

**Grand Lodge
Free & Accepted Masons
Of California
Grand Oration 1951**

**Grand Orator
Edward H. Rowins
"The Marks Of A Master Mason"**

Most Worshipful, distinguished Past Grand Masters, Officers, Members, and Guests of this Grand Lodge-Brethren all

Several weeks ago during the progress of the trans-Pacific yacht race one of the occasional but dramatic incidents of the sea occurred. A crewmember from one of the competing yachts was lost overboard. Before speed could be slackened so that the yacht could turn around and effect his recovery, he was lost in the vastness of the great Pacific. For more than thirty hours there was no trace of him, and the feeling grew that further search would be futile. Just fifteen minutes before the order came to abandon the search, crewmen of a navy rescue craft sighted and saved the solitary figure bobbing on the sea. Truly a miracle had been realized.

In the interviews that followed, this question was inevitably asked of the man who had been lost-"What did you think about during the time you were adrift?" Naturally, the immediate hope and expectation had been of rescue since his fall into the sea had been observed. But as the yacht sailed beyond his view and the hours slowly passed without sight of help, decreasing hope must have been followed by increasing fear. During these hours he reported he thought of all the things he had ever done, and even more of the things which should have been but were not done. Certainly no circumstances could produce a situation more conducive to great soul searching and critical self-appraisal.

You and I will probably never have an experience of just this kind. But this man's experience should make crystal clear to all of us the necessity of so living from day to day that in our respective hours of crisis, and such experiences come to all, we shall in our own hearts and minds not be found wanting. If we practice diligently the tenets of Freemasonry that we know so well, we can and will achieve a pattern of living equal to all occasions. With this thought in mind I'd like to have you join with me in exploring some of the aspects of living which ought to characterize the Master Mason.

Some years ago there was published a book entitled, "The Marks of an Educated Man", which became a best seller of that day. It was extremely popular because the author sought to do what is always intriguing but what is not always simple-namely, to analyze the qualities of personality and character which make for successful living. People being what they are, there is within the heart and mind of every person the continuing desire, sometimes weak and sometimes strong, but ever-present, to discover ways and means of living more richly and more fully than he has before. It is this spirit which accounts for whatever progress man has made and may make. Let us think together, therefore, of what are, or perhaps should be, the marks of a Master Mason.

As a major premise of our present consideration no statement could be more significant than these brief words of a fellow Californian, Edwin Markham.

We are all blind until we see
That in the human plan
Nothing is worth the making
Unless it makes the man.

Why build these cities glorious
If man unbuilt goes?
In vain we build a world
Unless the builder also grows.

Free Masons are in the finest sense of the word, and in accordance with their rich traditions, builders-builders today of human character even as their operative forebears were builders of stately cathedrals. In both kinds of endeavor certain common qualities are essential. These are the marks of a Master Mason to which we shall devote our thought and our attention.

The Master Mason, more so than other men, must possess an inquiring mind. Our great ritual is nothing but meaningless words and empty forms unless we probe beyond the symbols to discover the ideas and the ideals which they represent. Back of every material thing, there was first a plan; back of the plan, there was first the inspiration born of and from an inquiring mind. Today there is a great tendency for people to be superficial in many ways. We are prone to take for granted the comforts of life, the achievements of science, and the human liberties which have made them possible. We cannot, we dare not fall into such ways, without placing in jeopardy the values which free men have always cherished. The key to our survival, the key to our progress, is to be found in the cultivation of an inquiring mind. This is one mark of a Master Mason.

The Master Mason, more so than other men, must be a skilled craftsman. Whatever his work, whether it be in business or on the farm, trade or profession, he should take pride in doing a superior job. The very word "Master" suggests competence of a high order. We must not be satisfied with less. What would this nation be today if the men and women of yesteryears had assumed an attitude of "good enough"- What I have done is not my best, but it will get by? History is full of examples of primitive societies where basically this attitude dominated and was responsible for their elemental mode of existence. History is also full of examples of great civilizations, which having risen to new heights of cultural achievement, decayed and fell when the spirit of the people became one of "good enough." It is not the lot of every man to be a leader, but it can be the lot of every man to make his contribution. Let us always remember what the historian Green has told us, that the world is moved not only by the mighty shoves of the heroes, but also by the aggregate of the tiny pushes of each honest worker. This quality is also the mark of a Master Mason.

The Master Mason, more so than other men, must be an understanding friend. An American patriot once stated during the critical years of our nation's birth, "These are times that try men's souls." The same sentiment can be repeated today with equal fervor and with equal justification. We are again engaged in a great human conflict, the contributing factors to which are many and varied; and yet which in the final analysis stem from the fact that we have not yet learned how to live together as friends and brothers. Obviously, there is no simple answer to the present complication. However, of this I am very sure, a spirit of sincere friendship, based on mutual respect for our fellow men because of their dignity and worth as human beings, will provide the only satisfactory climate in which differences can be resolved. This is easy to say; it is difficult to achieve. To have a friend, one must be a friend. This too is the mark of a Master Mason.

