

strangers who have become fellow-worshippers. Especially do we hold this to be the case with young men and women, particularly the former. They come to the city from their distant homes with hearts that ache at the separation from those to whom their whole wealth of love has been given. While hurried in the labors of the week they do not so much mind the smart of separation, but on the Sabbath they have plenty of time to think of home and old friends, and it seems desolate to them to meet Sabbath after Sabbath with a great congregation, to no one of whom are they bound by the slightest tie of sympathy. They come a while, expecting that somebody will say a kind word to them, that they may even here find a hand-pressure of welcome; they wait and linger on the threshold as if to invite a kind word, but it does not come. They intermit attendance, perhaps fall into the hands of some of Satan's colporteurs, who hold out both hands toward them, and in the company of errorists or open transgressors they commence their descent swift to ruin. Had they been greeted in their early attendance upon the sanctuary with a warm welcome from some Christian man who should have introduced them into the sympathetic circle of the good of their own age, they might have been saved. Don't sacrifice the welfare of immortal souls to a poor punctilio about propriety."

PRAYER-MEETINGS.

The piety and usefulness of the Church are most intimately connected with its prayer-meetings. Whether as cause or effect, it is found that the degree of the one is always in proportion to the interest manifested in the other. It will therefore be seen at once that this is a

subject which claims the most careful attention of the pastor. It is one which he must not only study, but carry out into practice from the first to the last day of his ministry. Everything demands of him that it should be made most prominent in both thought and practice.

(a) CONDUCTING PRAYER-MEETINGS.

The interests of the Church are so vitally connected with its prayer-meetings that the question of how they can be conducted so as to be made the most profitable is one which the pastor should carefully examine. Very much of the life and attractiveness and advantage of such meetings depends upon the mode in which they are conducted. They may be made so slow and cold and dull as to be positively repulsive, or they may be made so full of joyous animation as to prove the happy hours of the week. Great stress should be laid on this point, and it should receive earnest attention. It is deemed of so much importance that we shall go into considerable detail concerning it.

Our suggestions have been gathered from all quarters; they are the result of experience; they have all been well tried, and they are perfectly practicable, so that they can be carried out under almost any circumstances of pastor or congregation. It is certain that they will greatly help in giving interest and profit to meetings which are too often but little attractive, and are consequently shunned by all excepting those who are led to them by the imperative demands of duty. All our recommendations need not be carried out at each meeting; some of them are general, and should characterize every gathering for social worship, while some of them can be used at one time and some at another. Each one

of them should receive so much attention as would lead to its importance being seen.

1. *The prayer-meeting should be regarded as an index of the piety of the Church.* It has not inaptly been called the thermometer by which the degree of that piety may be seen. In a measure that can scarcely be mistaken, the attendance and interest in these meetings show whose hearts are alive to the things of Christ, and what is the extent of spirituality that pervades the body. Most members will attend upon the principal service of the Sabbath from other considerations, but those who frequent the social meetings for prayer are ordinarily prompted by love for the cause, by spiritual earnestness and by a desire for the presence of Christ. They go often at some worldly sacrifice, because they are led by the impulses of a living piety. Then the prayer-meeting not only indicates the degree of spirituality in a church, but it also tends most effectually to increase it. Its influence is to sustain the church's spiritual life and to warm it up into a richer glow. There is hardly anything else which can have a more salutary influence upon that piety. It preserves it by breaking in upon the rush of the world that would sweep it away; it increases it through the prayers by which it brings down the Holy Spirit as a sweet but ever-brightening flame. In this way the prayer-meeting, when the hearts of Christians are in it and the life and unction of the Holy Ghost pervade it, sends out its blessed influences over all the other activities and interests of the Church. Through it the Lord's-day services are made more profitable, the Sabbath-school is blessed, the effort to attract to the sanctuary is prospered, the family is happier and the fruits of the Spirit are everywhere seen. Let the prayer-meeting, therefore, in the first place, be properly

appreciated as the index of the Church's life and as a centre from which flow out blessings in every direction, and then a deeper interest will be taken in it by both pastor and people.

