

SPRIG OF ACACIA

If the All-Seeing Eye is the most ancient and the 47th Problem of Euclid the grandest of the emblems of the Master Mason's Degree, the Sprig of Acacia holds the greatest comfort. Not even the Anchor and Ark as symbols of hope speak to Masons as does the simple sprig of evergreen "which once marked the temporary resting place of the illustrious dead."

Acacia was a symbol long before Freemasonry existed. It is the shittim wood of the Old Testament, the erica or tamarisk at the foot of which the body of the dead Osiris was cast ashore so that, when found, it would rise again.

The Jews have always considered shittim a sacred wood; a symbol of life. Logs of it used in houses sprout long after the tree is destroyed that the beam be made. Everyone is familiar with the evergreen which does not seem to die in cold weather, as do less hardy trees which shed their leaves and sleep through the winter.

Shittim wood was used to construct the table of shewbread, the Tabernacle, the Ark of the Covenant, the sacred furniture of the Temple. Of its boughs, so it has been said, was woven the crown of thorns which the Nazarene wore ...

But if Freemasonry did not make it a symbol, we adopted it as symbolic of our own special Rite and beliefs.

Acacia marked the spot where lay all that was mortal of the Widow's Son. Raised from a dead level to a living perpendicular in the very shade of the acacia, how should the plant not stand for immortality, a life to come, the most blessed hope of man?

In the stately prayer in the Master Mason's Degree we hear, "For there is hope of a tree, if it be cut down, that it will sprout again -" Later we learn of man who "cometh forth as a flower and is cut down" by the scythe of time which gathers him "to the land where his fathers have gone before him."

Where is that land?

Uncounted millions have asked. Freemasonry's reply is that glorious immortality symbolized by the Sprig of Acacia. Its reality is attested by every hope of every man born of woman since the first infant cried the birth cry.

The Sprig of Acacia has another equally beautiful implication, besides that of certainty of spiritual survival. "Faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen." The Sprig of Acacia is not only the emblem of a future life but of faith.

It matters little what faith that it. It is the existence of some faith which is important; the certainty of things not seen. The Mason may be Methodist, Baptist, Spiritualist,

Universalist, Unitarian, Trinitarian, Mohammedan, or Brahmin! He may believe in the orthodox future life of golden streets and milk and honey; his faith may send him to a whole realm of seven planets which with the esoteric Buddhist he must visit in turn; he may believe in the successive planes of Spiritualism or the Nirvana of the Orient - the Sprig of Acacia is at once a symbol of the immortality taught by his faith and of the faith itself.

We cannot prove immortality any more than we can prove God. Proof is the result of logic, and logic is a process of the mind.

Faith is the product of a process of the heart. We cannot reason ourselves into or out of love; we cannot reason ourselves into or out of faith.

The Sprig of Acacia proves nothing - nor tries to. It means everything to him who has the faith. It is Freemasonry's attestation to her children of the certainty with which she regards her trinity of truths:

There is no Plan without a Planner.

That Which Was Lost will at long last be found.

Divine life which is ours can no more die than can Divinity.

The phraseology is the author's. The teachings are Freemasonry's. Their symbol is the little green sprig which Freemasons drop with their tears on the body of a deceased brother in full faith that - where and how we presume not to say, leaving it wholly to the Eye which sees and the Everlasting Arms which enfold - he, even as we, shall live again.

THE LAWS OF FREEMASONRY

Master Masons are obligated to abide by the laws, resolutions, and edicts of the Grand Lodge, the bylaws of the particular lodges of which they are members, and to maintain and support the Landmarks and the ancient usages and customs of the Fraternity.

The written laws, based on the General Regulations and the Old Charges first printed in 1723, are the Constitution and by-laws of the Grand Lodge, its resolutions, regulations, and edicts, and the by-laws of the particular lodge. The Ancient Landmarks are written in some jurisdictions; in others they are a part of the unwritten law.

The General Regulations as set forth in Anderson's Constitutions were adopted shortly after the formation of the Mother Grand Lodge in England. Unquestionably they embodied the laws of Masonry as they were known to the four old lodges which formed the first Grand Lodge and hence have the respectability of antiquity.

In general, the Old Charges are concerned with the relations of the individual brother to his lodge and his brethren; the General Regulations with the conduct of the Craft as a whole. The General Regulations permit their own alteration by Grand Lodge

- the Old Charges do not.

Many civil laws are provided with measures of enforcement and penalties for infringement. Masonic law knows but four penalties: reprimand, definite suspension, indefinite suspension, and expulsion. These penalties for serious infractions of Masonic law may be ordered after a Masonic trial and a verdict of guilty, but mercy is much more a part of Masonic than of civil law. Infractions of Masonic law resulting in trial and punishment are rare, compared to the number of Masons, the vast majority of whom are so willing to obey the laws that enforcement is seldom required.

There is no universality of Masonic law in all jurisdictions. Different latitudes, characters of people, ideas, have all left their marks upon the enactments of our forty-nine Grand Lodges. In the majority of essentials they are one: in some particulars they hold divergent views. Most Grand Lodges adhere to the spirit of the Old Charges, and - so far as modern conditions permit - to the sense of the General Regulations.

Masons desiring to understand the laws by which the Craft is governed and the legal standards by which Grand Lodge measures its laws, resolutions, and edicts should read both the Old Charges and the General Regulations of 1723. The last (thirty-ninth) of these General Regulations reads, "Every Annual Grand Lodge has an inherent Power and Authority to make new Regulations, or to alter these, for the real benefit of this Ancient Fraternity; provided always that the old Landmarks be carefully preserv'd," etc.

