



## **How The Grand Stewards Got Their Red Aprons**



A sort of 'Just-So story' produced on the occasion of the installation of RW Bro The Hon. E L Baillieu, A.G.M. by RW Bro G L C Colenso-Jones, PJGW in the Grand Stewards' Lodge, 18 January 1978. When the Temple at Jerusalem had been completed, KS ordered that a great feast should be held, so that the brethren in all the classes of workmen might have the opportunity to rejoice together at the successful culmination of their labours. Accordingly, a stated day having been fixed for the feast, preparations began to be made. It soon became obvious that they could not all sit down together, for the only dining hall available was the House of the Forest of Lebanon which King Solomon had built between the Temple and the Palace and this would only hold three hundred and thirty. As you are aware, a vast number of masons had been employed in the building, and so the following arrangements were made: The EA's were issued with a double ration of corn, wine and oil and told to enjoy themselves as best they could; the FC's were summoned to the middle chamber and given double wages and told to buy themselves a good dinner. The menatchin or prefects were given a stand-up buffet lunch in marquees erected in the Palace garden. This left just three hundred and thirty of the most senior brethren to sit down in the hall. They consisted mainly of Grand Officers, together with Provincial Officers representing each Province from Beersheba to Dan and a number of J.G.R.'s (Jerusalem Grand Rank)

The question then arose: who was going to serve the wine at this banquet? Normally some of the junior brethren would have been recruited for this duty but on this occasion they were all disporting themselves elsewhere; and so, some of the 330 would have to wait upon the others. KS therefore sent for Adoniram who was, as no doubt you are well aware, the general masonic odd-job man in Jerusalem. The King instructed Adoniram to select a couple of dozen of the 330 and to make them Grand Stewards; at the same time informing him that although the office of GS would always be the most junior in GL, yet in days to come it would be such an honourable office that it would be sought after by the highest in the land. Adoniram didn't believe this, but accepted the task, and enquired how the GS were to be distinguished; for, as he pointed out, when one's glass is empty, it is important to be able to identify the man who will fill it. And of course, at this time everyone was still wearing white aprons to keep up the pretence of innocence. KS decreed that GS's should be distinguished by a jewel appended to a white collar, and he summoned a skilful artist to design it, a certain brother Garth (generally known as 'Hoe Garth, because he was a bit of a rake). Unfortunately, the jewel designed by brother Garth consisted of a combination of the jewels worn by the principal officers and this led to great difficulties. The feast had only been going for a few minutes before it became obvious that this system would not work. Indeed, one Past Grand Warden, on his way to the door in order to restore himself to his personal comforts after the fish course, was accosted by a fairly junior brother at one of the lower tables, who demanded of him a full bottle of wine, at the same time asking what he was expected to do with the empty one. To his credit, be it said, the Past Grand Warden did not ignore that junior brother, but turned and told him exactly what he could do with his empty bottle: advice, which had it been taken literally, would have proved extremely uncomfortable - even if physically possible. Certain of the more eminent of the brethren then went to KS to acquaint him with the utter confusion into which they had been thrown.

The King therefore stood up, and observing Adoniram at a distance - (and notice that, even at this early stage, Adoniram had already achieved that quality which has been found in wine-stewards ever since: the ability to be always 'at a distance') - the King, observing him, beckoned him in the accustomed manner. Adoniram was so flustered that he wondered if he ought to kneel. Then, thinking better of it, he decided that he ought to salute the King, with the G or R sign. Unfortunately, at that particular moment, he happened to have a bottle of red wine in each hand. The consequences were inevitable: the glass (or clay) shattered in fragments while the wine, like Aaron's precious ointment, ran from his head to his beard, and even to the skirts of his clothing. There was a moment of deathly silence; and then one of the brethren cried, "See, Adoniram hath a red apron!" while others, more animated, exclaimed, "Lo, how it matcheth his face!" (Certain obstinate historians maintain that the words used here were actually "Lo, how it matcheth his nose", but it is kinder to think that the authorised version is to be preferred at this point.) The King, ever mindful of the comforts of all his officers, soon put Adoniram at his ease; he called an immediate muster of all the Grand Stewards who were told to form a column in the north and turn half left. Each was then handed two bottles of red wine and, taking their time from the G.D.C., saluted the King with eleven. Thus were the G.S.'s first equipped with red aprons. For several years the custom continued, and at the annual meeting of Grand Lodge, after all the other officers had been invested, the G.S.'s of the year were lined up, handed bottles and instructed to salute. And then came a year when inflation pushed up the cost of wine to an unprecedented height. (I think there had been a bad harvest of apes and peacocks in Ophir, or something.)

It was at that opportune moment that there came before the King three zealous and expert brethren by the names of Toye, Kenning and Spencer, who made a full confession that they had in their possession a large quantity of red ribbon which they were anxious to place at the King's disposal. (In actual fact, they had been decorating chocolate boxes for an RMBI festival, and had over-ordered.) From that time, therefore, red ribbons had been substituted for the genuine and original regalia. Perhaps the time has now come when we should revert to the ancient custom - especially now that the cost of ribbon greatly exceeds the price of two bottles of wine. (Though, if this were to be implemented, I am afraid the tickets for the Grand Investiture would be in even greater demand than they are at present!!)

Long may the Grand Stewards continue to enjoy their traditional privileges and customs - and the proud motto especially composed for them by KS himself:

***"Aspectu meo quam mappa rubro, quia fortiter labore"***

which, being interpreted is:

***"If my face looks as red as my apron, it is because I am working so hard"***

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