

**Grand Lodge
Free & Accepted Masons
Of California
Grand Oration 1868**

**Grand Orator
John B. Felton**

MOST WORSHIPFUL GRAND MASTER AND BRETHREN OF THE GRAND LODGE

We meet to day as Masons. At the door of this Temple we leave behind us all prejudices, all distinctions, all differences of family and nation, of race, religion, and opinion we meet simply as men. The tie which binds us together is one which all humanity can recognize, and if we insist, as a condition of entering our brotherhood, on the belief in a God, it is not because we exact of any one to have a particular religion or any religion at all. It is because this belief is an irresistible part of our human nature-it is because this belief is born with us; it is because we cannot be brothers without having a common father; it is because it is a universal belief; and however much a man may persuade himself that he believes there is no God, when he is confronted with his own soul, he knows and feels that God exists. It is not an exception excluding a portion of mankind that we make when we exclude the atheist from our Temple it is only a condition that we impose that every man who comes here shall recognize what his nature teaches him-what he cannot escape from-what is essential to the obligations he assumes when he becomes a Mason. If there is no God to whom we owe our common origin, what relation can exist among men"

It is one of the regrets of my life that I did not in my youth join the Masonic Fraternity; that I have not had time and leisure to study profoundly its beautiful legends, to make myself master of its antiquities, to follow historically this noble institution to its origin, and to comprehend fully its scientific teachings: but fortunately the fundamental tenets of Masonry are simple to the comprehension of a child It is not necessary for me to understand fully the science of music in order to be thrilled and swayed by the influence of harmony, nor is it necessary for me to give myself up to a long study of Masonry to comprehend fully that exquisite but simple harmony which addresses itself to every mortal ear. It is not because Masonry goes back to the earliest antiquity; it is not because the great, the good, and the learned men of every age have been proud to listen to its teachings; it is not because of its badges, its regalia, its long processions, its ceremonies, and its pomp that I regard it as one of the great privileges of my life to be a Mason. It is because, by entering our order, I felt and knew that human sympathy, made more intense by this common tie, would go with me through life. I knew and felt that the relation which exists between men, because they have a common nature, was made closer and more intimate by admission to an Order whose principles admit all mankind, provided they are worthy of sympathy. And yet I have had occasion to feel that, too often in attending to the outward forms of Masonry, in the strict observance of its rights and ceremonies, in the rigid performance of its external duties, the true spirit of Masonry is lost sight of; that frequently, while the body wears the outward emblems of Masonry and is disciplined to all the signs and tokens by which the fact of membership is communicated from one to the other, the mind and soul are not trained and disciplined to a corresponding interchange of mutual good feeling, love, and sympathy.

It has been my misfortune often to hear Masons question the motives of their brethren, and place unjust, uncharitable constructions on their acts. I have seen brothers, whom I knew to be in all respects worthy, stopped in their advances towards Masonic light by the sectional spirit—the partisan prejudice—the opposition which competition in business and diversity of interests create. And I have found that the Lodge, sworn to love, charity, and sympathy, has been often times convulsed by cabals, intrigues, and bitter personal enmities.

The mutual dependence of man on his brother man is the fundamental principle of our order. But in what does this dependence consist? You and I may never have need of material aid. It may be our good fortune to go through life independent, in the ordinary sense of the term; to be in a position where we can dispense favors, and have no need to receive them. But are we really independent of our fellowmen, in the deeper sense of the word? Whatever riches or position a man may acquire, what is he if he stands alone in the world? Selkirk, on his desolate island, in his

years of solitude, forgot the language which his mother taught him. But there is a moral isolation which makes a man forget the very language of the heart, of the soul—the language which he was born to speak; and that isolation comes whenever there is a barrier between him and his fellow men.

The experience of the man of the world brings him at last to the same conclusion which our beautiful fundamental law adopts as a rule, and it is this : " Eely on your brother man; believe in him." Often we are deceived; the lying tongue, the treacherous heart, the insincere protestations of friendship delude and beguile us; but the instinctive reliance on human faith, which nature has planted in the mind of the child for its protection, abandons us as we enter on the threshold of active life only to re-turn to us as a reasoned principle when we grow older.

I have seen witnesses swear in platoons to falsehood. I have found that the sweetest smiles the most honeyed accents were put on with preconceived purpose to injure and defraud. Often I have said to myself, if man is like this, my great wisdom will be in watching him closely, in never believing, in universal distrust; and then when I turned to myself and saw my own weakness, I comprehended that God had made me such and that if man wished to destroy, I was destroyed—if he wished to deceive, I must be deceived—if I could not place reliance on him I had better die, for the world was no place for me. For I was placed in such a relation with my fellow man, that my sleep by night was in danger and my walk in the evening was beset by perils which, in the broad light of day, only, my eyes would serve me to point out, if there did not exist some inward original bond of kindness, goodness, and love between man and man, on which each could rely. And when I saw the necessity for this reliance, and that life was impossible without it, I have turned to examine and see whether such a bond could exist, and to what extent it could be relied on. I saw that the most intimate friends were sundered by death, and that in a short time the mourner consoled himself and forgot. I saw that it would be unsafe to demand the greatest sacrifices, even from friendship or family. I knew that if I said to myself—because there is this bond of love and sympathy between me and my fellow-man, I can therefore lean my whole weight upon it—that it would inevitably give way. I saw that it had its limits, and I saw too why it should have its limits. The world would be in perpetual mourning were even love made so strong that there could be no consolation for its loss. The sympathy between man and man, as such, must be bounded by necessity, by closer affections, by patriotism, by one's duties to others.

