

MASONIC MUSINGS

The Masonic Education Newsletter

of Lodge Epicurean No 906 and Lodge Amalthea No 914

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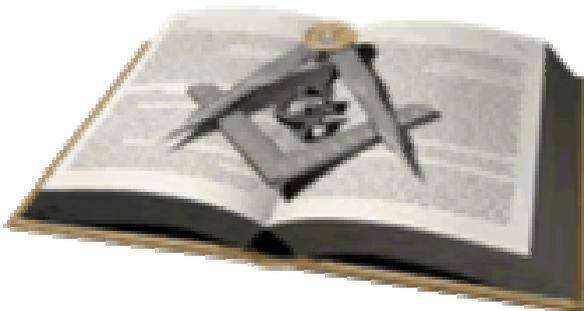
Welcome to *Issue Fourteen*, the second for 2014. In this Edition I print two very interesting short talks by our Grand Librarian, RWBro. Jim Spreadborough – *The Three Great Lights*, and the particularly fascinating *Colour Symbolism in Freemasonry*. The following question (followed by my answer) was actually asked of me by a young lodge member! More please!

Fraternal regards,
Kent Henderson.

The Three Great Lights

On the evening of his Initiation the candidate's attention is drawn to the three great Emblematic Lights of Freemasonry, namely, the Volume of the Sacred Law, The Square and the Compasses.

The Volume of the Sacred Law teaches us our duty to God, the Square to regulate our conduct to all mankind and the Compasses to keep our passions and prejudices within due bounds. Later he is informed that the furniture of the Lodge consists of the Volume of the Sacred Law, the Compasses and the Square. The Sacred Writings are to rule and govern our faith and the Compasses and Square when united to regulate our lives and actions.



The Premier Grand Lodge of England was formed in 1717. In 1751 a second Grand Lodge was also established there. The older Grand Lodge came to be known as the Moderns, the other the Ancients. The Moderns regarded the Volume of the Sacred Law, the Square and Compasses as the furniture of the Lodge. To the Ancients these three emblems were known as the Three Great Lights. When the two Grand Lodges were united in 1813 and the Lodge of Reconciliation revised the ritual, both Grand Lodges were reconciled by the three emblems being referred to as the Three Great Lights as well as the furniture of the Lodge.

Our oldest Masonic documents made no reference to the Bible, probably because no part of the Bible was printed in English prior to 1525, and the first complete Bible in English was not printed until 1533. At that time, therefore, one would hardly expect the Bible to be found in general use outside the church or monastery, unless in a wealthy household. The Volume of the Sacred Law first appeared in the *Old Charges* in the Grand Lodge No 1 Manual Script of 1583 as an essential part of the equipment of an operative Lodge.

There is an interesting set of questions in the *Dumphries No 4 Manual Script* dated about 1710, which shows how early the three emblems were used in Freemasonry.

Q. How many pillars in your Lodge?

A. Three.

Q. What are these?

A. Ye square, Ye compass and ye Bible.

We have evidence of a new Bible having been presented to a Scottish Lodge in 1720. In 1730 an exposure "Masonry Dissected" contained the following:

Q. What is the other furniture of a Lodge?

A. Bible, Compass and Square.

Q. Who do they properly belong to?

A. Bible to God, Compass to the Master and Square to the Fellowcraft.

A 1762 exposure gave the following:

Q. When you were thus brought to light, what were the first things you saw?

A. Bible, Square and Compass.

Q. What was it they told you they signified?

A. The Three Great Lights in Masonry.

Q. Explain them Brother.

A. The Bible to rule and govern our Faith, the Square to Square our actions, the Compasses to keep us within Bounds with all Men, particularly with a Brother.

It is evident that the Volume of the Sacred Law, the Square and the Compasses were in use in Speculative Lodges from early times but they did not reach the prominent position of the Three Great Lights until about the middle of the 1700s.

Many years ago the United Grand Lodge of England withdrew recognition from the Grand Orient of France mainly because of the Volume of the Sacred Law being removed from their Lodges.

In 1929 the United Grand Lodge of England saw fit to issue the declaration of the *Basic Principles of the Craft*. Three of them are:

1. That a belief in the Great Architect of the Universe and His revealed will shall be an essential qualification for membership.

