

**Grand Lodge  
Free & Accepted Masons  
Of California  
Grand Oration 1943**

**Grand Orator  
Arthur Paulsen**

Most Worshipful Grand Master, Distinguished Past Grand Masters, My Fellow Grand Lodge Officers and Brethren

Since men first raised their eyes to behold the vision of a nobler life beyond the sordid things of earth the gifted tongues of able men have sounded the praises of this great institution, praises which no feeble words of mine can embellish or enrich. I come to you today with no panegyric upon Masonry, but as a blunt and lowly member of the craft, impelled by the tragic current of events to use plain words and deal with simple truths. I am not here to seek the plaudits of the crowd but to bring to you the message of a troubled heart, hoping that some word or thought of mine might help, in some small way, dispel the clouds that now obscure the light.

For more than thirty years I have labored in the quarries of Masonry as did my father before me and I yield to no man in devotion to this cause. And if I loved it less, I might now proceed to paint a glowing picture of a brilliant past and then sit down content. Because the fervor of my love has not abated with the lapse of time, and because I still believe that the divine attribute of Truth is the foundation of every virtue and that sincerity and plain dealing should distinguish us, I cannot hold my tongue while all about a troubled world is crying for relief.

For years I have watched our workmen ply their trade and for years I have pondered the meaning of it all. I have seen the march of those who passed and in the fullness of their hearts embraced the wisdom of our art, of those who came to see, and having seen passed on. I have seen the faithful of the craftwork on unsung, without the urge for rank or praise. I have seen others by a patient and unselfish toil climb to the heights of fame and then, when its delusive light no longer cast its luster on their names, still work on, giving to Masonry the last full measure of devotion. I see them now, at home and here, sincere and noble men, performing their allotted tasks, pondering, even as I have done, the aim and object of it all.

But the picture is not yet complete. I have also seen divergent schools of thought arise concerning the purpose of our work; one that sometimes made a fetish of ritualism, forgetting the message that it brought; the other so impressed by the lessons we impart that it sometimes sought to belittle the means employed to impart it.

I have seen times when our lodges were full to overflowing; but more often, night after night, mere handfuls of our total strength have met to work, while in the neighboring block service clubs were flourishing with every member in his place.

I have seen earnest, able and dynamic men lost to the craft because they lacked a plan to utilize their skills without delay. I have seen some stand in line for years waiting for their chance to serve and then, disheartened, turn away to use their talents in other fields; while others have worked their way to win distinction in the Master's Chair, only to find when that was done, that they could spend their time in small assignments or could sit quietly and listen while other men conferred degrees.

Brethren, what is wrong? Is there some defect in the design upon the trestleboard? Or have we, perhaps, misread the plan?

What can our mission be? What means may we employ to make our power felt? Is ritual the end? Or do all men, and we, need something more?

Let us turn back the swiftly moving pages of the past and see if we can find some answer to these questions that now cause us such concern.

From tropic isles to frozen seas, from east and west, from all the corners of the earth, we see the slow and painful struggle of ancestral man. With head bowed down, his great concern is food, and shelter, protection from wild beasts and wilder men, and freedom from the fears of a mysterious universe he cannot understand. He knows one law, and only one: the law that might makes right. He hoards his food, only to have it taken by some neighbor with a longer spear. In time, he sees a ray of hope, and out of his longing for a better life there slowly comes the knowledge that a code of higher laws exists which teaches Love and Truth and Justice for

mankind. With greater hope he struggles on and builds and hoards again, and with a stronger zest for life he plans his future course in the belief that lip-service to these higher laws has brought security at last; only to find that some neighboring group still rules by sword and fire, and in the end his plans for peace and happiness are cast aside and all his goods and liberty are lost.

So on and on through centuries we see this battle ebb and flow between the peaceful toiler and the tyrant with a lust for power, between the law of jungle and the law of God.

From time to time new groups are formed which seek to solve the troubles of this tragic world. Philosophies and creeds are born, each in its turn offering to man its cure. Some are good, and some are bad. Some strive with open minds to search for Truth; while others, equally sincere, are sure that they, and they alone, have found the magic formula of liberty and peace. Some carry on with noble and unselfish zeal; while others, in pursuit of power, themselves succumb to the base traits their founders sought to crush.

And into such a world Masonry was born. Starting from the Middle East, where man first grasped the concept of a God of Love, these craftsmen spread across the earth. Their paths were marked by stately temples whose beauty and design have set a pattern rarely equaled since. Free men were they, who knew that character and self-control were all that kept them free. But gradually the plan was changed. The beauty then took on symbolic mold and men of rank and wisdom came to lend their talent and to build in newer forms. The trowel passed to other hands that hoped to build a mighty temple of the soul where men, at last, might be secure and free.

