

**Grand Lodge
Free & Accepted Masons
Of California
Grand Oration 1918**

**Grand Orator
Chas. H. Victor**

Most Worshipful Grand Master and Brethren

Very earnestly and sincerely have I wished that the appointment given me by the Grand Master and the duty and the responsibility placed upon me might have carried with it the inspiration and wisdom, the power and the vision to have grasped so great an opportunity, but this is a vain wish and likewise a futile one; but yet, perhaps, after all it is well that it should be so, for in times like these men are learning to attempt tasks that are unusual and are taking up duties that seem almost impossible, even when they are aware of their own deficiencies.

This is an unusual communication of the Grand Lodge. There is a different atmosphere about our meeting this year from that which has been present heretofore. We cannot help but feel it and we cannot fail to recognize it. We do not greet each other in that carefree, off-hand way so common to good fellowship that has marked our greetings in the past. We are not interested in the ordinary social diversions and conversations that have been so pleasant a feature of the recurring anniversary of our meetings heretofore. When we grasp each other by the hand it seems as though we can look into each other's hearts and have a response come back to us that we are standing together. There seems to be a deeper sense of our relationship and our brotherhood than has marked this relationship heretofore. On the lapel of the coats of many of you is that little button with its bright star that marks the fact that the boy is gone, the fact that he is willing to offer up on the altar of his patriotism a devoted service. And that star represents more than words can tell. That star is at once your pride and your despair, and so we cannot help but recognize the one great, outstanding, ever-present, over-powering fact that our condition is different this year from previous years.

It seems to me that every sentence that has been uttered since we first gathered together has been directed toward the one thought that we were at war. The one big thing that stands out in our minds is not a discussion of the beautiful philosophy of Masonry, not a discussion of the abstract problems that are so interesting and that are at times so inspiring, not thinking even upon those things that intimately concern our individual Lodges or our individual fortunes, but rather is our thought going all the time to the fact that although we are a peaceful fraternity, and although we have been inspired through our entire history by the one great outstanding idea that peace is the desirable condition of the world, yet in our minds there is only running the thought of war, war, war. And we cannot help but feel that, Brethren, because the conflict in which we are engaged, the war that is weighing so heavily upon our minds, upon our time, upon our thought and upon our re-sources, is a war forced upon us, attacking the very foundations of our Institution; and we would be untrue as men, and more than untrue as Masons, if we were not at this time thinking only of the ways and the means by which this conflict may be brought to a close—yea, I should say, a speedy close, and that right and justice and truth may triumph and we may be allowed to continue our peaceful pursuits that were so pleasant heretofore.

It seems appropriate and almost necessary that in any discussion by the Grand Orator at this time, the principles underlying the great conflict in which we are engaged should be discussed. We have been told, and we rightfully believe, that the war in which we are engaged is a war for democracy, a war to preserve for the world a democracy; but, Brethren, I believe that we can state with equal force and with equal truthfulness that this great war in which we are engaged is a war to make this world safe for Masonry, because I want to say to you and I do not believe that you will contradict or deny the statement—that in their very last and final analyses Democracy and Masonry are one and the same thing.

We are waging a war today against not a people primarily, not a power primarily; but rather is this great conflict raging between two great ideas, between two great ideals, between two great systems of government—the system on the one side that says "Might is right; those

who are strong and can conquer must prevail; he who has the power to claim may have; that the weak simply exist for the benefit of the strong and that there is a God-given power by accident of birth that one man might control the destiny of the world." But over against that ideal, over against that system of government, is the one for which Masonry has stood since time immemorial—the idea that a government derives its just power from the consent of the governed; the idea that the duty of the strong is to protect the weak; the idea that has been so clearly and so forcefully stated by our great President, that the right of self-determination is a right of all peoples and of all nations, and that it is our business in this present crisis to see that right is preserved to the world.

Masonry recognizes and really teaches that this whole world is one great republic and brotherhood of man, and that in this great republic dwell all kinds of people, and it exemplifies in its ritual the thought that brotherly love can bring together all of these people and that the world can be a great republic. We say that it is on this basis of brotherhood, that it is on this basis of mutual respect and understanding that we unite every race, sect and opinion, and cause true friendship to exist among those that might otherwise have remained at a perpetual distance; and it is a broad interpretation of this ritual of ours that enables us to stand firmly and squarely with our President in the right of self-determination of peoples.

