

**Grand Lodge
Free & Accepted Masons
Of California
Grand Oration 1874**

**Grand Orator
Samuel C. Densen**

MOST WORSHIPFUL GRAND MASTER AND BRETHREN OF THE GRAND LODGE

To us who have grown to manhood amid the resounding machinery of modern progress, it does not appear surprising that we sit to-day around the common altar which we have established in this beautiful temple, "erected to God and dedicated to His Holy Name;" but to our patriot fathers who, within the present century, held dubious titles to their firesides and were in constant warfare with wild beasts and savages, how improbable would have seemed a prophecy that a Grand Lodge of Free and Accepted Masons would be convened, under the present circumstances, on the verge of the western world, where the pulses of the Pacific ocean throb and the setting sun takes its leave of the American continent.

The fact that we are here today is but one more demonstration that our Order is founded upon living principles of broad and universal application. Those valiant song of knighthood and chivalry who, in ancient times, rode forth emblazoned with the crude emblems of our Order, and illuminated a dark and cruel age with deeds of heroism and mercy, never imagined, even in their wildest dreams of romance, that the principles of justice and charity which they could maintain only by fostering the martial spirit, would survive the assaults of superstition and fiendish folly in religion's guise, and finally arise triumphant and build for themselves temples in the hearts of an enlightened people to live in a world to them unknown.

From the windows of this Grand Lodge Hall we look to-day, with pride and admiration, upon a city grand and beautiful, teeming with life and reverberating with a thousand industries—the centre of a large and constantly increasing population— the only city in the world presenting the compactness of apparent antiquity and at the same time embellished with the symmetrical beauty of modern architecture. Upon these crowded thoroughfares the European, the Saxon, the Celt, the Asiatic, and the tawny sons of the isles of the ocean, meet upon a common level of civil and religious liberty, each intent upon working out for himself the solemn problems of life.

A few short years ago the site of this splendid city was a waste of shifting sands. For untold ages had the stars of heaven kept silent watch by the unpeopled portals of the sea, while none but ships of mist rode at anchor in this beautiful port. It was long after the intrepid Columbus discovered and presented a new world to the Queen of Castile that the first civilized man stood upon the mountains' summit, and gazed in rapturous wonder upon the placid waters of the Pacific Ocean, and later still, when the English corsair and Spanish buccaneer dropped anchor in San Francisco bay; while far up in the nineteenth century this bright land of the vine and the fig, the shining metal and the golden harvest, was so little known that even the greatest of American statesmen characterized it as a land fit only for the habitation of reptiles and beasts of prey. The votary of an occult science looked to the crucible of the alchemist for gold; while, wiser and more courageous, the California pioneer sought and found it in the mountain's gorge in the land of the sunset. Scarcely a quarter of a century has elapsed since this fair State was an unexplored waste, and now no land beneath the sun is better known for its wonderful productions or for the enterprise and intelligence of its people.

To the accomplishment of these splendid results Masonry has contributed in no small degree. Pull well do we know that a firm reliance on the universality and - reality of Masonic charity moved many of our bravest, wisest, and noblest pioneers to endure the hardships and perils incident to their immigration and conquest of a remote and mysterious land. Amid all the excitements and distresses, all the moral and political revolutions caused by pouring in of a cosmopolitan population, Masonry was neither forgotten nor neglected, but constantly raised its kind and pleading voice in solemn admonition, and undoubtedly exerted a mighty influence in moulding the destinies of and giving character to the State This beneficent work of the past indicates that we have before us opportunities involving high duties and presenting a field for

unprecedented achievements; while the past history of our society formulates this distinct proposition-The genius of Masonry is productive and conservative of republican institutions.

