

**Instructions for the Knights Beneficent of the Holy City on the antiquity and original purpose of Masonry drawn up and approved in the National Convention of the three Provinces of Gaul held in Lyon in September and October, 1778 = 465<sup>1</sup>**

My Well-Beloved Brother,

When you were admitted into the Novitiate, you were made aware of the Illustrious Order which you were about to join. You were informed about its origin, its development, the high degree of glory to which it was elevated, and the powerful persecutions which so quickly worked its ruin. It was then that, under the most inviolable secret, you learned that this unfortunate Order, which had appeared to be completely destroyed by the blows of hatred and injustice, had however never ceased to be, and that many virtuous Knights, having escaped from the cruellest torments, had had the courage to preserve it beneath the mysterious veil of Masonic symbols and allegories. You saw its misfortunes precisely retraced in our first four Grades, through their relation to the upheavals of the Temple of Solomon which had served as its cradle. Finally, my Dear and Well-Beloved Brother, you learned the places where the Order had been secretly preserved, the illustrious heads who had governed it, and how it was propagated in this Kingdom where it was reformed in a National Assembly under the name of Knights Beneficent of the Holy City, the first title of our founders. And so the Order, being returned to the first moment of its existence, made a total renunciation – both general and specific – of all the titles, rights, privileges and possession which it had been able to acquire during its glorious career. Affected by the same sentiments which animated our pious founders towards the human family, this Assembly created rules to extend the beneficence of the Order over all the kinds of needs which can afflict mankind. It applied itself to creating an administrative plan relevant to the times and the customs of the present day and the present state of the Order, which by this would merit the confidence and protection of political governments.

At the time of your profession, you were informed of the duties of Knights in general, and of each class in particular, and you solemnly promised to fulfill all those pertaining to you and to devote yourself zealously to the beneficence which the Order had at that time, above all, recommended to you. Your general devotion to be useful to mankind, and above all the unfortunate, earned you the esteem and affection of your Brothers. May you enjoy for many years the peacefulness which an association uniquely founded upon virtue and the good of humanity should offer you.

Irrevocably joined to the Holy Order of Knights Beneficent of the Holy City, my Well-Beloved Brother, today you will receive even more important education. It will lay out for you the path to knowledge which will enlighten your spirit, provide you with new incentives to fulfill your duties, and new means to become useful to men, since your beneficence towards them will have a goal which is quite superior to their physical and moral needs.

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<sup>1</sup> This document is publicly available, and catalogued as MS 95.920-1 in the *Fonds Willermoz* in the National Library of Lyon. Note that the date of 465 counts from the year the Order of the Temple was destroyed, in 1313.

For a long time the Temple of Solomon has been the object of your studies. It will continue to be so, but from another point of view. As a simple Mason, you studied its structure and its exterior. As a Novice you entered the porch, and as a Knight you have been admitted to the Temple itself. The Order is going to open to you the door of the Sanctuary, but from that point on, left to your own devices, you can expect no more success except through your own work. Your intellect exercised on the symbols and allegories should, by its own efforts, pierce the veil which the Supreme Architect has spread over His works: He has given you the means, and it is for you to use them.

The Sanctuary of the Temple, my Dear Brother, is open to all Knights, but not all are penetrated by the rays which emanate from it. Some, victims of habit and prejudice, close their eyes in disdain and go back to their daily habits. Others catch a glimpse of their beauty without having the courage to fix them with their gaze. Finally others, with better judgment because of their background and the nobility of their being, neglect nothing to make themselves worthy of contemplating them before judging those objects which you are about to glimpse. Therefore pay the most serious attention to yourself, set aside all prejudices, take account of your strengths, choose those you would emulate, and above all do not neglect your intellect, that ever-luminous flame to those for whom love of truth is the sole motivator.

Up till now, my Dear Brother, you have seen the Knights of the Holy City as the founders of Freemasonry, and yet it is far more ancient. Masonry was known to many different Nations in Europe many centuries before the establishment of their Order. The Masonic records of England provide quite convincing proof that the English Masons recognized that the Lights and Ancient Regulations brought by the Masons of France to their first National Assembly were of great assistance to them, which indicates that in their view Freemasonry was more ancient at that time in France than in England. This is how they express it:

Although the ancient records of the Fraternity in England were destroyed or lost during the wars between the Saxons and the Danes, nevertheless King Athelstan, grandson of King Alfred, undertook great works after establishing peace among these states... To assist him he had many Masons come from France who brought with them Lodge Regulations which had been preserved from the time of the Romans. From the King they obtained the right to improve the Constitution of English Lodges in accordance with that foreign model, and to increase the salary for Masons' work. Prince Edwin, the brother of King Athelstan, having been instructed in Masonry and being charged with the duties of a Master, through love for the art and for the principles on which it was founded, obtained a Charter from his brother which gave Masons the right of jurisdiction over themselves as they had had in olden times, with liberty and power to govern themselves, to rectify all which might be required in their work, and to hold a General Assembly once a year.

