

## BIG TREES IN SOCIAL MEETINGS

"WELL, my daughter, what kind of a meeting did you have?"

It was lame Mrs. May who spoke. She had been a cripple for years, and all the good she obtained from the meetings, as a general thing, came from the lips of her daughter Esther.

Esther was a loving, dutiful daughter, and it was her delight to recount to her mother the good, encouraging remarks which the minister had made at the opening of the meeting; to turn the leaves of her Bible, and read the precious words he had read, and tell what lesson he had drawn there-from. And then to tell how three to five were on their feet at once, to speak of the blessedness of walking with Jesus. But to-day as she walked homeward, she felt no desire to tell mother about the meeting. It was a short walk, and her mind was still in a state of unrest and query, as she walked into mother's room. Throwing hat and hymn book upon the lounge, she dropped down beside them, and in reply to her mother's question there came at first only a deep-drawn sigh. But mother's question must be answered, so she said:—

"Oh, mother, I'm puzzled. I guess the big trees are crowding the little ones out."

"Big trees crowding the little ones out! What do you mean, my child? You talk in riddles."

"Yes, and it seems like riddles to me. But will there be any benefit in solving them? The truth is, mother, I can't understand some things. Since Elder Light left, nearly everything is so different in the social meetings from what it used to be."

"Different? How? Perhaps my daughter was partial to our minister."

"No, mother, I am sure it is not that. There is Elder Day; when he leads the meetings we have just such meetings as we did when Elder Light was with us. Those men come into meeting with their faces fairly aglow. It verily seems as though they come from communion with God and angels, and bring some of heaven's light and atmosphere with them.

"They never talk more than five minutes at the opening of the meeting. They read just a few verses of some scripture that is full of encouragement, or that conveys some striking, impressive lesson. It seems as though they *expect* to have a love feast and we *do* have one.

"Those men seem to feel that everyone present is *waiting for an opportunity* to tell of some glowing experience, and they themselves seem anxious to hear."

But now Esther paused; she seemed unwilling to speak further.

"Well, daughter, I know this is so, but in this there is no explanation of your riddle."

"No, no; but, mother, I don't want to speak evil, and if I tell you what troubles me, it may be speaking evil."

"I think not, my daughter. Your object is not to find fault. Your very unwillingness to tell what troubles you, because you would not speak evil, proves that your motive is not to find fault. If you will tell me, I may be able to help you. We can pray over it together at least, and you know the promise 'where two agree.'"

"Yes, mother, I know God hears prayer. I sometimes wonder, though, that he did not heal you when we followed so carefully all the instructions given. And truly his Spirit did come very near us at that time."

"Yes, Esther, it was a precious hour, a bright spot to look back upon and I can say, Our Father's will be done. He knows best. Some lesson for us perhaps. It is all well. But now about your 'big trees'?"

"Well, mother, I did not tell you that I left the meeting two weeks ago. I did. There was a division of the meeting that day, and when you asked me about the meeting, I told you about the one downstairs, the inquiry meeting. The truth was, I could not stay in the social meeting.

"Elder Night led the meeting upstairs that day. His face was like funeral. He seemed to think everyone had died a spiritual death, and that he had to talk them to life. He talked, and talked, and talked, and prayed a long, long, prayer. O mother, it hurts me to say these things, but truly it did seem as though he had no light or life himself, and that he thought everyone else was in the same condition.

"I was just longing to tell how precious Jesus was to my soul, how he had helped me during the week to gain victories; and truly it seemed to me a full half-hour that we sat there listening to an exhortation, which I verily believe no one needed. I surely thought, by the happy faces there, that nearly everyone was longing to speak. I could not endure it, and I finally left the room, and went down to listen to the testimonies of those who were seeking Jesus.

"Today Elder Wiltus led. I really couldn't help wondering if it would not have been better to say we will have another sermon, instead of social meeting. What he said was good. It was not deadening; but he talked so long that when he was through I couldn't help feeling that there was not even one little scrap of a minute for me.

"As I was coming home, I just began to wonder if there could be some way to trim the big trees in social meeting, so there would be room for more little ones to grow larger.

"Now, Elder Light and Elder Day come into meeting just as I go to my flowers in the window there. I draw up the curtain and let in the sunlight, and dig around them gently,—just little,—and water them carefully, and they seem to love to grow.

"We can't help but grow under the watch-care of Elder Light and Elder Day. They *expect* us to grow, and so they give us room to grow; and we grow beautifully when we are treated in that way. And it really seems to me that a fragrance ascends from the lives of such blossoming Christians like that from my plants. Don't you remember, mother, in one place the Lord says, 'I will not smell in your solemn assemblies'? And in another he says—the sweet incense that was offered before him was 'the prayers of saints.' Then we also read that when those who loved the Lord spoke to each other, he hearkened to hear it."

Esther paused, but Mrs. May seemed too much absorbed in thought to speak, and so Esther went on:—

"Now, Elder 'Night seems to think we are either spiritually asleep, or dead, and that he must pound us to bring us to life. And he pounds us till we are numb. Elder Wiltus is so luxuriant, and grows so much himself, there isn't room for little trees."

Mrs. May sighed as Esther paused, and 'then she said :—

"Well, daughter, I am sure I need not caution you not to speak of this to anyone else."

"No, mother, it gives me pain to think of it. I only spoke to you because I knew I must say something about the meeting."

"Get your Bible now, my dear, and we will read the thirteenth chapter of First Corinthians. And then we will pray that God will help Bro. Night and Bro. Wiltus to see their mistake."

Esther's gentle voice read, and as a slight rustle of garments told me that they were kneeling for prayer, I took advantage of that moment to leave the adjoining room, that they might not know another had heard their conversation.

As I sat here by the river, listening to the gentle music of its waters, I began to wonder if God did not send me into that room, just as Esther entered the other, that I might hear, and write out her thoughts for the Bro. Nights and Bro. Wiltuses who live in other churches than Elberfield.

Much has been said and written about long, dry exhortations killing a prayer-meeting. Now, it is just as true that they will kill a social meeting as a prayer-meeting. If those who come together for social meeting must be inspirited after they get together, before they are ready to speak of what Jesus has done for their souls, then it would be better far to change the appointment, and say we will have a sermon at the hour we should have social meeting.

It is like pouring ice water over thriving plants on a warm summer day, to preface with a long exhortation a social meeting where hearts are burning to tell of a daily connection between their souls and Heaven. The plant may survive the chill, but its tender leaflets will droop and wither. So the heart longing to tell of victories through Christ, in the assembly of his people, will droop and grow faint under a long exhortation.

And yet men who *ought* to know better, will open a social-meeting with a prayer ten minutes in duration, and an exhortation of twenty to thirty minutes, which only deadens, deadens, deadens. Oh, why cannot they learn better? It seems to me if each one who has to lead a meeting would just ask some brother or sister to time him once or twice, it would be an excellent thing. Would you like to know if you are Bro. Night or Bro. Wiltus? Get someone to time you. It may be this course of procedure would "trim up the big trees," and "give the little ones a chance to grow."

Thank God! there are men who do not need this trimming - men who come into meeting, as Esther said, with shining faces, bringing the atmosphere of heaven with them. Such men realize that there are other hearts aglow with the love of Jesus, and they are glad to hear, as well as to be heard. They know how to break up what they desire to say into several pieces, and bring in a few words here and a few there. This, too, makes the meeting more social, for in this way often what the leader says will come as a response to someone, and thus it comes home to that one with double power.

"O wad some power the giftie gie us,  
To see oursils as ithers see us."

**MARY.**

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