

# Warren Harding — Freemason

A Nation is not simply a human encampment, or a business concern. It is both of these, but much more. It is the fusing of millions of people into a vast fraternity, a great friendship, into a unity of faith, feeling, purpose and destiny. It is a collective memory and a collective hope; a thing of spirit, ideals, sentiment — a fellowship in history, service and that obligation to the future which is one of the noblest sentiments of mankind, and the most disinterested. Of the faith, history, genius and destiny of the Republic, the President is the embodiment. He is a symbolic figure. When he is running for office he is only a man like the rest of us, chosen from among ourselves by virtue of his strength of intellect and nobility of character, as these have developed before the eyes of his fellow citizens. When he is elected he is something more. He becomes then the incarnation of the spirit and will and purpose of a great people, and we need not apologize to any sentiment of equality for regarding him with reverence. There is, in one way of looking at him, something sacred about the President, as the instrument of the execution of the organized will of the nation.

This is not a mere fancy, but a fact of deep import which we need to ponder. The investiture of the President with the power and purpose of millions of people makes him other than he is in his private capacity. What the President does before the world he does for and through us, typifying the nation as no mere ruler could typify it. He is a servant of the people, not a master. His character as revealed in his stewardship is our character, his work in no real sense our work, doing things which free people decree shall be done. He stands for the only Divine right that Republics know — the right of men to rule themselves. The accolade of the popular will changes him and makes him a High Priest of humanity in this land, where, are being wrought out the highest ideals of the race.

The President is the nation brought to a focus of personality, and we see him walking in a fiercer light than ever beat upon a throne — from humble life to the highest office a mortal may hold while wearing our morality. We have had many great Presidents, never a bad one. No one on that great roster has betrayed his people, or proved unworthy of his mighty trust. Each is known to have been moved by pure motives — doing with an honest purpose all he could for the glory of the Republic. Read the life of each President, and, in the light of all the facts and the posture of the hour, it will be seen that a better choice could not have been made than was made at the time.

In a manner not merely accidental, but providential, each of our Presidents, by virtue of his temperament, training, character and personality, has been the man to match the hour — for, to a degree not realized, the personality of the President gives and receives the tone and temper of the nation. The names and services of our Presidents are a testimony to all the world that the plain common people can be trusted, while showing what kind of men a democracy can discover and develop. Most of the great Presidents revealed their greatness after the wise ones wondered why they had been elected. What was then the future and now the past has vindicated the intuition of the nation, in an almost miraculous manner.

Into this great tradition of honor and service came President Harding, at a time of disillusion and confusion, in the wake of a gigantic War, when the world was feverish and almost fanatical with shell-shock; a quiet, gentle-hearted man of fraternal instincts and humanitarian sentiments, having wisdom of patience and the patience of love; conservative, conciliatory, seeking to plant seeds in the good soil of understanding; friendly of spirit, faithful of heart; a man of haunting sympathy and healing goodwill; a small-town man, who loved all kind of folk, at once our neighbor and our President; honored for his character, beloved for his simple, unveneered humanity, and to be remembered as a man in whom the spirit of our Republic revealed itself as a great Friendship.

Alas, just as he was striking his stride as a servant and leader of the people, God touched him and he fell asleep — plunging the nation and the world into a bereavement as unexpected as it was profound. Each of us, whether we agree with the politics of the President or not, felt a sense of personal loss, as if a near neighbor and old friend had suddenly passed away — leaving us to wonder at the fleetingness of life and the strange ways of God. He brought the people close to the Government, and the Government close to the people; he wanted to foster fellowship, understanding, brotherhood, co-operation between classes, creeds, nations, races. In short, he was a man and a President to whom Fraternity was the fundamental need, faith and hope of the nation and the world, without which chaos comes again; and in this he was a true Master Mason.

