

CHAPTER V.

FREEMASONRY IN RELATION TO THE ANCIENT MYSTERIES.

EVERY Mason is naturally desirous to know something of the origin and history of the Craft. The available literature on the subject is diffuse and unsatisfying. It offers a mass of disconnected details of archæology and comparative religion without unifying them into any helpful light and deals rather with matters of minor and temporal history than with what alone is of real moment, the spiritual lineage of the Craft. In this paper, therefore, it is proposed to trace a rough outline – and, in the space available, only a very rough one is possible – of a movement which is as old as humanity itself and the purpose and doctrine of which are still faithfully, if very rudimentarily, preserved in the Masonic system. But such a sketch, by providing a general outline for the enquirer to contemplate and the details of which he may fill in for himself by subsequent study of his own, may perhaps prove more serviceable than a mass of fragmentary facts over which one may pore indefinitely and with much interest, yet without perceiving their inter-relation or coordinating them into one comprehensive impressive scheme.

No really serviceable work upon Masonry exists that treats of its history and purpose in the only way that matters vitally. The student is apt to waste much time to little profit by turning for information to publications the titles of which seem to promise full enlightenment, but that leave him unsatisfied and unconvinced. Desultory collections of information upon points of symbolism, archæology and anthropology, the tracing of connections between modern Masonry and mediæval building-guilds and other communities may be all very interesting, but these are but as the dry bones of a subject of which one desires to know the living spirit. They fail to answer the main questions one asks from the heart and is anxious to have answered; such as, What was the nature of the Ancient Mysteries of which modern Masonry purports to be the perpetuation? To what end and purpose did they exist? What need is there to perpetuate them to-day? For what purpose was Initiation instituted? Did it at any time serve any real purpose or can it now? Was it ever more than it is to-day, a mere perfunctory ceremonial leading to nothing of essential value and emphasizing only a few moral principles and elementary truths which we know already? It is to answering such questions as these that the present paper is directed.

Now one of the first things to strike any student of Masonic literature and comparative religion is the remarkable presence of common factors, common beliefs, doctrines, practices and symbols, in the religions of all races alike, whether ancient or modern, eastern or western, civilized or barbarian, Christian or pagan. However separated from others by time or distance, however intellectualized or primitive, however elaborated or simple their religion or morals, and however wide their differences in important respects, each people is found to have employed and still to be employing certain ideas, symbols and practices in common with every other; perhaps with or without some slight modification of form. Masonic treatises abound with demonstrations of this uniformity in the use of various symbols prominent in every Lodge. Authors delight in supplying evidence of the close correspondences in various unrelated systems and in demonstrating how ancient and universal such and such ideas, symbols and practices have been. But they do not go so far

as to explain the reason for this antiquity and universality, and it is this point which it will be well to clear up at the outset, since it furnishes the clue to the entire problem of the genesis, the history, and the reason for the existence of Masonry.

If research and reflection be pushed far enough it becomes clear that the universality and uniformity referred to are due to the fact that at one time, long back in the world's past, there existed or was implanted in the minds of the whole human family – which was doubtless much smaller and more concentrated then than now – a Proto-Evangelium or Root-Doctrine in regard to the nature and destiny of the soul of man and its relation to the Deity. We of to-day pride ourselves upon being wiser and more advanced than primitive humanity. We assume that our ancestors lived in moral benightedness out of which we have since gradually emerged into comparative light. All the evidence, however, negatives these suppositions. It indicates that primitive man, however childish and intellectually undeveloped according to modern standards, was spiritually conscious and psychically perceptive to a degree undreamed of by the modern mind, and that it is ourselves who, for all our cleverness and intellectual development in temporal matters, are nevertheless plunged in darkness and ignorance about our own nature, the invisible world around us, and the eternal spiritual verities. In all Scriptures and cosmologies the tradition is universal of a "Golden Age," an age of comparative innocence, wisdom and spirituality, in which racial unity and individual happiness and enlightenment prevailed; in which there was that open vision for want of which a people perisheth, but in virtue of which men were once in conscious conversation with the unseen world and were shepherded, taught and guided by the "gods" or discarnate superintendents of the infant race, who imparted to them the sure and indefeasible principles upon which their spiritual welfare and evolution depended.

The tradition is also universal of the collective soul of the human race having sustained a "fall," a moral declension from its true path of life and evolution, which has severed it almost entirely from its creative source, and which, as the ages advanced, has involved its sinking more and more deeply into physical conditions, its splitting up from a unity employing a single language into a diversity of conflicting races of different speeches and degrees of moral advancement, accompanied by a progressive densification of the material body and a corresponding darkening of the mind and atrophy of the spiritual consciousness. To some who read this the statement will probably be rejected as fabulous and incredible. The supposition of a "fall of man" is nowadays an unpopular doctrine, rejected by many who contend that everything points rather to a rise of man, yet who fail to reflect that logically a rise necessarily involves an antecedent fall from which a rise becomes possible. This point, however, we cannot stop to discuss and must be content merely with indicating what in both the Scriptures of all races and the Wisdom-tradition of the sages of antiquity is unanimously recorded to be the fact.

From that "fall," which was not due to the transgression of an individual, but to some weakness or defect in the collective or group-soul of the Adamic race, and which was not the matter of a moment but a process covering vast time-cycles, it was necessary and within the Divine counsels and providence that humanity should be redeemed and restored to its pristine state; that it should be brought back once more into vital association with the Divine Principle from which by its secession it became increasingly detached, as its materialistic tendencies overpowered and quenched its native spirituality. This restoration in turn required vast time-cycles for its achievement. And it required something further. It required the application of an orderly and scientific method to effect the restoration of each

fallen soul-fragment and bring it back to its primitive pure and perfect condition. I emphasize that the method was necessarily to be not a haphazard, but a scientific one. Anyone may fall from a housetop and break his bones; skilled surgery and intelligent effort by some friendly hand are required to heal the patient and get him back to the place he fell from. So with humanity. It fell – out of Eden, as our Scriptures describe the lapse from super-physical to physical conditions – why and how, again we must not stay to enquire. It fell, through inherent weakness and lack of wisdom. Unable to effect its own recovery it required skilled scientific assistance from other sources to bring about its restoration. Whence could come that skill and scientific knowledge if not from the Divine and now invisible world, from those "gods" and angelic guardians of the erring race of whom all the ancient traditions and sacred writings tell? Would not that regenerative method be properly described if it were called, as in Masonry it is called, a "heavenly science," and welcomed in the words that Masons in fact use, "Hail, Royal Art!"?

Thus, then, was the origin and birth of Religion. And Religion is a word implying a "binding back" (re-ligare). As with the setting and bandaging a broken limb, so the collective soul of humanity, fractured and comminuted by its fall into countless individuations and their subsequent respective progenies, each separately damaged and imperfect, needed to be restored to the condition from which it had become dislocated and once more built up into a perfect harmonious whole.

To the spiritual guardians of primitive man, then, one must attribute the communication of that universal science of rebuilding the fallen temple of humanity, of which science we now surprisedly find traces in every race and religion of the world. To this source we must credit the distribution, in every land and among every people, of the same or equivalent symbols, practices and doctrines, modified only locally and in accordance with the intelligence of particular peoples, yet all manifesting a common root and purpose.

