

VICTORIA LODGE OF EDUCATION AND RESEARCH
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MASONIC CLOTHING

From Chapter XIX of The Newly-Made Mason by H. L. Haywood
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During its first four to six centuries Freemasonry lived and worked among the customs of the Middle Ages. The whole weight and pressure of those customs was directed toward a dividing up of society, religion, work, and public life into separate entities, each one as independent as possible. The larger crafts, trades, arts, and professions were organized under the guild system, which meant that men belonging to any one of them had a local guild in their own town or city, and that this local guild had locally a complete monopoly of its own work or trade, and bristled with resentment if any neighbor guild intruded upon its jurisdiction. The general crafts and callings were divided down into as many separate branches as possible, as when the craft of leatherworkers were divided into tanners, saddle-workers, makers of men's shoes, makers of women's shoes, etc.; and each of these local branches had its own local guild. This guild custom had the opposite effects upon Britain as a whole: on the one hand, it united the men of any one craft, and it united these crafts into a national guild system, thereby giving the nation a single organization of both work and workers; on the other hand, it automatically reduced each local guild into a local entity, with a wall around it.

The word "guild" is here used in a generic sense. There were many forms of organizations called by many names: fraternities, sodalities, sororities, societies, orders, associations, covines, clubs, companies, corporations, etc. Monks and nuns had their orders; lawyers and doctors their societies,

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women had their sororities in schools; religious cults had covines; literary men had their clubs. If a craft called for special skill or expert knowledge it might be called a mystery - Freemasonry was often called by that name.

A family itself, if it had a homestead and owned sufficient property, was often an organized unit and could even be incorporated, as families still are in China and Japan; the old law of entail was enacted for that purpose, and the oldest son, to whom the property was left, was not so much its owner as its trustee. A family itself belonged to one of the "classes" (they were in reality castes), and these classes were recognized by the government and had their privileges protected by law; so that classes and families both were entities, and each one had its own recognizable identity.

To maintain this general system of many separate social entities, it was necessary to make sure that each entity remained as unchanged as possible, otherwise the religious and civil laws by which they were generally governed would be unworkable. Weavers used the same methods to scour, spin, weave, and dye from one village to another and from one generation to another; lawyers used the same procedures, forms, regalia, words, and gestures from century to century; so was it everywhere. "New" did not mean something novel, something unheard of, but a new way to preserve something old. Nor did men move from craft to craft or from calling to calling as they do now; they remained in the trade in which they had served their apprenticeship, and lived in its quarter of the town, and adhered to its customs.

In a modern factory machines are replaceable, and almost any machine can be

used for many purposes; in a Medieval factory the men were replaceable. During his apprenticeship a youth learned to use each and every tool in his guild, and to do any kind of work the guild called for; therefore as a rule the men in any given guild used the same tools, followed the same methods, and worked on the same materials; they had, as some now-forgotten historian once wrote, "the same callouses, the same stoop, the same gait, the same expression in the eyes. The whole outward form of a man was his identification. and a stranger could see from a distance what craft a man belonged to, and therefore could know the quarter of the town in which he lived.

It is easy to see from this why it was that in the Middle Ages clothing, or garb, or costume, or livery had a significance so great. Men in the same craft worked alike; they therefore dressed alike. and the nature, style, and materials of their clothing was dictated by the needs and nature of their work. The garb identified a man, showed at a glance, like a uniform, the guild, or class, or family to which he belonged. It was a badge, and this was as true of the Freemasons as of any other Craft. Monks and nuns had their habits, lawyers and physicians had their robes, merchants had their apparel, women dressed in the habiliments of their class or station, farmers wore smocks, and men in the crafts wore such clothing as their work required.

