The Lost Tribes

Christians and Jewish scholars in the past twenty centuries were deeply concerned and pre-occupied with many absorbing speculations regarding the probable fate of the lost tribes of Israel.

The Jewish people, as well as the Christians, from time immemorial were encouraged with Messianic expectations. According to traditional belief, the salvation of the Jewish people could not be fulfilled until the gathering of all the scattered remnants of Israel had been accomplished. Then, and then only, will they be redeemed from their cruel sufferings.

We read in the Book of Ezekiel 37,21:- "Thus said the Lord God; Behold, I will take the Children of Israel from among the heathen, whither they be gone, and will gather them into their own land", and in 37;22 we read:- "And I will make them one nation in the land upon the mountains of Israel; and one king shall be king to them all, and they shall be no more two nations, neither shall they be divided into two kingdoms any more at all." Furthermore Ezekiel says:- "And the Most High will bring peace to all mankind."

From these quotations and prophecies, it is quite obvious why the pious Christians and Jews alike, look forward to the eventual discovery of the lost tribes, in order to achieve eternal peace on earth, for all men of goodwill. The history of the lost tribes is interwoven into a legendary romance. After the Israelites of the Northern Kingdom of Israel had been taken captive to Assyria by the emperors Tiglath-Pilezer and Shalmanazar (Sargon II) they vanished completely from historical view. We read in the Second Book of Kings 18,11:- "And the King of Assyria did carry Israel away into Assyria, and put them in Halah and Habor by the river Gozam, and in the cities of Medes."

Dramatic developments took place in the tenth century, when a traveller-merchant by the name of Eldad ben Mahli Ha-Deni, claimed to be a scholar from an independent Jewish State in east Africa. He declared that his country was the home of the lost tribes of Asher, Gad, Naphtali and Dan. He himself belonged to the tribe of Dan, as his name indicates. He left behind him a record of his travels, which probably constituted more legend than fact.

A semi-legendary medieval priest-ruler, Prater John, in his apocryphal letters relates to several Jewish tribes living beyond the River Sambatyon. Ever since, the subject of the ten lost tribes, and the mythical Sambatyon River, which threw up a protective rain of rocks during weekdays, and subsided on the Sabbath, did not fade from Jewish folklore.

A medieval English chronicler, Mathew-Paris, relates that during the Crusades some of the Tartars and Cumanians have been found to be of Israelitish descent, and that they have settled in the region of the Caspian Mountains.

In Abyssinia a tribe was found, called the Falashas, they claim to be descendants of the Israelites, who on order from King Solomon, accompanied by the Queen of Sheba on her return to her native land, and stayed on in that country during the reign of King Manilek, also called Ibn-Hakin (Son of the wise one). According to the Abyssinian legend, he was the son

of the wise King Solomon, and the Queen of Sheba. The present reigning monarch, Haille Selassie, (1965) claims to be the direct descendant of this union.

It is most surprising how many people claim and traditionally believe that they are the descendants of the ten lost tribes of Israel. The Christian Nestorians, many Georgians in Russia, certain Afghan tribes, the Mohammedan Berbers, even some Chinese and Japanese sects.

Companions, every degree in Freemasonry conveys to us a moral message and a lesson. The ceremonies enacted in our degree work, are meant to celebrate important events in the history of mankind, and to commemorate certain personalities who had an important bearing in shaping the course and destiny of mankind.

From this you have so far learned the speculation of historians as to the lot of the ten lost tribes. We learn about the survival of the Tribes of Judah and Benjamin (and the Levites and Priests). We also celebrate the discovery and survival of the Book of the Holy Law. We, in this degree, commemorate the name of the illustrious benevolent and tolerant King Cyrus, who, by his decree, was responsible for the return of the remnants of the Children of Israel to their homeland.

We immortalise the name of Prince Zerubbabel, the Prophet Haggai, and the High Priest Jeshua, all who have been responsible for building the second temple. Last but not least, we commemorate and immortalise the names of the two scribes, Ezra and Nehemiah, who were instrumental in the compiling and fusing of the V.S.L. and officially declaring it to be the Book of the Holy Law for the use of all mankind.

The above is an excerpt from a paper delivered by: M.E.C. Arnold Cotow Official Lecturer in 1996 for the City of Sydney R.A.C. of Research and Instruction. The paper was entitled: A Commentary on the Royal Arch Banners.