

EDITORIAL DEPARTMENT.

ST. JOHN THE BAPTIST AND THE ESSENES.

We propose in this article laying before our readers a few facts which may in some measure assist them to decide for themselves the question whether or no St. John the Baptist can be rightly claimed as one of our patrons. To this day he is commemorated to our Lodges as one of the great benefactors of the Craft. When was this commemoration first made? It must have been a new thing at some time. Those who originated the custom, and the brethren who were present when for the first time St. John the Baptist's name was connected with a Lodge, must have asked for and received the fullest information as to his connection with Masonry. Let any one endeavor to introduce a new patron to-day—let him try to substitute St. Peter, for example, for St. John, and the would-be innovator will speedily discover the force of the above argument.

Turn, now, to the Sacred Volume and see whether the instructed eye cannot discern enough upon which to build a strong presumption that the Baptist was, if not a Freemason, at least a member of an order which abounds with points of similarity with Freemasonry. A single verse contains all that we know of St. John's history for a space of thirty years—the whole period which elapsed between his birth and the commencement of his public ministry. But that single verse is very rich in its suggestions: "*The child grew and waxed strong in the spirit and was in the deserts till the day of his showing unto Israel.*" From childhood to manhood he dwelt in the wild and thinly peopled regions westward of the Dead Sea, called the *Deserts* in the text. Now, we happen to know from Philo that those very *deserts* were the headquarters of the people known as "Essenes." Is it likely, then, that St. John—the hard asceticism of whose life was its distinguishing feature—could have lived for thirty years in close proximity to the Lodges or communities of the Essenes—men who lived lives as ascetic as his own, and yet be unacquainted with them and with their tenets? It may be objected to this that the Bible says nothing about St. John's being an Essene. We answer, neither does the Bible say anything about the Essenes themselves, and yet we know from contemporary history that they existed, and in large numbers. Their very name is significant to us, for it means the *silent*, the *mysterious*.

They chose out *children* while they were pliable and fit for learning, and reared them as their own (Josephus, B.J. ii. 8,) until their initiation. So of St. John the Baptist we read that he was a *child* when he left his father's house for the desert. They had three degrees of membership, as we have. They presented the initiated with an axe, a white robe, and an apron—the *leathern girdle* St. Luke speaks of as worn by St. John.

Their conduct was directed by three rules: The love of God; the love of Virtue, and the love of Man. Their day was divided into three portions; one to study, one to prayer, and one to labor.

Full membership was imparted only after the candidate had bound himself by "awful oaths," "to observe piety to God, justice to men, obedience to those in authority; fidelity to all; to love truth; to reprove lies; to conceal nothing from the brethren; and to reveal nothing to the profane; finally, to communicate their doctrines to no one otherwise than as he received them himself."

The following description might almost have been written of the Free-