

## EGYPTIAN MYSTERIES AND MODERN FREEMASONRY.

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### I.

AN interesting question now presents itself: What relationship, if any, do the Egyptian Mysteries bear to Freemasonry? Dr. Mackey, a well-known writer on Masonic themes, in an examination of the analogies between the Ancient Mysteries and the rites of modern Freemasonry, lays particular stress upon "the identity of design and method in the two systems, as illustrated by the division—into steps, classes, or degrees—to which both were subjected, viz., *lustration* (purification, or preparation), *initiation*, and *perfection*."

The "Old Charges" are nearly all unanimous in claiming Egypt as the birthplace of the art of masonry (or mystery). How far the legends of the Craft are to be relied upon in this regard is a matter for learned investigation.

Heckethorne (*Secret Societies of all Ages and Countries*, Vol. I.) is not very partial to the Fraternity, but he says: "The Mysteries as they have come down to us *and are still perpetuated in a corrupted and aimless manner in Freemasonry*, have chiefly an astronomical bearing." (The italics are mine.)

A hundred or more works have been written to prove that Freemasonry is the *lineal* descendant of the Mysteries. Similar claims have been made in favor of the following systems or sects: (1) The Pythagoreans; (2) The Essenes; (3) The Roman Collegia; (4) The Culdees; (5) The Druids; (6) The Knights Templars; (7) The Rosicrucians; (8) The Mediæval Cathedral Builders. The truth of the matter seems to be in favor of the latter,—the Mediæval operative masons, who built those superb Gothic edifices, such as the cathedrals of Cologne, Rheims, Strassburg, Notre Dame, and Westminster Abbey. Originally an operative institu-

tion, Freemasonry became a "speculative society to promote the practice of the moral, fraternal, and charitable principles which had characterised the old organisation."

Many noted scholars who were well versed in ancient religions and occult philosophies were initiated into Freemasonry in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Perhaps these students introduced the theosophic symbols of the Neo-Platonists, Cabbalists, Gnostics, and Mediæval Rosicrucians into the Craft. There is authority for the support of such a belief. Says Gould (*History of Freemasonry*, p. 26): "According to Mackey, an instance of the *transmutation* of Gnostic talismans into Masonic symbols, by a gradual transmission through alchemy, Rosicrucianism, and mediæval architecture, is afforded by a plate in the *Azoth Philosophorum* of Basil Valentine, the Hermetic philosopher, who flourished in the seventeenth century. This plate, which is hermetic in its design, but is full of Masonic symbolism, represents a winged globe inscribed with a triangle within a square, and on it reposes a dragon. On the latter stands a human figure of two hands and two heads surrounded by the sun, the moon, and five stars, representing the seven planets. One of the heads is that of a male, the other of a female. The hand attached to the male part of the figure holds the compasses, that to the female a square. The square and compasses thus distributed appear to have convinced Dr. Mackey that originally a phallic meaning was attached to these symbols, as there was to the point within the circle, which in this plate also appears in the centre of the globe. "The compasses held by the male figure would represent the male generative principle, and the square held by the female the female productive principle. The subsequent interpretation given to the combined square and compasses was the transmutation from the hermetic talisman to the Masonic symbol."

Just how much was borrowed from older systems by modern scholars, or how much was inherited from the guilds of operative masons, is a mooted question. The "Old Charges" are silent on the subject of the secret work of the Order. In those days the esoteric part of the ritual was better kept. Many writers, however, have claimed that the operative masons of mediæval times possessed no particular legends or symbols. The ceremony of initiation into a lodge was very simple, the candidate being taught nothing but a few trite ethical lessons, and the grips and words whereby to make himself known to his fellow-craftsmen, when travelling from city to city in quest of work.

From either standpoint—that of inheritance or late borrowing—much of the wisdom of the ancient temples of Egypt and Greece has undoubtedly filtered into the Fraternity, although it has been sadly misunderstood and misinterpreted by Masons in general. The esoteric student, however, is able to draw aside the veil of Isis and discover the true meaning of the symbols and legends of the Craft. Gen. Albert Pike, than whom no greater unfolders of masonic mysteries ever lived, has done this to a great extent in his remarkable book *The Morals and Dogma of the Scottish Rite*. Robert Hewitt Brown has performed a similar work in his interesting treatise *Stellar Theology and Masonic Astronomy*. Brown emphasises the astronomical origin of the rites of Freemasonry, tracing them back to the Mysteries. Heckethorne supports this view. It is a very plausible one in some respects, particularly as regards the third degree of Masonry. In almost all of the Mysteries of the ancient world we see this solar allegory cropping out,—the death and resurrection of the sun-god, and the lessons to be drawn therefrom as regards the life of man.

