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MASONIC EDUCATION
SERIES

From



Whence **W**e
Came **V**

Where Did It Grow ?

For the past year we have explored the origins of Masonry. With this booklet we look at the possible problems and solutions encountered by those first lodges.

Since they were independent the ritual and story of Masonry was entirely theirs. As time passed, it was safe to assume different rituals and messages arose. Even then we are sure there were Masonic “experts” who refused to compromise the message of the fraternity. This story is about compromise and how Masons working together can accomplish great tasks.

By the first of the seventeenth century lodges were springing up all over Europe, especially in England. While there were still a few operative lodges where most of the members were stonemasons, other than some symbolism, most of the influence of the old working guilds was gone. The new “speculative” lodges drew men of every background. Yet, most of the aristocracy tended to join together as did the working classes.

Regardless of the membership, the lodges provided a place for men to come together and practice skills that made them better men. Previously, the only real places that men came together was the church and almost every function of the church was governed either by doctrine or the priest. The new “Protestant” churches at first appeared to be more open to social reform but many soon proved to be more strict in their dogma than the church in Rome. The new “speculative” lodges filled the void.

Each lodge functioned on its own. In most lodges the membership was composed of men of similar backgrounds. In older times the members attempted to meet “on the level” but this soon proved impractical because of differences in education and social duties. The man who made shoes had little in common with the man formally educated at Oxford. These differences eventually polarized the membership into forming lodges composed of similar socioeconomic classes. The transition was peaceful and the lodges functioned well... for a time.

Most lodges had a select handful of men responsible for delivering and lecturing on the two degrees. (Editor’s note: The Third Degree would not be introduced until around 1720) In most lodges these men borrowed the ritual workings from a former lodge and accepted it as their own. Yet, they were free to “improve” their actions and words as they saw fit. Over a long period of time, a “change” here and an “improvement” there made the ritualistic work and lectures of one lodge entirely different from the others. Eventually most lodges had a ritual which was entirely their own and had little or no similarity to other Masonic lodges.

Speaking Parts:

Master James

Brother Willard

Master Luther

Master Farrow

There was a knock on Master James' door shortly after sunset on the Sabbath. The Master put down his book and stood his pipe on the table. He went to the door and it was Brother Willard. The Master invited him in.

"Master James, I know I should say nothing, but I come to you disturbed."

"What is the problem, My Brother?"

"As of late I have visited several lodges and attended their rituals."

"This is good," said the Master. "It is in the old charges that any Mason may visit another lodge."

"Yes Sir, and the welcome and fellowship I received at each of the lodges was impressive. I was seated in the finest chair and given the finest refreshment at each of the lodges I visited. Every brother went out of his way to meet me, share his name, and make me feel a part of those gathered."

"This sounds good, Brother Willard. It is good to hear the craft is doing so well. But you said you were disturbed."

"Yes Sir, but it was not the welcome or the hospitality that concerns me. It is the ritual. In none of the lodges I visited was the ritual in any way similar."

"Well, My Brother, you are aware that each lodge is responsible for its own ritual and, to be honest, some confer it better than others. This I understand. We may not like it done the way someone else..."

"No Sir," interrupted Brother Willard. "I do not question the way it is delivered. I question what is delivered."

“I don’t follow you.”

“Where did Masonry originally originate?”

Master James smiled. “In the First Degree lecture we say it originated in the sands of the Sahara a thousand years ago, but that is to convey a story. Actually, it originated four or five hundred years ago with the old operative stonemasons.”

“This I understand and I assume you are right, but I visited one lodge where the claim was made that Masonry originated with the Pharaohs of Egypt and another that claimed it to be the Greeks. Still another said the Phoenicians.”

“I can see your concern, Brother Willard, but where it originated has little to do with conveying the lecture. The First Degree lecture has more to do with the message of unity and brotherhood. I do not see how where the story is placed is of any major concern.”

“I will agree, but the story wasn’t really conveyed. Many times it was about triumphing over an enemy, in one case defeating the church in Rome. These things have no place in a Masonic lodge.”

“Now, I must agree with you. Defeating an enemy or the church has nothing to do with Freemasonry.”

“And some of the names they call in the lecture. One said the *Ancient Charges* were written by the Pharaoh Cheops. They claimed the Saints were members. One said the Lord Jesus was a Mason. Another laid claim to Moses. Sir, in my opinion, it is out of hand. The simple message of Brotherly Love is out of hand.”

“Hmmm. I did not know it was this severe.”

“Oh Sir, it is worse than that. In my travels one man told me he was refused admission into a lodge because he was unable to name the stars.”

