

**Grand Lodge
Free & Accepted Masons
Of California
Grand Oration 1950**

**Grand Orator
J. Everett Houser
"The Unfinished Temple"**

Most Worshipful, Honored Past Grand Masters, Members of Grand Lodge, Distinguished Visitors and Brethren

There is a saying that exceptional times produce exceptional leaders. It has held true in the history of the United States and I submit it has come true in the Grand Lodge of California this year. Call it luck if you will, I prefer to call it providential, that in this important Centennial year, an event which occurs once in one hundred years, we have as our leader a Grand Master such as you meet once in one hundred times. The Most Worshipful Ellsworth Meyer, by his gifted leadership, engaging personality, sparkling eloquence, and far-sighted planning, has assured the success of this Communication and has represented us with distinction before the world.

OUR RECORD

California has often been accused of doting on superlatives. They say we love to brag about having the highest mountain, the lowest valley, the biggest or the most of various things. Even our Grand Lodge has not been exempt from this influence, which, perhaps, is traceable to the progressive and ambitious character of our people. Our Annual Communication has been pointed out as the longest Grand Communication held anywhere, noted for the number in attendance, the amount of business transacted, the quality of what is said, and, here is something you can really appreciate, the length of the committee reports.

Proud as our record is, our Grand Lodge has outdone herself this year. This historic meeting place, the record attendance, the splendid program which has been provided, and the number and distinction of our visitors mark this as a Communication which will always be remembered by those in attendance, a proud milestone in our history.

THE UNFINISHED TEMPLE

I have chosen as my subject today, "The Unfinished Temple." In considering this subject, I want you to abstract your mind from your immediate concerns and discomforts and go with me for the short thirty minutes allotted to me. I will take you to a high mountain from which you can glimpse the world and all things therein contained.

For, today, we are standing on a mountain peak of history. Behind us lies the glorious record of our Fraternity, one hundred years of Grand Lodge Masonry in California alone. This magic year of 1950 also marks the one hundredth anniversary of the admission of California to the Union. It also marks the mid-point of the twentieth century; the sands of this century have half run out. Midway, it is time to take stock. In what's new, there is always a backward glance; in what's old, there is always a window into the future. At the turn of the half-century, yesterday and tomorrow arch into the perfect circle.

There is no one among us who witnessed the founding of this Grand Lodge. There are a good many who witnessed the turn of the century and who will remember how the years of the twentieth century stretched ahead, seeming endless. Yet, here we are half through. I hope and pray that there are a great many within the sound of my voice at this moment who will be able to attend the sesquicentennial of this Grand Lodge in the year 2000 and that they will find that Masons have met the challenge, have overcome the perils which threaten us and that Masonry remains the most powerful, fraternal influence for good in the world.

THE UNITED STATES

The story has often been told of the influence of Masons and Masonry on the founding of the United States, and the striking parallel has been pointed out between the principles of the Constitution of the United States and the principles of Freemasonry. These stirring words of Thomas Jefferson in the Declaration of Independence sound almost like a Masonic address: "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights, that among these are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness." Thirty-one of the fifty-six signers of the Declaration of Independence were Masons, Brother John Hancock being the first to sign, with a bold hand, so, as he said, King George III would have no difficulty in reading his name.

Of the thirty-nine men who later signed the Constitution at the Constitutional Convention, twenty-three were Masons.

Brother George Washington was sworn in as first president of the United States while still Master of his Masonic lodge.

To us, the words "freedom," "liberty," "justice," and "Freemasonry" have a similar import. Freemasonry flourishes where men are free and languishes where they are oppressed. It is therefore no wonder that so many men prominent in the service of our country are also Masons. A recent survey shows that thirty-seven of the eighty-nine justices of the Supreme Court have been Masons, seventeen of the fifty-two Secretaries of State, and thirteen of the thirty-two Presidents of the United States, including Brother Harry S. Truman, Past Grand Master of the Jurisdiction of Missouri.