In Freemasonry we have the curious legend of Hiram Abiff, the widow's son. The Hiram who cast the great pillars of brass, Jachim and Boaz, which ornamented the portal of Solomon's Temple, and the numerous holy vessels used in the Jewish ceremonial, was not assassinated. Neither in the Bible nor in the writings of Josephus is there any account of his dying by violence. The story of Grand-Master Hiram Abiff is now regarded as a fable, pure and simple, by all Masonic scholars. It has no historical significance whatever, any more than the story of Isis and Osiris. It is, in the opinion of many eminent authorities, a solar allegory.

When, or how, the legend of Hiram came into the Masonic Fraternity is shrouded in mystery. Some claim that it was inherited from the Egyptian Mysteries, through Jewish, Grecian, or Mithraic channels, being a sort of paraphrase of the Osiris myth. Other writers assert that it was introduced into the Craft at a late date, probably during the speculative epoch. The astronomical significance of the legend has been lost to Freemasonry, so far as the explanations of the ritual are concerned. It is a pity! Masonry should not only be in possession of ethical and spiritual truths, but scientific as well. Nothing is grander than the contemplation of the heavenly bodies, and facts connected with their mysterious orbits.

Gen. Albert Pike shows that the name "Hiram" is a corruption of *Khairum* or *Khurum*, a compound word, having reference,

in one of its meanings, to the sun. *Khairum* in Hebrew signifies "was raised up to life, or living." In Arabic *hrm*, an unused root, meant, "was high," "made great," "exalted," and *Hirm* means an ox, the symbol of the sun in Taurus, at the vernal equinox. I have not the space to follow the learned author in all of his philological dissertations upon this point. The reader is referred to the work itself (*Morals and Dogma*, etc., pp. 78-88) for detailed explanations. The raising of Hiram (or the sun) from the grave of winter to life and power is the substance of the allegory.

On the 21st of June, when the sun arrives at the summer solstice, the constellation *Leo*—being but 30° in advance of the sun—appears to be leading the way, and to aid by his powerful paw in lifting the sun up to the summit of the zodiacal arch. April and May are therefore said to fail in their attempt to raise the sun; June alone succeeds, by the aid of *Leo*. When, at a more remote period, the summer solstice was *in Leo*, and the sun actually entered the stars of that constellation at the time of his exaltation, the connection was more intimate, and the allegory still more perfect.

Says Brown: "The *visible* connection between the constellation *Leo* and the return of the sun to his place of power and glory, at the summit of the Royal Arch of heaven, was the principal reason why that constellation was held in such high esteem and reverence by the ancients. The astrologers distinguished *Leo* as the 'sole house of the sun,' and taught that the world was created when the sun was in that sign. 'The lion was adored in the East and West by the Egyptians and the Mexicans. The Chief Druid of Britain was styled a lion. The national banner of the ancient Persians bore the device of the sun in *Leo*. A lion couchant with the sun rising at his back was sculptured on their palaces.'

"After the sun leaves *Leo*, the days begin to grow unequivocally shorter as the sun declines toward the autumnal equinox, to be again slain by the *three* autumnal months, lie dead through the *three* winter ones, and be raised again by the three vernal ones. Each year the great tragedy is repeated, and the glorious resurrection takes place.

"Thus, as long as this allegory is remembered, the leading truths of astronomy will be perpetuated, and the sublime doctrine of the immortal nature of man, and other great moral lessons they are thus made to teach, will be illustrated and preserved."

## II.

There is an emblematic figure, copied by Pluche from the collection of Mountfancon, and painted on a mummy case at the Austin friars' of La Place des Victoires, which represents the death and resurrection of Osiris, and the beginning, progress, and end of the inundation of the Nile. Speaking of the figure, John Fellows says:<sup>1</sup> "The sign of the lion is transformed into a couch, upon which Osiris is laid out as dead; under which are four canopi of various capacities, indicating the state of the Nile at different periods. The first is terminated by the head of the dog-star, which gives warning of the approach of the overflow of the river; the second, by the head of a hawk, the symbol of the Etesian wind, which tends to swell the waters; the third, by the head of a heron, the sign of the south wind, which contributes to propel the water into the Mediterranean sea; and the fourth, by that of the virgin; which indicates that when the sun had passed that sign, the inundation would have nearly subsided

"To the above is superadded a large Anubis, who with an emphatic gesture turning towards Isis who has an empty throne on her head, intimates that the sun, by the aid of the lion, had cleared the difficult pass of the Tropic of Cancer, and was now in the sign of the latter, and, although in a state of exhaustion, would soon be in a condition to proceed on his way to the South; at the same time gives to the husbandman the important warning of retiring to avoid the inundation. The empty throne is indicative of its being vacated by the supposed death of Osiris.