It was no accident that Speculative Masonry blossomed forth in the land of Magna Charta and the Bill of Rights. For let us not forget that Masonry and Freedom must go hand in hand. Where Freedom fails, no Masonry exists; and those who love its truth must ever fight and work in Freedom's cause. It was the recognition of these facts that caused the members of our craft one hundred fifty-six years ago to help bring forth a new charter of liberty and human rights, a new landmark for the guidance of all men, the Constitution of the United States.

And what happened since those days the ancient feuds went madly on. The charter we had helped to build had recognized a thing that free men could not tolerate. We fought, and Freedom won. And then for years the right of men to go their way was paramount. But is it now ?

Compare our times with those just thirty years ago. Then we were free. But when the ugly head of tyranny again was raised across the sea, we sallied forth to do our part—a righteous war, I still believe—proclaiming to the defenders of our faith that we were fighting to make the world safe for democracy. We had a foe who taxed our courage and our skill. Rich and fertile lands were plundered and defiled. The arts of peace were crippled or destroyed. Huge debts piled up. We struggled on. In time we won that war. And then we lost the peace because men were not yet prepared to adopt the principles we teach. And in the wake of that Great War, depression came to test our claim that we were free. The wheels of industry were stilled. Trade languished while men stood in line to beg for food. The terror and the fear of those tragic days made us cry out for help from any source, at any price, and for a time the cherished right to think and write and speak was almost lost.

Because men had rejected the stones that should have become the head of the corner, the improvised temple of peace that was to have brought liberty and happiness to the oppressed of the world crumbled and decayed. Because we and other peoples of the earth were determined to believe that by mere repetition of the higher laws we could somehow circumvent the Supreme Grand Master's plan, escape the consequences of our acts and thus avoid the work that men must do if they expect to climb, we helped prepare the way for greater crimes than men before had ever seen.

The ancient doctrine of divine right of kings and rule by warrior clans gave way to vicious creeds that now proclaimed the divine right of blood and race, and ruthlessly set forth to murder or enslave all those who, by the standards of those perverted minds, were of some lesser breed. Fire and sword were used to torture and destroy the helpless victims of that mad campaign. Masonry was first to go, as was everything that dared to stand for what was right. Our brethren were thrown into concentration camps or slain, and such an orgy of spite and hate and murder was indulged in that even beasts of prey were put to shame.

And now in almost every corner of this troubled earth our brethren and other fearless and unselfish men who will not yield their right to live as free men should, are giving up their lives that those they love, and we, and other members of our craft, may be secure. Yes, be secure. Secure how long? Until some other war reduces men to slavery and despair ?

In less than thirty years we have witnessed the greatest and most savage wars that men

have ever known. The First World War derived its name because it had eclipsed in power the most titanic struggles of the past. The suffering, the loss of life, the staggering debts, and the disaster in its wake left men aghast. The aftermath of troubles that it brought had not been solved when this new war arrived to dwarf the first in pain and grief and cost of every kind.

And when this war is won, what then? Are we again to lose the peace? Are we to jeopardize the things for which we sacrificed and fought by a selfish and shortsighted course that in the end will bring destruction to the very things it was intended to preserve? Can we then pursue our usual course in a world that will lie prostrate at our feet? Where men are crazed by hatred and a longing for revenge? Where someone must restore the values it has lost? Will ordinary means suffice? Whose business will it be to teach disillusioned men that Justice must prevail that Truth is mightier than the sword, and that we still believe that brotherly love can prevail and rule the destinies of men?

What, then, must Masons do? Our first duty is to win this war and to that end we must devote our time, our wealth and every energy that we can muster to support this cause. For the time being, we must give to our high command the power to fulfill the trying tasks we have imposed. Let us be patient and resigned. The small privations here at home are trivial when compared to hardships that must be born by those who represent us at the front. Yes, we must carry on. We started as free men and as free men we must continue to the bitter end. We cannot and we will not fail.

When the perverted and treacherous leaders of the Axis gangs have been punished for their crimes, we must play our part by helping to devise some just plan to see that they, or men like them, shall not return again to plague the world. But can we find a way to prevent some other race or power from repeating the attempt to rule the earth? Will Masons in high places, who were taught the lessons of Brotherly Love and Justice that we learned, stand by and lend their aid in execution of the plan?

