

A FOCUS ON FREEMASONRY

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This Short Talk Bulletin has been adapted from a paper, "A Sketch of Freemasonry", which Most Worshipful Brother Ronin prepared for the Scottish Rite several years ago.

Through the years in our American society, Freemasonry has stood head and shoulders above the some 700 other fraternal organizations. Its more than three million members today evidence its impressive size and stature. It has been a powerful instrumentality for good because of its great teachings of morality. The kindred fellowship of good men seeking great goals in living has merited the splendid reputation which Masonry possesses. Our members can be justifiably proud of our American heritage which in a large measure is the work product of members of the Craft.

The imprint of Freemasonry was indelibly engrossed in the birth certificate of our Nation, the Declaration of Independence. This bold document was authored by Thomas Jefferson, and was adopted by the Continental Congress, which was predominantly Protestant, and whose leaders were members of our Craft. Fifty years after its adoption and shortly before his death, Thomas Jefferson penned these prophetic words concerning his crowning masterpiece: "May it be to the world what I believe it will be to some parts sooner, to others later. but Finally to all, the signal of arousing men to burst their chains under which ignorance and superstition had persuaded them to find themselves and to assume the blessings and security of government."

The message of Jefferson made inference to those democratic ideas which are the heart and philosophy of our government. Among them are these words which should be not only familiar but thoroughly understood by all Americans: "All men are created equal--they are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights--among them are life, liberty and pursuit of happiness--to secure those rights governments are instituted among men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed. "

Later those rights were preserved in the Bill of Rights which was added to the Constitution of the United States, which is the greatest document of modern history. William Gladstone, one of England's greatest statesmen, attended to the truth of this statement in these eloquent words: "The American Constitution is the most wonderful work ever struck off at a given time by the brain and purpose of man."

The rights of free men are inalienable because they are given by Almighty God and not by man. The purpose of our government is to protect these rights which insure the dignity of man. These constitutional guarantees make it mandatory that our government be one by law and not by man. In 1776 men were governed by the personal rule of kings and emperors, and the declaration of the rights of free men was revolutionary. It is apparent to us today that these rights are in accordance with Masonic doctrine, which is interwoven into the fabric of the governmental

structure of the nations. The hopeful expression of Jefferson that the entire world might be free and possess the security of government to these ends is far from being realized, and undoubtedly he would be grievously alarmed with the formidable and ominous dangers to these sacred rights and purposes of our government. There is a real and vital need of Masons today to be vigilant and alert to safeguard these precious rights from those who seek to circumvent and undermine as well as those who seek to overthrow our form and purpose of government.

The average American desires wholesome things in his life. He believes in virtue and the qualities of honesty and decency. He has innate within him the desire to express, to give and to share his time, talent and substance for assisting those individuals who are truly in need. In recent years it has become fashionable for too many persons to shirk opportunities and tasks for the assistance to unfortunate persons and the general improvement of our society. There too frequently evolves the decision to let the government take care of these problems, or we find excuses to close our eyes and pretend that things are not as bad as they are. Moral and mental laziness have emerged from the course of inaction toward these problems in our communities and even in our immediate families. This ineptness has seriously affected the personal moral responsibility of the individual. These conditions were apparent to the late Brother Peter Marshall (Old Monkland St. James Lodge No. 177, S.C.) when he made this significant statement, "Let us stand for something lest we fall for anything!"

We need directive purpose in our striving and endeavors for successful living. We need to be both sensitive and responsive to the needs of others. We need the vision and then to strive to attain great goals in living. The doctrines and brotherhood of Masonry furnish guidance, inspiration and assurance for those who conscientiously seek its truths and live in accordance with its precepts. The organized and unified effort and work of the members of our Craft produced wonderful accomplishments in its benevolences and charities, which would be utterly impossible if left to individual effort and action. The strong bonds of brotherhood are strengthened and become meaningful in this good work.

The appeal and call of Freemasonry has ever been in its effective techniques of building character. Masonic law requires that only those of good moral character and possessing an unqualified belief in a Supreme Being may be admitted to membership. Contrary to most other organizations, membership cannot be directly solicited and new members are motivated to petition for Masonry by the excellent reputation our Fraternity and its members enjoy. This is a fine compliment to Masonry and is one of those attributes which make it unique.

