

On The Threshold
Grand Lodge of Ancient, Free and Accepted Masons of Maryland

What This Booklet Means To You

You are given this booklet because your petition for the Degrees of Freemasonry has been approved by the Lodge to which you made application.

You are "On The Threshold"—standing outside, waiting to get in. What is it all about? This booklet contains answers to some of the questions that are naturally in your mind. Read it; study it; ponder it. When you do so, you will learn something about the purpose and the general structure of Freemasonry. *Make* time to familiarize yourself with the material in this booklet; then you will know better what to expect and what will be expected of you. You are going to start on a course of instruction in the building of character. The lessons which will be imparted to you will have more meaning to you when you have studied this booklet than they would have without that study.

As you progress in Freemasonry, you will be given other booklets—one after you have **received** each of the three Degrees. Those booklets have been written with just one purpose in mind—to help you to absorb the real meaning of the teachings of Freemasonry and to emphasize the responsibilities which you are going to assume.

Realize this basic *fact*: You are about to become a member of a unique, world-wide institution which believes whole-heartedly in the Fatherhood of God, in the immortality of the Soul, in the Brotherhood of Man, and in the fundamental principles of high character— honor, truth, and justice.

What you will get out of Freemasonry will depend largely on yourself—on the spirit and attitude which you bring to it and on your determination to profit from the lessons which you will learn from it. You can help to put yourself into the right attitude "On the Threshold" of your Masonic career by a thoughtful study of this booklet.

On The Threshold

You have been honored by the fact that the members of the Lodge to which you made application have unanimously approved your petition. You are now a candidate for the First Degree. You have been investigated by the members of a Committee who called on you and talked with you—and talked with others who know you.

You filled out—in your own handwriting— the petition which was presented to you. You signed that petition. You take full responsibility for all the statements you made. Recall some of them now.

- (1) *You assured the Lodge* that in making your petition you were not influenced by any improper solicitation on the part of any of your friends or of anyone else. Freemasonry *never* solicits any man to become a member.
- (2) *You assured the Lodge* that you were not asking for admission to Freemasonry because you expected to get some personal advantage and that you had no selfish motives of any kind in mind. Freemasonry will not help you to make money.
- (3) *You assured the Lodge* that you were prompted by a genuine desire for knowledge and were resolved to render service to your fellowmen. Freemasonry is primarily an education in how to live and

how to help live.

(4) *You assured the Lodge* that you are a firm believer in the existence of God. Freemasonry is built on the Fact of God.

(5) *You assured the Lodge* that you would cheerfully conform to the long-established usages and customs of Freemasonry. There is not one thing in those usages and customs that conflicts in the slightest degree with the duties you owe to your God, to your country, to your family, or to your friends.

By filling out the petition and signing **it**, you thus assumed certain obligations and responsibilities, and you assumed them thoughtfully and deliberately. You are about to enter into a relationship which you dare not take lightly. You are going to engage in serious business.

Resolve, therefore, to keep your mind open. Make a real effort to take in the meaning of what you will hear and see. Be assured that every word and act has a meaning. You will be given instructions, but it is your responsibility to *think*, so that you may take in the meaning of it all. When you are admitted to the Lodge, you will stand in a special and peculiar relationship to the members of that Lodge and to all Masons everywhere. The Lodge will become a home to you—a place where you will find opportunities to serve the members, to serve God, and to serve humanity. You will start on a study of moral principles—a study which you can continue to the end of your life without exhausting the rich possibilities of Freemasonry.

Here are a few practical suggestions you should take to heart right now and especially before you come to the Lodge for initiation into the First Degree.

(1) Come clean in body. Think of such cleanness as an outward sign of the absolute honesty of your intentions.

(2) Come with a clean and a clear mind. Divest yourself of distracting influences, so that nothing will divert you from the lessons that are going to be imparted to you in the Lodge. Determine to lay aside prejudices of all kinds.

(3) Come with a pure heart. Free yourself from hatreds and animosities. If you know that you have wronged someone, try honestly right now to make amends. Put all evil thoughts out of your mind.

