

THE BADGE OF A MASON.

A great deal has been written about the Masonic Apron and one must admit that the opinions of the many theorists have made the subject a very confusing one. The Apron made of fig leaves by Adam, the mysteries of Kabbala have all been given as the origin of our badge, but we must remember that our Ritual describes it as the Badge of a Mason, an emblem of innocence and sacrifice and above all it is an inheritance from the past.

Because the Apron was an important part of the operative mason's equipment it is inevitable that speculative masons should continue to use it for symbolic purposes. In the early days of speculative masonry (the middle of the 17th. century) aprons of various shapes and sizes were used. The earliest examples were of linen, for evidence the records of the old Lodge of Melrose mention this fact, the same linen type aprons were used in the St. Mary's Chapel No. 1. Edinburgh, which is reputed to be the oldest Lodge in the World. It was not until after the formation of the Grand Lodge of England in 1717 that the general pattern of the Masonic apron conformed to anything like the shape and size we know it today. In Anderson's Constitutions dated 1723 a Brother is shown bearing gloves and aprons of considerable size with long strings. The Hogarth cartoon "Night" of 1737 shows two masonic figures with aprons reaching to their ankles. Pictures of the same period show aprons reaching only to the knee. It is obvious that about this period, aprons began to decrease in size and were conforming to a more regular shape.

In adopting the white lamb skin as the distinctive clothing of the speculative mason I have often pondered over its symbolic meaning. We are told when we were invested as E.As. that it was the badge of innocence and of course we know that for countless ages WHITE has always been an emblem of innocence and purity. It is evident that a man of the full of 21 years can ^{NOT} be as innocent and pure as a child, but he can by living up to the true principles of masonry, by his kindness to ALL, by his determination to do no moral evil to any ~~person~~ person, by his charitable forgiveness of his brethren when they do him harm, prove to all the happy and beneficial effects of our Ancient Institution.

The lamb skin might also be described as a symbol of sacrifice of which the lamb has long been an emblem. What do we mean by sacrifice? A mason's sacrifice is the cheerful surrender of all that is in him un-masonic. If he is too proud to meet a brother on the square he must put away his pride, if he has been guilty of corrupt habits they must be abandoned or else the wearing of the apron will be a sham.

There is little I can say about the apron of the F.C. except that it is adorned with two rosettes to denote that he has been passed to the 2nd degree. The adoption of the rosette has often been written about, but it is my opinion that it was adopted as an emblem of secrecy and silence. In the 2nd. Chapter of the Songs of Solomen (1st.verse) our Saviour is referred to as the ROSE OF SHARON.

In quite a number of Lodges the E.A. wears his apron with the flap upturned pointing out that the brother aspires to higher things. The F.C.'s apron shows the "triangle of the soul qualities now superimposed on the material square"

The present style of the M.M.'s apron was approved by Grand Lodge at the Union in 1813 and no doubt you have heard many talks on its symbolism. It is adorned with a ribbon of blue (the colour of the Spirit) and may have been adopted from the practice of the Israelites who were told to hem their garments with a ribbon of blue to remind them of the Commandments, so the hem of your apron should ever remind you of those great duties you have solemnly promised to observe.

The three rosettes may represent the 3 who rule the lodge, the W.M. and his two Wardens. The triangular position should remind us that though their duties are separate from each other yet, as the points of a triangle each point in a different direction they are united in forming a perfect figure, so are the Wardens equally zealous in the well ruling and governing of our Lodge. The four corners and the point of the flap represent the 5 who hold a lodge and the five points of F.

The tassels you will notice are of metal and allude to the first artificer in metals - T.C. The strands of the tassels are seven in number and allude to the 7 liberal ~~xxx~~ arts and sciences also to the seven who make a perfect Lodge. The two long lengths of ribbon to which the tassels are attached represent the two pillars which were placed at the entrance of K.S. temple and as they were placed to remind the children of Israel of the pillars of Fire and Cloud which enabled them to escape from their Egyptian bondage, so we are reminded that when we put on our aprons and enter the Lodge we do so with God's protection and God's guidance.

On the Master's and Past Masters aprons you will notice that the rosette is replaced by the TAU commonly known as the TEE SQUARE. In antient times and even to the present day the tee-square is regarded by architects as the most important instrument. When used with the pencil and the straight edge of the tracing board it enables him to produce true horizontal parallel lines, and when in conjunction with the set-squares true perpendicular parallel lines in the draft or plan. Its counterpart in operative building is the level which is used to produce horizontal parallel lines in the building. No doubt many brethren will have noticed that quite a number of old Lodge banners show the Tau, Level and Square.

I feel that I must remind all the Brethren that the first regular step of a Mason, in fact all the Masonic Steps, show the feet formed in a TAU.

Tau is the Greek T and is also derived from the hebrew. It is the antient mark which you will find referred to in the 9th. Chapter of Ezekiel, from which reference it may be regarded as a sign of LIFE. In Masonry it is ever regarded as a symbol of the Deity.

This Brethren is the best explanation I can give to the Mason's Badge and I sincerely trust that you will ever wear it with pleasure to yourself, usefulness to the Craft and honour to this our antient Lodge.

(talk given at Vernon Lodge No. 560
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