

## The legend of the Third Degree.

The ancient <sup>old</sup> gilds of operative Masons dating from 1100 A.D. are distinguished from all others by the fact that they alone preserve a traditional history. This is outlined and may still be read in the so called "Ancient charges", the earliest copy now in existence, being the subject of my former paper to the Society, and finding origin in the days of Wyclif, Langland and Chaucer. But this traditional history is not the legend of our third degree. It makes no mention of Hiram the son of the W - , Master builder of K.S. nor of the manner of his death.

Our legend of the Master appears quite suddenly in the records of the Craft, about 1720, and to date all efforts to trace it to an earlier date and find its origin have proved unavailing. It has many counterparts and correspondences among the traditions and mysteries of the ancients, but it is itself peculiar to Masonry, unique as known to Masons alone for it exists nowhere else, than in our third degree ritual. As there stated, the most superficial examination declares it to be most improbable, even impossible as history, yet its mystical appeal to all who receive it, is so considerable that each in his own way, strives to elucidate for himself, its meaning. Perhaps nothing in modern Freemasonry has excited more attention nor occasioned more speculation than our legend of the third degree.

I propose, therefore, to attempt for you a survey of the many Masonic papers written upon the subject, as well as to outline ideas I have formed about it after an extended comparative study of the mysteries and legendary literatures of many ancient peoples. This latter study has perhaps been more helpful to me than my Masonic reading, in entering into and appreciating the mystical truths, significantly portrayed by our myth, for myth undoubtedly it is.

Let me at once remind you, that the value of legendary and mystical narrative does not lie in its being history, but in its psychological influence upon us, affecting our outlook upon life generally, and therefore the quality of our subsequent conduct; stimulating us to efforting according to principles of life, which it portrays by its narrative picture.

Our myth or legend is not less valuable because it makes certain assertions impossible in historical narrative. Let us at once admit that its historical form is but the garb of hidden mysteries of nature and science which only become apparent to those who seek and succeed in making some advancement in what we may term Real Knowledge @ the Science of the Realities of Life, that which we designate "Masonic Knowledge" to distinguish it from the facts of ordinary social, commercial, religious, and political living.



That said let us get down to our survey of the facts that can be authenticated about the myth.

The legend of Hiram and the manner of his death, of his sepulture and raising can be found (to date) nowhere else but in the Craft degree - a fact which should enhance its value to every Mason - and the rituals of the 3<sup>o</sup> embodying it, appears to have originated either in the 17th or 18th Centuries - most probably between 1720-30. About the same time the Rise of the Holy Royal Arch makes its first public appearance in Masonic records, and must be considered with our third degree which it claims to complete. The problem of the antiquity of the legend of Hiram has thus been raised, and Masonic Students have eagerly sought to find its source and origin. As I have already promised, the quest is still in progress, and today opinions are divided into two groups. There are those who feel that the story came in outline from ancient times as one of the well kept secrets of the operative stone-craft or Gothic builders, and was moulded into its present amplified form by the speculatives of our premier Grand Lodge of 1717, and there are others, who say that the story was first fabricated about that time, for mystical and even for political reasons.

In the consideration of some of these opinions, the importance to our Craft, of the opening decades of the eighteenth century must be clearly grasped. It is the time of the founding of the Grand Lodge of 1717. Then it was that the association of Freemasons with operative Gothic work had ceased, due to the decay of that style of building, the stoneyard lodge was replaced by the tavern for gatherings, architects had largely separated from the Craftsmen who alone carried on their traditional meetings, and erudite non-operative brethren in greater and greater numbers associated themselves with the members of the building craft. Masonic traditions were thereby preserved from limbo, by a collection of records, and by setting out Masonic teaching in lectures, in question and answer dialogue, and in the ritual forms in which we know it today, more than mere preservation being effected in that it was amplified, enriched with correspondences from hermetic and Kabbalist sources and welded into the present complete system of three degrees.

Students are now generally agreed that at the original meetings of Grand Lodge at the Goose and Gridiron in 1717, only one degree was known and practised, that between 1717-20, when, by order of Grand Master, Geo. Payne, charges and general regulations were collected and edited, a second degree was made by dividing the original one, and the F.C. as distinct from the E.A. degree appears.

The M.M. degree was not used before 1722, - though we find some mention of a "Masters Part" probably not the degree at all, but akin to the work done in installing our Masters in the Chair. - there appears opposition to its adoption, and there were needed visits of instructors from London, to secure its Knowledge, its acceptance and its usage.