2. *Let the prayer-meeting be made interesting, and it will be well attended.* The professed people of God ought to attend it, because of the sacred obligations which rest upon them and out of love for the cause, but sad experience proves that multitudes of them will not, and in the work of the gospel we must take men just as they are. It is a fact which cannot be concealed that when prayer-meetings are not made interesting they are ordinarily but poorly attended, but when they are made interesting they will almost inevitably fill up of their own accord. And the interest which is needed in the prayer-meeting does not depend on mere novelty; it is not the result of flippant methods of arousing attention; but it does depend on the warmth, life, promptness, good feeling and manifest earnestness which are made to pervade all the exercises. Let these be attended to and the meeting will be filled; and when the prayer-meeting is filled the public sanctuary will not be empty. A stranger attracted habitually to the prayer-meeting is certain soon to become a member of the congregation. The promise of the divine presence is made to the coming together of even two or three, so that there need be no discouragement if only a very few are present; but, at the same time, when many are present all are cheered, there are more to partake of the blessings of the hour, the attendance of large numbers attracts still others, and the influence of a well-attended prayer-meeting is felt through the whole Church and community.

3. *A spirit of friendliness should be cultivated.* The

prayer-meeting is eminently the social gathering of the people of God for prayer and praise and mutual spiritual edification, and therefore true friendliness ought to reign in it. There is no other place where there is so good an opportunity of showing the love of the brethren. Here the social element of our nature should be utilized and cultivated. If opportunities are sought for the exercise of these kindly feelings, they may readily be found. When entering the room and finding seats, or after the services are closed, there is time for friendly greeting and such little attentions as will show that there is a spirit of kindness. It will do no harm to linger a few moments for the cordial handshaking and for the word or two that may either establish or foster the acquaintanceship which ought to subsist between those who are of the same great family of Christ and of the same branch of that family. Then there should also be care taken to notice strangers and to introduce them, so that when they come again they may feel that they are among friends. Every one—the pastor setting the example and leading the way—should take pains and devise methods for cultivating this sociability in the prayer-meeting. It will spread an atmosphere of good feeling which will make such meetings delightful to those who habitually attend, and attract others to come to their enjoyment, as well as constitute them the very places where the Holy Spirit may most certainly be expected.

4. *The prayer-meeting should be carefully guarded against all scolding, grumbling and fault-finding.* There are some persons who are constantly indulging in these. They complain of the small attendance, of the coldness, of the want of success; they censure those who are absent for staying away; they expatiate upon the supe-

riority of other churches; they have not one kind or encouraging word to speak about their own. Such persons take the course best fitted to bring about the state of things of which they complain. Many a meeting is killed by them—either blotted out altogether or made so repulsive that but few attend it, and none to edification. Scolding in prayer-meetings, by minister or others, never does good. It forces nobody into attendance; on the contrary, it drives and keeps many away. It is mortifying to those who really love the church to hear it before strangers who may happen to be present. It is discouraging to all those who are conscientious in their attendance, grates upon the nicer sensibilities, ruffles the feelings, drives away the sweet spirit of kindness and forms a very unsuitable atmosphere for the presence of the Holy Ghost. By all means should cheerfulness reign in the place where people go to get their hearts warmed and elevated with holy emotions.

5. *The people should all be seated near to the leader of the meeting*, in order to promote sociability and animation. When they are scattered over the house, back by the door or around the walls, there is a feeling of coldness cast over the whole assembly. Then nearly all the advantages of the presence of numbers and of felt sympathy are lost; the sensation of indifference is inevitably produced; if strangers happen to be present an exceedingly unhappy impression is made upon them; the minister or other leader is chilled by seeing nothing around him but empty seats, while the people seem to want to escape as far away from him as possible, and the feelings of the leader being dampened, they will soon communicate themselves to the whole meeting. The people ought to be told of this in the plainest

terms, and it ought to be repeated to them again and again and again until they shall be led to think of it. This may appear to them a small matter, but where the very life of the meeting is at stake it is not a trifle. Most persons seem to be strangely thoughtless about it; they are almost unkind in giving no heed to the entreaties of the minister when he even begs them to do him that little favor. But the effort should not be abandoned until the evil is overcome. It is well sometimes even to go down and take a seat among the people, to call attention more pointedly to the trouble. There is much in this little thing, as the testimony of all ministers will verify.

