

Copyright of this publication is vested in the WHJ Mayers Lodge of Research and the author, and anyone wishing to reproduce it in full or in part should first obtain permission from the Lodge Secretary.

The Lectern

Official publication of the

WHJ Mayers Lodge of Research



To Seek The Light of Knowledge

Volume 20 Issue 9

March 2013



R.W.Bro. W.H.J.Mayers was the first District G.M. of the District Grand Lodge of Carpentaria within the United Grand Lodge of Queensland

THE LECTERN is the official publication of.

W.H.J.MAYERS MEMORIAL LODGE OF RESEARCH

Holden under the Charter of Gregory Lodge No. 50H UGLQ

AFFILIATE OF THE AUSTRALIA AND NEW ZEALAND
MASONIC RESEARCH COUNCIL

Secretary and Editor Wor. Bro. Harvey Lovewell
(harbar88@gmail.com)

Opinions expressed in this publication are not necessarily those of the Lodge as a whole or Freemasonry in General but are of the authors

LEDGENDS AND SYMBOLS OF FREEMASONARY

Presented by the District Grand Master, RW Bro Robert C Wakely at the
WHJ Mayers installation meeting 07112012

My thanks to Arius De winter and others for their inspiration.

At one time all learning was conveyed by symbol. i.e. the square Morality the Level equality and the Plumb uprightness of life and action

The object of legends is not to establish historical fact but to convey philosophical (consonant with, showing, philosophy) doctrines (what is taught, religious etc belief, dogma, or tenant)

They are a method by which esoteric (meant for, intelligible to, initiates only) instruction is communicated. One has to accept them for their positive use and meaning of developing Masonic Dogma.

Take, for instance, the Hiramic legend of the third degree. How important is to know if it is true or false. All that is necessary is to know its internal signification; and to learn it is intended to illustrate the doctrine of the immortality of the soul. It is a legend simply because it rests on no written foundation. It is oral, therefore legendary.

To investigate its historical accuracy would depend on an individual's curiosity to try to reconcile any of its apparent contradictions.

So of the lost keystone, so of the second temple, so of the lost Ark which are legendary narratives? Each of these legends is an expression of a philosophical (rational) idea.

The other method of Masonic instructions is by symbols. No science is more ancient than symbolism. At one time the learning of the world was conveyed by symbols. Modern philosophy deals in the abstract (not concrete, ideal, theoretical, essence, summary) Freemasonry deals with symbols to communicate knowledge.

From the Greek "to symbolize" means to compare one thing with another. So a symbol is a comparison or contrast of some object with a moral conception or attribute. Thus the Plumb is a symbol of rectitude and conduct. After a careful study to the speculative Mason it becomes an expression of moral uprightness.

Thus the symbol is visible and the legend audible. Both are designed to convey moral sentiment, and both illustrate the philosophy of speculative Masonry.

It is necessary to investigate these legends and symbols to gain the moral and philosophical lessons so as to draw on ignorance and indifference to reach the true philosophy of Freemasonry.

To study the symbolism of Freemasonry is the only way to investigate its philosophy. This philosophy teaches us the relationship of God to Man. The work offered to the public is to try to explain this philosophy and science. It will show that there are in Freemasonry, the germs of profound speculation. If it does not interest the learned it may instruct the ignorant.

Ancient and universal as Freemasonry is, whence did it arise. We scarcely need go back further than the beginning of the eighteenth century for modern Freemasonry. However, ancient Freemasonry dates back to the unity of God and the immortality of the soul so we have the right to say this was the incunabula (early printed books, esp. before 1500) – the predecessors – of the Masonic institution as it now exists.

So from the earliest age certain truths have been communicated, most probably by direct inspiration from God to man. They most probably consisted of the unity of God and the immortality of the soul.

These truths of God and immortality were most probably handed down through the line of Patriarchs of the race of Seth and were known to Noah who communicated them to his immediate descendants. These truths were cultivated by the Noachidae, the Noachites or descendants of Noah.

At a subsequent period – possibly around the time of the building of the tower of Babel – a large number of the human race seceded from the Noachites. These seceders soon lost sight of the divine truths, corrupting the worship of the religious faith that had primarily been communicated to them. This system of doctrine is called Spurious Freemasonry and refers to the descendants of the heathen or Gentile line.

Ed note see The Symbolism of Freemasonry by Albert Galatian Mackey 1882

The truths were preserved by the patriarchal line while still fewer maintained the true light. This system of doctrine is called the pure or Primitive Freemasonry and refers to the descendants of Noah.