What we believe in and work for, determines in a large measure who and what we are. The lives of truly great men attest to this fact. Likewise, Masonry opens new horizons for those who will give it "the attentive ear, the instructive tongue, and the faithful breast," and who are sensitive for the needs of others and willing to work as a cog in a mighty organization whose designs are honorable and far reaching. We need, however, to strength that which we have. Our teachings must first be significant in the lives of our members before we can discern good effects which would naturally emerge from them. The purpose of this sketch of Freemasonry is not to analyze comparative strength and weakness of our Fraternity, but to bring into sharper focus its need, and the force which Masonry has to offer in the lives of its faithful members.

It is a matter of common knowledge how Operative Masonry existed for many centuries and that great cathedrals were constructed by these craftsmen. The magnificent structures erected by them before the time of modern machinery testify to the skill and devotion of our ancient craftsmen to their assigned tasks. From this gradually emerged the beautiful symbolism of Speculative Masonry which became formally organized in the early part of the 18th Century. It has been aptly said that while Operative Masons built great temples for the worshipers, Speculative Masonry seeks to build worshipers for the Temples. Anyone who is even superficially informed as to the work and doctrines of Masonry knows that it cannot be classified as a religion or as a substitute for one. Masonry does engender Brotherly Love and Adoration to God, which should induce its members to become better members of the church of their choice.

The Blue Lodges of Ancient Craft Masonry have three splendid and impressive degrees. The thrust of the Entered Apprentice Degree is the teaching of great moral principles by beautiful ceremonies and lectures. These include the four great cardinal virtues of temperance, fortitude, prudence and justice, together with the beloved golden tenets of Masonry--Brotherly Love, Relief and Truth. The Fellowcraft Degree emphasizes the importance of the acquisition of knowledge, and that with it comes greater duties and responsibilities. The great degree of all Masonry is the sublime degree of a Master Mason. This degree reveals the Doctrine of the Immortality of the Soul in a very impressive manner and also charges that it is incumbent upon all Masons to continually pursue further light as we travel symbolically in our pilgrimage in life from the West to the glorious East.

In the Master's Degree we are told to emulate the legendary Master Hiram who was faithful even though his life was imperiled. It would be well for us today to not only emulate his fidelity and courage but his industry, skill, and devotion to his work. Perhaps one of the greatest teachings of Masonry is that the building of human character is likened to that of building a great Temple. If it is important that the best designs, materials and workmanship should be used in the erection of a beautiful Temple, isn't it even more important that greater concern should be employed in the building of our own character temples, which the Apostle Paul so vividly depicts as a "house not made with hands, eternal in the Heavens. "

What we do not understand, we do not possess. Neither can we impart to others what we do not possess. Superficial exposure to Freemasonry will not suffice to achieve even minimum requirements of a real Mason. To be meaningful it must be more than an intellectual exercise or a passing experience. Ritualism must be supplemented and embellished by explanation, education, personal fellowship before Masonry can become a part of us and its precepts strengthened by performance.

The late Roscoe Pound, formerly Dean of the Harvard Law School and Honorary Past Grand Master of the Grand Lodge of Nebraska, was a great scholar of Masonry as well as of the law. Dean Pound expressed his concept of the meaning of the true acquisition of Freemasonry with these words: "Albert Pike taught that the individual Mason, instead of receiving a predigested Masonry ladled out to him by another, should make his own Masonry for himself by study and reflection upon the work and symbols. He stood for a Masonry built up within each Mason by himself and for himself on the solid foundation of internal conviction."

The penetrating observation of Dean Pound goes to the very heart of Masonry. It also reminds us of the very first lessons of Masonry, when we were informed that we must first be prepared to be a Mason in our hearts. Most of us fail to see or realize the full measure of the limited time God has given us, because we insist on looking outside instead of within us. The greatest problem of our lives lie within us and are concerning ourselves. As Masons let us be aware that God has built within us meaningful resources for greater living. Freemasonry is a virtual treasure-house of wisdom, strength, and honesty which upholds good over evil, and whose doctrines and teachings have been and are now unchangeable, that gives us vision and purpose, and reassurance in time of sorrow or stress.

This closing prayer seems appropriate to the tasks that lie before us:

"O God, make of us what Thou wilt,

Guide Thou the labors of our hands;

May all our work be surely built,

As Thou the Architect has planned!

But whatso'er Thy power shall make

Of these frail lives, do not forsake

Thy dwelling place. Let Thy Presence rest

Forever in the Temple of our breasts."