

THE CABLETOW LENGTH

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The word "cabletow" is purely Masonic and not heard of in general use outside of the Lodge Room.

In Medieval days the cabletow or rope noose was worn when taking an obligation, as a symbol of submission, inferring that it could be used to inflict the penalty if a breach of that contract was committed.

In speculative Masonry it is symbolic of our obligations and teaches restraint, self-discipline, prudence, temperance, etc.

Elsewhere in the ritual "cable length" is a measure of length used at sea defined as being 200 yards.

A ship's cable can vary according to prevailing conditions of sea, wind, size of ship, weight of vessel to be towed and the length is given as 100, 120, 130 fathoms.

The trade guilds of the middle ages were leaders of social life and laws to protect their crafts and skills. They assisted the needy, sick and aged, and generally promoted goodwill and fellowship and encouraged church attendance.

Our Freemasonry of today has a strong resemblance to those guilds, and has made symbolic adoption of their trade customs and skills for moral instruction, and in some respects, there is a close relationship to the wording of their apprenticeship obligations.

Indentures of Apprenticeship which no doubt some present will possess have a clause giving the apprentice the right to cancel his Indenture should his employer go out of business and cannot place him with another employer within a distance of three miles, in some, in others five miles.

According to ancient laws of Freemasonry every brother must attend if he be within the length of his cabletow.

Old writers define the length of a cable length as three miles, others five to fifty miles.

Three miles was generally recognized as a reasonable walking distance.

The Master Mason promises to obey all signs and summons sent to him if within the length of 'my cabletow.'

When we take the full sentence the word 'My' in this phrase is very important. It is personal, it represents the individual. So the length of each of our cabletows can vary according to each of our own personal commitments - sickness or self or family, work obligations, transport problems.

It is doubtful that in Speculative Masonry the cabletow was ever intended to have any physical length but purely as a means of impressing the individual Mason that he was committed to fulfill his obligation to his Lodge and the Brethren, in regard to his attendance, to the utmost of his ability and not to let trivial things prevent him from discharging his responsibility.

The compilers of our ritual were men who saw that it was only by attendance of our Lodge that we as Master Masons can be instructed in the spiritual and symbolical teaching of our Craft, a fuller realization of the Fatherhood of God and the universal Brotherhood of man, a greater understanding of the principles of Brotherly love, relief and truth. By emulating the virtues displayed in the Five Points of Fellowship we will find that although our duties and obligations have increased, that which was once a tie has now no longer

length or distance lost in the satisfying reward of love, peace and harmony in fraternal nearness and fellowship.

Symbolically the length of the cabletow is the scope of Freeman's responsibility to God, his neighbour and himself in the light of his ability to discharge that obligation.

This is summed up briefly in the words of an American Brother;
"It is as long as the arm that stretches out a
helping hand.

It reaches as far as the Brother's cheering voice.

It goes as far as charity's dollar can travel.

Wherever the mails can carry a letter,

It can be carried."

The length of a Master Mason's cabletow is precisely equal to the extent of his influences.