

**Grand Lodge
Free & Accepted Masons
Of California
Grand Oration 1915**

**Grand Orator
Matt S. Hughes
“A TRIAD OF MASONIC IDEALS.”**

Most Worshipful Grand Master, and Brethren of the Grand Lodge

At any given point in time three ages meet—the age that is (lead, the age that is living, and the age that is unborn. The first age is the realm of history; the second is the field of achievement; the third is the territory of ideals. Any institution that has gone any distance beyond its beginnings finds itself related to each of these three ages; and these relations exist for the ancient and honorable order under whose auspices we meet in annual session.

Corresponding to these three institutional aspects, are certain types of mind. There are those for whom the past of Freemasonry" has peculiar fascination. The antiquarian here finds a field rich in treasure. The explorations in this region have been richly productive; the results have been embodied in a great and growing literature; they are accessible upon the shelves of our libraries. There are others who are interested in the present activities of our Order. They sustain its routine work; they fill its official positions; they direct its philanthropic enterprises; they serve all its immediate and varied purposes. Then, there are among us men of vision, whose eyes are to the future. They are the prophets of the new order; the pioneers of the unknown years. They see the great fraternity, not as it has been and not as it is, but as it ought to be and as it may be. Beyond the historical past, and beyond the practical present, these seers glimpse the possible future.

The spokesman of such an occasion as this hears a challenge from each of these three sources; and, by reason of limitation of time and sense of fitness, must make his choice of theme. That choice has been made by your speaker after due deliberation. He has chosen to speak on certain Masonic ideals. In making that choice, it has been taken into account that the function of the orator is not that of the secretary or the historian—they make record of that which has been done or undone. Neither is it the task of the orator to confine himself to ritual utterance, routine work, or constitutional limits. He has a liberty beyond all these restraints, and by his speech he may change or confirm ritual and service and constitution.

Another consideration dictating this choice of subject has been the fact that the past of our Order has been embalmed in a literature, accessible to all students, and the speaker has no fresh contribution to make to such Masonic lore. He has also been mindful in choosing his subject that this annual communication is a time of making and receiving reports. He could expect to add nothing worth while to the clear and comprehensive resume of present activities and existing conditions contained in the annual address of the Most Worshipful Grand Master, supplemented as it has been by the reports of the other Grand Officers.

There is still another point of view. No institution can live by history alone. Decay has already begun when any institutional succession is content with the borrowed splendor of ancient glory. It was a true, as well as witty, saying that any man who has nothing better wherewith to commend himself than pride of ancestry, is like a potato—the best part of him is under ground. We shall not yield our minds to the deadly heresy that the best of Freemasonry is written in dusty volumes or buried in ancient tombs. It is also to be borne in mind that no man does his best work in the present, unless he is inspired and sustained by a vision of the future. This vital truth has been illustrated on a magnificent scale by the fortunes of the people of the Yellow Empire. With an education consisting mainly in the memorizing of the writings of the sages of the past; with a religion calling for the worship of ancestors; and with a code of ethics largely lacking in the vitalizing element of a profound belief in immortality; that great people for centuries lagged behind the world procession. They have only wakened from the stupor of centuries as they have come into contact with progressive races and have been given the vision of a great future. So a Mason may lie letter-perfect in the ritual; may be able to fill any chair in the Lodge; and may perform all

prescribed duties with the precision of a piece of perfect mechanism; but if he has no vision he lacks the soul of a true Mason.

For all these reasons, the speaker has had the conviction that the demands of the hour called him away from the past and away from the present, into the limitless field of Masonic possibilities. The blindest and most devoted lover of our fraternity would scarcely claim for it a flawless past or a perfect present. That means there is room for improvement and reason for advancement. Our theme does not call for the discussion of anything revolutionary. The ideals are those of Masonry and the most conservative member of this Grand Lodge will recognize them as ancient landmarks. The discussion will also emphasize the practical value of the ideal; for it will have to do with elements as matter-of-fact as those embodied in the report of the Committee on Finance. And now, after this somewhat lengthy preparatory parley on the outside, we are ready to approach our subject proper.

