

themselves have stated, "that with what knowledge they possessed of Masonry, and as people of color by themselves, they were and ought by rights to be free and independent of other lodges." Accordingly, on June 18, 1872, they issued a protocol in which they said: "We publically declare ourselves free and independent of any lodge from this day, and we will not be tributary or governed by any lodge but that of our own."

This was the "legitimate beginning" of which the Ohio committee speak so complacently. By all the laws and usages of Freemasonry, in every country where the Institution exists, which laws and usages have been in force since the year 1717, the African Lodge of Boston, thus organized, was to all intents and purposes CLANDESTINE. The committee cannot get over this conclusion unless they discard the fundamental principles of Masonic law. The question is too plain to be argued. A lodge working without a warrant or charter from the constituted Masonic authority within whose obedience it is situated, is illegal and clandestine. This is the only law that we acknowledge. But this is not all. This self-constituted and illegitimate lodge soon after assumed the name and title of the "Prince Hall Grand Lodge." It at once exercised the prerogative of granting charters, and issued several to subordinate lodges. From this illegitimate and clandestine Grand Lodge have proceeded, directly or indirectly, all the colored lodges in this country.

Can any one fail to call that document "astonishing," which, in the face of this plain narrative, does not hesitate to say that "Colored Freemasonry had a legitimate beginning in this country, as much so as any other Freemasonry? Can it be possible that the preparers of that report could have been ignorant of these facts? If so, their ignorance is more astonishing than their boldness.

The next paragraph of the report is as follows:

"Your committee will not attempt, at this time, to investigate as to the transmission of this legitimate beginning down to the present time, when we find more than forty subordinate lodges and a Grand Lodge of so-called Colored Freemasons, and an aggregate of more than eight hundred members in the State of Ohio. Your committee have only to say that such is the fact."

It was very prudent in the committee not to attempt "to investigate as to the transmission of this legitimate beginning down to the present time." The result of the investigation might not have been in pleasant accord with their previous statement. But yet this investigation was precisely what, as a preliminary and all important duty, they were called on to perform. Without this investigation the report is utterly valueless as a means by which the members of the Grand Lodge, to which it is addressed, can come to a fair and honest decision of the question. The data not being given on which the declarations of a legitimate beginning and a regular transmission are based, the report is no more than so much waste paper. The statistics in the latter part of the paragraph have nothing to do with the question at issue, which is not as to the number of "Colored Masons" in Ohio, but as to their Masonic status. Be it eight hundred or eight thousand—it is no matter—the inquiry is not as to population, but as to Masonic character. But "straws show which way the wind blows," and this ingenious inuendo that there are so many "so-called Colored Freemasons" in the State who ought of course to be conciliated, is an example of the tendency of the committee to address themselves, in their argument, to the feelings of their auditors rather than to the facts of the case. It is a sort of logical artifice often used by those who are laboring in a weak cause. It is not, however, always successful.

The next paragraph contains the most incomprehensible of all the statements made in this report. The committee say:

"Your committee have the most satisfactory and conclusive evidence that these Colored Freemasons practise the very same rites and ceremonies, and have substantially the same esoteric or secret modes of recognition as are practiced by ourselves and by the universal family of Freemasons throughout the world."

Now there are but two possible ways of discovering that the same rites and ceremonies and the same secret modes of recognition are practiced by the two organizations. The white Freemason can know this only by either visiting one of the "so-called Colored Lodges," or by holding Masonic communication with a "so-called Colored Mason," by comparing notes with him, and by giving to and receiving from him the necessary information on the subject of these secret rites and ceremonies.

It is needless to say that no Freemason who respects his obligation can practice either of these methods. The committee have, therefore, placed themselves in this awkward position, either that they have made the statement as a mere guess or gratuitous supposition, or that they obtained the knowledge on which they have founded that statement in an unlawful manner. We dare not charge them with this latter course, and must, therefore, suppose that they have really no authority for asserting the identity of the work in the two organizations. But even if this identity of ritual were proved it would not affect the law of the case.