But, make all the deductions which you will, and see how much there is left in the nature of man to sympathize with and to love. There is truth. Lying and deceit are but the exceptions, and the basest man yields to a temptation and swerves from his own innate desire when he lies. The great protection which the law gives to property and life is based on the general devotion to truth in men. In the oath administered to a witness, when on the story that he tells hangs a human life, the law, with an experience taught it by ages of reflection on human nature, appeals, and appeals with safety, to two great attributes common to all men—to reverence—to truth. Be-lying on man's love to God and his devotion to truth, the jurymen renders his verdict and the judge pronounces sentence. Every commercial principle, every rule of business, takes for granted and assumes the existence of original, high moral qualities in man. The credit system, the promissory note, the trust in a man's word, the relation of servant to master and of principal to agent, all have this lying at their base. They are all founded on the principle that when no eye is on him, when temptation to do wrong holds out impunity, when interest conflicts with duty, man's nature is worthy of trust.

Analyze any custom of society, and you will find that it implies and assumes that human nature is good, true, kind, benevolent, full of reverence and love. The desire to please, benevolence, love of our kind, charity, all lie at the base of the evening party, the social dinner, the elaborate toilet, the courteous salutation, the curtsy and the bow. We grasp each other by the hand, for we wish to express, by an outward union of the body, the union in feeling and affection. Scattered through the land the spire of the church, the frequent school house, the university, the commodious hospital, the refuge of the deformed, the blind and the deaf, the temple of justice all are the expressions of the love, the good will, the sympathy, the ideas of the just and good with which the hearts .of the generality of men abound. Crime shocks and startles the natural moral feeling, just as discord falls harsh and clashing on the ear, however untutored. God has tuned the mind to the good, as he has tuned the ear to harmony.

There is not in the world a being more unfitted to live in it, to perform the ordinary business of life, to be successful in his undertakings, than the man who has be" come suspicious and

distrustful, who attributes bad motives to acts, and who has lost confidence in his kind. He may have arrived at his conclusions from a bitter experience; he may have been often cheated and deceived; where he had a right to look for gratitude, he may have encountered the cold look or averted eye; but he has made the mistake of taking the exceptions for the rule. He has reasoned to himself because I have been deceived, man is deceitful; because I have had kindness met with ingratitude, man is ungrateful. What is there for such a man to do but to hamper himself, like Timon? He is but one; he cannot be ubiquitous; he cannot always wake and watch. How can such a man perform large enterprises, where trust in many men is necessary? How can he be a General, when he relies not on the highest qualities in thousands? How can he be a statesman, when he has no faith that the laws he frames have any goodness in human nature to address themselves to? How can he perform the slightest task, when he stands on the outside of the great army of mankind, ready to run at the first sign of approach? Man is so constituted that even the intellect of a Napoleon could only work through the brains and arms of others. What a feeble creature Napoleon would have been had he not had implicit reliance on man. Instead of drawing strength and inspiration from others, their strength would have been to him a constant menace; their enthusiasm would have been hypocrisy; their faces, lighted into radiance at his approach, would have been but the mask to hide the malicious, envious, and deceitful heart. And what is the condition of him who has failed to gain the sympathy of his fellow men? How his own sympathies wither and fade, deprived of the sunlight that beams from other human hearts. What fruit or flower grows on the barren waste of his intellect? The voice of the heart becomes mute when it speaks to ears that are deaf. It has often seemed to me that, for such a man, even the laws were less powerful to protect. He goes before a jury, and there he finds men who are but human after all—whose prejudices affect their reason. Even with the right and the law on his side, there is a grapple, a struggle, and a fierce contest when it is a question of doing him simple justice.

I wear my badge of Masonry with pride and exultation. I know, as I pass along the streets, that men unknown to me look kindly upon me because I am one of them. I know that I have no need of a long acquaintance before my brother trusts in me—confides his dearest interests and his most intimate secrets to me. I know that the sunlight, as it is reflected from my Masonic symbol, carries back with it a ray of sympathy and mutual understanding to the hearts of thousands; and it is for that I value and love it. But if this badge stands merely by itself—a piece of lettered gold; if there is no great meaning symbolized by it; if the fundamental law of Masonry ceases to exist whereby the doctrine of love to man and confidence in the goodness of his character is inculcated as a precept; or if that law becomes a dead letter and is not carried out in our lives and in the habits of our minds—what care I for the bauble? I wear it now, and feel myself stronger and better because I am permitted to do so. Strip it of its idea, and I can only wear it from mere vanity.

It seems to me that the Mason who introduces disorder into our circle; who intrigues and plots for selfish ends; who is suspicious and jealous of his brethren; who allows unworthy motives to act upon him when it is a question of their admission or advancement is guilty of a greater crime against Masonry than he who is dishonest or dissolute, or who commits an offense against society at large; for he is guilty of treason against its organic law. Just as society cannot exist without government, Masonry cannot exist unless the law of good will is voluntarily and strictly observed.

This law is its fundamental idea, and without this law Masonry itself has no value.