THE IDEAL OF QUALITY

Our first Masonic ideal is that of quality—of quality as related to membership. It is of first importance in every particular. One of the cook books of a past generation had a recipe for cooking rabbits. The first direction was: "Get your rabbit!" The recipe for a Masonic Lodge calls for the getting of men; and, not only so, but the getting of men of a certain quality. The paramount importance of this ideal may well be emphasized by calling attention to certain indubitable facts:

In the first place. Freemasonry is not an association of the average. It contemplates a body of picked men; it demands certain distinctive qualifications of those who seek its fellowship; it insists that those who are admitted to its mysteries shall be worthy and well qualified; it inquires whether those who stand at its doors are in harmony with its honored past, its accepted principles, and its defined purposes. You could not make a Masonic Lodge out of the first one hundred men you might pick up on the street. That is the reason our doors are so jealously guarded; that is the reason candidates must be vouched for by those who have themselves stood our tests; that is the reason those who join us must take such solemn obligations. No other human organization is intended to pay greater attention to its membership quality; no other organization depends more for its standing and influence in the community upon the quality of its membership.

A second reason for this emphasis on quality is, that no institution is any better than the material out of which it is built. The weakness of many existing organizations is that their specifications call for marble while the material furnished for the building is only mud. If the Masonic Order stands out as one of the great institutions of our civilization; if it exercises an influence on the social order far beyond its mere numerical strength; the only reason is that it is an association of superior men. In other words, the efficiency of Masonry depends upon the quality of those who are recognized as Masons. The point needs no laboring.

Still another reason for regarding this matter of quality as of paramount importance is that every other interest of the Masonic Order depends upon it. It belongs to our fraternity to guard its ancient landmarks. But what do men who lack Masonic character and Masonic spirit care for ancient landmarks? In the keeping of many men our priceless heritage is not an inspiration and an honor; it is a contrast and a reproach. It belongs to Masonry to exemplify certain great principles in life. But we need to remember that principles are only safe in the keeping of men of principle. That is a lesson writ large on the pages of our history. It belongs to Masonry to further certain great purposes. Those purposes are unselfish and humanitarian. I am not mistaken when I say that the true Mason will ask: "What can I do?" The spurious Mason will always be asking: "What can I get?"

The ties of brotherhood are so close in Masonry that every opportunity and inducement is offered to the man of mercenary spirit who would prostitute it to personal uses. The result is that nearly every Lodge has those who are continually calling upon their brethren to turn their grindstones. There are those who capitalize their membership for business purposes; there are those who capitalize their Masonic affiliations for political ends. Such persons are the pan-handlers of Masonry. Whenever public-spirited citizens in a community begin to shake their heads and say it will be hard to defeat an office-holding barnacle because of his fraternal support, it is high time for those who love the Order to sit up and begin to take notice. Under such circumstances the hallmark of excellence is being erased from the Lodge door.

It is also to be noted, in this connection, that there are certain tendencies of our times, which affect the whole social order. They are atmospheric in their prevalence and no one of us is wholly immune from their influence. One of the most striking examples of such a tendency may be found in what may be termed the great American fallacy of numbers. We are everywhere suffering from a craze for numerical strength. We gloat over the census returns once in ten years when they announce our growing millions. The newspapers of every little town beat the tom-tom and our metropolitan dailies sound the hew gag over an increase of population. A distinguished ex-president of the United States shows his teeth against race suicide, as if what we need above all things is numbers. Even our churches are tainted. If one of the great denominations shows a falling off in the usual rate of increase for a single year, at once there is heard the sound of lamentation like unto the chant of resurrected Jeremiahs. Ministers are some-times rated by their ability to draw crowds, without any reference to the methods by which they draw them, or what they do with them after they get them.

