

**Grand Lodge
Free & Accepted Masons
Of California
Grand Oration 1919**

**Grand Orator
Charles H. Victor**

Most Worshipful Grand Master and Brethren of the Grand Lodge

The duty of your orator at this time is both a pleasant and a serious one; a pleasant one because we have so many reasons for congratulation, and serious in that we are confronted by conditions that are at once fraught with menace and danger not alone to our fraternity but to the land we love.

One year ago when we met together in annual communication we were engaged in a war, the equal of which has never been known in the annals of history. It seemed at that time, and we felt that the whole structure of civilization was threatened; we were hopeful that it might be ended soon, but even the most optimistic of us had no idea the end was so near or that complete victory could so soon be achieved.

The clouds of war passed, and today the banners of our gallant allies float beside our own starry emblem, bathed in the sunlight of a glorious victory. We cannot at this time refrain from congratulating ourselves, because now that the record has been made up, we find that the destroying Death Angel passed lightly through the ranks of our fighting men and our losses, severe though they have been, were light when compared to the tremendous sacrifice made not alone by our allies, but inflicted upon our adversary.

Before the great Architect of the Universe we humbly bow in thanksgiving for His goodness and mercy vouchsafed to us. Brethren we would be untrue to our calling if at this time we did not likewise refer to our allies who, through the many weary months preceding the time when the strong urge and call came upon us as a nation to enter the conflict, stood in the breach and fought to maintain the civilization in which we rejoice today.

We are prone to forget; we are prone to look to the future always, rather than to the past, so let us remember our gallant allies, and let us remember that they are allies still, and that in the great fight that must be waged in the coming month and in the coming year, and in the years that are ahead of us, the great fight of reconstruction that must be made for the fulfillment of the dream we had when we entered the conflict, that our allies must stand with us and that they must fight with us and that the burden cannot be borne by them or us alone. We must still be allies.

What a wonderful record it is that they present to us. We can spend a moment profitably in reviewing it. We all know how our hearts were burdened when the first news came that war had been declared away back in 1914. It seems so long ago, it appears to be a relic of almost a past age, and yet we were burdened with an oppressive thought that things were not altogether right in the world, and then those who afterwards became our allies in the conflict stepped into the breach. France had her part. France was true to the promise that she had made prior to this conflict. When the hour came that she must fight—fight she did. There was no sacrifice too great for her to make, and she poured out not alone her manhood but likewise tier womanhood upon the altar of her patriotism. She fought and fought against odds that seemed almost too great for human strength, on and on, willing if necessary to be annihilated rather than submit to a conquest she knew would be worse than destruction to her national life.

And Belgium—glorious Belgium—who, rather than sacrifice her honor for temporary safety and peace, threw her puny strength into the breach and fought back the invader who would at once have raped and then destroyed her. Her puny strength was sufficient for the moment, and although she lay desolated and almost destroyed in the path of the conqueror, still that strength was sufficient to allow others to rush into the conflict and hold until the hour when the death knell of autocracy could be sounded.

And then Britain—oh! we hear much of Britain in these days. I want to say to you, Brethren of the Grand Lodge, that we of Anglo-Saxon origin can never cease paying our debt of gratitude to that great Anglo-Saxon people, that great Anglo-Saxon nation who had been so

misjudged, who had been so misunderstood by our adversary, that they were counted upon to violate the pledge that they had made and leave their small neighbor in her hour of trial. But Britain stood as Britain has always stood, ready to fight for the right.

As we look over the record, England and Scotland and India and Australia and New Zealand and our near friends on the north, Canada, we find their blood and treasure poured out without stint, poured out in a sacrifice unparalleled in the history of mankind, and they stood and they fought and they waited until their Anglo-Saxon brethren on this side of the water came into the conflict and finally assisted in the settlement of the difficulty.

