

P A P E R

on

THE SYMBOLISM OF THE MASONIC APRON.

by

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THE SYMBOLISM OF THE MASONIC APRON.

I make no apology for my presence this evening, because I am here upon your own invitation in order to take my humble share in the object for which Brethren meet as a Lodge, viz:- that of "expatiating on the mysteries of the Craft". It is incumbent upon us to embrace any opportunity of conferring upon so interesting a subject and to mutually help to increase our store of knowledge.

We so frequently hear the phrase "Mysteries of the Craft" that it naturally leads one to inquire "what is a mystery?" My brother, if you or I know nothing whatever (absolutely nothing) of a subject, it is no mystery to us, whatever else it may be, because it is quite outside our consciousness. It is that part of a subject which is known, coupled with that which is unknown, which constitutes a mystery, when from previous thought we have learnt something, but are sure there is more to be known.

You have done me the honour of expressing a desire to hear a few words on that, which to Masons, is always an interesting subject - "The symbolism of the Apron". I am pleased to comply, but feel some diffidence in placing my views before you. Firstly, because although I may think a great deal over Masonic matters, I am aware of my inability to place the result of my meditation on paper in literary language. Secondly, being somewhat modest, I do not credit myself with knowledge not shared by my brethren, especially those who have attained the rank of Installed Master.

This paper, or at all events the greater part of it, was written for the St. John's Lodge (of Instruction No. 167, of which I was for many years Preceptor. It was printed solely with the object of interesting and encouraging those Brethren who had but recently joined our Order; and to shew them there is something beyond Freemasonry other than social intercourse and committing certain forms of Ritual, Signs and Tokens to memory. If possible, to induce them to seek for the deep lessons we know must lie beneath.

One of the most important questions put to a Candidate about to be passed to the Second Degree is "what is Freemasonry"? If a Candidate is left to answer this question according to his own ideas, what would be his reply? I think he would be somewhat puzzled to make one, nor is he less mystified when he is told to say "A peculiar system of M.....veiled in A.....illustrated by". What does this answer convey to the Candidate's mind, or even to a majority of the Brethren who may be present, judging by the hesitation with which this answer is frequently given; it is certainly a sentence which impresses them with the mystery which enshrouds the Order, but very little more. Has the Candidate been instructed in Symbolism during the short month or so which has elapsed since his reception into the Order? I think not. If he has, he is fortunate, because it is somewhat unusual.

Do all our Brethren realise that what they see and hear in Lodge is only a figurative representation of something else which is intended; in which a subject of a higher spiritual order is described in terms of that of a lower, the principal subject being kept out of view? That I believe is the correct definition of those two words SYMBOL and ALLEGORY.

I confess that thinking over the deeper meaning of the words as given in a good dictionary or encyclopedia, threw a new and clearer

light on the mysteries of Masonry, and considerably aroused my interests when first I entered upon minor investigations on my own behalf.

During the lengthened period I have been a member of the Order, a considerable part of which has been devoted to teaching Ritual and Ceremonial, a certain fact has been impressed upon me; and that is, how little appears to be known by what I may term, without disrespect, the younger generation of Masons; and consequently still less taught with regard to the hidden meaning, or symbolism, of the various articles of Furniture, Jewels and Clothing we observe in a Lodge, or the allegorical interpretation to be placed on the words of the Ritual. This part of the subject seems, of late years, to be kept in the background, and the words of the Ritual accepted too literally, the interpretation being ignored save by those who study the subject.

I must have been a great offender in this respect. For some years after my Initiation, owing to lack of instruction on the subject, I accepted the statement as given in the Ritual, as an account of something which has actually taken place during the building of Solomon's Temple. I allude to the death of Hiram Abiff. Instead, as I afterwards found, the Ritual from beginning to end, being a beautiful allegory of our birth in ignorance and our conduct through life, in order to prepare for our inevitable end. Birth, Life and Death.

I fully admit my ignorance, but I do not think I stand alone. So deeply rooted are early impressions, that it is even now, at times, difficult to divest my mind of the idea that some event of the nature described must have taken place upon which to base the narrative.

I fear that many of us, having become fairly proficient in Steps, Signs and Words, are too apt to allow the hidden meaning, that which is behind it all, to escape. Some brethren, I regret to say, do not get beyond the initial stage, and never realise there is anything removed from fellowship and social intercourse.

I do not say this in a spirit of complaint, because it has been my privilege to enjoy the friendship of those whose moral life would bear close scrutiny, who fulfilled the Laws of the Craft, and sat in Lodge apparently interested in the Ceremonies yet declining to take part therein, men who would probably have been enthusiastic Masons had they had certain things explained to them, or taken the trouble to ponder over the matter for themselves. There is an unreality in their Masonry, and they miss much that is both beautiful and instructive.

I fear that we, as individuals, and as Lodges, are in a great measure responsible for this apathy. We do not sufficiently arouse the interest of Brethren early in their Masonic Life.