Whatever way we look, new problems will arise to tax our ingenuity and faith. Those whom we have thwarted will try to rise again. Throughout the world self-conscious, backward races will be on the march with claims that must be reconciled.

And what are we to do about affairs at home? Are we prepared when peace has come to make an effort to regain the powers we have lent to prosecute the war? Or will depression stalk across the earth again. And if it does, will free men, living in a land which has the means to meet our needs, produce the things we want, and still stay free? Or shall we, the sovereigns here, abdicate again so we may eat?

Is there some easy way? Some short cut to our goal? We have seen science lift the burdens from men's backs and give them happiness and time to play. And we have often found that men with too much leisure time cannot stand the stress of modern life; that the things that science brings to our relief are seized themselves to thrust us back into the abyss from which we climbed.

Cannot the great religions of the world unite mankind? Not while their partisans follow a thousand separate and divergent paths. Too many still pursue some sacred cow.

Does some one say, "Then let us have a law to curb the gangsters of this earth; that is our favorite cure"? Yes, let us have a law to do that very thing but let us always know that laws do not enforce themselves. Our Constitution has guaranteed the rights of men and stood the test of time, but it has worked because the freedom-loving people of this land determined that they could not let it fail. When we have law, good or bad, the sanction of that law is force: good when the men who gave it life, are good; bad when the men who gave it life, are bad.

No plan that rests on force can long succeed unless the character of men is raised to that high plain where the need for such a law has almost ceased. We justify the use of force by us because we know, or think we know, that we are just, but it has a rightful place only when used to bring control until the day when men themselves are qualified to carry on without injury to their fellow men; when Truth and Justice are the guiding lights by which they work.

What can we do? For years the grand design has been spread upon our trestle-board where all who wished to look might see. The broad outlines laid down may be approved by any honest man and they present the only plan that ever can succeed. Yet it is a plan that men have shunned for ages because they thought it tiresome and slow. It is no easy scheme for men who are afraid to work or those who wish to build and hide behind a front. Its materials are common men. If they are rough, it seeks to fit them to The Builder's use, and if the work is carried forward to the end the time will come when free men may take their place in a spacious and resplendent temple of enduring peace.

How are we to carry out this plan? The same as we have always done? Brethren, when I began I said that I would use plain words, and deal with simple truths. I would be remiss if I took your time to paint word pictures of our glorious past when the picture of the future is so stark and grim. What we need now is not more words, but facts; yes facts that we can face and analyze so we can chart our course. The picture of the years ahead does not reveal a rosy path that we can follow blindly without heed to the lessons we have learned, or should have learned, from the history of the past. The things that are to come are written in an open book. The theme is just the same and the issues have not changed.

Brethren, more than a quarter of a century ago we reached the end of a great era and embarked upon a new, but we did not recognize the fact. Since the time the Pilgrims first landed on our shores we have regarded this great land as a haven where men oppressed abroad might come and be secure. And we have gone on in that belief, holding ourselves aloof from the problems of the outside world, maintaining that we had no part to play in the wicked schemes of men in other lands —lands that had long since passed the simple problems of this new world. We found great, virgin forests, unlimited supplies of every kind, and broad, fertile plains where men could take the things they need. We had no lifeline to maintain, no shortages to force us out into the violent currents and tempestuous seas where other men were struggling for their very lives.

And then, to our dismay, the myth of isolation exploded in our face. Through the advance of science, men whose hearts were filled with envy for our riches and our power, became our neighbors overnight and the problems that for centuries had tortured other men became our problems too.

War came, and more than two million of our men sailed across the sea to battle for a cause. Under the stimulus of that great conflict we talked of Justice and proclaimed to all the world that men were free. We planned a better world, with peace for all. The German fleet and army were destroyed—or so we thought—and by our mandate they could never rise again. And we went home, we and our allies, tired and disillusioned, to forget. But we forgot too much; forgot that force alone has never in the long history of the human race lifted men above the savage beasts, or changed the basic pattern of their being; forgot that he who makes a plan must also make it work.

Some years elapsed, and because we had neglected to prepare the soil in which the cause of freedom thrives, new tyrants of a more malignant growth rose up and told us in no uncertain terms that everything we cherished was outworn. Their purposes were not concealed. Their leaders carefully announced the plan. But we had troubles of our own and so we let them go to carry out their plot. The army that was not to be, began to grow and in the course of time, small though it was, it crossed into the forbidden valley of the Rhine. Did our old allies or we, who talked so much, take action then? One good division could have turned them back. We still believed in miracles and shibboleths and lost our chance by easy means thus to avert the war that now is shaking the whole earth.

