

Education & Enlightenment

A Special Committee of

The Ancient & Accepted Scottish Rite of Freemasonry of Canada



A Masonic Moment – April 2018 - Acacia

By Ill. Bro. Garry Perkins

April to most people is the unofficial start of Spring, with the snow now disappearing into the earth to negotiate the rising of May's flowers and the temperatures teasing us with double digits preparing us for the joys of summer now just over the horizon. This optimistic and joyous month also brings us Easter- the festival of memory and hope. This particular day in spring is set aside to praise the victory of life, as if the seasons of the soul were akin to the seasons of the year. April unites faith with life and it links the fresh buds of spring with hope and joy as we finally move from winter to summer.

Easter has been a day of feast and song in many lands among many people and cultures. In some cultures Easter is simply a day that allows a secretive bunny to distribute chocolate and coloured eggs in decorative baskets whereas in other cultures Easter Sunday has a deeper religious undertone. There is something about spring that stirs in our conscious, in the reviving of the earth, in the rebirth of flowers that gives rise to an unconscious, involuntary renewal of faith in the heart of man that refreshes his hope.

As Spring is an easy reference for flowers, there is no symbol more interesting to the Masonic student than the sprig of Acacia. In all the ancient systems of religion, and mysteries of Initiation, there has

always been one plant consecrated in the minds of the worshippers and participants and heralded as a sacred emblem. Before examining the symbolism of the Acacia, we should identify the true plant which occupies so important a place in the ritual of Freemasonry. The Acacia is an esteemed sacred tree that grew abundantly in the vicinity of Jerusalem where it is still to be found today. It is familiar to us all in modern times as the tree from which the Gum Arabic of Commerce is obtained. The Acacia, which in scripture is called shittah and in the plural shittam, was esteemed a sacred wood among the Hebrew. From Acacia, Moses was ordered to make the tabernacle, the Ark of the Covenant, the table for the showbread and all the rest of the sacred furniture.

In the impressive funeral service of our order, we state that "This evergreen is an emblem of our faith in the immortality of the soul". It was also an ancient custom, which is still used in various cultures even now, for mourners to carry in their hands at funerals a sprig of some evergreen, generally the cedar or the cypress, and to deposit it in the grave of the deceased. According to ancient history, the Hebrews always planted a sprig of Acacia at the head of the grave of a departed friend. The ancient Greeks also had a custom of planting herbs and flowers around the tombs of their departed. The ancients, it is said, substituted the Acacia for all other plants because they believed it to be incorruptible, and not liable to injury from the attacks of any kind of insect or other animal, thus symbolizing the incorruptible nature of the soul. Acacia is intended to remind us, by its evergreen and unchanging nature, of that spiritual part within us which can never die. This is an important meaning to us, as the symbol of immortality it is also appropriate to Freemasonry whose teachings are intended to inculcate the great lesson that "life rises out of the grave".

Acacia is also a symbol of innocence, but not depending on an analogy in the form of a symbol, but simply because in the Greek

language the word "Acacia" signifies both the plant and the moral quality of innocence or purity of life. Lastly, Acacia is to be considered also as the symbol of Initiation. It relates to the fact that in all ancient initiations and religious mysteries there was some plant, peculiar to each, which was consecrated by its own esoteric meaning, and which occupied an important position in the celebration of the rites. Therefore the plant, whatever it may be, from its constant and prominent use in the ceremonies of initiation, came at length to be adopted as the symbol of that initiation. In adopting Acacia as a symbol of innocence, Masonry has but extended the principle of an ancient and universal usage, which thus consecrated particular plants, by a mystical meaning, to the representation of particular virtues.