

**Grand Lodge
Free & Accepted Masons
Of California
Grand Oration 1911**

**Grand Orator
Albert G. Burnett**

Any man might well hesitate to deliver an address upon an occasion like this. The nature of the theme that must engage our attention, the high character and attainments of those who listen, and the expectations that have been aroused by the rhetorical efforts at past Convocations are rather discouraging to pretentious ambition, and they operate to increase any speaker's distrust of his ability to say anything worthy of the time and of the audience. How often have you been instructed, entertained and charmed by the learning and eloquence of the most gifted men of the State. Their utterances have undoubtedly sunk deep into your minds, and, like good seed sown in good ground, have produced an abundant harvest of inspiring thoughts and noble deeds.

I know not whether I shall be able to add anything to your mental equipment or to assist you in garnering more of the real substantial fruits of Masonic teaching, but may I not hope at least to convince you of my conviction that this venerable Institution is one of the greatest instrumentalities in the world for the moral regeneration of mankind; that we cannot love it with an affection too ardent, nor can we too generously devote our time and attention to the practice and promulgation of its principles.

We naturally ask: What is it about Masonry that challenges our admiration, excites our interest and justifies the labor and sacrifices that we furnish in its behalf? Do we not devote to its convocations and the duties imposed by its laws and ritual much time that we can really spare from our business? Do we not deny ourselves a portion at least of the joys of home life in order that the work of the Lodge-room may not be neglected?

Do we not contribute freely of money that we sometimes need for other purposes, that the boundaries of the order may be extended, that its power in the land may be increased and its influence enlarged and multiplied? Do we not spend hours of anxious thought and remain awake at night, concerned lest through our indifference or in-attention we hinder the mighty work in which the Craft are engaged?

What is it that prompts this keen interest? Why should we be so deeply concerned in the development and growth of the Order? For our conduct and attitude can we justify ourselves in the forum of enlightened conscience?

Do we revere Masonry, pay homage at its shrine, and profess adherence and devotion to its tenets because of its antiquity, because it has come down to us from the dim and mysterious past? This feature, my brethren, cannot be ignored; it is not to be minimized. It appeals strongly to the imagination and awakens the interest of every one who is not entirely engrossed with self. The fact that this institution has survived, for hundreds of years, the mutations of human affairs, that it has withstood the assaults of a thousand tempests of factional strife, that it has successfully resisted the persistent attacks of perfidious foes within and misguided and fanatical foes without, that the mighty conflicts of men and of nations for self aggrandizement, the wars of conquest and devastation, the revolutions in government and the storm and stress in the social and the political world, which history reveals, have not disturbed the foundations of our "ancient and honorable institution" is a circumstance of tremendous moment and a persuasive argument in favor of the validity of its claims upon the attention and admiration of mankind.

I need not remind you, however, that this alone is not sufficient to justify the esteem in which we hold this institution.

Do we glory in our membership because of the number and character of those who have allied themselves to the Order? We are associated, indeed, with a vast company of men, growing more numerous every year. Counting those on this and on the other shore, they are almost as numerous as the sands of the sea. In numbers there are majesty and strength and influence and we have a right to be proud of our connection with such a mighty host. But infinitely of more importance is the high quality of the men who have been and are identified with this organization.

Confining ourselves to the history of our own country, it is the language of truth and soberness to declare that its most brilliant pages have been the result of the genius, patriotism, courage and industry of members of the Order. Our brethren, indeed, have been in the very vanguard of progress in every department of human activity. They have acquired and maintained leadership in peace as well as in war.

What a splendid galaxy of inventors, of artists, of poets, of historians, of orators, of statesmen, and of warriors, could be summoned from our rolls since the days of the Revolution! What a tremendous task it would be to discover and to name the great leaders in our history, beginning with Washington, who have enlisted under our banners and who have considered themselves blessed of Providence because they were permitted to be members of our Order!

