

A DEFENCE OF MASONRY.

PUBLISHED A. D., 1730.

OCCASIONED BY A PAMPHLET CALLED MASONRY DISSECTED.

CHAPTER III.

Having taken off the weight of the great objection, the design of this chapter is to remove an imputation which has been often urged with great confidence, viz: The principles and the whole frame of Masonry is so very weak and ridiculous, that it reflects upon men of the least understanding to be concerned in it! And now, say the merry gentlemen, it appears evidently to be so by the Dissection, which discovers nothing but an unintelligible heap of stuff and jargon, without common sense or connection.

I confess I am of another opinion, though the scheme of Masonry, as revealed by the Dissector, seems liable to exceptions: nor is it so clear to me as to be fully understood at first view, by attending only to the literal construction of the words; and for aught I know, the system, as taught in the regular Lodges, may have some redundancies or defects, occasioned by the ignorance or indolence of the old members. And indeed, considering through what obscurity and darkness the Mystery has been delivered down, the many centuries it has survived, the many countries and languages, and sects and parties it has run through, we are rather to wonder it ever arrived to the present age without more imperfection. In short, I am apt to think that Masonry, as it is now explained, has in some circumstances declined from its original purity. It has long run in muddy streams, and, as it were, under ground; but notwithstanding the great rust it may have contracted, and the forbidding light it is placed in by the Dissector, there is, if I judge right, much of the old fabric still remaining; the essential pillars of the building may be discovered through the rubbish, though the superstructure be overrun with moss and ivy, and the stones, by length of time, be disjointed. And therefore, as the Basto of an old hero is of great value among the curious, though it has lost an eye, the nose, or the right hand; so Masonry, with all its blemishes and misfortunes, instead of appearing ridiculous, ought (in my humble opinion) to be received with some candour and esteem, from a veneration to its antiquity.

I was exceedingly pleased to find the Dissector lay the original scene of Masonry in the East, a country always famous for symbolical learning supported by secrecy. I could not avoid immediately thinking of the old Egyptians, who concealed the chief mysteries of their religion under signs and symbols, called hieroglyphics; and so great was their regard for silence and secrecy, that they had a deity called Harpocrates, whom they respected with peculiar honor and veneration.* A learned author has given us a description of this idol, thus: "Harpocrates, the god of silence, was formed with his right hand placed near the heart, covered with a skin before, full of eyes and ears; to signify by this, that many things are to be seen and heard, but little to be spoken. And among the same people, their great goddess Isis, (the same as Minerva, the goddess of Strength and Wisdom, among the Greeks) had always the image of a Sphinx placed in the entrance of her temples; because their secrets should be preserved under sacred coverings, that

* Vide Imagines Deorum, a Vincentio Cartulario.