

**Grand Lodge
Free & Accepted Masons
Of California
Grand Oration 1860**

**Grand Orator
Sir Henry M. Gray**

BRETHREN

Beneath the blue dome of this wide, unpillared firmament, and under the magnificent roof of a temple "not made with elands," we are met in joyful assemblage, upon a day sacred to the ancient memories of our Craft, to lay with appropriate and impressive ceremonies the foundation stone of a temple, henceforth and forever to be sacredly dedicated to the mysteries and work of Masonry.

In due form and manner the corn, wine, and oil poured forth upon that stone, have symbolized the great end and object of Masonic life; the swell of joyous music with its exultant harmony, has awakened in our breasts the responsive echo; the light in a thousand earnest eyes, and the quickened throb of a thousand loving hearts, have told how deeply this scene and this hour have impressed themselves upon our very souls; and, finally, the invocation of the blessing of Almighty God, to direct and prosper this undertaking to its successful completion, has, while it humbly acknowledges our dependence upon His powerful aid, given us the trustful hope that His paternal blessing shall be vouchsafed to us.

Brethren, the work is done! In the deep foundations of this structure you have placed your memorial. For the first time on the western shores of this continent, you have set up the pillars of your faith in enduring stone. In the generations yet to come, who shall gaze with pride upon this noble pile, and who shall under its secure shelter prosecute the glorious mission which Masonry has entrusted to their keeping, your labors will not be forgotten. They will recall, with proud and glowing retrospect, the memory of this day. They will pay due homage to the loyal faith, the loving interest, and the deathless attachment which you held to the great work of Masonry and which prompted you, in the very infancy of our State, thus to lay broad and deep the imperishable foundations of a Temple, which, while it should be one of the most conspicuous adornments of our city, should also serve as a perpetual record of that faith which, in all ages and in all countries, has, in its "outward visible form," illustrated itself to the world in all the grand triumphs of architectural glory, as, in the manifestations of its inner life has been the pioneer in the vanguard of civilization, charity, peace, brotherly kindness, and good will to men. If ever the light burns dim upon our altars, or the hearts of the faithful fail them "because of fear;" if the doubter or the skeptic ask, "The Fathers, where are they?"—then shall this Masonic temple answer: "The same faith that animated their hearts still survives in their descendants. This goodly Tabernacle, which the ancient craftsmen builded, yet stands in its pristine strength and beauty, a sacred heritage to be sacredly guarded and preserved by us and by those who shall come after us. So, evermore, shall the faithful remembrance of our brethren yet to be, preserve our memory green."

All creeds and faiths have their festal occasions. The State has its days of patriotic jubilee, the Church its seasons of rejoicing. On commemorative days, due homage is paid to all who, in every rank and in every good work, have adorned the age they illustrated. Thus religion, art, science, heroism, virtue, wherever their votaries have ennobled life by grand achievements, have claimed the ready homage of the world. They who have died on the bloody fields of battle for the liberties of their country, where thousands in the joyous, rush of death go down—they who in the fires of martyrdom have yielded up their lives a sacrifice to principle—they who in toilsome solitude have worked out the great problems of science, and given language and interpretation to the mute voices of nature—they who with strong hands and pure ambitions have guided the evolving destinies of nations—they who, as the apostles of divinest charity, have devoted life, substance, influence, all to the amelioration of human wrong or suffering, are alike canonized in the world's great heart, and compel the homage of the world's wide sympathy.

This is our festal day, my brethren; to us, a day of joy in a two-fold sense. This happy hour is witness of a ceremony of no small import to the future of Masonry in this State and on this coast.

We have come up together, with one accord, to aid in the laying of the corner-stone of the first Masonic Temple erected within the limits of our national confederation, on the westward slopes of the dividing mountains. For a brief space we have forsaken our usual avocations; and from fields of waving grain, from workshops of daily toil, from the quiet retreats of scientific pursuits, from the busy marts of commerce, from the sacred chancels of religion, we have come with "one heart, and one mind," to swell the pomp of this festive hour. Hallowed by our prayers and benedictions, we have placed the token of our affection to Masonry in the keeping of our mountain granite. Our loves, our hopes, our aspirations, we place beside those memorials: as soon may the one perish as the others. Not until the solid rock shall melt in the consuming fires of the final conflagration, shall die out in our hearts the noble teachings of our Order. Not even when the elements themselves shall yield to the inevitable laws of decay and dissolution, shall the pure, eternal, imperishable principles upon which our faith is based, perish or be lost.

