

King Solomon's Temple and the Story of the Third Degree.

by
Wor. Bro. ROBERT SMAILES, P.M.

Before commencing the subject of my address, permit me to remind you of a question with which you are all familiar, from the very beginning of your Masonic career. I mean, " What is Freemasonry ? " And the answer you are equally familiar with, " Freemasonry is a peculiar system of morality, veiled in allegory, and illustrated by symbols." Symbolism has been said to be the soul of Masonry, the ritual is the mere earthly wrapping in which it is enclosed ; but while we recognise that Symbolism is the essential part of our Order, and that we are not bound to anything in particular, by the mere wording of the ritual, still it cannot be without interest to know something of the historical basis on which that ritual is founded ; and though I cannot hope to invest the subject with the oriental picturesqueness which it deserves, I trust I shall not weary you, by giving a brief account of the events connected with the building of King Solomon's Temple, before considering the Story of the Third Degree.

Let us transport ourselves back in imagination to the time when King David, having become settled in his kingdom, and having built himself a palace at Jerusalem, felt it incongruous that the Ark of the Lord should be housed in wood and curtains ; he was, therefore, desirous of building a suitable habitation for it; but he was not permitted to carry out his design. Yet he did everything that was possible to him; he collected stonemasons, and artificers, and amassed-according to the Book of Chronicles - 100,000 talents of gold, and 1,000,000 talents of silver, brass and iron without weight, and many precious stones.

These sums appear to have been much exaggerated, for nothing can be more futile than the attempt to show that such a Prince as David could have been able to amass gold, not to speak of other treasures, which amounted on the very lowest computation to £120,000,000 of our present money, and this exaggeration has had much to do with the doubts expressed by some writers, as to whether Solomon's Temple ever existed at all. Jewish tradition has accepted the most extravagant statements about the Temple, yet sober and trustworthy documents prove, that, though no larger than many an English

Church, it was indeed, for that age, "exceedingly magnificent," and its fame spread to the furthest parts of the then known world, while it became an object of envy and emulation to the succeeding ages, so that 1500 years later the Emperor Justinian, when he had rebuilt the Church of St. Sophia at Constantinople, is said to have exclaimed " at last I have surpassed King Solomon."

David's difficulties were enormous, the Israelites were tent- dwellers and knew nothing of building, and he had not suitable timber at hand. Fortunately for him, to the north-west was the little country of Phoenicia, a narrow strip of land on the Syrian coast, towered over on the east by the Mountains of Lebanon, on whose sunny slopes vast quantities of cedar, cypress, fir, and other trees grew.

Though only a small nation, the Phoenicians were the great colonisers of the day, and excelled in all the arts. They were, however, lacking in food supplies, and had to look to Canaan for corn, wine, and oil. David had therefore no difficulty in forming a treaty with Hiram, King of Tyre, who, in return for the supplies he needed, was quite willing to let David have the timber and workmen he required.

Huge rafts of timber were floated by sea from Tyre to Joppa, a distance of 200 miles, and then with infinite toil, dragged about 35 miles up the steep and rocky roads to Jerusalem. This work was done by a large number of men, over whom overseers were appointed, and of these ADONIRAM was the chief. Adoniram, as you know, is a character of considerable Masonic importance as the reputed successor of Hiram Abif. When his duties as overseer were completed, he was appointed by Solomon to the office of collector of tribute, or inland revenue officer, and he continued to fill this post until the death of the King. He was again appointed by Rehoboam, but the Israelites, who had put up with Solomon's extravagance, owing to his wisdom and reputation, now rebelled, and the venerable old man, grown grey in the service of his country, met with a different reception, for the cry had gone forth " To your tents, O Israel," and they stoned him with stones until he died.

Resuming the story of the Temple ; on the death of David, his son Solomon continued the preparations for a further period of four years, when they were sufficiently advanced to allow of the building being commenced, and the King of Tyre again proved his friendship to Israel by sending HIRAM ABIF to be the chief architect, a man whose skill-like that of Michael Angelo-seems to have been serviceable for every branch of art.

