

**Grand Lodge
Free & Accepted Masons
Of California
Grand Oration 1939**

**Grand Orator
G. Ellsworth Meyer
"The Quest"**

Brethren of the Grand Lodge

In the treasure house of Freemasonry are many gems of symbolism. They have been gathered from the valleys of the Nile and Euphrates, the temples of India, the Acropolis of Athens, from Persia, Mount Moriah and Calvary, from the Rhineland and the banks of the Thames. There are pearls of faith, emeralds of hope, amethysts of temperance, the bloodstones of fortitude, sapphires of prudence, and rubies of justice. Gradual products of human evolution, crystallized by experience, they have been cut and polished by forgotten philosophic artisans. They all are of rare beauty, and in the light of contemplative thought glow with the eternal fire. They have captured and imprisoned individual rays of the light divine.

Yet, there in our treasure chamber is to be found one jewel surpassing all others, a diamond of majestic size and incomparable beauty from whose facets are reflected all the prismatic hues. Viewed from any angle it presents a thousand lights and shadows. Like a giant star heralding the dawn, it sparkles, it glows, and it bids us seek the light. It is The Quest, the search for the Lost Word, the indignation of the infinite, the simultaneous journey to the past and to the future—the mysterious, intriguing, eternal, compelling Quest.

Masonry is not alone in its apologue of a quest; the theme has been a favorite of poets and minstrels in every age and clime. At the dawn of civilization they who dwelt by the Nile told of Isis searching for the body of Osiris. The Greeks gave us the allegory of Jason, the Argonauts, and the Golden Fleece, as well as Homer and his epic quests of the "Iliad" and "Odyssey." From the epidemic fervor of the Crusades came the chivalric quests immortalized by Malory in his "Morte D'Arthur," and by Tennyson when in the "Idylls of the King" he recounted the stirring tales of King Arthur, Sir Galahad and the Knights of the Round Table in quest of the Holy Grail. Wagner in masterful style sent Sir Launfal in search of the Sacred Spear and the Grail in the opera "Parsifal." Tennyson's Ulysses sailed uncharted seas to the Happy Isles, and Maeterlinck followed Myltyl and Tylyl through a child's fairyland of fancy to find the Bluebird of Happiness.

These are but a few examples of every age and people, according to their own spirit, adventuring on symbolical quests. They are tales of perilous journeys beset by dragons, ruffians and death, of heroic struggles to possess objects said to confer supernatural powers. They show the animistic spirit of man endowing certain articles with spiritual associations, significance and power. They are mythical chariots to the sun, imaginary ladders to the stars, built to satisfy eternal aspirations. Of the same character, though couched in less fanciful terms, is our traditional story of the search for the Lost Word. To examine that Quest and at least one of its implications shall be our present purpose. There are some possible explanations of the word, the *logos*, with which we shall not concern ourselves, not because of intrinsic defects, but merely that every Mason having the right to see our symbols through his own eyes, we shall exercise our prerogative to find in The Quest a symbol applicable to our present lives and needs. Of what then are we in search? To what noble deeds and high adventure does this allegory call us? Where can we each discover the Lost Word?

The world in which we live is crowded with organizations. Our fellow men are banded together in innumerable groups, orders, clubs and societies for the attainment of a myriad of goals. In the political field there are countless precinct, municipal, state, and national organizations. Some are big and little Tammany's for personal aggrandizement, while others are striving for the common weal with the purest of motives, the highest concepts of civic duty and statesmanship. The religious realm has seen the rise of its ratio of groups devoted to missionary work at home and abroad, to the promotion of religious fellowship and the discharge of the duties of the laity. The social sphere is surfeited with societies for dancing, cards, and music. The worlds of commerce, industry, and the professions are overflowing with bankers' institutes,

manufacturers' and trade associations, labor unions, medical and bar associations. So numerous the groups, so short the day, that even the ancient custom of eating must have its accompaniment of organized effort, and those of a mind may open the day by attending a breakfast club, pause for a luncheon club and finish with a supper or dinner club. Gone, too, is the time when activity in an organization was a concomitant of plenty alone, for even those on relief now have their "Workers' Alliance" for the promotion of their programs and the attainment of their ends. Human activity has become so incubated that the hours for sleep alone remain unorganized pending the formation of an institute of insomniacs.

