

**Grand Lodge
Free & Accepted Masons
Of California
Grand Oration 1987**

**Grand Orator
Warren L. Sanborn
"Masonry - Nothing But Good"**

Most Worshipful Grand Master and My Brethren of this Grand Lodge

Many times during this past Masonic Year I have had occasion to remember the words of a very special Mason. This Brother meant, and still means very much to those who gather under our Grand Lodge Standard. He was the Brother who most "old timers" agree was, probably, our grandest Grand Orator. That was so despite the fact that he was not the Grand Orator. He was the Grand Chaplain. That exceptional man, outstanding Mason, was Brother Roland Bach. I remember him, primarily, as the Classroom Director of a Scottish Rite Valley. Invariably he gave his audience a clue as to how long he would speak and then spoke briefly. Well I'll clue you. I'm going to speak 23 minutes, or until I reach the end of my speech, whichever comes first.

Roland was not alone in his greatness, though his was unique. Our Craft has been graced with many great Masons. They were and are just some of the blessings we should all be grateful for today.

I learned a lot from Roland. He impressed upon me the fact that there are two (2) types of speeches. One is the duty speech, when you are speaking before strangers. You are speaking for affect, perhaps without really that much feeling for either your subject or them. You do, of course, owe them the courtesy of a good effort.

The other type is that presentation reserved for times when those you address share your thoughts; when those you stand before share your concern; when those to whom you speak are those for whom you care; when you share with them a love not often expressed and rarely experienced.

You are friends, and as Roland Bach would say, and his son did say, "Friends are never far away. If they are friends and in your mind, there is no such place as far away." I will relive this year with my friends many times.

The other thing that I want to impress you with, before I really start, is that Masons are not common people. You, and our Fraternity, are something special and, to be effective, you must, without pretension, accept that fact. You are something special. More about that later.

It has been a marvelous year! Perhaps, just perhaps, I should admit that it has been a disappointing year.

I imagine that such a comment is somewhat surprising to you. How can I say that, right here in front of the Grand Master who has brought us all such an exciting year? Any of you who have participated to any degree know that the year past has been one of positive outlook, positive thoughts, positive action, and positive results.

Frustrating? Disappointing? Why do I say that in front of this audience? There are before me a couple thousand of the most enthusiastic and capable members of history's greatest Craft. They represent this seemingly eternal Fraternity that means so much to us, and so much more to the world we serve. Nowhere on this Earth does more Masonic experience and knowledge gather at one time than right here in this room. How dare I say that it has been such a year, frustrating and disappointing? It is simple, really, it is the truth!

Consider the fact that precedent almost mandates that my purpose before you, that my purpose appears to be, to grasp Masonry's problems. Then I am to consider them, discuss them and suggest to you extra or different approaches that will, by the sweat of your brow and your persuasive ways, resolve those problems.

Brethren, for one year I have been looking, looking for problems with Masonry. I have done that so that we could discuss them today. My goodness, we do hear about them all the time! We have listened to a flood of lectures. a plethora of articles on the troubles with Masonry. I have

looked for them, the problems. For a whole year I have looked for problems with Masonry. I stand here to tell you that I have failed. But I have not, as they say, failed miserably.

What did I find? What did your Grand Lodge Family find as the traveled listened and labored up and down, and over, California and Hawaii (Beautiful California and Hawaii, if there IS heaven on earth, it is ours, here in California and Hawaii!). We found friends, many friends in every town! What a wonderful motto that would be for Masonry! We should put it right across the front of every Lodge building. We should put it on the facade, right over the entrance to Grand Lodge. It would face California Street where the tourist on the cable car would say, "What do they mean?" We know what it means. It is nothing new. Aren't we fortunate to have "A FRIEND IN EVERY TOWN?"

