

The Scapegoat (An article from the 'Masonic Square' March 1982)

Many animals have played curious parts in secular history and in religion. The Russian Bear, the British Lion, the American Eagle are all national emblems. The Lamb plays an important part in Christianity and in Freemasonry. The Bull is sacred in India as was the Cat in ancient Egypt. But in the rituals of all lands and climes and ages, no goat is found in Freemasonry, except in ridicule.

Witches and Devils

In northern Europe, the wood spirit wore Goat's horns, ears and legs. Pan, the Arcadian god, is represented as a man but with horns and long ears, and the lower half of his body in the form of a goat. He plays a pipe made of reeds and had a terrifying appearance at times. The word 'Panic' comes from the terror he inspired. Out of mythology, the god Pan evolved into Satan. Thus Satan has Pan's horns and tail, and in early England the Devil was supposed to ride upon a goat. Even today, the goat retains this ancient character as in the expressions, 'act the goat' and 'to separate the sheep from the goats'.

In Leviticus Ch. 16 v. 10 we read, *'But the goat, on which the lot fell to be the scapegoat, shall be presented alive before the Lord, to make an atonement with him, and to let him go for a scapegoat into the wilderness'*. The idea was widespread, that the sins of a people might be transferred to a goat which, driven into the wilderness to die, carried away moral trespasses. In the middle ages, men believed that the Devil took the form of a goat in order to work unnoticed. Satan thus had horns and a tail. Witch stories of the middle ages told of a Devil riding on a goat. Many believed that in the mysteries of masonic working, Freemasons were accustomed to 'raise the Devil' and so, riding the goat, a practice of witches, was transferred to Freemasons.

Two organisations in the early 18th. century were formed to bring ridicule to freemasonry, the Gormorgons in 1724 and the Scald Miserables in 1741. They held mock processions and these two societies did much to spread the idea that Masons 'raised the Devil' and 'rode upon the Goat'. The belief that in the making of a mason the candidate must ride upon the goat had widespread popular support. In my early days in the Craft there was the occasional reference to riding the goat, which for myself I always took as no more than a joke without any substance or foundation. However, such humour merely diminishes the sincerity and importance of the lessons that are conveyed to the candidate by the ritual.

Some believe that masonic initiations are humorous , concerned with horseplay, a form of college rag and if the same idea is carried into the Lodge Room the sublime symbolism of the ceremony is ruined. It is a pity that an Order so concerned with high ideals, brotherly love and character building should be so demeaned by ridicule. It is, therefore, the duty of every mason to vigorously discourage all inappropriate expressions and concepts, and to foster a reverence for the teachings of the Craft and to find in our ceremonies only uplift and inspiration. Only then will the Order have it's true understanding, both with it's members and with those outside the fraternity.

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