As we thread our daily course through this labyrinth of organized activities, as we endeavor to respond to the many demands for our time, interest and effort, well may we inquire the purpose, the necessity, for any given organization. It behooves us who are assembled here to examine the transactions of the past year, to plan and legislate for the coming year, to intelligently inquire respecting the mission of Freemasonry in this modern, chaotic, yet over-organized world. Perhaps our explorations will lead us to the goal of our Quest.

Are we then banded together for economic advancement? Will we learn the Lost Word in the market place? We would not even proffer this question did we not know that, notwithstanding the fine sieve of investigation, there are a few each year who slip through expecting to learn on the other side of the preparation room door some sesame which they hope will open the gate to personal economic advantage. We would not ask the question were it not true that once in a long while some subordinate Lodge indicates the possible presence of some confusion. Reduced to its simplest terms the answer may be stated in the question, how could Masonry promote the financial advantage of one brother over that of another when the latter may be, and most likely is, his business competitor? How could the Fraternity engage in such preferences and remain a brotherhood devoted to unselfishness and lofty principles? Yet Masonry can, and will, make these two better friends, better men, and give them a common bond which they might otherwise never acquire. If Masonry had not been above mundane business affairs, had economic or other controversial issues been permitted to obtrude into the Lodge room it would never have been possible for President William McKinley, while a union officer, to receive the degrees at the hands of Confederacies. Masonry cannot enter the market place with its barter and sale unless it is prepared to be sold itself. If ever we turn from our high purposes to enter our Order in the economic struggle, then will Masonry be inventoried and price-tagged. Nay, we must pass the market place in our Quest for the Lost Word.

Can we then find it in the political arena? The answer is axiomatic. There is substance, not shadow, supporting our maxim that no Lodge shall participate in partisan politics. True there have been occasions when some action, some resolution of this Grand Lodge, or of a subordinate Lodge, has seemed to some brother to be clearly indicated. We know his intentions have been of the highest, only his fervor has prevented for a time his seeing the wisdom, the necessity of silence and inaction. Some of the sad experiences on the Continent have demonstrated the salutary nature of a rigid, a complete ban on partisan political action. The records of more than two hundred years avouch the wisdom of the policy and admonish us to be zealous in its regard. Yet this wise policy does not mean that we as individuals should be without opinions on controversial political issues or neglect our civic duties. Quite the contrary, our Fraternity has always taught that it is our bounded duty to thoroughly inform ourselves on civic and world issues, to be alert, to separate the chaff from the wheat, the goats from the sheep, to speak and act vigorously and courageously through those means outside the Lodge room afforded for the expression and registration of our opinions. The Mason who neglects the ballot box for golf on election day, since he knows and should remember his duty, is the worse slacker. But that fine line of demarcation between proper conduct and that which is forbidden is important and aptly illustrated in the career of our distinguished brother, George Washington. His correspondence repeatedly demonstrated his pride in and affection for the Fraternity. He was the Master of his Lodge and served in other Masonic connections. Few men ever enjoyed a measure of personal and political confidence equal to that reposed in him by his brethren and countrymen alike. He could have been King or President for as many terms as he desired had he not unequivocally refused. Yet when he was called to lead the struggling, ill-fed, ill-clothed, untrained militia, when the Continental Congress sent him resolutions instead of food and arms, he did not call upon any Lodge to support him. He never requested any Lodge to memorialize the Congress. In his darkest, most trying hours he observed and preserved the traditional policy of our Order. Later when called to the highest executive post of the new nation, he never sought Masonic support for

his political views or policies. He never confused Washington the General, the President, with Washington the Mason. Instead, Washington the commander-in-chief of army and nation practiced in those offices the exemplary principles which Washington the Mason had learned at our altars. This policy is another of his which we may well emulate. Masonry cannot enter the political arena as a gladiator, a champion of some partisan cause or candidate without sooner or later feeling the heel of a new champion and receiving the thumbs-down of public opinion. We must seek elsewhere for the Lost Word.

Masonry is unlike other organizations, and the greatest danger it faces in this nation is the possibility that its membership may unwittingly tend to make it a prototype of others. It is not alone its claim to great antiquity which commands respect. Antiquity is a liability to most groups. There is much beyond age which in turn actually is responsible for its survival and great age. It cannot invite candidates; they must come of their own free will and accord, and they continue to come because of certain factors which, though they may not entirely understand before initiation, are attributable to its distinguishing features, its high purposes and policies. If, then, they are attracted by a difference, how foolish to try to simulate other groups. The wise Master will bear in mind those differences and plan his activities accordingly. He will then find that attendance will not be a problem and that, while not every member can participate in the conferring of degrees, every member can find inspiration, noble thoughts and deeds within the Lodge and his own part therein. Within the Lodge room is to be found the chart and compass which will guide his footsteps in The Quest.