2. That all Initiates shall take their obligation on or in full view of the Open Volume of the Sacred Law, by which is meant the Revelation from above which is binding on the conscience of the particular individual who is being initiated.

3. That the Three Great Lights of Freemasonry (namely, the Volume of the Sacred Law, the Square and the Compasses) shall always be exhibited when the Grand Lodge or its subordinate Lodges are at work, the chief of these being the Volume of the Sacred Law.

In the *Aims and Relationships of the Craft* concurrently issued by the Grand Lodge of England, Ireland and Scotland in 1938, Clause 3, appears in the following form:

The Bible, referred to by Freemasons as the Volume of the Sacred Law, is always open in the Lodges. Every Candidate is required to take his Obligation on that book, or on the Volume, which is held by his particular creed to imply sanctity to an oath or promise taken upon it.

In the 18th Century there was some difference of opinion as to the relative positions of the two instruments. At one time some old Lodges made a practice of directing the legs of the Compasses and the ends of the Square on the Volume of the Sacred Law toward the candidate, who thus found himself embraced by both implements.

Thus you can see that the Three Great Lights were pointed out to you not only to draw your attention to them on the night of your Initiation, but also to be a constant guide to you throughout life.

Colour Symbolism in Freemasonry

Colour is a fundamental element of Masonic symbolism. It appears in the descriptions of aprons, sashes and other items of regalia, in the furnishings and wall-hangings of the lodge room for each degree or ceremony, in the robes worn in certain degrees, and in many other Masonic accoutrements. The colours specified in each case appear to have no rational justification. As A. E. Waite wrote: "There is no recognised scheme or science of colours in Masonry. Here and there in our rituals we find an 'explanation' for the use of a certain colour, but this usually turns out to be merely a peg on which to hang a lecture or talk about it, having little if any connection with the origins of its use."

This talk is to find some rationale behind the selection of colours as Masonic symbols, restricting our examination to the Craft degrees, and those of other degrees or orders. It was early recognised that colours have a strong influence on

the mind and therefore can be employed for certain moral or aesthetic ends, through symbolical, allegorical and mystical allusions. Newton wrote of 'the sensual and moral effects of colour', where sensual must be understood as 'transmitted by the senses'. Goethe, too, wrote extensively on colour (over 2,000 pages!).

Masonic Blue

Blue, then, is the Craft colour *par excellence*, used in aprons, collars, and elsewhere. Let us quote Bro. Chetwode Crawley: "The ordinary prosaic enquirer will see in the selection of blue as the distinctive colour of Freemasonry only the natural sequence of the legend of King Solomon's Temple. For the Jews had been divinely commanded to wear...a 'riband of blue' (Numbers 15:38)." A modern translation of that verse in *Numbers* is: "You are to take tassels on the corners of your garments with a blue cord on each

tassel.” The biblical text, then, refers to blue cords to be incorporated in the tassels worn by pious Jews. Blue ribbons have become the embellishments of aprons, sashes and collars.

The use of red colours could be by association with St. Mary, mother of Jesus, ‘so prominent a figure in the pre-Reformation invocations of the *Old Charges*, drawing in her train the red ensign of *St. George of Cappadocia*, her steward and our Patron Saint’. Blue and red, the heraldic azure and gules are sometimes associated with the chevron of the Arms of the Masons’ Company.



‘English’ MM apron – light blue

The Masonic Symbolism of Colours

a) White

White, the original colour of the Masonic apron, was always considered an emblem of purity and innocence, exemplified in images such as the white lily or fallen snow. Plato asserts that white is par excellence the colour of the gods. In the Bible, Daniel sees God as a very old man, dressed in robes white as snow (Daniel 7:9). In the New Testament Jesus is transfigured on Mount Tabor before Peter, James and John, when his clothes became ‘dazzling white, whiter than anyone in the world could bleach them’ (Mark 9:3). Officiating priests of many religions wore and still wear white garments.

In ancient Jerusalem both the priests and the Levites who performed the Temple rites assumed white clothing. Among Romans, the unblemished character of a person aspiring to public office was indicated by a toga whitened with chalk. This is the origin of the word ‘candidate’, from *candidatus* ‘dressed in white’. Verdicts at trials were decided by small stones (*calculi*) thrown into an urn: white to absolve, black to condemn.

