



Provincial Grand Chapter of Warwickshire

The Sash

. Q. Whence came the inspiration for the sash worn by Royal Arch Companions? What is sacred about the sash? Why is it described as 'irradiated' and how does that further depict light?

A. The ribbon (riband, sash, garter) has long been associated with Orders of Chivalry. The following extract from The Queen's Orders of Chivalry* will be of interest. Ashmole wrote that:

Formerly the ordinary manner of wearing this riband (of the Order of Garter) was about the neck but for the more convenience of riding or action the same is spread over the left shoulder and brought under the right arm where the Jewel hangs. In Collins' Peerage an explanation was given that:

The custom of wearing the riband over the left shoulder arose from the circumstance of Charles, Duke of Richmond, King Charles the Second's natural son by the Duchess of Portsmouth, having been elected a Knight of the Garter. (The explanation continued:) When in 1681 his mother introduced him to the King with his riband over the left shoulder His Majesty was so pleased with this conceit that he commanded that all the Knights should wear it in the same way.

Several historians deny this explanation, but it is at least of interest to note that a few months after the date of this incident, in 1682, a formal instruction was issued by the King to the effect that 'in order that it should be clearly seen, the Knights should wear the riband henceforth over the habit beltways put over the left shoulder and coming under the right arm'.

I suggest that the Orders of Chivalry may well have been the source of inspiration for the wearing of a Royal Arch sash. 'Light' is often visually depicted in the form of an indented or zig-zag line; this is derived from 'rays of light' usually indicated by two lines starting from a given point and separating with distance. The most obvious example is seen in an illustration of the light from a lighthouse.

* Brigadier Sir (van De la Bere KCVO, CB, CBE; Spring Books, London, 1964, p.66) The Royal Arch sash is described in the Regulations as 'indented'; it symbolically represents the light emanating from the discovery made in the vault by the Sojourners.

I suggest the ribbon is described as a 'sacred emblem' because the colours blue and crimson are associated with the colours of the curtains of the Tabernacle; the ribbon should remind us of the significance of the Ark of the Covenant. The Bible tells us that all the materials used in the construction of the Tabernacle were given voluntarily, and to quote from the Encyclopaedia Judaica :

The value of the materials was in direct proportion to the degree of sanctity of the Tabernacle component or furniture for which it was used. In this way the conception of graduated holiness was preserved in every aspect of the shrine.

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