Oh, let us today not alone congratulate but likewise pay our respect, our feeling of intense thankfulness to our sister across the water for the fight that she waged, and let us stand unflinchingly forever against any propaganda that may be spread abroad to separate these two nations whose lives and whose futures have been brought together in bonds of blood!

And so the record runs on: Italy made a gallant and great fight, at some times fighting up in the snow-covered Alps and at others down on the plains—betrayed but never willing to give in; yes, Italy was a gallant part of the host of righteousness that fought in the conflict. And so with the others—Serbia, Roumania, the blacks from Morocco, Japan and China and Russia.

And friends, let us not forget the part that Russia played in this struggle. For many weary months she fought; she fought at times almost with bare hands, attacked from behind by traitors in her own camps, but ever fighting until resources were gone. But credit must be given for one thing: It was due to Russia that the horde of Huns was held back until their possible hour of triumph had passed and their fate had been written in lurid letters of fire on the sign-board of destiny. Russia played a splendid part until she was practically destroyed.

So we can congratulate our allies for their part in the conflict, and it is only fit and right that we should remember. Yea, brethren, let us never forget the part they played! Shame on him and shame on those who in this hour of triumph, in this period of re-construction, would try to spread dissension in our ranks by endeavoring to allot to any one particular nation the supreme palm of victory. All are conquerors, all have their part, all have made their sacrifice; so let us today congratulate and commend our allies and seek in no way whatever to take unto ourselves greater credit than is our due nor to take from any full credit for service rendered.

We are likewise to be congratulated as a fraternity. The reports that come from all jurisdictions show that many have been prompted to solicit the privileges of our fraternity. Our growth has been unparalleled in the history of Masonry. We cannot help but feel that these initiates of ours have come prompted by a desire to be of service to their fellow men. And Brethren, if that is true, and we cannot doubt it, then we have great cause for congratulations and great hope for the future, for it demonstrates that at heart the great mass of our people are sound. It demonstrates that the desire to serve has not left us with the war; it demonstrates that the principles that we have enunciated for these many years are finding a responsive echo in the hearts of more and more as the days go by. These numbers have augmented our material prosperity, so we can congratulate ourselves and our sister jurisdictions today upon the great increase in numbers and material prosperity. This is the bright side of the picture, and I would that I could spend the time allotted me in contemplation of a theme so pleasant and so delightful.

But there is another side to the picture and a side perhaps not quite as inviting. The war is over and the days of relaxation have come, and now the period of reconstruction is upon us. In the hearts of many the blood-lust still remains and we find dissension—we find indifference—we find active and open propaganda to destroy organized society—we find effort being made to spread confusion among the ranks of those who labor—we find an effort being made to destroy the pleasant alliance that has been formed between ourselves and other great nations who fought for liberty and for freedom, and with that problem, we as Masons and we as citizens are largely concerned, and we can readily afford to spend a few minutes of our time in this session of Grand Lodge in trying to find a solution to the difficulties that confront us.

To understand something of the problem we will have to revert again for a moment to the reasons why we entered the conflict that has just closed. Regardless of acts that may have been committed, there is no question in the minds of those who have studied the matter and who have been close observers, that our participation in the conflict was due to our following a great ideal. We fought the war for no mercenary motives—no thought of indemnity—no thought of political aggrandizement—no thought of material gain in any way whatever.

We felt that human rights and human freedom and liberty of all peoples were at stake, and with that splendid idealism before our minds we went into battle. No sacrifice was too great for us to make. Our blood and treasure were poured out; our young manhood was enlisted; conscription was accepted without a murmur; the onerous rulings of the Food Administration were taken as a matter of course. Economy was practiced that the Nation might have the funds wherewith to prosecute the war, and when the call was made by those organizations that were ministering to the comfort and to the welfare of the boys in camp and at the front, our purses as well as our hearts were opened to them.

