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HASTINGS

August 7th, 1944.

**LECTURE BY W.M. BRO. W. A. MEADS, P.M.  
COLOURS IN FREEMASONRY.**

Brethren

While appreciating the honour that you have, conferred upon me this evening in electing me as Worshipful Master of this Lodge of Research, I feel rather concerned about this my first duty, that of giving the address this evening.

Some years ago, when R.W. Bro. Parkinson inaugurated the practice of the W.M. giving the address at they installation meeting, it did not commend itself to me; but, having of necessity given the matter further consideration, I have changed my mind and now feel that it is a wise and useful practice.

Although I may be unable to emulate many of the, experienced and capable brethren who have addressed this Lodge, I will do my best and trust that something I may say will be of interest to you.

I am reminded that soon after my initiation into Freemasonry, I noticed that the most prominent colour in the lodges was blue: light blue regalia for the W.M., deep blue for officers of Grand Lodge, and red for the Grand Stewards.

Along the walls at that time were four curtains of blue, purple, red and white, which on inquiry I was informed were used in a higher degree.

As we had been told that everything in the Lodge had a symbolic meaning, I began to wonder how many colours were used in Freemasonry, and what were their meaning. This suggested the subject of my address, "Colours in Freemasonry." I found that there were four colours used in Craft Masonry—namely, blue, red, green and yellow—besides black and white. There does not appear to be any evidence that blue, or any colour, was originally adopted in Craft Freemasonry with any symbolic significance, but merely as a lining to the apron worn at that time. In the very early days of Grand Lodge the lining of the, apron and ribbon or collar, as we call them, was white, for, quoting from a minute of the Grand Lodge of England( dated 24th June, 1727, is the following: —

"That in all private lodges, quarterly communications and general meetings the Master Wardens do wear the jewel of Masonry hanging to a white ribbon.

"That the Master wear the square, the Senior Warden the level, and the Junior Warden the plumb rule."

Later it appears that the brethren had formed the habit of lining their apron in coloured material, and in order to bring about uniformity in the lodges, Grand Lodge ordered that certain distinctive colours only should be used. Again quoting from Lodge minutes dated 17th March, 1931:

"Taking notice of some irregularities in wearing the marks of distinction, which have been allowed by former Grand Lodges:

"Proposed that none but the Grand Master, his Deputy and Wardens shall wear their jewels in gold or gilt, pendant to blue ribbons about their necks, and white leather aprons lined with blue silk.

"That all those who have served any of the three Grand offices shall wear the like aprons lined with blue silk in all lodges and assemblies of Masons, when they appear clothed.

"That those brethren who are Stewards shall wear their aprons lined with red silk and their proper jewels pendant to red ribbons.

"That all those who have served the office of Steward be at liberty to wear aprons lined with red silk, and not otherwise.

"That all Masters and Wardens of lodges may wear their aprons lined with white silk and their respective jewels with plain white ribbons but of no other colour whatsoever."

This was carried. No particular shade of blue was mentioned, but a reference to the Rawlinson MSS reads :

"The order for aprons, at the Constitution of the Lodge at the Prince of Orange's Head in Mill Street, Southwark, given by Thos. Batson, Esq., D.G.M., 1734, quotes :

" 'Two Grand Masters' aprons lined with garter blue silk and turned over two inches; with white, silk strings.

“ 'Two Deputy Grand Masters' aprons turned over one inch and a half ditto'

" 'One apron turned with the deepest yellow for the Grand Master's Sword-bearer.' "

These extracts comprise all that is extant of the Sumpituary Laws of the Grand Lodge of England during the first twenty years of its existence.

Blue was also the colour used by lodges under the Irish Constitution, and the same light or sky blue used by the Grand Master of Ireland is the same colour to-day as that of the Grand Master of 1730.

Pro. W. H. Hugan thinks that "Ireland is more symbolical in character, in the adoption of light blue so as to typically represent the SKY, as the 'Canopy of a Lodge,' and may have started the use of colours in Masonic clothing."

Though the light or sky blue associated with the earliest days of the Grand Lodges of England and Ireland was transmitted, through the Army lodges, to the ends of the earth, yet the colour never commended itself to the Grand Lodges, or Orients of Continental Europe, with the exception of Portugal.

The colour selected by the Grand Lodge of Scotland was GREEN, the colour of the "Order of the Thistle," but the lodges were given the freedom of choice, so there may be seen in Scotland aprons of every shade, and even a combination of red, blue, white, green and tartan, and in some of the lodges the colours adopted are not permanent, but appear to be changed at pleasure, for there are records of some lodges having changed the colours of their aprons four or five times.

