

**Grand Lodge  
Free & Accepted Masons  
Of California  
Grand Oration 1916**

**Grand Orator  
Samuel E. Burke**

Most Worshipful Grand Master, and Brethren of the Grand Lodge

I am honored beyond my deserts by being accorded this opportunity to address you, and, as I look into your faces, I can say with the ancient Greek orator, "I have with me the best of Athens."

Centuries ago our Lodges were composed of operative masons. With trowel and square and plumb line they constructed the temples and palaces of mediaeval Europe. They were the friends of order and the allies of religion, and actually labored with the tool as well as the precept. Ever before the eyes of the humblest Mason who wielded the trowel was the vision of Grand Master Solomon directing the construction of that great temple in whose building the founders of our Institution worked for more than seven years under cloudless skies.

The temple of Solomon has crumbled in the grasp of four thousand years; the fraternity which he aided to organize has ceased to be operative, and the implements of the craft have become symbols instead of tools. Today we construct temples of character instead of temples of stone, and those edifices which we build will be unaffected by the ravages of Time, for they will accompany us and shelter us into the Great Beyond toward which we are fast journeying.

It was well said by a great Mason who long since climbed the path to immortality, "The Masonic Institution itself is more wonderful than any edifice which it ever constructed from the perishable materials of earth. It has an unspoken language older than any living language of Christendom. It has survived wars and revolutions, and is ever ascending to loftier planes of usefulness. It looks to the heavens for its model, and in its work imitates the Divine plan of nature."

The sun draws in vapory tributes the moisture from the ocean; the invisible winds carry it in clouds over the globe and distribute in refreshing showers the liquid treasures of the skies. In like manner, Masonry draws its strength and resources from the deep sea of human sympathies, and employs them to redress the wrongs and relieve the sorrows of humanity.

The dominating spirit of Masonry is Charity. Down the aisles of nineteen centuries comes the voice of Paul, saying, "Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not Charity, I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal. And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries, and all knowledge; and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not Charity, I am nothing. Charity suffereth long, and is kind; Charity envieth not; Charity vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up. Charity never faileth."

Said Brother Starr King fifty years ago, in an address: "Do we ever get tired of the tolls and tax of charity? Suppose the sun did? What does he receive in homage or obedience from the orbs that swing round him in comparison with what he gives—all his light, all his heat, all his vitality, for the blessing of four-score worlds? Shall we complain of the demand upon our treasuries, or our private purses, for the sacred funds of the Masonic Board of Belief? What if the sea grumbled at the assessment which the mighty sun, the Most Worshipful Grand Master of the solar system, levies upon its substance. Every day the sun touches its stores with its wand of light, and says, GIVE, GIVE, and the sea obeys. Evaporation is its tax, constantly demanded, constantly given. Every cloud we see, whether stretched in a beautiful bar across the east at sunrise, or hanging in pomp over the gorgeous pavilion of the retiring day, is part of the contribution for the general relief of Nature, assessed by the lordly sun. The water which the ocean keeps is salt. Pour a bucket of it on a hill of corn or a garden bed, and it kills it. The water which the ocean gives is fresh, and descends in blessing after it rides in beauty or majesty on the viewless couriers of the air. Nature tells us that to give is to live."

Truth is the dominant virtue of Masonry, and Truth is immutable, immaculate, and immortal. Experience dissolves in its clear light the cloud-capped fancies of youth, and the

passions and plans of manhood vanish amid the infirmities of age; but neither time nor decay can impair Truth. In Masonry, allied to this noblest of virtues, are the discipline of the mind, the subjection of the emotions to the dominion of reason, and the attainment of knowledge. Good is the vital principle of Masonry, and it is universal good, for the Mason who is good to his brother Mason is incapable of being bad to the rest of the world.

Time destroys material monuments erected by man. Beneath the waves of the mid-Atlantic are buried the relics of the cities of the lost Atlantis. The cities of Palestine are ruins; the pyramids and the sphinx are slowly decaying; in our own domain the ruins of Casas Grandes and of prehistoric aqueducts may be seen. But the principles of Truth, of Justice, of Equity, of Fraternal Love, of Charity, of Faith, of Hope, are indestructible, and because they are attributes of God, they cannot die.

Masonry, in the vast number, of its members and in the extent of its sway in all countries, is the most powerful, the most wonderful and the most beneficent social organization in all the world. Operative masonry is the oldest mechanical trade. Deep excavations made in modern Jerusalem have uncovered massive masonry of the time of King Solomon, which underlies work done in the age of Zerubbabel. Above these are specimens of mason work laid in the age of Herod the Great; and finally there appears, but still below the level of the present city, stones laid in the reign of Justinian.

