

# The Law of Silence

By Constant Chevillon

From 'le Vrai Visage de la Franc-Maçonnerie'

Egyptian priests personified silence with the symbol of the god Harpocrates. He was all eyes and ears, but his mouth was closed. This attitude is evocative: it is necessary to see, to listen, to understand, but, among the truths discovered, nothing should be revealed thoughtlessly. Later, Apuleius would write in the *Golden Ass*: “No danger could ever force me reveal to the layman what has been confided to me under the seal of secrecy.” And so it was with all esoteric teachings of the ancient mysteries – for those of Isis and the Pyramids, for those of Eleusis where were celebrated the mysteries of Demeter, Persephone and the divine Iacchus, for those of the Kabeiroi and of Mithras. It was even so for the mysteries of faith during the first centuries of the Common Era, divulged to the faithful in the silence of crypts and catacombs. The law of silence is at the origin of all real initiations. Its origins are, without a doubt, lost in the night of prehistory.

Why, then, does society use this like a machine of war against initiatic societies and in particular against Freemasonry? The reason is simple; they have lost the meaning of this law. Laymen and the enemies of this institution consider it, or at least feign to consider it, like a vow, mixed with hypocrisy, with a subversive goal and shameful mysteries attenuated by its auspicious shadow. Ignorance and a lack of faith explain this perception. All masons truly worthy of the name know that the law of silence hides nothing questionable, immoral or subversive; it is the legitimate extension, however necessary, of the injunctions given to the ancient adepts, an echo of the evangelical saying: “do not cast pearls before swine.”

But if the law of silence is legitimate, if the masters of esoteric thought have laid it down in precise terms, how should it be interpreted? Many ignore it, both among its benevolent observers, and *a fortiori* among its detractors. Too often, these detractors look upon the Masonic vow as a childish bit of the arcane, like the need all superficial beings have to give themselves, in their own eyes, a fundamental importance that veils their own emptiness. They know nothing of the Masonic doctrine. It is their only excuse, but their ignorance ought to incite them to probe the profound reasons such an interdiction imposed upon the recipient, before his admission into the antechamber of the temple.

So let us examine the problem in its entirety, without allowing stray thoughts not pertaining to the topic to distract us. Indeed, the simplest reflection will create them.

First of all, an affirmation must be brought to mind: all laws imply constraint, a clear obligation to submit to its content. But, here, a distinction must be made. Civil laws: political, economic or social, are the expression of a necessity, temporary or permanent, noted by the legislator and, most often, applicable to society without having previously consulted with her subjects. There is, therefore, a real and absolute constraint, and this constraint includes submission to the letter of the law, rather than to their spirit, until the day when the law will be retracted either by the strength of things or the reaction of the worn out masses. The Masonic law of the silence offers nothing similar to these reflections. In the first place, as we shall see in a little while, it is imposed by reason and not by the will of a man or a collectivity. Then it is presented to each

adept before his admission into the order and freely accepted. He submits willingly, in full knowledge of the reason and consequences of the law; what's more, he seals this acceptance with a vow thereby consciously aware of any ulterior motives of rupture or derogation. The constraint is, therefore, quite effective, but of another essence; it is transcendent to the individual and rests upon the initiate. Civil constitutions govern people, outside of their wishes and desires, they are, "*perinde ac cadaver*", in the hands of the state and judicial powers charged with applying the law. In Masonry there is, on the other hand, will and the joy of self-discipline and the vow to persist "*sine die*" in this freely agreed-upon discipline. So, the constraint of silence does not engender a state of servitude vis-à-vis the law, it is an adherence for which necessity, based on reason, leaves nothing to spontaneity. It is an initiatic norm without which no asceticism is possible; which we shall try to demonstrate.

The law of the silence, as we have said, proceeds from reason. Reason is a specifically human faculty, it coordinates applied or intuitive information, elaborated by understanding, into notions, concepts or ideas, and transposes them into judgments, affixing the repercussions of them onto our lives. And, in light of this reason, Masonry is the art of pursuit, the method of discovery, the science of integrating, in speculation and in practice, these laws of the essential relationships established between truth and human intelligence. Where is the truth? It is not in the fleeting expressions of language, a perishable peeling constantly modified by the vicissitudes of time and place. It resides within things, inside beings, in life. It is not in the tumult of discussions or in vain and pompous speech that one can penetrate the substance veiled by these concepts. The subtle voice of these essences only reaches us in the quieted mind, in the contemplation of meditation; it is intercepted by the clash of the profane world, constituted, too often, by unstable and useless noise. Thus, the law of the silence, far from being an arbitrary obligation, is a rational constraint, by which our body and soul are placed at the disposal of our spirit, allowing it to hear, in all quietude, the voices of beings, emanations and underlings of the great universal voice. The longer our meditations, the more complete our interior silence, and the better we will succeed in discerning this sublime harmony. These are the profound reasons for Masonic silence; we will see, farther on, how it should be organized. Let's hold on to the driving principle from now on: Initiatic instruction presents itself and is received in the silence all beings, establishes itself in meditation and bears its fruit in the most secret folds of the pacified mind.