Both these – spurious and patriarchal freemasons - maintained their Masonic doctrine. The spurious practiced among the pagan nations and the Noachites through the Jewish descendants of the patriarchs and taught the unity of God and the immortality of the soul. They travelled in time in

parallel but never comingling until the building of the great temple at Jerusalem. Here they were united by King Solomon the Israelite and the Tyrians under Hiram, King of Tyre and Hiram Abif.

Although united at this time the spurious Freemasons did not cease to exist but lasted for centuries. There was, however, by the union of the Spurious and the pure Freemasons at King Solomon's temple, a new system mooted and is the precursor of our present institution. This then is not the birth of Freemasonry but a modification of its character.

It is then that the legend of the third degree was adopted by pure Freemasonry which had no such legend prior to the building of King Solomon's Temple. But the legend had existed in other names and forms. The doctrine of immortality which was taught by the Noachites was then to inculcate as the symbol of Hiram the builder and be a distinctive feature of Freemasonry.

Another modified Masonic system was affected at the building of the temple. The Noachites had always been speculative and cultivated the abstract principle of divine truth.

The Tyrians were architects by profession and were leaders of spurious Freemasonry. At the temple of Solomon they were united with their Jewish contemporaries and practiced speculative science and the operative arts.

The system continued through the ages where we have elements of operative and speculative Masonry. This can be traced with reference to the Colleges of Artificers established in Rome by Numa; the Jewish sect of the Essenes who claimed to be descendants of the temple builders and the Travelling Freemasons of the Middle Ages whose societies were made up of learned men and workmen. So for a long time Freemasonry continued to be both operative and speculative.

The next change came about in the reign of Queen Anne, of England, at the beginning of the eighteenth century. At that time the very words that established modern Freemasonry are "that the privileges of Masonry should no longer be restricted to operative Masons, but extend to men of various professions, provided they were regularly approved and initiated into the order."

The progress of Freemasonry from its origin as simply a system of religious philosophy to all the modifications to which it was submitted until at length

it was developed in its present form. During this time it maintained certain characteristic which distinguish it from other associations.

These characteristics are, first, the doctrines which it has constantly taught, namely, that of the unity of God and the immortality of the soul; secondly, the manner in which these doctrines were taught, namely by symbols and allegories.

Taking these characteristics as exponents of what Freemasonry is today, we arrive at the conclusion that speculative Masonry and spurious Masonry are derived from the same source. From this we are indebted to the Tyrian Masons for the introduction of the symbol of Hiram Abif.

This symbol was borrowed from the pagan mysteries, where Bacchus, Adonis, Proserpine and a host of other apotheosized (deification; transformation; deified ideal.) Beings play the same role that Hiram does in Masonic mysteries.

In the technical terms of Masonry i.e. the working tools, the name of its grades and a large majority of its symbols we find a strong infusion into its religious philosophy the elements of an operative art.

These symbols and legends suggest the Masonic student may ponder as they are a guide to his own enquires into the progress of Freemasonry from its birth to its present state.

The compound character of a speculative science and an operative art, which the masonic institution assumed at the building of King Solomon's temple, in consequence of the union, at that era, of the Pure Freemasonry of the Noachidae with the Spurious Freemasonry of the Tyrian workmen, has supplied it with two distinct kinds of symbols--the *mythical*, or *legendary*, and the *material*; but these are so thoroughly united in object and design, that it is impossible to appreciate the one without an investigation of the other.

Thus, by way of illustration, it may be observed, that the temple itself has been adopted as a material symbol of the world, while the legendary history of the fate of its builder is a mythical symbol of man's destiny in the world. Whatever is visible or tangible to the senses in our types and emblems--such as the implements of operative masonry, the furniture and ornaments of a lodge, or the ladder of seven steps--is a *material symbol*; while whatever derives its existence from tradition, and presents itself in the form

of an allegory or legend, is a *mythical symbol*. Hiram the Builder, therefore, and all that refers to the legend of his connection with the temple, and his fate,--such as the sprig of acacia, the hill near Mount Moriah, and the lost word,--are to be considered as belonging to the class of mythical or legendary symbols.

And this division is not arbitrary, but depends on the nature of the types and the aspect in which they present themselves to our view.

Thus the sprig of acacia, although it is material, visible, and tangible, is, nevertheless, not to be treated as a material symbol; for, as it derives all its significance from its intimate connection with the legend of Hiram Abif, which is a mythical symbol, it cannot, without a violent and inexpedient disruption, be separated from the same class. For the same reason, the small hill near Mount Moriah, the search of the twelve Fellow Crafts, and the whole train of circumstances connected with the lost word, are to be viewed simply as mythical or legendary, and not as material symbols.

