

**Grand Lodge  
Free & Accepted Masons  
Of California  
Grand Oration 1896**

**Grand Orator  
Jacob Voorsanger**

MOST WORSHIPFUL GRAND MASTER AND BRETHREN, LADIES AND GENTLEMEN

Thrice happy is he whose footsteps led him this day to this favored spot in the sunny Alameda hills. Thrice happy he who, with us, may witness this sacred consummation of hopes long deferred, of prayers long unanswered, of wishes long unrealized. We stand on the hilltops o'erlooking our domain, every foot of which speaks of Faith, Hope and Charity. We stand at the closed groove, in which is sunk the keystone, noble symbol of patient faith kept alive by the love of our brethren. We stand aloft, gazing on the rich valleys of this dear, dear land; we watch the silver lines of the waters beyond; we watch these kindly faces, beaming with pleasure at the fulfillment of this holy task, and, surely, our first thought is—God is good; the Master who steels the arm for the sowing time permits us to stand on the threshing floor and sing our song of praise!

Brethren, this is a sacred hour. Well may we tarry to learn its lessons. There are few such periods in our busy lives. Usually we grapple with problems that often remain unanswered until we have gone our last journey. We hanker after power, riches, glory; we illustrate, in the mighty weakness of our reputed strength, the unhallowed selfishness of our ambitions and desires. Life is a battlefield strewn with the corpses of unsatisfied ambition, of wrecked hopes, of defeated schemes; and in our journey to the beyond we oft meet the cripples, whose maimed bodies tell the woeful tales of disaster to the one, conquest to the other. We live to conquer; to reach the goal in the mighty race for power and fame; to set our foot on the neck of the vanquished. This we call success, forgetting that there is a measure with which all are measured—a scythe that mows the ranks of men and knows not the difference between the conqueror and the vanquished. Death is the victor. Success is but the glimmer of a moment, a bright presence lighting up our little world but for a brief day. We pass on, to make room for others. We descend into the ocean of oblivion; its waters engulf us, and on the shore stand new generations, awaiting, wonderingly, the time when they, too, shall follow. What remains? Faith remains, hope abides, and charity, also—and the greatest of these is charity?

Do not think, brethren, that it is my intention to convert this moment of success into one of extreme melancholy. We are indeed happy that our enterprise hath prospered. We are moved to give thanks and praise to all who have contributed to this lasting monument of Masonry, and thereby have illustrated the promising fact that our natures are not altogether selfish. We are moved to glorify the generous mother of our Institution, the Grand Lodge of California, its wise, good men, and its women also, who recognize the services of Masonry to the world, and we gladly accord them the meed of praise they deserve. But this is not the hour for glorification, but for humility; not for praise of men, but of the Supreme Grand Master. This is not the hour to extol our success, but to deliberate the potency of greater effort. For, brethren, in setting this cornerstone in its socket, the thought grows on us that the inmates of the Home that shall here be erected are the very cripples who have been shot to pieces on life's battlefield. When we think of them the flush of success disappears from our countenances, for we begin to think, not of what we have achieved, but of what we owe them; not of our own poor glory, but of the responsibility that life's battle puts on them who have stayed in the fight to win and prevail. Here are to dwell orphans and widows. The Providence of God might, with unquestioned justice, have willed that your wives, your children should be cherished here. There is, in spite of the most unselfish humanity, a touch of humiliation in public support. They who need it are maimed, the cripples, the helpless, the fallen. How much have we for which to be grateful? How deeply moved to gratitude must we not be when we come to realize the great privilege vouchsafed us, that we may remove this touch of humiliation from the hearts of all who here will seek shelter beneath the wing of Masonry?

