterdam and The Hague, fall within such a ‘stadtholderless’ period. When William III died, childless, in 1702 –you know him well because he was also your King William, married to Mary II, the one of the Glorious Revolution–, the Hollanders, for reasons we will not

discuss, refused to appoint the second cousin William Friso that was next in line. He was appointed in other Provinces, though, notably in Friesland, in the north of the Republic. Accordingly, this prince moved his court to Leeuwarden, the capital of Friesland, and tended to make the *Hoogmogende Heeren* of Holland nervous, because he was obviously sitting there waiting for a chance to extend his stadtholdership to Holland. This caused the *Heeren* to jump at any symptom of Friso plotting for his return or wielding power behind their backs. It so happens that Freemasonry was such a symptom in their eyes. The pamphlet I have been reading from reports one more interesting point: not only have the lodges been shut, but even the theatres have been locked up. Why is that? The author can think of only one real reason: "because the Prince of Orange often Honour'd them with his Company, was pleas'd with their Performances, and had a Seat of Eminence prepar'd for Him". I think the lodges were closed for a very similar reason, perhaps just to spite the Prince and his followers, just because it was known that the Prince favoured the lodges and the freemasons.

The year before the suppression of Freemasonry in Holland, the Prince William Friso had married, in London, with the Princess Royal, Anne of Hanover. The marriage had to be postponed on account of an illness of the Princess, and There are some indications that one of the things the Prince did during the weeks that he had to wait was to have himself initiated as a freemason. There is no straightforward proof of this I admit, but we have some material in the Grand Lodge archives which would point to this, and I believe it must be so¹⁶. When he returned to The Netherlands the first Dutch lodge had been installed in the meantime, and almost all members of his retinue returning with him joined the lodge. We may think of the Grand Master Radermacher once again, Grand Treasurer of the Prince, and the founder of the lodge, Vincent la Chapelle once more. In 1735 La Chapelle exchanged his position with the British ambassador, Lord Chesterfield, for a similar post in the household of William Friso. There is some evidence that the Prince kept a lodge, or at least allowed it to work, at his court in Leeuwarden. In 1747, when William was finally rewarded for his patience and installed as stadtholder of the Province of Holland, and in fact all the other Provinces as well, a lodge was installed in Rotterdam, under the name of Orange Lodge. The ban on Freemasonry was never lifted, but simply forgotten. I think I have made it sufficiently clear what the masons had the Prince to thank for.

And this takes us back to Rotterdam, where we started, and where the local officials in 1735 had loyally implemented the orders given them from The Hague as regards the ban on Freemasonry. We have a full report on the matter: on January 10, 1736 they write an official letter to the Hoog Mogende Heren. Lodges, they report, they had not found. Yet it had come to their knowledge that a 'confraternity' of freemasons had existed within the city some years past, consisting of eight individuals, all of the English and Scottish nation. They summoned those who were reported to have been members and who were still living in the city. These five individuals admitted that a lodge had been in existence more than fourteen years ago, but they claimed they had not convened during almost a full twelvemonth now. In this society nothing had been discussed, they said, outside business or 'indifferent' matters'. The magistrate had earnestly warned them not to hold any meetings any further, and these same persons had willingly accepted this and declared they would be obedient to these and any other orders of yours, Illustrious and Hoog Mogende Heren. It is this official report that I consider convincing evidence that a lodge must indeed have been in existence at Rotterdam, fourteen years back from 1735 at least, which is 1721. Why would anyone make a formal statement about his membership of a masonic lodge if this were untrue? It is unthinkable. Apparently those members of it still living there were well known, because their names had been reported to the magistrate. There was no point denying it, and the five men must have been quite relieved when they were let off with just a warning. Unfortunately no names are mentioned in the official report, but it has been possible to reconstruct a few possibilities. One man can be named with a high degree of certainty: one Adam Duncan, born in Dundee, 1680, since 1702 merchant, charterer and underwriter at Rotterdam; he played a role of some importance in the Scottish community until his death in 1737. I wonder if his namesake Adam Duncan, the great admiral who gained a great victory over a Dutch fleet at Camperdown, two or three generations later, also from Dundee, is a grandson or great-grandson. Anyway, I salute him as the first freemason in The Netherlands, indeed, on the continent. There are other names: Robert Stirling from Edinburgh, Patrick Harper from Wexford in Ireland, Alex Naughton from Scotland, Robert Story, second generation Scotsman born in Rotterdam¹⁷. There were others, of course. Some of them may well have played a major role in the later lodge I mentioned, the Orange Lodge. Freemasonry in Rotterdam remained orientated on England throughout the 18th century.

