

**Grand Lodge
Free & Accepted Masons
Of California
Grand Oration 1862**

**Grand Orator
Humphrey Griffith**

MOST WORSHIPFUL GRAND MASTER AND BRETHREN OF THE GRAND LODGE

Again, mindful of the duty we owe to our ancient and Honorable order, we have assembled to deliberate and act for the good of the craft; and, having discharged the weightier duties that called us together, we pause from our labors to look back through the past, that we may thereby gain wisdom and strength for the future.

Well and proper is it that we should do so, for to our hands, in part at least, is committed the prosperity, the usefulness, and the honor of our association.

Far back in the past, where the moss of centuries clusters thick upon the pages of history, Masonry was. Its temples and its columns were reared, its principles taught, and its name revered, before even History itself was; the dim light of tradition alone can tell us its origin. Not only ancient but honorable has been its name. It comes clad in the venerable garments of departed centuries, and crowned with the favor and countenance of the wise and good who have gone before us; its greatness in no place stained with cruelty or blood; its traditions so pure and so truthful that neither the most ardent or the most scrupulous of its votaries can wish for their change; its honors to be read in enduring monuments of wisdom and science, of industry and skill, and in the mouldering and stupendous ruins of the mighty works wrought by those ancient Masons who were both operative and speculative; its moral benefits to be seen in the well ordered lives and conduct of those who are true Masons at heart, as well as in the homes made bright and happy by its influence its kind and charitable dispensations, falling on the worthy like the gentle dew of Heaven, are seen and read " in the trembling lip that *fails to speak its thanks and the crystal tear resting on the eye of gratitude."

This history, these noble deeds and enduring works, all these glorious recollections, are to be still further perpetuated and illustrated by us, if we are true to Masonry that was, and to Masonry that shall follow us. But today, I do not desire to content myself with prying far back into the mist of ages for the antiquity of Masonry, to review its past glories, and then urge upon all Masons, as the extent of Masonry, a compliance with its rituals, and strict fulfillment of the requirements of the great law of brotherhood alone. These, my brethren, although obligations on us as Masons, are not all that we owe to ourselves or to Masonry.

What, then, is Masonry, and what its mission on earth? Its foundation is surely divine. No wisdom, short of that given especially by Omniscience, could have so framed an organization that it should outlive principalities and powers, and all other societies and associations; that, as century rolled after century, and age and generation followed close upon age and generation, it should but increase with its age, and strengthen with the lapse of time. All other associations, all other monuments of human skill, or wisdom, or knowledge, have been transient and transitory; they lived and they passed away; the place that once knew them knows them no more; but, Masonry, in all ages, in all climes, still the same, unchanging and unchangeable, has endured and pressed on to the final fulfillment of the mission assigned it by God him-self at its outset.

Man, created pure, and endowed with all the attributes necessary for his earthly happiness, had wandered from the path of his God, had violated his solemn ordinances, had brought sin and death into the world. Yes, quickly following his disobedience, crime succeeded crime, in still increasing magnitude, until murder and fratricide stained the world with a brother's blood: —the trail of the serpent had passed over all that was pure and happy, and left its blighting, withering curse behind.

That man might not be wholly lost, the bounteous Father of the Universe left him still with memory to recall the bright and glorious visions of Paradise, when he walked in Eden with his God, and inculcated in his mind living principles of morality and right. He taught him their necessities, their beauty and their worth, and clothed them for him in attractive hues. Man saw

and hoped. God and His angels encouraged the hope, and implanted in his breast the love of those principles of morality and virtue which by His grace and blessing have since increased and flourished, and are now the foundation of Masonry and the root of all good.

As men increased in knowledge and in social intercourse, they taught these principles to one another, and associated together that they might thereby be encouraged in the practice thereof. From this sprang societies, and, as time passed on, and God again communicated with His creatures, these associations took upon them shape, until they finally culminated in Ancient Craft Masonry, that Fraternity which we all revere. It however is but the body, the exemplification of those cardinal principles. They lay at the foundation of our Order, at the foundation of religion; and without them, we can neither be happy here, nor hope for happiness hereafter.

These are the teachings of Masonry. Belief in the immortality, eternity, and goodness of God, and in man's accountability to Him. That as God is immortal, so is the soul of man immortal, and that only by strict adherence to the moral law and through the grace of God, can he hope for happiness hereafter. As Masons, in God we must put our trust, and in one only God believe, and have enduring faith in the sacredness and divine inspiration of the Scriptures. I care not who, having passed the outer door of Masonry, has witnessed its solemn ceremonial and learned its hidden arcana, if his heart be not enlightened and illumined and his action controlled by a belief in these things, he is not a Mason, neither indeed can he be.

These are they which constitute Masonry. Its forms and ceremonies are but the symbolic representatives of its reality, and in a knowledge of their representation of these principles should all Masons be versed. Believing firmly and implicitly in, and ever having present in our minds, the strict accountability we owe to God, we will necessarily and naturally desire to lead virtuous, benevolent, and upright lives; and as we view His bounteous goodness towards us, and His abundant charity towards all of our transgressions, our hearts will warm with brotherly love towards all mankind; and the humble prayer to Him, "to forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those that trespass against us," will have a force, a significance, and a pathos we have never before imagined.

Masonry has been made the custodian of noble and sacred truths, and piously have they been transmitted from generation to generation; sometimes recognized and manifest in all their beauty and purity; and at all times diffusing their benign influence over its votaries. As we look through the various symbols of our Order and at the truths by them illustrated, each step in Masonry seems pointed by the unerring band of Deity to lead us on to Him. New beauties ever appear clustering thick around us; the Order and its ceremonials clad in new attractions; and time itself seems too short to learn all its delights. These forms and ceremonial observances, beautiful and impressive even to the uninstructed Mason, when viewed by the light of knowledge, impress still more upon our minds the divine wisdom which inspired them.