Some aver that Dr. Desagulier wrote up the ritual of this new 3<sup>o</sup>, and therefore the legend possibly assisted in his task, by the Grand Secretary, Dr. Anderson, and by other learned brethren, while others suggest that the legend was already in existence and was merely incorporated by the compiler of the 3<sup>o</sup>, who made it the basis of its teaching. Among these are some who consider that Elias Ashmole invented the legend about 1660. The truth of this may however never be established, for unfortunately about 1720, certain brethren, anxious perhaps about these innovations of revising speculatives, whose presence and importance in the Craft were doubtless viewed with personal distrust and disfavour, to preserve masonic knowledge from publicity, burnt many valuable records - a loss which the Craft still deploras.

The fact emerges then, that our 3<sup>o</sup> came into existence about 1720 and with it the legend of the slain Master as we now have it. Can we trace the legend to a time prior to 1720? Is there even a bare mention of it, or hint to it in literature, masonic or otherwise prior to 1720?

Now the traditional history consists of a loosely connected series of legendary episodes, carrying the history of the Craft from before the Flood to the reign of King Athelstan. The origin of the seven Liberal Sciences is ascribed to the four children of Lamed, who ensured their survival after the Flood, by engraving them on two great pillars.

The next scene is the building of the Tower of Babel, after which we are told how Abraham introduced the Craft into Egypt, and Euclid became a "worthy scholar" and did much to organise it. Thence it was carried by the Children of Israel to the Land of Promise, where the Temple was its great achievement.

The Craft is next traced to France, brought by a curious Mason "aynon" who had been at the building of K.S.T. and there Charles Martell gave it royal patronage. It flourished in England under St. Alban, who improved the pay of the Mason, and the history ends with an account of the great assembly held at York Edom, son of K. Athelstan, at which a book of Charges, based on existing customs and usages of the Craft was drawn up, and ordered to be read to every Mason when made.



It is difficult indeed to trace even Lodges let alone our legend prior to 1700, for, unfortunately, very little literature of Masonry prior to this date is still in existence, and this consists almost entirely of Fabric Rolls of great buildings, Account Books, Stones of Builders, rites and customs, Gild mentions, and the so-called "Ancient Charges". These last, like the Regius MSS of 1390, the Yorke MSS, the Schaw Statutes, set out points for obedience by Masters and Apprentices, the story (usually) of the four crowned Martyrs, a traditional history of the Craft from children of Lamech to the tower of Babel through Egypt and Euclid, to Europe by Charles Martel and the two pillars and so to our own country by Athelstan or Edwin of York in Saxon times; and an outline of the seven liberal arts and sciences. A copy of the "Ancient Charges" became the warrant of the early lodges of the Craft. In none however is the death of the builder mentioned, though H.A.S. is held by some to be referred to under the archaic spelling of Aynone, Aman, Dynon, Ayman and the like.

Again the story of Hiram is not scriptural, some say that he is not mentioned in Holy Writ, for the verses of Chronicles alleged to refer to him are capable of very conflicting interpretations, while Josephus tells us that the Architect of the Temple at J, retired to Tyre and died there at a ripe old age.

The efforts of our brethren even to give definite historical antiquity to Hiram himself, have proved unavailing, all it remains still for some private library in the world somewhere to disgorge the solution of the origin and source of the legend about him. Bro. H.C. de Lafontaine perhaps best voices current feeling on the matter when he remarks in one of his papers— "The inclusion of the legend was not contemplated in the original scheme of Speculative Masonry, but the promoters thereof were confronted with it, when progression was made towards union with Operative Masons". In support of this, he points out that "The London Section of the Worshipful Society of Freemasons, Wallers, Slaters, Pariors, Plaisterers, and Bricklayers" have attempted to revive the performance of the Hiramic legend in the manner in which it is said to have been enacted once a year by Operatives in their stoneyards. The drama, he says, is simple. Lots are cast for the execution of the murder, its scene is depicted, discovery follows, the accused appear before G.S. and are condemned. But the drama is used by them solely as a yearly festival play, and not for the purposes of r----- a candidate as we use it.

