

## Solomon, The Founder of the Temple - The Worthies of Freemasonry

Extracted from The Masonic Review 1856

"SOLOMON was the heir of David. And he said, "Mortals I understand the song of the birds; I possess every kind of knowledge; I have been raised to the sublime height. " AL KORAN OF MOHAMMED.

IF the lives of Enoch and Noah have presented any topics of interest to the Masonic reader, that of King Solomon must claim his attention in a still greater degree. For the most important events of this monarch's career were so very intimately connected with the very foundation of Freemasonry, that the Craft have not thought him unworthy of the honourable title of their first Most Excellent Grand Master. They look upon him with reverence, as their great and wise law-giver and still submit with passive obedience to what they suppose to have been his will and his directions in the organization of the institution. Solomon, the king of Israel, the son of David and Bathsheba, ascended the throne of his kingdom 2989 years after the creation of the world, and 1015 years before the Christian era. He was then only twenty years of age but the youthful monarch is said to have commenced his reign with a decision of a legal question of some difficulty, in which he exhibited the first promise of that wise judgment in which he was ever afterwards distinguished.

One of the great objects of Solomon's life and the one which most intimately connects him with the history of the Masonic institution, was the erection of a temple to Jehovah. This, too, had been a favourite design of his father David. For this purpose that monarch, long before his death, had numbered the workmen whom he found in his kingdom, had appointed the overseers of the work, the hewers of stones, and the bearers of burdens, had prepared a great quantity of brass, iron and cedar, and had amassed an immense treasure with which to support the enterprise. But, on consulting with the prophet Nathan, he learned from that holy man, that, although the pious intention was pleasing to God, yet that he would not be permitted to carry it into execution, and the Divine prohibition was proclaimed in these emphatic words: "*Thou hast shed blood abundantly, and hast made great wars; thou shalt not build a house unto my name, because thou hast shed much blood upon the earth in my sight.*" The task was therefore reserved for the more peaceful Solomon, his son and successor.

Hence, when David was about to die, he charged Solomon to build the temple to God as soon as he should have received the kingdom. He also gave him directions in relation to the construction of the edifice, and put into his possession the money, amounting to ten thousand talents of gold and ten times that amount of silver, which he had collected and laid aside for defraying the expense. Solomon had scarcely ascended the throne of Israel, when he prepared to carry into execution the pious designs of his predecessor. For this purpose, however, he found it necessary to seek the assistance of Hiram, king of Tyre, the ancient friend and ally of his father. The Tyrians and Sidonians, the subjects of Hiram, had long been distinguished for their great architectural skill; and, in fact, many of them, as the members of a mystic operative society, the fraternity of Dionysian artificers, had long monopolized the profession of building in Asia Minor. The Jews, on the contrary, were rather more eminent for their military valour than for their knowledge of the arts of peace, and hence King Solomon at once conceived the necessity of invoking the aid of these foreign architects, if he expected to complete the edifice he was about to erect, either in a reasonable time or with the splendour and magnificence appropriate to the sacred object for which it was intended. For this purpose he addressed the following letter to king Hiram:

*"Know thou that my father would have built a temple to God, but was hindered by wars and continual expeditions, for he did not leave off to overthrow his enemies till he made them all subject to tribute. But I give thanks to God for the peace I, at present enjoy, and on that account I am at leisure and design to build a house to God, for God foretold to my father that such a house should be built by me; wherefore I desire thee to send some of thy subjects with mine to Mount Lebanon, to cut down timber, for the Sidonians are more skillful than our people in cutting of wood. \* As for wages to the hewers of wood, I will pay whatever price thou shalt determine."*

Hiram, mindful of the former amity and alliance that had existed between himself and David, was disposed to extend the friendship he had felt for the father to the son, and replied, therefore, to the letter of Solomon, in the following epistle:

