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**THE MADRAS MASTERS' LODGE, No. 4487**  
**Installation Meeting 19th February 1932.**  
**Inaugural Address of Wor. Bro. H. W. Barker, P.D.G.W. (Madras).**

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**Some thoughts on**  
**The Charges**  
**of a**  
**Freemason**  
**extracted from**  
**the Antient Records of Lodges beyond Seas**  
**and of those in**  
**England, Scotland and Ireland.**

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Each member of this Lodge <sup>as</sup> being a Past Master is very familiar with the Summary of the Antient Charges and Regulations, that forms the first part of the preface of the Book of Constitutions, so familiar that many of you could recite them with letter perfection, if asked to do so by the Master of your Mother Lodge, with very little notice, but I doubt if the majority of us are at all familiar with the second part of the preface, viz: "The Charges of a Freemason."

The Charges are six in number and the sixth head is divided into six sub-heads and concludes with a general charge. It is with some aspects of the sixth Charge that I shall deal chiefly but I have a few thoughts to put before you of the earlier charges.

**The First Charge**

The first Charge, which is concerning God and Religion, contains the sentence "Let a man's religion or mode of worship be what it may, he is not excluded from the order, provided he believes in the glorious Architect of Heaven and Earth and practise the sacred duty of morality." The far-reaching effect of this is more forcibly brought home to the Brethren who have the privilege to be members of a Lodge in India than to our Brethren in Western Countries. It is indeed a happy fact, to which every Freemason in India can testify, that Freemasonry does in very truth unite in bonds of fraternal affection men of every race, creed and caste.

In my personal experience Freemasonry has been the foundation of nearly every friendship that I have had the good fortune and pleasure to make with Indians of various creeds and castes; friendships that, I believe, are reciprocal and which would never have been made but for meetings "on the square."

**The Second Charge.**

The second Charge enlarges on the instruction given in our Ceremonies that as Masons we are to be peaceful subjects and never to be concerned in plots or conspiracies against the peace and welfare of the nation but are to conform to every lawful authority. It is, I think, beyond dispute that in these distressful days of acute differences in politics the general body of Freemasons have been loyal supporters of authority and that without prejudice to our determination to promote the prosperity of our country and to do what we believe to be in the best interests of the peoples of the land we live in.

Even when our differences of opinion have not been readily reconcilable, we have been able "to agree to differ" without wrath and rancour and without saying or doing anything that may hinder brotherly love and good offices to be continued.

The broad principles of the relation between Masons and T.G.A.O.T.U. and between Masons and those in worldly authority are dealt with in the first two charges, the remaining charges deal more particularly with the detailed duties of men as freemasons.

### **The Third Charge.**

The third Charge contains the often quoted sentence "From antient times no master or fellow could be absent from his Lodge, especially when warned to appear at it, without incurring a severe censure, unless it appeared to the master and wardens that pure necessity prevented him."

I am afraid this charge must be considered a council of perfection and that we must accept as a legitimate excuse for non-attendance the plea of a brother that he is "indisposed," even though it may mean that he is not disposed to attend rather than that he is unwell. For my part I would not treat so leniently an officer of a Lodge and I would emphasise the injunction in the Address to the Wardens in the Installation Ceremony that every officer by his acceptance of office pledges himself to a faithful discharge of the duties thereof as well as to a regular and prompt attendance, except when illness or the pressing necessity of his public or private avocation may literally prevent it.

### **The Fourth Charge.**

I am afraid that the first part of the next charge, which opens with "All preferment among masons is grounded upon real worth and personal merit only, . . . . . therefore no master or warden is chosen by seniority, but for his merit" has come to be "more honoured in the breach than in the observance" and that in our Lodges promotion is made not infrequently on more than the grounds of seniority of a brother, either in length of membership or in his status outside the bounds of freemasonry. I would appeal to members of this Lodge to use their influence in their private Lodges to see that this charge is not overlooked, at least to the extent of seeing that a Brother is not given preferment unless he has real worth and personal merit within Freemasonry.

This charge goes on to refer to the qualifications of a fellow-craft and I would use this as a peg on which to hang a reminder that the several degrees are not to be communicated indiscriminately but are to be conferred according to merit and ability. I feel that it would be a benefit if the conferring of the second and third degrees were not allowed to be a matter of routine at intervals of a month but if longer intervals were imposed and a young mason made to feel that he had indeed to make some progress in masonic knowledge before he was qualified to become first a fellow-craft and later a master mason.

### **The Fifth Charge.**

The management of the Craft in working is dealt with in the fifth Charge, of which I have chosen for comment the words "None shall discover envy at the prosperity of a brother." It is not unknown in this District and I have no doubt the same applies to others for this charge to be forgotten.

and occasionally one hears of a Brother's staying away from his Lodge or even withdrawing from it because of envy of the promotion of some other. I venture to point out that it is our duty as Past Masters to invite such a brother to ask himself whether he has worked and acted to his full capacity and personal merit as a member of our antient and honourable fraternity.