This was the one Holy Catholic (or universal) Religion "throughout all the world"; at once a theoretic doctrine and a practical science intended to reunite man to his Maker. That religion could only be one, as it could not be otherwise than catholic and for all men equally and alike; though, owing to the perverse distortive tendencies of humanity itself, it was susceptible of becoming (as has so happened) debased and sectarianized into as many forms as there are peoples. Moreover, its main principles could never be susceptible of alteration, though they might be (as they have been) exoterically understood by some and esoterically by others, and their full import would not all at once be apparent, but develop with increasing fidelity to and understanding of them. It provided the unalterable "landmarks" of knowledge concerning human nature, human potentialities and human destiny. It laid down the ancient and established "usages and customs" to be followed at all times by everyone content to accept its discipline and which none might deviate from or add innovations to, save at his own peril. It was the "Sacred Law" for the guidance of the fallen soul, a law valid from the dawn of time till its sunset, and of which it is written "As it was in the beginning, is now and ever shall be, world without end." It was the science of life – of temporal limited life lived with the intention of its conversion and sublimation into eternal universal life; and, therefore, it called for a scientific or philosophic method of living, every moment and action of which should be directed to that great goal; – a method very different from the modern method, which is entirely utilitarian in its outlook and totally unscientific in its conduct.

This Proto-Religion is related to have originated in the East, from which proverbially all light comes, and, as humanity itself became diffused and distributed over the globe, to have gradually spread towards the West, in a perpetual watchfulness of humanity's spiritual interests and an unfailing purpose to retrieve "that which was lost" – the fallen human soul. We have already said that in early times the humanity then under its influence was far less materialized and far more spiritually sensitive and perceptive than it subsequently became or is now; and accordingly it follows that with the increasing age and density of the race the influence of the Proto-Religion itself became correspondingly diminished, though its principles remained as valid and effective as before; for the self-willed vagaries and speculative conceptions of man cannot alter the principles of static Truth and Wisdom. To follow in any detail the course of its history is not now necessary and would require a long treatise. And to do so would also be like following the course of a river backwards from its broad mouth to a point where it becomes an insignificant and scarcely traceable channel. For the race itself has wandered backwards, farther and farther from the original Wisdom-teaching, so that the once broad and bright flood of light upon cosmic principles and the evolution of the human soul has now become contracted into minute points. But that light, like that of a Master Mason, has never been wholly extinguished, however dark the age, and, by the tradition, this of ours is spiritually the darkest of the dark ages. "God has never left Himself without a witness among the children of men," and among the witnesses to the Ancient Wisdom and Mysteries is the system of Masonry; a faint and feeble flicker, perhaps, but nevertheless a true light and in the true line of succession of the primitive doctrine, and one still able to guide our feet into the way of peace and perfection.

The earliest teaching of the Mysteries traceable within historic time was in the Orient and in the language known as Sanscrit – a name itself significant and appropriate, for it means Holy Writ or "Sanctum Scriptum"; and for very great lights upon the ancient Secret Doctrine one must still refer to the religious and philosophical scriptures of India, which was in its spiritual and temporal prime when modern Europe was frozen beneath an ice-cap.

But races, like men, have their infancy, manhood and old age; they are but units, upon a larger scale than the individual, for furthering the general life-purpose. When a given race has served or failed in that purpose, the stewardship of the Mysteries passes on to other and more effectual hands. The next great torch-bearer of the Light of the world was Egypt, which, after many centuries of spiritual supremacy, in turn became the arid desert it now is both spiritually and materially, leaving nevertheless a mass of structural and written relics still testifying to its possession of the Doctrine in the days of its glory. From Egypt, as civilizations developed in adjoining countries, a great irradiation of them took place by the diffusion of its knowledge and the institution of minor centres for the imparting of the Divine Science in Chaldea, Persia, Greece and Asia Minor. "Out of Egypt have I called My son" is, in one of its many senses, a biblical allusion to this passing on of the catholic Mysteries from Egypt to new and virgin regions, for their enlightenment.

Of these various translations those that concern us chiefly are two; the one to Greece, the other to Palestine. We know from the Bible that Moses was an initiate of the Egyptian mysteries and became learned in all its wisdom, while Philo tells us that Moses there became "skilled in music, geometry, arithmetic, hieroglyphics and the whole circle of arts and sciences." In other words he became in a real sense a Master Mason and, as such, qualified himself for his subsequent great task of leadership of the Hebrew people and the

formulating of their religious system and rule of life as laid down in the Pentateuch. The Mosaic system continued, as we know, along the channel indicated in the books of the Old Testament, and then, after many centuries and vicissitudes, effloresced in the greatest of all expressions of the Mysteries, as disclosed in the Gospels of the New Testament (or New Witness), involving the supersession of all previous systems under the Supreme Grand Mastership of Him who is called the Light of the World and its Saviour.

Concurrently with the existence of the Hebrew Mysteries under the Mosaic dispensation, the great Greek school of the Mysteries was developing, which, originating in the Orphic religion, culminated and came to a focus at Delphi and generated the philosophic wisdom and the æsthetic glories associated with Athens and the Periclean age. Greece was the spiritual descendant and infant prodigy of both India and Egypt, though developing along quite different lines. We know that Pythagoras, like Moses, after absorbing all his native teachers could impart, journeyed to Egypt to take his final initiation prior to returning and founding the great school at Crotona associated with his name. We know, too, from the *Timæus* of Plato how aspirants for mystical wisdom visited Egypt for initiation and were told by the priests of Sais that "you Greeks are but children" in the Secret Doctrine, but were admitted to information enabling them to promote their own spiritual advancement. We know from the correspondence, recorded by Iamblichus, between Anebo and Porphyry, the fraternal relations existing between the various schools or lodges of instruction in different lands; how their members visited, greeted and assisted one another in the secret science, the more advanced being obliged, as every initiate still is when called upon, to "afford assistance and instruction to his brethren in the inferior degrees." And we know that at the Nativity – or shall we say the installation in this world – of the Great Master, there came to Him from afar Magi or initiate-visitors who knew of His impending advent and had seen His star in the East and desired to acknowledge and pay Him reverence. In all these world-moving incidents in times when initiation was a real event and not a mere ceremonial form as now, it is of interest to notice the practice upon a grand scale of the same customs and courtesies as are still observed, though alas unintelligently, by the Craft of to-day.

We must now speak more fully of the Mysteries and the "Royal Art" as pursued by the Greek school. With the Greeks it took the form of a quest of philosophy; i.e., for wisdom, for the Sophia, just as in the Hebrew and Christian schools it took the form of a quest for the Lost Word. The end was of course the same in both cases, but the approach to it was by different means and, as we shall see, the two methods coalesced into one at a later date. The Greek approach was primarily an intellectual one and by what Spinoza has termed *Amor intellectualis Dei*. The Christian approach was primarily through the affections and the adoration of the heart. Both strained after "that which was lost," but one sought after the lost ideal by intellectual and the other by devotional energy. Humanity is but slowly educated; "line upon line; precept upon precept; here a little and there a little," one faculty after another being developed and trained unto the refashioning of the perfect organism. And if philosophic Wisdom and the sense of Beauty stood forth – as they did stand forth – most prominently as the main pillars of the Greek system, the Greeks had yet to learn of a third and middle pillar that synthesized and comprised them both – that of the Strength of the supreme virtue of Love, when towards the object of all desire it pours from a pure and perfect heart.

