

**Grand Lodge
Free & Accepted Masons
Of California
Grand Oration 1901**

**Grand Orator
John A. Hosmer**

Most Worshipful Grand Master, Brethren of the Grand Lodge

Upon the threshold of the new century we meet to renew our friendships and to inquire what improvement can be made to benefit our time honored Institution. The Order was never greater than at present. Its civilizing influences have appealed to the rising manhood of our communities, and in-creasing numbers have sought to identify themselves with its mysteries, and profit in its valuable lessons.

With the intelligence, both natural and acquired, which the busy world of to-day demands these votaries must prove valuable in maintaining our established fame. For whatever may be the time that has preceded its present existence, Masonry in this enlightened age is still a superior instructor of true manhood. In our appreciation of what we know, we endeavor to ascertain its origin. What influences first prompted it? How has it maintained itself throughout the intervening years, until in the progress of civilization it has taken a leading position? Inquiry into conditions is the result of education. Man's busy thought in developing hidden truths has encouraged new energy to improve upon what has been accomplished. It is with a sense of veneration that we contemplate the discovery of what in modern times has ripened into a necessity. Beneath the rule of barbarism and ignorance the civilization of the ancients fell, and darkness clouded the minds of mankind generally, offering no incentive to ambition beyond the privilege to exist. The great man, thinking beyond his age, and daring to declare his thoughts in the face of threatened destruction, is especially esteemed as we note his discovery improved upon, and serving our requirements. Deeds of recorded valor in the cause of freedom, with death as the only immediate compensation, retain the actor as a martyr in the interest of posterity. Storied battles are more regarded the further we are removed in time from them. There is something about the antiquity of a subject that gives it an apparent if not a genuine value in our speculation. And so with Masonry. We seek to know whence it came. Enthusiasts have endeavored to place it with the earliest life of man. Others have given it existence among idol worshipers. Then we have the tradition of its creation at the building of the Temple of Solomon. While others have made the more modest claim that it started with the bands of workmen that wrought at the building of London Bridge and traversed the Continent of Europe erecting the massive Gothic Cathedrals that now stand as monuments to their workmanship.

Whatever may be the truth upon this subject will probably always remain shrouded in speculation, as no manuscripts reveal the coveted information, it having been confided alone to the faithful keeping of the recipient. But we have it in our midst, as an aid to our cultivated age. That it was a measure of war, or hatred, or ill will, we cannot believe. That it should originate at such a time is not probable. Its precepts are all peaceful and in harmony with the conditions existing when Solomon's Temple was constructed.

With an allegiance, first to God, it seeks to ameliorate man's condition, and bestow upon him complete happiness. Operating within its own sphere; taking no part in the framing or supporting of political controversies; espousing no cause of feudal or other warfare; trenching upon no theory of Church government; and confided only to its trusted members, its mission was re-moved from the plane of ordinary history, above the spirit of the age of its creation, and awaited the arrival of the era that would look up to it, and appreciate it; when its history would be regarded and cherished as part of their lives by the thoughtful men of the world.

It has been the pleasure of its traducers to denounce it as mysterious. To commend themselves as doing the world a service in foretelling injury from its gatherings. To complain that conspiracy was its object, and destruction of the peace of the community its mission. That in the secret alliance, protection of its members in the working of iniquity was sure to result. This railing finds listeners even in this day of progression. Could it have existed if these reproaches were

true? Would men who stand pre-eminent in all communities as respected citizens, in all avocations of life, have accepted of | its mysteries, and retained their membership, and sought to have retained its existence? How long is the society founded for pernicious purposes recognized as politic? That there are members of this Order who have failed to fully appreciate its purpose there is no doubt. But they do not represent its sentiment, and the first to condemn improper action in them would be their better informed brethren.

Masonry has ever been true to its allegiance to the country in which it exists. Its necessary government has given rise to a code of laws subservient to those of the general government, but in their operation among its members as complete in every particular. And order is one of its chief aims.

That it should have mysteries is necessary to avoid its pollution by the un-worthy. They were necessary in the long night of darkness to enable it to straggle in its effort to remodel man and accomplish good. In this it but took its pattern from what surrounded its existence. The world is full of mystery. That we should live and possess within us a power to perceive and communicate the ideas, that pass through what exposed appears a barren mass of matter, and which by attention we can cultivate to perform most any task, is a greater mystery. So are the facts that we inhabit a ball in apparent vacancy that regularly moves and maintains a proper position; that seasons come and go, suited to our necessity; that around us exists a space, filled with numberless worlds whose distance we count in unlimited figures and whose end we are powerless to contemplate. The mysteries of Masonry are its protection. They enable it to preserve its beauties for those worthy of their reception. And while these mysteries exist, their knowledge would do the world no harm. . And he who partakes of them "dares do all that may become a man."

