Hiram Abif

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and the

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THE personality of Hiram Abif must always be an interesting one to all Master Masons. Our martyred Grand Master is the central figure in the Third Degree which forms the climax of Craft Masonry; he is held up to us, and rightly so, as a glorious example of unshaken fidelity, and we are admonished to be as true to our Masonic obligations as he proved to be to his.

The traditional history which relates his untimely end, bears a striking resemblance to various legends of ancient classical mythology, and it has been argued by many writers on Masonry that it is nothing but another form of these legends, devoid of all historical truth. Thus, Oliver, in his *Freemasons' Treasury*, Lecture 45, asks whether anyone can "be simple enough to believe that Dr. Anderson, in his *Defence of Masonry*, [*The Defence of Masonry*, printed in the

1738 Book of Constitutions, was not written by Dr. Anderson, but by Martin Clare, A.M., F.R.S., Junior Grand Warden in 1735 - Ed.] intended to prove a real historical fact when he explained the exhumation of the body of Hiram Abif "? and adds "Why, it is well known that the celebrated artist was living at Tyre many years after the Temple was completed." In Lecture 47 he points out certain discrepancies which exist in the traditional history. No one would venture to assert that there are no discrepancies, for it must be remembered, that traditions which are transmitted orally, become altered in the course of transmission, either by being misunderstood, or by the caprice of those who repeat them. But Oliver and others assert, that there is no trace of the death of Hiram Abif in the V. of the S.L. Perdiguier, in his work *Le Livre du Compagnonage* (Vol. II, p. 80) says, "The Bible, the only book of any real authority concerning the

construction of Solomon's Temple, says nothing about Hiram's murder." Ragon (quoted in Oliver, Lecture 46) says, "The Holy Scriptures tacitly disprove them (*i.e.* the Masonic traditions regarding Hiram's death), for they contain no reference whatever to the circumstances which constitute the legend of initiation." Now it is with these statements, and statements such as these, that this Paper is intended to deal, and to sketch, if only briefly, a theory to shew that some reference to the disappearance of our illustrious Grand Master does exist in the Holy Scriptures.

The V. of the S.L. contains two accounts of the building of Solomon's Temple, viz., in I Kings and in II Chronicles. They apparently differ in many details, and the differences in the paragraphs referring to Hiram may be here pointed out. In Chronicles Hiram

is described as being "the son. of a woman of the daughters of Dan," whereas in I Kings (chap. 7, v. 14) he is said to be "a widow's son of the tribe of Naphtali." Now a man's mother could not belong to two tribes, Dan and Naphtali. We must therefore conclude that two different Hirams are spoken of - one, whose mother was of the daughters of Dan, another, whose mother was of the tribe of Naphtali. This conclusion is strengthened by the fact that, according to the two versions, the Hirams mentioned are engaged in different work. In Chronicles, Hiram is stated to have been a worker "in gold, and in silver, in brass, in iron, in stone, and in timber, in purple, in blue, and in fine linen, and in crimson; also to grave any manner of graving, and to find out every device." In Kings he is called "a worker in brass ; and he was filled with wisdom, and understanding, and cunning to work all works in brass." One is a brass-smith only,

the other is an all-round workman, skilled in every kind of metal-work, also in stone and timber, consequently a builder, an engraver and a master of design. This also would lead us to conclude that there are two different men bearing the same name.

But there is a further curious fact. According to II Chronicles, King Solomon, before beginning the erection of the Temple, sent to Hiram, King of Tyre, asking for a skilful workman, when the all-round man was sent. In I Kings, chap. 5, we are told, that King Solomon asked Hiram, King of Tyre, to supply timber, which was sent; not a word is said about sending a skilful workman. Chap. 6 describes the building of the frame-work of the Temple, built of cedar-wood which Hiram, King of Tyre had supplied, and how it was overlaid with gold. The first portion of chap. 7 speaks of King Solomon building his own palace and in v. 13

states, that King Solomon "sent and fetched Hiram out of Tyre," the son of a widow of the tribe of Naphtali, a worker in brass alone; and then follow particulars of the brass articles which this Hiram made. The all-round good workman, the designer, was sent by Hiram, King of Tyre, at King Solomon's request, *before* the work was commenced; the brass-smith was sent for and fetched from Tyre by King Solomon, *after* the Temple walls and rooms were built, and he made the brass pillars, sea and lavers, all of molten or cast brass.

