

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 Bosan 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 potticost, the tapster was in short sleeves and wore a white apron the corner of which was tucked into the waist band, the brewer's 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 prime 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.

Brother ----- In the name of the Great Architect of the Universe, and by command of the Right Worshipful Master, I present and will invest you with the distinguishing badge of a Mason. It is more ancient than the Golden Fleece or Roman Eagle, more honourable than the Order of the Thistle, or any other Order in existence, it being the badge of Innocence and the bond of Friendship, and I would exhort you ever to wear and consider it as such. It may be that in coming years upon your brow may rest the laurel leaves of victory, upon your breast may hang jewels fit to grace the diadem of an Eastern potentate; nay, more than these, with light added to the coming light your ambitious feet may tread round after round of the ladder that leads to fame in our mystic circles, and even the purple of our fraternity may rest upon your honoured shoulders. But never again from mortal hands, never again, until your enfranchised spirit shall have passed upwards and inwards through the pearly gates, shall any honour so distinguished, so emblematical of purity and innocence and all perfection be bestowed upon you. It is yours to wear throughout an honoured life and at your death to be placed upon the coffin which shall contain your earthly remains, and with them laid beneath the silent clods of the valley. May its pure and spotless surface be an ever-present reminder of a purity of life and rectitude of conduct, a never-ending argument, your weery feet shall have reached the end of life's toilsome journey, and from your nerveless grasp shall drop for ever the working tools of life, may the record of your life and actions be as pure and spotless as this fair emblem with which I am about to invest you. And at last when your troubling soul shall stand naked and alone before the Great White Throne, may it be your portion to hear from him who sitteth as Judge Supreme the welcome words, "Well done, good and faithful servant, enter thou into the joy of thy Lord." You will observe that this badge is made of lambskin, and as the Lamb has been in all ages the acknowledged emblem of innocence and purity, it will remind you of that purity of life and action which should at all times characterise Freemasons. I trust you will live many years to wear this badge (invests candidate) with credit to yourself, usefulness to mankind, and an honour to the Lodge of which this night you have become a member; and I would further exhort you never to disgrace that badge for you can rest assured it will never disgrace you."

argument for nobler deeds, higher thoughts and greater achievements, and when at last your weery feet

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