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From Whence



We Came Book III

The Birth of the
Two Great Committees



MASONIC EDUCATION
SERIES

The Two Great Committees Are Born

Throughout history the world has been full of men's clubs and groups that come and go. Why has Masonry survived while so many others are gone? The answer is purpose.

While most of us enjoy Masonry, its purpose was never to be fun and enjoyment. Those groups whose purpose is to be fun and enjoyment all share a common fault: invariably something comes along that is more fun and more enjoyable.

Masonry's design is to improve the man with education, skills and relationships. In almost three centuries, for those who will take advantage of what is available, nothing has come along that does a better job.

Yet, the structure is easily harmed when we admit the wrong people or let misunderstandings get out of hand. The two Great Committees prevent this from ever happening.

This is the story of the birth of these committees, and how they keep Masonry alive three hundred years later.

From Whence We Came Book III

-The Two Great Committees-

The Committee on Reference

The years following the initiation of Lord Aaron brought about many changes. Not everyone felt that accepting members who weren't stonemasons was a good idea, but the evidence was clear. Good men uniting together was more successful than anyone could imagine. Together they accomplished things even they might have thought impossible.

Every man brought something to the guild. Those who could read and write taught the others the skill. They brought the worlds of literature and learning to men who had never traveled far from their homes. Men who made shoes were certain that no member's foot was ever unshod. The farmers made sure no member went hungry. The learned lawyers protected the members from those who would take advantage of them. Those who enforced the laws enforced them fairly. They stood for each other. Though one man might lack a skill or ability, another would have it and share it. Together they brought their world from a small group of individuals fending for themselves to a group of men of honor and respect. Word of the "Freemasons" spread throughout Europe.

Yet, some found the rules of the guilds as outlined in the "Old Book" hard to abide. Some of the rules were not usual. Some found them uncomfortable. In a society that was based on strength and position, equality was foreign. The lords were accustomed to being catered to and the working class members were accustomed to catering to those in authority. Just a simple conversation between a lord and worker was new and different. For the first time in their lives they shared something beyond the land and the air. For the first time in their lives they shared a common bond. They were Freemasons.

The First Great Committee - The Committee on Reference

Speaking Parts:

Narrator	Brother Teague
Master Brickman	Brother Adkins
Adam of Kent	Brother Sloan
Brother Ernest	

Though times were good and the guilds were thriving, it was obvious it could not continue so forever. Master Brickman was walking through the market noting how every one of the fruits and vegetables looked like a jewel. The warm nights and gentle spring rains had brought about a bountiful crop.. As he was picking through a rack of tomatoes he felt a tug at his sleeve. He looked around and it was Adam of Kent. “Sir, we must talk,” the man said. “Somewhere more private, if you don’t mind.” Master Brickman followed him to a stable behind the blacksmith’s.

“I am in conflict, Sir,” he said almost apologetically. “A brother owes me money and refuses to pay. I desire payment of a debt and Brother Ernest has denied me.”

“Brother Ernest is an honorable man. Why would he not pay you?”

“He falsely says that the grain I sold him was inferior.”

“Was it inferior?”

“No Sir, it was fine wheat I had purchased from a farmer of good reputation. Brother Ernest owes me four pounds three shillings and refuses to pay me.”

“Would you like for me to speak with Brother Ernest?”

“Sir, that is up to you, but I had hoped you would remove it from the guild deposit in Brother Ernest’s name and pay it to me.”

“Now, My Brother, do you actually expect me to remove it from Brother Ernest’s funds without speaking to him first?”

“Master Brickman, I have told you my story. Brother Ernest owes me the money. I would desire you just take it from his funds.”

“I do not doubt what you say, but life has taught me there are two sides to every story and before I would pay out money which belongs to Brother Ernest I would need to hear what he has to say.”

“As I said, I have told you what happened... If I do not collect my money I will be forced to sue him.”