At one point, Rotterdam Brethren formally sent a request to London Grand Lodge, in which they asked permission to set up a Provincial Grand Lodge in The Netherlands, based in Rotterdam and fully detached from the Grand Master residing in The Hague. At that time, they had a quarrel with that Grand Master. I promised you I would get back to the Grand Master. You remember I told you about the first lodge in The Hague and one of its members,

Radermacher, Grand Treasurer to the Prince of Orange. This man was elected Grand Master in the summer of 1735, elected apparently by the other members of his lodge, who interpreted the patent they had obtained from London as an authorization to create and constitute other lodges in The Netherlands, and so they did. It was the principle of a Mother Grand Lodge that was adopted here for the very first time. The new 'daughter' lodges had no direct link with London, indeed London did not even know about them, they were dependent on a warrant issued from The Hague, issued by that first lodge which elected Radermacher Grand Master and at the same time styled itself *Grande Loge des Provinces Unies et de la Généralité*. Much later, in 1753, a request for recognition of this self-proclaimed Grand Lodge was sent to England and met predictably with refusal. Thomas Manningham, English Deputy Grand Master, pointed out that the best thing the Dutch could hope for was a Provincial Grand Master. The stalemate ensuing was not solved until 1770, and until that year the English went on pretending blandly that they had a Provincial Grand Lodge in The Netherlands. Indeed, some quite recent books written by leading English masonic historians still pretend blandly there was such a thing as Provincial Grand Lodge with a Provincial Grand Master in The Netherlands¹⁸. There was not! The reason that a Provincial Grand Master was unacceptable in Holland was, curiously, a *point d'honneur* amongst noblemen. Noblemen, indeed, because the Dutch had soon seen the importance of having a Grand Master of the best possible social status. You remember I remarked upon this point earlier. The Dutch too, had noblemen to rule their Grand Lodge, whenever they could. In 1757 a newly elected Grand Master, Albert Nicholas, Baron of Aerssen Bavaria, has his Junior Warden write a letter to Manningham in which it is stated that "The Nobility in this Country is proud and acknowledges noblemen of equal rank only but no Superior, the Titles being considered by them of no importance". In other words, the Baron had no inclination to being told what to do by anyone. He was a Baron in his own right and he was not going to be second-in-command to some English peer of the realm with universal aspirations. An additional reason must have been that there was always a chance that the two countries might once again take up arms against each other, as they had done on several occasions. How would the freemasons be looked upon when Holland was at war with England and the lodges could be seen as a network under supervision of the enemy? It was much to be preferred to be independent. In 1770 we finally received our Charter of Independence, when the English Grand Lodge recognized the Grand Lodge of The Netherlands as a fully sovereign body. No more talk of Provincial Grand Masters, now it was a National Grand Master as the sovereign head of an independent body having jurisdiction over the Republic of the United Provinces, and all its territories and colonies overseas. Now it was the English Grand Lodge that was came to be seen as the Mother Grand Lodge, but in a different role: as a mother of grown-up children, whom she had let go off, to take care of themselves.

So much for Dutch Freemasonry in its years of inception, early development and coming of age. You have seen how intricately and intensely interwoven this history is with things British, with Britons in Holland, and Dutchmen in England. And you appreciate, of course, I have given you only the barest outlines. I thought these stories might contribute a little to the atmosphere of the trip you are going to undertake. But also, obviously, I chose to tell you these things because I like talking about Freemasonry in the 18th century. Why is it that masonic scholars so often seem to have this preference? The great Dutch historian Johan Huizinga has given a characteristic of that century that somehow contains the answer.

"When studying 18th-century civilized society one cannot fail to observe everywhere the naive spirit of emulation, of sociability and secrecy, which manifests itself in literary circles, drawing societies, in the amassing of great collections, especially in the field of natural history and other sciences, in the foundation of secret societies, the pleasure derived from all kinds of parties and meetings, all of which tendencies are based in a spirit of playfulness and performance. Which is not to detract from the positive value of these attitudes; on the contrary: with their whole-hearted enthusiasm and dedication unspoil by any doubts they are pre-eminently suited to sustain high culture."¹⁹

