

**Grand Lodge  
Free & Accepted Masons  
Of California  
Grand Oration 1944**

**Grand Orator  
William J. Courtiour  
"The Master"**

Most Worshipful Grand Master, Distinguished Visitors, and members of the Grand Lodge

For many years I have been privileged to attend the Grand Lodge communications, and with many of you I have looked forward with great eagerness and anticipation to the hour of 10:30 o'clock when the grand oration would be delivered before a group of good men, such as are gathered here today: Masters and Wardens of Lodges; men from every walk in life, the professional men, the mechanics; men from the farms; truly a cross section of the great American public, who meet together once a year with the end in view, of benefiting one another, and being of service to humanity, and as we have listened to the men who have preceded me on this platform, and from whose lips have fallen oratory that has made deep and lasting impressions upon our hearts and minds.

Surely Longfellow was right when he wrote the words:

"Lives of great men oft remind us,  
We can make our lives sublime.  
And departing leave behind us,  
Footprints on the sands of time."

For these men have left behind them footprints on the sands of time. For they have given to the craft, beautiful expressions, gems of thought, priceless treasures that you and I can read and enjoy at our leisure.

And it is with a feeling of deep humility that I stand before you, "a humble servant of the craft," praying that some word of mine might find an abiding place in your hearts and be an inspiration to you in the great work of reconstruction and the rehabilitation of men in the years that lie before us. For the Temples of Masonry, in many parts of the world, have been destroyed, our working tools beaten into implements of war, our Bibles and our altars burned, our young men taken from us, and our old men have been put to work. Our forefathers played their part in the building of this nation. It will be our part to rebuild it.

For the lapse of time, the ruthless hand of ignorance, and the devastation of wars have laid waste and destroyed many valuable monuments of antiquity upon which the utmost exertions of human genius were employed. Not only the Temple of Solomon, but many of the great temples and cathedrals of Europe, so spacious and magnificent, and constructed by so many celebrated artists, escaped not the unsparing ravages of barbarous force. Freemasonry, notwithstanding, still survives, and will survive, because it is not built of material things which are subject to the will of man. Freemasonry is embedded in the hearts of men. Men like DeMolay, Latimer, and the many martyrs, whose bones were broken on the rack, whose bodies burnt to the stake because they were true to a trust. The fires kindled around those great men are never extinguished for today they burn in the hearts of men and boys—fires of love, hate and patriotism.

Men who all through the ages have been willing to sacrifice and die for a just and righteous cause; freedom of speech, freedom of religion, freedom of the press, free enterprise, free to act in accordance with the dictates of his own conscience—real Master Masons.

But my subject must be of a Masonic nature, and so a little of its history will be in order.

In the book of human history, Freemasonry has a chapter of its own. In all ages and in all lands men have formed secret societies, made use of ceremonies of initiation, employed symbols, emblems and means of recognition. When Freemasonry came into existence, nobody knows how many centuries ago, it inherited much from such societies.

The oldest existing written record of our craft is a manuscript written by some unknown brother in England, about 1390, nearly six centuries ago. At the time this document was written all Freemasons were operatives, that is, they were workers engaged on buildings. There were many

kinds of Masons, but the evidence indicates that Freemasons were those builders of a superior type, who designed, supervised, and erected the great cathedrals and other marvelous structures in the Gothic style of architecture.

Operative Freemasons designed the buildings; dressed the stone from the quarries and laid it in the walls; set up arches, pillars, columns and buttresses; laid the floor and built the roof; carved out the decorations; made and fitted the stained-glass windows into place, and produced the sculptures. Their work was difficult, called for a high degree of skill and genius, and required much knowledge of mechanics and geometry as well as of stone masonry.

They were the great artists or masters of the middle Ages.

Training men for such work called for a long period of severe discipline. Boys sound in body, keen in mind, and of good reputation, at the age of twelve, were apprenticed to some Master Mason for a number of years, usually seven. This Master Mason was such a boy's tutor, his mentor, and his guide, who taught him both the theories and practices of the craft. At the end of his apprenticeship the youth was required to submit to exacting tests of his proficiency before being accepted into full membership in the craft.

When a number of Freemasons worked together on a building over a period of years they organized a Lodge, which might meet in a temporary building or in one of the rooms of the uncompleted structure. Such a Lodge was governed by a Master, assisted by Wardens; it had a Secretary to keep its books; a Treasurer to keep and to disperse its funds; a charity chest from which to dispense relief to the members in accident, sickness, or distress, and to widows and orphans of Master Masons. It met in regular communication, divided its membership into grades, admitted members by initiation; in short, it was in essentials what a Masonic Lodge is today.

