

OUR CONSCIOUS TEMPLE

Thomas Starr King

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GRAND LODGE OF FREE & ACCEPTED MASONS OF CALIFORNIA

MOST WORSHIPFUL GRAND MASTER AND BRETHREN OF THE GRAND LODGE:
In offering salutation to you, with cordial thanks for the honor and privilege connected with the office and duty which you have entrusted to me, I shall only attempt briefly, in the discharge of that duty, to note two or three points of harmony and correspondence between the structure and working of our Order, and the handiwork of the Almighty in the external world.

We belong to the great Fraternity of Free and Accepted Masons. The implements of our Craft, however, are no longer for operative toil. We do not now, as part of our covenant, set fast the Doric pillar, nor release from marble the ornament of the Corinthian capital. We no longer sketch the complications of Gothic piles, and cement the buttresses of haughty towers, and carry up, course by course, the aspiring stones of pinnacles. The tools of the Craft are representative now of speculative truth, and speak to the inward eye of laws and duties that make life noble and character symmetrical and strong. Yet, though we build no structures such as our ancient brethren reared, though the temples in which we meet are not the monuments of our own proficiency in the art whose instruments we cherish, we are builders and preservers in a richer sense; for our Order itself grows stronger and more precious with years, and its uses are more varied and beautiful with the lapse of time.

The Masonic organization is far more remarkable and wonderful than the noblest edifice it ever added to the landscape of history. Let us pause, brethren, on the word “organization?” That is the great word of the world. The Almighty is the Organizer. He creates elements in order to mingle and fraternize them in composition and products. In the original chaos matter was unorganized. The process of its death is dis-organization. All the marvels of beauty, all the victories of life, are exhibitions and triumphs of organizing force. The most fascinating chapters of science are those which unveil to us the vast fields which the forces traverse that sustain highest forms of life upon the globe.

A crystallized gem is the most attractive form of solid matter, because more thought and skill are expended in its structure than in any other stony combination

of atoms. A flower is of a higher order of charm, for more various and more subtle elements are wrought into its composite loveliness; and then the provisions for the growth and support of the flower affect us more profoundly still—the mixture of the air, the various powers hidden in the sun-ray, the alternation of daylight and gloom, the laws of evaporation and of clouds, and the currents in the air that carry moisture from zone to zone for the nutriment of vegetation. We soon find in nature that no element, or force, exists unrelated. It is in harness with other elements for a common labor, and an interchange of service for a common end. *Organization* is the idea which science impresses upon us as the secret of life, health, power and beauty in her realm. An organized product can appear only from forces of nature, which are the movements of the Divine will. Man can arrange, manufacture, weave, forge, adjust, refine; but he cannot organize as nature does. He can make machines through which the forces of nature will play for cunning ends; cannot conjure the principle of life into any mould of his making. He can start shuttles that will weave a carpet for the reception room of a palace in one loom; but he can build no mill, he can start no laboratory, where the warp and woof of the banana leaf can be plaited. He can tell how the sugar is secreted in the veins of a clover blossom; but he cannot make the clover seed. And you might as well ask the wisest scientific man to fashion a world, as to create one of the green needles which a pine tree produces by the million, or one of the innumerable blades of grass.

But the great glory of organization is when it is revealed in human life. The highest structure of the creative art is the body of man, representing in its complexity and the friendly partnership of its powers, the system and co-ordination which society should attain; and it is a marked epoch in history when a new movement is made which succeeds in organizing men widely and permanently for noble and beneficent ends.

We are not intended to be separate, private persons, but rather fibres, fingers, and limbs. The aim of religion is not to perfect us as persons, looking at each of us apart from others. The Creator does not propose to polish souls like so many pins—each one dropping off clean and shiny, with no more organic relations to each other than pins have on a card. We are made to be rather like the steel, the iron, and the brass, which are compacted into an engine, where no modest bolt or rivet is placed so that it does not somehow contribute to the motion, or increase the efficiency of the organism.

