

AN ASSESSMENT OF M.S.A.

The dreams, aspirations and plans for the Masonic Service Association by the Executive Commission back in the formative days of the 1920' s were carefully enumerated in a mimeographed publication, The M.S.A. Trestleboard. The designs on that "trestleboard" have stood the test of time.

In the first issue, dated December 3, 1920 we find the following comments:

"A. We cannot be sectarian. Postulating in the first instance Masonry's one dogma, the Fatherhood of God, we cannot and will not build a program which will disturb the faith of any brother, be he Mohammedan or Jew, Presbyterian or Episcopalian, Trinitarian or Diest. "

"B. We cannot indulge in political partisanship. We cannot espouse the candidacy of any man, or the political faith of any party. We can say that the right to vote is a priceless privilege, a weapon against wrong in the hand of every free citizen. We can bring the Mason to realize his obligation to vote, but we cannot tell him how to cast that vote."

"C. We cannot encroach upon Grand Lodge polity. We have neither the right nor the desire to interfere with Grand Lodge polity or discussion, much less endeavor to influence Grand Lodge legislation. Masonic government is of interest to every Mason, and he should exercise his prerogatives therein, but direction of this function does not fall within the scope of the Masonic Service Association of the U.S. This Association is a confederation for a specific purpose as outlined in its Constitution and ByLaws, and contemplates no other activity than is described therein."

"D. We cannot encroach upon Local Lodge polity. For reasons already expressed the Association contemplates no interference with the activities of any local lodge. The Association will undertake the preparation of certain material which it believes will be worthwhile for the use of local lodges, but the method for using that material must be determined by the cooperative judgment of each Grand Lodge and its constituent lodges. The opinion of those who prepare this material as to how best it may be utilized will be given, but no lodge or Grand Lodge should or can be bound thereby."

"The development of the great underlying principles of Freemasonry is the real task before us. Necessarily it must be undertaken in a way which will tend to broaden the vision of our brethren. Our exposition of those principles will be in support of that which is right. Our principles are external TRUTHS. Our program must make them a living force. That force will be ammunition against wrong. We may be able to point out the wrong as a target. We will be content if the Mason comes to learn what the target is and has the ammunition at hand. The rest we may confidently leave to him. His Masonic manhood will act with intelligence."

In Trestleboard Number 2, we find a great many more guidelines which have served your Association well over the years:There seems to be no difference of opinion among forward-looking Masons of today, that Freemasonry, working through its membership, should become a more constructive agency in our civilization. If it is to accomplish this result, Masons must come to realize certain things, and they must learn to apply Masonic principles to present-day problems with a new conception of what Freemasonry really is. Some of these things were gathered together under "Functions" as follows:

" 1. The function of Masonry is not the mere conferring of degrees. When a brother becomes a Master Mason, the Fraternity's duty toward him has just begun. He will realize his duty as a Freemason only when he knows what Freemasonry really is and what are its aims. Most initiates are hungry for such teaching. Our lodge officers, chosen from all walks of life, have seldom the time to study ways and means--other than by 'work'--to teach the fundamental principles of the Craft and supplement the Ritual. It is a function of this Association to provide the necessary information and suggest successful methods.

"2. We must apply methods which shall be interpretative of the 'work' and of our history, our organization and form of government. We must translate, in modern terms, that work brought down to us through the centuries, so that its usefulness may be the better rewarded.

"3. The work before the Fraternity, as contemplated herein, is one of originality and adaptation. To accomplish it requires that men charged with its promulgation shall be Masons first--trained and educated Masons, schooled in the lore and custom of the Craft, and possessing a vision of the world's problems. They must be able so to visualise Masonic principles that the brethren may learn Freemasonry's solution of those problems.

"4. Our aim is to make our brethren better Masons and to enable them, by a broader understanding of Masonic principles, to work effectively for civic righteousness and the betterment of humanity.

"Going further, the Commission has stated as the immediate object of the 'Inculcation of the Principles and Spirit of Masonry' the following:

"1. To preserve as a landmark of civilization the principle of monotheism. The civil government of all nations of the world must rest upon the common foundation of belief in God.

