

**Grand Lodge
Free & Accepted Masons
Of California
Grand Oration 1998**

**Grand Orator
Thomas M. Boles**

Most Worshipful Grand Master, Most Worshipful Past Grand Masters, honored officers of Grand Lodge, and my distinguished Brothers of Grand Lodge

This has to be the most exciting and most humbling moment of my Masonic life.

Most Worshipful Tony, Virginia and I owe this wonderful Masonic Year to you — and Marilyn, and we shall always remember this period in our lives as long as we live.

It has been thrilling from the moment you asked if I would accept the appointment as Grand Orator, to these final hours. My only wish is that every Mason in California could have equally shared this year with us. From the socials, the traveling, the cornerstones, the dedications and rededications, the awarding of 50 and 75 year pins, the business meetings, and, of course your great trip through the Scandinavian countries.

But most importantly, we wish all Masons in this jurisdiction, and their families, could see the new excitement in our fraternity, the acceptance of new challenges by so many, and the renewed pledges from the hearts of our members throughout the jurisdiction. I've never felt such an exhilaration, nor ever been so optimistic about something good, getting better.

I'm truly proud to have had the opportunity to serve you and the Freemasons of our Grand Lodge during the years 1997-98. To you Grand Master, Marilyn, and all the members of the California Grand Lodge, my everlasting gratitude. I'm sure, with the warm and friendly leadership you have given, an indelible impression in the footsteps of time has been left for those who follow.

I know you all are waiting to hear a "Grand Oration", which is traditional from the Grand Orator; however, what I'm about to say, will not necessarily be an oration. My duty, as the Grand Orator, is to deliver an address to you, the Grand Lodge, on matters appertaining to the craft. I'm not really sure what I'm about to say is even an address or even on matters appertaining to the craft. What I am going to say today — are the feelings about Freemasonry that are in my heart; and I pray some of you may have these same feelings.

But first, I would briefly like to share with you a story about a 93-year old mother who believes that Freemasonry is next to Godliness. A woman, who upon the birth of her only son, prayed to God that one day he would become a DeMolay and subsequently one day would become a Mason. She lived in a small coal-mining town, where poverty was as common as the noonday sun.

But, one very important thing about this small village was obvious — and that was the fact that the leaders in this town were the most respected people. They were the business owners, the churchgoers, and in her sight, were the elite of the community. They were all Masons to the man. She dreamed and prayed that her son would not become just another coal miner, but that he would fit into this special earthly heaven of another mind, that he would become one of the Masons in town.

The beginning of her dream was fulfilled fifteen years after her son's birth, when he was initiated into the Order of DeMolay; and climaxed six years later when he was Raised a Master Mason. The dreams of her little world were then fulfilled.

Fifty years after her son's acceptance into DeMolay, she still had the canceled check for his initiation, showing evidence of her pride in the Fraternity, and she even saved the Lodge's photograph of her son's first Stated Meeting as a Master Mason, which now is nearly a half century later. As a Past Worthy Matron of Eastern Star, she has, throughout all these years, shared each thrilling moment of her son's activities in Masonry. Time is running out for her and she may not have many years left, but her daily prayers include her thanks to God for her son, and appreciation to the Masonic Fraternity and what it has meant to her, and to her son.

I wonder how many of you can repeat a similar story? I'm sure this scenario is not unique, for this great and wonderful Fraternity has grown throughout time on the foundation of love and dreams.

And why not? We give to mankind more love and charity than any other body or organization in all of history. So, why don't we flaunt it, brag about it, advertise it — in other words why aren't we telling the world just how good we really are? I know that inside the breast of each Freemason is a heart filled with a special pride, unmatched by any pride that has ever been earned or received, throughout all time.

Each year, hundreds of millions of dollars are spent on children numbering in the hundreds of thousands across this vast continent. We boldly face every conceivable mental and medical problem known to man. I am well acquainted with several Masonic children's hospitals, that together, treat over 300,000 children each year, with every conceivable childhood disorder.

Everything from pediatric orthopedics, to cystic fibrosis, brain tumors, critical burns, cancer, epilepsy, you name it, and we treat it. One of the hospitals not only treats about 150,000 children each year, but has a startling statistic, that of over 49,000 visits to their emergency ward, in just a single year. They enjoy over 500 volunteer workers from the Masonic community. One of the other hospitals is proud of its 850 volunteer workers that assist the staff on assigned hours, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. These volunteers are also from the Masonic community.

