

**Grand Lodge
Free & Accepted Masons
Of California
Grand Oration 1914**

**Grand Orator
William H. Waste**

Most Worshipful Grand Master, and Brethren of the Grand Lodge

To dignify my remarks upon this occasion as an "oration," is to do violence to the English language. I would not dare to pit my feeble powers against the matchless eloquence of the many illustrious Grand Orators, who, in the past, have delighted and enthralled the members of this Grand Body. With a full knowledge of my own limitations and shortcomings, I approach with trepidation the task laid upon me a year ago, as one of the first official acts of my courteous and loving friend, the splendid man, who, during the interim, has been our beloved Most Worshipful Grand Master.

It is the duty of the Grand Orator to deliver, at each annual communication, an address to the Grand Lodge upon matters appertaining to the Craft. Agreeable to that requirement and with due regard to your patience and courtesy, it had been my purpose to discuss with you tendencies among the members of our Order indicating, to my mind, a want of understanding of the deep significance of some of the ancient landmarks of the Craft. In doing so let me make it clear, my brethren, I had intended to aim no darts of criticism or complaint at any person or persons, but to deal in generalities, and to speak only out of the store of our common experiences and observations. But all this I have changed.

It was my pleasure to accompany our present Grand Master on many of his visitations to the Craft throughout the jurisdiction. It was a most pleasurable experience. We met many of our brethren in their homes, in their social gatherings and in the Lodge room. Upon many of these occasions I endeavored to measure up to the requirements of my position by speaking upon topics relating to the teachings of the Craft. I was given most courteous attention and my brethren were good enough to say that I had in many instances furnished them food for thought. As I met these same brethren, many of them, in this annual Communication, they gripped my hand and wished me well, and were good enough to recall with expressions of evident pleasure our meetings throughout the year. They embarrassed me with spoken anticipations of this hour. In deep thought I wondered why.

As I look back over the year I remember that all I had spoken had been merely messages suggested by the time and place and spoken from the heart. I prayed, and prayed earnestly, brethren, to the Great Author of our Being that in this hour I might be given wisdom to direct me in bringing to you a message that would in some slight degree repay you for your patience and courtesy, and that in some measure would prove worthy of the occasion. But my thoughts came sluggishly, my pencil seemed weighted with iron and my written notes took shape with but a snail's pace. A ready tongue seemed my last possession, and eloquence fled—whither I know not, but it seemed to me, never to return. As I listened on yesterday with you to the address of the Most Worshipful Past Grand Master of Illinois, and noted how the simple words of that venerable man went directly to your hearts, all I had planned to say upon this occasion became as "sounding brass and tinkling cymbals." My preconceived ideas of an oration to be delivered upon this occasion, went fluttering out of the window like the notes of his maiden speech, never to come back.

And so, Most Worshipful Grand Master and Brethren, I bring to you today, only a simple message from the heart, a heart to heart talk, from one who loves them, to men he knows love him.

Another year in our earthly existence has gone. This annual Communication of men in earnest plan and endeavor assembled to take stock of our material advancement will soon be over. The stewardship of the present Grand Officers must be delivered to others. It is necessary to conserve the brick and stone of our earthly temples; our material advancement must be carefully marked and all our energies must be properly directed in order that we may the better

carry forward the work that we have to do. We must plan, we must build. Some must lead and some must follow in that work. The organization of our visible and physical institution must not be neglected. But before we part I want to talk of that other temple, not made of brick, or mortal", or wood, or steel, or stone, but built and enshrined in the human heart. It is my sincere desire to impress upon you if I can what to my mind is the greatest aim and object of Free Masonry.

Let us call Masonry what we may. Call it a philosophy, and there are other philosophies like it. Call it a science, and other sciences duplicate it. Call it a religion and it will measure well up to the standard. But it is an answering call to the cry of the human heart that Masonry rises sublime, and it is of that attribute of the order that I would speak.

