

**Grand Lodge
Free & Accepted Masons
Of California
Grand Oration 1867**

**Grand Orator
John R. Bucknee**

MOST WORSHIPFUL GRAND MASTER AND BRETHREN OF THE GRAND LODGE

"We learn from Holy Writ that it was decreed in the wisdom and counsel of Deity aforetime, that a house should be builded at Jerusalem, erected to God and dedicated to His holy name. We also learn from the same sacred source that it was in the heart of David to build that house, but in consequence of his reign having been one of war and bloodshed, this distinguished privilege was denied him. The promise made to David was fulfilled in the person of Solomon, his son, who, when David had been gathered to his fathers, and when peace and tranquility reigned throughout the earth, ascended the throne and swayed the sceptre over Israel."

We also learn from history and tradition, that tin? building was the most spacious, the most beautiful, and the most magnificent ever erected by human agency ; that its walls, its roof, its corridors, blazed with the lustre of precious gems; that in its inner courts, the Deity had chosen his earthly abode, and that there, between the cherubim, the divine presence rested, whence issued the voice of God, and whence the subtle perfume of delicate woods shed fragrance over the sacred place. That temple, in its earthly form, is gone. No longer does its roof of beaten gold reflect the glittering rays of the rising sun on the hills of Judea. Its wealth has long since become the spoil of the barbarous invader; its magnificent proportions of architectural beauty and the splendor of its internal adornment have for centuries only existed, as dreams exist, in the vague imaginings of that scattered people who once thronged its courts to offer thanksgiving to the everliving God. Yet that temple, the type of Divinity on the earth, has, like the seed of mustard in the sacred parable, grown and increased until its foundations have become imperishable, and its spiritual roof has covered the universal brotherhood of earth. And to day, within one of its courts, we, dwellers by this western sea, pause for awhile from our labor, to wonder at that plan which, developed in the visible form three thousand years ago near the shores of Galilee, has directed the quiet work of brotherhood, of order, and of law, until the spiritual temple of today in which we worship, outvies in the splendor of its virtues of wisdom, of truth, and. of charity, the magnificence of that visible temple which was but typical of our grander structure, based as it is on the choicest of human virtues.

It is customary with us to lay the corner stone of our Masonic history in the days of Solomon, King of Israel. To go back of that, one becomes lost in the labyrinth of mysticism and conjecture. Yet, is the present alone ours? Are we forbidden to go back? Shall one be deemed heretic who chooses to trace Masonic existence be-fore the orthodox days of David? Why is it that we seek to pass beyond the bounds of historic life, to travel in the regions of uncertain tradition, for the purpose, if possible, of discovering our origin? We know that human life has been the same in all ages; that in the unnumbered centuries since man has lived on this earth, he has been the same creature, has been subject to the same wants, the same desires as now and it is not too much to assert that the same yearnings to reach the ultimate cause', the desire to discover the truth, impels the mind to-day on the journey to that period where history has long since become tradition. It is the same feeling which actuated those of Eld who, standing on some headland of the Canaries or Azores, fancied they saw the land-loom of an unknown world. To us, as to them, it is not the longing for the distant or the unattainable; for, hidden in that western sea, there lay then, as now, a continent smiling in beauty. So we, not spurred by fevered or distempered thought, find, in the exercise of our reason, our steps arrested at every turn by all the evidences of an advanced civilization, by proofs of more exalted science and knowledge in those distant generations than we are willing to give them credit for. We turn our steps thitherward inquiringly because our traditions teach, and sacred writ gives evidence, that the pillars which stood within the porch were surmounted with emblems symbolical of the form of our earth and the form of our

universe, even in those days when all of known science in the world taught the ancient conception that our glorious sphere was "but a disc of earth begirt with sea."

