

THE MEANING OF INITIATION

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(More than once we have called attention, editorially and otherwise, to the admirable work of Brother Frank C. Higgins, of the Magian Society, New York, in his department of Masonic Research in the Masonic Standard. At first it began as a column of inquiry and answer dealing with the Deeper Problems of the meaning of Masonry, but it grew, most happily, into a series of systematic studies, or lessons--Masonry, as Brother Higgins conceives it, being the perpetuation among us, albeit little understood, of the ancient philosophy of Cosmic Harmony which, among the Hebrews, traced everything to the great Jehovah; at once a religious and a scientific pursuit, conducted along mathematical, geometrical and astronomical lines. In this field Brother Higgins is a master, and comes nearer than anyone with whose work we are acquainted, making the treasures of that rich but difficult culture intelligible to the average reader. In order to call attention again to his researches, and also to express the hope that they may be gathered into permanent form, we venture to reproduce two brief sections of his series of studies dealing with the meaning of initiation. This Society keeps an open and responsive heart toward all its fellow-workers, glad and grateful for any one who toils to make our great and many-sided Masonry more intelligible and effective.--The Editor).

In all ancient rites and mysteries the participants in which were received by initiation, the greatest care was always exercised with respect to certain details, which if not properly carried out might mar or invalidate the entire ceremony.

The true significance of all initiation has ever been that of a spiritual rebirth. The sacred Agrouchada of the Hindus says, "The first birth is merely the advent into material life; the second birth is the entrance to a spiritual life."

The newly initiated into the first degree of Brahmanism was called doudjia, which means "twice born." The very word initiate indicates that the candidate is at least symbolically in the same situation as if he had had no previous existence. He is to be ushered into an altogether new world.

In ancient initiations the extremity of humility was expressed by the rent garments of contrition for past offenses in the life about to be blotted out, the bosom offered to the executinner's sword, and the attitude of a captive.

PREPARING THE CANDIDATE

The most curious custom perhaps had to do with what might be termed the complete preparation of the candidate against the influences that had affected his previous career. During the multitude of centuries in the course of which astrology was thought to play the strongest part in human affairs, every circumstance affecting the welfare of humanity was deemed to have its rise in one or another of the planets, or perhaps in a lucky or evil combination of several. The science of medicine rose entirely from this curious belief in planetary affinities. The ancient physician diagnosed his patient's malady according to the diseases listed under the latter's unlucky stars and tried to cure it by application of substances designated as governed by those planets favorable to him. The same idea governed the individual with reference to articles carried upon his person. The superstitious carried various charms and amulets intended to draw favorable planetary influences to his aid, and was just as careful to avoid substance that might produce a contrary effect.

In the ordering of the candidate for initiation into the ancient mysteries this belief played an important part. The candidate might carry upon his person nothing that would invite the attention of occult planetary powers through the mysterious tie that bound them to terrestrial objects.

METALLIC TOKENS

The lists of plants, flowers, minerals, metals, and other things that were subject to these mysterious influences were long and complicated. Gold linked him with the sun which incited to the besetting sin of intellectual pride; silver drew upon him the fickle qualities of the moon; copper, sacred to Venus, provoked lust, and iron, the metal of Mars, quarrelsomeness; tin, tyranny and oppression, the qualities of Jupiter; lead, sloth and indolence, belonging to Saturn; while mercury or quicksilver was responsible for dishonesty and covetousness. Therefore a key or a coin, and above all a sword, was likely to bring confusion upon the whole mysterious operation of regeneration.

Above all were enjoined upon the candidate the three sacred virtues, which by the Jain sects in India are still called "the three jewels," represented by three circles, "right belief," "right knowledge," and "right conduct." In order to reach the spiritual plane, in which the soul is entirely freed from the bonds of matter, these were the chief necessities, and the person who clung to them would certainly go higher until he reached the state of liberation.

THREE REGULAR STEPS

To the ancient candidate were also recommended "the three successive steps which open the soul to free and unobstructed activity and communication on both the psychic and the spiritual planes." The first was to still the ego and empty the mind of every bias and standard of self and sense. The second consisted, when this passive state had been induced, in fixing and holding the attention upon the specific object about which the truth was desired.

Thirdly, the foregoing two steps having been taken, the individual was to stand firmly and persistently in the receptive and listening attitude for the immediate revelation of the truth, in the full expectation of getting it. This receptive state and expectant attitude opened the consciousness to "the psychic vibrations that write unerringly their story on the receptive mind."

WHOM DOES THE CANDIDATE REPRESENT?

Within the simple and easily formulated problem asked in the heading is contained the sublimest of all secrets, which various of the higher degrees have sought to answer, each in its own way. It involves the intimate application of all the symbolic degrees to the initiate himself, without which they are as empty as air.

In all the ancient mysteries a character was assumed by the candidate, and as the candidates were any and the character depicted always the same, it must have represented something essentially common to all alike. Furthermore, the precise similarity of the experiences to which each individual candidate was subjected argued the identical lesson in all cases.

Examination of all available detail, especially the sacred writings of many races, confirms us in the conviction that this universal character was but an allegorical representation of the ego or "self," engaged in the warfare of which it has been said that the victor is greater than he who taketh a city" and emerging a conqueror in the very instant of apparent defeat. We receive our earliest concrete presentation of such a character in the celebrated document known as the Egyptian Book of the Dead, the Bible of the builders of the Pyramids, fragments of which are found wrapped in the cloths of almost every mummy.

THE PILGRIM SOUL

The Book of the Dead presents the wanderings of a departed soul through the underworld to the council of the gods, who were to listen to its accusers, give heed to its defenders, and finally weigh its accumulated good deeds in the scales against the feather symbol of "truth." The name of this character is given as Ani the Scribe. It finally transpired that this name was equivalent to the Latin term ego, meaning the "I Am" or "self" in man. This leads to what was perhaps the greatest and most important of all secret teachings of the ancient world, one that has become so obscured by the confusion of its many dramatic representations with real historical characters,--that most clear and careful labor is required to trace the main ideas from age to age and people to people, in order to show that they are fundamentally everywhere exactly the same.

There is no difficulty whatever in recognizing the self-conscious principle in every man as being an actual spark of the infinite self-consciousness precipitated into material existence, through the labyrinth of which it is compelled to strive in ceaseless search for the Master's Word, the secret of its being and immortal destiny. If this idea of the struggle of a divine and immortal soul, weighed down with the burden of matter and assailed at every turn by foes that symbolize the continual transformations of matter from "life" to "death" and "death" to "life," be taken as the vital principle of every drama of regeneration, from the "Book of the Dead" to John Bunyan's "Pilgrim Progress," we too shall have progressed a long way upon the road to understanding that of Freemasonry.

THE PILOT STAR

The beautiful star that is the chief emblem of the Royal Arch degree, besides being the sacred symbol of Israel, has had no other meaning during the thousands of years from the most ancient Brahmanism to the Temple of today. Even when called "the United Seal of Vishnu and Siva," the "Immortal" and the "Mortal," or "Fire" the symbol of Spirit, and "Water" the symbol of Matter, it represented the same idea, that of the "Self Conqueror," the Perfect Man, who had learned the subjugation of human passions and perfection in attitude toward God and fellow man. Thus the uppointing triangle stood for the ascent of matter into spirit which is typified by the phrase "resurrection of the body," and the down-pointing triangle the descent of spirit into matter, and the complete star represents the immortal being fitted to dwell in "that house not built with hands, eternal in the heavens."