

**Grand Lodge  
Free & Accepted Masons  
Of California  
Grand Oration 1926**

**Grand Orator  
Ezra W. Decoto**

Most Worshipful Grand Master and Brethern

My brethren, I am not sufficiently versed in the history of Masonry to address you upon its origin, its accomplishments of the past, or its hopes for the future. Neither am I a deep enough scholar or philosopher to expound to you the real or fancied meaning of its symbols and to read into its ritual a covert meaning. But I have been permitted, through my profession and my public service for the last twenty years, as permitted few men, to delve into the lives and motives of many men, to peer into the minds of many people, to weigh what is worth while in life, to see the failure of those who strive for false things and to measure the happiness of those who, from instinct or reasoning, seek the real things of life, and when found, treasure them as they should be treasured.

An older lawyer once said to me: "The friends who will be your friends in the days of your prosperity, not envious of what you have already accomplished, wishing further and continued success, rejoicing in your advancement, and sharing quietly but none the less deeply in every bit of good fortune that comes to you; the friends who will seek you out in adversity to offer you their assistance or their substance; the friends who will come to you in the hours of bereavement, sit by your side, utter words of comfort and lift the burden of suffering from your troubled heart; the friends who will follow you alike in adversity as well as in prosperity, in sorrow as well as in happiness; the friends who will cling to you as a mother clings to her child. with that same faith, that same pride, that same hope, and that same love — those friends can be numbered upon the fingers of one hand."

In my youth I doubted him, but as I approach maturity I am more inclined to agree with him. Next to love of parents and wife and child and home, my experience has taught me to place the love of friend. If there were some one who had the power to fulfill a promise and he should say to each one of you, "My brother, your greatest desire will be granted, your dream of years will be made to come true, you will have all for which you have striven, the goal of your ambition will be reached, but, in payment for these things you must walk through the days and years of the future bereft of friends," unless the boon sought meant the reclamation of some life very near and dear to you, your answer would uniformly be, "Although you give the things for which I've longed, for which I have devoted my life, for which I have fancied I would give my all, still the price you ask is too great. I might as well be alone upon a desert isle, as well be adrift alone upon the sea, as travel through this life without friends."

There is no better example of the value of friendship than the price put upon it by large financial institutions. Every big business, in the last few years particularly, has awakened to the value of friendly relations between its own personnel and the people with whom it does business. This has brought about the department of "public relations." All large corporations, banking businesses and public utilities are stressing more than ever the value of "public relations." In every service club, in all fraternal Orders, in all public spirit movements you will find some high official of some large business institution, some man of executive ability, willing to take the time and give the energy necessary to the enterprise. He is not only permitted by the head of his organization to do this, but he is encouraged to do it. In every golf club of the country you will find leading men of big business taking the afternoon off in the middle of the week to play golf. While such recreation has a value of its own, its main value is the friendships that are formed or continued, a closer personal touch with those upon whose good will big business depends. It is a recognized principle of business that one of the most valuable men that can be employed is one that can keep the friendship of those whose business is essential.

May I quote from the philosopher, Emerson? "Pleasant are these jets of affection which make a young world for me again. Delicious is a just and firm encounter of two, in a thought, in a feeling. How beautiful, on their approach to this beating heart, the steps and forms of the gifted and the true! The moment we indulge our affections, the world is metamorphosed: there is no

winter and no night: all tragedies, all enemies vanish — all duties even; nothing fills the preceding eternity but the forms all radiant of beloved persons. Let the soul be assured that somewhere in the universe it should rejoin its friend, and it would be content and cheerful alone for a thousand years. . . . A friend may well be reckoned the masterpiece of nature."

If it be true that next to love of parents and wife and home and child there comes the love of devoted friends and the love for devoted friends, should we not make more than a casual effort to acquire new friends and devote a reasonable part of our days to the cultivation of those fine and rare friendships that can and do exist between men?