Think about it. There it is, a Masonic truth as old as the square and compass. If you travel through strange lands, or travel at all, without that awareness, you are missing one of Masonry's most comforting gifts. No matter where in this state, country, world you may go, you have a Brother, if not an entire Lodge full of Brothers. You have "a friend in every town". That friend is obligated to help and, more importantly, is willing to help, ready to help and anxious to help. You can pick up the phone in Honolulu Hawaii, or Houlton, Maine; you can pick up the phone in Tokyo or Paris, and you have a brother to help aid and assist. Is there any other source of such a promise? Just remember that "friend in every town". You will never travel a lonely road.

I have strayed from my intended route, haven't I? I was not supposed to be looking for and talking of the good things about this majestic entity called Masonry. I was looking for the problems with Masonry. I had to keep reminding myself that I was looking for problems, that I was looking for material for today. "Hey, Mr. Grand Orator, get out there and find those problems!" Supposedly, I should be falling all over them.

My search continued. We traveled from San Francisco to San Diego; from Palm Springs, Vista, San Bernardino, Red Bluff, Sacramento, Martinez, Paradise, to Honolulu and Kona. How beautiful all of those ceremonies were! National City, San Bruno, Napa, Vacaville, Castro Valley, all of those communities welcomed us with warm experiences. There were so many delightful meetings that they have blended into a kaleidoscope of brilliant memories. Public dignitaries? Yes, City Fathers, Mayors, Senators, Police Chiefs, so many Civic leaders, so many conscientious citizens and so many Masons attended and promoted those events. There were meaningful dedications, well-attended cornerstones, thought provoking degree nights. My, how impressive they all were.

The degrees, as usual, contained the same obligations, the same promises as those made by good people throughout the world. They are beautiful! They are obligations of charity, tolerance, of duty, friendship and love. They are promises as typical and symbolic of all that is good, as is our Craft.

Are those obligations still meaningful? Are they lasting? Consider any number of examples. Consider this quarter, this 25-cent piece. You see the likeness of George Washington, perhaps our most famous Mason. If you think of the fact that he took the same obligation, made the same promises, as you and I, you will realize how permanent they are. Take a minute more and look just below his chin. There you will see a portion of every Mason's character, of every Mason's life. It says, "In God We Trust." How many solemn and sincere moments have been experienced by men with a common faith and an uncommon goal. "In God We Trust" to teach us, to lead us. In whom do you put your Trust?

I am sorry. I forgot again. I was looking for problems, problems with Masonry. It seems that I constantly encounter these distracting good things about our Fraternity. That does make it difficult to concentrate on the problems.

I hope that you will forgive my lapse in concentration; however, throughout this stimulating year, as your Grand Lodge Family carried the message of corn, wine and oil to so many Cornerstone ceremonies and Lodge dedications, my mind did wander. Nourishment, refreshment, joy were the lessons. Again, those are old stories to those of us in the Craft. They were not too many who heard our Grand Master's messages. Many non-Masons attended. They listened with open interest, man and woman, young and old, as they learned of Masons and Masonry. How good it is to have such an audience. They thanked us. They asked for more information about our Craft. They learned the messages of charity, temperance, patriotism. They were taught the meaning of Masonry. We rejoiced in pride. Under those circumstances it became

increasingly difficult to maintain an eye for problems. I decided that a different approach was needed. We were experiencing no negative vibrations. I would, I told myself, actually dissect this Masonic Fraternity of ours, this Family of millions. I would find out just what it stands for. I would find out what it does, what faults it has. Surely I could expose those problems. They must, they must be there! So many people have told us so!

On the other hand, the Masonic advocates, serious and scholarly, tell us in our writings that Masons must believe that all humans are equal under God. We must believe that there is no place in our Craft, in our lives, for prejudice, bias or intolerance. We must believe that business, politics war, religion that none of these should be a barrier to universal and lasting brotherhood. Neither should what is behind us prevent understanding and peace ahead of us.

I made another incision. I searched further. I read that all religions are meaningful and worthy of, entitled to, respect. There is, those teachers continued, a Supreme Being who goes by many names. Each of those names is, to those who worship it, sacred and of equal magnitude, as well as of consuming purpose. Each man as a right to his own interpretation and to any of many beliefs. Enumerable philosophies and faiths lead to the same "open door." This we are told and this we embrace, for this is Masonry. Masonry welcomes all to its arms.

