

**Grand Lodge
Free & Accepted Masons
Of California
Grand Oration 1907**

**Grand Orator
Jacob Nieto
“What Makes A Mason”**

All beginnings are difficult, but I can imagine few beginnings more difficult than formulating the introduction to an address designed for this Grand Body.

When one remembers that seated as his audience are not only men of education, culture and refinement; men of discernment and discretion, skilled in worldly matters, able to sit in judgment and to determine upon the exact value of each word, phrase and sentence, and to criticise every thought and sentiment; but men who know the ritual and with whom its language is so fluent that they find it impossible to keep it out of their ordinary conversation, he becomes convinced that mere perfervid oratory, a flight of winged words will never do. Here are men of thought—and that which is offered them must not only be the result of mature thought, but must possess the additional quality of being able to engage their most serious attention and lead them by logical paths to a logical conclusion. I might enunciate a problem or suggest hypothetical questions and reasoning upon them, endeavor to educe some thought that might commend itself to the imagination, or I might proceed to discuss definitions and by thus limiting the breadth of discussion narrow down my argument to a few generalities.

But in the stead of all these expedients it is my purpose to pro-pound a question and in the course of my attempt to solve that question or answer it, to engage your thoughts and your most serious attention, to enliven your sympathies and sentiments and to lend wing to your imagination. The question I am about to discuss is, "What makes a man a Mason." I know that most of my friends here assembled would solve the question immediately by responding, his obligation makes a man a Mason, and that position I am about to contest.

An obligation no more makes a man a Mason than does subscribing to the creed of a particular church make one a true follower of the doctrines inculcated by that church. One may attend church every day and be conversant with every ceremony and be no Christian, or attend the Temple and repeat every prayer and be no Jew. Similarly a man may be present, whenever his Lodge convenes, know the work perfectly and be only a lodge Mason. Like some frequenters of churches and temples, whose religion never strays beyond the confines of the religious edifice, his Masonry may be and is confined to lip ser-vice and ritual work. Such men are never Masons and no amount of obligations can make them Masons. Men whose hearts do not realize, and whose minds cannot comprehend the real usefulness of Masonry; men who cannot apply the teachings of the Craft to their lives and to the practice of their daily existence, and feel their Masonry only within the precincts of the lodge room; such men are a detriment and a hindrance to the cause that Masonry represents.

When men originally banded themselves together under the name of Masons, it was the espousal of a sacred cause and a desire to promulgate the doctrines of that cause that impelled them to combine. In an age when ignorance among the masses was promoted and encouraged for fear that men might realize that freedom, their inalienable right was denied them; when factional feud and sectarian strife was fostered and stimulated by designing rulers that men's minds, diverted by the non-essentials represented by dogma and formula, should utterly fail to comprehend that they were deprived of their liberty, a few stout hearts that, with fearless minds, were willing to undergo martyrdom stood forth to champion the cause of liberty.

Collecting about them men of like caliber selected from all sorts and conditions of men they constructed a society that would, by destroying the stumbling blocks so adroitly placed in the path of human progress, render it impossible for men, through ignorance of one an-other, or bigotry, to retard the growth of that spirit of brotherly love that alone could cement the men who desired to serve the Grand Master of the Universe into one common band. Hence no restriction as to calling or creed was imposed upon those who, seeing the light and desiring to aid in spreading it, volunteered their services to the holy cause.

Each one thereafter undertook to individually manifest in the pursuit of his own existence, and to demonstrate in his personal life, the great beauties conceived and promulgated by the Fraternity.

The Holy Bible, the rule and guide of his faith, was the source from which shone the light which was thenceforward to be reflected in his own actions and words, in his demonstrations to his fellow men, in his companionship with his family and his comradeship with his friends. It is to the Bible then that we must look for the light that we are to absorb and then to disseminate that we banded together for the promotion of all that is best and noblest, may fit ourselves as master workmen proficient in the knowledge of our Craft and competent for the performance of our work. The fifteenth Psalm gives us the picture of an honest man, the man whose soul is above untruth, and who finds no joy in gaining wealth through the misfortunes of others. He never forgets nor does the true Mason that the mistakes of others are contributory to his own good, and often their failure means his success. He therefore deems it his duty to attempt equalization by proffering the unsuccessful aid and encouragement to prosecute his vocation. The psalmist speaks of God as mighty, just, powerful; but he is full of goodness; he is merciful, long-suffering and slow to anger too, and in the highest concept of the psalmist, God's most exalted function is described in the words, "Father of the Fatherless and Vindicator of the Widow." Brethren, do you realize what this meant, pronounced as were these words at a time when money had corrupted men's minds and the weakest and most helpless were prey to the strong and the rich? Or can you conceive the conditions that prevailed when that grand orator-poet Isaiah denounced his generation, berated them for the uselessness of their assemblies convened or convoked for personal gain or aggrandizement? When he characterized their holy convocations and fasts as farces and their unmeant devotions and supplications as blasphemies, and when he declared the acceptable day of God as one in which you break the yoke of servitude, free the enslaved, feed the hungry, clothe the naked, shelter the homeless and cease pointing the finger of scorn. Do you understand what pointing the finger of scorn means? You know the difference between insinuated insult and the affront conveyed in definite terms. The one is deadly because indefinite, and cowardly because un-determinable. The insinuated insult leaves a man helpless and denies him the human and natural desire to be avenged because it is not stated; it leaves him defenseless. So it is with pointing the finger of scorn. There is a pointing of the finger which is only mental, and men have been thus only mentally exposed to scorn because of their religious beliefs. But this is wrong in a society where men of all faiths are banded together for the prosecution of a common cause.