Oh, yes! We had a big ideal and we felt that we could sacrifice for that ideal. Then the war ended. Immediately there was a relaxation—immediately a letting down of the tense feeling we had had before. Some felt that duty was done; others that they had really played their part, and then the element came that desired to place a fallacious and absolutely wrong construction upon the reason for the sacrifice and is endeavoring to break up all organized society.

Now, that is what has led up to our present condition. We must face that condition and I know of no institution, I know of no organization that is better fitted to meet it than our great fraternity.

Why? Because from the very beginning of our government the principles of Freemasonry have been inculcated in the minds of our people. We hear statements made from time to time that we have no real political influence, and far be it from me, Brethren, standing before you this morning to advocate that a Masonic Lodge or the Masonic Grand Lodge or that any or all of our jurisdictions should in any time seek political preference. I rejoice this morning that we have no machinery, no organization that can go into the political arena and demand things to which we are not entitled by our rights as American citizens. And I hope the day will never come when we will seek for the Masonic fraternity anything that she is not legitimately entitled to have.

But let us look, Brethren, to see whether, the statement is al-together true that we have no influence. Let us go back to the very foundation of our government. We find that many of the men who organized this government were Masons. Our leading Colonial fathers were inspired by the lessons that have inspired us, and in the foundation of our government they endeavored to inculcate in the minds of our people those lessons of Freemasonry, and down 'through the years they have passed Masonry and Liberty, not with the many but rather with the few, and through those few have reached the many, until the idea of liberty and the idea of freedom and the idea of the rights of men have been planted in the hearts of our citizenship. And I say to you this morning, and I do not believe that any will refute the statement as I make it, that the idealism of the United States of America, that carried it through this great war for civilization, was the idealism that was planted through no other agency than the teachings of Freemasonry through the years that preceded it. And I want to ask you a question, that if that is a fact and if it be true and if you do not dispute it—is it not better that we have the substance rather than the shadow? Is it not better that our teachings through these years have built up in the hearts of the people a desire for that which is right, a desire for that which is true, a desire for that which is good, and has led them forth to lay their lives upon the altar as a sacrifice for those principles, rather than to gain some temporary advantage by political machinations? Brethren, we have the substance; let those who desire the shadow play the game as they will.

This opposition, this unrest, this indifference is the enemy we have to fight. Now there is no new—there is no startling remedy for this condition. I cannot stand here this morning and instruct you in the ways of life that will lead to the solution of this problem, but I can remind you. Brethren—I can only remind you—of the lessons which you have learned and to attract to your thought the fact that the promulgation of those lessons in your community through the medium of your daily life and your activities will bring about a solution to the problem.

Freemasonry stands today, as it has ever stood, for certain well-defined principles. Freemasonry stands first for a belief in God. It is primary and it is fundamental, and I want to say to you this morning, Brethren, that without a belief in God you can have no faith in your fellow man: Faith in fellow man is absolutely founded upon a faith in a higher or Supreme Being, so we can profitably think for a moment upon the principle that we enunciate —our belief in God.

Every Mason as he enters the Lodge is required to declare that belief. He is not required to accept a creed. He is not required to express an allegiance to any particular type of religious denomination. Freemasonry does not stand as a religion. We are not a religious organization, and

yet there is another fact in the same connection, Brethren, that we want to remember and never lose sight of—Masonry is not a substitute for religion. Masonry never can be a substitute for religion. I for my part would not want a religion that would be as narrow a religion as Freemasonry, if Freemasonry were a religion. Freemasonry bars so many people. I cannot take my children to the religion of Freemasonry. My wife cannot go with me when I attend the inspiring ceremonies of Freemasonry. My friend who has perhaps fallen, who has wandered from the paths of rectitude, cannot come back and be reformed by Freemasonry, because Freemasonry is not a reform institution. The man who comes to solicit our privileges must be a good man and true. He must be a man who in his heart has been prepared to be a Mason. He must be a man whose record as far as we can ascertain it, at least, is clean. We are not a reform institution, but religion has for one of its prime duties the building up of men who have fallen and reclaiming the lost and instructing the young and providing inspiration and meeting places for the sex that we do not admit to our membership.

