

WOMAN IN FREEMASONRY.

Woman is excluded from the benefits of Freemasonry. She is not recognized in all its arrangements. Can that be good which excludes from its enclosure the wife of our bosom, the mother of our reverence—the sister and daughter of our affection? And this is gravely urged as if it was true, while nothing can be further from the fact. What, woman deprived of the benefits of Freemasonry? When was this cruel edict given forth? What council of our Fraternity has been assembled to remove a Landmark that has stood for ages, in the sight of every Mason's eye, and beyond the power of the highest Mason to remove. If this charge is sustained—if proof be brought home to the Craft that woman is deprived of its advantages, I renounce my allegiance to the Craft, strip myself of the decorations which I have earned with almost seven lustres of service, and own myself no longer a Mason. Or, perhaps in the dark ages from which the Craft is just now (A. D. 1847) emerging, the evil found its way into the lodge of this section of the country and the Freemasons in the jurisdiction of the Grand Master of the State of Virginia deny to woman the benefits of Freemasonry. If so, I have authority to declare that your lodges are out of order and have placed themselves beyond all fellowship with the rest of the Craft. Woman, indeed, without the benefits of Masonry! The mother, the wife, the sister, the daughter and orphan child of either sex whose delicacy and innocence make him like woman, why these are they for whose advantage the lodges stand! The Brother of the Craft may not command the benefits without ample proof not only of his Masonry, but of his fair standing with the Brethren—but woman comes and claims, and scarcely need she present the proof of her relationship with a Mason! For her, the fund is poured out—for her, the advice is ready—in her presence inquiry almost ceases. The passions themselves are hushed and Masonry becomes the guide, the friend of woman, her refuge in distress, the guardian of her purity and the champion of her fame.

But woman is not admitted to the rites of the Craft. The rites of Masonry are appropriated to the character and uses of the Fraternity. They come to us through centuries that have seen changes in all else but have wrought none in these. Let the woman who would complain at

being excluded from the rites of Freemasonry, first inquire whether she comprehends those rites, and let her be assured that the husband, the father, the brother and the friend could find no pleasure in excluding woman from any associations to which her charms could give attraction, or in which the delicacy of her sex would find appropriate exercise. Let woman be assured that man, whether Mason or uninitiated, prizes too highly the pleasures of her intercourse to debar himself from the enjoyment whenever the gratification can be possessed without a sacrifice of what is most lovely in her sex.

The exclusion of woman from what by its character or by divine appointment seems inconsistent with the peculiar delicacy of her condition, and the elevated position to which she was evidently designed, is not new, nor peculiar to Freemasonry. The Hebrew church scarcely allowed woman to be present at much of the public worship of the Temple, and now when the sacrifice has ceased and the Holy of Holies is closed, woman is admitted to no share in the services of the Synagogue, and is only allowed to be present in some confined nook where she seems to occupy a place between man and his now unpermitted sacrifice, rather than the position between man and the objects of his prayers. St. Paul himself with celibetic asceticism says, "I suffer not a woman to teach"—Freemasonry, bowing to all that is of authority in the Christian rule, places woman where she may teach by her beautiful example and shine in the lustre of her feminine virtues. It imposes upon her neither the labor nor the secrets of the Craft, but it makes each Craftsman the willing laborer for her comfort, and the dispenser of the mysteries in her behalf.

In the foundation of the Craft in the dark centuries, in the very twilight of civilization, when woman was the sport of man's passions and the slave of his convenience, then Freemasonry recognized not only her claims upon man's highest earthly consideration, but it incorporated her name and her condition in its ritual, and connected the most solemn duties of its members with her comfort, her elevation, her honor, her purity.

And never, from that distant time to this day, have Masons assembled to dispense their mysteries that woman's highest and holiest qualifications have not been regarded as the true characteristics of her sex, and her tenderest, purest re-