

FOURTH OF JULY

As Freemasons, it is no perfunctory spirit that we remember the 148th (217th in 1993) anniversary of the adoption of the Declaration of American Independence, July 4th, 1776. It is a part of the history of our country and the history of our Craft, in this country; and it is our belief that a people who forget, or treat lightly, a great past, cannot have a great future. If they are indifferent to, or take as a matter of course, what cost so much in suffering and sacrifice, they are not worthy of the treasure they possess.

Happily, the old disputes which led up to the American Revolution, and the legacy of enmity which it left, are now faded and forgotten, and we think with kindness and respect of the land against which our forefathers fought. Since that far-off time America and Britain have joined hands in a vast enterprise, and their sons have fought side by side in a World War for the liberation of mankind and the redemption of civilization. But the American Revolution itself still stands, not only as the birth-hour of our Republic, but as the beginning of a new and great era in the history of humanity, the meaning and measure of which we do not yet see or understand.

No story outside of fairyland is more romantic than the history of the growth and development of our Republic. He is a strange man, and no Patriot at all, who can read the record and not feel his heart beat faster, stirred by a holy memory and an honorable pride. From thirteen thinly settled states, united in the struggle for freedom and in loyalty to a newly written Constitution, our Nation has grown to be one of the greatest, strongest, more far-reaching nations on earth; a human marvel and a social wonder. Never has there been such a flowing together of peoples, such a blending of bloods, as in America; it is a fraternal achievement in which many races and many faces mingled to build a freer and gentler Fatherland of Mankind.

Among the creative forces by which America has been made so great, none has been more benign than the influences of Freemasonry. The real history of Masonry in America belongs of right to the genius of poetry, and its story is an epic. Silent, ever-present, always active, by its constructive genius our Fraternity built itself into the very foundations of the Republic. When our fathers affirmed that "Governments derive their just powers from the consent of the governed," Masonry was present assenting to one of its own principles. What patriotic memories cluster about old Green Dragon Tavern in Boston! Webster called it "the headquarters of the Revolution," and there was also the headquarters of Freemasonry, where the Boston Tea Party was planned. As in Massachusetts, as throughout the Colonies, Masonry was everywhere active, indirectly as an Order, but directly through its members, in behalf of a nation "Conceived in liberty and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal;" which is one of its basic truths. It was not an accident that so many Masons signed the Declaration of Independence, or that Washington and most of his Generals were members of the Craft. Nor was it by mere chance that our first President was a Mason, sworn into office on a Bible taken from a Masonic Altar, by the Grand Master of New York. Such facts are symbols of deeper facts, showing the place and power of Masonry in the making of a nation.

Along the Atlantic Coast, among the Great Lakes, in the Wilderness of the Middle West, in the far South and the far West, everywhere, in centers of populations and in little Upper Rooms on the Frontier; the Lodge stood alongside the Home, the School and the Church. Who can measure the influence, much less estimate the worth, of thousands of Masonic Altars in this land where, all down our history, men have met in the name of God and the moral law, seeking to create that influence and sentiment which gives law its authority and touches with intellectual and spiritual refinement the life of society! Only a pen endowed with more than earthly skill could trace such an influence and tell such a story.

As Freemasons we believe that the things that made our Republic great in the past - made it not only possible, but powerful - are the things that will make it still greater in the future. A great English editor recently wrote an article asking the question, what has made America great? Not its rich resources, he said, because other lands - Russia, for example - are equally rich. Nor is it intelligence and enterprise of our people, because others are also intelligent. No, what has made America great, he said, is its form of government. If ever, of any men, it can be said that our fathers were divinely taught and divinely led when they instituted our form of government, in which individual initiative is united with social responsibility - liberty under law, liberty founded in right and reason, modified by private duty, public obligation, and a sense of the common good. For that reason we need today, all of us, a new baptism of the spirit of citizenship, of public-mindedness, of devotion to the state for what we can put into it and not for what we can get out of it. So, and only so, can we make our form of government effective for its high ends, and vindicate the wisdom of our fathers. Today hardly half of our people who are entitled to vote ever do so on any issue. Even the excitement of a Presidential campaign, such as that in which we are now engaged (July 1924), does not bestir them from their lethargy. With such negligence and indifference how can the words of Lincoln be fulfilled when he declared this to be a "Government of the people, by the people, for the people?" The facts show that it is not the foreign element who fail to vote, but those who are of American ancestry and training.

