

**Grand Lodge
Free & Accepted Masons
Of California
Grand Oration 1902**

**Grand Orator
Edward H. Hart**

MOST WORSHIPFUL GRAND MASTER, AND BRETHREN OF THE GRAND LODGE:

In the forests of California, amid the lofty and picturesque Sierra Nevada mountains, there is found a tree, the greatest and most wonderful that grows upon the earth. Nowhere else upon His footstool has the Almighty from His exhaustless stores scattered the seeds of this rare and mighty giant; only here upon the rugged mountain slopes with roots sunk deep among the rocks and boulders for, formed by a million years of time, stand these watch towers of the ages uplifted in majesty to the eternal heavens.

We look backward into the vistas of the past to learn, if possible, when these monarchs of the forest were not, and we find when COLUMBUS was arguing before the "wise men " of Salamanca that the earth was round and that an unknown world or an unknown passage to India lay beyond the seas, that these trees in their untrodden, primeval fastness were buffeting, the same as now, nature's wildest winds and weather. We go back further to the scenes at Runnemede when the barons of England were wringing from King JOHN the Magna Charta and laying the foundations of Anglo-Saxon liberty, and we still find these silent sentinels of the centuries deep rooted with arms extended, bidding bold defiance to the whirling unchecked elements; we go back farther, a long step backward, through the dark ages, through the long period of Rome's supremacy, when the eagles of this ancient empire were advanced to seemingly universal conquest, back to the hour when the wise men of the East, following the Star of Bethlehem, found in the manger the new born Prince of Peace, and still, according to the revelations of science, more than a thousand years had elapsed since the oldest and greatest of these trees had sprouted upon the cloud capped mountain top.

Like the giant sequoia of California is the Institution of Freemasonry; of its kind, it is the greatest in the world, and like the mighty denizen of the-forest the precise period of its existence may not with exact certainty be determined; its central legend and symbol, however, is undoubtedly as old as Egyptian civilization, and Masonry in some form of evolution has witnessed the same procession in the majestic march of time that has passed in review-before the sublime sun crowned monarch of the woods.

The principles of fraternity are very much the same whether illustrated in the precepts of Freemasonry or any other of the numerous brotherhoods that exist among men and which have for their laudable purpose the diffusion of the tenets of friendship, of relief and truth—all are good—but above and beyond those attributes that are common to all there are qualities inherent in Freemasonry which stamp it with its own matchless and supreme individuality. Its universality, its antiquity, and its freedom, through recognition of law, and obedience thereto, are characteristics essentially its own. It is not our boast that ours is a peculiarly American Institution, although as an American Institution it is surpassed by none; but it is more than simply this, it is true, that in America there are nearly one million Masons; "men, free born, and under the tongue of good report;" a more magnificent host than marches under the banner of any other brotherhood on earth ; an army as numerous, perhaps, as the fabulous multitude that the Persian monarch XERXES in the ancient days vainly led against the heroic Greeks ; an army larger than that which in our own country, forty years ago, mustered to the triumphant defense of the grandest flag that floats beneath the stars, and an army before which falsehood and untruth must ever stand aside to let it pass. It is our boast that Freemasonry is universal and world-wide in its character; obedience to law recognition of constituted authority, and loyalty thereto, whether it be democracy, monarchy, or republic, and belief in the Supreme Being, whether taught by the Christian Bible, the Jewish Pentateuch, or the Mohammedan Koran, all, according to circumstances, being the Great Light, are among its articles of faith.

It is true, literally true, that in every country and in every clime are Masons to be found; it is also true that in every continent on the face of the globe are there not only Masons, but regularly constituted and recognized Masonic Lodges. In Europe, from the snow-clad, picturesque mountains of Norway, from this land of the midnight sun, to the vine-covered hills of Italy, is there an unbroken line of Masonic altars; even in Spain and Portugal, resting, as they do, under the shadows of religious superstition; even in Turkey, center of Mohammedan faith and practice; even in darkest Russia, where liberty and freedom are banished, are the Lights of Masonry ever burning and its pillars of Strength and Beauty forever standing. Through Asia, domain of antiquity, birthplace of the human race; in Afghanistan and Burmah, in India and Ceylon, in China and Japan, is there constantly re-enacted, the same as here, the impressive scene from the career of the Tyrian widow's son who was sent to King Solomon. In Africa, land of tragedy and blood-shed; from Egypt, ancient realm of learning, of mystery and sin, dead for centuries, reawakening now under the touch of modern civilization, to Cape Colony, from the Canary Islands to Mauritius, a circle about this unsolved continent, are the beacons of our Order set, as torches flaming in darkness.

