

**Grand Lodge
Free & Accepted Masons
Of California
Grand Oration 1906**

**Grand Orator
Oscar Lawler**

"God moves in a mysterious way his wonders to perform."

Since the Divine fiat was sent forth which brought the world from darkness to light, the planet in its course through space has progressed into a series of diurnal revolutions, with alternating periods of light and darkness, and as, in a never-ending circling around the central sun, it never traverses exactly the same track, but comes almost back to the same places, only always a little farther on through the infinite expanse, so, there often seems to be a corresponding system of progress in the world of thought and knowledge.

Man, the creature, is born, passes through the morning, noon and evening of life, to vanish into the Great Beyond, whither his fathers have gone before him; nations are brought into existence, wax great and powerful, ultimately to wither and decay, going the way of all earthly things; God the Creator, everlasting and perpetual, supervising the passing generations, in his infinite wisdom has made each one better than the one which went before, and in the building of nations has given us a government of to-day better and more benefit cent than its predecessor of yesterday.

To human eyes the Divine purpose and the manifestations of the judgments of the Almighty have oft times—nay always—been a mystery. To their dim and restricted vision the visitations of a so-called merciful God have been sore afflictions, and the course of human affairs has at times seemed to be one of retrogression rather than of progress; but, in due course of time, which "healeth all wounds" the calamity of yesterday forms the background for the bountiful blessing of to-day—the pestilential visitation to one generation brings forth the means of securing health and immunity there from to its successor, and the grossness, passion and vice of one day has turned man to "love virtue, for she alone is free," the next.

The Jew was led from the bondage and oppression of Egypt to the Promised Land, where his genius established and his successors have maintained a system of personal conduct and a standard of moral character which affords an example susceptible of profitable imitation; and, though for centuries he has been a wanderer on the face of the earth, though (to their shame be it said), he has been oppressed by every people of every generation, and though to-day the blood of his brethren is enriching the soil of a corrupt and nominally civilized country, yet, as he contemplates the story of his race, and finds it illumined by contributions to the world and to humanity rich beyond compare and by examples of patient fortitude and steady fervency in his religious devotions, and its present marked by leadership in every field of human endeavor,—in letters, in art, in government, and in charitable efforts to alleviate and improve the condition of his fellow-man; who is there to deny in him the fulfillment of a divine purpose, and who will not rejoice with his Hebrew brother in the proud heritage of the Mother of all religions?

When the trials and tribulations of the Prince of Peace were ended by ignominious death upon the cross at Golgotha contemporaries marked the mere passing of a fomenter of discord and plotter against existing institutions, the elimination of a dangerous and disturbing element; but, whether He was a personal divinity or a prodigy of human virtue, the brutal and inhuman circumstances of his taking off have served to emphasize in striking contrast to the vice and passionate indulgence of the time the sublimity of his life and character, which for nineteen hundred years has been the pole star of rectitude, the inspiration and guide of a great portion of the human race in the path of virtue.

At an early day a great religious hierarchy was established, having for its purpose the promulgation of the precepts and exemplification of the practices of the lowly man of Galilee the lapse of time and accumulation of power it assumed control and dominion, not only over the religious, but also over the civil and governmental affairs of men and nations. The opposition thus aroused resulted in a controversy without parallel for the cruelty, bitterness, blood thirstiness and unbridled sway of animal passion displayed, and in which the characteristic least observable was

the Christian virtue professed by all the participants. Protestant vied with Catholic in devising means of torturing human beings into false professions—while Alva butchered, Calvin burned. If Mary led her victims to the stake, Elizabeth cast hers into foul dungeons, there to starve and rot. But, while the victims of those dreadful times may have felt that the God of Hosts had abandoned man to accomplish his own destruction, and that his course was one of retrogression, we who are enjoying the fruits of the long struggle for religious liberty, standing upon free soil, privileged to exercise our religious devotions at such time and in such manner as an unrestricted conscience may dictate, acknowledging citizenship in a country whose sole demand is that we be true to ourselves, can realize that the contradiction and barbarism of the Reformation was but part of the Divine plan of transition from a state of human serfdom and religious hypocrisy to a condition of citizen sovereignty and religious truth.

The "divine right of kings" had its origin and growth in the cupidity of princes and the ignorance of subjects. Through it the physical, mental and religious responsibility of the citizen was subordinated to the will and caprice of the sovereign. As the appetite grows great by what it feeds upon, possession of some power created the lust for more, and in course of time husband and son were bartered away in military service to enrich the crown, while wife and daughter were reduced to harlotry for kings, until, goaded to desperation by unbearable oppression and revolting at the grossness of the prevailing immorality, the populace, unchecked by education, and spurred by passion for vengeance, visited its wrath upon all persons in high places and innocent and guilty were alike swallowed in the vortex of the French Revolution. To say that God was accountable for the blood and carnage of the time would be almost sacrilege, and yet, when, cringing at the sound of the approaching mob the modern autocrat hastens from his bomb-proof seclusion to proclaim reform, may we not at least say that the demonstration of suppressed energy and reserved power of the multitude thus accomplished was not an unmixed evil?