To obviate all this when man's freedom was assailed on all sides, our Fraternity strove to disseminate the light which is of the eternal co-eternal and like a glory did invest the rising world of waters dark and deep. We are still banded together for the enlightenment of mankind and any danger that menaces humanity must engage our most serious attention. Individually each of us is under obligation to eradicate to the best of his ability any disease or distemper that threatens to infect men's minds, and destroying their reverence for God and righteousness cause crude forms of thought to hold sway.

Today there is a disorder which is not local, a malady which is not national, but epidemic the world over. Money fever, the greed for gold is a disease that has infected mankind, not only here but every-where, and nothing seems to have any value except it has a price in money. Today, when men of high repute and standing have their price in gold, and high officials become traitors to their trust for so much money, it becomes the duty of every Mason to lend his aid to battling against Mammon. In his service neither mercy or kindness, love nor sympathy finds a place; all things must subserve him. But we who serve God as our master must be up and doing. Gold will not unbolt the portals of heaven; money will not unbar the gates of Paradise. Money is not the standard by which we measure men; we judge by character only. Who is the most honored of our three first most excellent grand masters? Solomon, king of Israel, with gorgeous panoply of kingly raiment, or Hiram of Tyre with his wealth of stone and timber? Neither! but the humblest architect of the work who forfeited his life rather than his integrity, and whom neither persuasion nor force could induce to prove traitor to his trust. The simple, honest mind, great in its simplicity, drinking into his soul the lessons symbolized in the tools -of his trade is the greatest exemplar of Freemasonry known to man. Neither his obligation nor a knowledge of the work made him a Mason; but his answerable honesty, his piety, his fidelity, his putting into practice the principles of

his art, made him the noblest of all Masons. Our most ancient teachers inculcated morals by means of parable and allegory and, following their noble example, I will with your forbearance granted, attempt to compose one for you.

My soul was once granted leave to stray away from my body, that unobserved I might note the ways of men, entering into their secret thoughts without fear of detection. Accordingly my soul did stray away one night to a large and thriving mining camp, where the moral law is put aside and men carry legal decisions in their hip pockets. Among those most unfortunate there was a sturdy and strong young man who, to quote him, had been "lucky—fortune had smiled upon him," he said. He had dug in many a claim and found many a pocket which he had transferred to his bank account. Amongst those who had dug down into the earth, he had been most successful, and now grown rich he hungered to go home, not to do good 'tis true, but to show the villagers, his early companions, what he had done and how rich he had grown. He boarded the train, and in a short while fell asleep and dreamed. My soul kept company with his thoughts and dreamed his dream with him. He dreamed that he had died and the funeral o'er, his soul began its journey heavenward. On a rough and rugged road he found himself, trudging and laboring onward, his feet all cut by the projecting rocks and his frame borne down by the weight of gold. But as he labored painfully along other spirits passed him by whose feet seemed scarce to touch the ground, much less to suffer by the contact. And he looked and wondered and anon, as his strength waxed weak, he queried of a passing spirit the cause why he so pain-fully trudged along and they passed, experiencing no pain at all. "My good deeds have lightened the burden of my sins and I feel their weight no more," was the response, but still he labored on. Soon he came to an iron gate against which he pressed with might, but no strength of his could move those gates, so he stood aside to observe. Anon there came several souls that knelt them down and prayed and arising did pass through as though no gate were there. And there came a voice from out the heights that uttered the mandate, "Pray." Pray? Why, he had not prayed for years. In the busy life he lead he had no time for such a thing. Even the prayer he lisped at night at his mother's knee had from his memory passed clean away, and neither the memories of his childhood, nor the soft and refining influences that home recalls had entered into his life for many a year. Pray? Who prayed out there where he lived? But anon, like the cool breath of a heavenly wind, it came back to him again, and kneeling there at the iron gate he prayed a childlike prayer "that God would let him grow up to be a good man and true," and lo, the gates were there no more and he passed the portals through.