"2. To re-cast the ideals of Government on the basis of the recognition of our duties toward others, rather than as at present on our rights against others; the basing of civilization on declarations of dependence instead of declarations of independence; on altruism instead of selfishness. "3. To combat destructive tendencies and agencies seeking to undermine and destroy free institutions, by teaching, constructively, the true principles and functions of government and of civilization.

"4. To arouse the conscience of every individual Mason to the necessity for his own practical application of Masonic principles to his activities in life, governmental, social, business and otherwise.

"5. To stimulate charity and benevolence. "Taken in connection with the pronouncements already made in regard to relief and research work to be undertaken by the Association, it is the judgment of your Executive Commission that the above forms a complete and comprehensive program calculated to meet the needs of the coming years in a truly Masonic way."

The Third Trestleboard, dated December 24, 1920 had these observations: ".....Freemasonry teaches us that the first stone laid upon that foundation is the Brotherhood of Man. For two centuries Freemasonry has been inculcating an interpretation of this doctrine which is at once unique and practical. Civilization, however, has chosen to make selfishness the cornerstone of its superstructure. That cornerstone is crumbling.

"Masonry's task is to place a new cornerstone. The quality of the material of that cornerstone cannot be doubted, but we have always been taught that each stone must be squared and fitted for the place it is to occupy. In other words, if we are to impress civilization with the value of the Brotherhood of Man as a fundamental doctrine, we must shape it--that is, interpret it--in such a way as to make it available and understood by men.

"Essentially our study will have three phases: Historical, general (that is, the theory of government), and modern application (to America).

"A . HISTORICAL BACKGROUND. When we come to map out in a practical way the field covered by the doctrine of the Brotherhood of Man we must consider (1) how that doctrine has been crystallized into government; and (2) the part which Masonry has played in bringing about the result. We shall discuss and study (3) the lives of the great men who were the instruments through which this work was accomplished, and (4) the great principles which actuated them; (5) how they fought for the incorporation of the fundamentals of religious liberty in our great state documents, and how they insisted on the separation of church and state as a defense both for the state and for religion. We shall also pass in review (6) the obstacles against which they worked; (7) the anti-Masonic crusade and other historic conditions, all of which have contributed to the making of America. These are the things which your Commission believes need to be understood, for inevitably they form the background for our Masonic activities of today.

"B. CENERAL APPLICATION. It is equally important that we shall discuss (1) the functions of government, (2) the conditions under which we live which are the test of that government, (3) the principles which Masonry has contributed in the past to the end that the government might be a success, and (4) an interpretation of those same principles in modern terms so that they may continue to be a factor for success.

"Today forces are at work within the body politic to undermine the foundations of government. Some of these are active agencies working in the open; others seek by insidious propaganda to accomplish their ends.

"If we would be honest with ourselves, however, we must admit that these are not the only undermining forces at work. Indifference is itself a form of selfishness, and indifference has sometimes written itself into law. Take, for example, the tendency to organize, legalize and formalize the duties of the citizen. Lacking the urge of the lessons of pioneering, which caused

each man formerly to want to perform his functions as a citizen, we have now come to the time when we provide by law for the entire participation of each individual in his government."

"C. AMERICAN APPLICATION. Turning to another phase of our program, we believe that true patriotism would dictate a study of what government does for us. Our pride in our own government, and our enthusiasm for the principles which underline it, will increase as we come to know more of what is done for us in America, as compared with what other governments do for their citizens. That the study will also emphasize things which we may learn from them cannot be doubted.

"We shall find that the Masonic principles which have been taught and exemplified by the great leaders in American history have been written into our constitutional form of government. They are there as a direct result of Masonic teaching. They constitute the heritage which Masonry has brought down from the days of feudalism. That heritage is the body of principles which at the time of the formation of the Grand Lodge of England could be expressed only within the confines of a lodge. They are the principles which Masons of the modern day have neither had to fight nor work for, and of which they, in common with the world at large, fail to appreciate the value.

"Ours is the task, therefore, of bringing a keener realization of the value of these principles to Masons, and through Masons to the world; making our citizenry value America and realize something of what we owe in return. This logically leads us into very practical fields, and as your Commission interprets it the Plan and Scope already adopted by the Association points very definitely the way for the development of such a program."

The WISDOM of the Founders of the Masonic Service Association of the U.S. in formulating these basic guidelines, has proved to be the STRENGTH of your Association in stimulating an awareness in the BEAUTY of the Craft to countless brethren.