MASONIC TRADITION AND THE ROYAL ARCH

Part 1 of 2

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THE old distinction between Blue and Red has almost fallen into desuetude, so far as normal parlance is concerned, among members of the Craft in England; but we know that a memorial remains among us in the colour-symbolism found in the ROYAL ARCH.
The Blue also connotes Symbolical Masonry, and this is a valid qualification, because the Third Degree opens a door into a great figurative Mystery as into the blue distance.
It is not of our concern now but we might dwell for a moment on the significant fact that in Irish Craft workings the Candidate is told invariably that even the official and conventional penalties of the Three Degrees are to be regarded as a part integral of the symbolism which rules in all.
The ROYAL ARCH, or Red Masonry, has passed by its hypothesis out the symbolical domain: on the surface, at least, it is dealing no longer with allegory, but with an actual historical event. According to that version of the Holy Order which is at work in England and Wales, under the obedience of the Supreme Grand Chapter, it belongs – as we are all well aware - to the time of Zerubbabel and the building of the Second Temple.
With certain variations, which are not essential in character, it is the same, I believe, in Scotland and the United States & Canada
In Ireland the historical time of the Grade is much later, being that of Josiah the King, but of this I am unable to speak except by report, as there are no Rituals available.
There is a sense, however, in which all differences draw to the same end, for all are concerned with the central fact of a Secret Tradition, perpetuated by its hypothesis from an immemorial past, derived originally from sources behind Masonry and carried from Degrees leading up to the ROYAL ARCH, through the Holy Order itself and thence into Christian and some other High Grades.

It is a remarkable fact that on the surface of the Craft Degrees there is practically no intimation of this traditional inheritance. The presumable explanation is that those who constructed the Legend of the Third Degree, following any vestiges which may have come into hands of the 18th Century from the part of York or Scotland, had a mind to follow - a little roughly and crudely the lines of the Ancient Mysteries concerning figurative death and resurrection.
A signal confusion followed, for they slew the prototypical Master, whereas they raised the Candidate, creating a complete fissure in the logic of symbolism. So it has remained among us, but something like sixty years after the approximate date of construction, the Loge de la Bienfaisance at Lyons, which transmuted the RITE OF THE STRICT OBSERVANCE, intervened to save the situation, so far as French Masonry was concerned, and in the Grade of PERFECT MASTER of St. Andrew they raised Hiram as Christ.
If we pursue the subject of confusion from another point of departure, we know that - by the hypothesis of the Third Degree - the Temple of Solomon was left unfinished, like the legend itself, from which consideration of simple fact it follows that any completion of the Third Degree should take up the Hiramic myth at the point where its story broke off, and lead it to an end in symbolism.

Now we are familiar, and more than familiar, with the affirmation concerning the ROYAL ARCH, which is (1) that it is not to be regarded as in any sense a further Degree superposed upon the Craft, but (2) rather as a completion of the whole.

So far, however, from concluding the Hiramic myth it leaves unabridged in Ritual a gap of several centuries, understood as historical time, and jumps to an examination of certain legendary events connected with preliminaries to the building of the Second Temple in the days of Zerubbabel.

It follows that the Third Degree – historically speaking - is a story without an end, like Canova's German romance, while the ROYAL ARCH is a prolegomenon to another story, which story is not to be found in Masonry.

The sense in which the one is supplementary to the other is a matter of the Secret Tradition, a formula of loss and recovery, according to which the Holy Order seeks to elevate the Craft out of a region of encinctured symbolism to the threshold of Divine Science. It could have been done in a logical manner, preserving all the unities, and it so happens that the necessary elements were ready to the hands of the symbolists, if we can suppose as I think, is possible – that certain so-called side grades, or steps, were already existing in some primitive form.

In this case the ROYAL ARCH has been lifted out of a sequence to which it belongs essentially, and apart from which its real message is divided and confused, if it must not be called lost.

My purpose is to collect the links of the broken chain and then join them up.

If the question be why does the Craft Candidate pass through a figurative experience which connotes the idea of death, and then through a shadow of resurrection, the answer is that the god died and rose in the Ancient Mysteries, as in the great proto typical example which is that of Osiris. He was of the Divine Pantheon, and he returned thereto, as to former companions at once of toil and attainment. So also Iacchos was torn to pieces, but again he was restored to life; Tammuz died and rose; the dead Adonis was given back to the arms of Venus, even as Persephone to Demeter. If it be asked, on the other hand, why in the ROYAL ARCH there is a quest followed ad interiora terra and a discovery consequent thereon, the answer is that this is precisely the thesis concerning the preservation of a Secret Tradition, which descended from Adam, of which Enoch was a notable custodian, which came down to the time of Solomon and is carried thereafter through several eloquent memorials of Masonic Rite. It was not invented by Masonry, and if I speak here only of the mythos in Israel it is not peculiar thereto, though it appears under other aspects in other regions of traditional lore. Before linking up briefly the chain of Ritual, it is necessary to make a proviso with respect to the sources.

