

**Grand Lodge
Free & Accepted Masons
Of California
Grand Oration 1969**

**Grand Orator
William J. Williams
“Let There Be Light”**

Most Worshipful Sir, Brother Grand Lodge Officers, Distinguished Guests, My Brethren of the Grand Lodge

This morning I am at once filled with pride and humility; proud of being a member of our great Fraternity, humble in the knowledge and memory of the great men of Masonry that have addressed you in previous communications as your Grand Orator.

This past year has been, for me, filled with inspiration as we have participated in Masonic functions and ceremonies the length and breadth of our Grand Jurisdiction and the courtesies and expressions of brotherly love will never be forgotten.

The greatest satisfaction has been to become well acquainted with my brother officers of the Grand Lodge, and most particularly with our Grand Master, the Most Worshipful Robert Arthur Crigler. He is a pillar of strength when strength is so needed, a man of great dignity and moral courage at a time when we seek men of these qualifications, a man of personal warmth and great devotion to our Fraternity who has exemplified the teachings and principles of Masonry in his constant travels, his almost unbelievable number of meetings with his Brethren in Freemasonry, and in his daily life. It has been truly, Most Worshipful Sir, a great inspiration to serve as one of your Grand Lodge Officers and I shall be eternally grateful for this opportunity.

LET THERE BE LIGHT!

"In the beginning, God created the heaven and the earth, and the earth was without form and void, and darkness was upon the face of the deep, and the spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters, and God said, 'Let there be light,' and there was light." This passage from the Bible, the first verse in the Book of Genesis, the Story of Creation, is precious to all who revere the Bible, but particularly our Brethren in Freemasonry, for it was in response to this command, "Let there be light," that they first saw the Light by which Masons work.

From time immemorial, Masons, ancient and modern, have obeyed this august command and have labored in bringing Light to the world, much of which is still in darkness, devoid of the Light of Brotherly Love, Relief, and Truth.

We cannot trace our Masonic heritage with exact definition to the ancient builders of the pyramids, temples, and other great works of antiquity, but we do know they used the same tools, the plumb, square and level, for their operative work that we use today, and there is much to indicate that these tools were also used to teach valuable lessons in morality, life, and conduct, as we speculative Masons do at the present time.

We can, however, start tracing our history in the Tenth Century in the guilds of operative Masonry and in their building of the great cathedrals of Europe, places of worship and the universities, the seats of learning, and bringing to the world the great Lights of Religion and Education. How well our ancient Brethren performed their tasks is self-evident in viewing these magnificent structures today. They wrought not only in stone and timbers, but they wrought in the building of men, and each succeeding generation has advanced the principles of Masonry.

Coincidentally with the labors of our ancient operative Brethren, the Crusaders were, as they saw the truth, bringing the Light of Religion to those areas of darkness. They carried the banners of the Christian Religion and practiced the principles of our ancient Craft. In the walled City of Rhodes, 800 years ago, the Knights of St. John built a great monument to Brotherly Love, one of the first edifices for the relief of human suffering, a hospital that still stands, tending the needs of the citizens of Rhodes today, two hundred years later, the Knights of St. John moved to the Island of Malta and adopted the name of their new home and, as the Knights of Malta,

continued their charitable and religious activities. Their counterparts on the continent, The Order of Knights Templar, because of their role in bringing Light to their less fortunate Brethren, earned the fear and enmity of the despotic spiritual and temporal rulers of their time and their Order was decimated by the horrors of the Inquisition and their last Grand Master, Jacques DeMolay, was burned at the stake. These names, the Knights of St. John, the Knights of Malta, the Knights Templar and DeMolay are revered in Masonry today.

Over eight hundred years ago the barons stood before King John on the fields of Runnymede with their demand that he sign the Magna Carta, guaranteeing those rights to the people that have become the basis for democracy since that time and so treasured throughout the free world. There is little doubt that our Brethren of that day were in the vanguard of those seeking for themselves and their fellowmen the blessings of justice, equality, and freedom from oppression.

From our rich Masonic heritage, it was only natural that with the formation of the Grand Lodge of England two hundred and fifty-two years ago that Masonry became a dominant force in the colonies and that our early Masonic leaders were also the leaders, politically and economically, in the birth and development of our country. We have read of the relationship of St. Andrews Lodge and the Boston Tea Party, where, in its minute book, only the large letter "T" appears for that night's meeting. We know of its prominent members, Paul Revere and John Hancock, and history is replete with the leadership provided by those great Masons, Washington, Franklin, Madison, and scores of others for whom Masonry is justly proud.

