

Tubal-cain

Q. Why does Tubal-cain, an artificer in metals, play such a prominent part in our ritual? Why was not a builder chosen—or at least someone connected with the art of building?

A. For a full answer to this question, we have to go back to the oldest documents of the Craft, the *MS. Constitutions*, but first we should glance at the Biblical background to the story, which appears in Gen. 4, vv. 16-22.

The Bible tells how Cain, having murdered his brother, escaped from Eden to Nod where his wife bore him a son, Enoch. Cain then built, or started to build, a city and knowing himself to be accursed, he named it after his son Enoch. The succeeding verses then recount the birth of Enoch's grandson, Lamech, with the story of Lamech's two wives, and their four children:

Jabal, the father, or the originator, of the science of tending flocks. (Abel had been a shepherd, but Jabal had widened the class of animals that could be domesticated.)

Jubal, founder of the art of music.

Tubal-cain, inventor of the forge, skilled in brass and ironwork and in cutting instruments.

Naamah. The O.T. text simply names her as Lamech's daughter. But a Jewish tradition arose, and was well established among historians in the Middle Ages, that she was the inventor of the arts of weaving and other related skills.

So much for the background, amplified slightly with notes from the early commentaries. The story, in so far as it concerns our present ritual, is derived from the earliest pillar legend incorporated in the historical portion of the *MS. Constitutions*, our *Old Charges*. It tells how the four children of Lamech, fearing that the world was to be destroyed by fire or flood, 'took counsel together' and decided to inscribe 'all the sciences' that they had founded, upon two pillars, one of marble and the other of lacerus' (clay-brick), because the one would not burn and the other would not sink in water.

There is no need to discuss the 'accuracy' of the legend. Josephus gave one version of it in his *Antiquities*, and the story reappears in the writings of many of the medieval historians. The earliest 'Masonic' version appears in the *Cooke MS.* of c. 1410, where the compiler had clearly attempted to reconcile several conflicting accounts, but the *Cooke MS.* legend was repeated regularly (with variations) in all subsequent versions of the *MS. Constitutions*.

These two pillars, *not Solomon's*, were the earliest pillars in the legendary history of the Craft and our story then goes on to recount how the world was saved in Noah's flood and how the science of masonry traveled from the east through Egypt into Europe and was finally established in England.

Why was not a builder chosen? Doubtless because the first builder of a city, according to the O.T., was Cain, a murderer.

Why Tubal-cain? I would say, because he was the forerunner of H.A.; indeed the O.T. (Gen. 4, v. 22, and I Kings 7, v. 14) uses precisely the same two Hebrew words in describing their craft, [*choreish nechosheth*] 'a worker in brass'. Tubal-cain was the founder of the craft in which H.A., above all, excelled and he was the direct link between the two earliest pillars and those of Solomon's Temple.

Although the name Tubal-cain appears regularly in all our *Old Charges*, it should be noted that the name did not come into our *ritual* until a comparatively late date, c. 1745; there is no printed evidence of that name *in the Masonic ritual* earlier than 1745, but recently discovered transcripts of evidence given to the Portuguese Inquisition authorities suggest that the name was in use in a Lodge of Irishmen at Lisbon as early as 1738. (*AQC* 84, p.93)

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