

**Grand Lodge
Free & Accepted Masons
Of California
Grand Oration 1925**

**Grand Orator
Robert B. Gaylord**

Most Worshipful Grand Master and Brethren of the Grand Lodge

"In Flanders fields the poppies blow
Between the crosses, row on row,
That mark our place; and in the sky
The larks still bravely singing fly,
Scarce heard amidst the guns below.

We are the dead. Short days ago
We lived, felt dawn, saw sunset glow,
Loved and were loved, and now we lie
In Flanders fields.

Take up our quarrel with the foe,
To you from falling hands we throw
The torch—be yours to hold it high;
If ye break faith with us who die,
We shall not sleep, though poppies grow
In Flanders fields."

Those voices still call to us from Flanders fields. They speak in the words of Abraham Lincoln at the field of Gettysburg. They come from the men who stormed the rock-ribbed defenses of New England; from the Argonauts who crossed the plains; from the men who laid deep the foundations of American institutions. They come from the men who, in an earlier day, established the Anglo-Saxon principles of individual rights and personal freedom, which we still revere. They come from that old race which, through the centuries, kept for us the Book of the Law. They come from the martyrs who suffered at Rome to vindicate their beliefs and to maintain their principles. They come from all the men in all the ages who have worked and suffered and endured to promote and to perpetuate civilization, morality and the worship of God. "If ye break faith with us who die, we shall not sleep, though poppies grow in Flanders fields."

Those voices do not call to the American nation. They do not call to the great religious organizations from whom we have received and from whom the world expects so much. They do not call to the Masonic Order, nor do they call to the Grand Lodge of Masons of California. They call to the man, to the single, individual, isolated man who sits in your chair this afternoon, or who speaks from this platform; to the individual who is responsible for the progress, the accomplishments, the sins, the ideals and the sentiments of a race, and who can shift that responsibility to no other man or body of men.

Go home tonight and look in the mirror and you will see the government of the United States and the morality of a nation. Go home tonight and look at your children—your own—their discipline and training, the extent of their self-restraint and unselfishness and Godliness and love, and you will see the citizenship and the morality and the religion of tomorrow.

Those voices call to the Masons, the individual Masons, of California; more than a hundred thousand men; upright, moral, intelligent, clean men; the outstanding men in every community.

A hundred thousand men! There were sixty thousand who marched with Sherman to the Sea; there were less than thirty thousand in Lee's army when he surrendered at Appomattox; there was one regiment of American troops and a few scattered units with Colonel McAlexander at the second battle of the Marne who refused to obey the command to retreat, and changed the tide of a great war. There are more than a hundred thousand Masons in California alone!

There are approximately a million and a half of registered voters in this State. Five hundred

thousand of them will control any election to office or any popular vote upon legislative or constitutional enactment. One in every five, almost one in every four, of those five hundred thousand is a Mason—if we vote; and if you use male suffrage, as a basis, approximately one in every three, is a Mason.

How many active and despised abolitionists did it take in the days when Garrison was mobbed through the streets of Boston—good, old, moral, conservative Boston—how many despised abolitionists did it take in those days to create the sentiment which wiped the curse of slavery from the United States? There are more than a thousand men in this very room, equally intelligent and able, and far more highly regarded by their fellow men.

How many men does it take to form a bloc in Congress and thwart the will of the American people? How many men does it take in any time and in any cause, united, determined, courageous, to shake the sentiment of the State or the Nation to its foundation? One man led the Israelites from bondage and molded the morality of a race when he wrote the laws of Moses; one man broke the Boston police strike, a very moderately successful lawyer, who is the President of the United States, because he has the courage of his convictions; one man can dominate the politics of a city, and often of a State; one man can play a fiddle and a bridge will sway. One man sits in your chair this afternoon, not responsible for the influence which he in fact exerts, but responsible for the influence which he can exert, if he cares, and if he dares.