Now all this sort of thing is simply a species of lunacy. Anyone with sufficient intelligence to raise an umbrella under proper conditions ought to know that there is not a State in the Republic that could not lose a certain part of its population to its tremendous advantage. In fact, we pay enormous sums of money for the operation of cumbrous machinery for the sole purpose of getting rid, temporarily or permanently, of some units of our population that are counted by the census taker. There is not a church in this country, in all probability that would not be better off by reason of a few first-class funerals. And there are Masonic Lodges, not a few, whose quality would be vastly improved, if instead of preparing classes to get in, they could devote some time to preparing a class or two to get out. We Americans, in state, church, and in fraternal orders, need quick recovery from the insanity of numbers.

This whole tendency is against the Masonic ideal of quality. One does not need to seek afar the symptoms of this common craze in Masonic Lodges. Whenever the Master of a Lodge, in answer to your inquiry as to "the progress of the work, tells you with pride of the phenomenal number of candidates received under his administration you will find yourself face to face with a moon-struck brother. And some of our fraters have suffered such violent attacks that one feels as if he ought to ask for a writ of *de lunatico inquirendo*. Another acute symptom of the distemper is found in connection with the work of the Lodge, it comes to be regarded as nothing better than a degree factory. Members get the idea there is nothing doing unless there are degrees to be conferred. The good old call, hallowed by the years, for anything for the good of the Order, is not the signal for suggestions, motions, discussions and appointment of committees. The Lodges that put their whole emphasis on the work of initiation are those complaining of lack of attendance and getting up kitchen revivals to warm up the brethren of the craft.

The whole matter, with all its symptoms and all its effects, goes back in the last analysis to the primary problem of quality. We need to be more careful in the choice of material and we need more care for the material after it has been chosen. Of a certain sort of members it may be said, as of fleas and boils, the more you have of them the worse off you are. Better a small Lodge of quality than a great aggregation whose Masonry has been largely furnished by the jeweler. Increasingly our emphasis should be placed on the matter of quality.

THE IDEAL OF KNOWLEDGE.

Our second Masonic ideal is that of knowledge. One of the ends of Masonry is light; and light is synonymous with intelligence. The man who travels the highway from the West to the East is a seeker after light. The implication is that Masonry has an educational function and that every Lodge ought to be a school of instruction with a curriculum covering the theory and practice of brotherhood. This educational function of Masonry ought to have in view both the individual member and the world at large.

It is a necessity if we are to have a Masonically intelligent membership. It goes without saying that no man ever grasped the full significance of the principles of Masonry simply by receiving the degrees. In the first place, a great deal of our ritual work has come to us from the past. Much of it therefore, needs translation because of terms that are obsolete, and interpretation because of forms that are archaic. In the next place, there is much that is symbolical; and symbols, such as those employed by Masonry, need more than the passing explanation given in two or three brief lectures. Again, the circumstances under which the

degrees are received are not conducive to clearness and continuity of thought. And, finally, many Lodges are all too lax in conferring degrees without even the superficial preparation required by Masonic usage. These are some of the reasons why every Lodge should be a school of instruction on the subject of Masonic spirit and methods.

The results of our failure in this respect are manifest. The first outcome is what may be called Masonic illiteracy. It is not too much to say that there are a great many who have received our degrees who have no clear idea as to what a Mason actually is. If they were held up at the point of a gun some night with the demand: "A definition of a Mason, or your life!" they would be likely to turn up in heaven or some other place at breakfast time. The current notions about our Order sometimes remind one of the famous college definition of a lobster. A freshman was asked by the professor of natural history to define a lobster. He gravely replied that a lobster is a red fish that walks backward. The professor said it was a most excellent definition with some trifling exceptions. In the first place, a lobster is not a fish; in the second place, it is not red; and, in the third place, it does not walk backward. Otherwise, he said, the freshman had given a good definition.

