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Raleigh, North Carolina 27628

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Oxford, NC
Permit No. 56



MASONIC EDUCATION
SERIES

OCTOBER - DECEMBER 2004

From Whence



We Came

Book IV

The Birth of the
“Lodge”

The Birth of the “Lodge”

The guilds of the middle ages provided the ancient stonemasons a place to grow and thrive. There, they found work and protection. In times of prosperity it gave them a place to gather. It was there to help them in times of want. And, it was there to protect them in times of danger. Yet, few things last forever... the guild included.

As our story progresses we enter a time of change in Europe. In the centuries of the feudal system men served as virtual slaves to the lord of the manor. Everything on the manor, including the people belonged to the lord. It was the accepted way.

To the same extent, the people were bound to the church. The church had control over not only their earthly lives, but also their immortal souls. Few ever questioned the authority of the lords. Less questioned the authority of the church. That is... until times began to change.

From Whence We Came Book IV

-The Birth of the "Lodge" -

Speaking Parts:

Narrator	Brother James	Brother Carl
Brother Gilbert	Brother Herman	Brother Charles
	Lord Purciful	Master Martin
	The Bishop	Lord Abaline

Shortly after the beginning of the sixteenth century a German priest, Martin Luther, nailed his Ninety-five Thesis to the door of a German church challenging the authority of the Pope. This bold act would eventually impact the entire Christian world, but it would begin to change the face of Masonry almost immediately.

It appeared that everyone was contributing to the guild and enjoying its benefits. What was less obvious, and entirely normal, was that quietly the guilds were polarizing. In the towns where there was only one guildhall the operative masons and speculative masons each stayed more to themselves.

The stonemasons still primarily looked upon the guilds and the Master as their source of work and income and tended to spend more time with each other discussing jobs and what work was available. The others who were looking for the aspects of moral guidance spent their time at the guild discussing the esoteric of the Ancient Book .

To the stonemasons the Ancient Book was a list of rules about employment. To these simple and uneducated men the Eleventh Article which says "no mason should work by night..." meant simply a man should not work after the sun goes down. But the more educated speculative masons

devise any number of meanings for the article. They saw it as “no man should work on a job he doesn’t understand”, “no man should work because of a lie”, and any number of manners imploring “darkness.” The operative masons neither understood it, or wanted to have anything to do with it.

In the towns where there was more than one guildhall the polarization was more obvious. Regardless of which guild the man originally joined, eventually he would move to the one which fitted his needs better.

Yet, regardless of whether a guild was primarily operative or speculative, everyone contributed and in time of need everyone helped. It was good... for a while.

Shortly after dawn on a Monday morning in the Spring of 1531 Brother James comes into the tavern obviously upset. He sees a group of his fellow stonemason sitting at a table dressed for work. Excitedly he says “Brothers, what hear you of the news? What are we to do?”

The others look at him and then look at each other. They are confused. “Patience, My Brother, patience,” says Brother Herman. “Of what do you speak?”

“I just came from seeing the Master. There is no work.”

“No, you are mistaken. We have had no work all winter, but now the snows are gone. Today we begin the cathedral at Middlesex. It is a massive edifice which will take us years to complete.” Brother Herman smiled. “No, you are wrong. We sit here now waiting for the sun so we may all leave.”

“I promise you, My Brothers. I have left the Master not a half hour and he says there is no work. The cathedral has been cancelled. What are we to do?”

Almost in unison they all rose. Brother Carl dropped some coins on the table. They rushed through the door and to the oxcart tied in the front. They were headed to see the Master.

As they walked, almost running, Brother Carl spoke. “I sincerely hope Brother James is wrong, or confused, or mistaken, or something. It has been a long, hard winter. I have debts, debts that must be paid.”

“We all have debts, said Brother Herman. The merchants have trusted us. And now, my wife is with child. Brother James has to be wrong.”

They remained quiet, each man thinking about the news until they arrived at the guildhall. When they arrived they rushed inside. There were already others there. All were dressed in their work clothes. Some were cursing and talking loudly. Most were seated with their arms folded. One was looking out the window with tears running down his face. Master Martin was motioning for them all to sit. Most ignored him until Brother Herman shouted in his loudest voice for them all to sit.

