

What is Freemasonry?

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NOTE—Let us not attempt to define Freemasonry definitely or completely, because Freemasonry comprehends such a vast field of speculation that the best any of us can hope is a continually improving conception of Masonry. The object of this outline is to develop thought and discussion, and it is the desire of the committee to have suggestions or criticisms brought to their attention.

THE APRON.

"Masonry, by means of a series of dramatic representations, is intended to furnish those who care to discover its purport and to take advantage of the hints it throws out in allegorical form, with an example and with instructions by which our return to the 'East' may be accelerated. It refers to no architecture of a mundane kind, but to the architecture of the soul's life." (The Meaning of Masonry, by Wilmshurst.)

When we consider the apron as one of the most beautiful and impressive symbols which we use, its historical transmission to the present time is secondary to its usefulness in investing the soul with the purity its white symbolizes, and the subjugation of the lower nature by the higher, which its form may teach. We may well agree with Brother H. L. Haywood when he says, "Having been privileged to read up and down a great deal of Masonic literature I may say that on no other one symbol has so much nonsense, in my opinion, been written."

If we view the history of the apron from the viewpoint of the development of the organized Fraternity, we find that it was used by the operative masons of the Middle Ages for strictly material purposes, with no hint at any particular color or shape, for those which have been preserved are large and irregular. This was still the apron of the early Grand Lodge era, and what we now have in form and color has been a part of the development of speculative Freemasonry. Like many of the other symbols, we have adapted its use to the general design of Freemasonry.

If we view the history of the apron from what Brother Speth termed its ethical evolution we find many important hints, and some of the probable origins.

We are told that it is more ancient than the Golden Fleece or Roman Eagle. The Order of the Golden Fleece here referred to was instituted in 1429 A. D., and based its chivalrous ideals on the old Grecian story of the golden fleece which Phryxus presented to Aetes after he had sacrificed the golden ram to Zeus, and for the recovery of which the argonauts pursued their quest.

The Roman Eagle, which the Romans bore on their banner as a symbol of "magnanimity, fortitude, swiftness and courage", was used as early as 105 B. C.

The use of the triangular apron in ancient Egypt is amply attested by the recovery of statues and paintings. It was worn by the priests and initiates and always with the apex up.

"With all his robes of state and with the scarab upon his breast, with the All-seeing Eye above his throne, there was still nothing as precious or as sacred to the ancient Egyptian Priest King as the triangular girdle or apron which was the symbol of his initiation. The apron of the ancient Egyptian carried with it the same symbolism as the Masonic apron of today. It symbolized the purification of the bodies, when the seat of the lower emotions, Scorpio, was covered by the white sheepskin of purification. This symbol of purification was the most precious belonging of the ancient Pharaoh; and this plain insignia worn by many others below him in rank and dignity, but equal to him in spiritual purification, was the most precious of all things to the Priest King. There he sat, written upon him in the words of the Initiate, the symbols of his purification and mastery, a wise king of a wise people. And it was through these Priest Kings that the Divine worked, for they were of the order of Melchisedec. Through them was formed that doctrine which degeneracy has not been able to entirely obliterate, which we know as the divine right of kings—divine because through spirituality and growth God was able to manifest through them. They were conscious instruments in the hands of a ready writer, willing and proud to do the work of those with whom thorough knowledge and truth they had attuned themselves." (The Initiates of the Flame.)

The ceremony of investiture has been practiced by every people of antiquity, and there is much correspondence in the white robe, the girdle and the apron. After the candidate for

the mysteries of Mithra had undergone the severe trials and a purification by fire, earth, air and water, and had been obligated, he was invested with a girdle on which were depicted the twelve signs of the zodiac, a crown, a purple tunic and a white apron.

The Bible contains numerous cases of the symbolic clothing used for the same purpose that we use the apron. The Essenes, who are said to have held tenets that very favorably compare with Freemasonry, always invested the novitiate with a white robe. It is probable that many of the symbolic allusions have been lost, and it is also probable that a variety of interpretations may have been obtained in former as in later times; but it is certain that the white apron worn as an insignia always carried with it lessons in purity.