And this inclines me to say to you, brethren, that probably this very teaching of humility is the first lesson in Masonic philosophy. We cannot wholly conquer the selfishness of our natures; but we can strive to infuse mercy into life's battle. If we must war against one another, let us, after the manner of modern warfare, collect the maimed after the battle and heal their wounds. We owe it to ourselves. It is, it should be, an expression of our humility, a recognition of the fact that, if the race belongs to the swift, God gives strength to the one and weakness to the other. To me, the great beauty of Masonry is, and always has been, that it sets forth the relations between God and man, the duty man owes to his God and his neighbor. Masonry preaches the ideal of Fraternity, and preaches in bold, homespun language the theory that this warfare of man against man is wrong; that brotherhood is a nobler ideal than manhood, that amity is nobler than strife, that humanity is holier than the success of life. Masonry teaches that there is a democracy of spirits before God, in which not the mail-clad warrior, but the righteous man, not the wise, learned scholar, but the lover of his fellow man, shall be priest and ruler. In that democracy: as the spirit of Masonry interprets it, the classes and divisions of man are as naught in the face of the eternal verity, that God hath made all men of the same dust, hath endowed them all with the capacity of suffering, and hath ordained for them a common destiny, eternal rest for their weary frames, eternal light for their beatified spirits in the lustrous realms above where the Supreme Master of the Universe forever presides. That thought of a common origin and a common destiny humbles the Mason before the Great Light in the East, but strengthens his spirit to see wherein man departs from the great wisdom of the ages. That thought of the democracy of spirits levels, within Masonry, all classes and conditions. All are alike before the Supreme—the Master and the Apprentice, he who sits in the flood of Oriental light and he who gropes in darkness, he who wields the scepter and he who obeys orders, he who commands and he who toils. Banded and linked together by the power of that leveling principle, duty receives a different interpretation. There may be a palace for the one and a hovel for the other; but the denizen of the palace must know the fate of him who dwells in the poor man's hut; they are responsible to one another, for God has made them alike; they share a common destiny; both live, and both suffer, and both shall die, and both shall live again. Brethren, we are responsible to one another, and unless that link of responsibility holds us together. Masonry is not worth a thought. Rich and poor, learned and unlearned, strong and weak, high and low, these are the nomenclatures of life's battles, representing the victor and the conquered, the sound in body and the maimed; we know them not in Masonry; we are a democracy, standing before the Supreme Grand Master, girt with but one armament, uniform to all, the armament of virtue, of character and of good deeds! That is our creed. He who hath a better to offer let him step forward and improve the ideal, which is the design of God himself. And now, since we are thus constituted, with a firm belief in the justice of equality, we render no humiliating service to the families of our brethren who have departed on their last journey—we do but honor ourselves, we do but justice to ourselves, when we provide this shelter for them. Charity is kind, but the word charity is not so Masonic as the word justice! We do justice to our orphans, to our widows, when we remove them into surroundings where they may witness the strength of our teachings; it is justice to give them shelter, justice to clothe them, justice to educate, justice to love them! If I could, I would remove the word charity from our vocabulary. Faith, Hope and Justice would suit me better. Justice interprets the relations of man to man according to the design of law; it imposes righteous duty, whereas in these modern times the word charity is misconstrued as intending to place the poor and forlorn in the capacity of recipients, who with shamed face give thanks for the munificence that enables them to live. That is not charity—it is rank injustice. Our charity, our justice, is not only kind, but it offers to the poor our gratitude for that we are enabled to demonstrate the strength of our teachings. Our charity, our justice, is of that character that illustrates that all we have is not ours, that all we know is not for ourselves, that all we are able to accomplish is not for our own glory. In our Masonic democracy, at least a part of our possessions actually belongs to our brethren, and that is, or should be, the charity without which there is neither faith nor hope! For such charity we need no thanks, for it is the tithe of the Mason to a God whom he thanks for all his goodness and mercy!

In this spirit, brethren, let us labor on, illustrating to the world the glorious fact that Masonry weakens and finally eradicates the selfishness of human nature. We stand on the threshing floor; but the harvest is not yet complete. Much remains to be done; much faithful toil is yet to be expended. But the goal is in sight—the beginning of the end has approached. In our imagination the