In the new world, wherever civilized man has set his foot, has he erected the banner of Freemasonry. In Alaska, at Nome and elsewhere, almost within touch of the Arctic circle, where for long months of every year the stars of heaven shine in undimmed and undisputed luster through the unbroken winter night, there do we find, within Masonic Lodge-rooms, suspended in the East, the ever-present, never-absent letter "G," symbol of eternity and Deity, name before which all Masons, wherever found, stand uncovered and bow with reverence; from these icy regions of the north, down through the British possessions, through our own great land of liberty, into Mexico, the West Indies, through all the countries of South America, almost to the barren Cape Horn rocks, around which the hardy and heroic men who navigate the seas carry with difficulty their brave ships, do we find the altars of our Order; and even more, in the islands of the seas, beneath the burning tropic sun, in those once unknown and unexplored lands, peopled then by anthropophagi, are there Lodges, the same as here, erected to God and dedicated to the holy Saints John. Thus is our claim to universality easily established, and it is one of the commanding features that places Freemasonry, of all the institutions in the world, upon a plane entirely by itself.

As universality is one of the distinguishing characteristics of Freemasonry, so may antiquity be regarded as another. Whence came Masonry? is a question that has been asked a thousand times, and a thousand times, perhaps, variously answered. Masonry, it is usually admitted, came from the East; it came from the region whence arose the human race—the race which spread westward throughout the world. Masonry, in like manner, traveled, until it to-day, as we have shown, encircles the globe. Traditions of themselves have little historic value, and the traditions assigning vast antiquity to our Order are apt to be rejected by the casual and not over-diligent student, and the conclusion accepted that a span of two hundred years, or three hundred years, at most, measures the duration of our Fraternity.

A deeper study, however, of the antecedents of Symbolic Masonry reestablishes the conviction that, while the body of the present institution may have, and probably did, come out of the building societies of the middle ages, and have had a new birth into what may be regarded as modern Masonry something like two hundred years ago, yet the spirit or essence of Freemasonry, its principal symbol, has a direct lineage extending back to a time more remote, even, than the age of Solomon, the wise King of Israel, who is so universally regarded as our first Most Excellent Grand Master; and it cannot be doubted that the artisans sent by Hiram of Tyre to Jerusalem, to assist in building the Temple, were cemented by the mystic ties of fraternity and brotherhood, which ties and mysteries in various forms of growth and evolution and change have been transmitted from age to age and generation to generation to the present moment, and the powerful and puissant Institution of Freemasonry which to-day flourishes throughout the world undoubtedly had its birth thousands of years ago in the mists of the early morn of history. What other great characteristic may we name as contributing to advance Freemasonry to a standard entirely its own?

We answer, it is that quality implied by its name, FREE, and our recognition of the deeper and hidden and seemingly paradoxical significance that freedom means restraint, that liberty means law, and that all true greatness in individuals and institutions, as well as in nature and in

nations, flows from that freedom which arises from forces and faculties controlled by discipline, directed by intelligence and exalted by obedience to law. The forces of nature—fire, floods, lightning—when left to riot, breed devastation and destruction; controlled, and they do the herculean tasks of man; the grateful—and the mighty rivers within their restraining banks spread beneficence and blessings; the bonds broken and they become demons of turbulence and terror. The waters which formed the Johnstown flood, when held safely back in deep serenity, within rock-ribbed mountain walls, ministered to the comforts and necessities of man; the restraints rent asunder, and desolation unspeakable, death appalling and unthinkable, stalked with them through the stricken valley. The painted savage, ruled only by the wild impulses of his nature, kills and destroys, burns and devastates, lives and dies way down in the shadowy, and darkness ; civilized man, taught that restraint is liberty, lives. up nearer the light, and as he ascends, catches glimpses at times of the ideal manhood, of the ideal commonwealth.