It was as a result of this Charter that Prince Edwin convened all the Masons of the realm in York, in the month of June in the Year of Our Lord 926. They travelled there and established a General Lodge, or Grand Lodge, with Edwin as Grand Master. They brought with them all the archives and writings concerning Masonry: some in Greek, others in Latin, the language of Gaul, and other languages, out of which that Assembly established the Constitutions and Regulations of English Lodges, made a law for them to be maintained and observed in the years to come, and fixed an appropriate recompense for Masons' work.

And thus the first National Grand Lodge held in England predates the foundation of the Order of Knights of the Holy City by two centuries. So in order to find the origins of Freemasonry we must search in times which are much farther back. But although it existed a long time before the era of our illustrious founders, you should not be surprised, my Dear Brother, to learn that there were only a small number of initiates in the mysteries of Freemasonry, and that they had established the Order not only with a view to the beneficence to which they publicly dedicated themselves, but also to preserve in secret and amongst themselves the sublime mysteries to which even Sovereigns rendered homage and in which they were honored to participate. It is for that reason, no doubt, that the general opinion arose which, across all ages, has attributed mysterious and secret knowledge to some of the chief Knights.

Lodged from the birth of the Order, due to the generosity of King Baldwin, upon the ruins of the famous Temple built by Solomon in the city of Jerusalem to the glory of the Grand Architect of the Universe, that Temple which was the universal symbol of Masonic Initiation, our founders had a dual motive for perpetuating those mysteries among themselves by confiding them to those of their Brothers who were the most worthy to receive them, so that during the fatal period of the Order's destruction, the Knights who were able to escape that bloody persecution would find in that very initiation which had been transmitted to them a means to perpetuate it with certainty beneath the veil of Masonry; since the same symbol of Solomon's Temple, of its destruction and restoration, also provided a striking image of the trials which the Order of the Temple had experienced, and of the reestablishment for which our unfortunate Brothers never ceased to desire and hope for.

However, they added to the symbols of primitive initiation those allegories which were specific to the Order and to the circumstances in which they found themselves. From that time forward Masonic initiation had two very different purposes for their successors, and it wasn't long before these became confused, and led to a loss of sight of the original purpose. The small number of Brothers who had escaped torture or destruction, the distances which separated them from one another, and fear of fresh persecutions and total annihilation, meant that from then on they barely concerned themselves with admitting Knights, but rather with creating proofs which would assure the Order of their discretion. Very few of them were initiated into the ancient mysteries of Freemasonry or were found worthy of them, so that the majority of Brothers soon possessed no other knowledge than that of the Order and its misfortunes, and saw in Masonry only historical symbols which were appropriate to the certain preservation of the memory of those facts. Thus, the true and ancient purpose was sacrificed to that which was personal to them, and all might have been completely forgotten if it was natural for it to be so, and if it hadn't been preserved elsewhere, as you would be convinced once more by the records of Freemasonry in England. By making ourselves familiar with the doctrine of Masons in the 15<sup>th</sup> century, we can find clear proof that Masonic initiation is much older than the flight of the Knights Templar and the use they made of the three Symbolic Grades, since they teach us that in the century which followed the ruin of that Order the Masons had an infinitely more sublime objective, and that they even appeared to be unaware that Masonry was then serving as a veil and asylum for those illustrious victims.

In the year 1425, during the minority of Henry VI, King of England, who reigned from 1425 until 1471, the Masons were persecuted and the House of Commons prohibited them from assembling under the strictest of penalties. When Henry VI attained his majority, his opinion of the society

was quite different to that which had been presented to him. He wanted to educate himself as to their purpose, and conceived the idea of having himself initiated, if the replies given to the questions he had developed were of such a nature as to settle this. The result was no doubt satisfactory, since he was admitted into that Society and became its protector. It was in the year 1442, and in the 19<sup>th</sup> of his reign, that this event took place.

The questions asked by the Prince, and the responses which were given by the enlightened Masons of his time, were discovered around one hundred years later by John Leyland, Antiquarian to King Henry VIII and charged by him, following the abolition of the monasteries, to collect and preserve all precious manuscripts which might be found in them. This important item was written in Anglo-Saxon, and claimed to be in the hand of Henry VI himself. Leyland translated this original item, and declared that he had done so very faithfully on the order of his Royal Highness (Kings of England not yet having the title of Majesty). We do not know what became of the original manuscript. The English translation by John Leyland remained unknown for some years, but the memory of its existence was preserved, and Milford Thomas, Earl of Pembroke and a zealous Mason, undertook a careful search for it. In 1696, the famous Philosopher John Locke, who was then a profane, but who soon ceased to be so, discovered it in the Bodleian Library, and obtained a copy which he sent to the Earl of Pembroke, accompanied by some very interesting notes. Here we can only provide an abbreviated version of the questions and answers which are contained therein.

