

**Grand Lodge
Free & Accepted Masons
Of California
Grand Oration 1910**

**Grand Orator
Charles A. Adams
"MASONRY IN BUSINESS AND POLITICS."**

The origin, history and philosophy of Masonry have ever proved alluring, as well as fruitful and prolific, topics for Grand Orators; and such is the nature of our Institution with its inexhaustible wealth of symbolism and sentiment, that ever apparently is there something yet to be said.

I have, however, resisted the allurements of topics such as these, and have preferred, instead, to improve the opportunity to direct your attention to a view of Masonry in the concrete.

There will be no pretense at weaving garlands of rhetoric, no attempt at word painting to picture to your minds the beauties of the mystical, or mythical, in Masonry; and I want each one of you to divest your mind of all preconceived ideas of What an oration by a Grand Orator should be; or, if it will make it more acceptable, to consider what I shall have to say to you not as an oration, but merely as a plain, honest and sincere talk from one Mason to another upon a subject which intimately concerns each one of us, "Masonry in Business and Politics."

Now fear not, Brethren, that I purpose introducing into this Grand Lodge an interdicted topic; this is only another way of saying that I purpose talking to you of Masonry in our everyday life; because, after all, the life of the American Mason, apart from that of his home, is in business and politics.

First as to business; because, alas, with us, apparently, business comes first; and our political action is too frequently dictated by a regard for our own particular business. I have heard it repeatedly stated, and the statement justified by the citation of the decisions of the Committee on Appeals and Grievances, not only of this, but of other jurisdictions, that "Masonry is one thing and Business another." Brethren, except in the sense in which those decisions must have been rendered, to the effect that no Mason should be punished because of his misfortune, or for an honest difference of opinion concerning a business agreement, I do not believe that "Masonry is one thing and Business another." As well might it be said that "Honesty is one thing and Business another;" that "Truth is one thing and Trade another." Brethren, did you ever reflect that all Trade, all Commerce is founded upon Truth? Truth is the backbone of Confidence, and Confidence is the keynote of Trade.

There is hardly a commercial transaction which can be cited in which there is not involved this question of confidence in the truth and honesty of at least one of the contracting parties. Is it unreasonable to assume that special confidence may be safely reposed in the honesty and integrity of one in who has been inculcated the lessons of Masonry? Should not this be particularly true when we deal with each other?

Our nightly prayer offered up in every Masonic Lodge to the Supreme Grand Master is that He will "so influence our hearts and minds that we may, each one of us, practice out of the lodge, those great moral duties which are inculcated in it." How that prayer is answered, I need not tell you.

To too many of us, I am afraid, our Masonry is what their religion is to some professing Christians; just as they reserve their religion for use only on Sundays, so do some of us, I am afraid, re-serve our Masonry for our Lodge nights.

No Mason should, of course, bring his business into his Lodge; but that need not preclude him from taking his Masonry into his business. Nay, that is his duty; the very name of Mason should be a guarantee, not alone to the Fraternity, but to the whole world, of incorruptible honesty, strict integrity, and that personal fidelity upon which every one may, with the utmost confidence, rely.

The merchant who makes no special boast of commercial probity may attempt to justify the sale of short weight packages as "Trade Custom;" and may seek to palliate the offense of adulterating his goods on the score of the "exigencies of unfair competition;" but it is our proud

boast that Masonry sets a higher standard of morals and virtue than the mere law of the land imposes; and no Mason who fails to practice as a man, in his business dealings, that which he professes as a Mason, should be permitted to interpose, in extenuation, the specious plea that "Masonry is one thing and Business another."

The spirit of Masonry should incite us to greater fidelity in the discharge of every duty; and when a Mason deals with another in any other manner than that in which he himself would be dealt by, even though he be not guilty of actual fraud in the eyes of the law, even though he be not guilty of an offense involving moral turpitude, he violates the spirit at least, if not the letter of his obligation. He not only renders himself unworthy to be taken by the hand as a brother, but he forfeits the right to be known as a Mason.

I care not how far, nor with what speed he may have progressed in the Fraternity. He may be so well provided with the world's goods that he may have been able to pay for degrees enough to make him what the ignorant term "A high Mason;" he may be privileged to wear on his fob the Cross of Malta, or the Double Eagle, and in the lapel of his coat, the scimitar and claws; he may be a Thrice Illustrious Prince, a Sovereign Master or an Imperial Potentate,—but if he be a Grocer, and sell sand for sugar, he is not a Mason;—if he be a Tailor, and for wool, sell shoddy, he is not a Mason;—if he be a Law-yer and instigate and encourage litigation, or otherwise attempt to obtain a benefit for himself at the expense of his client, or by improper methods, a benefit for his client to which, under the law, he is not entitled, he is not a Mason;—if he be an employer of labor and take an unfair advantage of the poverty and distress of those who must hire to him, he is not a Mason;—if he be an employee and fail in the duty expressed in the quaint language of the ancient charges, "truly to see and work for the advantage" of him by whom he is employed, he is not a Mason.