But of equal or of more importance are the thousands "to fortune and to fame unknown" who may not be considered great by those who are dazzled by the artificial standards of the world, but who, in the quiet walks of life, have been animated by a high purpose, have gone on faithfully discharging their duties to their fellow-men, developing those traits of character that ally us to the Infinite and becoming living epistles of the utility and beauty of Masonic principles.

Again, my brethren, if we could comprehend the great field of benevolence and philanthropy that has felt the kindly touch of our ministration, if we could have indelibly impressed upon our minds a faithful picture of the distress that has been relieved, of the burdens of sorrow and despair that have been removed, of the misfortunes of crime and of poverty that have been alleviated, of the wayward steps of weak and sinful men that have been turned to paths of peace and righteousness, of the new song of hope that has been put into the hearts of the discouraged and the despondent and of the courage and inspiration that have been implanted in the lives of thousands of the "weary and heavy laden"—all through the influence and efforts of Masons working in the spirit of Masonry and under the guidance of its principles, we would have no occasion to inquire further whether our Order is worth while and whether it merits sincere affection and unqualified support.

Men and institutions are and ever will be judged by their works. "By their fruits you shall know them." As an Order we are willing to submit to that test. Blot out the contribution of Masonry to the cause of civilization and of humanity and the world would be poor indeed. Take away from our lives the influence of its principles and we would be fit associates for barbarians and savages. This last statement, after all, gives us the suggestion of the source of the wonderful power of this institution in the world and of the justification for our zeal in its behalf. The fountains of idealism that give character to all our teachings have their origin in the highest and noblest conception of moral truth. They are replenished by the living waters that flow from the eternal throne of God. These principles represent the crystallized product of the best thought of the best men of the ages. The wisdom and experience of the centuries have demonstrated the infallibility of these moral sentiments as a guide to success and to happiness. No one, indeed, can achieve success worthy of the name, no one can experience enduring happiness without at least an earnest effort to bring his life under the domination of these divine principles.

Changing somewhat the figure of speech and paraphrasing the language of Philips Brooks, may it not be said: That we are fed here with counsel when we are in doubt, with inspiration when we sometimes falter, with caution when we would be rash, with calm, clear, trustful cheerfulness through many an hour when our hearts are dark. The hungry souls of men all over the country are fed with sympathy and consolation. There is spread before us an abundant feast of great duty and devotion on which we may all grow strong. We are fed with solemn, solid truths. We learn the sacredness of government and the wickedness of treason. Our souls become glad and vigorous with the love of liberty. We learn to love truth and yet be charitable—to hate wrong and oppression and yet not treasure one personal injury or insult. We acquire a reverent and genuine religion. We are taught the love and fear of God in the shape in which we need them most. We may indeed become men worthy of any mission and prepared for any duty that may arise.

But the one supremely significant and vital principle that lies at the basis of all our activity and development is the value that we place on the individual. Our institution does not regard men so much in the mass, but it exalts the individual man as the most important object of all creation. It is not concerned particularly about his rank or station in society but it recognizes him as fit to associate with kings and to become the heir of all the ages. It looks upon him as the child of God and destined to live forever.

This is the tenet of our Order without which all the others would be as "sounding brass or tinkling cymbal." If our brethren, generally, would accept this truth without reservation, if the belief in the inestimable value of man and the conviction that he was made in the image of the Creator and shall live through eternity were a living, active, vital, compelling force in the minds of Masons everywhere, what a mighty revolution would soon be effected in human affairs; what tremendous strides would be taken by us towards the realization of the lofty ideals of our ritual! If the 45,000 Masons in California believed with all the power and fervor of sincere and undisturbed conviction that this earth is not our abiding place, that man is more deathless than the stars, that he is capable of infinite development, that we are destined to be associated through eternity with the spirits of the just made perfect, would not our influence for higher things be multiplied, and through our efforts would not the State soon become a much better place in which to live?