The old landmarks or the Ancient Landmarks as we usually term them are thus those foundations of the law of Masonry which are not subject to change. Had the Mother Grand Lodge formulated the Ancient Landmarks, it would have saved much trouble and confusion for Grand Lodges which came after. Apparently the unwritten law of Masonry - the common law - was so well understood and practiced then that it was not thought necessary to codify it.

Masons customarily observe a great body of unwritten law; our ancient usages and customs which are not specified in print. But the Landmarks have been reduced to print and made a part of the written law in many jurisdictions.

The Landmarks bear the same relation to Masonic law in general as the provisions of Magna Carta bear to modern constitutional law. Just as Magna Carta specified some of the inherent rights of men which all governments should respect, so the Landmarks crystallize the inherent characteristic fundamentals which make Freemasonry, and without which the Institution would be something else.

Mackey states that the Landmarks are:

1. The modes of recognition.

2. The division of symbolic Masonry into three degrees.
3. The legend of the third degree.
4. The government of the Fraternity by a Grand Master.
5. The prerogative of the Grand Master to preside over every assembly of the Craft.
6. The prerogative of the Grand Master to grant dispensation for conferring degrees at irregular intervals.
7. The prerogative of the Grand Master to give Dispensations for opening and holding lodges.
8. The prerogative of the Grand Master to make Masons at sight.
9. The necessity for Masons to congregate in lodges.
10. The government of the Craft when congregated in a lodge, by a Master and two Wardens.
11. The necessity that every lodge, when congregated, should be duly tiled.
12. The right of every Mason to be represented in all general meetings of the Craft.
13. The right of every Mason to appeal from his brethren, in lodge convened, to the Grand Master.
14. The right of every Mason to visit and sit in every regular lodge.
15. That no visitor, unknown to the brethren present or some one of them as a Mason, can enter a lodge without first passing an examination according to ancient usage.
16. No lodge can interfere with the business of another lodge.
17. Every Freemason is amenable to the laws and regulations of the Masonic jurisdiction in which he resides.
18. A candidate for initiation must be a man, free-born, un mutilated and of mature age.
19. A belief in the existence of God as the Grand Architect of the Universe.
20. Belief in a resurrection to a future life.
21. A "Book of the Law" constitutes an indispensable part of the furniture of every lodge.
22. The equality of all Masons.
23. The secrecy of the Institution.
24. The foundation of a Speculative science upon an operative art.
25. These landmarks can never be changed.

Compare these with the Landmarks as formulated by a committee and adopted by the Grand Lodge of New Jersey in 1903:

1. Belief in God as the Great Architect and Supreme Ruler of the Universe.
2. The acceptance of the revealed Word of God as the rule and guide for our faith and practice, and its visible presence in every lodge.
3. The Grand Master is elected by the Craft and holds office until his successor is duly installed. He is the ruler of the Craft and is, of right, the presiding officer of every assemblage of Masons as such. He may, within his jurisdiction, convene a lodge at any time or place and do Masonic work therein; may create lodges by his warrant, and arrest the warrant of any lodge. He may suspend, during his pleasure, the operation of any rule or regulation of Masonry not a "Landmark." He may suspend the installed officers of any lodge and reinstate them at pleasure and is not answerable for his acts as Grand Master. He may deputize any brother to do any act in his absence which he himself might do if present.
4. A Masonic lodge must have a Master and two Wardens, and when convened for Masonic work must be duly tiled.
5. No person can be made a Mason unless he be a man free- born, of mature and discreet age, of good character and reputation and having no maim or defect in his body that may render him incapable of learning the art or of being advanced to the several degrees, nor unless he apply for admission without solicitation and take upon himself the Masonic obligations. Nor can he be admitted to membership in a Masonic lodge except upon a secret ballot by the brethren of that lodge.
6. Masons, as such, are equal; possess the right to visit every lodge or assembly of Masons where their presence will not disturb the peace and harmony of the same, and to appeal to the General Assembly of Masons, or its substitute, the Grand Lodge, whenever aggrieved by any act of a lodge.
7. The Master of a lodge, before his election as such, must have served as a Warden. He and the Wardens are elected by the members of the lodge, but hold their offices by virtue of the warrant of the Grand Master, until their successors have qualified. They are his representatives in the lodge, and are not, therefore, responsible to the lodge for their official acts, nor can they be tried or disciplined by the lodge during their term of office.
8. Every Mason, for Masonic purposes, is subject to the jurisdiction of the lodge within whose Jurisdiction he resides.
9. The legend of the third degree; the means of recognition; the methods of conferring degrees; the obligations of those degrees and the ballot of every brother are and must continue to be inviolably secret.
10. Ancient Craft Masonry includes only the Entered Apprentice, Fellowcraft, and Master Mason degrees.

With these as a foundation, the Old Charges for precedent, the first General

Regulations for organic law, Grand Lodges write and adopt their constitutions and by-laws and particular lodges write and adopt their by-laws, which are usually subject to approval by Grand Lodge, a Grand Lodge Committee, or the Grand Master. Grand Masters, ad interim, issue edicts and make decisions; often these are later incorporated by the Grand Lodge into the written law of the jurisdiction. All of these together, except where they conflict (as some of the early General Regulations necessarily conflict with later enactments made to supersede them) form the legal structure of Freemasonry.

Undeniably it is much looser than the similar body of law for the government of a nation. If Masonic law were interpreted wholly by the letter - as is necessarily the case in civil law - the government of the Craft might often be as loose as its statutes. But as a matter of fact, the Craft is well governed. Its ancient usages and customs so soon win their way into the hearts of new brethren that there is a great resistance to any attempt to change the old order, unless necessity shows that it is inescapable. Masons much prefer to whisper good counsel to an erring brother than to subject him to Masonic trial.