

NOTES AND OBSERVATIONS

By W. Edmund Smith

I claim that it is good to be alive at this time in the world's history. Some may cry, "O tempora, O mores"—"O the times, O the manners", and there are many things that should give us pain. But too, there are so many things we can call moral and spiritual assets in our moral, social, individual, and national life. While we must not base our conclusions too largely on materialistic progress, nevertheless, these things have a place on the credit side of the ledger. In the Old Testament times God's blessing was indicated by the material prosperity He gave to those who honored Him. Abraham, David, Solomon, Job and others were men of wealth. The curse of God upon His people was seen in the locust and the caterpillar. Today the promise is often to the poor—especially those poor in spirit. God has chosen these to be millionaires in grace.

But there is no special virtue in poverty. It is a menace to comfort, morality, and decency. Those who are rescued from being derelicts upon the sea of life when saved become spiritual assets in the social order. They become sober and industrious and soon they better their temporal condition to the extent that some speedily become affluent in material things. This may lead those who were once "down and out," to become self-centred and proud, forgetting the pit from which they had been digged. Thus it would seem that divine grace in its operation in the lives of men, by the very prosperity it brings, also brings a danger. Is it not true that the greatest blessings always are accompanied with the greatest temptations. Only those who climb can fall. Mr. Wesley says, "The only way God's children can avoid the evil of prosperity is to Make, Save, and GIVE all they can. Heap up riches and they will damn you."

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Cheering news comes from Palestine. The Egyptians and the Jews have made a treaty of peace. This is a great boost to the UN which, sorry to say, so many of God's children have been "damning with faint praise." This victory puts out a threatened conflagration in the East, and gives prestige to the UNITED NATIONS as a world force.

Some will say "They don't even offer prayer at the UN." You are mistaken, many of their members pray in secret, some to the true God and others to the false god they have been taught to revere. When the rebel colonies in America drew up their constitution, which was called by the wise and good Gladstone, "The greatest document ever written by the hand of man at a given time," they did not even mention the name of God. The writers of that document were afraid of having too much religion in the State. Church and State must be kept separate. At first it looked as if the new nation would fall apart by internal strife. The capital was changed four or five times and some of the states talked of pulling out. But the old ship of state has sailed on, often over stormy seas as in the awful Civil war, and through two of the most terrible wars the world has ever seen. And in spite of our great national debt, and all the lawlessness and wickedness that abounds in high places and low, we have a land to which all the world turns in desire for moral and spiritual leadership, and with outstretched hands to have them filled from our marvelous resources. Yes, they

may call him UNCLE SHAM yet the mighty Churchill told the Labor government that their boasted success was due to the generosity of U. S. A.

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It is to this land come thousands of displaced persons for bread and for liberty. The other day there landed in Boston, a great ship load of these who were welcomed by government officials, bands and a great throng of citizens with warm hearts to receive these stricken folk. As the ship came to dock the decks were thronged with laughing, shouting and weeping immigrants, whose hearts beat high at the prospects of freedom. We heard some interviewed, over the air. They spoke in broken English and at times broke into sobs of appreciation and joy at the warm welcome given. Yes, they were coming to civil liberty, but we prayed that in America they may find that glorious spiritual emancipation which is above all earthly value.

Some deplore the lack of attendance at church. This is a great evil, tis true, but ought we not to praise God from the preaching on the air! On Sunday the air is full of gospel messages, and millions more now are hearing the Gospel than ever before. Listen to Dr. Maier of the Lutheran hour. He is preaching to some 24 foreign countries besides Canada and the homeland. He is a mighty preacher of a radical salvation. Never have I heard any holiness preacher either on the air, or in the pulpit, speak out so boldly as does Dr. Maier, against all forms of licentiousness. Divorce and adultery he lashes with the word of God. When I haven't heard too much at the morning service, I come home to have my heart stirred by Dr. Maier. He preaches to multiplied millions every Sunday and so does Brother Fuller. Besides these there are hundreds of "broadcasts" that reach immense audiences. I call this a present-day asset.