### The Sixth Charge.

The six sub-headings into which the sixth Charge is divided all deal with the required behaviour of a mason in different places and under various circumstances. The whole charge is of so much importance in the daily life of a Free and Accepted Mason that all of it should be well known to every member of the Craft and I suggest that the members of this Lodge should use their influence in the Lodges of which they are members to ensure that it is read in open Lodge at least once in every year.

I will now enlarge on some parts of this Charge. Under the third sub-head "Behaviour when Brethren meet without strangers, but not in a Lodge formed" there is written..... "without encroaching upon each other, or derogating from that respect which is due to any brother, were he not a mason, for though all masons are, as brethren, upon the same level, yet masonry takes no honour from a man that he had before; nay, rather it adds to his honour, especially if he has deserved well of the brotherhood, who must give honour to whom it is due and avoid all all manners." I have chosen this for comment because I feel sure that failure to act up to the injunction is a potential source of danger to the Craft.

It is beyond dispute that at times there has been an influx to a particular Lodge because it was known that a highly placed individual or Officer was a member of it and I am afraid that in some cases the sudden zeal for Freemasonry has been based on the unworthy hope that fellow membership may provide a means of access to him, and of possible social or material gain thereby. Let us remember that it would be as unmasonic for such a highly placed Brother to carry the equality, on which he and we are proud to meet in Lodge, into his public or private avocation as it would be for us to attempt to claim the personal access to or intercourse with him outside the Lodge that we are privileged to have within it and that it would be as improper and unmasonic of him to grant a material favour on the basis of a masonic acquaintance as it would be for a Brother to solicit it.

Failure on the part of misguided Brethren to realise the scope of this charge has caused some highly placed Brethren to withdraw from active participation in Freemasonry in this District and, to my personal knowledge, the fear of being asked for improper favours on the strength of a Masonic friendship has prevented several good men and true, who are fully imbued with the true principles of Freemasonry, from being numbered as Brothers amongst us.

It is a matter of much concern that every brother shall clearly understand not only what privileges membership of the Order confers but also the limitation of such privileges. It must do ultimate harm to the Craft if the right men withdraw or fail to come in because of the possible importunities of a few misguided brethren.

Under the sixth sub-head you will find:

"..... and if he is in want you must relieve him if you can.....  
But you are not charged to do beyond your ability....."

Our pride in our Masonic Charities sometimes leads Brethren and probably even to a much larger degree potential brethren and people outside the bounds of Freemasonry to look upon the Order as some sort of a Sick and Dividend Society. As for some years a member of the Allowances Committee of the Board of General Purposes of District Grand Lodge it has been forced on me the unwholesome degree to which, in some cases, the relatives, even to the  $n^{\text{th}}$  degree, of a deceased Brother appear to think not only that to ask is to receive but that they are entitled to demand help as a right.

It is our privilege and our duty to help a Brother in distressed circumstances and particularly to care for the widows and children of Freemasons, when in need, but with the position reversed the fact that a man is, or was, a Mason does not carry any sort of right to demand assistance either from an individual brother or from a Masonic Charity.

I suggest that it is as much a duty of an experienced Past Master to prevent the spread of such mistaken ideas as it is to promulgate the genuine tenets and principles of Freemasonry.

Let me next direct attention to an extract from the conclusion to the Charges, "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." In the address to the Wor. Master in the Installation Ceremony this injunction is given in these words "to prove to the world the happy and beneficial effects of our ancient Institution." I put it to you that it is an especial privilege of the members of the Lodge, as Past Masters and hence Senior Masons, to be examples to the younger members of the fraternity in this District and, I think, we can best do this by practising outside the Lodge the duties and privileges of Brotherly Love, Relief, and Truth that we are taught in it.

The charges or rules that I have touched on so briefly are like all rules clearer in the statement than in practice. We all know how every-day life blurs the issues of things and blurs the outlines for us, so that it is hard to see clearly but, in a society so tolerant, so comprehensive and all embracing as Masonry, it is all the more essential to the integrity of the Order that such rules as it imposes on its members, should be strictly and religiously adhered to.

I think there is no better definition of a true Freemason, than is to be found in the Fifteenth Psalm (those who know it well will forgive me for quoting it) which gives in the form of question and answer what we must all agree to be the distinguishing characteristics of a really good, Antient, Free and Accepted Mason.

Lord, who shall abide in thy tabernacle? Who shall dwell in thy holy hill?

He that walketh uprightly, and worketh righteousness, and speaketh the truth in his heart.

He that backbiteth not with his tongue, nor doeth evil to his neighbours, nor taketh up a reproach against his neighbour.

In whose eyes a vile person is contemned but he honoureth them that fear the Lord. He that sweareth to his own hurt and changeth not.

He that putteth not out his money to usury, nor taketh reward against the innocent. He that doeth these things shall never be moved.