Where do we find friends, so valuable? In youth they are found in the schools, in sports, in the Boy Scout movement and kindred organizations. In young manhood they are still found in sports, in business and in our universities. In universities, particularly, has one the greatest opportunities for the formation of close and lasting friendship. There, young men of the highest ambition, with the best of motives, selected for the quality of their minds and their desire to cultivate those minds, are assembled with common desires, common interests and common ideals. If I had a son who was fortunate enough to desire to attend a university, I would point out to him that all the fine things in college were not found in books and laboratories. I would point out to him that, while it was desirable to absorb as much as he could from these sources, there was another most important study that was not written in the curricula of the university — the study of his fellow men. I would advise him that just as he set aside a certain number of hours each day for preparation and study of the prescribed courses so should he also set aside a definite amount of time each day for close and friendly association with his fellow students. There, in those universities, are many of the men who in the near future will be the great scholars, the great dramatists, the great lawyers and doctors, the foremost men of business and the leading financiers. There, open to him for the seeking, is the friendship of the future leaders of the state and nation.

In more mature years, where then is the field that is open to men who would be friends and who would prize friends? It is in business, in the service clubs, in fraternal Orders, and particularly it is and should be found within the Lodges of our organization. All the teachings of our Order are conducive to the best of friendships. Throughout the whole ritual there runs its continued thread — In the atmosphere that surrounds our Order, friendship should flourish and blossom as the plant grows and blossoms in the most favorable environment.

I believe the most lasting friendships are formed when men relax, step out of their business selves and play. Then they are free from business cares, for the time exempt from worry, — kindly, interested in each other, heart open for the entrance and enshrining of a valued friend.

All Masons have a common interest, all Masons have been taught the same things, and all Masons have been similarly admonished. All Masons night after night listen to the same inspiring words which, in their final analysis, teach love of our fellow man. As we sit together, bound by the same sacred vows, one to the other, with the same common ideals, the same code of ethics and the same sound philosophy, there is and can be no more fruitful opportunity for the approach of friendship. When the serious work is done and we gather around the festive board, singing the songs we love, hearing the brothers we honor speaking to us their words of wisdom, the mind at rest, the cares of the day forgotten, there can be no greater chance for the consummation of the most sincere and lasting friendships.

Again, among the officers of each Lodge, as they climb the ladder step by step from the least important position to the supreme office of master, there is the same common interest, the same periods of hard work and the same periods of relaxation, and there slowly but surely grows up between them a friendship that exists through the hurrying years and year by year grows deeper and more enduring. There is to be found the friendship of the princes among men.

In the entertaining of other Lodges, in fraternal visits, in the meeting of the Masters and Wardens Association, in our various Masonic clubs, there is the same friendly opportunity. If it were left to me to point out to all the Masonic Lodges of this state their greatest opportunity toward their members and toward the Craft, I would seek to impress upon them the desire for good fellowship, which, in the ultimate analysis, is good friendship. I would point out to them the personal pleasure and the personal gain that comes to them through the time spent in cultivating the closer association with the good men of their own Lodge, and I would try to impress upon them the treasure in store for them in the love and admiration of their friends, and I would also impress upon them that "the only way to have a friend is to be one."

There can be nothing more open to criticism than the failure of any man to remember the

welfare of his friend. Nothing can be more open to censure than the failure of any man to speak up and defend his friend when he is falsely accused.

Turn with me to Hamlet and listen again to the words of Polonius in that comprehensive admonition he gave to his son, Laertes, as the young man was leaving for France:

"There, my blessings with thee! And these few precepts in thy memory see thou character. Give thy thoughts no tongue. Nor any unproportioned thought his act be thou familiar, but by no means vulgar. Those friends thou hast and their adoption tried, Grapple them to thy soul with hoops of steel."

In conclusion, let me leave with you these words:

"Life's story has been often told yet each must solve anew its problems for himself. Our time upon the stage of action is but brief yet in the drama each must play a part. The character is left for us to choose, a villain, if we will, or a man of honor holding high above all things, high as hope's great throbbing star above the darkness of the dead respect for virtue and love of wife and home and friend."