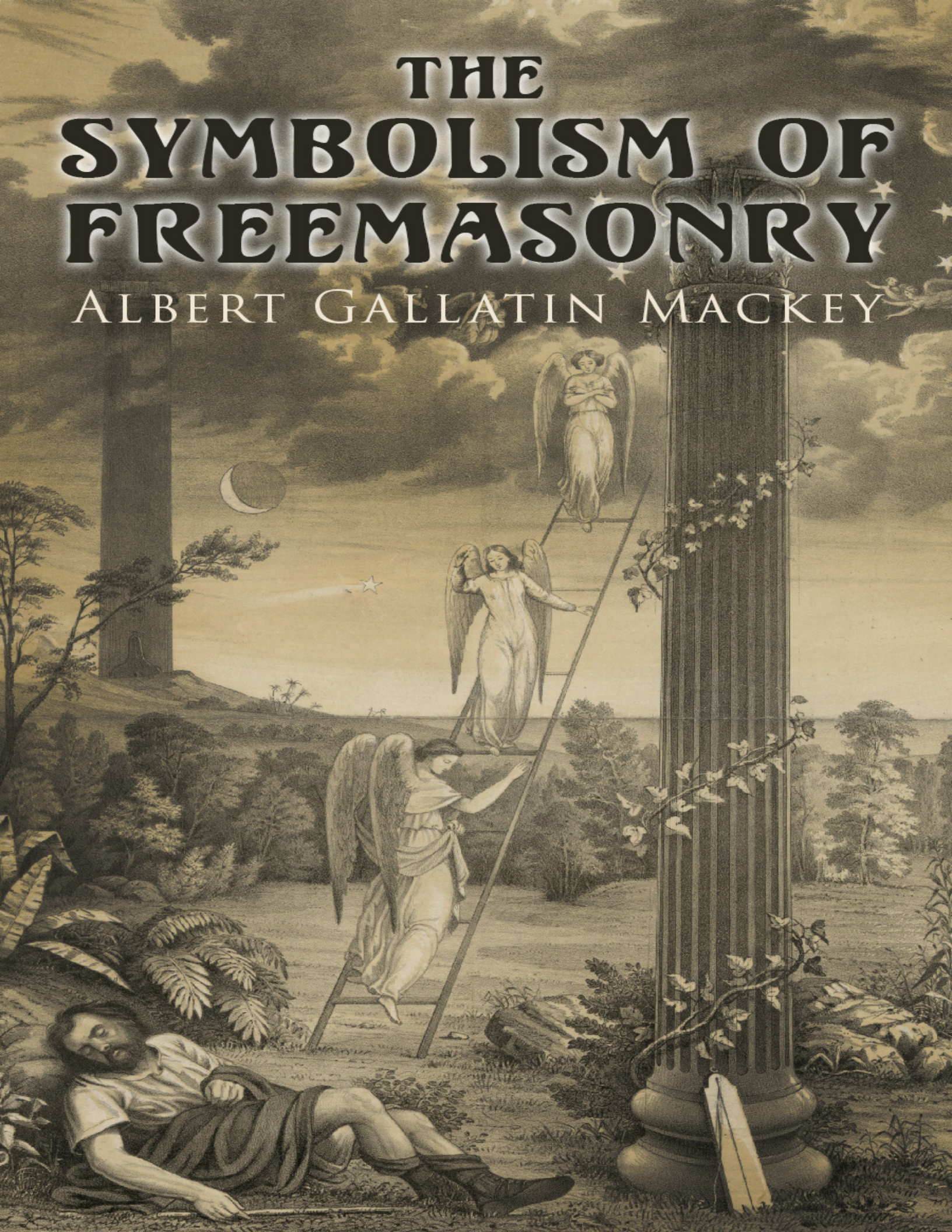


THE SYMBOLISM OF FREEMASONRY

ALBERT GALLATIN MACKEY



Albert Gallatin Mackey

The Symbolism of Freemasonry

**Illustrating and Explaining Its Science and
Philosophy, Its Legends, Myths and Symbols**

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*"Ea enim quae scribuntur tria habere decent,
utilitatem praesentem, certum finem,
inexpugnabile fundamentum."*

Cardanus.

To General John C. Fremont.

My Dear Sir:

While any American might be proud of associating his name with that of one who has done so much to increase the renown of his country, and to enlarge the sum of human knowledge, this book is dedicated to you as a slight testimonial of regard for your personal character, and in grateful recollection of acts of friendship.

Yours very truly,
A. G. Mackey.

Preface.