Master James just stared at Brother Willard for a moment. “Brother Willard, there are no rules that any lodge must conform to another, but obviously each day we grow further apart. If you were like me, I too would have been refused admission to that lodge that required the names of the stars.

This is sad news. Let me ponder on what to do. I thank you and we will speak later. This is sad news. Let me ponder on what to do. I thank you and we will speak later.

Discussion

1. Can you see Brother Willard's concern. Is the setting of the Masonic story and lectures important? Why
2. What prevents the same thing happening today? Do all lodges teach the same stories and ritual? What about other jurisdictions? Other countries?
3. Have you ever had someone visit from another lodge or jurisdiction and imply the way you do your work is wrong and theirs is right? How did you handle it?

Master James asked Brother Willard to meet with him. They joined each other at the Rooster and Comb.

“I think you will be pleased, Brother Willard. I have thought hard and long about your words. In addition, I traveled to several lodges and found your words to be true. It is out of hand. Our purpose is being confused. One lodge speaks of peace while another speaks of war. It is confusing. And, as far as the ancient words, they are almost gone.”

“But didn’t you say you have no control? Didn’t you say there was no control?”

“No, there’s not, but weak men will always say they can do nothing about something rather than try. I am not a weak man. I also hope you will not be. These things must be changed otherwise our fraternity will have no meaning. We will all be ships traveling in different directions.”

“What do you propose?”

“I have sent messages to thirty lodges. I have asked them to meet here at noon on the tenth of next month.”

“Do you believe they will come?”

“Some may not, but I feel sincere that most will. I have already received word that Master Farrow and Master Luther wish to meet me on the morrow next. Evidently, they are concerned. You too may meet with us. I value your council.”

“Thank you for the honor, Sir, but I am merely a brother.”

“That, Brother Willard, is why we meet. We meet for all the brothers.”

Two days later Masters Farrow and Luther met with Master James and Brother Willard at the Rooster and Comb. After social pleasantries were exchanged, Master Farrow looked toward Master James. “Good Master, we came early to discuss your concern. We have

already heard that some of the masters from afar plan to be here on the tenth. But we did not want to wait to hear of your dilemma.”

Master James filled all the glasses then spoke. “My dilemma, my concern, Gentlemen, is our fraternity grows apart. We all convey messages, but they are different. Our rituals and our beliefs are different.”

Master Luther spoke. “How can our beliefs be different. Are they not based on the *Ancient Charges* ?”

“Indeed they are, but the message is not. It has no foundation.”

“Of course it has a foundation,” said Master Luther. “Our work is based on that began by the ancient Pharaohs of Egypt. They are our foundation.”

“I’m confused,” said Master Farrow. “With all apologies, My Brother. You are in error. Freemasonry would never base its concepts on the scribblings of a Pagan such as a Pharaoh. Our beliefs are based on the writings of Abraham of the Bible. He was our first Grand Master. Everyone knows that.”

“I beg to differ Master Farrow, but I am certain the First Degree uses the examples of the building of the Pyramids to convey its message. There is no other way.”

“No, My Brother, the message comes from the assention of Abraham onto Mt. Moriah to deliver its words. Everyone is aware of this. This is common knowledge.

Master James let the other two debate their sides for a few minutes then lifted his finger to get their attention. “Brothers, Brothers, please. You now see what of I speak You are but two, and even you two differ. As for my lodge, we convey the building by the Roman Colosieum. A third manner. We speak of Caesar while you speak of the Pharaohs and Abraham.”

“Another Pagan,” said Master Farrow. “Don’t we profess a belief in one god? The Pagan Egyptians and Romans believed in dozens of gods. They can’t be used as an example to describe our ways.”

“Maybe not,” Brother Farrow, “but they are. Now you talk of our ways. What is the message of the First Degree?”

“I worry not about this one. The message of the First Degree is the strength of the fraternity against evil men. Everyone knows that.”

“With all respect, My Brother, that is absurd,” said Master Luther. “The message of building implies we build to fend of our nation’s enemies. That is the message of the First Degree.”

“Brothers, now you see my concern,” said Master James. “And today and the days to come I challenge you to go out and meet other Masters and Brothers. You will see our unity is just a vapor. We are telling our people different things. Our message would be clearer if we spoke as one voice.”

Master Luther was nodding his head. “I had no idea. I sincerely believed we all thought as one. I accept your challenge. Before we meet on the tenth I will discuss these things with Masters and Brothers alike. This is hard for me to believe.”

“Also I caution you,” said Master James. “I have found you two brothers as an exception. You are willing to listen to reason. Some feel that their way is the only way Some even claim a Divine Right and Jesus and an ancient member. These people, I fear, will not be willing to compromise.”