The Greek's quest of wisdom was something much more than a mere desire for larger information and maturer judgment about one's place in the universe. Merely to know certain facts about the hidden side of life profits nothing unless the knowledge is allowed to influence and adapt our method of living to the truths disclosed. Then the knowledge becomes transmuted into wisdom; one becomes the truth one sees; and a man's life becomes truth made substantial and dynamic. But to bring this about one must first be informed about or initiated into certain elements of the truth and be persuaded that it is truth before setting about to become it. The Greek method, therefore, began by initiating the mind into certain truths about the soul's own nature, history, destiny and potentialities, and then left the individual to follow up the information by a course of conduct in which the teaching imparted would become converted into assured conviction and living power, whilst his increasing progress in the science would itself result in awakening him to still deeper truths.

It cannot be too strongly emphasized that no one can learn spiritual science, whether as taught by Masonry or any other system inculcating it, without submitting himself to its processes and living them out in practical experience. In this supreme study, knowing depends entirely upon doing; comprehension is conditional upon and the corollary of action. "He that will do the will shall know of the doctrine."

Hence it is that in Masonry an installed Master is still called a "Master of Arts and Sciences," for he is supposed to have mastered the art of living in accordance with the theoretic gnosis or science imparted to him in the course of his progress. Real Masonic knowledge will never be achieved merely by oral explanation, hearing lectures and studying books. These may be useful in giving a preliminary start to earnest seekers needing but a little guidance to set them on that path of personal practice and experience where they will soon develop an automatic understanding of the doctrine for themselves; for those with but a casual dilettante interest the doctrine will continue veiled and secret. For example, it is one thing to hear explained what is meant by being divested of money and metals in the philosophic sense; it is quite another to have become insusceptible to all attraction by material interests and sense-allurements and to be consciously possessed of the wisdom accruing from that experience. It may interest to be told why, at a certain stage of progress, the candidate is likened to an ear of corn by a fall of water; but the explanation will be forgotten to-morrow, unless as the result of his own effort the hearer has become personally aware of an inward substantial growth ripening to harvest within him from the ground of his own being and fertilized by supersensual nourishment falling like the gentle rain from heaven upon his ardent and aspiring soul. Again, it may seem instructive to know that the great ritual of the Third Degree signifies a death unto sin and self and a new birth unto righteousness, but how will the information profit those who nevertheless mean to go on living the old manner of life, which at every moment negates all that that ritual implies?

The Ancient Mysteries, then, involved much more than a merely notional philosophy. They required also a philosophic method of living – or rather of dying. For as Socrates said (in Plato's *Phædo*, from which much Masonic teaching is directly drawn and which every Masonic student should study deeply) "the whole study of the philosopher (or wisdom-seeker) is nothing else than to die and be dead"; an assertion repeated by Plutarch, "to be initiated is to die"; and by the Christian apostle, "I die daily." Their method was divided into two parts, the Lesser and the Greater Mysteries. The Lesser were those in which the more elementary instruction was imparted, so that candidates might forthwith set about to

purify and adapt their lives to the truths disclosed. The Greater Mysteries related to the developments of consciousness within the soul itself, as the result of fidelity to the prescribed rule of life. To draw a faint analogy, the Lesser Mysteries bore the same relation to the Greater as the present Craft Degrees do to the Holy Royal Arch.

To deal adequately with the Mystery-systems would involve a lengthy study in itself. We will refer to but one of the most famous of them, the Eleusinian, which existed in Greece and for several centuries was the focus-point of religion and philosophy for the then civilized portion of Europe. "Eleusis" means light, and initiation into the Mysteries of Eleusis, therefore, meant a quest of the aspirant for light, in precisely the same, but a far more real, sense as the modern Mason declares light to be the predominant wish of his heart. It meant, as it ought to mean to-day but does not, not merely light in the sense of being given some secret information not obtainable elsewhere or about any matter of worldly interest, but the opening up of the candidate's whole intellectual and spiritual nature in the super-sensual light of the Divine world and raising him to God-consciousness. The ordinary and uninitiated man knows nothing of that super-sensual light by his merely natural reason; he is conscious only of the outer world and things perceptible by his natural faculties. In the words of St. Paul "the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness unto him; neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned." Initiation, therefore, meant a process whereby natural man became transformed into spiritual or ultra-natural man, and to effect this it was necessary to change his consciousness, to gear it to a new and higher principle, and so, as it were, make of him a new man in the sense of attaining a new method of life and a new outlook upon the universe. "Be ye transformed by the renewing of your minds," says the Apostle, referring to this process. As has previously been shown in these papers, the transference of the symbol of the Divine Presence from the ceiling to the floor of the Masonic Lodge is to indicate how the Vital and Immortal Principle in man can be brought down from his remoter psychological region into his physical organism and function there through his body and brain, thus as it were dislocating and superseding his natural mentality and regenerating him. This truth is still further reproduced in Masonry by the name "Lewis," traditionally associated with the Craft. "Lewis" is a modern corruption of Eleusis and of other Greek and Latin names associated with Light. In our instruction Lectures it is said to designate "the son of a Mason." This, however, has no reference to human parentage and sonship. It refers to the mystical birth of the Divine Light in oneself; as a familiar Scriptural text has it, "Unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given." It is the Divine Principle, the Divine Wisdom, brought to birth and function within the organism of the natural man, who virtually becomes its parent. It is further described in our Lectures as something "which when properly dovetailed into a stone forms a clamp, enabling Masons to lift great weights with little inconvenience whilst fixing them on their proper bases." All which is a concealed way of expressing the fact that, when the Divine Light is brought forward from man's submerged depths and firmly grafted or dovetailed into his natural organism, he then becomes able easily to grapple with difficulties, problems and "weights" of all kinds which to the unregenerate are insuperable, and to perceive all things sub specie æternitatis and in their true relations, as is not possible to other men who behold them only sub specie temporis and are consequently unable to judge their real values and "fix them on their proper bases."