And so, when I think of my religion, I want a religion that is broad enough and inclusive enough to include my family and my friends along with me. Therefore, I do not this morning advocate the thought that Masonry is a religion, but I do say this and I believe that you can find an echoing response in your heart, that each and every one of you will be a far better Mason if you will ally yourselves with and support some type of organized religion.

The Church has its place in society. The Church has been teaching for many years, and Masonry can support the Church in so far as the Church does not attempt to impose upon it an authoritative religion. Religion by authority, by direction, that does not allow for the free use of the conscience and the development of the intellect that God has given to man in the working out of his relation between the Deity and himself has no part in the support of Freemasonry.

So, let us, Brethren, endeavor as a means of meeting the spirit of unrest—let us endeavor as a means of meeting the anarchistic teachings that are being spread abroad today, support the churches that are building up true piety and righteousness in our several communities, so that their hands will be strengthened in the fight that they are making along with us.

Masonry likewise teaches certain very pronounced doctrines in regard to duty as citizens. Americanism is becoming a subject that is on all tongues. And some say "Well, your doctrine of Americanism—your doctrine of Nationalism does not conform to the universality of Masonry."

Brethren, let us get that idea or notion out of their minds! The universality of Masonry teaches us that at heart men are alike, and so they are. At heart we are inspired with the same feelings. We love, we hate, we work, we play, and regardless of the modes and the methods that we use, the feeling that prompts our motives is largely the same, whether it is in the heart of the white in San Francisco or the black in North Africa, so that universality is the feeling that we can account for when we talk of the universality of Masonry.

Masonry does teach this: that we should render a proper due to all mankind. We are as much obligated to be just and to be fair to our brethren who have the black skin or the yellow skin or red skin as we are to our brethren of the white skin. That is one of the phases of the universality of Masonry, but Brethren, never think for one minute that the universality of Masonry denies the doctrine of a splendid nationalism or a splendid Americanism.

A man can be a true Frenchman and a good Mason:

A man can be a true Scotchman and a good Mason:

A man can be a true Irishman and a good Mason:

A man can be a true Canadian and a good Mason:

But I assert to you this morning, Brethren, that no man can be a French-American; no man can be a Scotch-American; no man can be an Irish-American or Canadian-American and owe allegiance to those people and be a good American Mason.

Our safety as a people depends upon our loyalty to our own country. If we find those in our midst who are Americans; if we find those in our midst who have been born here and who have been trained here and are yet concerned in plots to destroy the liberty that has been built up through these many generations of toil and bloodshed, then let us deal with them as traitors should be dealt with. If we find in our midst those who have come from other shores and are accepting our hospitality, our benefits and our privileges, and yet are working as thieves in the

night, ready to stab us in the back and destroy the institutions that have made our land what it is, then let us send them back to the place whence they came and rid our country of an undesirable element.

So Masonry teaches good citizenship; Masonry teaches good Americanism. And Americanism today in its best-sense can be exemplified by the spirit that is willing to work in these problems of reconstruction as men inspired by that spirit that is willing to make the same sacrifice, who are willing to pay the same price that our country may be perpetuated and may go on in peace as it did in war, and if we can get that spirit in the hearts of our people then our American Nation is safe.

As a citizen there is one very important duty and that is the duty as a voter. Our registration shows some remarkable things, and one of the sad as well as remarkable things is that we are not as a people as careful and as zealous and as jealous of the privilege of the ballot as we should be. Many are indifferent even to registration, and of those who do register, large numbers of them do not vote. Brethren, in every Masonic Lodge at the time when an election is on, mention should be made that the prime duty of a voter is to express his opinion—not the opinion of the Lodge, not the opinion of Masonry, but his opinion as a voter.

