

**Grand Lodge
Free & Accepted Masons
Of California
Grand Oration 1947**

**Grand Orator
Judge William B. McKesson
"The Third Step"**

Most Worshipful Grand Master, Past Grand Masters, Grand Lodge officers, Distinguished Guests and Members of Grand Lodge

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As I stand here where but few are permitted to stand to address you as the Grand Orator, I am mindful that heretofore Grand Orators have been distinguished Masons of rare attainments and abilities. For one so humble in the labors of the Temple as myself to be permitted to occupy this honored station, is clear and convincing evidence of a basic belief of our Most Worshipful Grand Master. He believes, and by my appointment wants to demonstrate to you that Masonry affords opportunities to the low as well as the high. Throughout this year he has endeared himself to the members of the craft by his warm personality and faithful labor. If ever there was a man of whom it could truthfully be said that he could "walk with Kings nor lose the common touch," that man is John Randle Moore. I have read the thought provoking and inspiring Grand Orations of the past. Some of them have dwelt upon the beauties of our philosophy, others have chosen to rhapsodize in poetic-prose on our symbolism; the literature and poetry of the ages have been combed for references, similes, metaphors, and examples to illustrate the meaning of our working tools. Would that I could couch my poor speech in the diamond-studded phrases that have sparkled here in by-gone days, or that I could tip my pen with the gleaming gold of lofty thoughts, or even that I could deliver my prosaic platitudes in a voice redolent with the lush tones of a great pipe organ. Those gifts have been denied me, and I must therefore speak to you as I am, not as what I'd like to be. What others have given you in beauty, learning, philosophy and history, I cannot duplicate or even imitate—I can only promise you sincerity, humility and I hope a modicum of brevity.

Masonry is rooted in antiquity, ripened by modernity and harvested in eternity. Truly it is a growing and progressive science, ever unfolding new beauties as the men of every generation have explored its most concealed recesses. Someone has aptly said: "The practical object of Masonry is the physical and moral amelioration and the intellectual and spiritual improvement of individuals and society. Masonry labors to improve the social order by enlightening men's minds." It is to our duty as Masons to improve the social order that I would direct your thinking today under the subject of the Third Step.

The Three Steps in a Masonic career expressed in the terms of our beautiful ritual are, initiation, passing, and raising but I choose to denominate them Revelation, Education and Operation. These are the three progressive steps of a well-rounded Masonic career. Some Masons stop at the first step, initiation, when the meaning of our mysteries is revealed to them. Others take the second step—Education—by becoming proficient and learned in the art of Masonry and then stop. They fail to put into practical, daily living the lessons we teach. Important as these two steps are—and they must be taken before one is ready for the third step— it is the Third Step, Operation, that marks a man a Mason—what you do, how you live, what you stand for. Revelation, Education, Operation— these three—but the greatest of these is Operation.

Masonry, as I have said, is rooted in antiquity and Masons turn to the past for teaching and inspiration. Standing on the pinnacle of Today, as we look backward over the valley of the Masonic past, we see there majestic peaks, broad peaceful meadows, and great forests representing the giants of Masonry. Let us focus our attention for a moment upon that segment of Masonic history called American Masonry. There we see men wearing the Square and Compass, forsaking tradition, comforts and the security of their homeland to brave a three months' journey across an unfriendly and tumultuous ocean. In a tiny ship they sail to a savage inhabited land, where daily struggle is the price of existence, that they might practice the great Masonic principle—the Fatherhood of God and the Brotherhood of Man.

Like a great epic the history of American Masonry moves onward, its verses studded with the names of illustrious brothers, whose deeds shine like stars in the firmament of the future.

Masonry is entwined and interwoven with the history of America. As this new land of America grew, so Masonry grew. Our brothers of the past labored here to build an edifice where freedom, equality, justice and opportunity were vouchsafed to every citizen. Our failure to recount the deeds or call the names of those ever-honored brothers contained in that thin book of the Nation's Great cannot, nor is it intended to, dim the luster of their achievements for their fraternity, their country, their neighbors or their God. The list is far too long for enumeration on this or any other one occasion but no Mason can study the history of the United States without thrilling with pride at the great part Masons have played in building America. You will find them in all walks of life, in all fields of endeavor, in all periods of our Nation's history.

One glorious decade of our Fraternity's progressive march from the past to the future is that period between 1847 and 1857. The plains of America were overrun by ox-teams, covered wagons and trudging brothers moving westward, ever westward; fording streams, scaling mountains, penetrating forests and conquering deserts in feats of daring adventure that beckoned men onward, onward over the rough and rugged road beset with the ruffians of starvation, hardship and discouragement. It was a cavalcade of which it has been said that "Only the brave arrived; the cowards never started, and the weaklings died on the way."

