

**Grand Lodge
Free & Accepted Masons
Of California
Grand Oration 1956**

**Grand Orator
Wakefield Taylor
“FRANKLIN'S LIFE, A LESSON TO MASONS”**

As your Grand Orator, during the past year it has been my privilege to give short addresses at the constitution of new lodges and the laying of cornerstones and dedications of lodge temples and public schools throughout the state. I have also attended and enjoyed many receptions given for our Grand Master.

These experiences have been a true inspiration to me. The constitution of more new lodges this year than in any year since 1923 is evidence of the growth and renewed enthusiasm of Masonry in California. The construction of so many beautiful Masonic temples indicates a love for the fraternity and a rededication to the ideals of Masonry. In some instances these temples have resulted in large part from the unselfish practice of operative masonry by the brethren themselves. The surprisingly numerous school cornerstones and dedication ceremonies show good public relations and that the people generally are now aware of the tremendous support our free public school system is receiving from the Lodge. Not least among the pleasures of this year has been the privilege of witnessing the magnificent work performed by the Grand Master, and his warm and affectionate reception by the brethren throughout the state. Blessed with the ability to impart in a direct and meaningful way his qualities of spiritual faith and gentility, he has made a profound and lasting contribution to Masonry in California. It has been a great honor to serve with him.

The purpose of a grand oration is to impart a message of value to the brethren. This I prefer to attempt by the accepted Masonic method of precept and example. This year, the entire world is making note of the 250th birthday of Brother Benjamin Franklin, Grand Master of Masons of Pennsylvania, great Mason and true American. This, together with the fact that we are meeting in Constitution month, makes it particularly appropriate to point up some characteristics of this great man which might be guideposts to our own lives in Masonry.

There are many who will strongly contend that between the time of Leonardo Da Vinci and the present day, there has never lived a genius of such diversity of interest and accomplishment as Benjamin Franklin. A summary of the cold record will disclose that he was born in Boston in 1706, the son of a poor candle maker; that he was the 15th child of a family of 17; that he left home at the age of 17, and arrived in Philadelphia with three pennies in his pocket; that due to inherent wisdom and hard work he became a successful publisher, and had amassed a considerable fortune at the age of 44; that the remainder of his life (over 40 years) was devoted exclusively to the services of his fellowmen.

Franklin's gifts to his community and to the nation were so great in number and variety, it is impossible to list them all. He gave us the wise and practical philosophy of Poor Richard's Almanac, and our first circulating library. His scientific experiments, particularly in the field of electricity, were hailed the world over. He founded the first American fire insurance company, reformed the police and fire departments of Philadelphia, and organized the first American hospital. He planned and helped establish the University of Pennsylvania, and instituted the American Philosophical Society. He formed the first society in America for (he abolition of slavery). He reorganized the postal system. Outstanding though these accomplishments may seem, his greatest contributions, as we all know, were in the field of diplomacy and statesmanship. He was the only man Who signed all four important documents. The Declaration of Independence, The Treaty of Alliance With France, The Treaty of Peace, and the Constitution of the United States.

Franklin's Masonic career was no less impressive. In 1731 he became a member of St. John's Lodge in Philadelphia, in 1732 he drafted a set of by-laws for his Lodge, in 1732 he was elected Junior Grand Warden, and in 1734. at the age of 28, Grand Master of Pennsylvania. In August of 1734 he published the first Masonic book printed in America. There is good reason to believe that as Grand Master, he laid the cornerstone of Independence Hall. In 1776 he affiliated

with Masonic Lodges in France. He assisted at the initiation of Voltaire, and officiated at his Masonic funeral services. Over a period of 60 years he held numerous high Masonic offices and led an extremely active Masonic life upon which I have barely touched.

It is not my purpose today to attempt a biography of this many-sided man. I am merely citing him as a great man, whose life stands as a practical application of so many Masonic principles. The course he charted in his day for meeting important issues we still must face, can be a forceful and effective example today.

In Franklin's day, the education of the people was a real problem, as it is today. Franklin, in all his wisdom, realized that government by the people could not endure or be a blessing unless the people were sufficiently enlightened to shoulder the responsibility. In a letter to Samuel Johnson written August 23, 1750, Franklin said, "Nothing is of more importance for the public weal than to form and train up youth in wisdom and in virtue. Wise and good men are, in my opinion, the strength of a state; far more so than riches or arms, which under the management of ignorance and wickedness, often draw on destruction instead of providing for the safety of the people."