CALIFORNIA

Turning from the national scene, I want you next to view in retrospect the one hundred year history of California as a state.

In the fifteenth century, Ordonnes de Montalvo, a Spanish author, in a work of fiction, introduced the name "California" and described it as "a land of gold, at the right hand of the Indies, close to the terrestrial Paradise." Thereafter, this fictional name of "California" came to be applied to the territory which constitutes our present state, but it remained practically unknown until the exciting gold rush of 1849. Population then leaped from 7,000 to 85,000. In the days of '49, life in the mining camps was rugged. Tents and rude cabins provided the typical shelter. Provisions were few and meager in supply. There were no railroads. Travel to California was by the Isthmus of Panama, around the Horn, or across the plains, the latter a six months journey, the travelers beset with sickness, fatigue, the attacks of marauding Indians and the utmost hardship. It has been aptly said, "Only the courageous started, the weak never arrived."

One hundred years ago, life in California had its sunshine and its shadows but through it all runs the indomitable spirit of the pioneers, the builders of the West. On September 9, 1850, President Millard Fillmore signed the bill admitting California to the Union, a goal for which the pioneers had worked diligently and thus the fiction of the fifteenth century became the reality of the nineteenth and California entered upon a century of progress to fulfill her destiny as "a land of gold, near the terrestrial Paradise."

It is interesting to note that nine Masons, among them Brother Robert Semple, the chairman, participated in the writing of the State Constitution, and that eighteen of the thirty-two Governors of California have been Masons, two of them having also served this Grand Lodge as Grand Master, including our distinguished Past Grand Master and present Governor, the Most Worshipful Earl Warren.

THE GRAND LODGE

A pioneer band of forty or fifty Masons brought about the formation of the Grand Lodge of California on April 19, 1850, at the City of Sacramento, many months before the State was admitted to the Union. It may be fairly said that our first Grand Master, the Most Worshipful Jonathan D. Stevenson, was the father of Masonry in California. Credit is also due the original three lodges which formed the Grand Lodge. To this day they have retained their original

enthusiasm and zeal. They are: California No. 1 at San Francisco, formerly California No. 13 chartered by the Grand Lodge of the District of Columbia, Western Star No. 2 at Shasta, formerly Western Star No. 98 chartered by the Grand Lodge of Missouri, and Tehama No. 3 at Sacramento, formerly Connecticut No. 75 chartered by the Grand Lodge of Connecticut.

Although the Grand Lodge of California was thirty-second in point of time, it now ranks fifth in size in the United States.

Compare this with a recapitulation printed by our own Grand Lodge in 1852, proudly claiming twenty-three lodges and a total membership in the State of only 655.

THE LAST TEN YEARS

Let us consider for a moment what has happened to California in the last ten years. In that comparatively short space of time our State has absorbed over three and one-half million new residents, as many people as live in the entire state of Virginia, or Wisconsin, or as lived in California itself at the time of the First World War. Thus the state has reached a total population in excess of ten million, more people than there are in all of New England.

If California continues to expand at what experts call the law of growth, it will reach a population of twenty million within the next two or three decades.

I can well remember when our Chambers of Commerce believed in attracting migrants. Now the initiative has changed hands. It is the migrants who are planning on coming to California, not California which is planning to receive them.

IMPORTANCE TO THE FRATERNITY

These amazing facts and figures on the growth of California are of vital importance to our Fraternity in planning for future expansion, redistricting, locating, and designing lodge temples and designing the Grand Lodge edifice, itself.

There is obviously a lag between the growth of population generally and the growth of our Fraternity. Between 1940 and 1950 the state population increased about fifty per cent. In the same period of time, we gained twenty new lodges, while if our gain had been in proportion to the growth of population, we would have added over 200 new lodges.

