

**Grand Lodge
Free & Accepted Masons
Of California
Grand Oration 1955**

**Grand Orator
Milton D. Sapiro
“We Are Free”**

Most Worshipful Grand Master, and Past Grand Masters, Officers and Brethren of the Grand Lodge of California, and Distinguished Masonic Guests

Once more we are privileged to assemble in our Annual Communication. We gather here from the many sections of this glorious state so that we might continue to consult concerning the welfare of our institution, its members and our people, for surely no official gathering of Masons can ever take place that shall not reflect a concern for the whole of the people with whom we live.

Our Most Worthy Grand Master and Grand Secretary and others have presented their reports on the state of the Craft and these records will portray a healthy, sound, growing organization. They will demonstrate the strength of our body in numbers and in material worth and we in our Communication will want to absorb those facts and analyze and weigh them so that we may determine how to use the power that such a force can generate in the lives of our community.

As one journeys from one end of this state to the other observing the operations of our brethren in its variety of communities, one receives a tremendous impression of the reserves of manpower and of the formidable volume of energy stored in its Lodges and of the flood of influence represented in our various units. At constitutions and institution of Lodges, laying of cornerstones, dedications, receptions, and various types of ceremonies which we have attended there has been manifested the human strengths that make this Craft strong and that have made it live. Here, of course, in our Annual Communication, we witness the most expressive demonstration as to the type of men who constitute its leadership, drawn from the great mass of our membership, representative of all fields of endeavor and endowed with what should be a thirst and eagerness to declare their attachment for the ideals and truths that have brought this institution down through the ages until now when it attains the support of the greatest number ever known in the centuries of its existence.

Never before have so many men been a part of this Ancient Order, although you and I must well recognize that it is not by mere numbers alone that we will measure its advance or that it will thrive and continue to be. The quantity of members alone did not keep alive those Ancient Charges which have been characteristic of Freemasonry. Even when the adherents of Freemasonry were few, even when they clung together in small groups, harassed by dictators, spiritual and temporal, Masonic truths stirred them and caused them to draw other men to them and so enabled them to pass from generation to generation those everlasting truths. Ever has been their loyalty to God, their dedication to honorable conduct, their exemplification of moral and temperate habits, and their respect for the secrets of a brother and the constant regard for his welfare.

As we hold our Annual Communication we again remind ourselves of the history of Masonry and think of its ancient origin and accomplishments. We remember the founding of the Grand Lodge organization as we know it today, from its English beginnings in 1717. We know of the earlier ancient German stonemasons and the French guilds, which practiced an observance of the same tenets and truths we accept today: and we learn that even farther back in the deep past, delving into the mysteries of ancient religions that have stirred the thinking of mankind, there is evidence of the physical designs and the moral teachings by which we continue to conduct our affairs. These matters can all bear repetition for if we are to be loyal to our present day designation of Freemasons, the truths taught in these ancient forms and that have survived must be a complete part of our makeup and they must ever be present to guide us and those Master Masons who serve with us. They can only be understood by a constant attention to them. In each

of our Annual Communications we must ever renew our faith in our destiny as Freemasons, as we again dedicate ourselves to its noble purposes.

We meet here in the character of Masons, but we must always remember that we meet not merely as Masons but as Freemasons, for as the world has shaped its affairs in our generation that word "free" has become our most precious symbol. If it were not for the spirit it represents, we would be just another fraternal organization, but with if we establish ourselves as active faithful descendants of an ancient and honorable family, dedicated to those tenets of brotherly love and truth for which the term "free" itself has become the motive, and which exist in their highest form only when men are free.

It was once believed that the term "Freemason" referred to a Mason who worked with freestone, but that idea was soon discarded. It became evident that the term characterized those operative Masons who comprised the guilds and companies of Masons that were bold enough to exercise a freedom of movement, a freedom of artistic design and thought even in the Middle and Dark Ages when such activity was vigorously discouraged-even then there existed men who would not permit their feet to be fettered, their souls to be made captive, their minds to be subjugated. Somehow these men contrived to secure unusual freedom in days when the ability to secure an education and increase one's knowledge was limited to a small select group; in days when independent thinking was regarded as evil and as a crime against the ruling dominant force; in the days when men of science were punished for searching out the truths of our existence and were compelled under the torture of the rack to recant what their scientific research had taught. In those days the minds of men were subject to strictures so that their thinking as well as their art had to follow narrow setout trails, or be deemed blasphemous; even in those days men gained courage together to break away from some of the restrictions and in their groupings were denominated

"free" to mark the development of their aspirations and the enlarging scope of their activities and considerations.