6. *Brevity is essential to the life and interest of the prayer-meeting.* If, either as a whole or in its parts, it is too much protracted, many will grow weary and sink to sleep; the long-spun prayers or addresses will be filled with rambling verbosity, and there cannot be the interest that would be imparted by the sound of a variety of voices. It is absolutely ruinous to a prayer-meeting to drag it out into weariness. To the young especially such a meeting is peculiarly distasteful. Instances in abundance could be given where a meeting, at first pervaded by a fine spirit, was spoiled, and most persons present positively irritated, by prayers being spun out to a quarter or half an hour. What can the minister do to prevent this abuse? First, he can speak kindly in private to those who indulge in the habit. Very often they are sincerely devoted and humble men, and would not for the world offend, and they never dream that they are in the habit of occupying so much time. They strive only to do what is for the best. Second, he can set the example. He must not himself, by his long-protracted remarks and prayers, weary the peo-

ple and encourage others to take up much time. He should illustrate what is meant by brevity in prayer. As leader of the devotions he should do everything, and have everything done, as promptly as possible. There should not be an instant wasted in hunting up a chapter or giving out a hymn; there should be no pause for some one to commence prayer. It is better to sing often and but a few verses at a time. In each part of the services, and in the whole, there should be no dragging. Not more than an hour should ordinarily be spent in the whole service. The people should be sent away hungry, and then they will carry with them happier impressions, and long for the next occasion when they can meet again with the children of God in blessed union around his mercy-seat.

7. *It is well sometimes on one week to announce the subject for remarks and prayer on the next.* This plan is often found to be profitable, and to contribute very greatly to the interest of the services. When a subject has been announced beforehand it can serve to guide the thoughts of some in preparing words of address. Then there is often some point of doctrine or duty or comfort which individuals would like to have brought for consideration before experienced Christians, and this plan will give them an opportunity for presenting such subjects. Or the subject announced may be one on which many persons would like to hear the thoughts of others. Sometimes it will be advisable to ask some brother to be prepared to open the subject which has been announced, so that there may be no hesitation or delay at the beginning. It would not be wise, in most congregations, to have this plan as the fixed rule of the prayer-meeting, but it might be used occasionally, both for its intrinsic value and for the sake of giving variety to the exercises.

Very often the prayer-meeting is best conducted by leaving everything—subject of remark and all else—to the spontaneous feelings of the hour.

8. *Occasionally some other person than the pastor should conduct the meeting.* This plan has several advantages. It helps to bring out those who for the time are called to lead, giving them more freedom and encouraging them in the future to take part in the services; besides, it interests them as well as their friends more deeply in all the meetings. It also gives variety to the exercises when, from time to time, a new person conducts them, and almost of necessity imparts to them some change. Moreover, the pastor must necessarily be sometimes absent, and this prepares for such emergencies by having those ready who can easily take his place. Besides, it is often profitable for the pastor to sit among the people without the care of conducting the services on his mind, and give himself up to the reflections of the moment as to the subject of his remarks. Often the best addresses he makes are those which are prompted by something said or suggested at the moment.

9. *It is a good plan often to give an opportunity for voluntary remarks or prayer.* There is less stiffness or restraint when the meeting is thus conducted. Then it is often the case that some one has some thought which he would like to present for the benefit of others, and only awaits such an opportunity. Then, too, those whose hearts are warm and who are in the spirit of prayer can lead in the exercises and impart the same spirit to others. One is not always in the same frame of mind, so that sometimes even the most devoted would rather keep silent. When persons will voluntarily take part in the services, this is a most excellent plan of conducting them, but they will not always, and hence the plan is not

always practicable. It may, however, occasionally be resorted to with profit to all. When it is resorted to there must be great care to avoid long pauses while waiting for some voice to be heard. They are fatal to the interest of a meeting. They ought to be provided against by requesting beforehand some of the brethren to be ready to fill up every instant.

