

The Hiramic Legend

By George S. Draffen

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During the ceremony of the Third Degree, which is so well named the Sublime Degree, you can hardly fail to have been deeply impressed by the tragedy of Hiram Abif. To understand it, and to appreciate to the full its profound richness of meaning, is something that will remain with you as long as you live.

It is first of all important to understand that the drama of Hiram Abif is a ritualistic drama. We all know what a drama is. It is a conflict between a man and other men or between a man and other forces, resulting in a crisis in which his fate or fortune lies at stake. The crisis, or problem, is followed by a solution or resolution. If it turns out in favor of the man the drama is a comedy, in the true and original meaning of that word as a happy ending. If it turns against him, and as a result he becomes a victim or a sufferer, it means that the drama is a tragedy.

By drama in either sense I do not refer to plays as they are acted on the stage, which are not dramas at all, but representations of dramas. I refer to drama as it occurs in our own lives, to everyone of us, and in our daily experience. The only reason for our interest in reading or seeing stage plays is because they mirror the drama in which in real life we ourselves are the actors.

But the ceremony of Hiram Abif is not only a drama, it is a ritualistic drama, and the major emphasis should be placed on the word "ritualistic."

What is a ritual? It is a set of fixed ceremonies which address themselves to the human spirit solely through the imagination. A play in the theater may be built round some historical figure or some historical event, as in the case of Shakespeare's plays about the English kings and about Macbeth or Hamlet. And if the figures and events are not actually historical, they are supposed to be, so that the facts of time, place and individual identity are of some importance to it.

A ritualistic drama, on the other hand, does not pay any heed to historical individuals, times or places. It moves wholly in the realms of the spirit, where time, space and particular individuals

are ignored. The clash of forces, and crises and fates of the human spirit alone enter into it, and they hold true of all men, everywhere, regardless of who they are, or where and when they are.

Since the drama of Hiram Abif is ritualistic, it is a mistake to accept it as history. There was a Hiram Abif in history, but our Third Degree is not interested in him. Its sole concern is with a Hiram Abif who is a symbol of the human soul, that is, its own Hiram Abif. If, therefore, you have been troubled with the thought that some of the events of this drama could not possibly have ever happened you can cease to be troubled. It is not meant that they ever happened in ancient history, but that they are symbols of what is happening in the life of every man.

For the same reason it is an inexcusable blunder to treat it as a mere mock tragedy. Savage peoples employ initiation ceremonies as an ordeal to test the nerve and courage of their young men, but Freemasonry is not savage. Boys in school often employ ragging, which is horseplay caricature of the savage ceremonial ordeals, but Freemasonry is not juvenile. The exemplification of our ritualistic drama is sincere, solemn, and earnest. He who takes it trivially betrays a shallowness of soul which makes him unfit ever to become a Mason.

Hiram Abif is the acted symbol of the human soul, yours, mine, any man's. The work he was engaged to supervise is the symbol of the work you and I have in the supervision, organization, and direction of our lives from birth to death.

The enemies he met are none other than the symbols of those lusts and passions which in our own breasts, or in the breasts of others, make war on our characters and our lives.

His fate is the same fate that befalls every man who becomes a victim to those enemies, to be interrupted in one's work, to be made outcast from the lordship (or mastership) over one's own self, and, at the end, to become buried under all manner of rubbish – which means defeat, disgrace, misery and scorn.

The manner in which he was raised from that dead level to that living perpendicular again is the same manner by which any man, if it happens at all, rises from self-defeat to self-mastery. And the Sovereign Great Architect, by the power of whose word Hiram Abif was raised, is that same God in whose arms we ourselves forever lie, and whose mighty help we also need to raise us out of the graves of defeat, or evil, and death itself.

Did you wonder, while taking part in that drama, why you were personally made to participate in it? Why you were not permitted to sit as a spectator?

You were made to participate in order to impress upon you that it was your drama, not another's, there being exemplified. No man can be a mere spectator of that drama, because it takes place in his own soul. Likewise because it was intended that your participation should itself be an experience to prepare you for becoming a Master Mason, by teaching you the secret of a Master Mason, which is, that the soul must rise above its own internal enemies if ever a man is to be a

Mason in reality as well as in name. The reality of being a Master mason is nothing other than to be the Master of one's self.

Did you wonder why it was that the three enemies of Hiram Abif came from his own circle and not from outside? It is because the enemies to be feared by the soul are always from within, and are nothing other than its own ignorance, lust, passions, and sins. As the Volume of Sacred Law reminds us, it is not that which has power to kill the body that we need most to shun, but that which has power to destroy the spirit.

Did you wonder why it was that, after Hiram Abif was slain, there was so much confusion in the Temple? It was because the Temple is the symbol of a man's character, and therefore breaks and falls when the soul, its architect, is rendered helpless. Because the Craftsmen are symbols of our powers and faculties and they fall into anarchy when not directed and commanded by the will at the centre of our being.

And did you wonder why the lodge appeared to neglect to explain this ritualistic drama to you at the end of the degree? It was because it is impossible for one man to explain the tragedy of Hiram Abif to another. Each must learn it for himself; and the most we can obtain from others is just such hints and scattered suggestions as these I have given you. Print the story of Hiram Abif indelibly upon your mind; ponder upon it; when you yourself are at grips with your enemies recall it and act accordingly to the light you find in it. By so doing you will find that your inner self will give in the form of first-hand experience that which the drama gave you in the form of ritual. You will be wiser and stronger for having the guidance and the light the drama can give you.

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