Master Brickman lifted his hand. “I will no longer discuss the matter. I will talk to Brother Ernest and hear his words. In the mean time, Brother Adam,” the Master grasped the man firmly on the shoulder, “Freemasons do not sue other Freemasons.”

“With all respect, I do not see...”

“I will talk with Brother Ernest. Do have a good day, Sir.”

After the midday meal Master Brickman went to see Brother Ernest at his mill. When he entered Brother Ernest was loading some grain in a hopper above the massive millstone. Master Brickman threw up his hand. “Good Day to you, Brother Ernest, I trust I find you well.”

Looking up Brother Ernest broke into a broad smile. “Greetings, Master Brickman, you honor me with your presence. To what do I owe this honor? I know you need no flour. Your good wife purchased three bags just last evening.”

“No, I need no flour, just a moment of your time.”

“That is easy enough to abide. If you will allow me to throw this lever we will have time to talk.” Master Brickman smiled and Brother Ernest pulled a lever which caused a gear to mesh with the cogs on the millstone. The stone began to move and as it did bits of flour fell on the shelf below

“There. Now we have some time to talk. What can I do for you?”

“Brother Adam came to see me this morning and says you and he are having a disagreement.”

“Oh goodness. I hate he got you involved. I started to say something but decided not to.”

“So you two are having problems.”

“No, I just told him I wasn’t going to pay him for molded wheat. He claims wheat is wheat and I owe him the money.”

“I don’t understand,” said Master Brickman.

“Just follow me,” said Brother Ernest. They stepped over to the millstone and Brother Ernest pointed to the hopper at the top. “The way this thing works,” he said “is the wheat goes in the hopper at the top and falls toward the center of the two stones. As the one on the top moves it grinds the wheat into flour which falls to the outside and is collected on the shelf below. Then we sweep it into bags. That’s how flour is made.”

“That is very interesting but what does it have to do with you and Brother Adam?”

“In order for all this to work the wheat must be dry and clean. If the wheat is moist instead of making flour it only makes a mush that fills up the

rough surfaces of the millstone. It ruins the stone for making flour. The entire huge stone has to be removed and cleaned then completely dried. This is what happened with Brother Adam's wheat. It wasn't fit to use and I refused to pay him. As a matter of fact I should be charging him with the two days work I lost while I cleaned the stone, but I didn't say anything other than I wasn't going to pay for bad wheat."

"So you don't feel you owe him the money or any part of it?"

"No Sir, and he has no right to ask for it. I feel bad he went to you."

Break for Discussion

1. Master Brickman was approached by Brother Adam. If you had a problem with someone in your lodge would you approach the Master or just handle it yourself? Why would you do it this way? Would this be the correct way?
2. Which way is the "Masonic Way"? Why?
3. Have you any examples about disagreements between Masons and how they were handled? Was this the right way?

Master Brickman had a severe problem. In the normal world it would be a simple case of two people with a difference and it would be best to let the courts settle it. But this was not the normal world. This was the guild, and now the Freemason's guild. Two brothers battling in court had no place in the new world of the Freemason's guild. They were brothers. Brickman knew there must be a way to settle the problem like brothers. He just didn't know how. He bid farewell to Brother Ernest and sent word for Brothers Teague, Adkins and Sloan to meet him at the Rooster and Crow Inn after their dinner was finished. About seven o'clock.

Later that evening at the designated time the four of the met at the Inn. Over tankards of ale they discussed the events of the day. "I see no problem," said Brother Adkins. "The wheat was no good so Brother Ernest owes Brother Adam nothing. The matter should be dropped."

"Brothers, your purpose here is not to decide fault," said Master Brickman, "it is to decide how we can work this thing out as Masons."

"Before we decide anything, I feel it necessary to talk to everyone concerned... including the farmer. Brother Adam says he is a reputable man. I will go by to see him on my way to labor in the morning. Then all of us, including Brother Ernest and Brother Adam shall meet here again in two night's time. Does that sound agreeable?"