Then, as Freemasonry developed in the form in which we now know it, a product of an organized and soundly constituted institution, the term "free" persisted to have meaning and give life to our order. Where its Lodges existed and men met at its altars and under its signs, we found inspiration for human progress and advance. Under the quickening influence of its simple truths, men yearned for the opportunity for human freedom. In nations where Masonic lodges prospered, chains of tyranny were stricken and people as such began to enjoy the great opportunities that mark freedom. If we undertake to study those other countries where human beings most enjoy the advantages of democracy, such as England, France, and the Scandinavian groups, we will find that those who matured at Masonic altars were in the foreground of all those movements that advanced the course of and fixed the rights of Freemen. Even today in many countries where a type of dictatorship dominates the lives and seeks to control the minds of its citizens, we will find that Masonic institutions are still guarding the treasures of freedom and preparing the minds and hearts of men for self-government when they shall be free. These Lodges encourage their members, even under bitterly adverse conditions, as men of courage to stand firm and fast and prepare themselves for that day when the rights of freemen shall obtain on the soil of their land.

This freedom for men in which we believe and which we in this generation and nation take for granted, is threatened in all parts of our globe. So we who proclaim ourselves free had better talk of freedom so that we may understand it and so that we may live it and have the courage to preserve it.

Let us consider our being free as we enjoy it here in these United States, where men have attained heights of freedom which the early great philosophers pictured only as a literary utopia and the average man never contemplated in the history of the human race. I doubt whether even the Founding Fathers of this nation, except in their most imaginative dreams, could have foreseen that such a vast nation of people would enjoy the type of independence and civil liberty that we enjoy, that has taken us out of economic slavery, has given all the opportunity for being freed from the depression of ignorance, and that has freed us from so many of the ills and inconveniences that have plagued mankind over the centuries. Those early Americans lived in the days when human slavery was a part of their economic system. For so many years and in all states, property and other voting qualifications prevailed before one could vote as a citizen. Universal suffrage was unknown and we remember that it is just in our present century that

woman has received the right to vote. We find conditions and restraints that formerly restricted length of life and the scope of life have been changed and lifted as we developed and advanced our freedoms.

As one of the attributes of being free, let us not forget that we have been and are free to venture. Even now we live in an age when the opportunities offered to men are still unlimited. Look at the many obscure secrets that have been made known to man during our own lifetime. Today with the advantages for education that have been made available and with the spirit of research that has taken hold of our generation, it would seem that many of the mysteries of the universe and the unknown factors of life will become an open book for us, to be used for man's benefit and progress.

In the Book of Proverbs, there appears this quote:

"There be three things which are too wonderful for me, yea,
four which I know not
The way of an eagle in the air
The way of a serpent upon a rock
The way of a ship in the midst of the sea
And the way of a man with a maid."

How would the writer of that verse express himself if he were living in this world of today? Certainly he would know how, through the study of the eagle and other birds, man has gained knowledge of the laws of flight so that man soars to heights even beyond the eagle's reach and at speeds that would leave an eagle far behind. Now we even seriously discuss interplanetary travel and space satellites are already on the planning board.

And then that writer would be surprised to learn of all that we know of natural history and the ways and habits of serpents and other wild life, so that much has come to our attention and knowledge as to their living. Yet still there are so many things we do not know and much remains for us to discover. For instance, we know not why the birds of the air and the fish in the sea in an unsolved phenomenon return to breed and spawn in the same spots year after year: and many other subjects are there for us to learn.

That writer would find that the ways of a ship at sea are somewhat within our understanding too and that we even stabilize some of its actions. At the same time he would find that nature still controls many situations and occasionally to illustrate this goes on a rampage and sends forth what we describe as one of its daughters to play around, and then wreaks havoc-as to which we do not yet have the answer. We know how puny man seems when nature starts out to shake or ravage this earth and vents its wrath upon that which man has erected. Yet man is ever trying to find out how and why and understand what produces these natural disturbances; to ascertain why the earth quakes and shakes and to learn how we may build to avoid destruction, to control flood and in other ways to live within the exercise of nature's powers.

