

**Grand Lodge
Free & Accepted Masons
Of California
Grand Oration 1962**

**Grand Orator
Dr. Robert B. Watts
"Whirling Wheels"**

Most Worshipful Grand Master and Past Grand Masters, Officers and Members of this Most
Worshipful Grand Lodge, Distinguished Visitors, and Brethren

It is always a source of the greatest satisfaction and happiness when one is privileged to meet with one's friends: and this joy sparkles like the brilliant flashes of a well-cut diamond when those friends are, as today, Brethren of the Ancient Craft.

But as every brother who has preceded me in this office as Grand Orator has in one manner or another said to you, I confess that this joy is tempered by a deep feeling of humility and personal inadequacy as I undertake my present task. On second thought, my reaction should surprise no one who pauses to consider our present surroundings. For here, in this very place, we are within the living heart of Freemasonry as it beats in the proud sister States of California and Hawaii. Here is the veritable focal point upon which the love, devotion and aspirations of our hundreds of thousands of Master Masons are centered. Here is the meeting place where the leaders of the Craft are joined in council, bringing to bear a combined wisdom achieved, in life-long studies, in searching out the means whereby the membership of the Craft may further perfect themselves in Masonry. Here is the magnificent Temple itself, symbol of our great strength and love of beauty-superbly adorned not only materially but also by the living tapestry of your presence-so richly embroidered by the golden strands representative of our beloved Past Grand Masters and other revered Brethren And finally, here is the forum in which over the years the veritable giants of western eloquence have woven magnificent discourses in their Grand Orations.

Small wonder, then, that one who essays to follow in their footsteps and addresses this assembly upon matters appertaining to the Craft feels so keenly the need of what Wordsworth has called "a lasting inspiration, sanctified by reason and blest by faith." Consequently, my Brethren, you will understand when I most earnestly beseech your brotherly charity and forbearance. As a lesser figure, I take personal consolation from a jingle written by Augustus De Morgan, which has always amused me:

"Great fleas have little fleas
Upon their backs to bite 'em,
And little fleas have lesser
Fleas, and so ad infinitum!"

Not only fine tradition but the dictates of a heart full of gratitude and personal affection lead me before all else to express to Most Worshipful Grand Master Mize the admiration of his officers. I speak for every brother officer when I express to you, Most Worshipful Sir, our appreciation for the opportunity of having known you in that special sense of intimacy, which comes from service together for the Fraternity. We have, my Brethren, ever found our Grand Master wise, unstinting in his self-giving and friendship, and quick to overlook our frequent errors as we have sought to perform our duties. And we have seen in him the veritable courage and strength of a lion in his defense of the propriety of conducting the Craft's ancient ceremonies at the sites of public buildings. Nor is this high regard restricted to his Officers. All of us have witnessed, time after time, expressions of similar regard and personal affection on the part of countless members of the Craft. The many hues of their appreciation have arced like a flaming rainbow over the broad expanse of the sparkling Pacific.

But today I would go beyond these observations directed to the Grand Master and offer my oration as a tribute to you-to each one of you-the very flower and nobility of the Craft and the

rightful heirs and descendants of the whole body of our ancient brotherhood as it has existed through the ages. Hence, in the colorful language of minstrelsy and poetry, I would sing-not as did Virgil, of arms and man -but rather of men and Masons. Nor would I, in defining that Masonic host, apply the rigid definition of the historian or the grammarian, for thereby we might unduly circumscribe the object of our rightful pride. Rather, I would invite you to widen the lenses of your hearts and minds to catch the wide sweep of the compasses as they leap across the ages to join with you even the most remote of our operative predecessors. In you, they live on.

In the Book of the Prophet Ezekiel, there appears a spectacular account of the prophet's vision of God at the time of his call to minister to the exiled Hebrews. To be sure, this account is poetic and imaginative, but this is because in reality it is only in the language of shimmering imagery that this sort of deep spiritual experience can be expressed.

God, the Supreme Being before whom all Masons bow with reverence, is described in this vision as appearing in a whirlwind, upon a flashing throne supported by wheels within wheels controlled by "the spirit of the living creature."

Today I would invoke the symbolism of these "Whirling Wheels," the title which I have chosen for this oration, to assist me in developing to the Craft the tribute, which is upon my heart.

