

A TRIAL AND A REPRIMAND.

THE case was, without contradiction, a bad one. I was lecturing through that part of the country in which it occurred; and, holding letters of authority from the Grand Master, it was natural that I should be invited to come over and preside at the trial. I wrote to the lodge full instructions how to open the case; how to bring charges; to issue summonses; to take testimony, and to do all needful things preliminary to the decision of the question. Then I left my work, three days distant, out of pure good nature, and went to Purim Lodge, No. 80, to preside.

The case, as I remarked, was a bad one. Brother Elmore had fallen into bad practices and was on his trial (Masonically speaking) for his life. Who is it that tells a story about the devil once having a Freemason in his power, and compelling him to commit one of three grievous crimes, viz., either to steal, expose Masonic secrets, or get drunk? The poor fellow thought he was choosing the least of three evils when he chose the latter, and the joke is—he got drunk. Here the laugh comes in.

Alas, for the shrewdness of the arch-fiend; while the brother was drunk he committed the other two. It was “even so” (as some ritualist says with tremendous emphasis in a dozen places in his Blue Lodge lectures), “even so” with Brother Elmore. Being a kind husband, a good father, a peaceable citizen, and withal a first-class Freemason (all but for the Bourbon), he would have died at the stake before committing any offense to have compromised him in any of these relations. And so, being instigated by the “aforesaid devil” to commit some one sin, he had compounded with the old rascal by getting drunk; repeating the drunk on many occasions—in fact protracting the same drunk for several days, and in that condition (the strychnine in his whiskey being at war with the *cocculus indicus*—the tobacco juice, that so nobly does duty therein, being at enmity with the extract of poke-berry that colors it, and the potash refusing all chemical affinity with the other drugs so generously compounded by the distillers), delirium tremens stepped in, as he had every right to do, and arrested our brother Elmore, like a veritable police-officer, as he is. He quite took possession of that Master Mason for the time being, and played “old Hobbs” with him (whatever that expression means I don’t know. I put it with Burns’s other expression, “richt gude willie-wacht,” and give it up). He made him feel things; he made him see things; he made him taste things; he made him hear things; he made him smell things; he played the gamut on his five human senses, especially those three so greatly revered by our ancient brethren. Worse than that, he made him say things that would cause a man’s hair to stand on end if he had any, and if he hadn’t, would curdle his blood. I have heard a good many persons swear and objure. I have read a number of articles by Masonic editors. I have once or twice dipped into political papers, at election times, and even sat out a session of “woman’s rites” (is it spelled that way?); but never has the richness of the English language in expletives struck me so forcibly as when I sat up one night with a friend—I knew he was a friend for he afterwards denounced me in a Masonic paper as heartless—a friend who had delirium tremens, and heard him swear. There is where Webster made his “Unabridged,” in listening to the objurations of parties in the riper stages of delirium tremens.

Brother Elmore sustained the reputation of tremens, in using all the oaths he had ever heard, and then manufacturing a quantity, which for variety and seasoning were really curious.

But that was not the worst of it. Delirium tremens made that good husband kick his wife; made that father throw his little one out of the window; made that prudent, law-abiding man shoot his neighbor’s cow, which had innocently lain down by his wood-pile—shot her dead even with her unmasticated cud in her mouth; made that decent, modest brother go howling and naked in the street, like one of those lovely dervishes that Brother John P. Brown of Constantinople tells about in his book; made him, in short, as much worse than a beast, as a beast is better than a back-biting Freemason.

All this and more was ready for me when I arrived at 4 p. m. on the day of the trial. Three hundred pages of evidence, chiefly copies of the stupendous oaths that delirium tremens had made Brother Elmore swear. Tremendous oaths they were. Several of them were heavier than the heaviest hailstones that the weakest of our country papers have labored to describe. Thirty-eight witnesses, comprising a number of children, too young to know much, but brought in to prove that Elmore went naked in the streets; a piece of evidence that no one else was willing to give; and one old bed-ridden darkey to testify as to the kind of liquor “Massa Elmore got drunk on,” a fact so much dwelt upon by the Junior Warden, in the indictment, that he evidently considered it the gist of the whole matter.

Every member of the lodge was there, including the Rev. B. Battle, who never goes to lodge except on such occasions as that, and is excused from paying dues (though