

**Grand Lodge
Free & Accepted Masons
Of California
Grand Oration 1930**

**Grand Orator
William C. Hassler
"The Age of Speculative Masonry"**

Most Worshipful Grand Master, Distinguished Past Grand Masters, Officers and Brethren of the Grand Lodge of Masons of California.

In accordance with honored custom the 81st communication of the Grand Lodge pauses in its deliberations to listen to a message from its Grand Orator.

Because of the honor bestowed on me one year ago by our Most Worshipful Grand Master, I appear today as your Orator, and I trust all present will believe and understand that I approach this moment with due humility, realizing that in addressing the select men of 580 Lodges, representing 144,000 good men and true who constitute the body Masonry in this great State of California, that proverbially speaking I am "carrying coal to Newcastle."

While I am sincerely grateful for the high honor which this hour affords, I am also deeply moved in the august presence of these honored Most Worshipful Past Grand Masters, who, each in his time guided our destinies with a wisdom and foresight that has made our great Brotherhood the most honorable and respected institution in this glorious State.

We feel a great pride in our affiliation with this Brotherhood, and well we may, for nothing in history furnishes a parallel to its unselfish purpose in behalf of mankind or its universality. It is said to exist where Christianity has not gone, and its claims are respected where even the superior claims of religion would fail. May not the reason for this be found in the fact that Masonry is neither a religion nor a cult, yet it has consistently guarded the one essential of religion, namely, that great Central Truth, that God lives and is the universal Father of all mankind, and as such, we are the object of his love and mercy and entitled to equal considerations as members of the same great family.

Permit me to carry you back a few brief moments to review in retrospect the struggle and the evolution of man out of the abyss of darkness to the light of our day, because this struggle and this evolution have a direct bearing upon Masonry so far as its origin is concerned, and also on the influence it has exercised in the up building of the human race. We review the past, not in order that we may return to it but that we may find in what direction, straight and clear, it points to the future.

The age of Speculative Masonry is satisfactorily fixed in our minds so far as the order of the present day is concerned, but the antiquity of the "principle" on which our Speculative Masonry is founded reaches back to the dim and distant past, to the time when man first learned to communicate his thoughts to his fellowman.

No sage of the past nor philosopher since history has been recorded, has been able to testify to its antiquity, for in every age and in every civilization there is evidence that great secret orders existed that taught a faith in God above and a moral law within.

Zoroaster more than ten centuries before our Christian era taught a dual philosophy of good and evil and of light and darkness; the Egyptians, Greeks and the Romans as well as other ancient peoples, all had their secret orders and their mysteries. Some of these teachings in man's past seem to us perverted efforts, cruel and barbaric, yet the germ principle was to make life tolerable and offer happy hopes for the hour of death. If recorded history speaks of them, then surely we may infer that this principle of which I speak far antedates man's ability to write.

Plato in his histories tells us the Mysteries were established by men of great genius who in the early ages strove to teach purity and a higher life. Cicero speaks of the high purpose of the mystic orders of his day, all of which bear mute testimony that from the very beginning there arose out of conflicting faiths, that were based upon fears and superstitions, a Divine urge that impelled men to toil in behalf of a brotherhood that could satisfy man's craving for freedom and unity.

When we begin to study the history of man, whose mundane story scientists are just beginning to unravel, we can scarcely comprehend the vastness of time which has elapsed.

It takes us back two millions (and some claim three millions) of years. Back to the Pliocene or Miocene period when man lived and moved and had his being; while modern history, as we know it, embraces that brief space of time that has elapsed since the earliest Egyptian and Babylonian records were made.

With this knowledge before us, so patiently and so painstakingly drawn from the footprints and markings in the rocks and sands of time, we are justified in the conclusion that the principles of Masonry arose out of the wants and very needs of man's nature, out of the beatings and pulsations of the heart of a common humanity and the deep seas of human sympathy and which the secret orders and the mysteries failed to recognize and failed to satisfy.