Indeed, even today we have seen our 18th-century predecessors at play, and at work; for isn't labour itself the real pleasure? And we haven't even talked of rituals, the core business of the lodges, where play and performance come first and foremost. But even in the formal business we discussed, initiations and constitutions, recognitions and elections, conducted with appropriate earnest and zeal no doubt, there are the enthusiasm and the dedication proper to a new movement, a new experiment, a new experience. I wish we could read the minds of Adam Duncan and his friends, and those of Desaguliers and Chesterfield and the 'Hollandish Brother' present at the initiation of the Duke of Lorraine. What would surprise us most, I suspect, would be the lack of reflection, self-consciousness. They simply did it, they were unspoil by any doubts, by questions as to the meaning of it all. It's logical, really that they should be so direct and uncircumstantial. If you dance around a tree with other members of your tribe, it may happen that a white man with a sun helmet pops up from the bush and asks you why you are dancing. And unavoidably you begin

to wonder. It will take you some time, having been caught unawares, but you will find an answer of sorts: it is a dance to obtain good crops, or to let it rain. The white man makes a note of it, and classifies your tribe as primitive. The ritual comes first, reflection and explanation come second. So, you have lodges, and degrees, and secrets with each of those, and you have rituals. Everything seems fine. But the authorities are suspicious, the public ridicules you, pamphlets and even books are printed to denounce you and accuse you of terrible things and involvement in heinous plots and devilish practices. You are challenged to step forward and explain. What are you doing in those lodges? Why are you so secretive? What's the purpose of those rituals of yours? And you start wondering about the whole thing. My impression is that the freemasons of old had no ready answer. They hadn't thought of it, they didn't know.

What they could do, however, is to deny any involvement in criminal activities, in plots and debauchery. They could point out what excellent men were actually members of the lodges, how respectable and virtuous these men were, what high-ranking members we had, and a noble Grand Master. Also, they could point out that we were selective on the point of admission. We did not just take anybody as a member. Masons had to be "good Men and true, or Men of Honour and Honesty", "free-born, and of mature and discreet Age, no Bondmen, no Women, no immoral or scandalous Men, but of good Report"²⁰. Well, you all know about this. When you keep stressing the point that freemasons are particularly virtuous people, there is a next step you can make, as has indeed been made. If being a mason requires all kinds of virtues in a man, we are just a step away from the claim that Freemasonry makes people virtuous, the claim that we come to our lodges in order to become better men. And so, somewhere toward the end of the 18th-century a shadow fell over those playful lodges of old, where men pretended being workmen, building a Temple, each having his role to perform, enjoying their cooperation in creating an elegant ritual; the shadow of a lofty purpose, a purpose of men who apparently wished to acquire virtues which they lacked or possessed to an insufficient degree, and wanted to shed or fight their vices, faults and weaknesses. Thus, in 1801 a Deputy Grand Master of The Netherlands gave a speech in which he claimed that he had always viewed Freemasonry as a "discreet school of virtue and proper morals", thus, in the early 19th century, Dutch Freemasonry could position itself as a sort of 'religion of virtue' closely akin to the sort of liberal protestantism that was preached in many Dutch churches in those days, by right-minded, mild preachers and parsons, often freemasons themselves. Freemasonry was now a breeding ground for good citizens and virtuous family men. It was in the very same time that the Grand Orient de France appropriated the motto of the French revolution to express its own ideals: *Liberté – Égalité – Fraternité*. It still uses these words, and not inappropriately this masonic body has been characterized as *l'Église de la république*, the 'Church of the Republic', a creed of social and political virtue. In England, at that time, on the occasion of the merger of the 'Moderns' and the 'Antients' into the United Grand Lodge, Freemasonry was defined as "a peculiar system of morality, veiled in allegory and illustrated by symbols"; virtue and morality were in the air, and all over Europe teaching virtue was the role and the self-image that Freemasonry settled for. Up to the present day, United Grand Lodge and many other Grand Lodges in the world present this to the outside world in their PR as their special message and mission, and to all appearances this is indeed the firm belief of many a Board of Practical Purposes and many PR officers.

