

The charge in the Second Degree is not concerned with the enforcement of law by any means other than the force of conscience. It is concerned with our being able to trust one another, and it points out in some detail the difficulty anyone has in being a completely trustworthy person. It is interesting that phrases like square dealing on the level, should have passed into current parlance far beyond the confines of the Craft. Square dealing imports rectitude—a word that itself means squareness, though now almost entirely in a metaphorical sense. Dealing with others “on the level,” although also a can’t or slang phrase, it is well known as the other, and is apt as a physical illustration or not the idea was derived from the plumb rule in its Masonic application, the idea of uprightness, and the characteristics the word connotes, are known to all society.

Square dealing, upright dealing, level dealing; they are all concerned with our relations with other people; objective but benevolent, unimpassioned, and, above all, fair. These are the desiderata the Craft requires.

The underhand, the deceitful, the half-truth, these are ideas which cannot be made to fit such simple tools. They are conceptions that no social person will entertain as a counsel of perfection; where we give way to them is not in the hope that we will be done by as we have done.

And, like most Masonic lessons, the lessons of these three basic implements are easily understood, and uncomplicated, and make for simple perfection in conduct. Perfection, of course, is not really simple at all in practice, but only as an ideal. Most motives for conduct are complex, and few sets of circumstances are simple. But the application of the tools themselves can show what should be done to the physical material.



## THE TONGUE OF GOOD REPORT (New Zealand Craftsman)

One of the things we require of candidates is that the tongue of good report must have been heard in their favor. A well-known novelist, Maxence van der Meersch, whose last book, “The Hour of Love,” was published posthumously and has just appeared in English, uses this striking sentence: “And I was too young and too inexperienced to know that honour and reputation are not always the same thing, and that in fact the former might sometimes demand the sacrifice of the latter.”

There are other opposite expressions which have been used at various times by various people, notably the legal saying that it is not enough that justice should be done, it should also appear (or be apparent) that justice is being done. It is said that "Rumour is a lying jade," that "Who steals my purse steals trash . . ." and so on.

The requirement is not so frequently concerned with difficult cases as with the normal case, where it is required that a man shall be in good standing among his fellows, is generally known and believed to be a good man. If he has been slandered it is often possible to refute the slander. If he is generally known on evidence accepted by the community to be a bad man, the onus is on him to try to refute the imputation. There have been many cases where men have been under a cloud, as the expressive saying is, for many years; sometimes a cloud voluntarily assumed; and have in the end rehabilitated their good name. But in general terms, and in most cases, it is enough that a man be of good repute.

Nevertheless the implications of the result of calumny, of loose criticism and of the ill-considered expression of misjudgment, often indulged in irresponsibly and without any intention of doing a man any real harm, can be like the circles from the stone tossed into the pond. Often it is simply the result of "playing the man instead of the ball"; often the result of jealousy or envy; real vindictiveness is probably quite rare. Nevertheless, great harm can be done by criticism which is not inspired by malice.

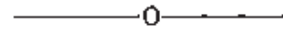
And so, when the tongue of good report has been heard, and the candidate has been received among us, we find we are subject to more than a few ritual exhortations to preserve and safeguard his character; any student of the ritual will remember them.

Not always are these exhortations uppermost in our minds. There must be a few of us who do not, at some time or another, express an unkind or prejudiced opinion, perhaps in a moment of excitement, which we bitterly regret later. And for the sake of improving a good story, for sensationalism or for some other reason, we can get into the habit of attacking other people's characters to the point where not their characters but our own sustain the harm. The development of such a habit in a normally kind and reasonable person is insidious and warping, and once recognized, a cause of shame and regret.

In some ways this is an age of talk. A moving picture some years ago showed a sequence of newspaper headlines and broadcast-

ing studios to demonstrate the futility of talk, of words, words, words, in international affairs. But words are powerful; they can do good or evil, for they form opinions. There is no need to regard the world through rose-colored spectacles — all men are compounded of good and evil, but all men are entitled to be dealt with in mercy, and with justice. The most frequent, and most un-Masonic trap into which we can fall is to confuse the action with the man. Because we disagree with the action, we tend to attack the motive. That is not objective criticism, it is personal. If we disagree with an action which concerns or affects us it is the action we should condemn, and be prepared to question its implications as we see them. The chances are that it is the result of worthy motives; worthy of being judged on its merits.

In this as in so many other spheres the rules of the Craft are much the same as the rules of society at large. But if a Freemason disregards or neglects them, his fault is greater.



## **PROMISE YOURSELF**

- “To close the door to an unhappy past and start life anew.
- To try Love’s way in everything, and let jealousy and hatred to go out of your life.
- To put beauty into every day — beautiful thoughts, beautiful deeds, deeds, beautiful work.
- To be self-reliant and ready to assume responsibility.
- To take time for study and self-improvement, no matter what your age.
- To learn to enjoy things without owning them.
- To talk health, happiness and prosperity, instead of disease, misery and failure.
- To hold your manhood, your character, above wealth or position.
- Try to appeal to the best in others; to encourage and help them not criticize and dishearten.
- To consider the importance of rest and recreation as well as concentration and application in other words, to live a balanced life.
- To hold in your mind the things which you wish to come true in your life; to think of yourself as you would like to be.
- To make your life a masterpiece.”

— Author Unknown