And of course, we cannot forget the 160 Childhood Language Disorder and Learning Centers around the country, and the ever present care for the eyes the contributions to the muscular dystrophy research, and many more human needs— far too numerous to share today. And don't let us forget the medical research for those children who will need help in the future; and the loving care given to those in their golden years.

Forgive me, I know I'm addressing the choir, but I just can't help reminding you of "who" we are. There is no question or doubt, that you who are here today are the workers, the leaders and a vital and integral part of the backbone and stability of our house — not built with hands.

You all have heard about our forefathers, and their accomplishments Just to name a few: Mozart, Beethoven, Bach, Washington, Franklin, Edison- and in this century alone — Presidents Teddy Roosevelt, Taft, Franklin Roosevelt Harry Truman — Generals Pershing, MacArthur, Doolittle, Bradley, Marshal — Admira 1 Byrd, King George of England, Winston Churchill, Lindbergh, Dr. Mayo Sousa Will Rogers, Rudyard Kipling— I could go on and on all day, and not name them all. Yes, and I am sure that I could name most everyone in this Grand Lodge as being great for something. You get the picture, don't you?

But there is one name I haven't mentioned. It's a name quite obscure to most of our members, but if I had to list the top twenty influential Mason's in this century, I would certainly include this man among the most worthy. The more I read about him, the more I am impressed with his contributions to our society and his presence in our lives today.

He lived at a time in Masonic history when our fraternity grew from 1 3 million members to 2.57 million. The time period was 1910 to 1920. This was a period when increased membership meant expanded administration for the various Grand Lodges and the concordant and affiliated bodies. All the officers had enlarged responsibilities. It meant more staff, more equipment, increased welfare work, and the establishment of new educational programs, and a new emphasis on Americanism. This was a period just right for a person like this man, or put another way, this person was just right for this period in Masonic history his enthusiasm for Masonry was the same energetic, continuing eagerness as that of his Masonic father.

At the age of 35, he joined the Army to fight in the Spanish-American War. It wasn't long before he was promoted to Captain, a title he enjoyed for the balance of his life. Ten years after leaving the Army, he was Raised a Master Mason in Louisville Lodge No. 400, and it wasn't long after, that he became Master of his Lodge. Shortly after his term as Master, he joined the York and Scottish Rite Bodies, and again, it wasn't long before he became Venerable Master of his Scottish Rite Valley. He was a special person, a knowing person, and everyone that knew him, agreed he as destined for greatness. A short time later he was coronated a 33° Scottish Rite Mason, and was crowned Sovereign Grand Inspector General for the Orient of Kentucky. His special aptitudes were so evident, that it only took a short while before he was voted the Secretary General for the Southern Jurisdiction of the Scottish Rite Supreme Council. He served

in this capacity for ten years, and then was voted into Scottish Rite's highest position, that of Grand Commander. His name is John H. Cowles.

Illustrious Cowles was not a well-educated man, not wealthy, and thought by many to be very controversial, but everything he did in life was for the good of the Masonic Order. He single handedly, persistently pursued an exhaustive campaign against the bureaucrats of Washington for a Department of Education and compulsory education for the children of America. Even though his efforts were not passed immediately by Congress, our neighboring State of Oregon decided to go ahead and adopt a referendum requiring compulsory attendance for all children in the public schools.

He was one of the first to establish a permanent foundation for the care of sick children in America — this was long before government welfare agencies were heard of. His penetrating focus on childhood disease, which was killing thousands of children throughout the nation, was long before vaccination programs and the development of antibiotics. As we all know, polio was a cruel adversary of children's health in those days. And it was during this period that the now world famous Scottish Rite Children's Hospital was built in Atlanta, Georgia. This hospital, I'm sure, was the inspiration and guiding light for the first Shriner's Hospital to be built in Shreveport, Louisiana in 1922.

Cowles once said, "A nation cannot last as a money-making mob; it cannot with impurity and simply plain existence, go on despising literature, despising science, despising art, despising nature, despising compassion and conceding its soul to every penny. The values inculcated by Freemasonry were needed for the common good of the nation, in danger of being spoiled by the excesses of the rich patterns of life."

Cowles was concerned about the disuse of public Masonic ceremonies, the little attendance at Masonic Burial Services, the reduction of laying cornerstones for public buildings. His belief was that Freemasonry offers a "spiritual oasis, a retreat from this world; that it reinforces traditional morality, so that the idea of the asylum promised harmony in a world, so sorely lacking it." Does this remind you of today?

Just think, nearly 100 years ago, it was said that the fraternity was concerned chiefly with membership and the individual Mason, and thereby had concentrated its attention on religion and the personal morality of its members. We were developing a consciousness of the external world, and desired some visible part in it, as Masons. They were saying then, that the problem of low attendance at Lodges revealed that a large number of members had come to regard Masonry "more as symbolic than a participatory organization".

