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BORN IN BLOOD

THE LOST SECRETS
OF FREEMASONRY



JOHN J. ROBINSON

M. Evans & Company / New York

Library of Congress Cataloging-in Publication Data

Robinson, John J.

Born in blood : the lost secrets of freemasonry / John J. Robinson.

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references.

ISBN 0-87131-602-1

1. Freemasons—History. 2. Freemasonry—History. I. Title.

HS403.R64 1989 89-23703

366'.1—dc20

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M. Evans and Company, Inc.

216 East 49 Street

New York, New York 10017

Design by M. Paul

Manufactured in the United States of America

2 4 6 8 9 7 5 3 1

To
J. R. Wallin
Master Craftsman



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Acknowledgments

Special thanks are due to the Reverend Martin Chadwick, M.A., Rural Dean of Chipping Norton in Oxfordshire, who obtained permission for me to use the Bodleian Library and its Radcliffe Camera at Oxford University in England. In that same locale, special thanks must also be expressed to Dr. Maurice Keen of Balliol College, who took time from his crowded schedule for a tutorial session with an amateur American historian. His insights into aspects of the Peasants' Revolt and of the teachings of John Wycliffe and of the Lollard Knights provided fresh starting points for research. The willing assistance of librarians is too often overlooked, so I would like to express appreciation for the helpful attitudes of the staff members of the libraries in Oxford and Lincoln in England, as well as those of New York's Forty-second Street library and the public library of Cincinnati. I was also given most gracious treatment at the county archives of Oxfordshire and at the Lincolnshire County Museum.

Recognition should also be given to a number of Freemasons of various degrees who shared with me not the "secrets" of the order, but rather their understandings of the origins and purposes of the fraternity as expressed to them by Masonic writers and lecturers.

It should be noted that although I received a great deal of generous help, the opinions expressed and the conclusions reached in this book are my own.

As for the contributions of my wife, they are difficult to enumerate. The manuscript was not just typed but reviewed for clar-

ity as well as for accuracy of dates and geography. She assisted in four years of research and enthusiastically discussed the outline and content of each chapter. Her knowledge of French eased that aspect of the research, and most of the sources in England came as a result of the friends and contacts she had made over a period of years as an educator in Oxfordshire.

Finally, a word of explanation about the dedication of this book. J. R. Wallin is not a "Master Craftsman" in the symbolic Masonic sense but is literally a master worker in iron and steel. During working hours his forge turns out decorative iron gates and brackets and furniture, but in his spare time it gives way to his fascination with the medieval period by producing such items as a mace, a dagger, or a jousting helmet. The hours spent with him talking about the Crusades and the Templars helped to keep up my enthusiasm for the project. I chose to dedicate this book to him because I think we should all encourage rare breeds, and there can't be many people left on this earth who spend winter evenings interlocking thousands of handmade loops to create a coat of chain mail.

John J. Robinson
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Introduction

In Search of the Great Society

The research behind this book was not originally intended to reveal anything about Freemasonry or the Knights Templar. Its objective had been to satisfy my own curiosity about certain unexplained aspects of the Peasants' Revolt in England in 1381, a savage uprising that saw upwards of a hundred thousand Englishmen march on London. They moved in uncontrolled rage, burning down manor houses, breaking open prisons, and cutting down any who stood in their way.

One unsolved mystery of that revolt was the organization behind it. For several years a group of disgruntled priests of the lower clergy had traveled the towns, preaching against the riches and corruption of the church. During the months before the uprising, secret meetings had been held throughout central England by men weaving a network of communication. After the revolt was put down, rebel leaders confessed to being agents of a Great Society, said to be based in London. So very little is known of that alleged organization that several scholars have solved the mystery simply by deciding that no such secret society ever existed.

Another mystery was the concentrated and especially vicious attacks on the religious order of the Knights Hospitaller of St. John, now known as the Knights of Malta. Not only did the rebels seek out their properties for vandalism and fire, but their prior

was dragged from the Tower of London to have his head struck off and placed on London Bridge, to the delight of the cheering mob.

There was no question that the ferocity unleashed on the crusading Hospitallers had a purpose behind it. One captured rebel leader, when asked the reasons for the revolt, said, "First, and above all . . . the destruction of the Hospitallers." What kind of secret society could have had that special hatred as one of its primary purposes?

A desire for vengeance against the Hospitallers was easy to identify in the rival crusading order of the Knights of the Temple of Solomon in Jerusalem. The problem was that those Knights Templar had been completely suppressed almost seventy years before the Peasants' Revolt, following several years during which the Templars had been imprisoned, tortured, and burned at the stake. After issuing the decree that put an end to the Templar order, Pope Clement V had directed that all of the extensive properties of the Templars should be given to the Hospitallers. Could a Templar desire for revenge actually have survived underground for three generations?

There was no incontrovertible proof, yet the only evidence suggests the existence of just one secret society in fourteenth-century England, the society that was, or would become, the order of Free and Accepted Masons. There appeared to be no connection, however, between the revolt and Freemasonry, except for the name or title of its leader. He occupied the center stage of English history for just eight days and nothing is known of him except that he was the supreme commander of the rebellion. He was called Walter the Tyler, and it seemed at first to be mere coincidence that he bore the title of the enforcement officer of the Masonic lodge. In Freemasonry the Tyler, who must be a Master Mason, is the sentry, the sergeant-at-arms, and the officer who screens the credentials of visitors who seek entrance to the lodge. In remembrance of an earlier, more dangerous time, his post is just outside the door of the lodge room, where he stands with a drawn sword in his hand.

I was aware that there had been many attempts in the past to link the Freemasons with the Knights Templar, but never with success. The fragile evidence advanced by proponents of that connection had never held up, sometimes because it was based

on wild speculation, and at least once because it had been based on a deliberate forgery. But despite the failures to establish that link, it just will not go away, and the time-shrouded belief in some relationship between the two orders remains as one of the more durable legends of Freemasonry. That is entirely appropriate, because all of the various theories of the origins of Freemasonry are legendary. Not one of them is supported by any universally accepted evidence. I was not about to travel down that time-worn trail, and decided to concentrate my efforts on digging deeper into the history of the Knights Templar, to see if there was any link between the suppressed Knights and the secret society behind the Peasants' Revolt. In doing so, I thought that I would be leaving Freemasonry far behind. I couldn't have been more mistaken.

Like anyone curious about medieval history, I had developed an interest in the Crusades, and perhaps more than just an interest. Those holy wars hold an appeal that is frequently as romantic as it is historical, and in my travels I had tried to drink in the atmosphere of the narrow defiles in the mountains of Lebanon through which Crusader armies had passed, and had sat staring at the castle ruins around Sidon and Tyre, trying to hear the clashing sounds of attack and defense. I had marveled at the walls of Constantinople and had strolled the Arsenal of Venice, where Crusader fleets were assembled. I had sat in the round church of the Knights Templar in London, trying to imagine the ceremony of its consecration by the Patriarch of Jerusalem in 1185, more than three hundred years before Columbus set sail west to the Indies.

The Templar order was founded in Jerusalem in 1118, in the aftermath of the First Crusade. Its name came from the location of its first headquarters on the site of the ancient Temple of Solomon. Helping to fill a desperate need for a standing army in the Holy Land, the Knights of the Temple soon grew in numbers, in wealth, and in political power. They also grew in arrogance, and their Grand Master de Ridfort was a key figure in the mistakes that led to the fall of Jerusalem in 1187. The Latin Christians managed to hold onto a narrow strip of territory along the coast, where the Templars were among the largest owners of the land and fortifications.

Finally, the enthusiasm for sending men and money to the