

**Grand Lodge  
Free & Accepted Masons  
Of California  
Grand Oration 1922**

**Grand Orator  
Will H. Fischer**

Most Worshipful Grand Master and Brethren of the Grand Lodge

I thank you for this courteous reception, and trust that I may be able to contribute to the thought of this Communication a suggestion or two which may be of value, and which will merit your consideration as the days speed by.

At the outset, Most Worshipful Grand Master, I desire to express to you my thanks for the appointment given me a year ago, and also my appreciation of the courtesy and consideration you have so unceasingly manifested toward me; and I also take this opportunity to acknowledge to my associate officers of Grand Lodge, to the Masters and Wardens here assembled, and through them to the brethren of this Grand Jurisdiction, my profound gratitude for numberless acts of fraternal kindness by which they have made me much their debtor.

We are met to exchange fraternal salutations, to give an accounting of our stewardship, to give ear to the admonitions of our master workmen, to enjoy for a little space the pleasure of each other's companionship, to break bread and eat meat together, to pledge our faith anew, to kneel at our common altar, to pay Affection's tribute to the memory of those beloved brethren who came so often into this presence but come no more; and then, as Masons have done in all ages before us, to go forth again unto our labors. On such occasion the duty of my office requires that I should address you "upon matters appertaining to the Craft."

At the Annual Communication of Grand Lodge we naturally concern ourselves with an effort to chart, as best we may, our future activities. We often hear brethren say: "We are not greatly interested in the past of institutions in general; our chief concern is not even with the present; it is the future to which we look." I make bold to suggest to you, my brethren, that we cannot intelligently chart the future of our own or any institution, and that we cannot discern the paths of wisdom in the present, unless we shall have first surveyed, to some extent at least, that which has taken place in the past; for it is the experience of the past that must always serve as a guide to the development of the future.

Society in general is passing through an era of restlessness, the effects of which are felt by Masonry as by all institutions, and as a result we frequently encounter agitated and excited brethren who have lost their hospitality for the traditional conception of Masonry's proper sphere of action. We find these brethren, apparently prey to anxiety and distress as they run about through the halls of Masonry pointing out activities to which, in their opinion, the Fraternity should commit itself, and opportunities of which they fear Masonry will fail to avail itself. I am going to speak to you today in simple, homely phrases, with reference to what I conceive to be the real opportunities of Masonry and Masons.

So far as I am concerned, I frankly confess that I am slow to commit the sanction of my individual judgment to those adventures and innovations which, in such great number, are suggested by enthusiastic brethren; for I am persuaded that these brethren have fallen victims to a confusion of thought, leading them to seek to impose upon the Institution itself duties and activities which properly belong to the individual Mason.

As I look back over the history of this Institution of ours I find that Masonry has never paraded under a militant flag; but Masons have bled in countless conflicts waged to advance the common state of man. Masonry has never ruled or sought to rule at the courts of kings, the palaces of emperors, or in the parliaments of the free. It has never exercised or sought to exercise a temporal power; it has required no embattled defenders by day and no masked avengers by night. But Masons have written into codes and constitutions those principles and laws, which have lifted the eyes of bondsmen to the sun, swept skies, and lighted the flaming torch of knowledge in the night of ignorance and degradation to illumine the upward-faring pathway, of humankind. Masonry has never presumed to perform a churchly office; but Masons in every country and in every clime have been distinguished by their reverence for Deity and by the virtue

of their lives.

From time immemorial Masonry has exercised a mystically beneficent influence over human society and human history; and I am convinced that this influence, like the Institution's age-long endurance and the intimacy and vigor of its appeal to men living under all manner of conditions and systems and governments, in shifting centuries and in changing times, has been due, first to its continuing and unbroken attachment to unchangeable fundamental principles of human conduct and divine aspiration, and secondly, to the fact that, like a great rock lifting itself from the sea, it has resisted in all times the fickle winds and tides of popular fancy, passion, delusion and design.