Truth today is taught in our mysteries through symbols, and we know that this peculiar teaching has always characterized our Order. With this proof running back to the days of the first temple, we glean from history that prior to that day, aye, even beyond the times of Moses or Noah, there were observances which seem like types of the Masonry of today. We know that, antedating their period in the history of the world, the ruins of vast cities were to be found. Is it heretical to inquire who builded those stupendous cities, the names of which are now unknown? May we not go back in speculative Masonry, step by step, at least into the vestibule of those great mysteries which prevailed in the abodes of man which existed in those fabulous times? May we not draw from thence a greater antiquity for that grand mystery of Egypt, of India, of Etruria, and of Phoenicia—the "Unity of Deity?" May not the "mysteriously glorious science" which we practice to-day, be the legitimate outgrowth of the Dionysian mysteries, as even they may have been drawn from that great fountain of all that is grand and mysterious, the incomprehensible Ind and her daughter Egypt, whence the cotemporaries of the great law-giver Moses drew their inspiration? What a field of almost limitless research opens here to our view—so vast that it appalls! And yet it is needless to spend our time in deciphering from decaying obelisks the names or the origin of the builders of those palaces of Etruria or Thrace, or ascertaining what may be the meaning of the wedge-shaped triangular characters which covered the slabs of Nineveh or the bricks of Babylon, or the correct translation of those innumerable myths of theologic belief or historic fact which covered the pyramids of ancient Egypt with hieroglyphics, almost as impenetrable in their mysterious silence as the Sphinx of that wonderful land. To us it is a useless task to inquire whether we are, in Masonry, the lineal descendants of, or can trace our genealogy back through the centuries to the primal Chaldean, the worshipper of Brahm, or the ancient Egyptian; whether our foundation was laid at the myth of Deucalion or at Noah's flood—at the erection of the earliest pyramids or at the building of the Temple. Needless, for we can but use conjecture as to time and place beyond history, and can only realize that our birth is in that misty time where the thread of history becomes attenuate, and fact becomes the fictitious offspring of fable and tradition. That in those fabulous times there existed societies whose mysteries centered around the great principle of God's unity, is surely evidenced by proofs gathered from the ancient writers. But to us it is of little importance—none, in fact, only as gathering greater age for our beloved Institution; for history gives us an age, in comparison with which all other institutions of earthly origin must be called younglings. Reaching back beyond Charlemagne and the Caesars, stretching centuries behind the birth of the Christ, we were before the "Star in the East" led the wise men to the manger in Bethlehem where lay the Messiah, from whose lips flowed all those inspired truths which centered around the initial point of the new dispensation—"Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself." At our accepted birth the Mede, the Persian, the Egyptian, and the Macedonian were in the full vigor of empire. Greece had not yet succeeded to the glories of ancient Etruria. Borne and her rival, Carthage, yet unborn, sat brooding in embryonic silence by the shores of the great sea. Then the religion of the Nazarene existed only in prophecy, the system of Mahomet was in the womb of the future? and all of modern Christendom was a "terra incognita" to the then enlightened world. Historically, my brethren, we only date from the building of the Jewish Temple, and yet we have outlived nations, and states, and empires. System after system of religion has risen, has flourished, has decayed; and yet, amid the wreck of creeds, of religions, and of nations, "Freemasonry still survives!" Aye, still survives with all the vigor of eternal youth, with the wealth of thirty centuries frosting her brow with glory; and while all things else of human origin have succumbed to the giant Time, which has written on their tombs the inexorable word "decay," we yet exist with as much certainty of immortality as anything on which an earthly imprint is stamped can possibly hope for.