In the days of the war the Four Minute man was told that there were two elements, and only two elements, in a successful speech; first, an idea, and then the sale of that idea to his audience; that he must forget oratory and rhetoric, that he must forget himself and the impression, good or bad, which he might create, that the welkin might ring with applause when he finished; but that unless he sold the goods—unless he created the market for Liberty bonds, or obtained the Red Cross contribution, or engendered the sentiment which was his aim, the speech was a failure. It is for that same reason that Lincoln's Gettysburg address will be a classic as long as the English language is known, while the rounded periods of the polished statesman from Massachusetts who, for two long hours upon that same occasion held his audience spellbound, are no longer even a memory. The tale of the four-minute speech is the tale of human accomplishment, an idea, and the sale of that idea to another man.

I have no new thoughts, which I can offer to you this afternoon, only my interpretation of ideas, which are hoary with age; an interpretation which many of you have heard me give before; but the old truths, if they be truth, endure. There is no greater force than God, and he was old when time began; there is no more attractive quality among men than common honesty, yet the Ten Commandments themselves condemn stealing and false witness; there is no stronger sentiment than mother love, yet doubtless even the brutes in prehistoric ages possessed it. Nor, brethren, am I unmindful of the opportunity of this occasion and of the responsibility which rests upon the man who speaks to you at such a time. It is an opportunity, which will not come to me again. It is one of the great opportunities which come to any man; an audience of picked men, each of whom has been honored by his Lodge, each of whom stands out in that Lodge and his community, each of whom is capable of influencing many others. The speaker who could leave an idea with every man in the room—not a passing impression nor a momentary enthusiasm; not necessarily the same idea for each hearer; but the speaker who could leave a definite, concrete idea, permanently sold to every man before he leaves the room, might well give to his address the preparation of a life-time; for by those implanted ideas passed on from man to man as such an audience as this can pass them on, he could influence civic righteousness and public and private morality throughout the State. What the speaker is to Grand Lodge for the moment, each of us is in his own community—the mouthpiece of Masonry. Masonry is not judged, as the Grand Master has suggested to us, Masonry is not judged by Lodges or temples; it is not judged by hospitals or homes or educational funds; its influence is not measured, nor is its scope determined, by its teachings, by the lesser lights or even by its Great Light. Men judge Masonry by Masons; and they judge Masons by their acts.

In any field of activity accomplishment demands courage. It takes courage as well as attention to business to successfully handle a commercial transaction, and it takes courage as well as attention to business to influence our fellow men and to make our contribution to human uplift. In both cases the type of courage is the same—moral courage, or, in a homelier phrase, the courage of a man's convictions. It was that type of courage which carried Columbus across the sea, and it required from him a higher type of courage to face the ridicule which he met at home before he embarked than was required upon the voyage to face the unknown perils which

lay before him; a higher type Of courage than is demanded even of the man who faces cannon ball or poison gas.

I imagine that for most of us it would require courage to take the Great Light of Masonry from off the altar, to openly put it under an arm and walk down the streets of San Francisco. I know it would demand courage for most of us, to take that Book upon our knees and read its pages as we travel to business in streetcar or on ferry. That particular thing may not be required, but the fact remains that the thing, if it were necessary, would demand of most of us, as we are constituted, some courage; it is also true that very few of us read that Book as we should, and that the man who reads it the least, and who needs it the most, is the man who would find it most difficult to publicly display his interest in the volume. The man is an exception who does not find it hard to discuss, or even to admit, his deepest beliefs; who is not almost ashamed of his sincerest religious convictions; and who does not find it hardest of all to emphasize the most important phases of moral and physical welfare to those whom he loves best of all, his own children. No man can do that better than a father; no father can perform a worthier act; and every man in this room admires and respects and is influenced by the other man who has the courage of his convictions.

The day is surely coming, perhaps it has already come, when we, as Masons, must squarely face the question what concrete influence we are exerting in world affairs, in morality and in approach to God; whether our Order with its growing membership, its increasing wealth and its potential influence, justifies its existence; or whether, like so many organizations political and social, which have gone before, it is in danger of becoming too self-centered, too self-serving, too self-indulgent, to accomplish the purposes of God.

The greatest danger in the world today, political, social or moral is indolence. Indolent public sentiment, and ignorance which indolence beget, permitted one world war and may permit another; only world sentiment can create world peace, but moral indolence will not create that sentiment. If there is corruption or incompetence in public office, indolence and only indolence permits it. If young men fill our prisons, if crime goes unpunished, if respect for law becomes a lost virtue, only the indolence of the men in this room, and of others like ourselves, permits it. From what Pharisaical height do we condemn the Bolshevik who would abolish law, if we ourselves obey no law, which thwarts our own desires, or if we enforce no law whatever? If the religious sentiment of a community wanes, if men instead of drawing nigh to God, depart from Him as his chosen people so often did of old, what but moral indolence is the cause, and whose is the indolence?