In savage life men are slightly organized. A savage tribe is like a heap of sand; the atoms are distinct; they are aggregated, not combined; no beautiful product springs

from them; and the first wind of disaster blows them away. A half-civilized nation is but slightly organized, so far as noble purposes and high sentiments are concerned. Progress is marked by wider, higher, finer developments, issuing from the combination and co-partnership of souls. There can be no such thing as justice, until men, in large masses, are rightly related to each other. There can be no prosperity in a community until the majority of its people are so organized that their minds receive training, and their energies are unfettered. There can be no happiness, except as the result of proper relations permanently established between the different classes or strata of the social world.

“No man liveth to himself.” “Whether one member suffer, all the members suffer or one member be honored, all the members rejoice with it?” “How good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!” When a compacted unity of living beings is seen, one of the most precious objects for which the world was built is attained. A large and well-ordered family is such a jewel. A neighborhood at peace, and free from scandal, is—or, rather I should say, *would be*—a still more precious jewel of the same quality. A state, a nation, so constructed that the forces of all ranks of its inhabitants should be brought into play, and the rights of all ranks should be saved from pressure, would be a more marvelous and a more inspiring structure than the material order and harmony of our solid globe.

It is in the light of this principle that the value and nobleness of Masonry appear. I say again that no edifice which our ancient brethren reared was equal to the living structure of which they and we are portions. How often we read, or hear with pride, that in the building of the first temple, the stones were made ready before they were brought together; so that there was neither hammer, nor ax, nor any tool of iron heard in the house while it was building! What is that to the growth of our Order itself? How quiet the process, yet how constant! Who hears the noise of it? Who sees, or knows, when the sound timber and the approved stones are brought together, and fitted, and lifted to their place amidst the roar, and strife, and selfishness of the world? Yet, in thousands of towns and cities of the world, in all its zones, in almost all communities and tongues of men, this work, in substantial sameness of method and pledge, is going on. The Temple of Solomon must stand as it was built. It could not enlarge itself. It could not bud with smaller temples, and then take them in under a widening roof or a swelling dome. Neither, when some of its pillars decayed, could it restore its own decrease, as the living cedars of Lebanon repair their wastes and renew their leaves. But our conscious temple does all this, and noiselessly. It fills in its losses; it enlarges its sweep and sway; it does it through men of all conditions, and classes,

and races; and still it stands in its old proportions, though in greater amplitude, symmetrical, mysterious, and sublime.

This is the most remarkable social organization of the world. None on the globe, with half so many elements in its composition, is so old. We are told of late that excavations made under modern Jerusalem disclose remnants of the old city in various periods of its history. Portions of the massive masonry of the time of Solomon are uncovered. Above these appear fragments of the work of Zerubbabel. On a higher historic stratum are specimens of workmanship from the age of Herod the Great; and still above these, but below the level of the present city, are remains of the constructive toil ordered by Justinian. We delight to feel, brethren, that the past, measured by as many ages, is under us; but it is not beneath us in a broken symmetry, and a dead grandeur, as under Jerusalem. It is rather beneath us as the roots are beneath a tree, and as the central rings are hidden in the trunk. They give power and pith to the structure still. They are part of its present majesty, sources of its living vigor, prophecies of its future strength.

We should take satisfaction, brethren, nay, a noble pride, in the consciousness of the age and vastness of our organization. If a stone in St. Peter's could be conscious, or any portion of the wall, or spire, of Strasburg Cathedral, do you not think that it would rejoice in its position, that it would be exultant over its partnership with other stones in rearing the grandeur of such a pile for such worthy uses? If any fragment of such an edifice could be conscious, and did not feel any pride, or any privilege, in its position and its call, would its indifference be a merit, or a shame rather? How shall it be with us? Shall we not feel that there is dignity, that there is privilege, in being living fibres of an organization which has passed from one era of the world to another, which is older than the oldest empire of Christendom, which has on its rail names that sparkle in history like the sovereign stars, and which exists, not for purposes of private aggrandizement, or the selfish joy of its members, but to give deeper root to good principles in the world, and to diffuse the spirit of peace and order? If a Mason is not grateful and glad over his fellowship, it is because he does not appreciate the value in the world of the organization of good.