Now, Masonry either stands for something definite, or it does not. If it does mean anything definite and distinctive, then every member of a Lodge should have clear ideas on the subject. That desirable end can only be accomplished by making every Lodge a school of instruction, and having intelligence, as one of our Masonic ideals, kept constantly in view. Even our fundamental principles need interpretation. It is a commonplace, for example, to say that Masonry means brotherhood. But at once a score of questions are suggested to the inquisitive mind: What kind of brotherhood? What is brotherhood? What does Masonic brotherhood imply? What are the obligations of Masonic brotherhood under specific circumstances? What is the relation of the brotherhood to those who do not belong? The intelligent Mason ought, at the very least, to be able to give answers to such elementary questions.

When we remember that the man who comes into Masonry takes up a life work, the necessity for the educational function of the Masonic Lodge appears even more imperative. Brotherhood is a profession, comprising both a science and an art; but who acquires a profession in the conferring of three degrees on three evenings, together with the memorizing of a few paragraphs of a ritual service, and the hearing of a few brief lectures? The man who takes up the profession of medicine these days must have a preparatory college course; must prosecute four years of strenuous study; must serve his time in hospital; and after all that it is considered that he is just ready to begin practice. The same thing is true of the other learned professions. But we expect to turn out qualified Masons after the manner of some of our get-rich-quick advertisements. The impossibility of such a thing is self-evident; the imperative demand for the persistent diffusion of Masonic intelligence among the members of the craft is no less apparent.

It is also to be emphasized that Freemasonry owes something in the way of the spreading of its principles to the world at large. Our teachings are not to be kept in cottonwood, only to be brought out and exhibited within the secrecy of the lodge-room. There are certain things for which Masonry stands and there are certain things against which Masonry stands, and those things may well be known to mankind both for the sake of Masonry and for the sake of the world. My earliest Masonic recollection goes back to the time when I was a little boy. There was a man in the small community accused of stealing turkeys. He was brought up for trial in a Masonic Lodge, found guilty and expelled. The action of the Lodge became known to the public and the community understood that whatever else the Order favored or opposed, it was against turkey stealing. That is the first thing I remember about the Masonic Order; and now that I have had a rather extensive and comprehensive acquaintance, it is my conviction that it was a very wholesome beginning.

We believe that our principles are of value to mankind, and that each fraternity is a prophecy of the coming time of universal brotherhood. There ought to be some point of influential contact between Masonry and the social order whereby the public might profit by a knowledge of what it is trying to do in the world. This work cannot be accomplished by one Grand Lecturer, whose hands are full by reason of the demands of the Order. It might be feasible for each Masonic jurisdiction to maintain a sort of university extension course—to have a number of really qualified lecturers, who could not only interpret the work to Masons in the lodge-room; but who in addition, could elucidate the broad principles of human brotherhood to the great world outside.

This program of education is a necessity if Freemasonry is to avoid the risk of being left behind in the progress of the race. The meaning of such a statement may be illustrated by reference to one of the familiar bits of our history. One of the stock stories frequently heard at Masonic banquets, is the incident of the wounded Mason on the battlefield giving the hailing sign of distress and being rescued and cared for by one of the enemy who was a brother Mason. It is always recited as a triumph of Masonic sentiment and principle. But without minimizing the value of such a manifestation of fraternity, it may be declared that the real triumph of Masonry will not be seen in the world until its influence is so felt and applied, that brother Masons will never be compelled, by personal ambition and arbitrary power, to face one another in deadly combat on the battlefield. And that end can only be attained by a persistent and prolonged process of general education on the basis of the principle of brotherhood. Freemasonry cannot be content simply with the rescue of an individual here and there from the horrors of actual warfare; it must strive by every means in its power to bring to humanity the lasting era of peace.

