

**Grand Lodge
Free & Accepted Masons
Of California
Grand Oration 1994**

**Grand Orator
J. Lloyd Clayton**

Most Worshipful Grand Master, Past Grand Masters, Distinguished Masonic Visitors,
Fellow Grand Lodge Officers, Brethren All

It has been a most edifying experience to be a Grand Lodge Officer, and at the same time, a most rewarding and exciting time in my Masonic career. I wish to thank our Grand Master, Most Worshipful Warren Blomseth, for the opportunity to serve this Grand Lodge as Grand Orator. My thanks also, to my fellow Grand Lodge Officers who rallied behind me at every event, always with words of encouragement and support.

I would be remiss if I did not express my appreciation for the aid and assistance given me by the Assistant Grand Lecturers, the Inspectors and Lodge Officers in the many districts where the Grand Lodge was called upon to perform the various ceremonies. Without the local history and background supplied by those dedicated Masons, the task of preparing addresses for the functions would have been much more difficult.

The last two years have been a most trying time for the Masonic Family as once again we have been under attack by anti-Masonic factions, who seem to be dedicated to the eradication of our great fraternity. Although we appeared to have gained a victory, I am afraid that we have not dissuaded them, we have only temporarily averted their attack. Let us review some of the anti-Masonic history of our order.

Our late Brother John J. Robinson, was a writer with a special interest in the history of Medieval Britain and the Crusades. In his research into the history of Medieval England, he was surprised by the constant trails that the early Freemasons left in the sands of time. His main interest was, of course, the England of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. With his curiosity peeked by the thread of Masonry woven through the history, he began concentrating his study on the activities of the Knights Templar.

The Knights Templar was formed in the days of the crusades, when pilgrims, on their way to the Holy Land were set upon by bandits and highwaymen. The Knights Templar provided safe passage to these travellers, and as a consequence, became wealthy and powerful people.

John Robinson determined that there was no doubt in his mind that the secret society which came to be known as Freemasonry, had been born out of the society of mutual protection formed by the Knights Templar and their associates in Britain.

As history has shown, conflicts have grown between powerful groups throughout the ages. In early Europe, the religious groups were in the position of great power, and the kings and rulers of the European countries were under the control of various religious factions. The power accumulating to the Knights Templar became a threat to some of these religious groups, and the result was an attempt to destroy the Knights Templar.

The public became aware of Freemasonry when four Masonic Lodges in London formed the Grand Lodge of England on June 24, 1717. It did not take too many years to pass before, in 1738, Pope Clement XII issued the first of many bulls or orders, from the Catholic Church denouncing Freemasonry as an adversary or threat to the church authority, and forbidding membership in Freemasonry by any member of the Catholic Church. The succession of bulls continued as Pope Benedict XIV renewed and continued Clement's Constitution. Pope Pius VII followed them both. Pope Leo XII, by his Apostolic Constitution-quo graviora - recapitulating the acts and decrees of the previous Pontiffs about the matter validated and confirmed them forever. In the same way. Popes Pius VIII, Gregory XVI, and very often Pius IX continued in the same vein.

The Masonic Order moved to the new world with the first immigrants to this country. Those members were very much in evidence as the struggle for independence progressed, and the

United States was formed. Freemasonry, it soon became evident, had not left the antagonists and reactionaries behind.

There were certain anti-Masonic sentiments apparent in the first years of our country. Such groups as the Quakers, the Mennonites, Moravians and Lutherans opposed membership in any so-called "secret society."

In 1826 the episode of the William Morgan Affair unfolded. Although no record can be found to confirm that William Morgan ever took the three degrees of Masonry, the records of the Western Star Chapter No. 35 in LeRoy, New York reveals that Morgan petitioned for the degrees of Royal Arch Masonry and was exalted to the Royal Arch in May 1825. He was involved in the forming of a new Royal Arch Chapter in Batavia, New York, but for unknown reasons his name was stricken from the roll.

Whether this prompted him to develop anti-Masonic sentiments, or for some other reason, no one will ever know, but within one year he authored an expose of the secret rituals of Freemasonry entitled "Illustrations of Freemasonry." Several attempts were made to stop the publication of the book, but apparently he had entered into partnership with others, and he no longer was in control of the book he had authored.

It is reported that a mysterious fire consumed the print shop where the book was being published. Morgan claimed that the Masons were responsible for the fire in order to stop the book's printing. Then out of the blue, Morgan was arrested on charges of theft. There are no documents detailing exactly what occurred after the arrest, but Morgan was released from jail on September 12, 1826. Outside the jail, Morgan entered a carriage. It is questionable whether he entered voluntarily or involuntarily, but his whereabouts can be traced to Fort Niagara. There is no reliable account as to his presence after September 19, 1826. He simply disappeared.