In the formation of the Constitution, one meets with the theory that government not only derives its power from the people, but that it is designed to protect the people from dictators and their greed. For the first time we find the theory that leadership is elected from the people, that while leaders should be followed faithfully and earnestly by the members, the leaders would soon return to the ranks to serve as a common member with their brethren. Where, in the political or religious thinking of that time, can that idea be found? Certainly not in English or Scotch politics, although they were very liberal compared with the rest of Europe. Neither can it be found in the Anglican, Congregational, Presbyterian or Methodist creeds, as they were then understood-and those were the four predominating religions in the colonies. Neither the Declaration of Independence nor the Constitution was based on credal concepts, but upon the broader concept of a Divine Designer, Creator and Upholder of the Universe, much broader than the creeds of that day. Where, in the political and religious thinking of that period, can you find a declaration for the separation of church and state, or a declaration in favor of the free exercise of religions? It is not found in our Scotch background, for they believed in their own established church; not in our English origins, for in most colonies they were strongly for the established Church of England; not even can that theory be found in Puritan New England, for they established a strict theocracy and established the Congregational Church as the church of the several colonies. These ideas can be found in none of the dogmatic religions or political philosophies of that day.

Where, then, in the political or religious thinking of that time can those ideas be found? Only in the great Light of the teachings and practices of Freemasonry. As we delve deeply into our country's early history we realize that Masonry was the great unifying force, the catalyst that welded the colonies with their diverse economics, political philosophies, predominant religions, and their geographical barriers, into one. With this glorious heritage down through all ages, we, as Masons, clearly recognize our responsibilities as citizens in maintaining for all the people those principles of freedom, equality of opportunity and justice, for which our early brethren worked, and lived, and died, that they might pass on to future generations a brighter and better world.

As Masonry has espoused these principles, it has recognized that they can only be attained and assured by an educated and enlightened citizenry. From the first public schools in the colonies in the mid sixteen hundreds and the founding of our first public high school by that outstanding Mason, Past Grand Master of the Grand Lodge of Pennsylvania Benjamin Franklin, Masonry has been the leader in bringing the great Light of Education to our country. California Masonry has achieved nationwide, and yes, even worldwide recognition, in establishing Public Schools Week in California in 1920. Nearly fifty years ago Past Grand Master Charles Albert Adams made the following proclamation, and I quote in part:

"As Masons, we unqualifiedly subscribe to the belief that an educated and enlightened citizenship is the first great care of a progressive State; and that upon our Public Schools depend the hope for the perpetuity of a free and untrammled democracy.

"The professions we make as Masons demand that as citizens of the Commonwealth we take an active and intelligent interest in all matters affecting our Public Schools.

"A crisis is now confronting the Public Schools System in America. There is a dearth of competent teachers, schools are being closed, children, particularly in the rural communities, are being denied the education to which they are entitled, and there is apparently a deplorable apathy concerning remedial measures which have been proposed.

"To focus the attention of the Craft on existing conditions, I, as Grand Master of Masons in the Jurisdiction of California, do now proclaim the week commencing Monday, September 27th, 1920, as 'Public Schools Week' in the Masonic Lodges in this Jurisdiction; and I do earnestly request that, during that week, in every Lodge in this Jurisdiction, some phase of the questions affecting the Public Schools be brought to the attention of the members present by speakers appointed for that purpose."

As is true of all great essays or proclamations, this one, too, is ageless. It is, with but the change of one word, "urban," instead of "rural," the exact statement of the condition of our Public Schools today. Today, as then, needed bond issues are being defeated by the traditional enemies of our Public School System, but more particularly by an apathetic public; now, as then, Boards of Trustees are seeking the best qualified men and women of the community for members and often are disappointed in their efforts; today, as then, teachers' salaries are too often below that of common labor and today, as then, our children, the most precious product of our society, are being taught by many teachers of less-than-the-needed excellence, because many desirable candidates for the teaching profession are being attracted by more lucrative offers in commerce and industry. Yes, my Brethren, we need to rededicate ourselves and redouble our efforts in behalf of our public schools, that they may continue to bring to our people the great Light of Education.

Those cherished institutions of a free and democratic society—a stable and responsible system of government guaranteeing equal opportunity for all; a system of free public education; those fundamental inalienable rights, the free exercise of religion, freedom of speech and of the press, the prohibition of deprivation of life, liberty, or property without due process of law—are being threatened today as never before in the history of our country. Never has our entire system of government been so viciously attacked, never has our entire educational system been threatened by such diverse elements from every economic and educational level. Classes are being closed, teachers beaten and abused, buildings damaged and destroyed. Demands are being made for reforms in our systems of education and government by individuals and groups ranging from well-meaning, interested citizens to militants, revolutionaries, and anarchists who would destroy that which we have been centuries building.