To the judgment of statesmen and the verdict of historians we must leave the final appraisal of the public acts of the President. Leaving these large matters for some ultimate estimate yet to be made, it is with the more intangible influences of character and personality that we have to do now; those things which seem imponderable, but which are more precious than any official act. Such influences are spiritual, mystical, incalculable, but they are beyond all price and make it worth our time to live.

As has been said, the President was a great fraternalist, alike by temperament and by the habit of his life. Brotherliness was native to his spirit, and he was a Mason in his heart, as all men should be, long before he was made a Mason, in the Lodge. "I like the atmosphere of Fraternity," he said in one of his last speeches; and that was no affectation, but the literal truth of the man. "I think I know the very soul of Masonry," he said in his address to the Imperial Council of the Shrine; and he rejoiced in the great place which fraternalism in general, and Masonry in particular, has in America. He saw its value, both as a bulwark against anti-social forces, and as a constructive force in behalf of social stability and advance. His estimate of Masonry was shown by the place he held in its fellowship, and the part he took in the assemblies, his Masonic affiliations being as follows: Marion Lodge No. 70, F. & A.M., Marion, Ohio; Marion Chapter No. 62, R.A.M., Marion, Ohio; Marion Commandery No. 36, K.T., Marion, Ohio; Scioto Consistory, A. & A.S.R., Columbus, Ohio; Aladdin Temple, A.A.O.N.M.S., Columbus, Ohio. Honorary Member Albert Pike Lodge No. 36, A.F. & A.M., Washington, D.C.; Columbia Chapter No. 1, R.A.M., Washington, D.C., and Almas Temple, A.A.O.N.M.S., Washington, D.C.

The President was elected to receive the Thirty-Third Degree of the Scottish Rite in 1920, but owing to the illness of Mrs. Harding, was unable to be present at the conferring of the Degree at Cleveland. It was his intention to attend the session of the Supreme Council, Northern Jurisdiction, in New York in the autumn, to receive the Degree; but in the hearts of his Brethren he had already been crowned with the highest Degree within the gift of the Fraternity, as much for his spirit and character as for his devotion to the Craft. At the time of his raising, and on various Masonic occasions, he left many expressions of his vision of Masonry, one of which, in his address to the Shrine, is as follows:

"No man ever took the oaths and subscribed to the obligations with greater watchfulness and care than I exercised in receiving the various rites of Masonry; and I say it with due deliberation and without fear of breaking faith. I have never encountered a lesson, never witnessed an example, never heard an obligation uttered which could not be openly proclaimed to the world. More, if the lessons taught were heeded, if the obligations read were assumed, if the relationships urged were adopted men would be infinitely better in their relationships.

"There is an honest, righteous and just fraternal life in America. It embraces millions of men and women, and a hundred fraternal organizations extend their influence into more than a third of our American homes, and make ours a better Republic for their influences. Fraternity is inherent in man. It is our obligation to make the most of it for human betterment . . . In the Lodge room there is molded what becomes public opinion, and contributes to the moving forces of developing civilization.

"I wish somehow we could have fraternity among nations, as it is taught in America among men. I do not mean to employ sign, grip and password; which afford an appealing mystery to our relationship, but the insistent demand for just dealing, the respect for the rights of others, and the ideals of brotherhood recited in the Golden Rule, and the righteous fellow-relationship which every man knows his God approves. Under such a reign of fraternity cruel human warfare will never come again."

Naturally, the President had a special affinity for the stately Order of the Knights Templar, in which two of the most beautiful things in the world are united — Freemasonry and Christianity. He was a Christian, holding his faith with the simplicity of a little child — wherein he was wiser than any philosophers — striving to live by its high principles, in private life and public office; and he died in its great assurance of the life immortal. Three days prior to his inauguration, at Marion, Ohio, the Order of the Temple was conferred upon him. After the conclusion of the ceremonies he addressed the assembled Templars as follows:

"Sir Knights: It seems for a moment as though Masonry must have been designed for my helpfulness at this particular time. If I have had a thought that I believed was my own, in all sincerity of a man's soul I believe that I have had the thought approaching my great responsibility in humility and faith; and I come tonight to the Temple of this splendid Knighthood and find it teaching me and emphasizing those things I have been thinking. And

so I have come to the new assurance and new confidence in the knowledge that the manhood of America which bears the stamp of Masonry is back of me.

