

**Grand Lodge  
Free & Accepted Masons  
Of California  
Grand Oration 1938**

**Grand Orator  
Warren E. Libby  
Our Responsibility**

Brethren of the Grand Lodge

Whatever I say to you today is merely giving back to Masonry a very small part of what Masonry has given to me. If I am led to impart to you something of inspiration, something that will invigorate your thought, I am only reflecting meagerly the inspiration that this Grand Lodge, and you, the members of it, have been to me year after year. Each time I have returned I have counted it a privilege, for the associations I have acquired and the riches that have flowed from them will never be estimated in any other way than in heart responding to heart. And so, in the spirit of sincerest humility I stand before you today blessed with the greatest honor of my life, that of addressing you as your Grand Orator. May this occasion be to our mutual benefit.

Our heritage in Masonry is indeed grand. But by the use we make of it shall we be judged, and justified or condemned. Because the wisdom taught by its glorious past has been imparted to us, we have a responsibility. It is of that responsibility I would speak to you today.

Have you ever asked yourself why it is that Freemasonry is so closely woven around King Solomon's Temple? In Masonry, everything is a symbol and every symbol teaches a lesson. No more perfect symbol of Masonry as an institution could be chosen than that of Solomon's Temple. It manifested the realization of a nation's purpose and the culmination of a righteous desire entertained for centuries. We get little or no inspiration from the material structure. For real inspiration we must soar into the realm of mind. We must look above and beyond the symbol. In contemplating the temple from that viewpoint, we find it to be the outward expression of the unified thought of a people, generated, protected and developed over many generations.

The Israelites had their beginnings in nomadic tribes with all their possessions in flocks and herds which furnished their own transportation whenever the wanderings of their owners required. Like us, they could best reach the mental through some emblem or symbol, and thus it was that they adopted as their reminder of deity, the Ark of the Covenant. This was just as movable a thing as the rest of their possessions. It was housed in a tent and carried on the shoulders of men in the forefront of battle or upon the march, as a constant reminder that they worshipped a single God and not idols or gods many. This people it was who persevered through centuries of journeying, in and out of captivity, over seas and rivers, through deserts and the wilderness until they finally came to their goal—the union for the first and only time of the twelve tribes under one king, which is our symbol of democracy, and the erection of a permanent temple for the worship of their God and for the housing of their Ark of the Covenant.

What more perfect symbol could there ever be for any institution or body of men than such a reminder that rewards are the fruits of constancy, fortitude and perseverance? Just as it took them centuries to attain, so it has taken centuries for Masonry to bring about the present freedom of thought. Later centuries have furnished no more perfect example of such attainment through unselfishness of purpose and the practice of constancy, fortitude and perseverance, than the founding of this nation where that freedom of thought has gained its highest level. When the Declaration of Independence was signed, yes, when the surrender of Cornwallis at Yorktown was an accomplished fact, the real work was yet to be done. Then came the tests of what metal our people and leaders were made. As we are told that it took seven years to build King Solomon's temple, so in this case there followed seven years of bolshevik, communistic rule when the Colonial legislatures were adopting moratorium laws so drastic as to prevent a foreign creditor from even suing a resident debtor, and every one seemed to be trying to avoid his debts and govern himself free from the restraint of laws.

From those times comes this lament of the great Washington. *"No morn ever dawned more favorably than ours did; and no day was ever more clouded than the present. We are fast verging to anarchy. Good God! Who, besides a Tory, could have foreseen or a Briton predicted the things that are going on. The disorders which have arisen in these states, the present prospect of our*

*affairs seems to me to be like the vision of a dream. My mind can scarcely realize it as a thing in actual existence. There are combustibles in every state, which a spark might set fire to."*

In speaking of the politicians of that day, General Knox writes: "*Virtue, I fear, has in a great degree taken its departure from our land and the want of a disposition to do justice is the source of the national embarrassments; for, whatever guise or colorings are given to them, this I apprehend is the origin of the evils we now fear."*

Of the press of that day Franklin said it was "*the supremest court of judicature which may judge, sentence and condemn to infamy not only private individuals, but public bodies—with or without inquiry or hearing. at the court's discretion."* And Washington said of it that he was "*bewildered with those vague and contradictory reports which are presented in the newspapers."*

Would not these descriptions of the three great factors in any nation, the people, the politicians and the press, adequately and accurately depict those of today? Human nature is not only the same the world over but it has been the same from the beginning of history. In each generation and period historians have recorded that the people of that generation or period thought it was the most strenuous generation and the most momentous period of all history. This is readily understood in the fact that each generation is trying to progress beyond the attainments of the previous one. No one here today is limited to the knowledge he possessed ten years ago, and ten years hence the extent of his wisdom will not be that of today. If this is true of the individual it must be true of the entire body of society and of each subdivision of society.