There is no eternity to matter. The adamantine walls of earth themselves must crumble into dust; and no work of man's hand can withstand the silent tooth of time. The mighty monuments of the forgotten past reveal themselves to us only in dim traditions or in almost undistinguishable fragments, puzzling the lore of the antiquarian and baffling the light of science. They leave us like mariners on the wrecking midnight sea, looking—and oh, how hopelessly—for the coming light. But principles cannot die. Truth is eternal. Justice, equality, fraternal love, charity, faith, hope, are all invulnerable, and immortal all. They are but the emanations of the eternal good — sparks from the eternal fire — drops from the ever-flowing river of immortal life. Like the deathless source from which they sprang, they also (albeit in clouded manifestation) must claim the high prerogatives of immortality. So, brethren, with the inner life of Masonry. It cannot die. Its temples may totter to the dust, and its visible tokens be utterly lost, but IT will survive. Its spirit is the spirit of the " All-working Good "—its work is the practical embodiment of all-working benevolence— its mission on this earth is but the reflection and exemplification of that divinest of all virtues— Charity!

Aside from the event which has convened us together, we enjoy another source of congratulation. This is one of our " holy days," set apart and dedicated to the memory of the holy Saints John. Since the early primitive rule of our first Grand Master, King Solomon, with the passing away of the ancient dispensation—with all its glorious symbols, types, and shadows—with all its rigid enforcement of the law as a penalty for disobedience—with all the magnificent surroundings which environed the ancient Masonry, and the rites and ceremonies of the early Temple worship—with all the forms and restrictions and subordinations, working in their iron channels—the lapse of ages and the changing conditions of society brought an epoch in which milder ^ laws and more tolerant systems were demanded by the necessities of the time. The early morning glow upon the eastern hill-tops announced the coming of a brighter day; the softer airs that swept westward from the ancient home of the stern wide-browed prophets and patriarchs, foretold the coming of a more genial summer; the dove, with the olive branch of peace, was flying o'er the stormy water in search of » resting-place for her weary feet; and then, when among the crumbling fragments of the earlier civilizations Masonry could find no permanent abiding place, she swept down the cloudy and perturbed centuries, until she rested under the shadow of the new dispensation of peace.

The earth had been convulsed for a thousand years; thrones, dynasties and empires were passing; through all the mutations of social and political existence; yet amid all this turbulent torrent of change in our world, the precious Ark of our Covenant floated safely down, until it rested securely upon the Ararat of perpetual repose.

Then lived in Holy Land two Holy men—two Johns. The one, the Baptist; the other, the Evangelist; men of extraordinary yet diverse characters, but both the living embodiments of the highest lessons of Masonic wisdom. The one, the impersonation of temperance, courage, self-sacrifice and heroic suffering for conscience sake; the other, the type of gentleness, meekness, sympathy, charity, brotherly kindness, and holy love. These men, so exalted above their fellows, so set aside and stamped with the mark of divine nobility, were eminently fitted to succeed the august King of Israel as the patrons and exemplars of our Order. Hence they, not alone and not chiefly as the forerunners and disciples of a new ecclesiastical dispensation, but from the singular purity of their lives, their devotion to the fundamental tenets of Masonic faith, and their sacrifice of all earthly good for the cause that engrossed their whole being, have been for two thousand years

the loved and venerated high priests of our Masonic faith. He of whom we speak today died a martyr's death. He perished in vindication of the teachings of his life. He fell an heroic sacrifice to the principles upon which our Order rests.

We speak of martyrdoms, and they are glorious. We speak of heroisms, and they are glorious. How they stand out in the cloudy past, like landmarks in the life gloom, these martyrs for the good—these heroes for the right! Some have sunk on the battlefield; some have watered the 'scaffold with their blood; others have perished in the agonies of fire. These have been of one race and language, those of another. This endured all things for one faith; that for another, but all, whatever their nation, or sect, or lineage, were alike the warriors of humanity, and perished that mankind might be free. The great and good of all eras form one great brotherhood. And. Thank God for having thus linked distant ages together by the ties of a common sympathy. The great souls scattered along the highway of history, are bound one to the other by an electric chain; and thus the influence of heroic deeds thrills from century to century down the long avenue of Time.

This day, my brethren, is held in sacred commemoration of St. John the Baptist, throughout the whole Masonic world. Every aspiration and prayer that arises today from your own full hearts, is met in the silent and illimitable fields of air by a million aspirations in every land and clime, from hearts as full and deep as yours.

All along the cloudy pathway of time our Craft have left their ever-enduring landmarks. While yet an operative organization, spreading from land to land, in Lodges of Labor, they have erected their mighty monuments, which, to this day, are the wonder and the glory of the world. The grand order and system which marked the building of the first temple, followed them in the latter ages; and although in the erection of the vast creations of Masonic skill, the busy sounds of labor were heard on every hand, as the grand arches and pinnacles and towers rose from their solid foundations to the heavens, yet the same beautiful plan of work by which the magnificent structure of the King of Israel.

