

## THE HIRAMIC LEGEND

Learned students have attempted to fix the date - as if dates mattered! - when the Hiramic Legend first made its appearance in Freemasonry. Their conclusions are more negative than positive, and none has gone behind the fact that in one form or another the Hiramic Legend is among the oldest as it is among the dearest myths of the human race. One may agree that documentary evidence does not put the legend of the martyred master workman into the third degree prior to 1725 and still see in it a recasting of the race-old drama of man's hope for immortality.

A dozen or more suggestions have been made by Masonic students as to what the legend means. Some take it literally even though the Old Testament says nothing of the death of that Hiram which Solomon fetched out of Tyre who "wrought all his work." Others believe it is another way of telling the story of Isis and Osiris - itself a legend which could hardly have been foisted on the people full born from the brain of some clever priest but must have been an heritage from the Hyksos, or even earlier inhabitants of Egypt. Fancifully, some see in it a modern version of the death of Abel at the hands of Cain, and of course thousands visualize it as the death and resurrection of the Man of Galilee.

Search the Great Light; you will find no account of the tragedy of Hiram Abif. You will learn of Hiram, or Hiram. If you delve deeply enough in Hebrew you will learn that "Abif" means "his father" which may indicate another Hiram, a son. Modern scholarship translates Hiram Abif as "Hiram, my father" meaning a Hiram looked up to, venerated, given a title of honour, as the father of a tribe, the father of an art, the father of the sacred vessels of the Temple. But of the Three, the tragedy, and the Lost Word, the Old Testament is silent.

Nor will you find in secular history any account of the drama of Hiram. For its truth you must delve into the myths and legends and fairy stories in which the race has half concealed, half revealed, those truths which do not bear telling in plain words.

Is there a Santa Claus? For six years old there is. For his elders Santa Claus is a means of telling a beautiful truth in terms which six years old can understand. Is the legend "true"? What is meant by "true" ? If the translation of "true" is "historically accurate," obviously neither Santa Claus nor Hiram Abif is "true." But if "true" means "containing a great truth," then both the myth of the Yuletide Saint and the Legend of the Master Builder are true in the most real sense.

Raised to the Sublime Degree, many men see in the living, the dying and the raising of the Master only a literal drama, designed to teach the virtues of fortitude and inflexible fidelity. For those whose ears hear only the melody and are deaf to harmonies, for those whose eyes are so blinded by the sunset as not to see the colors, this is good enough.

Yet any literal interpretation of the legend and our ceremony which exemplifies it misses its heart.

The Legend of Hiram Abif is at once the tragedy and the hope of man; it is virtue struck down by error, evil, and sin, and raised again by truth, goodness, and mercy. It is the story of the resurrection of that "which bears the nearest affinity to that supreme intelligence which pervades all nature." It is the answer to Job. It is at once the beginning of the even more sacred legend - of that which was lost - and the assurance that at long last he who seeks shall find.

How long is a rope? A silly question! It can be answered, presumably, if one can find one end and measure it to the other. Suppose the rope has only one end? Sillier and sillier! But if two ends are true of a rope, are they true of space and time and eternity? If time has a beginning, it has an ending. If space commences somewhere, there also will be its end to be found. If eternity has a beginning, it is not eternal!

Here is the shock, the surprise, and the glory of the third degree. It presents us with eternity in the midst of life. It pushes back the confines of our little dimensions, our tiny measurements of time, our small comprehension of space and shows us that we enter eternity at neither birth nor death. We have always been in eternity if we are in it at all. Hiram Abif was gathered to his fathers when the selfishness and sin of misguided men struck him down. But they were powerless against the Paw of the Lion and the might of Freemasonry. Each of us is born, lives his short life and, wearing his little white apron, is laid where our forefathers have gone before us. The drama of the third degree assures us that the life from birth to death and including both is but an episode, a single note in the great symphony.

The Hiram Legend is the glory of Freemasonry; the search for that which was lost is the glory of life.