Mount Moriah was found to be a very difficult site for such a building ; the sides of the hill were steep, its summit was rough and of insufficient size for the forecourts of the house. These courts had to be supported by immense walls, which have partly survived the ravages of many conquests. For the skilled work the King had to rely on Sidonian workmen, among whom special mention is made of the GIBLITES (A.V. stonesquarers), the people of Gebal, or Byblos, which was north of Berytos, and nearest to the Cedars of Lebanon. Ezekiel long afterwards mentions the wisdom and artistic genius of this Phoenician community. Even in Homer, the Sidonians are famed for embroidered robes, and skill in workmanship. In addition to so large a host of workmen, others were engaged in casting bronze in earthen moulds ; this was done in the clay soil of the Valley of Jordan, between Zarthan or Zeredathah, and Succoth, and the superintendent of all was HIRAM ABIF.

The character of the architecture, both inside and out, was undoubtedly Phoenician. From Tyre, too, came the use of curtains, dyed in the scarlet juice of the trumpet-fish, and other costly dyes. We know that inside the Temple no stone was visible, all was of gilded cedar- wood, cypress, and olive, variously carved, and tapestried in parts by purple and embroidered hangings. Strangely enough, existing records leave us entirely in the dark as to the external appearance of the Temple, and it is unnecessary to go into the various speculations on the subject.

Let us try to represent, says Dean Farrar, what a visitor would have seen, had he been permitted to wander into the sacred courts and buildings of this most celebrated of earthly shrines. Passing through the thickly clustering houses of the Levites and the Porticoes, he might enter the Temple by one of the numerous gateways mentioned in the Book of Chronicles and elsewhere.

Two gates did Solomon construct, devoted to acts of mercy. Through one gate the bridegrooms used to pass, through the other the mourners. The people on the Sabbath rejoiced with the bridegrooms, and consoled the afflicted. These gates were of wood, overlaid with brass. When the visitor stood in the outer court, he would have seen on one side of the Temple area, a grove of trees, Olives, Palms, Cedars, and Cypresses, which added to the beauty of the building, but were afterwards abused for idolatrous purposes. To pass from the outer court, into the court which Jeremiah calls " the higher court," the visitor would have had to pass up some steps, through an enclosure built with three rows of hewn stones, supported by a cornice of Cedar

beams. On the south-eastern side he would have admired the huge laver or basin, for the ablutions of the priests, which was regarded as one of the finest specimens of the skill of HIRAM ABIF. It was made of brass, and was known as " the brazen or molten sea." It had a length and breadth of 45 feet, and stood 7½ feet high, on the backs of 12 brazen oxen of the same height, of which three faced to each quarter of the heavens.

Approaching the porch, the eye would have been first caught by two superb pillars, which were regarded in those days as a miracle of art, and which for unknown reasons, received the name of Jachin and Boaz. Strange to say, it is a matter of dispute whether these two pillars stood detached from the porch, or were mere ornaments within it, or formed part of its absolute support, or, as is now believed by many, belonged to a detached gate in front of the porch itself. Ferguson, in his latest designs, supposed that the pillars were not detached like obelisks, but that they supported a screen or gateway, like the vine-bearing screen, described by Josephus and the Talmud, in front of the Temple of Herod. They were broken up and carried away, four centuries later, by the King of Babylon.

The Temple itself was surrounded on two sides by three storeys of chambers. A winding stair led up into the middle chamber of the middle storey, and thence into the upper storey. These chambers communicated with each other, and were, according to Josephus, thirty in number ; they were useful for a multitude of purposes ; it does not appear that they were ever inhabited, but they served as store rooms for the priests' garments, and for the immense accumulations of Temple furniture. You will remember, it was up this winding staircase, our Ancient Fellow Craft Brethren are said to have gone to receive their wages.

I need not go further into the construction of the Temple, except to say that the holiest place was plunged in unbroken and perpetual gloom. It contained nothing but the Ark, and one or two other precious memorials of the Mosaic age.

The whole structure was completed in sacred silence. The awful sanctity of the shrine would have been violated, if its erection had been accompanied by the harsh and violent noises which would accompany the ordinary toil of masons ; every stone and beam had been therefore carefully prepared beforehand, and was merely carried to its place, " so that neither was hammer, nor axe, nor any tool of iron heard in the house while it was building." The erection occupied

seven-and-a-half years, in spite of the small size of the actual Temple. Size indeed, was no element of its magnificence, for, as I have said, it was much smaller than many an English Church. But it must be remembered it was not intended for either priests or worshippers. Ancient and Eastern worship was mainly in the open air ; the Shrine itself only symbolised the residence of God.