It is incumbent upon us, as Masons and good citizens, to closely examine and analyze all of our public institutions in the light of our times. Are they this day serving the needs of our people in the best possible manner? Are reforms needed, and, if so, what are they? Surely no documents or institutions or regulations conceived in the minds of men are eternal. One of the best examples is the numerous resolutions Presented each year to this Grand Lodge, containing in them, in the minds of the petitioning Brethren, needed changes in our statutes and regulations. As we move into this Space Age, our needs of education, government, and economic systems must be geared to fill these needs. If reforms are needed, let us, as responsible citizens, be the ones in a timely and lawful manner, that bring about these changes; not wait until these needed changes are forced upon us by riots, protests, and violence by unlawful elements and illegal means. Organizations in every area of our society, who would overthrow all the things we hold sacred, are ceaselessly striving to find causes and areas where reforms are needed, then to espouse these needed reforms to give an aura of credibility and responsibility to their organizations and a platform upon which to carry on their nefarious designs and activities. On our campuses of colleges and universities particularly are such organizations flourishing, constantly searching for justifiable areas of complaint within our educational and governmental systems, to become, then, their legal front for their otherwise subversive activities.

Let us not permit needed reforms to be forced upon us by riots, protests, and violence by those who would destroy us, but let this prayer be our guide-
"Oh God, give us the courage to change those things that can and should be changed, the fortitude to endure those that cannot be changed, and the wisdom to differentiate one from the other!"

Let us, then, as responsive citizens, rob them of their opportunities for achieving false credibility and bring about the needed changes in a just and legal manner; let us continue to bear the torch in the search for the great Light of Truth.

Tomorrow, we have the opportunity of visiting the Masonic Home at Union City. I hope all, who can, will go for the first time, or as a previous visitor. It will be, in my opinion, the greatest experience you will ever have in the fraternal spirit of Relief and Brotherly Love. There, in this beautiful Home for our less fortunate Brethren, their wives and widows, is Masonry in action. It is one thing to relieve the body of physical needs by welfare, but it is something far apart to relieve the minds of our aged and infirm Brethren of the worry and fear of providing for themselves in their late years. To see the Light of love and appreciation for the Craft in the eyes of the residents of our Homes is something you will forever treasure. If every California Mason could visit our Homes, we would never have to worry about the success of our program for the support and maintenance of our Masonic Homes, where burns bright the Light of Relief and Brotherly Love.

We hold in our hands, My Brethren, the future and the destiny of Masonry in California. It can be an awesome burden, or a stimulating challenge. This past year we had one of the greatest numerical losses of members and Lodges in the history of this Grand Jurisdiction. This, in itself, need not be alarming, most other Grand Jurisdictions also sustained net losses in memberships, as have other fraternal organizations.

So, we can say, complacently, that it is the trend of the times and there is nothing we can do about it. Many downtown metropolitan Lodges, in the past great towers of Masonic strength and activity, are suffering severe declines in attendance and memberships; in many rural areas, where towns are disappearing due to better transportation and changes in living habits, these small Lodges, too, are disappearing. We hear many reasons for the disturbing condition-too many competing activities, too much or too little discretionary time available, commuting greater distances to work, and that great destroyer of useful activity, television. Or, is it a combination of these things, or is it none of them, but a lack of stimulation? Yes, the latter perhaps, for running counter to the general trend are Lodges in California that are enjoying outstanding activity, both socially and in their degree work. Let's look at some of them and see if we can come up with any general observations or conclusions. They generally are located in towns and cities near the residence, rather than the place of business, of their members. They take pride in the excellence of their ritualistic work and the attitudes and dress of their officers in the performance of their duties. They never compromise with the quality of their candidates to get a new member. They give real support, not just lip service, to our Youth Orders, the Order of DeMolay, Job's Daughters, and Order of Rainbow. Their observance of Public Schools Week and Constitution Month Observance are well planned and executed. They have good speakers and panels on subjects of Masonic interest and they make use of the service offered by the several Research Lodges. They have a well-balanced social program, father and son dinners, meetings where they can take that friend who you wish was a Mason, and they have several nice affairs each year honoring their wives. They have programs that are not peculiar unto large and wealthy lodges, but programs that are possible and practical for every Lodge in California.

These are not innovations in the body of Masonry which we swore we would not make when we were installed as Masters of our Lodges, but are stimulating and complementing programs to our basic Masonic work of stated and degree meetings. Let us use all these proper means that are possible and practical for our own Lodges and fill our Trestle Boards and our Lodge Rooms with meaningful Masonic activity.

If we do these things, then the ever-increasing body of Masonry will do credit to our stewardship and will truly indicate our devotion and service to those great Masonic Lights of Brotherly Love, Relief and Truth.

LET THERE BE LIGHT!