

By principles such as these, it is very evident that some living writers are accustomed to regulate their assent, and in this way a belief in Wren's *membership of the Society* will naturally arise out of its extreme improbability,¹ whilst a firm conviction in his having been *Grand Master*, will as readily follow from the circumstance of its utter impossibility!²

The object of this digression will have been but imperfectly attained, if any lengthened observations are required to make it clear.

Upon the confidence hitherto extended to me by my readers, I shall again have occasion to draw very largely as we proceed. We are about to pass from one period of darkness and uncertainty to another of almost equal obscurity, and which presents even greater difficulties than we have yet encountered. In writing the history of the craft, as far as we have proceeded, the materials have been few and scanty, and I have had to feel my way very much in the dark.

If, under these conditions, I have sometimes strayed from the right path, it will not surprise me, and I shall be ever ready to accept with gratitude the help of any friendly hand that can set me right. All I can answer for is a sincere endeavor to search impartially after truth. Throughout my labors, to use the words of Locke, "I have not made it my business, either to quit or follow any authority. Truth has been my only aim, and wherever that has appeared to lead, my thoughts have impartially followed, without minding whether the footsteps of any other lay that way or no. Not that I want a due respect to other men's opinions, but after all, the greatest reverence is due to truth."³

It may be observed, that in my attempt to demonstrate the only safe principles on which Masonic inquiry can be pursued, whilst making a free use of *classical* quotations in support of the several positions for which I contend, the literature of the craft has not been laid under requisition for any addition to the general store. For this reason, and as an excuse for all the others, I shall introduce one quotation more, and this I shall borrow

and my rebellious reason with that odd resolution I learned of Tertullian, *certum est quia impossibile est*. I desire to exercise my faith in the difficultest point, for, to credit ordinary and visible objects is not faith but persuasion" (Sir T. Browne, Works, edit. by S. Wilkin—Bohn's Antiq. Lib.—vol. ii., Religio Medici, sect. ix., p. 333). After this expression of his opinions, it is singular to find that only twelve years later (Inquiries into Vulgar Errors), the same writer lays down, that one main cause of error is *adherence to authority*; another, *neglect of inquiry*; and a third, *credulity*.

¹ The remarks on which the biographer of Sebastian Cabot founded his conclusion, "that the dead have not the benefit of the rules of evidence" (*ante*, p. 5), may be usefully perused by those who accept the paragraphs in the *Postboy* (Chap. XII. p. 133)—the only *positive* evidence on the subject prior to 1738—as determining the *fact* of Wren's membership of the Society. If the argument in respect of Cabot is deemed to be of any force, it follows, *a fortiori*, that we should place no confidence whatever in a mere newspaper entry of the year 1723.

It has been forcibly observed: "*Anonymous testimony to a matter of fact is wholly devoid of weight*, unless, indeed, there be circumstances which render it probable that a trustworthy witness has adequate motives for concealment, or extraneous circumstances may support and accredit a statement, *which, left to itself, would fall to the ground*" (Lewis, On the Influence of Authority in Matters of Opinion, p. 23).

² Tertullian's apophthegm, "*credo quia impossibile est*"—*I believe because it is impossible*—once quoted by the Duke of Argyll as "the ancient religious maxim" (Parl. Hist., vol. xi., p. 802), "might," Locke considers, "in a good man pass for a rally of zeal, but would prove a very ill rule for men to choose their opinions or religion by" (Essay on the Human Understanding, bk. iv., chap. xix., § 11). According to Neander, it was the spirit embodied in this sentence which supplied Celsus with some formidable arguments against the Fathers (General Hist. of the Christian Religion and Church, vol. i., p. 227).

³ Essay on the Human Understanding, bk. i., chap. iv., sec. 23.