The past of speculative Masonry, like that of operative masonry, is beneath us, but not like the grandeur of a ruin. It is beneath us like the roots beneath one of the giant sequoias of the Sierras—they still give life and strength to the great tree which has for four thousand years given shelter to all who gathered beneath its far-spreading arms.

Solomon's temple, which our ancient brethren constructed, was not comparable with the living temple of our Institution. Under the direction of Hiram of old, the stones of the first temple were prepared at the quarries. They were brought to the temple-site and laid in massive walls and arches in reverent silence, without sound of hammer or chisel or any metal tool. Thus have our living temples been constructed in every land and every age, without boasting and without noise. The best of the manhood of the land are the stones of this living temple. The strife and the selfishness of the world may roar outside the Lodge room but they do not penetrate within its walls, and the sound timber and approved stones are somewhere fitted to their places daily, without noise or confusion, in tens of thousands of Lodges in our land.

The walls of our Lodges never echo a sentiment that is not kindly and their doors never open for an evil deed. When those of us who are here today have been gathered to our fathers, our Masonic Lodges will look upon a field of labor and supply larger than we can dream of. Twenty millions of people will dwell in our California. Temples of art, and industry, and science, and religion, and benevolence, will send ten thousand spires to the skies. The outreaching arms of our iron Briareus will bring to our doors the trophies of a conquest which commerce shall achieve from Alaska to Patagonia, and which will extend over the western sea, to where sinks the sun.

And still as Yosemite in the presence of awe-struck tourists, tosses her soft white lace of falling waters into the air, as simply and as purely as in the days when she was alone with the forests, and the meadows, and the mountains, so will the maxims and the deeds and life of our Institution bear themselves serene and unchanged amid the din of human industry and the selfishness of human struggle.

Solomon's temple, where operative and speculative Masonry conjoined in organization and operations, stood as it was built, until its pillars and domes were leveled by the weight of centuries. It could not enlarge itself or recuperate itself. But our temple of speculative Masonry can know no decay, for it is a house not built with hands. It is an edifice of immortal and ever-rejuvenating vitality. It is like the cedars of Lebanon, which repair their waste and renew their leaves. Masonry fills in its losses, enlarges its sweep and sway, and stands in its old proportions, though in greater amplitude, symmetrical, mysterious, and sublime.

Masonry inculcates patriotism—love of country, love of the flag, and love of freedom. It especially thrives on American soil. Not American in that narrow sense which questions a man's birthplace, or inquires into his theological or anti-theological opinions, but American in a broader and more comprehensive definition; American as Niagara is an American cataract; and the Columbia an American river.

There are Masonic Lodges near the icy glint of lakes which lie far beyond the northern confines of our Republic; there are Lodges shadowed by the forests where Orizaba's purple summit shines. The Order invites to its membership all worthy men, whether aliens or citizens, wherever born and of whatever creed. It is American in the sense that its spirit is the spirit of the mountains, the forests, the prairies, the cataracts, the white-tipped lightning, and the thunder's voice. It gathers its tradition from ages and ages gone. Traces even of its pre-historic existence may be found in this western hemisphere. There are Masonic symbols in the Casas Grandes of New Mexico, in the ancient fortifications in the Mississippi valley, in the sculptured monoliths of Copan, and the ancient aqueducts of Arizona. Masonry evidently existed among races whose carvings in stone and whose ornaments in pottery and metal, in shell, obsidian and porphyry, are often unearthed all the way from Lake Superior to the Belize; races whose temples are crumbled, whose gods are vanished, and whose records exist only in the undecipherable hieroglyphics of a language lost and gone.

Our Lodges are dedicated to the use of an order whose chief object is brotherhood and charity; an order which accomplishes its benign purposes through the love that comes from knowledge of each other, and the strength that is born of association and cohesion.

Perhaps there are not in the whole vast vocabulary of human speech, syllables more articulate with honorable emotion than the one word "dedicate." In the beginning, when the morning stars sang together, the first grand dedication was made, and I wonder that painters of the pre-Eaphaelite school did not choose this subject above all others for their master effort. A new and swinging world, plucked out of the stilly and starless unknown; her brooks filtrated from the mists of chaotic wastes, her fields unblown, her first-born forests yet succulent with Nature's milk, her airs warm with wooing motion, and her freshly-tinted skies painting the crest of creation upon new-made lake and river. Suns unshorn of a virgin beam and moons unpropelled along unplowed paths, and stars yet untaught in sentinel duty over all the song less world. What though but a dewdrop hanging from the finger of the Great Author? It was a world set apart for the uses of mortal man, and dedicated in the presence of the angels to universal brotherhood.