Through struggles, privations and sacrifices was Masonry brought to California. The intrepid and rugged brethren who had found in the teachings of Masonry great solace from the trials of their daily lives carried it by land and sea to this new country. Like their brethren of the preceding century who had braved the forbidding Atlantic to plant Masonry on the eastern shore of this great land of opportunity, those who brought Masonry to the shores of the Pacific were impelled by an unyielding and indomitable conviction that men are better men where Masonry flourishes. From all outward appearances they seemed to be rough, uncouth, fighting men but they possessed that "goodness of heart, that purity of intention, and that love of virtue" that we know makes a man a better man because he is a Master Mason.

For ninety-seven years now the Grand Lodge of California has met in annual communication to hear the reports on the state of the craft in this jurisdiction, to consider whether any improvement can be made, either for strength or ornament in our work among the brethren, and to receive instructions whereby we may pursue our labors. A review of the proceedings of those annual communications reveals the abiding faith, lofty ideals and great accomplishment of those who have wrought here to "build our temples in the hearts of men." Would that time permitted a recital of the many stirring, inspired and inspiring incidents which have marked our progress. Would that we might just call the roll of those who have wrought at the building of Masonry's temple in California, as they planted Masonry on the highest hills and in the lowest vales of our great state. They knew with Virgil that "Too low they build who build beneath the stars."

Even as our pioneer brethren of 1849 dug the gold from the canyons, stream beds and mountains of California so can every Mason retrieve the great treasure buried in the Masonic libraries if he will but dig deep into the poetry, prose, narration and literature of Masonry.

In each new generation the meanings, attitudes, faiths and works of Masonry have ripened through the initiation and education of new members.

All of the symbolic ritual of our initiation and all of our learning, are as naught, however, if we do not take that third step in Masonry—Operation—whereby we put into practice those great truths, texts and principles which have been laid down as the rule and guide of our faith. We transmit our teachings to the repository of faithful breasts for one purpose only.

That purpose is the teaching men how to live as Masons. We are not mere vessels in which to store the rare vintages distilled from the fruits of our labors; the corn, wine and oil we receive as wages, are not to be hoarded, they are to be used to nourish, stimulate and strengthen our minds and bodies for the tasks that lie ahead. Mere proficiency in the ritual, learning in the arts, or study of the precepts, excellent as they are, do not in themselves make a man a Mason. It is what he does that proves that it is the internal, and not the external qualifications which recommend a man to be made a Mason. If he does nothing but spend his days in slothful idleness, he becomes a wastrel and Masonry shuns him. If he knows the great lessons taught at the Masonic Altar but is not impelled to put them into practice, Masonry has been wasted upon him, and it were better that he had never been permitted to share in the rich honor of becoming one of its members. We are an organization of the living, not of the dead! "Beaten paths are for beaten people." Our glorious history will crumble into the ashes of the past, unless we each take that third step—Operation.

In our proceedings we frequently hear the phrase "We no longer work in operative Masonry."

I wonder! Some assume that the only "Operative" Masons are those who build visible structures with stone and brick and steel, and concrete. Such, however, you know is not the case.

It is by demonstrating that we are operative Masons in the labors of today, that we take the third step in Masonry—Operation—and thus improve the social order in which we live.

Brief mention has been made of the brethren who had the vision and courage to bring Masonry to America; who held aloft the flame of Brotherhood as a beacon glowing in the wilderness in those early days of our republic; and of those who drained the swamps, bridged the streams and battled the elements that we might have Masonry in California. Pioneers they were, blazing new paths that we might follow after them. Did their matchless courage die with their generation; was the pioneer spirit buried with them; is their flaming faith now but a dying ember beside the campfire they left along the trails? Are the Masons of 1947 worthy of those of 1847 or 1747? You, my brethren, are the living answer to that question.

They say there are no more frontiers; that the pioneer spirit of yesteryear is gone because there are no new lands to conquer. My brothers: We are surrounded by ever expanding horizons for those who will but lift their eyes to see; each new day presents a new frontier. So long as man remains human, there will always be frontiers, frontiers of social, economic, political, scientific and religious wilderness to be invaded, explored and conquered by men of courage who have vision and faith.

All true Masons are "builders" and thus our craft is an "Operative" organization, each brother building here on earth "that house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens."

It has been said, "Our past is a poem, our present, a problem, and our future, a promise." I've indicated to you something of epic of the past, let us now turn to the problems of the present.

"A builder builded a temple,
Wrought it with care and skill,
Pillars and groins and arches,
Were fashioned to meet his will.

"Men said, when they saw its beauty,
'It shall never know decay,
Great is thy skill, O, Builder,
Thy fame shall live for aye!