When all was quiet Master Martin spoke. “My Brothers, I don’t know what to tell you. Shortly before dawn this morning a messenger from the Bishop knocked on my door. He was there to tell me the cathedral was not to be. It won’t be built.”

“You mean it will be delayed.... they’ll start it later?” Asked Brother Herman.

“No, it has been cancelled. The Bishop only received the news last night. The Pope has declared there will be no new churches until Europe comes back to God. That’s what I was told.”

“Comes back to God? What does that mean? Bellowed Brother Herman. Does he mean we are in sin? What does it mean?”

“I don’t know. I have no idea. I have asked Lord Purciful to join us. He is a member of our guild and surely will tell us... if he knows. Just be patient until he comes.”

Within the hour Lord Purciful arrived. He had been a member of the guild for some years and was respected by all. As he entered they all gathered around him. Master Martin told him of the events of that morning. Lord Purciful asked them to sit. “Brothers, I was not aware the cathedral was not to be built until this very minute. But I may be aware of why.” He motioned for a cup of water and sat. When the water was brought to him he drank it and cleared his throat. “I was in the king’s court this Winter and heard rumblings of a fellow, a priest, named Luther. It seems this priest has made demands of the Pope.” Quietly, he smiled. “And, as you all know, no one makes demands of the Pope.”

“It probably wouldn’t have mattered if one priest had simply made some demands, the demands would probably just be considered the rambles of a madman and ignored, but he sent copies of the demands to some of the most important bishops in Germany. And, they tell me, some of the bishops took notice. They felt his demands may have some merit. To cut to the chase, the King of Germany has begun to think in this fellow Luther’s direction. Also too, has our own King Henry who has in court always questioned the authority of the church... and the Pope.”

“Now, this order about the cathedral at Middlesex, I do not know, but I have already sent messengers to the Bishop and to the King’s court with orders they discover what they can. They should report back within the week. Until then, I know no more than what I have told you.”

On the third day the messenger who had been sent to the King’s court returned with news that the King knew nothing of it, was very upset by the Papal order, and would look into it forthwith. This was reported to the craftsmen.

On the fourth day the messenger who had been dispatched to Middlesex returned with the Bishop himself. After a discussion, Lord Purciful asked the Bishop to speak to the members of the guild. They met that very evening in the church.

“My Sons,” began the Bishop, “I believe it is never fair for the people to be involved in the affairs of state, especially when those affairs include the church. But, you and the other craftsmen of the country, have already been drawn into this matter. What I am about to tell you may be considered by some to be treason, but it is the truth.”

The Bishop was quiet for a long spell. It was obvious he was burdened by what he was about to say. “Our King Henry has long felt the King should be the head of the church. Much of this came from his desire for a divorce, which you know the church and the Pope forbids. He has often threatened to separate himself, and the church in England, from Rome. Now, with the uproar this priest, Luther, is making, it is likely he may do it. And, if he does, it would only be logical that he would take for his own any and all church property in the country.”

Master Martin stood and spoke. “Your Excellency, this is all well and good, but what does it have to do with us. We are but stonemasons.”

The Bishop looked at Master Martin, “It has everything to do with you, My Son. The Pope is not willing to spend one shilling on a building that may soon become the property of King Henry the Eighth, and even if that wasn’t happen, once Henry leaves the church he takes all of you with him. You will be excommunicated. In the church’s eye you will be outcasts. For you to even enter a blessed church will be sinful. For you to build one would be blasphemy.”

For a while there was silence. Then Brother Charles softly spoke from the back. “Excellence, I have no desire to leave the church. To do so would condemn my mortal soul to hell, or that’s what I have been told. Have I no choice in this matter?”

“No, My Son, not really. King Henry is a subject of God and the Pope. You are a subject of King Henry. Should he abandon the church he takes all of England with him. You included. To speak against the King would be treason and possibly cost you your life.”

“In other words,” said Brother Charles, “I can choose... my life or my immortal soul.” The Bishop just looked in Brother Charles direction. Brother Charles spoke again. “What would you do if you were us?” he asked.

