

**Grand Lodge
Free & Accepted Masons
Of California
Grand Oration 1917**

**Grand Orator
Robert B. Gaylord**

Most Worshipful Grand Master and Brethren of the Grand Lodge

Masonic custom has decreed that it shall be the duty and the pleasure incident to this office, to deliver at the Annual Communication of the Grand Lodge, an address upon matters appertaining to the craft. It would be superfluous, if not presumptuous, upon my part, to attempt on this occasion to eulogize our Institution or to extol its principles; that service already has been too well performed by those who have preceded me. It is my purpose to briefly direct your attention to this grand body itself.

While the Grand Lodge of California is the executive head of the Lodges in this jurisdiction, it is essentially a union of individuals, and not of Lodges. Upon its rolls are found many of the greatest names in our State, men of honor and of fame, men who have accomplished much. There are others whose faces are unknown and whose personality has been impressed only upon their immediate environment. Every one of them, however, has been, and every member of this Lodge today is, without exception, a chosen man. Each of them has stood forth among the brethren of his Lodge and by them has been deemed worthy to be a Master, with the power, the responsibility and the opportunity, which that office affords. Because of that fact others have watched him; his strength has been an encouragement, and where he has slipped they have fallen. We glory in the history of Masonry, in the fact that none but good men and true may enter, that it represents the best element in every community. If this Grand Lodge indeed be the select body of such a constituency, what opportunities stretch before it, what responsibilities rest upon it, how impressive are the requirements for its standards and its accomplishments! The time devoted by such men must accomplish more than the collection of per capita taxes, the adjustment of grievances or the enactment of legislation.

There are many standards for our guidance and our government. We establish standards for ourselves in our sessions and in our intercourse, we have our traditions and our customs. We are bound by Masonic law and the Constitution of this body; by the tenets of our Institution and its ancient landmarks. But by far the most inflexible standard is imposed neither by ourselves nor by the law, but by others; by the Masons of California who claim no membership in this body, by the men of California who never have knelt before a Masonic altar. The woman who sins is ostracized; the clergyman who is found in a compromising position forfeits his influence and his career; the judge who swerves from the path of strict integrity is universally condemned. They are constituted like ourselves, they have the same instincts and the same desires; but what is ignored among men means downfall among women; what is condoned in the business man, the laborer, the physician, the merchant and the attorney, is condemned in the clergyman or in the judge. I have no wish to plead the cause of double standards, but it is an irresistible fact that for each of us, according to his position and his profession, society has established bounds which he may not pass. Our mental justification of our acts is of no effect in this great court of human kind. We are judged not alone by what we are, and by what we believe, and by that to which we aspire; but even more by that which we profess, and by the extent to which, in the opinion of our fellow men, practice goes hand in hand with precept. It is a law more ancient than the law of Moses, as inflexible as the law of the Medes and the Persians, and as enduring as the word of God itself. The influence and the effectiveness of this grand body, its leadership among Masons and its respect among men, depend not so much upon its organization, its rules and its traditions, as upon its conformity to the standard which others impose; the standard which in the mature judgment of men comports with the dignity of such a body, with the precepts of the Institution of which it is the titular head, and with the pre-eminence which this Grand Lodge itself asserts.

The principle which underlies the law is that even as they worship God Himself, so do men revere integrity, square-dealing, consistency, and truth. They despise the sham and the

surface, while they admire and cleave to the substance; to rugged, fundamental honesty. The apple must not be rotten at the core, the grain must stand the test of milling, and men must stand the test of time and the judgment of their fellow men.

We read in the Book which all Masons revere, the story of One who died in Palestine nearly two thousand years ago. Many of us believe in His divinity, some of us reject Him; but believing or rejecting, we all recall with abhorrence the name of another participant in that tragedy, Judas Iscariot. There were those who arrested Christ, who pressed upon His brow the crown of thorns and spat upon His face; there were those who persecuted Him, who demanded His life and the freedom of a robber; there were the soldiers who crucified Him; there was the one who thrust the spear into His side; and there was Pontius Pilate who sat in judgment upon Him and washed his hands. Silently, one by one, they pass before us, and one by one they pale into insignificance beside the figure of Judas. He committed no act of violence, he was guilty of no insult; he identified the victim—that, and nothing more. We remember him because he betrayed his Lord and Master, because he betrayed that Master with a kiss, because the truth was not in him, because he professed much and practiced little; because, my brethren—because he was a hypocrite. In high places and in low, in business, in society, in government, in religion and in Masonry, men demand that precept and practice go hand in hand, and they make that same demand upon the Grand Lodge of Masons in the jurisdiction of California.