The idea of organization is connected with the idea of order. And here, also, Masonry reflects to us, or rather illustrates in a higher form, the wisdom breathed by the Great Architect through nature. It is said that order is heaven's first law. It is no less true, brethren, that it is earth's first privilege. It is the condition of beauty of liberty, and of peace.

Think how the principle of order for all the orbs of the solar system is hidden in

the sun. The tremendous power of his gravitation reaches thousands of millions of miles, and hampers the self-will—the centrifugal force—of mighty Jupiter, of Uranus with his staff of moons, of cold, and distant, and invisible Neptune. *There's a Grand Lodge for you, in which these separate Masters are held in check by the Most Worshipful Grand Master's power! Nay, they tell us now of a central sun around which all other suns, those fixed stars of the firmament, bend and sweep. If this suggests an argument by analogy in favor of a world congress of Masons, with a Grand Lodge of Nations, and a Supreme Master, whose power runs over seas and across continents, girdling the earth like a magnetic stream, I leave it to be discussed by the Committee on Correspondence, in the next volume of our Grand Secretary's admirable reports. But, in the case of our planetary system, is it any hardship that the separate globes are so strictly under rule, and pay obeisance to the sun? Is it not their chief blessing, their sovereign privilege? What if the order were less strict and punctual; what if the force in these globes, that chafes under the central rein and champs its curb, should be triumphant for a day? What if the earth should gain liberty against the pull of the sun? Beauty from that moment would begin to wither fertility would begin to shrivel. The hour of seeming freedom would be the dawn of anarchy; for the sun's role and apparent despotism is only the stern and beneficent condition of perpetual harmony, bounty, and joy.*

Everywhere, order is the great interest. What humanity needs is the fulfillment of these indications of nature, freedom with order, a proper consciousness of worth in every breast, a recognition by each man of the worth and claims of every other, and an acknowledgment by all of a common and controlling law. This idea of order fulfilled in the architecture of nature, is committed as a trust to our Fraternity and the proper reverence for it is poured out continually through the influence of our hallowed bonds.

For every country that influence is silently wholesome. In lands where the spirit of society does not recognize sufficiently the worth of man, but pays too much homage to rank and name, our Order quietly fosters the principle of the equality of privilege and responsibility under the laws of everlasting justice; and, without being revolutionary, it upholds the honor of human nature, and patiently rebukes despotic arrogance and aristocratic scorn. In our own country its service is of a different kind. We need more respect for authority, less self-will, a deeper sense of the sacredness of law, and education in the habits, manners, and feeling of deference and loyalty. The rupture of our National Unity, for a time, with its tremendous costs in treasure, blood, and agony, is in part the revelation, in part the penalty, in part, perhaps, through the

severe beneficence of God, the cure of our chronic insubordination of character to the authority and sanctity of high principles, which has unfitted us, all over the land, to handle the sacred responsibilities and delicate trusts of imperial statesmanship and continental government. Whatever will teach our people reverence, decorum, respect for others in the utterance and defense of opinion, submission to constituted authority with dignity and grace, will be medicine for our trouble, and will prepare for us a better future. I believe that the Order of Masonry, the quiet efficiency of its organism, the regard for forms it fosters, the love of order it induces and deepens, the graceful habits of submission it educates, and the sacredness it pours around organic law and the seats of authority, are a prominent portion of the bonds of civilization in our country, and an immense blessing when we consider our natural perils.

