

**Grand Lodge
Free & Accepted Masons
Of California
Grand Oration 1880**

**Grand Orator
Edgar F. Preston**

MOST WORSHIPFUL GRAND MASTER AND BRETHREN OF THE GRAND LODGE

It has fallen to my good fortune to address you, as Orator of this Grand Lodge, at this our Annual Communication, and certainly no theme was ever given upon which learning and eloquence could be more worthily bestowed, nor which appeals more forcibly to all that is noble, that is good, and that is pure in our natures. Coming to us from the dark ages of antiquity, wrapped in the mantle of Faith, Hope, and Charity, Masonry has so instilled its life-giving principles into the hearts of its followers that Time, which is said to conquer all things, has left no traces upon her fair brow. Founded upon principles and truths as enduring as the rock-ribbed hills, fed and nourished by the nature of mankind, she is as fresh, as enchanting, and as vigorous to-day as in the olden time when the cedars were hewn on Lebanon and the stones quarried in the hills of Jerusalem, and she united into one band of brothers the craftsmen who wrought with such cunning at the building of King SOLOMON'S Temple.

Dynasties have risen and fallen. The great, the good, the illustrious of earth have lived and died. From the few sparsely populated countries of Europe, man has extended his domain over the entire world, annihilating space with iron and electric bands, and yet, throughout the universe, the all-beholding sun is witness of the life, the strength, the power, aye, the immortality of Freemasonry. It stands forth to-day as bright and glorious as though it carried not the age of centuries upon it; and it is well for us, my brethren, to pause awhile in the struggle of life and to reflect upon these truths; to ponder and ask ourselves the reason; to fathom our minds and find why it is that Masonry has existed so long as one of the principal institutions of the human family; and if, in answering ourselves, we discover that it is because she carries within herself the germs of immortality, that her maxims and truisms are but the repetition of the utterances of divinity itself, and that to the weakness and frailty, as well as to the perfection, of man is to be attributed that which sustains and supports her; if, in fact, we find our beloved institution resting upon human nature itself, rendered necessary to us for the reason that we are only weak, struggling men, we not only are better fitted to understand why it is that Masonry has endured so long, but we will again turn to her and, with our enlarged understanding, love her the more dearly and follow her the more devotedly.

It has been said, and well. said, in words far more eloquent than I can hope to utter, that "Freemasonry is an inexhaustible mine of wealth to the mind and to the heart. No single vision may scan the whole of its glories. No one cunning crafts-man has explored the extent of its quarries, for they are as unbounded as the universe. No single mind may grasp its mysteries in their entirety. One sees a prismatic fragment of its beauty; another appreciates a separate portion of its strength; another fathoms, here and there, little by little, detached parts of its ineffable wisdom; but not until this mortal shall have put on immortality, not until he shall have entered that Celestial Lodge where the Supreme Grand Master of the Universe forever presides, shall one soul measure all its wisdom, strength, and beauty."

It is not until we study the foundation upon which the superstructure of Freemasonry is erected that we can appreciate the truth and force of these words, and it is my purpose to present to you, briefly, as the occasion demands, a few remarks upon the application of the Order to the most ordinary promptings of our nature.

With the history of Freemasonry you are all more or less familiar. The connection of the Craft with architecture has often been expatiated upon before you, but if you will go with me into the human heart, observe its throbbings, its pulsations, its hopes and fears, its virtues and its vices, its strength and its weakness, we may glean much that will enlighten us upon the true vital principles of Freemasonry. Above the little village of Bethlehem arose that bright star which has ever since continued to reflect its effulgent beams over the entire civilized world. The wise men

who, with anxious gaze, were scanning the heavens, followed its beckoning finger, until in the lowly manger was revealed to their worshiping sight the Divinity who, for love of man, sacrificed himself upon the cross. The Son of God was brought before the world and the religion of Christ, with all its infinite wisdom and mercy, was given to us. The dying sinner, upon the bed of death, turns his rapturous gaze towards the portals of the heaven which he has thus been permitted to enter, and, with exultant thoughts of the world to come, cheerfully resigns himself to pass the black river. Eternity robbed of its terrors, the sunlight of God glancing across the tomb, and the soul of man, immortal as the God who gave it, permitted to return to its Maker, are but some of the results of faith. Strip us of that immortal boon, rob us of the power to believe, and our intellect becomes but the miserable remnant of what might have been a glorious mind. With it, we are men; without it, we are nothing, With it, as one of our attributes, we may kneel as devotees at the shrine of Freemasonry; without it, the mysteries of our Order must forever remain as a sealed book.