" Rose like an exhalation, with the sound
Of dulcet symphonies, and voices sweet,"

governed the Craft in the building of those colossal triumphs of architectural genius, which shall forever demand the admiration and worship of the human intellect. Passing from this brief review of our subject, let us for a moment consider our institution in its adaptation to the wants of humanity; its fitness as the almoner of the holiest charity; its laws and precepts as the embodiment, not only of the purest morality, but presenting likewise a frame of government fitted for all conditions of life, for all races of people, and for all states of society. It sprang into existence far back in the distant ages, over whose history rests the pall of everlasting silence; it gleamed out of that darkness as the light of history began to irradiate the gloom only in dim and fabulous traditions; it took organic shape and practical development in the earliest days of the ancient Kings of Israel; and its culminating point was reached in that perfect system of work and government which presided over the erection of that miraculous structure—that marble poem of consummate genius whose lovely beauty, shining from the sacred mountain, gleamed to the remotest horizon like a star.

Thus it has come down to us from the earliest times. Through all the changes of empires, and amid all the revolutions of governments, it has preserved its existence. The altar now stands where it stood in the days of the first Masters; and the enkindled fires and the emblematic lights still shed their beams to illuminate the surrounding darkness. It has outlived the Temple which its ancient Craftsmen builded; but the same laws that held it in harmonious union then, alike preserve its unity and integrity now. The forms of architectural beauty and design may have gone down in the dust of the vanished ages, but the soul and spirit of the design, order and beauty, yet lingers in our Craft and hallows all its work.

From Praxitelean shapes, whose marble smiles

" Fill the hushed air with everlasting love; "

from towers and arches, moldering among their mocking ivy; from the solemn cloisters of many an old cathedral; from the dim aisles of grand old woods, whose mighty trees are evermore repeating

"Their old poetic legends to the winds;"

from the stupendous caves with all their sparry grotts; and from the grand rock-invest-ed gorges of the mountains, whose beetling walls might serve as the bastions of a world, where the sublime Architect of the Universe has, in the play of His omnipotence, set those grand copies for human genius to imitate: from each and all, the lesson falls with a deep significance on the Mason's heart. Architecture, its first great operative application, compelled the recognition of the laws of unity and order.

Prom the study and contemplation of the great principles upon which the harmony, of the material universe depended, the transition was natural and easy to the recognition and adoption of those laws governing the life, conduct, character, and actions, upon which alone, as upon a comer stone, could be erected the moral and spiritual Temple of Masonry.

Neither the time nor the occasion demand from me an exposition of the tenets f and principles of the Craft. I may, however, be allowed for a brief moment to allude to some of the excellences of our Order.

And first, its sublime equality. Its first principle is the recognition of the humanity of the man, and the acknowledgment of the fraternal ties that bind all men together. Within its sacred enclosure there can be no rank or caste. The royal ruler of a mighty realm; the mitred prelate ; the soldier, bearing upon his body the scars and trophies of a hundred fights ; the philosopher, whose keen vision has explored all the intricacies of natural or political wisdom; the soul of science that hath sojourned among the stars or dived into the nethermost depths—are all alike. Brethren all—made so by the recognition of each individual humanity—and each an equal scholar in the school of virtue. " Love one another " is written upon the doorposts, and the word " Brother " embraces in its comprehensive dialect, all ranks, from the Neophyte to the Supreme Master.

While prejudice alienates—while sect and nation, lineage and language, wealth and power, set up evermore the barriers which keep men asunder—while political distinctions and religious differences but deepen animosities and engender bitterness—

Masonry presents a platform and a principle broad and firm enough for all the world to rest upon in peace.

In the grand Choral Hymn of. the noble Schiller, I find these lines, which only could have sprung from a heart incandescent with Masonic heat:—

" Spark from the fire that gods have fed—
Love—thou Elysian child divine—
Fire-drunk, our airy footsteps tread,
Oh, Holy One, thy holy shrine.
Strong custom rends us from each other,
Thy magic all together brings,
And man in man but hails a brother,
Wherever rests thy gentle wings.
Embrace, ye millions, let this kiss,
Brothers, embrace the earth below,
Yon starry worlds, that shine on this,
One common Father know."

Masonry is, in short, the highest expression of the grand idea of Fraternity, and it is destined to be one of the most active agents in the accomplishment of that world wide fraternization which so especially marks the tendencies of the present age, and whose progressive development will ultimately result in drawing in a nearer and more perfect union all the children of the earth. It offends no prejudice, it opposes no sect. It stands aloof from all the noisy clamors of the day. Its mission is in secret and in silence. It does good and communicates," but the right hand knows not what the left hand doeth. It is the minister to want, the angel of consolation to patient suffering, the handmaid of religion; for, what religion teaches from lofty pulpits, it practically performs. Wherever there is want or sorrow, there is Masonry, the reliever; wherever is wrong or oppression, there is Masonry, the strong arm of support; wherever is death, or sickness, which is the shadow of death, there also is Masonry, to bind up the wound, to close the fixed and ghastly

eye, and then, with reverent care, to commit the dead body to the silence and retirement of the grave.

