

A NEW DELIGHT (The Apron)

Author: Grand Master of Masons in Georgia in 1938, Brother John L. Travis

There could be no better advice to men who are taking, as you are, their first step in Masonry, than that they should take due heed of all that upon which they enter. You have entered this evening as apprentices into the greatest school of morality and spiritual knowledge to be found in the world by men who are as unprepared as you are. Masonry is the school in which you are taught how scientifically to live your life in accordance with the will of God and how to regulate your conduct so that every act, word and thought shall be in harmony with the divine laws. By a cheerful and conscientious compliance with those laws and with the precepts of Masonry you will reach that point where death will have no terrors; where, when the call comes, you can, without fear and without improper regret, draw the drapery of your couch about you and lie down to pleasant dreams; where your ears will be attuned to the harmony of the spheres and your eyes will see the light which never was on land or sea. By a cheerful compliance with the laws and precepts of Masonry you will reach such a point of development as you cannot believe even to exist in your present condition and with your present knowledge.

Masonry teaches by signs, symbols and ceremonies. Every word, motion, and even your very foot-prints since you first appeared at the door of this lodge room have been full of a profound meaning; and these very words, motions and steps, together with the symbols which you see displayed about you, have hidden in them that mighty wisdom which was revealed by the Great Creator to the men who lived before the flood the primitive revelation which guided the footsteps of the ancestors of the patriarchs. When you come to see and to understand the beautiful and yet simple system of Masonic philosophy you will find a new happiness and every leaf and stone will contain for you a new delight.

It is impossible for me this evening to give you any explanation of many of these most important symbols. Therefore, we are compelled to leave for future study the plumb, the level, the square, the compasses, the Holy Bible, the pillars, the altar and many other of the symbols of Masonry, and we will confine ourselves to the Apron, which is perhaps the oldest of all symbols. After the Fall, as it is called, in the Garden of Eden, Adam and Eve made for themselves aprons of leaves, and the girdle and apron have been ever used as symbols of profound truth. The deepest of these meanings you are not perhaps capable of understanding, as to know all the meanings of the apron would require a most extended knowledge of ancient religions, ancient philosophies, astronomy, geometry, history and ethnology, and as you are just come to us from the outer darkness, to throw upon you too much light would have the effect that too much light ever has it would blind you and would be worse than the darkness from whence you came. However, some of the external meanings of the Apron can be given to you and may be the means of inducing you to seek for the further and deeper significations of this wonderful symbol. Pulling up the bib and pulling down the skirt you see a triangle with the point upward and a square. The square in this aspect of the Apron symbolizes matter, physical matter, the earth and the appetites and passions which belong to the physical body. The square in its various aspects and forms has many other meanings which you will learn when you are entitled to know them. The equilateral triangle with the point uppermost, symbolizes God in existence, while the right angle triangle, such as this is, with the point uppermost, signifies God in action and also the works of God and as man is considered to be among His greatest works it signifies the soul of man which is the spark from God. This is sometimes represented by a flame, the flame representing the triple nature of man, the fire, the light and the heat, representing the soul, the spirit and the body three in one and the point being upward as a flame, indicates aspiration. To quote from the old hymn:

*Rivers to the ocean run,
Nor stay in all their course;
Fire, ascending, seeks the Sun,
Both speed them to their source.
So the soul that's born of God
Longs to see His heavenly face;
Upward tends to His abode,
To rest in His embrace.*

In the Apron you thus see the representation of the soul and spirit in the triangle reaching upward to the highest things and the body, represented by the square, which hold it down to earth.

It is the purpose and object of Masonry to teach you how to conform your life by the practice of the virtues of morality honesty, charity, brotherly love, relief, truth, purity in heart and thought, so that the body may be raised to a higher rate of vibration, a higher condition, and be made a fit dwelling place for the Mighty Spirit, the spark from the divine fire which the Great Creator placed there at your birth. In order that this body may be a fit temple for God, you must cleanse and purify, removing from it every trace of intentional wrong-doing and making it clean and sweet and pure and holy, so that the glory of God may descend upon it and illuminate it, and that you may become a beacon for the guidance of all those who are seeking light. You may think that this is an ideal and not capable of practical demonstration. You may be surprised to learn that the half has not been told you of the capabilities of the human soul for development, growth and understanding, and that in the course of one short human life you can reach to heights which in your present condition you are incapable of conceiving.

Masonry is a scientific school. It does not depend upon theory, but every single point of its instruction has been tested by the experience of millions of men in all ages of the world. Not a single man ever lived in accordance with the Masonic tenets that did not get accurately, scientifically and impartially the absolute compensation for every single good act of his life. And there can be no safe, sane or permanent spiritual growth except on the lines laid down by Masonry. Because the teachings of Masonry are founded on the eternal truth.