To individual manhood. Masonry particularly appeals. As he comes from the masses to offer himself as a candidate, it is because he has formed a favorable impression of it. He must believe in God. Is that an unpleasant requirement? How unsatisfactory must the condition of that man be who can look around him and feel that he is alone. That he must pass from this earth and there the end. What satisfaction can the atheist find in the struggles of this life to pass to nothing? What current of thought must pass his mind as he views the works of nature, as to how and why they were made? What must he think of his own existence and his ability to participate in the affairs of men? And the agnostic, that doubts—would be convinced—but still doubts. What is his pleasure? A belief in God has never operated to the injury of man. A belief in God has never disturbed the quiet of a community. Happiness has resulted. The family ties, under its influence, have been more firmly cemented, and it has restrained many a wrong step, that temptation would have prompted. Its influence is ever peaceful.

As the operative piece by piece erects his edifice, so the individual becomes ' himself a temple to be subjected to his own control. His eyes that have been for the world are turned within to discover a being that has been to him unknown. An unformed character awaits his vision. There is something more than frivolity there. There is a mission in life, and for its faithful performance, his own acquaintance must be cultivated. A spirit must be subdued to perfect control. The nobler elements of man's nature exposed in all their beauty, present the contrast with the baser elements. Scorn, hatred, selfish-ness, and uncharitableness find no room for lodgment, as the lessons of good will take control of the willing recipient. Practical manhood opens before the peaceful path. As the perfect edifice displays its beauty in symmetry and order, an attraction to the eye and fund for the imagination, imperfect nature rejoices in a talisman that serves as rule and guide to its orderly arrangement. In the control of self what is more necessary than economy of time? How many hours are unconsciously lost, and with them accomplishments that might have proven of benefit when properly fostered. In them opportunities have passed that cannot be recalled. Lives become as barren wastes from not properly understanding how to regulate and surround them as you would a finished piece of machinery whose every action obeys an established law. In viewing the vista that must attend the necessary vexations of life with contentment, in the foremost is the service of God. Pre-eminently the adoration of the subject is claimed for the creator. Not in the spirit of necessity, as an escape from violence or destruction, but as a willing gift prompted by sincere love. Reverence is due unto His name. Erect in form, perfect in parts, dependent upon health to perform the offices which He permits, it is but in His service that the mission of the individual as an agent for good may be accomplished. The body

must be watched and nourished to preserve its usefulness in worldly good. The busy assistant that must plan and execute should be free from pollutions that lead to error. With the works that are established to benefit his race, a proper and learned use of them by man is in the service of the Maker. A due appreciation by the individual of the manifold blessings that surround him is an acknowledgment in the creator's service.

As members of one family, dependent upon each other for happiness and prosperity, the distressed are not to be shunned. Misfortune blesses the sympathy accorded it. Helpless, the hand of kindness is forever cherished. A pittance to alleviate want, while an act of charitable service to a brother, is not the only relief his being may crave. Comfort in sickness is sure to result from the encouragement of friendly speech. A word of unbiased counsel will break the darkest gloom. The interchange of genial companionship dissipates unpleasant broodings and lightens cares that melt in the assurance of its existence.

The busy world demands of each its due. The daily avocation which affords man sustenance, and makes him a contributor, greater or smaller, to its harvest, demands of him in his economy of time, his earnest efforts aided by his best acquired learning to the fulfillment of his duty. And as the coming day demands a renewed vigor, he must not forget the needed repose that will revive his energies and prevent a suspension of that animation that establishes his credit and esteem in the stern and arbitrary realm of business life.