Nor did Franklin limit his action to words alone. As I stated, he planned and helped to establish two great institutions of higher learning, and led the charitable movement sponsored by freemasons to establish free schools throughout the province of Pennsylvania.

The problem of free public education is, of course, still with us today. and has become an increasingly important part of our Masonic program. In the public schools, we Masons envisage the great training ground of our democracy. Here students from homes representing all races, religions, political beliefs, and economic levels rub shoulders and learn to live with one another in harmony, as we must in our adult life. Here they learn to be tolerant of the other fellow's convictions, and to be understanding and sympathetic toward his problems. Here children study the basic freedoms guaranteed by the Constitution. They learn the true meaning of Democracy and how to make its processes function. Here youngsters are inspired to patriotism by an appreciation of the founding fathers and the great American heritage.

Yes, we want our public schools to be places where inquiry and exploration are encouraged; where teachers are not inhibited by ancient tradition or by present fancy, but are academically free to test new ideas and to open up the unbounded vistas of the future; where students are free to ask of the propositions expounded, "Are these things true, and, if so, what is their significance in the general pattern of life?" The purpose of free education should be to stimulate an insatiable hunger for knowledge and a lifelong dedication to the pursuit of truth.

We Masons recognize, as Franklin did in his day, that this type of education is an absolute requirement, if our free form of government is to continue and flourish. Human progress occurs only in an atmosphere of liberty of mind and conscience; stagnation is the handmaiden of superstition and controlled thought.

Yet, with all of these basic truths before us, are we, as Masons and Americans, doing our part to foster our free public schools? When some immediate issue is called to our attention, we defend our schools from unwarranted criticism, or express ourselves on legislation. This is good and is to be encouraged. But are we also following Franklin's example, and doing something by way of a constructive contribution? Free institutions are under constant surveillance by those opposed to them. A weakness in the system is an invitation to attack. The real question is "What are we doing to continuously strengthen and improve our schools, to raise them above petty criticism, thus to stand respected by the community and desired by all parents?"

We cannot honestly deny that our public school system today has many marked deficiencies. For years in densely populated sections of the country we have had seriously inadequate school housing. In many places in California students are victims of double or treble sessions. Of even greater concern is the shortage of good teachers. This is due primarily to insufficient salaries and to a failure to accord to this, the mother of all professions, the public standing and dignity it so richly deserves. As President Eisenhower recently said, Good teachers do not just happen. They are the product of the highest personal motivation. But an enterprising young man of today is naturally able to give to his family the basic material comforts and the advantages of higher learning. He thus becomes reluctant to enter the field of education. Yet in no other field is it so important to have people of unquestioned ability, and

intellectual and moral integrity, for here we are dealing with all our hopes for the future of this great nation.

Yes, if the incomparable Franklin were alive today he might ask these questions: Are we in the front lines on much needed school bond issues and tax rate elections, not as mere voters but as sponsors. Are we willing to assume our share of the financial obligation which adequate teachers' salaries and school facilities require? Are we giving of our time as school trustees, or on the numerous committees appointed in each community to solve school problems? Are we as parents and good citizens giving every encouragement to those upon whose shoulders fall the sacred task of educating our youngsters, and thus of perpetuating our beloved country?

Benjamin Franklin's life warns us against hasty and thoughtless action, but, at the same time, exemplifies firmness and unflinching courage in the face of tyranny and the threatened extinction of the light of freedom. This wise and thoughtful man practiced, in the most trying of circumstances, the conservatism which Masonry has always recognized as a virtue. Thus when the colonies became increasingly restive toward Great Britain, Franklin was sent to England, and remained there over a period of almost 18 years in an attempt to work out a modus vivendi. He was successful in having the Stamp Act repealed, though he could not avert war. However, once the die was cast, there was never any question where he stood.

Herein lies a lesson to us all. We as Masons should not be conservative the sense of being lulled into a belief that we have reached the millennium in human progress. Such an attitude presages regression. The mind of Franklin was ever open to suggestion and constantly sought new avenues of progress, both in science and in the field of human relations. Yet Franklin had a wholesome respect for the lessons and contributions of the past and the advantages of the present. Before recommending any future radical action he encouraged the exploration of every peaceful and conservative approach to the burning issues of the day. He cautioned for patience and thoughtful action. He was fully aware of the great harm to humanity that can come from the unseasonable and unreasonable conduct of men.