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Of the various modes of communicating instruction to the uninformed, the masonic student is particularly interested in two; namely, the instruction by legends and that by symbols. It is to these two, almost exclusively, that he is indebted for all that he knows, and for all that he can know, of the philosophic system which is taught in the institution. All its mysteries and its dogmas, which constitute its philosophy, are intrusted for communication to the neophyte, sometimes to one, sometimes to the other of these two methods of instruction, and sometimes to both of them combined. The Freemason has no way of reaching any of the esoteric teachings of the Order except through the medium of a legend or a symbol.

A legend differs from an historical narrative only in this—that it is without documentary evidence of authenticity. It is the offspring solely of tradition. Its details may be true in part or in whole. There may be no internal evidence to the contrary, or there may be internal evidence that they are altogether false. But neither the possibility of truth in the one case, nor the certainty of falsehood in the other, can remove the traditional narrative from the class of legends. It is a legend simply because it rests on no written foundation. It is oral, and therefore legendary.

In grave problems of history, such as the establishment of empires, the discovery and settlement of countries, or the rise and fall of dynasties, the knowledge of the truth or falsity of the legendary narrative will be of importance, because the value of history is impaired by the imputation of doubt. But it is not so in Freemasonry. Here there need be no absolute question of the truth or falsity of the legend.

The object of the masonic legends is not to establish historical facts, but to convey philosophical doctrines. They are a method by which esoteric instruction is communicated, and the student accepts them with reference to nothing else except their positive use and meaning as developing masonic dogmas. Take, for instance, the Hiram legend of the third degree. Of what importance is it to the disciple of Masonry whether it be true or false? All that he wants to know is its internal signification; and when he learns that it is intended to illustrate the doctrine of the immortality of the soul, he is content with that interpretation, and he does not deem it necessary, except as a matter of curious or antiquarian inquiry, to investigate its historical accuracy, or to reconcile any of its apparent contradictions. So of the lost keystone; so of the second temple; so of the hidden ark: these are to him legendary narratives, which, like the casket, would be of no value were it not for the precious jewel contained within. Each of these legends is the expression of a philosophical idea.

But there is another method of masonic instruction, and that is by symbols. No science is more ancient than that of symbolism. At one time, nearly all the learning of the world was conveyed in symbols. And although modern philosophy now deals only in abstract propositions, Freemasonry still cleaves to the ancient method, and has preserved it in its primitive importance as a means of communicating knowledge.

According to the derivation of the word from the Greek, "to symbolize" signifies "to compare one thing with another." Hence a symbol is the expression of an idea that has been derived from the comparison or contrast of some object with a moral conception or attribute. Thus we say that the plumb is a symbol of rectitude of conduct. The physical qualities of the plumb are here compared or contrasted with the moral conception of virtue, or rectitude. Then to the Speculative Mason it becomes, after he has

been taught its symbolic meaning, the visible expression of the idea of moral uprightness.

But although there are these two modes of instruction in Freemasonry,—by legends and by symbols,—there really is no radical difference between the two methods. The symbol is a visible, and the legend an audible representation of some contrasted idea—of some moral conception produced from a comparison. Both the legend and the symbol relate to dogmas of a deep religious character; both of them convey moral sentiments in the same peculiar method, and both of them are designed by this method to illustrate the philosophy of Speculative Masonry.

To investigate the recondite meaning of these legends and symbols, and to elicit from them the moral and philosophical lessons which they were intended to teach, is to withdraw the veil with which ignorance and indifference seek to conceal the true philosophy of Freemasonry.

To study the symbolism of Masonry is the only way to investigate its philosophy. This is the portal of its temple, through which alone we can gain access to the sacellum where its aporrheta are concealed.

Its philosophy is engaged in the consideration of propositions relating to God and man, to the present and the future life. Its science is the symbolism by which these propositions are presented to the mind.

The work now offered to the public is an effort to develop and explain this philosophy and science. It will show that there are in Freemasonry the germs of profound speculation. If it does not interest the learned, it may instruct the ignorant. If so, I shall not regret the labor and research that have been bestowed upon its composition.

Albert G. Mackey, M.D.

Charleston, S.C., Feb. 22, 1869.

I. Preliminary.

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The Origin and Progress of Freemasonry.

Any inquiry into the symbolism and philosophy of Freemasonry must necessarily be preceded by a brief investigation of the origin and history of the institution. Ancient and universal as it is, whence did it arise? What were the accidents connected with its birth? From what kindred or similar association did it spring? Or was it original and autochthonic, independent, in its inception, of any external influences, and unconnected with any other institution? These are questions which an intelligent investigator will be disposed to propound in the very commencement of the inquiry; and they are questions which must be distinctly answered before he can be expected to comprehend its true character as a symbolic institution. He must know something of its antecedents, before he can appreciate its character.