walls of this glorious monument are raised; in our hearts are already resounding the benedictions that here shall fall from praying lips. From whose lips? From those homeless ones who here shall find a home; from those bereaved ones who here shall find their friends; from those fatherless children who here shall recover their parents and protectors. Ah, brethren, may God be thanked for the impulse that brings such labor to fruition; may the Master of us all be praised for the seed planted in these sunny hills! For the work is unselfish, it is God's work. Nothing can be compared to such evidence of loving kindness. Men erect monuments to commemorate or perpetuate various phases of usefulness. Here stands a university, there a chapel, over yonder the arts claim their asylum and science has her temple. But everywhere man, more or less, strives for himself and to some degree perpetuates the warfare of mankind against itself. Here alone—here alone none but the Creator can profit! Here alone—here alone, brethren, the suspicion of selfishness fades before the bright star of hope and faith that rises upon these hills. Here the tenderest sentiments of humanity shall find rich illustration, and the atmosphere shall not be tainted with the impure motive of every one for himself. Here shall rise a temple of humanity, and every Mason a priest therein; here shall rise an altar of love, and its censers swung by grateful women and happy children, from whose lives we shall have removed the bitterness that prevented them from seeing the good in man which comes from God. Think you the labor is worthy of the illustrious order which claims our allegiance? If so, continue to strengthen our hands. You must find the means to prosecute this great work to its consummation. Your intelligent legislation must devise permanent provision for the Home to be erected here. Your personal contribution, in money, is needed and desired. For love is a great, good thing; but starving love, helpless love, motiveless love is little more than a name, little more than a fancy, which hath a trick of self-deception and in the end means nothing whatever. Our charity and love are, must be, evidenced in the material support we shall give this institution. Now that we have begun in earnest, the consummation rests with you ; on you the obligation to permit the workmen no rest until, like the glorious temple of old, it shall rise in majesty, a lasting monument to the Masonry of California. Brethren, heed this advice. The Mason's love is substantial, not theoretical; his charity is continuous, not sporadic; his affections are tireless, for beneath them all rests, as a strong and safe basis, his sense of duty that tells him that this work is right—and that right must live and prosper and succeed.

The consecration of this cornerstone, brethren, emphasizes once more the Mason's duty to the State and to the Fraternity which honors him by elevating him to its service. To the State first, not last, for the Mason's loyalty to the dictates of honor and manhood is but an illustration of that allegiance he owes to his country. Our beloved who here shall find their abiding place will be taught that the Mason's greatest honor consists in serving God and his country. To make men good Masons, they must be taught to become good citizens. That humanity that knows no class nor condition, that sense of equality that looks beneath the artificial divisions of mankind, that cosmopolitanism that is identical with Masonry, these also will be taught to the flock, who from this hallowed spot may graduate themselves to become leaders of men. Therefore, brethren, our duty first to California, mother of us all! Our duty to the noble State redeemed from Craft ignoble, whose fostering hand raises the manhood of our children! Our love to the glorious, sun-kissed land, the cradle of honorable enterprises and of the Fraternity that makes all men kindred indeed! Long may she prevail, the noble mother, proudest and fairest among her sisters, who compose the holy band of priestesses in the temple of liberty, equality and Fraternity! Beneath the hallowed pennant of the bear, and the greater flag of America's united sovereignties, may this Masonic enterprise come to glorious fruition, and this cornerstone prove as firm as the eternal rocks 'gainst which the storm-laden waves of adversity dash in vain! And now, all hail to the Grand Lodge of California, mother of noble institutions, protectress of honorable enterprises, sacred teacher of our Masonic manhood! All hail to the venerable exponent of Masonry in California, beneath whose protecting hand we are permitted to consecrate this pile to humanity! In it the traditions of Masonry live again. Called into life in the days of gold, its wisdom sought permanence 'midst the coming and going of gold-loving way-farers, and secured a home for Masonic teachings on the Western shore; its strength supported its young apprentices until they become Masters, whom California did and does delight to honor; and its beauty attracted the noble youth, whom it taught the grand lessons of speculative Masonry. And these lessons, are they really the esoteric knowledge the world may not know? Two words constitute both its ritual and its philosophy. To the Mason the Delphic oracle contained no mystery. Know thyself. That is the sum of our

teachings. Knowing is acting, doing. Therefore we give honor to our Fraternity, our Grand Lodge, the venerable and worshipful brethren who constitute its leaders and teachers, for that we are permitted, under Heaven's blessing, to illustrate our self-knowledge by an act of unselfishness that shall redound not to our glory, but to the glory of Him whom Masons worship—the Supreme Architect, to whose divine care we commit the designs of our architects, the labor of our crafts, and the success of this noble enterprise.  
Most Worshipful Grand Master, I thank you.