



THE IRISH BRIGADE AND FREEMASONRY

BY RICHARD HAYES

Certain facts disclose Irish influences of various kinds that contributed to the establishment of masonry in France in the eighteenth century—some authorities even maintain that it was introduced there by Irish Jacobites. The cult was apparently non-existent in France until 1721. In that year, an English Catholic nobleman, Lord Derwentwater, and an Irishman, O'Hegarty, a prominent shipowner, established at Dunkirk the first civil lodge in that country. Four years later, they established a similar one at Paris, while, in 1732, 'one Martin Kelly' founded the first lodge at Bordeaux. The lodges were largely composed of Jacobite exiles and their main object was the restoration of the Stuarts to the English throne.

At that period, it was, however, in the French army that the chief strength of masonry lay, and this continued right up to the Revolution, in the causation of which it is now seen more and more clearly, as has been stated elsewhere, that masonic influences played a large part. The number of lodges in the various regiments increased from the year 1750 to the outbreak of the Revolution in 1789, and various dates during that interval mark the years of their constitution. In the official list of French lodges, that of Walsh's Irish Regiment (*La Loge Parfaite Egalité*) always took premier place. In 1772, the Grand Lodge of France definitely recognised it as the senior Field Lodge of the French army and, in addition, admitted its claim to date its constitution from the year 1688. This was confirmed by the Grand Orient in 1777. (The regiment, which was originally that of Roth, did not leave Ireland until 1691). In the middle of the eighteenth century we find the military lodge of this regiment composed of MacCarthys, Butlers, Nagles, O'Callaghans, Husseys, Keatings, FitzPatricks and other representatives of old Irish Catholic families. At the same period there was a lodge in Dillon's

Regiment functioning at St Germain-en-Laye which was made up of Lallys, Lynchés, Burkes, O'Neills, Dillons, MacDonnells, Fitzgeralds. . . . And at this time, too, Jacobite influences in various French masonic clubs were shown by the names given to new degrees—'Irish Master' 'Perfect Irish Master', 'Puissant Irish Master,' &c.

In his interesting work, *La Franc-maçonnerie en France des origines à 1815*, the Catholic writer, Gustave Bord, states:



After the battle of Fontenoy.

For more than a hundred years historians and economists are asking why a country so fundamentally monarchical and Catholic as France could have suddenly changed its ideals and faith. . . . France was sick at the end of the eighteenth century and that sickness was due largely to masonry and particularly to the masonic spirit. It is there we must look for the real causes and logical explanation of the Revolution. . . . In 1689, the Irish regiments embarked for France with their military rolls and their masonic rolls—the former were executive agents, the latter the directive power. It was through the Jacobites, who followed James the Second into France, that masonry was introduced into the French army.

And Louis Madelin . . . perhaps the most dispassionate historian of the Revolution, in his analysis of political and social conditions in France immediately before that event, writes in *La Revolution Française* (1911) that the army, which was the cradle in France of freemasonry, introduced by the Irish regiments from England, continued to be its favourite haunt.

For some time before the outbreak of the Revolution, the masonic clubs, under the sinister influence of German Illuminism, were undoubtedly active centres of intrigue against the Monarchy and the Church. The majority of the

French nobles had been members, but on seeing the trend of opinion in their circles they began to leave the clubs during the years immediately previous to 1789.

In the first year of the Revolution there was a well known masonic club in Paris, the Club de la Propagande, whose object was not only to consolidate the Revolution in France but to spread its principles to other countries. The leading figures of the time were among its members—Robespierre, Lafayette, Condorcet, Danton, Abbé Gregoire and others. The names of its Irish members are given in the records as 'Boyle, Okard and O'Konnor.'

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