What we need more than anything else is steadfast faith in these fundamental principles. We are comparatively weak and our influence is impaired because many of us do not believe with the whole heart the great vital doctrine that we profess. If we would, and could only accept it with full conviction and unchangeable purpose, we ' would have like power with those men of old, who the apostle says: "Through faith subdued kingdoms wrought righteousness, obtained the promises, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong, waxed violent in fight, turned to flight the armies of the aliens."

If we had the full measure of this faith in man and his Maker we should realize and we should teach our neighbors to realize that while we seem to be standing on the borders of an awful gulf which is swallowing up all things human and there appears to be, amid this universal wreck, nothing stable, nothing abiding, nothing immortal on which poor, frail, dying man can fasten, this seeming darkness of the tomb disappears before the illuminating light of faith and, sustained by its gracious influence, with joy and courage in the place of fear and despair, we approach the cold waters of death.

Everything else will disappoint you; everything else is mutable; everything else will fail you in the hour of severe trial. But this abiding faith in the value of man and in the existence and providence of God will never fail you. It may be represented as a citadel against which the storm may rage and spend its force in vain. It will stand firm amid the ruins of all material things and it will endure forever.

If we had this faith as an inseparable part of our daily life, if it were ingrained into the very fibre of our being, we could not be satisfied with our present indifference towards the misfortunes and misery of our fellow-men. How complacently, indeed, do we view the wretchedness that is all about us. How easily we persuade ourselves that we are not responsible for the unhappy condition of our neighbors and that we are powerless to alleviate it. Blessed probably with good health, possessing the means whereby we may secure for ourselves and families the comforts and even the luxuries of life and occupying, it may be, positions of honor and usefulness in the community, we wrap about ourselves the cloak of self-righteousness and wonder how anyone can find anything to complain about in this beautiful world.

If we had this faith as we ought, my brethren, we would rather be and feel like Tolstoy after the great change came into his life. This great philosopher of Russia was born in the ranks of the nobility and he enjoyed every possible social distinction. It is said that "He sounded all the depths and shoals of honor in so far as honor could be derived from society or from literature and yet, at the age of forty-eight, life seemed so vain and empty to him that he wanted to die." But he became a new creature through the inspiration of higher ideals and for thirty years living the simple life of a peasant, he preached and practised a philosophy based upon the doctrine of the great commandment: "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart and thy neighbor as thyself."

Nor could we be content to donate a part of our money to relieve the distress of our neighbors. Such assistance, of course, is to be commended, but we cannot so easily discharge our whole duty to those in need. No doubt, the donors of pretentious charity often apply to themselves the pleasing unction of "duty well done" though their gifts are like that of Sir Launfal, when starting upon his search for the "Holy Grail" he encountered the leper at the gate of the castle, beseeching aid. Sir Launfal was filled with loathing at the appearance of the afflicted man, but to salve his conscience he tossed, in disdain, to the beggar a piece of money. The

unfortunate mendicant needed money, but he needed sympathy and affection more, and with scorn he rejected the gift.

But how different is the story when Sir Launfal returned from his search and saw the leper again. His gift then was of the hum-blest character, but back of the gift were love and compassion. As Lowell has so beautifully expressed it:

"Then the soul of the leper stood up in his eyes;
And looked at Sir Launfal and straightway he
Remembered in what a haughtier guise
He had flung an alms to leprosie
When he girt his young life up in gilded mail
And set forth in search of the Holy Grail.
The heart within him was ashes and dust,
He parted in twain his single crust;
He broke the ice on the streamlet's brink,
And gave the leper to eat and drink;
'Twas a mouldy crust of cocuse brown bread;
'Twas water out of a wooden bowl,
Yet with fine wheaten bread was the leper fed
And it was red wine he drank with his thirsty soul."

Indeed, the world needs the red wine of sympathy and love more than it needs the chilling gifts of formal charity.