Thus Masonry has come down to us, performing its original functions, teaching to men the kindly, manly virtues, informing them with a generous and exalted patriotism, instructing them in the social sciences, and indelibly impressing on their minds a moving sense of the power, wisdom and goodness of the Great Artificer of the Universe. Upon that basis and with that sort of a program Masonry has ever transmitted from the eternal sources of Truth, through her votaries into the world about them, the light that illumines and makes possible the advance of civilization. Shall we now, in any rashness of inspiration or ambition, consider a departure from the old basis of our Institution, or innovations in its ancient and effective program? That, to me, is the challenge of the hour, the subject which should be uppermost in our minds.

I am not of that small number who insist that Masonry, as an Institution, can take no action whatsoever along so-called "practical" lines, but I am persuaded now, as ever I have been persuaded, that every characteristic of the Institution stamps it as necessarily conservative, and that every obligation imposes upon those in control of its destinies a solemn respect for such conservatism. It is Masonry's great function to inform; it is the function of individual Masons to perform.

Many experiments are proposed. We have brethren who insist that our Institution should enter the field of politics and attempt to function as a definite political organization in support of Masons who happen to be candidates for office. We have others who believe that Masonry should organize its forces to oppose or aid some particular class or creed. We have others who would commit the Fraternity to the espousal of certain specific measures of proposed legislation. Others would not hesitate to align the Order with one or another of the numberless movements of the day and the times. Still others would use the Fraternity to advance certain radical policies of public education. And so we might, if it were necessary, go through an extended list of experiments and ideas presented for our consideration, all of which must be and are rejected by the great body of sound, clear thinking Masons. Remembering that harmony is "the strength and support of all Institutions," let us examine the general conditions which surround us, so that we may judge with some intelligence as to whether Masonry might be successful in such adventures as have just been indicated.

The Mason coming upon the scene of life today finds that there are new pathways winding across the world, challenging his curiosity and daring; there are new sciences, new thoughts, new theories, new tendencies to be tested in the laboratory of experience; there are new ideas knocking at the door of Time; there are new battlefields on which the fluttering oriflammes of conflict are raised. There are old trails, too, choked, it may be, with new growth. There are old virtues, old proprieties, old modesties, old truths to be conserved, and there are old evils, old passions, old prejudices and old ignorance to be overcome. It is not strange that, in the midst of the maze and conflict of modern thought and action he should manifest a tendency to become confused; the age itself is confused and confusing.

Let us have a fleeting glimpse of the world at large. We become conscious at once of the fact that the wounds of the World War still bleed. Europe is torn and distraught. Ever and anon we hear the throbbing battle-drums, despite a factitious peace. The evils which follow in the wake of the great struggle feed anew the enmities, suspicions, greeds and passions that produced it. Beneath the flowing garment of diplomacy the hand of hate yet lies heavy on the hilt of that which arbitrates with death. Gaze upon the picture! Russia, with her mystery and her terror; Poland, with her dreadful fears; Germany, with her humiliation and resentment; France, with her obsessions; Austria, with her mendicancy, her once-proud eagles stricken into the dust; England, with her endless crises; Armenia, with her sons slaughtered and her daughters enslaved; Italy, with her smarting scars; Greece, with her fresh disasters; Thrace, with the clamorous Turk at her gates; the tinder-boxes of the Balkans, awaiting the touch of any torch; unhappy Ireland, wallowing in fratricidal blood; India, seething with revolt; Genoa, a failure; The Hague, impotent! In all the world

the year has given us but one probably effective agreement and instrument of peace — the Four Power Treaty — and that made possible only by reason of the confidence of nations in the friendliness, the integrity, the justice and fairness of the American people as personified in a simple American Mason in the White House at Washington !

I submit to you, my brethren, that so long as passion, prejudice and hatred ride upon the winds of the world, run upon its disheveled tides and dance upon its mountains like a flame, there is no hope for peace among men. It is only as a nation builds into the consciousness of the world an acceptance of its integrity, its friendliness, and only as it demonstrates in deed and practice that its people will live above the fogs of unreason and provincialism, that it can hope to be an instrument of service to its sister-nations. As this has applied so practically with reference to our own nation, so has it ever applied, and so will it continue to apply to that Masonry which breathed its spirit into the founders of the Republic. Founded on incontrovertible principles of right, Masonry has lived above controversy, teaching good will, scorning bigotry and avoiding meanness of spirit, ever calling into the consciousness of men the fact that we are all children of the same great Creator; that we are all descended from the same stock; that we partake of the same nature and share the same hope. If Masonry's beneficent influence is to continue to permeate, uplift and inspire society, we, my brethren, must never lose sight of this great truth.

