

than ever. And though we may be inclined to put little faith in the "vaticinations" of any writer, yet how can we explain this seeming paradox as regards Freemasonry, that, it has outlived many other institutions, and seems to move on its way unaffected by the benumbing influence of time, and even more vigorous and thriving from all such assailants and all such assaults. We believe, that there is and can be only one answer to such a question; only one explanation of such a seeming paradox, and it is this, Freemasonry possesses evidently in itself, some true, some vital, some beneficial principle, whether of action or association, which serves to commend it alike to the appreciation and approbation—to the sympathy and support of mankind. And if it be asked here, what is its present position in this country? We propose in the present paper, if possible, to give a reply to such a friendly query. We are anxious to use a commercial term, "to take stock," to endeavor to realize perfectly what is the present aspect, what are the future prospects of Freemasonry in England; to ascertain if possible what Freemasonry really is, whether looked at from a material, or social, or historical, or practical, point of view; to bring before us, in short, and in as careful an epitome as possible, what are its undoubted claims to our admiration and our approval, our zealous support and our loyal adherence.

First of all let us note its present position of material prosperity. We do not wish to lay down here or at any time, as an axiom, that material prosperity in itself or by itself alone, is an undoubted token of safe or satisfactory progress. But this we may claim for it, that it is an evidence in its measure of an acceptable and active support by a considerable portion of our fellow-creatures.

A society all worthy of support may indeed not flourish through some hidden cause of hindrance in its own peculiar object, or through some defect in its general arrangements, and a society which cannot properly call for present support on any ground whatever of actual good or utility, may, from some ephemeral cause, be floated on the full tide of worldly success, by the favoring breeze of popular approval.

But still we may fairly ask of any Fraternity or Association the question, does it meet with the approval of society, and is its membership sought by those, who will grace it either by their patronage, or strengthen it by their numerical adhesion? Probably there never was a time in the history of our English Freemasonry, when the Craft was so borne on by material prosperity as at the present hour.

Indeed, when we compare its early struggles with its actual position of prestige and numbers to day, the contrast is both very striking and very remarkable. The earliest return of lodges, acknowledging and subscribing to our English Grand Lodge, which exists in the archives of the Grand Secretary's office is of date 1723, and gives us a list of 51 contributing lodges.\*

In 1725, two years later, the number of such lodges had increased to 69, and in 1736, eleven years later, to 169.

So again in 1740 the number had still further augmented to 189, in 1745 to 197, in 1750 to 214, and in 1755 to 271. We observe so far a considerable and steady increase; but in 1760 the numbers had fallen back to 270, a proof, we think, of the entire reliability of these very interesting statistics.

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\* We have to thank our excellent and able Grand Secretary, Bro. John Hervey, for this statistical account, which he was so good as to supply us with at our request.