In our own country the Puritan landed at Plymouth and the Catholic in Maryland, both ready and willing to face the privations of the new world in order to escape the persecutions of the old, and entered upon a course of religious bigotry and intolerance, second only in degree to that from which they had fled. But enforced association in a struggle against common hardships and an enemy impressed them that each had permitted unchristian narrowness to dwarf his estimate of the other, and, when the bonfires of the revolution were lighted we find Jew and Gentile, Protestant and Catholic, marching shoulder to shoulder, sacrificing life for life in that great struggle for the establishment of a government which would guarantee both civil and religious liberty.

The progenitors of American independence promulgated the doctrine that all men are born free and equal; and yet, when the fundamental law was established, it countenanced the very antithesis of freedom by recognizing the institution of slavery. By some that recognition is still attributed to weakness and decried as a mistake; but, when we realize the portentous effect for good to the entire human race of the mighty struggle involved in the eradication of slavery, we may be pardoned the assurance in the course of our country's affairs of the guiding force of divine intuition.

Through all of the ages and with all of the changes and progress of the human race Freemasonry "has existed and kept pace. Frowning upon intolerance, oppression of every description, it has by precept and example and with due regard for the frailties of human nature insisted upon education and enlightenment as the only sure panacea for human ills. Looking to the individual as the basis of all society, it demands of him not only the faithful observance of his duty to himself, but a due performance of his relative obligations to his fellowman, and to posterity, If he is upright and honorable in his professions his religion will be a power for good, regardless of his denomination— if dishonest and hypocritical it will be a delusion and a farce. If as a citizen he is pure and honest, the country will reflect those virtues, and insist on the practice of that same honesty in governmental affairs which should prevail in dealings between man and man; but, if he be corrupt the country will be corrupt also. The foremost citizen, who has led in the efforts at the maintenance of proper moral standards is a member of our Craft, and may we not flatter ourselves that his superb confidence in his fellow-man, and magnificent optimism for the ultimate destiny of his country have been at least in part inspired by a familiarity with its principles and operations?

Though recent progress in moral regeneration has been great, there are yet evils to be met; still problems to be solved and difficulties to be surmounted whose magnitude occasions faltering and pessimism in the weak at heart. They cannot, however, be satisfactorily combated by approaching them in a spirit of intolerance, nor can they be solved by men embittered with prejudice. "To err is human—to forgive divine."

Heretofore the passions of men have driven the great pendulum of progress first to one extreme and then the other of the situation which for the time engrossed them, and only after great sacrifice of time and blood has genuine reform been accomplished. Civilization is too far advanced to permit a recurrence of such experiences. While we may be privileged to criticize and regulate the conduct of our fellow, our criticism and regulation must be tempered by a knowledge of our own shortcomings.

It is not unnatural that the possessor of great wealth and the incidental power it brings should view any attempt to regulate his use thereof or conduct in relation thereto as an unjust and unwarranted infringement of his rights—nor is it perhaps remarkable that the toilers of the land should look upon the interference of the law to prevent the destruction of the property rights of another as unjust and oppressive. Both are wrong; yet neither can be convinced of his error by bitter denunciation or personal abuse. The remedy will not come through weak submission on one side nor arrogant assertiveness upon the other, but through mutual concession and conciliation, which will preserve the good and eliminate the evil of their respective positions.

Freemasonry as an institution and Freemasons as individuals cannot be separated from the ordinary affairs of life. It is not a mere toy, serving as a mental diversion at each annual Communication, nor an idle lip service to be performed in the Lodge room. It is a great, living moral force which should pervade and regulate human conduct from childhood to age, at the hearthstone, on the marts of trade, in the social and business intercourse between man and man. Its principles express and their practice should exemplify the cardinal virtues which should be part and parcel of our every-day existence.

Never in the history of civilization since the elimination of religion from government has there been a time when a proper application of Masonic virtue could accomplish so much for the perpetuity and peace of beneficent institutions. We are taught that time, patience and perseverance, with proper exercise of temperance, fortitude, fervency and zeal, will accomplish all things. Let each party to existing controversies, standing upon that common level established by our magnificent institution, with patient zeal endeavor to bring about an adjustment of differences, and persevere in his efforts, let each with temperate consideration for the judgment of his fellow, and courageous fortitude in the hour of trial, zealously seek the right and fervently pursue it, and in God's own time honor, justice and truth will ultimately prevail.