

MASON'S FLAG

In the charge to an Entered Apprentice each of us has been told: "In the state, you are to be a quiet and peaceful subject, true to your government, and just to your country; you are not to countenance disloyalty or rebellion, but patiently submit to the legal authority, and conform with cheerfulness to the government of the country in which you live."

The second, third and fourth charges, to which all Masters must assent before being permitted to assume the Oriental Chair, are as follows:

"You agree to be a peaceable citizen, and cheerfully to conform to the laws of the country in which you reside."

"You promise not to be concerned in plots and conspiracies against government, but patiently to submit to the law and constituted authorities."

"You agree to pay a proper respect to the civil magistrates; to work diligently, live creditably, and act honorably toward all men." In the ninth charge an elected Master agrees: "To promote the general good of society, to cultivate the social virtues and propagate the knowledge of the Mystic Arts."

None who hear these charges need to be reminded of the assurances given them prior to their first obligation, regarding the allegiance all owe to their country.

These matters are here rehearsed that all may recall that Masonry is, actively and ritualistically, a supporter of established government; those who wish further assurances may read all the Old Charges of a Freemason for themselves, particularly the first; "Concerning God and Religion" and second, "Of the Civil Magistrate, Supreme and Subordinate."

A good citizen is not necessarily a Mason, but no indifferent citizen can possibly be a good Mason. The unpatriotic Mason is an impossibility, as much so as "Dry Water, or "Black Sunlight." One hundred and fifty years ago this month our forefathers declared that inasmuch as all men are created free and equal, they and their descendants shall always be free and independent. they set up their own government, these men who brought a new idea of government into the world, and they fashioned that new idea of the very stuff from which Masonry is made; aye, they cut the cloth of the flag from the garments of Freemasonry and with every stitch which put a star in its field of blue, they sewed in a Masonic principle of "Right, Toleration and Freedom of Conscience." They declared against tyranny and oppression, and they pledged their all - wealth, comfort, position, happiness and life itself - to maintain and support this revolutionary declaration that men are free and have a right to govern themselves.

This is neither the time nor the place to read again the inspiring story of the Revolutionary War, of the privations and problems of those early days, of the power which was Washington and the

fire which was Jefferson. But, in this, the anniversary month of the birth of this nation, all Masons may well pause for a moment in their busy lives to think of what Masonry teaches of citizenship and patriotism.

Ours is a government "of the people, by the people, and for the people." All have an equal share in it; one man's vote is as big and as powerful as the vote of another. But we do not always remember that there is no right in all the world, whether having its origin in God or in man, which does not bring with it a corresponding duty. We have, so we proclaim, the right to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness; therefore, we cannot escape the duty of seeing to it that our fellowmen have the same right. In 1776 we declared that we were free and equal of right; we thereby assumed the duty of maintaining that contention before all the world; the duty of fighting for what we claimed, no matter whom the opponent might be.

All battles are not fought with shot and shell, and not all opponents of our idea of liberty wear the robes of George the Third. We have a never-ending conflict with the forces of indifference, of selfishness and of ignorance; forces which are just as powerful and just as able to destroy this nation and this government as the armed force of men and guns which any nation or group of nations could bring against us. It is against these that the good citizen must always be in arms, these which the true Mason is always willing to fight and to conquer, even if it be himself he must first meet in conflict.

Any American citizen will resent with all the force of his being any attempt at disenfranchisement. His vote is own; his inalienable right, guaranteed to him under the constitution, the very heart and soul of his Americanism. But the vote is not only a guaranteed and inalienable right, it is a solemn duty. If all have this right, and none use it, there can be no government (of the people). If all have the right and only a minority use it, we have a government by the minority of the majority. Then what becomes of our boast that this government is "By The People?" The Mason who does not go to the polls and register his voice, no matter how small a part of the world it may be, not only gives up voluntarily the right for which hundreds of thousands of patriots fought, bled and died for, but dodges his solemn duty to the State in failing to live up to that Charge which admonishes him to be "True To His Government and Just To His Country."

