

OLD TYLER ODDITIES

Writing in *The Master Mason* some fourteen years ago, Dr. Joseph Fort Newton of the quotable pen said:

"I have been Tiler of my Lodge for forty years. . .' So runs the first phrase of a letter.

"He must be a good Tiler, this correspondent, or he could not have held his position for so long. He has been courteous to visiting brethren and made them feel welcome; one of the vital and important parts of any Tiler's work. The Tiler is the first point of contact between the would be visitor and the Lodge he would enter. As the Tiler is interested, pleasant, kindly, so is the impression the visitor receives of the Lodge. As he is surly, indifferent, uninterested, so does the visitor conceive the Lodge.

"This Tiler has made things easy for his officers for forty years, otherwise he would not have been so constantly reappointed. The officers' aprons and jewels have been in place, ready for use, before time for opening. If the charter is kept in a safe, doubtless the Tiler has placed it upon the Altar, and removed it after Lodge was closed- for forty years! Certainly not less than ten thousand times in those forty years he has answered a summons from within, or given one from without; if he has been prompt and active, he has saved the Lodge countless hours of time.

"He knows the membership of his Lodge as no other brother knows it; knows the brethren by name, face, reputation. The new brethren as they are raised he fixes in his mind, that he may greet them the next meeting, as members. The older brethren he knows by first names, and-if he is an old Tiler such as some we have known his cheery "Hello, Jim", or "Evening, Jack, how's everything?" has sounded the keynote of a cheerful brotherly fraternal evening for many.

"They also serve who only stand and wait. For forty years to be a member of a Lodge and seldom see its interior during a meeting; for forty years to stand without with a sword and the honor and sanctity of the Lodge in his care; for forty years to guard the gate against cowans and eavesdroppers that the brethren might meet and deliberate in peace and comfort-surely there must be honor in some Celestial Lodge for one who has done so much!

"But let us not wait for the Heavenly Grand Honors to be given to the humble and deserving; let us give them honor here, now. A word of cheer to the old Tiler, a pleasant appreciation of his efforts and his good work, will be worth more to him than the pittance he may receive for his time. Honor to those to whom honor is due. Surely the old Tiler who has stood guard for forty years is among them!"

From whence the name Tiler came, and when it came, are both moot questions.

In 1738 (and perhaps before) the officer of the Grand Lodge who stood without the door was called "Garder of ye Grand Lodge" as we learn from the portrait of Montgomerie (England). But

apparently this title was soon altered to Grand Tyler, and thereafter both in England and in America the brother "without the door with a drawn sword in his hand" has always been called tyler or tiler.

Just which spelling is correct is- a matter unsettled; the officer is tyler in one place, tiler in another.

Apparently the earliest mention of the word in Masonic usage is in the minutes of the Grand Lodge of England in 1732; there it is spelled "tyler". In this country it is as often spelled one way as another. Those who contend that the word comes from the operative art-the tiler being the Mason who set the tiles of the roof-of course believe the spelling "tiler" to be correct.

But it is not at all certain, although it is an attractive theory, that the tiler who guards the door was named because a tiler once set tiles on the roof of a building in which Masons met.

An old book, the *Proces des Templier*, tells of early French knighthood, and mentions that it was the practice to post a sentry on the roof during the time a Chapter was being held. The building being probably detached such a sentry would be enabled from this position to see that no unauthorized person approached the house. To tile, in French, is *Tuiller*, hence the name of the palace, the *Tuilleries*. The *Proces des Templiers* of course refers only to the French Knights, but as the ceremonies were the same in all countries, there is no reason to suppose that the practice of posting a sentry on the roof was not followed in England. The Knights Templars were for the most part soldiers, not clerks; ignorant of Latin and unable to read, they could with difficulty be taught their *Pater Noster*, the frequent repetition of which was all that was demanded of the rank and file of the Chapter. It is not improbable, therefore, that this sentry was known to the English brethren by the English word "tyler."

So some commentators not knowing of the sentry put upon the roof, considered that the word tyler is used because the roof closes the building against the weather and the sky above. It is the door that closes the room against the intrusion of outsiders, and the title of those who hold the door or entrance is never taken from the roof. We have sentry, from *sentire*, to feel, to know. Sentries are the ears and eyes of the camp, the watchdogs who guard while others sleep. The door is guarded by those who, if armed, are guards or warders; the same, if peaceful, are porters or janitors. The use of the word tyler is confined to Masons who apparently got it from the sentry on the roof of the Knights Templars.

Much that is curious and interesting clings to the tylers of the early days of Freemasonry. Apparently tylers often wore special clothing, or uniforms. The portrait in oils of Montgomerie, "Garder of Grand Lodge, 1736" before referred to, shows him attired in a dark blue coat trimmed with gold lace, and in a red vest or waistcoat.

