

Darith was a Brickmaker

Darith was a brick maker, and lived in the city on the plain. Human ingenuity had created a marsh between the two great rivers, and an island at the point of their convergence. Here, surrounded and protected by fast flowing waters and a bottomless quagmire, stood the city. Darith's father, Barith had been a builder, and did not understand a man who wanted to make bricks rather than construct things with them. His father's father, Arith, had been a farmer. For him earth was something you grew things in, not a building material, but there was no conflict. His life in the city was spent talking the world to rights and moving stones through hollows gouged in wooden boards in endless games. In the city or the village old men's lives were much the same.

At night Arith retired to the roof, where he slept under the stars between piles of drying firewood, fruits and spices. If it was wet he covered the piles before retreating to a small tent in one corner, protected by the parapet from the prevailing weather. It was here, when Edrith his great grandson, was a small child, Arith died in his sleep, and was buried in his beloved earth. Even before this Edrith was fascinated by the earth and clay, just as Darith had been by bricks.

Darith spent his childhood surrounded by Barith's bricks, there was no school, and boys had to earn their keep. Fetching and carrying bricks was good employment for a builder's son. Most people thought a brick was a brick was a brick, all pretty much of a muchness. But Darith saw bricks all day as his father put buildings up or tore buildings down, and he listened to his comments.

When buildings came down his father saved the timber and the thatch, on a densely inhabited, arable plain such things are valuable, if only as fuel. The bricks, made of packed clay and mortared with a thin wipe of wet clay, fused, and then eroded as one until the building was no longer useful. When the building came down they were flattened and made the base of the next one and thus the plinth on which the city stood above the waters. Darith watched, learned, took opportunities, and cultivated those with knowledge.

Within the world of clay bricks there are many divisions of opinion, if a man asked, "Do you cut or mould?"

the reply would start

"Well, that depends ..." and continue

"... on where I dig my clay" or, "on which God's season we are digging in" or, "how wet, hot, or dry, the weather is", or any one of a hundred other variations.

People seek opportunity for a division of opinion, and Darith listened to and assessed them all. He did not join in the arguments, he preferred the, good, solid, feel of the slabs to talking about them, but he knew more about them than most, and as a man he made them.

As a boy Erith dug clay for his father. Erith carried clay, mixed clay, cut clay and moulded clay. He sat in the sun and watched the clay change colour drying. Bits he flicked in to the fire at night took on the hard spirit of the wood, released by the fire. In the morning he found them among the ash, more changed by the sun in the hearth than they ever were by the sun in the sky.

Between thumb and forefinger he pinched small pieces of the clay to model the axe heads his

Grandfather and the other builders used, then moved on to model the bricks, the beams, and the builders themselves, then other interesting or useful shapes. Erith became closely acquainted with clay, and understood clay as his father had understood bricks. He knew how long to dry it, which fires cracked it, how to treat delicate shapes, how to spread heat by filling large pots with twigs, and which twigs. From ovens of clay, fired with charcoal, he created kilns, and in them glazes.

Erith returned to the land.