

THE SECRET BALLOT.

The secret ballot, and acceptance by—unanimous vote constitutes the impregnable bulwark of the Masonic Order. These conditions are fundamental, and unalterable, and without them Freemasonry could not exist at all. They are a positive prohibition of discord in their inception, and in theory they can produce nothing but harmony. In practice however, they are not entirely exempt from the fate of other beautiful theories—that is, they sometimes make a partial failure. Such isolated cases, while they prove the rule, and demonstrate the truth they seem to deny, are exceedingly troublesome whenever they arise in a Lodge. They are entirely beyond the reach of law or discipline, for the reason that they take refuge behind the impregnable bulwark and really abuse its sanctity while the offence is palpable and the offender is safe. Now, since, the ballot is secret, how do we know certainly there is an offender?

Every member of the Lodge exercises his rights to vote, and by the condition, no member's vote can be called in question. We do not certainly know that any one abuses his principles at the ballot-box, but we do know that times come in the history of some Lodges, when for months, even years, a clear ballot is unknown. This proves either that the Lodge is surrounded altogether by bad material, or that somebody inside of it has determined not to be satisfied with any applicant who may present himself. In either case it is hard for the Lodge to bear its situation patiently, and resist the impulse to surrender its charter.

Some plain words on what may be termed the abuses of the secret ballot are needed. No Mason of any experience will deny that these abuses exist; scarcely any one but has known some palpable instance of wrong perpetrated through the ballot-box. A sacred right to the many, has apparently given a few the right to do wrong, which admit of no redress. To remove the wrong would be to root up the right. In our immutable constitutions the Great Charter of Freemasonry itself, was locked up for safety, and the key purposely thrown away and lost. Conceived and brought forth in truth, it admits of no change but growth, and the natural development of its vital organism, and it was intrusted to pure hands. These conditions preserved, it is perfect, but in its contact and struggle with human passions its very perfections are sometimes distorted into blemishes, and made the means of injustice. It is to be deeply regretted that there are those in the Order who are so far from being Masons as to seize on the ballot-box as an instrument of vengeance.

Humiliating as this admission is, it is nevertheless an honest confession, safer to make than to withhold, for it may be the beginning of repentance and reform. The evil is not wide-spread, nor is it contagious, but it roots itself like a cancer in the body of a Lodge where it exists, and slowly but surely wastes it away. Some of our Lodges are now suffering from it, and from the highest enjoyment of health, peace, and prosperity they have been plunged into the depths of weakness and despondency. Their energy and activity are lost, and they lie torpid and languishing, as it were, pulseless on the bed of death.

All this, simply because one member, perhaps, has been disappointed in his aspirations for office; annoyed by the rejection of the petition of a personal friend or relative: or because some accused brother was not expelled. Forgetful of the high power he wields for good or evil: