

**Grand Lodge
Free & Accepted Masons
Of California
Grand Oration 1940**

**Grand Orator
Leo E. Anderson
“Civic Responsibilities of Masons”**

Mingled with the pleasure of speaking to you today is a sense of responsibility, and genuine concern, not only as to what I should say on this occasion that might be of value to you, but also what I must say if Masonry is to be a living force. Upon reflection, it has seemed to me that I could not better employ this opportunity than to bring home to you with such emphasis as I can, the truth of a conviction that has more and more gained upon me as the years have gone by. That conviction, briefly put, amounts to this: That upon the members of the Masonic fraternity, whose predecessors were largely responsible for our form of government, and the situation under which we live, and more especially upon the Masters and Wardens of the various Lodges, there evolve public duties and civic responsibilities which they may not any longer ignore or evade without neglecting the trust imposed in them.

These are perilous times in which we are living. Our ritual, in a lecture of the second degree, expresses the present international situation better than I could when it says:

"The lapse of time, the ruthless hands of ignorance, and the devastations of war, have laid waste and destroyed many valuable monuments of antiquity on which the utmost exertions of human genius were employed."

Nothing could portray more graphically the picture of today, except to add that those same forces also have destroyed, and are destroying, the rights and privileges of free men and of citizens, as known to Americans. Those rights and privileges are "valuable monuments of antiquity on which the utmost exertions of human genius were employed" and, unless guarded, bid fair to disappear from the world.

You brethren know that our forefathers and predecessors in Freemasonry here in America fought, bled and died to secure the blessings of liberty to themselves and to their posterity. You brethren know that the army, under that great Mason, George Washington, was officered almost entirely by Masons. You brethren know that the Constitutional Convention, which gave us the basic law of the land, was largely composed of Masons and that that Constitution clearly embodies these three great principles for which Masonry has stood through the centuries, religious freedom, political freedom and education. You brethren will recall that when Benjamin Franklin, "the venerable Grand Master of Masons in Pennsylvania, emerged from the Convention hall and was asked, "What kind of a government have you given us?" he replied, "A Republic, if you can keep it." In the light of this knowledge I propose to discuss the public duties and civic responsibilities of Masons and particularly Masons as citizens. I ask you to consider what kind of citizens should we Masons be and what are a Mason's duties as a citizen.

The fundamental premise upon which the Constitution was based was that the government was the servant of the people, not that the people were the servants of the government. The Constitution grants to the government certain powers and all others are reserved to the several states and to the people. It seems clear to me and history has demonstrated that unless the people seriously assume their duties and responsibilities as citizens, the government assumes more and more power and soon becomes the master rather than the servant of the people.

In proportion as public opinion is wise and enlightened, the government will be enlightened and wise. In other words, the people will always have as good a government as their intelligence and patriotism deserve and no better. In the long run, government can be made better only by the improvement of the public opinion upon which it rests. From time immemorial history shows that the brightest Jewels in the Diadem of Wisdom and Integrity have been members of our great Fraternity. The need of our day in America requires that Masonry again furnish to our nation men of wisdom, men of integrity, men of ability, men capable of molding public opinion in their several communities away from the radicalism to which we have fallen and back to sanity and Americanistic tradition.

It is for you as individuals to examine all proposals of political change in a light of knowledge and under the guidance of judgment and to appraise each at its true value. It is for you as individuals to recognize and expose the fallacies which too often lie in novelty and pretension, to caution and restrain those who would rush blindly into a field of political experimentation; to instruct the uninformed and the thoughtless that our Constitution affords in itself the best and surest means of constructive and wholesome change. In brief, it is for you to guard our system against the proposals and reckless innovations which would cheapen it to a scheme of inconsistencies.

Now you brethren may properly ask why I have chosen to discuss this subject so seriously. Let me tell you. All of us here are Masters, Wardens, or Past Masters of our Lodges. You are familiar with the ritual and ceremonies of our Fraternity. Therefore, in answer to your question, I shall quote of few portions of the ritual and of our ceremonies. You will find that citizenship should be one of your particular interests and you may be surprised to find how closely it is woven into the fabric of Freemasonry. The reason for the great stress laid upon citizenship in our ritual is obvious. No individual and no organization can shut itself away from the life of the community in which it lives. No individual is so self sufficient that he can go through life disregarding that community life and not affected by its changes. No individual is so unimportant that he should not add his voice to the composite voice of the community. Every man, whether he knows it or not, is a citizen. Let us see what our ritual has to say about citizenship.

In the first degree, while the candidate makes his first trip around the Lodge, he hears the Chaplain say: "Behold how good and pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity." "Unity," the word alone brings me a feeling of pleasure. It is the foundation of citizenship and of society. It was uppermost in the minds of those great Masons who did so much to give us our Constitution. You will recall the preamble of that Constitution:

"WE, the people of the UNITED States, in order to form a more perfect UNION, establish justice, insure domestic tranquility, provide for the COMMON defense, promote the GENERAL welfare and secure the blessings of liberty to ourselves and our posterity, do ordain and establish this Constitution for the UNITED States of America."

Thus, in the first part of the first degree, we find the first element of citizenship, namely, unity.

Let us explore further. The charge of the first degree tells us to regard the volume of the sacred law as the great light of our profession and "in it you will learn the important duties which you owe to God, your country, your neighbor and yourself." Then we are told, and I quote.

"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."

We are then told:

"As an individual you are charged to practice the domestic and public virtues."

There, in the first degree, plainly and forcibly, emphasis is laid upon our duties as citizens, but our ritual does not stop there. From the reference in the ritual to the beehive, I take a clear description of man's relationship to man and a Mason's duty to his community, and I quote:

"When we take a survey of nature, we view man in his infancy—more helpless and indigent than the brute creation. He lies languishing for days, months, and years, totally incapable of providing sustenance for himself, of guarding against the attack of the wild beast of the field, or sheltering himself from the inclemencies of the weather. It might have pleased the Great Creator of heaven and earth to have made man independent of all other things, but his dependence is one of the strongest bonds of society. Mankind were made dependent on each other for protection and security as they thereby enjoy better opportunities of fulfilling the duties of reciprocal love and friendship. Thus was man formed for social and active life, the noblest part of the work of God, and he that will so demean himself as not to be endeavoring to add to the common stock of knowledge and understanding may be deemed a drone in the hive of nature, a useless member of society,

and unworthy of our protection as Masons."

And finally in our ceremonies of the installation of officers we find the charges given to each incoming Master of his Lodge in this jurisdiction. Those charges include the following:

"You agree to be a peaceable citizen and cheerfully to conform to the laws of the country in which you reside.

"You promise not to be concerned in plots and conspiracies against government, but patiently to submit to the decision of the supreme legislature.

"You agree to pay a proper respect to the civil magistrate, to work diligently, live creditably and act honorably by all men."

Following these charges, the installing Master states to the incoming Master with reference to the brethren of his Lodge:

"Charge them to practice out of the Lodge those duties which they have been taught in it."

And in his closing statement to the members of the Lodge, the installing Master says:

"Within your peaceful walls may your children's children celebrate with joy and gratitude the annual recurrence of this auspicious solemnity."

I could quote many other portions of our ritual and ceremonies to illustrate the great stress placed upon our citizenship as Masons, but the quotations I have given you should suffice.

You brethren know that you only get out of anything, and particularly Masonry, that which you put into it. The Mason who joins a Lodge and never attends a meeting gets very little in return for his investment in Masonry. The Mason who attends meetings, studies the ritual and joins in Masonic fellowships gains much from Masonry, carries Masonry onward and continually finds new philosophy unnoticed before. So it is with citizenship. The man who practices citizenship and engages in civic activities gains much from his citizenship, contributes to better government and hands down to posterity the rights and privileges he enjoys. As our Most Worshipful Grand Master has said many times during his travels in the past year, the standing of the Masonic Fraternity depends upon the standing of its members. Where it is active and in good repute we find the members of the local Lodge active in civic affairs, honest in business and giving freely of their time in the discharge of their duties as citizens. Where Masonry is inactive and the community uninterested in it, we find the members of the local Lodge inactive in civic affairs and lax in the discharge of their duties as citizens. That is a practical illustration of the necessity that we Masons be good, active citizens. It also shows that we must educate and encourage our members to be good citizens, but above all we must practice citizenship. I do not advocate that our Lodges as organizations participate in politics, but I do advocate that Masons as citizens must take a real interest in government and community life.

Since we learn by doing, we shall never become good citizens simply by studying civic relations and problems. Nothing was ever solved or accomplished by shifting our problems and our duties to others. We all know that our individual requirements are so various and our system of living so complicated that no individual actually provides for himself more than a few of the things necessary to his existence and comfort. The house in which you live has been built by one set of men, painted by another, and provided with plumbing by a third. Your carpets have probably come from one state, your furniture from another and your pictures from a third. Your everyday needs and wants have been supplied by the exertions of a multitude of workers, some of whom live in America, but many of whom reside in foreign lands. Each of you must of necessity do the work for which you are particularly fitted, depending at all times upon the assurance that the other fellow will do the work for which he is particularly fitted, conscientiously and dependably. If it were otherwise, you could not exist and live as you now exist and live. Thus we see that the fact that you are a citizen gives you many rights that every member of the group enjoys. No person may claim all of the advantages of citizenship and then live in seclusion and do no work with his fellows. If he is to associate with his fellows, he must not only be a fit fellow with whom to associate, but he should be such a citizen that others will gain advantage from acquaintance and friendship with him. If he needs, as all of us do, the cooperation of those with whom he lives and

works, he must expect to contribute what he can. Some people think that the right to vote is the right of citizenship. The right to vote is merely a privilege of citizenship but it is the highest privilege which can be conferred upon a citizen. It is his privilege of self expression in the selection of those who shall stand over him in authority in the administration of the affairs of the nation, the state and the community and it is a privilege which too many of us do not take advantage of.

George Washington in his first inaugural address stated our responsibility in these words:

"The preservation of the sacred fire of liberty and the destiny of the republican model of government are justly considered, perhaps, as DEEPLY, as FINALLY, staked on the experiment entrusted to the hands of the American people."

Whether that experiment which has succeeded so marvelously in the last 150 years will continue to succeed depends upon the citizens of this country. It depends upon their use of the privileges which they enjoy. It depends upon their interest in government. It depends upon whether or not they will, by their intelligence and interest, select proper men and women to carry on the affairs of our government. Long-fellow said: "For some must follow and some command, though all are made of clay." It behooves us as citizens to see that those who command are made of the finest kind of clay. That means interest in government—not just voting for someone and then forgetting that he needs help to carry out the job you have given him. It means interest in politics, a word that has been much misunderstood. Politics means government and interest in politics means interest in government. That is one of our real duties as citizens.

To what does this discussion lead us? I believe it brings us to the question, for- what does Masonry exist?

You are all familiar with the globe, which we are told is for improving the mind and for giving it the most distinct idea of any problem or proposition as well as enabling it to solve the same. What is the end and purpose of our Order? I believe it is to diffuse light, that is, to spread knowledge among men.

You might agree with the historian Krause that the ultimate purpose is to perfect men, to make them better, wiser and consequently happier, but the means of achieving this perfection is general diffusion of knowledge. Hence, above all things, Masonry exists to promote knowledge. The Mason ought first of all to cultivate his mind. He ought to study the liberal arts and sciences, he ought to become a learned man.

The state seeks to make men better and happier by preserving order. The church seeks this end by cultivating the moral person and by holding in the background supernatural sanctions. Masonry endeavors to make men better and happier by teaching them and by diffusing knowledge among them. This, bear in mind, was true before education of the masses had become a function of the state.

Society is divided sharply into classes that understand each other none too well and hence are getting wholly out of sympathy. What nobler

Masonic lecture could there be than one which took up the fundamentals of social science and undertook to spread a sound knowledge of it among all nations? Suppose such a lecture on citizenship were prepared, delivered in Lodge after Lodge, and after criticism and recasting as a result of years of labor, was taught to all our Masters, would not our Lodges diffuse a real light in the community and take a great step forward in their work of making for human perfection ?

We are taught that the roof of the Mason's workshop is nothing less than the "clouded canopy or star-decked heavens" and that nothing that goes on beneath that spacious covering can be wholly alien to us. The needs of no one time and of no one people can circumscribe our objects. If the Craft is to be perpetual, it must appeal to each time as well as to all times. It must have in its traditions something that Today can use, although Yesterday could not use and Tomorrow need not. Hence we may properly inquire: what can we make of this wonderful tradition of which we are the custodians that will serve the world of today?

Our task as members of society is to advance civilization by asserting ourselves consciously and intelligently to that end. Every man may do this in some measure in his time and place. So every man may retard or obstruct civilization in some degree in his time and place.

What will serve civilization in the world of today? I believe the great need of today to be the practice of citizenship, interest in our form of government and the protection of those inalienable rights of free men which are under attack all over the world and without which civilization will falter

and fall back toward the dark ages. We Americans of today were born to those rights, we did not have to fight, bleed or die to secure them, but we may yet have to fight, bleed and die to keep them.

Few can really appreciate what we have here in America until they have seen the immigrants from foreign lands entering New York harbor and coming off the boats to set foot on our soil. They have lived under the systems of government in Europe—they know what those systems are. They know what living conditions are there. They come to America because they want to. They are not here simply because an accident of birth made them Americans. They appreciate what America has to offer, and to see them fall upon their knees and kiss the soil of this great free country would make you realize what this country offers as nothing else could. It would make you dedicate yourself to the task of working and fighting to keep those things. And finally, may I leave you with this thought.

I believe in America as I believe in God and I know that as Freemasonry did a great work in the past of America, so it can do a still greater work in the future of our country. With the utmost respect and regard for other lands and peoples, our care and our energy is for America, our America, and God's America, to keep it true to its high heroic tradition.