10. *The presentation of requests that special prayer be offered up on behalf of relatives and others should be encouraged.* In every congregation there are many devout persons, believing that "the effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much," who long to have that prayer poured forth for sons, husbands, brothers or other dear impenitent friends. And such prayers are undoubtedly often answered, as multitudes of instances on record abundantly testify. Then when such requests are presented there is a definite thing before the meeting upon which its prayers can be concentrated, and they become clothed with a reality and an earnestness that awaken every heart. There is hardly anything that will impart to a prayer-meeting so much interest as this, for there can be no deadness while all are pleading for the immortal life of some wandering soul. If the opportunity is only furnished, it will be found that such requests will be presented very frequently in almost any prayer-meeting.

11. *A meeting may sometimes be profitably taken up with a Bible exercise.* A Bible exercise, as it is called, is simply taking up some theme of Bible doctrine, duty, promise or warning, analyzing it, finding Scripture passages bearing upon each of its points, assigning each one of these passages beforehand to some person as his portion, and then in the meeting calling upon these persons to read them publicly, the leader first describ-

ing the point they are intended to prove or illustrate. This opens up the subject in a most profitable and impressive manner; it awakens a closer attention to the study of the Scriptures; it gives a comprehensive view of the teachings of the word on that particular subject, and it interests both those who read and their friends in the exercises of the prayer-meeting. Besides, it helps to prepare them for taking a public part in prayer or remark on future occasions.

12. *Ladies of the congregation might send communications that could with great profit be read in the prayer-meeting.* Their voices are not heard in the public meeting, but they might make their thoughts known even more plainly by writing. In this way they could impart that which would tend greatly to the edification of all. They might send facts, thoughts, brief essays, questions, reflections on passages of Scripture—many things that would interest, instruct, comfort, and elevate the piety of the Church. It will be seen at a glance how appropriate this would be and how much it would add to the interest of the prayer-meeting. Such communications could be sent to the pastor, either with or without the writers' names, through the sexton; or they might be dropped into a box provided for the purpose; or, best of all, they might be sent through the post before the evening of the meeting, so that the pastor might be ready to read them with more facility.

13. *Spirited singing is an important aid to the prayer-meeting.* In all great religious movements sacred song has had a very prominent influence. Among other agencies, it had much to do with producing and sustaining the recent blessed awakening both in Europe and this country. There must be protracted thought before we can arrive at a proper estimate of the influence it has

always had upon the devotions of God's people and in the extension of gospel blessings. Animated singing must necessarily give interest to the prayer-meeting. Other parts of the services may weary, but this is liked by all, both young and old. All can take part in it, and so it becomes eminently the service of all. Much of the life of the prayer-meeting depends upon the way in which it is conducted. It is a service which ought to be prompt, brief, joined in by every voice, frequently repeated and appropriate to the subject before the meeting. It is profitable to use the old hymns and tunes which are associated with all that is dear and sacred in the past, as well as those sweet gospel lays with which the piety of the present is stirring the hearts of believers. Both of these styles of sacred song should find a place in the social meeting. There are persons to whom each is peculiarly dear. It would give an interest ever fresh to have some new piece introduced from time to time. The whole matter of the singing should be in the hands of some competent and devoted person, who would make it a specialty and be always ready to throw in its important influence toward the attractiveness and profit of the services.