Whatever may be his trade, occupation or profession, if he does not in his business transactions, deal fairly, honestly and justly with all men, he is as much an impostor as though he had never been received into a Lodge of Free and Accepted Masons. He is not only false to himself, and faithless to his vows, but he brings upon the Craft shame and reproach.

Upon the individual Mason depends the reputation of the Fraternity. Boastful and proud claims of high morality and virtue, without the exemplification of those traits of character in our daily lives must provoke the distrust and contempt of the profane. Our acts as men must be the living testimony of the sincerity of our professions as Masons. If those in the community who are not of our number discover from their daily intercourse with us, from their business dealings with us, that we are only after all as other men; that although we are Masons, our Masonry is something apart from our business; and that we are under no obligations as business men, because we are Masons, to deal honestly and fairly, even with each other, they will believe, and they will have a right to believe, that we are only pretenders.

If our Institution ever ceases to be, in all things, that which it was designed to be, it will be because we talk, and write and think too much of Masonry in the abstract, and not enough of Masonry in the concrete; too much of Masons collectively, and too little of the individual Mason.

There seems to be a strange disposition, not only within the Fraternity, but also outside of it, in all the movements for the betterment of existing conditions, to ignore the importance of the character of the individual.

Whether the welfare of the general public is to be effected through a stronger social organization, or through a movement for greater individual liberty, whether we are to turn to "collectivism" or "individualism" to avoid the peril to the Republic from the "special interests," this much seems, to me at least, certain—that there will never be any beneficial, permanent, lasting reform in either our business or political methods, which does not involve a reform of the individual.

What a government is, and whether truth and justice prevail, depends upon the individual; because every government is, after all, but the reflex of the individuals of whom it is composed. No Nation, no State, no City, ever had a better or worse government than it really deserved; and much of that of which we complain, in our business and political methods, is due to the simple fact that it is almost impossible to convince the ordinary individual that his private interests must not be served at the expense of the State. Even the best of men, honest men and otherwise good citizens, will not hesitate to seek from the Government a special privilege, entirely unmindful of the fact that it is granted at the expense of the community.

It was only a few weeks ago, that I ran across an article written by a man who had served many years in Congress, in which it was stated that 90 per cent of the requests from his constituents were for special privileges at the expense of the National Treasury; and he quoted in its entirety, suppressing only the names, a letter he had received from the Pastor of his Church in which his good offices, were sought, and his influence asked, to have placed upon the pension list, the name of a man who, it was naively admitted, had deserted in the second year of the war. The Minister's justification for his re-quest was that there were thousands of others who were receiving pensions to which they were not entitled, and that the man in question was a burden upon the congregation. This, it will be conceded, is an extraordinary case; but it is more than likely that the Minister who made that request would be one of the very first to join in the cry for reform of existing conditions—totally unconscious, and in absolute ignorance (at least it is to be hoped so) of the fact that it is just such requests as that made by him that have brought about the condition which now demands an immediate and radical reform.

But there are those of us who neither seek, nor accept, for our-selves nor for others, special privileges at the expense of the community, who try to live honestly and to deal fairly and justly with all men, but who as Masons are remiss in the discharge of the civic duties enjoined upon us.

I confess that I approach this phase of the discussion with some hesitation—not however because I am among the number of those who believe that this is a matter with which Masonry has no concern; on the contrary, I believe that there is no higher duty devolving upon us as Masons than the duty we owe the State as citizens; and one of the highest duties devolving upon an American citizen is that which requires him to concern himself with, and take a part in, politics—not politics in that vile sense of artful or dishonest efforts to secure the success of party schemes, or even in that less objectionable, but still restricted, sense of the management of a Political party; but politics in that higher, broader and larger sense which may be best defined as that part of ethics which concerns the regulation of a Nation, State or Community, and the preservation of its safety, peace and prosperity.

In every community there are constantly arising questions which affect the public welfare—questions of public morals and good government—concerning which our duty is plain.

But we are today confronted with a condition in which our duty as Masons is not so clear; a condition which presents a problem to the solution of which must be brought not only the highest quality of mind, but which seems to call for a judgment influenced by the peculiar characteristics of the teachings of the Craft.