Hence, according to one account, Hiram was sent by the King of Tyre at the beginning of the work, whilst according to the other account, he was sent for and brought by King Solomon in the middle of the work. Consequently here again there seem to be two Hirams referred to, a designer, who drew up plans; and

erected the framework of the temple, another who, after the frame-work was set up, cast the pillars, sea and lavers. It is worthy of mention, that whilst Josephus (Antiq. vii, 4) knew of but one Hiram, he states "Now," - *i.e.* after the frame-work was erected - " Solomon sent for an artificer out of Tyre, whose name was Hiram," - thus agreeing in this respect with the statement in the book of Kings. In fact, the two accounts in Kings and Chronicles do not refer to the same incident; they are not repetitive, but supplementary. The attentive reader of Scripture will observe this also in other passages in the books of Kings and Chronicles, which deal with the same event - that an incident omitted in one account is recorded in the other.

Collocating the two accounts, the facts seem to be as follow. At King Solomon's request Hiram, King of

Tyre, sent a man named Hiram, skilful in all kinds of metal-work and designing, who acted as the architect, and under whose supervision the temple was built. When the work was nearly completed, *i.e.* when the temple proper was erected, King Solomon sent on his own initiative, and without consultation with Hiram, King of Tyre, and fetched a man, also named Hiram, out of Tyre, who cast the huge pillars, the sea and the lavers.

Now we may well ask why a second workman was required for the casting of these articles; the first Hiram is described as skilful to work in brass, why, therefore, did he not cast the pillars, etc.? Perhaps the solution of the mystery may be found in an apparently insignificant variation in the description of the two Hirams. The second Hiram, who was sent for by King Solomon during the course of the work on the temple,

is described as "a widow's son," whilst this designation is missing in the description in Chronicles of the first Hiram, the architect of the temple. The second Hiram was a widow's son at the time when King Solomon sent and fetched him out of Tyre. His father was dead. Who was his father ? He is stated to have been "a man of Tyre." Let us endeavour to discover some further mention of his father in the Scriptures themselves.

Masonry speaks of Hiram Abif. What is this name Abif ? There can be no doubt as to its origin. The second book of Chronicles, chap. 4, v. 16, reads as follows : "The pots also, and the shovels, and the flesh-hooks, and all their instruments, did Huram his father make to King Solomon for the house of the Lord of bright brass." This phrase "his father," has puzzled the commentators. It is explained to mean that Huram is called, Solomon's father, in the signification of

instructor teacher, advisor. This is possible, for the Hebrew word for "father" is often used in this sense. Someone, however, perceiving the strangeness of Huram being called King Solomon's father, regarded the Hebrew word for "his father" as part of Huram's name. Now the Hebrew word for "his father " is Abif, and thus, taking this word as forming part of Hiram's name, he called him Hiram Abif. This explanation is beyond all doubt. It has been given repeatedly. Anderson gave it in the first book of Constitutions; Luther also took the word "Abif," not as designating Hiram, but as part and parcel of his name, and called him Hiram Abif.

But what is really the cause of Hiram being styled in this passage "his father," and whose father is meant? For answers to these questions turn to the Book of Kings. After stating that King Solomon sent and

fetched Hiram the second out of Tyre, there is given, in chap. 7, an account of all the articles which this Hiram made, viz., the two pillars of brass, cast in the clay ground, the molten sea or cistern, and ten lavers of brass. V. 40 and 41 read, "And Hiram made the lavers" - the correct reading is "pots" not "lavers" "and the shovels, and the basins. So Hiram made an end of doing all the work that he made King Solomon for the House of the Lord." And then again the articles are enumerated as before, the pillars, the sea and the lavers, all, be it noted, of molten or cast brass, and in v. 46 we read where they were cast. But v. 45 breaks in as a parenthesis, repeating part of v. 40, - "and the pots and the shovels, and the basins ; and all these vessels, which Hiram made to King Solomon for the house of the Lord were of bright brass." Compare this passage with the parallel passage in Chronicles. After stating that Hiram, King of Tyre, was sending a

designer, chap. 3 describes the building of the walls and rooms of the temple, and concludes by saying, that the temple building was finished off by the two pillars which stood in front. Chap. 4 tells of the making of the molten sea and lavers, and v. 11 of that chapter reads "And Huram made the pots, and the shovels, and the basins. And Huram finished the work that he was to make for King Solomon for the house of God." And then, as in the account in the book of Kings, the articles are again enumerated, the molten pillars, the sea and the lavers, v. 17 informing us where they were cast. But v. 16, as in the book of Kings, is a parenthesis, "The pots also, and the shovels, and the flesh-hooks, and all their instruments, did Huram his father make to King Solomon for the house of the Lord of bright brass."