The other day there was a hue and cry throughout the nation at the danger of five to four decisions by the Supreme Court of the United States. Men were appalled at the tremendous power vested in one man by reason of a vote of five to four in that court, to thwart the will of the American people as expressed through representatives in Congress. Did you happen to know, while that clamor was at its height, or do you know today, that in one hundred and thirty-five years of constitutional history in the United States, forty-eight Acts of Congress and no more, forty-eight Acts of Congress have been held unconstitutional by the Supreme Court? Did you happen to know that of those forty-eight Acts of Congress, only nine were held unconstitutional by a vote of five to four? Did you happen to know that of those nine, only three were of more than passing importance? Do you happen to know that of those three, one has since become the law of the land by constitutional amendment; that the other two of those three Acts concerned only a single object, the regulation of child labor in every community and hamlet of the nation by a central power at Washington; and that today you cannot find a corporal's guard of states which are willing to ratify a constitutional amendment granting that authority to Congress? One subject matter in one hundred and thirty-five years, and as to that one subject matter the people of the United States today are unwilling to give the power to Congress! Upon that comparatively insignificant foundation rested all the clamor which spread through the land, and because of that clamor, millions of men were caused to distrust the greatest court upon the face of the earth; the only body under our system of government, which stands as a bulwark for the rights of the individual citizen when attacked by the unbridled license of a temporary majority who may oppose him.

The point of the illustration is not the insignificance of the thing: the point is that when the clamor was at its height, you and I did not know the facts. Can you imagine such a condition as that existing when the Colonies were struggling for their lives? Can you imagine such a condition as that existing when the adoption of that same Constitution was a matter of public debate? Can

you imagine such a condition existing in the days of the Civil War, when brother was shedding the blood of brother, because of adherence or opposition to the doctrine of States' rights? Political indolence!

What do you know today, what does the average American citizen know today of any of the great questions, of the facts of any great question, before the Nation? What does he know of the facts regarding encroachment by bureaucracy? What does he know of the facts, which tend to increase the power of that bureaucracy? Does he know whether it is a good thing or a bad thing? Does he know whether it is wise to centralize power at Washington, and to clip the wings of the States? Does he know the tendency of the day? Does he know or has he an intelligent opinion, whether it is wise to substitute a pure democracy, direct action by a temporary majority, for the representative form of government which is the genius of the American constitution? For that matter, brethren, does he know the difference between a republican and a democratic form of government? Political indolence!

When men fight for existence or for freedom, they prize the result and they survive. When men, or nations, or Masonic Lodges, loll in easy affluence and indolence, they die.

And what of moral indolence? What is our contribution to moral uplift in the community and to the worship of God? Perhaps we go to church; perhaps we seek some more congenial atmosphere. But whether to church we go or at home we stay, what do we do for the God who's Book lies upon our altar? What is the religious contribution of a hundred thousand Masons in California, who bow the knee to God, and praise Him with their lips? If our children are to worship Him, and we hope they will, if they are to worship God, where shall they learn of Him? Shall we send them to the church which some other man has built, or which some other man supports; shall we send them to Sunday school while we seek places which seem to us more pleasant; or shall we point to them the example of some man, some God-fearing man, some other man, who leads a better life than we have the integrity or the courage or the willingness to live? We teach our children morals and Masonry teaches us morality; but morality is neither Masonry nor God. Mere morality has never built a church or a school. It has never freed a slave or ennobled a woman or lifted a drunkard from the gutter. It has never reformed a criminal or saved a human life. It has never inspired a beautiful poem or a noble deed. Something greater than morality sent a Father Damien to the leper isles, and history has yet to record the name of a man or a woman who has gone to the stake with the blessed name of morality upon his lips.