How often have you, in this land of strange vicissitudes, been called upon to minister to such needs as these? The strong, bold-hearted adventurer, struggling amid discouragements and privations for his children's bread, is suddenly arrested by the palsying hand of disease. Poverty and want environ him. A stranger in a land of strangers, to whom shall he go for succor? The swift tides of life rush by him, and he is cast a stranded wreck upon the shore. In the desolation and agony of his heart, he lays down to die ; no friend near that death couch—no ministering voice of consolation—no brother's hand to clasp the nerveless fingers—no upward pointing angel of hope to guide the way to immortal life.

But stay, some one knows that poor man. Some one in all this bright world out of which he is passing into the unknown land, must know that man! Surely, he shall not die, and make no sign! Oh, no! He has found friends. In almost the last agonized convulsions of his members, when his tongue could no longer syllable his thoughts, he found a brother—a brother in a higher sense than the claim which our common humanity in suffering or sore distress demands of every man—one, whose soul was knit to that vanishing soul in all the gentle ministrations of love and charity, by ties as strong, aye stronger, than those which knit the souls of Jonathan and David.

This picture, brethren, is a picture of practical Masonry, You have it framed in all your hearts; its colors cannot fade from your memories. In your own dark hours of desolation, the light from it will be a beacon pointing upward to Heaven!

And now, the hour for our departure has arrived. Henceforth, our paths diverge. From manifold pursuits in life, and from distant homes, moved by a common impulse, we have come up to worship near this sacred shrine, and to renew the vows of fealty to our common faith. I trust the hour has not been spent in vain, and that it has been good for us to have been together. In this interchange of kindly greeting, we have strengthened our fraternal ties, and in this common labor dedicated to our common cause, we have strengthened the hands of our Craft in every land.

As Masons of California, this hour is full of deep significance. You are the representatives of the world. From distant lands and climes, from every rank and station in life, from the most dissimilar conditions of physical and political existence, you have assembled on the western shore of our continent, a family of brethren bound together by a common interest and protected by the glorious Constitution of our common country. You are one, as citizens; and owing allegiance to a common law, you share alike in the glory and advancement of the State. In your Masonic relations you present the same anomaly. Of various tribes and nations, of parentages and educations the most diverse, with wide and high partition-walls separating you one from the other, you yet, here, to-day, meet upon common ground. We are all one—on earth, the great all embracing, loving soul of Masonry claims us as her common children—and in the heavens above us, the One Eternal Father!

Before we go hence, let us review our work. Upon a solid foundation we have placed our memorial stone. It hides from mortal eyes (we hope for ages yet to come) in its safe and silent tomb, the records of this day. In all its appointments, and with all the glory of its architectural design, this proud temple shall rise to its lofty roof, a fitting and noble testimonial to the devotion of the Masonry of our State. But there must be something, brethren, underneath that stone, and underneath the foundation which supports it, deeper than all this, or the building will not stand. The master builder may perform his work never so well; the apprentices and craftsmen may labor in due subordination to the authority of the masters; the massive walls may rise in all their solid strength to heaven; the costly jewels of our work may adorn its various chambers; the fires may be lighted upon its inner altars; the entrances may be well and duly guarded; but all, all will be in vain, unless there is a deeper, surer, and more stable foundation than that on which our corner stone reposes. What is that nether stone? What is that upon which a true temple to Masonry must be built? Ah, brethren, it is the deep, underlying, imperishable foundation of Masonic love, and Masonic unity. With that beneath the material foundation, this Temple is indeed secure and indestructible. The solid foundations of the globe had need of no more permanent corner stone than that structure, under whose deep bases repose Truth, Charity, and Brotherly Love.

One prayer, one spontaneous aspiration, is a fitting conclusion to this hour: Oh Temple! planned with the cunning skill of laborious art, rise in all thy majesty and beauty toward the skies! May thy walls be strength, and all thy tabernacles peace! May the votaries who shall in the long

march of centuries enter thy sacred porches, find evermore therein repose, refreshment, peace! May the light of thy sacred altars burn ever like a star! May the " stranger and the sojourner in the land " ever enjoy the blessings of thy welcome and thy shelter; and when the hour of thy decay and dissolution crumbles thee to earth, may there be found thousands of faithful and devoted hearts to raise thee from thy ashes with renewed splendor and more enduring life! " So mote it be."