In a description of early Irish Masonry it is reported that "A huge red cloak covered the tyler to his very toes; the large sleeves which hung below his hand terminated in cuffs of orange velvet, on each of which was a representation of a skull and cross-bones in lustrous black; the blue collar had on it moons and stars of bright yellow, and candlesticks, compasses and other cabalistic symbols of the Craft nearly covered it with odd-looking devices. On his head was a

gigantic cocked-hat, which would almost have served him for a boat, it was so large. This was surmounted with blue and red feathers, and in his hand was a flaming falchion."

The emblems on the cloak referred not only to the Craft, but to the Royal Arch and Templar degrees, so that the one garment could be used by the janitor, no matter which of the degrees was being worked. The robe was a survival from the days when Craft Lodges in Ireland were accustomed to confer the Royal Arch and Templar degrees without any authorization other than that which they considered their Craft Warrant to bestow on them. The practice was general throughout Ireland at the close of the seventeenth century.

Writing of early Irish Lodges and quoting from their curiously brief minutes, the English authority Wonnacott has uncovered a wealth of odd details of early tylers and their duties.

Apparently the tyler was not usually a member of the Lodge he tyled. His fee on ordinary nights was 1/6, but when a Mason was made, this was increased by a special fee from the candidate of from half-a-crown to four shillings. Later his remuneration was increased to 2/6 per night, and about the same time (1744) there is an item continually recurring - "Drawer, 6d." The "Drawer" was probably the waiter or "Serving Brother" who attended to the creature comforts of the brethren, and not the one who "drew the Lodge". This was the duty of the tyler, who had to prepare symbolic diagrams on the floor of the Lodge and erase them when the evening's business had closed. This was also called "Forming the Lodge." A candidate for initiation having failed to present himself on the 5th December, 1770, - "Bro. Bottomley prayed that his making might be postponed, he undertaking to pay the Expences of forming last Night and this."

"In 1776. 1 May. Conven'd Night. On account of the Tyler having neglected to form a Lodge the Brethren were not Rais'd."

Another duty to be carried out by the tyler was to deliver the summonses to the members of the Lodge. "March 1st, 1736. "Agreed by the Member then present that Bro. Riddalls Servt be allowe, 12d. each Lodge night for Carrieing ye Letters t Each Member.

Riddall was landlord of the "Queen's Arms" in St. Paul's Church Yard, where the Lodge was then meeting. And in 1744 (3rd July) :- "Ordered that the Tyler for the future do deliver out the Summon's for the meeting of this Lodge and be paid for the same One Shilling exclusive of his money for the Tyling."

At Christmas it was customary to give the tyler a gratuity of 10/6

"1771. Wed. 11 Jan. A motion was made and seconded and passed Nem. Con. that in Consideration of the Tyler's due Attendances on this Lodge and faithful Services an extra Gratuity of 10s.6d be given to him out of the Gen. Fund of this Lodge, but this not to be a President for another year.

But it did form a "President" for several years as is attested by many entries to this effect: - "A motion was made that the Tyler may receive his usual Complimt of half-a- guinea at Christmas which was unanimously agreed."

Other entries disclose other duties to be performed by the Tyler. For instance,—"S Aug. 1740. `Tis agreed that the Tyler shall take the Visitors' money at the Door and bring it to the Mr. (Master) to save the trouble of the Junr. Warden and Secretary." In the 1760 By-Laws, it is provided that "the Tyler shall collect the Money of the Visiting Brethren before they enter the Lodge-Room," and "Every Bro. . . . shall pay . . . besides the Tyler's usual fees, which shall be Two Shillings and Sixpence for being raised to the Third Degree: the said Tyler being obliged to present each New made Brother with a List of the Lodges."

To modern Masons the idea of a Lodge having more than one tiler seems an absurdity; that a Lodge might have not only two but six or eight seems fantastic. Yet in France, apparently, in early days there were often a multiplicity of tilers!

Writing of this oddity the great authority G.W. Speth says;

"An early Bordeaux Lodge appears to have contented itself with two tylers. But in of the letters which came under my observation, which is signed by some score of officers of the Bordeaux Lodge, there are no less than six of them who sign `Tuilleur.' I believe that at that time, and especially abroad, the tyler was not a paid servant of the Lodge. The `serving brothers,' of whom we hear often enough, appear-to have been waiters merely. If this be the case, it is evident that the tyler's duties must have been performed by a member of the Lodge, and in order that there should always be a sufficient number present, and that moreover they should be able to share the duties of the evening so as to avoid any one of them spending the whole time without the door, several brothers would hold the office at the same time."

"The Book of Constitutions, guarded by the Tiler's Sword" is familiar to all. Some read into it the necessity of Masons to guard the Constitution of the nation, which seems rather far fetched and would certainly date that symbol rather late for something supposed to have come from "time immemorial." H. L. Haywood, noted American authority says:

"If the tiler is set to guard the Book it is to remind us that secrecy and watchfulness must ever be at hand to guard us against our enemies, for the tiler is here a symbol, rather than an officer of the lodge.

