

mind of the thoughtful student and earnest enquirer. For unless indeed we give up our old traditions and the annals of our Masonic forefathers, unless we sweep away with ruthless hands, the quaint and picturesque legends of the Operative Guilds, unless we prefer to accept that theory of the eighteenth century formation,—which has nothing to recommend it, but childish inconclusiveness and hasty generalization,—the history of Freemasonry is in itself both deeply interesting and very peculiar.

So much is this the case, that, we hardly know another like it, or that can compare with it in the annals of the world. For unless its claims are built up on "lying legends" or hateful imposture, it comes before us with the stately and startling proportions of a very marvellous episode in the history of our race. Shrouded in the dimness of ages, surrounded by those conditions of mysterious "Arcana," and universal organization, which have such interests for the human mind at all times, it also demands from us both praise and gratitude, as openly professing and as undeniably practising these great principles of philanthropic union and fraternal sympathy, which tend more than anything else we know of here, to combine and to conciliate the divergent opinions and jarring interests of our great world-wide humanity. We will assume then for the moment, though we hope to place the matter in a still clearer and more conclusive view before the close of this paper, that, generally speaking, the history of Freemasonry is that of long antiquity and far spread existence. Is it too much to say that it resembles one of the great Egyptian Pyramids amid the wide extending desert of time, towering before us in its mysterious meaning and mighty outline?

For strange though it be in itself as a fact, Freemasonry has been found alike in the most civilized and the most uncivilized portions of the world; amid the Arabs of the East and the Esquimaux of the North, among the Aborigines of Australia and North America, as well as amid the more polished communities of Europe and Asia. It is not an exaggeration to add, that Freemasonry exists in all the four quarters of the globe. Its marks and symbols are traced on the Cave of Elephanta and the Temples of Mexico; on the mighty Cathedrals and Ecclesiastical Buildings of all Europe, as well as on the Roman wall, on the Egyptian pyramid, on the remains of Grecian shrines, and the "debris" of Syrian buildings; on the internal decorations still visible through the whitewash of St. Sophia, and on the underground passages and skilfully constructed crypts of that sacred building at Jerusalem, so well known to all Freemasons, and still dear to the memory and the heart of some traveller and pilgrim from a far shore, as it was to those who once worshipped in a happier time within its ever holy walls.

Many have been, as we well know to-day, the mutations of the world and of man. "Nations and thrones and reverend laws," says a great statesman and law-giver of our day,* "have faded like a dream," but the "Sodalitium Lathomorum" still holds its ground. The rapid if silent tread of time has passed over the great highway of earthly life, throwing its spell of weakness and decay on all of earthly formation or human handiwork, and yet the "Antiqua Societas Cementariorum," still endures. It has been attacked vehemently, yet it has survived all attacks, it has been "trahi," as a foreign writer said one hundred years ago, "devoilé," "ecrasé," but it is now apparently flourishing more

* The Lord Chancellor of England, Lord Selbourne, in a Wiccarnical Prize Poem.