In the time that the Mysteries flourished, every educated man entered them in the same way that men enter a University in modern times. They were the recognized source of instruction in the only things that really matter, those affecting the culture of the human soul and its education in the science of itself and its divine nature. Candidates were graded according to their moral efficiency and their intellectual or spiritual stature. For years they underwent disciplinary intellectual exercises and bodily asceticism, punctuated at intervals by appropriate tests and ordeals to determine their fitness to proceed to the more serious, solemn and awful processes of actual initiation, administered only to the duly qualified, and which were of a secret and closely guarded character. Their education, differing greatly from the scholastic methods of a utilitarian age like our own, was directed solely to the cultivation of the "four cardinal virtues" and the "seven liberal arts and sciences" as qualifications prerequisite to participation in the higher order of life to which initiation would eventually admit the worthy and properly prepared candidate. The construction put upon these virtues and sciences was a much more advanced one than the modern mind considers adequate. Virtues with them were more than abstractions and ethical sentiments; as the word itself implies they involved positive valours and virility of soul. Temperance involved complete control of the passional nature under every circumstance; Fortitude, the courage that no adversity will dismay or deflect from the goal in view; Prudence, the deep insight that begets the prophetic or forward-seeing faculty of seer-ship (providentia); Justice, unswerving righteousness of thought and action. [¹] The "arts and sciences" were called "liberal" because they tended to liberate the soul from defects and illusions normally enslaving it, thus totally differing from science in the modern sense, the tendency of which is, as we know, materialistic and soul-benumbing. Grammar, Logic and Rhetoric with the Ancients were disciplines of the moral nature, by which the irrational tendencies of a human being were purged away and he was trained to become a living witness of the universal Logos and a living mouth-piece of the Divine Word. Geometry and Arithmetic were sciences of transcendental space and numeration (seeing that, as in the words of our own Scriptures, God has "made everything by measure, number and weight"), the comprehension of which provides the key, not only to the problems of one's being, but to those physical ones which are found so baffling by the inductive methods of to-day. Astronomy for them required no telescopes; it dealt not with the stars of the sky, but was the science of metaphysics and the understanding of the distribution of the forces latent in, and determining the destiny of, individuals, nations and the race. Finally Music (or Harmony) was for them not of the vocal or instrumental kind; it meant the living practice of philosophy, the adjustment of human life into harmony with God, until the personal soul became unified with Him and consciously heard, because it now participated

in, the music of the spheres. As Milton puts it: –

"How lovely is Divine Philosophy,
Not harsh and crabbed as dull fools suppose,
But musical as is Apollo's lute
And a perpetual feast of nectar'd sweets
Where no crude surfeit reigns."

Every possible device was employed and practised to train the mind to acquire dominion over the passions and to loosen and detach it from the impressions and attractions of the

1 The four cardinal virtues are referred to in both Plato's *Phædo* and the *Book of Wisdom*, ch. viii, 5-7, indicating community of teaching between the Greek and Hebrew schools.

senses, to destroy the illusions and false imaginations under which it labours when using no higher light than its own, and to qualify it for a higher method of cognition and for the reception of supersensual truth and the light of the Divine world. The idealism of Greek architecture and sculpture was entirely due to the same motive and with a view to elevating the imagination beyond the visible level and fitting the mind for the apprehension of ultra-physical form and beauty. Even athletic exercises were made to subserve the same purpose; wrestling and racing were not vulgar sports; they were regarded sacramentally, as the type of combats the soul must engage in against the competition of the fleshly desires; and the victor's crown of laurel or olive was the emblem of wisdom and illumination resulting to him in whom the spirit conquers the flesh. Thus every intellectual and physical interest was made subservient to the one idea of separating the soul from material bondage and was purposely of a purifying or "cathartic" nature that should cleanse the thoughts and desires of the aspirant and make him white within and without even as the modern candidate for the

Craft is clothed in white. This inward purity of heart and mind, coupled with the possession of the four cardinal virtues, was and still is an absolute essential to the ordeals of actual initiation, which otherwise rendered the candidate liable to insanity and obsessions of which the modern mind in its ignorance of what initiation involves can form no opinion. Those who became proficient and properly prepared in this curriculum of the Lesser Mysteries were eventually admitted to initiation in the Greater Mysteries. Those who failed to qualify were restrained from advancement. As now, the numbers of really earnest and qualified aspirants were only a percentage of the total of those who entered the Mysteries, for in the spiritual life, as in the world of nature, the biological phenomenon prevails that the available raw material greatly exceeds the perfected product. Every year far more seeds are borne, far more eggs are laid or spawned, than reach maturity, although every seed and egg is potentially capable of growth and fruition. Plato, speaking of the Mysteries in his own day, quotes a still older authority that "the thyrsus-bearers [²] (or candidates for initiation) are numerous, but the Bacchuses (or perfected initiates) are few." The same truth is restated in the words in the Gospels, "Many are called, but few are chosen."

One qualification above all was essential to the aspirant, as it is still to-day, – humility. The wisdom into which the Mysteries and initiation admit a man is foolishness to the world; it is a reversal and revolution of all orthodox and academic standards. To attain it a man must be prepared for that complete and voluntary self-denial which may involve his finding negated everything he has previously held to be true, or which those among whom he ordinarily mingles believe to be true. He must be content to "become a fool for the kingdom of heaven's sake" and to suffer adversity, ridicule and obloquy for it if needs be. This was one of the prime reasons for secrecy and one – though not the only one – of the origins of the Masonic injunction as to secrecy. The world's wisdom and that to which initiation admits are so antipodal in their nature that any intrusion of the latter will infallibly provoke resentment from the former. Hence it is written "Cast not your pearls before swine, neither give that which is holy unto dogs – lest they turn and rend you." Silence and secrecy are, therefore, desirable if only in self-defence, though there are other reasons; but humility is indispensable. In the public processions of the Lesser Mysteries –

2 The thyrsus (or Caduceus) was an elaborate wand borne by the candidate, to the symbolism of which deep meaning attached. Its present form is the wand carried by the deacon accompanying the candidate.

for the public were permitted at certain festivals to participate to a small extent in some of the more exoteric knowledge – the sacred emblems and eucharistic vessels used in the rites were carried with great reverence upon the back of an ass. With the same intention, it is said that one of the great Greek philosophers always had an ass by his side in his lecture-room when instructing his students. The explanation is given in the words of one of the old authorities upon initiation as follows: "There is no creature so able to receive divinity as an ass, into whom if ye be not turned, ye shall in no wise be able to carry the divine mysteries." In the light of this, one will at once discern the symbolical significance of the Christian Master riding into Jerusalem upon an ass.

Another and a greatly educative means employed in the Mysteries was that of instructing, enlarging and purifying the imagination by means of myths, expressing either in doctrinal form or by spectacular representation, truths of the Divine world and of the soul's history. The modern mind in its passion for actual concrete facts is little sympathetic to a method of teaching which dispenses with demonstrable facts and prefers to enunciate the eternal principles underlying such facts and of which those facts are but the manifested resultant consequence. Facts – of history or science – tend, however, to congest the mind and paralyse the imagination, as Darwin lamented in his own case. Principles stimulate and illumine the imagination, and enable the mind to interpret facts and adjust them to their proper relation. The Greek mythologists were adepts at expressing cosmic and philosophic truths in the guise of fables which at once expressed theosophic teaching to the discerning and veiled it from the careless and ignorant. Myth-making was a science, not an indulgence in irresponsible fiction, and by exhibiting some of these myths in dramatic form candidates were instructed in various fundamental verities of life.

One of the chief and best known of the numerous myths was that of Demeter and her daughter Persephone, annually performed with great ceremony and elaboration at the Eleusinia, and of which it may be useful to speak briefly. It told how the maiden Persephone strayed away from Arcadia (heaven) and her mother Demeter, to pluck flowers in the meads of Enna, and how the soil there opened and caused her to fall through into the lower dark world of Hades ruled over by Pluto. The despair of her mother at the loss reached Zeus, the chief of the Gods, with the result that he relieved the position by ordaining that, if the girl had not eaten of the fruit of Hades, she should forthwith be restored to her mother for ever, but that if she had so eaten she must abide a third of each year with Pluto and return to Demeter for the other two thirds. It proved that Persephone had unfortunately eaten a pomegranate in the lower world, so that her restoration to her mother could not be permanent, but only periodic.