They are texts of what I am accustomed to call the Greater Exile of Israel, being that of the Christian centuries, and they are three in number: (1) The TALMUD BABLI; (2) The TALMUD HIEROSOLYMAE, and (3) The SEPHER HA ZOHAR. The last is the latest of all in respect of time, its final reduction being referred by scholarship to the 13th Century, though it contains old elements. It is the great text of the Secret Tradition in Israel, and this - according to the ZOHAR - began with Adam, for Latin theology and that which is termed Cabalism meet unawares, and seem to clasp hands over things appertaining to the hypothetical state of unfallen man in Paradise. It was in a state of supernal know ledge, of the science which - by the theosophical hypothesis has its root in the Tree of Life, in the unity of Divine things, not in the duality and sophistication which is referable to the Tree of Knowledge. It is said that when the Holy One, blessed be He, created Adam, He exhorted him to advance in the path of goodness and revealed to him the Mystery of Wisdom. Adam contemplated, indeed, all wisdom and all highest mysteries. He was "encompassed by the glory from on high, “and was intended in the scheme of divine things to be united for ever with God, in Whose Image he had been made. But from the path of the Good and the One - all this notwithstanding - Adam fell into ways of separation and abandoned the Tree of Life, meaning the supreme theosophy of the inward Secret Doctrine. The penalty of this separation is described under the term death in the text of Genesis.

By the hypothesis of the ZOHAR, the Secret Doctrine, the Supreme Wisdom, in a word, that Hidden Treasure which was transmitted in perpetuity thereafter as a tradition through the ages, was communicated to the First Man by means of a book, which came down from heaven in the hands of the angel Raziel, and was delivered to Adam, the messenger in question being denominated Chief of Supreme Mysteries. It remained in the possession of Adam till he was driven out of the Garden, when it was ravished out of his hands. But as it is obvious that there could have been no Secret Tradition -such as was conceived by the mind of Israel - unless its depository were restored, so we hear in due course that in answer to his tears and entreaties it was given back in the end to

our progenitor by the angel Raphael. Adam transmitted it to Seth, from whom it passed to Enoch, who, after he was taken by God became the great angel Metatron, the Angel of the Presence and Chief of the Celestial school. It is said that the School of Metatron is the School of the Holy One, and that in his hands are the Keys of heaven. It came about for these reasons that the Secret Book is called the BOOK OF ENOCH, though it passed down ultimately to Abraham. Thereafter the ZOHAR is silent regarding its travels and whereabouts, but the Secret Tradition of which it is the source was communicated to the elders by Moses and thence, in the myth concerning it, through succeeding generations to the doctors of the Zoharic school, the chief repository at the time of the fall of Jerusalem being Rabbi Simeon ben Yochai.

From Zoharic Cabalism the tradition descended to the follies and iniquities of Jewish Ceremonial Magic, and so it comes about that in these dregs and lees there is a BOOK OF RAZIEL, which is a book of Divine Names and Conjurations based thereon. It is a favourable specimen of its class, in comparison with Keys of Solomon, texts of Goetia, Sworn Books of Honorius and things under the generic title of Grimoires; but it presents a corrupted form of the tradition concerning Enoch. Antecedent to the ZOHAR, as I have intimated, are certain Talmudic fables, which exceed the scope of this notice. Antecedent to both are Josephus and a comparatively ancient apocrypha of the apocalyptic class under the name of the BOOK OF ENOCH. To Josephus we owe the well-known myth concerning the Pillars of Stone and Brick, on which Enoch inscribed the Mysteries of Knowledge belonging to the age before the Flood: there are many variations of the legend, which concerns broadly the perpetuation of the Secret Tradition. It is not otherwise to our purpose. But the BOOK OF ENOCH, which is a series of visions beheld by the prophet when he was in the spirit, like the seer of Patmos, is a prototype of Masonic tradition and that especially which is reflected into the ROYAL ARCH. It is said that GOD shewed Enoch nine vaults in a vision, and that with the assistance of Methuselah his son, he proceeded to erect in the bosom of the mountain of Canaan a secret sanctuary, on the plan of what he had beheld, being vaults beneath one another.

In the ninth, or undermost vault, Enoch placed a triangle of purest gold, on which he had inscribed that which was presumably the heart, essence and centre of the Secret Tradition, the True Name of God, comprehending all grace, all power and the providence of Divine Mercy. It is the development of this legend which can be followed through several Grades and various Rites of Masonry, the root of all therein being referable to the Traditional History in the Third Craft Degree. We know that which it was attempted to wrest by violence from the keeping of the Master Builder: we know what he died to preserve inviolable, and though in reality it did not perish with him - because there were other Keepers -we know that Masonry suffered a loss through the centuries, and is represented as in the quest of its discovery in the Opening and Closing of the Lodge in the Master Grade. We know in fine what substitutes were accepted as distinctive tests, to prevail everywhere, until in some manner as yet unknown the term of quest should be reached and the pearl of great price restored. When Moses, Aholiab and Bezaleel sat in the Holy Lodge, at the foot of Mount Horeb, during the long wanderings of Israel in the desert of Sinai, by the great hypothesis of the tradition, they were in plenary possession of all the Masonic treasures. When Solomon and others of the triad, who ruled the Sacred Lodge, sat on Mount Moriah, it was still as if the sun were at its meridian, a noon-tide glory of Masonry. But a change came over, by which the triad was broken and the light of the Art was obscured. It seems to me that in the deeper understanding our Craft Lodges are a memorial of this original loss: it is a logical inference from all that we are told in the story and from that which we claim to seek; for it is with us as it was with those Brethren of old, who, after the passing of the Master-Builder, agreed – till they could do better - to be content with things casual, though they desired things essential, and with accidents in place of the noumenal. It is as if, having heard and followed a great call, and been long on the quest of God, it came about that - for want of a term - we had to rest satisfied with His image, or with unconsecrated Bread and Wine in place of the Higher Eucharist and the Holy Grail. Freemasonry is founded on the immutable laws of Truth and Justice and its grand object is to promote the happiness of the human race. WASHINGTON.