"Yes, but what will we say then?" Asked Brother Teague. "We have one brother who is convinced he sold good wheat. We have another brother who is convinced the wheat was bad. They are both honorable men. Where do we go from there?"

"You have one more thing," said Master Brickman, "you have two more days to figure out a peaceful conclusion. We can do it. That's why I referred it to you. Together we can figure it out."

The next day Brother Teague spoke with the farmer who had grown the wheat. He assured him that when it left the farm it was high quality dry wheat. The problem was no closer to being settled.

At the same time Brother Adkins spoke with Brother Ernest. He told him the same story as he had told Master Brickman, but this time he took him to where he had cleaned the stone and gave him a handful of the wheat in question. Indeed it was moldy.

Discussion

1. Brother Teague has spoken to the farmer and is convinced the wheat was clean and dry. Brother Adkins has evidence the wheat was moldy and not good. Has anything changed?
2. Does this evidence change the purpose of the Committee? What is the purpose of the Committee? What was Master Brickman's directive?
3. Let us assume the wheat was moldy. What are steps we can take to resolve the problem? What are some steps we can take if the wheat is good?
4. Who do you actually believe? Does it matter?

Two nights later they all met at the Rooster and Crow. Brother Adam immediately opened the discussion when he stated that Brother Ernest had wheat delivered to him, he had ground it, and owed him for the wheat. Master Brickman sat at the end of the table, drank a gulp of ale from his tankard and said, “you speak the truth, Sir, and you will receive your money.”

Brother Ernest immediately interrupted and said the wheat was bad, could not be made into flour, and he had no intentions of paying. Master Brickman took another sip of ale and said, “you, Sir, are absolutely correct also. You owe no money and will have labor reimbursed for cleaning your wheel.”

Brother Teague spoke up. “Sir, with all respect you make no sense. I spoke with the farmer who grew the wheat. The wheat was good and Brother Ernest owes for the wheat.”

Brother Adkins piped in. “I am confused. I held the bad wheat in my hand. I saw the mold. I felt the wetness. Brother Ernest owes no one.”

Master Brickman leaned back in his chair with a happy smile. “Gentlemen, you are all correct, but I am aware of something you are not. The farmer is a reputable man and when Brother Teague questioned him morning last he was very concerned. This was the second time this had occurred. The first time he assumed it was some kind of mistake and replaced the wheat, but this time he questioned his bound man as to how it could have happened. Being a reputable man he was embarrassed over the event he questioned the bound man severely. The man finally confessed he had delivered wheat from a pile he was directed to throw away and sold the good wheat keeping the money. The bound man has been severely flogged and his bound amount increased. Tomorrow morning a double load of clean dry wheat will be delivered to Brother Ernest. He can pay the amount he originally owed to Brother Adam, and for two weeks the bound man will work at Brother Ernests’ mill cleaning millstones or doing whatever menial tasks Brother Ernest may decide. Brothers, everyone has been made whole and both Brother Adam and Brother Ernest remain, as we know them, to be good and honest men.

When the laughter and smiling died down Master Brickman looked around the table. “Brothers, do we see the significance of what has happened? Do we really see the whole picture?” They looked at each other with a puzzled look.

“Because we are men of honor, the threat, the danger here was not the loss of a few pence of wheat. The threat was the loss of that honor we treasure so dearly. “Because Brother Adam is a man of honor and character Brother Ernest threw the wheat on his millstone without first inspecting it or checking it.

This he would not have done from the average man. Brother Ernest nodded. Because Brother Ernest is a man of honor Brother Adam did not expect payment until after the wheat was made into flour, possibly even after it be sold. In our world, people pay for goods when they are delivered. This is our way. This was not asked because Adam knew of Earnest's honor. Why was this all true? Because we are Freemasons."

"In the outside world no one would have questioned the events of the past few days. Brother Adam would be considered a cheat for trying to sell bad wheat and Brother Adam would be a deadbeat for not paying his bill. That's the way it would have ended. They would forever distrust and dislike each other. Nothing would have been referred to a group of good men for settlement. The reference group... The Master smiled... the Reference Committee... would not exist."