The designation FREE in the name of our brotherhood is to be taken, not so much in the literal sense of the word, as being not bound, not in captivity, but rather in the higher and truer meaning of the term of freedom from passion, prejudice or pride, freedom from the delusion that man is not or need not be obedient to law, but recognition, rather, of the truth that freedom under law alone is possible, and that the subjection of propensities to discipline and control points the only way to genuine liberty—this, we understand, is what is meant by the term Freemasonry, by the word Freemason.

Upon the very threshold of Masonry—as we all can testify—within a lodge of its very first degree, almost the first interrogation propounded is, "What came you here to do?" In substance the answer is returned, to learn the great lesson of self-control, and that this precedes all improvement in the knowledge and practice of our profession, as it does all development in man and in society, obedience is life and power, disobedience chaos and destruction.

An eminent thinker has said; " He who submits to the yoke of law becomes the child of liberty."

And another great mind propounds the truth that the principle to which society owes its stability; life, its happiness; youth, its acceptance; creation, its continuance, is obedience.

Before law is inaugurated, force, not liberty, reigns alone; and when law ends, tyranny, we are told, and truly told, begins. Obedience, we are assured, is the key to every door, and self-control, if not the beginning of wisdom, certainly is the foundation of greatness. Man's forces and faculties under direction and control exalt him to heights of usefulness and pre-eminence; unrestrained and they carry him frequently to the pit of blackness, of desolation and death.

Some of the world's greatest criminals, possessing as they often have, superior power, ability and courage, might have been among the foremost men of the earth had only the initial Masonic precept of "learning to subdue the passions " been observed; the presence or absence of this supreme element of self control frequently marking the only difference between demon and hero.

Discipline, or the striving to attain, is inseparable from the development of character; and the chief virtue of striving lies not so much in the visible reward or prize that sometimes follows as in the struggle itself.

He who fills with such perfection of grace and ability the Oriental Chair, in this Most Worshipful Grand Lodge, receives his reward not so much in the right which he has acquired to the title of Grand Master of Masons of California but rather in the augmented strength which has come to his character through the years of patient, conscientious and attentive effort which have been devoted to this service.

The chief merit of education, even, lies not so much in the possession of concrete information concerning certain subjects which education affords, as in the training and discipline, the power of mental concentration thereby acquired.

Lord Macaulay mastered Milton's "Paradise Lost" so thoroughly that he could repeat from memory its ten books; yet the absolute possession of this greatest of English classics was not the chief reward that came to Lord s

Macaulay through the hours of attentive study devoted to this work; but his chief reward lay rather in the fact that by such exercises he acquired faculties of mental concentration, both vast and wonderful, and a facility of expression unmatched by any writer of his century.

Moreover, some of the greatest victories the world has ever seen have been, so far as the individuals immediately connected with them were concerned, apparent failures, and where the prize had seemingly been missed.

The children of Israel wandered forty years in the wilderness sustained by the hope of arriving finally at the longed-for destination; but of the multitudes of men that started upon the journey only two were permitted to reach and enter the promised land; and yet the great purpose of the wandering was accomplished in the chastening and welding and perfecting of the people that had been chosen by the Almighty to do His high and important work. The Founder of the Christian religion, the faith that has so wonderfully spread throughout the world, perished, so far as His adversaries and enemies could see or understand in humiliation and agony upon the Cross of Calvary.

John Brown of Ossowotamie, the implacable enemy and hater of slavery, crazy though he might have been, wild and impracticable though he was in his methods, and dying, though he did, an ignominious death, yet inspired by his name and his memory, his deeds and his death, one of the soul-stirring battle songs of the Union, and while his body lay mouldering in the grave, the principles for which he contended went marching with the million Soldiers of the Republic on to victory.

Our efforts and our struggles are not for the moment nor for the hour, and our deeds are not simply for the day; but all contribute to make up the sum total of existence; and the value of a human life is not known until the book is finally closed and it becomes an influence to raise, to support, or to inspire others.