You may have listened to some silver tongued orator; his phrases soothe your ears, his thoughts hold your attention, his rounded periods rouse your enthusiasm; but he does not grip your heartstrings, because you realize that, after all, they were only words—graphically, scientifically and beautifully arranged, but; words nevertheless. Another speaker follows him; halting in his diction, meager in his ideas, with poorly chosen phrases, and his audience becomes restless; suddenly, as he relates some simple incident (it may be a tale from his own experience) there is a hush; perhaps the tears come into your eyes; he has struck the chord of human sympathy; he holds you because you know he speaks the truth; he has touched the underlying reverence we all possess, for simple, elemental truth, in whatever form it may be found. And if, among the silver tongues, Masonry is to reach the heart of its audience, our words and our acts must bear the impress, and have the ring, of sincerity and consistency. Masonry aspires to leadership, but leadership means more than a name, even though it be a name to conjure with. Leadership implies clearer vision than that of the rank and file. We recognize it to be axiomatic that the world is not perfect today—neither in theory nor in practice; and if we are to lead, we must be in advance of the times; we must espouse principles which are nobler than those which are generally accepted. Certain standards are maintained, certain principles are accepted, by popular sentiment; by the general average of clean, intelligent upright men. If we conform to those standards we are good men; but less we rise above them, we are not leaders.

I realize that this is not the occasion for the discussion of concrete points in Masonic law, which might, arouse material differences of opinion; but I trust that for the Purpose of illustration I may be permitted to refer to one of the laws of this jurisdiction; I trust also that you will understand that the references for illustration exclusively. It is the general sentiment of the better element in our country, that the retail liquor dealer, the saloon keeper, the bar tender, have crossed into that land which lies beyond the pale. Conforming to that sentiment (conforming to it not leading it) this Grand Lodge has denied to them the privilege of membership in our Institution. Should prohibition progress in fifty years to come, as it has in fifty years last past, we can readily imagine that the man of half a century hence will ask of the Grand Lodge of California this question; "By what technical distinction, by what fine spun reasoning, did you draw the line between the man who stands behind the bar, the man who employs the man behind the bar, the man who supplies the employer of the man behind the bar, and the man who stands in front of the bar, and who alone makes possible the man behind the bar?" Assuming that such a question will be asked of us in fifty years, should we not today, ask ourselves this further question; If Masonry is a worthy leader, if it rises above the deadly level of the general average, should it not possess the consistency and the vision which will enable it to answer for itself, today, the question which all mankind may ask of it in fifty years?"

Continuing the illustration (and remember it is only an illustration); It is an edict of the Christian Order of Knights Templar that no man in Templar uniform shall enter a saloon. With his uniform safely locked in the asylum, he may do as he pleases without violating the prohibitions of

Templarism. We have sought to distinguish between the Order and its membership, between the man and his uniform; and we have exalted the uniform above the man. We forget that without Knights Templar, the Order is empty armor and that if the principles of the Order are not the principles of its Knights, its teachings are an idle dream, and that it never can aspire to the day when it will become the force in the community which its dreams justify. If you or I as Master or as Grand Master, feel obliged to refrain from doing that which as man or as Mason we do without compunction, we pay unconscious tribute to our own insincerity. I do not, at this time, attempt to assert that the Templar, or the Master, or the Grand Master, should do that which our law now prohibits; nor do I attempt to assert nor do I attempt to assert that the man or the Mason should refrain from doing it; but I do assert that that which the Templar, or the Master, or the Grand Master is unwilling to do, the man as an individual can not justify.

When Moses was called from Jethro's flocks and turned aside to behold the flaming bush, which was not consumed, he was admonished to take his shoes from off his feet because the place thereon he stood was holy ground. Holy, because the bush was not consumed? because God was there? because he spake to Moses? No; holy, because it was a spot which marked a crisis a parting of the ways; because upon the decision of Moses his action, his vision of the future, depended the emancipation of a nation and the development of a race which had been chosen as the instrument of Jehovah for the enlightenment of a world. Review the history of Masonry; its precepts; the men, able, honorable and worthy who gather here; the vast number of men, clean, intelligent and conscientious, who look to this Grand Lodge for leadership and for example; and you will say with me, that if ever an organization stood upon holy ground, that organization is the Grand Lodge of Masons of California. Not only will men and Masons repudiate the man who prostitutes this body from selfish motives or for personal aggrandizement; but equally will they condemn the man who proves himself unequal to the emergency and unworthy of the opportunity.