“The priests and bishops too will have to make that choice. Some will remain as a subject of Henry in his new Church of England. Others will leave.”

“And you, Your Excellence?”

“I, My Son, will be leaving for Rome in a fortnight. I fear what I have said may already be considered treason. True, I fear for my life, but I fear more for my soul.”

The Bishop left and there was cold silence in the church. The men knew they had nowhere to go and even if they did they had never seen enough money to get there. Their choice had been made for them. They must stay in England. But if they stayed, what would they do? The majority of their income had been made from the massive churches and cathedrals. There were thousands of stonemasons in the country, dozens in their guild alone. There weren’t enough small houses and stone fences to keep one in ten alive. What would they do?

Lord Purciful sent word to Master Martin and he to all the craft that they would meet within a week and Purciful would tell them more.

Discussion

1. To really understand the power of the Bishop's words, one must try to understand the power of the church and Pope in the middle ages. Not only did the church control a man's life, it controlled his soul. What did this mean to a workman?
2. Martin Luther's Ninety-five Thesis had much to do with church selling "indulgences" whereby for money or goods paid to the church, a man could receive grace which would help his eternal soul. Does anything like this exist today? What?
3. Masons believe in "doing good works" and giving to charity. How does this differ from "indulgences"?

The days went slowly for the craftsmen and each morning some gathered at the Rooster and Comb and some gathered at the guildhall. They were scared. They were uncertain. They still had no idea what to do. What did Lord Purciful have on his mind. What could he say?

Each morning Brother Michael the baker distributed fresh loaves of bread to the men and Brother Allen the butcher gave them fresh meat. Each refused a farthing in payment and said they would settle at a later date. The same was true of Brother David the doctor who checked each day and dispensed any medicines and herbs that were needed.

Word came that Lord Purciful had declared that no landlord would evict anyone for not paying his rent and none of the money lenders were to try to collect until he returned.

On the fifth day, a Saturday, the men were becoming almost panic stricken. No word had been heard of Lord Purciful. The only thing they knew was that he and Lord Abaline of Lankershire joined together and had been gone since Tuesday. Before they left they talked to several of the speculative masons but they refused to divulge anything.

“We should be out looking for work,” said Brother Gilbert at the Rooster and Comb, “not sitting around here like rabbits in a cage. The snow is gone, the ground is mud. We should be digging foundations.”

“Foundations for what?” Asked Brother Carl. “Do you know of some building that we don’t? What is it? A massive church? A chapel? A house for birds? Where is this edifice of which you speak? There are fifty men here now who will join you. Just lead the way.”

Bother Gilbert just nodded his head and looked down. There was no work. He knew this. He also knew there were stonemasons in every shire in the same predicament. “Lord Purciful asked us to wait and this we will do picking up what odd jobs as may come about. Look, you earned a days wage this week repairing that fence and I earned nearly a crown helping the liveryman shoe his stock. We will wait as we were told.”

“Yes, I earned a day’s wage and when I tried to pay it to the baker he refused my money. I don’t like that. I pay my debts. I owe no man.”

“Very heroic, My Good man Gilbert, but have you talked to anyone from another shire? We all depended on the wages from the cathedral. The woodsman, the thatcher, everyone lost. Every shire and township has stonemasons sitting around some pub or guild saying the same things we are saying. I have all ideas by the time this thing is over we will all owe someone. No, for now we will wait for Lord Purciful.”

Brother Gilbert spoke again. “Lord Purciful? He is a speculative mason. He and those like him talk of philosophies and histories. They are not real masons. Besides, look out the window. You cannot look in any direction without seeing something that belongs to Lord Purciful. He’s not worried about paying his bills or keeping the landlord at bay. He won’t go hungry.”

Bother Carl looked at Brother Gilbert’s belly. It was round from a Winter of doing nothing. He smiled broadly. “No, my good friend, but from the looks of it neither Purciful or you is in any immediate danger of starvation.” He laughed as did those around him. But it was a laugh that disguised fear. All of them were scared of the days to come.