A family in the upper classes had its own family garb, unlike that of any other family, and easy to recognize; its own color, its own design, its own mark, its own badge, its own banner for its own men-at-arms to carry, and its servants had their own livery; anybody in the country, when walking or riding abroad, could identify at a distance any man or woman, and could see that he or she belonged to the Russels, or the Owens, or the Bohuns, or the Lowells, or the Plantagenets, or the Lancastrians, etc., etc. In Scotland family designs and colors were woven into the garments, hence the old saying, "every Scotsman wears a uniform." Out of these devices, designs, marks and badges were developed coats-of-arms, and from them were developed the old art of heraldry. Clothing showed who and what a man was.

As said above this also was true of the Freemasons. They had their own distinctive badges and habiliments. We have no official, or detailed description of that clothing; we know that it changed a little in detail from century to century, but from miniature pictures on manuscripts, from stained glass windows, and from Fabric Rolls, Borough Records, and many random sources we have accumulated a sufficient number of facts to give us an outline picture of what, as a general rule, it must have been. The Operative Masons wore a leather apron; leather gloves; a close-fitting cloth cap or hat; or close-fitting
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garment without pockets or flaps to be in the way; and soft leather shoes. This costume identified him wherever he went, and the square and compasses were, so to speak, his coat of arms. Our own Masonic clothing differs much from his, both in materials and in designs, but in purpose and principle it perpetuates his clothing; and for us and for him it is our livery, our costume, our badge; by means of it men anywhere can see at a glance that we are Freemasons.

Masonic Clothing is one of the great themes in the Ritual, and as it stands in the Ritual it is of an importance equal to that of the history, or the philosophy, or the jurisprudence of the Craft though it still awaits its Gould, or its Mackey, or its Pike-and it is a misfortune that this is so, because without such there can never be a complete understanding of Freemasonry. The theme is most nearly embodied (or expressed) in that magnificent Rite of Preparation which has in itself so many august meanings. That Rite as a whole (it is not confined to Entrance) has within itself. a number of particular

Rites, among them being the Rite of Preparation, the Rite of Disalceation, the Rite of Destitution, the Rite of Entrance. the Rite of Investiture (including the Apron); and the theme of Masonic clothing which is thus begun in the general Rite of Preparation is carried on in many forms, and at many times, from Degree to Degree, and from Ceremony to Ceremony, including such particular subjects as apron, gloves, collar, regalia, insignia. badges, modes of recognition, signs and passwords. The burden of this theme, wherever it appears, in whatever form, always comes down to the fact that any man who comes into membership is to be a Mason and is not to be anything else-is to do the same Masonic work as others, is to rise to a level with them, and as far as his Lodge is concerned he is not to be known as anything but a Mason. His clothing identifies him as such.

When the Apron, which stands for the whole of Masonic Clothing, is presented to the Candidate he is told at the beginning that it is more ancient and honorable than the Star and Garter, or the Golden Fleece, or the Roman Eagle, he is told that it is the Badge of a Mason; and he is admonished to wear it with a due sense of the honor which it confers upon him, and that if ever he becomes ashamed of it he will be unqualified to remain in Masonic membership. It may be, as we are told they are, that these particular phrases were first included in the Ritual in the Eighteenth Century, but that fact is of no importance; if they had not been included until 1950 A.D. they would still be as true as the oldest phrases in the Ritual. because that which they state is one of the oldest truths in Freemasonry, and it is a truth which would have been in Freemasonry even if it had never been stated - there is even a sense, if the words are taken in their full meaning and in their complete historical sense, that the phrases are almost the whole truth about Freemasonry, because they come as close to stating what Freemasonry is as any one sentence could do.