But he who expects to arrive at a satisfactory solution of this inquiry must first—as a preliminary absolutely necessary to success—release himself from the influence of an error into which novices in Masonic philosophy are too apt to fall. He must not confound the doctrine of Freemasonry with its outward and extrinsic form. He must not suppose that certain usages and ceremonies, which exist at this day, but which, even now, are subject to extensive variations in different countries, constitute the sum and substance of Freemasonry. "Prudent antiquity," says Lord Coke, "did for more solemnity and better memory and observation of that which is to be done, express

substances under ceremonies." But it must be always remembered that the ceremony is not the substance. It is but the outer garment which covers and perhaps adorns it, as clothing does the human figure. But divest man of that outward apparel, and you still have the microcosm, the wondrous creation, with all his nerves, and bones, and muscles, and, above all, with his brain, and thoughts, and feelings. And so take from Masonry these external ceremonies, and you still have remaining its philosophy and science. These have, of course, always continued the same, while the ceremonies have varied in different ages, and still vary in different countries.

The definition of Freemasonry that it is "a science of morality, veiled in allegory, and illustrated by symbols," has been so often quoted, that, were it not for its beauty, it would become wearisome. But this definition contains the exact principle that has just been enunciated. Freemasonry is a science—a philosophy—a system of doctrines which is taught, in a manner peculiar to itself, by allegories and symbols. This is its internal character. Its ceremonies are external additions, which affect not its substance.

Now, when we are about to institute an inquiry into the origin of Freemasonry, it is of this peculiar system of philosophy that we are to inquire, and not of the ceremonies which have been foisted on it. If we pursue any other course we shall assuredly fall into error.

Thus, if we seek the origin and first beginning of the Masonic philosophy, we must go away back into the ages of remote antiquity, when we shall find this beginning in the bosom of kindred associations, where the same philosophy was maintained and taught. But if we confound the ceremonies of Masonry with the philosophy of Masonry, and seek the origin of the institution, moulded into outward form as it is to-day, we can scarcely be required to look farther back than the beginning of the eighteenth century, and,

indeed, not quite so far. For many important modifications have been made in its rituals since that period.

Having, then, arrived at the conclusion that it is not the Masonic ritual, but the Masonic philosophy, whose origin we are to investigate, the next question naturally relates to the peculiar nature of that philosophy.

Now, then, I contend that the philosophy of Freemasonry is engaged in the contemplation of the divine and human character; of GOD as one eternal, self-existent being, in contradiction to the mythology of the ancient peoples, which was burdened with a multitude of gods and goddesses, of demigods and heroes; of MAN as an immortal being, preparing in the present life for an eternal future, in like contradiction to the ancient philosophy, which circumscribed the existence of man to the present life.

These two doctrines, then, of the unity of God and the immortality of the soul, constitute the philosophy of Freemasonry. When we wish to define it succinctly, we say that it is an ancient system of philosophy which teaches these two dogmas. And hence, if, amid the intellectual darkness and debasement of the old polytheistic religions, we find interspersed here and there, in all ages, certain institutions or associations which taught these truths, and that, in a particular way, allegorically and symbolically, then we have a right to say that such institutions or associations were the incunabula—the predecessors—of the Masonic institution as it now exists.

With these preliminary remarks the reader will be enabled to enter upon the consideration of that theory of the origin of Freemasonry which I advance in the following propositions:—

1. In the first place, I contend that in the very earliest ages of the world there were existent certain truths of vast importance to the welfare and happiness of humanity, which had been communicated,—no matter how, but,—most probably, by direct inspiration from God to man.

2. These truths principally consisted in the abstract propositions of the unity of God and the immortality of the soul. Of the truth of these two propositions there cannot be a reasonable doubt. The belief in these truths is a necessary consequence of that religious sentiment which has always formed an essential feature of human nature. Man is, emphatically, and in distinction from all other creatures, a religious animal. Gross commences his interesting work on "The Heathen Religion in its Popular and Symbolical Development" by the statement that "one of the most remarkable phenomena of the human race is the universal existence of religious ideas—a belief in something supernatural and divine, and a worship corresponding to it." As nature had implanted the religious sentiment, the same nature must have directed it in a proper channel. The belief and the worship must at first have been as pure as the fountain whence they flowed, although, in subsequent times, and before the advent of Christian light, they may both have been corrupted by the influence of the priests and the poets over an ignorant and superstitious people. The first and second propositions of my theory refer only to that primeval period which was antecedent to these corruptions, of which I shall hereafter speak.

3. These truths of God and immortality were most probably handed down through the line of patriarchs of the race of Seth, but were, at all events, known to Noah, and were by him communicated to his immediate descendants.