Obviously, American Masonry cannot project itself into European entanglements; but the American Mason can help a little by setting aside racial prejudices, by refraining from inflammatory remarks, by striving for a larger and clearer vision of the world, and by supporting our government in the exercise of those helpful offices which it properly may attempt to exercise.

When we turn to our own land we find a condition of outward peace; but inwardly, we are conscious of grave disturbance and menacing unrest, which we find wherever we turn. We cannot here consider these matters in detail, but we may mention a few points which to each of us will suggest others as important, which deserve our serious consideration.

For instance, we have the situation as between labor and capital. In the past year, according to Government statistics, the industry of this country has been disrupted by some 3000 strikes, involving over 3,000,000 workers. Since the year 1914, it is said, we have had 26,000 of these upheavals in industry, involving over 18,500,000 workers, with economic losses which would be more than sufficient to meet the money cost of the World War. What are we to do with reference to this condition? As an Institution we cannot go into the matter. No matter which side we might appear to take we would immediately be charged with partiality, tens of thousands of brethren would be offended, our influence would be lost, and in every way the Fraternity would suffer. Yet we know that these strikes and the evils attending them are wrong, terribly wrong, and that they are breaking down the structure of American industry upon which our material prosperity and social welfare must rest.

A reasonable and acceptable system of industrial adjustment is undoubtedly possible of attainment. We have merely a problem, however complex, and in the solution of it the individual Mason, by the adoption and maintenance of a proper attitude, can be of service. If I were the Master of a Lodge today, and labor troubles arose involving both employers and employees who were members thereof, I think I would try to get those Masons together, around the table in my home, and get them to exchange their views. I do not mean that I would try any rash intervention — not that! I would just try to get them to talk it over as Masons and give their thought to constructive plans with reference not only to their own dispute but to the larger subject of industrial relations. There is enough wisdom and goodness among Masons, and enough intimacy, under the Mystic Tie, to produce the real solution of the Labor problem. It is only necessary to exchange mutual understanding for mutual prejudice and misconception. And the solution must come. We cannot go on hereafter as heretofore, with employers on one side of the line and labor on the other, each side glaring and glowering at the other, provoking such horrors as we witnessed recently at Herrin, Illinois, and continuing such civil warfare as we have had for months in the coal zone. This sort of thing must come to an end; and Masons can and should assist by promoting among employers and employed alike those sentiments of mutual confidence, appreciation, respect and obligation which make the end attainable.

We find preaching in our streets, in every public forum, sometimes in our Masonic lodges, and frequently in our churches, the foolish visionary and disturbing demagogue, while behind them skulks the crafty and wicked radical intent upon the overthrow of all our cherished institutions. Too long have these creatures been permitted to pour into the ears of our people the poisons of their seductions. Our land is becoming afflicted with the "visions" of soft-headed

dreamers, while the radical and the demagogue, like devouring moths, are destroying the fabric of our social and economic systems. It is easily observable that the directing minds of radicalism in this country have discovered that America and its institutions cannot be destroyed by the old plan of frontal attack; that such destruction must come through appeal to the emotionalism and sentimentalism of the people. And so we find the deadly pill of anarchy is presented under a sugar coating, while the dynamite of destructive thought is disguised as "uplift movements," which appeal to well-meaning men and women who permit themselves to think with their feelings rather than with their minds.