(4) Come in a prayerful spirit. Perhaps you do not make it a daily habit to pray to God. If you do not, make it a point to pray before you come to the Lodge for initiation. Ask God— simply and honestly—to bless you in what you are about to do and to give you wisdom of heart, strength of purpose, and steadfastness of mind to enable you to get the most out of the experiences you are going to have.

(5) Finally, come with complete confidence in the honesty of your intentions. Ask yourself again whether it is still your sincere desire to be helped and strengthened in your search for the true, the right, the good, and the just. ‘When you are “On The Threshold” and before you cross it, remind yourself that there is no place in Freemasonry for the half-hearted or unstable man.

The moral lessons you are going to learn in Freemasonry are taught largely by means of symbols. A symbol is something that stands for or represents or recalls something else. Thus, the Flag of the United States is the symbol of all the freedoms that we hold dear. A handshake is a symbol of friendliness and goodwill. Everywhere you are surrounded by symbols. In school, you learned directly from books or from teachers. Freemasonry, however, follows the ancient method of teaching by symbols. What you will hear and see has a surface meaning; but always beneath the surface are deeper meanings which are intended to convey lessons in the building of character. Before you start, you need to understand that

there is nothing of a light or trifling nature about Freemasonry. If you have been told differently, you have been misled. There is a profound meaning in every aspect of what you will see and hear and what you will be asked to do.

What Is Freemasonry?

Many of the factors which lie at the roots of life are hard — indeed impossible — to define. How could anyone give a definition of the love you have for those who are near and dear to you by the ties of human relationship? How put into words the affection you feel for your friends? Where will you find words to express your reverence for God?

Over the years hundreds of thoughtful Masons have tried to put down the essence of Freemasonry, but the spirit eludes mere words. There is a time-honored sentence which has come down to us from English Freemasonry of the long ago: “Freemasonry is a system of morality, veiled in allegory and illustrated by symbols.” You can learn some things from that sentence.

(1) Freemasonry is a system—something carefully thought out, not something haphazard. (2) It deals with morality; it engages constantly in the effort to inspire and elevate your moral nature. (3) It is “veiled in allegory”; that is, its real meaning lies behind an external act or a series of acts. Many of the parables in the Bible are allegories. John Bunyan’s book, *Pilgrim’s Progress*, is an allegory. It is a story with a meaning; so, too, Freemasonry is a story with a deep meaning. (4) That meaning is illustrated by symbols, so that the meaning will come to life in your mind and heart.

Here is another attempt to define Masonry. It comes from a German encyclopedia published in 1900. It is a long sentence, and you will need to read it thoughtfully. When you do so, you will get a right conception of the institution of which you are soon to become a part.

‘Freemasonry is the activity of closely united men who, employing symbolical forms borrowed principally from the mason’s trade and from architecture, work for the welfare of mankind, striving morally to ennoble themselves and others, thereby to bring about a universal league of mankind, which they aspire even now to exhibit on a small scale.’

It is a long sentence. Look at it closely. (1) You are told that Freemasonry is activity—not inactivity. It *does* something. (2) It is the activity of closely united men—men whom you are going to meet in the Lodge and with whom you are going to establish relationships. (3) It performs its work through the use of symbols that are drawn from the building trades—tools like the square and the compasses which go far back in time. (4) Its basic purpose is to work for the welfare of all mankind. (5) It seeks to achieve that purpose by emphasizing nobility of character. (5) Its final aim is to bring about peace and harmony—a peace and a harmony which are the very essence of the life of a Masonic Lodge. There is nothing startlingly new to you in these principles of Freemasonry. What Freemasonry seeks to do is to emphasize, with all the dramatic power it possesses, the truth of these principles and to help you to realize them in your daily living.

The Structure Of Freemasonry

So far, you have been thinking about the *internal* truths of Freemasonry. You will want to know something about its *external* aspects.

