

FREEMASONRY'S ANSWER TO JOB

“If a man die, shall he live again? (Job 14:14)

Freemasonry has been called a religion which can be all things to all men.

Many dispute the statement that Freemasonry is a religion at all, on the theory that a religion is a specified manner of worship, whereas Freemasonry has neither creed nor dogma. Freemasonry is much more properly religion than “a” religion.

Freemasonry may, indeed, be all things religious to all men. Each may take from it, each may read into it, any creed or dogma which fits his personal religious belief - and find his faith fits with the teachings of the gentle Craft.

For be a man's faith what it may, it must be founded on the rock of a belief in Deity and a faith in a future life. Here, indeed, Freemasonry touches hands with religion and sees eye to eye with all beliefs. The Master Mason's Degree, the Hiram Legend, the Search For That Which Was Lost and the Sprig of Acacia all answer the cry of Job with comfort and assurance.

Pull the flower to pieces; remain the petals, a perfume, but no rose. Play the symphony, isolate note by note; sound is heard, but no music.

Every word Milton wrote is in the dictionary; but great poems may not be found there.

So of any written account of this degree; we may write of its symbols, analyze its legend, tell of its meaning, but we pronounce but words without rhyme, make a flower of wax, a song muted. The best we may do is to point out a path to the high mountain of spiritual experience which is the Sublime Degree, that he who climbs may see it with a new view - and clearer eyes.

To the universal and yearning hope of all mankind throughout all ages Freemasonry answers; there “is” a hope of immortality; there “is” a Great Architect by whose mercy we may live again, leaving to each brother his choice of interpretation by which he may read the Great Beyond.

The Third Degree teaches of the power- and the powerlessness - of evil. For those who are happy to believe in the resurrection of the physical body, the Sublime degree has comfort. For those whose hope is in the raising only of that spiritual body of which Paul taught, the degree assures of all the longing heart can wish.

When the greatest hope and the dearest wish of all mankind is made manifest, the Sublime Degree turns to “this” life and “this” brotherhood, and ties together the Hiram Legend and daily living in a manner which no thoughtful man may see and hear without a thrill; a way at once awe inspiring and heartening; terrible and beautiful; sternly uncompromising yet strangely

comforting in that land of inner life, that home of the spirit, where each man thinks the secret thoughts he tells never - never.

In his quiet hours, first among those matters unspoken is the age old question of Job. When he sees his children growing up and realizes that he is getting older, older and some day to be really old, he asks it. When he stands beside the coffin of his departed brother to cast into the open grave the Sprig of Acacia he asks it again, sometimes not knowing that the very act which gives rise to the question is Freemasonry's answer.

Acacia was a symbol of immortality before Freemasonry existed. It is the shittim wood of the Old Testament, the erica or tamarisk at the foot of which the body of the dead Osiris was cast ashore so that, when found, it would rise again.

The Jews have always considered shittim a sacred wood; a symbol of life. Logs used in houses sprouted long after the tree was destroyed that the beam might be made from it. Shittim wood was used to construct the table for the shew bread, the tabernacle, the Ark of the Covenant, the sacred furniture of the Temple. Everyone was familiar with the evergreen which does not seem to die in cold weather, as do less hardy trees which shed their leaves and sleep through the winter.

But if Freemasonry did not make Acacia a symbol, the Craft adopted it as symbolic of our own special Rite and beliefs.

Acacia marked the spot where lay all that was mortal of the Widow's Son. The Hiram Legend is of an immortality which was made manifest in the very shade of acacia; how should the plant "not" stand for the most blessed hope of man?

In the stately prayer in the Master's degree we hear "for there is hope of a tree, if it be cut down, that it will sprout again - ."

Later we learn of man who "cometh forth as a flower and is cut down," by the scythe of time which gathers him "to the land where his fathers have gone before him."

"Where is that land?"

Uncounted millions have asked. Freemasonry's reply is, that glorious immortality symbolized by the acacia, its reality attested by every hope of every man born of woman since the first infant cried its birth cry.

The Sprig of acacia has another and equally beautiful implication besides that of the certainty of spiritual survival. "Faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen." The Sprig of Acacia is not only the emblem of a future life, but of faith.

It matters little what faith that is. It is the existence of "some" faith which is important; the certainty of "things not seen." The Masons may be a Methodist, Baptist, Spiritualist, Evolutionist, Unitarian. Trinitarian, Mohammedan or Brahmin. He may believe in an orthodox

heaven of Golden Streets and Milk and Honey; his faith may send him to a whole realm of seven planets which he may visit in turn with esoteric Buddhist; he may believe in the succession of planes of Spiritualism or the Nirvana of the Orient - the Sprig of Acacia is at once a symbol of the immortality taught by his faith, and of the faith itself.

One cannot “prove” immortality any more than one can prove God. Proof is the result of logic , and logic is a process of the mind. Faith is the product of a process of the heart. We cannot reason ourselves into or of love; we cannot reason ourselves into or out of faith.

The Sprig of Acacia proves nothing - nor does it try to. It means everything to him who has the faith. It is Freemasonry’s attestation to her children and to the world that brethren drop their tears on the body of the deceased brother in full faith that - where nor how we presume not to say, leaving it wholly to the eye which Sees the Everlasting Arms which enfold - he, even as we, shall live again. He knows past all forgetting because he has learned the lesson of the Hiram Legend.

Learned students have attempted to fix the date -as if dates mattered! - when that story first made its appearance in Freemasonry. Their conclusions are more negative than positive, and none have gone behind the fact that in one form or another the Hiram Legend is among the oldest as it is among the dearest myths of the race. One may agree that documentary evidence does not put the legend of the martyred master workman into the third degree prior 1725, and still see in it the 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 it means.” Some take the legend literally. Others believe it is another way of telling the story of Isis and Osiris - itself a legend which could hardly have been foisted full born from the brain of some clever priest, but must have been a heritage from the Hyskos, or even earlier inhabitants of Egypt. Some see it in 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.

With such speculations the average Master Mason need have no concern. Nor need his heart be troubled as to whether the drama is “true” or not.

Search the Great Light how we will, we find no account of the tragedy of Hiram Abif. We learn of Hiram, or Hiram. If we delve deeply enough in Hebrew, we learn that modern scholarship translates Hiram Abif as “Hiram, my father” meaning a Hiram looked up to, venerated, given a title of honor, 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 can we find in secular history any account of the drama of Hiram. For its truth we must seek 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?” Historically Santa Claus nor

Hiram Abif are “true.” But if “true” means “containing a Great Truth” then both the myth of the Yule Tide Saint and the legend of the Master Builder are “true” in the most real sense.

Raised to the Sublime Degree, many men see the drama of the Master only literally, a teaching of 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 liberal 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 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 sacred legend of That Which Was Lost and the assurance that at long last he who seeks shall find.

Any man who has belief in a Great Architect and a hope of immortality may see in it the assurance that death is but a pause, not an end; a gateway, not a wall.

How long is a rope? A silly question! It can be measured, 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 true of a rope, it is true of space, time and eternity. If time has a beginning, it has an ending. If space commences somewhere, there is 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 Power of Freemasonry. Each of us is born, lives his little 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 in the glory of life.

We gaze through the microscope and telescope; and catch no sight of its shadow. We travel in many lands and far and find it not. We 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 unknowability 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!”