

The above paragraph is introduced to show that Freemasonry guards so very carefully the principles of its universality, ignoring entirely every feature of political partisanship and religious sectarianism, that it is willing to allow the most liberal construction of its general regulations, in securing to its adherents a full exercise of their individual opinions, predilections, and natural inherent rights while in the lodge fellowship. Freemasonry, therefore, stands committed to freedom of political sentiment and action, and to religious tolerance, without regard to country or sect. At the same time, it emphatically discountenances the violation of any law, and reprobates criminal offenses of every hue and character. In abhorring personal crime, it can justify no act by which the law may be deprived of its power to administer its just award. To construe the fraternal relationship which the brotherhood hold to each other as warranting a member to intervene between an offender of the law and its operation, would be to prostitute its most sacred principles of virtue and justice. The evil effects need not be reverted to here, but are allowable to show the criminal enormity of such a course. Its tendency would be to reduce the institution to a band of outlaws,—criminal confederates, ready, under certain circumstances, either by stratagem or intimidation, if needs be, to defend their fellows from a punishment deserved, and which the safety and common weal of a community demand. If any principle or landmark in freemasonry could be so distorted as to give evidence to a doctrine so repugnant to the instincts of our nature and our conceptions of morality and virtue, the good repute now adorning its honored frontal, and revered by the pure, the noble, and intellectual of the land, would soon become a "by-word and a reproach."

There is scarcely a Mason who may, or not, habitually attend the meetings of the lodge, but is aware of the tenacity with which any principle of honor and morality is guarded by the brotherhood. The sensitiveness of the brethren in protecting these delicate points, and in giving their advantages to their fellow craftsmen, and the fastidious care with which they adhere to the spirit of those virtues, is well calculated to mislead them while seeking their duty to an erring brother. There are not a few of the brethren who believe that in fulfilling their obligations to the institution, they are expected to shield a brother, guilty of any crime, if called upon by him, under the signals of distress, to do so. This is evidently an error, a fallacy, an infatuation, growing out of a morbid idea of masonic duty. A Mason who, by his own willful act, places himself beyond the pale of the institution, can claim none of its privileges, nor flee to the horns of its altars for protection. This fact, however, is not to be construed as extending beyond the masonic limit. A gentleman becoming a member of the order is not thereby shorn of his attributes as a man. He may, in the premises, exercise his own pleasure in that direction, as an individual, but he is not required to do so by any obligation under the mystic tie. On the contrary, such a course would be viewed with disfavor.

It would be proper to assist a brother in distress; to remember him in prayer; to admonish him in his errors; to give him good counsel, and to warn him of approaching danger. But these duties are only expected of a Mason towards a brother in good standing. The institution exacts no duty from its rotaries toward a brother which is not morally right and lawful. There are instances on record, in which the brethren