

THE HISTORY OF THE TWO PILLARS

by
W. L. Fawcette

According to tradition, Melcarthus, a Tyrian navigator and explorer, sailing in search of fabled Atlantis or dimly rumored Britain, had paused in a bay at the western extremity of the land beyond the straits, and set up there two pillars as a memorial, building over them the temple of Hercules. A colony of Tyre was established there, and the place grew into the ancient Gades, the modern Cadiz. As the temple increased in wealth, through the votive offerings of passing voyagers, it became more splendid, and the first rude pillars of stone were replaced by others made of precious metals. As late as the second century this temple existed in its greatest splendor. Flavius Philostratus, who visited it, testifies to its magnificence, and in his Life of Apollonius of Tyana gives the following description of the pillars:

"The pillars in the temple were composed of gold and silver, and so nicely blended were the metals as to form but one color. They were more than a cubit high, of a quadrangular form, like anvils, whose capitals were inscribed with characters neither Indian nor Egyptian, nor such as could be deciphered. These pillars are the chains which bind together the earth and sea. The inscriptions on them were executed by Hercules in the house of the Parcae, to prevent discord arising among the elements and that friendship being disturbed which they have for each other."

These pillars were the nucleus of the ancient Gades, and naturally became the metropolitan emblem of the modern city, as the horse's head was of Carthage.

The tradition of the Freemasons in regard to the two pillars, which are a prominent emblem of their Craft, is, that they represent the pillars Jachin and Boaz which Hiram of Tyre made for Solomon, and set one on either side of the entrance to the Temple, to commemorate the pillar of cloud by day and of fire by night which guided the Israelites in their forty years' wanderings in the wilderness. Whatever significance the Hebrews may have attached to these pillars, there is good reason for believing that they received the material emblem from the Tyrians at the time of the building of the Temple. The Scriptures give a minute account of the dimensions and designs of the pillars, (2 Kings, vii, and 2 Chronicles, iii,) but are silent as to their significance; and there is nothing in the whole Scriptural account of them to forbid the conclusion that the ideas symbolized by them were as much Tyrian as Jewish. Tyre had been a rich and prosperous city for over two hundred years, when Solomon undertook the building of the Temple. The Tyrians had been skilled in architecture and other arts to a degree that implied a high state of mental culture, while the Hebrews were yet nomadic tribes living in tents. The tabernacle was only a tent, and in this first Hebrew endeavor to give it a more enduring structure of wood and stone, Solomon naturally appealed to the greater skill of the subjects of the friendly Hiram, King of Tyre. When the Hebrews began to build the Temple, they ceased their wanderings, they became permanently established, and, as a memorial of this fact, they embodied in the architectural design of the Temple a symbol which, by the Tyrians and many other nations descended from the ancient Aryan stock, was considered emblematic of a divine leadership that had conducted them to a new and permanent home; this was the true significance of the two pillars.

As long as the Hebrews were wanderers, the pillars of cloud by day and of fire by night were merely a metaphor, to express their belief in a divine direction of their movements. When they came at last to the promised land, the figurative pillars of cloud and fire became the two pillars in the porch of the Temple, as the symbol of the establishment of the nation.

Having thus traced the story of the emblems back through two lines of descent to a common point in Tyre, we must take a look into the remoter past to find the origin of the symbol in the earliest recorded ideas of the human race in connection with the Deity, and from that point we may follow its descent again through the two independent routes of Greek and Scandinavian mythology.

The ancient Aryans who composed the Vedas had not then arrived at the stage of intellectual development in which they could entertain the idea of an abstract principle as the one universal law, or of any god except a risible one. To them it seemed impossible that there could be a spiritual essence without some material form. Fire, the most inexplicable and striking of the agencies of nature, was accepted by them as this first and all-pervading force which controlled the universe; and the sun, the grandest and most brilliant mass of fire, as the embodiment of the Deity.