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The other Sunday I heard a Roman Catholic (he preached a long time before I thought him to be a Catholic) bring a message on the law of sacrifice that would have sounded good in even a holiness pulpit. Among other things he said, "We ought not to think of and emphasize what we have to give up for Jesus. We empty our hands of the useless and He fills them with the good. He more than compensates us for the sacrifice we have to make." Don't that sound good?

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The sad thing is that holiness movements have often in prosperity forgotten, the ideal and experience which gave them birth. The very prosperity in numbers and money, education, and prestige are often the prophecy of spiritual decline. This prosperity often leads to the development of a sort of a hierarchy in which those of aggressive and ambitious spirit grasp the leadership, allowed to do so by the shouting, humble folk who are told they must acquiesce and not criticise, but accept the entire programme as of God. Sad to say, often the emphasis is placed upon numerical and financial increase. The leaders must boost these if possible to hold their jobs, so the Sunday School is boosted and not the prayer meeting. The social life of the church is enlarged to attract the outside. David numbered Israel and incurred the wrath of God. We today bow to the god of statistics. We neglect the prayer meeting which is the powerhouse of the church. Think of a holiness church having a big turkey banquet at \$1.50 a plate, with

some little religious talk to take off the harm, held in a place of worldly recreation, attended by at least 75 people, and the very next night having the weakly prayer meeting attended by fifteen of the faithful. And they put on contests to boost the Sunday School. I have seen how this works. I saw once two big holiness churches get into this fight for Sunday School supremacy. One of the pastors went to wild extremes in his propaganda for members. He sent post-cards to those in my church and other churches. He brought truck loads of people, picked up in Boston; some were given a dinner for attending. One Sunday they had sixteen hundred people milling around that church which would be crowded by five hundred. You can imagine the spirit of the occasion. But this pastor won, and the victory was celebrated by a great banquet; of course they had a succatash of religion to flavor the affair. Think of sixteen hundred people at the Sunday School hour! Was that not a success? NO! A lot of good people bowed their heads in shame. What has been the reaction! That same Sunday School today does well to have two hundred present. But that victory gave prestige to the pastor who soon went West.

Now Districts are going into the battle for supremacy. In the prayer meeting? Oh, no!—in the Sunday School. We must have more members and more money. Yes, we can boost Sunday School and even missions till we kill all the life of the church, and have only activity left. But leaders must make a show and will give prizes for numerical increase. Gideon's army grew stronger after he had sent home more than thirty thousand men. I can imagine, after Gideon started raising his army, (one asking him one day, "Well Gideon, how is the army coming?" and Gideon replying, "Oh great!" Never in the history of armies has there been anything comparable to this. Why think! We have had ten thousand volunteers the last week." Next week it was the same. They came flocking in. Gideon could say, "This is really wonderful. We can lick those Midianites out of their boots. What an army! No one ever saw the like of the way my (Church), no, my army has grown." But God said, "Gideon your army is too big. Cut it down." What a disappointment to Gideon! "But Lord I have to make a report at the conference and this thing has gone over big." But the Lord said, "Conference reports don't amount to much to me. The bigger your (Church), no your army, has grown the weaker it has become. Send these joiners home and just keep three hundred men. Let them take their lamps and pitchers. This is my battle." We know the rest. John Wesley repeatedly made his societies bigger by making them smaller; at times cutting them in half. He had a backdoor revival before they had a frontdoor revival. He refused to build of wood, hay, and stubble. But Oh, so soon the Church demands of their leaders a show in numbers and finance which give us prestige amongst the other churches.

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In her letter from Africa, Sister Kierstead reports a visit from some Swedish holiness missionaries, which she enjoyed. She says, "It was a pleasure to know these Swedish people. The ladies certainly looked like holiness women." It is nice to hear such a report from DARKEST AFRICA. We don't have too much such scenery here. Yes, we have the

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