The beginner in the builders' art was called an apprentice. After he had served as such a sufficient time to give evidence of his fitness, his name was entered in the Lodge books, after which he was called an Entered Apprentice. At the end of his seven years of apprenticeship he was called into open Lodge, his conduct was reported, - and he then had to prove his skill by producing what was called a "Master's piece."

Hitherto he had been on probation. If he passed his test satisfactorily he was made a full member of the craft. Then he stood on an equality of duty, rights, and privileges with others, a Fellow of the craft—the word "Fellow" meaning full membership. In the sense that he had now mastered the theories, practices, rules, secrets, and tools of his trade, he was called a Master Mason.

Completing their work in one community, the Freemasons would move to another, setting up their Lodges wherever they met. Other types of Masons were compelled to live and work in the same community year in and year out, and under local restrictions. A number of our historians believe that it may have been because they were free from such restrictions that the Gothic builders were called Freemasons.

Such was the fraternity in its operative period, and as such it flourished for generations. Then came a great change in its fortunes. Euclid's geometry was rediscovered and published, thereby giving to the public many of the Masons' trade secrets.

The Reformation came and the Gothic style of architecture began to die out. Social conditions underwent a revolution—laws were changed—these and other factors brought about a decline in the craft. During the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries Freemasons became so few in number that only a small Lodge here and there clung to a precarious existence. To recruit their numbers, Freemasons adopted a new practice—they began to accept non-operative members. In the old days only an operative Mason, in the literal sense, could become a member, but during the two centuries of the transition period, gentlemen with no intention to become builders, and out of curiosity, for social reasons, or from interest in the craft's ancient customs, were received as "accepted Masons." At first there were few of these, but as time passed their number increased, until by the early part of the eighteenth century they were more numerous than the operatives and were more influential.

The craft then took a step destined to revolutionize it and to set it on a new path of power and magnitude. On St. John, the Baptist's day June 24th, 1717, four or more old Lodges of London and Westminster met in London and organized a Grand Lodge and on the same day selected their first Grand Master: M. W. Anthony Sayer.

Within a few years of that date the craft had completed the transformation of an operative body into a speculative fraternity; reorganized the two old degrees into three degrees of Entered Apprentice, Fellowcraft and Master Mason; collected and collated the old Masonic manuscripts,

produced the first books of Constitutions; and was chartering Lodges in many countries, including our own, to take care of the fraternity's membership, which began rapidly to increase shortly after the organization of the Mother Grand Lodge.

This was the beginning of organized Speculative Freemasonry as we know it.

American Lodges, of which the earliest with authentic historical records was "The First Lodge at Boston" (1733), were under the charge of Provincial Grand Lodges, which were ruled by Provincial Grand Masters appointed by the Grand Lodges in England, or in Scotland, or in Ireland.

As a result of the Revolution, one after another American Grand Lodges became sovereign and independent. The question arose at that time whether there should be one Grand Lodge for the whole of the United States, but the wisdom of the craft prevailed and the scheme was abandoned.

As the years passed, one Grand Lodge was organized in each state, sovereign within its own limits, no other Grand Lodge having any right to control Masonic affairs under its jurisdiction. Today, in the United States, are forty-nine Grand Lodges, one for each state and one for the District of Columbia—and on their rolls over three million members.

Speculative Freemasonry did not spring full-formed out of nothing in 1717, but came as a gradual development of Operative Masonry. Through an unbroken line we can trace our lineage back to those builders of the early Middle Ages. We are Masons, yea we are Masters too, except that where they erected buildings, we build manhood; their tools we have transformed into emblems of moral and spiritual laws and forces; their practices and secrets we have embodied in the royal art of Brotherly Love, Relief and Truth; their rituals—mellowed, enriched, and made more beautiful with the passing of time—we employ in the entering, passing, and raising of our candidates. All that was living and permanent in their craft we have preserved to use in behalf of good will, kindness, charity, and brotherhood among men.

Surely the lines have fallen to us in pleasant places and we have a goodly heritage. Such is our history, and we must preserve it.

The same forces that sought to destroy all that was good, noble and free in the past is still abroad in the world, and the Master is still needed to eradicate the old abuses, to protect and safeguard our landmarks, and to promote the virtues of brotherly love, relief and truth.

