

Sharp Criticism.

SHARP CRITICISM.

THERE are times when reproof is necessary and must be administered. Times, when those who have been entrusted with the gavel must use it to divest the Institution of excrescences, and when they must firmly insist on a strict adherence to the principles of Masonry and on the practice of every virtue. Times, when tenderness towards manifest faults and errors will not suffice, and when the rigors of justice must be applied, or there will be no reformation. Some of our correspondents assert we are now in the midst of such a time, and that it is the duty of the Masonic press to lead off in the correction of whatever is wrong. One of them, residing in Wisconsin said:

"I am not deeply interested in the learned and eminent articles on Masonry, and have an opinion that sharp criticism on the loose habits lodges have fallen into, and on the low state of morals, winked at, if not sanctioned, would go further towards elevating the best of all human institutions. To come to a point. There have been several flagrant offenders among the brotherhood here, but no charges, no admonition, no notice."

We advised him as to the duties of the individual member of the lodge, under such circumstances, and to show the futility of single-handed effort, he replied:

"Years ago I came here and joined the several bodies by dimitts, and, on the first meeting of the lodge, after I had been elected to membership therein, I attended, and the Third degree was conferred, after which I was treated to a scene never before witnessed. A keg of beer was set on the pillar in the South, and the lodge proceeded to refreshment. I denounced the proceeding strongly, and told them openly that from that time on I should fight to overthrow such practices, and should ask for the arrest of the charter on a recurrence of the event. With a large number of the lodge it outlawed me for a time. But patient labor achieved much, and after seeing drunkenness and profanity permitted, unrebuked, for a long time in open lodge, two trials for unmasonic conduct were reached, and after positive proof of the charges, the lodge refused to purge itself, but voted to reprimand, which the Master did, about in these words: 'Brother ———, you have been a bad boy, but in the words of Christ to the woman accused of adultery, I say, 'go and sin no more.' Renewed license was given and the election of a Master followed, who was sometimes too drunk to do the work. And so for years the struggle went on. Now and then a good man was elected, but, in the main, any good man was at once rejected.

"On one occasion, when a candidate had been several times rejected, his petition was held until such time as there were only a few friends present, and then, half an hour before the time for meeting, the lodge was opened, the ballot passed, the candidate elected, and when the members began to collect, at the regular time, they found the obnoxious person already obligated. To the brother remonstrating, the Master said: 'Go home and take some soothing syrup.'

"In the course of time, I became Master of the lodge, and during one year, only good men were accepted, and a host of saloonists, roustabouts, raftsmen and barbarians, were rejected. For this, I was again outlawed."

This is not the whole of his picture of the conduct of Masons where he resides, but it is sufficient to show that "sharp criticism" and decided action are required. It is not to be expected that the members of any institution will lead *wholly blameless lives*, but it is to be expected that they will come as near doing so as human infirmities will permit. Masonry demands as much of her votaries, and, precisely in the degree that they fall short of this high moral standard, do they fail in fulfilling their obligations, and deserve rebuke. But, when many, because "it is human to err," display imperfections and foibles, who shall administer the reproof which shall be the excellent oil which shall not break their heads and which shall perfect them in the science of Masonic conduct? And who shall decide just when "sharp criticism" shall come in and the sword of justice descend? Shall it be the individual member of the Fraternity, the lodges, the press, or the Grand Bodies? In the case before us the individual member and the lodge have proven themselves delinquent to duty, and the remedy is in the Grand Lodge. It has the power to correct all the abuses complained of, and were they properly brought to its notice, correction would surely follow. No Grand Lodge would sustain such abuses.

The power of the press is great, but it has no official authority in "righting wrongs," and cannot go beyond "sharp criticism." The lodge and Grand Lodge can reprimand, suspend and expel, and the latter can, also, arrest and revoke charters. The complaining brother, instead of appealing to the Grand Master and the Grand Lodge for the remedy, applies to the *Voice of Masonry*, and then declares that "until there is a radical change, he proposes to stand aside." In short, he wants others to do his work, and when it is accomplished, allow him to come in and share the benefits.