4. In consequence of this communication, the true worship of God continued, for some time after the subsidence of the deluge, to be cultivated by the Noachidae, the Noachites, or the descendants of Noah.

5. At a subsequent period (no matter when, but the biblical record places it at the attempted building of the tower of Babel), there was a secession of a large number of the human race from the Noachites.

6. These seceders rapidly lost sight of the divine truths which had been communicated to them from their common ancestor, and fell into the most grievous theological errors, corrupting the purity of the worship and the orthodoxy of the religious faith which they had primarily received.

7. These truths were preserved in their integrity by but a very few in the patriarchal line, while still fewer were enabled to retain only dim and glimmering portions of the true light.

8. The first class was confined to the direct descendants of Noah, and the second was to be found among the priests and philosophers, and, perhaps, still later, among the poets of the heathen nations, and among those whom they initiated into the secrets of these truths. Of the prevalence of these religious truths among the patriarchal descendants of Noah, we have ample evidence in the sacred records. As to their existence among a body of learned heathens, we have the testimony of many intelligent writers who have devoted their energies to this subject. Thus the learned Grote, in his "History of Greece," says, "The allegorical interpretation of the myths has been, by several learned investigators, especially by Creuzer, connected with the hypothesis of *an ancient and highly instructed body of priests*, having their origin either in Egypt or in the East, and communicating to the rude and barbarous Greeks religious, physical, and historical knowledge, *under the veil of symbols*." What is here said only of the Greeks is equally applicable to every other intellectual nation of antiquity.

9. The system or doctrine of the former class has been called by Masonic writers the "Pure or Primitive Freemasonry" of antiquity, and that of the latter class the "Spurious Freemasonry" of the same period. These terms were first used, if I mistake not, by Dr. Oliver, and are intended to refer—the word *pure* to the doctrines taught by the descendants of Noah in the Jewish line and the word *spurious* to his descendants in the heathen or Gentile line.

10. The masses of the people, among the Gentiles especially, were totally unacquainted with this divine truth, which was the foundation stone of both species of Freemasonry, the pure and the spurious, and were deeply immersed in the errors and falsities of heathen belief and worship.

11. These errors of the heathen religions were not the voluntary inventions of the peoples who cultivated them, but were gradual and almost unavoidable corruptions of the truths which had been at first taught by Noah; and, indeed, so palpable are these corruptions, that they can be readily detected and traced to the original form from which, however much they might vary among different peoples, they had, at one time or another, deviated. Thus, in the life and achievements of Bacchus or Dionysus, we find the travestied counterpart of the career of Moses, and in the name of Vulcan, the blacksmith god, we evidently see an etymological corruption of the appellation of Tubal Cain, the first artificer in metals. For *Vul-can* is but a modified form of *Baal-Cain*, the god Cain.

12. But those among the masses—and there were some—who were made acquainted with the truth, received their knowledge by means of an initiation into certain sacred Mysteries, in the bosom of which it was concealed from the public gaze.

13. These Mysteries existed in every country of heathendom, in each under a different name, and to some extent under a different form, but always and everywhere with the same design of inculcating, by allegorical and symbolic teachings, the great Masonic doctrines of the unity of God and the immortality of the soul. This is an important proposition, and the fact which it enunciates must never be lost sight of in any inquiry into the origin of Freemasonry; for the pagan Mysteries were to the spurious Freemasonry of antiquity precisely what the Masters' lodges are to the Freemasonry of the present day. It is needless to offer any

proof of their existence, since this is admitted and continually referred to by all historians, ancient and modern; and to discuss minutely their character and organization would occupy a distinct treatise. The Baron de Sainte Croix has written two large volumes on the subject, and yet left it unexhausted.

14. These two divisions of the Masonic Institution which were defined in the 9th proposition, namely, the pure or primitive Freemasonry among the Jewish descendants of the patriarchs, who are called, by way of distinction, the Noachites, or descendants of Noah, because they had not forgotten nor abandoned the teachings of their great ancestor, and the spurious Freemasonry practised among the pagan nations, flowed down the stream of time in parallel currents, often near together, but never commingling.

