

Probably few elections to the high office he now so ably fills have been hailed with more unanimity by the Order generally, than was Lord Ripon's nomination and elevation to the Grand Mastership. Perhaps one great reason for the universal approval of the Craft may be found in this, that all equally are convinced, under his constitutional rule, the Order will continue to progress, alike in peaceful development and fraternal unanimity. Educated in the best school of Freemasonry, our Grand Master has more than once most eloquently proclaimed his clear conviction, that in order to preserve the great outer framework of our Masonic building in thorough repair, and the various portions of its inner machinery in working order, a firm while considerate maintenance of our *lex scripta* and our *lex non scripta*, is that which most surely best accords with the highest interests of the Fraternity, and with its truest progress, and the due maintenance of its influence amongst men. Everything seems to anger that, under our present Grand Master, Freemasonry in England will continue to preserve its present undoubted position of social elevation, upholding ever those great and immutable principles which constitute alike its honor and its happiness, its ornament and its value, its distinctive features and its most admirable characteristics.

Of late years we have welcomed amongst ourselves with universal congratulation, the advent of our royal and illustrious Brother the Prince of Wales.

The quaint words of a former generation recur at once to our memories,

"Great Kings, Dukes, and Lords,
Have laid by their swords,
Our myst'ry to put a good grace on;
And ne'er been ashamed
To hear themselves named
With a Free and Accepted Mason."

May we not believe then fairly that, as well socially as materially, the present position of our English Freemasonry is one both of undoubted progress and of peculiar promise?

And if now we turn to consider our position historically, we see at once also, what great strides archæological study and scientific inquiry are making amongst us. Time was, that we were content generally with somewhat too easy an assent to what others had said, and to what others had written, often with little of special knowledge on the subject, and less of accurate authority. Not that in saying this, we wish to disparage in any way the earlier labors and histories of Anderson, or Preston, or Laurie, or Oliver—on the contrary, we think that Anderson and Preston especially, subject to some needful modification, and some friendly pruning—give us in truth our safest and truest clue to the real history of our ancient Order. But we undoubtedly owe to our German Brethren that great impetus which has been given to the actual study of our documents, and the careful analysis of our own evidences. There have been those, there may be some still, whom Anderson calls "scrupulous Brethren," who have rather set their faces, and still set them against Masonic inquiry and research, against the verification of our commonly received authorities, against the opening out of our long hoarded stores of forgotten archives and dusty manuscripts. But let us hope that now, when all studies are advancing and all knowledge is progressive, we who have as Freemasons taken the lead in so many kindly acts of sympathy and good-will to men, will also not be backward, but on the contrary anxious to advance, in all intellectual appreciation and all archæological study, alike of our history and antiquities, our ancient legends and our time-honored traditions.

At this moment five great views of Masonic history (we leave out those of lesser importance) seem to divide Masonic students. There is first the theory which links Freemasonry on to the Templar Order or the Rosicrucian confraternity. This theory, however plausible in itself, or vehemently supported, has never been able to meet the sifting demands of history, and seems now to be given up even by its warmest supporters. It is in truth historically untenable. There is a second view, which more or less finds support from modern Masonic German writers, though the germs of it may be found in earlier authorities of that country, which regards Freemasonry as a purely speculative Order now, but deriving its origin from the German Operative Stonemasons, not earlier than the twelfth and not later than the thirteenth century. The one great objection to this theory is, that it is what is always a mistake, the application of a particular fact to advance a general theory. It may be true for instance, that the German Stonemasons existed as a fraternity in the thirteenth century with usages and customs very like our own, but "*non constat*" that therefore Freemasonry took its rise then or thence. Our able Bro. John Findel, of Leipsic, has put forward this explanation of our rise and progress as an Order, in his "*Geschichte der Fraumaurerei*," of which we have a translation in this country, and has developed his views on the subject with great clearness and ability, and his history of Freemasonry is most interesting in itself, and will well repay perusal. But the argument of Bro. Findel, is after all, only "*post hoc propter hoc*," as it is said, and though it reflects the greatest credit on his German patriotism, to make the good "*Gesellen*" of the German "*Steinmetzen*"