"A brother builded a temple,
Wrought with skill and care,
Forming each pillar with patience,
Laying each stone with care.

"None saw the unceasing effort,
None knew of the marvelous plan,
For the temple the brother builded
Was not seen by the eye of man.

"Gone is the builder's temple,
Crumbled into dust,
Pillars and groins and arches,
Food for consuming rust.

"But the temple the brother builded
Shall endure while the ages roll,
For the beautiful unseen temple,
Was our brother's immortal soul."

We have on the rolls of the 590 Masonic lodges in California 173,917 members; in the past year there have been 12,165 Master Masons added to our rolls, a greater number than in any other single year in the history of this Grand Lodge; our financial, administrative, and procedural practices have been tested, improved and modified until now they require only our routine attention; our treasury bulges with funds. Our house is in order—what kind of living shall we have

in it?

Some lament the recent unprecedented increase in our membership, in many quarters we hear the whispered complaint that our lodges have been too lax in accepting candidates and conferring upon them our cherished degrees. Be reminded, that many of these new brethren knocked at our portals and sought admission only after they had learned of the weaknesses of the flesh. They had beheld the stark horror caused by men's adherence to the philosophy of hate, and greed and brutality in a Second World War. They turned to us with souls awakened to the great spiritual truths we teach. Their eyes have seen the Glory of the Coming of the Lord.

In some distant shell-spattered battlefield they verified the truth we preach, that divine assistance is vouchsafed us when human strength and wisdom fail. From the foxholes, the beachheads and the life rafts they have come to us, truly seeking the Great Light. The greatest and most challenging task facing Masonry today, is the drawing of designs upon the trestle boards of our lodges that will give these new, eager, sincere brothers tasks to satisfy their yearning and tests to prove their strength! They came to us of their own free will and accord asking for bread; we dare not give them a stone !

Masonry today in California finds itself possessed of great resources; they can be hewn, squared, marked and numbered for the builder's use even as were the timbers felled in the Forests of Lebanon. Thus will the hopes, the sacrifices and the faith of our pioneer forebears not have been in vain. If, however, we fail to use with wisdom, strength, and beauty for the improvement and perpetuation of the temple our building materials of men, minds and money, we shall have squandered our heritage, violated our vows and betrayed our trust.

What specific duties lie ahead? Just how can our great brotherhood of 173,917 men work shoulder to shoulder? How shall we put our newly enlightened brothers to work and thus retain their interest and enthusiasm? What needs to be done by Masons today if we would have a Masonry of tomorrow? The answer to those questions constitutes the problem of the present; it is the new frontier for the Operative Masonic pioneer of 1947.

Masonry teaches many great truths, has many noble precepts and stirs many deep emotions, but the quintessence of all its teachings and inspiration is to teach the simple art of how men may live together in peace and harmony. "Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity. "In unity"—peacefully, cooperatively, helpfully, gloriously! Isn't this the basic, the fundamental task of Masonry today—teaching men to live together in peace? That would truly be an improved social order.

We read in sacred history that after King Solomon ascended the throne in Israel, peace and tranquility pervaded the world. Why did not this glorious fulfillment of man's most cherished dream—a peaceful world—continue? How was it that man left the ways of peace to follow the blood soaked pathway of war? Having traveled along that highway of horror these many centuries, can mankind now be turned aside; must we forever travel down the road of destruction? Today the pace is ever increasing as each new generation fashions fiendish instrumentality's more destructive than the one before? Must civilization commit suicide? A man seen tottering upon the ledge of a building 200 feet above the crowd as he prepares to leap into eternity excites all within sight to do something to deter him from taking that fatal plunge. Who will cry out to a tottering world to turn aside from its headlong pursuit of self-annihilation? Has Masonry a duty here?

An organization that is founded upon principles for right living cannot sit supinely by and let a dying world hurtle itself into oblivion. Here is a definite task that Masons around the world must assume. There will never be world peace—in spite of our prating about and for it—until there is a change in the hearts of the people of the world. So long as men cheat, lie and steal as individuals, they will continue to do it as nations! On the other hand, there can be universal peace if the lessons you and I are taught at the Masonic Altar are universally practiced. Simple acts they are: Never failing to go out of our way to assist another; remembering in our prayers to seek aid for others as well as ourselves; being unwilling to violate a trust reposed in us by our fellowman; helping to raise by our own hands those who are less fortunate than we; and by using every opportunity to spread the gospel of good will and wise counsel. These obligations if faithfully fulfilled by the Masons of the world would make war unthinkable! To those who think that Utopian day will never come when people will actually live that way, I say that unless such a day does come, we must surely perish. "One world or one cinder"—is not a mere catch phrase; it is a cold statement of our only present alternatives.