The Master stood and held high his tankard. "Tonight, Brothers, let us swear an oath that no brothers shall ever be in distress with each when a Reference Committee is not appointed to assist in resolving that distress. Yes, this will be an important part of Freemasonry... in some ways this Reference Committee will be Freemasonry."

They all swore to the oath, and deep in his heart every man present knew something important had happened that evening.

Discussion

1. In this case the bondsman confessed his crime. This would not always happen. This was settled peacefully. Do we see the importance of the Reference Committee? State it. How is the Reference Committee a framework of Freemasonry?

The Investigating Committee

Speaking Parts:

Narrator	Ben Delbert
Master Torrow	Brother Ben Little
Brother Malachi	Brother Israel

Soon after the midday meal one Thursday Ben Little came into the guildhall and approached MasterThorrow. “May we speak?” he asked.

Master Thorrow looked up from his desk and peered over his small glasses. “Certainly, Brother Ben, I always have time for you.”

“Thank you, Sir. This morning I was approached by Harvey the Thatcher who asked about joining the guild. He said he heard good things and would like to be a part of it.

“Harvey the Thatcher? I don’t know the man. Is he from around here?”

“No Sir, he is from Landry Town near Northhampton. He came here several weeks ago to seek work. He seems to be a likeable fellow who wants to join the guild.”

“What else do you know about him? Has he found work?”

“I believe so,” said Ben. “I believe he is working on some houses on the north of town. I only gather this from what he said.”

“Why did he approach you?” asked Master Thorrow.

“I... I don’t really know, Sir. He said he asked around and someone told him to speak to me. Who, I don’t know. What should I tell him?”

Master Thorrow leaned back in his chair and stared at Ben. He did so for several seconds.

“Have I done something wrong, Sir? The man just asked me...”

“Oh no, Brother Ben. I’m sorry. I was just thinking. I knew this day would come, but somehow I hoped it would be a long time coming.”

“Sir, I’m sorry. I do not understand. Days... coming...?”

“Brother Ben. Do not concern yourself. You did well. I will speak to some of the others this evening and let you know what we need to do. Until then, just say nothing.”

Brother Ben said “Yes Sir” and moved out the door. That afternoon Master Thorrow sent word for Malachi, the Senior Warden, and Israel, the Junior Warden, to come to the Master’s house when their labors were through.

At sunset the two men met along the road to Master Thorrow’s house. “He called you too?” Brother Malachi asked Brother Israel. “It must be something serious.”

“I agree,” said Brother Israel. “Normally if there’s a problem the Master just handles it himself and lets us know of it when the guild meets. This is very unusual.”

The two men entered the house. “Brothers,” said Master Thorrow. “I need your council... rather WE need your council.”

“Is something the matter?” asked Brother Malachi. “You seem disturbed.”

“No,” said Master Thorrow. “I’m not bothered, but I am concerned. Someone from outside our realm has asked to join the guild.”

“It isn’t unusual for someone to ask to join the guild” said Brother Malachi. “It happens often. Why are you concerned?”

“I am concerned because we do not know this man. We know nothing about him. Up until now it was simple, whether he was a nobleman or a craftsman didn’t matter. We were around these people most of our lives. We accepted the good ones and rejected the bad ones. It was simple.”

“Yes, it always bothered me to see someone we rejected on the road or at the market. Somehow they always glared at me.”

“It never bothered me,” said Master Thorrow, “because they never blamed themselves or the things they had done. They always blamed us, and I can live with that blame as long as it keeps us from letting bad members become a part of the guild.”

“Gentlemen, I have feared this day and I knew it would come. As long as we did well there was no way to avoid it. A man is knocking on our door that we don’t know. What do we do? Keep in mind this man will only be the first of many more to come.”