The validity of Franklin's policy in this respect has been forcefully illustrated within our own century. We have seen Russia in its transition from autocracy, swept by a relatively small group of violent men, into a ruthless, inhumane and soulless dictatorship.

In this fast moving era, we are constantly confronted with important issues, both in our personal lives, and as a nation. For example, today we are witnessing a crisis in the political, social and economic life of the Southern states. The issue cuts deep and feelings run strong, in this great segment of our country. We should all pray that restraint and reason will rule the day, and that the necessary transition in the lives of the people will take place without giving way to racial hatred, bigotry, emotionalism, and violence. May the conservatism and patience of Benjamin Franklin be practiced by those upon whose shoulders fall the solution of this modern national problem.

In our own individual actions toward our fellowmen, we also should practice those great Masonic virtues of patience and temperance. We should make a real effort to reason out our differences and arrive at a common ground of agreement. But, like Franklin, we must recognize that where the sacred guarantees of human liberties are endangered, there can be no compromise, but only determined and courageous opposition.

Franklin's religious convictions have been a matter of historical argument. There is no doubt that he had a firm belief in a benign God. His active life in Masonry and his many written references bear witness to this fact. Being a thinker and a scientist with a realization of the magnitude of the universe and the orderliness of its operation, he could not conclude otherwise. As he grew older, he was at least impressed with the goodness of true Christians and the virtues of the Christian faith.

The great contribution he made to the religion of this country was his insistence, with other great Masons of his day, that freedom of religion be guaranteed in the constitution to all people. His magnanimous mind despised religious bigotry, fear and superstition wherever he found it. As a youth in Boston, he, with his brother, attacked fervently and effectively the witch burning tactics of Cotton Mather. As an aged diplomat in France, he gave comfort and encouragement to the great Voltaire in his exposition of ecclesiastical abuses.

Franklin's insistence on prayer at the Constitutional Convention is evidence of his humility and his belief that religious and moral values are indispensable to our national life. He realized

that regardless of how technically perfect any governmental machinery may be, it cannot bring peace and happiness to the people unless it stands on a foundation of religious worship and conformity to high moral standards. This is true of the Constitution of the United States, and it is likewise true of the Constitution of the United Nations. No set of man-made laws, regardless of how thoughtfully conceived, can obviate the long and arduous task of inculcating in the individual a devotion to Almighty God, together with a power and willingness to distinguish between right and wrong in dealing with his fellowmen.

As Roscoe Pound, Dean Emeritus of the Harvard Law School has said, and I quote, "World wide, respecting every honest creed, but requiring obedience to none—Masonry finds its sphere in helping to maintain and develop the moral order. While it reminds us of our natural duties to ourselves, and the duties we owe our country as the embodiment of the social order, it insists above and beyond all these, upon our duties to our neighbors and to God through which alone the perfection of the moral order may be attained."

With the example of Franklin in mind, we must ever remember that a firm faith in God is the foundation of our fraternity and our nation. Let us also be grateful that Masonry does not impose the requirement of any particular creed or religious sect upon its members; that we encompass good men of all faiths; that we, as citizens and as Masons, will defend the right of all men to worship as they desire; that we decry expressions of bigotry and intolerance wherever found or heard; that we discourage vigorously any attempted imposition of religious doctrine upon our public schools or other free institutions.

One of the most remarkable aspects of Franklin's life was the rare combination of extensive scientific discovery, particularly in the field of electricity, and an unexcelled achievement in the field of human relations, that is, philosophy, morality, diplomacy and statesmanship. There is reason to believe that Franklin's first love was in things mechanical and scientific. He described himself in his will by the simple term "Printer". His scientific experiments were pursued with obvious enjoyment and zeal. There is also reason to believe that he considered the first obligation of his matchless resources, to be in the field of human relations. While we Americans marvel at Franklin's scientific accomplishments, we revere him primarily for his homespun advice and philosophy, and his contributions to the establishment of this great free nation. In surveying his entire life, there can be little doubt that he considered the matter of individual freedom, and harmonious and righteous human relationships, of far greater importance to mankind than the pursuit and development of material values.

The correctness of this line of reasoning has become more apparent with the passage of the years. Since Franklin's day, scientific and industrial expansion has completely changed our mode of living. In this great country we have all but banished poverty, and even those with meager incomes enjoy modern luxuries and conveniences. We travel between distant parts of the world in a matter of hours. Medical achievements have rolled back the destructive forces of disease and lengthened the span of human life. Yet, while enjoying the fruits of these great scientific gains, we live in a veritable state of constant anxiety and fear of total extermination. There can be little argument with the proposition that in the field of human relationships between men and between nations, we have failed miserably to keep pace with our material development.