The Lodge to which you have made application, along with all other Lodges in Maryland, is under the jurisdiction of the Grand Lodge of Maryland, which came into being on April 12, 1783, at Talbot Court-

House, now Easton, Md. All regular Lodges in Maryland are under the Grand Lodge of Maryland. There are 49 Grand Lodges in the United States—one in each state except Alaska and Hawaii, and one in the District of Columbia. When you are admitted as a member of the Lodge to which you submitted your petition, you will become subject not only to the ancient usages and customs of the Fraternity, but also to the Constitution, rules, and regulations of the Grand Lodge of Maryland and to the by-laws of your own Lodge. In all these rules and regulations, let it be said again, there is not one thing that conflicts with any true and honest obligation or responsibility that you have previously assumed.

When you cross the threshold and even before, you will become a participant in a ritual that has come down to us through time. Listen and watch and think. Remain calm and collected. You are going to go through nothing that hundreds of thousands of Masons have not gone through before you. The ceremony is serious throughout, and there is nothing whatever to be feared or to be alarmed about. The Lodge to which you have made application, like every other Lodge in Maryland, has certain officers. They are headed by the Worshipful Master who presides at all meetings. Meetings of Lodges are referred to as “Communications.” The Lodge has other officers— Wardens, Deacons, and Stewards, as well as a Secretary and a Treasurer, together with various Committees which do their share in the work of the Lodge.

As time goes on, you will learn how the Lodge carries on its work. All the time, however, remember that that work has one fundamental purpose—to imbue *you* with the real spirit of Freemasonry, to make *you* aware of its high ideals, and to help *you* and and all other Masons to think and live in accordance with those ideals.

What Freemasonry Is Not

Now that you understand—at least in a small measure—what Freemasonry is and what it is trying to do, you need also to know what it is *not*.

(1) Freemasonry is not a charity. You have been accepted by the Lodge because its members believe that you are well able to take care of your financial responsibilities, including the dues which the Lodge asks you to pay to enable it to carry on its work. Still, it is eternally true that the practice of charity is one of the fundamental principles of Freemasonry. Every Lodge quietly comes to the relief of Masons or their families who have come on hard times. At Cockeysville, Md., you will find the beautiful Masonic Homes, “Bonnie Blink,” which all Masons in Maryland have a part in supporting and which you ought to visit as soon as you can. Freemasonry performs numberless works of charity, but it is not a charitable institution.

(2) Freemasonry is not an insurance organization. It has no plan for insuring its members against old age or need of any kind. It provides no sick benefits; it issues no policies on the lives of its members; it pays no death benefits of any kind. It believes in the principle of insurance, but it confines its help to individual situations when such help becomes necessary. Your part in Masonic charity is far more likely to be that of a contributor to the Lodge funds and assessments for “Bonnie Blink” (included in your dues) than that of a beneficiary.

(3) Freemasonry is not a religion, although it is intensely religious in its spirit. In your petition you stated your belief in the existence of God. Freemasonry is not concerned with your religious affiliation. It never takes the place of organized religion any more than it takes the place of schools or colleges or governments— local, state, and national. The first Constitution of

Freemasonry, which dates back to 1723, says plainly that Masons are “obliged only to that religion in which all men agree, leaving their particular opinions to themselves; that is, to be good men and true, by whatever denominations or persuasions they may be distinguished.” Further than making sure that you believe in God, Freemasonry makes no inquiry into your religious beliefs.

(4) Freemasonry can never be used to promote any political interests. It is not a reform society. It does not engage in political discussions. Its whole influence, however, is on the side of loyalty to the free institutions of our country. Indeed, the Grand Lodge of Maryland has made this official declaration: “Masonry must be opposed to Communism. Self-preservation is the first law of nature, and it must be quite obvious that were Communism to prevail, Masonry would receive the death sentence. Furthermore, Communism is opposed to all of the things which we, as Masons and American citizens, hold dear—the right of free speech, the right of assembly, freedom of conscience, the right of worship as one sees fit. . . . Masonry abhors Communism as being repugnant to its conception of the dignity of the individual personality, destructive of the basic rights which are the Divine heritage of all men, and inimical to the fundamental Masonic tenet of faith in God.”