There ought to be more opportunities given for explanation, Many Lodges of Instruction take little notice of this part of the subject, and confine themselves to teaching the method of working the Ceremonies. But this, and this alone, does not go deeply enough into the mysteries of Masonry, nor is it sufficient to retain the interest of a Brother beyond a certain period when he reached the Master's Chair.

I ask you Brethren, in all seriousness, what is the use of our Craft, if after pledging ourselves to solemnly carry out its precepts, we make little or not effort to get beyond its outer surface.

I am aware that the QUATUAR CONORATI, and one or two other Lodges of Research, are endeavouring to revive interest in symbolism.

Freemasonry was formerly more exclusive than it is to-day. It would appear from circumstances which frequently come to light, that in

numberless instances, sufficient care is not exercised by some Lodges in the selection of those admitted, and in giving the necessary instruction when admitted. I think that the peculiar temperament of the individual is rarely taken into account, but for the good of the Order, I humbly submit it should be seriously considered.

Down to the year 1800 (Little more than a century ago) there were only about 300 Lodges under the Constitutions which united, and many of these were abroad. Manuscript or printed Rituals or aids to memory were very scarce, if not practically unknown. This leads me to feel convinced that in former times there was much less of the set form of words in the Ceremonies of the Degrees, but that Candidates were put through a severe course of instruction in the religious attributes and moral teaching of certain tools and appliances actually in use by Operative Masons. Or shall I say the ~~the~~ structure itself as well as everything which had to be used in its erection.

I believe this to be one reason why Freemasonry has withstood the test of time in so marked a manner. It was difficult before printed Ritual became general to give away secrets, or to explain to enquirers that our actions in life are influenced by the religious attributes and moral teaching of certain working tools and Lodge furniture. Such an explanation would have been, and probably was, laughed at. To-day it is not an uncommon occurrence to hear an indiscreet Brother recite Sentences from the "Book" in the presence of those not entitled to hear.

It is to be regretted that much of this part of a most interesting study (the explanation of the mystical) now appears to be neglected, owing, I believe to the introduction and general use of Manuscript, or printed Ritual. The book has taken the place of verbal instruction in that which lies beneath.

We need not look far for the reason. It is suggested that the evolution of speculative Masonry, based on the religious attributes of Geometry and Astronomy was the work of ancient priests, and we have reason to be thankful that they occupied their time and thought on so grand and so noble a work. I wish we possessed more of their records - hieroglyphic or otherwise, but their mysteries were jealously guarded handed down orally from one generation to another, and after existing century after century, gradually became a deeper mystery still, by being all but lost or forgotten, and it has been left to earnest students of Archaeology to reconstruct and re-learn by tracing them through various Guilds of Operative Masons both at home and abroad, ultimately reviving Speculative Masonry.

The result is, that although we have several forms of beautiful Ritual, full of ennobling and inspiring sentiments, and references to moral attributes, these Rituals are all more or less modern, and contain few complete or conclusive explanations of Masonic symbolism.

To make a comprehensive review of all that we observe in a Lodge would be impossible in one short paper, therefore I will confine my remarks to attempting a brief "EXPLANATION OF THE APRON OR BADGE". But what explanation must not be considered in any sense complete; every point could be amplified. Indeed it is only the fringe of the subject, and the more we study it, the greater the interest it arouses in an appreciative mind.

If you put this question to a number of Masons - "Why do you wear an Apron when you visit a Lodge, and what does it mean?" - what would be the answer of a majority? probably this - "It is the Badge of a Mason, the survival of something ancient, and I would not be admitted without it". All very true Brethren, but not enough of it.

How little we tell our newly-made Brother about the Badge with which he is invested at the time of his Initiation. Indeed, how little we find with regard to Masonic Regalia throughout the Ritual.

I confess that I never felt content altogether, with our present form of Investiture. When we consider the importance of the act, the short address given by the Senior Warden seems lacking in the force and impressiveness one would expect at that period of the Ceremony "The supreme moment" which has perhaps been awaited for years, when the Candidate realises he is entitled to wear the Badge of a Mason. In a few words, it is true, we speak of the honour and antiquity of the Badge, and tell the Candidate that if he never disgraces it, it will never disgrace him. There is no doubt Allegory underlying this, but the Candidate knows nothing of it. We say nothing as to colour, shape or material, and little as to its actual significance.

Bro. Revd. Dr. Oliver, who devoted much time and labour in Masonic research, writes:-

"In advancing through the different Degrees of Masonry your stock of information is progressively increased, and the practice of virtue enforced by a reference to the symbols in which Masonic knowledge is embedded. The investiture of the Apron is an unequivocal symbol which accompanies every step of your progress".

Later on he says:-

"The Apron or Girdle in ancient times was received as an emblem of truth and passive duty".