By becoming Masons we are nonetheless integral parts of the body politic and a. such we should carefully study our Order and ourselves in the relation that it and we bear, collectively and individually, to the State and to our fellow-citizens. Upon the very threshold of Masonry we are taught to "be quiet and peaceable citizens, true to our government and just to our country;" and "not to countenance disloyalty or rebellion, but patiently submit to legal authority and to conform with cheerfulness to the government of the country in which we live." But this is the bare suggestion of a thought to be constantly elaborated, and we, as members of an enlightened and conservative Craft, owe it to ourselves, our Order, and the government which sanctifies our lives, protect our property, and approves the celebration of our ancient rites and ceremonies, to devote untiring service to that government and to purify, preserve, and protect it from political gangrene and decay

And here, lest my position be misunderstood, I take occasion to declare that I would not have our excellent Order become a political body or interfere in partisan issues. I am proud to say that from time immemorial the Masonic lodge-room has been a sanctuary where the disturbing elements of partisan politics could not enter to mar its fraternal harmony; but as men and citizens we have ever enjoyed the broadest discretion in the exercise of individual duty to the State. I am not of those who believe that the world is growing worse, nor do I believe that wickedness is the handmaid of enlightenment; but with the present facilities for the transmission of news we hear more of current gossip. The unusual and remarkable incident attracts attention, so that more is said, thought, and written of one vile act than of ten thousand noble and virtuous deeds which should invoke the applauding smiles of angelic hosts.

We have no right to justify ourselves by the standard of the past. We claim to be wiser than our predecessors, and ought to be better and purer than they. In the midst of all our intelligence, crime, like a grim demon, stalks through the land; error goes capering through the highways, and by-ways; and corruption, like the obscene vulture, sits unbidden at the public feast and threatens to taint and pollute what it does not destroy. So long as these things exist our field of labor is extensive and we must not sit idly by the wayside and see the clouds of error obscure the warming rays of freedom's light. A vigorous and concerted effort should be made by our benevolent Fraternity to foster, mould, and create in the public mind sentiments of honor patriotism, and self-sacrificing devotion to the affairs of State.

Governments are merely the compacts of the people for mutual benefit an extended family-a cooperation of the multitude for the benefit and protection of the individuals; and to say that a government is corrupt, as such, is tantamount to an assertion that the mass of the people composing the same is corrupt, or so neglectful of vital interests as to permit a vicious and polluted minority to hold the reins of power. The character and nature of a government will depend upon the virtue intelligence, bravery, and patriotic zeal of its subjects. No good government can exist among a debauched and wicked people, and no bad one can long hold sway over a virtuous and intelligent people. Then the most direct means of securing a good government is by an infusion of the proper spirit into the minds of the masses and here, my brethren, is our widest field of action, one where we owe our first and highest duty as members of an enlightened and benevolent body having for its object the promotion and amelioration of the condition of man.

My brethren, are we prepared for our exalted mission? Have we each and all succeeded in "divesting our hearts and consciences of all the vices and superfluities of life, thereby fitting our minds as living stones for that spiritual building, that house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens?" Have we plucked from our hearts all the vile weeds of selfishness, jealousy, envy, bickerings, ill will, malice, and hatred, and substituted the fragrant flowers of fraternal love, sympathy, faith, hope, charity, and nobleness of purpose? If we go forth clad in the armor of justice, crowned with the helmet of reason, protected by the shield of personal purity, armed with the sword of truth, and inspired with an unflinching determination to purify the world, we shall not entirely fail.

We must stand before mankind characterized by the virtues which we profess and teach, and it should be notorious to the profane world that to be a Mason is to be a good and upright man. Each individual Mason should so live and act that all his neighbors and acquaintances shall

respect him for his sterling virtues, his integrity, moderation, and wisdom, and look to him for aid, comfort, advice, and example-- As neighbors, we must be just and liberal; as husbands, kind, devoted, true, and affectionate; as parents, circumspect, genial, and open-hearted; as citizens, loyal and punctual; and as Masons, true to our tenets and strict in the observance of our ancient charges.