The outer wheel, circumscribing the infinite universe, we naturally ascribe as Masons to God, its author and creator. The inner wheel we may view as man, or more particularly for our present purposes, as Masons, struggling through the ages to achieve individual dignity and true freedom under God.

Both outer and inner wheels are whirling because both the universe and all, which it contains, are dynamic, moving and developing-not static. Each wheel presents basic concepts, which are essential to my theme.

First, we turn to the outer wheel of God's infinite power, which includes all else. The great light of our faith illumines this wheel with its mighty opening words-"In the beginning, God" Here operates the eternal and immovable God upon whom, in this changing world, we may always count as a fixed source of love and strength. Here, in short, is the Almighty, Omnipotent and Infinite Creator of the whole universe symbolically surrounding and protecting us.

Some time ago, the distinguished editor of the California Freemason printed a verse, which described God's creation of our particular earthly planet in these colorful words:

"A fire-mist and a planet,
A crystal and a cell,
A jelly-fish and a saurian,
And caves where cave-men dwell:
Then a sense of law and beauty
And a face turned from the clod-
Some call it evolution,
And others call it God."

Today, of course, we know that this planet earth is but a speck in the total universe and that numberless worlds are indeed around us, all framed by the same Divine Artist. We are thoroughly space-minded, and our scientists constantly expand their knowledge of space and simultaneously strain upward and outward in their practical calculations as to how to propel man toward the very stars. Yet the whirling outer wheel of our imagery assures us that our God is a great God; that wherever man's imagination or his techniques may ultimately permit him to soar - and far beyond that extreme point-there will be found the same Divine Artist. Be assured, my Brethren, that man is no chance collection of particles, created and then turned loose to flicker briefly amid surrounding chaos-but stands in his Maker's image ever surrounded by the protective comfort of the outer wheel of God's infinite presence.

Finally, and yet of essential importance to us, we know this Infinite God to be a personal God-the God of Abraham, Isaac and of Jacob. More than this, He is the God of all mankind-a dynamic, present and active God today just as He has been and will continue to be as the outer wheel whirls on.

Within the orbit of this outer wheel we find the whirling inner wheel, which symbolizes you, my Brethren, as representatives of all Freemasons of every age. And this inner wheel has

four flashing spokes which taken together represent the four age-old goals of the Craft. The first is the achievement of individual dignity. The second is the winning of individual freedom. The third is the accomplishment of national freedom. And the fourth is the establishment of individual freedom of worship.

Because our forefathers in the Craft have built well toward the establishment of these freedoms, the rights which they bestow are ours to enjoy, to defend and in our turn to expand. Their heroic accomplishments are no dry bones of history. Rather, they shower down upon us, and envelop us in stardust as the guardians of their treasures.

For no matter how far back our gaze or imagination carries us, whether it be to the skilled members of a college of artificers in urban Rome, or to the lonely watchers in Babylon and the deserts of Egypt who carefully plotted the courses of the stars and planets long before the building of the pyramids, we shall find the same origins and the same basic drives motivating and leading upward those whom we Masons are proud to call "Brother." For all mankind is kin, and what dedicated men of all ages seek is, ultimately, not material nor of this world. Rather, 'they seek to escape the duality of their natures, to achieve an essential unity: to transcend the material, to rise out of the earthly into the fullness of the spiritual.' In short, they seek to harmonize the whirling inner wheel, which is symbolic of their lives and action, with the rhythm of the celestial outer wheel.

Through generation after generation, above the clank and vibrations of material progress. Masons have continued to labor and to listen for an omnipotent voice. And the motivation, which drove them to do, so survived the rise and fall of mighty empires, and the whiplash and retribution of tyrants in every age. That motivation we call basically man's struggle for freedom, his journey upward upon what Lord Tennyson described as ' the great world's altar-stairs, that slope thro' darkness up to God.' For man has ever sought to rise from anonymous slavery to individual dignity and freedom, and once launched upon those twin quests has gone on to struggle for national freedom and the priceless privilege of worshipping his Creator in his own way. Hence the four spokes of the inner wheel.

In Tolstoy's War and Peace, there appears a moving scene between Pierre, Count Bezukhov, and an elderly traveler who is recognized by the ring he wears as being a Freemason. The Mason, in reply to a suggestion that his brotherhood suffered from a delusion, replies:

"I should never dare to say that I know the truth. No one can attain truth by himself. Only by laying stone on stone with the cooperation of all, by the millions of generations from our forefather Adam to our own times, is that temple reared which is to be a worthy dwelling place of the great God."