For thousands of years men traversed the land by foot or beast of burden, and the sea by oar or sail. Within a single cycle we have conquered earth and air and water. We traverse the seas in palaces propelled by steam, or dive beneath the waves. We have captured the thunderbolt and rival its power. We speed through the air faster than traveled the cannon ball in the days of 61. We talk for thousands of miles with no means of communication other than the atmosphere in which I speak to you. If responsibility comes with opportunity, and opportunity with power, what responsibility rests upon the men who, within a hundred years, possess the power to revolutionize the physical world, and to annihilate habits of action and means of communication and transportation which previously have changed but little since the days of Noah?

I do not know whither we are bound, nor do you. What the future holds for the Order we revere and the land we love is known only to God; but what that future shall be, rests not with Him, but with ourselves. We do know that after the seed time cometh the harvest, and that as we sow we shall also reap. We do know that the same God who sent the flood to sweep men from the earth, who brought confusion at the Tower of Babel, who sent fire and brimstone upon Sodom and Gomorrah, who, through the centuries sent His prophets to His chosen people, yet punished. Them when they sinned; we know that that same God rules the universe today. We know that He is not only the loving Father who sends His rain upon the just and upon the unjust, but He is as well the jealous God who demands that men shall love and worship Him with all their hearts.

We know, too, that if we strive, however ineffectively, that if we put the talent to the exchangers, though it be but one, that however deeply we may sink in the depths of despair or degradation, always there are beneath and about us the loving arms of Him who doeth all things well, our Father's God. There is an old English poem, which tells a legend of Judas Iscariot, whose name was anathema. You remember that there were those who arrested Christ, who placed upon His brow the crown of thorns, and spat upon His face. There were the soldiers who crucified Him. There was the one that thrust the spear into His side. There were those who persecuted Him demanding His life and the freedom of a robber. There was Pontius Pilate who sat in judgment upon Him, and washed his hands. All of them pale into insignificance beside the

figure of Judas, the ingrate, the man who betrayed his Lord and Master, and who betrayed that Master with a kiss. And at the end he lay in the field of blood. And the legend is that as he lay there in the field, the soul of Judas Iscariot looked down upon the body in despair and sought to find some place wherein to hide his disgrace from the eyes of men. He took the body upon his back and wandered forth, hither and yon through the world, seeking a place of hiding, but discovering none. He tried to bury the body in the earth, but it could not be done. He cast it in the stagnant pool, but it rose from the depths with glassy eyes staring back at him. He sought to cast it in the torrent, but a thousand weird faces drove him away. So he wandered on and on and on, always seeking, but finding not. At last one night he saw in the distance a gleam of light. With the body still upon his back he stumbled and struggled toward it through the storm, and at last he came to the open doorway of a lighted hall. Utterly exhausted, as he stood within the circle of light, he cast the body upon the ground at his feet. And then the poet says:

*'Twas the soul of Judas Iscariot
Did hush itself and stand,
And saw the bridegroom at the door
With a light in his hand.*

*The bridegroom stood in the open door,
And he was clad in white,
And far within the Lord's Supper
Was spread so broad and bright.*

*The bridegroom shaded his eyes and looked
And his face was bright to see—
'What dost thou here at the Lord's Supper
With thy body's sins?' said he.*

*'Twas the soul of Judas Iscariot
Stood black, and sad, and bare—
'I have wandered many nights and days;
There is no light elsewhere.'*

*'Twas the wedding guests cried out within,
And their eyes were fierce-and bright—
'Scourge the soul of Judas Iscariot
Away into the night!'*

*The bridegroom stood in the open door,
And he waved hands still and slow,
And the third time that he waved his hands
The air was thick with snow.*

*And of every flake of falling snow,
Before it touched the ground,
There came a dove, and a thousand doves
Made sweet sound.*

*'Twas the body of Judas Iscariot
Floated away full fleet,
And the wings of the doves that bore it off
Were like its winding-sheet.*

*'Twas the bridegroom stood at the open door,
And beckon'd, smiling sweet;
'Twas the soul of Judas Iscariot
Stole in, and fell at his feet.*

*'The Holy Supper is spread within,
And the many candles shine,
And I have waited long for thee
Before I poured the wine!'*

*The Supper wine is poured at last,
The lights burn bright and fair,
Iscaiot washes the bridegroom's feet,
And dries them with his hair.*