

**Grand Lodge
Free & Accepted Masons
Of California
Grand Oration 1885**

**Grand Orator
Reverend William A. Knighten**

MOST WORSHIPFUL GRAND MASTER AND BRETHREN OF THE GRAND LODGE

The first duty of a speaker connected with a body of such distinction as this should be to express his gratitude for the high honor that has been conferred upon him and the privilege it gives, therefore salute you most gratefully, my brethren.

The duty of this hour is the honest reflection of this Body upon the principles underlying our noble Order, the objects for which we maintain its institutions, and a glance at the hopes we entertain for its future.

First. To be a Mason, a man must have a desire to hear, and see, and know some truths hidden from the view of other men; to find a mystery of value to the heart and mind unknown before.

Second. That desire must be intelligently directed. The surroundings of a Mason must be able to enlighten and develop the manly qualities of the man.

Third. To be a Mason, man must be a temple. In him must live, as active agencies, all the highest mental and moral qualities. He must be able to love, to obey, and to lie truthful. These are eternal principles. Time and the grave can never touch them.

Fourth. A man must be progressive. If we have a dogma, this is it. We accept the great doctrine of Masonic evolution, and advocate a special order of advancement. We move along all the lines of usefulness that God has ordained in all his laws. Each individual must march with his elbow touching a brother, and with his eyes expectantly fixed upon the sublime work of self-conquest.

Masonry has not lost her high ambitions. New stars are nightly beaming down upon her "wise men," and new gifts are coming to the birth of bar new and mighty truths.

Some have thought us fogies and have declared our mission ended, but the fields of higher usefulness and destiny still open up before us. Along the path of centuries it has been the friend of Progress. It opened the secret vaults of HIRAM OF TYRE and gave a field for his genius, wealth, and ambition, and made his name immortal by associating it with HIRAM ABIF and our illustrious Grand Master, KING SOLOMON, and the temple of his God. It took the QUEEN OF SHEBA and the royal caravans of the East, and stood them before its temple, that they might witness the glory of its architecture and the wisdom that planned it. It has ever gathered about its altars the noblest and best of souls.

The friends of Masonry have been the benefactors of the race. They have championed every cause dear to the poor, the ignorant, and the oppressed, and have many times fought the battles of human liberty against the votaries of superstition and tyranny. They have been the friends of learning. Art, science, and literature have often lit their torches at our altar fires. They have always borne aloft the banner of religious liberty. From age to age the light of divine truth has been shining upon her altars; and, with consistent and steady march, she has taught the world the great lessons of liberal thought. Not a religious institution, we have guarded the word of God more closely than our traditions, and have preserved its golden pages beneath our heads and hid its teachings in our hearts.

It is said that ALEXANDER had the Iliad of HOMER bound in gold and placed nightly beneath his pillow. So do we with this eternal word. He read of Trojan heroes and their struggles with the Greeks. We read of the victories of truth and the stately marches of its friends. This word greets the eyes first opened into the realms of true Masonic life. Masonry has no creed, but all creeds may bow around its common altar. In the deep and far-reaching plans of God for the moral and spiritual uplifting of the human mind. Masonry seems to have been one among his divine purposes, plainly indicated on the great trestle-board of time.

When this nation struggled for its rights among the greater powers around it, Masons stood by their open Bibles with their uplifted swords. WASHINGTON and LA FAYETTE were bound by its sacred ties and lived and died as the noblest types of manhood in this or any other age. It has not alone manifested its power in the defense of right upon the field of battle, but, during the pursuits of peace, it has fostered every interest of mankind. The plans of this Fraternity are intended IT the world to-day and for the ages yet unborn. It reaches across all lines of race, color, and clime, and touches the industries, the commerce, the arts, the learning and the social and national relations of all countries. It has helped to subjugate and control error, and has aided in the enlightenment of ignorance. It embraces in its teachings the wisdom and experience of SOLOMON, the ardent love of JOHN THE EVANGELIST, and the integrity and patriotism of WASHINGTON. It strives to re-strain all personal prejudices, control all warring passions, and bring out into clear and beautiful review the highest, noblest and best of moral jewels in the soul. It is an arm of protection about virtue, and a word and shield about virginity. It has for its aim the eternal uplifting and approximation of man to an ideal higher than nature has yet produced—a manhood after the will, and subject to the perfect government, of God. It means to apply the square of its principles to the rough ashlar of humanity, and, with the chisel of wisdom and genius, bring a polished, shining stone into that ever living, imperishable building of God—that house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.

The world is full of ruined enterprises. Cities, theories, creeds, statutes, and even nations have passed away. It is said that time proves all things. It has tested many of man's inventions, and they have melted in the crucible of its touch, like the enemies of the Hebrew Children in the furnace of their own construction. The errors of PHAROAH were washed with him from his chariot in the billows of the sea. The ruins of Troy are the monuments that tell of the lust of PARIS. The dust of the desert has drifted across the heathen temples of Thebes and Palmyra, and the mighty walls of Nineveh have long since slept unnoticed save by the excavator who digs amid her ruins.. The mythology of Greece has come down from the Olympian heights, and the ephemeral thrones of their visionary deities have been buried for centuries from the belief of men.