Injustice was the underlying reason, the foundation stone on which all the other reasons rested, which caused men to rebel against the English King, and declare themselves independent. Taxation without representation; the feeling that they were being exploited; that the millions of subjects of the King, loyal and true to the ideals of the Mother-Country as they knew themselves to be, were but pawns in a game in which George the Third played with human destinies for purely selfish reason; these were the bitter dregs of the cup held to the lips of the colonists, which they could not swallow.

Injustice, inhumanity, the exploitation of the weak by the strong, the oppression of the helpless by authority, the enslavement of men's bodies or their souls by force - these are anathema to Americans. And so our legal structure, our courts and our ideals of justice are all so arranged and used that every possible protection is thrown about a man who must stand before his fellows, accused of wrong- doing, lest injustice be done.

At the very root of our system of justice is the jury system. But what a mockery a "Jury of his Peers" often becomes! When it is a mockery, it is because we, who would fight to the death under a waving Flag of Stars and Stripes rather than let an enemy have one inch of our sacred soil, often turn away from the call to jury duty and allow selfish pleasure, indifference and personal convenience to keep us from doing our share in the administration of that justice, to promote that for which this nation was born.

A jury-serving citizen may not be a Mason, but no real Mason who obeys the teachings of our great Fraternity will not let anything less potent and important than his duty to his family cause him to "Beg Off" from jury service, or try to dodge his share in the administration of that justice which we proclaim is "For All." It is a proud Masonic boast that politics is not discussed in lodge rooms, and that Masonry is not a power politically. But the boast is and should be true only when the word "Politics" and "Politically" are used in the narrow, partisan sense. Masons cannot be, in their lodge rooms, "Republicans" or "Democrats." But Masons can and should take a most earnest interest in the political activities of the nation as a whole and cast their votes and raise their voices for those moments which are for the benefit of all.

Particularly is this true of the public school system.

The "Little Red School House," which so well served the forefathers of this nation, is rapidly passing; the consolidated school, the better city and town schools with new and better methods of transportation are taking its place. But only the form of the building and the quality of the teaching have changed; the underlying idea is the same. And for that idea Masons have always stood firm, and must always stand four-square.

Though our Declaration of Independence asserts that men (people) are created free and equal, we know that no power of government can keep them equal. Different people, different minds; different people, different characters. All government can do and all it should do towards preservation of equality is to assure equality of opportunity. And that is what the public school system does, provides an equality of opportunity by which the high and the low, the rich and the poor, the clever and the stupid, may have equal chances to drink from the fountain of knowledge, equal chances to become well informed men and women, equal opportunity to rise to the top!

With some of our greatest leaders coming from log cabins, no one in all the world can say this nation does not practice what it preaches. The highest gift in the hands of the nation can be and has been given to a son of plain people, and will again. That equality of opportunity today has its beginnings in our public school systems. The Mason who is not interested in those schools, whether or not his children attend them, the Mason who is not alert to prevent encroachments upon the system, which some organizations continually attempt; the Mason who is not a self-constituted watch-dog of juvenile freedom and the child's right to the best education that State can provide, has little right to wear the Square and Compasses, and none to answer "Well!" when in some far-off day a Great Judge shall ask him, "How Did Ye With Your Obligation as a Freemason?" Over your head, and mine, waves the most beautiful Flag in all the world. Its red is the red of the blood shed by selfless men, for the establishment and the preservation of the Union. Its blue is the blue of the sky, a symbol of limitless opportunity; the blue of Blue Lodge Masonry, which first raised the flag aloft and whose hands have held it high for one hundred and

fifty years. Its White Stars and Stripes symbolize purity; the purity of aim, purity of ideals, purity of intentions and purity of purpose to sacrifice for the common good.

Let us keep the red unspotted; let us maintain the blue as loyally as we maintain the sacred institution under whose letter "G" we meet together; and let us, one and all, from the Worshipful Master in the East, to the youngest entered Apprentice in the Northeast Corner of the Lodge, keep the white unspotted, that the government "Of The People, By The People and For The People Shall Not Perish From The Earth!"