15. But these two currents were not always to be kept apart, for, springing, in the long anterior ages, from one common fountain,—that ancient priesthood of whom I have already spoken in the 8th proposition,—and then dividing into the pure and spurious Freemasonry of antiquity, and remaining separated for centuries upon centuries, they at length met at the building of the great temple of Jerusalem, and were united, in the instance of the Israelites under King Solomon, and the Tyrians under Hiram, King of Tyre, and Hiram Abif. The spurious Freemasonry, it is true, did not then and there cease to exist. On the contrary, it lasted for centuries subsequent to this period; for it was not until long after, and in the reign of the Emperor Theodosius, that the pagan Mysteries were finally and totally abolished. But by the union of the Jewish or pure Freemasons and the Tyrian or spurious Freemasons at Jerusalem, there was a mutual infusion of their respective doctrines and ceremonies, which eventually terminated in the abolition of the two distinctive systems and the establishment of a new one, that may be considered as the immediate prototype of the present

institution. Hence many Masonic students, going no farther back in their investigations than the facts announced in this 15th proposition, are content to find the origin of Freemasonry at the temple of Solomon. But if my theory be correct, the truth is, that it there received, not its birth, but only a new modification of its character. The legend of the third degree—the golden legend, the *legenda aurea*—of Masonry was there adopted by pure Freemasonry, which before had no such legend, from spurious Freemasonry. But the legend had existed under other names and forms, in all the Mysteries, for ages before. The doctrine of immortality, which had hitherto been taught by the Noachites simply as an abstract proposition, was thenceforth to be inculcated by a symbolic lesson—the symbol of Hiram the Builder was to become forever after the distinctive feature of Freemasonry.

16. But another important modification was effected in the Masonic system at the building of the temple. Previous to the union which then took place, the pure Freemasonry of the Noachites had always been speculative, but resembled the present organization in no other way than in the cultivation of the same abstract principles of divine truth.

17. The Tyrians, on the contrary, were architects by profession, and, as their leaders were disciples of the school of the spurious Freemasonry, they, for the first time, at the temple of Solomon, when they united with their Jewish contemporaries, infused into the speculative science, which was practised by the latter, the elements of an operative art.

18. Therefore the system continued thenceforward, for ages, to present the commingled elements of operative and speculative Masonry. We see this in the *Collegia Fabrorum*, or Colleges of Artificers, first established at Rome by Numa, and which were certainly of a Masonic form in their organization; in the Jewish sect of the Essenes, who wrought as well as prayed, and who are claimed to have been the descendants of the temple builders, and also, and still more

prominently, in the Travelling Freemasons of the middle ages, who identify themselves by their very name with their modern successors, and whose societies were composed of learned men who thought and wrote, and of workmen who labored and built. And so for a long time Freemasonry continued to be both operative and speculative.

19. But another change was to be effected in the institution to make it precisely what it now is, and, therefore, at a very recent period (comparatively speaking), the operative feature was abandoned, and Freemasonry became wholly speculative. The exact time of this change is not left to conjecture. It took place in the reign of Queen Anne, of England, in the beginning of the eighteenth century. Preston gives us the very words of the decree which established this change, for he says that at that time it was agreed to "that the privileges of Masonry should no longer be restricted to operative Masons, but extend to men of various professions, provided they were regularly approved and initiated into the order."

The nineteen propositions here announced contain a brief but succinct view of the progress of Freemasonry from its origin in the early ages of the world, simply as a system of religious philosophy, through all the modifications to which it was submitted in the Jewish and Gentile races, until at length it was developed in its present perfected form. During all this time it preserved unchangeably certain features that may hence be considered as its specific characteristics, by which it has always been distinguished from every other contemporaneous association, however such association may have simulated it in outward form. These characteristics are, first, the doctrines which it has constantly taught, namely, that of the unity of God and that of the immortality of the soul; and, secondly, the manner in which these doctrines have been taught, namely, by symbols and allegories.

Taking these characteristics as the exponents of what Freemasonry is, we cannot help arriving at the conclusion that the speculative Masonry of the present day exhibits abundant evidence of the identity of its origin with the spurious Freemasonry of the ante-Solomonic period, both systems coming from the same pure source, but the one always preserving, and the other continually corrupting, the purity of the common fountain. This is also the necessary conclusion as a corollary from the propositions advanced in this essay.

There is also abundant evidence in the history, of which these propositions are but a meagre outline, that a manifest influence was exerted on the pure or primitive Freemasonry of the Noachites by the Tyrian branch of the spurious system, in the symbols, myths, and legends which the former received from the latter, but which it so modified and interpreted as to make them consistent with its own religious system. One thing, at least, is incapable of refutation; and that is, that we are indebted to the Tyrian Masons for the introduction of the symbol of Hiram Abif. The idea of the symbol, although modified by the Jewish Masons, is not Jewish in its inception. It was evidently borrowed from the pagan mysteries, where Bacchus, Adonis, Proserpine, and a host of other apotheosized beings play the same rôle that Hiram does in the Masonic mysteries.

And lastly, we find in the technical terms of Masonry, in its working tools, in the names of its grades, and in a large majority of its symbols, ample testimony of the strong infusion into its religious philosophy of the elements of an operative art. And history again explains this fact by referring to the connection of the institution with the Dionysiac Fraternity of Artificers, who were engaged in building the temple of Solomon, with the Workmen's Colleges of Numa, and with the Travelling Freemasons of the middle ages, who constructed all the great buildings of that period.