Brethren, let us cherish the duties and trusts of our Fraternity for this good influence that it so naturally and liberally expends. Let us resolve, as part of our duty to the Creator, the source of order and law, to drink more deeply of the springs, within our enclosure, whose issue is healing and reviving. In the maintenance of the bond and customs of order is the pledge of our prosperity, as well as the assurance of our service. *Order has limits.* Let us continue to guard sacredly our limits, to suffer no transgression of them. What a power is represented in the men who have gathered within this temple, during the present week, to superintend our general interests and interpret and apply our law! What harmony has prevailed here, what decorum of speech, what promptness in duty, what efficiency in protecting and guarding the common good! A visitor from outside our fellowship, suddenly brought in here to look, for a moment, at the representative men thus gathered from all sections of our State domain, and to observe, by one glance, the quiet power embodied in the assembly, might imagine, if suddenly taken out again, that there could be something perilous to the public welfare in the association, by secret ties, of so many men of such varied ability, working in seclusion from public criticism and without passion. He would feel secure again by knowing that it is only by keeping rigidly to the work of fostering the interests of the Order, that the dignity, the calm, the freedom from passion, the efficiency, are manifest or possible. Let any other question be intruded here, and there could be no detriment to public interests; for our harmony would break. Volcanic flame and blackness would burst through the lofty and snowy peace. By keeping within our limits alone are we prosperous and orderly; and within our limits our prosperity is the welfare of the community, the good of the State, the strengthening of civilization. Rejoice, brethren, in your privilege; wall off from intrusion the garden of order you have received; and guard the book of your Constitution with the Tyler's sword.

Organization and Order! In preserving these we are in harmony with the will and work of the Sovereign Architect, published in the harmony, dignity, and peace of nature. And one other word must be spoken, so familiar, so precious, to the Masonic ear and heart. You anticipate what it is—Charity. In nature, which speaks the wisdom and character of the Invisible Spirit, organization is not for the sake of wisdom and skill chiefly—order is not for the sake of law and obedience chiefly—but all for the sake of Charity. There is harmony and stability that there may be breadth of bounty, constancy in giving wherever there is need. Within every district of nature there is beneficence to all the need within that district, and then a pouring out of alms into a general fund of bounty and cheer.

Every mountain upholds and supports the herbage on its slopes, and sends off rills to carry down soil to the vales and plains, while they feed herbage there. You cannot find a tree, or plant, or flower, that lives for itself. The animal world breathes out gases for the vegetable kingdom, and then the vegetable world exhales or stores up some elements essential to animal health and vigor. The carbonic acid we breathe out here and which is poison to us, blown eastward by our west winds, may be greedily taken up, a few days hence, by vineyards on the slopes of the Sierra, and returned to us in the sweetness of the grape. The equator “sends greeting” to the Arctic zone by the warm gulf stream that flows near the polar coasts to soften their winds. The poles return a colder stream and add an embassy of icebergs, too, to temper the fierce tropic heats. Selfishness is condemned by the still harmonies of the creation. Perfect order issues out of interwoven service.

Do we ever get tired of the toils and tax of charity? Suppose the sun did. What does it 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 gun—the Most Worshipful Grand Master of the system—levies on his substance? Every day the sun touches its stores with its wand of light and says *give, give*. And it obeys. Evaporation is its tax constantly demanded, constantly given. Remember, brethren, that every cloud you 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.”

Society is struggling up to reach the order which nature thus indicates. Civilization is yet in its infancy. There is no town, no village, of Christendom yet where the bounty of nature to all the needy is fulfilled. Let us be grateful, brethren, that, within our fellowship, charity is organized, as well as law and peace. Our treasury has no avarice in it. The oil poured upon our head flows to the end of the beard and the garment’s hem.

How good and how precious it is for brethren to dwell in such unity! May it continue, brothers, and widen through our fidelity and service and beneficence! God preserve our organization, guard our Order, inspire our beneficence, and grant that, a century hence, our successors may meet here to enjoy in a larger fellowship the result of our faithfulness, and within a nation not sundered, but presided over by one Grand Master, heir of the virtues, the hope, and the blessing of WASHINGTON!

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On motion of Bro. William H. Hill, it was—

Resolved, That the thanks of the Grand Lodge be tendered to the Grand Orator for the beautiful address just delivered by him; and that a copy thereof be requested for publication with the proceedings of this Communication.

Oration delivered by Thomas Starr King on May 16, 1863 in San Francisco, California.
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