

The Legend of the Lost Word

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Ancient Craft Masonry attains its climax in the symbolism of the Lost Word, and A quest for its recovery; but in our ritualistic work there is little attempt at explanation.

The observation has been made that language is a growth; every word had to be created by man. Back of every word is some want or necessity of mind or body and the genius to make expression in some sign or sound that we call a word.

"Some words are rough and rugged like the skins of wild beasts, other glitter and glisten like satin and gold. Words have been born of hatred and revenge, of love and sacrifice, of hope and fear, of agony and joy. In them mingle the darkness and the dawn. They are the garments of thought, the robes of reason, the shadows of the past, the reflection of the present and the crystallization of human history."

It has been said that the egocentric instinct in man has made "self-preservation the first law of nature," that growing out of or alongside of it is the gregarious instinct which has produced social governments and philanthropic enterprises. Deeper than these instincts there is in man a consciousness, however dim, in explicable forces and agencies, and an urge to realize their potency. In the childhood of the race this occasioned the thought of supernatural power in a word.

"The word that causes the heavens on high to tremble, The word that makes the world below to quake."

Constitute the first two lines of a Babylonian hymn inscribed upon a clay tablet five thousand years ago, in which the wise priesthood of a great religion sang praises to the might and power of a word. Some Masonic writers have held that A U M, pronounced "oom," is the oldest omnific name of God in the world; that it came out of India, and that it has also been spelled A O M, but pronounced the same way. Frank C. Higgins has written a book on his name as the "Lost Word," and claims it is concealed in the terminal letters of the names of the three ruffians. To the best of my knowledge this concealment has not been satisfactorily explained.

In my opinion, Freemasonry is largely indebted to the Hebrews for the legend of The Lost Word. Shakespeare says, "What's in a name?" The Jews saw in a name "a sign standing for the personality, the achievements, the reputation, the character, the power and the glory of the one who wore it." Joseph meant "increaser," Moses meant "drawn out of water," Israel meant "Prince of God." At the burning bush the ineffable name of God Almighty was communicated to Moses; so overwhelming was its glory that the people pronounced it in whispers.

The third commandment of the Decalogue, delivered from Mount Sinai, declared, "Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord, thy God in vain." The priestly rule contained in Leviticus reads, "He that pronounceth the name of the Lord distinctly shall be put to death." At last only the high priest was permitted to utter the name, and that but once a year. On the Day of Atonement, and in the holy of holies, its utterance was accompanied by the beating of cymbals and the blowing of trumpets, so as to completely extinguish the sound of the human voice. Such were "the wrappings of secrecy and sanctity which the Jews threw about the name of God."

As they used no vowels in writing, all that was ever seen were four consonants, J H V H, the Tetragrammaton or four lettered name of God which we call Jehovah. From the letters there was no clue to the pronunciation. No one could understand them any more than we could know that Mr. stands for Mister and Dr. stands for Doctor unless someone told us so.

According to tradition, the great catastrophe of the Babylonian captivity was that, through the death of the high priest without a successor, the name was lost. "At the end of that captivity priests and scribes began a search for the lost name which has continued without avail for two and one-half millenniums." The four consonants they had, but it is doubtful if anyone has been able to supply the sound of the vowels. It is believed that this four-lettered name of God is the Lost Word of Masonry today.

Like everything else in our science, it is a symbol. It is the consummation of all Masonic symbolism because it stands for the Divine truth. Brotherly love and relief are but the means to an end; the final design of our Institution is its third principle tenet, the imperial truth. In some aspects truth seems relative, because it is not complete, but only partial. Now we see through a glass darkly, but the ultimates of truth are immutable and eternal, the Fatherhood of God and the immortality of the soul, "Down to this deep foundation Masonry digs for a basis of its Temple and finds an everlasting rock."