Every petitioner for the degrees, before he was permitted to knock at the door of Free Masonry, was required to sign in his own true hand a petition, wherein he "represented that, unbiased by friends and uninfluenced by mercenary motives he freely and voluntarily offered himself as a candidate for the mysteries of Masonry; that he was prompted to solicit this privilege by a favorable opinion conceived of the institution, a desire for knowledge, and a sincere wish to be serviceable to his fellow creatures." That is a wonderful declaration—a fundamental statement of a great faith in an institution. Has, to you and me, that faith been realized? For a personal answer to that question I go back forty years and more in my own experience. As I do so I feel sure that many of you will travel with me over forgotten roads of memory and that you will wander in bypaths of forgotten experiences, and that possibly you, like myself, will find a sufficient answer to the question.

My first impressions of Free Masonry were indeed boyish but have been lasting. They were received when, as a mere lad my father held me by the hand, at the funeral of one dear to my family; a man of standing and influence in the community. One of the then Grand Wardens of this Body, a dear and intimate friend of him who had gone, by special request, had come from his distant home to conduct the funeral ceremonies according to the ritual of the order. He acted as the Master of the Lodge upon that occasion and his presence there created comment, for even then, although young in years, he was being honored by the people of the State. He was my father's friend and I looked up to him as being a great man.

The village preacher was there, acting as chaplain of the Lodge:

"A man he was to all the country dear."

Often did I hear him in his strong denunciation of sin and the sinner; as often did I shudder at his portrayal of an angry God; but more often did I run at his kindly call to have him lay his hand upon my head and out of the kindness of his great loving heart talk to me as one boy to another. He was loved in the community, for he never turned aside from the call of distress. Where sickness was, he was there:

"Beside the bed where parting life was laid,
And sorrow, guilt, and pain, by turns dismay'd,
The loving champion stood."

The village schoolmaster was there. He wore his white apron, the badge of a Master Mason, with the same simplicity with which he went about his daily task. He, too, was loved and revered in that community and of him it might be said as Goldsmith sang, of that other schoolmaster of the deserted village:

"And still they gazed and still the wonder grew
That one small head could carry all he knew."

The Judge from the neighboring county seat was also there, a man of probity and uprightness; and though stern, recognized as just. The strong men of the county grouped around that humble abode—the men who were the backbone and sinew of the community. The Holy Bible was borne forth by the eldest member of the Lodge, and as it passed supported by the Deacons with their rods, a hush seemed to fall on the place. It was a tribute, to my boyish mind, to the word of God. Those early impressions remained with me as I grew into man-hood. I had a

simple faith in, coupled perhaps with a youthful curiosity to learn more of, this to me, mysterious order.

I became a man; I knocked and the door of Free Masonry was opened unto me. Within the Lodge I met men who called me "Brother." I felt that my boyish ambitions were about to be realized; that my dreams were about to come true. As a novitiate I received instruction. I learned that the three principal tenets of Masonry are Brotherly Love, Relief and Truth. I saw men reverently bow their heads and invoke the blessing of God that He would so influence their hearts and minds that they might practise out of the Lodge those great moral duties inculcated in it. In the outer world I saw Masons in high places in political and official life, administering the affairs of the State and Nation, with honor and uprightness. I saw justice tempered with mercy and guided by "that standard, or boundary of right which enables us to render unto every man his just due, without distinction." I saw the man of God soften his dogmatic creeds with the doctrine of universal love. I saw men leading little children tenderly along the pathways that lead to truth, and fighting valiantly for the rights of childhood. I saw my brethren occupying positions of honor, integrity and trust, and everywhere regarding the volume of the Sacred Law as the great light of their profession—considering it as the unerring standard of truth and justice, and regulating their actions by the divine precepts it contains.