These nineteen propositions, which have been submitted in the present essay, constitute a brief summary or outline of a theory of the true origin of Freemasonry, which long and patient investigation has led me to adopt. To attempt to prove the truth of each of these propositions in its order by logical demonstration, or by historical evidence, would involve the writing of an elaborate treatise. They are now offered simply as suggestions on which the Masonic student may ponder. They are but intended as guide-posts, which may direct him in his journey should he undertake the pleasant although difficult task of instituting an inquiry into the origin and progress of Freemasonry from its birth to its present state of full-grown manhood.

But even in this abridged form they are absolutely necessary as preliminary to any true understanding of the symbolism of Freemasonry.

II. The Noachidæ.

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I proceed, then, to inquire into the historical origin of Freemasonry, as a necessary introduction to any inquiry into the character of its symbolism. To do this, with any expectation of rendering justice to the subject, it is evident that I shall have to take my point of departure at a very remote era. I shall, however, review the early and antecedent history of the institution with as much brevity as a distinct understanding of the subject will admit.

Passing over all that is within the antediluvian history of the world, as something that exerted, so far as our subject is concerned, no influence on the new world which sprang forth from the ruins of the old, we find, soon after the cataclysm, the immediate descendants of Noah in the possession of at least two religious truths, which they received from their common father, and which he must have derived from the line of patriarchs who preceded him. These truths were the doctrine of the existence of a Supreme Intelligence, the Creator, Preserver, and Ruler of the Universe, and, as a necessary corollary, the belief in the immortality of the soul¹, which, as an emanation from that primal cause, was to be distinguished, by a future and eternal life, from the vile and perishable dust which forms its earthly tabernacle.

The assertion that these doctrines were known to and recognized by Noah will not appear as an assumption to the believer in divine revelation. But any philosophic mind must, I conceive, come to the same conclusion, independently of any other authority than that of reason.

The religious sentiment, so far, at least, as it relates to the belief in the existence of God, appears to be in some sense innate, or instinctive, and consequently universal in the human mind². There is no record of any nation, however intellectually and morally debased, that has not given some evidence of a tendency to such belief. The sentiment may be perverted, the idea may be grossly corrupted, but it is nevertheless there, and shows the source whence it sprang³.

Even in the most debased forms of fetichism, where the negro kneels in reverential awe before the shrine of some uncouth and misshapen idol, which his own hands, perhaps, have made, the act of adoration, degrading as the object may be, is nevertheless an acknowledgment of the longing need of the worshipper to throw himself upon the support of some unknown power higher than his own sphere. And this unknown power, be it what it may, is to him a God.⁴

But just as universal has been the belief in the immortality of the soul. This arises from the same longing in man for the infinite; and although, like the former doctrine, it has been perverted and corrupted, there exists among all nations a tendency to its acknowledgment. Every people, from the remotest times, have wandered involuntarily into the ideal of another world, and sought to find a place for their departed spirits. The deification of the dead, man-worship, or hero-worship, the next development of the religious idea after fetichism, was simply an acknowledgment of the belief in a future life; for the dead could not have been deified unless after death they had continued to live. The adoration of a putrid carcass would have been a form of fetichism lower and more degrading than any that has been discovered.

But man-worship came after fetichism. It was a higher development of the religious sentiment, and included a possible hope for, if not a positive belief in, a future life.

Reason, then, as well as revelation, leads us irresistibly to the conclusion that these two doctrines prevailed among the descendants of Noah, immediately after the deluge. They were believed, too, in all their purity and integrity, because they were derived from the highest and purest source.

These are the doctrines which still constitute the creed of Freemasonry; and hence one of the names bestowed upon the Freemasons from the earliest times was that of the "*Noachidae*" or "*Noachites*" that is to say, the descendants of Noah, and the transmitters of his religious dogmas.

III.

The Primitive Freemasonry of Antiquity.

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The next important historical epoch which demands our attention is that connected with what, in sacred history, is known as the dispersion at Babel. The brightness of truth, as it had been communicated by Noah, became covered, as it were, with a cloud. The dogmas of the unity of God and the immortality of the soul were lost sight of, and the first deviation from the true worship occurred in the establishment of Sabianism, or the worship of the sun, moon, and stars, among some peoples, and the deification of men among others. Of these two deviations, Sabianism, or sun-worship, was both the earlier and the more generally diffused.⁵ "It seems," says the learned Owen, "to have had its rise from some broken traditions conveyed by the patriarchs touching the dominion of the sun by day and of the moon by night." The mode in which this old system has been modified and spiritually symbolized by Freemasonry will be the subject of future consideration.