There are many lazy people today; but there are also many energetic people. The proportion is no different than in the time of Washington. The only difference is that in those earlier times many of the lazy ones put rifles over their shoulders and drifted further from civilization to the frontier where no law except the survival of the fittest governed, while today there is no frontier. These lazy ones we shall always have with us. So we must learn the solution of that problem. Other countries have solved it by class distinction. We seek to avoid that and rightfully so. But the only solution is through the justice, equality of opportunity and exercise of the individual faculties which Masonry teaches.

The Washingtons and Hamiltons and Franklins and Marshalls were very much in the minority in their time. The conditions they faced were an absolute parallel of todays. Their problems seemed just as hopeless to them as ours do to us. They faced them like men and the Masons. they were. They founded a nation that has become the largest and the oldest under one continuous unchanged form of government on the earth today. They brought order out of chaos and announced the principles of free government in the midst of their wilderness of human fears and hopes. They did it by pronouncing, iterating and reiterating the lessons of the Freemasonry they knew and practiced. Then, are we to be the whimpering slackers of Masonry? Are we to surrender without a struggle? Are we to sit supinely by and let a loud, lazy, grafting, racketeering minority rob us of our heritage and birthright and leave us a paltry mess of pottage in a bankrupt nation? If we do, we can blame no one but ourselves.

Remember, each generation has had to think or fight its own way out; each has done one or the other. In the founding of this nation they chose to think their way out; with one exception, the question of slavery. There they compromised with principle on a question of human rights, no more vital than the human rights of today, and left its solution for a future generation who, in the heat of the controversy, had not the opportunity to think it out, so they had to fight it out. At what cost? Four long years of bloodshed to overcome a minority that was wrong.

Human progress is not accomplished in a day, a year, nor even in a century. I am reminded that one day in perusing an old volume containing the record of all the trials conducted in the Tower of London, I came upon the record of the trial of an eleven year old boy who was charged with stealing a pewter pitcher of the value of less than ten dollars. He was convicted and hung. That was only a little more than one hundred years ago, but it was more than six hundred years after the Magna Charta was wrested from King John on the field of Runnymede. Two hundred years ago the Colony of Georgia was founded as a refuge for poor debtors. One hundred years later Dickens was picturing Mr. Pickwick in jail for the non-payment of a debt; and it was many years after that before imprisonment for debt was abolished in England. There are those living today who fought to abolish the slave market where human beings could be sold like cattle, in this, the most enlightened country of the world. Truly, human rights and liberties have been acquired slowly! But progress is an eternal law of God and since it is a fundamental principle of Masonry depicted in the three, five and seven steps, we Masons must ever be found striving for individual liberty—the freedom of thought and conscience which always takes us higher and yet

higher.

Masonry has erected its own landmarks. It has placed upon that altar a copy of the Holy Writings as the Great Light in Masonry. Yet it was fifteen centuries after the Master walked this earth before that volume was, through the enlightenment taught in Masonry, translated into English and made available to the common people. And what did that step cost? Tyndale was persecuted, driven from England, imprisoned, strangled and finally burned by a church run by a wrong minority. Yet within fourteen short years after that event four different translations of the Bible were published in England to satisfy the demand of the majority.

Such unreasoning persecution would never have allowed Masonry or its teachings to survive had not Masonry enjoined secrecy as one of its tenets. But for that one thing the fraternity itself would have been exterminated. In too many countries are the fires of Masonry burning by that secrecy while the institution is outwardly suppressed. Heeding this lesson our wise forefathers shrouded the constitutional convention with the same secrecy, and only by that means did they come forth with that profound document, our Constitution. Because Masonry is founded upon truth, because it teaches liberty, justice, equality of opportunity, it can never be overpowered. Truth protects its own.

But, you say, I am talking of the problems and saying nothing about the remedy. I am talking about the problems because every last one of them contains a promise. How is that? you say. Every problem of a preceding generation has been solved. That is why each one is a promise that we can solve our problems today. The application of the same principle by consecrated, unselfish thinking will bring us safely through. But, a little folding of the hands, even a short nap, might mean bloodshed. Eternal vigilance is indeed the price of liberty. It has been necessary to look at our history long enough to clarify our vision, to determine where we are headed, and what our responsibility really is. Then, in the words of an old hymn, let us be up and be doing, dare all and prevail.

