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CRITICISM.

CRITICISM, we have often been told, is the life-blood of democracy, and criticism, if it is helpful and constructive, can strengthen the hand of the doer and inform the ideas of the thinker. Today, in spite of all the goodwill which the Craft, the Churches and other benevolent institutions engender, we live in an atmosphere of recrimination. The newspapers open their columns to the public, and daily there appear throughout the Dominion hundreds of letters criticising the Government, local boards and councils, officials and individual members of the public. Everyone seems to be labouring under a sense of grievance, everything done officially appears to be suspect. We are sceptical and distrustful one of another.

It may be that there is corruption in high places and in the minor arenas, it may be that black markets and unauthorised discounts have run riot. Much of this spate of criticism may be justified and may do good. But less and less does there appear to be any idea of giving the other man credit for trying to do a good job.

Our attitude towards society to some extent reflects ourselves. The self-seeker is quick to detect self-seeking in others. The man who is mean recognises his brother. May it not be that we all, as individuals, have come to embrace a too-easy cynicism, to forget that men do sometimes enter into public life from motives other than self-interest; that sometimes they may even do so because [their desire to serve the public may be stronger than our own? Any public man becomes a public Aunt Sally; and public criticism, not always of the good-humoured brand of some of our leading cartoonists, can be needlessly and unjustly distressing. Should not we, if we feel that something is being done ill, try to help in having it better done, or, if we can, offer to lend a hand ourselves? Vilification will do no good; it can only create disharmony.

Harmony is one of the main objectives of the Craft; we should confine our intolerance to what we are sure is bad in intent. To impugn motives simply because we disagree with actions is too dangerous a pastime for any but the mind-reader; we are not informed enough to indulge in that presumption.

If on the other hand, all this criticism is justified, then society is genuinely in a state of decay. If that be so, should criticism be aimed at our leaders? Should it not rather be directed against ourselves? After all, we are members one of another, and few things flourish in an atmosphere of strong general disapproval. If the standards of the man in the street are rigid and inflexible, upright and honest, triable by level, square and plumb, then vice and corruption will find no forcing ground and will be held in disrepute. If our leaders show the symptoms, we ourselves, who make up the community, harbour the disease. If we rid ourselves only of the symptoms we will soon be faced with a new crop, but if we tackle the disease we will find that the symptoms disappear and do not return.

From the individual attitude only can a good society come, and the Craft can play an enormous part in seeing that our society is a good one. The Order in New Zealand comprises a high percentage of the adult male population. But are we all good Masons? If all of us adhered rigidly to the principles of the Craft, refused to condone the fast one and the slinter, and refused to associate ourselves for present advantage or for anything else with what we know to be against the rules, then we would raise the whole tone and level of social life in this country.

Self-examination is a useful discipline, and a question which all of us might with advantage ask is whether we ourselves are more concerned with what we can get out of the community, or life, or our daily work, or with what we can contribute towards it.

The combined influence of the Craft as a society is dependent upon the total of the influences of its members. This matter is largely in our hands.

Let us, then, "unite in the grand design . . ." The code for our guidance is written in every page of our rituals.