The crudities of nature are always the subjects of offense. As we admire that which approaches a standard of perfection, so are we pained as we behold imperfections that should not exist. The sightless man always appeals to our pity. Deformity in any particular arouses feelings of displeasure. Frivolities, while they may excite laughter, condemn the actor in our thoughts as they appear greater or less in their impropriety. The rude and imperfect marble chiseled by a master hand challenges the admiration of the beholder. "Without the roundness and the glow of life how hideous the skeleton." Unpolished nature in humanity is equally offensive. But with what pleasure in the silence of the mind do we note the departure of error before determined effort. A realization that it is gone is courage to meet and conquer another. So our natures are disciplined. The greater the success in this important task, the more does our temple commend itself to our fellows. The less of humiliation do we feel in meeting their criticism, and the better are we fitted for our mission among men and to fill that space reserved for us in the spiritual temple of the great hereafter.

With freedom to think and act, the only restraint being that busy monitor that walks with man when he walks, thinks when he thinks, and sleeps when he sleeps, and criticises the minutest variance from an act he does not approve, fervent in the advocacy of his approved course, and zealous in adhering to its consummation, the spirit of rising manhood pursues its path in peaceful satisfaction. This vigor must be so used as not to infringe upon the equal right of the neighbor. Austerity and conceit are both injurious, and prompt rebuke rather than concession. The perfect nature must accept as aids Temperance . in mode of life, in manner, and in speech, Fortitude to maintain what has merited approval. Prudence, while maintaining, still doing so in a way that will not offend, and crowning all with the spirit of Justice.

With what personal satisfaction will the progress of the observance of these admonitions greet the possessor. But the foundation upon which they must rest is Truth. It must begin within the self. "To thine own self be true, Thou canst not then be false to any man," has stood the test of ages. It needs no explanation to support it. It requires no expression of one falsehood to counteract the effect of another. It is read in the eye. It is known in the composure of the features. It is without restraint. No lingering suspicion attends it. And perfect confidence follows it. Can the mental vision striving with imperfect nature be opened on a more harmonious lesson? Can a grander apprenticeship in the system of self-government be imagined?

With endeavor to be proficient, no surer testimony to a loyal manhood is necessary, which goes forth to battle in the affairs of life, insuring uprightness in the sight of God and man, insuring square and impartial dealing and the promise of the reward both here and hereafter which is the attendant upon the knowledge of duty well performed.

But it is not self-aggrandizement that alone affords strength. The cultivation of self counsels the assistance of others. The cordiality of fraternal sympathy cements our structure. Our workmanship is imperfect without a true appreciation of the use of our trowel. As the operative accepted to his counsels those who were not of his trade, and dignified them with the title of his

profession, there is brought to our altar the chosen of every calling in life. The miner who delves in the earth, the merchant, the mechanic, the operator, the lawyer, the clergyman, and he who depends upon the labor of bodily strength, forsaking for the moment their several avocations, meet as brethren and obey a common influence in the ceremonies of their Lodge room, acknowledging their dependence upon the Great Being who rules the Universe. They there, through the various means afforded by our Institution, hold in solemn contemplation those truths and virtues, by the practice of which man has in all ages attained, and must ever attain his highest and noblest state of perfection.

In the world's battle we learn how we are mutually dependent on each other for support and counsel. Admonished by our lessons, a brother's welfare is to be regarded as sincerely as our own. His clouded vision is entitled to the aid of all light we possess to guide him into the correct path; his errors are not to be ignored, but sought to be overcome by mild and gentle measures, and his true manhood aroused to a sense of earnest effort to reclaim his lost position. How soothing is the mantle of charity. In judgment of offense it subdues where harshness encourages defiance. In distress of mind or body, it assures the recipient that he is of kin with the world. It lends peaceful consolation to the dying bed, and brightens the pathway of the widow and orphan in their sorrow. The brother in Freemasonry feels that he may trust his confidence in his fellow without fear of its being violated. As a stranger in a place distant from his home, his membership is a guaranty of character that will afford him immediate commendation. And how careful should he regulate himself that he do not prove his brethren impostors in receiving him and giving him the credit that the name of Mason carries with it. It is a safeguard in peril. The waves of the storm-angered ocean have been braved to rescue the brother from the wreck. In the midst of battle the foe has become the affectionate aid and comforter of the wounded and imprisoned opponent. The Indian, at sight of the signal of distress, has unbound the cords that held the captive to the stake prepared for torture, and the lance of the Arab has been lowered and hostility changed to the embrace of the friend and brother. Nor has its influence been lost in quieting disturbance incident to frontier life. When the desire for gold had taken men to the then far off gulches of Montana, a community assembled, composed of those who came to work and desperadoes who came to profit by violence upon the earnings of the industrious. Nearly equally divided, it was long a question who should triumph. Without law and without organization, the quiet worker was necessarily submissive. But a day of retribution came. A dying man requested, if possible, a Masonic burial. Brethren there assembled from all parts of the world made themselves known to each other by our mystic symbols. The funeral rites were performed. Each man's character who assisted was vouched for to the other in his Masonic membership. They trusted each other. They organized for mutual support. And in their union they restored order out of chaos. They drove the desperado from their midst and out of disorder established assurance that all well-meaning citizens should live and enjoy their earnings and proper privileges as securely and completely as in a country organized under efficient laws.