Man has split the atom and has seemed to reverse the processes of nature, It was not so many centuries ago that such an accomplishment would have brought about charges of witchcraft and all concerned with such an activity would have been condemned. Today we encourage man to acquire that knowledge, for we realize that the strength and power possessed by natural forces should, if possible, be harnessed and made available for the beneficial use of mankind; and such is being done.

Lastly, that writer spoke of the way of a man with a maid as one of the things of which he knows not. This still seems in the realm of the inscrutable. Yet, with the advances made in the field of psychology, psychiatry and related sciences of human behavior, can we hold those matters to be entirely beyond the scope of human discovery? When we consider how much has been developed by research and inquiry as to the reactions which concern and affect human nature and human relationships and the better understanding of the motives and pressures that impel human conduct and move us into action, it would seem that even the last of the things unknown to that Biblical author will in many respects become available for our comprehension and better living. This is no simple task and there will still be many of the mysteries that surround creation and existence that will remain for us to ponder on the way in which the Supreme Architect of the universe works his wonders for us to behold.

The world however moves forward as we keep open the door of opportunity for clear, untrammled thinking, as we remove all fetters that would bind the human mind, as we permit it to look forward and backward without restraint and without requiring it to peep through colored glasses and permit it with boldness to discover and discern the truth. This will produce material advances but we must be continuously aware that these material achievements can be of real service to man only as we recognize the spiritual values they must indicate and preserve.

The spirit of the pioneer, that spirit which caused men and women to stride forth courageously over our Western plains, facing perils known and unknown but with a firm determination to establish a home for themselves and their families at whatever cost, must be permitted to continue to pervade our lives and drive us on with like courage and eagerness to meet the problems that this advancing age presents to us, especially as it concerns our relations with our fellowmen.

This is the field of endeavor in which we as Freemasons are particularly designed to carry on as we are free to serve, and do for and respect our fellow men. Never has Masonry existed for itself alone, nor has an individual Mason, true to its teachings, existed for himself alone. This cannot be, for our strongest virtue is in our dedication to brotherhood and every move we make in our fraternal association is intimately bound with the good it should bring about for each individual and his neighbor.

Scan the history of our institution and you will find that it has oppressed no man. It has compelled no man to enter its Lodges. To it inquisition and persecution have been abhorrent. Our concern has been to assist and forward human welfare and build through those humanitarian efforts that give men strength, peace, harmony and dignity. This we have been able to do as we served our fellowmen because we were Freemen and Freemasons. We have accepted as the crowning glory of God's handiwork a virtuous, law-abiding, right-thinking and acting man.

At our altars we have welcomed men of every creed. We have respected the thinking of every man. We ask only that he believe in God, but we do not dictate to him the road to pursue as he approaches the worship of his God. He shares with us our philosophies, our teachings, our fellowship and companionship, and this constitutes no interference with the mode of worship he has chosen.

This is the tolerance of which we so proudly boast. Not tolerance in the sense of a gracious acceptance of the other man's difference, but tolerance in the sense of the understanding of the equal rights which every man possesses to follow the religious creed of his choice. This is the kind of relationship that is clear and free from every bigotry and prejudice and should characterize the fellowship of all men. This is the kind of religious freedom Freemasons wrote into the Constitution of the United States. We know that man is capable of hating and having and maintaining prejudice and discrimination, but not so a Mason. Our freedom to think and our association one with the other must have taught us that we necessarily judge each man by his individual worth and merit and weigh by exact and similar standards: and if we fail to do so then we have missed entirely the spirit of the words we utter at our Lodge altars and have failed entirely to absorb the lessons of our Masonic teachings.

