

In presenting my paper this evening I would point out that it is not my intention to shew you a number of aprons in use by the various Constitutions throughout the world. We all know and we all see on occasions aprons worn by members Scottish or Irish Lodges who visit our Lodges, and very occasionally we may see Dutch or Scandinavian ones where colours other than those worn by us can be seen. For specimens of those I would advise you to visit our Provincial Masonic Museum where I should say there is a collection second only to that housed in the Museum of Grand Lodge in London. I propose to deal only with the one we all know so well and are so proud to wear. We sing in the Entered Apprentice's Song that "The world is in pain our secrets to gain, so let them wonder and gaze on." What do they gaze on? Surely our Apron is a source of admiration and it is well that we consider tonight its origin, its form and ornaments and finally its symbolic meaning. Most of the landmarks as well as the symbols of Modern Freemasonry can trace their origin to the earliest times. The manners and customs of the ancient world are graphically reflected in the rites and ceremonies of Masonry as we know it to-day. This is particularly true of the apron whose archetype stems from the religious practices of many peoples whose history dates back to the dawn of civilisation.

In masonry the apron is the distinctive badge of a member, ever reminding him of his obligations, both as a man and a Mason. Presentation of the Apron to the candidate is known as the rite of investiture. It is a solemn occasion that should ever remain impressed upon the mind of the novitiate.

In the Middle Ages, the apron, as it is generally known, was the badge of the skilled artisan in certain crafts. It is not only protected his clothing, but often denoted his rank or degree of skill in his trade. It was natural, therefore that the Speculative Mason, should adopt, as its symbol, the apron which figured so prominently in Operative Freemasonry. Even to-day, the apron denotes the progress which the Candidate has made in the Craft.

Records of the past, offer conclusive evidence that the use of the Apron or some equivalent mode of Investiture, as a mystic symbol, was common to all nations from the beginning of History.

Among the Israelites the girdle formed part of the Investiture of the priesthood. In the mysteries of Mithras in Persia, the candidate was presented with a white apron. In Hindustan, the ceremony of investiture was preserved but a sash called the Sacred Zonnar was substituted



for the apron. The Jewish sect called the Essenes clothed their notices with a white robe. The Japanese, who practised certain rites of Mysticism invested their candidates with a white apron bound around the lions with a zone or girdle. In the Scandinavian rites, the military genius of that people caused them to substitute a white shield and its presentation was accomplished by an emblematic instruction not unlike that connected with the Masonic apron.

The apron has ever been regarded as an exalted badge of distinction. It has always been a coveted honour. Historical evidence proves that it was considered more an ecclesiastical than a civil decoration. Generally investiture was a religious form. Dr. Oliver, the well known Masonic authority says the Royal Standard of Persia was originally an apron in form and dimensions. The fact that the apron is part of certain Church Regalia, he adds, "is collateral proof of the fact that Masonry was originally incorporated with various systems of divine worship used by every people in the ancient world." Masonry retains the symbol or shadow. It cannot have renounced the reality or substance.

#### The Apron A Guild Custom.

In his history of London, Sir Walter Besant points out that not only in the Headquarters of the Guild, but in the street, the craftsman of the eighteenth century wore distinctive clothing by which his trade was recognised.

Thus he says - The Carpenter wore a wide apron looped up at the side. The shoemaker wore a short leather apron, the blacksmith wore a long leather apron, the barber a white apron with pockets in front to hold his tackle, the butcher wore a blue coat and apron, the baker was all in white, The waterman wore a sailors' kilt or potticoat, the tapster was in short sleeves and wore a white apron the corner of which was tucked into the waist band, the brewer & drayman wore a leather apron and a red cap, a printer wore a stiff apron from head to foot, the shopman except those of the draper all wore long aprons.

The modern apron is of comparative recent date, as the Grand Lodge ruled in 1814 that the Apron of the E.A. should be of plain, white lambskin, 14 to 16 inches wide, 12 to 14 inches deep, rectangular in form, no ornaments, white strings and a flap.

The F.C. Apron was to be similar, but to have two rosettes added. The earliest recorded appearance of the rosette was about 1815. The rosette is a symbol of the rose, light blue was the colour of Isis and later of the Virgin Mary, the rose also being her emblem. Rosettes came into use as a



means of distinguishing the grades of the brethren and also probably from the love of ornamentation. Masonic colours were selected by the G.L of England mainly on the basis of those used by the noble order of the Garter and the Bath and not from ancient symbolism.

For the three craft degrees, the colour is Cambridge blue and was deliberately chosen to contrast and mark the difference from the deep blue of Grand Lodge Insignia which was probably adopted from the ribbon of the order of the Garter.

Light blue is the azure blue of the sky and represents in particular, prudence and goodness. Blue in general denotes immortality, eternity, chastity and fidelity and in Masonry, is also the emblem of universal brotherhood and friendship. White throughout the world is an emblem of purity, truth and innocence, an apron of white lambskin is a badge of innocence.