Like Galahad returning to Camelot, there within the Lodge in time will come the realization that, though we may sail distant seas, traverse many lands, joust and conquer, yet if we are ever to find that of which we are in search, to attain Sangreal, we must find it within ourselves. Our Quest will **end in** victory when we learn that the Lost Word is engraved upon our own hearts, that we can pronounce it aloud to the world by the lives we live. There may be Modreds to sneer and seek to destroy by contempt, by indifference, citadels they dare not directly assault. There may be those who look upon personal ideals as a sort of phosphorescent mist hovering over a marsh, bright and shiny, but evidence of stagnation below. Yet as long as this world is more than one of jitter-bugs and jelly fishes, the development of personal character will continue to be of primal import.

"For we are all blind until we see
That in the human plan
Nothing is worth the making if
It does not make the man."

To those few unfortunates who can find in life no mystery to be solved, to those blind eyes which cannot distinguish the light from darkness, to those ears which can only hear the prescribed dogmas without curiosity, to those poor, benighted souls who have never asked why, where, or when, our words would be a hopeless jargon, Masonry a child's recitation with awkward gestures, and The Quest a hollow, empty vessel. But to him who can see the stars and hear the music of their motion, who can tell the day from the night, thrill to the dawn, to him who can demand of the silent, black sky whence he came and whither he is traveling, Masonry speaks. To these The Quest is life itself, eternal, and omnipotent.

Personally I doubt if there is any human ant so busy with the work of the world, so engrossed in dragging a carcass into his hole, that he has never paused to see the sunset's glow, the stars swinging in their orbits, nature and the universe proceeding in response to the inexorable command of law and order. Certain it is that if he has paused but for a moment, he has seen everything within the range of his vision moving according to the silent but compelling law. Can he then safely wager that he alone is not subject to the higher command? Is he not a fool if he persists in gambling his all upon being the exception? Is he less than the electron spinning about the nucleus of the atom or greater than the starry constellation navigating the sky to its rendezvous?

For centuries scientific men devoted their lives to the cataloguing of facts, to proving their theorems. Each labored in his own place, the geologist among the rocks, the archaeologist amid the ruins, the botanist among the plants, the historian among the musty pages, the astronomer peering into the sky. Then suddenly they looked at each other, they spoke, for each had discovered THE law. They called it evolution—not a mere descent of men from monkeys, but a

grand march of the animate and inanimate from the simple to the complex, a march from origin toward a goal, all nature on its Quest. The evidence which the physical sciences have disclosed has reached the point where it preponderates against superstitions, a point where cries of heresy and the repetition of dogmas and creed are no longer availing, a point at which evolution, progress, has at last been recognized as the divine plan, the story of the past, the process of the present, the hope of the future, a living, thrilling Quest.

But evolution—progress—has not had to rely upon natural selection alone, nor has it been confined to natural processes. Man has taken part of the plan into his own hands and speeded it up. He has experimented with cross-breeding of various plants and animals to develop superior species and bring desirable characteristics to the fore. He has expanded his knowledge of parasites and disease until he has stamped out many which were commonplace a short while ago, and removed the menace of others not yet eradicated. In so doing he has not only made life more comfortable, he has lengthened his own existence. He has harnessed the lightning from Franklin's kite and made it provide light, warmth, and carry his messages and voice over wires and through the air. He has burrowed into the ground to find ores and petroleum and put them to new and greater usage. But his progress has not been confined to material things alone. He has carved new empires from the dark shores of ignorance and gone forward in seven-league boots on many paths. No longer are barbarous tortures and punishments meted out for crime. The vulgarity prevailing in the lowest modern dive is approximately that which prevailed among the elite of the Elizabethan era. We frequently hear cries of immorality against the modern age; yet, on the whole, probably no age has equaled the morality which now generally prevails. Yet with all the advances made, there are yet new goals to be reached, higher standards to be established, and I for one am firmly convinced that the human race is capable of completing its Quest. There have been serious reverses, lapses to barbarism, such as we are witnessing in the European conflict, but our horror of the holocaust of war, and our realization of its utter futility, are themselves evidence of progress.

