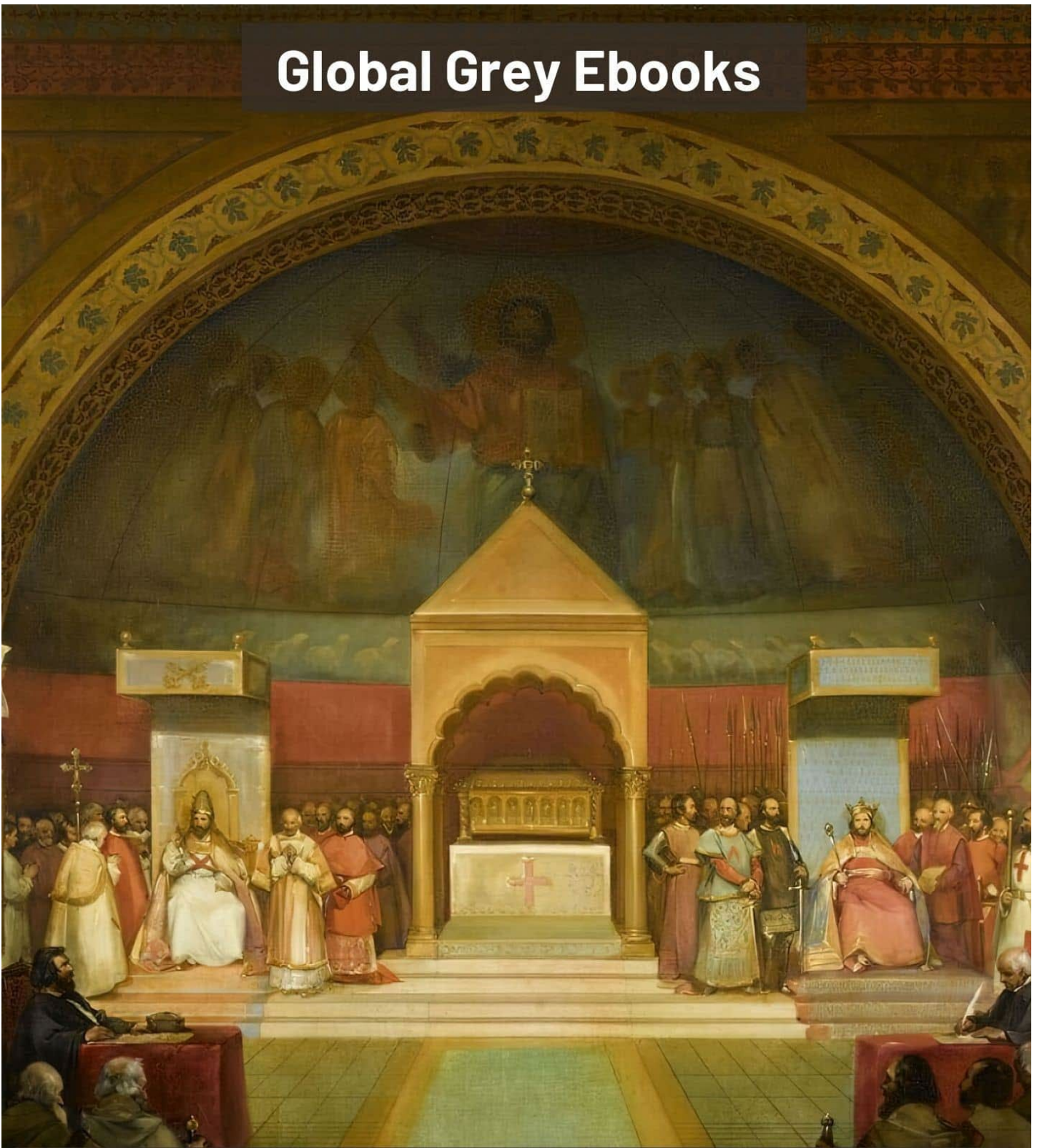


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ANCIENT MYSTERIES AND MODERN MASONRY

C. H. VAIL

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Ancient Mysteries and Modern Masonry by C. H. Vail.

First published in 1909.

This ebook edition was created and published by Global Grey in 2018,
and updated on the 20th December 2022.

The artwork used for the cover is '*A General Chapter of the Order of the Temple, gathered in
the Commandery of the Temple of Paris*'

painted by François Marius Granet.

This book can be found on the site here:

globalgreyebooks.com/ancient-mysteries-and-modern-masonry-ebook.html

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1. The Origin And Object Of The Ancient Mysteries

Along with the popular traditions and public cults of ancient times, there existed an inner organization of religion the Mystery Institution which was the channel of secret traditions.

While our knowledge of the Mysteries is not so extensive as we could desire, owing to the fact that they were anciently guarded with the greatest care the slightest violation of the oath of secrecy being punishable by death we know that the mystery- side of religion, a knowledge of its highest cult and doctrines, was only attained through initiation. Every great Teacher of antiquity passed through these portals. This one fact in itself makes the study of the Mysteries of the utmost importance to Masons.

The Institution of the Mysteries was to be found in all parts of the world. There were the Mysteries of Isis and Osiris in Egypt, the Mithraic Mysteries of the Persians, the Orphic and Bacchic and the later Eleusinian semi-Mysteries of Greece, the Mysteries of Samothrace and Chaldea, the Mysteries of India, the Druidical Mysteries, the Gothic Mysteries, and many others.