This, coupled with other matters which do not enter into this paper, I think, corroborates my belief that in times gone by, the investiture was made more impressive, and Candidates were instructed in symbolism to a far greater extent than they are at the present day, and enlightenment on this subject formed part of Ceremonies now lost or forgotten. A study of the questions which we now put to Candidates before Passing and Raising, leads to the same conclusion. They imply a survival of something ancient.

I will now endeavour to explain briefly my own reading of the "E.A." "F.C." and "M.M." Apron as worn at the present day under the English Constitution. It may not, of course, agree in many particulars with the ideas of others.

I do not deal with those very ancient aprons such as may be seen at Freemason's Hall.

I do not know the date, or who designed the Aprons in their present form, but it was probably some time prior to the Union of the Grand Lodges in 1813.

In ancient times it was customary for Freemasons to fashion their own aprons, and they made them, or had them made, from a thin leather skin, or in many instances of silk and satin, without much regard being paid either to shape or size. Various Masonic devices were then hand painted or embroidered thereon according to the skill of the maker. The amount of decoration did not necessarily denote the wearer's rank (there were not any Masonic jewellers in those days) and it was no doubt with a view to ensure uniformity that the Apron as at present worn was designed and adopted. (Kennings and Spenders began to be busy about this time)

Now with regard to the material and colour of the Badge. In every age the Lamb has been accepted as the emblem representing the spiritual idea of Innocence, and although, strictly speaking, White is not a colour (being a combination of those, which united, form a ray of clear light)

it is synonymous with purity and cleanliness. So that there can be little doubt why, in Free and Accepted or Speculative Masonry, the plain white Lambskin, clean and spotless, was chosen as the material for the Badge of a newly-made Brother, whose life (if he adheres to the tenets of the Order) will be free from moral blemish.

White is mentioned several times in the Sacred Volume in that sense. King Solomon said:- "Let thy garments be always white"
"Though thy sins be as scarlet, they shall be white as snow"
"Raiment as white as the night".

The Apron, is, as you know, absolutely plain and unadorned, but ready to receive the symbols of those Masonic attributes it is our duty both to deserve and attain.

In shape it is SQUARE. The superficial square is an ancient theological symbol denoting "earthly existence". The four equal sides may be taken to represent the four elements necessary to existence, viz:- EARTH, AIR, FIRE and WATER.

The four corners, or right angles, refer to the four cardinal virtues, viz:- TEMPERANCE, FORTITUDE, PRUDENCE and JUSTICE. These moral duties are fully dealt with in the sections or Lectures, so that it is unnecessary to further dwell on them here.

The long white strings, passed twice round the body, and tied by a double bow in front, have more significance than an Initiate would at first realise. They may, without the slightest doubt, be accepted as an allusion to the "mystic tie" or bond which unites us, bearing in mind that it requires at least two to form a friendship, though there is no limit as to number.

Our OB, having been duly rendered, it is thus we have all been received into our Bond of Brotherhood, and I submit that this symbol forcibly brings to mind, not only how dependent we are on the tie of true friendship for our earthly happiness, but further, it is the emblem of our pledge to closely adhere to the laws and ordinances which so wisely govern our organization; a responsibility we have, of our own free will, humbly solicited to be permitted to share.

To be strictly logical, I think every Initiate should wear a perfectly new apron, because he has begun what may be considered a new life (his Masonic Life) clean and free from blemish, of which that Apron is the Symbol; and we should recognise that Badge as the record of our Masonic Life.

Imagine, at the moment of Investiture the flap of the Apron being raised, the Candidate will then observe the symbol of the mystic tie of brotherhood before him. "True friendship is never cast off or put behind him" and he may realise by the upward point, where and to whom he must look for guidance and counsel through life.

Our Rev. Bro. Dr. Oliver says:- "The strings are also believed to have an allusion to the Girdle or Zone, used in ancient times by Essenian Masons, who were clothed in long white robes fastened tightly round the waist, symbolically to separate the heart, or spiritual part, from the lower or more impure portions of the body. At the present day, in certain parts of the East, a girdle is worn round the flowing robe to distinguish the Christian from Mahomedan, so that there is both symbolism and antiquity attaching to it. You will notice how the symbolism of our Apron from the Entered Apprentice to the Grand Master himself, is all built up on that plain white skin, thus intimating by its simplicity alone, that the very basis and foundation of our order is "PURITY". We could not possess a more secure foundation."

Having been invested, our newly-made Brother is placed in the North-East corner of the tessellated floor with his feet forming a right-angle, the symbol of TRUTH and RECTITUDE. In that position he figuratively represents the first, or foundation, stone of a new edifice, viz:- his own Masonic Life: the superstructure to be erected and dedicated to God and His service. He then receives his first trial in Freemasonry, an appeal to his sympathy for those in distress. This is to ascertain whether that stone has been well and truly laid.

The Apron is the "symbol of labour" and our life's work is to carry out the will of the G.A.O.T.U. by living in brotherly love, relieving the distressed and practicing truth in all our dealings, thus promoting the grand principles of the Order.

