# *The Royal Arch Banners*

**By Albert Mackey 1873**

Much difficulty has been experienced by ritualists in reference to the true colors and proper arrangements of the banners used in an American Chapter of Royal Arch Masons. It is admitted that they are four in number, and that their colors are blue, purple, scarlet, and white; and it is known, too, that the devices on these banners are a lion, an ox, a man, and an eagle; but the doubt is constantly arising as to the relation between these devices and these colors, and as to which of the former is to be appropriated to each of the latter. The question, it is true, is one of mere ritualism, but it is important that the ritual should be always uniform, and hence the object of the present article is to attempt the solution of this question.

The banners used in a Royal Arch Chapter are derived from those which are supposed to have been borne by the twelve tribes of Israel during their encampment in the wilderness, to which reference is made in the second chapter of the Book of Numbers, and the second verse: "Every man of the children of Israel shall pitch by his own standard." But as to what were the devices on the banners, or what were their various colors, the Bible is absolutely silent. To the inventive genius of the Talmudists are we indebted for all that we know or profess to know on this subject. These mystical philosophers have given to us with wonderful precision the various devices which they have borrowed from the death-bed prophesy of Jacob, and have sought, probably in their own fertile imaginations, for the appropriate colors.

The English Royal Arch Masons, whose system differs very much from that of their American Companions, display in their Chapters the twelve banners of the tribes in accordance with the Talmudic devices and colors. These have been very elaborately described by Dr. Oliver, in his "Historical Landmarks," and beautifully exemplified by Companion Harris, in his "Royal Arch Tracing Boards."

But our American Royal Arch Masons, as we have seen, use only four banners, being those attributed by the Talmudists to the four principal tribes-Judah, Ephraim, Reuben, and Dan. The devices on these banners are respectively a lion, an ox, a man, and an eagle. As to this there is no question; all authorities, such as they are, agreeing on this point. But, as has been before said, there is some diversity of opinion as to the colors of each, and necessarily as to the officers by whom they should be borne.

Some of the Targumists, or Jewish biblical commentators, say that the color of the banner of each tribe was analogous to that of the stone which represented that tribe in the breast-plate of the high priest. If this were correct, then the colors of the banners of the four leading tribes would be red and green-namely: red for Judah, Ephraim, and Reuben; and green for Dan; these being the colors of the precious stones sardonyx, ligure, carbuncle, and chrysolite, by which these tribes were represented in the high priest's

breast-plate. Such an arrangement would not, of course, at all suit the symbolism of the American Royal Arch banners. Equally unsatisfactory is the disposition of the colors derived from the arms of speculative Masonry, as first displayed by Dermot, in his "Ahiman Rezon," which is familiar to all American Masons, from the copy published by Cross, in his -Hieroglyphic Chart." In this piece of blazonry, the two fields occupied by Judah and Dan are azure, or blue, and those of Ephriam and Reuben are or, or golden yellow; an appropriation of colors altogether uncongenial with Royal Arch symbolism.

We must, then, depend on the Talmudic writers solely, for the disposition and arrangement of the colors and devices of these banners. From their works, we learn that the color of the banner of Judah was white; that of Ephraim scarlet; that of Reuben purple; and that of Dan blue; and that the devices of the same tribes were respectively the lion, the ox, the man, and the eagle.

Hence, under this arrangement-and it is the only one upon which we can depend-the four banners in a Chapter of Royal Arch Masons, working in the American Rite, must be distributed as follows among the banner-bearing officers:

1st. An eagle, on a blue banner. This represents the tribe of Dan, and is borne by the Grand Master of the first veil.

2nd. A man, on a purple banner. This represents the tribe of Reuben, and is borne by the Grand Master of the second veil.

3rd. An ox, on a scarlet banner. This represents the tribe of Ephraim, and is borne by the Grand Master of the third veil.

4th. A lion, on a white banner. This represents the tribe of Judah, and is borne by the Royal Arch Captain.