And so the Temple was completed, and after a further period of twelve months, for preparation, came the most magnificent ceremony the nation had ever known, viz. the Dedication, culminating in the beautiful prayer of Solomon, with the constantly recurring refrain, "Hear, Thou in Heaven, Thy dwelling-place, and when Thou hearest, Lord, forgive."

"Sacred to Heaven behold the dome appears,
"Lo, what august solemnity it wears.
"Angels themselves have deigned to deck the fane,
"And beauteous Sheba shall proclaim its fame."

The Temple was thenceforth the centre of all the national life of the Jews, and that centre was no idol shrine, no material image, but the symbolic palace of Him, whom Heaven and the Heaven of Heavens could not contain.

Passing over the visit of the Queen of Sheba, we must carry the history of Solomon a little farther ; he continued his building operations for a period of twenty years, at the end of which time the King of Tyre thought they ought to have a squaring-up, when it was found that Solomon was considerably indebted to him, and also that the exchequer was empty. Solomon, however, made Hiram a present of some country next to Phoenicia with which at first Hiram was very pleased, but when he went to view it, he found it worthless, and that he had been over-reached. Notwithstanding this diplomatic breeze, no breach appears to have been made in the friendship of the two Kings.

Jewish writers in less ancient times cannot overlook HIRAM'S uncircumcision in his services towards building the Temple. Their legends relate, that because he was a God-fearing man, and built the Temple, he was received alive into Paradise, but that after he had been there a thousand years, he sinned by pride, and was thrust down into hell.

You will notice, that while we have this legend about the KING of TYRE, and the authentic record of the death of ADONIRAM by stoning,

there is nothing to indicate the end of HIRAM ABIF. It has been urged by some that there were two architects, father and son, and that the father was killed as stated in our ritual, and succeeded by the son. This theory is based on what I think is a wrong translation of the word "Abif," and occurs in the message from the KING OF TYRE to SOLOMON : "And now I have sent a cunning man, endued with understanding of Hiram, my father's." Abif is a compound name : "Ab," meaning "father," is a token of respect, and "I," or "If," the definite article, and is not intended merely in the parental sense, as Abraham, the father of the faithful, but Abif is more properly the father or master builder. I think we are bound to conclude there was only one great architect for the Temple, and this prototype of our Order disappears very modestly from view in the simple words recorded in the Book of Chronicles, "And HURAM finished the work he had to make for KING SOLOMON for the House of God."

And now we will change the scene from this vision of Eastern splendour, to the more sombre atmosphere of London, at the beginning of the eighteenth century, when four Lodges, meeting at such quaint houses as "The Goose and Gridiron," "The Rummer and Grapes," the "Apple Tree Tavern," and the "Crown Ale-house," decided to form themselves into a GRAND LODGE in order to reform and reorganise Freemasonry in accordance with the spirit of the age, of which Lodge ANTHONY SAYER was elected Grand Master in 1717.

Of the men who took part in this reorganisation, the three most eminent were Dr. Theoph. Desaguliers, the Rev. James Anderson, and George Payne. Payne was the second Grand Master in 1718. Anderson was afterwards asked to write the Book of Constitutions. Desaguliers was third Grand Master, and of this triumvirate, probably the most important. He was the son of a French Protestant Minister, and was born at Rochelle in 1683. After the edict of Nantes, he with his father came to London in 1685. His education was finished at Oxford, and in the course of time he attained considerable notoriety as a mathematician and natural philosopher. In 1705 he gave a course of public lectures on experimental philosophy, which were attended by persons of all classes of society. In 1723 he was commissioned by Parliament to devise a plan for heating and ventilating the House of Commons, which he effected in a very ingenious manner. There are some occurrences in the life of Desaguliers which merit particular attention, as having exercised a peculiar influence on the Masonry of his day. His love of mechanics, and the prominent part which that science plays in operative Masonry, no doubt induced him to become a member of the Fraternity. He soon, however, found the Brethren could

teach him nothing. On the other hand, the spirit of toleration which he found prevailing among the members of the Fraternity, peculiarly grateful to one who had suffered from religious intolerance, inspired him with the idea of reconstructing the Society on a basis which should unite together in harmony, those who were divided by religious and political schisms. In carrying out his plan, he was materially aided by the high position he held in society, and by the widespread acquaintance he enjoyed. As a French refugee he was, of course, a zealous Protestant, and this fact must have influenced him in making alterations in the ritual of Masonry, in which several changes were made subsequent to 1717, for the purpose of divesting it of some of the lingering remnants of Romanism.

