

**Grand Lodge  
Free & Accepted Masons  
Of California  
Grand Oration 1894**

**Grand Orator  
Niles Searls**

MOST WORSHIPFUL GRAND MASTER GRAND OFFICERS AND BRETHREN

There come into the lives of us all, periods when we pause to indulge in a "retrospect over the past, and a survey of the present, as a predicate for the future.

As an experienced navigator takes the altitude of the sun to determine his position and shape his future course, so thoughtful men, convinced of the wisdom of founding future action upon past experience, gather up the threads of that experience, test their value, discard the worthless, and from the remainder supply the warp and woof from which to weave the garments with which to clothe them-selves for their future work.

The meeting of this Grand Lodge may be likened to the reminiscent moods of men at which I have glanced.

You come here, my brethren, not simply as heralds, to proclaim to this Grand Body the edicts of your several Lodges; not as ambassadors from a foreign land, replete with knowledge to be secretly imparted to your superiors, but as an integral part of this Grand Body.

You come to report to your equals, the experience, surroundings and prospects of the several Lodges of which you are the representatives; to interchange the ideas you have gained and garnered during the past year; to formulate such wise regulations as experience and observation shall dictate as essential to the welfare of the Craft; to select the sentinels who shall guard the watch towers of our citadel; to proclaim the Grand Officers to whom shall be confided the sacred treasures of the Order, and the control of Masons and Masonry, within this jurisdiction for the ensuing year.

Nor is this all. You come to indulge in that ennobling, soul-inspiring, fraternal intercourse with your co-workers, your brethren of the mystic tie that experience has proven is so beneficial to us all.

It is as water to the thirsty palate, as copious showers to the parched earth. In union there is strength. In fraternal intercourse may be found the elixir which stimulates to grander efforts, to greater achievements.

We need the incentive of encouragement and hearty cooperation as a prompter to continued action.

The projectors of temples and cathedrals in which vast assemblages could congregate and unite in unit of action, realized this fundamental truth.

Silent prayer may attune the soul to harmony with the divine will, but it is the lull voiced invocation in the "golden cadence of poesy" which lifts it to the celestial plane.

The Annual Convocations of this Grand Lodge, it is submitted, should be so conducted, the association of its members so arranged and so intimate and full in expression and sentiment, that each may return to his abode, with a consciousness of a deeper insight in the great underlying truths of Masonry, a higher appreciation of its divine influence, a firmer resolve to illustrate and inculcate among his brethren the precepts and practices involved in its curriculum.

A half century since, and the orthodox Mason was supposed to believe that while the world moved and mutation was impressed upon all other sublunary things. Masonry alone stood as a crystallized entity, embodying the same essential elements, illustrated by the same formulas, characterized by the same mystic signs and symbols as in the days of King Solomon.

To-day, the consensus of opinion, as I think, regards it as a product of evolution as a product of that change under natural and fixed laws, which involves continuous progress from the homogeneous to the heterogeneous, in structure, and from the single and simple to the diverse and manifold in quality and function.

It applies to Masonry as to the growth, development, expansion of institutions, manners, language, civilization and all other products of human activity.

The laws which govern the process are often obscure and difficult of analysis, but however difficult the rationale of the theory, we can usually trace the progress of change from result to premises through even its dim manifestations.

Viewed in this light and what seems to us the origin of Freemasonry becomes consistent with history and easy of comprehension.

The Greeks were far in advance of all their neighbors in a knowledge of the arts and sciences. Architecture with them had reached a degree of perfection not elsewhere attained, and it may well be doubted if much has been gained even to the present time (except in modifying their forms to meet modern wants), over the knowledge possessed by these ancient architects.

The religious mysteries of all former ages were familiar to them. When, therefore, a colony of the inhabitants of ancient Attica, driven by the exhaustion of their soil and by overpopulation to abandon their own country, they carried with them to Asia Minor not only a riper knowledge of science and art than was possessed by their new neighbors, but also the mysteries of Athene and Dionisius in their original purity.