White signifies beginnings, virtualities, the white page facing the writer, ‘the space where the possible may become reality’. White is therefore

understandably the colour of initiation. It is a symbol of perfection, as represented by the swan in the legend of *Lohengrin*. In this aspect it is related to light or sky blue, which in Hebrew is *tchelet* and may be connected semantically with *tichla* (perfection, completeness) and *tachlit* (completeness, purpose). (See also the observations on the symbolism of blue).

Among the Celts the sacred colours of white, blue and green were understood to stand for light, truth and hope. Druids were robed in white. White is also connected with the idea of death and resurrection. Shrouds are white; spirits are represented as wearing white veils. White, rather than black, is sometimes the colour of mourning, among the ancient kings of France, for instance, and in Japan. White, finally, can signify joy. *Leukos* (Greek) means both white and cheerful; as does *candidus* in Latin. The Romans marked festive days with lime and unlucky days with charcoal.

b) Blue

Blue is the colour of the canopy of heaven: azure, cerulean or sky blue. Universally, it denotes immortality, eternity, chastity, fidelity; pale blue, in particular, represents prudence and goodness. In the Royal Arch, the Third Principal is told that it is an emblem of beneficence and charity.

In biblical times, blue was closely related to purple. Generations of scholars have puzzled over the correct meaning of *tchelet* (light blue) and *argaman* (purple), usually mentioned together, without reaching satisfactory conclusions. Only recently has the problem been finally solved in the course of far-reaching research into the dyestuffs and dyeing methods used by the ancient Phoenicians and Hebrews. Both colours, it turns out, were produced with dyeing materials extracted from murex, a shellfish abundant on the coast of Lebanon. The *tchelet* was obtained from a short-variety (*murex trunculus*); the *argaman* came from two kinds: the single-spined *murex brandaris* and, to a lesser extent, the Red-mouth (*thais haemastoma*).

Some historians have concluded that, in the Middle Ages in Europe, blue was low in popular esteem. The favourite colour was then red because the dyers could achieve strong shades of it which brought to mind the prestigious purple of the ancient world. Towards the end of that period, blue gradually became recognised as a princely colour, the ‘Royal Blue’ which displaced red at court, red then being used by the lower classes and so regarded as vulgar. Blue and gold (or

yellow) then became the colours of choice for shields, banners and livery.

It may not be by chance, therefore, that the Master was said to be clothed in 'yellow jacket and blue breeches', in the famous metaphor first used in an exposure, 'The Mystery of Freemasonry', which appeared in *The Daily Journal* in 1730. The traditional explanations of the phrase relate it to the compasses, the arms of gold, gilt or brass and the points of steel or iron. (Steel can certainly appear blue; iron cannot!)

Blue was used royally in France noticeably as the background to the *fleur-de-lys*. It became associated with terms of prestige such as blue blood, cordon bleu (originally the sash of the *Order of the Holy Spirit*), blue riband (of the Atlantic) and blue chip.

c) Purple

Purple is a symbol of imperial royalty and richness but can also relate to penitence and the solemnity of Lent and Advent in the seasons of the Christian church. Although described (in the Royal Arch, for instance) as 'an emblem of union, being composed of blue and crimson', I believe this to be a somewhat contrived explanation. But an interesting fact, which appears to have escaped most writers on this subject, is that in the Kabbala, the Hebrew word for purple, *argaman*, is a mnemonic, representing the initials of the names of the five principal angels in Jewish esoterism.



An 'English' Mark Master Mason's apron – light blue and red.

d) Red

Red or crimson, the colour of fire and heat, is traditionally associated with war and the military. In Rome the *paludamentum*, the robe worn by generals, was red. The colour of blood is naturally connected with the idea of sacrifice, struggle and

heroism. It also signifies charity, devotion, abnegation – perhaps recalling the pelican that feeds its progeny with its own blood.

In Hebrew, the name of the first man, Adam, is akin to red, blood and earth. This connection with earth may explain, perhaps, the connection of red with the passions, carnal love, the cosmetics used by women to attract their lovers. It is the colour of youth. Generally, it represents expansive force and vitality. It is the emblem of faith and fortitude and, in the Royal Arch, of fervency and zeal. It has also a darker side, connected with the flames of hell, the appearance of demons, the apoplectic face of rage.