When I was Master of my Lodge there came to us, to lay the cornerstone of a public building, a beloved Grand Master of this jurisdiction. He performed the impressive ceremonies of the occasion with dignity. Later at a gathering in his honor, standing upright in our midst he made an appeal to his Brethren of the Craft to be men. It was a strong cry, uttered from the heart of a strong man. It made a deep and lasting impression upon the throng of Masons there assembled. Standing in the full height of his physical manhood and with a voice like that of a prophet calling to his children to follow him, he closed with the beautiful words of Doctor Holland:

"God give us men! A time like this demands
Strong minds, great hearts, true faith and ready hands;
Men whom the lust of office does not kill;
Men whom the spoils of office cannot buy;
Men who possess opinions and a will;
Men who have honor—men who will not lie;
Men who can stand before a demagogue,
And damn his treacherous flattering without winking!
Tall men, sun crowned, who live above the fog
In public duty, and in private thinking:
For while the rabble, with their thumb-worn creeds,
Their large professions and their little deeds,
Mingle in selfish strife, lo! Freedom weeps,
Wrong rules the land, and waiting justice sleeps!"

In his annual address at this Communication, our Most Worshipful Grand Master has alluded with deep feeling to the personnel of our Craft in this jurisdiction. He has dwelt at length upon the calibre of the men who comprise the membership of our order in this state. I know that he is justified in his high estimate of these men. As we journeyed together throughout the length of the jurisdiction, as we met these men, as we looked into their faces around the festal board, or reposed in their homes as their honored guests or met them in their customary fields of business activity, an observing mind could not but be impressed to the same degree that our Grand Master was, and I assert that the rank and file of the Masons in this state measure up to the cry of the poet, so beautifully expressed in the words quoted by the Grand Master, now deceased, "God give us men!"

It is not in the material achievements of our Order that the greatest results of its teachings are to be found. Our success rests not in stately edifices of brick, and mortar, and wood, and steel, and stone, but in influence on the minds and hearts of men. The greatest monuments to the success of the institution are to be found in the work carried on by it in furtherance of that "sincere wish to be serviceable to his fellow creatures" expressed in the petition of each Master Mason. Service of the distressed worthy Brother, the protection and care of his widow and orphan, the

good counsel whispered in his ear, the admonition of his errors, the efforts for his reformation, and the inspiration of his soul to better things and to immortality—these are the greatest of its achievements. This may be expressed far more beautifully than I, in my own language, might tell it, in a little story by Professor Henry Van Dyke, which I have a number of times during the year used to illustrate this point. I had not intended to repeat it here, but, at the request of a number of the brethren, and with apologies for its repetition, I will again tell it.

It is "The Story of the Other Wise Man," Artaban, the Median, who in the days when Augustus Caesar was master of many kinds' and Herod reigned in Jerusalem, dwelt in the City of Ecbatana, in a beautiful garden watered by the streams descending from the slopes of Mt. Orontes. and made musical by innumerable birds. He was one of the ancient priesthood of the Magi, called the "Fire Worshipers" It had been revealed to him and to his three companions, Caspar, Melchior and Balthasar, in the ancient tablets of the Chaldees that a new star would appear, which would herald the birth of one who should be born of the King of Israel, one who should point the way to all Truth.

Artaban sold his house and his possessions and bought three jewels to carry them as a tribute to the King. They were wonderful gems—"one blue as a fragment of the night sky, one redder than a ray of sunrise, and one as pure as the peak of a snow mountain at twilight."

While Artaban watched in his home for the coming of the stars. His three companions were watching at the ancient temple of the Seven Spheres in Babylonia. Artaban called many of his friends together and showed them his precious gems, told them of the coming of the star, and asked them to accompany him, but one and all, they turned aside and Artaban was left in solitude. As he watched "far over the eastern plain a white mist stretched like a lake. But where the distant peak of Zagros serrated the western horizon the sky was clear Jupiter and Saturn rolled together like drops of lambent flame about to blend in one. Artaban bowed his head. He covered his brow with his hands. It is the sign,' he said. -The King is coming, and I will go to meet him."

All night long he rode westward on Vasda, the swiftest of his horses. Day by day, for ten days he rode wisely and well that he might keep the appointed hour with the other Magi. On the evening of the last day his horse was almost spent and he would gladly have turned into the city to find rest and refreshment for himself and for her, but he knew it was three hours' journey yet to the Temple of the Seven Spheres, and he must reach the place by midnight if he would find his comrades waiting. So he did not halt, but rode steadily across the stubble fields. A grove of date palms made an island of gloom in the pale yellow sea. As she passed into the shadow Vasda slackened her pace, and began to pick her way more carefully. * * * At last she gave a quick breath of anxiety and dismay, and stood stock-still quivering in every muscle, before a dark object in the shadow of the last palm tree.