There is no taint of evil in Masonry. Its temples are dedicated to Love and Charity, and still retain the master idea of ages old; still rear their proportions a perpetual rebuke to tyranny, and always a stronghold of rectitude and justice, catching glints even through the quagmires of the superstition of heathen nations, or the jungles of obscure faiths, of that celestial light that shall endure forever.

Wherever there is Masonry, there is progress, and charity, and good deeds, and kindly words. Where the eloquence of art speaks in thrilling tones through lips of marble and bronze, or shines through canvassed walls; where music breathes the symphonies of Heaven's own tongue; where the dramatic art throbs in life full verity its lessons to men there the Lodges of Masonry are erected.

Where the doors of 'hospitals swing open at the sight of human suffering; where libraries yield their treasures and professors their-erudition without cost to the seeker for learning; where the branding-iron and thong have been banished from penal institutions—there the spirit of Masonry walks abroad. Where the pageant of power rushes daily over millions of miles of iron rail, where the lightning sounds the paeon of progress upon Thought's million-chorded lyre, where the iron barges of commerce smite the abject seas with their conquering force—there the triumphs of Masonry are sung.

Where the sun draws pictures, and the microscope reveals the secrets of life, and discovery and invention have made the existence, of the day laborer more comfortable than that of a barbarian king—there Masonry is a force for right doing and Tight thinking. Where science has pursued unchecked and encouraged, her mighty march until the voices of the living may be heard through the air thousands of miles and the voices of the dead speak from the mouth of the phonograph, and men sail in great ships above the clouds and under the seas—there sits Masonry, smiling, saying to her votaries "Do not believe that of this mighty panorama of human progress, you will catch but the fleeting glimpse afforded by the brief life of earth for the ages live with you and with them you shall live."

Masonry in its march keeps step with civilization, and is the apostle of liberty, and the conservator of order. Masons have been inventors, artists, organizers and promoters of industries, authors, orators, and statesmen ever foremost in every field of beneficent effort.

Masonry requires only that its members shall be " free born and of good repute." It demands of an applicant for admission that he shall be an honest man who believes in the existence of an Almighty God. It does not ask upon what soil he was born, or to what religious creed he professes allegiance. In Masonic Lodges kings have obeyed the orders of subjects seated in the Worshipful Master's chair, and major generals and corporals have clasped hands in fraternal grasp. Multi-millionaires and mechanics, college professors and hand-laborers, merchants and clerks, meet on terms of equality which elsewhere is theoretical, but in the Masonic Lodge is actual. By the couch of the sick and the bier of the dead, Masonry alleviates human suffering and sympathizes with human sorrow, and its succoring ministrations are given to the widow and the fatherless. Neither the restlessness of change nor the march of time have impaired its strength or altered its principles.

Mutual assistance is a fundamental principle of Masonry. The man of wealth does not become a member in order to increase his holdings, the politician does not expect to influence the vote of a brother Mason, nor does the college professor enter our Lodge room in order to add to his knowledge of Greek or Latin. The help that Masons give to each other is not sordid and not the result of bargaining. The Mason seeks and obtains counsel of his brother in health, care in sickness, assistance in difficulty, and defense when needed. Masonry seeks to improve the characters rather than the worldly condition of its membership. Unless calamities of Nature, such as fire or disease overtake our brothers, they do not apply to their fraternity for aid. Want is not often a visitor in a Lodge room, for Masons are intelligent, industrious and frugal. Artificial social distinctions which wealth and station create, have no place in our fraternity. Masonry does not deny ministrations to the physical wants of its members, but it seeks to promote an expansion of their sympathies. It promotes the fellowship of manliness, not that of political or ecclesiastical or social distinctions. Its basis is the brotherhood of man and the fatherhood of God. In the Lodge room, rich and poor, learned and unlearned, public official and private citizen, meet upon a basis of absolute equality, and all contribute equally to a common treasury.

No man can be a Mason at heart, unless he worships God and loves his neighbor. No charlatan, no glutton, no adulterer, no hypocrite, no miser, no man who does not aspire and labor to obey the moral law, can ever become a true Mason through any process of admission. Perfection in this life we cannot attain, but we can reach toward it with faithful hearts and steady eyes. It should be our task amidst the teeming vitality of California, under the institutions by which we are protected, in the spheres of labor to which we are respectively called, not merely on holy days, but every day, by the cheerfulness and persistence of our industry, by the promptness and punctuality with which we keep our engagements, by the modesty of our pretensions, by the general probity of our conduct, by our firmness and patience under affliction, by our unaffected sympathy and charity, by our strong control over appetite and passion, and by our temperate enjoyment of pleasure, to spread the light and warmth of Masonry.