Still further I went, but my journey only underscored what had already become quite clear. There were more words that told me that Masons must constantly spread the cement of the brotherly love and affection that makes our ties more binding. We must treasure our unique, intangible friendship.

I stopped! How blind I may have been! Friendship? A problem? How can a Mason describe this special friendship that is Masonry? What is it that makes our weekly attendance at Lodge so warm and refreshing, so relaxing? What is it like to be among true friends? What possible definition, what possible description could be used to share that feeling of Masonic friendship? What explanation is there for those on the outside? There is none. Had I, then, finally found a problem with Masonry?

I was, of course, taking a very basic approach. Yet, it is a problem. There is no possible way that we can convey to those outside our Craft the sense of security brought by the sincerity of our Fraternal brotherly love. We can not, it's not a question of may not, shall not, or must not, we can not relay to a non Mason the most precious secrets of our Fraternity. Strangely, they are not intentional secrets. It's just that we cannot tell a potential member what our Craft's most precious, priceless benefit is. It is, in wording familiar to many of you, an ineffable blessing. Brethren, perhaps Masonry does have problems. once again, think. That is not the type of problem that we have discussed for years. We have been warned about dwindling membership, lost revenues, archaic rules, of a Fraternity left behind because of its inability to adapt to a changing society. Well, my friends, those are not problems with Masonry. If they exist, they are problems with people. Masonry is nothing but good! Masonry's problem is not a problem with Masonry. Unlike Paul Newman's "Cool Hand Luke", what we have here is not the failure to communicate, that our Craft has been confronting for some time now. That is being handled quite capably. What we have here is not a failure, it is an inability to communicate. All we can do is try to give others the opportunity to experience it, to share in our treasures. We do try.

Is, therefore, everything negative that we have heard in recent years about Masonry fact or is it fiction . Do problems really exist? Have we been fed a diet of fact or of fiction? The fact is that we have been trying to digest both. Problems with Masonry? That is fiction. Problems in Masonry? That is likely to be fact. If they exist, if so, they are problems with people, not problems with Masonry. Since they are people problems, we can change them, and we are. Masons are doing a commendable job. Those "people problems" are disappearing, perceptively albeit gradually. We are winning, through your efforts. Masonry's perfection is shining through more and more. There are those who will follow us. At that later time, they will decide what was important and what was not. They will decide who among us was worthy of his task and who was not. They will decide as the "Monday Morning Quarterbacks", which decisions were correct and which were not. They will look back from the future and judge. Unfortunately, we cannot look back from that future and judge ourselves. This, however, we can do. We can from past performance know what we are when we say we are Masons. Let me tell you what you already know. Let me remind you of what you already know. This is what you are.

Brethren, the greatest thing that has ever happened to you is Masonry! Everything that Masonry touches is better for that contact! Everything that Masonry does brings with it a better world! Can't you feel the strength of Masonry?

Masonry is all good! Masonry stands for the best of times, the best of humanity. Just feel the strength of Masonry. No one need ever apologize, no person need ever feel guilty because of his Masonic affiliation. Look around and be proud, very proud. Look around and be happy, very happy. Feel the strength of Masonry!

Masonry is good! Bless the day you found it for Masonry is nothing but good. Be grateful for every minute that you spend in its vineyards. Masonry is Good!

Sure we have some internal differences; sure we have some "bad apples" sure we have those who labor for their own aggrandizement, rather than that of Masonry; sure we're human; but, overall, Masons are exceptional humans and Masonry, Masonry is nothing but good!

Watch our Craft prosper and grow. Bask in the knowledge of, surround yourself with that panoply of friendship and love! Flaunt your membership, your beliefs and your satisfaction before all mankind. Do that because, before God, Masonry is nothing but good! If your life contains nothing else, you could do no more, you would owe apologies to no one. Masonry is Good! Just feel the strength, for Masonry is nothing but Good! Bless you all for making it so!