Wm. Hutchinson, in the "Spirit of Masonry", quotes from *Biographia Ecclesiastica* as follows:

"The ancients were wont to put a white garment on the person baptized, to denote his having put of the lusts of the flesh, and being cleansed from his former sins, and that he had obliged himself to maintain a life of unspotted innocence."

With the exception of the triangular apron of the ancient Egyptians there is nothing to indicate any symbolism regarding the form of the apron until comparatively recent years. There has been great development of much of our geometrical symbolism within the last hundred years and many writers have given valuable interpretations.

The apron, which probably has the most possibilities for geometrical symbolism, is one which is a perfect square of 16 units of length and breadth and having a flap with an altitude of 6 units so that when it is divided it forms two right-angled triangles with 6, 8, and 10 as the length of the sides.

The square base of the apron has been very widely used to symbolize the material or physical nature, and the triangular flap to symbolize the spiritual nature. When we begin to subdue the physical to permit the spiritual to gain control, we

find the physical is most prominent and it is only by successive steps that the spiritual finally triumphs over the physical and the spiritual attributes of man are fully in view.

As one author states it, "The triangle symbolizes spirit, or the three highest principles; the square or quaternary the four lowest. Each principle is correlated to a plane, a round and a race. The spiritual triad is the spiritual body of St. Paul, and the quaternary the natural body. The triad, which is the immortal part of man, contains potentially all the powers of Divinity; and to develop these latent attributes it must descend into matter—the triad must incarnate in the square."

"This is represented in Masonry by the degree of Entered Apprentice, and is symbolized by the way in which the Apprentice is taught to wear his apron. The spiritual is subordinate to the material—earthly desires and pleasures rule supreme. But the candidate is here to learn to subdue his passions; his partial success is represented by the degree of Fellow Craft, and is symbolized by the way he wears his Apron in that degree. The complete triumph of the spiritual is represented by the Master Mason degree, and is again indicated by the Apron." (Ancient Mysteries and Modern Masonry.)

The ritual informs us that the Apron is an emblem of innocence and the badge of a Mason; more ancient than the Golden Fleece or Roman Eagle; more honorable than the Star and Garter, or any other order that could be conferred at this time, or at any future period, by king, prince, potentate, or any other person, except he be a Mason."

In addition to this quite standard explanation there are many beautiful interpretations which have been given and it seems certain that this is the one place where uniformity may be sacrificed to the benefit of breadth of view and expansion of sentiment.

"Light and white are its leathern folds;
And a priceless lesson its Texture holds.
Symbol it is, as the years increase,
Of the paths that lead through the fields of Peace.
Type it is of the higher sphere,
Where the deeds of the body, ended here,
Shall one by one the by-way be
To pass the gates of Eternity.

Emblem it is of a life intense,
 Held aloof from the world of sense;
 Of the upright walk, and the lofty mind,
 Far from the dross of Earth inclined.
 Sign it is that he who wears
 Its sweep unsullied, about him bears
 That which should be to mind and heart,
 A set reminder of his art.

So may it ever bring to thee
 The high resolves of Purity.
 Its spotless field of shining white
 Serve to guide thy steps aright:
 Thy daily life, in scope and plan,
 Be that of the strong and upright man.
 And signal shall the honor be
 Unto those who wear it worthily.

Receive it thus to symbolize
 Its drift, in the life that before thee lies.
 Badge as it is of a great degree,
 Be it chart and compass unto thee."
 (Fay Hempstead—Poet Laureate of Freemasonry.)

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Allegory	Zodiac
Apron	Essenes
White	Eleusinian Mysteries
Spiritual Temple	Triads
Golden Fleece	Triangle
Eagle	Dionysian Mysteries
Triangle and Square	Phallic Worship
Egyptian Mysteries	Druidical Mysteries
Egyptian Priests,	
Initiations of the	