

**Grand Lodge  
Free & Accepted Masons  
Of California  
Grand Oration 1886**

**Grand Orator  
Morris March Estee**

MOST WORSHIPFUL GRAND MASTER AND BRETHREN OF THE GRAND LODGE

There is something sublime in the thought that behind the ages, in the gloom of the unremembered past, in the very boyhood of man, there was a Society whose principles were founded upon the equal rights of man, and that the time of the creation of this society can not be marked by any historical event. Conspicuous among the traditions of Masonry is the belief that it existed before any records of profane history, before SOCRATES taught his sublime philosophy, before DEMOSTHENES thundered his orations against PHILIP of Macedon, before Rome existed, and long before the Christian Era erected a new mile-stone on the highway of nations.

In Masonry the old and the new are blended, the monarchical government of the patriarchs and the freedom of modern republics are made to harmonize together, and the lessons of the remote ages serve to shed new light through the gloaming of the present. The quaint rituals of our Order and the faith which one Mason is taught to have in another, are lessons which indicate in a most marked degree the simple character of those who lived in the early period of man's existence; and these must have received their inspiration from the patriarchal age.

The old and the new differ in this, that the richer people become, and the more enlightened they are, the more doubting and commercial are their instincts. A warm heart does not often go with great business intellectual development, as business knowledge is principally the knowledge of dollars. In this age, man believes what he sees more than what he is told. These facts would seem to carry on their face, if none others existed, the proof of the antiquity of our Order; but its antiquity does not alone inspire our veneration; it is not the number of its years, but its deeds, which we most admire.

Indeed, it matters but little whether Masonry existed only a few hundred years ago, or before the pyramids, for we do believe that it existed before books were printed, before gunpowder was invented, and before America was discovered or steamboats dreamed of. We know that railroads, telegraphs, telephones, and steam engines were not thought of when Masonry was being exemplified over a great portion of the world. We knew that new nations have been created and old ones have passed away; that new and marvelous inventions have been made, and that the world's history has been written and re-written over and over again since Masonry was first taught to man; yet the principles of Masonry are but little changed, because time can not destroy truth, and because the calls of humanity and the emotions of the human heart are the same to-day as always. These are like the inspirations of religion, or the love we have for home and kindred.

Although our rituals are unchanged, Masonry has progressed. Masons have learned something during the recent past. Masonry has advanced with the tide of events and progressed with the march of human intelligence. It has been a learner and a teacher among men, but it has learned only in its business relations with the outside world. Its spirit, its soul, is the same as of old; and, whether we note its lessons in practical Masonry as exemplified in the construction of King SOLOMON'S Temple, or its sublimer lessons in human charity and Christian benevolence, every-where, and in all ages, it has been an educator.

To-day it is the same grand old Order as it was at the beginning. Its great age has not brought with it decrepitude or nurtured the seeds of decay, for it survives now on what it does to-day. It carves out its own history as fast as the fleeting present passes by. We must admit that it is a human organization, with many human frailties, and not destitute of human faults; that it makes mistakes and corrects them; but the mistakes our Order makes are but the proof of our humanity. The remedies we afford come from the inspirations of a Divine Providence, and these represent the generous, the charitable side of man.

If we are to believe tradition, there is a peculiar romance about the early organization of our Order. It came into existence in the far East, amid the grandest specimens of God's handiwork,

and in an age of faith that reached even beyond the skies. It was cradled under the fostering care of the Patriarchs, and the sacred precepts of prophecy and religion formed the corner-stone of the edifice. Yet Masonry acknowledges no sect but the human race, no religion but that taught in the Bible, whose GOD was the GOD of ABRAHAM, ISAAC and JACOB. In the early times Masonry was a peace offering to the world, and indeed in war it has been a conspicuous messenger of peace. In peace it has been the advance guard in the march of human freedom. Founded upon inspired religion and controlled by law, it acknowledges alike its duty to religion, good order, and regular government. Though every Lodge is a little republic, yet it flourishes under the shades of monarchies, and amid the benign influences of the most perfect democracy, for the whole human family is its children, and the whole world its home.

It is especially suited to the practical charities of everyday life, for ostentation finds no place in Masonry. Though it is a human organization and conforms to the customs of the peoples of all lands, yet its creed is, and ever has been, to "do unto others as ye would they should do unto you. Its lessons give hope and courage to the poor and ignorant, and lowers the pride of the rich and the envious. Whatever else may be said of it, it is a great leveler of men, but it seeks the high-eat plane for its level, and on that plane all are equal.