But Sabianism, while it was the most ancient of the religious corruptions, was, I have said, also the most generally diffused; and hence, even among nations which afterwards adopted the polytheistic creed of deified men and factitious gods, this ancient sun-worship is seen to be continually exerting its influences. Thus, among the Greeks, the most refined people that cultivated hero-worship, Hercules was the sun, and the mythologic fable of his destroying with his arrows the many-headed hydra of the Lernaean marshes was but an allegory to denote the dissipation of paludal malaria by the purifying rays of the

orb of day. Among the Egyptians, too, the chief deity, Osiris, was but another name for the sun, while his arch-enemy and destroyer, Typhon, was the typification of night, or darkness. And lastly, among the Hindus, the three manifestations of their supreme deity, Brahma, Siva, and Vishnu, were symbols of the rising, meridian, and setting sun.

This early and very general prevalence of the sentiment of sun-worship is worthy of especial attention on account of the influence that it exercised over the spurious Freemasonry of antiquity, of which I am soon to speak, and which is still felt, although modified and Christianized in our modern system. Many, indeed nearly all, of the masonic symbols of the present day can only be thoroughly comprehended and properly appreciated by this reference to sun-worship.

This divine truth, then, of the existence of one Supreme God, the Grand Architect of the Universe, symbolized in Freemasonry as the TRUE WORD, was lost to the Sabians and to the polytheists who arose after the dispersion at Babel, and with it also disappeared the doctrine of a future life; and hence, in one portion of the masonic ritual, in allusion to this historic fact, we speak of "the lofty tower of Babel, where language was confounded and Masonry lost."

There were, however, some of the builders on the plain of Shinar who preserved these great religious and masonic doctrines of the unity of God and the immortality of the soul in their pristine purity. These were the patriarchs, in whose venerable line they continued to be taught. Hence, years after the dispersion of the nations at Babel, the world presented two great religious sects, passing onward down the stream of time, side by side, yet as diverse from each other as light from darkness, and truth from falsehood.

One of these lines of religious thought and sentiment was the idolatrous and pagan world. With it all masonic doctrine, at least in its purity, was extinct, although there mingled

with it, and at times to some extent influenced it, an offshoot from the other line, to which attention will be soon directed.

The second of these lines consisted, as has already been said, of the patriarchs and priests, who preserved in all their purity the two great masonic doctrines of the unity of God and the immortality of the soul.

This line embraced, then, what, in the language of recent masonic writers, has been designated as the *Primitive Freemasonry of Antiquity*.

Now, it is by no means intended to advance any such gratuitous and untenable theory as that proposed by some imaginative writers, that the Freemasonry of the patriarchs was in its organization, its ritual, or its symbolism, like the system which now exists. We know not indeed, that it had a ritual, or even a symbolism. I am inclined to think that it was made up of abstract propositions, derived from antediluvian traditions. Dr. Oliver thinks it probable that there were a few symbols among these Primitive and Pure Freemasons, and he enumerates among them the serpent, the triangle, and the point within a circle; but I can find no authority for the supposition, nor do I think it fair to claim for the order more than it is fairly entitled to, nor more than it can be fairly proved to possess. When Anderson calls Moses a Grand Master, Joshua his Deputy, and Aholiab and Bezaleel Grand Wardens, the expression is to be looked upon simply as a *façon de parler*, a mode of speech entirely figurative in its character, and by no means intended to convey the idea which is entertained in respect to officers of that character in the present system. It would, undoubtedly, however, have been better that such language should not have been used.

All that can be claimed for the system of Primitive Freemasonry, as practised by the patriarchs, is, that it embraced and taught the two great dogmas of Freemasonry, namely, the unity of God, and the immortality of the soul. It may be, and indeed it is highly probable, that

there was a secret doctrine, and that this doctrine was not indiscriminately communicated. We know that Moses, who was necessarily the recipient of the knowledge of his predecessors, did not publicly teach the doctrine of the immortality of the soul. But there was among the Jews an oral or secret law which was never committed to writing until after the captivity; and this law, I suppose, may have contained the recognition of those dogmas of the Primitive Freemasonry.

Briefly, then, this system of Primitive Freemasonry,—without ritual or symbolism, that has come down to us, at least,—consisting solely of traditionary legends, teaching only the two great truths already alluded to, and being wholly speculative in its character, without the slightest infusion of an operative element, was regularly transmitted through the Jewish line of patriarchs, priests, and kings, without alteration, increase, or diminution, to the time of Solomon, and the building of the temple at Jerusalem.