The clothing worn by Grand bodies working the Craft degrees in various jurisdictions of the world may be divided into four broad classes:

- (1) Those which confine themselves to the various shades of blue. This comprises most of the Grand Lodges.
- (2) Craft lodges working under Grand "Orients," which generally replace blue by red, both in the apron and lodge decorations, an exception being the Grand United Lusitanian Orient of Portugal, where the Grand officers wear light blue and gold similar to the Grand Lodge, of Ireland.
- (3) Those in which each lodge chooses its own colour, the governing body alone having a fixed-colour (such as Scotland and the Grand Orient of the Netherlands).
- (4) The Grand Lodge of Egypt, which replaces blue by dark and light green. The Grand Orient of Italy uses a green colour to ornament the F.C. apron, whilst the M.M.'s apron is decorated with red and worn with a green sash.

It has been suggested that the adoption of green in Italian Masonry may be due to the fact that a, Lodge of Scottish Jacobite Masons was working in Rome in 1735; also that in Egypt the colour may have come from the same source, as much of Egyptian Masonry came from Italy.

Thus we see that whereas blue, red and green are used a great deal in our symbolic lodges, yellow is rarely mentioned. There is a reference in old manuscripts to the compasses, under the guise of the "Yellow Jacket and Blue Breeches."

Turning to other degrees we have all the colours. Red and purple are the colours apportioned to the Royal Arch. In the fourth degree (Secret Master) black and white is used; in the fifth (Perfect Master), green and white ; in the sixth (Intimate Secretary), black and white in the seventh (Provost and Judge) red; in the eighth (Superintendent of the Builders), red ; in the ninth and tenth (Elect of Nine and Elect of Fifteen), black and white ; in the 11th (Sublime Knight), hangings black sprinkled with tears ; in the 12th (Grand Master Architect), hangings white sprinkled with flames ; in the 13th (Royal Arch of Enoch), yellow ; in the 14th (Grand Scottish Chevalier of the Holy Vault) red ; in the 15th (Knight of the East or the Sword), light green and red; in the 16th (Prince of Jerusalem), red and orange; in the 17th (Knight of the East and West), red ; in the 18th (Prince Rose Croix of Heredom), red and black; in the 19th (Grand Pontiff), blue and gold; in the 20th (Venerable Grand Master), blue and yellow ; in the 21st (Russian Knight), probably blue of any; in the 22nd (Prince of Lebanon), blue and red; in the 23rd (Chief of the Tabernacle), white, red and black ; in the 24th (Prince of the Tabernacle), blue, red and purple; in the 25th (Knight of the Dragon Serpent), red; in the 26th (Scottish Trinitarian or Prince of Mercy), green, red and white; in the 27th (Grand Commander of the Temple), red and black ; in the 28th (Knight of the Sun), blue and gold; in the 29th (Grand Scottish Knight of St. Andrew), red; and in the 30th (Knight Kadosh), black and silver.

In all these degrees the colours are purposely symbolic, and although I have mentioned only the main colours, many of them have other colours too decorating the apron. But from these colours you will easily see how we get the expressions of "Blue Masonry," "Red Masonry," "Black Masonry."

I cannot conclude without some reference to black and white. We are all acquainted with the Mosaic Parchment, the black and white that arrests our attention as we enter a lodge; but I would like, to refer to the black and white clothing worn by the brethren and which has become known as Masonic dress.

Much has been said and written recently with regard to the change back to normal Masonic dress, and while I agree with some of the, writers as to the "bizarre and undignified effect ordinary dress produces on the eye, I think there was also a lack of harmony.

Few may have realised the difference that the dark clothing makes to the regalia, worn at our ceremonies. The black robe or black horse have touched man's imagination for ages, and "white as linen" or "snow white" are common expressions. Black and white are admirable foils for colours, so that the blue, red and gilt of the regalia tend to appear brighter when worn on black, and therefore to my mind give to them their proper significance.

As an illustration of the use of black, and its effect on colour, we have only to look at the stained glass windows of our churches. The dark outline of the lead makes the colours appear brighter and more jewel-like. So with white: the Red Cross on a white ground; the Union Jack owes much of its brilliance to the presence of white among its reds and blues ; and the colours of the Masonic clothing are truer, more uniform, and brighter owing to the presence of white and the dark clothing worn at our assemblies.

You may have noticed that a predominant colour in Freemasonry is red, which has several symbolic meanings; but possibly white is used most, not only symbolically, which I think is significant to us in that white harmonises all things, but—I have not set out to give a lecture on symbolism, and have deliberately left out any attempt to moralise on the symbolism of the various colours used in Freemasonry. Such a subject would be more than enough for several lectures, and would be of deep interest. Suffice it to say that as there is not a character or emblem depicted in our lodges but has a symbolical meaning, so, while colours in themselves are not important, there is not a colour used in the various degrees but which likewise is adopted because of its symbolical application.

I acknowledge my indebtedness to the transactions of Ars Quatuor Coronati.