Here is where Masonry can render a real service, as well as in helping to create a more vivid sense of the sanctity of law. The increase of lawlessness in America in the last twenty-five years has been appalling. Even before the Great War some kinds of crime had increased fifteen hundred percent. For anyone to think lightly of our constitution, or any part of it, is to strike a blow at the basis of ordered civic life. To obey only such laws as suit our fancy or interest our appetite, is to lead the way to anarchy. Others, by the same principle, may disregard other laws - even those protecting life and the ownership of property - and the result will be chaos. Lincoln was right when he said that obedience to law must be the political religion of our Republic. The growth of racial rancor among us bodes no good for us or for our children. If left unchecked, it will poison private fellowship and pollute germs of ills sure to breed all sorts of social diseases. As has been said, no one race made America; it is a fraternal adventure of many races, each adding something of precious worth to the total achievement. Seven nationalities were represented on the Mayflower alone. By the facts of its history, no less than by the spirit of its laws, America must know nothing of the Saxon race, nothing of the Teutonic race, nothing of the slavic race. It must know only the Human race, of whose future and fulfillment it is the last great hope and promise, if it is true to its genius of liberty, toleration and fraternity.

There is room for everything in America except hatred. If we have been careless and sentimental in the past about allowing so many people of different races to enter our country, we must correct the error. But those who are already here are entitled to our regard, and only love, good will and the spirit of fraternity can Americanize men and women, much less little children.

Americanization is not a formula - it is a friendship. If we allow people of many races to knock at our doors, we do not want them to "knock" our institutions after we open the doors and admit them. Nor must we "knock" them. People whom we admit through the gates of America must not be foreigners, but friends. If they are often clannish, it is because we are indifferent. What we want for all is not simply freedom and opportunity, but fraternity - mutual respect and good will.

Here Masonry, by its very genius and purpose, can render a real service to the Republic, and at the same time strengthen its foundations. An instance in point is the Roosevelt Lodge in Rhode Island, almost every charter member of which was a man of a different race. The purpose of the Lodge was to bring men of many races together at the Altar of Masonry, and it was a happy thought to name the lodge for the man who, more than any great American of recent times, exemplified in his spirit and temper the wider fraternity of races. He was the incarnation of fraternalism, and by that token, a truly great Mason whose soul goes marching on, leading us out of bitterness toward brotherhood.

Since the Great War there has been an unhappy revival of religious intolerance in America. In nothing was the founding of our Republic more significant than in the new relation which it established between Church and State. Our fathers separated the two forever, but they gave equal liberty and honor to all elevating and benign religions. Such is also the spirit and teaching of Freemasonry, a great and simple principle which our Craft had learned and practiced before the name "United States" had ever been spoken. Toleration is not enough; we need insight, appreciation and understanding if we are to have many races without rancor, and many faiths without fanaticism. Our religion must be a part of our patriotism, and our patriotism must be religious in its depth, warmth and power. America is our Holy Land - sacred to our thoughts and dear to our hearts - and we dare not let it be darkened by lawlessness, defiled by racial rancor or disfigured by religious intolerance. Narrowness of thought and littleness of spirit are out of place in the land of the large and liberal air where the future of humanity lies.

So, once more, in memory of our national birthday, all Freemasons ask all Americans of every race, creed and condition to renew their vows of love, honor and loyalty to our Constitution, our President and our flag, which is the immortal symbol of all that is sacred in our life, law and history. Nay more, we ask all to join hands and hearts in behalf of a greater America tomorrow, worthy of the mighty America of the past to which, like the men who signed the Declaration of Independence, "We Mutually Pledge to Each Other our Lives, Fortunes and Sacred Honor.