Scarlet was the distinctive colour of the *Order of the Golden Fleece*, established in 1429 by Philip the Good, Duke of Burgundy (1419-67). Not only was the mantle scarlet, but also the robe and a special hat – the chaperon – with hanging streamers.



Scottish Grand Officers
– note the prevalence of green

e) Green

Green has been directly associated with the ideas of resurrection and immortality. The acacia (the Masonic evergreen) has been suggested as a symbol of a moral life or rebirth, and also of immortality. To the ancient Egyptians, green was the symbol of hope. The Grand Lodge of Scotland has adopted green as its emblematic colour, and, in varying shades, it is incorporated in the dress and furnishings of degrees and Orders beyond the Craft in English, Irish and Scottish Freemasonry.

f) Yellow

Yellow is rarely seen in lodge, except perhaps on the Continent. It is an ambivalent colour, representing both the best and the worst, the colour of brass and honey, but also the colour of sulphur and cowardice. Yellow is the perfection of the Golden Age, the priceless quality of the

Golden Fleece and the golden apples of the *Hesperides*. It is also the colour of the patch imposed on the Jews as a badge of infamy. In the sixteenth century, the door of a traitor's home was painted yellow. A 'jaundiced view' expresses hostility, but the most memorable symbolism of yellow is that it reminds us of the sun and of gold.

g) Black

The three fundamental colours found in all civilizations, down to the Middle Ages in Europe, are white, red and black. These, too, may be regarded as the principal colours of Freemasonry: the white of the Craft degrees, the red of the Royal Arch and of certain of the degrees of the Ancient and Accepted (Scottish) Rite, and the black of some of its others, and of the Knights of Malta.

The other colours of the rainbow find limited uses; they serve only to frame or line the white lambskin upon which so many aprons are based, or for sashes and other items of regalia. Traditionally, black is the colour of darkness, death, the underworld although it was not introduced for mourning until about the middle of the fourteenth century, such use becoming habitual only in the sixteenth. The 'black humour'

of melancholy (*atara hilis*) the black crow of ill omen, the black mass, black market, 'black days': all refer to negative aspects. The Black Stone at Mecca is believed by Muslims to have been at one time white; the sins of man caused the transformation.

Black has also a positive aspect, that of gravity and sobriety; the Reformation in Europe frowned upon colourful clothing. Formal dress for day and evening wear continues to be black. It is associated with the outlaw and the banners of pirates and anarchists, but also with rebirth and transformation. In the French and Scottish Rites, the lodge in the third degree is decorated in black and is strewn with white or silver tears, representing the sorrow caused by the death of Hiram Abif.

Conclusion

A review of the traditional explanations for the choice of certain colours in Masonic symbolism reveals their weaknesses. In considering the use of blue in the English regalia of a Master Mason, it has been possible to find a connection between one of the Hebrew words for that colour and the Volume of the Sacred Law.

Question and Answer

I understand that in some countries, the ritual in lodges is read? Is that the case?

Actually, the answer is very relatively simple – although it requires considerable explanation! The *rule of thumb* is, if the lodge works in English, then the ritual is memorized and recited. If it works in a language other than English, then all the ritual is read. Largely, even if the lodge works in a language other than English, **IF** the ritual used is an English-type ritual (commonly *Emulation*) then it will probably be learnt and recited.

There are, of course, more than a few exceptions to the rule, but if the language is other than English, and the ritual is other than 'English', then almost certainly it will be read. With the various 'Continental' rituals, almost all the ritual work in these ceremonies is shared between the WM, SW and JW – each of whom has a manuscript on his pedestal. This applies in almost every country in Europe, except Turkey (their ritual devolves from Scotland) and Finland (their ritual comes from the USA).

If we look to the Asian Region, most lodges work in English (under England, Ireland or Scotland) – in the likes of Singapore, Malaysia, Hong Kong, etc. The Philippines and Japan use 'American' ritual – they have the odd lodge working not in English, but few.

There are a few French lodges in New Caledonia, Tahiti, Thailand – naturally they work in French (although to be confusing, there are some French-warranted lodges that work in English!), and unless they use *Emulation ritual* (relatively few...) they read. Virtually all lodges in India and Sri Lanka (many!) work in English, and thus learn and recite.

There is a very obvious question here – why do the Europeans (largely) read their ritual and not learn and recite it? If someone likes to ask the question, I will endeavour to answer it in a subsequent edition of *Masonic Musings!*