

Lessons in Freemasonry

The Lion's Paw and the Third Degree

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Before embarking on the subject of the Lion's Paw, let's review how or when the evolution of Hiram Abif surfaces and its significance and connection to the Hiram Legend.

The Halliwell MS (circa 1390 A.D.), named for the person who discovered it, also known as the Regius Poem, is believed to be composed of two poems and having numerous writers. It does not, however, indicate any Hiram Legend associated with our third degree in Speculative Masonry. It is supposed that authors who were adding or deleting from the MS were either ignorant of the Hiram Legend or some form of corruption of this legend caused it to be omitted. We are aware, however, that the medieval Masons were aware that King Solomon had an assistant in the design and construction of the Temple, and that the assistant had been sent to Solomon by Hiram of Tyre. Moreover, there seems to be some confusion or ignorance of the scriptural name and qualities of that assistant. The Cook MS (circa 1400-1410 A.D.) refers to the Hiram Legend which is also mentioned in various forms in succeeding constitutions.

To give some understanding of these *Constitutions*, you might refer to the address I gave at the New England Lodge No.4 200 year Anniversary Banquet held on October 25, 2003 at the Aladdin Shrine Center, or the paper I presented as High Priest of the Chapter of Research titled, *From Whence We Came*, at the winter meeting held in Youngstown Chapter No.26 in Youngstown, Ohio on December 1, 2001. This paper is printed in the *Proceedings* of the Chapter of Research, Volume XXIV, 2001-2003. You will find in both references a listing of the Gothic Constitutions from the Old Short History, circa 1360 A.D., including the Regius MS, circa 1390, to the James Roberts MS, circa 1663.

In September 1721, the Grand Lodge of England requested The Reverend Dr. James Anderson to review ancient documents that were written during the medieval period and in particular during the period of Gothic construction. In March 1723, A Committee was appointed by the Grand Lodge to review what Anderson had compiled. Anderson was given approval and printed his first edition of the *Book of Constitutions* in 1723. Anderson may have omitted the Hiram Legend in his first edition either inadvertently or it was not mentioned in any of the Gothic Constitutions he may have had in his possession at that time. He did, however, include it in his 1738 edition whereas we find on page 12, "...But above all,

he sent his Name sake, Hiram Abbif, the most accomplished Designer and Operator upon Earth.....” Also, on page 14 we find, “It (the Temple) was finished in the short Space of 7 years and 6 months to the Amazement of all the World, when the Cap-Stone was celebrated by the Fraternity with great Joy. But their Joy was soon interrupted by the sudden Death of their dear Master, Hiram Abbif, whom they decently interred in the Lodge near the Temple, according to ancient Usage.” The Biblical references are from the 2nd Book of Chronicles, Chapter 2, Verse 13 and Chapter IV, Verse 16.

It was, then, the aim of early rites and mysteries to teach the doctrine of the immortality of the soul. With that early doctrine, the virtue of the mortality of the body and the immortality of the soul would be exact in the lesson portrayed in the allegory of the Third Degree.

You must remember, at least from previous presentations I gave to you as an educational program, this whole being of Ancient Craft Masonry (and Speculative Masonry), originated from those Gothic Builders who were Roman Catholic citizen artisans. From the demise of the Gothic Builders in the middle fifteenth century to the rise of Speculative Masonry in the early sixteenth century, any ritual or dogma that may have survived and being practiced in some modified use today will have Christian references with its roots from the medieval period. We see this immediately when we state that “modern Masons dedicate their Lodges to Saint John the Baptist and Saint John the Evangelist.”

Early Masonic Scholars connected the legend in the allegory of the third degree to the legend of Osiris, and his wife Isis, of Egyptian Mythology. In the study of Egyptian ancient history, it becomes evident that at that time it was the cradle of an advanced culture and the philosophy of man and his existence in the world. When one studies the mysteries of Freemasonry and compares it to the mysteries of ancient Egypt, one can possibly see a correlation between the two.

The legend of Osiris, King of Egypt, was known as "the Lord of all earth." He set out to civilize his nation. He taught agriculture, compiled a body of laws for the regulation of conduct and instructed them in reverencing and worshiping gods, thus establishing Egypt in all the essentials of truth. The Osirian Cycle tells of the life, death and resurrection of Osiris which are the degrees used in the Egyptian "rite of initiation." This legend of Osiris whose body is found by Isis, his wife, and brought back to life have similar characteristics in the allegory of the third degree with the murder of Hiram Abif.

It has been written that these early initiations of Egyptian mythology took place in pyramids and temples. Moreover, some early Masonic scholars have even made a connection of the two pillars, Boaz and Jachin, to have been copied from the two obelisks that stood at the entrance of many Egyptian temples. Symbolically, the candidate descends into the darkness of a tomb, and, after having wandered in the Hall of Hades, he is reborn, that is, his soul is released from darkness.

However, from the traditions and practices that have survived from the medieval period, our whole ritual in Symbolic Masonry is associated with the construction of King Solomon's Temple. Any mysteries that have crept into Symbolic Masonry not connected to Temple of Solomon, and there are many, would not have any validity in pursuing a lesson of virtue portrayed in the third degree.

The reference of Solomon, as the Lion of the Tribe of Judah, breaths life to the allegory as the Master of the Lodge raises the candidate in this most sublime degree. It completes the Christian symbolism of Him (Christ) who has brought life and immortality to light. Here we find the Christian interpretation of the Masonic symbol in the resurrection alluded to in the Cook MS. In Ancient Craft Masonry, all allusions to the lion, as the lion's paw and the lion's grip, refer to the doctrine of the resurrection taught by Him who is known as the "Lion of the Tribe of Judah."

The lion was also a medieval symbol of the resurrection, the idea being founded on a legend. The poets of that age were fond of referring to this legendary symbol in connection with the Scriptural idea of the Tribe of Judah. In the symbolism of Ancient Craft Masonry, where the lion is introduced, as in the allegory of the third degree in connection with the Tribe of Judah, he becomes simply a symbol of the resurrection. Thus, referring to the symbolism of the Medieval Ages, which was founded on a legend that the lion's whelp was born dead, was brought to life by the roaring of its sire. Philip de Thaun in his *Bestiary*, written in the twelfth century, gives the legend which has been translated from the original old Norman French: "Know that the lioness, if she brings forth a dead cub, she holds her cub and the lion arrives; he goes about and cries, till it revives on the third (day)...Know that the lioness refers to Saint Mary, and the lion, Christ, who gave Himself to death for the people; three days He lay in the earth to gain our souls..... By the cry of the lion they understand the power of God, by which Christ was restored to life and robbed of hell."

Thus, we learn from the virtue portrayed in the allegory of the third degree a lesson in the mortality of the body and the immortality of the soul as the candidate is raised by the grip of the lion's paw.

So mote it be.

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