FAITH, then, as one of the cardinal tenets of our Order, simply expresses one attribute of the mind which we, as Freemasons, but share in common with the entire human family, and to which the world owes nearly all that is sacred and divine.

Unto nearly all lives there comes a day of darkness, when the light seems to fade from the face of the earth, and the voice of gladness makes unto us strange discord. Misfortune in its thousand forms never ceases to pursue, and with unwearied pinion hovers over us from the cradle to the grave. When reverses come and their shadow falls upon the soul, chilling with its gloom the flow of joy and mirth and happiness, HOPE, one of God's best gifts to man, extends her shining wings, flies to his aid, and from the vortex of despair will place the wearied and despondent mortal where he may bask in her bright rays, and fill his soul with grateful praise and love.

It did not need the divine command, " Hope to the end," to cause us to love the gentle goddess, for, like the mother's love for her offspring, it permeates every fibre of our being, and every thought and aspiration, every gift of noble origin, is breathed upon by Hope." It is not strange, then, that Masonry, whose cardinal tenets are interwoven with every one of our heartstrings, should have chosen this as one of the foundation stones upon which to rest its superstructure, and that during the lapse of ages it still stands firm and unyielding. Faith may be lost in sight, but Hope, to every mortal dear, remains with us to the end.

Each individual, whatever be his rank, his talents, or his wealth, considered as an isolated being, is weak and helpless. To the good offices of his fellow-man he is more or less obligated at all times for the helping hand, the sympathetic voice, the friendly counsel, and that kind and considerate judgment of his motives and actions which we all so much desire. To err is human; to be perfect is only an attribute of divinity. The passions, the prejudices, the weaknesses of the heart we all know, and so do we all know our dependence upon our fellow man. Truly, then, do we say— " But the greatest of these is charity." Nothing is nearer God, for it is divinity itself. It extends to all countries and to all climes. The bronzed Arab upon the burning desert, the wild Tartar upon his native steppes, the cultured child of civilization, all recognize its existence and its worth, and render unto it the same homage.

"In faith and hope the world will disagree,
But all mankind's concern is charity."

At the very portal of our institution we meet with " Faith, Hope and Charity, best boons to mortals given "—not exclusive to us as Masons, but shared by us in common with all our fellow-men as the best, dearest and brightest virtues we can exercise or enjoy. They are as obligatory upon us to-day as they were upon the ancient crafts-men whose skilled hands labored under the supervision of the great architect of the Temple, not because inculcated by Free Masonry alone, but because both by the law of God and the universal law of man they form the duty of every one within or without the Order.

BROTHERLY LOVE, BELIEF AND TRUTH. Another world of truisms, another field which we but share as tenants in common. Nothing peculiar to Masons, but a broad plane upon which the whole human family stands upon a footing of equality. By brotherly love we are taught, not simply to cherish a kindly feeling, but, in its more enlarged sense, it prompts to those many actions which one may do for another. And here, again, we see that it is to the imperfections in

human nature that we owe our existence as an Order as well as to the virtues we may exercise; for, were we all perfect, the necessity for mutual self-reliance would be greatly diminished. Every day, from within the circle that falls under your observation, you see men whose feet have grown weary and who have fallen by the wayside. It is not necessary that want should be staring them in the face. The fall may be in their moral nature. They may have strayed from the path of rectitude, unmindful of the teaching of our symbol, the plumb, which admonishes us to walk uprightly before God and man. A word of warning, a little good advice administered in a friendly way, so as not to be offensive, may give fresh courage to take up life's burdens, to once more stand erect before God and man, to perform some disagreeable duty, to be a man amongst men. Surely this is noble, it is like the quality of mercy that "blesseth him that gives and him that takes." To do such actions, to feel that some poor struggling mortal has been assisted along his rugged road, and to know that in so doing you are only following the precepts of Freemasonry, is again to acknowledge that you but regard the Order as the exponent of all that is great and good in mankind.