This myth, and the importance once attached to it, will be appreciated only upon understanding its interpretation. It is the story of the soul and is of the same nature as the Mosaic myth of Adam and Eve and the apple, and as the cosmic parable of the Prodigal Son, neither of these being meant to be regarded as historically true, but as a fiction spiritually true of cosmic facts. Persephone is the human soul, generated out of that primordial incorruptible mother-earth which the Greeks personified as Demeter, just as the Mosaic narrative speaks of God forming man out of the dust of the ground. Her straying from her Arcadian home and heavenly mother in quest of flowers (or fresh experiences on her own account) in the fields of Enna, corresponds with the same promptings of desire that led to Adam's disobedience in Eden and his fall thence to this outer world. All unruly desires end in dissatisfaction and bitterness, and "Enna" (signifying darkness and

bitterness) is the same word as still meets us in Gehenna. One may, however, profit by one's mistakes. It is they which breed wisdom, and it is the riches of wisdom and experience that are signified by Pluto, the god of riches, into whose kingdom Persephone falls. She might have returned thence to her mother for ever, Zeus decreed, had she not still further injured herself by eating of the fruit of the lower world, but having done so her restoration can only be partial and temporary. This alludes to the soul's still further self-soilure and degradation by lusting after the inferior pleasures of this lower plane, which, as the pomegranate symbolizes, is many-seeded with illusions and vanities. Until these false tendencies are eradicated, until the desires of the heart are utterly weaned from external delights, there can be no permanent restoration of the soul to its source, but merely the periodic respite and refreshment that death brings when it withdraws the soul from Pluto's realm to the heaven-world, to be followed again and again by periodic descents into material limitations and reascents into discarnate conditions, until it becomes finally purged and perfected.

By this great myth, therefore, instruction was imparted as to the history of the soul, its destiny and prospects, and the doctrine of reincarnation [³] was emphasized.

Now Masonry follows this traditional method of instruction by myths. Its canon of teaching in the Craft degrees contains two myths. One is that of the building of King Solomon's Temple. The other is that of the death and burial of Hiram Abiff narrated in the traditional history. The Royal Arch contains a third myth in the story of the return from captivity after the destruction of the first temple, the commencement to build the second, and the discovery then made. This third myth has already been expounded in our paper on the Royal Arch degree, so that we need now speak only of the Craft Myths.

To the literal-minded the building of Solomon's temple at Jerusalem (which is of course largely but not entirely based upon the Hebrew Scriptures) appears to be the history of an actual stone and mortar structure erected by three Asiatic notables, one of whom conceived the idea, another supplying the building material, whilst the third was the practical architect and chief of works. The two former are said to have been kings of adjacent small nations; the third was not a royalty, but apparently a person of no social dignity and a "widow's son."

As has previously been said in these papers, these details of an enterprise undertaken more than two thousand years ago can have no possible value to anyone to-day and if they related merely to historic fact modern Masonry might as well close its doors and cease to exist for any benefit that fact could impart to serious or reflective minds. But if the narrative were never intended as a record of temporal historic fact, but be a myth enshrining philosophic truths concerning eternal principles, then it must be interpreted with spiritual discernment and its analysis will reveal matters of real importance.

The story of the building of the temple, then, is a philosophical instruction, garbed in quasi-historical form, concerning the structure of the human soul. That temple is not one of common brick and stone, but of the "unhewn stone" or incorruptible raw material of which the Creator fashioned the human organism. The Jerusalem in which it was built was not the geographical one in Palestine, but the eternal "city of peace" in the heavens; not, as St.

3 As this doctrine is not popularly inculcated in the West as it is in the East, and will be novel and probably unacceptable to some readers, its acceptance is not pressed here. We are merely recording what the secret doctrine teaches.

Paul says, "the Jerusalem which now is, but the Jerusalem above, which is the mother of us all," like the Greek Demeter. Its builders were not three human personages resident in the Levant, but the Divine energy considered in its three constituent principles spoken of in our Instruction Lectures as Wisdom, Strength and Beauty, which as "pillars of His work" run through and form the metaphysical warp and basis of all created things. These three metaphysical principles may be defined in modern terms as Life-Essence (or the substantial spirit of Wisdom); incorruptible Matter, serving as the mould, matrix or vehicle of that Life-Essence, to give it fixity, form and objectiveness (Strength); and lastly the fabricative intellectual principle or Logos binding these two together and constituting the whole an intelligent and functionally effective instrument (Beauty). Of these three principles, or upon these three pillars, was the human soul originally and divinely built in the heaven-world, and our Lectures, therefore, rightly say that those three pillars "also allude to Solomon, King of Israel; Hiram, King of Tyre; and Hiram Abiff," because those names personify the indissociable triadic constituents of the Divine Unity. (They are also shown inscribed upon the central symbolic altar in the Royal Arch Degree as further evidence of this divine construction of the human soul). The temple of the soul has, however, now been destroyed and thrown down from its primitive eminence and grandeur. Humanity, instead of being a collective united organic whole, has become shattered into innumerable fragmentary separated parts, not one stone standing upon another of its ruined building. It has lost consciousness of the genuine secrets of its own origin and nature and has now to be content with the spurious substituted knowledge it picks up from sense-impressions in this outer world. Like Persephone it has eaten the pomegranates of Pluto's dark realm in preference to the ambrosia of Arcady, and until that poison is eliminated from its system it cannot permanently reattain its unfallen state, but at best must endure a rhythm of deaths and rebirths and of intermittent periods of labour in this world and refreshment beyond it. But it may become cleansed; the temple can be rebuilt, and each Mason's soul that is wrought into a true die or square by his work upon himself here, becomes one more new stone of the restored temple in the heavens.

A further word is necessary as to the concealed significance of Solomon and the two Hiram. Solomon personifies the primordial Life-Essence or substantialized Divine Wisdom which is the basis of our being. It is defined in the Book of Wisdom (chap. vii., 25-27), as "a pure influence flowing from the glory of the Almighty; the brightness of the everlasting light, the unspotted mirror of the power of God and the image of His goodness." It is described as a "king" because it must needs transcend and over-rule whatever is inferior to itself, and as "king of Israel" because "Israel" itself means "co-operating or ruling with God" as distinct from being associated with beings or affairs of a sub-divine order. To conjoin this transcendental Life-Essence to a vehicle which should give it fixity and form required the assistance of another dominant or "kingly" principle, personified as Hiram, King of Tyre, who supplied the "building material." Now inasmuch as we are dealing with purely metaphysical ideas, it will be obvious that the Tyre in question has no relation to the Levantine sea-port of that name. The name Tyre in Hebrew means "rock" and the strength, compactness and durability which we associate with rock, whilst the same word recurs in Greek as Turos and in Latin as Terra, earth, and as Durus, implying form, hardness, consistency and durability. "King of Tyre," therefore, is interpretable as the cosmic principle which gives solidity and form to the spiritual fluidic and formless Life-Essence, and which is comparable to a cup intended to hold liquid. Solomon and Hiram of Tyre therefore contribute their respective properties of Life-

Essence and durable form and "building material" as the groundwork of the soul, which then is made functionally effective by the addition of the third principle described as Hiram Abiff, the widow's son, and personifying the active intellectual principle or Logos. In a word, Hiram Abiff is the Christ-principle immanent in every soul; crucified, dead and buried in all who are not alive to its presence, but resident in all as a saving force – "Christ in you, the hope of glory." Consistently with Christ-like humility, Hiram Abiff (literally, "the teacher from the Father") is not described as a "king" as are Solomon and Hiram of Tyre, but as one "of no reputation," a "widow's son"; a beautiful touch of Gnostic symbolism referable to the derelict or widowed nature of the Divine Motherhood or Sophia owing to the errancy and defection from wisdom of her frail children. Such of those children as have rejoined, or are striving to rejoin, their mother are alone worthy to be called the "widow's sons," and it is to the cry to those who have rejoined her from those still labouring at that task in the flesh, and perhaps wiping from their brow the bloody sweat of their Gethsemane anguish in the struggle, that the traditional petition applies, "Come to my help, ye sons of the Widow, for I am the Widow's son!"