What has universal peace to do with Masonry? I propose merely that all Masons forsake the evil companions who have lured them from the teachings of Masonry and return to the Temple where nobility counts for more than trickery; integrity supplants intrigue; virtue transcends vengeance; and truth makes men free. If this Grand Lodge and all the Grand Lodges would seriously lay out plans by which the more than 2,500,000 Masons in the United States—not to mention the vast number scattered around the globe—could and would honestly set about to put the philosophical precepts of our order into practice in the world, war would not have to be outlawed, it would be outlived. Here is a frontier that beckons as alluringly as did the quest for gold a century ago!

Brother John H. Cowles, Sovereign Grand Commander of the Scottish Rite, Southern Jurisdiction of the United States, voiced this thought some time ago when he said, "The cry is for peace, when there is no peace . . . Clearly the matter has been approached from the wrong angle. There is but one way to insure peace among nations and that is putting into practical application of the Masonic ideal—the Brotherhood of man and the Fatherhood of God. Nothing less than this great objective—for which every true Mason constantly prays, hopes and works—can solve the problems of war with its ever present threat of civilization."

How can we set about to achieve this great objective? Work of that kind commences with the individual. Passing resolutions, adopting platforms or issuing manifestos, will not do the task. So long as brother continues to assail brother for divergent political, economic, social or religious convictions; so long as men seek to gain advantage through violence rather than through merit; so long as one portion of society seeks to suppress or handicap another portion merely because of economic status, the color of the skin or racial origin; so long as men consort with the vices of intolerance, cupidity, bigotry, suspicion, greed, envy and jealousy—I say, so long as these things continue in the world there is work for Masons to do—Masons who will become Operative Masons.

Many controversial issues confront us today; they seek to rend society into factions and divide it into competitive groups; they tend to destroy unity among the people. The Operative Mason of 1947 will recognize that disregarding the rights of our fellowmen; failing to honor the dignity of man as the Son of God, is un-Masonic conduct whether done by economic pressure, minority subjugation or political emasculation. Masons occupy places of leadership in every industrial, governmental, professional, academic and business enterprise and it is their great opportunity in the years that lie ahead to demonstrate that they have the fortitude to undergo the pain, peril and danger of ridicule, criticism and obliquy of those who scoff at our attempts to make a better world by making better men. This is the kind of fortitude our pioneer brethren preached, and lived and passed on to us.

The late Bishop Bruce Baxter, of the Methodist Church, once said, "The man who is too busy to serve his God and his community is too busy." No true Mason will be "too busy." Here is the supreme opportunity of Masonry to prove its worth—will mankind be bettered by the kind of pursuits and activities Masons propose, sponsor and support? We have the choice to fill our cities and communities with wholesome, stimulating, worthwhile projects or those which are a reproach to decency and virtue. A community is the kind of community it deserves to be, and the Masons in any community can withdraw from participation in the affairs of the people or they can be leaders, builders and helpers—whichever choice they make, they cannot shirk responsibility for the kind of community in which they live.

"Am I a builder who works with care,
Measuring my life by the rule and the square?
Am I shaping my deeds to a well laid plan,
Patiently doing the best I can?
Or am I a wrecker who walks the town,
Content with the labor of just tearing down?"

Yes, there have been and still are great men in America who are Masons and we are proud to call them brother. But one does not have to be a great man to be a great Mason; does not have to be a great man to be a big man. When he excels in the simple art of being helpful to the needy, friendly to the forlorn and comforting to the distressed then he has become a true Mason—he has learned how to live.

"So I say, let me walk with the men in the road,
Let me seek out the burdens that crush;
Let me speak a kind word of good cheer to the weak
Who are falling behind in the rush.
There are wounds to be healed, there are breaks we must mend.
There's a cup of cold water to give;
And the man in the road by the side of his friend
Is the man who has learned how to live."

My brethren, this has been but a simple message urging you to justify the privations, sacrifices and hardships of your pioneer predecessors by vitalizing not just cherishing the precepts of Masonry; by turning ideals into realities; by improving the social order by the kind of life you live as an Operative Mason.

The story is told of a deformed and crippled brother who lived out his suffering days near a fork in the highway which was poorly marked. During the season of the heavy rains countless travelers invariably took the wrong road and had to retrace their weary course. Wracked with pain but fired by a burning desire to serve his fellowmen, the cripple hobbled his torturous way each rainy night to the intersection and hung a lantern there, that all might know the right road. No one ever knew who hung the lantern there, and the poor cripple never knew how many travelers uttered their silent thanks for the simple, kindly thoughtfulness of the man with the twisted body. He had found the way that even he could serve humanity. Isn't that the real object of Masonry?

"We can be great by helping one another;
We can be loved for very simple deeds.
Who has the grateful mention of a brother
Has all the fame he really needs."