

THE APRON

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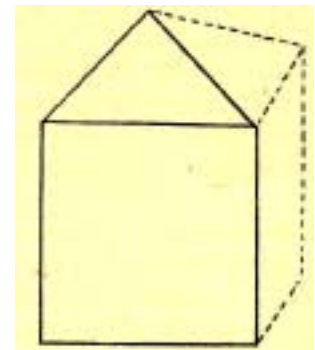
BUT few, if any, of the various symbols regarding which the Masonic candidate is instructed carry with them a wealth of symbolic significance and interesting suggestion equal to that borne by that symbol which the candidate is given, and concerning which he is instructed, in his first degree--the Masonic Apron. The briefest study of its origin, its color, its material, and its shape, and of the various positions in which it is worn, cannot fail to give the student a better realization of the wonderful completeness and perfection of Masonic Symbolism.

The rite of investiture, and the significance of that rite, i.e., the appropriate preparation of the candidate for the ceremonies in which he is about to engage, come to us from far back in the world's history and they come "well recommended." The priests of the Israelites wore a linen apron. In the Persian Mysteries the candidate was invested with an apron. The Essenes always provided their novices with robes. And in the Scandinavian Rites the candidate received a shield.

In each of these instances the color of the investiture was, like that of the Masonic apron, white. The significance of that color has always been the same-- purity. That white is the symbol of purity could be illustrated by ,almost innumerable examples. Throughout the Scriptures are many illustrative references. The Egyptians decorated the head of their principal deity, Osiris, with a white tiara. The disciples of Pythagoras, in attendance at his school, wore garments of white when chanting the sacred hymns. In the early ages of the Christian Church a white garment was placed upon the recently baptised convert to denote that he had been cleansed of his former sins. Portal in his "Treatise on Symbolic Colors" refers to white as "a characteristic sign of purity."

The material of the apron--lambskin--is also of symbolic significance. The ritual states that the lamb has been, in all ages, an emblem of innocence. Examples of the truth of this statement are too common to call for notice here.

The significance of the shape of the apron can be, perhaps, best seen when this symbol is spread to its greatest extent, as illustrated in solid lines in the figure. In this position it



leads to the contemplation of the Triangle, the Square, the Nine Significant Numbers, the Broached Thurnel, and the obelisks of Egypt. That it, by its flap, presents the Triangle, and, by its body, presents the Square, is obvious.

It presents one large figure, composed of two smaller figures, one having three sides and the other four sides; it is bounded by five lines and has six lines in all; the square has four angles and the triangle has three, making seven in all; it may be considered as a full front view of a solid (a side and a top face of which are indicated by dotted lines in the figure) composed of a cube surmounted by a rectangular pyramid, and this solid, as it stands on a support and with its bottom face concealed, presents eight faces and, as lifted from the support to expose all its faces, presents nine faces. Thus does the apron call attention to the Nine Significant Numbers, and hence, to the various philosophies of numbers.

Again, the solid suggested by the apron is the thurnel. The Broached Thurnel is, it is to be regretted, growing unfamiliar to many present-day Masons though it still appears upon the trestle board of the French Entered Apprentice. It is for the Entered Apprentice to try his Working Tools upon. Among English speaking Masons it has given place to the Perfect Ashlar.

Because of its shape--that of a rectangular parallelepiped surmounted by a rectangular pyramid - the solid suggested by the apron brings to mind the obelisks of Egypt. Thus the apron, by indirection, refers to the Pillars of the Porch, it being hardly open to question that those pillars found their suggestion in the obelisks erected, one at each side of the entrance, before Egyptian temples to symbolize the Northern and the Southern limit of the travel of the sun. From this point the student is led by an almost inappreciable step, to the consideration of Sun Worship, Circumambulation, the Egyptian Mysteries, the story of Osiris and his murder by Typhon, and kindred matters.

The positions in which the apron is worn are also significant. Considering its position as a whole, it is worthy of notice that that position is about the waist. Being so placed the apron not only divides the human body into two distinct parts--the upper intellectual portion and the baser lower portion--but also, and what is of more importance, it conceals the lower portion. So, symbolically, it reveals the nobler qualities

of Man and conceals the baser, always doing in theory that which it ought always to do in practice.

Considering the apron with regard to the varied positioning of the flap and the body in the first, the second, and the third degree, it is plain to be seen that the symbolism in this connection is identical with that of the Square and Compasses. That is, there is here symbolically presented the gradual domination of the Material represented by the Square, by the Spiritual, represented by the Triangle.

This final lesson--that Masonry inculcates the overcoming of the Material by the Spiritual--is the greatest teaching of the apron. Indeed, in giving us this crowning symbolism, does not this simple, white lambskin apron, presented to each of us in the period of our first gropings for Masonic Light, give us the summation of all the Teachings of Masonry?