You will remember the opening prayer in the Second Degree:-

"We supplicate the continuance of Thine aid, may the work begun in Thy name be continued to Thy glory and evermore established in us by obedience etc."

In the F.C. Degree the point of the flap is turned downward, thus implying this answer to our supplication for guidance - "That we must continue our work on Earth, aided by FAITH and HOPE" typified by the two Rosettes, which are now placed on the lower part of the Badge. FAITH in the G.A.O.T.U. and HOPE in Salvation.

The possession of these virtues will no doubt carry us through many trials, but as one writer on the subject truly says:-

"Your Faith and Hope must be made perfect by Charity, or all your attainments will be nothing. You may speak with the tongues of men and angels. You may have all the wisdom and knowledge, but if your Masonry, though founded on Faith and Hope, be not animated by Charity, it is only a worthless skeleton, and adds no brilliancy to your moral reputation".

So on the M.M.'s Apron we find a third Rosette placed, you will notice, above the others, and representing CHARITY, the crowning jewel of our Masonic profession.

You will remember the words of the Ritual - "On the foundation laid may you raise a superstructure, perfect in its parts, and honourable to the builder". Now notice how the edifice is rising from the foundation.

Draw a line between each of the Rosettes, and you obtain an equilateral triangle, and most sacred of emblems.

I need hardly remind you that the Ancients used a triangle with one point upward to denote "FIRE" or "SPIRITUALITY". As a flame leaps upward: and when reversed it meant "WATER" - as the gentle dew drops from Heaven.

Therefore we place the Crowning Jewel of our Masonic profession - "CHARITY" in the position indicated.

I must not say anything further now with regard to the triangle as it is a special emblem used in another Degree.

Each of these Rosettes is placed within a right-angle, the symbol of TRUTH, STRENGTH, and PERFECTION. I think it is a beautiful allusion to certain virtues being thus protected - FAITH added by TRUTH, HOPE sustained by STRENGTH, and to remain in CHARITY with all is the highest perfection to which we can attain.

On the Apron there are FIVE POINTS alluding to the five points of F. The centre one may be taken to represent or refer to "THE POINT WITHIN A CIRCUMFERENCE FROM WHICH A M.M. CANNOT ERR". On this I have a little more to say later on.

There are FIVE right-angles. There are FIVE signs in this Degree. FIVE hold a Lodge. There are FIVE noble orders in Architecture.

Five Lodges into Lodges of FIVE.

The same number will be obtained if the steps taken when advancing in the three Degrees are added together - 3,5,7, equalling 15. THREE rule a Lodge, FIVE hold a Lodge and SEVEN make a perfect Lodge.

To digress for a moment - I do not know whether the Brethren present are sufficiently interested in figures to have noticed how the odd numbers predominate in Freemasonry. It is claimed that this may be attributed to PYTHAGORAS who considered odd numbers more perfect than the even ones.

Some years ago, I read a little book on Scottish Masonry entitled "Reflected Rays of Light" in which the writer described the three steps in the First Degree as representing Youth: First, his birth into Masonic Life; Second, his ignorance of the world; and third, the lessons he receives to prepare his mind for that which is to follow.

The Five steps in the Second Degree, the writer applied to Manhood, and the Seven in the Third Degree to Old Age. Those Fifteen Steps, thus shewing the Candidate as always rising to a higher state of perfection.

FIFTEEN is a significant symbol. It was a sacred number amongst the Orientals because the letters of the Holy Name "JAH" were, in their numerical value, equivalent to Fifteen. The Fifteen Steps of the Winding Stair are therefore significant of the name of "GOD", and hence a figure in which the nine digits were so placed as to count Fifteen either way or diagonally, was deemed a most sacred talisman (see diagram 6)

RIBBONS OR HANGERS

I agree with our Brother, Dr. Hammond, that many years ago when the two pendant ribbons or hangers were placed together on the front of the Apron and under the flap, they may have been, perhaps were, intended to represent the ends of the strings or ties, but I venture to think that in the position they are now placed, it is more probable they refer, both from their length and width, to the two great pillars B....and J..... which stood at the P.....or entrance to K....S.....Temple. Some Grand Lodge Officers still have purple strings instead of a Belt. They are tied with a double bow in front, but the pendant Ribbons or Hangers are still attached.

The TASSELS which always have SEVEN strands, allude to the Arts and Sciences - Seven Celestial and Seven Terrestrial.

The Globes are, as you know, placed on the Senior and Junior Wardens Columns, which refer to those two Great Pillars.

The Hangers and Tassels may also allude to Jacob's Ladder connecting Heaven and Earth, consisting of as many strands, rounds or staves, which point out as many moral virtues.

The Tassels also refer to the Seven regularly made Masons without which number no Lodge is perfect, also the Seven days of the week or periods of Creation. K...S.....was Seven years in building, completing and dedicating the Temple. Seven has always been considered the complete or perfect number.

