

ELEUSINIAN MYSTERIES.

WE are induced to give a brief sketch of the greater and lesser mysteries of the Eleusinians at the request of a number of our friends, who may correctly say that the masses will not wade through tome after tome, even if convenient, to get at the gist of an organization once so popular in the world, and to which allusion is so constantly made by instructors in Masonry. Even the superficial student in Masonry should make himself acquainted with the general nature and history of every secret institution, because they all bear in some way on those of his own.

Let not the casual reader confound the Eleusinian with the Masanean Mysteries, the latter of which were instituted and propagated by the Jews in the closing period of the second century (B. C.) as a society of piously disposed men, who, in the solitudes of the western sides of the Dead Sea, sought a retreat from the corruptions and conflicts of the world—these never exceeded four thousand in number, and disappeared after the destruction of Jerusalem.

Eleusis was a hamlet twelve miles from Athens, in Greece, where the very celebrated mysteries were dedicated to Ceres and her daughter, Proserpine. Ceres was the goddess of the earth in its capacity of bringing forth countless fruits; Proserpine was her young loved daughter, carried away and suffered rape by Pluto. The mother, lighting her winged, snake-drawn car and made pursuit, and resting at Eleusis, instituted the festival of spring, when the earliest flowers appeared, and this nine-day celebration was the occasion of the initiation into the lesser mysteries, which commenced on the 20th of September with a grand torchlight procession, and lasted nine days, pending which the greater mysteries were revealed, and then only to free born Greeks, never to foreigners or slaves. Long preparation and probation of the Neophyte was exacted for the due celebration and intelligent conception of the ceremonies of the festival by introducing him or her to the deeper meaning of the loss of Proserpine to her mother. The unity of God and the immortality of the soul are supposed to have been the secret doctrines of the mysteries.

The most enlightened and most virtuous of men who had been initiated into those mysteries never allowed themselves to speak of them but with the greatest caution and respect. The little mysteries were but the preparatory course for the greater, which were celebrated in the Temple of Ceres, capable of holding from twenty to thirty thousand men. The preparation of the lesser mysteries was by many religious ceremonies, sacred customs and symbolic actions, which was to draw the initiate from the world, its business and its joys, and to awaken in him a power of altering his opinion, a more pure devotion and sincere longing for the knowledge he hoped was about to be revealed unto him. The purification or preparation lasted one year. Athenians only were at first admitted, afterward it was extended to the other inhabitants of Greece.

The first officer was the Hierophant, representing the Creator of the Universe, bearing the symbol of Almighty power. The second, the torch bearer, representing the Sun, who purified the candidate. The third, the Sacred Herald, who commanded silence to the candidate, and told the unholy to fly or be forever cursed. The fourth, the servant who bore the emblem of the Moon. There was an officer to command order and obedience, and a tribe of servants and priestesses. The preparation took place at night, the candidate's brow being encircled with myrtles. Upon his entrance he washed his hands in holy water, and it was exacted that the hands should be clean, the heart pure, and the Grecian language unexceptional.

This question and answer commenced the ceremony. The Hierophant demanded, "Have you eat?" the answer being, "I have eat out of the tympanum and drank out of the kymbalon, and borne the kornos." Then followed quickly varying scenes, conducing to stretch the phantasy to the utmost possible extent, and by quick transition from horrors so terrific as to be almost beyond endurance, to celestial joys that make a lasting and lively impression upon the mind. The preparatory ceremonies commenced with scenes of horror; in the midst of darkness, thunder, awful lightning, and flashes of fire, the most horrid spectres appeared, of gigantic stature and terrific forms; the candidate was thrown upon the ground and flogged without knowing why or by whom; his nerves were frozen with horror, and the sweat of anguish rolled from his brows. After a given amount of endurance, the curtain fell; the Courts of the Temple were disclosed to view. The initiate was conducted into the Temple by the Hierophant. The magnificence with which it was lighted up, the splendor of the scene and glory with which he was now surrounded confounded and amazed his senses as much as the horrors he had just gone through; the sight was dazzled by a most brilliant light—pure and holy places, and flowery meadows on which festive dancers amused themselves. His ears were ravished with notes from the sweetest voices and sounds of the most enchanting harmony; and finally he was dismissed with the Oriental mystical words,