Now, we care not what the race may be; we care not what the color of a man may be; we care not what his education and his culture may have been, for we declare as Masons that that man has a right to decide for himself and the nation for itself how they are to live, how they are to act, what form of government they may want to have over them in so far as their actions, their desires and their governments do not interfere with the same liberty, and the same rights and the same actions of other peoples and other governments. And that is the thing we are fighting for today. That is the reason why we, as a country that to a certain extent has always been isolated from the great quarrels of the world, a country that has kept itself separated, that has not engaged in the wars and the intrigues of other continents, have transported our troops across seas to the continents of Europe and of Asia, and there we are fighting battles, not for territory—because it has been clearly stated that we do not want one foot of the territory of our enemies, not for indemnity or money, because it has been equally stated with as great force that we do not want one penny of indemnity or pay for the service we are rendering, but rather that we might bear practical testimony to our consecration to the principles of liberty, fraternity, equality and self-determination of all peoples of the earth.

And, Brethren, as we have waged this war, many from our own ranks have gone; the report that was given by our Grand Secretary showing that between five and six thousand Brethren are now in the active service speaks for itself. The same report has come from other jurisdictions, and we have found our Brethren who are capable of bearing arms springing to the defense of these principles of ours. Many of us have not been able to go, but we have found consolation in the effort and work behind the line. and that is perhaps the important thing to you and to me this morning.

Oh, I know that it is inspiring and it just fills and it just thrills us when we hear the reports as they come to us of what the boys are doing. It just makes us rise up and thank God that we are Americans. It just makes us happy all over and proud to think that we have in this country of ours raised a race of men of the power, of the heroism, of the spirit and of the physical valor and courage that have made possible some of the brilliant exploits that our men have already experienced, and those of you who heard the story of our Marines at Chateau Thierry were filled with that spirit, and I believe that it is in keeping with the spirit of the hour that the facts as they have come to us might be repeated. Some of you know the story and some of you do not, but over there on that eventful 15th day of July, ninety-five hundred of our Marines were at Chateau Thierry faced by two divisions of the German army—and crack divisions, we are told, the very flower and pick of the Prussian army—and the order came for the Germans to attack, and that mighty horde came over, and nearly three to one, Brethren. With strong arms and under the force of the compact the Marines yielded, they reeled and went back about half a mile, and then the lines had been re-formed and the order from the commander went out that they go forward, and they started. Then the order came in from the French general to retreat. The word went back from the commander of the Marines that he regretted very much his inability to obey the order, that his patrols had already gone forward and that his men were on the march, and that he must save and protect those men whom he had commanded to move, and so they went forward, and for three

days the battle raged. Then the fight was over, and what was the result? The information that comes to us is just this: that but twenty-five hundred of the ninety-five hundred Marines that went into that conflict were able to stand and answer roll call. Seven thousand of them were either dead or wounded—a tremendous sacrifice laid upon the altar of their country, but, Brethren, what of the horde that attacked them? What of those two divisions that came over to drive them back? The story that comes to us is that not a squad could be gathered together to answer roll call. The ninety-five hundred Marines had accounted for two divisions, or twenty-four thousand Germans. That kind of a story. Brethren, fills us with enthusiasm for our boys; it fills us with enthusiasm for the American spirit, and I want to say to you that the thing that put that kind of a spirit into the hearts of those men was the free institutions that have brought them up, the institutions that have been nurtured, that have been fostered, that have been created and brought to fruition by the principles laid down by our Masonic fraternity.

So while this thrills us, it also inspires us to our work behind the lines, and we are seeing a splendid exhibition of patriotic spirit harnessed for service. I do not know how many of you that are sitting here this morning are in the Four-minute service, but I think many of you are. I don't know how many of you have taken that little package of cards and have gone from door to door and from store to store and from office to office, and have sold Liberty bonds, but I dare say that many of you have. I don't know how many of you have just wished, away down in the bottom of your hearts as I have wished, that your circumstances were such that you might wear on your sleeve that Red Triangle and that you might go across to give comfort and consolation to the boy in the hour of his greatest need, but you have not been able to do it and you have taken up your burden right here, and when the call has come you have gone down into your pockets and you have given of your substance for the carrying on of that work. You have done this and, more than that, I dare say, that many of you have gone out and you have told the story individually and collectively to many and have asked that they contribute likewise of their means that the great work could be carried on. You have been the second line of defense, away behind the line, away off seven or eight thousand miles, perhaps, from the actual conflict, but you as Masons and as men have been doing this wonderful, this beautiful patriotic work that has given inspiration and encouragement and heartiness to the boys over on the firing line. And we have seen a new spirit come up in our nation, a spirit of community service, a spirit of mutual helpfulness, a spirit that, properly directed after this war is over, will mean much for our country.