(5) Finally, Freemasonry is not a secret society in spite of the fact that **it** is often referred to as such. It is a *private* society. It has certain reservations which **it** makes known only to Masons. It establishes close relations among its members, just as you and the members of your family establish close relations. If Freemasonry were actually a secret society, its members and the places where **it** meets would be secret. Such is not the case. It is easy to find out the meeting places of Masonic Lodges. Hundreds of thousands of men are known to be Masons. The proceedings of the Grand Lodge of Maryland are published in book form. The Grand Lodge maintains a Library on the second floor of the Masonic Temple at 225 North Charles Street. Many Lodges have individual libraries. No one knows just how many books on Freemasonry have been written and published, but they run into the tens of thousands. There is nothing secret about the purposes or the aims of Freemasonry. Still, there are some reservations that the institution makes—some things which **it** makes known only to its members. What those things are you will learn as you make progress in Freemasonry. You will be responsible to keep those reservations, when they are made known to you, strictly to yourself.

What Freemasonry Expects Of You

You have been reading about the privileges of Freemasonry—about the honor that comes to any man when he is admitted within its doors. Privileges and opportunities are always coupled with responsibilities and obligations.

Let it be said again that no responsibilities, no obligations which you will assume as a Mason will interfere in the slightest degree with any honest responsibilities that you have assumed or that you are now carrying or will carry. Indeed, many of your present responsibilities are interwoven with the responsibilities you will assume as a Mason. Here are just a few of them.

- (1) You are responsible to act and live in accordance with the teachings of Freemasonry. Do nothing, say nothing that will react against the fraternity and its high and noble principles.
- (2) You are responsible to be loyal to your home, to your loved ones, to your friends, to

your country, and to Freemasonry. You are to have no part in any act or movement which undermines or is disloyal to your land.

(3) You are to understand that Freemasonry is a staunch upholder of liberty, equality, and fraternity for all mankind, as well as for Masons.

(4) You are to realize that Freemasonry stands for the fundamental freedoms of thought, speech, action, and religion and that it stands foursquare against any kind of autocracy that seeks to bind the bodies, the minds, or the souls of men.

(5) You are to free yourself from bigotry, intolerance, and superstition.

(6) You are to develop your friendships, especially with Masons, and to act and live in the spirit of humility, patience, and gentleness, which are the marks of a true gentleman and Mason.

A Prayer

Freemasonry, you will find, begins with prayer and ends with prayer. The best way to end this booklet, which is intended to prepare you for the uplifting experience that lies ahead of you, is to give you part of a prayer by that outstanding Masonic writer and teacher, Dr. Joseph Fort Newton, who departed this life on January 24, 1950. At the time of his death he was Rector of the Church of St. Luke and the Epiphany in Philadelphia. When you enter deeply into the spirit of this invocation, you will be prepared to stand "On The Threshold" and to enter the door of Freemasonry.

"Eternal Father, as the sons of men and Thy children, we gather in a House of Light, erected to Thee and dedicated to Thy Holy Name, humbly invoking Thy blessing. Hallow the Lodge with Thy holiness; overcome our evil with Thy goodness; help us to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly before Thee. Unite our minds to know Thee, our hearts to love Thee, and our hands to serve Thy holy will; that we may be worthy workmen in Thy Temple.

'Make us men of Brotherly Love in an unbrotherly world; give us gentle and skillful hands in the practice of Relief; lead our minds in the quest of Truth—even the truth of Eternal Life in the midst of our fleeting days. Here may youth find Thy consecration, and age Thy consolation.

"Merciful God, to all weakness which our Brothers bear as a burden from the past, make us merciful; to their faults make us forgiving, as we would be forgiven. Teach us to be gentle in our thoughts, just in our dealings, and generous in our judgments.

"May the Spirit of Masonry dwell in us, casting out all envy, all uncleanness, all unkindness. At the end of the day when our labor is done, admit us into the Great White Lodge in the House not made with hands. Amen."