There are a number of stories as to what happened to William Morgan. The Freemasons who could be identified as being in Morgan's company from Batavia to Fort Niagara claimed Morgan accepted a sum of money in return for leaving New York, never to return, and resettled in the Canadian wilderness. Anti-Masonic factions claimed the Masons murdered Morgan in retaliation for revealing secret Masonic rituals. In reality, no one knows what really happened to William Morgan. The fact is that his disappearance, and the subsequent furor raised by the anti-Masonic factions, caused Freemasons who lived through the 1827 to 1840 period to experience many difficult times.

As a result of the adverse publicity of the Morgan affair, Freemasonry began losing its members. Lodges suffered such losses that there were many consolidations, and many Lodges gave up their charters. Masonry was at a low ebb.

According to a report given by Worshipful Brother John R. Nocas, one of our leading authorities on Masonic history, the Lodge at Batavia where it all began, was dormant for sixteen years, and was not revived again until 1842. The nine Lodges in Monroe County, New York, surrendered their charters under pressure from public opinion. The number of Lodges in New York fell from almost 500 to 49 in 1834. The Grand Lodge of Massachusetts surrendered its charter to the state, and its temple in Boston was closed and sold. For a period of time there were no active Lodges in Vermont. The Grand Lodge of Maine, during the period from 1834 to 1843, never had more than four Lodges attend their annual communications. During that same period, the President of the United States, John Quincy Adams, was an outspoken enemy of Freemasonry and loudly condemned the Fraternity.

The Anti-Masonic Political Party was born out of the Morgan incident. In 1828 they held a State convention in LeRoy, New York, and enjoyed stunning and surprising success in the New York State legislative elections. But like many third party groups in American politics, the solidarity that brought them into existence slowly dissipated and by 1840 the Anti-Masonic Party disappeared.

The anti-Masonic movement has been very active during this century. The amount of papers, pamphlets, tracts and books which have been published against Freemasonry is staggering. Some of this literature has been authored by men who claim to have been Masons, but have "seen the light" and have left the fraternity; some by religious men whose goal it is to discourage membership in our fraternity; other literature has been written by church priests and ministers whose interpretation of their religion is so narrow, that they have trouble accepting even persons within their own denomination, who do not measure up to their narrow definitions.

The many writings of John Ankerberg, a modern-day critic, have been believed by countless readers as an accurate reflection of the Masonic teachings, partly because anything written in a book is believed to be true because it is in print. Another reason these books are accepted as true is because Masonry has not offered any rebuttal to the charges against them. Our silence has been interpreted to mean that they are correct in their statements.

A Masonic Brother, the Reverend Lansing B. Harmon, Jr., of Hampton, Virginia wrote; "The narrow sectarianism and pious orthodoxy of religion have many times been in the forefront of those who would discredit Freemasonry. The voices of priests and clergymen have been raised in violent opposition to Freemasonry, but those same voices have often been silent in the presence of tyrants and oppressors." He goes on to say; "Yet the fact is that Freemasons make valuable contributions to their parishes. Almost always our Fraternal Brothers give expression of their faith in a fine manner, and at the same time bring great credit to the Craft in their conduct and character, and in their support for all the great causes that make for a better world."

Our detractors continually quote and misquote Masonic writers such as Albert Pike, Dr. Albert G. Mackey, Henry C. Clausen, Coyle and many others as authorized spokesmen for the Masonic Fraternity. We all know, that with over one hundred Grand Lodges in the world, numerous Supreme Councils of the Scottish Rite, and governing bodies for the York Rite, Royal Order of Scotland, the Shrine of North America and many other allied and concordant organizations affiliated with Freemasonry, there is no one government to speak for all of the Masons of the world. The writings of these members are their own thoughts and interpretations of the teachings and principles of Masonry, and do not represent Freemasonry per se.

In June of 1992, the Southern Baptist Convention voted to approve a study of "whether or not Freemasonry is compatible with Christianity and the Southern Baptist Doctrine." James L. Holly, M.D., President of Mission and Ministry, Inc., a leader in the Southern Baptist Church, at the 1992 convention made the motion that this "study" of Freemasonry be made. Debate on the motion was held the following day with a limitation of fifteen minutes devoted to discussion, each speaker limited to three minutes, and under the stipulation that no discussion was allowed to give the merits of Freemasonry. After discussion, the motion was amended to refer the matter to the Interfaith Witness Department, instructing them to study the Fraternity and come back to the 1993 convention with a recommendation.

Dr. Gary Leazer, at the time of the 1992 convention, was the Director of the Interfaith Witness Department. He made an objective study of the compatibility of Freemasonry with religion, and specifically the Southern Baptist Doctrine. His report, however, was never seen by the messengers who attended the Convention in Houston. Dr. Leazer was forced to accept another position in the Home Mission Board, and a substitute report, with eight points critical of Freemasonry, was submitted to the convention. The primary criticism of Freemasonry as reported in the final report to the convention, was leveled at the penalties of the obligation outlined in the ritual, and of the use of the term, "Worshipful Master," used to address a Masonic Lodge Officer, as well as the implications that Masonry's good works programs, for example, children's hospitals, language development centers, and philanthropies such as the Eye Foundation, represented a means whereby Masons could receive salvation. On August 6, 1993 Dr. Leazer addressed the Southern Masonic Conference in Atlanta, and subsequently on October 22, 1993, he was forced to resign from the Home Mission Board.