So the world moves on, with grander marches up the heights of reason, faith, and hope, toward the higher goal of God's higher purposes in its creation. Errors still grow old and dusty and are laid away in the vaults along the wayside of the years. The wrong assumptions of our enemies, their egotistical anathemas, and their evil prophecies, have marched back with the long procession of the fossiliferous departed. Human progress has stood beside these sepulchres and inquired the causes. Down from the echoing corridors of history has come the true response—man's ignorance and sin. Error in man's moral temple weakened its structure. Decay and change crumbled it away. Blind reason sought the realms of Faith and found its grave in the deep, dark wilderness of Superstition. Masonry has stood beside them all in the calmness of delightful contemplation.

I seem, my brethren, to be standing in the vestibule of some great temple. It is grand in all its vast proportions. The architecture is superb. Its foundations are deeply laid. Every stone has passed the plumb and square of some master wad. Every column has been turned and polished for its royal stand in the processions of its long and spacious halls. Every arch stands richly inlaid with keys and cappings firmly bound. The cornice is gilded. Its domes rise high above the ruins of man's other plans, and gold-tipped spires lift their shining heads from dizzy heights, and first salute the rising of the sun. I stand beside its altars, and seem to see its burning tapers and the rising incense. I hear the voice of prayer. This, my brethren, is Masonry.

I hear the tread of increasing multitudes as the years go by. The wisest and the best of each successive generation came and go. One is a kingly form. He comes from the throne, and with majestic tread ascends the stairs and takes the place of honor in the East. Here is another. He is the master workman and the widow's son. Famed in the hearts of kings for genius above his age, he takes his place as counsellor to the King. HIRAM ABIF and SOLOMON, are here. Now comes the third, a man of Tyre, gorgeous in the gold that glitters in his crown and sparkles on the border of his kingly robe. Here is one standing by the lighted tapers. He is looking at the measurement of ethereal walls, and counting the multitudes along the shores of eternal streams. He hears the music of the upper worlds, and looks upon the temples of the shining hills. This is JOHN THE EVANGELIST.

Years have passed. Now comes a man with the Tools of all the Craft. He toils amid the laborers of his age, and leaves his monuments in shapely domes and marble columns till a kingdom repeats his praises. This, my brethren, is Sir CHRISTOPHER WREN, the great London architect. There is silence for a time. Then comes a form—tall, graceful, and with an imperial glance. He takes his stand near the East. He has just sheathed his sword. He now pauses near the altar, then he passes down the halls. This, my brethren, is the Father of his Country. There are multitudes like these whose feet have walked these holy aisles. FRANKLIN, GABFIELD, STARR KING and THOMAS GUARD have passed the open door, and rest their weary feet beneath the green acacia. Noble deeds have borne aloft the banner of our Order, and unveiled characters have stood about our altars like stars above us in the night of human life.

This Temple is composed of eternal elements. A true Mason is one at heart. Here is the throne of speculative Masonry—the real seat of Masonic life. It carries into a man's soul the priceless jewel of friendship, and brings from his inner life the Sowings of its pure and living fountains. It is no argument against Masonry that the covenant unites only those who take it. This is true of all human organizations. The bond is world-wide and its tenure forever, and the heart of every true Mason beats responsive to humanity's call, while, with the mystic trowel, his hand is ever ready to spread the cement of Friendship and Brotherly Love. We have a key to the arches of this Temple that never shall be shaken by the storms and changes of Time. It is CHARITY. Deeply inlaid with jewelled tears of gratitude, and embalmed in our Masonic covenant, it sheds the lustre of its brilliance upon the world. Speak it not to your left hand, but let the angels tell your deeds of love, where the incense of true devotion rises forever from the altars of our spiritual temple—where God, our Supreme Grand Master, forever presides. 'Where is it seen? Where is its earthly whisper heard? Where is the quiet tread of its footfall? Go, angel of inquiry, to the bedside of the sick, and place your ear upon the pillow of the dying. Go, angel, to the distressed widow and fatherless children. Go to the grave of the loved one, and there see the light of this holy virtue shining from the windows of the soul. Where there is sorrow to need sympathy, where there is need to call for relief, where there is wrong to be made right, and where there is darkness to be made light, there let the beams of this divine sun fall from our Order forever and forever.

WASHINGTON IRVING says that " DIONYSIUS, the tyrant, conscious of the disaffection and enmity of his subjects, became suspicious and distrustful even of the courtiers that surrounded him. He had a cave near his palace arranged in the form of an ear. He then caused them to be placed therein, while he would station himself in a secret place and listen. He could hear the faintest whisper." Love needs no such safeguards. It hears and tells only truth. This is true Masonic greatness. Here is a secret tie stronger than death—a Gordian knot that no impetuous ALEXANDER has yet been born to cut. This is the sacred fire like that of the Temple service, that will never expire; and this, my brethren, is a secret reason why Masonry will never die.