We should remind ourselves of what was said early in this chapter about the a confessed sense of shame as if it were a badge of inferiority, he is not fitted to be a Mason and the Craft should have none of him. castes or classes of Medieval Britain. Those men, and those families, and those classes who believed themselves to be "upper," who claimed to rule and to own the country and the men and women in it, looked down on work, they held workers in contempt; it did not matter to them who the workers were or what work they did, or whether it was brain work or brawn work; it was work itself for which they felt contempt; and this included the Freemasons who built the cathedrals, and the churches, and the castles, and the halls, as much as it included ditch-diggers or sailors. Throughout those centuries the Freemasons refused to admit that this was true! The Freemasons leather apron was their badge; it was the very sign and proof of rough work; but for all that the Freemasons were proud of it. They were proud of it because their whole philosophy of life was the opposite of the orthodox philosophy of the whole Middle Ages. The men who held that philosophy looked down upon a man who worked; the Freemasons looked down upon a man who did not work, and they hold to that belief now as firmly and as implacably as ever. It is the marrow in the bones of their Fraternity. The apron is a workman's apron? Yes. The gloves are a workman's gloves? Yes. The collar is the sign of the authority of a Master of Workmen? Yes. It is for that very reason that Masonic Clothing is more ancient than the Golden Fleece or Roman Eagle, more honorable than the Star and Garter; and if any Mason holds not to this belief, if he dons his apron or takes up his gloves and his working tools with either a secret or a confessed sense of shame as if were a badge of inferiority, he is not fitted to be a Mason either in the Lodge room or on the street to wear Masonic
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clothing.

When Pope Clement XII issued the first Bull against Freemasonry in 1738 A.D. he

accused it of being a secret society; when, two centuries later, and continuing the same attack, Leo XIII issued his Encyclicals against it he repeated the charge and at the same time enlarged upon it. When alter the Morgan Affair in 1826 A.D. the Anti-Masons attempted to destroy Freemasonry in the United States their principal attack was upon the obligation but second alter it they made the same charge that Freemasonry is a secret society, and they argued that it would not keep itself in secrecy if it had not something to hide. 'While these AntiMasonic fulminations were going on - and long centuries before they began - the actual. known history of the Fraternity was contradicting their charges at every point. How could it be said that Freemasons keep themselves hidden in secrecy when during these centuries the Fraternity has compelled each and every Mason to wear a badge, the very purpose of which is to notify to the public the fact that a man is a Mason? How could it be said that Freemasonry hides itself away in secrecy when it compelled each member when he acts as a Mason either inside the Lodge Room or on the street to wear Masonic Clothing?

Following the presentation of this paper, a question was asked pertaining to the statement that "When the Apron is presented to the Candidate he is told at the beginning that it is more ancient arid honorable than the Star and Garter, or the Golden Fleece, or the Roman Eagle This phrase does not refer to the Golden Fleece of Greek mythology, but rather, to the Order of the Golden Fleece, which was founded in the year 1429 by Philip, Duke of Burgundy. The Order of the Star dates back to 1352. The Order of the Garter was founded in 1348 by King Edward Ill. The Roman Eagle became Rome's insignia of imperial power about one century before the Christian era.

As a blank page has no place in a presentation from a Lodge such as this and in view of the proximity to January 25th herewith is presented the final entry of the 1821 edition of "Illustrations of Masonry" by William Preston.

SONG XXII

THE FAREWELL

To the Brethren of St. James Lodge, Tarbolton

BY ROBERT BURNS

[Tune, Good Night, and Joy be wi'you a']
ADIEU! a heart warm, fond adieu!
Dear brothers of the mystic tie!
Ye favour'd, ye enlighten'd few,
Companions of my social joy!
Tho' I to foreign lands must hie,
Pursuing fortune's slidd'ry ba',
With melting heart and brimful eye,
I'll mind you still, tho' far awa'.

Oft have I met your social band,
And spent the cheerful festive night;
Oft' honour'd with supreme command,
Presided o'er the sons of Light:
And by that hieroglyphic bright

Which none but Craftsmen ever saw!
Strong mem'ry on my heart shall write
Those happy scenes when far awa'.

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May freedom, harmony and love,
Unite you in the grand design,
Beneath the omniscient eye above'
The glorious Architect divine!
That you may keep th' unerring line,
Still rising by the plummet's law'
Till order bright completely shine,
Shall be my prayer when far awa'.

And you, farewell! whose merits claim
Justly that highest badge to wear!
Heav'n bless your honour'd, noble name,
To Masonry and Scotia dear!
A last request permit me here'
When yearly ye assemble a',
One round, I ask it with a tear,
To him, the Bard that's far awa'.