Of these changes, the most important was the fundamental one which is at the root of our present system that of belief. You will remember the old Charges all began with an invocation to the Trinity; later this seems to have been changed to God and the Holy Church; the latter was now dropped, and a simple belief in the Deity only imposed on initiates. One cannot help thinking that the leaders of the movement belonged to the Latitudinarian School of Theology, as this school was distinguished from both Puritans and High Churchmen by their opposition to dogma, and by their preference of reason to tradition, an example of which we have in that beautiful portion of the ritual, where we are forcibly impressed to "listen to the dictates of reason."

A PHILOSOPHICAL ESSAY ON DEATH.

The Story of the Third Degree is a philosophical essay on Death, in which is recited the supposed death of Hiram Abif, at or about the completion of King Solomon's Temple, and just as it is the sum of the small which makes the large, and a simple word may plant the seed which, in its time, blossoms into fragrant action, and alters the courses of lives, rounding life itself into its fullest beauty, so this tragedy of the Tyrian architect has blossomed into an Order, whose branches are extended over the whole surface of the habitable globe, and of which we are justly proud.

We have seen, however, that there is no historical foundation for this story, and I have it on the authority of Bro. HUGHAN, that ritualistically HIRAM ABIF is unknown before the THIRD DEGREE, and this has not been traced before 1723-7. Many eminent Masons have sought for the story in the Miracle Plays of the Middle Ages, but without success. The question then arises, Was the story entirely originated by the compilers of the new ritual, or was there some

foundation for it existing in the CRAFT GUILDS before the formation of GRAND LODGE?

It is not to be supposed that Brethren, who a generation later, split up on very simple points into Ancients and Moderns, would allow an entirely new legend to be introduced into Freemasonry, and I think there is sufficient evidence to prove that some story of HIRAM, the Builder, was known to Masons before this period.

In the account of the Installation of the DUKE OF MONTAGU as Grand Master in 1721, we read that "immediately afterwards, as if unpremeditatedly, the Grand Master Montagu nominated Dr. John Beal, Deputy Grand Master, who was invested and installed into the chair of HIRAM ABIF, to the left hand of the Grand Master.

Professor Swift Johnson has made a study of the literature of the 17th century, with a view of tracing the introduction of the legend during that period, but without success. In a paper read before the Q.C. Lodge, he says:

"As a result of such search as I have made in the subject put before you, we may safely conclude that in the 17th century, the description of King Solomon's Temple excited a very considerable amount of attention and interest; but that in the writings that appeared, there was little, if anything, of Masonic importance. The result may be called a failure, were it not that we should always bear in mind the sound Baconian maxim, that the negative instance is always more valuable than the positive. It shows that the legends were not taken wholesale into our system from an outside source of current knowledge, and leaves us with the alternative that this characteristic of our Craft was either part and parcel of the ancient teaching, or that it was an addition made at or about the beginning of modern Masonry."

Looking further back, we find that in the first English Bible, published by Coverdale in 1535, Hiram, the architect, is there spoken of as Hiram Abif, but in all the succeeding translations the "Abif " is omitted, and only reappears to our knowledge in Masonry in 1721, so it is fair to presume, it had been handed down orally, through the Masons from the former time.

Then there is what is known as Dr. MARKS' wonderful discovery. Dr. Marks was not a Mason, but a celebrated Hebrew scholar, and in his researches at Oxford, he came across an Arabic Manuscript of the 14th century, in which reference is made to a Masonic sign or password,

and which, translated, would read, "We have found our Lord Hiram." Bro. Hughan writes me, "Long before such an announcement, a Jewish Rabbi explained just such a reading to Capt. Philips 33° and myself."