Artaban dismounted. The dim starlight revealed before him the form of a man lying across the road; a poor Hebrew exile apparently dying of the deadly fever, which ravished the marsh, lands in autumn. Artaban thought him dead, but a long faint sigh came from the man's lips and his brown bony fingers closed convulsively on the hem of the Magian's robe and held him fast. Artaban's heart was troubled. He could not stay to minister to the dying stranger, for it would keep him beyond the hour when he should meet his companions. They would go without him. But if he went on now the man would surely die. If he stayed, life might be restored. He turned back to the sick man, carried him to the foot of a palm tree, brought water for him and moistened the sufferer's brow and lips. He mixed a draught of one of those simple and potent remedies, which he always carried in his girdle, and poured it between the colorless lips. Hour by hour he labored until the man's strength returned. As Artaban departed, the Jew raised his trembling hand solemnly to Heaven and said: "Now may the God of Abraham and Isaac and Jacob bless and prosper the journey of the merciful, and bring him in peace to his desired haven."

It was already long past midnight and Artaban rode in haste; but the first beam of the sun sent his shadow before him as he rode, scanning the great mound of Nimrod in the Temple of the Seven Spheres. As he feared, his friends had gone. At the edge of the terrace he saw a little cairn of broken bricks, and under them a piece of parchment. He caught it up and read: "We have waited past the midnight, and can delay no longer. We go to find the King. Follow us across the desert."

Artaban sat down upon the ground and covered his head in despair.

"How can I cross the desert," said he, "with no food and with a spent horse? I must return to Babylon, sell my sapphire, and buy a train of camels, and provision for the journey. I may never overtake my friends. Only God the merciful knows whether I shall not lose the sight of the King because I tarried to show mercy."

Artaban made due preparation and followed the other wise men over the dreary undulations of the desert, high up upon the back of his camel, rocking steadily onward like a ship over the waves. He searched the gardens and orchards of Damascus, the snowy ridge of Hermon, the dark groves of cedars in the valleys of the Jordan, and by the blue waters of the Lake of Galilee, moving steadily onward until he arrived at Bethlehem. It was the third day after three wise men had come to that place, and had found Mary and Joseph with the young child Jesus, and had laid their gifts of gold and frankincense and myrrh at his feet. But inquire as he would about the visit of his brethren and to what house the star had directed them, he could find but little. "The streets of the village seemed to be deserted. From the open door of a low stone cottage he heard the sound of a woman's voice singing softly. He entered and found a young mother hushing her baby to rest. She told him of the strangers from the East, who had appeared in the village three days before, and how they said that a star had guided them to the place where Joseph of Nazareth was lodging with his wife and her new born child, and how they had paid reverence to the child and had given him many rich gifts." But the travelers, she told him, had disappeared as suddenly as they came, and it was whispered that Joseph had taken the baby and his mother and fled into Egypt.

As Artaban listened to her timid speech the child in her arms looked up in his face and smiled—stretching out its rosy hands to grasp at the winged circle of gold on his breast. His heart warmed to the touch of the little one. The young mother laid the baby in its cradle where it fell asleep, and set before the strange guest that fate had brought into her house, the plain fare of peasants, but willingly offered, and therefore full of refreshment for the soul as well as for the body

Suddenly there came the noise of a wild confusion, and uproar on the streets of the village, a shrieking and wailing of women's voices, a clangor of brazen trumpets and a clashing of swords, and a desperate cry: "The soldiers! The soldiers of Herod! They are killing our children." The young mother's face grew white with terror. She clasped her child to her bosom, and crouched motionless in the darkest corner of the room, covering him with the folds of her robe, lest he should wake and cry.

"But Artaban went quickly and stood in the doorway of the house. His broad shoulders filled the portal from side to side, and the peak of his white cap all but touched the lintel.

