

**Grand Lodge
Free & Accepted Masons
Of California
Grand Oration 1952**

**Grand Orator
Ralph C. Hine
"A Time For Vision"**

Most Worshipful Sir-My Brethren All

The privilege of serving during this Grand Lodge year has proven to be, for me, a unique educational experience. While it has been necessary, as required, to do a great deal of talking, it has also afforded the opportunity to be a good listener. Out of this opportunity comes the challenge to picture for you the concern of the brethren of all ranks for the influence, or lack of it, which Masonry in general and individual Masons in particular have, or will have, during these troubled times. Two experiences, vivid in my memory, seemed to illustrate that ever-present concern. While these experiences occurred in particular localities, there can be little, if any, doubt that they could be duplicated under similar conditions in every community in this Grand Jurisdiction.

Last Memorial Day our Grand Master placed wreaths upon the graves of two Past Grand Masters. On that occasion the Lodges of the Community also remembered, in like manner, their deceased Past Masters. As we trod that path of memory, starting with the oldest, brief accounts were noted of their service to Masonry, the Community, the State and the Nation. It was a thrilling experience until we reached a period somewhere in the early thirties when it suddenly became apparent that, with a few exceptions, little more could be said than that they had been "good and true." Can it be possible that we have reached, even passed, the point where it is deemed sufficient for a Master Mason, particularly a Master or Past Master, just to be "good and true?"

On July 25th our Grand Master, after taking immediate steps to ascertain the personal needs of our brethren following the earthquake of the previous Monday, met with the Officers of our Lodges in Kern County to survey the material damage suffered by Lodge properties. The unity of thought, the universal expressions of eagerness to plan and promote mutual assistance was worthy of our highest traditions. Can it be possible that we have reached the point where it takes a disaster or a tragic emergency to bring out our latent capabilities?

Thoughtfully considering these experiences, in the light of the concern so often expressed, these questions posed themselves.

Have we forgotten our heritage?
Have we lost the vision?

Last year the Grand Orator of this Grand Lodge stressed the phrase "The Master Mason, more so than Other Men," and closed his address with these thought provoking words "SEE! THIS OUR FATHERS DID FOR US."

In the light of all this it seems that this address, devoted to matters appertaining to the Craft, should consider this our One Hundred Third Annual Communication, as a TIME FOR VISION.

The short period of time, starting this morning and ending Friday afternoon, should have a special meaning since it might well begin with the miracle of looking backward into the past and it must end with the uplift of looking forward to the future. Until now, really, we have lived our year largely in the present, rarely thinking back beyond yesterday, rarely farther ahead than tomorrow. Suddenly now, as by a special blessing, we can see other days in crystal clarity. We see again, how clearly, the faces that are gone and hear once more the sound of voices long since stilled. It is almost as though the old days were back, and the old scenes and the old hopes and presences, forming the framework of our heritage and our vision. As these days pass, our thoughts and actions might well be governed by what we should remember-there are so many things for us to remember.

Directing our vision backward to the past should we not remind ourselves, over and over again, that our Forefathers, men with the Spirit of Masonry in their hearts, brought forth on this continent a new Nation, "conceived in Liberty and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created Free and Equal." That these men guided by their memory of the past and their vision for the future build into the frame-work of the government of this new Nation three great Corner Stones which are the very essence of the Spirit of Masonry.

These Spirit of Masonry Corner Stones may be stated as follows:

That those who govern should receive their just powers with the consent of the governed.

That all men have the right to worship God in accordance with the dictates of their own conscience.

That free public education is a prime necessity for a people who are to remain free and equal.

We should further remind ourselves that other men with the Spirit of Masonry in their Hearts, carrying the Torch of this Vision, as pioneers, extended the frontiers of this new Nation westward, ever westward, until they spanned this great continent and were standing on the shores of the vast Pacific. Some of these pioneers carried warrants for Masonic Lodges in their hands as well as the Spirit of Masonry in their Hearts. They established Lodges wherever they settled, and so as Territorial and State Governments were erected, Grand Lodges came into being, thus giving assurance that the Spirit of Masonry would continually be impressed upon the minds and hearts of the coming generations of men, thus ensuring that the Torch of our Forefathers Vision would be forever held aloft and that they would guard and maintain the Foundation Walls of these great Corner Stones strong and secure.

We need but to look around us to be impressed by the almost miraculous development of this great Nation and this great State and to realize that we must be something more than just "good and true" if we are to impress the spirit of Masonry upon the minds and hearts of other men and encourage them to hold aloft and carry forward this Torch of Vision.