I recently heard a great atomic scientist explaining the unlimited power potential latent within the bowels of the earth and the rays of the sun. He stated that even now, were the nations of the world able to resolve their differences, and thus convert the production of destructive weapons into peacetime atomic development, it would be a relatively short time before all peoples, including the starving and impoverished masses of Asia, could be enjoying a standard of living equal to our own.

Yes, the most pressing problem of the day is that science continues to outstrip and outdistance the humanities. There can be little doubt, either, that the achievement of harmonious human relationships is more difficult. While the scientist deals with the constant and unchanging laws of nature, the philosopher, statesman, or moral and religious leader grapples with the emotionalism and uncertainty of the human mind.

It is becoming increasingly evident that unless the world achieves a better balance between science and morality, dire trouble lies ahead for us all.

The emphasis on Masonry in Franklin's life is added evidence of his realization of the necessity for men to learn and practice its great moral and social virtues. His gifts to humanity

and to his country clearly illustrate (hat to him Masonry had a practical aspect. It was not sufficient to learn and absorb the fine moral and religious lessons inherent in our ritual and Masonic teachings. The real test of a man's Masonry was whether he made useful application of those teachings outside the Lodge room, and in his every day dealings, not alone with Masons, but with all men.

Obviously it is given to few men to possess the faculties of a Benjamin Franklin or be capable of such tremendous contributions. Therein lies no excuse for any of us. The question is: Are we as Masons, within our own limitations, performing our obligations to our respective communities and to our country? Are we performing the regular duties of good citizenship within a democracy? Are we doing our part to sponsor the numerous youth organizations which are attempting to develop character in the future citizenry? Are we taking the time to give adequate parental guidance to our own children in this fast moving age? Are we lending our presence and support to our religious institutions? Are we giving succor to the crippled, the sick, and the poor, by supporting our great volunteer charitable and welfare agencies? As I have asked before, I will ask again, are we giving real support to our own local public schools? Are we strictly honest and fair in our business dealings? And last, are we cultivating and practicing tolerance and understanding toward all men?

These are practical, not theoretical, questions. These are questions which all good Masons should constantly ask of themselves. The answers to these questions should tell us whether we are doing our individual part as Masons to effectuate a better world, a world based on morality and reason. Masonry, because of its universality, and the broad base of its membership, can become an instrument of tremendous and world wide influence in bringing righteousness into the relationships between men and between nations; in dispelling the nightmare of gloom and despair which now threatens all mankind.

As Albert Pike said, "Masonry should not be a mere watch-tower, built upon mystery, from which to gaze at ease upon the world, with no other result than to be a convenience for the curious — It is the duty of Masonry to assist in elevating the moral and intellectual level of society,"—"to harmonize conscience and science". To this duty and work the Initiate is apprenticed. He must not imagine that he can effect nothing, and, therefore, despairing, become inert. Many great deeds are done in the small struggles of life. There is, we are told, a determined though unseen bravery, which defends itself, foot to foot, in the darkness against the fatal invasion of necessity and baseness. There are noble and mysterious triumphs, which no eye sees, which no renown rewards, which no flourish of trumpets salutes. Life, misfortune, isolation, abandonment, poverty, are battlefields, which have their heroes.—heroes obscure but sometimes greater than those who become illustrious^

In conclusion on this 250th year of the birth of Benjamin Franklin, great man and great Mason, we should reconsider the lesson of his life and rededicate our own lives to a furtherance of the American ideal he helped to establish.

If Franklin were to return to life today, as he often expressed a desire to do, his eyes would behold a strange new material world, a world of magic and scientific wonders. Yet, with all this progress, he would recognize the same basic social issues that perplexed man in the 18th Century, magnified and still unsolved. He most certainly would now, as he did then, throw his tremendous capabilities into the struggle.

Today then, let us take this occasion to reaffirm our unshakable belief in a wise and all-powerful God. Let us rededicate ourselves to the education and enlightenment of our youth, to the interests of our great

Democratic way of life. Let us be temperate, and understanding, in our approach to all problems involving our fellowmen. Let us, like Franklin, stand unflinching in the face of any assault, be it direct or subtle, upon our sacred heritage of freedom of thought, expression and religion. Yes let us have the satisfaction of knowing that we are bearing that share of the public responsibility which good citizenship and good Masonry imposes.