

THE THREE LESSER LIGHTS

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IN all ages and among all peoples there have ever been two fundamental beliefs which have permeated the body politic. The first is, that nature itself is subject to a constant struggle between two contending forces which continually strive for the supremacy. As day and night, light and darkness, good and evil. The other belief was that the soul is immortal. On these two beliefs were founded the ceremony of initiation depicted by the Mysteries of the various nations.

Masonry as the logical descendent of these Ancient Mysteries likewise seeks to impress upon its initiate of 'today, in' the strongest manner possible, its continued belief in these two great fundamental principles, which have come down to us from our forefathers of long ago. Therefore do we bring the initiate in Masonry from darkness to light and illustrate to him the Hiram legend in the third degree.

In all the Ancient Mysteries this struggle between light and darkness was typified by two deities, who in each case were a male and a female representing respectively the Sun and the Moon.

In the Indian Mysteries these two deities were called Mahadeva and Bhavani; in the Persian, Mithras and Asis; in the Egyptian, Osiris and Isis. This same characteristic is also peculiar to the Phoenician, Phrygian, Grecian, Britain and Scandinavian systems of theology.

In the Egyptian Mysteries Anubis shares in the honors which were paid to Osiris and Isis. He was the friend and counselor of Osiris and when Isis started out in her search for the body of Osiris she was accompanied and aided by Anubis, who took the shape of a dog and thus becomes Sirius, The Dogstar, the brightest star in the heavens. Anubis is of peculiar interest to us, as Masons in that he was renowned among other characteristics as the inventor of astronomy and surveying and as the deity who first taught the worship of gods and the building of temples.

In the Eleusian Mysteries, the temple in which the ceremonies were held was lighted by a hole or a window in the roof and the three great lights of nature, the Sun, the Moon and Mercury (the latter being the same as Anubis) played an exceedingly important part and were mystically represented by three images.

It has ever been a custom on the rise of a new sect or institution for it to lay hold of that which was good in its predecessors and make it an integral part of itself, either on the one hand because it believed by so doing it would the more securely fasten its hold on its converts or on the other, because it desired to thus perpetuate its intimate connection with that which it had succeeded. From a study of the growth of the early Christian Church we know that to make the new religion more understandable to their new converts, the priests held their meetings in the same temples where the sacrifices had been made to the "pagan" divinities. They appropriated the statues of the "heathen" gods and sometimes by placing on them a new head and at other times even dispensing with this formality they transformed them into "Saints" of the Church.

Among their new converts, especially, the priests continually found a tendency to revert to the worship of the gods. Particularly was this true in the case of Isis and her infant son Horus. After combating unsuccessfully with this tendency for several years the priests finally assimilated both the statue and the attributes which were associated with it. Thus Isis and her son Horus became the virgin Mary and the Infant Jesus whence comes the prominent place given to their worship in the Roman Catholic Church of today.

As the church has thus unintentionally and unconsciously immortalized the mysteries no less has Masonry deliberately perpetuated the customs of our ancient brethren. The three great lights of nature, as we have said, which in the Ancient Mysteries were represented by images dedicated respectively to the Sun, the Moon and Mercury, have become the three lesser lights of a Masonic lodge, but how, when or where the substitution of the "Master of the Lodge" for "Mercury" crept in, it is impossible to trace. There seems to be about as much justification for it as there was for the addition by Jeremy Cross of the "Marble Monument" and its explanation as given in the lecture of the third degree. While the three lesser lights are to be found in all regular

Masonic lodges there seems to be no fixed rule as to where they should be placed in the lodge.

In some jurisdictions a light is placed at the station of the Master, one at that of the Senior Warden and one at that of the Junior Warden.

There may be some justification for this arrangement but it would not be possible to adapt it to the "work" as it is now given in this and many other jurisdictions.

In some lodges they are represented by a metal stand about three feet high with three arms branching out at the top. At the extremity of each arm is a light and these lights are in the form of an equilateral triangle. This metal stand is usually placed at the right of the altar as one faces the East. In other lodges the three lesser lights are grouped about the altar in the form of a right angle triangle; the base of the triangle parallel to the West, with the hypotenuse running from the South to the East to join up with the perpendicular in the East.

The metal stand with its branching arms in the form of an equilateral triangle is emphatically incorrect. It is a product of an inventive age and a concession to cheapness and facility in installation which should never be tolerated save when a more expensive arrangement is inadvisable.

The other grouping is the one used in this and many other jurisdictions. It is sanctioned by Albert Pike than whom there is no greater authority. He uses this arrangement in his liturgy for the first as well as in the thirty-second degree.

This arrangement is justified too in that it is the natural position in which to place the triangle, could we but consider it as separate and apart from the necessity of avoiding the placing of a light in the North; in that the base, which here represents "Ignorance" is surpassed in potentiality by "Learning," represented by the perpendicular which is longer than the base as four is to three. This perpendicular runs from East to West which constantly reminds us of the belief of our ancient brethren that all learning has its origin in and proceeds from the East.

This grouping, however, might be considered objectionable in that it places a light in the North directly opposite the one in the South. This is contrary both to the practices of

the Ancient Mysteries as well as to teachings of modern Masonry. In the Ancient Mysteries the initiate in his circumambulations followed the course which our forefathers ascribed to the-sun in his daily travels. When the initiate reaches the East, it is here the Sun rises, at the South the Sun is at meridian height, while it is in the West that the Sun sets. From here until he reaches the East again the initiate is supposed to be traveling at night, or as we say in a place of darkness. For this reason modern Masonry has no light in the North and not for the stupid reason as given in our lecture in the first degree.

The correct placing as depicted in all the ancient prints we have been able to find, fixes the lights about the altar in the form of a right-angled triangle but with the right angle at the South; the base runs from the East to the South, the hypotenuse runs from the East to the West with the perpendicular connecting the South with the West.

Both methods represent the right angled triangle as we have it in the 47th Problem of Euclid. Its sides in the proportion of 3, 4 and 5 of which proportion 3 is the base, 4 the perpendicular, and 5 the hypotenuse. Its perpendicular represents the male, its base, the female, while the hypotenuse represents their progeny or the product of the two. Thus to the ancients did this right-angled triangle represent "Humanity."

The light in the East is dedicated to the Master of the lodge, the one in the West to the sun and the one in the South to the moon. As the Master sits in the East the light dedicated to the Sun is on his right hand; the one to the Moon is on his left. Hence you will understand why the jewels of the Senior and Junior Deacons who likewise sit on his right and left bear respectively representations of the Sun and of the Moon.

Therefore, in pointing out the lesser lights to the initiate, the Master should be careful to call his attention first to the light in the West as representing the Sun, next to the one in the South as representing the Moon and finally to the one in the East as representing the Master of the Lodge. When the three principal officers of the lodge group themselves about the altar each should be careful to take his stand directly in front of his respective station. They will thus form an equilateral triangle ever considered by our ancient brethren as an emblem of "Deity."

With the Master, Senior and Junior Wardens thus grouped about the altar we have formed a living equilateral triangle symbol of Deity; with the three lesser lights about the

altar forming the right-angled triangle of Euclid, symbol of Humanity. We, therefore, have at the conferring of each and every degree in Masonry a striking symbolism of the two great fundamental teachings of our order:--"The Fatherhood of God and the Brotherhood of Man."