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The History of Free Masonry

The Scottish natural philosopher and historian of science Sir David Brewster (1781–1868), best remembered as a friend of Sir Walter Scott and the inventor of the kaleidoscope, contributed reviews and articles on a huge variety of subjects to such periodicals as the *Edinburgh Review* and *Fraser's Magazine*. (His *Letters on Natural Magic Addressed to Sir Walter Scott* and his two-volume life of Isaac Newton are also reissued in this series.) In this work, published in 1804, Brewster is determined to refute the allegations often directed against the Freemasons, as representing 'caverns of darkness, in which the most detestable schemes have been hatched'. He does so by tracing the history of the 'peaceful institution' of Freemasonry from antiquity until the end of the eighteenth century. He then describes the history of the Grand Lodge of Scotland from its institution in 1736, basing his account on the records of the Lodge.

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The History of Free Masonry

*With an Account of the
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THE
HISTORY
OF
FREE MASONRY,
DRAWN FROM
AUTHENTIC SOURCES OF INFORMATION;
WITH
AN ACCOUNT
OF THE
GRAND LODGE OF SCOTLAND,
FROM ITS INSTITUTION IN 1736, TO THE PRESENT TIME,
COMPILED FROM THE RECORDS;
AND
AN APPENDIX
OF ORIGINAL PAPERS.

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TO THE RIGHT HONOURABLE
GEORGE EARL OF DALHOUSIE,
GRAND-MASTER ELECT ;
AND
THE OFFICE BEARERS AND MEMBERS
OF THE
GRAND LODGE
OF
SCOTLAND,

This Work is Inscribed

By their Obedient

And

Obliged Servant,

ALEX. LAWRIE.

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PREFACE.

FROM the events which have lately taken place in Europe, the History of Free Masonry has a claim upon the public attention, to which, at another period, perhaps, it might not have been entitled. The history of a peaceful institution, whose proceedings are concealed from the public eye, can be interesting only to its own members, who are solicitous about the honour and advancement of their order. But, whenever it influences the opinions and practices of men; whenever it contributes to the disturbance or degradation of kingdoms; and whenever it is deemed an instrument in the promotion of those great revolutions, which involve, in their consequences, the happiness of individuals, and the stability of nations, it may then arrogate some title to public attention. That such allega-

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tions have been made against the fraternity of Free Masons, is a circumstance which is known to all. A few weak-minded alarmists have represented the lodges of the order as caverns of darkness, in which the most detestable schemes have been hatched, and from which have issued those monsters of wickedness who have unsettled the tranquillity of Europe, and subverted the principles of religion and of government. The scenes to which I allude are deeply imprinted on the minds of all ; and it must have occasioned no small degree of terror to the friends of order, were they convinced that there existed in every town, nay, in every village of their native land, a dangerous association of powerful men, who were partakers in the enormities of the French Revolution, who were instigators of rebellion in their own country, and conspirators against the existing governments of Europe. We cannot, indeed, sufficiently admire that depth of wisdom which pretended

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pretended to discover such evils, nor applaud that stretch of patriotism which warned Europe of her danger. But we must be allowed to think, that such pretended discoveries have been productive of the most baneful effects: They have weakened that reliance which man naturally places upon man: They have broken those ties which bind together the members of the same community: They have introduced distrust, suspicion, and terror, into every district where Free Masonry prevails, and where such reports have been credited.

THE best way of refuting those calumnies which have been brought against the fraternity of Free Masons, is to lay before the public a correct and rational account of the nature, origin, and progress of the institution; that they may be enabled to determine, whether or not its principles are, in any shape, connected with the principles of revolutionary anarchy, and whether

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or not the conduct of its members has ever been similar to the conduct of traitors. For this purpose, as well as for the instruction of those who desire to be initiated into the order, the following Treatise on Free Masonry is submitted to the consideration of the public. The works on this subject, which have already been given to the world, are of such a repulsive nature, as to deter the most inquisitive from their perusal. They contain nothing more than a meagre account of public buildings; and by referring the origin of the order to the creation of the world, and ranking among the list of Free Masons, the most celebrated monarchs of the east, without any authority from authentic history, their authors have discredited an institution which they meant to have honoured. It shall be the object, therefore, of the following work, to divest the history of Free Masonry of that jargon and mystery in which it hath hitherto been enveloped; and to attempt something

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thing like a classical view of this ancient and respectable institution.

The difficulties which attend such an undertaking, can be obvious to those only, who are, in some measure, acquainted with the subject. From the very constitution of the fraternity, its origin must be involved in obscurity; the materials for its history must be scanty in the extreme; and those which can be procured, cannot in themselves be of such an interesting nature as to excite general attention. The history of an association, however, which has existed from the remotest antiquity; which has extended to every corner of the world, and embraced men of every rank, of every religion, and of every form of government, must surely be interesting to a contemplative man, who is accustomed to discover new features of the mind, in every human institution. But those who derive amusement, only from the recital of
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of bloody wars and domestic commotions, who are delighted with romantic narrations, and stories of imaginary happiness and misery, will find here no gratification of their sanguinary and corrupted taste. They will turn, with disappointment, from the history of a peaseable association, formed for the purpose of scientific improvement, and the exercise of mutual benevolence ; patronising and executing those magnificent structures, which at one time have contributed to the utility and ornament of nations, and at another to the amusement and admiration of succeeding ages ;—an association sometimes persecuted from the jealousy of power,—sometimes alarmed by the threats of superstition,—frequently attacked, but never overturned.

AFTER having investigated the origin of Free Masonry, and exhibited the state of the fraternity from that period to the present day, the Second Part of the work
is

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is exclusively devoted to the history of Scottish Masonry, from the institution of the Grand Lodge of Scotland, in 1736, to the present year. This has been extracted from the records of the Grand Lodge, and contains much important information, equally interesting to the public in general, and to the Brethren of the order. Two ancient charters from the Scottish masons to the Sinclairs of Roslin, from Hay's Manuscript in the Advocates' Library, together with other papers which were necessary for completing the work, are given by way of appendix.

THE attentive reader will find, in the First Part of this work, some interesting facts, which have hitherto been unknown, and many more brought to view which have never been noticed in any former history of Free Masonry. The history of the Grand Lodge of Scotland, too, is altogether new, as its records, though frequently solicited, have never been granted

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granted to any who have written a history of the order.

As no labour has been spared in the execution of this plan, it is hoped that the candour of the public will be experienced for any defects which they may discover; and that these may be imputed to want of ability, rather than to want of attention. For the sentiments which are expressed concerning the nature and tendency of Free Masonry, neither pardon nor indulgence are solicited. The object of the fraternity is certainly innocent and salutary, though, like other institutions, it has sometimes been perverted by the ignorance and depravity of its members.

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a leaf is to be taken in, marked by [2 S]