Located in Tyre, surrounded by a people between whom and themselves there was little in common, possessed of information to which their new neighbors were entire strangers, finding their acquirements could be turned to good account in their new abode, and animated by a strong desire to perpetuate among themselves and their descendants the knowledge and the ennobling principles inculcated among them in their former environment, it is not strange that they organized themselves into a society for mutual benefit and improvement, or that such society should have taken on the mystic character of the religious associations of their native land.

The members of this society became the architects and artificers, the projectors and builders of the temples and palaces of Tyre.

They hewed the rough stones of the quarry into forms of strength and beauty. They carved the trees of the bountiful forests of the mountains into objects of symmetry and usefulness.

Their devotion to principle, their fidelity to their brethren and to their art, stamped them as worthy of the approbation of the Tyrian King. They beautified and adorned Tyre; and Hiram, its King, upon ascending the throne, extended to them his protection and became a recipient of their garnered knowledge, a patron of their mystic rites.

Their isolated position at first, and the fame they acquired a little later, together with the ever present necessity for mutual aid and protection, all tended to cement them together as a close corporation and to impress upon them a distinctive character.

Their fame having extended far and near, it was but natural when a little later King Solomon desired to erect a temple to be dedicated to Jehovah, the resplendent lustre of which should eclipse the world, that he should apply to his royal neighbor, Hiram, King of Tyre, for a detail of the famous designers, architects and artisans to consummate the great work.

At the head of this body of men, as our traditions inform us, was the son of a widow, Hiram Abiff, under whose auspices something akin to our organization was formulated for the government and control of the various bands of the workmen confided to his care and guidance.

The ritual of the Order of Free and Accepted Masons abounds in evidence of not only the belief of those by whom it was prepared in the Scriptures, and of the grandeur of the Temple, but in all the canons of the church of the earlier days, and the mystical and symbolical views entertained among the Hebrews in relation to the temple are pretty faithfully copied by the Craft.

To trace the course of operative Masonry through the middle ages and down to the last century is much easier than to discern its connection as a consistent and continued Order.

The first Gothic Cathedrals of the middle ages-many of which as a matter of fact greatly excelled in size and grandeur the temple of King Solomon were, as we are assured by the historian of the day, erected by companies of builders who possessed a peculiar social organization, which enabled them to preserve most of their professional secrets, and furnished facilities for mutual defense and assistance in the midst of rude and turbulent communities.

Among them there was always a governing head from whose decision there was no appeal and "every tenth man was called a warden and overlooked each nine."

In his manner and by these freemasons were built the "magnificent convent of Batalha in Portugal, about the beginning of the 15th century the Cathedral of Strasbourg from 1018 to 1439,

of Cologne, which occupied centuries in its construction, and many other famous structures in England, Italy and various parts of Europe.

In England and Scotland they were incorporated guilds and were early known as Freemasons, a name assumed by reason of the many exclusive privileges which they enjoyed as a corporation of builders.

All these remarks are trite, and are only indulged as a predicate for the enforcement of the central idea, which is, that from this practical organization having for its main object the advancement of the material welfare of its members has solved the grander organization of speculative Masonry, with the higher and nobler purpose of advancing the moral and intellectual forces of its members.

The practice of admitting to their ranks men distinguished for their profound learning and their attainments in the arts and sciences, prevailed from an early period, and little by little, as this practice continued, and knowledge increased the rank and file of the Order was filled by men of genius and culture, who animated by high aims and noble purposes, gave to the body an accelerated impetus in the direction of a broader culture, a grander destiny.

Thenceforth its ranks were sought by men, not so much intent upon advancement in a chosen vocation, as by a desire for a higher and broader culture in the social amenities, moral perceptions, intellectual acquirements. It became an educator of the age, an intelligent mental force of the times, around which clustered the deepest thinkers, the broadest humanitarians, the grandest moralists of every land graced with its presence.

Were I asked to designate the highest attribute of wisdom exhibited in the formulation of Masonry, I should respond, it was in seizing upon the social instinct and making it the basis for moral and intellectual culture.