The law of the silence has yet another aspect, an entirely external aspect and not generally considered by the members of the institution and especially its enemies. When the Venerable closes the works of the lodge, he says: "Withdraw yourselves in peace, my Brothers, under the law of silence." This phrase of the ritual has two senses, the one studied above and in an exoteric sense, applicable to the layman. And, if the symbol of the god Harpocrates concerns the first, the evangelical speech and the text of Apuleius, mentioned at the beginning, apply incontestably to the second. Here again, reason dictates the law. In essence, any idea, divulged without discernment, is unprofitable for the blind masses that are unfit to receive it. For them, it becomes a prey that is completely exposed, a prey to ravage. They seize this idea with all their ignorance and disrespect, they grind it, torture it with fantastic interpretations and applications to make it into a misshapen, unaesthetic monster, according to the words of a Latin poet: "*Monstrum horrendum informe, ingens, cui lumen ademptum.*" It is 'an immense, malformed and horrible monster from whom the light has been removed.' Yes, Masonic speech thrown into the pastures of the masses becomes, passing through the brain cells of individuals without adequate culture,

an illogical monster, an amalgam of rebel concepts against the fertilization of the living light. The danger of some inopportune disclosure, then, appears fearsome. Because of them, Masonry, from all time, has been considered to be like an enterprise of death, like an assembly of destroyers or 'marked' men. Yet, only the opposite is true, because it endeavors, in its authentic tradition, to guide the individual and all of humanity toward the higher spheres of Wisdom and Spirituality. Hence, the absolute moral necessity to conceal from the masses the Masonic symbols and ideas inaccessible to their intelligence, not only to avoid the profanation of them, but again to prevent the transformation of a life tool into a weapon of death, of light into darkness, of truth into error. "*Sancta sanctis*," say the Scriptures; it is necessary to reserve the mysteries for the mystics, while trying to increase their number progressively raising all the elite to the heights of the sacred science. Masonry has not been deemed the royal science in vain, it is this in essence and, as such, it is the subtle appendage of intelligence transplanted on a will of bronze and consolidated by a big heart. The masses, in the present state of the human evolution, will never be able to assimilate the mysteries, to carry them away from our institution; they would constitute a filter of madness, a star too luminous for sight accustomed to the darkness of the forest of prejudice.

Now let's get back on track and see how the silence prescribed by Masonic law needs to be organized. Being quiet amongst strangers, to veil one's thoughts if we judge them unworthy or indifferent, appears relatively easy. The vow of silence in spite of repeated violations can, from the rest, be in this case, an obstacle sufficient to all indiscretion. But there are circumstances where the difficulty is greater. Each of us has a family, dear friends, friends to whom we grant our confidence; in love or friendship, sympathy can incite us to revelations which can jeopardize the tranquility or harm those near to us because of the incomprehension of our words, by our affections on one hand, and on the other by Brothers to whom we are linked by a solemn vow; this is why the law of external silence is absolute, the Mason must know how to be quiet, he must respect his vow without failure. He must be silent when not in the temple or in the presence of equals. Heed well these words: "We say, his equals and not his brothers" All Masons are, indeed, Brothers, between them solidarity, fraternity and love reign without any distinction of age, they form a chain of union, unique and indissoluble, from the youngest to the oldest, but they are not all equal in regards to the truth, they don't all see it all from the same angle, they are also not all capable of achieving a work conceived as part of the great work of the constructors. Also, as it would be inopportune and even dangerous to confide the sculpture of a capitol to an apprentice who has only just learned to rough down a quarry stone, it is necessary to avoid prematurely revealing to him the secrets of superior lodges and the truths which they act to veil; his rudimentary science would not allow him to assimilate them entirely. He would not know how to use them according to the norm, and confronted with the pointlessness of his efforts to understand and accomplish the work, discouragement and the disgust would invade his spirit. The Mason speaks therefore only amongst his equals, before workers capable of achieving their own work. This is the reason why masonry is a progressive institution; to its adepts it gives the truth in stages and not in one sole block. These are the arguments that back up the law of silence, outside and inside the institution. Here is the way to understand it and to practice it; but the question is greater still, these are merely the superficial prolegomena, it is the letter of obligation. Indeed, we have to examine the organization of silence in the very heart of a Mason's conscience. We said it a little while ago, the truth is not situated in the words that surround our concepts and ideas; it resides in the essence of things and beings. Only silence can permit us to hear the subtle

