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THE MASTER'S PIECE.

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In the olden time it was no easy matter for a man to become a Freemason. He had to win the right by hard work, technical skill, and personal worth. Then, as now, he had to prove himself a free-man of lawful age and legitimate birth, of sound body and good repute, to be eligible at all. Also, he had to bind himself to serve under rigid rules for seven years, his service being at once a test of his character and a training for his work. If he proved incompetent or unworthy he was sent away.

The rules by which an Apprentice pledged himself to live, as we find them in the Old Charges, were very strict. He had first to confess his faith in God, vowing to honour the Church, the State, and the Master under whom he served, agreeing not to absent himself from the service of the Order, save with the license of the Master. He must be honest and upright, faithful in keeping the secrets of the Craft and the confidence of his fellows. He must be obedient to the Master without argument or murmuring, respectful to all Freemasons, avoiding uncivil speech, free from slander and dispute. Such was the severerule under which the Apprentice learned the art and secrets of the Craft.

After seven years of study and discipline, either in the Lodge or at the Annual Assembly, where Awards were usually made, he presented his "MASTERPIECE" - some bit of stone or metal carefully carved, for the inspection of the Master; saying, "Behold my experience" - by which he meant the sum of his experiments. As an Apprentice he had spoiled many a bit of stone; he had dulled the edge of many a tool; he had spent laborious nights and days, and the whole was in that tiny bit of work. His MASTERPIECE was carefully examined by the Masters assembled; and if it was approved he was made a Master Mason, entitled to take his kit of tools and go out as a workman, a Master and Fellow of his Craft - not however until he had selected a Mark by which his work could be identified, and renewed his vows to the Order.

Masonry was not invented; it grew. Today it unfolds its wise and good and beautiful truth in three noble and impressive degrees, and no man can take them to heart and not be ennobled and enriched by their dignity and beauty. The first lays emphasis upon that fundamental righteousness without which a man is not a man, but a medly of warring passions - that purification of heart which is the basis alike of life and religion. The second degree lays stress upon the culture of the mind, the training of its faculties in the quest of knowledge, without which man remains a child. The Third seeks to initiate us, symbolically, into the eternal life, making us victors over death before it arrives. The First is the Degree of Youth, the Second the Degree of Manhood, the Third the consolation and conquest of Old Age, when the evening shadows fall and the Eternal World and its unknown adventure draw near.

What then, for each of us today, is meant by the MASTER'S PIECE? Is it simply a quaint custom handed down from our ancient brethren, in which we learn how an Apprentice was made a Master of his Craft? It is that indeed, but much more. Unless we have eyes to see a double meaning ~~in~~ everywhere in Masonry, a moral application and a spiritual suggestion, we see little or nothing. But if we have eyes to see, it is always a parable,

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an allegory, a symbol; and the Master's Piece of olden times becomes an emblem of that upon which every man is working all the time and everywhere, whether he is aware of it or not; his character, his personality, by which he will be tested and tried at the last. Character, as the word means, is something carved, something wrought out of the raw stuff and hard material of life. All we do, all we think, goes into the making of it.

No one of us is strong enough not to need the companionship of good men, and the consecration of great ideals. Here lies perhaps the deepest meaning and value of Masonry. It is a fellowship of men seeking goodness; and to yield ourselves to its influence, to be drawn into its spirit and quest, is to be made better than ourselves.

MASTER'S

Amid such influences each of us his making his ~~MASTERS~~PIECE. God is all the time refining, polishing, with strokes now tender, now terrible. That is the meaning of pain, sorrow, death. It is the chisel of the Master cutting the rough stone. How hard the mallet strikes! But the stone becomes a pillar, and arch, perhaps an altar emblem. The masterpiece of life, at once the best service to man and the fairest offering to God, is a pure, faithful, heroic, beautiful Character.