If we had faith, my brethren, even as a grain of mustard seed,, we should studiously refrain from spreading any snares, digging any pitfalls or placing any stumbling blocks for the wandering feet of our weak, erring neighbors. Are not the inducements to sin sufficiently alluring? Are not the temptations to abandon the way of virtue sufficiently strong? Are we not all in danger of becoming finally castaways? And shall we, with knowledge of the peril that lurks even for the strongest and best, do anything to encourage the evil beasts of passion or of appetite to impair or destroy the moral fibre of our brother's character?

We may be strong, but we must help to bear the burdens of the weak. We may be able to resist temptation, but we must put no temptation in the way of our brother who may fall. We "must eat no meat" even, if it cause our brother to stumble.

If this faith and our profession mean anything to us will we not be restrained from defaming the character of our brother and will we not hold his character in our affection as a treasure worthy of preservation just as we regard our own good name? This does not demand compromise with flagrant vice or fellowship with dishonesty or corruption, or that we shall ignore or excuse persistent wrong-doing or that we abate our opposition to everything that is indecent or debasing in public or private life or that we shall waver in our demands that Masons shall observe the moral law and discharge as a sacred trust the duties of citizenship. But it does mean that the reputation of every man, especially of this "Household of Faith," shall be a precious thing in our sight, that we shall scorn to destroy or to de-tract from it unless we are compelled by a high sense of duty to society or the interests of justice require that we speak the truth.

Brethren, may we have this day a stronger faith than ever before in the everlasting efficacy of these great ideas upon which our Order is founded. May our strength be renewed, our vision clarified and May we have a higher conception of the importance of the work in which we are engaged. May we realize more fully the debt of gratitude we owe to the munificent Author of our being for the gifts of mind that He has bestowed upon the children of men and for the possibilities of moral and intellectual progress and development that are ours without distinction of outward circumstance. May we never forget that not only is it our imperious duty to cultivate and develop those gifts, but that the employment of them in the service of our fellow-man must ever be the source of the greatest gratification and the surest guarantee of their ultimate perfection.

Let us not be satisfied with our past achievements nor content with what we are now doing for the welfare of mankind. There is an urgent demand everywhere for more aggressive efforts to stay the hand of injustice, to oppose the usurpations of tyrannical power, to cripple the wings of avarice and to bring to naught the ambitious schemes of selfish aggrandizement. But the only

way possible by which the destruction of wrong may be effected and needed reforms in government and society may be accomplished is through the acceptance by the masses of the people of these moral sentiments to which we have pledged our allegiance.

As Mr. Bancroft has said: "It is alone by infusing great principles into the common mind that revolutions in human society are brought about. They never have been, they never can be effected by superior individual excellence." He refers to the age of the Antonines as the age of the greatest glory of the Roman Empire when men, distinguished by every accomplishment of culture and science, for a century in succession held undisputed sway over more than one hundred millions of people, until Marcus Aurelius, the noblest of all the emperors, ascended the throne. He could do nothing. His philosophy, though of the highest type, did not and could not stay the downward tendency of the Roman Empire, nor did it accomplish a single great beneficent reform. It is a solemn truth that Bancroft uttered when he declared that "Society can be regenerated, the human race advanced, only by moral principles, diffused through the multitude," And we must do our part, my brethren, to induce the multitude to believe and to accept these principles.

The task we have before us is, of course, a stupendous under-taking, but the reward will be commensurate with the effort required. We shall not work alone, but we are to be associates and co-workers with all the forces of righteousness, and it may not be in our day, but in the near future, as the splendid result of all these good influences the world shall know the truth and "the truth shall make them free." And men shall believe, and act as they believe, that "there exists," as Washington said, "in the economy and course of nature an indissoluble union between virtue and happiness, between duty and advantage," "and the propitious smiles of Heaven cannot be expected on a nation"—and lie might have added, on an individual—"that disregards the elemental rules of order and right which Heaven itself has ordained."

Let us never doubt for a moment, my brethren, that these principles are eternally right, that if we faithfully practise them they will bring us peace and happiness here and glory in the Hereafter.

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Grand Orator