

**The
Brotherhood of
the Free**



ORATION BY

GEO. KENT

Past Master Quitman Lodge No. 76

Grand Orator, 1913

ORATION.

THE BROTHERHOOD OF THE FREE.

M. W. Grand Master and Brother Masons:

The Brotherhood of the Free, Worshipful Master and Brother Masons:

In asking you to turn with me to the fraternal side of our Order, and to study it in the aspect it presents as the Brotherhood of the Free, I believe I am inviting your attention to the most splendid and difficult achievement of our human history. Brotherhood, and Freedom, apart, have been comparatively easy. To have them together has been the supreme achievement of the age.

You Masons, you whose souls have been stirred by the rugged and often noble eloquence with which your officers, plain men the most of them, have given the obligations and lectures of our several degrees, you cannot but have caught the emphasis on those two vital principles of our Order, those principles by which a man and a Mason lives most a man, and most a Mason, amongst his fellowmen, his Fellowship and his Freedom.

Bringing home to our initiates by every appeal and argument convincing to human nature at its best, the claims of such brotherhood as ours, how forcibly we urge the right of every Brother to the integrity and freedom of his own manhood! And I am sure that none of you have meditated upon this two-fold pledge, so solemnly assumed and sacredly observed by us, without the thrilling sense that here indeed we undertake the most admirable and arduous of human achievements. I find it the joy of any earnest Mason to trace these fundamental principles of his Order, Fellowship and Freedom, along the course of their development. For he will mark, as I have done, with every step of his research, and every step of their advance, the widening area of their application, the multiplying complexity of the problems they encounter, and the greatening achievement of whatever victories they win!

So natural and creative a development it has been that I can ask you to go down with me to the cosmic roots of that Love and Liberty whose noblest fruitage is in such Brotherhood of the Free as our Order cultivates.

It has been the devoted effort of years with me to attain some foothold on that most perplexing field of anthropology, that of man's relation to the cruelties and the kindness, the bloodshed and the benevolence of earth's long history.

I learnt in the early stages of that study to acquit man of the time-worn charge that it was he who changed a peaceful and happy world to cruelty and bloodshed. For I found the indubitable evidence, written deep upon the rocky pages of the earth, milleniums before man existed,—the indubitable evidence of tooth and claw and talon and spine and poison fang,—that there went to the first rough building up of life on earth ages before man, the very forces of ravin and ferocity whose presence has been charged to him, and when it comes to blaming him for their appearance, he squarely proves an alibi. He wasn't there. He wasn't born.

But more than this, much more! Amid the apparent chaos of that time, when life was planting its tenacious roots in elemental flesh and bone and appetite, and rearing its stubborn strength for coming aeons of a finer growth, I have rejoiced to find the equally tenacious roots of those affections and fidelities which unite us in our Human Brotherhood to-day. I take the huge and savage beasts that mark the utmost development of force and ferocity in those old fighting times. The cave bear, of which our grizzly is a tame and shrunken type. The sabretoothed tiger, able to slash the hide of a rhinoceros, and with the blood-lust to do it. And in the dens of those wild beasts, at the very time of their deadliest antipathy to every other creature, and when the female of the species was worse to encounter than her mate, I find a self-forgetting solicitude and tenderness,—wonderful, beautiful, in those great, awkward brutes,—as father and mother beast cared for their young together! Yes, I go farther: I journey for centuries, for milleniums, farther back along the path of evolution, and among the treasures of my search, I cherish the huge imprint, of which I have a copy, stamped in the sand that has turned to stone, of a creature of the reptile age,—the fish-lizard, it is called,—for there in that impression is preserved the first instance I can find of that miracle of nature, so unspeakably appealing and sacred to any normal man, of the mother-creature carrying within the sanctuary of her own body the child she will live for, or die for if need be, as long as it is helpless and dependent on her.

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It is in such tokens of a distant past I claim to see the cosmic roots of love.

Of that very love, for instance, on which our Grand Master so aptly and eloquently dwelt last night, as he commended the manly spirit of good will and good humor with which you acted together upon issues you had debated with such rousing divergence of opinion.

There we have the earth roots of that love that has grown from simplest motherhood, there on the dim border line of fish and reptile, to this world-wide Brotherhood of ours, and which, we glory to confess, still derives its fundamental impulse from the throbbing hearts of our mothers!

And I tell you frankly, after fruitful and happy years of study, that to me the evidence of all this age-long history is alike cumulative and conclusive, that here is no incomplete recovery of a lost perfection once possessed. No, but the achievement, slow, stupendous, incalculably hard and splendid, of a new creation!

Along no other course of study have I trod, with care so patient, and with a step so reverent, as in tracing the progress, from simple and low beginnings of Human Fellowship and Freedom, to what it has attained.

I see the cave man, daring to fellowship with none but that miserably meagre group, his kith, the few he knows, and his kin, the few of his own blood, and free, only within the narrow bounds,—all hedged about with ignorance and fear and inefficiency,—in which he gropes his way.