Let us, Brethren, lay just a little bit more stress on the observance of this privilege and this duty and a little less stress on who and what we are voting for. Oh, it is so easy to get up excitement over an individual; it is so easy to get up a temporary excitement over an issue, but it is hard to get up enthusiasm and excitement over just ordinary duty. But, voting is not an ordinary duty. It is the greatest duty that we as citizens have to perform.

Masonry should likewise enter into the everyday life of the individual if these problems are going to be solved. Masonry is not a thing for the Lodge-room alone; it is not a thing for our festive occasions alone, but, it is a practical everyday philosophy of life. A man to be a good Mason should be a good business man, should be a good lawyer; should be a good bricklayer or a good mechanic. Into his everyday work should go the principles that have been inculcated in his life through the medium of his Lodge. He should feel that he is endeavoring to dignify his craft or his profession, he should endeavor at all times to show that the word of a Mason in business or as a laborer or as a professional man is absolutely inviolable. The fact that he is a Mason should be sufficient recommendation of his character. And in our Lodges we should lay emphasis upon that fact. We should teach the fact not alone in the beautiful phraseology of our ritual, but in the common ordinary language that every man can understand, and if we find in our community Masons who are not living up to the teaching of Masonry in their everyday business life and affairs, then some means should be found to show them the error of their ways.

Brethren, the teaching of Masonry is nothing more or less than old fashioned, common honesty and common sense. Those are the things that are particularly needed in this hour of crisis. There is no new panacea for the ills of the world. Work honestly performed, duty faithfully done, will bring peace and happiness and contentment to our land. Let us in our Lodges as we go back from this communication of the Grand Lodge give consideration to the old fashioned virtues; let us bring them before our member-ship as we have never brought them before. Let us put greater stress upon the social side of our Institution, so that we can come to understand and know our Brethren better; let us give them the inspiration of our companionship; let us give them the helpful and strengthening influence of a closer acquaintanceship; let us have them feel that as they go out in their several walks of life that they have the interest and support of the brethren of their Lodges. Let us endeavor by this close, active connection and acquaintance-ship and frequent meetings together to weld ourselves into one solid mass that will stand for righteousness and for honesty and for uprightness in our civic as well as our private dealings; let us be bound together into one great mass that will move forward as a solid unit for righteousness.

Just a little while ago I heard a soldier telling of his experience with the army of occupation. He was sent to the Rhine after the armistice was signed and reached the border or edge of the river at night. In the morning, when he went out from his tent and went to the river to look across at Coblenz, he saw over the great fortress of Ehrenbreitstein the American flag flying. It made a wonderful impression on his mind. He said he had never been thrilled before as he was thrilled by the sight of the American flag over Ehrenbreitstein, and he turned to his comrades and found that they were feeling just as he felt; and so morning after morning, during the time they spent with the army of occupation they went out and saw Old Glory floating over Ehrenbreitstein

and as they returned to their native land he said the thought came home with them. His whole company seemed to be inspired with the thought that as they returned to their land they would endeavor to so live and act that they might keep that American flag flying over Ehrenbreitstein—Ehrenbreitstein, not in its physical character but Ehrenbreitstein as it typified the ascension of righteousness and of truth and of freedom over autocracy and sin and error.

And so, Brethren, in these, my closing words to you, I would urge that as we go forth from this communication of the Grand Lodge, we go with the feeling and inspiration that we are going to keep Old Glory flying over Ehrenbreitstein and that error and unrighteousness and ignorance and lack of patriotic fervor shall be forever cast forth from among us and that the principles that we are so pleased to enunciate as the principles of our grand order may animate and inspire mankind, to the end that we may have a better, brighter and more glorious land in the future than even our glorious record of the past.

Were it not for the modesty of the Orator, the transcript above would show the applause, which frequently greeted the speaker. On motion of the Junior Grand Warden a rising vote of thanks was extended to Brother Victor.