As Masons, we regard those two Great Pillars as symbolical of the "Strength" and "Sustaining Power of the Creator". "In Strength I will establish this Mine house to stand firm for ever".

As those Pillars were set up in so conspicuous a position to constantly remind the Children of Israel of the happy deliverance of their forefathers from bondage, Free, Accepted or chosen, so I believe the Masonic symbols of those pillars are placed in a prominent position on our Aprons as a constant reminder to us of our Obligations.

THE SKY-BLUE BORDER Denotes that our earthly life is surrounded by the light which springs from knowledge and contemplation, whilst the lining, it will readily be seen, refers to the Blue Vault or Canopy of Heaven, covering the whole expanse and embracing all. This colour is, we know, one of the most beautiful and enduring in nature. It is therefore, characteristic of Freemasonry which has stood the test of time.

Professor Konody in his work on "Art" in writing on the symbolism of colour, says:- "Blue is the coldest colour, expressing calmness and absence of emotion". This, I think, refers to the darker shades. He then goes on to say:- "As an ethical symbol, it signifies Modesty, Faithfulness and Gentleness, Heaven, Knowledge and Contemplation." We may justly claim this for the Sky-Blue. By contemplation we acquire knowledge or inward consciousness of things unseen, yet in the existence of which our Faith inspires Belief.

Thus the Border, lining and belt remind us that we should be modest, faithful and gentle, also that Universal Brotherhood should be expansive and all-embracing like the Blue Vault of Heaven.

Brethren will have noticed that on the Apron of an Installed Master, instead of three Rosettes, but placed in the same position, there are perpendicular lines, which we generally call "Levels" or "T-Squares". From these we obtain three separate sets of two right-angles. I think these emblems, and not the rosettes, refer to the three Grand Masters who bore sway at the building of the Temple.

Three rule a Lodge - consequently, being Geometrical symbols, these emblems are deemed a mark of proficiency or perfection, as a Brother entitled to wear them becomes a Ruler in the Craft and a Master in our Art or Science.

I have heard it suggested that the three Rosettes on the M.M. Apron refer to the Three Grand-Masters, but if this is correct, Why are there only two on the F.C. Badge? Personally I look upon the Rosettes as implying the true characteristics of a good Mason.

Brethren may have observed that Masonic Virtues or Attributes are invariably grouped in threes, for instance:-

Brotherly Love, Relief and Truth.
Unity, Peace and Concord.
Secrecy, Fidelity and Obedience.
Faith, Hope and Charity.

and many more, but always in groups of three.

This increases my belief that the Rosettes refer to qualities we should all strive to possess. As they apply to all who have taken the M.M. Degree, they are placed prominently on the face of the Apron as a reminder of our duty in this respect.

The Brother honoured by his Lodge in being installed as Master may justly be presumed to have practised those virtues and be worthy to rank as a ruler, a circumstance far more likely to be indicated by a Geometrical Device, which he is then invested with.

This symbol is really the Hebrew Tau, and for the reason before mentioned I must not say much with regard to it, beyond this - although as placed on the Master's Apron we obtain six right-angles, referring to the Six Lights in Freemasonry (Three Greater and Three Lesser) there are other ways of placing them equally interesting and all indicating that the Rank of Installed Master is but the stepping-stone to higher attainments.

When first entering upon this study, it puzzled me why so much R.A. symbolism could be traced on the M.M. Badge, but I found that many years ago, prior to the time R.A. was made a separate Degree, the rites were performed and secrets communicated in a M.M. Lodge, showing how the two Degrees are blended.

For instance, permit me to continue the line of the flap down to the lower corners, and we find the result in right-angles equal to the Tau.

The Tau appears to me to form a combination of the three Working Tools of a F.C., viz:- SQUARE, LEVEL and PLUMB RULE. You may notice that if of sufficient size, it can be used for either purpose. This somewhat impresses me, as in ancient times, the Masons' working tools were very large, and in this sense, the emblems would denote Moral teaching, Equity and Uprightness which coincides with the duty of the Master in well ruling and governing his Lodge.

The Tau also represents the position of the feet when standing to order, and when advancing to the East at a critical period during the First Ceremony, steps which indicate lives and well-squared actions.

It is curious and interesting to note that the Tau (the installed Master's emblem) is a reduced section of the corner stones of Ancient Egyptian structures. A model can be seen in the possession of Bro. Dr. Hammond in the Museum at Freemasons' Hall, which he was good enough to shew me.

It is usually considered that this completes the explanation of the Apron, but although I have listened at various times to most interesting remarks on the subject, and upon which I have ventured to address you, I have not yet heard anything which leads me to alter my opinion that the Symbolism of the Apron does not end here. It may be a brief explanation of that which is visible to the initiated, but it does not follow that nothing more is intended and I am anxious to ascertain how far you agree with me.