It is not my intention to startle you with my opinion that they are all wrong in this. They may well be right. But I do think that imparting and promoting virtue, making people better persons, better husbands, better fathers, better friends and colleagues, is a claim that hardly distinguishes us from other clubs and societies. If performing rituals is supposed to boost our morals, the same is very likely to be true for a drama club or a theatre company. Playing a dramatic role well is a deeply thrilling experience, because it demands that you go to the very limits of your talents and possibilities. It teaches you as an inescapable truth that you, in your role, depend on the other actors for your success, and that they depend on you. It confronts you with unsuspected truths about yourself. It will equip you unexpectedly for situations in real life. I am sure that is an important aspect of the benefit people derive from dramatic and theatrical activities. They become better persons, in a way. Playing a game, being a sportsman may do similar things for you. People normally think of sports as a healthy kind of activity, physically healthy. I wonder if sports really are so healthy, looking at the frequent injuries in soccer and hockey, for instance. But I am sure, on the other hand, that soccer and hockey are healthy mentally. The sense of team work as a frame for personal achievement, fair play, the experiences of winning and losing, being nearly champion but being beaten in the last round, these are aspects of games that have their positive influence in other reaches of life. They can make you a happier person, a more self-confident person, a good colleague, in short, you may become a better man. Wellington's famous *dictum* that the battle of Waterloo was won on the playing fields of Eton points the same way: some activities have a spin-off that can contribute enormously to making a person tougher, fitter, more adaptable to all kinds of situations, in a word, *better*. Even collecting stamps may do you some good. Freemasonry is our choice of activity. It

may do us a wealth of good. It has made many men better. But in this it is very far from unique. Thus, to claim this as our special mission, to make this our message to the world, seems to me to be an absurd kind of arrogance. So many things make people better. Sometimes, moreover, one and the same thing makes one man better and the other worse. The effects of the activities we undertake in our lives, are unpredictable. Also, it may be a useful remedy against complacency to observe that our mission statements do not at all convince the world, at large. Our charity donations of course are welcome enough. But people in general do not exactly take membership of a lodge as a recommendation for an appointment in jobs, functions, commissions, and so forth. I seem to notice that the very opposite is more or less the rule. No wonder so many masons wish to keep their membership of this virtuous fraternity to themselves.

If we are unique in any respect, it is in the curious adoption of the claim that we make people better. Because, you may observe that other organizations that could make a similar claim, normally avoid doing this. Is there a drama club that tries to recruit new members promising to make you a better person if you join? Is there a soccer club that would do such a thing, or a piano teacher? We would find it absurd and laughable. Then why do we make this preposterous claim? If you are a cricket player and you go to your club on a Saturday afternoon, it is very clear what you are going to do. You are either going to train and practise, or you are going to play a match; in either case and anyhow, you will be playing cricket. That's what a cricket club is for: to enable you to play cricket and to make it possible for your team to take part in a competition. If you are a member of an amateur choir and you go to your weekly evening, you will probably be practising and rehearsing certain pieces, but anyway, you will be singing. That's what made you decide to join the choir in the first place: you wanted to sing. What pleasure or other benefits you derive from it, is entirely left to you.

I feel that, whatever it is PR officers claim, most masons still go their lodges because they want to take part in what is the lodges' core activity: performing or practising the ritual. It may be a formal lodge that you attend or take an active part in as an Officer or otherwise, it may be a Lodge of Instruction that you take part in, either as a Preceptor or in order to be instructed, to rehearse and learn. As a freemason, you are attached to the rituals, to the experience of undergoing or creating that special tension that is needed to make it spark, to the sharing of this experience you're your brethren, because it is the shared experience that creates that unique fraternal atmosphere that we all know and cannot find anywhere but in our lodges. That's why we come to the lodge; whether we become better men through our membership is a wholly different question. It is a pity, I feel, that we have allowed masonry to become so overgrown with the claim that we have a special avenue to virtue.

Please do not suppose that I am unaware that 'virtue' is a special concept within the masonic frame of reference. It is, both in that we require new members to be of impeccable repute, to have a sound moral standing and understanding, and also, in fact, within the rituals themselves. This latter point might seem to be a serious objection against my view. It is true that many a moral precept is spoken of in our initiation rituals, in the English way of doing things in the three Lectures especially. Yet, in origin the masonic concept of virtues is that they are building skills, demonstrated in the faultless and skilful application of the several tools. That these virtues, however, have the potential of a wider application, in situations outside the lodge, is undeniably true, too. Here however, we enter the domain of the individual and private person where those words from the First Charge apply, viz. "leaving their particular Opinions to themselves". Or, perhaps a little more to the point: my wife sings in a choir and in its *repertoire* there are many very old, very devoutly Christian songs and cantatas, beautiful pieces. The members of the choir are not selected on the criterion of their personal beliefs. Sometimes someone, singer or listener, may be moved by these songs to say an extra prayer, or they may cause them to reflect upon religious matters differently. But the touchstone for the singers is musical skill. Freemasonry is like a work of art in that it may stir certain emotions, and enable us, at times, to experience feelings and visions we had never thought of before. But to pick out these very subtle and private effects of ritual practise and single them out for a mission statement, and to make them our message, is I think obtuse, a regrettable bluntness.

