

WILLIAM O. WARE LODGE OF RESEARCH

BOOK REVIEW

ALBERT PIKE'S ESOTERIKA

THE SYMBOLISM OF THE BLUE DEGREES OF FREEMASONRY
TRANSCRIBED AND ANNOTATED BY ARTURO DE HOYOS

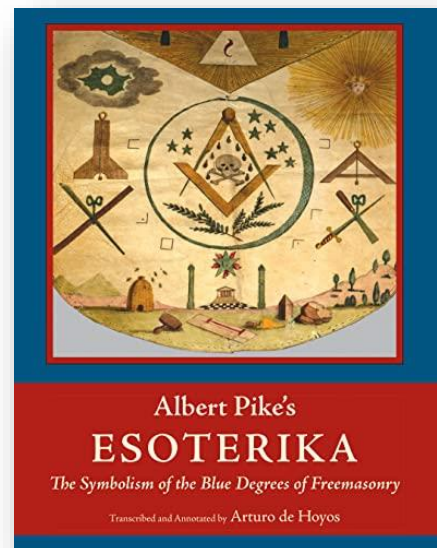
Reviewed by: Dan M. Kemble, PM, William O. Ware Lodge of Research

Albert Pike is something of a mythical figure in Freemasonry. Synonymous with the Scottish Rite (Southern Jurisdiction) and known mostly for his massive work, *Morals and Dogma*, Pike may be the most often quoted and most seldom read figure in the history of the Craft.

The sheer volume of *Morals and Dogma*, and its sometimes-impenetrable prose, has had the effect of causing casual students of Freemasonry to avoid Pike's writing when possible. An examination of his work leads to the conclusion that this would not have displeased Pike. Leaving aside *Morals and Dogma*, Pike was a prolific writer whose scope of interest extended far beyond the Scottish Rite, and, indeed, beyond Freemasonry. One of his more obscure books (at least for many decades), *Esoterika*, is the subject of this review.

Pike wrote *Esoterika* in 1888. He kept the book in manuscript form, with only two copies in existence. One copy was retained by Pike at The House of the Temple in Washington, D. C. The other copy, he sent to British Masonic scholar, Robert F. Gould. Gould shared the manuscript with George Speth and other members of Quatuor Coronati Lodge No. 2076. Although the response of his English Masonic Brothers was overwhelmingly positive, Pike did not proceed with the publication of *Esoterika*. As a result, it remained in manuscript form at The House of the Temple for over a century. In 2005, Grand Archivist and Grand Historian Arturo de Hoyos published an annotated version of *Esoterika* through The Scottish Rite Research Society. Freemasonry owes a tremendous debt of gratitude to Brother de Hoyos for making this remarkable book available to the Craft.

Esoterika is a collection of essays that Albert Pike wrote that contain his views on the symbolism of the three Craft Degrees of Freemasonry. It should be noted that Pike did not approach these



writings as being a comprehensive review of the symbols of the first three Degrees. Rather, they reflect Pike's views on symbols in which he was particularly interested, and those which, in his view, had not received adequate explanation. It should be further noted that Pike also addressed the Degrees themselves as symbols.

Esoterika opens with a detailed preface written by Brother de Hoyos which sets the stage for Pike's writings. Included in the Preface are excerpts from correspondence between Pike, Gould and Speth. In one letter, Pike wrote, "As I have said, the symbolism of Masonry is, in my opinion, the soul of Masonry." From that viewpoint, Pike goes on to address the nature of Masonic symbolism and its value to Masonry.

Pike added his own "Introductory" to *Esoterika*, in which he stated his opinions of the value of the study of symbols. Much in the same tone as Albert Mackey, Pike wrote that, "...every intelligent Mason knows that of every hundred of the Brethren, taken as one falls in with them, not more than two or three regard the symbolism of Freemasonry as of any real value, or care to study it." From this beginning, Pike went on to enumerate the several areas in which he felt that a study of the symbols was insufficient. His chief complaint seems to have been that too many Masonic symbols were merely accepted at face value, or with only the most superficial explanations.