“They must. The matter is beyond belief. Had I have not seen it myself... I woulddn’t have believed it,” said Master Farrow. “I too pledge my support. We will rebuild our ritual into something that conveys a goodly message to every man. This we will do.”

Discussion

1. Neither man assumed such differences could arise from lodge to lodge. Why did Master James feel it was their duty to correct the situation?
2. What were some of the things that could happen if the situation was allowed to continue? The message was different in most of the lodges. Was it necessary to correct it? Why?
3. Master James called together the other lodges for a meeting. Was there a better way to do it? What are your ideas?

Master James had no idea of what to expect at the meeting. How many would come and what they would say was beyond him. Yet, the Masters and Brothers began arriving long before the day of the meeting. They filled the rooms of the Inn and occupied any room available in the small town. The Rooster and Comb closed for regular business just to accommodate the visitors.

Master James arrived a full hour before the meeting and was met by an overflow of attendees. By the time he did arrive he was met with a group of otherwise composed men all shouting their positions on the problems at the top of their lungs. He stepped to the stage.

“My Brothers, Masters, I thank you for coming. Please consider the importance of these next few hours. As you obviously already know, we are drawn in numerous directions. Evidently, those who came before us in their enthusiasm for our fraternity seldom talked before creating a ritual. This is sad, because it leaves the task for us to do.” Those attending nodded.

Master James continued. “Shouting our positions and thoughts will get us nowhere. If we do our jobs properly, we will first establish our needs then calmly discuss the best way to fill them. Brothers, we will need to learn the meaning of compromise. None will leave completely happy, none will leave entirely defeated. Any attempt to impress this assembly that your way is the right way or the only way will just delay these proceedings. No one here has achieved perfection. Working together we still may not achieve perfection, but there is no reason we can’t strive for it.”

Master Luther spoke out. “Our first job is to decide where we came from. The setting of our lecture is of prime concern. As it stands we have lectures originating from almost every land and time.” He was met by shouts. Each man wanted to impress the validity of their lodge’s lecture.

Master James spoke but was drowned out by the shouting. He picked up a gavel and banged on the table. The men came to order. Brother Luther, I do not disagree with you, the setting is important, but we have a commitment to make that is even more important.” The men

gave a questioning look. “Brothers, if we don’t commit today, that whatever decisions made will be carried to our lodges and used there our work will be for naught. We will be in the same poor position in the days to come. I say this because when we return to our lodges there are members, good members, who believe with all their hearts that whatever you have been saying is biblical truth. They believe that the first Grand Master was a Pharoah, or Abraham, or Caesar, or even Jesus. Brothers, it is time for the truth. We don’t know who the first Grand Master actually was but we do know for absolute certain it was none of these men. We know it was a stonemason, not a king, or an emperor, or a god. A stonemason. And he lived just a few hundred years ago.”

“I ask you, Brothers, will you make this commitment to take our story back to your lodges? If there are those here who won’t, those men just as well leave now. They will accomplish nothing here. This is our first task.”

No one left. Everyone became silent.

“Then I pose a question. Not who or where, but what they were doing.” Everyone was silent until a small voice from the back of the room spoke up. “They were building.”

Master James spoke up. “They were building. Who said that?”

A small man in the back stood.

“And what were they building, Brother?”

“They were building giant buildings... giant edifices. We use this to impart building men.”

“Right you are, Brother. They were building and we need an example of a great building and those who built it.”

The Pyramids. The Pharoahs,” shouted several. “The Coloseum in Rome,” shouted another. “The Greek Temples shouted a third.”

Master James saw Master Farrow rise and knew what he was about to say. “Brothers, all of them are fine buildings, but they were built to honor Pagan gods. As Masons, we vow to accept only one god. Don’t we have an example to one god?”

“The Great Temple of Solomon,” said one man. “Solomon’s Temple.” Several nodded and smiled. “There must be dozens of examples in the Bible of the wisdom of Solomon when he built the Temple,” said another.

Voices across the room smiled and repeated “Solomon’s Temple.” The source of Masonry had been found!

The meeting went on for two days. Food was brought in because no one wanted to leave. Never before had so many worked in perfect unison. Each task was an opportunity to teach. Each step was an opportunity to create something good and lasting.

Stories were contrived about ancient lodges to teach the privacy of the fraternity. Stories about the wisdom of Solomon were developed to teach about order. Classes of workmen was used to teach about duty and responsibility. The Bible was a lively source for names and events. The meeting was good.

As they walked from the Rooster and Comb Master James looked at Brother Willard. “I feel good about our work,” he said.

“I do to. I know we haven’t created Masonry, but I think we have made it long lasting.

Discussion

1. Give examples of Biblical references in the First and Second Degrees.