Masonry has no secrets that can injure the world. All its secrets as an order tend to promote the universal good. It is said that an Emperor once built a palace of glass, that all might see him in his private life, and that he placed it on a hill, to allay the suspicions of his subjects. We do not need these outward displays. We take the simplest of the heart's expressions of secret faith. This is an essential element of our strength. How quietly the heart can trust its friends—how strongly it can hold its forces upon the soul! There is no miracle in the universe grander than the silent influences of the soul of man. Atoms, worlds, stars, suns, and constellations are swung in their grand harmonious circles, and have been kept in their most sublime and orderly marches, night and day, since "the morning stars first sang together and all the sons of God shouted for joy." Faith is more subtle. It enters the deep places of thought and searches the hidden realms of mind for the solution of eternal problems. It reaches the depths of the past and peers as the mysterious and unfathomed future for the purposes of its life. It takes hold of the present and its wonderful hopes and relationships, and gathers the fragments of earth's broken urn, and lights the fires of eternal affection anew in the world of spirits far beyond the stars. Thus, my brethren, we are as a family in the world, looking for the security of the earthly and present good of all mankind, and also waiting for the opening of the eternal doors, when the immortal Tyler shall let us enter upon a grander life.

We need frequently to look at qualities. Forms of the ritual and the externals of the profession do not fill the requirements of Masonic life. We must look higher than all our symbols

for the true import of our Masonic obligation. We must search the motives. They must be laid upon the conscience and be measured by the highest sense of duty. Any candidate for these honors, at these sacred altars, should first desire to be a better man. Better innately. Better in every high and manly resolution. Better in every relationship to the brethren of the Craft. Better in every aim as a part of the moral structure to which you belong and of which we form a part. Bound more intimately than any other human society, we must all be honored in the success of one, or pained and injured by the failures of one. We are to be a building.

Motives to moral excellence should be always growing stronger. Our moral qualities are the true centers of our highest strength. There must be fidelity to the cause. The noblest of the Craft have been shining out this highest virtue upon the shrine of Masonry down to the present day. The first lesson of this brother-hood gathers its force from a character illustrious by fidelity. Death for a principle. Death for the protection of truth, innocence, and love. Here gathers the other moral excellencies, as stars in groups.

The strength of the human will is involved. What words of mystic power in the " I will," " I do," " I am " of Masonry. No terms of equal force are found in all the grasp of human thought. The reason, the emotions, the conscience, have left the destiny of society at the feet of this supreme authority, and have waited for its assent. In the consciousness of an abiding conviction, we have placed ourselves upon this border-land of infinity and asserted our will of devotion and consecration to this sublime Order. The greatest care of Masons should ever be to strengthen this, man's noblest gift. Enforced by all the faculties of the mind and body, let it carry in its divine supremacy all power in the resistance of evil. Morally stand firm. This will is up beside the throne of Freemasonry. In fact, it presides here over every virtue we are called upon to defend or reveal, and it stands by the eternal throne, in the inner temple of the universe. The great object of this institution is to make strong men. While we may help the weak, it is also intended to raise the standard of character higher than the mere fancy of illiterate and corrupt, or dissipated and flattering society.

What grander mission than that of the strong arm, thinking brain, and increasing wealth, guided by a broad plan, a keen eye, and a high determination to help the helpless and comfort the comfortless! What better method than organized thought and heart and will! CROMWELL was right, when he found the gold and; silver images of saints standing in the church, to command them to be made into coins and distributed to the poor. The work of all the Craft is toward this one divine achievement. The return of necessity is the common expectation of all generations. The consecrations of the strong are the remedies that God has prepared for that certain day or hour. Fountains are falling from the clouds and creeping from the edges of eternal snows, to pour in cataracts down to the bedsides of the suffering; but there must be somewhere a friendly hand to give a " cup of cold water to one of these." Times of darkness, like prowling enemies, sometimes come to the threshold and fling their long deep shadows across our loved ones and our homes, but the attentive ear must hear the sighs, the faithful breast must beat with sympathy, and, with fleet foot and rapid wing and angel purpose, come to smile away our gloom.

So the young, brave, and strong led the aged and trembling King SOLOMON up the stairs of "three, five and seven." So in the recruiting ranks of this illustrious Grand Lodge of California. The gallery of bright and noble faces will increase in numbers out by the stairway. New faces will be seen, and other feet will walk these sacred halls. They will move along the great highways of the future to bear the burdens and meet the responsibilities of the Order, and to imitate the virtues of those who have gone before.

Brethren, look at the great uprisings of opportunity. Every step taken in the rapid development of the State, every advance in her material resources, in her commercial relationships, in her mental and moral progress, brings some new possibility to the Craft. New charters, new halls, new initiates, and new necessities are coming rapidly up together. Let us, then, go out from this our annual convocation with higher resolves for the work of the coming year. With our attachments all made stronger, our hopes more firmly knit about the sublime destinies of the future, and our memories refreshed with the treasured glories of our illustrious departed, let us go to the places of our labor in the temples of the Craft.