

sonry is the issue of that society, or rather, does it show that the founders of this Fraternity incorporated into it as a part of its distinguishing features the religious opinions and ceremonies which they held and observed, and desired to extend throughout the earth.

The lapse of time and the scarcity of authentic materials present the greatest difficulties to the preparation of an unbroken narrative of Masonic history; but the popularity and reputed antiquity of the Institution has induced investigation, for philosophic minds could not easily refrain from undertaking such a work, though admonished that curiosity and ambition might be consumed in toil and disappointment. The efforts of this century show diligent research, and a fair share of ingenuity, but whether the volumes written will prove beneficial, time alone can determine. Some at least possess the merit of the zealous patriot, who ascribes whatever is celebrated in art, science or history to his own country; and their reading, disclosing their peculiarities, may remind you of the remark of Tacitus when, considering the characteristics of their author's ancestors, he pronounced them the natural productions of the soil. As fact cannot be proved by fable, nor the missing link in the broken narrative be supplied by romantic history, a brief reference to the character of some of the evidence adduced may not be uninteresting or unprofitable, for if you are to be bound no longer by the charms of myths and legends, let those who seek to liberate you take care lest they become enchanted by their magic spells.

The history of ancient Rome is so obscure that the written story can only be considered as an ingenious attempt to account for institutions; its situation on the rocky hills in the midst of an extensive plain probably suggested its name, which signifies strength; and the warlike character of its inhabitants doubtless prompted the fiction that its founder and first ruler was a son of Mars; therefore the primitive legends point to Romulus as the framer of its military system (for who by nature was so well fitted to teach the Roman soldier this art as the son of the fabled god of war). In like manner they ascribe to his reputed successor, Numa (a name which signifies law), the authorship of its religious rites and civil institutions, the very foundation of law and order; it is also said that this law giver divided the people into various colleges, one of which was called the college of builders, and that these institutions were extended into every country where the Roman standard was planted. Thus has been erected an immense but rude structure of fable on a narrow basis of truth, but while the world abounds with men of easy faith, the designing few can lead them, as they did the superstitious Romans, the worshippers of a hundred gods, even by the dim light of legends.

The operative character of the Masonic Society during the greater period of its authentic history, has induced many to believe that it must have had its origin among the guilds or corporations employed in the erection of the majestic temples and grand monuments which adorn the capitals of Europe. The advocates of this theory claim to have traced its origin through these corporations to the college of builders, reputed to have been instituted more than seven hundred years before the Christian era, and to have discovered such a resemblance between the initiator's ceremonies, religious observances and forms of government of the two organizations, that, aided by the light of Roman history, the relationship is established, the vexed question is solved; but where is the evidence to form the basis for their conclusions. Is it in the mythical story of the founding of the city, in the popular legends under the guise of history, in the marvelous and romantic traditions which impart a seductive charm to the very name of Roman, or in the poetical rhapsodies of hero worshippers, embellished by the fictions that fancy loves to breathe around its idols? Less difficult would be the task of restoring the law of the twelve tables from the fragments which have been preserved, than to sift truth from apocryphal history. There is no evidence, hence the argument must fail, and the conclusions be deemed mere vagaries.

If the Gothic Constitution, which is claimed to have been accepted by the lodges of England early in the tenth century, and preserved, though the constitution ascribed to Edward III. about the middle of the fourteenth century, is verified, it stands as a monument to mark the period which divides traditional from authentic Masonic history; but admitting its authenticity, are the reference to past events therein found, based on recorded facts or tradition merely? It refers to the conversion of the Angles and Saxons to the Christian faith; it declares that King Charles, Martel, sent Masons from beyond the sea, on the demand of the Saxon kings, and regrets the devastations upon the occasion of the incursions of the Danes. These are references to facts confirmed by contemporaneous history. It also says, "he (referring to the law giver) has ordained that the institution founded in the time of the Romans by St. Alban should be re-established and confirmed anew." Is there not in this an introduction to the founder of Masonry, as he was known to the framer of this constitution, and to the intelligent Masons convoked at York from Britain, Gaul, Greece and Rome to discuss