Dr. Joseph Fort Newton says:

"Freemasonry makes no argument, but presents a picture, the oldest, if not the greatest, drama in the world, the better to make men feel those truths which no mortal words can utter. It shows us the tragedy of life in its blackest hour, the forces of evil, cunning, yet stupid, which come up against the soul, tempting it to treachery, a tragedy which, in its simplicity and power, makes the heart ache and stand still. Then out of the thick darkness there rises, like a beautiful white star, that in man which is most akin to God, his love of truth, his devotion to duty, his willingness to go down into the night of death, if only virtue may survive and throb like a pulse of fire in the evening sky." "Here is the ultimate and final witness of our Divinity and immortality, the sublime, death-defying moral heroism of the human soul." Translated into personal terms it is the Apostle Peter at his execution asking to be crucified head downward. It is the Spartan Leonidas at the Pass of Thermopylae, with a handful of men holding back the hordes of Persia and spelling out the salvation of the Greek Republic.

It is the Swiss, Arnold Von Winkelried, receiving the points of Austrian spears into his

own breast and making his dead body a bridge of victory for his countrymen. It is the American, Nathan Hale, grieving that he had but one life to give, but one supreme sacrifice to make at the altar of our National Liberty. It is our operative Grand Master, the Tyrian Builder before the brute forces of death and destruction, surrendering his life but preserving his integrity.

Brother H.L. Haywood says: "The search for a lost word is not a search for a mere vocable of a few letters which one might write down on a piece of paper, it is the search for a truth." It is a quest for the highest possible life in the spiritual unfoldment of humanity; it is the seeking after the name, the power and the glory of God.

The purpose is the same whether this age-old legend of the quest be woven into a tragic tale like Eugene Sue's "Wandering Jew," or thrown about a mystic drama like Maurice Maeterlinck's "Blue Bird," or crystallized in an epic poem like James Russell Lowell's "Vision of Sir Launfal," whether it be a missing chord of music, the vacancy of a sanctuary, a design left unfinished by the death of the Master Builder, or the Lost Word in Masonry to be recovered through patience, perseverance and time. It always symbolizes a search for something good and beautiful and true.

At times of meditation and introspection there is something vaguely haunting in the Legend of the Lost Word; like the fleeting fragrance of a forest flower experienced in the past, the murmured music of a rippling brook heard in childhood, the purple sheen of twilight on a distant hilltop, or some exquisite dream of infinite love in the long ago; forgotten, but trembling at the doorway of memory.

This quest is the central thought of Henry van Dyke's "The Other Wise Man," an inspirational story of beauty and charm, which tells of the days when Augustus Caesar was the master of many Kings and Herod reigned in Jerusalem. Artaban, the Median, the fourth wise man; studied the constellations and certain prophecies of Zoroaster, Balaam and Daniel. Inspired by the appearance of a star in the sky, he sold his possessions and bought three gems; a sapphire, a ruby and a pearl; to bear as tribute to a newborn King.

The other three wise men were to wait for him at the ancient temple of the seven Spheres. Because he tarried in a palm grove outside the walls of Babylon to minister to a Parathion Jew in the ravages of a fever, he did not reach the appointed place in time, and found a note, which said, "We have waited past the midnight hour and can delay no longer. We go to find the King. Follow us across the desert." This meant that Artaban must sell his sapphire to buy camels and provisions for the journey. A ministry of mercy cost him the first jewel.

The third day after the wise men had laid at the feet of a child in a manger their gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh, Artaban entered Bethlehem, weary but full of hope, bearing his Ruby and his Pearl. The streets were deserted, but from an open door of a low stone cottage he heard a woman's voice singing softly. He entered and found a young mother hushing her baby to sleep. She told him of the strangers from the east who had appeared and gone, that the man from Nazareth had taken the babe and its mother and

fled away to Egypt. She placed food before him, the plain fare of humble peasants. The baby slumbered, as great peace filled the quiet room; but suddenly there came the noise of wild confusion in the street, the shrieking and wailing of women's voices crying: "The Soldiers of Herod! They are killing our children."