"The tiler, in the present connection, is a reminder that each of us must become a watchman seeing to it that no influence shall undermine our organic law, and that no enemies shall be permitted to our fellowship. Every loyal Mason must be a tiler, watchful lest he recommend an unfit candidate, and careful lest he admit such influences into the Lodge as make for disunion and disharmony. To keep off rowans and eavesdroppers, figurative and actual, is one great duty of membership.

"Cowan is a Scotch term. It was used in early Scotch Masonry in more than one sense but seems originally to mean `a man who uses round unsquared stones for building purposes, whether walls or huts'; in other words, the Cowan was originally an unskilled Mason. Oftentimes a Cowan was loosely affiliated with the Craft but never given its secrets for which reason he was often known as a `Mason without the Word.' The term was also employed to describe a non-affiliated skilled Mason, one who had unlawfully obtained the secrets of the Craft.

"The word was employed by English Masonry in the early Grand Lodge period; Brother J. T. Thorp believes it was Dr. Desaguliers who first used it after his visit to Scotland in 1721; Brother Vibert believes it was imported by Dr. Anderson in 1723 or later. Be that as it may the word found a permanent place in our vocabulary albeit with gradual changes of meaning. Literally speaking, as the word is now employed, a rowan is a man with unlawful Masonic knowledge; an intruder is one with neither knowledge or secrets who makes himself otherwise obnoxious; a clandestine is one who has been initiated by unlawful means; an irregular is one who has been initiated by a Lodge working without authorization. In all these senses a man is designated a rowan who makes use of the Fraternity in an illegal or obnoxious manner, who uses Masonry for unMasonic purposes. Manifestly such men can not be kept out by the Tiler alone; every member must assist in this work of the guardianship of the Order."

The romance which seems to gild the tylers of an older day is hardly in evidence today; most tylers appear rather prosaic officers with a job which, while necessary and important, is without much interest; hence the usual practice to pay for the service.

But there is romance to be found in tylers, so we look deep enough, nor do we have to look into other centuries to find it.

This has been as well expressed by Rob Morris, poet of Freemasonry, in his immortal verse:

God bless the Old Tyler! how long he has trudged,

Through sunshine and storm, with his "sum and monses due!"

No pain nor fatigue the Old Tyler has grudged

To serve the great Order, Freemasons, and you.

God bless the Old Tyler! how oft he was led

The funeral procession from Lodge door to grave!

How grandly his weapon has guarded the dead

To their last quiet home where Acacia boughs wave.

God bless the Old Tyler; how oft he has knocked,

When, vigilant, strangers craved welcome and rest!

How widely your portals, though guarded and locked,

Have swung to the signal the Tyler knows best!

There's a Lodge where the door is not guarded nor tyled,

There's a land without mourners or sin,
There's a Master most and mild
And He waits the Old Tyler, and bids him come in!
And there the Old Tyler, no longer outside,
No longer with weapon of war in his hand,
A glorified spirit, shall grandly abide
And close by the Master, high honored, shall stand.

QUESTION BOX

Why are we called "Free Masons"?

There are many theories: a man was a Freemason because his ancestors were not slaves nor was he a slave; he was so called because he was free within his Guild, or free of the Guild's laws and could thus "travel in foreign countries" and work where he would; he was a Freemason because he worked in freestone, which is any stone which can be cut, smoothed, carved in any direction; he was free when he had passed his apprenticeship and became a Fellow of the Craft; he was free when he had left the status of serf or villein and legally became free. Probably at one time or another Masons were called Freemasons for any of these reasons or for all of them. The consensus leans to the theory that the Freemason was such because of his skill, knowledge and abilities which set him free of those conditions, laws, rules and customs which circumscribed masons of lesser abilities in the Cathedral building age.

What are the "Old Charges"?

The first book of Freemasonry, printed in 1723, is known as Anderson's Constitutions. In it appear six "Old Charges" which are a statement of the old laws of operative Freemasonry concerning a Mason and his conduct. These six Old Charges are titled: Of God and Religion; Of the Civil Magistrate Supreme and Subordinate; Of Lodges; Of Masters, . Wardens, Fellows and Apprentices; Of the Management of the Craft in Working; Of Behaviour. The last, sixth Old Charge is concerned with behavior: "in the Lodge while constituted; after Lodge is over and the Brethren not ,gone; when Brethren meet without Strangers, but not in a Lodge; in presence of Strangers not Masons; at Home and in the Neighborhood; towards a strange Brother."

Many "Books of the Law" - Constitutions, Codes, etc. - of Grand Lodges print these Old Charges. They can also be found in Mackey's Encyclopedia and in the Little Masonic Library.