True we are sometimes wearied with its plain and often-repeated lessons as heard in the Lodge room, as we become annoyed at the rays of the blazing sun; but, like the sun, this Order gives hope and life to all the world. No man can be a good Mason who is not a patriot, and true to his country, yet Masonry has no national pride, no distinct nationality. There is no boundary line that marks the limit of its usefulness, and the whole earth is its home. Still, each Jurisdiction is within some national authority which Masonry is bound to obey. This is true because the language of Masonry is universal; it speaks in every tongue and is known in every land. The most benighted and most ignorant of men can understand its great truths and appreciate them. Its very simplicity is its greatest strength, for it is intended for all men and all ages, past and to come. It is said that Masonry has been the most remarkable and the most illustrious organization ever known in history, because it has brought, and still brings, into one family and under one control all classes of people, from the prince down to the humblest cottager. It makes no distinction of place, and confers no honor except for real merit, for, after all, its only glory is the good it does.

We often expect too much of Masonry, and we always expect too much of Masonry and we always expect too much of Masons. Masons are human beings, and Masonry can only make the Mason the best of his kind. The Masonic Order, therefore, cannot be any better than the men who compose its membership; but Masonry never made a man worse, and it has made many men better "than they would have otherwise been. It is true that Masonry is not intended to remedy all the ills of life, nor does it give without receiving, for its charities are not and cannot be universal. Necessarily they are limited to those who come within the scope of Masonic knowledge. To say that Masons, even in the distribution of their charities, make mistakes, is only to admit that they are human, and subject to the same errors that other human beings are; and, though we do make mistakes, we correct them without undue punishment or disgrace.

A Mason should never belittle the great character of the Craft by boldly defending those who possess neither character nor honor of their own, for the character of Masonry as an Institution is judged by the character of the men composing it. We do not expect to build a house except upon a firm foundation, but when the house is so built we would support its tottering walls against every blast that beats against it. Masonry does not defend crime or criminals, nor does it seek to hide them from the penalties which the law of the land imposes upon them; for the influence of Masonry should always be directed towards every good cause in the Order or out of it, as the Masonic character is a good character and can only be maintained by good works.

It therefore becomes all-important for us to judge well of the character of those we admit into our Lodges. It is, perhaps, too frequent a thing that we in-crease the membership thereof by admitting into our ranks those who are ill-fitted to come among us; but we should not use the blackball to keep a good man out of the Order. Absolute justice is a living principle of Masonry. It is most important to guard against proselyting. It is not only important, but it is a direct violation of Masonic usages to ask any one to become a member of our Order. Let those who wish to know us, seek us, and they will find what we are. Once let it be known that we are not trying to outnumber other associations, or to excel them in popularity, and good men will seek admission to the Craft, and bad men will avoid us. It is the best men we want, not the most. The great

mistake, after all, is that we are trying to popularize Masonry too much. By this I mean that we try sometimes to make everybody like us ourselves, and like the Institution of Masonry, when, in fact, we should only seek to deserve every good man's esteem and not to expect his praise,

Masonry is, however, the most important social institution for still another reason—it organizes the moral forces of the people. It occupies a plane different from that of the churches, (though it gives strength to them,) because it has no religious creed. Its services in the field of politics are no less important, (though it has no politics and belongs to no party,) because it teaches respect to organized government and obedience to law, and because every Lodge-room is a little re-public where each brother is taught that he is a unit in the great organization of which he is a member, and in which he may rise step by step to the highest position in its gift. Thus a laudable ambition is encouraged in the minds of the young, which reaches its full fruition in advancing years.

And so, too, in the Lodge-room the impetuosity of youth is softened by the milder counsels of age and experience. The old and the young in the Lodge are on an even plane, equal in their rights; and yet every member has to earn his reward by long and faithful service. Promotion in our Order is not often a matter of accident, and never should be gained by social position or electioneering devices. It comes as the breath of Heaven comes, to strengthen and invigorate, not to weaken or destroy. Masonry holds out to every good man a higher and loftier aim in life than that afforded by the reward which comes of gratified ambition. It gives every member the opportunity to benefit his fellowmen. The consciousness of duty performed; the belief that one has lived with a purpose, and that purpose a noble one; that he has made bright spots along the pathway of others; that he has given to the poor and cared for the sick; that he has buried the dead and made glad the heart of the stranger; are among the higher aims and loftier purposes of Masons and Masonry. Whatever else we leave undone, these must be done. Failing in these, we fail in all the best and noblest purposes of the Order.