

MASONIC CLOTHING

How did the Ancient Craft get its distinctive dress? Whence the apron, collar, jewel, raiment? Why do we put so much emphasis on being "properly clothed"?

No one can answer with complete authority; so many causes contributed that it is impossible to state an origin as having been at one time or place.

The first paragraph in the "History of the Cryptic Rite" (Authors Hinman, Denslow, Hunt) sets forth:

"In slavery days in this country, little colored babies were sometimes sold to speculators who raised them for the market. Topsy, in Uncle Tom's Cabin, was a child thus raised, and therefore with no knowledge of her parentage or age. She said she 'never was born, never had no father nor mother, nor nothin; I was raised by a speculator with lots of others. Old Aunt Sue use to take car' on us-I 'spect I just grow'd.'"

Masonic clothing is much like Topsy-it "just grow'd". No man may say who its father and mother were or the date when it was born. But there is much to be said of the family, and, if we cannot trace direct, we have some knowledge of collateral ancestors!

Apron and gloves have already been considered in these pages (June, 1932; February, 1940) but clothing as a whole and "clothing the lodge" is of wider interest.

"Clothing" should not be confused with "regalia"---It too often is, and modern dictionaries are to some extent responsible. In its Masonic sense "clothing" and "regalia" are distinct.

"Regalia" is not found in Latin with its present meaning. William of Malmesbury in the 12th century, describing the coronation of Emperor Henry V by Pope Paschal 11, says: "After the ceremony the pope laid aside his *sacerdotalia* and the emperor his *regalia*". The words "regale" and "regalia" meant the royal prerogatives. "Regale" meant the privileges of kings of France to receive certain revenues and to present benefices. But by the 17th century, the modern meaning was given to the word "regalia".

According to the Standard Dictionary that "modern meaning" is "the distinctive symbols or decorations and insignia of a particular order as 'the Masonic regalia'". But the dictionary also states that in Old English law the word meant the six prerogatives of sovereignty: judicature, power over life and death, right to wage war or conclude peace, right to tax, to coin money, and to take charge of masterless goods.

In England today "regalia" is formally used to mean the emblems of royalty used at a coronation: the crown, scepter, verge (rod) staff of Edward the Confessor, ampulla (flask of anointing oil), anointing spoon, bracelets, spurs and vestments.

"Vestments" is apparently the only modern British connection of "regalia" with "clothing" as the latter word is used in the Masonic sense.

In 1772 Preston described "properly clothed" for public appearance as follows: "All the Brethren, who walk in procession, should observe, as much as possible, an uniformity in their dress. Decent mourning, with white stockings, gloves and aprons, is most suitable and becoming; and no person ought to be distinguished with a jewel, unless he is an officer of one of the Lodges invited to attend in form. The officers of such Lodges should be ornamented with white sashes and hat-bands; as also the officers of the Lodge to whom the dispensation is granted, who should likewise be distinguished with white rods".

The Festival of St. John the Baptist was reported in the Boston Gazette for July 2, 1739 as follows: "At three in the Afternoon They assembled at the House of their Brother John Wagborn, from whence they walk'd in Procession to His Excellency's House, properly Clothed, and Distinguished, with Badges, and other Implement pertaining to the several Orders and Degrees of the Society, proceeded by a Compleat band of Musick, consisting of Trumpets, Kettle Drums, etc".

In early days of Masonry in London the brother "made" had to "clothe (or cloath) the lodge" which meant that he supplied the aprons and gloves to all who attended. Those who did not attend did not receive "clothing" from the newly-made brother, as we learn from many sources.

The by-laws of a Boston lodge of 1733 specify: "The Master of this Lodge, or in absence, the Grand Master, Deputy Grand Master or Wardens, when there is a private Lodge ordered to be held for a Making, shall be obliged to give all the Members timely notice of the time and place in writing where such Lodge is held that they may give their attendee and every member being duly warned as aforesaid and neglecting to attend on such private Making shall not be cloathed.

"No member that is absent from the Lodge of a Lodge night when there is a Making, shall have the Benefit of being cloathed for that time."

It is correct to speak of proper Masonic clothing as the "livery of Masons", although for those to whom the word means only the uniform of a domestic servant or butler the statement may seem strange. Nevertheless livery, meaning the costume of a class, sect, organization or group, can be applied to the costume of the ancient pilgrim, seeking his goal in a dress peculiar to his vocation, or to the modern Masons in apron, gloves, collar, jewel, and hat.

The pilgrim is a character of song and story; the pilgrimage made to a holy place is, apparently, as old as man. Exodus speaks of "the land of Canaan, the land of their *pilgrimage*, wherein they were strangers". One of the great poetic passages of the Bible is in Hebrew, 11: "By faith Abraham, when he was called to go out into a place which he should after receive for an inheritance, obeyed; and he went out, not knowing whither he went. By faith he sojourned in the land of promise, as in a strange country * * * * For he looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God." The story of faith is finished with the verse: "These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of

them, and embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and *pilgrims* on the earth." (Italics supplied.)

The pilgrim, then, was a man who sought good -- -who traveled to seek God. In the Middle Ages his dress was conventionalized and prescribed, giving us a new vision of the age of livery and clothing and dress as a part of ceremony.

The pilgrims of the early 'teen centuries wore a long gown, dark in color, coarse in texture, a leathern girdle as an emblem of humility and poverty, a staff, a rosary and cross, and carried a *scrip* (bag). Spenser in the "*Fairie Queen*" describes one thus:

A silly man in simple weeds foreworn

And soiled 'with dust of the long dried way,

His sandals were with toilesome travel torne

And face all tanned with scorching sunny ray;

As he had travelled many a summer's day

Through boiling sands of Araby and Inde,

And in his hands a Jacob's staff to stay

His weary limbs upon; and eke behind

His scrip did hang, in which his needments he did bind.