And now. Brethren, while we recognize the condition and while we appreciate the splendid services that our soldiers are rendering, and while we appreciate the work that each and everyone is doing in his individual capacity, and will continue to do until this war is over, is there not likewise a question that raises itself in your minds as to what is going to happen when the fight is over and when the boys come home? Is there not a question that arises in your minds, as has been hinted at in that masterful address of our Grand Master yesterday, as to what part Masonry is going to play in the day of reconstruction?

I dare say that this is in your minds, because not one but many of you have spoken of it since we came to Grand Lodge, and I am wondering whether in that period of reconstruction (a period which I am satisfied is going to try the souls of men perhaps as the war has not tried them, a period that will present problems that will be greater problems and problems that will mean more to the life of our nation even than the problems of the war), things will readjust themselves without that of which I have spoken, because after the war is over the spirit of conflict will be gone; after the war is over we will not have an enemy right in front of us attacking us, but rather will we have to fight foes that are in the dark, foes that will practice insidious program and propaganda that will far outweigh the propaganda we have had forced upon us by our present enemies.

And are you going to be satisfied .is Masons to go on in just the same way that you have gone heretofore? I do not believe that there is a Mason in this Grand Lodge this morning that will be satisfied after the war is over to drop back to the same kind of staid routine that characterized the average Masonic Lodge before the conflict began. And I want to say to you, Brethren, that in the reconstruction period there will be a great burden laid upon Masonry. No, I will change that, and say not particularly a burden, but a great privilege and a great responsibility will be laid upon Masonry, because in the last analysis our Masonic brethren are a choice selection of men—they are the pick of their several communities—they are the men who by virtue of their moral qualities,

by virtue of their love of humanity, by virtue of their training and education within and without the Masonic Lodge, stand out above and beyond the average man of the community. They have seen a vision, and if they have not seen the vision then they have never been brought to Masonic light, and in the seeing of that vision they have come to realize that they are concerned with the welfare of their brethren; and I want to say to you. Brethren, that while I agree with the Grand Master's statement of this morning that the Masonic fraternity is not organized for social service, I do want to say to you that a Masonic Lodge is not measuring up to the full measure of its opportunity and responsibility unless in that Lodge it educates its membership to a large social service. And I want to say to you—and it is with a deep regret that it has to be said—that I do not believe our Masonic Lodges in the past have accepted the opportunity that has been offered them for education in this broad direction, and if we do not in the days that are to come devise ways and means and adopt plans and methods whereby we may do this type of work, then we will be derelict in the duty we owe to our nation, and we will fall short of the duty we owe to ourselves as men and as Masons.

Now the question naturally comes up, "What can we do?" and I believe that it is more a matter of the lack of a method or a program rather than a disinclination to accept the duty of the hour. And just by way of suggestion, I might say that many questions of public importance and public moment are interesting to Masons. In your Masonic Lodges, through the instrumentality of a Masonic brother who has informed himself and who can speak with authority upon a given subject, why not have him come and tell you Masons, met in a Masonic Lodge, the truth or the reasons or the idea back of a public movement? Incidentally we are going to vote on some twenty-five or more amendments to our State Constitution next month. Why would it not be a good idea for every Master of a subordinate Lodge in this jurisdiction to have in his Lodge not a discussion, but an explanation of those amendments, what they mean to the people, why they are proposed, what condition they intend to correct, or what condition they intend to create, so that our Masons may go out and be thereby more intelligent citizens? I just offer that as one suggestion.

There is another thing, Brethren, that I believe it is time the Masonic fraternity took a larger interest in. We believe in education. We came into our Masonic Lodges that we might receive light, Masonic light. We were fitted to receive that type of light that is given in a Masonic Lodge by an elementary education, and I believe that the time has come when Masons, not necessarily Masonic Lodges—because the Masonic Lodge, our Grand Master has said, is not organized for that purpose; but the time has come when Masons must interest themselves more particularly in the elementary education of their children than heretofore. If I were to ask all the Brethren present this morning to stand who believed honestly and sincerely in the public school, each and every one of you would be on your feet in an instant, and you would say that the public school is the bulwark of the nation—and it is. But if I were to ask you how many of you knew anything about your public schools, how many of you were acquainted with the principals of the school to which your children went, how many of you even could recall the names of the teachers that were daily giving your children instruction, I dare say that but few of you would be on your feet.