The extension of the badge as given by the W.M. in the second degree, emphasise that the candidate is expected to make the liberal arts and sciences his future studies, that he may be able to discharge his duties as a craftsman and estimate the wonderful works of the Almighty. In the third degree the M.Ms apron is of the dimensions previously stated and is of white lambskin edged with sky blue and having three rosettes, and the Candidate is told that the apron not only points out his rank as a M.M. but is also meant to remind him of the great duties he has solemnly engaged himself to observe and calls upon him to afford assistance and instruction in the inferior degrees. There is an interesting explanation of the M.M's. apron which is used in some Lodges, briefly this :- The three rosettes represent the three rulers, the W.M., and his two wardens or the three who rule a lodge. The five points, one at each corner and the one at the end of the flap are the five who hold a lodge, or they may recall the five points of fellowship, the seven strands or tassels symbolise the seven who make a Lodge perfect. The two strings on which the tassels are fixed shew that the wearer has passed through the pillars of stability viz the two great pillars of K.S. Temple. This, however, although pleasing, is doubtful and fanciful and was invented after the apron. It is fairly certain that the strings of the present apron are relics of the days when they were passed around the body and tied under the flap. In time these became decorative and probably had tags affixed to stop the ends fraying too far, and it is easy to speculate how they could develop into the present form, the belt being merely a matter of convenience. There appear to be no record of rosettes or the Installed Master's symbol until after the union.



One other interesting point is that sometimes the Grand Masters of late years wear aprons which have no strings. I believe this is true of our present G.M. his deputy and the assistant G.M. The Duke of Kent wore an apron with strings. It seems however that notwithstanding how interesting a discourse on these phases may be, you and I can derive much to interest us from meditating on what the apron symbolises. Often have we heard in open Lodge when the working tools are presented. But as we are not all operative masons but rather free and accepted or speculative we apply these tools to our morals, so in this sense, the apron teaches us, that varying as it may be, in regard to ornaments and colours it is a symbol of work, Rank, Responsibility, Honour and Peace.

Work : From the earliest times every workman wore a suitable apron, our ancient brethren who were operative before they were speculative wore an apron at their daily toil as a matter of necessity. Whilst you and I are now speculative masons and wear an apron as part of our regalia, it is a symbol of work, the service you and I are obligated to give irrespective of our trade or profession. We must remember that the claims of Masonry are not satisfied when we finish our daily toil or complete our professional duties, for Masonry being a life, lives on, and the service we are expected to render is a continuous one in the home, in the community, in the office, in sport and so on and is consummated only when we have answered the call of the Great Leveller.

Masonry always emphasises the necessity of work - listen to some familiar phrases

"The Legitimate occupations of Life "

"Labour is the lot of man "

"Knowledge - aided by labour."

One thing we should always remember is that anything in this life is only obtained through sincere honest effort, Professional skill, Scholastic attainments, or success in industry and commerce, are the outcome of sustained effort.

Rank :- In Lodge the Apron is a symbol of rank or status, e.g. The E.A. wears a plain white lambskin, the F.C. has two sky-blue rosettes whilst the M.M. is distinguished by the sky-blue lining, and so on, up to the G.M. and G.L. officers with their garter blue and gold and various emblems, but the apron has a greater significance than to simply point out rank in Masonry. It is a symbol of that rank which in every activity in life demands from its wearers the practice of all the virtue and principles which not only make a good mason.

Let us remember that our rank never ceases when we close Lodge, we take it with us to work and business and when we have finished with things temporal and have passed



to the Grand Lodge above our rank here will live on as a memory and a record.

Responsibility :- When the E.A. is invested with his apron not only does he accept honour and rank but is invested with a heavy responsibility, a responsibility to so live that the great traditions of Masonry and the reputation of the Craft will be safe in his keeping. Great and good men have worn similar Aprons, Kings and Emperors have considered it an honour to do so, but it entails grave responsibility that each of us must accept and continue to hold while life shall last. Therefore Brethren when Lodge is finished and you place your apron in its case, carry with you to your vocations in life a sense of great responsibility that the apron places upon you.

Honour :- It is in deed a great honour to wear the badge of a Mason. Sometimes a proposer may say of his candidate, he will be an honour to the craft if elected, should it not be that he will be honoured by the craft if elected, for to be a member of such a worthy institution and permitted to wear that apron is indeed an honour which countless thousands have sought and failed to obtain, an honour which money cannot buy or bravery achieve. Our Ritual says it is more honourable than the Garter or any other order in existence. Affluence, political power, social status, educational attainment alone cannot obtain it. Many of you have none of these qualifications but yet you may wear that badge because you have been found worthy of character to be admitted to this honour.

Peace :- I like to think of our apron as an emblem of peace. Just think for a moment that each of you sitting here to night is at peace with the other, if there is a brother who is not so, then he has no right to be here for do you remember the charge the W.M. delivered to you immediately after your investiture as an E.A. to the effect that should you wish to visit a Lodge where there is a brother with whom you are at variance, you are not to put on that badge but to ask for the brother to retire to settle your differences amicably. There is however a large sphere for this spirited peace to operate, and I believe there never was such a time as the present when we are beset on either hand with international conflicts over trade and commerce, racial jealousies and bitterness and economic depressions which are challenging Masonry and other similar institutions to exert their influence towards international peace. Again I say there never was a time when our apron should mean so much to us as a symbol of peace.

And now may you wear and ever to continue to wear your apron as the badge of innocence and the bond of friendship, being assured that if you never disgrace that badge it will never disgrace you.