

CRITICISM.

(A contribution written by one of our "Y" Girls.)

What is criticism? Primarily it is a judgment in literary and artistic matters, but the word has a secondary meaning; namely, that of censure. "The critical faculty is one of man's most valuable assets," says Miss Cartwright, "but it becomes dangerous if used destructively. Mistakes there are and must be so long as imperfect man lives in an imperfect world."

The question which arises naturally in our minds is: Have we, as professing followers of Christ, any right to criticise in a carping spirit those around us? Have we any just reason for detracting from another's character. Have we anything in the teachings of Christ to justify us in censuring our fellow-man?

In answer to these questions let us turn first to the words of Jesus Christ. In the Sermon on the Mount, the Master says: "Judge not, that ye be not judged, For with what judgment you judge ye shall be judged." The great law of cause and effect provides that what a man sows that shall he also reap; therefore if we judge our neighbour harshly, so surely shall we ourselves be judged.

In the Epistle to the Romans, St. Paul says: "Thou art inexcusable O man whosoever thou art that judgest, for wherein thou judgest another thou condemnest thyself; For thou that judgest doest the same things." It is a remarkable thing that in the majority of cases the man, who criticises a fellow for a certain fault, has in a larger or smaller degree that fault in his own character. In illustration of this, here is a story recently told from a neighbouring pulpit. A missionary and his two small sons were walking from their home to attend a church service some distance away. The day was very warm and the heat shimmered upon the pavement. The missionary said to his sons, "Look at that man ahead of us. His coat is smothered in flies; I wonder what he has beneath it?" One of his children exclaimed, "Oh! father, your own coat is exactly the same but you can't see it." How often we ignorantly censure a fellow-man and how often if we only looked in our own heart we would find that we must remove the beam from our own eyes before attempting to remove the mote out of our brother's eye. By condemning our neighbour we do our-

selves more harm in the long run than we do our neighbour.

Paul says, "Wherein thou judges another thou condemnest thyself." The habit of criticising grows upon us until we can see no good point in our neighbours, and this harsh judgment will be returned upon ourselves in full measure.

"The highest culture is to speak no ill;
The best reformer is the man whose eyes
Are quick to see all beauty and all worth;
And by his own discreet, well-ordered life
Alone reprove the erring.

When thy gaze
Turns it upon thy own soul, be most severe.
But when it falls upon a fellowman
Let kindness control it; and refrain
From that belittling censure that springs forth
From common lips like weeds from marshy soil."

How easy it is to take away our neighbour's character! A toss of the head, a contemptuous curl of the lip, or a malignant word, and the story flies from mouth to mouth magnified a thousand times, and the object of our unkind criticism finds himself or herself "a dog with a bad name." After all, if one's good name goes what else is there? Riches, position, fame. What are they compared to a spotless reputation? Shakespeare makes one of his characters say,

"Good name in man or woman
Is the immediate jewel of their souls;
Who steals my purse steals trash; 'tis something, nothing;
'Twas mine, 'tis his, and has been slave to thousands;
But he who filches from me my good name
Robs me of that, which not enriches him,
And makes me poor indeed."

Well may we say, "Set a watch, O Lord, before the door of my lips that I offend not with my tongue." And well may we follow the advice of old Polonius to

"Give every man thine ear but few thy voice;
Take each man's censure but reserve thy judgment."

In the parable of the Good Samaritan, Christ tells how the priest and the Levite neglected a sorely-wounded man, and left him for a Samaritan to succour. But we do not read that they stood by with their arms folded and criticised the way the Samaritan did his rescue work. Let us bear this in mind in church life, business life, and social life. If we are either too lazy or too heedless to help our weaker brethren at least let us have the grace to pass right on and not criticise those who are willing to do what is our duty. But let us not be lazy or heedless. How much nobler to emulate the example of the Samaritan and bind up our brother's wounds and take him to an inn and see that he has the best of care. Let us be up and doing, correcting our own faults, caring tenderly for our weaker brethren, and then we will have neither time nor inclination to be always criticising real or imaginary faults in our neighbours' characters.

"The heights by great men reached
and kept,
Were not attained by sudden flight,
But they, while their companions slept,
Were toiling upward in the night."

If these great men had stood still to criticise their brethren for sleeping, would they have attained to and kept those heights they were toiling to reach?

"There are hermit souls that live withdrawn
In the peace of their self-content;
There are souls, like stars, that dwell apart,
In a fellowless firmament;
There are pioneer souls that blaze their paths
Where highways never ran;
But let me live by the side of the road
And be a friend to man.

Let me live in a house by the side of the road
Where the race of men go by—
They are good, they are bad, they are weak, they are strong,
Wise, foolish—so am I.
Then why should I sit in the scorner's seat,
Or hurl the cynic's ban?
Let me live in my house by the side of the road,
And be a friend to man."