When, as Entered Apprentices, we first enter the Lodge, we are solemnly taught the inevitable punishment of sin, as well as our own blind and helpless condition. We learn to bow to God in prayer in times of trouble and trial and affliction—to invoke His blessings upon all our undertakings, and ever remember our dependence upon Him. We learn the necessity of a virtuous and upright life, and pure and spotless reputation. We are taught our duty to ourselves and to our fellow man. Through the view of the world around us, our attention is pointed to its great Ruler and Architect, and we are instructed to have "faith in Him, hope in immortality, and charity toward all men;" thus teaching us to live uprightly and, walking truthfully and with all humility seeking Divine aid, to so fashion our lives as, despite our rude and imperfect state by nature, shall fit us for a place in the temple on high—being ever in life full of truth, firm in the right, prudent, temperate, and just.

Progressing in the science as Fellow Crafts, we still further learn our dependence upon God, and at all times to think and speak of Him with due reverence and veneration; and also that, as Masons, we must improve the talent intrusted to our keeping, and so cultivate our minds and understandings as to exalt our Maker in ennobling ourselves.

As Master Masons, the full beauty of ancient Masonry is displayed to us in the most impressive lessons. Here we learn fidelity, and pure and unflinching adherence to truth; that for no temporary benefit or good, nor for safety from threatened harm, are we to deviate from the right. The neophyte here finds himself surrounded by the signs and tokens of death. It is even itself present with him, and all its dread paraphernalia cling close to his form and is realized in his

person. But he also learns that, though the "wicked for a time prevail," the time will come when a just and terrible punishment shall descend upon their guilty heads. He learns to look without fear upon death and the grave, for through our mystic symbols he looks beyond the tomb, and sees the life prepared for the just and good. He has impressed upon him anew and lastingly the immortality of the soul, and has manifested to him the raising and restoration of the body, firmly believing that, in the great day when the Builder shall call for his workmen, it will rise and be as immortal and incorruptible as his son! a lesson and a thought that fills our minds with hope for the future and an earnest desire to fit ourselves for the glorious life opening before us; that in these bodies made incorruptible and cleansed from every taint of sin, we shall meet, in that other and better world, the loved and lost that have gone before us.

Well may we, as Entered Apprentices, be taught to preserve a purity of life and conversation—well as Fellow Crafts, to revere God—and well, as Master Masons, earnestly to search for and piously preserve the ashes of our deceased brother: well knowing that the body we reverently lay in the tomb shall be with us clothed again with life, in the day when mortality shall put on immortality, and corruption shall have put on incorruption.

These are the teachings of Masonry brought to our view by symbolic emblems expressive of them all; every sign and symbol, each word and token, conveying some moral, some divine teaching filled with the precepts of virtue. To be a Mason at heart is indeed to be a good man and true, renouncing all false gods and all infidelity.

This being the end and mission of Masonry—to inculcate these teachings—how manifest the wisdom that established it, that thereby truths and historical lessons might point the mind to the real aim of life, and impress upon it, through signs and mysteries, the great teachings of Freemasonry, which are the teachings of the Holy Bible—the eternity and self existence of God—His omniscience and omnipotence— and the rich honors laid up by Him for the Mason in truth. Masonry teaches all this, and her teachings are true, for they are drawn from the fountain of truth—the Word of God itself.

Thus before us stands our Masonic edifice in all its simple grandeur and greatness; worthy of its Maker, God, worthy of its great exemplars, Solomon, Hiram of Tyre, and Hiram the widow's son, as well as of the love and adoration of its votaries to the latest day. Fit is it that its mission should be the noblest ever intrusted to merely human hands—to relieve the willow, the poor, and the fatherless—to bind up the wounds of the sore and the sick—to pour the oil of consolation upon the bruised and weary spirit—and, after making man happier here, to point him to a bright and shining home on high.

The material Temple built by Solomon and the Craft at Jerusalem fell under the attacks of its foes. The second temple, rebuilt by the Craft, has long since passed away, and even the foundation stones thereof cannot be found. But our Masonic Temple is but approaching its completion—its foundation laid broad and deep in the belief in Deity—its columns each inscribed with a virtue that surpasses the other, its towers reaching to heaven—its ample space filled with goodness, with purity, and with truth. Brotherly love pervades its worshipers, and that divine charity, which ever aids the erring to return, and forgives the contrite and repentant, breathes through all its votaries.

Grand and majestic Temple! When its fires were dimmed and its altars well nigh overthrown, its enemies knew that its God still lived, for they could ever read inscribed on its pediment, "The soul is immortal." Imbue yourselves then, my brethren, with its sacred enthusiasm; elevate your minds to its majestic heights; open your souls to receive its divine light, that it may illumine your pathway on to God; for the day will come when the gavel shall sound in the heavens, calling the craftsmen from the long slumber of the grave to the joy of the heavenly Lodge, where our Grand Master shall be the mighty God, our Lodge room the Heaven of Heavens, and our brethren beatified spirits of just men made perfect. Then shall true Masons meet in that glorious home and holy brotherhood, to enjoy forever the benefits of the lessons we here learned.

Hail, then, Masonry! Co-laborer, handmaid, sister of religion. Glorious was thy history when Solomon ruled the Craft at Jerusalem; but more glorious thy triumph when the first temple shall be forgotten in the greatness of the Eternal One, and when the vast concourse of the good shall assemble around thy everlasting altar set high in the heavens; and, bowing themselves, worship, saying "He is good, for His mercy endureth forever."