Our ancient Brethren, though largely bereft of material pleasures, personal possessions and the blessings of freedom, instinctively knew this truth, and realized that the first key to the stone by stone erection of freedom consisted of knowledge. And so they patiently began to observe, to study and to reflect-all in ages when formal teaching was the special prerogative reserved to kings and priests. The book of nature lay open before their inquiring minds, and from it they read and began to understand something of the secrets of the skies and something of the everyday workings of simple natural laws, as well as being drawn to the realization that all these things pointed unerringly to the existence of one great Creator. As they slowly opened the vistas of their minds, so too they increased the skill of their hands, and began to bring to bear their new knowledge in the production of ever more beautiful objects of their Craft.

In this expanding process of acquiring personal dignity and freedom, they early adopted two principles. The first was to establish a means of preserving their growing body of knowledge at a time when the art of writing was largely closed to them. This they did, with an effectiveness to which we can testify, by the use of symbols, selected from the Craft's most expressive tools and implements. The second was to protect for themselves, their apprentices and fellows, the precious secrets of the skills of the Craft, which permitted their application to ever more complex and stupendous edifices. This they achieved by the use of secrecy-made functional by the concept of the tiled lodge wherein learning was imparted and protected from profane ears.

I recall these events to you, not as a presentation of pages of Masonic history-for there are present far more learned historians than I. Rather, I cite them as the means whereby our early Operative Craft made one of the most dramatic strides forward ever made by man in his

long quest for freedom. For observe, and swell with pride at what had been achieved by our Brethren.

Out of serfdom, out of ignorance, out of the denial of the right even to stray from their chance places of birth-yes, out of next to nothingness-there had emerged through the power of Freemasonry the priceless possession of human dignity. Men of the Craft were indeed recognized as individuals, and to prove it for all time, they possessed their individual marks with which they stamped their handiwork. Moreover, they had created a great class of men who were in truth made free to travel wherever their skills were in demand. Here were indeed Freemasons, and men cloaked with that mantle of human dignity without which man could never go forward to achieve those full freedoms, which made up the spokes of the inner wheel.

If you would experience, even across long centuries, something of a personal, physical bond with these ancient Brethren, you may find that experience as I did in the company of Most Worshipful Brother Shell. Not long ago, we stood together in a very old cathedral in Austria. And there, amidst the music and liturgy of a religious ceremony not ours, we reached out our fingers and touched, on one of the soaring arches of the cathedral, the master's mark of our Masonic Brother whose hands, together with his fellows', had erected that mighty building centuries ago. With such a physical bond, my Brethren, one almost literally sees before him, stepping out through the mists of the past of long ago, the stalwart form of a living Brother, a fellow Mason and a mighty champion of freedom. And one is proud indeed to be his follower in that great quest.

There is another brilliant jewel of the early Craft's accomplishment upon which I presume to speak. If authority for such comment be needed, it may be found in the teaching of the Ancient Charges and Regulations, which demand of us that "you agree to hold in veneration the original rulers and patrons of the Order of Masonry." To what further jewel of accomplishment do I, then, refer?

To nothing less than the example of the great care and concern of our early Brethren in transmitting their ideals and aspirations to the young men who were growing up around them. They spent time with these youths, they worked with them, and they gradually opened their minds and vision to the worthiness and keen desirability of achieving fellowship and membership among the enlightened ones. Youth responded, as it always has, to the adventure-dangerous as it might be-of fighting for high ideals. And when those high ideals were understood to be personal dignity and the freedom of all men, interest became enthusiasm and enthusiasm became dedication. Thus at the portals of Masonry, sons knocked at the door and sought admission as had their fathers. Friends followed friends. And thus, joining the Masters of the Craft, there was a perfectly natural progression, a built-in admiration and devotion, which provided a steady replenishment and growth for the Order.

But note, I beg you, the critical fact that this invigorating flow of young Entered Apprentices, this transformation of boys into Craftsmen who fought to understand and improve the world as well as themselves, was solidly supported by active and continued personal contact with members of the Craft.