Henry asked:

1. What might the secret of Masonry be?
2. Where did Masonry begin?
3. By whom was it brought to the West?
4. How was it brought to England?
5. Do Masons have more knowledge and are they better than other men?
6. What are the arts and sciences which Masons have communicated to humankind?
7. Have Masons communicated all the knowledge which they possess to other men?

They had to be careful in answering him: as King, he could demand many things, and it would have been very dangerous to deceive a prince who would then have been disappointed at his initiation.

Firstly, they replied, Masonry is the way to acquire knowledge of Nature, of the power which acts within it, and of its marvellous works. It is the science of true numbers, weights and measures by which all beings are constituted, and of the true manner of making all things which result of some good to man.

Secondly, it began among the first men who populated the East and who received it from God Himself. From there, extending its progress to the West, it brought consolation and help to those almost savage and unfortunate men.

Thirdly, the Phoenicians, the most commercial people of high antiquity, first came from the East to the West, and brought with them the original knowledge of the East.

Fourthly, Pythagoras, a Greek from that Nation, travelled to be taught in Egypt and Syria, and in all the ports to which the Phoenicians had brought Masonry. He was initiated into the sciences, and made very extensive studies thereof. On his return he continued to improve himself and became a very famous philosopher. He settled in Greater Greece, and there, in his turn, he initiated men and in Crotona instituted a Grand Lodge which created many initiates. They in turn established other Lodges, and some travelled to France, where they established Lodges too. It is from there that over time, Masonry passed into England.

Fifthly, Masons do not essentially have greater knowledge than other men, but they do have more rights and opportunities to acquire it. In truth, many men lack the capacity, and a greater number lack the industry necessary to procure such useful knowledge. There are Masons who are less virtuous than other men, but in general they are better, which they wouldn't be if they were not Masons.

Sixth, Masons have taught humankind Agriculture, Architecture, Astronomy, Geometry, the Science of Numbers, Music, Poetry, Chemistry, and finally Religion and Legislation.

Seventh, they have constantly communicated from time to time to humankind those of their secrets which could be generally useful; and have only held back those which would have become harmful in the hands of the ill-intentioned, so that they might not be used by the wicked for evil purposes. They have also guarded those which would not have been universally useful unless accompanied by instructions which may only be given in a Perfect Lodge.

Henry VI, satisfied by these explanations which he received, finally asked them if they would communicate these arts and secrets of Masonry to him? The response he received is quite remarkable and absolutely proper to produce serious reflection in those who believe that they have a right to anything because of their rank and their least desire: "You will be instructed", the Masons replied, "if you are worthy of them. You will be taught if you are capable of being so."

Henry was King and could demand anything; but he felt he had to merit that which neither pretention nor authority could obtain.

My Dear Brother, we can quote you many other facts of this kind, but these will suffice to give you some interesting ideas on the origin and original purpose of Masonic initiation, if you have the least inclination to do any research of this kind.

Since you were admitted into the Masonic Order, you will often have been surprised by the uncertainty which prevails among our Brothers about the true purpose of their initiation, but today you should recognize that if it was originally a goal which required the most profound veneration by those who had the good fortune to know it, it should only be passed on following a long period of trials in the Symbolic Grades. From this we can see that the more the truly initiated Masons were circumspect in admitting proselytes to a knowledge of the mysteries of the Order, the more those who were not judged worthy exhausted themselves in pointless inquiries and useless

speculations, while attempting to uncover the meaning of the allegories which had been entrusted to them. But from what they came to know of the various aims, both true and false, and imagining them to be of no importance, it became far less difficult for them to confer the Grades to which they had been admitted. As a result of this, the number of Lodges and Masons grew, as did the confusion over its origins and ideas, from which you should conclude, my Dear Brother, that the Mason who seriously wishes to know everything which this title lays claim to, cannot apply himself hard enough to unravel the various things which have become tangled up in Masonic symbols, in order to grasp all that can lead him to a knowledge of the goal which is so essential to man. And so he should principally apply himself to recognizing the difference between Masonic initiation and Masonic knowledge: for knowledge is the thing he seeks, and initiation is only the means to it.

