

In the aforesaid work the author ridicules the several pretensions to a high antiquity and to an honourable origin, to which many Freemasons lay claim. It seems, that some of these say they were founded by those fraternities of masons who rebuilt several cities in Palestine during the Crusades, and who were the fabricators of our beautiful Gothic Churches: others ascribe their institution to our King Athelstan, the Grandson of the great Alfred; who, having sent over to the Continent for the most able builders that could be engaged, gave them a charter and a code of laws peculiar to themselves; whilst many more claim a descent from the builders of Solomon's famous Temple. To all these, M. Le Franc replies, that it is clear, from their own confession, as well as from every other circumstance, that their building is of a mere emblematical nature; their profession being to erect temples for the protection of virtue, and prisons for the reception of vice. It appears, that of late years, many members of this society, and amongst the rest the celebrated Count Cagliostro, maintained that the strictest conformity is to be found between the mysteries of Freemasonry and those practised in the worship of Isis, and that, therefore, the former were to be traced up to a very remote period of antiquity, and to the country of Egypt. For whatever learning there is in this account, Le Franc says, that Cagliostro is indebted to the publication on this subject of Monsieur Guilleminet, a learned Mason. He is as far, however, from admitting this as the other genealogies of the society in question. On the contrary, he says it cannot be traced higher than the famous irreligious meeting of Trevisan, Ochin, Gentilis, Lelius, Darius, Socinus and others, at Vicenza, in 1546: but it is to Faustus Socinus, he asserts, that the proper foundation of Freemasonry, as a hidden and emblematical system of equality and deism properly belongs. This artful and indefatigable sectary, having seen Servetus burnt by Calvin at Geneva, for maintaining only a part of his system, and finding that the Protestant and Catholic states were equally hostile to its reception, is said to have concealed it under emblems and mysterious ceremonies, together with certain dreadful oaths of secrecy, in order that, whilst it was publicly preached amongst the people in those Provinces in which it was tolerated, it might silently steal, especially by means of the learned and the opulent, into other countries, in which an open profession of it would then have conducted to the stake. The propagation of this system is stated to have been veiled under the enigmatical term of building a temple, "the length of which," in the terms of Freemasonry, "was to extend from the east to the west, and the breadth of it from the north to the south." Hence the professors of it are furnished with the several instruments of building: the trowel, the mallet, the square, the level, the plummet, &c. This accounts for the name of Masons, which they have adopted. As to the epithet