Discussion

1. Master Thorrow appeared upset by the news from Ben Little. Why?
2. Why was the news good? Why was it bad?
3. Do you believe Ben Little got as much information from Harvey the Thatcher as he should?
4. Was Master Thorrow suspicious of the Thatcher? Why would he be?

“He can’t be from around here. Otherwise we would know him,” said Brother Israel. “Who is he? From where does he hail?”

“His name is Harvey the Thatcher. He is from Landry Town. About two days from here, near Northhampton.”

“That’s simple enough,” said Brother Malachi. “Send him back to Landry Town or Northhampton, or wherever he’s from and let him join the guild there.”

“No, it’s not that simple. He is working here now. Obviously he wishes to stay here. Gentlemen, discuss this alone. What do we do? How do we handle it? Discuss it then meet me in the garden and we will talk further.”

Brother Malachi and Brother Israel talked for a short while then went to the garden. Master Thorrow already had cups of wine poured. Master Thorrow was looking over his cup and into the clear sky. “You know, Gentlemen, the decisions we make tonight may make the difference between something that may change the world or something that in just a few years no one will remember. That’s a heavy load.”

“With all respect, Master Thorrow, aren’t you putting too much importance on this? What if we do let in a bad one every now and then. Would that be so bad?” asked Brother Israel.

“No, Brother Israel, if that’s all it was that may not be so bad, but that will never be all there is. The morals and integrity of a good Mason are far above those of the average man. The average man can never understand that it is better to be moral and just than it is to be popular. Just being one of the crowd would never appeal to a Mason. But it does appeal to the average man. No matter how base or how vulgar something is, if others do it the average man thinks it is acceptable. Allow one in and he will bring his friends. This I guarantee you. Soon, Freemasonry will be nothing but average men. When it is... it will die. This is the danger.”

“Is your opinion of the guilds and the people in them actually that high?” asked Brother Israel.

“Oh yes. Fifty years ago even the thought of a nobleman speaking to a craftsman other than to scream an order at him would have been unthinkable. Yet, now we sit together every Tuesday night in harmony to converse and plan. Do you believe this would have happened to “average” men? Average men created a world where one group was better than another. The average men volunteered to be the lower ones. The average man is always on the dungheap of humanity. We have pulled ourselves above it. Yes, I believe it, and yes I fear bringing an average man into our midst.”

Both Brother Israel and Brother Malachi lowered their heads in humiliation. Even they had not considered the importance of whom they selected for membership. Brother Malachi looked at the Master and asked him to get whatever information on the man he could and have it at the guild at sunrise. Master Thorrow agreed.

Discussion

1. Was Master Thorrow too concerned about allowing in the average man? Why?
2. Today, there are many Masons who believe the requirements to become a Mason are too high. Are they? Should they be lowered? Why?
3. What things would lower our requirements?
4. How do these things lower our standards?

The next morning at sunrise Brother Malachi rode up to the guildhall with Brother Jason and Brother Delbert. He met Master Thorrow out front.

“Have you the information?” he asked.

“Yes, but why do you want it?”

“Your words of last night touched me. And to be honest, Sir, embarrassed me. I felt myself an oaf to not be aware of the accomplishments of the craft. They are great and you are right. No man, no thing, should ever be allowed to compromise this. I should have known this. For this I am sorry. The three of us shall leave today for Landry Town to discover what we can about this man. These things we will report to the craft so they can make a proper decision.”

“Your contrition is good, My Friend and Brother” said Master Thorrow. “Indeed, to know about the man we must. But the information you ask I do not have. All I know is a man named Harvey the Thatcher asked Brother Ben Little if he may join. He is recent to here and heard of the guild. Other than that I know nothing. Certainly not enough to justify leaving your labors for a ride of such distance. Come, you and the brothers sit. Before anyone goes further we need to determine what we do need to know about this or any other man who comes to our door.” The men nodded in agreement and dismounted.

“Together they sat in the guildhall and Master Thorrow took a parchment and pen. “My first thought,” said the Master, “is does the man fear our God? Do we want him among us if he does not?”

