

UNAFFILIATED

by: Unknown

The most dramatic legend in history concerns Ahasuerus, a doorkeeper in the Palace of Pontius Pilate, who offered insult to Jesus as He Struggled under the burden of His Cross on the way to Calvary. Jesus turned to him and said:

“Tarry thou Till I come!” Ever since, the Wandering Jew has tarried in the world, unable to die. All knowledge is his; all ambitions are fulfilled; all pleasures are satisfied. He has done all that may be done; seen all that may be seen; experienced all that the world has to offer, save one thing only - he cannot die! Accident, injury, disease touch him not; a frightful fate, to long for death and rest, and be compelled to live and wander!

Unaffiliates are the Wandering Jews of Masonry, that pitiful group of Master Masons who are neither the quick nor the dead. They are, yet they belong not. They know; yet they cannot use their knowledge. They are of, but not in, the Order.

Their penalty is self-inflicted; theirs is the sin of indifference; worst of all, they know not all their punishment or they would end it!

As a universal factor in Freemasonry, lodge membership dates only to 1717, when the Mother Grand Lodge was formed. There were some continuing lodges before the Grand Lodge in which brethren held membership but most were like the occasional, emergent sporadic, temporary lodges convened for any building operation. For the time being all Master Masons attended these. When the labor was over, the Master Masons went their several ways, and the lodge in which they had met, was no more.

As a consequence of the stabilization of lodges as continuing organizations, resulting from the formation of Grand Lodges, lodge membership became an important matter. It is distinct from the state of being a Master Mason. No man may belong to a lodge unless he is a Master Mason, but he may be a Master Mason without holding membership in any lodge. Indeed, it is possible that man be made a Master Mason without ever being a member of a lodge. Thus, a Grand Master may convene an Emergent Lodge to make a Master Mason “at sight.” This brother may be unable to pass the ballot for affiliation in any lodge. Such a one would be a Master Mason even though he never belonged to any regular lodge, the Emergent Lodge in which he was made going out of existence. as it came into it, at the pleasure and will of the Grand Master.

With membership as an inalienable right of the newly made Master Mason - a “right” since he becomes a member of the lodge in which he was elected to receive the degrees, and as soon as he is Raised a Master Mason - came also a duty, inevitable accompaniment of all right; that of continuing a member of a lodge. This was recognized in the formation of the Grand Lodge in 1717, if it can be believed that the Constitutions of 1723 truly represent the state of the law and the beliefs of the brethren of the Mother Grand Lodge six years before their first

publication in print. In the description of a lodge, the Constitutions say: "Every brother ought to belong to one," and later: "in ancient times no Mason or Fellow could be absent from it, especially when warned to appear at it, without incurring a severe censure, until it appeared to the Master and Wardens that pure necessity hindered him." The modern Constitution of England provides that "a brother who is not a subscribing member of some lodge (i.e., affiliated with it) shall not be permitted to visit any one lodge in the town, or where he resides more than once during his secession from the Craft." A similar rule is found in many American Grand Jurisdictions - which have been a solid unit frowning upon the state of being unaffiliated, because if a non-affiliated could visit as often as he pleased, he might argue "why pay dues to any lodge, when I can attend when I wish without it?"

The one visit to each lodge in "the town or place where he resides" is permitted that the non-affiliate may be able to judge for himself whether any of the lodges he visits are such as he may wish to apply to for affiliation.

The unaffiliated Masons, when remaining so for any length of time (except in a very unusual case, of which more in a moment) works a real injury to the ancient Craft. Any man who receives and gives not is a liability, not an asset, to that institution from which he takes.

An unaffiliated Mason in possession of a demit or certificate of transfer, or even a mere certificate that his dues have been paid (sometimes given a brother who has been dropped N.P.D. and been refused re-affiliation, after a year, with the lodge that dropped him) is, technically "in good standing." He owes no money to any lodge. He is not under charges. He has not been censured, suspended, or expelled. He is a member of the Fraternity, although he belongs to no Masonic family.

The old saying, "Once a Mason, always a Mason" is true in the sense that no act of any man or any body of men, no Grand Master or Grand Lodge can release a brother from his Masonic obligations. Once given, there can be no going back. We may expel him for un-Masonic conduct, visit him with the greatest punishment we know - Masonic death - but we cannot release him from his pledged word. How much less, then, can it be considered that the unaffiliate (who has committed no crime, although his state is considered a Masonic offense) is not bound by his obligations.

But, if he is bound to us by so much, then are we bound to him. The unaffiliated Mason has still all the rights and privileges which inure Masons to Masons, as distinct from lodge members. Of the rights which go with lodge membership he has none. Conversely, he is bound by all his obligations to the Craft as a whole, but not by those which relate only to the lodge in particular, since he has no "lodge in particular."

No Mason would refuse a non-affiliate the right of assistance in peril. We do not ask of a drowning man, "Are you an affiliated Mason? Show me your good standing card!" But the unaffiliated Masons have no right to ask for, and no Mason is foresworn who refuses to give "help, aid or assistance" to the Mason who has voluntarily severed himself from his Fraternal relations to avoid payment of dues to his lodge. No unaffiliated Mason has the right to ask any lodge for assistance.

