

**Grand Lodge
Free & Accepted Masons
Of California
Grand Oration 1937**

**Grand Orator
William B. Ogden
"Our Heritage"**

To the M.W. Grand Lodge of California

The office of Grand Orator ought to inspire one to high ideals and lofty planes. Annually for nearly a century my predecessors have stood on the dais of Grand Lodge and delivered words of wisdom, hope and inspiration in tones that stirred their hearers beyond conception. Not all can attain the heights, not all can paint the lily or tint the sunset sky to a new loveliness—one can only bring to you such gifts as one possesses; the task is mine, the award is yours.

It is the duty of the Grand Orator at each Annual Communication to deliver an address to Grand Lodge upon matters appertaining to the Craft, and the topic "Our Heritage" has been chosen for the subject of the address today.

Heritage may be defined as something inherited; something handed down to us by our fathers; something possessed; or it may be defined as something cherished not for its intrinsic value but because of whence it came or for some inherent quality; and it is in the latter sense that I propose to discuss it. We should also bear in mind that we live in America and practice American Masonry. For what then do we, as Americans and as Masons cherish Masonry? That we might have divergent views as to what constitutes this great heritage is not difficult to conceive.

Some might cherish Masonry for its antiquity. It is said to have existed from time immemorial. There are those who refer to the Magi of Egypt as our Fathers in Masonry; and with some reason, for at a time 3,000 years before the present era, in a country bowed down under idolatry they worshipped one unseen, omnipotent, omniscient God, admitted their members by three steps, and taught their precepts by the use of the tools of architects and builders as symbols. There are others who sincerely believe, and accordingly cherish Masonry because its origin and civilization are thought by them to have been concomitant. Others will tell you of the Ancient Mysteries or the Dionysian Artificers or the Roman Collegia or the Comacine Masters, and each will sincerely believe that there was the origin of Masonry or the means whereby it was transmitted to us of today.

But he who cherishes Masonry for its antiquity need not rely upon similarities or myths or legends for the basis of his appreciation. Among the treasures of the British Museum are sixty-four ancient Masonic manuscripts, the oldest of which is the Regius or Hallowell Manuscript; sometimes called the former because it was found in the King's Library, and sometimes called the latter in honor of its discoverer.

This ancient document is written by hand on vellum or parchment and in a script and language as foreign to the eye today as Greek itself, yet, it is English, and from its form and phraseology those who have made a study of such things tell us it was written sometime between 1315 and 1390, and by the document itself we learn that even then Masonry was honored for its antiquity.

Each of you has made the computation and will agree with me that that was 600 years ago. But can you visualize, can your mind conceive, the time that has elapsed since the hand of man penned or brushed its pages. Let us assume the year 1315, then

It was:

Two centuries before the Reformation.

Two hundred years before the word "Protestant" took on its present signification, and Martin Luther was not to see the light of day for 175 years, nor would Columbus petition Queen Isabella for a like period.

One-third of all the land in England belonged to the Pope at Rome, and

The revenue of the Pope from England was greater than that received by England's King.

Edward II was King of England and it was but a year after the Battle of Bannockburn, the

greatest defeat ever suffered by English arms.

The Hundred Years' War had not yet started.

Gunpowder had never been used in warfare.

Land transport was by foot and saddle, roads were mere trails and parties traveled from town to town under protection of armed guards.

Roger Bacon was in prison because he had sought to teach a new philosophy which he had brought back from his travels in Egypt and India.

Marco Polo had just returned from China and had been excommunicated because he presumed to teach geometry and the sciences which he had learned on his travels.

Jacques de Molay, the Grand Master of Knights Templar, had been shortly before this time, burned at the stake by order of the French King and at the behest of Pope Clementine.

The Black Death which was to take a toll of more than one-half of all England, had not yet devastated that fair land.

Chaucer, the first English poet, was not yet born, and Sir John Mandeville, the first English prose writer of note, still lived.

The Magna Carta had been extorted from King John at Runnymede but a hundred years before, and there were Englishmen still living who had witnessed the assembling of the first House of Commons.

And the first page to be taken from a printing press would not be seen by Gutenberg for a century to come.

There is the picture! The space of 600 years can be realized only when measured in progress of events, rather than in time, and by such a picture for comparison.

It was a land of the high and the low, the rich and the poor, the noble and the serf, the priest and the illiterate. Yet Masonry lived, and had lived for centuries, for so many centuries, in fact, that even then its past was lost in tradition and legend, and yet "the attentive ear received the sound from the instructive tongue and the mysteries of Masonry were safely lodged in the repository of faithful breasts."

