

John J. Robinson. Born In Blood: The Lost Secrets of Freemasonry. New York: M. Evans and Company, 1989, 376 pp.

The recent revival of anti-Masonic literature, telecasts and investigations has stirred up interest in this centuries-old fraternity. Who are these over four-million men who are called Freemasons? Are they a religious sect? Why the secrecy of their meetings? Most books and articles written to answer these questions have been biased pro or con, depending upon the membership status of the writer. This book offers a more balanced view and new theories about the origin and traditions of the lodges.

When Mr. Robinson researched the subject and wrote this work, he was not a Mason. He became a member before his death in September, 1993, after having been favorably impressed by the history of the Freemasons' fight for freedom of conscience. He had not set out to write about them at all, but in his research on the Wat Tyler Rebellion or Peasants' Revolt of 1381, he found references to a "Great Society" which seemed to underlie the uprising. Further study convinced him that this group was comprised of forerunners of the Masonic lodges.

The fourteenth century was a time of unbelievable hardship for the common people of Europe. The Bubonic Plague destroyed thirty-five to forty percent of the population. Corruption in church and state was raging as popes and kings demanded more taxes to support their wars.

The Knights Templars order of soldier-monks, organized during the Crusades, had become wealthy and powerful through numerous large donations and by providing banking and security in the transfer of funds. In fact, they introduced paper money. King Phillip IV of France had borrowed large sums from the Templars which he did not care to repay. He conspired with Pope Clement V to have the Templars arrested and their vast properties confiscated.

On Friday, October 13, 1307, some 15,000 of the Templars were arrested, chained in dungeons and cruelly tortured until most of them confessed heresy and other crimes and perversions. Later, when Grand Master Jaques DeMolay recanted his confession and pleaded the innocence of the order, he was burned at the stake.

Pope Clement ordered King Edward II of England to arrest the English Templars, but the English monarch "drug his feet" for three months, and by the time of the arrests in early 1308, there were few Templars to be found. They had gone "underground."

Robinson believed that these underground Templars were to emerge some 400 years later in 1717 as the lodges of Freemasonry. In the meantime, they had devised secret words, phrases, and signs and symbols for self-preservation and for the protection of other fugitives from the unspeakable tortures which awaited anyone who dared to differ with pope or king.

Much current criticism of Freemasonry has to do with the "Bloody Oaths" which the initiates are required to take. The author points out that such extreme pledges were necessary in that terrible period of time because any betrayal would have resulted in those gory penalties having been executed, not by the lodge, but by those officials who had dissenters beheaded, drawn and quartered, or burned at the stake.

To other moderns who accuse the Masons of being a cult, the author correctly states that Masonry teaches no plan of salvation, but encourages each member to worship God according to his own conscience. Belief in the Supreme Being has always been a prerequisite for membership as the Templars, or early Masons, would not entrust their safety to a non-believer.

As evidence for this theory of the origin of Freemasonry, Robinson cited many Masonic words and phrases not used in modern English but which would have been spoken and understood by the French-speaking Templars of the fourteenth century. He explained that the commonly accepted account of Freemasonry's emergence from the stonemasons' guilds may have been a cover story developed to hide their true origin.

Robinson contended that during their underground period, the Freemasons provided safe havens and support for many dissenters who were working toward religious freedom and that they "surfaced" in 1717 shortly after England was finally governed by a parliament instead of a king.

The author calls attention to the many early American patriots who were Freemasons and gives them credit for helping to establish freedom of religion in our country. He reminds that the lodges have usually been outlawed by dictators, and that we are indebted to them for their stand for freedom and tolerance. He suggests that the Masons could do much better than they have of informing the public about their philosophy and their charities. He envisions the Freemasons as being instrumental in promoting peace in the Middle East with their concept of a completed or restored Solomon's Temple as a place of worship for Christian, Jew and Moslem.

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