I repeat, that the social feature of Masonry has been the basis of intellectual as well as moral culture.

Not that sociology, which is but that branch of philosophy which deals with the constitution phenomena and development of human society, necessarily and directly leads to great mental culture, but indirectly the teachings which lead men to an inquiry as to their true relations as members of society, and prompt them to the exercise of their relative duties to their fellows, tend to that intellectual awakening which eventuates in a broader culture and greater intellectual effort.

Socially, we occupy a pivotal point from which a hundred paths diverge, some of them leading to lofty heights, crowned with a diadem of truth, faith, hope and charity; others lead to the lowest depths of depravity—caverns filled with hateful things, fit abode for the vilest of nature's sons.

The friends we make socially exercise over us a potent influence as to the paths in which we travel. If Masonry did no more than to exercise over its votaries benign social influence it would commend itself to every thinking man competent to judge its merits.

Its power in this direction, though silent as the speed of light, is mighty in molding our lives in forms of beauty.

In its incipency, the influence of operative Masonry was directed to the advancement of its members in the practical affairs of life, and their growth in the higher and nobler attributes of manhood was largely a sequence of the lessons of form and beauty implanted in their minds.

By the evolutionary process under which speculative Masonry was developed an entire change of theory was gradually unfolded, and the rough ashler has become not an object upon which to bestow manual labor for the purpose of practical results, but a symbol of man's rugged nature, to be brought into harmony with the divine scheme, by diligent culture and a patient practice of the Masonic virtues

To this end, my brethren, bend all the energies of your natures, cultivate, within the limits prescribed by our rules, the social instinct as a means to the growth and expansion of all the moral and intellectual forces within you, ever remembering that that moral soundness which has honesty and integrity as its basis, is essential to the formation of such a character as should be possessed by every true Mason.

Forms and symbols are useful in conveying to the mind beautiful and ennobling lessons, just as words convey ideas; the latter are as prosy as the mathematics; the former are the poetry of life, and find a rhythm in every responsive soul.

So long as we confound not, the altar with the sacrifice, these object lessons are as poems of ineffable beauty to the heart and mind. After all, they are, like all forms and ceremonies, but a means to an end. They are the rich golden surface prospect, which encourages us to delve deep down for the hidden treasure of the mine.

#### THE SPREAD OF MASONRY

It may seem at first blush that universal dissemination is desirable of an Order calculated to promote the welfare and happiness of men.

Experience, however, teaches that its influence for good depends not so much upon the number of its members, as upon the character of its membership.

Wherever Masonry has become popularized, and has included within its ranks a large majority of the people of a given locality, the tendency to deterioration in the quality of its material has been apparent. A single unworthy Mason may do us more harm than several exemplary members can counterbalance.

He who stands as an index of Masonry, where the number is small, and who is the cynosure of all profane eyes, it must be confessed, is more likely to act with circumspection and a care to the dignity of the Order, than where its membership; includes the good and the bad.

In the latter case, individual effort counts for little; in the former for much. It may not be either logical or complimentary to say this, but it is believed experience and observation warrant the remark.

Wherever labor is unproductive of practical results, it is likely to cease. Reduce the grade of a Masonic Lodge to the plane of the lowest intelligence of the community in which it exists, and its power for good will be reduced to a minimum. We are judged largely by the standard of our unworthy members.

If their conduct is such as to bring reproach upon the Order, all its members must inevitably be the sufferers.

That we have sometimes been too lax in receiving improper material, and more frequently too indulgent in retaining it when once received, is everywhere apparent,

The excuse of weak Lodges, another specious reasoning that greater numbers will add to their efficiency, regardless of the character of the material, has done much to reduce the high standard of character which should everywhere pervade Masonry.

You, my brethren, can perform no more useful service to Masonry, than in keeping from its ranks unworthy material; except, perhaps, it may be in expelling from those ranks such as, having become members, have demonstrated their unfitness to remain such.

