

EVERY BROTHER HIS OWN TILER

All Masons know the importance of the Tiler, and the scope of his duties. But the Tiler is only one brother - secrecy is a Masonic duty for all. Throughout the three degrees, and in the ceremonies of opening and closing a lodge, are references to the importance of preserving inviolate the secrets of the Order, preventing the approach of cowans and eavesdroppers, guarding against the disclosure of the esoteric work to those whom it is not proper to be made known.

In the Ritual explanation of the third cardinal virtue, Prudence, we are told (see most monitors) "This virtue should be the peculiar characteristic of every Mason, not only for the government of his conduct while in the Lodge, but also when abroad in the world. It should be particularly attended to, in all strange and mixed companies, never to let fall the least sign, token, or word whereby the secrets of Freemasonry might be unlawfully obtained.

The charge to the entered Apprentice admonishes him, among other things; "Neither are you to suffer your zeal for the Institution to lead you into an argument with those who, through ignorance, may ridicule it."

The FellowCraft is exhorted to preserve steadily "in the practice of every commendable virtue." In the Third Degree the newly Raised Master Mason learns that "The Book of Constitutions, guarded by the Tiler's Sword, reminds us that we should be ever watchful and guarded in our words and actions, particularly before the enemies of Masonry, ever bearing in remembrance those truly Masonic virtues, silence and circumspection."

Not only the "work," both printed and exoteric, and secret and esoteric, exhorts us to "silence and circumspection;" the inner meaning of the symbolism of the Tiler and his Sword teaches plainly that each of us should be a Masonic Tiler.

In other words, the duties of the Tiler are not confined to that officer; every Mason should be, in effect, a Tiler. He is a good Mason as his words and actions are duly "Tiled," and a detriment, if not a positive injury, to the Craft as he is careless of or indifferent to these duties.

In the ancient operative days the secrets of a Master Mason were valuable in coin of the realm. The Mason who knew the Master's Word could travel in foreign countries and receive Master's Wages. Many who could not, or would not, conform to the requirements tried to ascertain the Master's Word and some of a Master's skill in a clandestine manner.

The "eavesdropper" - literally, one who attempts to listen under the eaves, and so receives upon him the droppings from the roof - was altogether without the pale; he was only a common thief, who tried to learn by stealth what he could not learn by work.

The cowan was a more or less ignorant Mason; one who laid stones together without mortar, or piled rough stones from the field into a wall, without working upon them to make them square and true. He was a "Mason without a word" with no reputation; the apprentice who tried to masquerade as a master.

The operative Masons guarded their assemblies against intrusion of both the non-Mason thief, and the half-instructed craftsman, who, like the Fellowcrafts of old, desired to obtain the secret word of a Master Mason by force, rather than by labor.

While nothing very positive is known either as to the date when the guardian of the door first went on duty, or why he was called a Tiler, or Tyler, it is believed that the office is very ancient, and that, inasmuch as the man who put on the roof, or tiles, (tiler) completed the building and made those within secure from intrusion, so the officer who guarded the door against the intrusion was called, by analogy, a Tiler.

In modern days the Tiler of a lodge uses his sword only as a symbol of authority. While all faith and trust in his zeal is entertained by the Master and the Brethren, it is usual to make sure by a ceremony familiar to all Masons that no profane, cowan, or eavesdropper, Apprentice, or Fellowcraft has entered the lodge room of Master Masons prior to opening.

So ancient is the office, and so important the functions, that Mackey says that the Eleventh of his Twenty-Five Landmarks is "The Necessity that every lodge when congregated shall be duly tiled." But of what avail is it to tile a lodge meeting, if individual brethren do not "bear in remembrance those truly Masonic virtues, silence and circumspection;" if we fail to heed the charge and do suffer our zeal to leads us into argument with the profane, regarding Masonic matters?

Unless all of understand and abide by the need for us to tile our own words and actions, our portals might as well be in charge of a door keeper who would admit on the production of a printed ticket! In the profane world (the word is used in its ancient sense of meaning "without the doors of the Temple") considerable curiosity exists regarding the Masonic Fraternity. The inescapable newspaper reporter, with his accounts of Masonic meetings, does not lessen it. Public appearances of Masons naturally arouse curiosity; spectators are interested when the Grand Lodge, in silk hats and frock coats, embroidered Aprons and with solemn and ancient ceremony, lays the cornerstone of a church, or when a private lodge, attired in white Aprons and Gloves, conducts an impressive funeral, with customs quite different from those of the usual religious service.