The query has sometimes been made as to what word in our language has the deepest meaning: what word possesses the most profound significance.

Various answers have been given, some affirming that the word which stands for "Deity" is the greatest word of all; others maintaining that the word "Love" has for the human heart a still deeper meaning, and others advocating the supremacy of the sentiments expressed by the words "Mother," "Home," "Duty."

While admitting the strong grounds for the preferences claimed, there is, we believe, another word that stands for the greatest force in all the world in the formation and development of human character, and right direction is given to this force only through regard to the great Masonic precept of self control which meets every initiate at the very doorway of Freemasonry; and the word which stands for this force is HABIT.

We are endowed by our Creator with one nature; habit gives us another more powerful than the first.

Indeed, so great a thinker as Gladstone has remarked that habit is ten times nature. Our characters are either good or bad, according as the habits we have acquired tend to uplift or degrade.

The cardinal virtues of Temperance, Fortitude, Prudence and Justice, are established and strengthened in every human being by force of correct habits; and just as certainly may the naturally upright individual become the victim of vice, intemperance, weakness, despair, and death itself through the destructive influence of evil habits.

An eminent divine has stated that as discipline, self-control and practice strengthen habit, so habit, like the sculptor's chisel on the block of marble, is forming for eternity our moral characters, and it is almost as easy to change the sculptured figure in the marble as to alter the character that habit has once formed.

The chains of evil habits, it has been said, are frequently too light to be felt until they are too strong to be broken, and the growth and power of this force are aptly illustrated by an Oriental legend which runs something like this:

"That, as ABDALLAH lingered over his morning repast, a little fly alighted upon his goblet, took a sip and was gone. It came again and again, became bolder and bolder, grew in size, and finally assumed the image of a man; consumed ABDALLAH'S meat until he was weak and thin. Contention arose between them, and the youth smote the demon so that he departed, and the youth rejoiced at his deliverance. The demon soon returned more charmingly arrayed, and was restored to favor. On the morrow the youth came not to his teachers, and, searching, they found him in his chamber lying dead upon his divan. His features were black and swollen, and on his throat was the pressure of a finger that was broader than the palm of a mighty man.

His treasures: were gone. In the garden were discovered the footprints of a giant, one of which measured more than six cubits."

Such is the Oriental portrayal of the growth, and power of habit, a force which Masonry seeks to direct aright by 'that quality of Freedom implied in its name and inherent in its character.

Nothing in this world ever attained permanent and lasting success that did not have truth as its foundation, and for its inspiration a deep, a genuine and an earnest purpose. Systems and societies have in times past arisen, have for a period flourished, have fallen into decay, have passed away and been forgotten, because error lay at the foundation, and the purpose was either frivolous, narrow, bigoted or insincere. Contrasted with these, and with a beginning extending into the mists and traditions of a past covering many centuries of time, and coming into the light of an authentic history of three hundred years, we have found a system of philosophy and action binding men together as with hoops of steel.

We look back into the past and see it at times struggling under tyranny and oppression; we see it often opposed by prejudice and dogmatic religion, and its adherents not infrequently persecuted, their liberties abridged and denied, and even their lives imperiled and destroyed; we see its meetings at times conducted by stealth and in secrecy, yet always with a worthy purpose; and still, in spite of all opposition, and without causing in its entire history the sacrifice of a single human life or the shedding of a single drop of human blood, advancing with the advancing tide of time. The world has stood aside to let it pass, and it has become to-day one of the mightiest factors in civilization and progress.

As an Institution we see it always upholding and supporting every just government, and always aiding in the maintenance of law and order. In reference to the individual, we see it reaching down to raise him up; we see it place about him the strong arm of friendship; we note that it whispers in his attentive ear the words of counsel and advice, and amid doubt and darkness, and in trials and trouble, we see it fold about him its mantle of protection; and when he has gone, and its emblem of immortality has been deposited upon his urn, we see it extend to the widow and the fatherless its gentle and warning touch of love and sympathy, of comfort and support. This, my friends, is the great Fraternity to which we belong, and in the evolution of the race, Freemasonry will always endure, its lights will ever shine, and its influence will never cease to elevate mankind and lift him upward.