

WILLIAM O. WARE LODGE OF RESEACH

BOOK REVIEW

THE BETTER ANGELS OF OUR NATURE

THE CHALLENGES OF TODAY'S FREEMASONRY

By: Michael A. Halleran

Reviewed by Ryan A. Clendenin, William O. Ware Lodge of Research

Michael Halleran's book, *The Better Angels of Our Nature*, is an excellent piece of work for those who are interested in a detailed description of the impact of the Craft during the American Civil War. He lays the work out in seven chapters that will be detailed in this review.

PROLOGUE

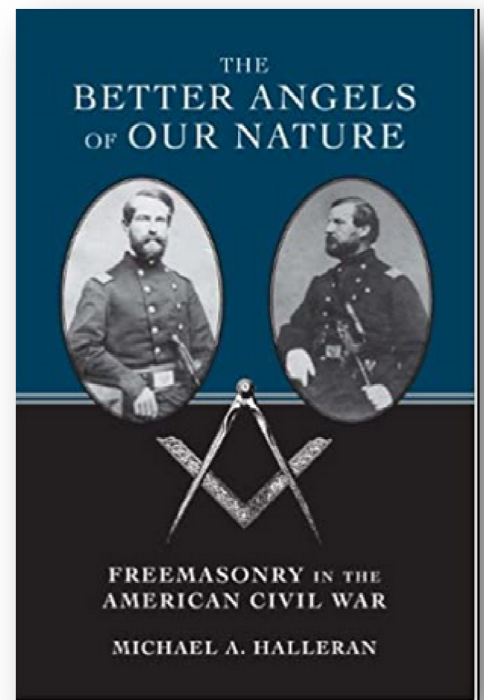
The Author wastes no time in examining what was one of the famous Masonic tales of the War, Lewis Armistead's request for Fraternal assistance at the Angle during Pickett's Charge at Gettysburg. Halleran dissects numerous firsthand accounts and finds no evidence that this was the case. The book, however, does present credible data of numerous acts of brotherly love and affection detailed herein.

Chapter 1: Masters and Fellows

The chapter outlines the state of Masonry in the early part of the 19th century and into the years of the War. There had been a large decline in membership due to the Morgan Affair and he details the revived interest in the Craft at the onset of the Conflict. The total number of Masons was 3.75% of the population per the 1860 census. Halleran articulates how Masonic ties would be extended to a scale likely never seen before under the circumstances of War.

Chapter 2: Plures Ex Uno

This chapter explains the complexities of a divided Nation and its brethren. Masonic Grand Lodges from the North and the South held official communications to try to diffuse the Rebellion. The Grand Lodge of Kentucky was part of that effort. This obviously did not stop the drums of War. Once conflict began, Halleran's notes on page 53, "Let us agree to separate amicably," summed up the situation perfectly. As casualties began to mount, Grand Lodges in the South agreed that their allegiance was to their home state and not to the United States.



Chapter 3: “If That Is Masonry, I Will Take Some of It Myself”

In this chapter, Halleran showcases some of the lesser-known acts that created a lasting impression on those who later became distinguished Masons. One example was from the Grand Master of New York, Finlay M. King, who wanted more Masonic participation. He is quoted as saying, “The light of Masonic charity and mercy shed forth their cheering beams, bringing balm to the sufferer, comfort to the sorrowing and sustenance to the poor and hungry.” Another intriguing example involved General Albert Pike who later served as the Sovereign Grand Commander of the Supreme Council, Scottish Rite. His home was in Little Rock, AK and the Federals were intent on burning it to the ground until Colonel Thomas Hart Benton, Jr. (Grand Master of Iowa) stepped in and prevented its razing by way of making it his headquarters. This act saved Pike’s large Masonic library, which became the Supreme Council (Southern Jurisdiction) of the Scottish Rite’s library. Another example offered by Halleran involves a Union Staff Officer, William McKinley (future President of the USA), who saw Masonic relief by a Federal surgeon towards Confederate prisoners of war. He was quoted as saying “If that is Masonry, I will take some of it myself.” Following the surrender at Appomattox, McKinley petitioned a Southern Lodge in Winchester, VA and was made a Mason.