Shall we not say, then, that those who cherish Masonry for its antiquity are somewhat justified in their appreciation? And yet if age alone were all that Masonry had to offer, would it justify its existence, or our labors in its behalf? It is at least debatable.

Then there are others who cherish Masonry for its practice of teaching by symbols. This is probably the most ancient of all methods of instruction and communication. Macaulay said, "Logicians may reason about abstractions, but the great mass of men must have images." It is true that the letters we use in writing and the figures of the accountant are symbols, but they are abstract. One may be educated, learned, and therefore able to decipher the meaning of the writer or ascertain the results computed by the accountant, but the uneducated, no matter how intelligent he may be, is unable to gather a single thought or idea of the meaning of the writer from the written figure or letter.

Not so, however, with the method of teaching by symbols. Intelligence is all that method requires, and the degree of intelligence determines only the extent to which the lesson or philosophical thought may be carried by the recipient.

I may say to you that we stand upon the level. For one it means simply that our elevation is equal, but for another it would take hours to express all the philosophy of life embraced within that symbol. Thus each according to his capacity participates to the uttermost in the lesson to be taught.

Science teaches that an idea is conveyed seven times more quickly through the eye than through the ear. A scene once viewed remains indelibly upon the memory, while a description by word of mouth may quickly fade.

Shall we not say, then, that those who cherish Masonry for its method of teaching are somewhat justified in their appreciation. Yet there are other methods and means of teaching, and it may be debated whether they are not better. Certainly we must seek some other justification for our existence.

Again, there are those of us who cherish Masonry for its teachings. But every precept of Masonry comes from that Holy Book which is the rule and guide of our Faith, and no thought is expressed in the teachings of Masonry which could not be equally well and as appropriately expressed in the chapel, church, synagogue, mosque, temple, or cathedral of any of the several religious faiths.

It may be this religious touch to our ceremonies which attracts many of our members who

have no other connection with the Word of God, and if so, shall we not say that they, too, are somewhat justified in their appreciation of Masonry because of this characteristic? And yet if this alone is to be considered, I fear it does not justify our existence, for such appreciation could be as well or better fostered amid the faithful of any religious sect under the direction of a leadership devoted to the worship of the Great Creator.

Then there are those who cherish Masonry for its accomplishments. I do not speak of our charities which, although numerous and of considerable magnitude are by Masonic law restricted to our own members and their dependents. Many indeed, may question that Masonry has any accomplishment to its credit aside from these charities, and may greatly deplore the fact that we are not as an institution in the forefront of great civic movements, or the leader in economic and political propaganda.

By Masonic law, Lodges do not memorialize Congress, nor advocate the passage of laws, nor the election of men, nor promote a particular religion, nor prefer one political party above another. Such is not Masonry's method or means of accomplishing its ends, nor ever has been.

As early as 1723 we find the rule stated in Anderson's reprint of the Old Constitution, as follows:

"Therefore no private piques or quarrels must be brought within the door of the Lodge far less any quarrels about religion, or nations, or state policy (for we) are resolved against all politics as what never yet conduced to the welfare of the Lodge, nor ever will." (ART. 6, SUBD. 2, ANDERSON'S OLD CONSTITUTIONS, ED. 1723.)

Masonry in America from the earliest days has adhered strictly to this law—this landmark, if you please—and no Grand Lodge has departed from the rule. When, if ever, American Masonry steps out of its character as a society for the promotion of the moral and social virtues, and engages itself in controversial matters, that day will Masonry enter upon a course fraught with grave danger.

Perhaps even in this Grand Lodge there have been times when ardent, faithful members eager to be up and doing have noted with keen regret that our Committee on Policy and General Purposes had, conformably to this law, reported adversely on resolutions which to those members seemed admirable in every respect, resolutions which other organizations were adopting by acclamation and for which they seemed to receive the approbation of all right-thinking people. But such is not the way in Masonry, and because it is not the way it has been done, there must be a reason, and a good reason, or it would be otherwise.

In civil life, majorities, when aroused are all powerful and intolerant, and would if permitted utterly crush all opposition; utterly annihilate all opponents. Such is the course of history; such had been the experience of the Colonists who migrated to America to escape intolerance. So in government we have written laws, a constitution, and a Bill of Rights, and courts are set up as an independent arm of government to administer them for the protection of the rights of the minority.