These legends of Freemasonry constitute a considerable and a very important part of its ritual. Without them, the most valuable portions of the masonic as a scientific system would cease to exist. It is, in fact, in the traditions and legends of Freemasonry, more, even, than in its material symbols that we are to find the deep religious instruction which the institution is intended to inculcate. It must be remembered that Freemasonry has been defined to be "a system of morality, veiled in allegory and illustrated by symbols." Symbols, then, alone, do not constitute the whole of the system: allegory comes in for its share; and this allegory, which veils the divine truths of masonry, is presented to the neophyte in the various legends which have been traditionally preserved in the order.

The close connection between the institution of Freemasonry and the ancient Mysteries, which were largely imbued (saturate, dye, inspire) with the mythical character of the ancient religions, led, undoubtedly, to the introduction of the same mythical character into the masonic system.

So general, indeed, was the diffusion of the myth or legend among the philosophical, historical, and religious systems of antiquity that all the history and philosophy of the ancients proceeded from myths.

The word *myth*, from the Greek μῦθος, *a story*, in its original acceptation, signified simply a statement or narrative of an event, without any necessary implication of truth or falsehood; but, as the word is now used, it conveys the idea of a personal narrative of remote date, which, although not necessarily untrue, is certified only by the internal evidence of the tradition itself.

These myths and symbols were derived, on the one hand, from the helpless condition and the poor and scanty beginnings of religious knowledge among the ancient peoples, and on the other, from the benevolent designs of the priests educated in the East, or of Eastern origin, to form them to a purer and higher knowledge.

The allegorical interpretation of the myths, connected with the hypothesis of an ancient and highly-instructed body of priests, having their origin either in Egypt or the East, taught under the veil of symbols. Visible symbols were the most vivid means of acting upon the minds of ignorant hearers. The next step was to pass to symbolical language and expressions; in such allegorizing way, the early priests set forth their doctrines respecting God, nature, and humanity,-a refined monotheism and theological philosophy,-and to this purpose the earliest myths were turned. But another class of myths grew up under the hands of the poets--myths purely epical and descriptive of real or supposed past events. So to preserve mystical ceremonies as a secret among various religious fraternities, an initiation in certain myths and legends was administered by hereditary families of presiding priests.

Persons who had gone through the preliminary ceremonies of initiation were permitted at length to hear, though under strict obligation of secrecy, this ancient religion and cosmogonic (Mapping of the universe) doctrine, revealing the destination of man all disengaged from the corruptions of poets, as well as from the symbols and allegories under which they still remained buried in the eyes of the vulgar.

In this long but interesting extract we find not only a philosophical account of the origin and design of the ancient myths, but a fair synopsis of all that can be taught in relation to the symbolical construction of Freemasonry, as one of the depositaries of a mythical theology.

The myths of Masonry, at first perhaps nothing more than the simple traditions of the Pure Freemasonry having been corrupted and misunderstood in the separation of the races, were again purified, and adapted to the inculcation of truth, at first by the disciples of the Spurious Freemasonry, and then, more fully and perfectly, in the development of that system which we now practise. We must give to them their true significance, and trace them back to those ancient doctrines and faith whence the ideas which they are intended to embody were derived.

The myths or legends which present themselves to our attention in the course of a complete study of the symbolic system of Freemasonry may be considered as divided into three classes:--

The historical myth. The philosophical myth. The mythical history.

And these three classes may be defined as follows:--

1. The myth may be engaged in the transmission of a narrative of early deeds and events, having a foundation in truth, which truth, however, has been greatly distorted and perverted by the omission or introduction of circumstances and personages, and then it constitutes the *historical myth*.
2. Or it may have been invented and adopted as the medium of enunciating a particular thought, or of inculcating a certain doctrine, when it becomes a *philosophical myth*.
3. Or, lastly, the truthful elements of actual history may greatly predominate over the fictitious and invented materials of the myth, and the narrative may be, in the main, made up of facts, with a slight colouring of imagination, when it forms a *mythical history*.

These form the three divisions of the legend or myth and to one of these three divisions we must appropriate every legend which belongs to the mythical symbolism of Freemasonry.

These masonic myths partake, in their general character, of the nature of the myths which constituted the foundation of the ancient religions, in oral tradition.

Those are the very principles that govern the construction of the masonic myths or legends. These, too, owe their existence entirely to oral tradition, and are made up of a due admixture of the real and the ideal--the true and the false--the facts of history and the inventions of allegory.

The first series of historical facts, after the fall of man, must necessarily have been traditional, and transmitted from father to son by oral communication. The same system, adopted in all the Mysteries, has been continued in the masonic institution; and all the esoteric instructions contained in the legends of Freemasonry are forbidden to be written, and can be communicated only in the oral intercourse of Freemasons with each other.

The test by which a myth is to be distinguished from a strictly historical narrative, that the myth must owe its origin to the intention of the inventor not to satisfy the natural thirst for historical truth by a simple narration of facts, but rather to delight or touch the feelings, or to illustrate some philosophical or religious truth.

