

Indictment

WHY don't men practice what they preach?" demanded the New Brother of the Old Tiler, walking up and down in the anteroom.

"I dunno, why don't they?" The Old Tiler hooked a chair nearer to his own. "Sit down, son, you remind me of a Marathon.

"I don't want to sit down! I want to know why men profess brotherhood and act like selfish beasts. I want to know why Masons agree to uphold each other in trouble and forget they have any brethren when trouble comes. I want to know why we preach charity and practice personal isolation from the other fellow's woes. I want to know . . ."

"Don't you also want to know why Masons preach toleration and broad-mindedness and then walk up and down the anteroom like caged lions, spouting intolerance and narrow-mindedness?" inquired the Old Tiler, mildly.

"That was right pat, for you," laughed the New Brother, "but we do prate a lot of charity and while we give money enough, we don't do enough personal work!"

"Vague indictment," countered the Old Tiler. "You have something on your chest beside your vest. Suppose you unload?"

"I was put on a sick, committee last week," began the New Brother. "And among our sick was a chap named Brown. We found him in Mercy hospital. In a ward, he was, with a dozen or so other patients. He was so pleased to see us and so appreciative of our visit, it was pathetic. Said if it wasn't for the visits of his brethren he'd go crazy. Said some of us had been to see him every two weeks for several months. Then he pulled me down over his bed and said, 'Look here, brother, you look like a regular guy; lemme tell you I am not the only Mason here. There are seven brethren in this ward, all from foreign jurisdictions, and no one visits them!'

"I hunted these chaps out, and I conferred with the committee, and we bought fruit and flowers and took them to all these seven, and five of them cried! And, damn it, I cried, too! Here they were, four of them hardly more than boys, in a strange town, in a strange place, and not a single Mason had hunted them up or said a word to them until we did it. I say we are pikers not to go and see them, and I'm going every week, and the lodge can pay the bills, or I will, but those chaps are going to think at least one brother believes in charity and . . . I don't mean it as charity, I mean brotherhood and common decency. We preach such a lot and do so little and we ought to be ashamed of ourselves and . . ."

"Whoa!" the Old Tiler grinned. "Back up, son! Your sentiments do you credit. It is true Masonic spirit to comfort the sick, but don't be too hard on the lodge. A lodge is not omniscient, you know. Neither the Master nor the committee on the sick can know of every sick Mason in town. If those seven Masons had written to their own lodges and told the facts, those lodges would have written to us here, and we would have been on the job.

Nine times out of ten when a strange brother, in a strange town is sick and no Masons visit him, it's because they don't know he is there.

"Now You have discovered these brethren, you need not keep a monopoly of their care. Tell your story in lodge and you'll start a whole procession of Masons toward Mercy Hospital. We are often apparently careless because we don't know, but that we preach charity and practice its neglect I will not agree. Are you a better Mason than any in our lodge?"

"Why, of course not!"

"Well, are you a better man than any in our lodge?"

"I don't think so!"

"You certainly do talk so!" responded the Old Tiler. You have been to Mercy Hospital. Your feelings have been touched by visible evidence of suffering and the need for Masonic visits. You are going to give what is needed. But you never did, before you went there. If you took the lodge out there wouldn't they all feel the same way?"

"I suppose they would!"

"Then why damn them because they haven't had your opportunity? You didn't have to wait until you were drawn on a sick committee to go to Mercy Hospital. You just never thought of it. Now you have seen for yourself, you are moved to action. So would any of the rest of the Masons in this lodge be. Be charitable to them, too, as well as to the boys in the hospital. Go inside and tell your story; you'll have plenty of company when you go to the hospital next time."

"How do you know?"

"I visit Mount Alban Hospital every week," said the Old Tiler, a little shyly, "and tell the boys, and I know what they do."

"There are times," answered the New Brother, "when I think you should be framed and put on a wall! You are too perfect to be real."

"Oh, don't say that!" cried the Old Tiler, "or I'll think you are trying to borrow a cigar instead of just about to give me one!"