RELIEF. Suffering, destitution, want, helpless widows, and fatherless orphans can well awake compassion within the breast of every one within whom beats a heart that can throb responsive to human agony. And once more, until it sounds like useless repetition, are you brought face to face with the great fact that it is not peculiar to Masonry to consider again the utter weakness and unreliability of human affairs—to realize that human foresight and sagacity are daily set at naught by the remorseless decrees of Fate. When misfortune has come unto the strong man, striking dismay and cowardice into the brave heart that has with fearless front so long withstood the brunt of life's battle, to hold out the helping hand of relief, to give some shelter from the storm, to smooth away the difficulties and enable him once more, with increased energy and strength, to renew the conflict, is a privilege that any true man would prize. The reward of having done so would be that his soul would be filled with the sweet music of gratitude and that consciousness of well doing with which God requites every good action. But if all this be so, how much more forcibly does it appeal to you, after the husband and father has been stricken down, when the long sickness comes, the hour of agony, the funeral pall, and then the agonized mother and weeping children, with grim want stalking like a spectre through the desolate home. Surely it does not need Masonry to direct the promptings of your heart in a case like this. Is there one among you who would think it necessary to do all in your power to relieve the unfortunate, simply because, in so doing, you were obeying the behests of Masonry? Your minds will answer me before I could frame my lips to say the word. Oh, my brethren, there is a world of beauty, a world of wisdom, and a world of strength in the teachings of our beloved Order, elevating, ennobling all who will study and comprehend them.

But one more, and we have traversed the circle. TRUTH. It needs no demonstration from me, no words of argument or reason from any one to convince you that in that one word is comprised a crystalization of all the rest. Strip this world of false-hood, and fraud, deception, and slander would be unknown. If men would only deal truthfully with each other but little injustice would be done, and there would be much less need of the exercise of the other virtues. I do not look at it only as a divine command. Leave that, if you wish, out of the consideration, and think only of its practical effect upon common every day affairs, and of what would be the result upon our lives if the observance of this virtue was universal. Is it any wonder then that, as Masons, we are taught to be truthful, and that it is one of the cardinal precepts of an Order which is founded upon the needs of humanity. So might we examine every tenet. So may we scan its every teaching. To be men in the highest and best sense of the term, to live, act, and die as such, is really all the obligation we assume as Freemasons. It matters not that we are taught to do BO in a higher degree towards our brethren—that we are to a certain extent exclusive. It is that which makes us a society; it is only in that regard that we differ from the rest of the world; and it is for the reason that because we are bound together by the mystic tie that, as a society, we pledge ourselves to be to each other what all men really should be.

I have traversed this ground to endeavor to inculcate a lesson, valuable not only for the great living truths that it comprises, but, as I said in my opening, that you may look with enlarged understanding upon our beloved institution, and, with increased knowledge to comprehend its teachings, prize it the more dearly and cherish it the more tenderly; that you may know why it is universal and extends its broad arms over the entire world, folding in its fond embrace men of

every nation, sect, and clime—why it has penetrated into the wilderness and found its lodgment within the heart of the barbarous, the semi-civilized, and the civilized— why it has survived the shocks of time and come to us, not covered with the load of centuries, decrepit, tottering, and near unto its end, but bright and beautiful and cheerful, as dear to man to-day as ever, and enthroned in the minds of its votaries secure in an undying love.

The word, the grip, the sign, the lambskin, the ceremonial, are but the outward forms which, as a society, we assume toward the world; not towards our brethren, but as a shield and protection against cowans and eavesdroppers. Do we not some-times grasp the shadow for the substance? Do we not frequently neglect the spirit of Masonry for the form? I fear so. Many brethren pay too much attention to the merely mechanical, when they should consider that the purity of the lambskin is but emblematical, and that every symbol is but used to impress upon the mind wise and serious truths. For this reason have I taken you with me to an illustration of the principal tenets of our Order, to show you, from a purely philosophical standpoint, unaided by history or learning of any kind, the foundation stones, that you may better appreciate the superstructure. I have endeavored to give you the keystone of the arch which sustains that storehouse of tradition, of history, of learning, and of virtue, that is known in the world as Freemasonry. Let us hope, that for all time to come, so long as earth knows man, that, as in ages past, Masonry may remain enshrined in the human heart, filling it with the glory of peace, good will, and love unto all mankind.