

THE LEGEND OF THE LOST WORD.

This legend, as briefly stated by Dr. Mackey, is as follows:—"The mystical history of Freemasonry informs us that there once existed a WORD of surpassing value, and claiming a profound veneration; that this word was known to the few, and that it was at length lost, and that a temporary substitute for it was adopted."

The idea of a mystic, all-powerful "word" was an ancient and widely-diffused superstition. Just how this notion originated has not been handed down to us, either by tradition or otherwise. It, however, probably came to be entertained in the following manner:—It was generally known to the profane—*i. e.*, the uninitiated—that those who were admitted to the "Mysteries" were entrusted with a certain sacred word, under a most solemn pledge not to reveal it to the world; and as the scientific knowledge also secretly imparted to those who were initiated, gave those who took the higher degrees the power to work apparent miracles, the ignorant and superstitious multitude naturally thought, and were perhaps taught to believe, that it was the use of this "word," so sacredly concealed, that the priests were able to perform all their wonderful works. This word was, however, nothing but the "password," which went with the "sign," by which the initiated could make themselves known to one another. This idea of an all-powerful word was very prevalent among the Jews, no doubt derived from their long stay in Egypt. The notion was that this "word" consisted of the true name of God, together with a knowledge of its proper pronunciation, and that the fortunate possessor of this knowledge became thereby clothed with supernatural power—that by the speaking of this word he could perform all sorts of miracles, and even raise the dead. According to the Cabalists, "the very heavens shook, and the angels them-

selves were filled with terror and astonishment when this tremendous word was pronounced."

Jewish tradition states that God himself taught Moses his true name and its correct pronunciation at the "burning bush." And they believed that Moses, being thus possessed of the "Word," used it to perform all his miracles, and to confound and overthrow Pharaoh and his hosts. The Jews of a later date, seeking to account for the wonderful works of Christ, asserted that he unlawfully entered the "holy of holies," and clandestinely obtained the word used by Moses, which was engraved upon the stone upon which the ark rested. The superstition in relation to a wonder-working word also prevailed among the Arabians, who said that King Solomon was in possession of this "grand omnific word," and by its use subdued the *genii* who rebelled against God, many of whom Solomon imprisoned by the use of his magical seal, upon which the word, contained in a pentacle, was engraved.

It was from these, and other similar legends thus widely diffused among the ancient Oriental nations, that the veneration for a particular word arose, together with an earnest desire to obtain it, and a laborious search for it, by ambitious believers in its power. All the magicians, enchanters, and wonder-workers of the East, and the adepts of the West, were supposed to have, in some mysterious way, become possessed of this "word," and were known to the aspirants and students of the occult sciences (not yet so fortunate) by the name of "masters," and the "word" was called by them the "master's word." This ancient superstition seems to have left its impress on our ritual, for the "word," of which we hear so often therein is assumed to be, something more than a mere "password," although we, as Masons, now use the phrase "master's word" in a very different sense from that of the adept of former times.