This definition precisely fits the character of the myths of Masonry. Take, for instance, the legend of the master's degree, or the myth of Hiram Abif. The invention or imagination of all the incidents of which it is composed, but its invention or composition in the form of a myth by the addition of some features, the suppression of others, and the general arrangement of the whole, is the doctrine of the immortality of the soul.

It must be evident, that all the legends and traditions of the order are, to the very letter, historical facts; more or less intermixed with fiction, but the historical always predominating.

Thus there is a legend, contained in some of our old records, which states that Euclid was a distinguished Mason, and that he introduced Masonry among the Egyptians. The legend which makes Euclid the contemporary of Abraham shows that the whole story is a sheer invention. The intelligent Mason, however, will not wholly reject the legend, as ridiculous or absurd; but, with a due sense of the nature and design of our system of symbolism, will rather accept it as what would be called "a philosophical myth"--an ingenious method of conveying, symbolically, a masonic truth.

Thus "when we read of foreigners [in Egypt] being obliged to submit to painful and tedious ceremonies of initiation, it was not that they might learn the secret meaning of the rites of Osiris or Isis, but that they might partake of the knowledge of astronomy, physic, geometry, and theology."

Another illustration will be found in the myth or legend of the *Winding Stairs*, by which the Fellow Crafts are said to have ascended to the middle chamber to receive their wages. As a myth, it finds its origin in the fact that there was a place in the temple called the "Middle Chamber," and that there were "winding stairs" by which it was reached; for we read, in the First Book of Kings, that "they went up with winding stairs into the middle chamber." But we have no historical evidence that the stairs were of the construction, or that the chamber was used for the purpose, indicated in the mythical narrative, as it is set forth in the ritual of the second degree. The whole legend is, in fact, an historical myth, in which the mystic number of the steps, the process of passing to the chamber, and the wages there received, are inventions added to or ingrafted on the fundamental history contained in the sixth chapter of Kings, to inculcate important symbolic instruction relative to the principles of the order. These lessons might serve more closely to connect the institution of Masonry with the ancient temple.

Again: the myth which traces the origin of the institution of Freemasonry to the beginning of the world, making its commencement coeval with the creation,--a myth which is, even at this day, ignorantly interpreted, by some, as an historical fact, and the reference to which is still preserved in the date of "anno lucis," which is affixed to all masonic documents,--is but a philosophical myth, symbolizing the idea which analogically connects the creation of physical light in the universe with the birth of masonic or spiritual and intellectual light in the candidate. From the commencement of

the world that we may trace the foundation of Masonry to a masonic lodge held in the Garden of Eden is pure supposition and would justly subject us to the ridicule of every intelligent person. The only idea intended to be conveyed is this: that the principles of Freemasonry, are coeval (of same age, duration, epoch) with the existence of the world; that when God said, "Let there be light," the material light must burst upon the mind of every candidate, becomes the living thoughts and divine principles which constitute the great system of Speculative Masonry, shall, from intellectual darkness, bring forth intellectual light.

In the legends of the Master's degree and of the Royal Arch there is a commingling of the historical myth and the mythical history. The legend of the third degree is, in some of its details, undoubtedly mythical--in others, just as undoubtedly historical. The difficulty, however, of separating the one from the other, and of distinguishing the fact from the fiction, has necessarily produced a difference of opinion on the subject among masonic writers, who think the whole legend an allegory or philosophical myth. Some suppose it a mythical history. In the Royal Arch degree, the legend of the rebuilding of the temple is clearly historical; but there are so many accompanying circumstances, which are uncertified, except by oral tradition, as to give to the entire narrative the appearance of a mythical history. The particular legend of the *three weary sojourners* is undoubtedly a myth, and perhaps merely a philosophical one, or the enunciation of an idea--namely, the reward of successful perseverance, through all dangers, in the search for divine truth.

"To form symbols and to interpret symbols was the main occupation of the ancient priesthood." Upon the studious Mason the same task of interpretation devolves. It is for that idea that the student must search in the myths of Masonry. Its true value, as a science, consists in its symbolism--in the great lessons of divine truth which it teaches, and in the admirable manner in which it accomplishes that teaching. Every one, therefore, who desires to be a skilful Mason, must not suppose that the task is accomplished by a perfect knowledge of the mere phraseology of the ritual, by a readiness in opening and closing a lodge, nor by an off-hand capacity to confer degrees. All these are good in their places, but without the internal meaning they are *but mere child's play*. He must study the myths, the traditions, and the symbols of the order, and learn their true interpretation;

for this alone constitutes the science and the philosophy--the end, aim, and design of Speculative Masonry.

RW Bro RC Wakely

District Grand Master