Looking abroad for evidence, we find in France a Society called "Les Companions du tour de France," which was divided into three, "Sons of Solomon," "Pere Soubise," and "Maitre Jacques," and included other trades besides Masons. PERDIGUIER, a French writer, informs us "that the joiners of Maitre Jacques wear white gloves, because, as they say, they did not steep their hands in the blood of Hiram." Also apropos of "chien," a title bestowed on some of the Companions, he says, "It is believed by some, to be derived from the fact, that it was a dog which discovered the place where the body of Hiram, the Architect of the Temple, lay under the rubbish ; after which, all the Companions who separated from the murderers of Hiram, were called `chiens' or dogs."

I think you will agree that we have some evidence of a legend of the death of Hiram existing before Grand Lodge era. When could such a tale have been incorporated into Medieval Masonry? The late Bro. SPETH once said:

"I can see no epoch more likely than that of the return from the Crusades. The Knights of the Cross were enthusiastic builders ; the remains of their Churches dot the Holy Land to this day. The European builders must, in the nature of things, have required large numbers of native workmen to assist them, and among these the Temple legend, if it existed, would certainly be known. The builders, on their return, would have brought the legend with them, and it would have been adopted all the more readily, as it was in perfect accord with the traditions, aye, even of the practices, of that age in England."

Another factor in the construction of the Story of the Third Degree was the exhibition of a large model of King Solomon's Temple in London, in 1724.

As Prof. Swift Johnson has told us, the Temple seems to have captivated the imagination of a large number of writers during the 17th century, both in England and on the continent. Among the latter, a Spanish Jesuit, called VILLALPANDUS, was the most eminent. In obedience to a royal command, he drew up a description of the Temple, and regarding the plan as being given by the Most High to the wisest of Kings, he incorporated in his account all those excellencies he deemed essential to a most perfect edifice; and this description was practically repeated by Bishop WALTON in his polyglot Bible, published

in 1657. Partly in opposition to this description, SAMUEL LEE published his "Orbis Miraculum," or the Temple of Solomon portrayed by Scripture light, and this is interesting to us, because we read for the first time of a symbolic meaning attached to the two pillars, B. and J. He says:

"The pillar on the right side, that is, the South, was called Jachin-He shall establish, noting the fixedness of the pillar on its foundation ; and that on the left hand, or on the North side, was called Boaz, denoting the strength and firmitude of that piece of brass."

JOHN LIGHTFOOT, one of the giants of Biblical criticism, was the first to translate the results of his Hebrew reading into the vernacular, and sums up his account of the Temple in these words:

" And indeed Solomon's Temple did very truly resemble one of our Churches, but only that it differeth in this, that the steeple of it (which was in the porch) stood at the east end."

Hugh Broughton, John Selden a lawyer, John Ogilby, and towards the end of the century, Humphrey Prideaux Dean of Norwich, all had something to say on the subject.

I have quoted these writers to explain the interest which was taken in the exhibition of this model in 1724. A handbook to it was published in 1725, a copy of which is in the possession of Bro. W. H. RYLANDS, from which I will quote the following extracts:

"The Temple of Solomon, with all its Porches, Walls, Gates, Halls, Chambers, Holy Vessels, the Altar of Burnt Offering, the Molten Sea, Golden Candlesticks, Shew Bread Tables, Altar of Incense, the Ark of the Covenant, with the Mercy Seat, the Cherubims, &c."

"The motive of forming this model of Solomon's Temple, which is now seen here in London, was an Opera, representing the Destruction of Jerusalem, acted at Hamborough, and as the Opera House was built at the charge of Councillor Schott, a man very learned and judicious, much renowned for the pains he took to represent his scenes in the most accurate manner, and altogether to conform to antiquity. The last decoration of the before-mentioned Opera, where the City of Jerusalem, together with the Temple, are represented, was brought by him to the highest degree of perfection. The project thereof was not carried on, by opinion or conceit, but according to the direction of the Scriptures, and the most authentic authors, not neglecting to consult

in all points thereon, the most renowned architects and learned men then living."