Masonry and the principle on which it is founded have no creed, no dogma and offers no religious formula by which the benefits of religion may be secured, whether it be the religion of Confucius, Moses, Buddha, Mohammed. or Christianity. That is why we find today representatives in goodly number of all these faiths, votaries of Masonry.

Wisely King Solomon said: "We walk upon the ashes of the generations who have gone this way before us and to which in turn our ashes contribute." In other words, we have advanced because of the experience of those who have gone before and to which our achievements will in turn contribute for the benefit of those who follow us.

These things we must also bear in mind in connection with the present mental status of man, particularly in his outlook upon nature when compared with the dim and distant past, and the evolution of the Masonic principle.

Even in this Twentieth Century, mankind en masse, in its attributes and in its thoughts is largely controlled by inherited beliefs and impulses, which countless thousands of years have ingrained in his nature, like instinct.

With all our vaunted civilization in this Christian era there is still being used over vast regions of our earth amulets, charms, magic, and incantations as the chief weapon of defense against malignant nature.

Is it any wonder that primitive man sought in the supernatural an explanation of the phenomena of life? No, it was but natural that he should people his world with spiritual beings, defying objects of nature and assigning to them benign or malign influences which he could invoke or propitiate.

To primitive man life seemed "full of sacred presences" which he began early to deify, so that until quite a recent period his story is mainly associated with a Pantheon of greater and lesser gods which he manufactured wholesale.

Xenophanes (536 B. C.) was the earliest philosopher to recognize and write of man's practice of making gods in his own image and endowing them with human faculties and attributes. The Thracians he said made their gods blue-eyed and red-haired; the Ethiopians, snub-nosed and black.

And so, all through early history we find a pantheon full to repletion bearing testimony no less to the fertility of man's imagination than to the hopes and fears which led him in his exodus from barbarism.

It is marvelous what a long line of superhuman powers, major and minor, man has invoked of his gods. We find in Tyler's definition of religion one outcome of a belief in spiritual being has been "that man has built an altar of righteousness in his heart."

Ray Lankaster in his Romanes Lectures "Nature and Man" (Oxford University Press, 1905, p. 21) remarks that a man is nature's rebel. The mental qualities which have developed in man, though traceable in a vague and rudimentary condition in some of his animal associates, are of such an unprecedented power and so far dominate everything else in his activities as a living organism, that they have to a large extent cut him off from the general operation of that process of natural selection and survival of the fittest which up to the appearance of man had been the law of the living world.

They justify the view that man forms a new departure in the gradual unfolding of nature's predestined scheme, for to man only has been given the attributes of Knowledge, Reason, Self-consciousness and Will.

Swinburne sings of man's effort and struggle for light in these words:

God-by-God flits past in thunder till his glories turn to shades
God by God bears wondering witness how his gospel flames and fades

More was each of these, while yet they were, than man their servant seemed;
Dead are all of these, and man survives who made them while he dreamed.

It has been a slow and gradual growth and not until within the latter half of the 19th century has science, which is organized knowledge, so searched out the secrets of nature, as to control her power, limit her scope, and transform her energies.

The victory is so recent that the mental attitude of the race is not yet wholly adapted to the change.

Man wandered the earth for ages seeking to find himself. The lamp of reason, lighted in his soul at birth, even in his darkest period, has never been wholly extinguished, but re-trimmed and re-furnished by his indomitable energies, it now shines more and more toward a perfect day.

The slowness of its arrival is explained by Jung in his *Psychology of the Unconscious*; when he says the difference between ancient (that is, preathenian) thought and modern thought is that the former was undirected thinking, the latter directed thinking. In other words, the one was a thinking in images, a world of subjective fantasies, like the world of children that creates not science, but mythology, and the other is an orderly direction of thought.