The fruits of radical propaganda are making themselves apparent. We encounter, among the people, a restive disposition. We have a greater measure of prosperity and general comfort than can be found elsewhere in this wide world, and yet we have a discontented people. We see these fruits in the crumbling of the home; we have but to read divorce statistics. We find a people whose forefathers fought to make this a Republic drifting from their old moorings, departing from the system which was handed down to them as the one plan of government under which the people could escape, on the one hand the tyranny of kings and on the other the tyranny of mobs, and surrendering their priceless heritage for a democracy full-sown with the seeds of social and economic revolution. Our old Americanism, which was the wonder and admiration of the world, is shaken and corrupted. We find the people, led by demagogic guides, demanding that government take upon itself the exercise of functions which nature intended, and which our ancestors fought to win, for the individual; and at the same time, through the adoption of whimsical popular devices advertised as precursors of the millennium, they are withdrawing from government the exercise of vital functions and prerogatives in the deprivation of which government loses its integrity, its power and its virtue and becomes the craven creature of the crowd.

Masonry as an Institution could scarcely be expected to interpose itself directly among these matters; but every Mason can individually damn the treacherous flatteries of the demagogue, the visionary and the radical. And he should have no hesitancy in doing so. Let every Mason in this jurisdiction rededicate himself to common sense, to old-fashioned Americanism, and go forth to give battle to all who counsel the follies we have had under discussion. The society of our day supports numberless institutions and organizations, each especially created and designed to advance one particular science, to promote one particular profession, to encourage one particular business or industry, to protect one particular group of labor, to uphold the interests of one particular church or party. In those organizations the Mason has wonderful opportunity to bring to the treatment of every problem and activity of our times an application of the sound principles which Masonry has instilled into his consciousness and into the impulses of his life. There, in the busy round of every day, my brethren, is our transcendent opportunity to win the world to that Masonry of action and spirit which is the very heartthrob of civilization.

We hear and think much about our schools. Now, the Masonic Fraternity is on record, and always has been, as a champion of public education. There is not one among us who would care to take a backward step. In a nation such as ours it is imperative that the people should be educated. We stand always; and with all our strength, for the protection, integrity and up building of the public school system. In that we are unanimous. But, if I be not mistaken, the individual Mason is not committed, by reason of such loyalty, to specific measures of education. I do not conceive it to be my Masonic duty blindly to endorse every measure presented to me, merely because it comes from those who have in charge the administration of the schools. I do not recognize it as a Masonic duty to vote for issues of school bonds, for instance, unless I have assured myself of the public necessity therefore. The point I wish to make is this, that Masons should never become the unquestioning and unreasoning bondservants of any institution, whether schools, or churches, or societies. It is our duty to know what we are doing when we exercise the electoral franchise, and to realize that those who administer human institutions are as human as ourselves, subject to the same ambitions and faults. There is never a time when Masons should not be particularly careful to see that the causes they publicly support have real merit and deserve such support.

But speaking broadly, the cause of the schools is the cause of Masonry, and herein, perhaps, the Institution itself, can find some functioning scope. If Masonry is to remain, as it will, a great pillar of support to the schools, there may be room for the application, in a formal way, of well-considered Masonic judgment as to school administration and also as to the character and efficiency of the training imparted to the young. Above all, Masonry might well undertake to see that the professional school politician is driven out of our educational system.

Our educational cost is enormous. It is of the utmost importance to see that the expenditures along that line are made with the highest possible degree of efficiency. I would like to see Masonry, in this jurisdiction, through properly organized committees keep in close touch with the schools, studying them carefully and impartially and reporting their findings from time to time for the information and guidance of the Craft. These investigations might especially relate to educational policies as expressed in courses of study. The spirit of our schools, and the purposes they have in view, are of high importance. There is an old French saying that it is impossible to make a silk purse out of a sow's ear. If our schools are to perform their function in a manner most useful to society they must equip the individual student with the training he or she is qualified to receive. It is a useless expense to insist on giving a large-caliber education to a small-caliber mind. It is not only extravagant but socially dangerous to make the swivel-chair the objective of all education, because there are a great many boys and girls who do not possess swivel-chair brains, but who are well qualified to lead socially useful and personally happy lives if given the proper aspirations and training. Once we have passed the elementary studies we must adapt education, so far as may be possible, to the individual, or at least to classes and types of individuals. We must not hold up false standards of success, and we must not flatter children. It is wrong to induce a boy, by nature intended for a mechanical trade, to go through years of so-called higher education to become, ultimately, a failure in a profession to which nature has not adapted him. It is wrong to insinuate that the purpose of modern education is to raise the youth of the land above the necessity to labor. It is right to dignify labor and to train the labor of the oncoming generations for efficiency. There are liberal rewards for efficient labor. I would like to see a rule enforced which would close the doors of our free universities to all students who had failed to manifest the highest degree of ambition and scholarship. I would like to see those doors opened to every student who had demonstrated his capacity for higher learning; and if he were poor I would like to see the State advance him the money required for his support.