It is often necessary not only to avoid evil, but the appearance of evil. The presence of unworthy members is a constant menace to our standing, and greatly detracts from our power for good.

It must follow that we should exercise freely the right to deny access to our ranks to such as are either by nature or education unfitted to illustrate the exalted principles by which Masonry is animated; and that the pruning process should be freely exercised to the end that its members may stand as indices, as exemplars of those principles.

If the realm of Masonry cannot be extended without detriment to its high character, better that it be confined to narrow limits.

#### THE RELIGIOUS TEACHINGS OF MASONRY

The Fraternity exacts from all its members' evidence of a firm belief in, and reliance upon, a Supreme Being, the Creator and preserver of all that exists—a Heavenly Father, whose children we are and whose loving care is extended over all.

It advances no collateral dogmas, a belief in which is essential to admission within our walls. The wisdom of thus confining the requisite belief of the Order to the great underlying truth upon which our holy religion is based, is worthy of commendation.

Men are so constituted that their affections, sentiments and religious belief, never quite keep pace with their intellects. In the course of human development, in the advance of science, the fallacy of many of our religious theories is from time to time demonstrated.

Reason discards the error when discovered; faith clings to it as an essential element in a grand scheme—as a necessary factor in the great problem of religion; and thus upon matters merely ancillary or collateral to religious belief, men, impelled by sentiment and sustained by faith, sever in their views, and the bond of union between them which seemed a chain of forged steel, of triple brass, becomes a rope of sand.

Some, failing to distinguish between essentials and non-essentials, discard all religious truth others, falter and shamble along in the paths illuminated by science, yielding only under protest an unwilling acquiescence to truths which they should have embraced with alacrity.

Masonry discards as non-essential much of the formula in which religious truth is enveloped and establishes as its tenets only the great central truths, to which we all subscribe.

As a sequence, harmony in belief, unity of action, has ever characterized Masonic Intercourse on the subject of religion.

## THE FUTURE

It is not given to men to do more than conjecture as to that which lies in the future. That permanency and success of Masonry must depend largely upon the condition of the people among whom it exists, goes without saying.

By taking advanced ground in the promotion of knowledge and upholding of virtue and personal worth, it may wield a wide influence upon the public, and at the same time contribute to its permanency and success as a factor in the problem of civilization.

That vast changes must, under natural laws deeply affecting the condition of the people of our own country, take place in the comparatively near future, is very apparent.

Under these altered conditions, were we inclined to be pessimistic, we might demonstrate with some plausibility:

1. In another century the ratio of increase maintained during the last hundred years will give us a population of six hundred millions, or say equal to that of China.
2. A population of such density must entail untold deprivation and suffering upon a majority.
3. A suffering people are always a discontented people and are prone to attribute all their woes to their form of government or its administrators.

A suffering majority in a free government, with the power in their own hands, invariably seek to change such government, and, in most if not every instance, end in anarchy and final despotism.

This theory, so far as founded upon past experience, involves the predicate of ignorance among the masses, and may serve for senile men who find signs of decay exhibited on every hand.

To you and me, in the heyday of youth, no such dark visions rear their horrid front. We realize full well—

1. That under well established laws, epidemics, plagues and war come as cheerful messengers, to stay excess of population.
2. That the general diffusion of knowledge is steadily elevating the masses to a plane where anarchy and despotism cannot exist.

We believe, too, that great as has been the strides of progress and especially of invention in the past, that it is as yet in its infancy, and that the coming century will outstrip the past in new discoveries tending to human comfort.

Already it is asserted that from oxygen, hydrogen, nitrogen and carbon and a few compounds, eggs, beef, bread and other articles of food may be produced in factories with as much ease and certainty as cloth is now woven. 738 Professor Berthelot of Paris, claims that he can now produce in his laboratory a three year old beefsteak in twenty minutes; while by a combination of gases, sugar, it is claimed, can be manufactured at a cost of one cent per pound.