"I thought while the Eminent Commander was speaking of the Flag, that he need not worry about the Flag. All America is consecrated to the Flag, and I promise you, though I may fail you in many ways, God knows I will not fail you in that one thing. While I love peace no less than any man on earth — While I think peace is the greatest thing to be thought of — I should have no hesitancy to draw this sword in the preservation of our national honor.

"Have you ever stopped to think that tradition seldom preserves anything not worth while? Oh, how beautiful is the story of Christ, and how you can bring it home to every man! Every man has his Gethsemane. Every man has his cross to bear, and the measure of his manhood is the way he bears it. Men are crucified every day, as was Christ; and, while they do not rise again, perhaps, in the same great way, any man who performs his service to Christ never fails to live again.

"Knighthood is no more forgotten today than when it flourished in its outward manifestation. I believe the world is everlastingly growing better. The Order of the Temple made a great impression upon me. One of the twelve chosen apostles privileged to be with the Master daily, failed, and today we do not expect one man in twelve, or indeed, one in many more than twelve to fail. We are going on to a finer and better order in the world. The World War isn't chargeable to the Christian Religion, but to the failure of those who profess it. Too often we take an obligation carelessly. Too often we do not give it the consideration which we should. "I am mindful tonight that three days hence I am to take an oath — a solemn one, one that no man can approach without solemn thought. I mean to take that obligation to defend and preserve in humility and faith; and in love of truth. I want your help. I want you to realize that the next administration of the greatest land on earth is yours, not mine; it's that of one hundred million, and I want the help of all of them."

His last address, read by his secretary almost at the hour when he passed away, was in presentation of a traveling banner, of which he was the honored bearer, from the Grand Commandery, Knights Templar of Ohio, to the Grand Commandery of California, at Hollywood, on the afternoon of August 2nd. The banner was inscribed with the text, "Not unto us, O Lord, Not unto us; but unto Thy Name be the glory;" and the President said:

"We should glorify the Holy Name, not by words, not by praise, not by display of arms, but by deeds of service in behalf of human brotherhood. Christ, the great Exemplar of our Order, repeatedly urged this truth upon his hearers. There was nothing mystical or mythical in the code of living preached by Jesus Christ. The lessons He taught were so simple and plain, so fashioned to be understood by the humblest of men, that they appealed to the reason and emotions of all. His words to the fishermen bore conviction to the learned men of the Roman bench. All his teachings were based upon the broad ground of fraternalism, and justice, and understanding from which flows peace, always. 'A new commandment I give unto you, that ye love one another.' Surely this is 'all the Law and the Gospel.' . . .With the universal observance

of Christ's commandment we would have the essentials of all religions. Perhaps I will best express my thought if I say we need less of sectarianism, less of demoninationalism, less of fanatical zeal and its exactions, and more of the Christ spirit, more of the Christ practice, and a new and abiding consecration to reverence for God."

Thus passed President Harding, Friend and Brother; on his lips words of love to man and faith to God, leaving a legacy of honorable character and gracious service. All the Craft unite in the words, "Hail and Farewell, until we meet in the Great White Lodge," the while we wonder in our hearts what it must be like to be past death — to have accomplished that one amazing act which we have yet undone before us, and which awaits our adventure — to know what that awful and mysterious thing is, and that its pains and terrors are gone past forever. For, whether we be Presidents or peasants, walking in high or humble lot, these things will pass away like a dream of the night, leaving only the Eternal God and the immortal soul, and the loves and fellowships of these many days and years!