Economy in school administration is required because of the vast educational need, as may be observed from the figures on illiteracy. As shown by the 1920 Census there were in this country over 5,000,000 people above the age of ten years unable to read or write in any language, of which number more than 4,400,000 were above the age of 21 years. What sort of citizenship are we going to expect from men and women who have no means of learning our history or imbibing the ideals of Americanism — no equipment for transacting the business of life in a complex age? Why, under modern conditions they become a prey to the exploiter and the agitator. Victimized, disappointed, embittered, they become as fallow and fertile fields in which to plant the seeds of disorder, violence, crime, anarchy and all social vices. Masons, as good Americans, have the right and duty to demand that illiteracy be eradicated.

Illiteracy is intimately associated, as we all know, with the problem of Americanization. It would appear that "Americanization" has become a mere slogan. Doubtless we might develop various opinions as to how we might make good Americans of those who come from foreign shores. The subject is too large for extended discussion, but it challenges the extended thought of every Mason. Dismissing it quickly as we hasten along, I leave this thought for your consideration: Don't pamper the immigrant; don't entertain him with cheap movies, for he can attend to his own entertainment; but insist that he get a square deal and decent treatment in industry and that his children be given a decent education. In the meantime, keep the gates of immigration closed until we have Americanized the immigrants now in our midst, and then open them only to immigrants of the better classes.

Masonry, as an Institution, can practice no greater folly than to consider itself a political organization. Politics is a rock upon which, with haste and irrevocable disaster, the baroque of Masonry would be split; but every Mason, my brethren, can do politics for himself, and every Mason should be an active politician, using that word in its best sense. Because of our adoption of popular legislation there rests upon each of us a great responsibility. For instance, we shall find on the ballot, on November 7th, thirty propositions, most of them proposed amendments to the Constitution, the organic law of our State. On each of these propositions it is our duty to vote intelligently. How many of us can honestly say that we have studied those measures — all or any of them — and given thought to the principles they involve? How many of us feel that we are capable of standing here now and giving an intelligent opinion as to the probable results, in operation, of these amendments, some of which go to the very heart of our economic and governmental organizations? Our duty is clear. If we fail to perform it, how can we boast of our good citizenship? Let us, my brethren, strive to attain breadth and vision and the understanding

that each of us has a proud privilege and a great duty as a citizen of this country of ours; that every act and policy of government has a meaning for the people; that we owe it to society and to ourselves to take a little time away from our auto rides and the movies and give a night occasionally to honest study and thinking and discussion relative to the welfare of our nation and our State.

We have another great problem—the crime problem. Why, in my county of Los Angeles, which produces so many other great figures for the edification of you gentlemen from other parts of the State, we produced in a year more murders than in the same space of time were committed in the British Isles. All sorts of crime are prevalent, not only in California but throughout the nation; and the most shocking phase of the situation lies in the fact that so many of the criminals are mere youths. What is the cause and what is the cure? I must confess that the answer is difficult to supply. On the one hand we have our schools, and compulsory education. We have hundreds if not thousands of philanthropic and uplift societies; we have churches and charities; we have good men and women in all sorts of social service. We have wealth, comfort, luxury, music, art, and refinement. On the other hand we have the multiplication of criminals, both young and old; we have violence; we have vice; we have an increase in the number of feeble-minded; we have increasing insanity. The wave of crime rises until it threatens to engulf us in general disorder and a social breakdown.