From his Introductory, Pike moves to Lesson 1, The Compasses and Square. He notes that Masons are introduced to these two objects in their earliest encounter with Masonry, and are told that they represent two of the Lodge's "Great Lights." Pike poses the question, "By what right are the compasses and square made two of the Great Lights of the Lodge?" Coming to grips with his answer requires no little introspection.

Lesson 2 discusses the weapons and the blows of the three ruffians who appear in the Legend of the Temple. Here, Pike offers his assessment of what the weapons used by the ruffians represent, and why the locations of the wounds that they inflicted is significant. Pike's conclusions are the basis for a much longer treatment of this subject.

In Lesson 3, Pike offers his views on the significance of the various grips of the Degrees. He writes that the grips represent science, logic and faith. Pike asserts that while each grip has a function in the specific Degree to which it relates, the grips should also be considered collectively.

Lesson 4 forms the heart of *Esoterika*. Here, Pike writes at length about the Master's Word. It is arguable that, at least as of 1888, his comments on the Master's Word represent the most penetrating analysis of that subject. While other Masonic writers have since addressed the same topic, Pike's observations as to the relationship of the three Grand Masters to each other, and to the Master's Word, appear to be foundational.

Pike devotes Lesson 5 to the 47th Problem, which he describes as "A Great Symbol of Pythagoras." Clearly, this particular topic is Pike's pet peeve. Rejecting the more conventional explanations of this symbol, Pike launches into an exploration of Masonic numerology, Geometry, and Hermeticism.

Following Lesson 5, Pike inserted a section called “Fragments,” in which he wrote very briefly (especially for Pike) about the concept of Truth, the Cable-Tow, Corner Stones, Jacob’s Ladder, Tubal Cain, and Solomon and Hiram, among other subjects. Each of these “Fragments” provide interesting material, and offer some additional insights into the mind of Albert Pike.

“Fragments” concludes Pike’s writing in *Esoterika*, but Brother de Hoyos, giving some added perspective in which to contemplate Pike’s work, adds five appendices, each of which are quite helpful.

The first Appendix is labeled “Parallels to The Symbolism of the Blue Degrees.” Here, Brother de Hoyos adds excerpts from other writings by Pike that further illuminate his comments in *Esoterika*. The parallels offer additional context for Pike’s work.

The second Appendix is “A Letter Touching Masonic Symbolism.” This is a copy of an 1890 letter from Pike to Robert F. Gould. It not only contains Pike’s thoughts on the importance of symbolism in Freemasonry, but it offers further insight into the relationship between two of the foremost Masonic scholars of the age.

Appendix 3 is “Pike’s Dependence on Other Sources.” This interesting section is a discourse by Brother de Hoyos examining the extent to which Pike was influenced by earlier writers.

Appendix 4 represents something of an apology for Pike, and is titled, “The Faith of Albert Pike.” Some of Pike’s writings, taken out of context, have been used for over a century to support the idea that Freemasonry is a Satanic cult. Brother de Hoyos debunks this ill-conceived notion by use of other writings of Pike (offered in proper context) and certain of his private correspondence. Whatever else Pike may have been, he was certainly not a Satanist and his religious faith appeared to not stray very far from the orthodoxy of the time.

If the reader found nothing else appealing in *Esoterika*, Appendix 5 would still make the investment in the books worthwhile. Here, Brother de Hoyos has inserted the text of four exposures of Freemasonry: A Mason’s Examination (1723); The Grand Mystery of Free Masons Discovered (1725); Masonry Dissected (1730); and Jachin and Boaz (1762). Pike had made reference to each of those exposes in *Esoterika*, and again, to provide context, Brother de Hoyos has offered them here.

Albert Pike’s contemporaries hailed the manuscript, *Esoterika*, as a masterpiece, yet Pike never published it. Thanks to the careful work of Brother Arturo de Hoyos, and the Scottish Rite Research Society, *Esoterika* is available for the 21st Century Freemason. *Esoterika* not only gives us the writing of Albert Pike, and his constant admonition to look for meaning beyond the mere surface of the symbols of Freemasonry, it also gives us a rare glimpse into the context of the times in which it was written. It is an important addition to any Masonic library.

Esoterika is available through on-line booksellers.