Discussion

1. It had lone been believed by the kings that their power was absolute. Yet, how could their power be absolute if they were subject to the Pope and to the church? We say the Master is the final power in the lodge. Does he control the lodge? Is a Masonic lodge a “democracy”?
2. Today, if a lodge brother is out of work does the lodge owe him anything? Should the lodge try to assist him? How? Why?
3. If a brother doesn’t pay his debts it may be considered “unmasonic conduct”. Should the lodge help him pay his debts? Which debts?
4. Should a man who has declared bankruptcy and not paid his debts be elected as an officer in his lodge? What about a member who refuses to pay another brother? Should any steps be taken? What steps?

The next morning word went out across the shire that Lord Purciful wanted to see every member of the guild in the church before the Sunday mass. Father Jenkins couldn't believe the crowd. The normal Sunday morning handful swelled to fill every seat and the choir. The brothers expected to see only the operative masons in attendance, but the speculative members were there also. Lord Purciful was in a chair near the altar. He was dead asleep. Even the sound of the men entering the church did not awaken him. When Lord Purciful's squire saw the church was full he tugged at the lord's tunic. He did not move. The squire was almost embarrassed as he explained that Purciful had not slept in days. The squire shook him. He awakened with a start and looked around the church. When he regained his composure he stood and approached the pulpit. His squire handed him a cup of altar wine. He took a sip and began to speak.

"Gentlemen, my brothers in the guild, the news is not good. There will be no work in the foreseeable future." The crowd groaned. "The word of the Bishop was correct. It appears King Henry has given notice to Rome that England is no longer subject to the Pope. In past times, this would be sufficient to cause some country or countries to declare war, but in all of Europe it appears only France continues its allegiance to Rome. This protes... protes..." he looked at Lord Abaline who whispered "protestant" said as "protest" and "ant". "This protestant movement has covered Europe."

"My first thought was that even if King Henry's new Church of England isn't subject to the Pope they will still need churches. Four days ago I spoke of this with the King's Counselor. He tells me that it is King Henry's desire to bring the churches to the people and he can build a thousand small churches for what it costs to build one cathedral. Unfortunately, he doesn't require a thousand churches. He has stated that the small churches," he motioned with his hands, "like this one, will be entirely sufficient. Gentlemen, the Pope and church in Rome built the massive cathedrals as a tribute to God. The King has his thoughts more with man. The days of the massive cathedrals are over. Where it took a thousand men to build one cathedral. It will only take a handful of men to build a small church and once it is built only one or two to maintain it."

The men were deathly silent until Master Martin stood and spoke. "Then, Melord, what are we to do?"

"I believe we have a something to help. It is not a solution and will not immediately bring every man back to the wages he is accustomed, but his family won't starve either."

Lord Purciful took a sip of his cup. “My operative brothers,” he smiled, “you real stonemasons, decades ago you allowed us speculative masons to join you and learn your ways. You taught us of the Old Book and a morality that few men will ever know. For this you asked nothing but for us to be one of you. My Brothers, we owe you much, and maybe in some small way in this time of change we can pay a small part of what we owe.”

“Many of you, most of you, are not going to immediately like what I am about to say. People don’t like change, and there will be some changes. For this I am sorry. Lord Abaline and I propose this for our shires and towns only. Eventually all of England will be in an uproar, but we cannot be responsible for all of England, first we are responsible to our brothers.”

Lord Purciful called on Master Martin. “Master Martin I am asking you to do something very difficult and embarrassing. You love every man in your guild.”: Master Martin nodded. “You know how much work you have available and how many men you will need to do it. You also know how many men you can keep busy. I ask you at this time to give me that number.”

Master Martin fidgeted for a moment, stared at the ceiling obviously in thought and then said, “To pay the wages a man would have made from the cathedral...” Lord Purciful interrupted.

“No, not the wages of the cathedral. Those days are over. They are gone. Let me rephrase my question, How many men do you believe you can pay a wage that will pay his fair debts and rents? And I know there are about four dozen stonemasons in the guild.”

“Actually, Melord, there are sixty.” He thought again. “To answer your question, I feel that I may be able to keep eight, no more than ten men in work.”