It were a thankless task to follow up the broken threads in the tapestry of ancient mythology, to trace through the labyrinths of doubt the mythological representation of the death and resurrection of Osiris, the orgies of Bacchus, the rites to Ceres, or the mysteries of Dionysius, of Mithras, or of Egypt, or of the Samothracian rites, even could we pick our steps with safety to the conclusion that the base of their secret worship, their "great mystery" was belief in the "unity of God" and the "immortality of the soul." For, while as speculative Masons, we may weave beautiful theories to flatter our self-love, we need not the adventitious aid of such a beginning to make us

love and venerate our institution; since we know that none can enter its sacred portals but those who believe in God and in the soul's immortality, and that on those cardinal points we build our grand speculative structure. Believing in God's unity and man's immortality, we are forced to the adoption of the virtues which are traced on our "trestle board "with characters of living light— " brotherly love—truth—charity." We know we shall be immortal, for truth cannot die. We shall progress, and yet be unchangeable; for from our initial point, year after year, and through all the centuries, our teachings have been impelling us on-ward in the faith of man's brotherhood; while the everyday necessities of man impel us to relieve the distressed, to whisper good counsel, to wipe away the tear of the widow, and to comfort the orphan. This work gives us a higher and holier grasp of charitable thought. It not only goes with us through life, but, as we stand around the last resting-place of mortality, it teaches us to give our brother, with prayers and hope, into the arms of the Great Father. Our faith looks beyond the veil; and while we do not dictate to any a religious system or creed, we yet recognize that Masonry is the handmaid and aid of religion in its highest and purest signification.

It is true that our first Grand Master gave us this admonition—" Forget not the law and remove not the ancient landmarks which thy fathers have set;" but it has not been kept simply as a duty, for laws have been made which the framers decreed should be unchangeable and perpetual, yet they have passed away. The light upon our altar has not been kept bright simply by the discharge of the duties of benevolence or charity, nor because of the command to cherish that which is good; but rather because our Order has seized hold of grand truths, and, without forcing them, has, by its teachings, led the world from a low barbarism to a high civilization; because we have builded on a sure foundation, not blown by adverse winds into the eddies and shoals of error; because through all our mystery there runs the golden, thread of " brotherhood." And, while we know that the source whence has flown all of theology, all of philosophy, and all of science is to be found in the ancient mysteries, and that we must go back of history to find the fountains of truth; yet, as those societies were the fountains of moral life, so we have become heir to their virtues, and stand today by our record in the light of history as the mother of civilization. I do not overdraw the picture, nor is it painted in a spirit of pride or boasting. Yet when we reflect that all ideas which look to the elevation or advancement of our race are received at first as fanatical; that vast cycles of time sometimes elapse between the birth of the thought in the brain of some true brother, and its actual practical application in the world of science, or politics, or theology; when we remember this, we rejoice that the cornerstone of our temple of Love was ever laid; we rejoice that the walls of our imperishable House, dedicated to the name of our God, were ever reared, wherein brotherhood has become an actual truth, and whence streams of charity flow out from our holy altars, bearing blessings to all mankind. Away back-unnumbered centuries in the past it was said: " Choose ye from among yourselves a captain." Yet it is very recently that this idea has been practically applied to governmental policy; and, although we know that the idea of brotherhood has existed from the primeval days, it has not even yet been carried out in political science. The last century has moved with rapid strides towards the realization of that grand dream of the fathers, yet the prejudice be-gotten of custom, of habit, or of education, still holds us chained to the rock of error. Long before the patriot fathers and brothers of our Order adopted the system of representative government, our Masonic theory taught the Craft " that all preferment depends on real worth and personal merit only;" and in that we only carried out in our practice the philosophy of the theory that " Masonry regards no man for his worldly wealth or honors." While we all vigorously repudiate the doctrine of the levelers, we yet cherish the fact that " rank is but the stamp on the guinea."

Masonry, while truly conservative, is a progressive science. In its ritual every one of its symbols will lead the mind into delightful paths in science or morals. From the moral truths drawn from the impressive ceremonies of the several degrees, we may go out into nature and drink in a perpetual joy in thought. Every throb in nature has its counterpart in our mysteries. So long as sickness, sorrow, and death exist on earth, so long will our mission remain unfulfilled; so long as morality, as philanthropy, as charity, shall remain human virtues, so long will our destiny force us to exist as a power potent for good, the enemy of vice, the twin-brother of virtue. We are but instruments in the hands of the Omniscient, carrying out the problem of human destiny; and, as generation succeeds generation and the bubble of individual life breaks on the shore of the river dividing life and death, we shall realize that " it is the dead who govern; we, living, but obey."