Coal tar, it is said, is to be debased into the form of tobacco, while the fuel of the future will be drawn from the underlying heat of the earth.

Electricity will become the motive power of the world, and the friction of moving trains of cars will go far toward generating the power needed for their propulsion.

Men will navigate the air, making the trip across our continent perhaps in twenty-four hours; sail in ships beneath the surface of the ocean, thus avoiding the force and effect of storms upon its surface; and in a thousand ways alleviate the discomforts of life and add to the means whereby that life may be sustained by other and superior means than those now in vogue.

Already men are talking of a fourth dimension, a description of which will be left to those who can comprehend it, as we cannot.

Of one thing we are assured: the genius of coming ages will be found adequate to grapple with its great problems, and to solve them in the interests of humanity.

To us those problems are as a fourth dimension, past finding out; to them they will become plain, and of that life they will form a part.

Will Masons rise to the level of these new conditions, lend their aid in molding public opinion and guiding the destinies of the people amid the astounding changes that are sure to occur?

Their opportunities will be many, and if they reach those sublime heights from which they can survey the whole field of progress, and enter with a zeal born of knowledge upon the great work of leading countless millions to higher views of usefulness, to nobler practices, then, indeed, will they become important factors in the regeneration of the world.

To drift with the current is easy. To meet and subdue error, to lead in the battle of progress, to sway men into paths of greater usefulness to themselves and the world, calls for the exercise of the highest attributes, the sublimest courage, imparted by deity to mortal man, and nurtured by the ennobling lessons of Masonry.

If we perform well the duties devolving upon us, and leave to them bright examples for imitation, we may reasonably hope that, profiting thereby, Free and Accepted Masons, in the golden future as in the prosy past, will so live and conduct themselves and so illustrate the Masonic virtue that the very name will stand as a synonym for all that is pure and noble.

Then will it be said of those who have constructed and adorned the grand structure which we call Masonry: They builded better than they knew.

Professor Berthelot of Paris, claims that he can now produce in his laboratory a three year old beefsteak in twenty minutes; while by a combination of gases, sugar, it is claimed, can be manufactured at a cost of one cent per pound.

Coal tar, it is said, is to be debased into the form of tobacco, while the fuel of the future will be drawn from the underlying heat of the earth.

Electricity will become the motive power of the world, and the friction of moving trains of cars will go far toward generating the power needed for their propulsion.

Men will navigate the air, making the trip across our continent perhaps in twenty-four hours; sail in ships beneath the surface of the ocean, thus avoiding the force and effect of storms upon its surface; and in a thousand ways alleviate the discomforts of life and add to the means whereby that life may be sustained by other and superior means than those now in vogue.

Already men are talking of a fourth dimension, a description of which will be left to those who can comprehend it, as we cannot.

Of one thing we are assured: the genius of coming ages will be found adequate to grapple with its great problems, and to solve them in the interests of humanity.

To us those problems are as a fourth dimension, past finding out; to them they will become plain, and of that life they will form a part.

Will Masons rise to the level of these new conditions, lend their aid in molding public opinion and guiding the destinies of the people amid the astounding changes that are sure to occur?

Their opportunities will be many, and if they reach those sublime heights from which they can survey the whole field of progress, and enter with a zeal born of knowledge upon the great work of leading countless millions to higher views of usefulness, to nobler practices, then, indeed, will they become important factors in the regeneration of the world.

To drift with the current is easy. To meet and subdue error, to lead in the battle of progress, to sway men into paths of greater usefulness to themselves and the world, calls for the exercise of the highest attributes, the sublimest courage, imparted by deity to mortal man, and nurtured by the ennobling lessons of Masonry.

If we perform well the duties devolving upon us, and leave to them bright examples for imitation, we may reasonably hope that, profiting thereby, Free and Accepted Masons, in the golden future as in the prosy past, will so live and conduct themselves and so illustrate the Masonic virtue that the very name will stand as a synonym for all that is pure and noble. Then will it be said of those who have constructed and adorned the grand structure which we call Masonry: They builded better than they knew.