Leaving it, then, to pursue this even course of descent, let us refer once more to that other line of religious history, the one passing through the idolatrous and polytheistic nations of antiquity, and trace from it the regular rise and progress of another division of the masonic institution, which, by way of distinction, has been called the *Spurious Freemasonry of Antiquity*.

IV. The Spurious Freemasonry of Antiquity.

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In the vast but barren desert of polytheism—dark and dreary as were its gloomy domains—there were still, however, to be found some few oases of truth. The philosophers and sages of antiquity had, in the course of their learned researches, aided by the light of nature, discovered something of those inestimable truths in relation to God and a future state which their patriarchal contemporaries had received as a revelation made to their common ancestry before the flood, and which had been retained and promulgated after that event by Noah.

They were, with these dim but still purifying perceptions, unwilling to degrade the majesty of the First Great Cause by sharing his attributes with a Zeus and a Hera in Greece, a Jupiter and a Juno in Rome, an Osiris and an Isis in Egypt; and they did not believe that the thinking, feeling, reasoning soul, the guest and companion of the body, would, at the hour of that body's dissolution, be consigned, with it, to total annihilation.

Hence, in the earliest ages after the era of the dispersion, there were some among the heathen who believed in the unity of God and the immortality of the soul. But these doctrines they durst not publicly teach. The minds of the people, grovelling in superstition, and devoted, as St. Paul testifies of the Athenians, to the worship of unknown gods, were not prepared for the philosophic teachings of a pure theology. It was, indeed, an axiom unhesitatingly enunciated and frequently repeated by their writers, that "there are many truths with which it is useless for the people to be

made acquainted, and many fables which it is not expedient that they should know to be false." ⁶ Such is the language of Varro, as preserved by St. Augustine; and Strabo, another of their writers, exclaims, "It is not possible for a philosopher to conduct a multitude of women and ignorant people by a method of reasoning, and thus to invite them to piety, holiness, and faith; but the philosopher must also make use of superstition, and not omit the invention of fables and the performance of wonders." ⁷

While, therefore, in those early ages of the world, we find the masses grovelling in the intellectual debasement of a polytheistic and idolatrous religion, with no support for the present, no hope for the future,—living without the knowledge of a supreme and superintending Providence, and dying without the expectation of a blissful immortality,—we shall at the same time find ample testimony that these consoling doctrines were secretly believed by the philosophers and their disciples.

But though believed, they were not publicly taught. They were heresies which it would have been impolitic and dangerous to have broached to the public ear; they were truths which might have led to a contempt of the established system and to the overthrow of the popular superstition. Socrates, the Athenian sage, is an illustrious instance of the punishment that was meted out to the bold innovator who attempted to insult the gods and to poison the minds of youth with the heresies of a philosophic religion. "They permitted, therefore," says a learned writer on this subject⁸, "the multitude to remain plunged as they were in the depth of a gross and complicated idolatry; but for those philosophic few who could bear the light of truth without being confounded by the blaze, they removed the mysterious veil, and displayed to them the Deity in the radiant glory of his unity. From the vulgar eye, however,

these doctrines were kept inviolably sacred, and wrapped in the veil of impenetrable mystery."

The consequence of all this was, that no one was permitted to be invested with the knowledge of these sublime truths, until by a course of severe and arduous trials, by a long and painful initiation, and by a formal series of gradual preparations, he had proved himself worthy and capable of receiving the full light of wisdom. For this purpose, therefore, those peculiar religious institutions were organized which the ancients designated as the MYSTERIES, and which, from the resemblance of their organization, their objects, and their doctrines, have by masonic writers been called the "Spurious Freemasonry of Antiquity."

Warburton,⁹ in giving a definition of what these Mysteries were, says, "Each of the pagan gods had (besides the public and open) a secret worship paid unto him, to which none were admitted but those who had been selected by preparatory ceremonies, called initiation. This secret worship was termed the Mysteries." I shall now endeavor briefly to trace the connection between these Mysteries and the institution of Freemasonry; and to do so, it will be necessary to enter upon some details of the constitution of those mystic assemblies.

Almost every country of the ancient world had its peculiar Mysteries, dedicated to the occult worship of some especial and favorite god, and to the inculcation of a secret doctrine, very different from that which was taught in the public ceremonial of devotion. Thus in Persia the Mysteries were dedicated to Mithras, or the Sun; in Egypt, to Isis and Osiris; in Greece, to Demeter; in Samothracia, to the gods Cabiri, the Mighty Ones; in Syria, to Dionysus; while in the more northern nations of Europe, such as Gaul and Britain, the initiations were dedicated to their peculiar deities, and were celebrated under the general name of the Druidical rites. But no matter where or how instituted, whether