Our Brother Edwin Markham caught and projected this Vision when he wrote:

"We men of earth have here the stuff
Of paradise-we have enough!
We need no other thing to build
The stairs into the unfulfilled-
No other ivory for the doors-
No other marble for the floors-
No other cedar for the beam and dome of man's immortal
Al dream. Here on the paths of every day- here on the common human way-
Is all the busy gods would take
To build a heaven, to mold and make new edens. Ours the stuff sublime
To build eternity in time."

As we carry on our deliberations during the coming days it should be Vision as well as Reason which tells us that while all this is our heritage from the past, we are the custodians of the present and must be the builders, who examine, maintain and, as necessary, strengthen the Foundation Walls of these Spirit of Masonry Corner Stones that they may be projected into the future bright and vivid with opportunity and challenge for those who come after us.

While these Corner Stones, like all units of a Trinity, are co-equal in importance and, in the end, must be considered as one, it seems best to start with the one first mentioned.

That those who govern should receive their just powers with the consent of the governed.

Since we are, first of all, Freemen and then Freemasons, it may be well for us to examine the foundation wall of this Corner Stone in the light of our understanding of this thing called Freedom. The following, taken from a story by Clarence Buddington Kelland, is chosen as a basis for our consideration, and I quote:

"Freedom is that state of being in which a citizen is not conscious that he is being governed.

"There must be government and there must be laws. Great masses of men and women cannot live together without organization for the common good.

"That is Government.

"Great communities cannot exist if each individual does exactly what he wants to do. The whole must be protected against misconduct on the part of each of its members. Each must surrender to the whole some part of his right to do at all times whatever he may want to do. This willingness to forego the right to injure one another must be embodied in a set of accepted rules of conduct.

"These rules are the law.

"The instant that Government steps over the line and meddles with any right not ceded to it by the individual, there is an impairment of Freedom. The instant a rule is enacted and becomes a part of the body of the Law which forbids a citizen to do a thing which does not harm his neighbor, there is an impairment of Freedom. The instant a law is enacted which compels a citizen to do a thing which it is his natural right to refrain from doing, there is an impairment of Freedom.

"Freedom then, is a state of existence in which a citizen lives his life and carries on his affairs according to the dictates of his own conscience, limited only by the necessity that all citizens must be protected against depredations of any one citizen or group.

This seems clearly to express the Vision of our Forefathers when they builded this Corner Stone into the framework of constitutional government for the Nation, this State and this Grand Lodge. How well do we, as Masons, maintain the foundation wall of this Corner Stone?

The mounting complexities of our public, social and fraternal life has been such through the years that we have, of necessity, delegated some of our functions to appointed Boards, Commissions and Committees in violation of our traditions that formation of policy shall be delegated only to the hands of elected officials. While theoretically these committees, or whatever they may be, can only recommend, and their recommendations have no binding force, still they may strongly influence opinion, for it seems only natural to assume that they have fairly considered all of the evidence and reached impartial judgment. Too often, however, such bodies tend to overstep their prerogatives in their zeal to do what they consider good.

Since we should set the example, as well as just be "good and true," we can best maintain and strengthen the foundation wall of this Corner Stone by being very sure, during our deliberations, that this ever increasing philosophy of government does not influence the law making process by which we, as Masons, govern ourselves.

As we approach consideration of the second of these Corner Stones we should walk softly, yet proudly, for it is the very stone of foundation of the Spirit of Masonry.

That all men have the right to worship God in accordance with the dictates of their own conscience.

When our Forefathers, who were devoutly religious, God fearing men, builded this Corner Stone into the framework of our constitutional government, they did so as evidence of their distrust of the organized religions, occasioned by their bitter experiences in both the new and the old world. Their basic concept was not only complete separation of Church and State, that there should be no State Religion, but as well, that men should, as a matter of right, be allowed to worship, or not, as they saw fit.

Masonry's concept has always been, always must be, that some where in the foundation of all organizations, public or private, which are worthy to survive, will be found a mythical stone upon which, graven there by the faith of its members, will be found the symbol, or the name, of the Great Architect of the Universe. We need but to review, and to remember, the ritualistic teachings of this Fraternity to realize that this Stone of Foundation is present in all Masonic Lodges and through them all Grand Lodges.