On the other hand, Masonry is and always has been tolerant of all sincere beliefs. By that ancient law the opinion of a majority can never by mere force of majority resolve be made the opinion of the minority. Force cannot change a belief, nor law control an opinion. Samuel Gompers wisely said- "One fact stands out in bold relief in the history of men's attempts for betterment. That is, that when compulsion is used, only resentment is aroused and the end is not gained. Only through moral persuasion and appeal to men's reason can a movement succeed." Hence Masonry has this ancient law for the protection of the minority, and the belief or opinion of the minority, however small, is, and ought to be respected and tolerated so long as it does not violate the moral and philosophical tenets of Masonry. Moreover it is conducive of harmony, and "harmony is the strength and support of all societies, especially of ours."

So, if this has been the rule of conduct on the part of Masonry from a time whereof the memory of man runneth not to the contrary, then that rule must be the safe rule and the rule consistent with its character as a moral and philosophical institution. How then *does* Masonry accomplish its purposes?

Masonry promises nothing to the novitiate; as an institution it obligates itself to nothing. The obligations of Masons are mutual and reciprocal, but the institution nowhere assumes any obligation for or to its members. Masonry is not socialistic. It is not communistic. It is not collectivistic. It has no feature of its teachings or workings that bears any resemblance to a combination of efforts, or a community of interest in the results. It is merely a manner or way of life. It is purely personal and individualistic.

There is not a man in this Grand Lodge who has not stated that he freely and voluntarily,

unbiased by friends and uninfluenced by mercenary motives offered himself as a candidate for the degrees of Masonry. He himself arrived at that conclusion. It was his own personal and individual desire that brought him to the point of petitioning for the degrees.

It is equally true that he petitioned as an individual; was investigated as an individual; was balloted upon and took the several degrees as an individual.

With each degree he received a charge. In those charges were set forth certain duties he, himself, personally and individually owed to his Creator, to his country, to his neighbor, and to himself, and it became his duty and he was obligated to go forth and exemplify in his everyday life those Masonic virtues which were epitomized in the charges. And if Masonry is highly esteemed in the community in which he lives and in the circle of his acquaintances, it is because he, himself, personally and individually has been obedient to the precepts of Masonry, and if Masonry is not esteemed in his community or in the circle of his acquaintances, it is because he, himself, or some other individual Mason has fallen short of being a true Mason. Its honor, its reputation and its usefulness are in the hands of the individual Masons of the community. Thus through the individual does Masonry accomplish its ends, and to the lives and works of our members must we look to ascertain the accomplishments of Masonry.

From time immemorial the principles of liberty, justice, equality and individual responsibility have been proclaimed in Masonic Lodges and have formed the basis of Masonic teachings.

The rights of the people, and of the individual, obedience to law and constituted authority, and the obligation upon the individual to subordinate himself and his own pleasure and profit to the good of the community, are all principles embraced within the tenets of Masonry, and the duty to actively uphold them is clearly placed upon the shoulders of every individual Mason in the charges delivered at his initiation, passing and raising. When we are in the midst of domestic tranquility, when progress and prosperity move forward as upon lubricated rails, it is easy to forget those principles which safeguard our rights as Free Men and which Free Masons have been obligated to uphold.

Our Brother, General John Pershing in an address several years ago remarked "the greatest danger faced by the American people today is indifference." All those things which in former days were held in high regard: the church, the community house, the affairs of government, the rights of the people, and of the individual, are today, to too many of our citizens, more or less matters of indifference in their busy lives. We are prone to give little or no concern to those things which do not immediately and directly affect our purse or our person.

There was a time in this country when its citizens were deeply religious, when they took an active part in the discussion of public affairs, when the family was a matter of concern on the part of its head, when the thought and activities of the young were guided with a strong hand; strict observance was the order of the day, and our forefathers in Masonry were strict observers of the tenets of Masonry.

When the wrongs committed by a distant and autocratic government could no longer be borne, Masons as individuals became active, memorials were sent to the King, and all edicts of the King and Acts of Parliament were debated throughout the colonies; the Committee of Safety appeared; the Sons of Liberty organized; the Committee of Correspondence sprang into existence; the American colonies were a forum wherein appeared such men as Otis, Dickinson, Hancock, Warren, Livingston, Patrick Henry, Hamilton, Madison, Jefferson, Franklin, with hundreds of other Masonic leaders who in those stirring times at the risk of their individual lives, liberty and fortune, stood forth and proclaimed those Masonic principles of liberty, justice, equality, and individual responsibility. I need not recite the deeds of our forefathers in Masonry which led up to the establishment of an independent government for this country of ours, for their record is known to all of you. I would but mention one of their accomplishments—the making and adoption of the Constitution of the United States and the initiation of a national government thereunder.