To guide you in such an important study, the Committee of the National Convention of the three Provinces of Gaul, held in Lyon in September and October 1778, has had these preliminary Instructions drawn up for those Knights who value this kind of inquiry; and this is the result of its deliberation, because of which it has authorized an objective as venerable as this within the Order:

*Several Brother Knights having given a report to the National Convention of the three Provinces of Gaul that there existed among the Lodges of Europe many diverse opinions as to the origin and true purpose of Masonry, and desiring that the Convention might undertake to settle, so far as it were possible, the Brothers' conception of this essential object, the Committee charged with this examination and composed for this purpose of the Prefects, or Representatives ad hoc of each Prefecture, and the Provincial Knights resolved:*

*That it is most important for Freemasonry in general and Freemasons in particular to frame justifiable notions concerning the true purpose of the Institution, and of Masonic symbols. Accordingly, prompted by such powerful considerations and aided by the teachings and research communicated by some Brothers, the Committee examined the various opinions on this matter with the most serious attention. This examination accepted that without doubt Masonic Initiation had fundamental connections to the secret initiation practiced from greatest antiquity among the different Nations of the Orient and among the Egyptians, who communicated them to the Greeks and to other Nations, where they have been perpetuated under different forms and denominations according to the manner and customs of the times and the societies in which they were produced! However, the Committee, on considering those ancient initiations from the points of view which had been presented to it by a host of witnesses, recognized that there was nothing more at their origin than a knowledge of the original and universal religion of man and of the religious and moral duties which it prescribed for him, which have been confirmed and perfected through the wisdom of the Christian Religion, which itself was originally an initiation as mysterious as those of its predecessors.*

*The Committee, animated by a strong desire to succeed one day in restoring to fundamental Freemasonry what had originally belonged to it, and to profit from the wisdom and research of all the Knights who wished, through their work, to support such a praiseworthy project to the benefit of their Brethren and all humanity, encourages and earnestly invites them to bring together and reassemble all the information they can obtain concerning Freemasonry examined in relation*

*to the ancient initiations, but nevertheless without abandoning or weakening the truth of the allegories concerning the said Order which have been adopted over the past several centuries, and which, given their usefulness, deserve to be respected.*

*To this end, the Committee has unanimously determined that the results of the pieces of information on which it has deliberated shall be drawn up in the form of Instructions by the Respectable Brother Chancellor of Burgundy, so far as the personal commitments of the Brothers who have produced them, or are going to produce them, will allow.*

*Let the aforesaid Instructions be communicated to the General Assembly of the National Convention of Gaul which will make use of it according to its wisdom, however without it being inserted into the Acts of the Convention.*

*That in the case that the said educational document shall be approved by the Convention it shall only be communicated to those of the Knights who appear suitable for this kind of research and who will value the truths to which they speak, which communication shall be made to them without any ceremony, nor Obligation on the part of the Knights who have already received it.*

*Deliberated and approved in the Committee of the National Convention of Gaul, in Lyon September 3 – October 23, 1778/465.*

My Well-Beloved Brother, it is as a result of that deliberation by the Committee, given after the most serious examination, that these Instructions were drawn up such as you have just received them, and that the project was communicated to the General Assembly of the National Convention which gave them its complete approbation, applauding the beneficial insights of the Committee, and determined that, without being inserted into the Minutes of its activities, the decision of the Committee and the educational document should be deposited in the National Archives, and in those of all the Prefectures which had participated in these activities, or who afterwards agreed with them, as being the only permanent Assemblies of the Order, and which are especially charged with the general education of Knights.

The General Assembly of the National Convention also determined that the desire of the Committee concerning the communication of the aforesaid Instructions should be precisely observed among all Knights appropriate to cooperating on a piece of work so essential to Freemasonry, inviting and authorizing all Brother Knights who are so invited to assemble freely among themselves and without ceremony, to share the results of their research, and the discoveries they may make concerning this important topic.

Admitted from this day into these Assemblies, my Dear Brother, you will hear the observations and research undertaken by your Brothers, and they in their turn will profit from the education which your zeal may procure for them, and whose results they await. But we should first warn you that the most important observation which they have made up to today, is that initiations and Freemasonry have often been altered and corrupted by different Nations and in different ages; and that in many ways they have been perverted. That is what has induced them to warn you that you should be suspicious of those who offer you interpretations which are contrary to your duties

towards the Supreme Architect of the Universe and to humanity, or who apply the symbols of Freemasonry to the fruitless and illusory science of the Alchemists.

We pray the Ineffable Being, Source of all Illumination, to bless your efforts and ours, to His Greater Glory, and for the wellbeing of humanity.

**Concordat cum originale  
Fr. Baptista ab Eremo, Eq. Benif. C.S.  
Cancellarius conventus nationalis gallicarum  
et II<sup>e</sup> Prov<sup>ce</sup> ordinis, alvernia.**