"The raising of Hiram is evidently copied from this fable....

"It may be remarked that the lamentations uttered for the death of grand master Hiram is in exact accordance with the customs of the Egyptians in their celebrations of the fabled death of Osiris, the sun; of the Phœnicians for the loss of Adonis; and of the Greeks, in their mystic rites of the Eleusinian Ceres.

"It is through the instrumentality of Leo that Osiris, the sun, is retrieved from his perilous condition. The strong paw of the lion wrests him from the clutches of Typhon, and places him in his wonted course. Anubis, the dog-star, is the herald of this event."

An ancient Egyptian drawing, found in the sarcophagus of one of the kings of Egypt, entombed in the pyramid erected to his memory, constitutes "startling testimony of the entire correctness

<sup>1</sup> *Exposition of the Mysteries, or Religious Dogmas and Customs of the Ancient Egyptians, etc.*, p. 15.

of the astronomical solution of the legend of Osiris and that of Hiram."

*Stellar Theology* (p. 49) thus explains the emblem :

"The form that lies dead before the altar is that of Osiris, the personified sun-god, whom the candidate represents in the drama of initiation, lying dead at the winter solstice. The cross upon his breast refers to the great celestial cross, or intersection of the celestial equator by the ecliptic. The figure of the lion grasping the dead sun-god by the hand alludes to the constellation Leo and the summer solstice, at which point the sun is raised to life and glory, as has been just explained in the allegory of the resurrection of the sun, and denotes that the candidate is about to be raised from a symbolical death to life and power by the grip of the lion's paw. This is made clearly manifest from the fact that the lion holds in his other paw the ancient Egyptian symbol of eternal life, or the *Crux Ansata*. The tablet at the feet of the candidate has inscribed upon it in hieroglyphics the sacred names of *Amon* and of *Mut*, the wife of *Amon Ra*, and probably that of the royal candidate. The figure erect at the altar is that of the Grand Hierophant, attired as Isis, with the vacant throne upon his head, emblematic of the departed sun-god. She has her hand raised in an attitude of command, her arm forming a right angle; her eyes fixed upon the emblematic lion as she gives the sign of command that the candidate be raised from death and darkness to light and life. The objects on the altar are two of those peculiar-shaped jars, with pointed bases, in which wine was kept (see Wilkinson's *Egyptians of the Time of the Pharaohs*, p. 86, woodcut 62), and which, the same author says, 'always had their place on the altar of the gods' (page 13). The emblem placed between the votive jars of wine is more obscure. It may be the *thyrsus*, but is more probably a floral offering. (See *Ancient Egyptians*, Vol. I., woodcut 260, no. 5.) There can be no doubt but that the whole device is a symbolical picture of the initiation of some important person into the Mysteries, not of Osiris, however, as Paterson thinks, but of Isis, who, represented by the Grand Hierophant, stands behind the altar, giving the command to raise from death Osiris, who lies before it."

The reader will find in *Stellar Theology* the astronomical significance of many other important Masonic symbols—symbols that teach not only scientific facts, but typify the unity of God, and the immortal progress of the soul. He says: "Though in all parts of our ritual, from the threshold to the altar to the *penetralia* (as in the ancient Mysteries, from which Freemasonry has descended),

the profoundest truths of science and true religion are taught and illustrated by astronomical allegories, yet nowhere do we find, even in its most ancient portions, any prayers, invocations, or adorations, addressed to the heavenly bodies themselves. The sun and the hosts of heaven are only used as emblems of the Deity. . . . The Mysteries themselves, in their primitive and uncorrupted form, taught the unity of God and the immortality of man as their cardinal doctrines, and that the sun was but a symbol of Him whom 'the sun, moon, and stars obey, and beneath whose all-seeing eye even comets perform their stupendous revolutions' (*Masonic Lecture*)."

"In the great mysteries of Eleusis," says Albert G. Mackey (*Symbolism of Freemasonry*, pp. 108-109), "we learn from St. Chrysostom, as well as other authorities, that the temple of initiation was symbolic of the universe, and we know that one of the officers (the *dadouchos*, or torch-bearer) represented the sun." The myth of Demeter searching for her daughter in the realms of Pluto, or the underworld, is the old solar allegory with a Grecian tinge.

All places of initiation in the ancient days typified the universe—Hindoo, Egyptian, Persian, and Grecian. The masonic lodge is a symbol of the world and the three principal officers represent the sun at its rising, its setting, and its meridian height.