A few days ago I stood in this Temple and watched our boys march by to war. And as I watched, I wondered how many of them would come back to us; I wondered how many of those who return will be maimed, or blinded or insane; how many of them will be so diseased or deficient in body or in mind as to be worse than dead. I thought of the price they pay for an idea, a vision or democracy and their native land; I thought that 'no price is too great to pay for such an idea, and that every one of us, if need be stands ready to pay that price. And then as we returned to the peaceful quiet of this room, with its mighty cross above us I thought that no price- in time, in money, in body, or in mind is too great to pay for another idea, a vision, a native land- for the kingdom, whether it be in the heavens or upon the earth, of the almighty Father who reigns above. One of the leading clergymen of this coast (a man who appeals to men) said recently, that if Masonry fails, the world is lost. He gave as his reason, the fact that while our churches accept all who chose to come, Masonry takes only the best; and that if the best shall fail, no one can succeed. We may or may not agree with his statement but we will all agree, that if the church shall fail, and if Masonry shall fail it will not be because of any weakness or inefficiency in that Old Book of ours. It will be because we need less Sunday religion and more Man religion; because we need less Lodge Masonry, and more Man Masonry.

Masonry recognizes no creed or dogma, no restricted belief in Deity save a belief in the Great Father of All who is worshipped alike by Jew and Gentile, Mohammedan and Christian. We meet upon that common ground, and from that meeting point each must respect the individual views and opinions of his brother. By virtue of that very spirit of toleration, we may freely learn our lessons from the best of that in which any one of us believes. In the Book which we all revere, we find a rule of brotherhood which is greater than the law of an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth greater than the golden rule that we should do unto others ... we would that they shall do unto us, greater than the admonition that if a man smite thee on the one cheek thou shalt turn to him the other- it is the new commandment, that "ye love one another as I have loved you." It is the greatest teaching ever given to man; that we render to our brethren the kindly, tolerant, sympathetic and forgiving love, which inspires the Father of all, as He beholds His children. If that love were embedded in your heart and in mine, in the heart of Kaiser, President and Emperor it were the motive power behind diplomacy, if it animated the capitalist and the laborer, and the men of every race and creed, the strife and animosities of the world would vanish like the dew before the sun, and peace and prosperity would reign from pole to pole.

There dwells in the tropic seas a speck of animal life whose essential usefulness is, that it shall die. Its tiny skeleton rests upon the bed of the ocean, and others gather and die, above, and beside and around it. Through the centuries, they live and they die not knowing whence they come or whither they go; until at last there arises above the waters an island of coral, upon which men may live and prosper. So we receive our spark of life, perform our pygmy task, and, after passing the allotted span, leave behind what there has been of substance in our lives. Year by year through the centuries the countless millions come and go. Though we strive blindly, though we never behold, and comprehend but vaguely if at all, that for which we have lived, there will at last rise above the seas of time, our coral isle-a goodly land-a land upon which He who reigns above may establish His eternal kingdom.

When I was King and a Mason-a master proven and skilled-
I cleared me ground for a Palace, such as a King should build
I decreed and cut down to my levels, presently; under the silt
I came on the wreck of a Palace, such as a King had built '
There was no worth in the fashion-there was no wit in the plan-
Hither and thither, aimless, the ruined footings ran-
Masonry, brute, mishandled, but carven on every stone-
"After me cometh a Builder. Tell him, I too have known."

Swift to my use in my trenches, where my well-planned ground-works grew
I tumbled his quoins and ashlar, and cut and reset them anew.
Lime I milled of his marbles; burned it, slacked it, and spread-
Taking and leaving at pleasure the gifts of the humble dead.

Yet I despised not nor gloried; yes, as we wrenched them apart
I read in the razed foundations the heart of that builder's heart
As though he had risen and pleaded, so did I understand
The form of the dream he had followed. In the face of the thing he had planned.

When I was a King and a Mason-in the open noon of my pride
They sent me a word from the Darkness-They whispered and called me aside;
They said "The end is forbidden." They said "Thy use is fulfilled,
"And thy palace shall stand as that other's-the spoil of a King who shall build

I called my men from my trenches, my quarries, my wharves and my sheers;
All I had wrought, I abandoned to the faith of the faithless years
Only I cut on the timber-only I carved on the stone:
After me cometh a Builder. Tell him, I too have known!
Kipling.