

“Freemasonry and the Ancient Gods”

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CHAPTER XV

THE MYTHOS

THE legend of H. A. is one of the most dramatic stories in existence, and its very simplicity adds rather than detracts from its dramatic force. Yet there is little evidence in support of its historic truth. What evidence we have actually contradicts the chief incident. The Bible tells us that H. A. finished his work, and Josephus relates that he returned to his own country and lived there to a ripe old age. The fact that Josephus should mention that he lived to a ripe old age makes one wonder whether the alternative version of the story was already in existence and known to him. A Rabbinical tradition states that Solomon ordered the slaughter of all those who had assisted at the building of the Temple lest they should afterwards build temples to the false gods; but there is not the slightest evidence in favour of this tradition, and on the contrary everything to render it antecedently improbable.

But the story as we know it bears a striking resemblance to several known solar myths. The Egyptian story of Osiris and Horus, the Norse legend of the murder of Baldur, and the Palestinian myth of the death of Adonis, all tell in a dramatic form the allegory of the sun which dies each day and rises on the next, and, still more, the overthrow of summer by winter and the resurrection of the sun and with it of all life in the spring. Now it will be noted that Adonis was a local deity of the Syrian and Palestinian coast, and, further, it will be remembered that in the Egyptian legend the body of Osiris in its ark or chest was washed ashore at Byblos, the city of Adonis, and lodged in a tamarisk-tree, a shrub similar to the acacia. Here we are able to link the acacia. Adonis and Osiris, Egypt, Phoenicia, and Palestine together.

H. A. was a Phoenician, and this is not without its significance. Further, a large part of the workmen who built the Temple are said to have been Egyptians, and H. K. of T. was of course a Phoenician. Phoenician characters have been found on the foundation stones of the great Temple of K. S., and, though I have not heard that any Egyptian characters were found there, we know that Egyptian workmen were employed. Thus we get a strong Phoenician and a weaker Egyptian blending of two elements. But there is another Biblical character, Adoniram; surely this is no one else than Adonis Hiram. If, then, the origin of our story is derived mainly from the tale of Adonis, we see how it could be connected with H. A. But, further, the name of Adonis is the Greek version of the god's name rather than the Syrian, and if this be so we obtain evidence of the Greek influence and the Dionysian artificers. Finally, we perceive that a mixed body of men drawn from various nations and each with its own national gods might refuse to reverence a local Syrian god like Adonis, but would willingly unite in honouring the name of the great architect and skilled craftsman of the Temple. Very strict Jews who were drawn into the craft at a later date would have bitterly opposed any reference to the Phoenician god Adonis, but would see no reason why they should not commemorate the actions of H. A. the man. As time passed and those who knew H. A. in the flesh passed away, the tendency would be for the masons to associate with his name much of their mystery lore.

It should be carefully noted that H. A. is not a true Jew. He is a Phoenician and the subject of a Phoenician king. Nor is there any evidence that the Jews themselves were builders or skilled at all in masonry. On the contrary, all the evidence goes to show that they were at that time a race of shepherds and small farmers, and Solomon had to import aliens to build his Temple. These would, of course, have their own local faiths, among which the cult of Adonis would naturally be one of the strongest. But the masons excluded women, and in their version there was no room for a woman; so we have no woman of any kind, not even Isis, the loving sister wife. Moreover, it is not an elaborate allegory such as that of Osiris, for, though there is a distinct hint of the doctrine of the Resurrection, it is but a hint and nothing more. In the story of Osiris it is made abundantly plain that Osiris rises from the dead and reigns as King of Heaven, but we are left only with the solitary light in the East, the light of hope that he did rise. It is a simple legend, and, like all that appertains to the craft, it can be accepted by all because it does not dogmatise. In short, the mysteries of many lands were mingled together at the beginning of K. S.'s Temple. No doubt the men who came to build it imbibed some of the Jewish ideas of God. These would appeal to them, for in their mysteries they had learnt, as a great and terrible secret, that all the gods were but forms of the one true God, and at Jerusalem they found themselves building a temple to Him where He could be worshipped openly. This discovery probably explains the vast importance which the Building Guilds henceforth attached to the building of this particular Temple.

But to make the matter clearer, we must ask ourselves what was the organisation which erected the Temple. That it was an elaborate and highly organised body of workmen is plain, not only from masonic legend, but from the account in the Bible itself. The true explanation seems to be that they were the body later known as the Dionysian Artificers.

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H. J. Da Costa, in 1820, in a *Sketch for the History of the Dionysian Artificers: a Fragment*, gives most interesting details of this Guild, and Laurie, in his *History of Masonry*, chapter i, draws on Da Costa, who quotes numerous authorities for the existence of this body, who must not be confounded with the play-actors who were later known by the same name. Strabo, in his *Geography*, lib. xiv, 921, wrote of them: "Lebedos was the seat and assembly of the Dionysian Artificers who inhabit Ionia to the Hellespont; there they had annually their solemn meetings and festivals in honour of Bacchus." Robertson, in his *Greece*, tells us they were a secret society having signs and words to distinguish their members, and used emblems taken from the art of building, quoting Eusebius, *de Prep. Evang.* iii, c. 12, in support of these statements. Why Waite should ignore them it is difficult to say, for their existence,

which seems to be completely proved, explains many things. They appear to have arrived in Phoenicia and Asia Minor about fifty years before the building of the Temple of K. S., and Strabo traces them through Syria, Persia, and India, and their existence would explain the masonic legends in China to which we have already referred. If they reached India there is no reason why they should not have reached China in small parties, and it would be from them that the strange society who taught their tenets by symbolising architectural tools and wove their legends round a mysterious temple set in a desert would have derived their inspiration.

I fail to see how the evidence of Strabo and Eusebius can be lightly brushed away. On the contrary, they usually carry great weight, and I hold that the Dionysian Artificers are the link which completes the chain of descent connecting modern Freemasonry with the ancient mysteries and the still more ancient initiatory rites. We know that in its original form the legend of Dionysos was very similar to that of Adonis ; and if we want further corroborative evidence we have it in that apparently strange statement of Josephus that the architecture of K. S.'s Temple was of the style called Grecian. " What, Grecian architecture in the days of King Solomon! " most people would exclaim, " why, it did not exist until nearly five hundred years later: Josephus was wandering." But was he? After all, was he not trying to explain that it was the prototype of Grecian, as distinct from Egyptian or Assyrian work, built by the men who, when they reached Greece, evolved the style we now regard as Grecian, and that it was not a mere repetition of ancient Egyptian or Assyrian styles ?