Here are two verses of the Vedas, as translated by Max Muller, which may be called the Genesis of the Brahmins, and in them are two words around which have crystallized fancies growing into myths, and myths growing into monuments of wood and stone, and again into ideal beings, until the original conceptions have been almost lost. Yet through all these changes some characteristics of the original meaning have been so stamped upon each new form, that the thread of connection, from those ancient

days when the first peoples of the human race worshiped the sun on the plains of Central Asia, down through all the ages to the comparatively modern symbol of the Pillars of Hercules, is unmistakable:

1. "In the beginning there arose the golden Child. He was one born lord of all that is. He established the earth and this sky;- Who is the God to whom we shall offer our sacrifice?
2. "He who gives life, he who gives strength, whose command all the bright gods revere, whose shadow is immortality; whose shadow is death; Who is the God to whom we shall offer our sacrifice?"

If there were nothing but the coincidence of the two words italicized in the foregoing verses, with the names of the two pillars in Solomon's Temple - Jachin meaning strength, and Boaz to establish - if there were nothing but this to establish the connection of the two pillars as well as the Pillars of Hercules and also the Greek myth of Castor and Pollux, with these ancient expressions, the identity or all these myths and symbols might be more doubtful than it is; but there is more.

In the Vedas the sun is called the "runner," the "quick racer;" he is called Arvat, the horse; Agni, the fire; Arusha, the red one, the strong one, the son of Heaven and Earth; Indra, the god of all gods. He is represented as drawn in a chariot over his daily course through the heavens by "the harits," "the rohits," and "the arushas," i.e., the gleaming, the ruddy, and the gold-colored horses of the dawn, which are the first rays of the morning sun.

The flexibility of the idea, within a certain range of expressions seems to be acknowledged by the poets of the Vedas in the following verse:

"Hear thou, the brilliant Agni, my prayer, whether the two black

horses bring thy car, or the two
ruddy, or the two red horses."

Notwithstanding all the interchanging of names, numbers, and genders, and the changing of forms from animal to human, and vice versa, there is an adherence to the idea of beings endowed with supernatural strength and brightness, and of a contest between, and alternating supremacy of, light and darkness!

It requires no great stretch of the imagination to conceive how, in the Greek modification of this many-sided plastic myth of the sun-god, Indra should be the prototype of Jove, and Arusha of Apollo, and also of Heracles. Indeed, it seems probable that, out of the numerous names of this one object of adoration, the sun, grew nearly all the wonderful and fantastic system of both Greek and Scandinavian mythology.

In the Vedic myths, the phenomena which attended the rising and setting of the sun, the clouds, some black, some ruddy, and some shining like molten gold or silver, and also his first and last beams darting through, were spoken of as horses or cattle, or beings with human forms, almost invariably in pair.

In some places the ruddy clouds that precede his rising are called the "bright cows." The two horses which the sun is said to harness to his car are called the "Arusha," the red ones; in other places they are called the "two Asvins," the shining mares; and in others the idea is modified still more, and they are called the "two sisters," and, at last, we find, are named Day and Night, the "daughters of Arusha," the one gleaming with the brightness of her father, and the other decked with stars. Professor Whitney, in his Essay on the Vedas, introduces the "two Asvins" as "enigmatical divinities," whose vocation or province in Aryan mythology he does not discover, though, at the same time he

intimates the probability that they may be identical with the Dioscuri of the Greeks; and Professor Muller hints at the same identity, but with no more reference to their true character of divine forerunners or guides for families, tribes, or races of men wandering about the world in search of new homes. It is related of the Dioscuri that, when Castor for was killed, Pollux, inconsolable for his loss, besought Jove to let him give his own life for that of his brother. To this Jove so far consented as to allow the two brothers to each pass alternate days under the earth and in the celestial abodes, their alternate daily deaths and ascensions to the heavens being only another version of the story of Day and Night, the daughters of Arusha. The twin brothers, Castor and Pollux, are represented as always clad in shining armor, and mounted on snow- white steeds, thus reproducing the chief characteristics of the "two Asvins," the shining mares of the Vedas, and showing that all these metamorphoses are only variations of the same idea.

The Hebrew metaphor of the pillar of cloud by day and of fire by night, to express the idea of a divine leadership, points to the same natural objects - clouds and fire - that to the earlier Aryans were symbols of the presence of the Deity; and the whole idea might seem a reproduction or elaboration of that expressed in the following verses of the Rig-Veda, written a thousand years before:

"Wherever the mighty water-clouds
went, where they placed the seed
and lit the fire, thence arose He
who is the sole life of the bright
gods; - Who is the God to whom
we shall offer our sacrifice?"