Certainly, with reference to crime, the so-called modern theories have failed to produce results. The old, fundamental law still holds. Naught but the fear of punishment is a deterrent to crime. Masons can do this much; each one of us can exercise his personal influence to impress upon jurors the folly of the prevailing idea of heroizing criminals. We can say to the editors of our great papers that we do not want crime capitalized at our expense; that we do not want it exploited all over the front page every day. We can signify that we are not interested in reading, and in having our children read, the sensational exploits of boy bandits. We can say, if we will, that we do not wish to read the salacious details of every putrid divorce case that can be dug out of the sewers of either high or low society. Each of us can carry that message to our editors. If the Masons of California would act in unison along that line, the complexion of the news would be greatly changed and improved; for let me tell you, my brethren, that when you take the publicity out of crime and vice today, you will go a long way toward reducing these evils. We can say to the judges of our courts that we have had enough of this silly idea of releasing crooks and criminals on probation; we can demand that the criminal courts function as they were intended to function. They can enforce the law and the penalties of the law; we need no extraneous organizations for that purpose. And we can say to the proprietors of moving picture houses which we attend that we want them to quit showing pictures that breed crimes and the troop of vicious lusts. Let us, as Masons, impress everywhere those sound, clean, right principles with which we are imbued at the altars of Masonry.

We must stand a little firmer, my friends, for the integrity of the American home. I have suggested to you that the statistics of the divorce courts of our land are very depressing. I know that this is a delicate subject. I realize that there are many cases wherein the severance of marital ties is justified by conditions; but in just the measure that it is possible, Masons, who claim to be special and sworn defenders of the home life of our country, should frown upon the idea that men and women can make easy marriages and hasty separations, leaving children orphaned while their parents yet live, cases for our courts to handle, soil in which the seeds of crime will flourish; and over and above all the destruction in the minds and hearts of men and women of those fine old ideals which have lain at the very roots of our national life, and which are the very foundation stones of any Christian civilization that has hope of endurance. And along that line, my brethren, practice as we preach.

Someone has said: "It is not the number of people that makes a nation great, else China would be the greatest nation on the globe today. It is not prowess that preserves empires from decay, else Rome would have lived forever. It is not genius, else the dust of the Parthenon would not now be mingled with the dust of Grecian art, and we might still be enchanted with the songs of some dark-eyed Sappho and charmed with the Iliad of some modern Homer. It is the virtue and patriotism of the people and their faith in Almighty God, that uphold nations and lengthen the paths of their glory."

Our late Brother, Theodore Roosevelt, gave us this utterance:  
"We here in America hold in our hands the future of the world, the fate of the coming years; and shame and disgrace will be ours if in our eyes the light of high resolve be dimmed, if we trail in

the dust the golden hopes of men."

Drawing now to a conclusion, my brethren, let us have a right conception of this Masonry of ours. Let us get away from the idea that, as an Institution, it is militant; for it never was formed to function that way. Let us carry in our minds and hearts an understanding of that nobler Masonry which prompts men to manifest in their lives those manly virtues which are the flower of a just, generous and elevated spirit. And let us be kind.

So many gods, so many greeds,  
So many paths that wind and wind,  
When just the art of being kind  
Is all this old world needs.

We speak of the mysteries of Masonry. The only mystery I have ever encountered in Masonry is the fact that so many Masons fail to understand its simplicity. Let us drink deep, my brethren, at the fountains which spring beside our altars. Let us realize that the teachings of Masonry, so simple, yet so sufficient, are genuine expressions of the only thoughts, the only principles, that will preserve our race and our civilization and continue us a great and glorious nation. Finally, I commend to you the spirit of a poem

Let me but live my life from day to day  
With forward face and unreluctant soul,  
Not hastening toward or turning from the goal,  
Not mourning for the things that disappear  
In the dead past, or holding back in fear  
From what the future veils; but with a whole  
And happy heart that pays its toll  
To youth and age and journeys on with cheer.  
So, let the path wind up the hill or down,  
O'er rough or smooth, the journey will be joy,  
Still seeking what I sought when but a boy—  
New friendships, high endeavor and a crown.  
And thus my heart will keep with courage to the quest,  
Knowing the road's last turn will be the best.