

NOTES AND OBSERVATIONS

By W. Edmund Smith

An old man is apt to be critical, especially an old preacher; he is apt to be hypercritical. God has given us all the critical spirit, which is for our good and His glory if it be sanctified. Paul says, "He that is spiritual judgeth all things," and that word means to criticize all things, i. e., to pass mental judgment upon all things, which we all do in such a casual way that we are not conscious of it for the most part. If our hearts be right we shall feel like commending the beautiful and the good whether seen in natural scenery, or architecture, artistry, animals, or human beings.

Everywhere we go, every day we pass mental judgment upon everything, or every person we see or meet. In other words, everything we see either gives us a pleasant sensation or an indifferent one, and even a feeling of aversion. For my part, I see and have seen so much of the beautiful around where I have lived, and where I have travelled, I am compelled to say, "How much there is to delight our souls!"

This is the month of which the poet spoke of "Earth being crammed with heaven, and every bush ablaze with God, and he who has eyes to see, takes off his shoes, while others stand around and eat blackberries." If you could take an auto trip through the Mountains of Vermont, at this season of the year, and not be thrilled with the glory of the autumnal tints and shades, you must indeed be lacking in aesthetic sensibility. Truly God is a wonderful artist. The artist's skill reaches the nearest peak of perfection in proportion as he can make trees and flowers and animals look as they really do in nature.

But still beautiful bushes ablaze with glory cannot satisfy the desire for food. The time might come when we would get tired of mere scenery and then a good tuck out of blackberries would satisfy us more than mere scenery. But this is my critical spirit popping up.

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When I go to church I pray "Lord enable me to make some contribution to the service. Help me help the preacher preach." I think singing is an important part in a service. I love to sing, and what I lack in quality I make up in quantity. Didn't David advise me to sing with a loud voice; or was it to play with loud music upon instruments of brass? Anyway David wanted some life in the meeting. It has been an affliction for me at times to go to church, with a bronchial affection which precluded my lifting up my voice in song. It may have been to the delight of those who do not fully appreciate good singing, but I am sure it was a discomfort to me.

Now I want you to know that I have been around some and have heard all kinds of singing. But I am a good deal prejudiced in favor of the old-time singing I heard when a boy, in the old Methodist Church near my home. I have seen that big ark of a church filled on a Sunday night. In my father's pew, besides us children, there would be several big huskey men with mighty voices. And in the next pew there would be others of the same calibre. My father set the tunes. He could read notes as I could read ordinary print. From the pulpit perched on the side of the wall, the preacher would give out the hymn, reading it through verse by verse, and then re-reading the first verse. My father would

rise and start one of those long meter tunes and all would pitch in. In one place the soprano would stop and the bass would sing a few words and then the soprano would start again. It would seem like a sort of a mix-up, but oh it sounded mighty good to me, although I was afraid at times they would not all come out together at the end. But they did.

I can well remember times when the chills would run up my spine at the wondrous harmony of those old-time singers. You see, that was where I received my early training in vocal harmony. And now when I hear much that passes for singing I am a good deal critical. Go to a big church and hear what they call a prima donna scream and yell and turn vocal somersaults is really taxing to one who had the early training I have had in vocal harmony.

Good old camp meeting singing sounds good to me, and we have those who can inspire and charm us with their unaffected singing, so free from what Brother Ziba Orser called "shivers and shakes." Oh, yes, I have heard a wonderful tenor thunder out "The Road to Mandalay." Heap big sound and a lot of puffing and blowing, but it is all in another realm to that which thrills and inspires my soul. But this is my critical spirit popping up again.

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I go often to church and hear all kinds of preaching. I try not to be critical, but I must confess that when a preacher takes the pains to let me know that he is a college graduate (a good thing he did for I could not have mistrusted it by his grammar), but some think they are putting on a fine touch when they say, "What a lesson that is to **you and I**, or what a lesson that is to **we** who are older; or they can learn something from **you and I**. When I hear a preacher who has perhaps scarcely finished the grades using such bad grammar I don't feel at all critical, but for a college grad, it is reprehensible and inexcusable.

And then there is the preacher who is always bringing up the **original**. He must tell what the root meaning is and often he gets the roots tangled in his teeth for it doesn't come out straight. I have done many foolish things in my preaching that have taxed the patience of my hearers no doubt, but I have never been guilty of having many times in fifty-five years, afflicted audiences by giving nice discriminations in words. I may be a little proud of my humility in this regard, but I leave this for those who scarcely know the Greek alphabet. I heard a young man, now ordained, but at that time just a local preacher, giving a message and taking pains to tell what the text was in Hebrew. Of course a person can get this in Hebrew, Greek, English lexicon or in an inter-linear translation.

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I went to church one morning tired in body but victorious in soul. I had been so tested during the week that I said, "Lord, there must soon be a great blessing down the road for me, for Thou hast seen that I have defeated the devil by Thy grace, at every turn of the way." The service began and the singing was inspiring. A dear sister who had been sorely bereaved, led in prayer. And how she prayed! God was praying through her and souls were blessed. But before the preacher could take his text another sister, who had been passing through sorrow, worse far worse than death, arose and with tears and

praises told of what Jesus meant to her. It rolled out of her inmost soul.

I had been that sister's pastor thirty years ago, and the like of her for spiritual fervor and amiability of disposition I had never seen nor have I seen since. All the sorrow she has met has not quenched the flame. And I said in my soul, "If you can find in a church, even of considerable size, ten people who have the blessing, they will make a fire in that church that will be a wonder to those on the outside.

After that sister had testified another arose and then another, and there was singing and shouting and testimony for fifteen minutes or more, while the dear pastor looked as if he would like to see it stop. I did thank God that I had gone to church. I received grace enough to listen to a long sermon in which the pastor preached his sermon over several times. But then I had to say, "Just like you have done yourself, and so many were praying you would get through." The end was the best part of the sermon. It is just as I feel when that great singer gets through her great effort, "Thank the Lord she is through." But this may be my critical spirit.

How is the prayer meeting in your church? What would it be like if every member were just like you? I knew a good brother on the Jacksonville circuit, where I went as a boy preacher. Johnnie Harper was his name, and what a fine man was he, and a devout Christian. He was a great worker and ran a rented farm, and brought up a large family. He told me: "I work hard and have to make ends meet. But on Wednesday I take it a little easy in preparation for the prayer meeting. I feel that not only must I go to the meeting but I want to go both spiritually and physically able to make a contribution to the success of that meeting. I can't do that if I am all tired out."

Do you find it easy to excuse yourself from even attending prayer meeting? Or you work so hard that you say you are too tired to go to prayer meeting; and now you wonder why the preaching is not better or things are not more lively in your church. Ask yourself the question: Am I a real live member or just a pious bench-warmer once a Sunday. But I must stop or I shall be criticising.

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Mrs. E. P. Phillips—One sheet and one pair pillow cases.

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H. E. MULLEN,

Chairman of

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