"He who by His might looked
even over the water clouds, the
clouds which gave strength and

lit the sacrifice; He who alone is
God above all gods."

The fact that nearly every manifestation of the presence of the Deity recorded in Hebrew history down to the time of the building of the Temple was in a cloud, shows at least a remarkable resemblance to the Aryan conceptions of the divine presence. The further elaboration of the idea in symbolizing the presence of the Deity by two pillars of wood or stone, and particularly of such presence in the character of a leader through long wanderings to a place of permanent establishment, was not exclusive with the Hebrews. Other races with whom the Hebrews could not have come in contact had precisely the same symbol of two pillars of wood or stone, a fact which makes it a reasonable presumption that the two pillars, one of cloud, one of fire, which were their prototypes, were not more exclusively a Hebrew idea.

In Sparta the twin Dioscuri are said to have been represented by two pillars of stone, which were sometimes joined by a smaller horizontal bar to represent their twinship. Frequently the top of one of these posts was carved in the semblance of a human head. The Spartans may have borrowed the emblem from the Tyrians; the fact that the ancient Noesemen employed the two pillars to symbolize precisely the same ideas as those connected with them by the Hebrews and Greeks, makes it quite likely that the Spartans derived the symbol from the same original source as the Tyrians.

A column of stone was in fact a common symbol of the Deity among many ancient nations. Venus was worshiped at Paphos under the form of a stone. Juno of the Thespians and Diana of the Icarians were worshiped under the same form. The most famous of the Syrian deities was El Gabal, (the stone,) a name to which is akin the modern Arabic gebel, a mountain, or a rock.

The very name of Gibraltar, one of the mountains to which poetry has transferred the title of Pillars of Hercules, is from Gebel Tarik, the mountain, or the rock, of Tarik, one of the first Moors who set foot on the northern side of the straits, and after whom came those who established in Spain the brilliant and romantic empire of these successors of the ancient Phoenicians. There is good ground for the presumption that Heracles of the Greeks was only another version of the myth of the Dioscuri. The Hebrews gave each of the pillars a name, though they received the emblem from the Tyrians, who employed them as the emblem of one deity; and as the Tyrians were earlier than the Greeks, this phrase of the monotheistic significance of the pillars must have come down from the same ancient source as the myth of the Dioscuri. With both Greeks and Tyrians "Heracles," transformed by the Latins into "Hercules," seemed to be a transferable honorary title. The proper name of the Tyrian Heracles was Melcarthus, whose mother was said to be Asteria, the starry heavens; while the proper name of the Greek Heracles was Alcaeus, who was said to be the son of Jove by a mortal mother, Alcmena, as the Dioscuri were said to be the twin sons of Jove by a mortal mother Leda. The Heracles of the Tyrians and the Castor and Pollux of the Greeks were the patron deities of seamen and navigators, as well as of feats of strength and agility. Turning now to the mythology of the Scandinavians, we find in the character of Thor one which corresponds in all these particulars. He was said to be the son of Odin, the eldest of the gods by Jord, (the earth.) Not only do the stories of his feats of strength with his hammer correspond to those of Heracles with his club, but he was the patron deity of the early Norse

navigators, who were as daring as even the Phoenicians.

The "sacred columns" of the Norse mythology were two high wooden posts, or pillars, fashioned by hewing. These stood on either side of the "high seat" of the master of the household, and hence were called "the pillars of the high seat," and were a sort of household symbol of Thor. The upper end of one of the pillars being, like the Spartan symbol, carved in the semblance of a human head, the setting up of these pillars was the sign of the establishment of the household on that spot. When a Norseman moved, no matter how far, he took his sacred pillars with him; and where these were set up, there was his home until he made a formal change of domicile by moving them to some new spot.

When the Norsemen discovered Iceland, and began to emigrate there, the sacred pillars of each Norse family were thrown overboard when the ship came near the land, and on the nearest habitable spot to where they were cast ashore by the waves, they were set up, by planting the ends in the ground, as a symbol of possession, being in some respect a formal act of "entry," having something of the same significance as the act of the emigrant in the Western States who has "staked out a claim."

