

The President's Corner

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DO YOU HAVE A HOBBY? Almost everyone has, nowadays—copper tooling, collecting antiques, or bird-watching, to mention only a few. No one can deny the value of a hobby to keep you alert and interested and to give you food for conversation as well as occupation for leisure moments. Most hobbies require some equipment as well as training or expert advice.

We human beings all share a common hobby, however, which requires no training nor equipment and in which we are all self-styled experts. I refer to the age-old hobby of "people-watching." In these days of mass communication we receive more encouragement to develop this hobby, for the press and television keep us constantly informed of what people in the public eye are wearing, what they are thinking, how their homes are furnished, even what they eat for breakfast. Though there is much ado about this today I do not feel that it is a new trend. People have always enjoyed minding other people's business and forming opinions on "how the other half lives." There is no more common occupation known to humanity than that of criticism.

You say you have never taken up this hobby? It appears in many forms. One of the favourites is criticizing the "teenagers," that ill-begotten race who are heading straight for destruction with their loud music, their strange fads of dress, dance and hair-do and their wild driving. It is not so many years since the present group of "fifty-and-over" citizens were being scored for practically the same things, is it? A translation from the writings of a Greek philosopher, written somewhere about 386 B.C. appeared recently in one of our magazines. The burden of his complaint was that the younger generation of his time were shiftless and empty-headed and incapable of accepting responsibility. He could foresee nothing but disaster for his country if its affairs were doomed to be managed by them. I dare say that the adults of 2063 A.D. will take just such a dim view of the offspring of that day.

Another favourite form of this hobby is every bit as old. We have our own or our group's set of rules as to what constitutes acceptable behaviour. The person who violates this unwritten law may expect to become the butt of a storm of criticism. Often we condemn a person on the strength of actions which apparently do not meet our standards, only to find when we know the whole story that there is a perfectly good explanation. The old Indian saying, "Never criticize a man until you have walked a mile in his moccasins" is very good advice.

Most of us get through life with a very moderate amount of criticism, provided that we do a fair job of our daily round of duty. It is when one ventures out into the field of public service that the full force of the winds of criticism are felt. The officers of any local organization, the School Board member, the councillor or reeve, the coach of a team, the school teacher and the minister are all surrounded by a crowd of people who can point out in detail just what errors they are making and tell just how they should be conducting their affairs. Strangely enough, these pointers are very seldom directed to the person in question, are they? How much more true this is as we approach higher levels of service! We are not kind to our leaders; indeed we have often seen in the course of history that the person who is devoted to a cause and who offers leadership, may be called upon to surrender his life as the price.

Now, I do not mean to convey that criticism in itself is wrong. Without criticism there would be no progress. A teacher knows that only kindly, constructive criticism can point the way to desired goals and bring about the desired improvement. He also knows, however, that it achieves its best results when spoken in private and directly to the person involved. What a difference between this and the acid words spoken behind an unsuspecting back! Many a person who could make a worthwhile contribution to an organization has been frightened away by a critical attitude on the part of its members.

The most valuable type of criticism, of course, is self-criticism. I am speaking now of how this can apply to our own organization. Let us honestly examine the contribution we as individuals are making. Have you brought in any new ideas or suggestions lately to add to the interest or effectiveness of your program? Have you invited someone to become a member, or do you rather enjoy your own little crowd? If you feel that your officers are doing a good piece of work, have you told them so? To turn the appraising eye on our branches: Is our branch fulfilling the aims for which we were organized? Are we supporting our own organization first? Happily, I know