He has no right of visitation, except as permitted by the Grand Lodge in the Jurisdiction in which he may be. Commonly, as noted above, this is limited to one visit to the lodges in his locality, that he may determine their desirability as a permanent Masonic Home. Like the entered Apprentice and the Fellowcraft, the unaffiliated Mason has no right to a Masonic burial nor may he walk in a Masonic procession.

The unaffiliated Mason is as subject to government by the Order as his affiliated brother. If he commits a Masonic offense, he may be tried by any lodge in the Jurisdiction in which he may be at the time.

Mackey asserts that it follows that a persistently non-affiliated Mason may be tried for the offense of non-affiliation. Doubtless it is true, but it is improbable that a Grand Lodge would push the theory that far. Masonic trials are also Masonic tribulations; non-affiliation, while an offense against Masonic law, is usually held to be a matter of the head and not the heart; in other words, an offense against a regulation, not against Masonic nature. In some situations a willful non-affiliation might be applauded rather than condemned. A brother commits a crime against civil law; he regrets, makes restitution and leaves his home to rehabilitate himself. If permitted to take a demit, on the promise not to attempt affiliation until his brethren are convinced his reformation is complete, he helps his brethren avoid the self-protective measure of a trial and suspension or expulsion. In his status as unaffiliated, he cannot ask for relief from another lodge; he cannot willfully break his promise and affiliate, even with his demit, because the lodge to which he applies will, of course, request particulars as to his character from the lodge from which he demitted! But such instances are extraordinary and exceptional. It is the generality of non-affiliates who are the Wandering Jews of the Order. The vast majority are merely indifferent. Some don't care, because they have not the background, the imagination or the education to take unto themselves the reality of the principles of Masonry. Such cases are usually failures of the investigating committee. Some become indifferent because of too many other interests. They take a demit - or become suspended N.P.D. - "to save paying dues."

We are to blame for a certain proportion of such non-affiliates if we do not sufficiently educate our members as to what really happens when they allow themselves to be suspended for non-payment of dues. Many a man submits to that penalty who would be shocked if he realized that a permanent, ineradicable record becomes a part of the lodge and Grand Lodge archives. Many men look upon being "posted" in a club for "arrears in dues" as a joke. They pay up and forget it, as does the club. These may think that being dropped N.P.D. in a lodge is a similar light matter.

It is not. Down in black and white to remain as long as the records exist are the few words which say "John Smith wouldn't pay his debt to his lodge, so his lodge dropped him." No lodge drops any unfortunate brother. He needs only to ask to be carried, and the brethren do it cheerfully. None may rightfully plead poverty as an excuse for non-affiliation "Via" the disgraceful road of failure to pay dues.

Some brethren plead they could not sacrifice their pride by going to the Master or Secretary, confessing their inability to pay, and asking to be carried. But that is false modesty. The permanent record is an indelible mark against their names; confession of inability to pay and

a request to have dues remitted is usually, as it always should be, a secret between the unfortunate and his brethren. As the unaffiliated Mason, no matter what the case, injures the Fraternity, it is far better for the lodge to remit the dues of the unfortunate than to have him become a Masonic Ahaseurus. A splendid opportunity for constructive Masonic work is to be found among the unaffiliated Masons in any locality. Masons may not ask the profane to join the Fraternity. But there is no reason why we should not seek to recreate interest in the Order in hearts which once possessed it. Brethren who know of a Mason unaffiliated of his own will and not by compulsion may do "good work, true work, square work" by persuading him of the advantages of affiliation, securing his application and, eventually, making him a member of the lodge. The Chapter, Commandry, Council and Scottish Rite, not to mention such quasi-Masonic orders such as Shrine, Tall Cedars, Grotto and Eastern Star automatically drop from membership the brother not affiliated with a lodge. As many demits are taken when moving from one city to another with the intention of re-affiliating, these bodies usually wait six months before dropping the unaffiliated. After whatever time is statutory, the bodies, membership in which depends upon on membership in a Blue Lodge, strike from their rolls the unaffiliated Mason.

This fact too, may be called to the attention of the non-affiliate, who may remain in that state merely because he has never had brought home to him the fact that it is a Masonic offense, frowned upon by Grand Lodges, a loss to his brethren, and a failure of that brotherhood he has voluntarily assumed. The brother who is anxious to do something for his lodge and the great Order which may do so much for him can find no better place to begin than an interview with a non-affiliated Mason and attempt to persuade him back into the Mystic Circle.

Romances and poems have detailed most movingly the sufferings of Ahaseurus, driven continually from place to place to escape from himself, shut out from the fellowship of mankind, joined not only by their common life, but their expectancy of a common death, a united immortality.

Salathiel the Immortal must tarry, earthbound, a wanderer till Christ shall come again. But the wandering non-affiliated Mason - unless he is, indeed, of those infortunates who have so lived that no Mason wants again to take him by the hand as a brother - may apply to a lodge, again pass the ballot, and once again become of that circle the bonds of which are the stronger that they cannot be seen. Pity the Wandering Jew - and be not his Masonic prototype, not only for your own but for the sake of all who have joined hands across the Altar to tie the knot that may not be untied!