“Will you guarantee me that you will keep eight men at a wage that will pay his debts and his rents?”

“I believe I can promise this if his debts aren’t unreasonable or out of line.”

“If any man’s debts do get unreasonable you can speak to me of this and I will assure you they will be back in order shortly. Now, I’m going to ask you to pick those eight men. Pick your best eight. You other men, that means Master Martin will not be picking fifty-two of you. Don’t think unkindly of him. If anything, pity him for the decision I am asking him to make. I can promise you no man, including me, would want to make such a decision.”

Lord Purciful motioned toward his squire. The squire lifted a box from beside his chair. Purciful looked at the squire and said “sixteen.” The squire wrote something on sixteen pieces of paper and dropped them in the box and shook it. Lord Purciful came down from the pulpit and sat on the steps of the altar.

“My Brothers, in this box are fifty-two pieces of paper. On sixteen of them is written my name. On thirty-six is the name of one of the speculative masons who you have so graciously allowed into the guild. Each piece of paper represents a job. A job that will allow you to pay your debts and rents. The box will go around. You will pick a piece of paper. If you cannot read, someone will read it for you. And don’t be too concerned about this job. You will only have it for one week. Next week you will go to one of the other jobs. Each week you will change for another one of the jobs. Eventually, you will find one you enjoy. Maybe it won’t be your perfect job, but you will feel you can live with it. Who knows, you may find you love it. When you do find such a job speak to the merchant or craftsman. Ask him to teach you that craft or trade. At that point you will no longer switch tasks weekly. You will remain there, you will learn the trade or skill. If you wish, you can move on. If you and the tradesman desire you can continue there. In any event, you will have a trade you can use to feed yourself and your families. Once more you will be a proud man.”

“On sixteen of the ballots is my name. These will be tasks on my estate. I can’t tell you what you may be doing. You may be working in the fields, you may be helping the blacksmith, tending sheep, or the tailor may have you mending socks. I don’t know what you will be doing, but I do know that for those who decide to stay, you will be taught to read and write, you will be taught mathematics, and you will learn of business. Should you want to, you will be enrolled at the University when you are ready.”

Some of the men began to weep. Few had ever done as much for them as was being done now. Lord Purciful spoke again. “Now, if during this time, any man wishes to leave, if he feels he has learned his trade, or if he just wants to move on, he may. And he will owe nothing. The decision is up to you.”

“Now comes the part that for me is painful. So many of us have learned from the guild. We have taken from the guild, but we are not stonemasons. The guild should be a place of business. It should be a place where workmen congregate and plan their tasks. It should be a place where men talk of tools and bricks, not philosophies and rhetoric.”

“So beginning today, Master Martin, your guildhall will again be a place of business, and tools and bricks. The speculative masons will meet at the Rooster and Comb to discuss our philosophies and rhetoric. And, when any of you fellows feel inclined to discuss Plato or Aristotle or the Old Book, please join us. There will always be a place for you in our...” Purciful smiled. “At first we didn’t know what to call this band, then Lord Abaline came up with what I consider the perfect name. It is the name of a place that is safe and comfortable and warm. As I was saying, there will always be a place for you in our “lodge.””

Lord Purciful’s plan worked well, but no one could have predicted the outcome. Brother Carl, a tall, massive, gruff man, learned to bake pastries. His work was tasty and beautiful. Word of his ability spread and eventually, he became chief pastry chef for the King of Norway.

Brother Andrew, a small, retiring man who could neither read or write worked on Lord Purciful’s estate, learned letters, attended the University and became a lawyer. He died as the Council to the Duke of Edenborough.

Discussion

1. Why did Lord Purciful feel obligated to do what he did? Do you feel he was obligated? Why? Why not?
2. Obviously, most of the speculative Masons supported Lord Purciful’s plan? Is this realistic? Why? Why not? Would you have supported the plan? Why? Why not?
3. Though Lord Purciful indicated no repayment was expected, do you believe the craftsmen owed Lord Purciful a debt?
4. What do you believe was the attitude of those NOT chosen by Master Martin? Do they have a right to feel resentful?