Being thus enabled to wield that salutary influence which every leading citizen should exert over his immediate friends and associates, the minds of these would yield to his influences and become assimilated to his in habits of thought and action. Thus will the moral sense of each family and social circle be elevated, the sense of justice be sharpened, and correct habits of thought and reasoning be engendered. Each individual member of the State will thus become an independent power for good, and the constant tendency will be to cast off from society all that is vicious and detrimental to advancement, as well as every obstacle that impedes the progress of the sublime philosophy of the moral and political economy. The ignorant must be instructed, the morally weak encouraged and strengthened, the evil disposed admonished, cautioned, and curbed, and above all, the high and low, rich and poor, educated and unlettered, must be brought to a realization of the supreme importance of a strict observance of the command—" Do unto others as ye would that they should do unto you."

It should be the constant care of every good man, and particularly of every Mason, to positively discourage crime at every stage, from incipiency to final culmination; and to encourage an elevated and jealous regard for every law of the land. The thoughtless and careless should be brought to realize that the only route to individual happiness and national stability is along the pathway of dignified and virtuous citizenship. There is too great a tendency in the public mind to excuse and palliate transgressions of the laws; and while this disposition is founded in great measure upon the virtue of charity, crudely existing in the hearts of the people, it too often exceeds all reasonable bounds and degenerates that priceless virtue into a morbid sentimentalism.

It is not enough that we proclaim and recommend the inculcation of the excellent virtues espoused by our order; we must educate the public mind up to a just realization of and a nice distinction between those virtues. Undeserved or misapplied mercy in weighing the guilt of men is quite as detrimental to the well being of the body politic as the fierce application and enforcement of the arbitrary will of a JEFFRIES.

To each person, in his individual capacity, is due a truly merciful consideration in weighing his guilt when accused; but to the thousands who never trespass across the bound of legal right, and to those who, by warning, may be restrained within the line of duty is due the higher obligation of a firm and undeviating application of the square of justice.

The mind of the community must be elevated to that standard which frowns on crime and injustice, and exacts a strict observance of every law, written or un-written, by meting out to every crime committed its merited penalty, regardless of the wealth or position of the criminal. From him who violates a public trust must be withdrawn the respect and recognition of honest men, that his name may become infamous and a terrible warning to others. It is a matter of shame and disgrace upon the intelligence of the age in which we live that it should even be surmised that the wealthy criminal may easily evade the penalties of the law; and upon us, as the vanguard of moral reform, rests the duty of eradicating from the public mind the corruption, or moral aberration, that gives plausibility to such a scandal.

With commendable pride we point to the long genealogy of our order, and rejoice in the achievements of its many splendid triumphs over ignorance, error, and superstition; but we must not idly stand, in conceited retrospection, forgetting the future and neglecting the present, and permit our society to become fossilized and overgrown by some more vigorous, though worthless growths. We cannot stand supinely by and permit the growth of error, the commission of crime, or the spread of corruption, without doing violence to our most sacred trusts; nor can we remain spotless in the eyes of the Supreme Grand Master, if wrong or crime be committed when within our power to prevent it. Is the heartless mother, who forgets all the finer impulses and affections of nature and permits her helpless offspring to perish for the want of maternal nurture and care, less guilty than the highwayman who, for gain, will sacrifice human life? The man who sees a fellow being unconsciously approaching a precipice and raises no warning voice nor stretches forth a restraining hand, but permits him to go on to destruction, is morally no better than he who,

by more direct means, accomplishes the same result. It is at least safe for us to assume the proposition that we are guilty of the commission of all the wrong that we might, but do not, prevent; and I believe it possible, by long continued effort and education, to eradicate crime from the human mind and eliminate wrong from the conduct of men.

All wrong is unnatural, unreasonable, and productive of unhappiness, while the necessary result of every good deed is the increase of human happiness; and it may be considered as an evidence of dereliction in duty on our part that this fact has so slight a hold on the public mind at this day. There are great evils which have been admitted into place in the fundamental constitutions of the governments of the earth, which, although seemingly permissible in their inception, have become, by the enlightenment of the age in which we live, disgraceful to the genius of our civilization. What have we, as leaders in moral improvement and as advocates of "peace on earth and goodwill towards men," done toward the suppression of the hideous ogre of war—that inhuman practice of wholesale murder which has caused more suffering, more immorality and demoralization in society, more darkened households, more blighted hearts, more tears and more anguish than all other existing evils?