Our point may also be illustrated by a reference to our familiar work of charity. Freemasonry is philanthropic. No little time and thought are given in such gatherings as this to the work of relief and the sustaining of charitable institutions. Our fraternity responds to the cry of distress with open-handed generosity; but the giving of alms is only the kindergarten course in human relief. The Good Samaritan was faithful to his immediate duty when he took care of the unfortunate victim of thieves on the Jericho road. It has been suggested, however, that the modern Samaritan has been extending his work of travelers' aid. He has been inquiring about the antecedents of the thieves and seeking to know why the boys in Jerusalem and Jericho are growing up as criminals; he has been wanting to know why the authorities do not give protection to those whose business calls them to and fro between the two cities. He is no longer content simply to exercise humane offices in behalf of the individual who has become the victim of preying criminals and negligent authorities.

Thus, in the nature of things, we must add to our work of relief, some inquiry into the reasons why appeals for help are being made from time to time. And if it is discovered that many of these burdens have been thrown upon Masonry by reason of wrong and oppression in the social order, then Masonry must do its part in the righting of the wrongs and in the prevention of such injustice. It is childish to imagine that a great order will always be content to care for specific cases of want, without inquiring as to the causes of the want it is called upon to relieve. These things, certainly practical and pressing in character, simply serve to show that we must give new attention to the Masonic ideal of knowledge.

THE IDEAL OF RELIGION.

When we speak of the ideal of religion in connection with Freemasonry there will probably lie some well-meaning persons so ill advised as to declare there is no such thing. There are those who hold the vain imagination that our Order has nothing to do with religion. If it is meant by that to say that Masonry is not committed to my religion or your religion, the statement is correct. But to say that it has nothing to do with religion is another matter.

Let us call to mind some familiar facts. No Masonic Lodge is regularly in session unless the Holy Bible lies open on the altar. It is known among Masons as the Great Light. But what is the Holy Bible that is given this central place in all our gatherings and which is described as that which illuminates the Masonic way? It is something more than a certain weight and size of blank paper bound in book form. If the Bible is only a piece of lodge-room furniture, without any reference to its contents, then we might as well put a volume of the United States Census Reports in its place. For our civilization the Bible is the textbook of religion, and it is the text-book of religion because we believe it contains a revelation from God. Now the Bible in the Lodge and its ritual either means something or it does not. If it has no real significance for Masonic life and practice then we ought to cease all such false pretence; if it has any meaning it must be from the character of the Book, a religious meaning.

Masonic bodies have among their officers a chaplain, who is an official representative of religion. Our sessions are opened with prayer. Is there any intelligent Mason who would suggest that the prayers offered in our Lodges are only venerable forms of words and that they really have no religious significance? We call upon the name of God and we do it with reverence; but is there anyone who would suggest that our appeal to heaven means nothing in the way of religion? If the

Deity is only an impressive convenience for ritual purposes; if the Bible on our altars is only a venerable relic of no recognized authority; if our prayers are only empty forms, so devoid of significance that they cannot be called religious; then Freemasons are open to the charge of being the most conspicuous body of self-confessed hypocrites known to history.

There are some authorities who have denied the existence of an ideal of religion to Freemasonry. This has been done on the basis of a partial and faulty definition of "religion." Religion has been defined as "a system of faith in, and worship of, a Divine Being." On the other hand, Freemasonry has been described as "a peculiar system of morality, veiled in allegory and illustrated by symbols." It has been held that "morality" is concerned with man's duties to his fellowmen, and is therefore something different from "religion," which is concerned with his duties to his Creator. It is sufficient answer to say that the definitions are faulty. Religion according to the Great Light of Masonry comprehends both man's relation to God and man's relation to man. Its full orb has two hemispheres—one divine and one human—and what God has thus joined together the definitions of lexicographers must not put asunder. Further, it is also to be said that the large part of the duties enjoined by the Creator have to do with human relationships so that morality becomes an essential part of religion. Religion and morality are thus one and indivisible for Jew and Christian on the authority of the Old and New Testaments of the luminary of Masonic theory and practice.