As a nation we have been called to mourn around the bier of our beloved President. Stricken, in the midst of health and usefulness, by the ignorant and destroying hand of Anarchy, without a reason for the inhuman act except that he represented in his person the executive head of our beloved Country. Our grief is the stronger because he had partaken of our mysteries and exemplified in his life a just and upright Mason. Gentle and kindly in manner, charitable in his criticism of his opponents, observing in his private life filial and domestic duties that have marked his career with affectionate comments of all people. In the grandeur of his attainments he is commended as an example for loyal manhood to emulate. Beginning at the foot of the ladder he reached its top. Against the adverse notions of his people he wisely reserved action until he considered it proper. Temperance, fortitude, prudence, and justice were marked characteristics in his career. A consistent Mason, he was one of the world's great men.

Greatness finds its own sphere instinctively and obeys its teachings with a consciousness of success. It is trustful of its own powers, self-reliant, independent, and impresses an unmistakable individuality upon its possessor which relieves him from all entangling surroundings. Time is not so essential as opportunity for the development of greatness. It is sure when opportunity offers and as often as it offers to make itself known. Age, beyond the mid-day of active manhood, only leads to its reduplication. It can never displace it. The great man full of years has no more to

show, proportionally, for his life lease than the great man who falls before his prime. The world has determined the characters of both.

Great men are great mediums through whom an inspiration from the immortal world is breathed upon this to make it wiser and happier. They form the connecting link with that wondrous chain of being which reaches beyond our present confines and which will dawn upon our vision when we burst the cerements of the grave. In their lives, hallowed by thought, and canonized by conduct born of a more glorious sphere than this we inhabit, a foretaste is given of the joys that await us when our spiritual or higher nature has become developed. Viewed in this light and not merely as an outburst of every-day life, with what an interest is the career of every man invested who has lived and breathed the atmosphere of greatness. With what avidity do we seek to taste the fountain where that thirst was slaked. How readily we distinguish the genuine from the counterfeit. Insignificant indeed does he appear, who in the effort to cajole the world into the belief that he is great, condescends to grovel lower in its filth than those he desires to propitiate. When we de-part from greatness in its general operations to consider it as it seizes upon the elements which constitute particular forms of character, and see it molding statesmen and heroes, its exhibitions swell into a magnificence in comparison with which all other human affairs utterly fail. We can find nothing wherewith to liken it, outside our own conceptions of that world where we are to pass our other life. There we feel that we shall know it better. There the mysterious in its nature will be explained, and we shall learn why God was less prodigal of gifts to one than to another of our race. It is thus that greatness, with a power as true and unvarying as that which points the needle to the pole attracts our hopes, sympathies and aspirations to the great infinite embosomed in the future.

To that great power the last thoughts of our martyred brother were addressed: " God's will, not ours, be done," closed his earthly knowledge. And our evergreen deposited in that grave must strengthen that faith that our lessons teach us that there is an immortal part within us that shall live when time shall be no more.

The peaceful warfare of Masonry for the building up of manhood finds stimulus in this tragedy. The Governments of the world are mourners; the virtues of the deceased are extolled and universal condemnation is visited upon the doctrines that have accomplished this crime. Destruction, ignorance, vicious feeling, individual discomfort and lack of faith in anything are the conspiring elements that remind us of our duties in the light we have received.

I cannot more fittingly close my remarks than in the adoption of the thoughts of another:" Let us endow Masonry with those principles, thoughts and actions fitted to its capacity for good. Let us arm it with the sword of truth, the bow of virtue, the breastplate of temperance and the robe .of parity. Let us guard it and watch over it that no vice or crime pollute it, so that in infancy and age, while commanding the reverence of all, its influence may afford a perfect illustration in the lives and examples of its votaries; of its fitness still to improve and dignify the world of mankind."