The temple of the human soul, primordially constituted of the three principles just spoken of in due balance and proportion and divinely pronounced to be "very good," has deflected from that state. Its fall has been effected by the disproportioned, unbalanced and, therefore, disorderly abuse of its inherent powers. Just as a man in a temper becomes temporarily unbalanced and liable to do what he would not in serene moments, so the soul has disorganized its own nature utterly. Of the three pillars that should support it, Wisdom (Gnosis) has fallen and become replaced by a flexible and shifting prop of speculative opinion: Strength (divine dynamic energy) has become exchanged for the frailty of the perishing flesh: Beauty, the god-like radiant form that should adorn and liken man to his Divine Creator, has become superseded by every ugliness of imperfection. Man is now a ruined temple, over which is written "Ichabod! Ichabod! the glory is departed!" Severed from conscious intercourse with his Vital and Immortal Principle, he is a prisoner in captivity to himself and his lower temporal nature. It remains for him to retrace his steps and rebuild his temple; to continue no longer a bondsman to his self-made illusions and the attractions of "worldly possessions," but become a free man and mason, engaged in shaping himself into a living and precious stone for the cosmic temple of a regenerate Humanity unto which, when completed and dedicated, Deity will again enter and abide.

To be "installed in the chair of King Solomon," therefore, means in its true sense the reattainment of a Wisdom we have lost and the revival in ourselves of the Divine Life-Essence which is the basis of our being. With the reattainment of that Wisdom all that is comprised in the terms Strength and Beauty will be reattained also, for the three pillars stand in eternal association and balance. Not to reattain it, not to revive the Divine Life-Essence, during our sojourn in this world, is to miss the opportunity which life in physical conditions provides, since the after-death state is one not of labour at this work, but of refreshment and rest, where no real progress is possible. Initiation, therefore, was instituted to impart the science of its reattainment and so lift the individual soul to a new life-basis from which it could proceed to work out its own salvation and develop its inherent powers along the true line of its destiny and evolution. But, as the Ancient Mysteries taught, the soul that never even begins this work in this world will not be able to begin it hereafter, but will remain suspended in the more tenuous planes of this planet until such time as it is once again indrawn into the vortex of generation by the ever-turning wheel of life. To quote

Plato again, "those who instituted the Mysteries for us taught us that whosoever descended into Hades (the after-death state) uninitiated and without being a partaker in the Mysteries, will be plunged into mire and darkness, but whoever arrived there purified and initiated will dwell with the Gods." This teaching is reproduced in Masonry in the reference to the Master-Mason being "admitted to the assembly of the just made perfect": the implication being that those who have not reached that proficiency and are neither "just" (i.e., rectified) nor perfected, will abide upon a lower level of post-mortem existence. For the levels of superphysical life are numerous – "in my Father's house are many mansions," or, literally, resting places – and they and their occupants are graduated in hierarchical order according to their degree of fitness and spiritual eminence. The disordered modern world, with its perverse democratic ideals of equality and uniformity, has lost all sense of the hierarchic principle, which since it obtains in the higher world ought to be reflected in this.

"Order is Heaven's first law and, that confessed,
Some are, and must be, greater than the rest."

But Masonry preserves the witness to this graduation, and to the existence of separate tiers of life in the heaven-places, in the symbolic distribution of its more advanced members. Above the Craft Lodges there presides the Provincial Grand Lodge; beyond that rules the Grand Lodge of the nation. Theoretically higher than any of these is the Royal Arch Chapter, with the Provincial and Grand Chapters towering beyond that. In the symbolic clothing worn by the members of each of these ranks the observant student will perceive the intention to give appropriate expression to the truth thereby signified. The Masonic apron has been explained in an earlier paper as a figure of the soul's corporeality – the body (not to be confused with the gross physical body) which it wears and will display when it passes from this life. Its pure white is fringed in the case of junior brethren with a pale shade of that blue which, even in physical nature, is the colour of the heavens. With seniors in the Provincial and Grand Lodges this has intensified to the deepest degree of that hue in correspondence with their theoretical spiritual development, whilst the gold lace adornments of the clothing emblemize what is referred to in the Psalmist's words, "The King's daughter (the soul) is all glorious within; her clothing is of wrought gold": for as the Life-Essence or Wisdom becomes increasingly "wrought" or substantialized in us, it becomes the objectified corporeality of the soul. In the Royal Arch the Craft devotional blue is intershot with red, the colour of fire or spiritual ardour, the blend resulting in that purple which both in earth and heaven is the prerogative of royalty. Thus, by their clothing in the various grades, the members of Masonry emblemize on earth the angels and archangels and all the company of Heaven. Some of them are clothed with light as with a garment; others are ministers of flaming fire.

In a short paper such as this our reference to the Ancient Mysteries is necessarily brief and has been restricted to the Greek Eleusinian system. Many others of course existed and an extensive, though scattered, literature is available for those who would pursue the subject further in the direction of the Egyptian, Samothracian, Chaldean, Mithraic, Gnostic and other systems. In their respective days and localities they formed the authoritative centres of religion and philosophy, using those terms as but phases of an indivisible subject which nowadays has become split up into many brands of theology and speculative philosophy having little and often no possible connection with each other. What the old writers made public about the Mysteries of course discreetly avoids descriptions of the deeper truths they imparted or of the actual processes of initiation. These must always remain a subject