“No,” said Brother Malachi, “and the oath he would swear would mean little if not to the Lord God of all. A wise thought.”

“Should he not swear allegiance to the Pope?” asked Brother Delbert.

“I don’t think so,” said Master Thorrow. “Even our King swears no such allegiance, why should we require it of the man at our door? Kings and Popes fight their wars. Need we take sides even before such wars begin? Besides, isn’t a belief in the Almighty sufficient? Doesn’t this say more about the man than which church he attends? They all nodded in agreement.

“My next question would be is he employed? A part of the guild is to protect and help our own when they need, but do we knowingly bring in a man who can never contribute?” Again, the others nodded and Master Thorrow wrote this down.

“Should he not swear allegiance to the King? asked Brother Delbert.

“I think “does he abide by a lawful authority” would accomplish our tasks without saying more than needs be said,” chimed in Master Thorrow.

“Then, we need to know the names of people who know him. People who can tell us about him. Even then we have no guarantees they will be

absolutely truthful.”

“We do if they are brothers,” smiled Brother Malachi.

“A good thought,” they all agreed.

Later that day Master Thorrow spoke to Brother Ben Little and told him what information they would need. He urged him to speak with Harvey the Thatcher and pass the information on to Brother Malachi so they could begin. Brother Ben said he would.

Several days later Brother Malach spoke with Master Thorrow.

“Greetings, Brother Malachi, we have been to Landry Town, Northhampton and Westminster. We found nothing.”

“No one knew the man?”

“Yes, several, but they knew nothing about him other than he was quiet, and none of them knew him long.”

“I don’t understand.”

“The man moves a lot. He stays no where long. That’s why we went to Westminster. But it was the same thing there... nothing.”

“I believe the next step is to talk to the man,” said Master Thorrow.

That evening Master Thorrow and two of the brothers met with Harvey the Thatcher in the loft where he was living. They talked and found him very friendly but he said little. When they asked him why he moved often he only smiled and shrugged his shoulders. They bid him farewell and met back at the Rooster and Iron Tavern. Over ale they discussed what they had. “We have found no reason to turn down this man’s request to join the guild,” stated Brother Malachi matter-of-factly.

“No, and neither have we found any reason to approve his request,” said Master Thorrow. “I still want to know why the man moves around so much. Just the fact he has no roots makes me wonder.”

“Yet, Master Thorrow, wasn’t it the same for our Freemason ancestors? Didn’t they move about? Isn’t the very reason for the guild to protect them in their travels? Aren’t we forgetting that?”

“No, I’ve thought about that too, but this man is a thatcher. Every house is a place he can work. Every village has months of work available. His is not a skilled labor. He has no noblemen trying to capture him for his value. No, something is wrong. I don’t know what it is, but I am in need of as much a reason to vote for a man as I am a reason to vote against him. I have no such reason.”

“But as you say, you have no reason to vote against him. He is friendly. He is likable.”

“Indeed he is,” chuckled Master Thorrow. “That he is, but that is no reason to approve him. I hope we never see the day we include a man simply because he’s likable. I had much rather trust a man than like him. Oh well, we will vote on him when we meet at midweek. We will report that we really have nothing to report. We really found nothing.” They all agreed.

Nothing more was said, but when the vote was taken that Tuesday evening there were three black leather squares in the plate. Only one was needed to reject him.

Brother Ben Little said he would tell the Thatcher the result, but when he got there Harvey the Thatcher was gone. Where he went no one knew. Master Thorrow didn’t know who had dropped the other two black squares, but deep in his heart he knew he had voted the right way.

Discussion

1. Was Master Thorrow being too strict on the Thatcher? Why? Why not?
2. Some say the ballot box has turned into just a formality. Do you agree with this?
3. Being just a “Good Old Boy” wasn’t enough for Master Thorrow. Is it enough for you?
4. Mater Thorrow wanted a reason to vote “for” a man. What are some of those reasons?