*"It is fit to bless God, that he hath committed thy father's government to thee, who art a wise man and endowed with all virtues. As for myself, I rejoice at the condition thou art in, and will be subservient to thee in all that thou sendest to me about; for when, by my subjects, I have cut down many and large trees of cedar and cypress wood, I will send them to sea, and will order my subjects to make floats of them, and to sail to what places soever of thy country thou shalt desire, and leave them there, after which thy subjects may carry them to Jerusalem. But do thou take care to procure us corn for this timber, which we stand in need of, because we inhabit in an island." \*\**

Hiram lost no time in fulfilling the promise of assistance which he had thus given; and accordingly we are informed that Solomon received thirty-three thousand six hundred workmen from Tyre, besides a sufficient quantity of timber and stone to construct the edifice which he was about to erect. Hiram sent him, also, a far more important gift than either men or materials, in the person of an able architect, "a curious and cunning workman," whose skill and experience were to be exercised in superintending the labours of the craft, and in adorning and beautifying the building. Of this personage, whose name was also Hiram, and who plays so important a part in the history of Freemasonry, we shall have occasion in our next article to speak more particularly. King Solomon commenced the erection of the temple on Monday, the second day of the Hebrew month Zif, which answers to the twenty-first of April, in the year of the world 2992, and 1012 years before the Christian era. Advised in all the details, as Masonic tradition informs us, by the wise and prudent counsels of Hiram king of Tyre, and Hiram Abif, who, with himself, constituted at that time the three Grand Masters of the Craft. Solomon made every arrangement in the disposition and government of the workmen, in the payment of their wages, and in the maintenance of concord and harmony which should insure dispatch in the execution and success in the result. That no confusion might arise in consequence of the great number employed, which has been estimated by some writers at not less than two hundred

and seventeen thousand two hundred and eighty-one, the workmen were divided into three classes, distinguished by their different degrees of proficiency and skill. To each of these classes, peculiar signs and words of recognition were intrusted, and of each distinct duties and labors were required. The most admirable methods of paying the craft were adopted, so that every possibility of imposition on the part of the craftsman, or of injustice on that of the rulers, was easily avoided. All the stones were hewn, squared, and numbered in the quarries of Tyre, and the timbers felled and prepared in the forests of Lebanon, whence they were carried by sea, on floats, as King Hiram had promised, to Joppa, and thence by land to Jerusalem, where they were deposited and secured in their appropriate places by wooden mauls, so that as Scripture, as well as Masonic tradition informs us, "*there was neither hammer nor ax nor any tool of iron heard in the house while it was in building.*" Another tradition seeks to impress upon our minds the favor with which the undertaking was viewed by the Deity, by affirming, that while the building was in progress, it did not rain in the day-time lest the workmen should be interrupted in their labors.

To Hiram Abif was intrusted the general superintendence of the building, while subordinate stations were assigned to other eminent Artists and Masons. Their names and offices have been handed down in the traditions of the Order.

Adoniram, who is said to have been the brother-in-law of Hiram Abif, appears, under the title of "Inspector," to have held the next position in dignity to that illustrious personage. We are informed that he commanded the workmen at Jerusalem, at their first organization, before the arrival of H.A., and that afterwards he had the inspection of the works at Mount Lebanon, where the monthly levy of ten thousand Jews, in connection with the Tyrian craftsmen, were employed in the preparation of timbers. \*\*\*

Tito Zadok, the High Priest, and Prince of the Harodim, or nobles, was appointed to control the three hundred architects who were appointed to superintend the disposition of the materials, and at the same, time Solomon instituted a school of architecture for the instruction of the workmen, so that as the temple was advancing in its progress towards completion, the Craft were augmenting their knowledge and experience of the "royal art." Masonic tradition informs us that the Jewish workmen who were employed were divided into twelve classes, according to their several tribes, and that twelve illustrious knights were appointed to render to Solomon a daily account of the work which had been done by their respective tribes.

In short, the utmost perfection of human wisdom was displayed by this enlightened monarch in the disposition of every thing that related to the construction of the stupendous edifice. Men of the most comprehensive minds, imbued with the greatest share of zeal and fervency, and inspired with the strongest fidelity to his interests, were employed as masters to instruct and superintend the workmen; while those who labored in inferior stations were excited to enthusiasm by the promise of promotion and reward.