Thus it follows that the key to antiquity is a knowledge of its Mysteries. The late Gen. Albert Pike, formerly Sovereign Grand Commander of the Supreme Council, Southern Jurisdiction, A. A. S. R. illustrates this by saying: "Through the veil of all the hieratic and mystic allegories of the ancient dogmas, under the seal of all the sacred writings, in the ruins of Nineveh or Thebes, on the worn stones of the ancient temples, and on the blackened face of the sphinx of Assyria or Egypt, in the monstrous or marvelous pictures which the sacred pages of the Vedas translate for the believers of India, in the strange emblems of our old books of Alchemy, in the ceremonies of reception practiced by all the mysterious Societies, we find traces of a doctrine everywhere the same, and everywhere carefully concealed. The occult philosophy seems to have been the nurse or godmother of all religions, the secret lever of all the intellectual forces, the key of all divine obscurities, and the Absolute Queen of Society, in the ages when it was exclusively reserved for the education of the Priests and Kings." (*Morals and Dogma*, p. 729.)

THE ORIGIN OF THE MYSTERIES.

The Mysteries had their origin in the first great Teachers and Guides of humanity. These are called the "Sons of Venus," they formed the "Nursery of Adepts" the nucleus of the first Great White Lodge. The Chief of these is known by many mystic names in the old writings the "Root Base of the Occult Hierarchy," the "Kumara," etc. Surrounding the Chief there was a small band of Beings who came to earth to labor for the evolution of young humanity. Another class of Beings who aided in this work was called Agnishvattas. Many of these, we are told in the "Stanzas of Dzyan," became Arhats. Thus was established upon earth, according to tradition, the first Great Occult Hierarchy.

In the early ages occult knowledge was taught openly, as the sciences are taught in our colleges to-day. But in the course of time many allowed their selfishness to rule and so abused their power that it became necessary to withhold such knowledge from the unworthy. This was the condition of religious affairs when the Mysteries were necessarily established by the King-Priests of the Divine Dynasties, in the days of Atlantis.

There were many already in possession of occult knowledge who were so engrossed in selfishness that they could not be brought into the divine path; and their abuse of this power over the forces of nature made them giants of evil. They rebelled against the White Emperor, and became Black Magicians, this caused a long and fierce struggle. At last the cup of evil was full; the forces of nature were turned against the land, until the great continent, together with all followers of their own selfish practice, sank beneath the waters of the ocean. Before the storm broke, however, the men of the "Good Law" heeding the summons to escape, migrated to a place of safety.

Before the overthrow of Atlantis the Mysteries were well established in ancient Chaldea and Egypt the two great Fourth race nations being offshoots of the great Atlantean civilization. The Indian Mysteries came from her own Priest King, the Manu, who gave to the first branch of the Aryan stock its religious teaching. From this fount of the Aryan race the Mystery-teaching in after years flowed westward, and mingling with the older tradition, derived from Ancient Atlantis, gave to it new life and power. The Greeks received their Mysteries from Orpheus, who introduced them direct from India. But from whatever source the various nations received their mystic instruction, the meaning was ever the same all Initiates were members of the one Great Brotherhood. In these early days the Mystery-Institutions were conducted by Great Adepts whose knowledge was the fruitage of a prior system of evolution; but as time went on and our humanity developed, the great Masters gradually withdrew, and the Mysteries were committed to the advanced pupils of our present system of evolution.

THE SOURCE OF RELIGIONS.

There are two schools of thought in the modern world Comparative Mythologists and Comparative Religionists. The answers given by these two schools to the question of the source of religion are diametrically opposed, but both base their arguments upon the same common facts. These facts are of marked similarity, not only in the teaching, character, and power of the Founders of religions, but also of the main outlines of their lives. The stories of these Savior-Gods and their teachings antedate, some of them by many centuries, the birth of the Christian Savior. This similarity amounting in many cases to practical identity, denotes, according to both schools, a common origin.

The Comparative Mythologists contend that the common origin is one of common ignorance, that the universal natural phenomena and the personification of these powers of nature, resulted in similar ideas. This school maintains that the loftiest religious sentiments and doctrines are merely the refined feeling and expression of the barbarous guesses of primitive men; that Animalism, Fetishism and Nature-worship are the soil out of which the highest forms of religious flowers have blossomed and that the founders of the great religions are the highly developed but lineal descendants of the "whirling medicine man."

On the other hand, the Comparative Religionists maintain that the common origin is one of Divine Wisdom, or Gnosis. All religions, they say, originate from the teachings of Divine Men, who constitute a great Brotherhood of Spiritual Teachers, and give out from time to time, to different races and nations of the world, such parts of the fundamental truths of religion as are suited to the needs of the people.

They contend that Animalism, Fetishism, and Nature-worship are the distorted and dwarfed descendants of true religious belief, and that the founders of great religions are men who have advanced beyond normal humanity, thus becoming the spiritual guardians of the race.

We have no hesitancy in saying that we accept the view of the Comparative Religionists, for the Scriptures of the various religions furnish abundant evidence that the founders were advanced men, and their teachings are not surpassed (or often equaled) by later writers in the