

A LETTER TO A PROSPECTIVE CANDIDATE

You have expressed a wish to be a Freemason. We believe we may assume that you have thoroughly considered the step you propose to take but the exact nature of our association being unknown to you it may be that you are not sufficiently informed on certain points, the knowledge of which might affect your decision and prevent regrets when it is too late to alter it. It is, therefore, to facilitate your inquiries important for you and for the Society and as a guard against your own illusions as well as to shield itself from any future reproach on your part, that we consider it a duty to offer you a few observations touching your future obligations towards it and to certain possible prejudices and erroneous ideas as well as to acquaint you with what it is entitled to expect from you. We also invite you most earnestly for your own piece of mind to beware of undue haste. The notions that men who are not Freemasons have as to the aims of our Society are as varied as they are mistaken and have in former times drawn upon us in some countries violent and even fatal persecution. Here we have been taken for sectarians, there for conspirators or men dangerous to the State but respected theologians and ecclesiastics of all creeds, distinguished statesmen in diversely constituted States, princes and even kings are members of our Fraternity and refute by their presence such unjust prejudices.

Freemasonry meddles neither with religion nor politics and as to these recognises no particular system. Neither does it concern itself with the cultivation of any branch of science or art or of any trade, not even of practical architecture from which it derives its name. It is therefore neither a religious, political, scientific nor technical institution. At our meetings we remember suffering humanity which has procured for us the honourable reputation we have for charity. On another count, the fraternal meals that assemble us on different occasions, at which light-heartedness prevails, have given rise to some to the mistaken belief that the aim of Freemasonry consists exclusively in the enjoyment of social pleasures. As for these pleasures we only taste them to enliven our spirits and we practice Charity according to our individual means as one of the first and holiest of duties. But, far from being the exclusive goal of our Craft, the practice of Charity and the participation in banquets are not in the least sense its most important objects. In a word, Freemasonry is no more a simple charitable institution than the Lodge is a club or casino.

Another misconception exists against which you as a Candidate must be forewarned. It is the hope of temporal advantage, favours and influence to be obtained in social and personal relations. Many a candidate already has deceived himself on these points. Freemasonry does not by any means contemplate the gratifications of such hopes but, aspiring to interests of a higher nature, it abandons to each of its members the care of himself that he may do what his welfare in civil life demands.

The principal motive of many of these who wish to become Freemasons has its source in simple curiosity. The greater it is the more usually is expectation exaggerated. Precisely for this reason it is rarely that Freemasonry is able to gratify it. In all friendship we warn you of this because it may be that what you would find in our midst is not what you seek. In all probability it is an entirely different thing from what you have imagined.

These remarks are only preliminary advice yet they should suffice to allow you to infer what Freemasonry is NOT. In the present our duty is to leave to your own consideration whether it may not yet be something else which may induce you to persist in your determination.

It remains for us to direct your attention to some points of our internal organisation which might perhaps equally have an influence on your decision. In our meetings we only consider the character of the individual without regard to the favour of fortune. We only appreciate the qualities of heart and mind. In the outer world we recognise and respect all distinctions and relations which it has established but in the interior of the Lodge these distinctions fall. There we appear as simple members of one and the same family in the primitive relations of reciprocal fraternity and also in the broad conceptions of filial dependence on God. Our sole and most beautiful title among ourselves is that of "Brothers". But the name only could not suffice wherefore Freemasonry wills that all should have truly fraternal feelings for those who call upon us or whom we call "Brother" without us being influenced by their public station in life being superior or inferior to our own or even if in outside matters our ideas are opposed. Will you then be strong and broad-minded enough to recognise for true Brethren those you may deem beneath you socially or even those who on certain points may be conscientiously opposed to you.

The duties which you must solemnly promise to fulfil have reference only to the arms of our Society. They contain nothing which is contrary to your duty to God, to your especial form of religion, to the State or your domestic or other relations, but they impose on your discretion a faithful and strong attachment to the Craft in general and in particular to the Lodge of which you may become a member. Also the observance of our laws and respect of those who are charged with their application. They exact that in every circumstance of your life you should strive with zeal, with earnestness and with all your strength to cooperate in our efforts to attain the ideal of our Craft and to devote to that Masonic activity which has for its first object your own welfare, as much of your time and faculties as you can give without neglecting other duties. They demand also that without a legitimate hindrance, you will never neglect our meetings and that when it may be necessary to take measures in accord with the spirit of our Institution you will unreservedly help to the best of your ability for as much as it depends on you as well as the others to bring them to a perfect fulfilment.

In truth we have no authority at the present time to give you further information as to the real aim of our Brotherhood but what we have already imparted to you is sufficient for you to be able to conclude that it is in no way contrary to the principles and obligations of a man of upright heart and of cultivated mind but that, on the contrary, it is worthy in every respect of his cooperation. Still, we cannot hide from you that for the various sacrifices that Freemasonry claims from its members it offers in exchange no compensation or enjoyment, except to those who, in their inner being feel impelled to labour towards their own moral improvement and that of all with whom they are brought into contact.

Finally, we warn you that admission to our Craft not only entails expenses for entering fees but also for the maintenance of the objects belonging to the Society which are covered by subscriptions levied.

Tell us whether you are single or married and, if so, whether there is any possible fear that your consort may take umbrage at your participation in a Society whose mysteries you will be forbidden to reveal to her? For were it so, your request would be refused because we attach too great a value to conjugal peace to be able to accept later the reproach of having contributed by your admission to disturb the tranquillity of your family. The same refusal would be given should your religion oblige you to compound with your conscience to be able to join us.