On the one hand, there are existing evils which must be corrected if the government is to survive on the lines established by our fathers— a government by the People, as well as for the People; on the other hand, brought about, no doubt, by a recognition of the existence of the evils of which we complain, and due, perhaps, to an honest and praise-worthy desire to correct them—there is a condition no less intolerable to the earnest Mason, imbued with the teachings of the Craft, and who is not swayed by passion or prejudice, nor influenced by the almost universal popular discontent.

It has come to be the fashion to assail those in high places, and to impugn their motives and question their honesty. On all sides, from every source, from the rostrum and from the pulpit, in the columns of the daily press and in the pages of the monthly magazines, come warnings of a great peril, which, it is said, confronts us. We have been persistently told, and we have begun to believe, that we live in an age peculiarly subject to the tyranny of wealth; that all men suffer from a consuming thirst for gold; that corruption is everywhere rampant, and that the very foundations of the Republic are tottering beneath the weight of insatiate greed and inordinate avarice. It would appear that the world had grown suddenly wicked.

Now, Brethren, Masons should be optimists—not pessimists— Things are not as bad as they seem; and the world has not grown suddenly wicked. There never was a time since the world began when

"man's inhumanity to man" was not the burden of the popular song; and there never was a time when there did not exist that of which we are now complaining; and this arraignment today of existing conditions is, of itself, evidence to the thinking man that the world is growing better.

The fact of the matter is that we are passing through what may be termed the hysteria of an awakened public conscience. Our passions are inflamed by radicals obsessed with the idea of universal corruption. Our judgment is influenced by an appeal to our personal interests—For

instance, we see the cost of living increasing, and we are willing to believe that we, the plain people, are the victims of a gigantic conspiracy designed to crush us. Great good has come—greater good will yet come from this awakening; but the condition is also pregnant with great evil.

Popular discontent and passion have been stimulated to a pitch perilously near to class hatred. There has been instilled into the minds of thousands of our people, a belief that there is no justice in our Courts for the poor man, and that the decisions of our Judges are either purchased for money, or rendered in accordance with class sympathy. The highest Court in the land—"The Greatest Court in Christendom"—is not, it would appear, secure against unjust criticism. Here Brethren, is a real danger to the Republic.

"The Honest Lawyer" is a jest as old as the profession itself; the lawyers have survived it, and no harm has been done. But Brethren, when you make a jest and byword of the honor of our Judges, and the sanctity of our Courts, you imperil a safeguard of American liberty.

Courts and Judges are not above criticism, and honest Judges do not resent it; but they have a right to expect, and it is our duty to insist, that that criticism shall be just. It is not sufficient that the critic shall be honest, but he must be likewise qualified and competent to pass judgment upon that which he criticizes. Indiscriminate and 'unjust and ignorant criticism not only tends to weaken that respect for our Courts upon which their usefulness depends, but it, of itself, defeats its very purpose. To criticize a Court for rendering a decision, which proves unpopular, although justified and required by the law, is to invite and encourage corruption and dishonesty in the judiciary. It serves notice upon every Judge upon the Bench that the esteem in which he will be held by the public, and the probability of his re-election, depend not upon his honesty and integrity—not upon his learning and ability, but upon his willingness to prostitute his high office to the appeal of public clamor.

Here, Brethren, I say is a danger to the Republic against which we must firmly and sternly set our faces; and this is but one of the evils which result from that unworthy willingness—nay that despicable eagerness—with which we credit every statement which impugns the motives, or questions the honesty, of men in public life.

I cannot but believe, unpopular though that belief may be, that inseparably connected with our duty to stand for good government, and to array ourselves with those who are opposing corruption in public life, is another duty no less incumbent upon us—incumbent upon us as good citizens as well, and particularly, as good Masons;—and that is to uphold the hands of those in authority, and to encourage and support them with our respect and confidence until, convinced by evidence, and not influenced by vague suspicion, we have reason to believe that they have ceased to deserve it.

It seems to me that when we do less than this, we have failed in our duty as Masons; because we have not rendered unto every man his just due; and we have suffered our passions and our prejudices to become the masters of our judgment.

There is evil enough of which we may justly complain. In too many instances great wealth has been acquired by means, which if not illegal, are at least, from an ethical standpoint, illegitimate. Too frequently has organized capital illegitimately and arrogantly interfered with, and attempted to control, the election of candidates for public office. In too many instances for government by the people has there been substituted government by what has come to be known as "The Interests." Bribery and corruption do exist, and are not excused by the fact that they have always existed.