Our tendency is to destroy individualism and to aggregate the world into unity and brotherhood. Our most important truths are not taught by language, for that is an imperfect mode of expression. By the quiet growth of symbolic teaching we shadow forth the eternal and the infinite. God reveals himself to man more powerfully through the symbols of nature than through verbal machinery. No language can speak so eloquently of God's magnificence and power as the sight of "the world with its corollary of stars and drapery of gold-fringed clouds." Symbols are the speech of Deity. So Masonry speaks more clearly through the allegory of symbols. To the ear of the initiate there is a deeper meaning in all the sounds of nature; to his sense, the sun at morn, at noon, at eve, is more than suggestive; to him the world is a book, and nature a kindly teacher; the drops of rain, the river, the waterfall, the sprig of evergreen, the golden grain, the fragrant valleys, the everlasting hills, the voice of the lion, the hum of the bee, the light of day, the gloom of night, the din of labor, or the quiet hour of rest, each brings reflections symbolical of truths unknown to the profane. To us each of our signs and symbols is fraught with meaning, and, connected with nature, is clothed with magic beauty. The prodigality with which the universe is decorated teaches us to avoid materialism—skepticism. No one can bring his soul face to face with nature and not be drawn by the subtle attraction of spirit to a closer communion with the great, divine, invisible centre. Go out in nature's solemn hour and cast your eyes upon the harmonious scene, and you will unconsciously become divested of self, and, looking into the immeasurable depths of space, will exclaim—

" How often we forget all time, when lone,
Admiring nature's universal throne,
Her woods, her wilds, her waters, the intense
Reply of hers to our intelligence !
Live not the stars and mountains? are the waves
Without a spirit? Are the dropping caves
Without a feeling in their silent tears?
No, no, they woo and clasp us to their spheres.
Dissolve this clod and clog of clay before
Its hour, and merge the soul in the great shore—
Strip off this fond and false identity—
Who thinks of self, when gazing on the sky?"

A pyramid whose base rests on human brotherhood, whose apex pierces the divinity of heaven, at whose altar men of every nation and clime and creed kneel to the common Father, within whose portals the sound of discord is unheard, thou standest, oh Masonry! majestic in thy severe simplicity! We, thy votaries, love thee that thou art good—that thy benevolent hand scatters the blessings of charity like gentle drops of dew from heaven upon the erring and the suffering—that we, the living fibres in thy mighty body, feel the brotherly thrill of the Master's words, "together brethren." Let us not abuse our glory and our privilege. Let us not forget to practice out of the Lodge all those virtues inculcated in it, that the world may see our acts correspond with our professions.

Most Worshipful Grand Master and brethren, the hour warns me to close. We shall soon hear the signal from the South, and from our labors here we shall disperse to our several abodes. May peace and prosperity attend us all, and may each look back to this pleasant reunion of the Craft in this jurisdiction as being a time void of envy and full of delicate brotherly remembrances. And, if before another Grand Convocation here, the inexorable hand of death should "loose the silver chord," bearing some loved brother from our mortal sight, may his memory be blessed, and his entrance abundant into the Paradise of God. Let each of us bear constantly in memory that "our hearts like muffled drums are beating funeral marches to the grave." " Let us so live that when our summons comes to join the innumerable caravan that moves on to the realms of shade," we may lie down as those who lie down to pleasant dreams; that, when we shall have rested our allotted period, after life's fitful fever, we may be raised by our Supreme Grand Master, with the full fruition of our hope in the blessed immortality of the just realized, and find our names recorded in the book of life as worthy members of that Grand Lodge over which He, the Great Architect of the universe, forever presides.