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THE CHARGE BEFORE LEAVING.  
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BRETHREN :

You are now to quit this sacred retreat of friendship and virtue, to mix again with the world. Amidst its concerns and employments forget not the duties you have heard so frequently inculcated and forcibly recommended in this Lodge. Be diligent, prudent, temperate, discreet. Remember that around this altar you have promised to befriend and relieve every brother who shall need your assistance. Remember that you have promised to remind him, in the most tender manner, of his failings, and aid his reformation; to vindicate his character when wrongfully traduced: suggest, in his behalf, the most candid and favourable circumstances. Is he justly reprehended? Let the world observe <sup>how</sup> Masons love one another.

These generous principles are to extend further. Every human being has a claim upon your kind offices. Do good unto all. Recommend it more especially to the household of the faithful.

By diligence in the duties of your respective callings; by liberal benevolence and diffusive charity; by constancy and fidelity in your friendships, discover the beneficial and happy effects of this ancient and honourable institution. Let it not be supposed that you have here laboured in vain, and spent your strength for naught; for your work is with the Lord and your recompense with your God.

Finally, brethren, be ye all of one mind; live in peace, and may the God of love and peace delight to dwell with and bless you!

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A "Charge to the Initiate" of 1735.

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You are now admitted, by the unanimous Consent of our Lodge, a Fellow of our most Antient and Honourable Society; Antient, as having subsisted from times immemorial, and Honourable, as tending in every Particular to render a Man so, that will be but conformable to its glorious Precept. The greatest Monarchs in all Ages, as well of Asia and Africa as of Europe, have been encouragers of the Royal Art; and many of them have presided as Grand Masters over the Masons in their respective Territories, not thinking it any lessening to their Imperial Dignities to level themselves with their Brethren in Masonry, and to act as they did.

The World's great Architect is our Supreme Master, and the unerring Rule he has given us is that by which we work. Religious Disputes are never suffered in the Lodge; for as Masons we only pursue the Universal Religion or the Religion of Nature. This is the Cement which unites men of the most different Principles in one sacred band, and brings together those which were the most distant from one another.

There are three general Heads of Duty which Masons ought always to inculcate, namely, to God, our Neighbours, and Ourselves. To God, in never mentioning His Name but with that Reverential Awe which Becomes a Creature to bear to his Creator, and to look upon him always as the SUMMUM BONUM which we came into the world to enjoy; and according to that view to regulate all our Pursuits.

To our Neighbours, in acting upon the Square, or doing as we would be done by. To Ourselves, in avoiding all Intemperances and Excesses, whereby we may be rendered incapable of following our Work, or led into Behaviour unbecoming our laudable Profession, and in always keeping within due bounds, and free from all Pollution.

In the State a Mason is to behave as a peaceable and dutiful Subject, conforming cheerfully to the Government under which he lives. He is to pay a due deference to his Superiors, and from his Inferiors he is rather to receive Honour with some reluctance, than to extort it. He is to be a Man of Benevolence and Charity, not sitting down contented while his Fellow Creatures, but much more his Brethren, are in Want, when it is in his power (without prejudicing himself or Family) to relieve them.

In the Lodge he is to behave with all due decorum, lest the Beauty and Harmony thereof should be disturbed or broke. He is to be obedient to the Master and presiding Officers, and to apply himself closely to the Business of Masonry, that he may sooner become a Proficient therein, both for his own ~~own~~ Credit, and for that of the Lodge. He is not to neglect his own necessary Avocations for the sake of Masonry, nor to involve himself in Quarrels with those who through Ignorance may speak evil of, or ridicule it. He is to be a Lover of the Arts and Sciences, and to take all opportunities of improving himself therein. If he recommends a Friend to be made a Mason, he must vouch him to be such as he really believes will conform to the said duties, lest by his Misconduct at any time the Lodge should pass under some evil Imputations. Nothing can prove more shocking to all faithful Masons than to see any of their Brethren profane or break through the Sacred Rules of their Order, and such as can do it they wish had never been admitted.