Never may we find it here. You shall gaze through microscope and telescope and catch no sight of its shadow. You shall travel in many lands and far and see it not. You shall listen to all the words of all the tongues which all men have ever spoken and will speak - the Lost Word is not heard. Were it but a word, how easy to invent another! But it is not a word, but The Word, the great secret, the unknowableness which the Great Architect sets before his children, a will o' the wisp to follow, a pot of gold at the end of the rainbow. Never here is it to be found, but the search for it is the reason for life.

The Sublime Degree teaches that in another life it may be found. That is why it is the Sublime Degree.

## THE SANCTUM SANCTORUM

In the Entered Apprentice's and Fellowcraft's degrees the altar is the place of obligation. Here in due form the initiate takes upon himself those duties and offers those promises which make of the candidate an Entered Apprentice, which pass the Entered Apprentice to the degree of Fellowcraft.

In the Master Mason's degree the altar is more - much more. It now becomes the Masonic Holy of Holies, which the Great Light teaches us was the center and heart of both the Tabernacle in the Wilderness and the Temple of Solomon. In the Holy of Holies was the Ark of the Covenant, over which the Shekinah, the very spirit of God Himself, glowed in a radiance too bright for mortal eyes.

Let him who reads remember the Rite of Discalceation as it was in the preceding degrees and compare it with that practiced here. As he reflects on the symbolism of the altar in the Sublime Degree, he will understand why it is different. Exodus iii, 4 and 5 help:

... God called unto him out of the midst of the bush and said, Moses, Moses. And he said, Here am I. And he said, Draw not nigh hither; put off thy shoes from off thy feet, for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground.

In the East the worshipper removes his shoes that the Temple be not defiled. The Rite of Discalceation does not proclaim that the Masonic initiate will defile the Temple of Freemasonry, but that he is thus made to recognize that "the place whereon thou standest is holy ground" - a place not to be approached as are other places, but one into which one walks as set forth in the prayer book, "reverently, discreetly advisedly, soberly, and in the fear of God."

Some things may not be written; not so much that it is forbidden as that they are not to be expressed in words. Kneeling before the altar of the Great Architect of the Universe to offer petition for himself, alone with his Maker, the Freemason is himself a symbol of that strange relationship which all feel and none may speak; that oneness with infinity by which he whose heart is quickened may understand - as much as it may be understood - the Fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man.

## THE LION

The lion is one of Freemasonry's most powerful and potent symbols both in the Lion of the Tribe of Judah and the paw of the lion.

Judah was symbolized as a lion in his father's deathbed blessing. The lion was upon the standard of the large and powerful tribe of Judah. "Lion of the Tribe of Judah" was one of Solomon's titles. Christian interpretation of the phrase springs from Revelation (v, 5), Behold, the Lion of the Tribe of Judah, the Root of David, hath prevailed to open the book and to loose the seven seals thereof.

The idea of a resurrection is curiously interwoven with the lion. In the Twelfth Century, one Philip de Thaurin stated: "Know that the lioness, if she bring forth a dead cub, she holds her cub and the lion arrives; he goes about and cries, till it revives on the third day."

Thus the strong lion of Judah  
The gates of cruel death being broken  
Arose on the third day  
At the loud sounding voice of the father.

But the lion was connected with the idea of resurrection long before the Man of Galilee walked upon the earth. In ancient Egypt as we learn from the stone carvings on the ruins of temples a lion raised Osiris from a dead level to a living perpendicular by a grip of his paw; the carvings show a figure standing behind the altar, observing the raising of the dead, with its left arm uplifted and forming the angle of a square.

The Lion of the Tribe of Judah, considered as signifying a coming redeemer who would spring from the tribe, or meaning the King of Israel who built the Temple, or symbolizing the Christ, must not be confused with the mode of recognition so inextricably mingled with the Sublime Degree, teaching of a resurrection and a future life.

Unquestionably the Israelites absorbed much of Egyptian belief during the Captivity, which may account both for the Lion of the Tribe of Judah, and our own use of the paw.