This suggests that the legend may have been used before 1720, and these quotations from expose literature also point to the same fact. In "Masonry Dissected" published in 1730 this dialogue occurs:—

Q. How was H--- raised? A. As all other Masons are when they receive the Master's Word.

Q. How is that? A. By the F.P.O.F.

Again in "The Mason's Examination" published in 1723 in "The Flying Post" at the same time as Anderson's First Book of



Constitutions, the candidate being admitted says:-

C - An entered Mason I have been  
 B and J. I have seen  
 A Fellow I was sworn most rare  
 And know the Astler, Diamond and Square,  
 I know the Master's Part ful well,  
 As honest Maughbin will you tell.

to which the Master makes reply:-

M. If a M.M. you would be  
 observe you well the Rule of Three  
 And what you want in Masonry  
 Thy Mark and Maughbin makes three free.

It would seem that the R. of three (S.K.I. H.K.T. and H.A.B.)  
 and the setting of the three degrees with their symbolism and J ---  
 were well established by 1723, too well indeed for the legend to be  
 of but recent compilation.

Many have been the explanations for the appearance of th legend in  
 our Craft, but they can be reduced to three types. Bro. Hextall has  
 ably advanced the arguments urged by many who hold to the Ashmoleum  
 theory. These are in favour of the legend being written up on the  
 bases of the Ancient mysteries by Elias Ashmole about 1650 for Political  
reasons. He outlines that Ashmole, born Litchfield 1617, Alchemist,  
 astrologer and selffavoured, Rosicrucian, entered military service  
 of King Charles of Martyr-Fare, that he was present with the army  
 at Oxford and Worcester, retired to Wiltshire 1646 and was Initiated a  
 F.M. at Warrington, returned to London to become the welcome associate  
 of such eminent men as Samuel Peryn and John Evelyn the diarists,  
 Robert Boyle the scientist, Wm Lilly the Astrologer and Isaak Walton  
 of "Compleat Angler" fame.

At the Restoration he became Windsor Herald and later refused the  
 office of Garter King of Arms". He bequethed all his collections  
 to Oxford, was an active Mason in London, a royalist who planned  
 the return of the King.

He died in 1692 only a few years before the founding of our premier  
 Grand Lodge. It is claimed for him that he conceived the idea  
 of making Charles, the central figure of a new "Mythos", under the  
 guise of Hiram. The language of symbolism has ever been used to  
 conceal a truth in a garb of seeming innocence, to make appeal to  
 popular fancy and feeling and to point impressive and abiding lessons.

In the story of H.A.B. the same senses of loss and expectancy are  
 evoked as in the stories of the Kingly Osiris of Egypt, and of King  
 Arthur of Britain, of whom Tennyson wrote -----

"He passes to be King among the dead  
 And after healing of his grievous wound  
 He comes again".



The same expectancy can be fostered of the Stuart Charles - the analogues among Hiram, Osiris and Horus and Charles, father and son are very striking. Each is a fallen master, murdered of villains, indecently interred, in each case a secret is lost and is sorrowfully sought.- the secret of Kingship in the case of Charles - in each there is a raising again and reunion with the former companions of his rule, the widow's son restores the splendour of the former state.

It is known that many prominent Jacobites in the times of the "Pretenders" were active Masons, that Masonic firing to the King "over the water" was practised, and that Continental Masonry has been, not unrighteously suspect of political intrigue and flattery, and thus many Masons are moved to feel the legend may have had some such origin for the political purpose successfully accomplished in 1660, but not sustained as the events of 1715 and 1745 show.

Bro. Race, with many others, approaches the matter differently. He considers the story from the points of its historical enormities. Would a murder be considered within the precincts of the incompleated Temple of Solomon, could it be enacted there in secrecy at high noon, why was a fixed day named for the P.C. to J. were there three entrances or only one to the temple, how could the secret known of three be lost by the death of one. And was it possible either to raise the dead Hiram on the F.P.O.F. or to bury it near the S.S. of the Jews, so adverse to anything fleshy and mundane in or near their sacred edifice? No, the story is only the libretto of a religious drama the acting originally being mummery as in the old mystery plays, like "Everyman" and the Townley Cycle and York Plays, and nothing now remains but our verbal account of it - besides, the climax of the whole thing lies in the raising of the representative not in the death of the Master. It is the story of the Sun in his yearly progress, that glorious luminary of midday splendour rising in the East to diffuse light and gladness to man as taught in the two first degrees. Yet its secret power is destroyed, once in each year, the villains being the months October, November, December. Those who raise it again to strength are January, February and March, assisted by the Five W.F. - April, May, June, July and August.

This conception typifies the work of such students as Fazer of "Golden Bough" renown, who reduce all myths and Antient rites to a symbolism of the Agricultural Deity.