voice of essences. How, then, can we achieve the law of silence within us and penetrate into the spirit of our vow? Let's examine the history of sages and philosophers.

Pythagoras, before creating his school in Crotona, spent several years in absolute silence. Having become head of the school, he imposed silence upon his pupils. This was the origin of the "Akoustikoi", the 'hearers' or 'listeners'; they had to listen and had to be quiet, they never questioned, they followed the master's lessons and meditated upon them in the secret of their intelligence.

The hidden life of Christ lasted 30 years, during which history reveals no perceptible fact, gesture or speech to put us on the track of his intellectual and spiritual formation. Before getting involved in public life, he retired for 40 days to the desert, in order to concentrate his thoughts and to nurture them in the absolute silence of the trans-Jordanian solitude. About this same time, Apollonius of Tyana denied himself any speech for five consecutive years, and he was hardly 20 years old. These masters had understood the value and the quasi-supernatural virtue of physical silence. Brilliant Intellects, they surpassed the masses as centenary oaks crush the modest bushes of the forest. This is why we can see them and imitate them from afar. From their example let's procure this first principle:

"A Mason speaks at the appropriate moment and watches his words, he only expresses his essential thought." Everything else is vain speech, murmured without consistency, the chatter of a parrot achieved with so much success by the tribunals of our political assemblies and literary societies.

Here is how it is necessary to understand and to regulate physical silence, a primordial quality of Masons. There are too many, in the world, of speakers and not enough thinkers, too many ideologists and not enough directors to put these ideas into action, because man in his animal nature constantly externalizes himself by vain words and gestures instead of enclosing himself in the silence of meditation, the only source of great thoughts and equally great actions. But that's not all; it is still necessary to organize within oneself the psychic silence, the silence of the soul. It is necessary to impose control of reason and will upon the rush of instincts and passions; to force them to express themselves only in circumstances where to suppress them would be an unmistakable error, and a cause of dwindling one's vital force, an unjustified impoverishment of the instinct to conserve. It is, therefore, necessary here, as if it were about words, to supervise instincts and passions, to discern their movements and to give free course only to those manifestations compatible with the natural laws of human evolution. This restriction, this psychic silence is the very basis of the virtue of temperance, the opposite of the brutal impetus of animal incontinence.

On this platform of the organization of silence, the Mason, already, reveals himself extensively equipped for the struggle against profane easiness. We can finally see the scope of the asceticism required to reach relative perfection of the conscience. It is necessary, indeed, in a final stage, to achieve interior silence, the silence of the spirit, to more easily hear the speech of things and the Word of God.

This operation, difficult as it is, advertises a very long habit, it borrows two different attitudes: elimination and purification.

As the law of the silence urged us, just now, to supervise our trivial words and passionate overflow, it now invites us to watch our thoughts, to eliminate the dissonances capable of shrouding Truth, Beauty and Goodness, in the field of our conscience. Not happy with this negative operation, it is necessary to pass to a positive attitude, because purification is the refinement of thought. However this refinement operates through the contact of our mind with the essence of things. Silence is the crucible in which our reason and our will are subjected to the living fire of nature and her sublime creator (*tr. Note: in the sense of 'one who emanated'*). By this fire we cause in ourselves thoughts of justice, mercy and charity, thoughts susceptible of leading us to the confines of the spiritual world. Finally, of these various attitudes, it will be necessary as a last resort, to attain some sort of synthesis and to obtain the silence of our whole being. Our passions and our instincts reduced to the state of docile instruments will be used in view of both individual and general good. We will, then, progressively arrive at the canalization of all our feelings, all our notions, concepts and ideas in the path of serenity. Then, our life will appear like a synchronized vibration in the universal harmony of the cosmos, by the Virtue of the law of Silence, joyously accepted, and respected, painful certainly, but without fail.

And so we will definitely settle into this ultimate state, the obligatory outcome of all true Masonry: *illumination*.