Why this repetition of the name Huram in verse 11, "And Huram made the pots, etc. - and Huram finished the work"? Why also this insistence, both in Kings and Chronicles, upon the facts that Huram made the pots and shovels, and that they were of bright or polished brass?

The explanation is this. Remember that the second Hiram was a brass-founder, and nothing more, and that the first Hiram, besides being cunning in design - an architect - is also stated to have been skilful in all kinds of metal-work. Now, in the light of this explanation, read again the two passages. Hiram made the pots and shovels, but Hiram finished the work, viz., the pillars, the sea, and the lavers. It is quite evident that the two different Hirams are here intended. The first Hiram made the pots, &c., the second Hiram the pillars, &c. And then an explanation

is given why the first Hiram made the pots, &c. "The pots also, and the shovels, and the flesh-hooks, and all their instruments, did Huram his father make * * * of bright brass," for he alone possessed skill in this kind of brass-work. They were of beaten work, beaten out of a lump, and highly polished. This was a very difficult class of work, [cf. the Talmudical tradition that Moses confessed his inability to fashion the golden candlestick of the Tabernacle in this manner.] and it required an artificer as skilful as the first Hiram was, for this difficult kind of metal-work.

Now we come to something of the utmost importance, the meaning of the phrase "his father." Note well!" The pots and the shovels did Huram his father make." (II Chron. chap. 4, v. 16). Whose father? THE FATHER OF THE LAST-MENTIONED PERSON, of course. And who is the last-mentioned person?

HIRAM THE SECOND, who is said in the verses immediately preceding to have carried out the casting of the huge brass pillars. THE TWO HIRAMS WERE, in fact, FATHER AND SON. Hiram, the Son, made the pillars, but the pots, &c., did Hiram, HIS father make, of bright brass.

A very curious fact bears out this interpretation. In Chronicles, which tells us that at King Solomon's request, Hiram, King of Tyre sent him a skilful workman, Hiram Abif - Hiram, his father - the name is not really H-i-ram, but H-u-ram; whilst in Kings, which informs us that King Solomon sent and fetched Hiram the son out of Tyre, the name is H-i-ram. The names are really identical, the interchange of the vowels " i " and " u " being very frequent in Hebrew proper names. In Chronicles, H-u-ram, the name of the father, is used throughout, except once, when H-i-

ram, that of the son is employed. [vide earlier note] This exception proves almost to a certainty the correctness of the foregoing interpretation, for it is in that very passage which various other considerations have led me to conclude contains mention of both father and son. Thus v. 11 reads "And H-u-ram" - bear in mind that this is the father's name - "made the pots and the shovels, &c., but H-i-ram " - the son's name - " finished making all the work," viz., the two pillars, the sea and the lavers [vide earlier note]. There is a slight change in the names in the parallel passage in Kings, which seems to point to two different persons being designated there also. [vide earlier note]

Now why did not Hiram, the father, cast the pillars, &c.? Why was the second Hiram needed to finish the work? The father is described as being skilful in all kinds of metal-work, and he certainly intended casting

them. Something must have prevented him doing so, and necessitated another finishing the work. What had happened? The V. of the S.L. is silent upon this point, but Masonry gives us the light. It is unnecessary to remind Master Masons of what our traditional history tells us regarding the untimely end of our illustrious Grand Master, Hiram Abif. But is there nothing at all in the Bible, that hints at what our tradition avers, prevented Hiram Abif completing the labours he had begun?

When sad necessity compelled King Solomon to obtain another Workman to complete the Work of the Temple, he sent and fetched Hiram out of Tyre. SCRIPTURE TELLS US, BY IMPLICATION, OF HIS FATHER'S DEATH HAVING PREVIOUSLY TAKEN PLACE, by describing this second Hiram as being the son of a widow Woman. Her husband, father of the

second Hiram, was dead at the time When King Solomon sent and fetched him out of Tyre. And as we have gathered from Scripture that this "his father" Was Hiram Abif, who superintended the erection of the temple, and as Scripture practically tells us that the father was dead when the son was brought from Tyre, during the course of the work on the temple, WE HAVE SURE CORROBORATION IN THE VOL. OF THE S.L. OF THE MASONIC TRADITION, THAT HIRAM ABIF DIED WHILST THE TEMPLE WAS BEING ERECTED.

