

Languages ; and from the contents thereof, they framed the CONSTITUTIONS of the English Lodges, and made Law for themselves, to preserve and observe the same for all time coming, etc. etc. etc."

Preston accepted the legend, and gave it in his second edition (p. 198) in the following words:

"Edward died in 924, and was succeeded by Athelstane, his son, who appointed his brother Edwin patron of the Masons. This prince procured a Charter from Athelstane, empowering them to meet annually in communication at York. In this city the first Grand Lodge of England was formed in 926, at which Edwin presided as Grand Master. Here many old writings were produced, in Greek, Latin, and other languages, from which, it is said, the constitutions of the English Lodges have been extracted."

Such is the "York Legend," as it has been accepted by the Craft, contained in all old manuscripts, from at least the end of the fourteenth century to the present day, officially sanctioned by Anderson, the historiographer of the Grand Lodge in 1723, and repeated by Preston, by Oliver, and by almost all succeeding Masonic writers. Only recently has any one thought of doubting its authenticity ; and now the important question in Masonic literature is, whether it is a myth or a history, whether it is in all or in any part fiction or truth ; and if so, what portion belongs to the former, and what to the later category. In coming to a conclusion on this subject, the question necessarily divides itself into three forms.

1. Was there an assembly of Masons held in or about the year 926, at York, under the patronage, or by the permission, of King Athelstan?

There is nothing in the personal character or the political conduct of Athelstan that forbids such a possibility. He was liberal in his ideas. Like his grandfather, the great Alfred, he was a promoter of civilization ; he patronized learning, built many churches and monasteries, encouraged the translation of the Scriptures, and gave charters to many operative companies. In his reign the "*frith-gildan*," free guilds, or Sodalities, were incorporated by law. There is, therefore, nothing improbable in supposing that he extended his protection to the Operative Masons. The uninterrupted existence for several centuries of a tradition that such an assembly was held, requires that those who deny it should furnish some more satisfactory reason for that opinion than has yet been produced. "Incredulity," says Voltaire, "is the foundation of history." But it must be confessed that, while an excess of credulity often mistakes fable for reality, an obstinacy of incredulity as frequently leads to the rejection of truth as fiction. The Rev. Mr. Woodford in an essay on *The connection of York with the History of Freemasonry in England* inserted in Hughan's *Unpublished Records of the Craft*, has critically discussed this subject, and comes to this conclusion ; "I see no reason, therefore, to reject so old a tradition, that under Athelstan the Operative Masons obtained his patronage, and met in General Assembly." To that verdict I subscribe.

2. Was Edwin, the brother of Athelstan, the person who convoked that assembly? This question has been ably discussed by various writers and the suggestion has been made that the Edwin alluded to in the legend was not the son or brother of Athelstan, but Edwin, King of Northumbria. Francis Drake, in his *speech* before the Grand Lodge of York, in 1726, was, I think, the first who publicly advanced this opinion ; but he does so in a way that shows that the view must have