That immortal Mason, Abraham Lincoln, wisely said that our nation was "*conceived in liberty and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal.*" It was in seeking that liberty that men first settled on American shores. It was in the search for a greater freedom and the avoidance of the irksomeness of even a liberal government, that they pushed the frontier farther and farther out until they reached our own fair state. Recognizing in the first instance that the land was all taken up and handed down from generation to generation without opportunity for others to acquire it, men set forth in small schooners. In the second instance, feeling that even the recently settled land was too hard to acquire, they set forth in prairie schooners. But who were the ones to retain the new possessions? Were they either acquired or retained without a struggle? Were they retained by those who started at the top of the ladder and went down by immediately mortgaging them for all or more than they were worth, or immediately gambling them away? Or were they retained by those who appreciated their value and were temperate enough to make sacrifices to retain them?

From the tall redwoods and the eternal snows of the north to the balmy sunshine of our Southland it was frugality, hardship and self-denial that retained advantages once secured. The opportunity today is no different. A rich heritage has been given to us from the past and yet we complain of how hard it is to retain it. Some have always had more than others throughout history and it ever will be so because some work harder than others, some are brighter than others, and some practice more temperance than others. Some are more contented with less and that is the reason they are richer than the avaricious. Because one man has a house, that is no reason why another should seek to tear it down, but rather is it a promise that by the practice of equal energy that other man may acquire a house of his own. The rule is just as true as between youth and age as it is between men of the same generation.

Modern inventions and appliances indicate that we shall never go back to the inconveniences of former years but nothing can insure us prosperity save the exercise of our mental faculties and the practice of the age-old social and moral virtues. Only the development and use of those qualities of character taught by our Masonic symbols and lectures will ever bring us peace and contentment. If they are of value, do not desert them, but put them into use daily and hourly. Remember the promise contained in each accomplishment of the past.

Our country may seem large and our influence may seem small. But if the Colonial Masons proved that a righteous minority can govern we can prove it today. Their sheer force of character actuated by the principles we love, accomplished then and can accomplish today. If they could bring order out of chaos, surely we can retain that order given us as our heritage and not

squander it, and leave to our children the task of regaining it. It is for us to become militant in spreading throughout all society the practice of those great moral virtues of temperance, fortitude, prudence and justice.

Samuel Adams was the prime instigator and the most prolific contributing member of the Committee on Correspondence at a time when there were few newspapers, and the methods of communication were fewer and slow. But that one activity led directly to the Declaration of Independence. It was merely a process of education. That is all our task is today—a process of education, a process we ourselves have too long neglected. We can be forceful, we can rearm, and we can be militant in the spread of Masonic education to the point that it permeates society. We need not do it as Masons but as citizens. We need not do it by force of arms but by force of reason. Reason is on our side and it will outweigh all the lies that can ever be arrayed against it. Have faith; have hope; yes, have charity, for those who, ignorantly or willfully, betray the truth. Don't wait for the other fellow to do it. We ourselves must do it now. The power of reason is still ours. Masonry has stood for our rights as individuals. Then exercise those rights and: make our thought felt by all about us. Preach, but above all, by our conduct be examples. In this way the whole mass will be finally leavened by the minority. Then will political freedom and individual liberty again predominate.

Ours is a delicately balanced democracy in which the citizen is both governor and governed, ruler, ruled and beneficiary. It is at the same time inefficient and for that reason demands more and constant attention. It will perish as quickly in an attempt to do a right thing in a wrong way as it will in doing the wrong thing. Ours is the responsibility. This is our government—we are this government; this is our country—we are this country. Then let us exercise that prerogative and see that our neighbor does the same. Thus is the change accomplished by education, ever outward and upward, broader and higher.

If the people are to govern, they must be alert enough to see their government encompassed in their right thinking. They must detect deceit in whatever guise it presents itself. That candidate for office who takes for granted that his friends will believe and trust him no matter what comfort he gives a subversive group by statements in behalf of its cause, in order to get votes, is just as much a charlatan and a demagogue as the devil himself and should be blackballed on the ballot just as quickly as any other traitor to the truth. Watch everything that has even a tendency to subvert the peace and good order of society. Smash all spy systems. Do not be guilty of simply making another ruling class as Russia has done, but try the spirits to see if they measure up to Masonic standards.

The greatest mistake is adherence to the wrong standard. If material wealth and fame, if social preferment and glory, worldly advancement and prestige continue as the goal to be attained, then just so long will the world remain awry. Until unselfish service, honest labor, just wages, fair returns to capital become the foremost desire of the national thought, discontent, dishonesty, distrust, privilege, graft and rackets will remain the order of the day and the passions of men will continue to be roused and appealed to according to those dictates. Because graft exists and rackets sometimes rule the affairs of men, business and governments, the temptation is to try to accomplish something with the same weapons instead of first destroying the potency and effect of those weapons and excommunicating those who use them. Only as we adhere to the teachings of Freemasonry and declare that honesty, unselfishness and justice shall reign in the affairs of men can we hope to succeed. When those ancient and homely virtues are placed foremost and uppermost, then, and only then, will the nation's thinking dissolve the present chaos into mist. It has been done, and quite recently. Already the signs of the times are showing the arousal of a better conscience.