One explanation for this is that many Masons moving to California have failed to demit, retaining their membership in the state of their former residence. Our Grand Master has taken wise steps this year to meet this phase of the problem. Another reason is that Masons demitting to California usually join old lodges rather than to start new ones. Another and more important reason is that the newcomers to California are comparatively young. They do not represent a cross-section of the American population, but a selection. They are young people, active, in their best working years, forty-five per cent of them between the ages of fifteen and thirty-four.

The full impact of our increased population will be felt by the Fraternity in the years ahead, when the present youngsters grow up and want to be "made a Mason."

I confidently predict, in the light of present trends, that within the next fifty years, we will have twice as many lodges and a membership of over half a million, and that we are some day destined to become the largest Grand Jurisdiction in the world.

Now you can understand why I have chosen for my subject, "The Unfinished Temple." It is not a time to sit down and gloat with complacency over the accomplishments of the past, superb as they are. It is rather a time to realize that we are midway in the stream, that the temple is only half-completed, that vigorous, devoted, far, sighted labor is required to prepare for the flood of candidates who soon will be knocking at the door of Freemasonry.

THE GLOOMY SIDE

The rosy picture I have painted of the future also has its gloomy side.

We live in an age of stress, disturbance and change. At this very moment, men are gathered in the four corners of the world, discussing matters of policy and state, but with little hope of universal accord.

Man has created light and heat, art and music unsurpassed, science beyond the imagination, great systems of education, yet he has failed his Creator, he has failed to obey the commandment of the HOLY Script, he has failed to create peace.

COMMUNISM

In this Centennial year of 1950, the chief barrier to world peace is the struggle with Communism. This is true because Communism and democracy are utterly irreconcilable. In this struggle, the principles of Masonry concur with and support those of democracy and oppose those of communism. Masonry flourishes under liberty and freedom. Masonry, and the church, are driven underground in the communist-controlled countries. So the conflict with communism and other ideologies will continue indefinitely. Brethren, the sad and bitter truth is, that unless foreign ideologies can be overcome and replaced with an abiding belief in the universal brotherhood of man, as inculcated in Masonry, there will be no peace in our time.

100 YEARS HENCE

One hundred years from now, China will be more powerful than Russia. China only awaits development of her vast manpower, industry and commerce. Anglo-Saxon leadership appears at times to be diminishing, and with it the love of liberty. Now the cry is for security. Today, we hear the slogan in England, "Security from the cradle to the grave." Our Colonial forefathers, fiercely individualistic, had a different motto, "Beaten paths are for beaten men."

THE KEY

We have progressed materially but not in morals, objectives, ideals. Man, conqueror of time and space and matter has failed in the conquest of man, himself.

The key to this tumultuous century is in the rate of change. More has happened to change the face of this planet and to alter the lives of those who live on it than in all of modern history. We have seen adopted one breathtaking change after another, almost overnight. There has been a revolution in every department of life.

The conquest of disease, until recently accepted by man as part of a miserable destiny, has been pushed to fantastic lengths.

The human life span has been increased more in fifty years than in the preceding two thousand years.

The productivity of grain and animals has been doubled and then doubled again.

The ancients dreamed of flying, but only in this century have men actually flown in heavier than air machines.

Radar makes visible the invisible.

We are scarcely adjusted to the wonders of radio before television crowds it out.

In our time, science has isolated and split the atom, releasing boundless energy, a result which, like the pavement in King Solomon's temple is checkered with good and evil.

Manmade objects are envisioned to float in space, beyond the pull of gravity.

Rockets to reach other planets are now within the realm of possibility.

WAR

What a sad commentary on man's moral nature, that new inventions and discoveries are first turned toward destructive ends. Poison gas was thought the ultimate until the destructive power of the atom bomb was demonstrated. Scientists argue that germ warfare is even more potent. Dr. Brock Chisholm, World Health Organization Director General, declared publicly last year, "Mankind can be wiped out with seven ounces of a known biologic if spread widely enough." The newest development is the hydrogen bomb, said to be at least a thousand times more destructive than the atom bomb.

