

In the "Charges of a Freemason," published in 1723, by Dr. Anderson, and based apparently on the Old Constitutions it is said:

"In ancient times no Master or Fellow could be absent from the lodge, 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."

Our acquaintance, at this day, with the Constitutions of the Stonemasons and the other early, English guilds, is far more extensive than that of Anderson, but they confirm his statement. Everywhere in these Constitutions do we find that attendance on the lodge, when summoned, is laid down as a duty not to be neglected.

The earliest of these documents, the Halliwell MS. (about 1390) says—I modernize the orthography:

"Every Master that is a Mason must be at the general assembly, if he has been told in reasonable time where that assembly is to be held; and to that assembly he must go unless he has a reasonable excuse."

In the Cooke MS., whose date is 1490, it is said:

"Every master of this art should be warned beforehand to come to his congregation, and that they should duly come, unless they were excused by some manner of cause."

Still later, in all the Constitutions of the 16th and 17th centuries, we find the same law for compulsory attendance prescribed.

Thus the Lansdowne MS. of 1560 says:

"Every Master and Fellow shall come to the Assembly if it be within 50 miles of him, if he have any warning."

And this law continues to be repeated in all the subsequent Constitutions, almost in the same words. The distance was, however, gradually diminished so that at last in 1714, according to the Papworth MS., a Mason was required to attend the Assembly if it was held within five miles of him.

The Assembly or Congregation or Association (for each of these titles is used) was evidently the place where the Masons met for consultation on the interests of the interests of the Craft. The words lodge and Grand Lodge may, therefore, be properly be considered as equivalent terms at the present day.

The same provision for compulsory attendance is found in the early English Guilds, social, religious and craft, which bear, in very many respects, the most striking analogy to the corporations of stone masons.

An examination of the numerous constitutions of these Guilds, which were collected by the late Mr. Toulmin Smith and published by the Early English Text Society, will show to what an extent this usage of compulsory attendance prevailed. Two or three witnesses will be sufficient.

The Guild of Smiths of Chesterfield (1387), ordained that:

"If any brother being summoned to a feast will not come, he shall pay a pound of wax and beef a mark."

The Guild of Tailors of Lincoln (1328), ordained that:

"There shall be four mornspeeches (meetings) held in every year to take orders for the welfare of the guild: and whoever heeds not his summons shall pay two pounds of wax."

The wax was used for lights for the altar, furnished by the Guild.

In the ordinances of the Shipman's Guild (1363), it is ordered:

"If any brother be summoned to any meeting and he be in town and will not come, and have no leave of the alderman, he shall pay a pound of wax for the lights."

A similar provision for compulsory attendance is found in the ordinances of nearly all the other guilds. The omission of such a regulation is exceptional.

Hence, we see that in the other guilds, as well as in the Masonic, it was the constant usage to require attendance on the meetings and to punish those who were absent without excuse. Compulsory attendance was evidently a part of the spirit of the guild institutions.

But from the fact that Anderson says that "*in ancient times* no Master or Fellow could be absent from the lodge," it might be possibly implied that the rule no longer existed—that it was a regulation of former days, but not of the present. That it had been discontinued.

The unwritten law of Masonry will, however, show that such reasoning is incorrect. Every Mason is obligated by the ritual law to "answer and obey all *due* summonses." Every Mason agrees to this regulation at the time of his initiation, and hence, if we do not find the law laid down in modern constitutions as it was in the old ones, the spirit, and indeed the letter, is continued in the oral or ritual law of the Institution, by which every Mason promises obedience to any *due* summons which he may receive if within the province of his circumstances so to do.

And then, in answer to the objection that Freemasonry is a voluntary association with the spirit of which anything compulsory would be incompatible, I reply, that it is