John Cowles was a tireless promoter of job placement for our members throughout the nation who were unemployed, and as such, set up an unofficial national employment service. He was also exceedingly generous with his own personal resources, rarely refusing the appeal of any family in need. It wasn't uncommon for him to respond to a letter requesting help — with a sizeable check from his own personal account.

Of course. Masons do this today, and they always have, and I pray they always will. And like many men we know today, those sitting to my right, and many of you around this Lodge room, John Cowles as a Mason's Mason.

The straight lines of history appear rarely, perhaps as often as baseball's seventy home runs or as infrequently as Halley's Comet. Instead, the crooked grains of the past bend toward the present, usually bulging into the future by rounded curves like those encircling a dark knot in a pine board. As I have learned in my philosophy class at school, some philosophers of history insist on the grand theme of returning cycles. They believe starting points and destinations share a similarity approaching sameness. Consequently, we find that history does repeat itself. Surprisingly, history is not simply a turning wheel with compass points fixed and known in advance. History indeed has its circles, but it also has its crooked roads.

This is apparent in the ever-ancient and ever-new question — where are we going? It is, however, a far more problematic question than — where have we been? From the past, a historian can extrapolate a few tendencies, underline noticeable trends, and examine causes and outcomes. But these variables do not help predict next year's weather. Rather than a sense of inevitability about the cyclical lessons of history and their bearing on what happens next. A trustworthy and memorable coincidence occasionally offers the interlude that

lets us have history both ways — as nothing new under the sun — and surprisingly— as a direct beam of light to direct our future.

No time or place on earth, in all of history, has the work and deeds of the Freemasons been more evident than today. Our history and our future certainly has the direct reflection of a perfect light.

I've often been puzzled, as you have been, why doesn't the general public — yes, and even some of our own members— see us for what and who we really are?

Do you think, maybe, we might need a uniform of some kind, like the Salvation Army, or wear an armband with a cross on it, or hang a stethoscope around our neck or a uniform like the paramedics? No, I don't think so! For when you think about it, we do have a uniform, but its one that can only be seen by those who see our good works. The uniform we wear is a perfect fit, for it fits around our heart. It's given to us when we kneel at the altar, and take our obligations. You may not have noticed it at the time, but you were fitted with a coat of human relief, trousers with pockets full of caring love, shoes that will take you to every needy person you can find. You wear a shirt of purity, and a tie of brotherly love with the design of charity written all over it. Your gloves are of pure lambskin in which you carry the Holy Writings of your individual faith, and under your arms are the square, compass and level, all three so symbolic of our way of life.

Yes, you have a beautiful uniform, and many in this world have seen it, but many more have not — and this is our challenge. You see, I have a vision and a challenge. Maybe it's the same as yours. I can see men of all ages searching for a better life, better surroundings, and a better universal world to live in. This vision and d challenge includes a society of people without needs of the flesh, a happy people with purity in their souls. A society void of selfish wants. I see men of all ages wanting to share their lives with others, to maintain an environment of traditional values worthy of our Lord's plan for all mankind.

At the front of this vision and challenge, I see the square and compass being handed out to every man who understands the purpose for our creation as a brotherhood, with a charge to lead the way to that perfect life, as it was intended in the beginning. We have all been given the tools of learning, and with these tools, we can teach and influence those who follow us in the ways of righteousness and of goodness.

There still are, as there always have been and always will be, frontiers to conquer, discoveries undreamed still remain. The greatest literature has not yet been written; the finest painting has not yet been painted; the finest symphony has not yet been composed, our wonderful fraternity has not yet seen its finest day. In this vision and challenge, I see new and exciting horizons.

If we can but maintain the initiative and develop the imagination to penetrate them, we will see that society which is reserved for only the good.

Remember the standards that Grand Commander Cowles exemplified We must keep those same standards in our vision to make possible that which is impossible, make honest that which is dishonest and reinstitute goodness as a standard in our everyday life.

"We know that when Freemasons stand united, they truly will leave an Indelible Impression".

So in conclusion and with remembrance of the past, and a heart filled with love and gratitude from the little lady of 93, who always believed in her son and m Freemasonry - and also with my heart hull of teary-eyed sentiment and wonderful memories and dreams - my mother of 93, my children and grandchildren. Virginia and I - thank you for the privilege of serving the greatest and most honorable fraternity in the history of mankind. Thank you.

Respectfully submitted,
Thomas M. Boles, Grand Orator