It has been said that "too much of our thinking is an emotional glorification of the past rather than a dynamic realization of the present." At the risk of being indicted for such an offense, I recall to your minds that a majority of the delegates actively engaged in the work of the convention were Masons; that our illustrious Brother George Washington presided, and that Franklin, Hamilton, Madison, Dickinson, the two Pinckneys, Ellsworth, the two Morrisses, Wilson, Sherman, Mason, Randolph, Rutledge, and Livingston led the debates; that after its adoption and the election of George Washington as the first President, we find him at his inauguration taking the oath of office on a Bible brought from the Grand Lodge of New York, while Chancellor

Livingston, the then Grand Master of Masons in New York, administered the oath; nor is it surprising to find the cabinet of Washington composed of Masons, and that the appointees to the Supreme Court of the United States were likewise Masons. Need we go further?

Bernard Fay, a non-Mason and Masonic critic of ability, says: "American Masonry cannot decline the honor and responsibility of having given the signal for rebellion (p. 240). . . Freemasonry cannot deny the outstanding role played by its leaders in the Revolution, or that the Continental Congress where the delegates from the colonies met to prepare a common political program and to organize the defense against England was in majority composed of Masons. These Congresses were imbued with the purest Masonic spirit as proved by their action which was expressed in the Declaration of Independence." (FREEMASONRY AND REVOLUTION, PP. 240, 241.)

Yet notwithstanding the distinctly Masonic character of the movement and the preponderance of Masons engaged, careful and long continued research has not developed a single record of a Masonic Lodge, Grand or Subordinate, that can be said to indicate that Masonry as an organization had taken any side or part in the conflict; those Masons who participated were courageous enough to risk life, liberty and fortune without involving the institution or seeking to have it stand at their back, and every crisis in the affairs of men has and will demand and bring forth individual Masons of a character able, willing and courageous enough to go forth alone, unaided by the reputation of any institution, and make the fight for Truth and Light and Liberty. That is Masonry's function and reason for being and it must ever continue to inspire men to higher and better and more worthwhile accomplishment.

Nor is it surprising to find that American Masonry in the year 1802, while many were yet alive who participated in those stirring events, witnessing the rapid depletion of their ranks at the hand of the Grim Reaper, and desiring, as I conceive it, to perpetuate their work, should adopt into its ritual a new and, prior to that time, unknown hieroglyphical emblem—the Book of Constitutions guarded by the Tiler's Sword.

As the Great Creator set a cloud by day and pillar of fire by night to lead the chosen people in their wanderings in the wilderness, so, I have reason to believe, our Masonic forefathers gave us this emblem as a beacon to guide us, lest in the days to come amid all the fantasies of the theorists, in the wilderness of politics, we should turn aside to worship a molten calf.

This Union of States, this government of law and not of men, this Constitution of the United States based upon the Masonic principles of liberty, justice, equality and individual responsibility, as said by Gladstone, "the most wonderful work ever struck off, at a given time by the brain and purpose of man" was an accomplishment of Masonry, and whosoever cherishes Masonry, for its accomplishments can, beyond the peradventure of a doubt, look with justification upon this work as the Great Heritage of American Masonry.

Perhaps the editor of the Los Angeles Times had something of this idea in mind when he wrote on May 17, 1917, in a long editorial on the 200th anniversary of the founding of the Grand Lodge of England, this paragraph: "One of the watchwords of Masonry is the watchword of the loyal American people today. When the Master rises and says 'Together, Brethren', he speaks a language which thrills every heart in the Lodge. It is the same language which says to the American people 'Our country, our whole country and nothing but our country.' "

But sometimes I fear that Pershing was right. Sometimes it seems that indifference pervades our ranks- sometimes it seems that the Lodge is at refreshment and that the Tiler's Sword is sheathed and hangs in the locker with the discarded regalia. Beyond question it was not so in those former times. Our forefathers were alive to their duties as Masons and their lives and their actions will live through the ages as examples for "all who go this way." Their works and their inspiration will beckon us as a cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night.

A great Mason has expressed the thought that I would convey: "To sow, that others may reap; to work and plant for those that are to occupy the earth when we are dead; to project our influence far into the future, and live beyond our time; to rule as Kings of Thought over men who are as yet unborn; to bless with the glorious gifts of Truth and Light and Liberty those who will neither know the name of the giver, nor care in what unregarded grave his ashes lie, is the true office of a Mason and the proudest destiny of a man." (Albert Pike.)

Our forefathers in Masonry sowed that we might reap; they blessed us with the glorious gifts of Truth and Light and Liberty. Away then with indifference! Let us call from refreshment to labor! Let us unsheathe the Tiler's Sword and guard this priceless work of American Masonry lest those who come after us proclaim us wastrels and despoilers of this their rightful heritage.