Today one can hardly pick up one of the popular priced magazines without finding an account either of some illegitimate scheme of the predatory rich to prey upon the people, or of the exposure, some-where, of the depths of political degradation to which some men are willing to descend; and always at the end comes the query, "What are you going to do about it?"

Truly, Brethren, a difficult question, notwithstanding the fact that the radical is ready with his answer. Unfortunately, however, there appear to be as many different answers as there are different kinds of radical. Just at present there seems to be a trend throughout the country toward a movement for a third party. This is neither the time, nor the place, to discuss that question. This much, however, I think I may with propriety say concerning it—reiterating the opinion I have already expressed. Neither through a third, nor through a thirtieth party will there come a lasting reform, which does not involve a reform of the individual. The reform of the individual will be brought about only by a crystallized public sentiment expressed in no uncertain terms —

expressed not in vague generalities as to the desirability for a re-form, expressed not by the substitution of office holders of one political faith for office holders of another political faith—but expressed by the manner in which we treat the individual. The means by which the individual will be reformed are, I believe, at hand, and will effect his reform when we are big enough and brave enough, and have the moral courage, to make use of them.

If you and I, and every honest man, here and everywhere, in every walk of life, will refuse to consider as our social equal the man who even while keeping within the pale of the law, transgresses the plain proprieties of honest business and social intercourse, if we refuse to take his hand, if we refuse to bow to him in the street, or to recognize him except as an unclean thing, contact with whom must contaminate every honest man, the goal for which we are contending will soon be in sight. Men do not strive for great wealth for the mere gratification of their material wants. All that a man has, Emerson says, will he give for right relations with his mates. Even the power which wealth brings will not compensate for the loss of human intercourse with those who he knows, and the world knows, are honest men, and whose companionship he desires.

Refuse that intercourse to those whose only claim thereto is the dishonestly acquired wealth they have accumulated, and the incentive to amass money is removed. Let it once be known in any community that no matter what a man may have, or who he may be, if he be not honest there shall be withheld from him the companionship of all decent men and women, and a greater stride will have been made for the moral uplift of that community than could ever be effected by all the power and majesty of the law.

When every individual shall have been convinced of the good which he can individually accomplish, when all of us shall have become possessed of that great moral courage required for the strict performance of the duty devolving upon us as men, and as Masons, when we practice out of our Lodges the lessons we are taught in them, when we, in truth, render unto every man his just due, without distinction, then there will have been created and crystallized a public sentiment against which greed and dishonesty and vice and corruption will not dare contend.

The objection, which has been made to, the remedy proposed is that it is Utopian; so is perfection in government Utopian; and yet we strive for it. And what, after all, is there Utopian about the plan, except in the single idea that there can be found men willing to blind their eyes against the dazzling rays of yellow gold? Are the teachings of our Craft Utopian? Is it Utopian to believe that it is the internal, and not the external, qualifications which recommend a man, and determine our relationship with him?

There are, no doubt, some of you who know of at least one man whom you would not permit to enter your homes, and to whom you refuse social recognition, either because of his occupation, or because of the fact that by his own misconduct he has forfeited all claim to recognition by decent men. It requires no moral courage upon our part to socially ostracize such a man, because a sufficient number of men have already determined to, and do, withhold their companionship from him; and so it would appear that the remedy suggested is extraordinary and Utopian not in the direction, but only in the length of the step.

Brethren, because the world is surely and steadily growing better, the day will come when it will be thought strange and extraordinary that an honest man was ever willing to consider as his social equal, one who he had reason to believe, and who was known in the community as, a malefactor—whether a malefactor of wealth or of poverty.

And until that day comes, and that it may be the sooner here, each of us must do his whole duty as he sees it; and this. Brethren, as it seems to one who loves Masonry is our duty as "Masons in Business and Politics;"—to live honestly and uprightly; to act fairly and justly with all men; in business as in all else, to deal as we would be dealt by; to take an active and intelligent interest, not only in public questions involving the whole nation, the welfare of the whole people, but as well in the politics of our own communities—to cast our ballots for no man whom we do not believe upright and honest, and fitted for the office to which he aspires; and above all, to be faithful and loyal to the government under which we live, and to be willing and anxious to believe that in our public servants, as in other men, goodness and truth and honor and virtue do exist, and will be discovered when we seek for their motives with the searchlight of true Masonic charity—that charity "which envieth not and doth not think evil and rejoiceth not in iniquity;"—the simple creed of a good Mason, and an honest American citizen, the highest and noblest type of manhood.