There is a glaring inconsistency in the laws which, by the infliction of capital penalties, prohibit individuals from an appeal to arms to settle their disputes, and at the same time countenance the code of war between nations. The encouragement and practice of international homicide is as antagonistic to the minds of a majority of the earth's enlightened people as would be the establishment of a governmental bureau for the introduction, propagation, and dissemination of plague, contagion, and pestilence; yet we have cowardly refrained from striking down this fell monster, while, for a century past, the enlightenment of the people composing the great powers of the world has been prepared to immortalize the name of the heroic and humane Order that would blot the name of war from the vocabulary of international law.

Masonry, by its ancient lineage, its chosen councils, and its universal organization, is peculiarly fitted for this sublime and glorious conquest. There is no land so dark, no corner of the earth so remote, and no people so unlettered as to be beyond the warming influence of the genial rays of the sun of Freemasonry. There is in all this broad domain scarcely a hamlet or crossroad village that has not within it an organization of our Craft. The power and influence of our Order in moral reform, especially if we begin by reforming ourselves, is such that if we place the seal of earnest Masonic condemnation and anathema upon the hell-born practice of slaughtering men by thousands because statesmen quarrel, the iniquity must cease. The times are propitious and the genius of the age is ripe for this great reform. Indeed, the question of an international tribunal for peaceful arbitration of all national disputes is already in agitation, and if the Freemasons of the world will throw their weighty influence into the good work, the result will be accomplished.

We cannot, without violence to the important trusts committed to our care, nor in view of the obligations due from us to the government under which we live, neglect this opportunity to serve humanity. The Grand Lodge of California, by its surroundings, its history, its youthful fire and rapid growth, the cosmopolitan character of our population, and the fructifying influences of our mental and moral atmosphere, seems peculiarly indicated for the formal promulgation of the Masonic condemnation of homicidal war for any purpose or upon any pretext.

The history of the past gives a hopeful and cheering view, and shows that from the earliest gleams of traditional light to the present the constant tendency of man-kind has been towards enlightenment; and I fear not successful contradiction when I declare that, with all the existing evils, the moral and political horizon of the nineteenth century is clearer and brighter than in any century past. We cannot hope to acquire for mortal man the quality of absolute perfection, but we can and must prune away his vices and imperfections and cultivate and develop his inherent virtues.

The result of the education and advancement of each generation is, in some degree, transmitted to the next, and places it at a starting point one degree higher in the scale. Each generation may advance nearer to perfection than its predecessor, and I have sometimes indulged the fancy that the cycles of eternity will evolve from rudimentary man a perfect being, who will be enabled to comprehend the mysteries of infinity and hold rational intercourse with the "Supreme Intelligence that rules the universe." We must not find discouragement in the reflection that all the life of our generation is barely long enough, and that with devoted effort, to accomplish one short step in the lengthy journey; but we should rather take courage and work more

zealously. Indeed, the advancing steps of development call us to hopeful and diligent labor for the welfare of mankind.

My brethren, let us rekindle the fire upon our altar and go hence to-day inspired with redoubled zeal and determination more vigorously to prosecute our wonted crusade against vice and folly. May fortitude, prudence, temperance, and justice, constantly hover around our blessed banner, and may hope, illuminated by the star of faith, enable us to behold in the distant future a bright and beautiful field of sun-shine and joy, where martial strife and bloodshed will be things forgotten—where the golden chains of fraternal love and holy charity will bind the children of the earth in harmonious sympathy—where the brilliant rays of heaven-born reason will guide the actions of men—where the penal code will be an antique mystery—where the beneficent mission of Freemasonry will be accomplished—and where its forms and ceremonies, " like streaks of morning cloud, shall have melted into the infinite azure of the past."