Chapter 4: Saving the Life of the Enemy

The brethren of the time period placed importance of outward signs of the Craft, such as watch fobs, pins and drawings of Masonic symbols on pieces of equipment. An excellent example cited by Halleran was by a Union Lt. Matthew J. Borland of the 10th Ohio Volunteer Calvary, who was captured by the Confederates. Borland recounts: “I make the following statement, as much to combat the impression that Masons in the rebel army would not recognize ‘the Yankee masons’ (as they call them,) as to show the benefits of Masonry under certain circumstances. While out on a scouting party on the 3rd day of August, 1864, I was surprised and attacked by four times our number, and myself and two men taken as prisoners. I expected to receive very severe treatment, as our captors were a roving band, and not under very good discipline. The private soldiers had taken from me all my valuables before the commanding officer made his appearance. When he came up (it was a Col. Andrew Young) he recognized me at once as a Mason, secured and returned to me all my personal effects that could be found, and allowed me to ride in his company and share his rations. When we reached Gainesville, GA, he introduced me to prominent Masons-among others the D. G. Master of South Carolina... I am glad to say that I received very kind treatment from every Mason I met.”

The last example that I found striking occurred after the War. A Union Veteran placed a newspaper advertisement which reads as follows, “If the Confederate soldier belonging to company A of the 15th TX, who gave a wounded Federal soldier a canteen of water during the battle of Chickamauga, will write me at --Hotel, New Orleans, he will learn something of interest to him.” -John Randolph. The two men met in New Orleans and the canteen from the battle was returned to the elderly Confederate Mason.

Chapter 5: Gentlemen of the White Apron

This chapter elaborates on Masonic ties in POW camps. The first example that I found curious was from a Union prisoner of war named John Ransom. He was captured and transferred to Belle Island prison near Richmond, VA. He was greatly assisted by his fraternal ties in the way of food and shelter. One of his captors recognized him to be a Mason and let him escape at his first chance. Another illustration occurred at the infamous Andersonville prison in Georgia, which had a "Masonic" tent inside the prison walls. They were never interfered with and seemed to be better fed and sheltered than the rest of the prisoners. Halleran makes clear that if a man was a Mason and in a POW camp, his Masonic identity could mean the difference between life or death.

Chapter 6: A More Decent Interment

The beginning of the chapter quotes Albert Mackey, "When a Mason has reached the third degree, he becomes entitled to all the rights and privileges of Ancient Craft Masonry... These are the rights of membership, of visitation, of relief, and of burial." The obligations we take in solemnity were extended on the battlefield with the objective of a decent burial. Several of the burials described by Halleran happened hastily on the field of battle with an abridged funeral rite. The book cites examples of wounded brethren placing Masonic diplomas near themselves with the hope of a proper interment. Halleran details a firsthand account of Union and Confederate soldiers and sailors meeting on the level to conduct Masonic funeral rites. Interestingly enough, a Union Captain was buried at Grace Church Cemetery in St. Francisville, LA. The odd burial of a Federal Boat Captain in a Southern cemetery is still celebrated by townspeople today. Road trip, anyone?

Chapter 7: All Passions Laid Aside? Freemasonry in the Army

Army lodges were not new at the time of the American Civil War. British Military lodges are credited with having played a small part in dispensing Masonry into the New World. During the War Between the States, Halleran noted that there were 98 Union Army lodges and 153 Confederate lodges which were under dispensation of a Grand Lodge. The photo section of the book provides an example of a beautiful Federal field lodge with all the accoutrements of their Home Lodge. Men had an interest in keeping the Masonic traditions of home in the field.

Conclusion

In closing, the book was a fascinating read for those with a deep curiosity in the American Civil War coupled with Freemasonry. The use of our modes of recognition is a recurring theme, whether it be on the battlefield interactions with the enemy, POWs or civilians. I have not read elsewhere of this many instances of the mystic tie being stretched thin, but never breaking. Lastly, the book made me pause to reflect on my own knowledge of the

ancient landmarks that we take for granted. Every time that I place a Masonic pin on my lapel, it will truly inspire me to honor the great tenets of our gentle Craft.

The Better Angels of Our Nature remains in print and is available from online booksellers.

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