



THE SWORD IN THE CRAFT

By: Unknown

Before the door of all lodges stands a Tyler "with a drawn sword in his hand." Customarily it is a straight blade; such a shining shaft of steel as was carried by Knights of olden times. According to Mackey it should have a snake-like shape. Formerly such swords were the badge of office of the Tyler, so made in allusion to the "Flaming Sword which was placed at the East of the Garden of Eden which turned every way to keep the way of the tree of life."

Properly no Tyler's sword is ever carried in a scabbard; its symbolism requires it to be ever ready at hand to "keep off cowans and eavesdroppers."

Our lectures refer to the sword but twice; we are taught of "the Book of Constitutions Guarded by the Tyler's Sword," and we learn also of the "Sword Pointing to a Naked Heart." "The Book of Constitutions, Guarded by the Tyler's Sword," is a comparatively modern symbol; its introduction has been traced to Webb, about 1800. Its symbolism is rather obscure, the more so that it seems so obvious.

We are told that it "Admonishes us to be ever watchful and guarded in our words and actions, particularly before the enemies of Masonry, ever bearing in remembrance those truly Masonic virtues, silence and circumspection." But the Book of Constitutions is not, in

any sense of the word, a secret work. It was first ordered printed by the Mother Grand Lodge, and a few original copies as well as uncounted reprints of the Old Charges and the General Regulations of 1723 are in existence, to be seen by Mason and profane alike. Obviously, then, it is not the secrecy of the Book of Constitutions which the Tiler's sword guards; neither silence nor circumspection regarding that particular Masonic volume is necessary. Some have read into Webb's symbol the thought that it was intended to express the guardianship of civil liberties (a constitutional government) by the Masonic Fraternity, but this seems rather far fetched. It is a principle of science never to formulate a difficult hypothesis when a simple one explains the facts. Surely it is easier to think that the Tiler's sword admonishes us to brook no changes in our Ancient Landmarks, to be guarded lest our words and actions bring the foundation book of Masonic law into disrepute before the enemies of Masonry, applying the Book of Constitutions as well as to the secrets of Freemasonry "those truly Masonic virtues, silence and circumspection. "The sword pointing to the naked heart" is a symbolical adaptation of an old ceremony not peculiar to Masonry, but used by many orders and secret societies, in which the initiate taking his vows is surrounded by swords with their points resting against his body, ready to pierce him upon the instant if he refuses obedience. The sword is so used at the present time in some of the "higher Degrees" of freemasonry and contemporary engravings of the eighteenth century show swords were once used in some English and many Continental lodges. How this comparatively modern symbol became associated with the "All-Seeing Eye" - which is one of the most ancient symbols know to man, and borrowed by Freemasonry from ancient Egyptian ceremonies - is too long and difficult a study for any but the Masonic student with plenty of time and Masonic sources at hand. The sword appears in the Grand Lodge as the implement of the Grand Sword Bearer, an officer found in most, if not all Grand Lodges. It comes, undoubtedly from the ancient "Sword of State," which seems to have begun in Rome when the lictor carried - as a symbol of authority and power to punish the evil doer - his bundle of rods with an axe inserted. In the middle ages the rods and axe metamorphosed into the naked sword, carried in ceremonial processions before the sovereign as a symbol of his authority and his power over life and death; and his dispensation of swift justice. The custom in England was known at least as early as 1236 when a pointless sword (emblematical of mercy) was carried at the coronation of

Henry III. The second edition of Anderson's Constitutions sets forth, that in 1731 the Grand Master, the Duke of Norfolk, presented to the Grand Lodge of England "The Old Trusty Sword of Gustavus Adolphus, King of Sweden, that was worn next by his successor in war, the brave Bernard, Duke of Saxe-Weimar, with both their names on the blade, which the Grand Master had ordered Brother George Moody (The King's sword cutler) to adorn richly with the arms of Norfolk in silver on the scabbard, in order to be the Grand Master's sword of state in the future."

Brother Moody was later appointed Grand Sword Bearer, so the office has the respectability of an antiquity almost coincident with the formation of the Mother Grand Lodge.

The idea the Grand Sword Bearer carries his implement to protect the Grand Master from enemies seems entirely fanciful; the sword is merely the emblem of his power, the evidence that he is supreme within the Masonic state over which he rules. Early prints of lodge meetings on the Continent show the sword in use in the ceremonies; in this country the sword was never brought into the lodge room even during that era when a sword was as much a necessary article of a gentleman's dress as shoes or gloves. It was then deemed, as now, incompatible with that "Meeting Upon the Level" which is so integral a part of all lodge communications; the sword, either as a weapon, which made its possessor stronger than he who was unarmed, or as a badge of rank or distinction; was held to have no place in the lodge. From this development the almost universal custom of the Tyler requesting all military men in uniform ;to leave their swords without the lodge before entering. This rule, or custom, comparatively little known in this country because few military men in times of peace go to lodge in full uniform, was often broken during the recent war when soldiers clanked up and down lodge rooms with the arms of their profession at their sides. But it is as Masonically inconsistent to wear a sword in lodge as to appear therein without an Apron. It goes without saying that the Tyler's Sword is wholly symbolic; whether it was always so or not is a matter lost in the mists which shroud ancient history. In the operative days of Masonry the workmen upon a Cathedral held meetings in the house erected for their convenience - the lodge. Operative Masons possessed secrets of real value to the craftsmen; the Master knew the geometrical method of "trying the square;" all those who had submitted their Master's Pieces and satisfied the

