

Such a course illy becomes a Fellow Craft, much less a Master Mason. Fidelity to the Institution cannot be so gauged. If this is "sharp criticism," he furnishes the text for it. Could he read the addresses of the respective Grand Masters, and the reports of the proceedings of the various Grand Lodges, he would be convinced that the abuses he complains of are nowhere sanctioned, but everywhere condemned, and that the mass of the Fraternity do not even "wink at a low state of morals."

If he will look abroad he will find that no institution has ever been free from abuses, and that the moral record of Masonry will not suffer, in comparison with that of any other society, not excepting the Church.

There are wrong-doers in all societies. The tares will grow among the wheat, but that is no reason why the wheat should become disgusted and refuse to grow. On the contrary, it is a great reason why it should come to perfection and fulfil its mission. For the same reason the perfect ashlar should not fly off in a tangent when they find a few rough ones in their vicinity. If they do, the work that is still required for the temple will not be brought up, and the celebration of the laying of the coping-stone will never occur.

Responsibility for perfect work rests upon each Craftsman, and no act of another can release him from it. The presence of impostors prevents no honest workman from having his work accepted, nor from receiving his wages.

Moral:—Never "be weary in well-doing" because your neighbor's conduct is not gauged by your rule, nor circumscribed by your compass.—*Voice of Masonry.*

THE LAST DEGREE.

STARTLING, indeed, are the rapid knells that daily announce to us the speedy and unceremonious transition of the souls of our brethren from time to eternity. In rapid succession, one after the other is being called from our side, on this sublunary sphere, to the imperishable edifice of our God.

The past and present inclement season is impoverishing our ranks, and laying to waste our temporal hopes and alliances.

Daily there comes an alarm at our doors from an inexorable warrior, whom none dare deny admission. Into our midst dashes an unannounced and foaming steed, and he who sits upon him is Death, who, gathering into his icy grasp the doomed mortal whom he seeks, rides forth in bold mockery with the captive. Trampling under foot broken hearts and hot tears of sorrow, regardless of all opposition, still the yawning man of the sepulchre is not satiated. Another and another is, and shall be, swallowed up by this grim monster, until the "degree of silence" shall have done her work upon every brother in the land, and other generations shall the gavel wield.

Reflect upon it. Think of the fatality in our midst, and the amiable characters that have been summoned from our roll. And still others fall on quick and fast. And who among us shall say: "What shall be on the morrow?"

"Death comes sure, speedy and relentless, while love and friendship receive their everlasting seal under the cold impress of Death.

"For there, with tomb-key hanging at his breast,
Silence appeared, and his lips his fingers pressed."

We know not the value of those endearing terms by which we salute our brother until he is lost to us. Then do we, awe-stricken, silently gaze upon all that remains of those we loved, and think and wonder upon the mysterious, silent end that is, we know not what, and lies, we know not where. But we realize that our brother has fulfilled his allotted time on earth, and has passed away into eternity, through the damp stagnation of the tomb or the cold grave, and is heard no more. Thus do we learn that life is but a transient, fitful shadow, an existence where we learn to walk, to act and speak, until the degree of transition comes, and he with the key upon his unheaving breast and his sealed lips, are with his fingers pressed. Then are we taught gratitude and silence. All the stages of life and phases of nature are but degrees of advancement or retrocession—from birth to babyhood, from that to youth, from youth to age, from age to silence.

And thus we creep our tardy pace, day after day, from degree to grade, until we reach the yawning chasm that leads through the dark valley of the shadow of silence.

Who has returned to relate the vicissitudes of the voyage? Any? God hath said to man: "I have many things to tell you, but you cannot hear them now," therefore wait. So says Masonry, as one by one, from grade to grade, we are taught its beautiful mysteries, and at the end we comprehend, indeed, that all Masonry is devoted to the glory of the deity. Its precepts are Faith, hope, and Charity.

Faith in God, Hope of a peaceful hereafter, and Charity for all mankind. These precepts, well observed, will entitle us to a peaceful death and initiation into that mysterious degree of silence.—*Hebrew Leader.*