14. *Variety should be observed in the mode of conducting the services.* In this meeting, which depends so much on life and interest, it is not well to continue always in precisely the same order of exercises, or even to adhere always to exercises which are exactly the same. It is safe often to vary the mode and diversify the services. There is charm enough in variety to make an effort for it here very desirable. There are several modes of conducting a prayer-meeting, and advantages in each; but these several advantages cannot be reached if it is always managed in the same way, while varying

the mode may in the end secure them all. Sometimes one plan can be adopted and sometimes another. There may be an attractive change produced by varying the subjects, the persons leading, the order of exercises, and even the kinds of exercises. It might be advantageous even to observe a rotation of modes of conducting the services. It would not be wise to publish such a plan, and so make it obligatory. But to guide the pastor in arranging for the meetings, to keep any of the methods from being omitted and to preserve an attractive variety, it would certainly be profitable. A plan for the successive meetings might be something like this: (a) Meeting conducted in the common method; (b) Bible exercise; (c) Prayers and remarks voluntary; (d) Services conducted by a new leader; (e) Papers from correspondents; (f) Subjects previously announced. It is believed that the adoption of some such scheme of exercises, to be continued in as regular succession as circumstances might admit, would add very much to both the pleasure and profit of the prayer-meeting. One departure from the ordinary method should here be specially recommended. It is that of occasional silent prayer. When there is an unusual degree of solemn feeling in a meeting such prayer will have a most happy effect. Sometimes it will do more than the most glowing eloquence. It should not, however, be too often resorted to—hardly ever unless when deep feeling prevails. Then it will deepen and improve that feeling.

15. *A sense of the Divine Presence should be cherished in every meeting.* This is our final and most important counsel. The presence and the blessed influence of the Holy Ghost should be so highly esteemed that there

would be a most determined effort to secure them at every assembly of the people of God for prayer. Without this all other devices to make the meeting interesting and profitable will be in vain ; with it, a holy influence will come down—a sweetness, a solemnity, a power which will impart a peculiar delight and make the spot the dearest on earth. That the presence of Christ by his Spirit, when it is prayed for and looked for, may certainly be expected, is made abundantly sure by his own promise: “For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them.” Why should not this promise be fulfilled to the letter in every prayer-meeting? If it were believed, prayed for and expected, and the meeting entered upon in that spirit, it undoubtedly would ; and it certainly should be aimed at with all intensity of desire and purpose in every assembly of the people of God for his worship of prayer, praise and holy meditation. The presence of the blessed Master! Oh, what an elevated and sacred tone it would give to all the services of the hour! what a sweetness it would impart to every element of the services, from first to last! Then the blessing would surely be realized—the blessing of peace, the blessing of pardon, the blessing of comfort, the blessing of strength, the blessings of “love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance”—the blessing that would build up believers in their most holy faith, and the blessing that from time to time would bring the impenitent into the kingdom of our dear Lord. This would be to the prayer-meeting the crown of interest and profit and glory. The presence of Christ would make every prayer-meeting so sacred and happy that it would of a truth be a foretaste of heaven. It would in the end draw the attendance of the people of God, and others

too, as no other plan, no matter how well devised, possibly could.

(b) COTTAGE PRAYER-MEETINGS.

In addition to the weekly prayer-meeting held ordinarily in some apartment of the church, it is an excellent plan to sustain cottage prayer-meetings in private houses throughout the bounds of the congregation. The places for holding these meetings should be so selected that they would be held occasionally in every district covered by the territory of the church. All arrangements for them—such as the times and places of holding, and the persons to conduct them—should be in the hands of one of the elders. The same elder might be the leader, or he might appoint some other person to take that place, while the pastor, who should attend as often as possible, takes his seat with the audience and joins very briefly in the exercises of prayer or remark. When such meeting is appointed at the house of any family, that family should feel it a special duty to endeavor to secure the attendance of all its neighbors, whether worshipers in that particular church or not. Notice should be given from the pulpit every Sabbath of the place where this meeting is to be held.

The influence of such meetings would be very beneficial in many ways. Holding them with families which perhaps had become somewhat cold or alienated would be likely to restore them to new interest. Families or individuals that could not otherwise be persuaded to put themselves under the sound of the gospel might in this way be induced to go to the house of a neighbor and there hear of its priceless blessings. There could be no better opportunity than is thus furnished for young and diffident men to begin to take part in the exercises of