On a different road he now stood. Rocks no more bothered his feet, but grassy turf unevenly laid, and, borne down by his wealth, he labored along till he came to a silver gate. Here again his strength was of no avail to force an entrance and he waited to watch and saw numbers approach the gate and reverently kneeling proclaim, "Oh, God, I have sinned," and instantly the gates did part and they entered in. He too would have entered but found his progress hindered, the gates were closed to him. Repent? Why should he repent? What had he done to repent? He had only done what all the others had done; it was usual and customary amongst them. He had only done as the others had done, and followed the usual business methods. Everybody had taken advantage of others, and no one had been considerate; their faults had been their misfortunes, but he could not help that. Thus reasoning, he sought to force his way through, but the gates resisted him. In the sight of heaven wrong is wrong, and nothing justifies crime. Strong with a new emotion, his disappointment had taught him, he too knelt at the gate and as from the depths of sincerity rang out the words, "Oh, God, I have sinned; forgive me." The gates flew wide open and he, like the others, passed through. And now he stepped upon mossy ground with paths moist with heaven's dew and toiled along till he came to a golden gate as slight as a spider's web. But it was strange indeed that strength could not move that gate. So again he waited in order to observe how admission could lie here gained. And as he waited there passed him by an aged and back-bent sage that with humble mien came and stood by the gate. From out the heights a voice was heard speaking in tones sublime: "Oh thou faithful servant, most welcome to the realms of bliss; you have spent your life in charity the greatest and most kind. To those who did not know you have imparted knowledge, and men have learned through you of God and human love, enter thou most deserving one."

And while he gazed bewildered there also passed him by a woman bent with years and marred with toil. From out the height a voice was heard in accents full of love: "Oh, thou blessed

one, long has thy love been known; thou hast earned heaven's most cordial welcome. Hungry yourself, you shared the little you had with those who had nought." And the golden gates parted for her.

Moved by a sentiment he had not known before, the man flung from his back his treasure of gold and said, "Oh, God, send this back to earth and give it to those who will protect the orphan and dry the widow's tears." He looked up and the gates were not there. Lured forward by a sound of music not of earth, he hastened his steps, now made more free, his burdens having been removed, and at length arrived in a chamber where it seemed to him the hosts of heaven were assembled. An awful silence held all there enthralled and troubled were the brows of all ministering angels. Suddenly there was a blast of trumpets, long and loud, and every soul trembled. It was the day of judgment, awful and sublime, and the courts of heaven were about to convene; men and angels were to appear before the throne of grace and reward or punishment was to be meted out. Again the trumpet blasts were sounded and Justice looked askance at Love and Truth, looked shamefacedly at outraged Virtue. Justice remembered growing blinder at the request of Love and Truth recalled concealing facts to protect outraged Virtue. From above the throne of grace "the Voice" proclaimed, "If in the sight of heaven angels are not without fault, how can mortal man be stainless?" A third time the trumpets sounded and heavenly heralds proclaimed the opening of the divine courts. It seemed as though all earth was present and in the midst a glorious throne, above which shone a light bright and luminous. In front of the throne was exposed a ponderous tome, in which was inscribed the record of man's misdeeds and from which the accuser read the charges from time to time, staying to demand judgment: And Justice would assent as Truth confirmed the charges that were read. At length the reading was ended and again the accuser rose to demand sentence upon mankind. The advocates on the defense had been heard, the angels of Grace had interposed, and soul sent sympathy to soul as they waited the awful moment when their doom would be pronounced. But such is the custom in the courts of heaven, that sentence cannot be passed, till all the angels have been heard, nor is that tribunal ever closed to appeals for pardon. One place in that heavenly host was vacant, one ministering angel had strayed away. Mercy was missing, and so the court delayed remaining yet in session. Down on earth, where misery holds companionship with want and hearts are crushed beneath a multitude of woes, there was Mercy busily engaged bringing sunshine where nothing but darkness was before. Here she soothed a stricken one, there carried cooling water to parched throats. Now joining together in loving fellowship those who had been separated for years, helping the weary, comforting the sorrowing, feeding the hungry; aye, even in dens whence Virtue had long been banished, Mercy entered to bring the Grace of God to those who had turned away from it. No place was too mean, no being so base, but that Mercy would minister to aching hearts. On a sudden in the extreme circle of the assemblage of sorrow a sound of unrestrainable joy was heard, and a tumult of gladness not to be silenced. Some one was approaching and all there felt that in the person of the one entering was great good for all. Not that the sight presented would have suggested great things, for the figure approaching was tattered and worn, with hair disheveled and garments wet with tears of men's greatest sorrows. So it is that mercy sometimes despises wealth to lurk beneath the beggar's tattered robe. On, on came the figure until it reached the foot of the throne of glory, and throwing herself athwart the great book Mercy wept most convulsively. Even in heaven they respect sincere grief, so no one for awhile interfered till at last Faith and Hope, tenderly drawing nigh, raised Mercy from across the throne and lo, the page was blank, for Mercy's tears had washed the record clean.