

THE LAMBSKIN APRON

by Carl H. Claudy*

The Lambskin Apron is introduced in our ritual by these words: “More ancient than the Golden Fleece or Roman Eagle, more honorable than the Star and Garter”

By references to such well recognized and revered icons and symbols, our ritual dramatizes the importance of the Masonic apron to impress upon each candidate, who has been invested with the white lambskin, its symbolic meaning to the Craft and its spiritual value to the wearer.

Consider:

- The Order of the Golden Fleece was founded by Philip, Duke of Burgundy, in 1429.
- The Roman Eagle was Rome's symbol and ensign of power and might a hundred years before Christ.
- The Order of the Star was created by John II of France in the middle of the Fourteenth Century.
- The Order of the Garter was founded by Edward III of England in 1349 for himself and twenty-five Knights of the Garter.

It is commonly supposed that the apron became the "badge of a Mason" merely because stonemasons wore aprons to protect their clothing from the rough contact of building material. Reference to this historic fact is made in the ritual and gives rise to one symbolic analogy. But it is essential to remember that the ritual also clearly states, and reminds us, that the apron is far, far older than the Golden Fleece or Roman Eagle, than the Star or Garter, than the stonemasons of the Middle Ages – aye, older than the Comacine Masters, the Collegia of Rome, the Dionysian Artificers who preceded them.

The Ancient Hebrew prophets wore aprons, and the high priests of the Temple were so decorated. In the mysteries of Egypt and of India, aprons were worn as symbols of priestly power. The earliest Chinese secret societies used aprons; the Essenes wore them, as did the Incas of Peru and the Aztecs of Mexico.

There are references to lambs, throughout the Old Testament, often in connection with sacrifices that are deemed worthy, and more frequently used in a sense symbolic of innocence, purity, gentleness, and weakness. This image is enhanced by the further reference to the color of white, which is commonly, if often unconsciously, associated with purity, probably because of the hue of fresh snow.

This association is universal in Freemasonry, and all candidates are instructed that they should ever strive to protect their characters and, by constantly improving themselves, keep their aprons white and themselves innocent. The badge of a Mason should be a visible sign, in its color as well as its material, of the purity of true Masonic character; and further denote that Masons should forever be innocent of wrong toward all, but "...more especially a Brother Mason."

Therefore, with the presentation of the lambskin apron, the Lodge accepts the candidate as worthy. It entrusts to his hands its most distinguishing badge. With it, and symbolized by it, comes one of the most precious and most gracious of gifts: the gift of brotherhood, with the obligations of brotherhood, and the duty to help their fellow man. Lucky the Entered Apprentice, who has the wit to see the extent and the meaning of the gift; thrice lucky the Lodge whose initiates find in it, and moreover keep, that honor, probity and power; that innocence, strength, and spiritual contact; that glory of unity and oneness with all the Masonic world, which may be read into this symbol by him who hath open eyes of the heart with which to see the lessons it teaches about character. In the words of the Old Dundee Lodge's Apron Charge:

"It is yours to wear throughout an honorable life, and at your death to be placed upon the coffin which shall contain your mortal remains and, with them, laid beneath the silent clods of the valley. Let its pure

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and spotless surface be to you an ever-present reminder of a purity of life and rectitude of conduct, a never-ending argument for nobler deeds, for higher thoughts, for greater achievements. And when at last your weary feet shall have come to the end of their toilsome journey, and from your nerveless grasp shall drop the working tools of life, may the record of your thoughts and actions be as pure and spotless as this emblem...”

For thus, and thus only, may it be worn with pleasure to yourself and honor to the Fraternity.

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