When the pillars were set up, the house was built around them, and, though the pillars and the domicile might be moved to new locations, the place where the pillars were first cast ashore always retained a peculiar significance and sacredness to the family. Thus it is related of Throd Hrappsson, that his pillars, when cast overboard, were carried away by the waves and currents and apparently lost. He settled, however, on the eastern side of Iceland, and had been living there ten or fifteen years when it was discovered that his pillars had been cast ashore on the western coast, upon which he

straightway sold his estate, and moved to the locality where his pillars had been found.

Many other instances of the casting of the sacred columns into the sea, in order that they might guide Norsemen in their selection of homes in Iceland, are related in Rudolph Keyser's Religion of the Norsemen. Of Eirik the Red it is told, that, having loaned his posts of honor (possibly as a pledge of some promise to be fulfilled) to another Icelfander, he could not get them back, which gave occasion for a long feud, into which many other families were drawn, and many of the adherents of both parties were slain.

"When the Norse chieftain Thorolf Mostrarskegg left Norway to settle in Iceland, he tore down the temple of Thor, over which he had presided, in which he seemed to have some kind of proprietary right from having built it chiefly at his own expense for the use of the worshipers of Thor, and took with him the most of the timber, together with the earth beneath the platform on which Thor's statue had been seated."

When he came in view of Iceland, the two sacred columns of the temple were thrown into the sea; and where these were cast on shore by the waves, he called the place Thorsnes, and built the temple of Thor, placing the two sacred columns, one on either side, just within the doorway. The incidents in which the two columns thus appear in the earliest history of the Norse people are, it is true, of modern date, when compared with their appearance at the building of Solomon's Temple, of the erection of the Pillars of Hercules by Melcarthus, near the straits of Gibraltar; but their later appearance in history as the "Pillars of Thor" does not argue that they

were copied from the Pillars of Hercules, but only that written history, or even chronology of any kind, was not known in Scandinavia until a much later period than in Syria and Greece. The Germanic race, however, of which the Norsemen were a branch, had its origin in the centre of Asia near the Caspian Sea. From there they had brought the same tradition as the Syrians and Greeks; and the religious myths, out of which the Greeks afterwards elaborated their fanciful system of mythology, were by the Norsemen, whose rude climate gave imagination a gloomier turn, fashioned into the more barbarous, grotesque, and sanguinary "Asa faith." The cosmogony of the Greeks and the Norsemen corresponds so nearly as to leave no doubt of a common origin, and yet the details were so different as to show that for ages the ancient stories must have been handed down from one generation to another by people possessed of a vastly different degree of refinement, and surrounded by a different aspect of nature. The Asa faith was as ancient as the cosmogony of the Phoenicians and the Greeks, and the sacred columns of Thor were not an idea borrowed from the Pillars of Heracles, but an independent perpetuation of the same mystic symbol. The facts that the two pillars were a sacred symbol in three ancient and contemporaneous religions, and that they occupied the same position and significance in the temples of Thor of the Scandinavians, Heracles of the Tyrians, and Jehovah of the Hebrews, help to confirm the theory of a common mythology as the foundation and the source of the ideas of all the later faiths. The fervid spirit of the Hebrews gave to their version of this and other ancient conceptions a diviner mould. As the solar ray of light, split up by the prism, yields three groups of rays, one of which carries with it the main portion of the heat, another

the greater part of all the light, and another nearly all the actinic qualities, and each of these groups embracing two or more of the seven prismatic colors, so the rays of that ancient Aryan sun, the first and most natural emblem of the Deity, falling on the human mind, have been elaborated to a great variety of faiths, each carrying with it some of the divine light, but in other characteristics as different as the groups in the spectrum of the analyzed solar ray. With one race the predominant traits of religious thought are brilliant, but merely sentimental corruscations of poetic fancy; with another, cold, practical maxims of thrift; with another, the fervid, but sombre, enthusiasm, the zealous dogmatism that overturns empires.

But in all there is the acknowledgment that the regular alternation of day and night is the work of God, the phenomena indicating his presence to guide man around the habitable portion of the world.

"Sun and moon go in regular succession, that we may see Indra and believe," writes one of the poets of the Rig-Veda.

"The day is thine, the night also is thine: thou hast prepared the light and the sun," sings the poet of Israel.