

history of the peculiar people, and of whom he especially avouched himself to be their God. It is impossible, I believe, to conceive aright the solemnity and grandeur of that scene, such as has never been equalled and can never be realized again in the history of the world, when the temple, which had been seven years in building, was finished, with its symbolical pillars, and all its furniture, its altars of burnt offering, its altar of incense, its veil and inner sanctuary, the Holy of Holies, its molten sea standing upon twelve oxen of brass, its ten lavers of brass, its golden candlestick with seven branches its table of shew bread, its lamps, its tongs of gold, its bowls, its snuffers, its basins, its spoons, and its censers, and "Solomon assembled the elders of Israel, and all the heads of the tribes, the Chief of the fathers of the Children of Israel," and brought up the ark of the covenant of the Lord to Jerusalem and to the temple which, under divine direction he had built, and when the priests were come out of the holy place in which they had placed the ark, "the cloud filled the house of the Lord so that priests could not stand to minister, because of the cloud, for the glory of the Lord had filled the house of the Lord," and Solomon addressed and blessed the people and offered to the Lord one of the most sublime and beautiful of all the prayers recorded in the Holy Scriptures, imploring that the eyes of the Lord might be toward that house night and day, and that all the prayers which the people made towards it might be heard, even though from lands of exile and in distress. We have no right to expect any such divine manifestations as took place on that occasion, when we dedicate our temples; their purpose is not especial, as that of the temple of Solomon, and yet is a high and glorious purpose. No temple that we erect is the special selected place of God's manifestation of himself and of his meeting with his people, but every one is erected to his glory for the great purpose of maintaining and promoting the knowledge of his name, and for the great purpose of celebrating his pure worship, than which no nobler purpose can be entertained by man. Freemasonry has entertained these purposes throughout its history; they belonged to it when Solomon and Hiram presided in the meetings of the brotherhood at Jerusalem, and reduced the system to an order and perfection which it had not attained before; and they equally belong to it now. Every new temple dedicated declares their subsistence, proclaims their premanence. Let us look for the evidence of the divine favour, not manifested by a visible cloud of glory, but manifested not less really by the evident answer of our prayers, by the evident blessing resting on our meetings and our works.

It is with just pride that Freemasons reflect on the antiquity of their system and of their Craft, the most ancient of all existing institutions of mere human origin. And, this is not, I think, an improper occasion for adverting to the complete failure of the attempts recently made to assign to our modern Freemasonry a mere modern origin, a very recent date. With no little show of learning and research, in a boastful spirit of unprejudiced inquiry and ruthless criticism, it has been maintained that Freemasonry was invented by Dr. Anderson, Dr. Desaguliers, and others, their associates, by them first established in England in the year 1717, and thence extended over the world. It may well be deemed a conclusive argument against this opinion, the 1717 theory as it has been called, that it ascribes base imposture to men who are held in high respect by their contemporaries, and whose names have been mentioned with honor from their own time to the present. To make such an assumption without the clearest and strongest evidence to sustain it is monstrous, and especially unworthy of a Freemason contrary to all Masonic principles and teaching. The character of a brother is not to be lightly assailed, the character of the dead ought to be held even more sacred than that of the living. Dr. Anderson and Dr. Desaguliers did not profess to introduce a new system to the world. The whole history of their proceedings consists with the notion that they acted in good faith, and is utterly inconsistent with an opposite notion.

I may observe that we have abundant evidence of the existence of Freemasonry in England at dates long anterior to the beginning of last century. Our old constitutions and charges belong to much earlier times. But I will not dwell on the evidence afforded by these. Permit me rather, in a few words, to refer you to the proof we have of the existence of Freemasonry in the 17th century, which itself is sufficiently against the notion of its having originated in the 18th. In Plot's history of Staffordshire, we find an attack upon Freemasonry, evidence enough of its existence, and all the better as coming from an enemy. And in the works of Roger Ashmole we find a record of his having been a Mason in the 17th century and that is highly honorable company. Some enemies of Freemasonry have asserted that it was originated by Roger Ashmole and a few kindred spirits, by way of amusement. It is an absurd guess, put forth at a venture, by men resolved not to acknowledge the antiquity of our system and our Craft; and is utterly inconsistent with Ashmole's own statement of facts as to his initiation. The enemies of Freemasonry may choose between the 1717 theory and the Ashmole theory. Both are for its enemies, not for its friends. But they are antagonistic, and cannot be maintained together.