Entered Apprentices assembled on the ground floor. Many of our members never get beyond the Ground Floor, content to pay their dues, and wear the pin—moving and being swayed with the crowd—just a member. A few advance a little higher in thought, read and study a little more, and progress as far as the middle chamber. But only those who become real Masters have the privilege of meeting in the sanctum sanctorum, finding in fraternal associations the fellowship which none can find alone.

### **Who is the Master?**

He is the man who draws the designs upon the trestle board at the commencement of the day. Whether he be doctor, lawyer, or builder., plans must be made so that there will be no confusion among the workmen.

### **Who is the Master?**

I see him in the character of that one who could not be bought with gold—a seemingly insignificant character in our degree work, but in that man I find the real Master as he answers, "Then you cannot go for it is strictly forbidden"—the man that could not be bribed. He had mastered self.

I find him in the mountains of the Southland—a great naturalist; a member of the craft; giving to the world, by his writings, the beauties of nature; finding the sanctum sanctorum in God's great cathedral, the great outdoors.

I sit with him in his cabin as he pens the words:

Not what seems fair, but what is true.

Not as we dream but the good we do.

These are the things that shine like gems.

Like jewels in royal diadems.

Not as we take, but as we give.

Not as we pray, but as we live.

These are the things which make for peace,  
Both now and after time shall cease.

### **Who is the Master?.**

I find him in the foxholes in the South Pacific and the battlefields of Europe, forgetting his own wounds, and going on foot and out of his way to assist his buddies. I see the Master workman in the field hospital. Those doctors bending over our boys from morning far into the night to alleviate their pain and suffering. These men have the satisfaction of meeting with the Masters. They have served as Apprentices. They have enjoyed their meetings in the middle chambers. But the real joy comes as they meet with the Masters, practicing the virtues and studying the philosophies inculcated in the degrees of our order.

It is the Master who can say, when assailed by the enemies of right and truth, "I can not, I will not, I shall not."

Lincoln once said:

"Stand with anybody that stands right;  
Stand with him while he is right,  
And part with him, when he goes wrong."

The world is always looking for men who are not for sale. Men who are honest, sound from center to circumference, true to the heart's core, whose consciences are as steady as the North Pole; men who stand for right if the heavens totter and fall- men who will tell the truth and look the world right in the eye; men that neither brag nor run; men that neither flag nor flinch; men who know their message and . tell it; men who know their business and attend to it; men who will not lie, shirk nor dodge; men who are not too lazy to work and not too proud to be poor; men who are not afraid to say "No" with the emphasis.

Freemasonry is an exclusive institution. Guard well your doors. Beware of the Cowan's and imposters who seek admission, those men who have not learned to build fairly and squarely with all men.

Frederick Dalco, that great Masonic scholar and gentleman, once said:

*"Let down the bars, and you will soon have the birds roosting in your rafters, and the cobwebs hanging over your doors."*

Freemasonry expects from its members, the noblest and the best, and only the best should be allowed to enter our doors, for the good name of Freemasonry must be protected and preserved.

It was Shakespeare who wrote:

"He that stealeth my purse stealeth trash,  
'Tis something, 'tis nothing, 'tis his, 'tis mine,  
But he who filches from me, my good name,  
Robs me of that, which not enriches him,  
But leaves me poor indeed."

"A good name is better to be chosen than great riches."

The eyes of the world are upon the Masters. The Master is some boy's ideal. It may be his own son, the neighbor's boy, or the boy down the street. Some boy somewhere is watching your life. He is shaping his own after some ideal, just as you did when you were a boy.

A prize was once offered for the best picture representing "peace." One artist painted a picture of a beautiful lake, not a ripple anywhere, not a movement in the trees, the animals peacefully grazing in the meadows it was a beautiful picture, and in the corner he wrote, "Peace."

But the prize was won by the artist who painted a picture of a storm; the lake covered with

whitecaps; the trees swaying from side to side; the sky covered with black clouds; lightning striking across the horizon. Perched among the branches of one of the trees was a nest with a bird setting on its eggs, peaceful and secure. Underneath he penned the word, "peace."

The Master is the man that can be calm when the battle rages, when misfortune :and difficulties arise.

My Brethren, our advancement in Masonry takes us through the state of an apprentice, into the field of education as a fellowcraft, to the stern realities of our responsibilities as citizens, to the beauties and satisfaction of a Master, and as we journey along its pathway we find it inexhaustible in its interest, lifelong in its appeal, a power within us to enrich, to ennoble, and to inspire.