

A DEFENCE OF MASONRY.

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OCCASIONED BY A PAMPHLET CALLED MASONRY DISSECTED.

CHAPTER IV.

Whatever reflections may attend the few remarks that follow in this Chapter, arising either from an overflow of wit or ill-nature, I shall be unconcerned, and leave them wholly to the mercy of the serious reader; only desiring them to remember that no more ought in any case to be expected, than what the nature of it will reasonably admit. I own freely, I received a great pleasure in collecting, and was frequently surprised at the discoveries that must evidently occur to an observing eye.

The conformity between the rites and principles of Masonry, (if the Dissection be true) and the many customs and ceremonies of the antients, must give delight to a person of any taste and curiosity, to find any remains of antique usage and learning preserved by a society for many ages, without books or writing, by oral tradition only.

I. The number three is frequently mentioned in the Dissection; and I find that the antients, both Greeks and Latins, professed a great veneration for that number. Theocritus thus introduces a person who dealt in secret—

*Thrice, thrice I pour, and thrice repeat my charms
Verbaque ter dixit: † Thrice he repeats the words.
Necte tribus nodis ternos, amarille, colores ‡
Three colors in three knots unite.*

Whether this fancy owes its original to the number three, because containing a beginning, middle and end, it seems to signify all things in the world; or whether to the esteem the Pythagoreans and other philosophers had for it, on account of their Triad or Trinity; or lastly (to mention no more opinions) to its aptness to signify the power of all the gods, who were divided into three classes—Celestial, Terrestrial and Infernal, I shall leave to be determined by others. The gods had a particular esteem for this number, as Virgil asserts:

Numero deus impare gaudet: Unequal numbers please the gods.

We find three fatal sisters, three furies, three names and appearances of Diana—*Tria virginis ora Dianæ: Three different forms does chaste Diana bear.* *Æneid*, lib. iv.

The sons of Saturn, among whom the empire of the world was divided, were three; and for the same reason we read of Jupiter's *fulmen trifidum*, or three-forked thunderbolt, and of Neptune's trident, with several other tokens of the veneration then due to this particular number.

II. A particular ceremony belonging to the oath, as declared by the Dissector, bears a near relation to a form of swearing among the antients, mentioned by a learned author.|| The person who took the oath was to be upon his bare knees, with a naked sword pointed to his throat, invoking the sun, moon and stars to be witness to the truth of what he swore.

† Ovid's *Metam.*, lib. vii.

* Alexander ab Alexandro, lib. v. cap. 10.

‡ Virg. *Ecl.* viii.