

THE OLD CHARGES

THE CHARGES
OF A

FREEMASON
EXTRACTED FROM THE
ANCIENT RECORDS OF LODGE
BEYOND SEA

TO BE READ AT THE MAKING OF NEW BRETHREN, OR
WHEN THE MASTER SHALL ORDER IT

GENERAL HEADS

I. OF GOD AND RELIGION.

II. OF THE CIVIL MAGISTRATES, SUPREME AND
SUBORDINATE.

III. OF LODGES.

IV. OF MASTERS, WARDENS, FELLOWS AND
APPRENTICES.

V. OF THE MANAGEMENT OF THE CRAFT IN
WORKING.

VI. OF BEHAVIOR, viz:

1. In the Lodge while constituted.
2. After the Lodge is over and the Brethren not gone.
3. When Brethren meet without strangers, but not in a Lodge formed.
4. In the presence of strangers not Masons.
5. At home and in your neighborhood.
6. Towards a strange Brother.

I. CONCERNING GOD AND RELIGION

A Mason is obliged, by his Tenure, to obey the Moral Law, and if he rightly understands the Art he will never be a stupid ATHEIST nor an irreligious LIBERTINE. But though in Ancient Times Masons were charged in every Country to be of the Religion of that Country or Nation, whatever it was, yet is now thought more expedient only to oblige them to that Religion in which all men agree, leaving their particular Opinions to themselves; that is to be GOOD MEN and TRUE, or Men of Honor and Honesty, by whatever denominations or persuasions they may be distinguished; whereby Masonry becomes the Center of Union, and the means of conciliating true friendship among persons that must have remained at a perpetual distance.

Editorial Note: Every Worshipful Master shall "see to it that the Ancient Charges are read and discussed in his Lodge at least once a year, and as much oftener as may seem necessary in order that the Craft generally become familiar with the foundation of our Ancient Fraternity." 1932: 257.

II. OF THE CIVIL MAGISTRATES, SUPREME AND SUBORDINATE

A Mason is a peaceable subject to the civil powers, wherever he resides or works, and is never to be concerned in plots and conspiracies against the peace and welfare of the Nation, nor to behave himself undutifully to inferior Magistrates; for as Masonry hath been always injured by war, bloodshed and confusion, so Ancient Kings and Princes have been much disposed to encourage the Craftsmen, because of their peaceableness and loyalty; whereby they practically answered

the cavils of the adversaries, and promoted the Honor of the Fraternity, whoever flourished in times of peace. So that if a Brother should be a rebel against the State, he is not to be countenanced in his rebellion; however, he may be pitied as an unhappy man and, if convicted of no other crime, though the loyal Brotherhood must and ought to disown his rebellion, and give no umbrage or ground of political jealousy to the Government for the time being; they cannot expel him from the Lodge and his relation to it remains indefeasible.

III. OF LODGES

A Lodge is a place where Masons assemble and work; hence that assembly, or duly organized Society of Masons, is called a Lodge, and every Brother ought to belong to one, and to be subject to its By-laws and General Regulations. It is either particular or general, and will be best understood by attending it, and by the regulations of the General or Grand Lodge hereunto annexed. In ancient times, no Master or Fellow could be absent from it, especially when warned to appear at it, without incurring a severe censure, until it appeared to the Master and Wardens, that pure necessity hindered him. The persons admitted members of a Lodge must be good and true men, freeborn, and of a mature and discreet age, no bondman, no women, no immoral or scandalous men, but of good report.

IV. OF MASTERS, WARDENS, FELLOWS AND APPRENTICES

All preferment among Masons is grounded upon real worth and personal merit only; that so the Lords may be well served, the Brethren not put to shame, nor the Royal Craft despised; therefore, no Master or Warden is chosen by seniority, but for

his merit. It is impossible to describe these things in writing and therefore every Brother must attend in his place and learn them in a way peculiar to this Fraternity: Candidates may nevertheless know, that no Master should take an Apprentice, unless he has sufficient employment for him, and unless he is a perfect Youth, having no maim or defect in his body, that may render him incapable of learning the art of serving his Master's Lord, and of being made a Brother, and then a Fellow Craft in due time, after he has served a term of years as the custom of the country directs; otherwise qualified, he may arrive to the honor of being a Warden, and then the Master of the Lodge, the Grand Warden, and at length, the Grand Master of the Lodges, according to his merit. No Brother can be a Warden unless he has passed the part of a Fellow Craft; nor a Master until he has acted as a Warden, nor a Grand Warden until he has been Master of a Lodge, nor Grand Master until he has been a Fellow Craft before his election, who is also to be nobly born, or a Gentleman of his best fashion, or some eminent Scholar or some curious Architect, or other Artist, descended of honest parents, and who is singularly great merit in the opinion of the Lodge. These Rulers and Governors, Supreme and Subordinate, of the Ancient Lodge, are to be obeyed in their respective stations by all the Brethren, according to the Old Charges and regulations, with all humility, reverence, love and alacrity.

V. OF THE MANAGEMENT OF THE CRAFT IN WORKING

All Masons shall work honestly on working days, that they may live creditably on Holy days; and the time appointed by the Law of the Land, or confirmed by custom, shall be observed. The most expert of the Fellow-Craftsmen shall be

chosen or appointed the Master, or Overseer of the Lord's work; who is to be called Master by those who work under him. The Craftsmen are to avoid all ill language, and call each other by no disobliging name, but Brother or Fellow; and to behave themselves courteously within and without the Lodge. The Master, knowing himself to be able of cunning, shall undertake the Lord's Work as reasonably as possible, and truly dispense his goods as if they were his own; nor give more wages to any Brother or Apprentice than he really may deserve.

