

substance of the husbandman. Amidst all these, the Genius who presides within this Temple, taking for her watchwords brotherly love, relief and truth, went forth a minister of peace, and in the exercise of kind offices, maintained intact her purity and moral grandeur.

This retrospection naturally leads back through each preceding age, to the earliest period fixed by tradition for the origin of Masonry. Many eminent persons have entered this unknown field and endeavored to unravel the tangled web of its history, but has any one yet traced back the thread so far as to tell the story of its birth? As the explorer of the unknown source of some great river, meeting confluent streams, must choose the one which he will follow, so the researcher for the origin of Masonry, wandering in the maze of the ancient mysteries, will select the one that he believes contained the germ; but read the narrative or history, and you will learn the peculiar theories which guided one or in inspired the other; like footprints in the rocks of other years, they will reveal themselves. Read any history of the origin of Masonry, and if the writer believed not in the Christian's faith, you will there discover that he found a confluent in some pagan rite.

No effort will be made in the brief words here spoken to surmount the obstacles which lie in the way to a solution of this interesting question, for he who would seek the source of Masonry will find himself in a labyrinth of theories which may lead him back into the night of time, even into the obscurity of chaos. In the absence of authentic records the historian must not expect to furnish authentic history; hence until such documentary evidence is produced, none but the very credulous must be expected to absorb the mere speculations of those writers who select their materials with a view of fashioning them into a structure which shall reflect their own theories. The Masonic Society has always been exclusive, and surrounded by mystery, and its members solemnly bound not to communicate their art, except verbally, have so scrupulously observed this restriction that prior to the time of King Athelstan, not only its secrets, but its history was preserved almost wholly by tradition, and was as a sealed book to the outer world.

In the absence of authentic records, the student must seek other evidences of the origin of this Society, and where would its true history be more likely to have been preserved than in its ritual and lectures, which abound in historic allusions to known events of the period referred to. When a fact is shown to exist, it may be presumed, until the contrary is oven, that prwith reference to the subject to which it is applied, it always existed, so the allusions to history and to the founding of this Institution, preserved in its ritual and lectures, may be presumed to be true until some evidence is produced that would convince a reasonable person of their absurdity. If the ritual and lectures are true, the problem is solved; but if not known to be true, the incredulous may doubt, and why? Do they contain anything illogical, or anything which is not plausible, or anything which an intelligent man may not believe because of its absurdity, or if the picture is too highly colored, may not a truthful narrative be found beneath the embellishments?

Every intelligent Craftsman perceives, by the light of his own experience, a constant change in the use of words and phrases in the rituals and lectures for the illustration of the lessons inculcated by the philosophy of Masonry, but does he discover any change in the moral and religious truths developed in that philosophy? Admit that the forms and ceremonies of initiation are ever varying, and that the master workman has appropriated modern implements adapted to his speculative mind, are the important and significant symbols lost sight of in the personal representation by the candidate, and in his esoteric instruction in the sublime art there first revealed to his understanding; then, until the historian shall hurl against this beautiful system arguments more potent than the mere assertion that the Masonry of the ritual and lectures is an illusion, and their story of its birth apocryphal, or the iconoclast shall in like manner destroy your household gods, or remove them so far that you will never more behold them; you may safely rely upon the unimpeached traditions, and they may laugh, "but an atheist's laugh is a poor exchange for Deity offended."

While man possesses the faculty of imitation, and is an habitual borrower, not only of forms but of ideas, it is not to be expected that any human institution will present evidences of entire originality. Indeed it would be a remarkable circumstance if among the many societies of antiquity no trace could be found of any of the forms of the Masonic initiation; then if by investigation, the ceremonies of the first degree appear to resemble the forms of the Egyptian mysteries, does it prove that Masonry did not have its origin in Judea, a country within the radius of the influence of those celebrated schools, or rather, does it not show from whence the first Masters borrowed some of the beautiful designs which adorn this mystic Temple; and if by further research the lessons of the third degree are found to be illustrated by that sublime allegory, the universal type of all religions, found in the Hebrew mysteries, does it prove that Ma-