There are two common Masonic offenses against this ideal of religion. One is committed by the Mason who is openly and notoriously irreligious. There are such members of our Order, though we believe their number is on the decrease. When Masons are known in the community as godless in their lives, as profane and blasphemous in their speech, as antagonists of religion, as obstacles in the way of the best influences in the social order, it is a reproach to the Order. Such men carry their own indictment with them. Professing to have the Holy Bible as the light of their lives, they violate its teachings and live as though there were no such authority in existence. Professing disbelief in prayer, they belong to an order that numbers a chaplain among its regular officers, whose function it is to open and close its sessions with prayer. Professing no faith in God, they are the same men who stood at the Masonic altar and called upon God to witness and help when they took their solemn obligations. If honor has value and consistency is honor, then these persons are offenders against the most sacred things of the Order.

There is another class of offenders against the Masonic ideal of religion—those who would substitute Freemasonry for the teaching of religion and those who would substitute the Lodge for the institution of religion. While Masonry has a religious aspect, its principles do not exhaust the teachings of religion, and the Lodge is not the distinctive institution of religion. Yet it is no unusual thing to hear some enthusiastic Mason declare that the principles of the Order are his religion and the Lodge his church. And sometimes, with an air of profound wisdom, some thoughtless brother declares that if a man is just as good a Mason as he ought to be he will be a good-enough Christian. Some sayings have the sound of wisdom without its substance, and this is one of that platitudinous sort. Why if a man is just as good a blacksmith as he ought to be, he will be a good-enough Christian. Or, to stretch the imagination somewhat, if a man is just as good an alderman as he ought to be, he will be a good-enough Christian. Such speech is wasted lung action.

But suppose one does make a religion out of Masonic principles and a church out of his Lodge, what kind of a religion does he accept? Consider only one aspect of the subject. We have come to the point in the progress of humanity when universality must be a mark of any accepted religion. The time was when peoples were satisfied with national duties—gods without power outside the country's boundaries. There are parts of the world today where men worship household gods. But the intelligent man of today would not bow in worship to a California god or a United States deity. The religion of use to the modern individual must be a universal religion. The civilized man of the twentieth century must have a religion for all men everywhere.

Now, considering Masonry as a religion and the Lodge as a church we are confronted by the startling fact that a man with such a religion is satisfied with something that has no place for one-half of the human race, and that the best half—its womanhood. He has a religion from which his mother, his wife and his daughter are all debarred. They cannot become Masons, and the man finds himself with a religion that has no place for womanhood. The average man, not to say Mason, might well hesitate a long while before avowing a religion for a single sex. That sort of

thing does not sound like genuine Freemasonry. It is also to be noted that certain races of men have no place in this peculiar religion. It is further to be remembered that no fortunate person of the single sex can join this peculiar church until he has passed his majority. It is finally to be emphasized that only those can get into this church who come with a certificate of good character; in other words, it is a religion without hope for those who have fallen, unless they can pick themselves up and make good.

By the very nature of things. Freemasonry is not and cannot be a universal institution at the present time. Its very existence and usefulness depend upon the union of picked men for the accomplishment of definite purposes. As far as we can judge, that necessarily will exist for generations to come. But when any man thoughtlessly proclaims that he has made Freemasonry a religion, he does two things: he announces to the world his satisfaction with something very narrow and limited in the way of religion, and he brings needless reproach upon the Order in the eyes of intelligent persons by giving unmerited opportunity to opponents of the Fraternity. It is high time that a great silence fell upon all such foolish talk about the principles of Freemasonry being adopted as a religion and the Lodge being accepted as a substitute for the church. Masonry has a religious ideal, but it is not the ideal religion.

Here endeth our annual lesson. The ideals of quality, knowledge and religion have been brought to remembrance because your speaker considers them of prime importance. They offer to this and all Jurisdictions the greatest opportunities of advancement in the years to come. They are commended to all Freemasons who love the Order and believe in its mission. And while we may not realize our ideals, either as individuals or as institutions, there can be no such things unless ideals are kept in view and our activities move in their direction.