There are many indications that the human race is turning its attention from material progress to spiritual values. Take not my word for the future, but hearken to the words of scientists, industrial leaders, men of every walk not given to sentimentalism or wishful thinking, who have declared that our generation will witness no new inventions like the telegraph, the incandescent lamp, the motion picture, or the radio, but that we shall see great moral, social, and spiritual gains, that control of the intangibles will be developed to equal existing controls of the material. These thinking men have declared that even now the survival of the fittest is evolving into the higher concept of the struggle for others, just as self-preservation in our own lives can evolve into parental protection, just as the concept of the Creator has evolved from a God of retribution to a God of love. Man has developed physically, grown intellectually, and now pushes forward spiritually. He seeks the Lost Word that he may truly travel in foreign countries and be a builder of the temple of humanity.

For several moments we have been speaking in a sort of collectivistic sense, but we have not forgotten that society is made up of individuals, that the whole is but the sum of its many parts, that no great edifice was ever built but stone by stone, brick by brick, timber by timber. We have not forgotten that for the shrine each stone must be hewn true and square. So, too, with life, the tenor of nations, the progress of society, depends upon the individuals which make up the social order. Man's long, hard struggle against tyrants, against intolerance, has been the struggle for the emergence of the individual. We have grown from the idea that the individual was created for the state, to the higher ideology that governments were created for the service of men. True we are observing in some parts of the world what looks like an unraveling of the entire tapestry, but every age has seen some human hesitation, some retrogression; yet, after a short period of fever man has ceased acting as a measuring worm and donned his seven-league boots. He will again. In ancient times only philosophers speculated as to individual importance, individual responsibility. Then gradually the common man began to think of himself not as a slave to tyrants, the puppet of hierarchies, but as an individual with inalienable rights, and later as having correlative duties. Masonry is very much in tune therewith. In fact there are those who say it has kept alive that philosophy, and they point to those who would stamp out the Order because they fear that it will keep alive that very song.

The candidate who knocks at our door comes as an individual, he is individually received, all the lessons taught him, and all the symbols used are applied to him individually, to his individual conduct. He is taught to face his Creator individually, to pray for himself and not

through an intermediary. He is taught to stand on his own feet, that he is individually responsible. It is any wonder that collectivism and some so-called ideologies see in Masonry an antithetical philosophy ? Freemasonry teaches the candidate that spiritually, morally, he must travel the rough and rugged road of life alone until he has faced the ruffians of vice, avarice, and intolerance, until by experience he has conquered the forces of evil, has proved himself true to those instincts which are within him, until he can live daily and in every action in response to that small but insistent voice within, until he has attained the light, found the Lost Word and made it articulate in his life. No truer words were ever penned than the admonition of Polonius to Laertes when, after summing up that which should and should not be done, the father said: "But this above all—To thine own self be true; and it must follow as night the day, thou canst not then be false to anyone." Yet the admonition to Laertes, "To thine own self be true," is no small command; it is a clarion call to a task supreme, a bugle call to the battle of life.

"The bravest battle that was ever fought,
Shall I tell you where and when?
On the maps of the world you will find it not;
It was fought by the souls of men.
"No marshalling troop, no bivouac song,
No banners to gleam and wave,
And O ! that battle, it lasts so long
From the cradle to the grave." (Adapted)

There may be "no banners to gleam and wave," but there is an abiding satisfaction to be gained which riches cannot buy, which poverty cannot deny, which worldly honors cannot exact, from which pain cannot detract. Victory in The Quest demands that we have faith in Divine Providence, faith in ourselves and our fellow men; it demands of us hope for the future; it demands of us temperance of thought and deed; it requires of us that higher courage to live, not to die; it requires of us that prudence which is reason. With victory we cannot help but attain justice and charity toward all mankind, keeping alive the flames of humanitarianism through the boundless realms of eternity, preserving to posterity that highest political concept, democracy. Victory will insure an economic system in which life may be lived, not merely endured. It will be conducive to a social order in which the tremendous possibilities of the future may be realized. It will inevitably lead us to such knowledge and awareness of the Infinite as is possible to finite minds.

In a world capable of peace, honor, tolerance and charity, but momentarily confused and floundering, Masonry presents, in allegorical form, The Quest. Let us then heed the clarion call of Ulysses:

"Come my friends,
'Tis not too late to seek a newer world,
Push off, and sitting in order smite
The sounding furrows; for my purpose holds
To sail beyond the sunset and the baths
Of all the western stars, until I die.
It may be that the gulfs will wash us down;
It may be we shall touch the Happy Isles;
Though much is taken, much abides;
That which we are, we are;
One equal temper of heroic hearts
Made weak by time and fate, but strong in will
To strive, To Seek, TO FIND, and not to yield."