Masonry has given to the language certain phrases used by the entire English speaking world. The "Third Degree" of the police is a perversion of a Masonic matter; so is the "goat" of the familiar joke. "He's on the level" - "He's on the square" are commonplaces. Naturally the public begins to ask questions. What is Masonry? Who may be Masons? Why can't women be Masons? What do Masons do? Why do you wear those funny little aprons? The Mason who is his own Tiler is "ever watchful and guarded" in what he answers.

To satisfy a legitimate curiosity about Freemasonry there is much information which a brother may conscientiously give. A sincere desire to learn something of the Fraternity, on the part of a man who is considering making an application, is an evidence of thoughtfulness. He is entitled to a serious and thoughtful answer to all proper questions. Much information regarding Masonry is printed; its history, its government, its extent, its public appearances - such matters are no more "secret" than a Masonic Temple is secret. Few Masons, not even the careless and indifferent, will disclose the esoteric work of the degrees; the modes of recognition, the words or our methods of teaching. It is not the disclosure of these that we who would tile our hearts and lips must fear.

But in between lies a vast body of knowledge and information which are borderland to both the exoteric and esoteric. Here the indifferent, the careless, the uninstructed and the ignorant can - and sometimes do - work an injury to the Fraternity. A Mason comes home from lodge and remarks to his wife - "Joe Smith has applied to the lodge. I'm glad old Joe is coming in!" Friend wife thinks nothing of it. Apparently it is a harmless statement.

"But suppose Joe Smith is blackballed!" "By the way," remarks Mrs. Mason, after a few months. "Why don't you call for Joe Smith when you go to lodge tonight?" What is the Mason going to say? What can he say? And so Mrs. Mason learns - and with the utmost innocence may tell - that Joe Smith applied for the degrees of Freemasonry and was rejected.

If Joe Smith wants to make the matter public, that's his business. But as a man may be rejected for the degrees for many reasons; and, while the public thinks only that the rejection means unfitness it's unfair for the lodge, or for any individual member of the lodge, to make the matter known.

This is offered merely as one small instance of the harm that may be done by a Mason who is not his own Tiler. A thousand others will occur to the thoughtful. Particularly should we Tile our lips in communities so small that a lodge meeting assumes almost the importance of a Public Event. As a general rule, we are well advised if we do not talk of anything which occurs in a lodge - even such matters as are harmless - with those who are not of the Fraternity, since such conversations give rise to questions, and questions lead to answers.

Freemasonry works her gentle miracles in men's hearts in a way which no profane can understand. Her reputation among the general public is that of silence, secrecy, good works, unselfish doing of good, failure to advertise and to seek publicity. These facts in the jewel of her reputation are the working tools of the Craft among the profane. Every inadvertence which breaks down any one of them, injures the Fraternity in the public eye and thus her ability to do good. Every airing of scandals, every dragging of lodge politics - hateful words! - into community talk, every disclosure of charity, even when dictated by pride, is, in the long run, injurious to the Fraternity.

Many good men and true seek to "improve" Masonry. Modern conditions do demand ideas; our brethren of two hundred years ago, for instance, never hard of a Masonic Home. Many "improvements" are wholly exoteric, and necessary. Others, so-called, attempt to change the "Ancient Usages and Customs," destroy some of the Landmarks and nullify some of the Old Charges. The Freemason who is his own Tiler will set his face steadfastly against all such efforts.

As one bad egg will spoil an omelet, so the unfit candidate, admitted, does more harm to the lodge, and thus to the Fraternity, than ten good men and true can do good. The well Tiled Mason will be very careful in the petitions he brings into the lodge. It is not enough to say "Oh, Jim's a good fellow." Jim must be more than a "good fellow" to be a real Mason. It is for us to see that we Tile the petitions we sign with truly Masonic "circumspection."

Finally - and perhaps most important of all personal duties we perform as Tiler - let us see to it that we do not ourselves bring anything into the lodge but brotherly love. Let us be "ever watchful and guarded" that, in the language of the Old Charges, we bring "no private piques or quarrels" within the tiled door. Not only with our lips but truly, let us meet on the level and part upon the square. Let us each so act in the lodge, as a brother, and out in the world, as a member of the Ancient Craft, that our brethren within, and our friends at large without, can be proud of what Masonry means. For only by so tiling ourselves can we insure that, that with which we are so solemnly charged as Entered Apprentices will endure; "that the honor, glory and reputation of the Institution may be firmly established and maintained; and, the world at large convinced of its good effects."