Have we learned anything from this? We talk of Justice and make plans, but when our men are back, tired and disillusioned as before, who will provide the aircraft, garrisons and fleets for years to come and promise never to forget? When taxes weigh us down from debts so big we cannot even comprehend their size, shall we then remember the things that now seem clear?

And let us not forget that freedom is not always lost to forces from without. Wars pave the way for greater evils from within.

The logic of events has justified our help to Russia, for by doing so we help ourselves and millions who are now oppressed. But do we know what she will do when she is free to exercise her will?

For six long years China has waged a battle for its life and yet today a great communist army of Chinese stands by in idleness. What is it waiting for? What vision has it seen?

When the present restraints have been removed from Europe and new forces are unleashed, can any man be sure that communism will not take command? And let no man delude himself into the belief that this tyrant can be reconciled with the democratic principles that we hold dear.

What of conditions then at home? The same forces that have contended for ten thousand years are still contending here. Blocs and more blocs appear to claim some special privilege, often forgetting in their zeal that other men have rights.

Whatever progress we have made in the long years since life commenced upon this earth, has come from the slow development of character in man. Each starts from scratch, and each in turn must learn his lessons in the treadmill that is life. This generation cannot do the work of those

who are to come. No magic formula can lift this burden from their backs or save them from the course they must pursue. But if enough are taught and learn their lessons well, then, and then only, will mankind be free.

And if America has reached the time when it must play a more important role, is it not possible, at least, that Masonry has reached a turning point? Eternal principles will never change. The things we treasure most will still endure. Relief will always be a work of love with us, if we have caught the spirit of it all. And as the teacher must provide a means to make the pupil see the beauty of the lesson he imparts, so must perfection in our ritual be our constant care and a great and lasting source of pride for every member of the craft.

But will our missions be fulfilled if we stop there? It has been said "Talent is built in solitude; character in the stream of life." Men must be taught; and men must learn to live. Mere repetition has never been enough. The noble concepts of Truth and Love and Justice may take form, but in the haze that comes with time, they fade away, unless by practice they are woven into the very fabric of our souls.

Within the recent history of our times, wise and discerning leaders here have seen the light, and we have thus arrayed the ranks of Masonry behind our public schools; and we have rallied to support that master plan, once fashioned partly by Masonic hands, that now proclaims the right to freedom in this land.

But I am not convinced that we have yet exhausted all the means that Masonry or Masons could employ to give our straying brothers work or make our power felt. I am not unmindful of the fact that Masonry in other lands has sometimes gone astray and suffered loss. But in view of all the things that I have seen in this chaotic world, I cannot now believe that we have sketched in all the minor details of the plan, or have built the character in men that we must have to reach the last and highest goal: the Fatherhood of God, and the Brotherhood of Man.

And never will this goal be reached while men in every land must live in terror of the god of war and sacrifice their right to love, and think, and grow, and search for Truth.

I am not here to urge some innovation in our work. I only hope that we may catch the spirit of it all. Whatever landmarks might appear to bar our way, we never can be lacking in the power to save ourselves or carry through until we reach the height toward which we climb. I am not here to recommend procedures or techniques; for well I know if we but have the will, the means will soon be found.

Whatever rule or regulations may appear to hold us down, I know there is a higher law that cannot be ignored: growth is the law of life, and every living thing must grow or waste away and die.

And if we hesitate, then let us see the truth. Let us first ask what every man must ask: "What is our allegiance to this cause?" Are we free men prepared to do the things that must be done if we stay free?

In Justice something real that makes us want to render unto every man his just due, without distinction? Do we believe in brotherly love that regards the whole human species as one family? Do we want Truth itself when it suddenly confronts us with some fact we do not dare to face. And if we answer "No," let us forget the things that we profess and join the countless millions who believe that men may have their way no matter where it leads. And if we answer "Yes," let us as men who have the faith and courage to support the right, stand up and tell the world we will defend the cause we represent.

Brethren, we have work to do. Let us build men who will be adequate to the performance of these great and glorious undertakings.

Our fathers' God! from out whose hand  
The centuries fall like grains of sand,  
We meet today, united, free,  
And loyal to our land and Thee,  
To thank Thee for the era done,  
And trust Thee for the opening one.

O make Thou us, through centuries long,  
In peace secure, in justice strong;  
Around our fight of freedom draw  
The safeguards of thy righteous law:

And, cast in some diviner mould  
Let the new cycle shame the old.