

brought back the erring to the path of virtue, dried the tears of widows and orphans, and is the parent of many an institution for benevolent purposes.

The history of Freemasonry—long veiled in mystery interwoven with legends, purposely distorted by misrepresentations, has through the profound and conscientious researches of some few solitary and unprejudiced Brethren, acquired of late years a sure foundation upon scientific principles. I refer more especially to the *origin* of the Fraternity, concerning which, even to this day, the most confused ridiculous and discordant opinions prevail; blended by absurd self-conceit, and an eccentric desire to prove the *extreme* antiquity of the Institutions. Many Masons have combated, most strenuously, the idea that the Fraternity originated in the "Operative Masons;" or, seeing that the ancient symbolical marks and ceremonials in our Lodges bear a very striking resemblance to those of the "Mysteries of the Ancients," have allowed themselves to be deceived and led astray, imagining they can trace back the history of the "craft" into the cloudy mists of antiquity; they have, in fact, allowed their zeal to over-ride their discretion which not unfrequently involves entanglement in unessential particulars and the main object is lost. The actual *idea* of Freemasonry is unquestionably as old as human civilization, having its source in the human heart as language has its in the spirits, and therefore it is that we find the *idea* of Freemasonry already existing in the remotest ages as a shadowy presentiment. Rev. Bro. Oliver in his "Antiquities of Freemasonry," with all gravity, places the *origin* of Masonry even prior to the Creation, tracing its germs back to the very honeymoon of Paradise, and also informs us that Moses was Grand Master, and Joshua his Deputy. Another Masonic writer attributes it to the followers of Pythagoras, another to the Essenes and first Christians; many to the building of King Solomon's Temple. Thomas Payne and others ascribe it to the Druids, others again to the time of the Crusades, and so on down to the seventeenth Century. In comparing the social organization, customs, doctrines of Freemasonry with those of the "Medieval Building Associations" we find many indications of a close historical connection existing between the two institutions—taking the various surrounding circumstances into consideration, and combining with them the results of historical investigation already arrived at, it appears to me to be now placed beyond successful contradiction that our modern Society is the direct descendent and successor, in an unbroken line, of the Operative Fraternity of Masons of the Middle Ages; the present form of Constitution which we at present enjoy is evidently the outcome of the four London Lodges in the year 1717 at which time they bestowed upon the Fraternity of Freemasons