The mother's face grew white with terror; she huddled with her child in a dark corner of the room. Artaban's form filled all the doorway, and looking straight at the Captain he said: "I am alone in this place and am waiting to give this jewel to the prudent Captain who will leave me in peace." He showed the Ruby glistening like a great drop of blood in the palm of his hand. The lines of greed tightened hard around the Captain's lips. He took the Ruby in his fingers and gave the order: "March on, there is no child here, this house is still."

Artaban turned his face to the East and prayed, "God of Truth, forgive my sin, I have said that which is not to save the life of a child." The voice of the woman said, very gently, "Because thou hast saved the life of my little one, may the Lord Bless thee and keep thee, lift up the light of His Countenance upon thee and give thee peace." Thus he parted with his second jewel.

Down in Egypt Artaban found faint traces here and there of the holy family. Though he found none to worship, he found many to help. He fed the hungry, clothed the naked, healed the sick and comforted the captive. His years moved swiftly by; after thirty-three had gone, in his old age an irresistible impulse came upon him to go up again to Jerusalem. He had his Pearl and was looking for the King.

It was the season of the Passover when he reached the city. There was great excitement; multitudes were being swept as by a secret tide toward the Damascus Gate. He joined the throng and inquired the cause of the tumult and where they were going. "We are going," they answered, "Outside the city walls to a place called Golgotha where Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews, is to be crucified."

How strangely the words fell on the tired heart of Artaban. At last he was to see the King and he still had his pearl, in time, perhaps to offer it as ransom. A troop of Macedonian soldiers came down the street dragging a young girl into bondage and slavery for debts of her father who had died. Being of Artaban's country, she recognized the sign of the Priesthood, the Winged circle of Gold which he wore.

Tearing away from the soldiers and throwing herself at his feet, she prayed, "Have pity upon me, save me from a fate that is worse than death." Artaban trembled as a conflict entered his soul. It was the old conflict which had come to him in the Palm grove and again in the Stone cottage; the conflict between expectations of faith and the impulses of love. In the darkness of his mind it seemed clear that the inevitable comes from God. He took the Pearl from his bosom and placed it in the slave girl's hand, saying, "This is thy ransom. It is the last of my jewels which I kept for the King."

As he spoke the sky darkened, the earth quaked, the houses rocked, a heavy tile shaken

from a roof fell and struck the old man on the temple. He lay breathless and pale. As she bent over him there came a voice through the twilight, small and still, like music sounding from a distance. The old man's lips began to move; she heard him say, "Not so my Lord, for when I saw I Thee an hungered and fed Thee, or thirsty and gave Thee to drink? Thirty and three years have I sought Thee, but I have never seen Thy face nor ministered to Thee, my King." Again the maid heard the sweet voice, faintly, as from afar, but now it seemed as though she understood the words. "Verily I say unto thee, inasmuch as thou hast done unto one of the least of these my brethren, thou hast done it unto me."

At the end of the journey, in the presence of human need, in the expression of human sympathy, in the rendering of human service, he came face to face with his King and discovered his Lost Word. He heard a Divine voice saying, "Inasmuch" and "Well done, good and faithful servant."

The Lost Word symbolizes the kind of truth that cannot be acquired from reading books, that cannot be obtained by paying so much money and listening to so many college lectures. It symbolizes a truth that must be wrought out through the vicissitudes of life in personal experience.

If the Word stands for the personality, the attributes, the power and the glory of God, we must be satisfied with a substitute, because human life and ages of time are too short for a complete revelation of that high and holy name. The whole design of Masonic science is a quest for the truth.

"Divine truth is symbolized by the Logos, the Word, the Name." Through this symbol all the other symbols of Masonry guide a man onward and upward to God.

Over the hills to a valley of endless years,
Over roads of woe to a land without a tear,
Up from the haunts of men to the place where angels are,
This is the march of morality, to a wonderful goal afar.

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