Masonry has known for hundreds of years that the thoughts of the heart make us what we are, and that it is possible for man to control those thoughts, to keep out the bad and call in the good and by controlling those thoughts we can control every act of our lives and be no longer mere derelicts tossed about and blown hither and yon by every passing wind, but we can move forward grandly, steadily and irresistibly toward that goal of happiness which can be reached only as the result and reward of honest effort.

There is another meaning of the Apron. The square is used to symbolize the receiving faculties, and the triangle the giving powers. In this Apron you can see your life history in that heretofore you have received far more than you have given. Masonry has long ago discovered that happiness consists in giving not less than we receive. Heretofore you have received more benefits than you have conferred, but by this symbol you are told that you cannot keep this up. You must confer at least as much as you receive. Emerson says in his wonderful essay on Compensation: Benefit is the end of nature. But for every benefit which you receive, a tax is levied. He is great who confers the most benefits to receive favors and render none. In the order of nature we cannot render benefits to those from whom we receive them, or only seldom. But the benefit we receive must be rendered again, line for line, deed for deed, cent for cent, to somebody.

Heretofore Masonry has had no concern with your conduct. It has had no obligation to you, and you have had none to it. You are now accepted into membership in the oldest society or association in the world, and from the moment of your reception here, every member of that society throughout the world owes you obligations of vast importance. Your reception here may be truly said to be the greatest benefit which has ever been conferred upon you in your whole life. Do not forget that from this moment you owe Masonry a most sacred duty. This Apron, which is presented to you freely by the lodge to be your own property, and which we trust you will preserve and cherish until it shall be laid at last about you when your body shall be placed in the grave. This Apron, for the first time tied about your waist tonight, is the emblem of purity and innocence. Not the innocence of the infant who cannot think evil, nor, if he could, can he carry it into effect, but the innocence of the strong man, that innocence which is better expressed by the word harmlessness; the innocence of him who knows wrong and can do it, yet chooses the right because it is right.

This Apron you may remove when you leave the lodge room, but symbolically it will ever be tied about you, and to your dying day you can never remove the obligation which this garment symbolizes. If you disgrace it by dishonesty, stain it by impurity or by any of those things which are immoral, you will be inexpressibly base, for you will violate your own most sacred promise and now, since you know it, it will be a deliberate violation one of the fundamental laws of nature of God.

You are thinking that some Masons do not live as they should, and that if they do not live right, you, too, can be excused for failure to perform your duties and discharge your obligations. Yes, my Brother, some men do fail to do right, and this is found not only among Masons, but among other classes as well. But do you think it any excuse for the murderer that other men have committed murder, or to the thief that other men steal, or to the deserter that others have basely left their duty in the face of danger? No, my friend, you are now to try to live by higher rules; not to be as good or better than others, but to be better than yourself.

Purify your heart, therefore, my Brother. And remember that purity of heart is a condition to happiness and spiritual growth. For when the great day of judgment shall come, if you have to offer to the Most High for a temple a dwelling place, only a mind full of lust and filthy imaginings and a body debased by impurity and evil practices, what will be your condition? If, instead of a fit dwelling place, you can offer to the King of all the earth and sky but a pig wallow, will you not in that day call upon the mountains and the rocks to fall upon you and hide you from the face of Him that sitteth on the throne? But if you can truly say on that day, Dear Lord, here is myself, as a living temple, swept and garnished by labors for others, purified both within and without by love, charity, and truth, plumbd by the plumb of justice and right, level with the level of brotherly love and humility, and square with the square of virtue, then indeed will the Divine Spirit enter into your heart and dwell there and give you peace.

Therefore, guard thy heart with all diligence, for out of it are the issues of life and death.

HOW TO USE THIS SHORT TALK

There are several ways in which this Short Talk can be used effectively in Lodge. It can be read! However, this is the least preferable way. It can be memorized and recited as a lecture. If this is done, it would be wise to preface it with an explanation that it is in the phraseology of the early 1900s. It can be used as a tool in providing Entered Apprentices with added instruction for them to study at your leisure. Possibly it could be used to stimulate their interest and provide them with add-ed material for discussion. Probably the greatest use will be for this Short Talk Bulletin to be used as the basis for other talks by Masonic Speakers. It contains a variety of thoughts which can be elaborated and built upon. Masonic Study Groups will find it a useful tool in generating discussions and exchanging thoughts. However it is used, it will serve the Craft in providing more light and more insight into the application of Masonic teachings into our daily lives.

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