FAITH

Terrifying indeed are the prospects. How can there be peace when there is no peace? How can man face the future of these dark and forbidding times? There is a limit to human strength and wisdom but let us remember, Brethren, that when they falter, divine assistance is vouchsafed us from above. It is a time for increased faith and reliance on the Great Architect of the Universe. William Cowper had that faith when he wrote:

"God moves in a mysterious way His wonders to perform: He plants his footsteps in the sea, and rides upon the storm."

GOD'S ECONOMY

We speak with awe of this being our Centennial year. What is a hundred years in God's economy? The Good Book tells us that one-day is with the Lord as a thousand years and a thousand years as one day.

Word comes from an American astronomical observatory that they are studying a newly-discovered solar system in the far reaches of the heavens, compared to which our own, with all the stars in the Milky Way, is but a tiny pygmy. The nearest star in this new cluster is measured as being sixty million light years distant, and a single light year is a matter of six trillion miles.

"The heavens declare the glory of God and the firmament showeth his handiwork.'

"What is man that Thou are mindful of him or the son of man that Thou visitest him?"

THE LODGE

In Freemasonry we have a constant reminder that "God's in his heavens, all's well with the world." You have sat, as I have sat, after the day's work is over, within the peaceful walls of a Masonic lodge, and as you have seen the work of the degrees unfold, you have felt the nearness and reality of the Supreme Being. There is a sense of beauty, order and harmony there that the profane cannot comprehend. The moral force of Masonry is what the world needs to find the way out of the morass of selfishness and greed.

If the three hundred Masons in the United States when this country came into being could help create the most ideal form of government which this world has yet seen, cannot today's three and one-half million Masons save it?

When we hear dark forebodings of the eventual total destruction of civilization, let us reflect, with faith, that this is God's world, his handiwork, and that He will not permit his handiwork to be destroyed by any man or group of men, whether they are in the Kremlin, or elsewhere.

LIFE TODAY

Life today is like a storm at sea. The night is dark and stormy. Mountainous waves buffet a lonely vessel. The wind lashes the foam into the faces of the anxious mariners as they peer through the gloom, searching, searching for some familiar landmark. At length, a glad cry of joy is heard above the roar of wind and wave, "a light, a light." Hope gives new strength to weary bodies, and a few minutes more confirms their approach to a well-known lighthouse. Their position is plotted, they swing into course along a sheltering shore and soon another lighthouse guides them past a rocky headland, and another and another until they reach the shelter of a peaceful harbor.

LIGHTHOUSES OF MASONRY

What are the lighthouses of Masonry? What are the guiding lights by which we can steer our individual lives over this tempestuous sea of troubles to find anchor in a peaceful harbor "where the wicked cease from troubling and the weary shall find rest?"

For the answer, I turn to the rich archives of Masonic literature and select five propositions which, it seems to me, express the fundamental interpretation of Masonic teaching. Let the tumult and the shouting rage; they stand serene and untroubled. They are as enduring as the living granite of the Sierra Nevadas, as comforting as your mother's arms:

- (1) There is one God, the Father of all men.
 - (2) The volume of the Sacred Law is the great light in Masonry, the rule and guide of our faith.
 - (3) Man's soul is immortal.
 - (4) Character determines destiny.
 - (5) Love of man is, next to love of God, man's first duty.
- Lay hold of these eternal truths, plot your course by their dictates, and all difficulties will be overcome.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, Brethren, I want to leave this thought with you: faith and hope are the touchstones of Masonry. They have guided our Grand Lodge through the first hundred years of its existence; they will safely guide us in bringing toward completion, the, as yet, unfinished temple.

You Masons of faith and hope are the salt of the earth. You are the leaders of your country. You are the hope of the world. Lead on, Brethren, lead on.