of secrecy, but by the perspicuous reader enough can be found in their purposely obscure and metaphorical accounts to indicate what occurred, and with what effect upon the candidate. Initiation, we have already said, is something which but few are fit to receive, even after long and rigorous preparation, and fewer still are competent to impart. It was an experience of which a writer has said in regard to the candidate, *Vel invenit sanctum, vel facit* – it either finds him holy or makes him so. Virgil's account in the sixth *Æneid* of the initiation of *Æneas* into *Elysium* (or the supernatural light), or that of *Lucius* (again a name signifying enlightenment) in the "Golden Ass" of *Apuleius*, when he was permitted to "see the sun at midnight," are instructive instances. So also the exclamation of *Clement* of *Alexandria*, who had been received into the *Gnostic* school: "O truly sacred Mysteries! O pure Light! I am led by the light of the torch to the view of heaven and of God. I become holy by initiation. The Lord Himself is the hierophant who, leading the candidate for initiation to the Light, seals him and presents him to the Father to be preserved for ever. These are the orgies of my Mysteries. If thou wilt, come and be thou also initiated, and thou shalt join in the dance with the angels around the uncreated, imperishable and only true God, the Word of God joining in the strain!" The Mysteries came to an end as public institutions in the sixth century, when from political considerations they and the teaching of the secret doctrine and philosophy became prohibited by the Roman Government, under *Justinian*, who aimed at inaugurating an official uniform state-religion throughout its Empire. Subsequently, as the Roman Empire declined and broke up, the Roman Catholic Church emerged from it, which, as we know, has resolutely discountenanced any authority in religion and philosophy as a rival to her own and at the same time claimed supremacy and an over-riding jurisdiction in temporal matters also. For the Freemason the result of that Church's conduct is instructive. For when an authority upon matters wholly spiritual and belonging to a kingdom which is not of this world, lays claim to temporal power and secular possessions, as the Roman Church has done and still does, it at once vitiates and neutralizes its own spiritual qualifications. It becomes infected with the virus of "worldly possessions." It loads itself with the "money and metals" from which it is essential to keep divested. The result has been that what might have been, and was designed to be, the greatest spiritually educative force in the world's history, has become a materialized institution, exercising an intellectual tyranny which has estranged the minds of millions from religion altogether. As *Lot's* wife is metaphorically said to have crystallized into a pillar of salt through turning back in desire to what she ought to have renounced altogether, so in trying to serve *Mammon* and *God* at the same time the Roman Church has failed in both and, as the result of the false steps and abuses of centuries, the world is to-day a chaos of disunited sects and popular religious teaching is as materialistic as Masonry. It is a pity, for in its original design and practice Christianity was intended to serve as a system of initiation upon a catholic or universal scale, and to take over, supersede and amplify all that previously was taught, in a less efficacious way and to a more restricted public, in the Ancient Mysteries. It is not possible here to enter upon the extremely interesting questions involved in the transition from pre-Christian to Christian religion, or to explain why and how the Christian Mysteries are the efflorescence of the earlier ones and transcend them. In their central teachings, as in the philosophic method of life they demand, the two methods are identical. The differences between them are only such as are due to amplification and formal expression. Christianity came not to destroy, but to fulfil and expand. That fulfilment and expansion were consequent upon an event of cosmic importance which we speak of as *The Incarnation*. By that event something had happened

affecting the very fabric of our planet and every item of the human family. What that something was and the nature of the change it wrought is too great and deep a theme to develop now, but, to illustrate it by Masonic symbolism, it was an event which is the equivalent of, and is represented by, the transference of the Sacred Symbol of the Grand Geometrician of the Universe from the ceiling of the Lodge, where it is located in the elementary grades of the Craft, to the floor, where it is found in the Royal Arch Degree surrounded with flaming lights and every circumstance of reverence and sanctity. How many Masons are there in the Order to-day who recognize that, in this piece of symbolism, Masonry is giving affirmation and ocular testimony to precisely the same fact as the churchman affirms when he recites in his Creed the words "He came down from heaven, and was incarnate and was made man?"

By a tacit and quite unwarranted convention the members of the Craft avoid mention in their Lodges of the Christian Master and confine their scriptural readings and references almost exclusively to the Old Testament, the motive being no doubt due to a desire to observe the injunction as to refraining from religious discussion and to prevent offence on the part of brethren who may not be of the Christian faith. The motive is an entirely misguided one and is negated by the fact that the "greater light" upon which every member is obligated, and to which his earnest attention is recommended from the moment of his admission to the Order, is not only the Old Testament, but the volume of the Sacred Law in its entirety. The New Testament is as essential to his instruction as the Old, not merely because of its moral teaching, but in virtue of its constituting the record of the Mysteries in their supreme form and historic culmination. The Gospels themselves, like the Masonic degrees, are a record of preparation and illumination, leading up to the ordeal of death, followed by a raising from the dead and the attainment of Mastership, and they exhibit the process of initiation carried to the highest conceivable degree of attainment. The New Testament is full of passages in Masonic terminology and there is not a little irony in the failure by modern Masons to recognize its supreme importance and relevancy to their Lodge proceedings and in the fact that in so doing they may be likening themselves to those builders of whom it is written that they rejected the chief Corner Stone. They would learn further that the Grand Master and Exemplar of Masonry, Hiram Abiff, is but a figure of the Great Master and Exemplar and Saviour of the world, the Divine Architect by whom all things were made, without whom is nothing that hath been made, and whose life is the light of men. If, in the words of the Masonic hymn:

"Hiram the architect
Did all the Craft direct
How they should build,"

it is equally true that the protagonist of the Christian Scriptures also taught universal humanity "how they should build" and reconstruct their own fallen nature, and that the method of such building is one which involves the cross as its working tool and one which culminates in a death and a raising from the dead. And, of those who attain their initiation and mastership by that method, is it not further written there that they become of the household of God and built into a spiritual temple not made with hands, but eternal and in the heavens and of which "Jesus Christ is the chief corner stone, in whom all the building, fitly framed together, groweth unto an holy temple builded for an habitation of God?"

Neither the Ancient Mysteries nor Modern Masonry, their descendant, therefore, can be rightly viewed without reference to their relation to the Christian evangel, into which the

pre-Christian schools became assumed. The line of succession and evolution from the former to the latter is direct and organic. Allowing for differences of time, place and form of expression, both taught exactly the same truths and inculcated the necessity for regeneration. In such a matter there cannot be a diversity of doctrine. The truth concerning it must be static and uniform at all periods of the world's history. Hence we find St. Augustine affirming that there has never existed but one religion in the world since the beginning of time (meaning by religion the science of rebinding the dislocated soul to its source), and that that religion began to be called Christian in apostolic times. And hence too it is that both the Roman Church and Masonry, although so widely divergent in outlook and method, have this feature in common, that each declares and insists that no alteration or innovation in its central doctrine is permissible and that it is unlawful to remove or deviate from its ancient landmarks. Each is right in its insistence, for in the system of each is enshrined the age-old doctrine of regeneration and divinization of the human soul, obscured in the one case by theological and other accretions foreign to the main purpose of religion, and unperceived in the other because its symbolism remains uninterpreted. To clear vision, Christian and Masonic doctrine are identical in intention though different in method. The one says "Via Crucis"; the other "Via Lucis"; yet the two ways are but one way. The former teaches through the ear; the latter through the eye and by identifying the aspirant with the doctrine by passing him personally and dramatically through symbolic rites which he is expected to translate from ceremonial form into subjective experience. As Patristic literature shows, the primitive method of the Christian Church was not that which now obtains, under which the religious offices and teaching are administered to the whole public alike and in a way implying a common level of doctrine for all and uniform power of comprehension by every member of the congregation. It was, on the other hand, a graduated method of instruction and identical with the Masonic system of degrees conferred by reason of advancing merit and ability. To cite one of the most instructive of early Christian treatises (Dionysius: On the Ecclesiastical Hierarchy), with which every Masonic student should familiarize himself, it will be found that admission to the early Church was by three ceremonial degrees exactly corresponding in intention with those of Masonry. "The most holy initiation of the Mystic Rites has as its first Godly purpose the holy cleansing of the initiated; and as second, the enlightening instruction of the purified; and finally and as the completion of the former, the perfecting of those instructed in the science of their appropriate instructions. The order of the Ministers in the first class cleanses the initiated through the Mystic Rites; in the second, conducts the purified to light; and, in the last and highest, makes perfect those who have participated in the Divine Light by the scientific contemplations of the illuminations contemplated." This brief passage alone suffices to show that originally membership of the Christian Church involved a sequence of three initiatory rites identical in intention with those of the Craft today. The names given to those who had qualified in those Rites were respectively Catechumens, Leiturgoi, and Priests or Presbyters; which in turn are identifiable with our Entered Apprentices, Fellow Crafts and Master Masons. Their first degree was that of a rebirth and purification of the heart; their second related to the illumination of the intelligence; and their third to a total death unto sin and a new birth unto righteousness, in which the candidate died with Christ on the cross, as with us he is made to imitate the death of Hiram, and was raised to that higher order of life which is Mastership.