Both the Master and the Masons receiving their wages justly, shall be faithful to the Lord and honestly finish their work, whether task or journey; not put the work to take that hath been accustomed to journey. None shall discover envy at the prosperity of a Brother, not supplant him, or put him out of his work, if he be capable to finish the same; for no man can finish another's work so much to the Lord's profit, unless he be thoroughly acquainted with the designs and draughts of him that began it. When a Fellow-Craftsman is chosen Warden of the work under the Master, he shall be true both to Master and Fellows, shall carefully oversee the work in the Master's absence to the Lord's profit; and his Brethren shall obey him. All Masons employed shall meekly receive their wages without murmuring or mutiny, and not desert the Master till the work be finished. A younger Brother shall be instructed in working, to prevent spoiling the materials for want of judgment, and for increasing an continuing of Brotherly Love. All the tools used in working shall be approved by the Grand Lodge. No laborer shall be employed in the proper work of Masonry; nor shall Freemasons work with those that are not free without an urgent necessity; nor shall they teach laborers or unaccepted Masons, as they should teach a Brother or a Fellow.

VI. OF BEHAVIOR

1. IN THE LODGE WHILE CONSTITUTED

You are not to hold private committees or separate conversations, without leave from the Master, nor talk of anything impertinently nor unseemly, nor interrupt the Master or Warden's, or any Brother speaking to the Master; nor behave yourself ludicrously or jestingly while the Lodge is engaged in what is serious and solemn; nor use any unbecoming language upon any pretense whatsoever; but to pay due reverence to your Master, Wardens and Fellows, and put them to worship. If any complaint be brought, the Brother found guilty shall stand to the award and determination of the Lodge, who are the proper and competent judges of all such controversies (unless you carry them by appeal to the Grand Lodge), and to whom they ought to be referred, unless Lord's work be hindered the meanwhile, in which case a particular reference may be made; but you must never go to law about what concerneth Masonry, without an absolute necessity apparent to the Lodge.

2. BEHAVIOR AFTER THE LODGE IS OVER AND THE BRETHREN NOT GONE

You may enjoy yourself with innocent mirth, treating one another according to ability, but avoiding excess, or forcing any Brother to eat or drink beyond his inclination, or hindering him from going when his occasions call him, or doing or saying anything offensive, or that may forbid an easy and free conversation; for that would blast our harmony, and defeat our laudable purposes. Therefore, no private piques or quarrels

must be brought within the doors of the Lodges, far less any quarrels about religion, or nations or State, we being only, as Masons, of the Universal Religion above mentioned; we are also of all Nations', Tongues, Kindred, and Languages and are resolved against all Politicks, as what never yet conducted to the welfare of the Lodge, nor ever will.

3. BEHAVIOR WHEN BRETHREN MEET WITHOUT STRANGERS BUT NOT IN A LODGE FORMED

You are to salute one another in a courteous manner, as you will be instructed, calling each other Brother, were he not a Mason: for though all Masons are as Brethren upon the same level, yet Masonry takes no honor from a man that he had before; nay, rather it adds to his honor, especially if he has deserved well of the Brotherhood, who must give honor to whom it is due, and avoid ill manners.

4. BEHAVIOR IN PRESENCE OF STRANGERS NOT MASONS

You should be cautious in your words and carriage, that the most penetrating stranger should not be able to discover or find out what is not proper to be intimated; and sometimes you may divert a discourse, and manage it prudently for the honor of the Worshipful Fraternity.

5. BEHAVIOR AT HOME AND IN YOUR NEIGHBORHOOD

You are to act as becomes a moral and wise man; particularly not to let your family, friends and neighbors know the concerns of the Lodge, but wisely to consult your own honor, and that of

the Ancient Brotherhood, for reasons not to be mentioned here. You must also consult your health, by not continuing together too late, or too long from home, after Lodge hours are past; and by avoiding of gluttony or drunkenness, that your family be not neglected or injured, nor you disabled from working.

6. BEHAVIOR TOWARDS A STRANGE BROTHER

You are cautioned to examine him, in such a manner as prudence shall direct you, that you may not be imposed upon by an ignorant false pretender, whom you are to reject with contempt and derision, and beware of giving him any hints of knowledge. But if you discover him to be a true and genuine Brother, you are to respect him accordingly; and if he is in want, you must relieve him if you can, or direct him how he may be relieved: You must employ him some days, or else recommend him to be employed. But you are not charged to do beyond your ability, only to prefer a poor Brother, and a Good Man and True, before any other people in the same circumstances. Finally, all these charges you are to observe, and also those that shall be communicated unto you in another way; cultivating Brotherly Love, Foundation and Cap-stone, the Cement and Glory of this ancient Fraternity, avoiding all wrangling and quarreling, all slander and backbiting, nor permitting others to slander any honest Brother, but defending his character, and doing him all good offices, so far as is consistent with your honor and safety, and no further. And if any of them do you injury, you must apply to your own or his Lodge, and from thence you may appeal to the Grand Lodge, at the Quarterly Communications, and from thence to the annual Grand Lodge, as has been the ancient laudable conduct of our forefathers in every Nation; never taking a legal course but when the case cannot be otherwise decided, and patiently

listening to the honest and friendly advice of Master and Fellows, when they would prevent your going to law with strangers, or would excite you to put a speedy period to all law-suits, that so you may find the affair of Masonry with more alacrity and success; but with respect to Brothers or Fellows at Law, the Master and Brethren should kindly offer their mediation, which ought to be thankfully submitted to be the contending Brethren; and if that submission is impracticable, they must, however, carry on their process of Law-suit, without wrath or rancor (not in the common way), saying or doing nothing which may hinder Brotherly Love, and good offices to be renewed and continued that all may see the benign influence of Masonry, as all true Masons have done from the beginning of the world, and will do to the end of time.

AMEN, SO MOTE IT BE