Here too, we must set the example as well as just be "good and true." We can best do this by demonstrating in our lives and actions the fact that while Masonry is indeed deeply religious, it is not, and does not profess to be, a religion. Remembering, at all times and in all places, that only these indispensable questions, concerning religion, are ever asked in Masonry.

Do you believe in God and a future existence?

In whom do you put your trust?

To maintain and strengthen the foundation wall of this Corner Stone should be our never-ending aim for which reason, it should be, and it must be, our constant effort.

Since it may well be the means by which we are enabled to retain all three, the last mentioned Corner Stone might be the greatest of all.

That free public education is a prime necessity for a people who are to remain free and equal.

Are we sufficiently aware of the development of a dual system of education in this country which is contrary to the founding principle of this Corner Stone which contemplated a single public school system which would serve all creeds?

There are actually three school systems: the public schools, which carry out the original intention; parochial church schools, which emphasize a particular creed; and private schools, which emphasize economic or social distinction. As a greater proportion of our youth are encouraged to attend nonpublic schools, private or parochial, the greater the threat to our democratic unity and principles.

Therefore, the danger in allowing the ever-increasing criticism of our public school system to go unchallenged. We must, it seem, so familiarize ourselves with its Officials, its Teachers and their methods, its courses and their aims, that we can as Citizens, as well as Masons, challenge at any time and under any conditions hostile critics of our public school system and make them "show their colors."

Therefore, we should unalterably oppose the diversion of tax funds, by direct or indirect means, for the support of nonpublic schools, private or parochial, since their major use would ultimately be to extend their scope and facilities and thus help them to undermine and eventually destroy the free public school.

Under the direction of this Grand Lodge we have, over the years, a proud record of support of our public school system through the observance of public school week. However, the time has come when it is not enough to pay lip service to this great founding principle one week a year. We must as individuals stand up and be counted, every day in the year, especially during the days immediately ahead.

To examine, maintain and strengthen the foundation wall of this Corner Stone is a vital necessity for, in the final analysis, the Free Public School and the Masonic Fraternity are dedicated to a common objective. That of teaching people HOW to think instead of WHAT to think.

Our Vision, turning to the future, must now tell us that these Corner Stones are in fact the Spirit of Masonry and that they must be considered as one, for should any one of them be allowed to fail, those which remain could no longer sustain the proud structures which they support.

Our vision might be stimulated by remembering the first stanza of an old, old hymn:

ONCE TO EVERY MAN AND NATION, COMES THE MOMENT TO DECIDE, IN THE STRIFE OF TRUTH AND FALSEHOOD, FOR THE GOOD OR EVIL SIDE;

SOME GREAT CAUSE, GOD'S NEW MESSIAH, OFFERING EACH THE BLOOM OR BLIGHT, AND THE CHOICE IS GONE FOREVER, TWIXT THAT DARKNESS AND THAT LIGHT.

Now it should be vision which tells us that when we examine the foundation walls of these Spirit of Masonry Corner Stones we are examining OURSELVES, for WE are the LIVING STONES in these foundation walls which need to be maintained, and, as need be strengthened, if the principles which they represent are to be projected into the future bright and vivid with opportunity and challenge for those who come after us.

It should be vision which tells us that we must not be satisfied to just be "good and true" if we are to be found worthy to impress the Spirit of Masonry upon the minds and hearts of those with whom we come in contact, especially those who approach our doors in search of Light and Truth.

Therefore, this challenge, again in the words of our Brother Edwin Markham:

THERE'S A STONE THAT IS NEEDED FOR THE WALL
A MARBLE TO HEIGHTEN THE BEAUTY OF ALL,

ONLY YOUR SOUL HAS THE MAGIC TO GIVE IT GRACE,
ONLY YOUR HANDS THE CUNNING TO PUT IT IN PLACE.

YES, THE TASK THAT IS GIVEN TO ALL, NO OTHER CAN DO,
SO THE ERRAND IS WAITING, IT HAS WAITED FOR CENTURIES FOR YOU,
NOW YOU APPEAR, AND THE HUSHED ONES ARE TURNING THEIR GAZE,
TO SEE WHAT YOU DO WITH YOUR CHANCE IN THE CHAMBER OF DAYS.

Finally My Brethren, we, as the living stones in the foundation walls of these Spirit of Masonry
Corner Stones, have it within our power to compel recorded history to change the closing lines of
that poem to read:

THEN WE APPEARED, AND THE HUSHED ONES NODDED THEIR PRAISE,
AT WHAT WE DID WITH OUR CHANCE IN THE CHAMBER OF DAYS.