Ragon, a continental Mason and prolific writer declares that Ashmole drew up the 3<sup>o</sup> ceremony modelled upon the ancient mysteries of Egypt, as were all the other mysteries of Phoenicia, Greece, Persia and even India.

Also, certain so-called "Egyptian Mysteries" were promulgated by Cagliostro and others about the time of the legend's appearance, and one of its degrees depicted the dead Osiris mourned in the Hall of Death.



The Candidate is questioned as to his complicity in the murder and absolved from all share in his death. He is then given a blow, made to represent Osiris, and raised as Horus the widow-Isis' son, the avenger of his father's wrongs and the one who restores his beneficent rule. This would appear to be the source of inspiration of our legend whether it comes from the pen of Ashmole in 1650, of Desaguliers in 1720 or of some still unrecognized learned brother.

To me, its writing in its present form appears impossible, out of an age in which the prime interest of its scholars is the wisdom of the ancients and the metaphysic of human life and existence. Such an age could only have been in England since 1600, when the full effect of the Renaissance had lifted man out from his "Dark Ages" to metaphysical speculation as our literature generally attests, and the Reformation permitted such freedom of thought that Masons would tolerate the mysteries other than Christian. Thus unless the legend can be discovered in the literature of the first Century or thereabouts, it is more than likely to have originated in the years between 1600 and say 1700.

I will pass by many variants of the story, in which many interesting and curious statements occur such as the naming of the assassins as Giblo, Gibla and Giblum or Jubelo, Jubella, Jubellum, the hiding of the body amid the rubbish of the site etc. and conclude the survey with a quotation from the paper of an eminent Dutch Mason, Bro. W.H. Derder Van der Gon, which helps us in arriving at very real value of the legend.

In trying to set forth the meaning of the 3<sup>o</sup>, we must go back to the rites of antiquity and to the initiations of the middle ages "he says". In many ages and lands, we find a system of three steps or degrees, portraying spiritual growth of man and his progress towards perfection. Sometimes there are more than three, but they all can be reduced to three.

The first step has to do with the basic morality underlying manhood, upon which character rests.

The second deals with the culture of the intellect. These degrees teach nothing that may not be known by a good man in the outer world.

The third step is different, it has to do with the profound mystery of humanity and the most daring adventure of the soul". He points out too that in the Holland working of one lodge the Candidate advances to be obligated "backwards" as if retiring into himself, his eyes still looking towards the world of ordinary affairs in which he has already become established in strength.

Here is a hint to the finding of the Centre, the Knowing of



oneself, the using of the Compass second point, the retirement within the darkness visible to find and be the vital and immortal principle buried in the sublimary abode—our intelligent natures. So the third degree according to the usages of all the ancient mysteries marks a mystic event in human life the progress of man from an old self to which he dies, his raising to a higher living selfhood of true Mastership, assisted thereto by observation and acceptance of true points or principles of fellowship.

Masonry is thus showing to be the modern guise of the Ancient Mysteries. Its legend of the third degree closely corresponds with the legends of Osiris, Dionysius, Mithras, Christ. The teaching and intention of the rituals are identical—death and rebirth, loss and finding, transmutation of life from psychical level to spirit height are dramatically presented to point the way to aspiring humanity.

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"Masonry rests upon 3 fundamental degrees, the triple duty of a mason is to study whence he comes, what he is, and whither he goes; the study that is of God, of himself, and of the future transformation." Masonic Initiation was modelled on that of the lesser mysteries. The 3<sup>o</sup> was one used both in Egypt and India from time immemorial, and the remembrance of it lingers to this day in every lodge, under the name of the death and Resurrection of Hiram Abiff, the "Widow's Son". In Egypt the latter was called Osiris, In India "Loka-Chakshu (Eye of the world) and "Dmakara (day-maker) or the Sun.- and the rite itself was everywhere named the "Gate of Death". The coffin, or sarcophagus, of Osiris, killed by Typhon was brought in and placed in the middle of the Hall of the Dead with the Initiates all round it and the candidate near by. The latter was asked whether he had participated in the murder and notwithstanding his denial, and after sundry and very hard trials, the Initiator feigned to strike him on the head with a hatchet; he was thrown down, swathed in bandages like a mummy, and went over. Then came lightning and thunder, the supposed corpse was surrounded by five and was finally raised.

Ragon speaks of a rumour that charged the Emperor Commodus - when he was alone enacting that part of the Initiator - with having played this part in the initiatory drama so seriously that he actually killed the postulant when dealing him the blow. This shows the lesser mysteries had not quite died out in the second century A.D.