"The soldiers came hurrying down the street with bloody hands and dripping swords. At the sight of the stranger in his imposing dress they hesitated with surprise. The captain of the band approached the threshold to thrust him aside. But Artaban did not stir. His face was as calm as though he were watching the stars, and in his eyes there burned that steady radiance before which even the half-tamed hunting leopard shrinks, and the fierce bloodhound pauses in his leap. He held the soldier silently for an instant, and then said in a low voice: I am all-alone in this place, and I am waiting to give this jewel to the prudent captain who will leave me in peace.' He showed the ruby, glistening in the hollow of his hand like a great drop of blood."

The captain was amazed at the splendor of the gem. The pupils of his eyes expanded with desire and the hard lines of greed wrinkled around his lips. He stretched out his hand and took the ruby. "March on!" he cried to his men, "there is no child here. The house is still."

The soldiers passed down the street and Artaban reentered the cottage. In dismay he bowed his head and cried out: "God of truth, forgive my sin! I have said the thing that is not, to save the life of a child. And two of my gifts are gone. I have spent for man that which was meant for God. Shall I ever be worthy to see the face of the King?" But the voice of the woman weeping for joy in the shadow behind him, said very gently: "Because thou hast saved the life of my little one, may the Lord bless thee and keep thee; the Lord make his face to shine upon thee and be gracious unto thee; the Lord lift up his countenance upon thee and give thee peace." And Artaban was comforted.

He continued his search for the King, passing "through countries where famine lay heavy upon the land, and the poor were crying for bread. He made his dwelling in plague-stricken cities where the sick were languishing in the bitter companionship of helpless misery. He visited the

oppressed and the afflicted in the gloom of subterranean prisons, and the crowded wretchedness of slave markets, and the weary toil of galley-ships. In all this populous and intricate world of anguish, though he found none to worship, he found many to help. He fed the hungry, and clothed the naked, and healed the sick, and comforted the captive; and his years went by more swiftly than the weaver's shuttle that flashes back and forth through the loom while the web grows and the invisible pattern is completed.

"Three-and-thirty years of the life of Artaban had passed away, and he was still a pilgrim and a seeker after light. His hair once darker than the cliffs of Zagros, was now white as the wintry snow that covered them. His eyes, that once flashed like flames of fire, were dull as embers smoldering among the ashes.

"Worn and weary and ready to die, but still looking for the King, he had come for the last time to Jerusalem. He had often visited the Holy City before, and had searched through all its lanes and crowded hovels and black prisons without finding any trace of the family of Nazarenes who had fled from Bethlehem long ago. But now it seemed as if he must make one more effort, and something whispered in his heart that, at last, he might succeed. It was the season of the Passover. The city was thronged with strangers and there had been a confusion of tongues in the narrow streets for many days. There was a singular agitation visible in the multitude on this day. The sky was veiled with gloom and currents of excitement seemed to flash through the crowd like the thrill, which shakes the forest on the eve of a storm. The people were moving one way, their bare feet shuffling over the stones unceasingly along the street that leads to the Damascus gate. Artaban joined company with a group of people from his own country and inquired of them the cause of the tumult. 'We are going,' they answered, 'to the place of Golgotha, outside the city walls, where there is to be an execution—two famous robbers are to be crucified, and with them another called Jesus of Nazareth, a man who has done many wonderful works among the people so that they love him greatly. But the priests and elders have said that he must die because he gave himself out to be the Son of God. And Pilate has sent him to the cross because he has said that he was the "King of the Jews."

"Artaban's heart beat unsteadily. For a life time over land and sea he had been seeking this King. Could it be the same who had been born in Bethlehem thirty-three years ago, and of whose coming the prophets had spoken? He said within himself: 'The ways of God are stranger than the thoughts of men, and it may be that I shall find the King, at last, in the hands of His enemies, and shall come in time to offer my pearl for His ransom before He dies.' So he followed the multitude with slow and painful steps toward the Damascus gate of the city. "A troop of Macedonian soldiers came down the street, dragging a young girl with torn dress and disheveled hair. As the Magian paused to look at her with compassion, she broke suddenly from the hands of her tormentors, and threw herself at his feet, clasping him around the knees. She had seen his white cap and the winged circle on his breast.