This is so important to remember in days like these when contact between many peoples has become such a simple everyday fact. We meet with persons from all over the globe. Many of them even set their goal of life to be found in this, our own nation. Many will apply to our Lodges for admission. Are we going to continue to judge them by what they are or are we going to look to and check their religious background and the creed they follow to see if they conform? And are we going to set up some other artificial test? If we do that, we make our words as we pledge anyone to ourselves, a sham and a deceit. Hypocrisy in our life we must avoid, for such false pretense has contributed so much to the world's difficulties. So we must from time to time examine into our own souls deeply in order that we may determine and know how Masonry has fashioned our lives. What would you have done if a Dr. Sammy Lee, that stalwart patriotic American officer and athlete of Korean descent, had sought to purchase a house in the tract where you live? Would you have been true to the Masonic ideals you profess, judging him by the standards symbolized by our Masonic tools, or would you have permitted your judgment to be swayed by a mean, petty bias and prejudice that characterize the narrow minded or the demagogue, who seeks to divide men so that he might climb to power on the hate he can engender? This problem becomes more and more real to us as the world's distances are

lessened and barriers between people are destroyed by reason of the ease of communication and travel and of association with each other. Will we not exercise our freedom of being together with full appreciation of the high respect we must have for our fellow men, whose conduct and character call for that respect; and will we not judge them by the same standards we judge ourselves? Doing this has made our truths living truths and has contributed to keeping our institution alive and active throughout the ages. Doing this, we bring about in our own lives and in our Lodges a solid exemplification of the spirit of brotherhood and the foundation of our order is strengthened for continued existence and service.

What we teach in Masonry can only be of value as we make it a part of our personal everyday life. This has been so thoroughly emphasized in the history of this, our own nation, and is being illustrated constantly in our daily civil existence. From the very beginning of the national aspirations of the United States, Freemasons have played a most important part in shaping its destiny. From the teachings in their Lodge rooms they obtained a reverent respect for the rights of human beings and a yearning and regard for freedom. Fortified by that which had been inculcated in them in Masonic meetings, they were the leaders in the effort to advance the general welfare and lift the weight of royal oppression from the shoulders of our people. When it became necessary to set up a new nation to obtain and assure freedom, they had the fortitude to be the leaders in that movement. Many of the signers of the Declaration of Independence were of our Fraternity, and for its support pledged their lives, their fortunes and their sacred honor. We know well their activities in defense of this newborn nation and how, with unstinted courage from Washington down, they contributed so much to the successful formation of these United States. They acted as individuals, but they were stimulated by what they had absorbed from their Masonic affiliations. History has revealed what George Washington thought of his Masonic institution-and how he recognized and wrote of its liberal principles, founded on the immutable laws of truth and justice and whose object was to promote the happiness of the human race-so that, under the influence of such ideals, it is understandable how he took the position he did when freedom was at stake. He reflected in his life the effect of Masonic teachings. He, of course, did not stand alone as a member of the Fraternity. So many of our brethren participated with him that the history of this nation is graced in many volumes with the lives of those affiliated with us. It might well be said that American freedom would never have been attained without the leadership of our fraternal brethren.

Those of us who are familiar with the development of law in this nation and particularly that law which shaped and outlined the paths that our new nation should follow into strength after the Constitution had been adopted, know that John Marshall, Chief Justice of the United States Supreme Court for some 34 years, a Past Grand Master of Virginia, was responsible for giving us our present day conception of national unity. Incidentally, this year is the 200th anniversary of his birth and the American Bar Association dedicated its annual meeting to that great American judicial leader, our brother Freemason who charted the course of our national strength and destiny in the courts. He made his Freemasonry a living force in his life and expressed its everlasting principles in his decisions. And again making history on that court with his noble grasp and concept of human relationships is a Past Grand Master of California, the present Chief Justice, Earl Warren.

All of these men who brought this nation into being and helped carry it on truly represented the highest values in their Masonic indoctrination. They must be driving and exhilarating examples for us. Freedom is not something that, once obtained, will be ours just because we had it. Can any words be more apt and especially today than those of Washington when he said "eternal vigilance is the price of liberty"? We are free to maintain our political liberty and it is important to us as Freemasons that we do so, for it is in such an atmosphere that Masonry best flourishes and works and develops its program for the good of all. We know well that our institution as such takes no part in the political activities of the nation; but it certainly must serve to inspire the individual member to an active participation, in the life of the nation, to an acceptance of responsibility for the protection of the nation and to all necessary activity for a realization of its ideals, guided as were its Masonic founders by the principles and philosophies of life developed through our Masonic association.