I hold the opinion - rightly or wrongly - I must leave my Brethren to judge - that when, many years ago, our present M.M. Badge was designed (I do not know by whom or the date) Geometry entered largely into it; and in order to make the mystery deeper, and less easily read, everything except the key to the puzzle was removed.

Those of us who have inspected those Ancient Aprons which were worn many years prior to the Union, must have noticed how they differed in size, shape and material, also that they were, in some instances, profusely decorated with Masonic Emblems, Geometric and Symbolical. Our Badge is now comparatively plain. My suggestion is that the most important of these symbols were placed on the face of the Apron, and all but the key then eliminated.

Why was this pointed flap placed on the Apron at all? It cannot be said to add greatly to its adornment. Some say it represents the cover or flap over a pocket. Others say that by giving a fifth right-angle it alludes to the Five Points of F. There we may agree, but I think, by its peculiar length and position, it ALSO serves another purpose by directing our attention to a certain spot. By following the lines of that right-angle we reach the vanishing point when the mystery of the Apron begins. An index to something unseen.

I believe I am correct in saying that in all explanation given of the M.M. Apron, we are told that this fifth point MAY be taken to refer to the point within a circle. If you accede to this, am I not justified in placing a circle thereon, with that point as its centre, and seeing to what it will lead. If you grant this, am I not equally entitled to continue certain EXISTING LINES and angles with a view to seeing to what conclusions they will guide me?

This is, I believe, the rule recognised in solving all systems of symbolism:- We are entitled to make use of THAT WHICH EXISTS as a means of investigating the problem.

Every Brother will see that the chief Masonic symbols which are of a Geometric nature can be obtained from a point within a circle, and as we speak so forcibly in our Ritual of THAT point from which a M.M. cannot err, I contend that it refers to the point of the flap in the centre of the Apron, because when taken in conjunction with those words, it so forcibly suggests the CIRCLE.

DIVIDE the circle by 3, it gives an Equilateral Triangle.

DIVIDE the circle by 4, it gives a Square.

DIVIDE the circle by 4 again, with point upward - a pendant square, as worn by the W.M. This has been described by our eminent Brother, Dr. Klein, as the "Great Symbol".

DIVIDE the circle by 5, it gives the Pentagon of Five Points of F.

DIVIDE the circle by 6, the Double Triangle as used in R.A. Fire and Water.

and utilised in the manner I will presently describe, it gives the accurate right-angle as well as the form in which the Master's emblem was formerly worn, one leg being larger than the other, and shewing how the angle had been obtained.

In submitting this Diagram, I must ask you to notice that I have done little more than continue existing lines and add a circle.

It has been stated, and generally accepted, that Seculative Freemasonry is based on the science of Geometry applied to Religion.

I was experimenting one day, in an idle moment, with a simple problem, and (as is customary with me) applying it to Freemasonry. To represent the Apron I drew a superficial square, the symbol of Earthly Existence. The four corners, or points, representing the Cardinal Virtues. The four equal sides denote the four quarters of the Globe, and also allude to the four elements necessary to sustain life, viz:- EARTH, AIR, FIRE and WATER.

This explanation could be continued, but it is not necessary for my present purpose.

Upon the Square I placed a Circle - the emblem of "ETERNITY" as it has neither beginning or end. I found the point within that Circle from which every part of the circumference is equidistant. This agreed with the fifth point of the Apron formed by the flap.

Across the exact centre of the circle, and through "Earthly Existence" I drew a straight line: continuing that line down to the centre of the Rosette (on either side), through which the line of Aternity runs, and bringing it back to the starting place, I obtained an accurate right angle.

You may notice how this applies to the questions and answers in the opening of a M.M.Lodge.

What is that which was lost?

How came they lost?

How do we hope to find them?

What is a centre?

And WHY with the centre?

Now I ask you to bear in mind - historians tell us that for some centuries (probably covering the period during which Solomon's Temple was erected) the sciences has been neglected by those who, in those days, were considered the most enlightened of the human race, and had become almost a lost Art. We say in Speculative Masonry, that the genuine secrets of a M.M. were only known to three.

I contend that it is the "SCIENCE OF GEOMETRY" which is referred to in those questions and answers. Some of the most learned men in Masonic research of to-day, say that the method of obtaining a right angle from a point within a circle (attributed to Pythagoras) is THE ONE we mention in our Third Degree as the secret which was lost.

That of course, is now, owing to mathematical instruments, a simple problem, but it is one upon which many of the more intricate are based or proved.

Applying this problem to Speculative Masonry, I think it represents that "straight and undeviating line of conduct, laid down for our pursuit in the V. of the S.L." a sentence we lay great stress upon in our Ritual, because ~~our~~ "FAITH" and "HOPE" (take the problem which side you choose) we are able to obtain "TRUTH" and "RECTITUDE", both being symbolise by the right angles.