I wish, sometimes, that we could simply dance around that tree again, or that we would have told that chap with the sun helmet and the notebook to be off. When I started writing this paper, I did so from the preconceived title 'Freemasonry with a Message and a Mission', because I had planned to talk to you about the contrast between the 18th and 19th centuries in Freemasonry. I have done a little of that, it is true. But as you write, your paper sometimes takes a turn of its own and more emphasis fell on the genesis of Dutch Freemasonry and on the 18th century, accordingly. To do honour to our masonic forebears of that era I might have called my paper 'Freemasonry without a

Message and a Mission'. That was when the chap with the helmet had not met the barbarians, yet. I wish you a couple of very happy days in Holland.

¹ Quoted from Elizabeth Story Donno (Ed.), *Andrew Marvell. The Complete Poems*. Harmondsworth 1972 (Penguin); p. 112, 'Table of Dates' pp. 13-16.

² *off-scouring* means 'refuse', according to Donno, *op. cit.*, p. 263

³ *alluvion* means 'inundation', according to Donno, *ibid.*

⁴ My article 'Het Licht aan de Maas' in: *Thoth* 53 (2002), especially p. 42, and the sources mentioned there (De Schampheleire, Van Reijn, notes 3 en 23)

⁵ p. 129

⁶ The events surrounding the initiation such as the whereabouts and activities of the major participants are discussed in E.E. Stolper's excellent article 'The Initiation of the Duke of Lorraine', in: *AQC* 95 (1982), pp. 170-9

⁷ John Hamill, *The Craft. A History of English Freemasonry*, [London] 1986; pp. 44-5.

⁸ Anderson 1738, p. 109. Hamill, *op. cit.*, p. 41.

⁹ Frederick Smyth, *A Reference Book for Freemasons*, London 1998 (QCCC). P. 114, *s.v.* Grand Master

¹⁰ phrasing used on the title page of Anderson's first edition, 1723

¹¹ Stolper, *op. cit.*, p. 172-3

¹² See the concluding paragraphs of Stolper's paper, pp. 178-9

¹³ It seems he is on the 1730 membership lists of two separate London lodges, (1) that of the lodge at the Rainbow Coffee House, York Buildings, now Britannic Lodge No. 33, where there is mentioned a Vincent de la Cappell; and (2) that of the lodge at the Prince Eugene's [Head] Coffee House, Saint Alban's Street, which mentions a Vincent La Chappelle.

¹⁴ Jan Cornelis Rademaker, alternatively *Jean Corneille*, alternatively *Radermacher*, 1700-1748, since 1732 Treasurer General and Steward of the Domains to William Henry Friso; 4.3.1735 E.A. in the 'First Lodge', 24.6.1735 elected Grand Maître des Provinces Unies et de la Généralité; 24.10.1735 attended the installation of the second lodge in The Hague, known by the name of 'Le Véritable Zèle'; between 9 and 12.12.1735 made to appear before the Court of the Estates of Holland, Zeeland and West-Frisia and to promise to abstain from any masonic activities. On 22.3.1744 it was with his permission that lodges resumed their activities.

¹⁵ Quoted from P.J. van Loo, *geschiedenis van de Orde van Vrijmetselaren onder het Grootosten der Nederlanden*, [s-Gravenhage] 1967; p. 3.

¹⁶ See my article 'Ontstaanstheorieën over de Grootte Loge in Nederland', in *Thoth* 47 (1996), pp. 205-18, esp. p. 207 and n. 8, p. 217

¹⁷ Johan A. van Reijn, draft of two chapters of a monography on Freemasonry in Rotterdam, not published; cf. n. 23 of my article 'Het Licht aan de Maas'.

¹⁸ John Hamill, *op. cit.* pp. 88 and 96; John Hamill and R.A. Gilbert, *World Freemasonry. An illustrated history*, London 1991; pp. 47-8 and 52

¹⁹ Johan Huizinga, *Homo Ludens. Proeve eener bepaling van het spel-element der cultuur*, Haarlem 1938; p. 191; this passage in my own translation

²⁰ Anderson, *Constitutions* 1723, First and Third Charge.