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HOW OLD IS FREEMASONRY?

WE are often asked the question, "How old is Freemasonry?" Probably this question will never cease to be asked, and answered. There is an interest naturally associated with it that makes it seem never to be old, or stale, or unprofitable; and there is, besides, so much new light being continually thrown upon the subject, that the answers of to-day may not be accepted as the answer of to-morrow.

It is curious to note the current of opinion upon the question of the age of Freemasonry, in different decades and centuries—for it appears to ebb and flow almost like the current of the tide. Certain authors in certain years trace it back to the remotest antiquity, while others at a later epoch, make it alarmingly modern. Thus it floats on the popular wave, apparently uncertain of its origin, and without its birth recorded in any volume that has come down to us.

In this matter, as in most others, the extremes meet in their absurdity, while the truth lies between them. Those that advocate the existence of Paradise Lodge, No. 1, in the Garden of Eden, in the year 1, on the one hand, and those that would have us believe that Freemasonry was originated in a London Tavern, in A. D. 1717, are equally in the dark, and both need to be historically "brought to light." Either their brains are strangely muddled, or their prejudices have warped their reason, so that they both have their mental vision distorted. Instead of looking at the subject clearly and plainly, with their eyes, the one applies a reversed opera glass to his intellectual sight, which removes the apparent origin of the Fraternity far back into the mists of the remotest antiquity; while the other levels his opera glass directly and naturally at the object, and brings it immediately and seemingly close before him. Both are falsifiers. Both should throw aside their deceptive aids, and open their eyes to the plain truth. This is what we shall attempt to do.

How many men, great in other respects, have shown their littleness in dealing with this question. Bros. James Anderson and George Oliver (both English clergymen) soberly inform us, in their writings, that Adam was a Mason, and instructed his sons in Masonry, and that Moses was a Grand Master, and Joshua his Deputy? Others, like Lenoir, in France, trace it back to the Indian and Egyptian Mysteries; or, like Krause, in Germany, date it 700 years before Christ, about the time of the establishment of the Corporations or Colleges of Roman Architects by King Numa Pompilius; or, like de Villosion, find it testified to among the ruins of Herculaneum! or, like Ramsay, find its origin at the epoch of the Crusades among the Knights Templar. All of these are bare conjectures, without historical proof. As theories they are entitled to consideration—as facts they are worthless. The spirit of Freemasonry must have existed from the time of Adam, but its visible form has not yet been traced back to *Anno Mundi* 1. The reader who is curious to review, in brief and interesting form, these various theories, may find them about as well and pithily stated in Bro. Steinbrenner's "Origin and Early History of Masonry"—a small and readable work, as in any book with which we are acquainted.

But what are the facts? They are these, unmistakably and beyond cavil. There is now in vigorous existence a Masonic Lodge which has worked continuously from the year A. D. 1599 to the present day, and its minutes of that early year are still pre-