But if, after taking the line across the centre, we carry it to the lower angle of the square, and bring it back, note the words of the Ritual, OR RECOVER on the centre, we still have the right angle, and it gives us the P.....S... of a M.M. and again we reach the point from which we cannot err. We have moved two sides of the elongated triangle but obtain the same result.

Remember Brethren, that the square represents our Earthly Life, the Circle signifies Eternity, and the Triangle in the position shewn denotes Fire or Spirituality. Now observe that not only is the sign itself shewn, but the penalty attached to an infringement of the OB is also indicated. Under the no less a penalty than that of being s.....in t....(i.e.) My earthly life severed, My body b.....to a.....(the line of life, straight and undeviating passes through Fire or Spirituality) and those a.. s.....over the face of E.....and W.....by the four cardinal winds of H.....N.E.S.W.

The four quarters of the globe are each represented by an angle of 90 degrees.

There are doubtless several readings of this symbol, but none I venture to think more helpful and encouraging than the one I now suggest.

Having passed through our Earthly Life, in accordance with the principles and tenets laid down for our guidance, and aided by those Masonic virtues, FAITH, HOPE and CHARITY, we may attain to a higher plane of existence, cleansed and purified by the flame of Spirituality.

The lines marked in red shew a very ancient method of obtaining a right angle for the purpose of marking out ground for foundations. It was accomplished by three rods of unequal length but of known proportions or by a knotted rope passed round pegs driven into the ground.

I know very little on the subject, but can readily understand that in beginning all architectural work and building operations, the correct right angle is absolutely essential. I am told that even to the present day it is often obtained the way first mentioned.

An interesting item on the diagram is, I think, that although those lines and angles were placed there to illustrate the matters of which I have been speaking, and I knew not to what they would lead, when I looked at the whole carefully I was surprised to see that by following certain of them I could trace the Square hanging pendant as worn by the W.M. (Shew it with aid of Model)

Kindly note that the Rosette which I believe to symbolise CHARITY, occupies the centre of the jewel.

The Compasses are also clearly outlined by the combination of the triangle, and the extension of the line formed by the flap of the Apron, the points rest on FAITH and HOPE, and the pivot on which they work is CHARITY.

Many volumes have been written with regard to that most profound and inscrutable of all mysteries - Creation. From the atom to the Universe, from nothing to life, intelligence and power; but in spite of scientific explanation, can we affirm that we are much nearer the elucidation of the Mystery?

In a minor degree it is the same with regard to Freemasonry. Originating, we cannot say how or when definitely, it has risen (so far as its ideals are concerned) to a condition bordering upon perfection. But we are quite justified in assuming, that it was the work of pious men inspired by noble thought for the moral, intellectual and spiritual welfare of mankind.

We know that Freemasonry in its principles and teaching so forcibly brings to our minds the marvels of Creation. I have often wondered if any reference to Symbolism could be traced in our Badge or Emblem. My study leads me to think that the reference is there and to be found in the symbolism afforded by the Geometrical figures on the face of the Apron; at present I have only a bare outline.

Firstly, the utter blank or nothing - then the beginning of life and energy; finally the light of reason culminating in the development of knowledge, proving the existence of some mighty power behind it all.

Our Ancient Brethren depicted the subject more fully when they adorned their Masonic clothing with mystic symbols denoting the planetary system.

I am inclined to believe that the subject is also referred to in the emblem worn as the jewel of a Past Master, viz:- the 47th proposition of Euclid, also said to have been the invention of Pythagoras, as it certainly is emblematical of the symmetry and beauty of Creation, and the unalterable laws of Divine Wisdom and infinite power which governs the Universe.

The three Taws or levels (the emblems worn by an installed Master) when united also point to the same conclusion, but this again goes into R.A.

Several of the sections of the First and Second Lectures also refer to the mystery, and one of them in speaking of Geometry says:-

"By it we trace Nature through her various windings, to her most concealed recesses, and by it we may discover the power, wisdom, and goodness of the Grand Geometrician of the Universe".

The Grand Master wears the blazing sun on the centre of his Apron as the emblem of his exalted office. The centre point of the M.M. Badge, no doubt draws attention to that grand luminary - the centre of the Universe - which sheds light and lustre throughout all created nature. It is the symbol of the all powerful Creator, who is also represented in our Lodges by the Volumns of the Sacred Law. Among ancient symbols, a circle with a dot in its centre represented the Sun.

The use of the "Great Light" without which our Lodge is never opened, is the guide to all truth. By its use, Freemasonry has been enabled to extend its powerful influence over the habitable parts of the Globe, permitting men of every station in life, of every shade of opinion without restriction as to shade or colour to unite in the bond of Brotherly Love. Men who but for that influence would never have had anything in common, and would (to quote from an ancient charge) "Ever have remained at a perpetual distance." As the light of Reason has spread, Civilization has advanced and Masonry has flourished.