When Christianity became a state-religion and the Church a world-power, the materialization of its doctrine proceeded apace and has only increased with the centuries.

Instead of becoming the unifying force its leaders meant it to be, its association with "worldly possessions" has resulted in making it a disintegrative one. Abuses led to schisms and sectarianism, and whilst the parent-body, in the form of the Greek and Roman Churches, still possesses and jealously conserves all the original credentials, traditions and symbols in their superb liturgies and rites, more importance is attached to the outer husk of its heritage than to its kernel and spirit, whilst the Protestant communities and so-called "free" churches have unhappily become self-severed altogether from the original tradition and their imagined liberty and independence are in fact but a captivity to ideas of their own, having no relation to the primitive gnosis and no understanding of those Mysteries which must always lie deeper than the exoteric popular religion of a given period. Regeneration as a science has long been, and still is, entirely outside the purview of orthodox religion. The Christian Master's affirmation "Ye must be born again" is regarded as but a pious counsel towards an indefinite improvement of conduct and character, not as a reference to a drastic scientific revolution and reformation of the individual in the way contemplated by the rites of initiation prescribed in the Mysteries. Popular religion may indeed produce "good" men, as the world's standard of goodness goes. It does not and cannot produce divinized men endowed with the qualities of Mastership, for it is ignorant of the traditional wisdom and methods by which that end is to be attained.

That wisdom and those traditional methods of the Mysteries have, however, never been without living witness in the world, despite the jealousy and inhibitions of official orthodoxy. Since the suppression of the Mysteries in the sixth century, their tradition and teaching have been continued in secret and under various concealments, and to that continuation our present Masonic system is due. As previously intimated in these papers, it was compiled and projected between two and three centuries ago as an elementary expression of the ancient doctrine and initiatory method, by a group of minds which were far more deeply instructed in the old tradition and secret science than are those who avail themselves of their work to-day, or even than the text of the Masonic rites indicates. If they remained obscure and anonymous, so that the modern student's research is unable to identify them, it is only what is to be expected, for the true initiate is one who never proclaims himself as such and is content ever to remain impersonal and out of sight and notoriety, planting his seed for the welfare of his fellow men indifferently and leaving others to water it and God to give it increase. But, within the limits they allowed themselves, they achieved their work well and truly and, as has been sought to demonstrate in these pages, made it a rescript, faithful at least in outline and main principles, of the ancient teaching and perfecting rites of the philosophic Mysteries. It has been well said by a writer of authority on the subject that they put forward the system of speculative Masonry as "an experiment upon the mind of the age," and with a view to exhibiting to at least a small section of a public living in a time of gross darkness and materialism an evidence of the doctrine of regeneration which might serve as a light to such as could profit therefrom. If this theory be true, their intention may at first sight appear to have become falsified by subsequent developments, in the course of which there has sprung up an organization of world-wide dimensions and vast membership, animated undoubtedly in the main with worthy ideals and accomplishing a certain measure of benevolent work, but nevertheless failing entirely in perceiving its true and original purpose as an Order for promoting the science of human regeneration, and unconscious that by this default its achievements in other directions are of small or no account. But a broader and wiser view of the situation would be one that, whilst recognizing a great diffusion of energy to little

present purpose, sees also that, in the long run and in the amplitude of time, that energy is not wasted but conserved, and that, besides benefiting individuals here and there who are capable of truly profiting from the Order, it preserves the witness and keeps burning the light of the perpetual Mysteries in a dark age. Like the light of a Master Mason which never becomes wholly extinguished, so in the world's darkest days the light of the Mysteries never goes out entirely, and God and the way to Him are not left without witness. If, in comparison with other witnesses, Masonry is but a glimmering ray rather than a powerful beam of light, it is none the less a true ray; a kindly light lit from the world's central altar-flame, and sufficing to lead at least some of us on amid the encircling gloom, until the night is gone. Light is granted in proportion to the desire of our hearts, but for the majority of Masons their Order sheds no light at all, because light is not their desire, nor is initiation in its true sense understood or wished for. They move among the symbols, simulacra and substituted secrets of the Mysteries without comprehending them, without wishing to translate them into reality. The Craft is made to subserve social and philanthropic ends foreign to its purpose and even to gratify the desire for outward personal distinction; but as an instrument of regeneration it remains wholly ineffective.

Is this nescience, this imperviousness and failure to comprehend, however, to no purpose? Perhaps not. Each of us lives in the presence of natural mysteries he fails to discern or understand, and even when the desire for wisdom is at last awakened, the education of the understanding is a long process. Nature in all her kingdoms builds slowly, perfecting her aims through endless repetitions and apparently wanton waste of material. And in the things of the Kingdom which transcends Nature, the same method prevails. Souls are drawn but slowly to the Light, and their perfecting and transmutation into that Light is often very gradual. For long before it is able to distinguish shadow from substance, Humanity must try its prentice-hand upon illusory toys and substitutions for the genuine secrets of Reality. For long before it is worthy of actual initiation upon the path that leads to God it must be permitted to indulge in preliminary unintelligent rehearsals of the processes therein involved. The approaches to the ancient temples of the Mysteries were lined with statues of the Gods, having no value of themselves, but intended to habituate the minds of neophytes to the spiritual concepts and divine attributes to which those statues were meant to give objective form and semblance. But within the temple itself all graven images, all formal figures, symbols and ceremonial types, ceased; for the mind had then finally to learn to dispense with their help, and, in the strength of its own purity and understanding alone, to rise into unclouded perception of their formless prototypes and "see the Nameless of the hundred names."

"Get knowledge, get wisdom; but with all thy gettings, get understanding," exclaims the old Teacher, in a counsel that may well be commended to the Masonic Fraternity to-day, which so little understands its own system. But understanding depends upon the gift of the Supernal Light, which gift in turn depends upon the ardour of our desire for it. If Wisdom to-day is widowed, all Masons are actually or potentially the widow's sons, and she will be justified of her children who seek her out and who labour for her as for hid treasure. It remains with the Craft itself whether it shall enter upon its own heritage as a lineal successor of the Ancient Mysteries and Wisdom-teaching, or whether, by failing so to do, it will undergo the inevitable fate of everything that is but a form from which its native spirit has departed.

End of The Meaning of Masonry – by W.L. Wilmshurst