The Master Mason, more so than other men, must be an exemplary citizen. The teachings of our fraternity are the same principles which under gird real democracy. No matter what its form or name may be, any government whose sovereignty is vested in its people can be only as strong as they are intelligent and responsible in meeting the demands imposed on free people. America today has the novel and difficult role, whether she wants it or not, of being a world leader. Her success, as well as the fate of millions throughout this world, will be conditioned in large measure by the maturity, the courage and the devotion we display in the discharge of our civic obligations. Do you vote at each election for which you are eligible, first having studied the relative merits of the issues and candidates which may be under consideration? How well do you support your duly elected officers as they seek to do their duty, sometimes in the face of strong pressures not in the public interest? Is law observance a good thing only so long as it applies to the other fellow? These and other tests will provide simple answers to the question of how well we are meeting our acknowledged responsibilities. Good citizenship is an essential mark of a Master Mason.

The Master Mason, more so than other men, must be a person of scrupulous integrity. The legend of the third degree, one of the landmarks of Freemasonry, is an impressive illustration of this important virtue. The significant human freedoms which have been won over the ages at so great a price-the right to worship God according to the dictates of one's own conscience; the right to peaceably assemble, such as in a Masonic Lodge; the right to speak one's thoughts, so

long as they are free from slander; these and all of the other cherished rights of free people-can continue to exist only where a nation's citizens manifest a high order of personal integrity. All social institutions-our governments, our schools, our churches, our businesses-will be strong and effective in direct ratio to the integrity of their members, and especially of their leaders. As we evaluate the life of our times, feeling deep concern about the precarious state of national and world conditions, is it not probable that one reason for our present plight is the light regard among too many people for this quality of personal integrity? Constancy of character, based on righteousness and morality, is a clear mark of a Master Mason.

The Master Mason, more so than other men, must have a substantial capacity for weighing values. Life in one respect may be regarded as a continuous experience of making choices. The decisions men accept materially shape not only their own lives, but may profoundly influence the future of all those associated with them. The real measure of any man is to be found not in what he professes, but in how he lives. As the well-known American essayist, Ralph Waldo Emerson, has put it "What you do speaks so loudly I cannot hear what you say." You and I daily condition the future of ourselves and of our families by the alternatives we select in any given situation requiring deliberation and decision. Fortunately, as Freemasons we are in possession of criteria by which we can make intelligent, ethical judgments. To the extent that we do so, we are demonstrating a quality which is still another distinguishing mark of a Master Mason.

The Master Mason, more so than other men, must have a vital faith, a faith that transcends mere worldly knowledge, a faith born of the experience that when human strength and wisdom fail, divine assistance is a real and present resource. The life of any individual is immature until he comes to recognize and accept his own inadequacies and his own limitations. In some high moment of genuine humility he may discover the truth of that seeming paradox, to save one's life he first must lose it. Out of apparent defeat can come great victory. God is good. We must know Him and be His if our lives are to reflect the divine destiny inherent within each human spirit. Dynamic faith of this kind is a basic mark of a Master Mason.

It will already have been noted by many the repetition of the phrase, "The Master Mason, more so than other men, . . ." The meaning of this should be readily evident. The fraternity of Freemasonry accepts for membership only good men of high purpose. Let me say at this point, parenthetically but with emphasis, that if we fail in this respect we have failed in our obligations. The charge you know so well might properly be recalled to mind-namely, that you will refuse to recommend anyone to a participation in our privileges unless you have strong reasons to believe that by a similar fidelity he will ultimately reflect honor on our ancient Institution.

A year ago the Grand Orator of California Masonry's centennial year, in an extremely able address before this Grand Lodge, presented a challenge for the Master Masons of this jurisdiction to continue building well the Unfinished Temple. A strong foundation was laid and a fine superstructure erected in the first hundred years. It becomes our task now to provide the detail and ornamentation which will make this Temple not merely functional but truly beautiful. We can accomplish our mission only if we are strong in those qualities which we have discussed this morning. Are they in a significant measure characteristic of you?

Do you have an inquiring mind, a probing spirit, always seeking to extend your intellectual horizons?

Are you a skilled craftsman, ever proud of the contribution you can make to the world of work?

Are you accepted as an understanding friend, interested in and able to see in all men their true potential as members of the human family?

Do you exemplify the attributes of a good citizen, being one who knows and accepts the responsibilities attendant to your community's welfare?

Are you one whose integrity is such that your word is regarded as good as your bond?

Do your decisions reflect a high level of values in which considerations of prime import always come first?

Is yours a faith which gives to all life meaningful purpose and intelligent direction?

If these things are true, you are indeed proceeding in the ways of a Master Mason.

May this hour be one of solemn rededication to the task that should consume us all-that of building finer and nobler personality and character. To the end that all who know us may see in the work we do and in the lives we lead the true marks of a Master Mason, let us be guided by the thought of John Ruskin who once said-"When we build, let us think that we build forever. Let it not be for the present delight nor for present use alone. Let it be such work as our descendants will thank us for, and let us think as we lay stone on stone, that a time is to come when those stones will be held sacred because our hands have touched them, and that men will say as they look upon the labor and wrought substance of them-'See! This our Fathers did for us.'"