Whether a man is a Christian, a Jew, a Buddhist, a Parsee or a Mahomedan, if he believes in a God, in an existence after death; and in the supremacy of good, he may become a Mason. If he is an Atheist, who denies the existence of an Almighty Power, he cannot become a Mason.

Masonry teaches that "it is not all of life to live, nor all of death to die." Masonry teaches its members to lead clean lives and to respect the rights of others. Masonry is a bulwark of order and a dove of peace. Masonry is the foe of ever materialistic philosophy.

We are steadily toiling up the mountain-heights seeking knowledge. Below us are the tangled undergrowth out of which our fathers crawled. Above us tower the star-lit peaks which our children may ascend. And now there steps from out the wayside shadows the gloomy presence of a cold and pitiless philosophy. It says, "Fatigue not yourself with trying to climb higher. There is no future. There is no Divine Law. Faith is a folly Hope is a delusion. Good and Evil are only words. The universe is only a charnel house of dead languages, dead faiths and dead gods. Go back to the bliss of ignorance. Eat, drink, and be merry, for tomorrow you die."

A Mason will not accept this creed of these apostles of Annihilation. He says, " I decline to consider myself as an intelligence unfit to survive the death of my body. I prefer to believe that there is ceaseless and progressive life. I prefer to believe that the Almighty has placed by every bed of death a waiting cradle for the soul, and that death itself is but " that first breath which our souls draw when we enter Life, that is of all life center." Masonry believes that materialistic

philosophers are mischief-makers. They are like the ruffian who kicks the crutches from under the arms of a cripple and leaves him no other support by which he can limp away from the storm. Their dogmas tend to paralyze the consciences and strangle the nobler impulses of men and banish them from the white light of later centuries, to grovel among the cave dwellers of a prehistoric age.

Masonry believes that faith in a future existence where a man shall reap what he has sown in earthly life, is an armed guard, whose arresting hands are laid upon the selfish, the savage and the criminal impulses of man, and that even from a more worldly and economic point of view society cannot afford to snatch the star from the breast of the Invisible Guardsman, and trust for protection to a creed of personal irresponsibility based upon the hypothesis of personal annihilation after the death of the body.

Masonry says to the Materialist: "Have all the formative forces of the universe been exhausted in producing Man? Is he the crowning and ultimate feat of all creation? Of course, we of the human race are very wise and very great, but after all, we are far from perfect, even physically. Even with our aero planes any wild goose can out fly us, any dog or rabbit outrun us, and relative weight considered, any grasshopper can out hop us.

Masonry places God's message to man upon its altars and emblazons God's initials on its walls, because Masons believe that Man is but one link in the endless chain of existence which stretches out over the purple path of space from the depths of night to the home of the •singing stars. Masonry says that if evolution demonstrates that man has been developed from a lower order of being, does it not follow that in turn a higher order of being will be evolved from man? If we start with the mollusc, must we stop with the human? Surely the difference between a clam and a materialist is greater than the difference between •a. materialist and almost any kind of an angel. If an advocate of materialism can trace himself backward to the time when he was an invertebrate, wriggling a slimy argument against a future life, or a saurian insisting that beyond crocodilism there could be no further development, or any ichthyosaurus babbling to his fellow-fishes about the impossibility of there being any other world than the watery one in which they were swimming, why cannot he project himself forward into another existence where he will have an opportunity to explain to the other devils how it was that he came to make such a mistake in this one?

I cannot better conclude this address than by a quotation from a brother who long since journeyed on: "There is," said Frank Tilford "no eternity to matter. No work of man can resist the ruthless hand of violence or the unsparring scythe of time. Even the temple which our ancient craftsmen erected on the sacred mountain, that marvelous structure of consummate beauty, has not escaped the universal doom. Note the changes wrought on our planet since the era of authentic: history. Science reveals to us the unchangeable decree of the Infinite that the time must arrive in the grand procession of the ages, when all life shall cease upon our globe. The atmosphere with its gorgeous hues and banner of clouds will pass away; the rivers and oceans will disappear; the myriad voices of nature will no longer rise to the heavens in songs of rejoicing, and the mighty monuments of the past will remain, tombs of generations that have died amid the awful solitudes of a dead world; but the principles of Masonry cannot die. They must survive. They are rays from the eternal light, drops from the river of •everlasting life, and, like their deathless original, they, too, possess the attribute of immortality."

O Masonry! with origin vested in mystery, yet whose pathway is luminous with the love of humanity; whose life is the spirit of ever-working benevolence; whose mission is the divinest charity; may thy standards advance, thy temples rise, until Truth, Justice, Faith, Charity and Fraternal Love encompass with their holy influences every tribe and every nation.