"Have pity on me,' she cried, 'and save me, for the sake of the God of Purity! I also am a daughter of the true religion, which is taught by the Magi. My father was a merchant of Parthia, but he is dead, and I am seized for his debts to be sold as a slave. Save me from worse than death!"

"Artaban trembled.

"It was the old conflict in his soul, which had come to him in the palmgrove of Babylon and in the cottage at Bethlehem—the conflict between the expectation of faith and the impulse of love. Twice the gift, which he had consecrated to the worship of religion, had been drawn from his hand to the service of humanity. This was the third trial, the ultimate probation, and the final and irrevocable choice.

"Was it his great opportunity, or his last temptation? He could not tell. One thing only was clear in the darkness of his mind—it was inevitable. One thing only was sure to his divided heart—to rescue this helpless girl would be a true deed of love.

"He took the pearl from his bosom. Never had it seemed so luminous, so radiant, and so full of tender, living luster. He laid it in the hand of the slave. 'This is thy ransom, daughter! It is the last of my treasures which I kept for the King.' While he spoke, the darkness of the sky thickened, and shuddering tremors ran through the earth, heaving convulsively like the breast of one who struggles with mighty grief.

"The walls of the houses rocked to and fro. Stones were loosened and crashed into the street. Dust clouds filled the air. The soldiers fled in terror, reeling like drunken men. But Artaban and the girl whom he had ransomed crouched helpless beneath the wall of the Praetorium. A heavy tile, shaken from the roof, fell and struck the old man on the temple. He lay breathless and pale, with his gray head resting on the young girl's shoulder, and the blood trickling from the wound. As she bent over him, fearing that he was dead, there came a voice through the twilight, very small and still, like music sounding from a distance, in which the notes are clear but the words are lost. The girl turned to see if some one had spoken from the window above them, but she saw no one.

"Then the old man's lips began to move, as if in answer, and she heard him say in the Parthian tongue: 'Not so, my Lord! For when saw I thee an hungered and fed thee? Or thirsty, and gave thee drink? When saw I thee a stranger, and took thee in? Or naked, and clothed thee? When saw I thee sick or in prison, and came unto thee? Three-and-thirty years have I looked for thee; but I have never seen thy face, nor ministered to thee, my King.' He ceased, and the sweet voice came again. And again the maid heard it, very faintly and far away. But now it seemed as though she understood the words:

"'Verily I say unto thee, inasmuch as thou hast done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, thou has done it unto me.'

"A calm radiance of wonder and joy lighted the pale face of Artaban like the first ray of dawn on a snowy mountain-peak. One long, last breath of relief exhaled gently from his lips. "His journey was ended. His treasures were accepted. The Other Wise Man had found the King."

Most Worshipful Grand Master I have done. Poorly I know-have I returned to you the confidence you placed in me one year ago, but from your generous heart I know you will overlook my failure. You have led our Craft well. Our earthly showing under your guidance has multiplied and increased. Another strong man will take up the burden where you lay it down. Each succeeding year we will build a new chamber in our earthly home. We can not recall the past. It has gone, but the future waits for each of us. Each year we will move into a new chamber never to return to the old again.

Just as the gentle New England poet, studying how the chambered nautilus

"Left the past year's dwelling for the new,
Stole with soft step its shining archway through,
Built up its idle door,
Stretched in its shining home and knew the old no more,"
may we not, like him, burst into song and give
"Thanks for the heavenly message brought by thee,
Child of the wandering sea."

May we not, inspired with devotion to, and love for our great brotherhood, with him

"hear a voice that sings:—

Build thee more stately mansions, O my soul,
As the swift seasons roll!
"Leave thy low vaulted past!
Let each new temple, nobler than the last,
Shut thee from heaven with a dome more vast,
Till thou at length are free,
Leaving thine outgrown shell by life's unresting sea."