Let us not ever forget that if we become indolent or careless or casual or in any way weaken our will to maintain those freedoms, they may become lost to us. Once we assume any

such attitude we become unfit for liberty and are not likely to enjoy the liberty and freedom we possess. Certainly you cannot be unaware of the fact that there are those in these United States who would gladly assume the role of dictators. This is not only confined to those who stupidly believe that life might be enriched or that they themselves might enjoy power if they allied themselves with such a cause as Communism. There are others also who would deride the American freedoms as established by our American forebears and set forth in our Bill of Rights and would gladly hand this nation over to themselves or to institutions to whom and to which the term freedom is an unknown factor. Let us not forget the lessons of history in our own lives. We have seen nations, presumably enlightened and civilized, revert to barbarism and savagery in a few short years and destroy all freedoms among their people including the right to be in Freemasonry. In those nations people were not alert to what was happening about them. We must remember that lesson and be alert to protect our freedoms. So we must take out into our daily life every virtue that Masonry extols. We cannot leave this concern for freedom to others but we as individual citizens must be the leaders in every facet of life of the community and the nation.

Our President, Dwight Eisenhower, in a speech last January, outlined the faith of an American which should guide us as members of this Fraternity because he expressed the truths upon which we stand. He said that Americans must have great fundamental belief in our national life, our common belief that every human being is divinely endowed with dignity and inalienable rights-this faith with its corollary -that to grow and flourish people must be free, shapes the interest and aspiration of every American. He declared that we must maintain justice and freedom among ourselves and champion them for others so that we can work effectively for enduring peace.

Those words might almost have been taken out of Masonic ritual for they so well express Masonic aspirations. As a student of American history, which he is, the President has imbibed the spirit of Washington and Franklin and those whom we admire for their courage and valor in putting these aspirations into effect.

Let us here at this Annual Communication, take renewed faith in the preachments of Masonry, so that we can contrive as workers in the field of Freemasonry to serve our brothers and our nation in the continued maintenance of freedom. Let our faith and pride in our order and its history and its traditions place us in the forefront of those citizens who are to be found strengthening the foundations of our freedom and defending them as against those who would undermine such foundations. Let us not be found on the sidelines criticizing and doing nothing, but let us be out there where the battle wages doing our part. Keep in mind those fighting words of that enthusiastic American Freemason and patriot, President Theodore Roosevelt, when he said:

"It is not the critic who counts; not the man who points out how the strong man stumbled or where the doer of deeds could have done them better. The credit belongs to the man who is actually in the arena; whose face is marred by dust and sweat and blood; who strives valiantly; who errs and comes short again and again, because there is no effort without error and shortcoming; who does actually try to do the deed; who knows the great enthusiasms, the great devotions, spends himself in a worthy cause; who at the best, knows in the end the triumph of high achievement, and who, at the worst, if he fails, at least fails while daring greatly, so that his place shall never be with those cold and timid souls who know neither victory nor defeat."

While we are at this Communication and when we depart for our homes, as members of this Fraternity, to which we have given our time and devotion, let us remember that it is our individual responsibility to see that we remain free. Let us each work so that we will realize and continue forever to realize in the life of this great nation its promise of freedom. If we do that by our participation as individual citizens, then we know that the purpose of our institution will have been attained and we will have supplied the fuel, the power and the motive force by which it should survive through the ages to come.

Freedom is but another name for virtue. Let us gain here that wisdom which can strengthen us to maintain freedom and exemplify the highest virtues of men. Our Masonry teaches us the wisdom of living with our fellow men in peace and harmony; and Freemasonry

because of its international scope may be the means by which we can better assist in bringing about peace between peoples and nations. At least we can set such an example of living here that its influence will unquestionably spread and mankind generally will perceive its benefits and through what you as individual Freemasons do will come to know, realize and cherish the values that are represented by the term Freemason as they have been guarded, preserved and transmitted through the centuries.

The future we face seems to offer so much of enlightenment and enjoyment in the lives of our people, but only as we practice the virtues we teach. Let us then by our renewed faith in ourselves and our Freemasonry so vividly demonstrate in our own everyday existence that loyalty to God, that dedication to the principles of freedom, that concern for the welfare of our fellow men that is so essential, that not only we ourselves by our devotion to these virtues, but generations to come, may proudly and happily continue to proclaim "we are free."