"King Solomon sent and fetched him out of Tyre." He evidently sent him an escort, fearing that some attack might be made upon him, and the son suffer the same fate as his father. The son of the murdered architect was the natural person to complete the unfinished work, for amongst the ancients, sons were trained in

the occupations of their fathers, generation after generation.

There is a Jewish tradition that Hiram, King of Tyre, was killed by Nebuchadnezzar, King of Babylon, when he destroyed the temple that King Solomon had built. This would have given him a life-time of extraordinary duration. There is, however, another Jewish tradition, that, in reward for his participation in the erection of the temple, Hiram, King of Tyre, never tasted death, but, like Enoch and Elijah, entered Paradise alive. These two traditions are, of course, contradictory, and there seems to be no doubt that the legend of Hiram's admittance alive into Paradise, alludes, not to Hiram, King of Tyre, but to Hiram the builder. Indeed, one Jewish version of the story, distinctly relates it of Hiram the builder. Legends such as these, although not committed to writing until centuries after the

events took place which they profess to record, were yet the common property of the populace, and reflected their opinions and views. Have we not here, then, the popular explanation of the disappearance of Hiram Abif? The legend certainly seems to point, to there having been something mysterious connected with the end of the builder's life in this world, and to have been invented in order to account for his sudden withdrawal from the scene of his labours. The Israelites, being unacquainted with the facts of his murder, the knowledge of which was confined to only a few, accounted for his mysterious disappearance by stating that he had been received alive into Paradise. Indeed, it is difficult to explain such a rumour, except by assuming that his end was sudden and secret. If this is the origin of this popular legend, it is evident that at the time when it first became current, it was common knowledge amongst the Israelites that Hiram

the builder had come to a mysterious end, and in ignorance of the real cause of his disappearance, the rumour went that he had been taken into Paradise without suffering death, because of the assistance he had rendered in the erection of the temple. This legend, therefore, would seem to prove that there is something more than a slight substratum of truth in the Masonic tradition regarding the death of Hiram Abif.

It may be taken for granted then, that there are distinct traces in the V. of the S.L. of the so-called Hiramic legend. The death of Hiram Abif was known to but few. Besides King Solomon, Hiram the son, and the fifteen present at the re-interment, and perhaps also Hiram, King of Tyre, no one else was cognisant of the true circumstances - they were regarded as a Masonic secret. Consequently, the sacred historians of

the books of Chronicles and Kings, do not record them, even if they were aware of them. But in describing the building of the temple, and the manufacture of the brass articles contained therein, they state exactly how the temple was erected, and exactly who made the various articles of brass, and in making these statements of fact, they cannot avoid giving, in the very words and phrases they employ, and probably without knowing that they were doing so, hint upon hint which point to the main fact contained in the traditional history of the third degree, viz., that the architect of the temple lost his life during the course of erecting the sacred edifice.

The fact that Hiram Abif did not live to complete the work may not be apparent in the Scriptural records, the vulgar eye may not be able to read it, but, nevertheless, it is there, and if we read the accounts of

the building of the temple by the light that Masonic tradition casts on them, we are enabled to perceive this important fact referred to time after time. And since the Bible, the unerring guide to truth, and therefore itself true in all respects, does, more or less directly, inform us of the death of Hiram Abif, we should be convinced that the legend of the third degree is something more than a legend, that it is historically true, and that they who assert that the biblical records are entirely silent upon this point, have themselves not yet seen the light.

NOTE.

SUBSEQUENTLY SUPPLIED BY BRO. MARKS

To make the matter clearer, it will be well to transliterate the Hebrew names.

In Kings, where I hold the name of the son appears, it is Ch-*i*-ram (*ch* guttural as in the Scotch loch).
In Chronicles where the name of the father appears, it is Ch-*u*-ram.
Thus I Chron., chap. 4, v. II, reads in the Hebrew "And Ch-*u*-ram made the pots, &c., and Ch-*i*-ram finished the work, &c."
In II Kings, chap. 7, v. 40, the passage in the Hebrew reads, "And Ch-i-rom made the pots, &c., and Ch-i-ram finished the work. The name Chirom in Hebrew is not spelled the same as Chiram. This is the slight change referred to, and seems to point to two different persons being mentioned. As a matter of fact, there is

a marginal note to the Hebrew text, calling attention to the change of spelling in II Kings, chap. 7, v. 40.

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