

might have been the contents of the record, if any record of the fact were extant, in the same manner that an antiquary attempts to restore an inscription which is part defaced or obliterated.'

"If, indeed," as it has been well observed, "the results of historians lead to an immediate practical result; if the conclusion of the writer deprived a man of his life, liberty, or goods, the necessity of guiding his discretion by rules, such as those followed in courts of justice, would long ago have been recognized."

It is, moreover, but imperfectly grasped by Masonic writers, that as a country advances, the influence of tradition diminishes, and traditions themselves become less trustworthy.' Where there is no written record, tradition alone must be received, and there alone it has a chance of being accurate. But where events have been recorded in books, tradition soon becomes a faint and erroneous echo of their pages; and the Freemasons, like the Scottish Highlanders, are apt to take their ancient traditions from very modern books, as the readers of this work, in the one instance, and those of Burton's "History of Scotland" in the other, can readily testify. Yet if an attempt is made to trace such traditions *retrogressively* up to the age to which they are usually attributed, we are presented with no evidence, but are merely given the *alleged facts*, a mode of elucidating ancient history, not unlike that pursued by Dr. Hickes, who, in order to explain the Northern Antiquities, always went farther north—a method of procedure which might serve to illustrate, but could never explain, and has been compared to going down the stream to seek the fountain-head, or in tracing the progress of learning, to begin with the Goths.'

Although it is impossible to speak positively to a negative proposition, nevertheless the writer who questions the accuracy of his predecessors can hardly, by reason of his scepticism, be considered bound to *demonstrate* what they have failed to *prove*.' It has been

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Lewis, *On the Methods of Observation and Reasoning in Politics*, pp. 247, 248, 291.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 196, 197. The author of the "Memoir of Sebastian Cabot" (bk. i., chap. i.), thus comments on a hearsay statement respecting the discoveries of that navigator: "It is obvious that, if the present were an inquiry in a court of justice, the evidence which limits Cabot to 56° would be at once rejected as incompetent. The alleged communication from him is exposed in its transmission, not only to all the chances of misconception on the part of the Pope's Legate, but admitting that personage to have truly understood, accurately remembered, and faithfully reported what he heard, we are again exposed to a similar series of errors on the part of our informant, who furnished it to us at second-hand. *But the dead have not the benefit of the rules of evidence.*" The preceding extract will merit the attention of those persons who attach any historical weight to the newspaper evidence of 1723, which makes Wren a Freemason, or to the hearsay statement of John Aubrey.

<sup>3</sup> "Although," says Buckle, "without letters, there can be no knowledge of much importance, it is nevertheless true that their introduction is injurious to historical traditions in two distinct ways: first by weakening the traditions, and secondly by weakening the class of men whose occupation it is to preserve them" (*History of Civilisation*, vol. i., p. 297).

<sup>4</sup> J. H. Burton, *History of* and from 1689 to 1748, vol. i., p. 135. See Chap. XII., *passim*.

<sup>5</sup> A parallel might be drawn between the influence upon the popular imagination of such works of fancy as Scott's "Lady of the Lake" and Preston's "Illustrations of Masonry." In his notice of the Highland Costume, Burton observes: "Here, unfortunately, we stumble on the rankest corner of what may be termed the *classic soil of fabrication and fable*. The assertions are abundant unto affluence; the facts few and meagre" (*History of Scotland*, vol. ii., p. 374).

<sup>6</sup> Nichols, *Literary Anecdotes*, vol. iv., p. 457.

<sup>7</sup> This is precisely and exactly what my reviewers (in the Masonic press) seem to require of me, and I respectfully commend to their notice the following remarks on the intolerance of the "Cameronians," as being capable of a far wider application: "The ruling principle among these men was