It is to the Greeks that we owe the first brief freedom of the human mind. Not so much in the results achieved, but in the attempt that was made, will live the true value of Pythagoras, Plato, Aristotle, Pericles, Socrates and the other great Greek thinkers and writers

It is not that they answered questions, but they dared to ask them. Never before their time had man challenged his world or the way of life to which he was born.

Never before had he said or thought that he could alter his condition by shattering traditions to which seemingly necessity bound him and still live.

Hence there is no measuring of the debt which our generation owes to those apostles of light nor to those others of the middle ages of our own era—Shakespeare, Goethe, Pasteur and a host of others.

They were pioneer heroes in life's evolution whose daring, for the purpose of comparison, was greater than that of an Amundsen, a Peary, a Byrd, or a Lindbergh.

It is a far cry from the day when man with his stone implements, guttural speech and crude drawings banded with a few others for protection, to the highly complex civilization composing our modern society, with its achievements in the arts and sciences.

The social mind of modern society required many centuries of warfare against darkness, superstition and intolerance to the acceptance of the new consciousness that recognizes every man, no matter how high or how low in the scale of development, as our brother and entitled to the same protection, sympathy and kindness we expect from and give to our equals.

Slowly to be sure, but very positively, increasing numbers of people and more nations are apprehending the reality of a human brotherhood, the needlessness of wars, of cruelties and oppression and the possibilities of the common purpose for all mankind.

In this uplifting and development of the race, Masonry has played a most important role. We can trace, like a golden thread woven into the warp of a fabric, all down the line of receding ages into that dim obscurity of an unrecorded past and behold emerging with the first rays of dawning light, the principles and tenets that form the broad foundation of our institution

The thread is buried for a time by ignorance, intolerance or tyranny, but is never lost, nor was the interval of its suppression wholly wasted, for in these periods of rest, like a tree in winter which stores its energy in its roots, so too were the truths of its tenets, the justice of its principles, stored in the heart of man, to burst forth like Springtime with new vigor, and like the tree, bear new and better fruit.

Well may we ask as "the flying shuttle of time flashes rapidly back and forth through the warp of the fleeting years, what are we weaving"?

We have seen how man groped and stumbled in his march toward light; not the light of the sun which many races for ages worshipped, but for the spiritual light which his subconscious mind told him could satisfy his inner craving. Then came a period in the world's history when the fruition of man's longing began. Nineteen hundred years ago there was preached "The Sermon on the Mount" by the lowly Nazarene, whose one command was "love one another."

He was not a warrior like the Moslem founder, Mohammed. He taught peace on earth and good will toward man and told his followers to turn the other cheek.

The message of his sermon was hope and comfort for the meek, the poor and those that mourn shall be comforted. He healed and protected the poor and sinful woman by inviting those

without sin to cast the first stone.

He preached kindness, but above all earthly things, he placed charity, and left the world with Hope Eternal given to us in the words: *"In my Father's house are many mansions: If it were not so I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you, and if I go, and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also."* (St. John 14 :2-3.)

Magnificent are the works of genius, the accomplishment of earth's greatest men from, or even before, Hammurabi and Moses, the two greatest law givers, to the wisest men of our day who seek to measure and limit the universe for us now, but we find nothing in history before or since the Sermon on the Mount that has so influenced man, nor has anything ever had the same promise of perpetuity.

His birth was the opening of a new era in the history of the human race. It was the entrance of the Word made Flesh into the scene of sense and time, and established the consciousness and possibility of a Universal Brotherhood of Man, whose redemption was assured as was also the immortality of his soul.

Masonry lives today because its tenets are founded on the faith that God lives; that there is hope of redemption and the charity a universal brotherhood inspires

Slow and toilsome has been this upward march when calculated by time, but grand and glorious when measured by achievement.