Mine is no function or intention of critical comment as to the degree to which Masons of our day may fail in seeing to it that they work thus steadily with young men and bring to them that spark of enthusiasm which in turn will bring them to our doors as eager recruits. Mine rather is but the function of the remembrancer; for once the rays of recollection and realization flash before your minds, certain it is that your own keen intellects as Masonic leaders will unerringly point the way whereby the Craft of today may improve itself in the performance of this great Masonic privilege and duty.

But let us return to our inner wheel and examine briefly the two remaining spokes, which represent the right of all men to national freedom and religious liberty. We all know how the torch of individual freedom, once lighted by our ancient Brethren, kindled the determination of men through century after century, which followed to achieve still more complete freedom for all mankind. This unceasing quest for freedom is at the very core and essence of Freemasonry, and, together with its humble dependence upon God, readily explains both the attraction and the power of our Order.

As rapidly changing scenes of the past flick past in memory, we see our Brethren standing behind the barons who forced Magna Charta from King John of England at Runnymede in 1215. We see them as they furnished the French Revolution with much of its strength and with

its great rallying cry of "Liberty, Equality and Fraternity!" We see them in Indian dress at the Boston Tea Party, warning a foreign monarch that there were limits of oppression beyond which his subjects could not be pressed.

We look at the scenes of heroism at Valley Forge and elsewhere throughout the Colonies, and we see the mystic seal of the Square and Compass deeply impressed upon our nation's fight for freedom. We watch the Constitutional Convention of 1787, which followed victory and see there the careful labors of Freemasons. And we read with pounding pulses the ringing words of freedom's charter, which they wrote in the immortal preamble of our Constitution.

As political liberties expanded there grew apace the right of every man to believe and to worship God as he sees fit-and here again we thrill as we see the handiwork of our Brethren in sweeping away the strangle-hold which long had held men's consciences in thrall.

Thus the never-ending struggle of men, and of Masons, has come down to us. Slowly, over the generations, the rhythm of the inner wheel becomes more in harmony with the outer. Slowly, but magnificently, the spokes of individual dignity, personal freedom, national freedom and freedom of conscience have expanded and held firm.

All these events-all these accomplishments over the centuries-are both our common birthright and a part of the swirling clouds of glory which surround and adorn each one of you. Of these things are you made. And for these things, to which each one of you have added so much by your own devoted labors, I sing your praise.

But truth demands that I stop not here with words of praise-for it must also be said that the continued possession of our freedoms demands of us both vigilance and exertion. Heed the words of Goethe's "Faust":

"Whate'er you have, bequeathed you by your father,
Earn it in order to possess it..."

Strong as we are in our nation's military might, we are but slowly awakening to the realization that deadly danger surrounds us. For all too long we Americans have indulgently gauged others by our own peaceful intents and purposes. We have been far too prone to assume that our liberties and freedoms are automatically to be ours forever-without exertion by us. We have tended to think of our Constitution in terms of a rare document kept safely on display at Washington-instead of seeing in its the living bulwark which our Brethren raised against arrest, torture, loss of our property and death itself, without due process of law.

Now that we have begun to realize more and more the chilling possibility of nuclear attack against us, all too many of our citizens are thinking of meeting any such attack on a "survival only" basis. Yet I assert that any such timorous objective may well destroy free civilization, taking us along with it. "Survival only" is not a policy. It is the delusion of a nation marked for suicide. It is a faulty stone, which I pray that you, as Master Craftsmen, will firmly reject. The great Edwin Burke described the danger very neatly when he commented, "All that is necessary for the triumph of evil is that good men do nothing." Let us heed those words and never lay down our working tools.

To you, the very flower of Freemasonry, must go the leadership in this resurgence of spirit-this recovery of an understanding long buried in the rubbish of the Temple. In the words of the Prophet Isaiah, the call is made to you to ". . . lift up a standard for the people!" That you will succeed is not open to doubt. Your stature in the Craft, your proven abilities as leaders, and the clarity of your vision, all combine to assure that the mighty structure of freedom so truly built by our predecessors will rise to new heights by your accomplishments in our times. And, thus, with our labors ended, we shall watch the whirling wheels move on, as ". . . time and the world are ever in flight."

My Brethren, I salute you.

"I do not know beneath what sky
Nor on what seas shall be thy fate;
I only know it shall be high,
I only know it shall be great."