Master's of the Craft as to their proficiency received the "Mason's Word," which enabled them to satisfy others, in "foreign countries" (which might be the next town as well as the adjacent nation) of their proficiency as builders. When the beginnings of Speculative Masonry made their appearance, they added, those secrets which only Masons possessed. Naturally, many desired to obtain those secrets. These were divided into two classes; the "eavesdropper," who listened under the eaves of a building and therefore received the droppings from the roof, and the "cowan," or, partially instructed Mason. As early as 1589 (Schaw Manuscript) appears this passage: "That no Master or Fellow of the Craft shall receive any cowans to work in his society or company. nor send none of his servants to work with cowans." Mackey traces the word to Scotland. In Scott's Rob Roy, Allan Inverach says: "She does not value a Cawmil mair as a Cowan." a term of contempt, an uninstructed Mason; i.e. a Mason who builds dry walls without mortar, a "dry-dicker." But there are other possible derivations of the word; for instance, it may have come from an old Swedish word "kujon" meaning a silly fellow, or the French, "conyon," meaning a coward, a base man. The Tyler of the operative lodge may well have been armed with a sword for actual defense of himself, or the lodge in which his fellows were meeting, from the encroachment of the cowans who wanted the word and the secret of the square without the necessity of serving a long period as an apprentice and of laboring to produce a satisfactory Master's Piece.

The modern tiler keeps off the cowan and eavesdropper by the simple process of refusing to admit those he does not know; if they still desire to enter the tiled door, they must either be vouched for or request a committee. The Tyler's sword is but the emblem of his authority, as the Gavel is the symbol of that possessed by the Master.

Occasionally a lodge member is a little hurt, perhaps offended, if the Tyler does not know him and demands that some one vouch for him before he is permitted to enter.

"Why, I've been a member of this lodge for fifteen years!" he may say. "Here's my good standing card. You ought to know me!" It is possible that the Tyler "ought to know him." But Tilers - even the very best and most experienced Tylers - are just human beings with all the faults of memory which beset us all. Many of us are sure that we know a face and are yet unable to say that we have seen it in a lodge. How much more true this may be of the Tyler, who must see and memorize so many faces!

To be offended or hurt because a Tyler does his duty is merely to say, in effect, "I'd rather you didn't do what you are supposed to than hurt my vanity by failing to remember me!" Not very long ago a Grand Master paid a surprise visit, all unaccompanied, to a small lodge. Their Tyler did not know him. The Master, sent for, to vouch for the distinguished visitor, was highly mortified and said so in lodge. The Grand Master stopped him. "You must not be mortified, my brother," he said. "You are to be congratulated on having a Tyler who knows his duty and does it so well. I commend him to the brethren."

All of which was a graceful little speech, which carried a wholesome lesson on the reality of the authority and the duty represented by the shining blade which no Tyler is supposed to put down while on duty.

No symbol in all Freemasonry but is less than the idea symbolized. The Volume of the Sacred Law, the letter "G," the Square, the Compasses; all symbolize ideas infinitely great than paper and ink, a letter formed of electric lights, or carved from wood, a working tool of metal. Consequently the Tyler's sword (like the sword of state of the Grand Sword Bearer) has a much greater significance, not only to the Tyler but to all Masons, than its use as a tool of defense against an invasion of privacy.

As not all cowans which may beset a lodge come through the Tyler's door, every Master Mason should be, to some extent, a Tyler of his lodge and wear a symbolic Tyler's Sword when on the important task assigned to the committee on petitions.

Some "cowans" slip through the West Gate, are duly and truly prepared, properly initiated, passed and raised; yet, never become real Master Masons. This happens when members of the committee have not heeded the symbolism of the Tyler's sword. All of us know of some members who might better have been left among the profane. They represent the mistaken judgment, first of the committee, then the lodge. Had all used their symbolic Tyler's sword - made as accurate an investigation of the petitioner as the Tyler makes of the would-be entrant through his door - these real "cowans" would not be a drag upon the lodge and the Fraternity.

The "eavesdropper" from without is longer feared. Our lodge rooms are seldom so built that any one may listen to what goes on within. The real "eavesdropper" is the innocent profane who is told more than he should hear, by the too enthusiastic Mason. In the monitorial charge to the entered Apprentice we hear: "Neither are you to suffer your zeal

for the institution to lead you into argument with those who, through ignorance, may ridicule it." The admonition of the emblem of the "Book of Constitutions Guarded by the Tiler's Sword" applies here - we must "be ever watchful and guarded of our words and actions, particularly before the enemies of Masonry." Constructively, if not actively, every profane who learns more than he should of esoteric Masonic work is a possible enemy. Let us all wear a Tyler's sword in our hearts; let us set the zeal of silence and circumspection upon our tongues; let us guard the West Gate from the cowan as loyally as the Tiler guards his door. Only by doing so may the integrity of our beloved Order be preserved, and "the honor, glory and reputation of the Fraternity may be firmly established and the world at large convinced of its good effects." For only by such use of the sword do we carry out its Masonic symbolism. To Masonry the sword is an emblem of power and authority, never of blood or wounds or battle or death. Only when thought of in this way is it consistent with the rest of the symbols of our gentle Craft and wins obedience to the mandates of the Tyler by brotherly love, an infinitely stronger power than strength of arm, point of weapon or bright and glittering steel