We can point to numerous instances when great results have followed small beginnings, and certainly Freemasonry may be classed as one of the most notable examples.

The man in whose brain the idea originated of creating a bond of fraternal sympathy by the peculiar system of Morality he adopted, could NEVER have conceived so vast an organization such as ours was destined to be the result. I speak of one man, because a thought or conception must occur in the mind of an individual, and before being imparted, to others take some form or shape.

One of the most scientific men of the present day, Dr. William Hannah Thompson, an American, affirms that ideas or conceptions are not created in the brain, but are first conveyed thereto by afferent or external impression, probably through the nerves which govern the five senses.

This is, I am aware, bordering on Metaphysics and does not enter into Freemasonry except so far as it teaches us to think, but at this distance of time - after the lapse of centuries - it is curious to imagine a man contemplating two blocks of stone, one rough and unhewn as taken from the quarry, the other cut and smoothed into a perfect die or square. From these he evolved a beautiful symbolism with regard to the cultured and uncultured mind of man. The same with regard to Working Tools and implements until he reaches the completed structure.

I have not made any discovery. Knowing that I was studying something the basis of which we claim to be absolutely pure, I worked on these lines, endeavouring to obtain the most helpful explanation. I am free to confess to a feeling of pleasure, that without aid of any kind beyond pencil, compass and rule, I have got thus far.

A friend of mine once said:- "I believe in all Systems of Symbolism, there is usually enough disclosed to enable a thoughtful student to use it as a clue, or stepping stone to the next stage."

I know in my own search for knowledge that when I felt sure that the part of the Apron to which probably least (or little) attention is paid was the key, one thing after another unfolded itself, each suggesting further investigation. It would appear (as my friend also says) "As if these matters were buried of design, to prevent the superficial follower from handling secrets too deep for his comprehension."

At some time or another Brethren will all have experienced during such those fleeting moments, fractions of time, when the brain suddenly realises a possible explanation of the matter which has puzzled them. We are apt to say "It flashed across my mind". It is a curious psychological problem and one difficult to explain. I experienced the feeling in a marked manner on one occasion when thinking over this subject.

In imagination I saw the Designer of our Badge draw straight lines from corner to corner of a square, and on this place those two sacred emblems, the Circle and the Triangle. Thus Earthly Life - Spirituality - and

Eternity were all indicated.

To afterwards make a mystery of it was not difficult. By placing a small Rosette at each point, the Triangle could be taken away. By utilizing the point at which the lines crossed for the flap of the Apron, it left quite sufficient to indicate both diameter and circumference, when taken in conjunction with the words of the Ritual, and the circle could be removed.

The five points and five right angles were already there, and simply needed the ribbon border to make them clearer.

Perhaps I owe an apology to those Brethren present who are as old as myself in years, and in the Craft, for inflicting this Paper upon them; but we are all anxious to uphold the dignity, and do something to promote the welfare of the Order, so I hope I may serve some useful purpose in addressing these words more particularly to the younger members.

I am hopeful that, however, crude and incomplete my paper may be, it will at least induce others to enquire into the subject.

I like to see a Brother prize his Masonic Regalia, not in vanity and simply as a personal adornment, but as a visible sign, which by contemplation will remind him of the solemn duty he has undertaken.

The Operative Mason wears an Apron of a material and texture sufficient to afford protection during his hours of labour. The Free and Accepted or speculative Mason wears an emblem on which to meditate, and by so doing keep free from moral stain.

I need not now ask - "Why do we wear Aprons when engaged in Masonic Work?" but let me impress this: - "Whenever we put on our Badges we clothe ourselves with the emblem of purity, and a reminder of our duty to God, our Neighbour, and ourselves."

The Apron being the symbol of labour, our work is to promote the grand principles of the Order. I think it also points out to those of us who have had greater experience in the Craft, the duty we individually owe to the those gentlemen we introduce viz: that of giving advice and instruction at the very outset of their career in that which we are pleased to call the "Mysteries of Masonry", i.e. the hidden meaning underlying it all, and to awake appreciation for that which is morally beautiful. A few words at the beginning will have greater and more lasting effect than if delayed until a brother has become apathetic.

Depend upon it that if a Brother in the early part of his Masonic career understands and accepts the things which he does see, he will be all the more able hereafter to enter into the mysteries or symbolism of things unseen.

We do not work for ourselves alone, but for the happiness of all. Jealous of our privileges, but willing to share them with our fellow men, who from motives good and true, seek admission to our Brotherhood.

Just a few words on the general subject in conclusion. If, after thinking over, or discussing a subject in which we are deeply interested, we arrive at what may be deemed a correct conclusion, we may justly congratulate ourselves; but there is so much in Freemasonry which is shrouded in the mist of past ages, that some of our conclusions must inevitably be speculative. But reasoning on THIS subject, whether we reach the correct solution or not, I humbly submit does not greatly matter, because we have been trying to obtain the highest inspiration we can from that which we know to be pure;