(It also connects Hiram with the Sun-



We have now made a rapid survey of the history of the 3<sup>o</sup> and its legend as far as it is known, and of the Masonic literature advanced in explanation of the legend. We have noted that both the degree and the legend are claimed to be new to the Masonic system in the year 1720, that there was difficulty in getting the degree known and accepted by the Craft, and that eminent Masons of the 16th and 17th century have been held to be their author. We realise too that there is no direct evidence of any legend of H.H.B. among the operators, though possibly the F.P.O.F. were practised - as they well could be apart from the ceremony of raising, and when we find the legend we are informed by those who seek to explain its presence in our Craft, that it is based upon the Ancient Mysteries which was not the traditional Masonry of the Operatives. More - there is evidence that brethren desiring pure and ancient Masonry, among both "Moderns" of Premier G.L. and the "Antients" of the Atholl Fraternity were disturbed by the presence of both the 3<sup>o</sup> and the Royal Arch Rite, until the Union of the Grand Lodges in 1813, when the second article of Union was needed to declare and pronounce "that pure and Ancient Masonry consists of three degrees and no more viz those of the E.A. the F.C. and the M.M. including the Supreme Order of the H.R.Arch."

Thus today, unless there can be found some ancient trace of the legend in the operative Craft, we are compelled to acknowledge, another line of descent of Masonic truth into our system, and to modify the operatives conception of Masonry, which was Geometry, to become ours today.

If the legend was compiled in the 16th and 17th century - I have no doubt it was put in its present guise then - the one who did it did the work so well, that it appears to be derived from antiquity. It rings true to the plan of every myth of the Ancient mysteries and inculcates corresponding teachings. It is there that study of comparative religions, symbolisms, rites comes to our aid.

For consider the grave of Hiram and the raising of the representative of the Master. It is a wonderful addendum to the traditional history that mates the "Master Spirit" to be buried in the pinnal centre - Quote ritual. -

(a) Centres - Correspond with Revn.. Descartes in 1650.

(b) Vital and immortal principle.

(c) Raising - a becoming conscious on a more than just rational way.

All this is pre Christian and while coming by way of Christendom veiled in Christian imagery, comes also along lines of Malion-imedan Culture to form the bases of hermetic and Kabbalist cults in the 16th Century.



- 6 17
- Again consider - The darkness visible - and the bright morning star.
- (a) St John - Light shining in darkness, the darkness comprehending it not.
  - (b) Christ the bright morning star - is the "Christ in you" of St Paul - the Mystic Christ.
  - (y) Egyptian - The Gothic cycle - Sirius the dog star - which was afterwards used as the symbol of Christ.

Also consider -

The widow's son - brethren to H.A.B.	Mother nature in
The Master slain - and raised.	travel gives birth
The secret lost - despite being known to two others.	to higher manhood.

There is nothing particular to the 16th and 17th century in all this.

It is all Knowledge and teaching of 1st century of Christian Era and before. Had it originated then and been expressed, re-edited in say 1650 we could have expected to have it in its present form. There is however the veil of secrecy upon the matter. But brethren we have the legend, we highly prize its teachings, it is unique to masonry - though we evidently may not know how we came by it, though we may not know its writer, does that matter - we still draw hope from the wonder of its setting, we still find it helpful and comforting, inspiring in our lives.

In conclusion one thought - what is that great force operating amid humanity through the ages, who has weaned man from primitive savagery to cultured civilisation? What has kept man and is keeping him from reverting to type - back to his homosumman stock. Since 2000 B.C. it has been the mysteries.

Said Cicero the Roman orator speaking of the Eleusian Rites of Athens of which he was an initiate. "Much has goodly Athens given to man, but nothing greater than her mysteries, by which man is weaned from rugged barbarism to fair citizenship, and from despair and woe to bright promise of fair futurity and immortality. This is true of all mysteries, this is true of Masonry. It is hard to calculate the civilising influence of Masonry upon Europe and Britain, difficult to estimate its power in the cause of brotherly understanding and peace. A German may throw off the Hebraic guise of our legendary history and symbolism, and replace them with ~~our~~ a fresh garment of presentation. But if the spirit of the mysteries be quickened, thereby barriers of national isolation now being developed will tumble down, and universal benevolence, charity and peace will ultimately prevail. As for ourselves, we are sure that our Masonry unlocks for us the principles of true manliness; acknowledge our brotherhood of Hiram the widow's son - our brother man everywhere, we practice the truths of the legend of the 3<sup>o</sup>.