The report from the Home Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention concluded its recommendations on the study of Freemasonry by indicating that, "it was up to the individual Baptists to judge Masonic practices in light of Christian beliefs and Southern Baptist Doctrine." Appropriately, the anti-Masonic amendment did not pass. By overwhelming vote estimated to be 9 to 1, the 17,800 or more messenger/delegates to the Southern Baptist Convention rejected bigotry for truth, and denominational tyranny for individual freedom.

A large proportion of the credit for the defeat of this attack on Masonry, lies with the positive responses printed in the February 1993 issue of "The Scottish Rite Journal," and authored by many prominent Masons among whom are Grand Masters, Past Grand Masters, 33° Masons, including many Southern Baptist clergymen and Presidents and Presidents Emeritus of Southern Baptist Universities. A great contributor to the cause was our late Brother, Illustrious John J. Robinson, 33°, who dedicated a considerable portion of the proceeds from his book, "A Pilgrim's Path: One Man's Road to the Masonic Temple" to the establishment of the new "John J.

Robinson Center for Masonic Education" within the Masonic Service Association of the United States. The Southern Jurisdiction of the Scottish Rite mailed 5,000 copies of the February 1993 issue of "The Scottish Rite Journal" to the Southern Baptist leaders, and over 30,000 copies to every Blue Lodge in the United States. Then, just prior to the Southern Baptist Convention in June 1993, the Center for Masonic Education used radio, television, and newspapers to tell the story of Freemasonry.

Traditionally, it has been the practice of the Masonic Fraternity, to refrain from engaging in any public debates on the merits of our order. This silence has been misinterpreted by some to reason that Freemasonry has something to hide, or that its principles are flawed. Nothing could be farther from the truth. This Masonic practice of turning the other cheek has only encouraged more criticism. I think a precedence was set last year when such a strong stand was taken against our detractors. In the words of Illustrious C. Fred Kleinknecht, 33°, Sovereign Grand Commander of the Southern Jurisdiction of the Scottish Rite, "Masonry provides a philosophy and a fraternity where good men can 'meet on the level and part on the square.' It binds all in a mystic tie of sincere brotherhood and mutual love. Faith and work, soul and body, heart and hand are united as Masons everywhere labor through Freemasonry in peace and harmony to honor the Creator and serve mankind. Such are the objectives of Freemasonry."

My Brothers, it becomes incumbent upon all of us to increase our knowledge of Freemasonry. There is ample printed material available on the teachings and history of the Masonic Order from this Grand Lodge, from the Scottish Rite, from the York Rite, and from numerous Research Lodges in this and other jurisdictions. Many of our Lodges and concordant bodies maintain outstanding libraries where thousands of books on Freemasonry are available to us. We must continue our education of Freemasonry, that we may become better informed, and thus more capable of responding to the misinformation which is shouted against us.

Not everyone has the ability to write lengthy articles, compositions or essays on our Fraternity, but I was particularly pleased to read those articles in the Scottish Rite Journal by such celebrated Masons as Dr. Norman Vincent Peale; Abner V McCall, President Emeritus of Baylor University; John Edwin Johns, President of Furman University; Past Grand Master R. Stephen Doan; Bishop Carl Sanders' and Rabbi Sidney S. Guthman. Our own Grand Master, Most Worshipful Warren J Blomseth, along with most of our Past Grand Masters of California have contributed inspiring and informative articles to this and other publications on the subject of Freemasonry. It is through essays and papers such as those presented by such prominent and influential Masons who have the power of persuasion to be able to set the record straight, that Masonry can hope to defuse any potentially explosive situations before they become menacing. While it is incumbent on such influential Masons to continue to defend Masonry, it is also incumbent on each and every one of us to increase our knowledge of the Order.

I therefore challenge everyone present today to improve your personal library, to seek out the many good books and publications dealing with Freemasonry, to read and study them that you might become more informed about our Fraternity, and, in turn, to share the knowledge you have acquired with your fellow Lodge Brothers. To the Masters and Wardens, I challenge you to organize a short educational program to be presented at your Stated Meetings which would help educate all your members about the history and character of Freemasonry. You may find that such a program might not only improve the members knowledge of the Craft, but might also help to improve the attendance and participation at your meetings.

Starting today then, my Brothers, let us rededicate ourselves to the advancement of our education and enlightenment of the Fraternity, so we can stand, unflinching, in the face of any assault by our adversaries.