We do not lose sight at this period, of the stone of foundation, to which reference has already been made in the lives of Enoch and Noah. Tradition informs that, coming into the possession of King Solomon, with the knowledge of that ineffable name which was inscribed upon its surface, he took the securest precautions to preserve it from future destruction by accident, or from the pollution of unhallowed curiosity, by depositing it in "a place of silence and secrecy," which, in a mode that we are not at liberty to explain, he caused to be constructed.

While every thing in relation to the temple was in this happy progress to completion, an event occurred of a most lamentable nature, which at once threw the whole of the craft into confusion, suspended the works for a temporary period, and became a source of the deepest grief to King Solomon. An act of treachery was unexpectedly committed, which impaired for a time the harmony and order with which the undertaking had heretofore been conducted, and deprived the monarch of his most faithful friend and wisest counsellor. But the judgment and decision, for which Solomon had heretofore been distinguished, did not desert him at this trying moment, and by a well digested and admirably executed plan he succeeded in arresting the criminals and inflicting on them that punishment which their crimes so richly merited; while by the previous exercise of his prudence and sagacity he was enabled to prevent the irretrievable loss of that sacred symbol, for the surreptitious possession of which the offence had been committed, and by means of that stone of foundation which had already been its conservator in the days of Enoch to secure it for the discovery of future times.

King Solomon, immediately after the death of his valued friend, made the necessary preparations to supply his place as far as it could possibly be accomplished. The ineffable degrees supply us with a large amount of information in relation to the means thus adopted by Solomon for carrying on the works of the temple. For this purpose he instituted new degrees and appointed new officers, among whom he divided the labors that had formerly been executed by one man. The architectural work was placed under the control of several persons who were styled intendants of the building, and who were selected from among the class of architects who had been previously placed under the care of Tito Zadok, while the administration of justice was intrusted to another class who were called Provosts and Judges. In this manner the progress of the building continued uninterruptedly until the temple was at length finished in the month Bul, answering to our November, in the year of the world 3000, being a little more than seven years from its commencement.

As soon as the magnificent edifice was completed, and fit for the sacred purposes for which it was intended, King Solomon determined to celebrate the consummation of his labors in the most solemn manner. For this purpose he directed the ark to be brought from the king's house where it had been placed by King David, and to be deposited with impressive ceremonies in the holy of holies, beneath the expanded wings of the cherubim. This important event is commemorated in the beautiful ritual of the Most Excellent Master's degree.

Our traditions inform us that when the temple was completed, Solomon assembled all the heads of the tribes, the elders and chiefs of Israel, to bring the ark up out of Zion, where King David had deposited it in a tabernacle until a more fitting place should have been built for its reception. This duty, therefore, the Levites now performed, and delivered the ark of the covenant into the hands of the

priests, who fixed it in its place in the centre of the holy of holies.

It was during the construction of this edifice that we believe the system of Freemasonry to have been thoroughly revised and placed under its present organization. The great truths which had been preserved by Enoch and Noah, and handed down through along succession of patriarchs, had, as we have already seen, been lost to the rest of the world since the time of the dispersion and confusion of the tower of Babel. But the Tyrian workmen who arrived at Jerusalem, in possession only of the dim and imperfect light which they had derived from what has been called the spurious Freemasonry of the Pagan mysteries, were here, at Mount Moriah on the threshing floor of Ornan the Jebusite, to recover their lost knowledge, and once more to find the universal language and the true doctrines of Freemasonry. "The whole system of Freemasonry," says Archdeacon Mant, "underwent some revisal under the command of Solomon, who, being acquainted with many of the most famous systems of mysterious instruction, was enabled from that knowledge to settle among the true believers an improved form of Masonic discipline; and from this point, accordingly, our present system of Freemasonry is undoubtedly to be dated."