But I see him, by and by, learning to grip hands with the stranger, as friendly sign that neither holds a treacherous stone or knife. I see him contriving a rude order that gives a little ampler range of safety and liberty to man and wife and child.

And as a Master Mason might trace the building of some vast Temple, up from its rough and coarse and strong foundation, in the dirt, the wet, the darkness, up and up to where its stately domes and soaring pinnacles catch the first light of coming day and herald the sunrise to the shadowed streets below, so I delight to trace the up-building, on those old, rude and strong foundations, into ever-growing use and beauty, of the great fabric of men's right relationship. Ah, none but the most shallow and cynical of students can measure lightly the complexity and difficulty of that mighty enterprise. To build up

Fellowship alone was easily and quickly done. Despotisms did it. Slaveries did it. Hierarchies and inquisitions did it. And on the other side, the side of Freedom, it has always been a simple thing to run away from human fellowship, and thus be free.

The outlaw, the celibate, the hermit in his desert cave, have tried that freedom, which a saner and a braver time repudiates as cowardly and worthless.

But to stay in this thronging world of men, right where we belong. With minds and wills of our own. With interests that conflict with others. With needs and desires that contend for the same things. With hungers and passions that inevitably clash. Aye, with ideals and virtues and fidelities that often mean not peace but a sword. And right in such a striving world, to keep fellowship with our fellow-men and true freedom for us all, ah, there's the work for God and man to do together!

To get it done is going to be the grandest triumph of the ages, immensely far as yet from being won, but inestimably worth whatever toil and love and loyalty we are called to give for its achievement!

Let us look together at a single stage of this creative work, work that is ours to do, together with the Great Architect and Master Builder of our universe. And, I tell you, that as we look, we shall be constrained to bend in awe before its illimitable scope, and yet shall be inspired to lift our heads in immortal cheer that we are called to share in its accomplishment. Take the single step that has led to our ability, right here, to hold this close and wonderful communion of thought and will, in this Grand Lodge of ours. Men mastered speech that they might break the barriers of silence separating them and gain a base of fellowship. And you and I can read the sacred story of that creative day—yet in the morning of its fulfillment. From scanty sounds helped out by signs, to languages of a hundred thousand words; from the bare indication of objective things to the expression of divine ideals; from uncouth gutturals to melodious music, human speech has been wrought out to meet the needs, and in its turn to help the progress of a growing fellowship.

Nay, not content with speech, men invented letters and created literature, that they might reach out, in touch of mind and soul, across the gulfs of space and time, to men afar, and men as yet unborn, in the irrepressible attraction of a common spirit!

We know the limitations that make language still imperfect as a means of world-wide intercourse. But here again we've learnt the truth, so rich in its encouragement. We haven't lost, we simply haven't won as yet, our perfect liberty of speech with our fellow-men.

Our mother-tongues, with all their wonderful adaptability to every new discovery and fresh experience and added thought of ours, are still encumbered by the conditions of their origin. Created by one common impulse of our human fellow-feeling, they had to be wrought out in the busy workshops of life by a hundred different races of mankind.

And between them, as they did this creative work, there stretched the barriers of mountain chain and storm sea, of wilderness and desert, holding them apart.

And hence, to-day, a hundred variant forms of speech deny us the full freedom of access to our fellows. Thus, indeed, it comes about that even in this far-reaching Brotherhood of ours, the only language that we all can understand, and are all prepared to answer with our ready help and friendliness, is as yet the primal, fundamental one of sign and hand-grip.

But, I dare to ask, what influence is there, so widespread and so strong, to inspire the passion and the effort for a full and perfect understanding amongst men, as a united Freemasonry like ours? That we do not have it yet only means that this creative day must still go on, until the knowledge of one master tongue shall be wrought out, the grand equipment of a universal human brotherhood.

And then,—ah, then shall not alone the morning's brave beginning of this creative day, but its evening's sublime fulfillment, pronounce it good!

Had we but time, my Brothers, how gladly I would ask you to traverse with me other fields of such research, yielding kindred truth. Let me in brief, with full and faithful heart, declare to you that in all the long and hard and great achievement of Fellowship and Freedom, my study of human history yields me no instance more impressive, no example more inspiring, of a Fellowship made true and strong, with a Freedom kept inviolate and sacred, than in this loved Fraternity of ours.

And it is not in just the zeal of my allegiance, it is in the clear conviction of an honest and humble scholar, that I call you to reverence and love and serve your great Order.

Yes, it stands for what the world of men most needs to win, and, with such help and leadership as yours, will yet achieve,—the Brotherhood of the Free. It means our continuing creation, of this world that's in the making yet.

We, Master Masons, and our GRAND MASTER at the creative work together.

It means no less than Love and Law and Liberty made one in human will and deed. And only incomplete as yet, because the fullness of it is illimitable!