The word *livery* comes from that which was *delivered-anciently*, land or property held in trust, and given to its owner at the proper time; *delivery* was the act of possession. Hence, according to Mackey, when feudal lords *delivered their* clothing to their servants, that clothing became "*livery*". Clothing and livery became synonymous in the time of Edward the First and he who joined a gild or association was said to "have the clothing". Mackey thinks there is no doubt that the "clothing" of Masons, and our custom of speaking of one ready to enter lodge as "properly clothed", comes from this custom of livery or uniform costume of the old gilds.

Hence "a Freemason's livery" is a term of honor, not one of belittlement.

The emphasis on "clothing" for Masons-which varies in different countries and times-according to the noted authority H. L. Haywood springs from the days of the operative Masons, the cathedral builders. To them the twin questions of clothing and of wages were of vital importance. Indeed, the "Master's Wages" of modern Masonry seems an echo of days when builders were badly underpaid, so much so that they could not afford decent clothing.

Today workmen would form a union, strike and get what they wanted. In the early centuries of cathedral building such remedies were not known. The authorities had a much better plan.

If a workman could not afford good clothes for his family, they tried to make him satisfied by forbidding him to buy them or his family to wear them! Clothing for wives, sons, daughters was a matter of legal enactment to keep workmen and their families from dressing "like their betters", and to make sure that the workmen and their people wore the proper livery of their craft. In the time of Edward the Third, the law specified that "people of handicraft and yeomen" could not wear cloth costumes higher than forty shillings, and furs, except the very cheapest, were forbidden the women.

Here Haywood finds a reason why gloves were early so important in Masonry---the gloves worn in lodge meant that here at least the lowest was the equal of "his betters".

Some Grand Lodges today prescribe Masonic clothing in great detail; others content themselves with specifications as to the size and permissible decorations of the apron; still others have no, or little, regulation.

Massachusetts is typical of those Grand Lodges which go into detail as to clothing. In addition to prescribed shapes, sizes and forms for jewels and other insignia, the Grand Lodge specifies:

"The Collars of the Grand Officers shall be chains of gold or metal gilt.

"The Apron of the Grand Master shall be of white lambskin, lined with purple, ornamented with the blazing Sun, embroidered in gold in the center; on the edging the pomegranate and lotus, and the seven-eared wheat at each corner, and also on the fall; all in gold embroidery, the fringe of gold bullion, with purple edging and strings.

"The Apron of the Deputy Grand Master and of a District Grand Master shall be of the same material and lining, having the emblem of his office in gold embroidery in the center, and the pomegranate and lotus alternately embroidered in gold on the edging.

"The emblem of the District Grand Master shall be within a double circle bearing the name of his District.

"The Aprons of the other Grand Officers shall be of white lambskin, lined with purple; edging of purple three and a half inches wide; with purple strings; ornamented with gold, having the emblems of office, in gold, in the center.

"Each officer of a Lodge shall wear a blue velvet collar trimmed with silver lace, or a white metal chain collar upon blue ribbon of such pattern or patterns as shall be approved by the Grand Master, from which shall be suspended the jewel of the office in silver. The aprons may bear the emblems of the offices and a fringe of silver.

"The Apron of a Master Mason will be a plain white lambskin, fourteen inches wide by twelve inches deep. The Apron may be adorned with sky-blue lining and edging, and three rosettes of

the same color. No other color shall be allowed, and no other ornament shall be worn except by officers and past officers."

The Ahiman Rezon of the Grand Lodge of Pennsylvania sets forth that on the occasion of "public participation in any ceremony, all the members of the Grand Lodge shall appear in Masonic dress, consisting of a suit of black clothes, black necktie, black silk hat and white gloves; the Officers of the Grand Lodge and Subordinate Lodges shall wear their appropriate jewels and aprons; the other members of Grand Lodge white lambskin aprons; Past Grand Masters, Past Deputy Grand Masters and Past Masters shall wear their appropriate jewels on the left lapel of the coat".

It is further stated in this book of the law that a brother must "wear a Masonic apron on entering a lodge* * * * every Past Master must wear his jewel".

Incidentally, in Pennsylvania Grand Lodge officers have white *satin* aprons with purple velvet borders with a gold edging, but are rounded at the bottom and have a rounded flap; they are lined with purple and have purple strings.

In a few lodges, here and there, those who conduct a degree, usually the Master's degree, wear costumes, generally called robes. The practice is not common, and is neither provided for nor forbidden by the Masonic law in most jurisdictions. It is perhaps a compound of the desire to "dress up the parts and make the scene more lifelike, and a throw-back to the days when the proposal was made in the Grand Lodge of England (1778) that the Grand Master and his officers should be robed. The cloak or mantle is very old, and must have been known to the Masons of the Grand Lodge of England in 1778 as ancient dress, because for many years it had been the hallmark of chivalry, the knight-in-armor's principal decoration when *not* dressed in steel. But wise counsels prevailed, the Grand Lodge decided to stick to its own peculiar style of dress, rather than ape that which had long been prescribed for a different order.

Nevertheless robes, cloaks, costumes are occasionally used in Symbolic Lodges; they are much more common in Royal Arch Chapters and find their fullest use in the ceremonies of the Ancient and Accepted Scottish Rite and in such appendant orders as the Shrine and Grotto.