Brethren, I hope that the time will come in this fair land of ours when it will be absolutely necessary that every child between the age of six and sixteen must spend at least five hours a day in the public school. I believe that the time is coming when we should take a stand against the narrow bigotry of the parochial school and the snobbishness of the private school. And I want to say to you that it is a fit subject for consideration in a Masonic Lodge, and I want to say to you that it is time the Masons of every subordinate Lodge in this State knew who were running the public schools in their towns. And I want to go a little bit further and I want to say that it is time the Masons of this country were considering and understanding what is being taught in the public schools.

Why, do you know that almost from the inception of our government we have been teaching errors in our history? Now, I dare say that every one of you who was educated in a public school in this country came through with one great big dominant idea in your mind—I know I did—and that one idea that was placed in my mind because of the history I had studied was that if there was one people on the face of the earth that America could "lick" it was England, and if there was one people on the face of God's earth that was antagonistic to the American republic it

was England; and yet I want to say to you, Brethren, that no greater fallacy ever existed in any history. And I want to say to you further than that, that the progress of this old nation of ours would have been further advanced if there had been a better understanding between these two great English-speaking countries. And it is only recently, when we have looked into the facts of the case, that we have come to understand that the aims of the mother country and the aims of this country have been one and the same thing and that we stand together on the same platform of republicanism or democracy. Now, how has this error crept in?

A VOICE: The Irish.

MR. VICTOR: Perhaps the Irish. But I do not believe that we are going to place the blame this morning upon the Irish altogether, regardless of what they may have to do with it, because I want to tell you that the Irish people today just as much misunderstand the great English nation as we ourselves have misunderstood them, and when the time comes that the light percolates into the brain of the Irish people they will see that the best friend they ever had was England. But I am not here this morning to laud England particularly. I merely wanted to bring home a truth, and if we will go back to the time of the Revolution we will find that the true representatives of the English people were opposed to the treatment that was accorded the Colonies; and we will find further, that it was a Prussian monarch upon the throne of England that forced the Colonies to revolt. If we go just a little further we will find that it was the hired soldiery of Hesse that fought the major part of the fight, so that our war was not a war particularly against the English people, but a war against a foreign king, ruling over the English people—a king who was imbued with the same ideas that the Prussian monarch of today is imbued with, a king that would have forced upon us the same kind of rule that the Prussian monarch would force upon us today, and I merely cite that so that we should know more about what is being taught and that the public school should engage more of our thought, more of our attention, more of our consideration as men and as Masons in the future. And so, Brethren, we could go on and we could enlarge upon the things that we might discuss both politically, not in a narrow partisan sense, but in the broader sense of those things that concern intimately the welfare of our people, and we must in our Masonic Lodges lay down some definite, specific program of education, and I commend to the Committee on Education of this Grand Lodge the idea that the Blue Lodges are not so much interested in the musty history of the past or in the musty tradition of Masonry, or of who lived and who died and who wrought some thousand or two thousand years ago, and that if they will bring to the Lodges of this jurisdiction a program that will have for its purpose a consideration of the men and Masons that are living today, that are existing today, that is important to our welfare, and I might say important to our life itself, then they will find a response from their Lodges that they have not had heretofore.

And so, Brethren, we have our work mapped out for us. There is much on the trestle board to be done, and it seems most fitting that we should just adopt for the future that splendid cry that has come out from the west front. You know, regardless of how the battle has ebbed or flowed, regardless of whether victory has been perching on the banners of our British allies or whether defeat has been their part, there has just been a certain something down in the heart of the British Tommy that has found expression in that battle cry of "Carry on," "Carry on" through defeat, "Carry on" through victory—"Carry on," and so this morning I would say to the Grand Lodge of California, in full appreciation of the splendid work that has been done in the past, in full appreciation of the magnificent foundation that has been laid, in full appreciation of the Lodge and the labors of the splendid men that have gone before us, in appreciation of our defeats and of our victories, as we face toward the future, as we look out upon the problems that confront us, as we realize the burdens that are being laid upon us, I would say to the Grand Lodge of California, "Carry on, Carry on!"

(During the delivery of the oration the Brethren frequently manifested their approval and pleasure by lively applause, which was noted by the stenographer. Brother Victor, however, requests that the reporter's transcript be amended by striking out references thereto, and his desire is reluctantly granted.)

On motion the thanks of Grand Lodge were extended to Brother Victor, and he was requested to furnish the manuscript of his oration to be printed with the Proceedings of Grand Lodge.