Let it not be misunderstood we claim for Masonry more than that its essence and chief excellence contains the morality of religion. Its wisest scribes have never claimed for it divine origin nor a supplanting of the Church. We confess to an earthly derivation. It is the handmaid and an adjunct of religion and seeks only to supplement the ministry of the Church. It has, so far as it goes, the same objects in view, to subdue our passions, enlighten our reason and elevate our moral nature yet Masonry believes in a vigorous, passionate and energetic religious conviction as the only moral health and vigor on which any nation can survive.

History confirms the fact that no civilization has long outlived the demise of its religious faith because, as Professor Leighton tells us in his "Religion and the Mind of Today," from no worship of nature alone can be drawn the moral power and insight to save society, we must look to the rational conscience within us, to the needs of the social order in which we are inalienable members, and to the moral order of history, as the three-fold revelation of the Divine purpose and destiny of man as an ethical and spiritual being.

Founded upon these tenets, tested by fire and the most diabolical punishment and torture ever conceived by man, Masonry has not only survived, but its benign influence in the elevation of mankind has grown, and year by year its votaries are increasing in every land.

In the beginning it was the essence of our Speculative Masonry which arose out of man's dire needs for a light on the path to lead him back to his Creator who had fashioned him in His Image and divinely endowed him with powers given to no other of his creatures, and whose favor he forfeited by sin, that caused the foundation stone of the Masonic structure to be laid; and on which each succeeding generation spurred by its clearer understanding, has placed block upon block in the walls of that great social Temple wherein all mankind is destined to unite in a universal brotherhood that will know no hatred, no greed, no selfishness, a brotherhood that will know only Truth, an unshakable faith in God, a hope sustained by that faith that in our Father's House we shall be welcomed, and an abiding Charity that wipes out all need.

These are the three great stars of Masonry:

Faith, Hope and Charity,
Oh Brethren of the Mystic Tie
Pure light on your path will shine
If on these stars you fix your eye.

All this answers the question, has Masonry served a useful purpose? Is its ministry such as to warrant its support? Is there a need for Masonry today?

Beecher said: "We sleep but the loom of life never stops and the pattern which was weaving when the sun went down, is weaving when it comes up tomorrow."

So it is with the generation that is, as it was with those that have passed into history. There is as great a need for the ministry of Masonry in the complex life of our day as there was twenty centuries ago, and we who stand today the successors of those early brethren who formulated

the ideals under which we work, cannot lose sight of their true significance. The institution we have inherited must be kept at all times in the forefront of progress, for ours becomes a greater duty, because the vastly greater numbers in our world have brought to us greater opportunities and greater responsibilities.

Our world is far from the ideal of civilization, yet there is hope, for as man develops he places a greater value upon his own rights; liberty becomes for him a grander and diviner thing and he begins to value the rights of others, but only when all men give to all others the rights they claim for themselves, will this world become civilized.

Masonry, therefore, has an important role to sustain. Its symbolism and its teachings are directed toward the individual and not toward the State; its function is to inculcate the moral principles that build character.

Her deep truths are drawn from that inexhaustible fountain, the Holy Bible, which is always open upon our altar; she has always preached the sanctity of the home and the purity of life. Her name will always be coupled with obedience to law and order, to loyalty to government and all that citizenship under that government stands for.

Masonry has for over 200 years in this great Union of ours, not only builded mankind, but she has been the champion of light, as reflected in our public school system, and has consistently supported the building of those indissoluble monuments of civilization— freedom of speech, of the press and a religious liberty.

Monuments that will serve the generations who shall be our heirs as keys to unlock the fetters of ignorance and tyranny, no matter what form they seek to assume; she is a believer in the fundamental rights of liberty of man within the full meaning of freedom, provided he does not use his liberty as a cloak for a maliciousness that subverts human rights or loyalty to the Flag of Country.

Masonry teaches loyalty to the State, but it abhors and condemns the use of the Order, or even the inference that it can be used for political purposes. It respects the privileges of its members as individuals of the community to exercise the right of franchise as their conscience dictates.