By the construction of this magnificent edifice, Solomon and the Masons engaged with him in the undertaking acquired immortal honour. The Order was now firmly established and thoroughly regulated, and the wisdom of the illustrious founder became the theme of admiration to surrounding nations. It was this wide-spread reputation that induced the Queen of Sheba, a country supposed by most commentators to be situated in the southern part of Arabia, to visit Jerusalem and inspect the celebrated works of which she had heard so many encomiums. And, Masonic lore informs us that, when she first beheld the stupendous edifice, which glittered with gold, and seemed, from the accurate adjustment of all its joints, to be composed of but a single piece of marble, she raised her eyes and hands in an attitude of admiration, and exclaimed, "Most excellent Master!"

Here, then, the immediate and personal connection of King Solomon with the Craft begins to draw to a conclusion. It is true, that he subsequently employed those worthy Masons whom, at the completion and dedication of the temple, he had received and acknowledged as Most Excellent Masters, in the erection of a magnificent palace and other edifices, but in process of time he fell into the most grievous errors; abandoned the path of truth; encouraged the idolatrous rites of spurious Masonry; and, induced by the persuasion of those foreign wives and concubines whom he had espoused in his later days, he erected a fane for the celebration of these heathen mysteries, on one of the hills that overlooked the very spot where, in his youth, he had consecrated a temple to the one true God. It is however believed that before his death, he deeply repented of this temporary aberration from virtue, and, in the emphatic expression, "Vanity of vanities! All is vanity," he is supposed to have acknowledged that in his own experience he had discovered that falsehood and sensuality, however they may give pleasure for a season, will, in the end, produce the bitter fruits of remorse and sorrow.

That King Solomon was the wisest monarch that swayed the sceptre of Israel, has been the unanimous opinion of posterity. So much was he beyond the age in which he flourished, in the attainments of science, that the Jewish and Arabic writers have attributed to him a thorough knowledge of the secrets of magic, by whose incantations they suppose him to have been capable of calling spirits and demons to his assistance; and the Talmudists and Mohammedan doctors record many fanciful legends of his exploits in controlling these ministers of darkness. As a naturalist, he is said to have written a work on animals, of no ordinary character, which has however perished; while his qualifications as a poet were demonstrated by more than a thousand poems which he composed, of which his epithalamium on his marriage with an Egyptian princess, and the Book of Ecclesiastes, alone remain. He has given us in his Proverbs an opportunity of forming a favorable opinion of his pretensions to the character of a deep and right thinking philosopher, while the long peace and prosperous condition of his empire for the greater portion of his reign, the increase of his kingdom in wealth and refinement, and the encouragement which he gave to architecture, the mechanic arts, and commerce, testify his profound abilities as a sovereign and statesman.

After a reign of forty years he died, and with him expired forever the glory and the power of the Hebrew empire. But the Masons whom he had instructed and organized, dispersing into various countries, in search of employment, carried with them the most grateful remembrance of his wisdom and his youthful virtues, and conveyed to the remotest lands the blessings of the noble institution that he had founded, and which, lost by the wickedness of his ancestors at the tower of Babel, was by his piety again discovered on the threshing floor of Ornan the Jebusite.

\* That the Israelites, not long before the building of the temple, were deplorably deficient in the mechanic arts, is evident from the declaration in Samuel, that in the time of Saul, - "there was no smith found throughout all the land of Israel." 1 Sam .xiii: 19. But during the reign David, perhaps from their intercourse with the Tyrians, their skill had considerably increased.

\*\* These epistles of Solomon and Hiram are given by Josephus, who says that In his day copies them were preserved, not only in the Jewish books, but also in the public records of the Tyrians. Ant. B. vii. ch. iii. The substance of the letters will be found in the books of Kings and Chronicles, but in a condensed form.

\*\*\* Adoniram is mentioned in several places of scripture, as the chief of the tribute. See Sam. xx: 24, 1 Kings iv:6, and xii:18, and 2 Chron. x:18.