The whole teaching and principle of Masonry makes it our responsibility—yours and mine—to carry forward this enlightenment and education of the individual which results in the freedom of thought, action and conscience throughout the whole of society. Down through the centuries, Masonry has striven to give each man his opportunity to see that he lived up to his full responsibility, to take him out of mass ignorance and make him an individual thinker.

When requested to sign our By-laws each one of us was told that it would subject him to all the burdens and responsibilities as well as entitle him to all the benefits and privileges of Masonry. Watch out that by the things we advocate we are not slipping back into slavery and serfdom, rather than striving to maintain the ideals of Masonry. Be careful to appreciate and protect the free government, and the liberties our forefathers in Masonry bequeathed us and do not be put to sleep without a protest. If we are this government and this country, then wake up

and claim it as ours; make our protests felt and stop voting for paternalism just because we hope to get some of its free gifts. Stand by these doctrines we preach and kick out the tyrants, traitors, grafters and racketeers wherever they appear. Despotism and communism work together, for what one does not accomplish the other does. But they are alike the foes of Masonry. It is our responsibility to resist them at every turn and never to be caught asleep on the job. We must do our own thinking, for thinking is the only way out. It is our problem above any other class of citizens, nor is it that of a succeeding generation. From the seeds we sow will come the harvest for our children and their children. Shall it be tares or wheat?

Here we may pause, and heed the admonitions and the promises that have been given us, that our faltering faith may blossom into a brighter hope. That Good Book tells us that a Moses led a whole nation out of the darkness and slavery of Egypt, through a wilderness of human fears and hopes into a promised land. Likewise a dauntless Nelson met the greatest navy the world had ever assembled and at Trafalgar with the aid of winds sent by divine providence, vanquished the foes of progress. Later a Wellington, when opposed by the Napoleon of all times, came through with the victory of Waterloo to place divine approval upon the principle that God's free peoples shall never be the vassals of any one tyrant. And in our own country, a Washington, following closely the teachings of our own beloved Order, led our ancestors from the status of servient colonies through the trials of Valley Forge to the surrender of Cornwallis at Yorktown and into the glorious freedom of the greatest and oldest Republic on earth today.

Are we to be the ones to repudiate the statement that all men are created free and equal? Are we to surrender without a struggle or a protest those liberties acquired by trials and hardships, sufferings and sacrifices? Or are we to rouse from this lethargy of mass psychology and claim our American and Masonic birthright and control our own government? The larger this nation becomes the more active and keen must be our interest and participation in its government if we would not see it controlled by a minority actuated by selfishness. Choose ye this day whom ye shall serve! This process of education is the only way out and there is no other way under heaven nor known among men.

This is our responsibility, for in the charge of the first degree we were told that, "*As a citizen, you are enjoined to be exemplary in the discharge of your civil duties, by never proposing or countenancing any act which may have a tendency to subvert the peace and good order of society; by paying due obedience to the laws under whose protection you live; and by never losing sight of the allegiance due to your country.*"

You, my Brethren here today, are the leaders in every community, and hamlet in this fair state. You are leaders of men. Despair not of accomplishment nor be disappointed at reversals, but practice out of the Lodge those great moral duties which are inculcated in it—not as Masons, but as citizens, as teachers, as preachers, as laborers, as capitalists, as friends and as neighbors. For thus only shall our teachings permeate society and the square no longer be peculiarly significant to Masons, but everywhere become the symbol of brotherly love, of truth, and of justice. This is practicing Masonry. This is making Masonry practical.

Masonry was not originated in order that we should have a corner on the idea of the square. Give and keep on giving of your Masonry. Share your Masonry with others for in the simple virtues taught and reiterated by the symbols of Freemasonry is the key to the solution. If those virtues are good for Masons, have faith that they are just as good for others. It is merely a question of the light of understanding. It is our duty to turn on that light; to let that light—o shine that it will draw all men unto it; and to stand firm until the storm is past. That is our responsibility as Masons.

Patiently await the issue! Be mindful that as landscape painters have never been able by their art to distinguish between a rising and a setting sun, so in life it is often difficult to have faith that the truth will preponderate. It is recorded that throughout the constitutional convention the picture of a rising sun hung at the back of the president's chair. At the conclusion while the last members were signing that immortal document, the venerable Franklin remarked to those near him that he had often and often looked at it and wondered which it was. Then he added: "*But now at length I have the happiness to know that it is a rising and not a setting sun.*"

Herein is our faith justified, our hope given sweet promise, and in a few or many days our unselfish charity crowned with realization. If the rays of that rising sun are reflected by the performance of our responsibility, that sun can never pass the zenith, but must at the eternal meridian forever radiate in noontide glory.