Masons who choose to take part in the affairs of State do so as individuals and stand or fall upon their own merits, just as did the patriots who founded our Government.

It may interest you to know that out of the 56 signers of our Declaration of Independence, 52 were Masons, and in the Army of Washington, the Commander in Chief, every Officer who attained the rank of Brigadier General was a Mason.

There never was and never will be a place in Masonry for a traitor. The principles on which it was founded, the compelling power of its ideals, are the guarantee of that loyalty to government and integrity of the home which will ever preserve the Liberty and Freedom of man.

Masonry owes to America a great debt, but the world owes to Masonry a still greater obligation. It came to our shores at an auspicious period in the World's history, a period when the Old World was taking on new life. A time, that as a result of the Renaissance, there came into being a consciousness of the importance of mankind which was to be the beginning of the end of slavery of mind and body.

No American reviews the history of his country without mingled emotions of pride in her past achievement and responsibility for her future.

The settlement of America by the Pilgrims and Puritans came as a result of the, desire to be free, and while in the beginning it was wholly a movement for Religious freedom, it was nevertheless the beginning of true representative Government.

Out of their religious beliefs came the conviction that mankind was born with a right above all others to be free which led straight to the right of self-government, the necessary corollary to which was the privilege and requirements of education.

A beginning to achieve this was made by the Virginia Company in 1621 when they provided as they said "for the education of children and grounding them in the principles of religion where of both the Church and the Commonwealth take their original foundation and happy estate"; this led to the founding of Harvard College in 1636; the College of William and Mary in 1692; and Yale in 1701.

It was in this atmosphere and in this cradle of liberty that Masonry was rocked and later fostered by the hands of Benjamin Franklin, America's great statesman and philosopher; the immortal Washington, the great organizer and translator of the American spirit of freedom; Hancock, whose bold hand was the first to sign the Declaration of Independence; Warren, who on

the heights of Charleston was the first to sacrifice his life for his country.

It was under these auspices and the liberty guaranteed by that sublime human document, "The Declaration of Independence," that Masonry has grown and prospered like the Green Bay Tree.

Of its perpetuity we need have no fear so long as it builds mankind. The poet tells us:

We are all blind until we see
That in the human plan, nothing is worth the making,
Unless it makes the man.
Why build our cities glorious
If man unbuilt goes
In vain we build the world, unless the builder also grows.

It has been well said, that the Mason who gathers the lesson his Lodge would teach him, is one who knows no rest and no satisfaction in things done, but is one who catches the gleam of the transforming power of the high ideals placed upon him, and lets each succeeding-day of his life mark some fruition of these teachings and ideals.

Therefore, whether teacher or disciple, whether leader or follower of this great and glorious moral institution, let each of us remember:

We sit to day at the loom of life, and weave, and weave and weave
the warp is laid by hands Divine, but the weft is where we grieve
For every moment of every day, the shuttle flies through and through
And the patterns we scheme, with the dreams we dream, are made up of the things we do.
We have naught to do with the warp we tread, and the threads are already set,
Smiles and tears, kind words and fears, are wound on the bobbins, we wind
And every thoughtless word is there, and every word unkind;
And every act we would fain forget, and the thoughts that are dark and vain,
We view in the fabric of life we weave, and we see them and see them. again.
So we sit and weave with an aching heart and a world of intense regret,
And tears fall fast as we view the past, and we pray that we may forget.

But out of repining and soul recoil, we look in the future and see
Our life stretch out in its broader plan, and a new hope comes to us;
We know not the length of the warp we view, we know not our given span,
But into the fabric we yet may weave, we'll put all the best we can,
Harmony, sunshine, faith and hope, and thus our contrition prove,
When the throw shall fall from our nerveless hand and the shuttle lies at rest
May we hear the voice of the Master say, you've done what you thought was best. *

* "Life's Weaver" by William Jay Johnson (with apologies for changes).