You can quite understand that this Exhibition soon won its way to popular favour, and cannot have been without effect on the rank and file of Freemasons at the very time when our legends were being moulded and harmonised, and this model must have exercised a real influence in the development of our ritual.

Bro. JOHN SENEX, the publisher of the first Book of Constitutions, in 1723, in which year he was junior Grand Warden, also published a finely executed engraving, or plan of Jerusalem, with views of the Temple and its principal ornaments. This publication, by one of the Grand Officers, could not fail to have extensive circulation among the Lodges. The setting of such legends as had to do with the Temple, must have been so framed as to accord with the impression left by an engraving, that might fairly be regarded as semiofficial.

We have, then, the dry bones of a legend of the death of Hiram, and the exhibition of this model as a fitting "mise en scene" for the Story of the Third Degree, but what was the power, whence came the vital force which put life into these dry bones, caused the Courts of the Temple to resound once more with the feet of moving masses of workmen, and produced the beautiful ritual, as we now have it?

Let us turn for a moment to consider the social condition of England at the time this new ritual was promulgated. The first of the new line of Hanoverian Kings reigned on the throne, a king who knew not the language, and cared less for the people, and whose Court was presided over by two of his German mistresses. The real ruler of the kingdom was Robert Walpole, a clever, but corrupt statesman, who kept himself in power for over twenty years by bribing the House of Commons. Of the prominent statesmen of the time, the greater part were unbelievers in any form of Christianity, and distinguished for the grossness and immorality of their lives. The Church was at its lowest ebb, in that deepest darkness of the gloom which preceded the dawn of the revival by Whitfield and the Wesleys; its ministers were the most remiss in their duties and the least severe in their lives, and to talk of religion was to be laughed at.

The philosophy of the day was that of HOBBS and his disciples, one of whom declared the Soul was only a state of nervous vibrations, and HOBBS taught that friendship was only a sense of social utility to one another. The so-called laws of nature, such as gratitude or the love of

our neighbour, were, in fact, contrary to the natural passions of man, and powerless to restrain them.

Both the high and the low were drunken and licentious, and the pictures of Hogarth, which we are inclined to look upon as caricatures, were true pictures of the life of that day. The little leaven was only to be found in the middle classes.

We can well believe, that to such an intelligent and enlightened philosopher as Desaguliers appears to have been, such a social condition must have been most repulsive.

The Landmarks of the Order are a standing protest against atheism for all time. The ritual of the Third Degree was an active protest against the irreligion and immorality of the day.

How different the teaching of our ritual from that of Lord Chesterfield in his celebrated letters to his son, written about this time, in which he instructed him in the art of seduction, as part of a polite education. Compare the philosophy of which I have spoken with "Listen to the dictates of reason, which teach you that even in this vile and perishable frame, there exists a vital and immortal principle." Contrast Death, represented as a skeleton with a scythe-the avenging angel, the fell destroyer-with "the holy and inspiring hope which will enable you to trample the king of terrors beneath your feet."

Brethren, I have no documentary evidence in support of this theory, and nowadays nothing is accepted in Masonry without it; formerly the wildest fables were advanced to prove the antiquity of the Order, but "tempora mutantur," we have changed all that, and the pendulum has swung all the other way, perhaps it has swung too far; documentary evidence is not always to be relied on,-the kings of England were described in official and other documents as Kings of France long after they had lost all power in that country, and other instances could be quoted.

At any rate the ritual was not at once popular, and Masters' Lodges were formed for working it, while it was not until twenty years later it was compulsory, and properly incorporated with the making of a Mason. I will not speak of the opposition of the Gormogons, [A brotherhood somewhat similar to Freemasons, which existed in England between 1725 and 1738.] nor pursue this view of the Story of the Third Degree further, but will rather leave it to your earnest consideration, and, in conclusion, return to the point from which we

started, viz. : The Symbolism of Masonry, and though we may not be able to trace with certainty the origin of our Order, nor the exact source of its ritual, the Soul of Masonry will live if we ever remember the three grand principles on which it is founded:

"BROTHERLY LOVE," "RELIEF," and "TRUTH,"

and never forget that "Death has no terrors equal to the stain of falsehood and dishonour."

Extracted from

***The Transactions of
The Lodge of Research No. 2429, Leicester [England]
for the Year 1905-6.***