

A few remarks upon Prayer-Meetings.

BY THE REV. C. H. SPURGEON.

Our meetings for prayer have very greatly improved during the last few years. A gracious Revival has shed a benign influence upon many of the Churches, the spirit of supplication has been rekindled, and the fire of prayer remains while the flash of excitement has departed. It would be too flattering to hope that the beneficial change is universal, but our observation leads us to believe that it is very general. The hard-shelled brethren whom no enthusiasm can penetrate, and no arguments arouse, continue in their usual petrified condition, mumbling forth prayers which exercise none of the Christian graces, except the patience of those who are doomed to listen to them; but their influence and supremacy are on the wane even in their own circles.—Encompassed with solid bulwarks of ice, there are some Churches which are impenetrable to any genial warmth from without, and far removed from the possibility of a thaw from within; but these, we think, are rare exceptions, demanding our deepest humiliation before God, but not forbidding our fervent expectation of better things in the Church at large. Perhaps even these are rather apparent than real exceptions; even here an irresistible under-current of earnestness may be setting in, destined in due time to quicken the sluggish tide which now conceals it. It is our conviction that the most sorrowful cases of immovable indifference are not without signs of progress; the very dullest of our Adullams have been disturbed with echoes which have startled their hollow caverns, and Zoar itself has become weary of its boasted littleness. Where zeal for Christ, love for souls, and earnest pleading with men are still suspected to be dangerously unorthodox, there is nevertheless an alteration in tone and manner, indicating a secret revolution of which the men themselves are unconscious; so unconscious, indeed, that they would repel the blessed impeachment with contempt if it were pleaded in their hearing. If the prayer-meetings of our Baptist churches were all visited, there would be found to be a very considerable advance in the numbers attending them, the spirit of the supplication, and the manner of utterance. We may be wrong, but making all allowance for the cases at which we have hinted, we speak with much confidence, and believe that our estimate is a correct one.

The old faults, which are gradually disappearing, were mainly these:—*Excessive length*: a brother would pitch himself against the table, and pray for twenty minutes or half-an-hour, and then conclude by asking forgiveness for his *shortcomings*—a petition which was hardly sanctioned by those who had undergone the penance of endeavouring to join in his long-winded discourse. A good cure for this is for the minister judiciously to admonish the brother to study brevity; and if this avail not, to jog his elbow when the people are getting weary. This fault, which is the ruin of all fervency, ought to be extirpated by all means, even at the expense of the personal feelings of the offender.

Cant phrases were another evil. "We would not rush into thy presence as the unthinking (!!) horse into the battle field." As if horses ever did think, and as if it were not better to exhibit the spirit and energy of the horse rather than the sluggishness and stupidity of the ass. As the verse from which we imagine this fine sentence to be derived has more to do with sinning than with praying, we are glad that the phrase is on its last legs. "Go from heart to heart as oil from vessel to vessel," which is probably a quotation from the nursery romance of "Ali Baba, and the Forty Thieves," but as destitute of sense, Scripture, and poetry as ever sentence could be conceived to be. We are not aware that oil runs from one vessel to another in any very mysterious or wonderful manner; it is true it is rather slow in coming out, and is therefore an apt symbol of some people's earnestness; but surely it would be better to have the grace direct from heaven than to have it out of another vessel—a Popish idea which the metaphor seems to insinuate, if indeed it has any meaning at all. "Thy poor unworthy dust,"—an epithet generally applied to themselves by the proudest men in the congregation, and not seldom by the most monied and grovelling, in which case the last two words are not so very inappropriate. We have heard of a good man who, in pleading for his children and grandchildren, was so completely beclouded in the blinding influence of this expression, that he exclaimed, "O Lord, save thy dust, and thy dust's dust, and thy dust's dust's dust." When Abraham said, "I have taken upon me to speak unto the Lord, which am but dust and ashes," the utterance was forcible and deeply expressive; but in its misquoted, perverted, and abused form, the sooner it is consigned to its own element the better. Very many other perversions of Scripture, uncouth similes and ridiculous metaphors, will recall themselves to the reader; we have neither time nor patience to recapitulate them: there are a sort of spiritual slang, the off-spring of unholiness, unmanly imitation, or graceless hypocrisy; they are at once a dishonour to those who constantly repeat them, and an intolerable nuisance to those whose ears are jaded with them. They have had the most baneful effects upon our prayer-meetings, and we rejoice to assist in bringing them to their deserved end.

Another evil was, mistaking *preaching for prayer*. The friends who were reputed to be "gifted," indulged themselves in public prayer with a review of their own experience, a recapitulation of their creed, an occasional running commentary upon a chapter or psalm, or even a criticism upon the pastor and his sermons. It was too often quite forgotten that the brother was addressing the Divine majesty, before whose

wisdom a display of our knowledge is impertinence, and before whose glory an attempt at swelling words and pompous periods is little short of profanity; the harangue was evidently intended for man rather than God, and on some occasions did not contain a single petition from beginning to end. We hope that in our own time good men are leaving this unhallowed practice, and are beginning to see that sermons and doctrinal disquisitions are miserable substitutes for earnest wrestling prayers, when our place is the mercy-seat and our engagement is intercession.

Monotonous repetition frequently occurred, and is not yet extinct. Christian men who object to forms of prayer will nevertheless use the same words, the same sentences, the identical address at commencement, and the exact ascriptions at conclusion. We have known some brethren's prayers by heart, so that we could calculate within a few seconds when they would conclude. Now this cometh of evil. All that can be said against the prayers of the Church of England, which were many of them composed by eminent Christians, and are, some of them, as beautiful as they are scriptural, must apply with tenfold force to those dreary compositions which have little virtue left, since their extempore character is clearly disproved. O for warm hearts, burning with red-hot desires which make a channel from the lip in glowing words; then, indeed, this complaint would never be made. "What is the use of my going to the prayer-meeting, when I know all that will be said, if So-and-So is called on?" is not an uncommon excuse for staying away; and really, while flesh is weak, it is not so very unreasonable a plea: we have heard far worse apologies for greater offences. If our (so called) "praying men" drive the people away by their everlasting repetitions, one half at least of the fault lies at their door.

Most of these diseases, we trust, are finding their cure; but the man would be hardy, not to say foolhardy, who should affirm that there is now no room for further improvement. "Advance" must still be our motto, and in the matter of the prayer-meeting it will be found most suitable.

Our brethren will excuse our offering them advice, and must take it only for what it is worth; but having to superintend a large church and to conduct a prayer-meeting which scarcely ever numbers less than 1,000 to 1,200 attendants, we will simply give our own notions as to the efficient means of promoting and sustaining these holy gatherings.

1. Let the minister himself set a very high value upon this means of grace; let him frequently speak of it as being dear to his own heart; let him prove his words by throwing all his vigour into it, being absent as seldom as possible, and doing all in his power to give an interest to the meeting. If our pastors set the ill example of coming in late, of frequently staying away, or conducting the engagements in a drowsy formal way, we shall soon see our people despising the exercise and forsaking the assembling of themselves together. A warm-hearted address of ten minutes, with a few lively words interposed between the prayers, will do much, with God's blessing, to foster a love to the prayer-meeting.

2. Let the brethren labour after brevity. If each person will offer the petition most laid upon his heart by the Holy Spirit, and then make room for another, the evening will be far more profitable, and the prayers incomparably more fervent than if each brother ran round the whole circle of petition without dwelling upon any one point. Compare the subjects of prayer to so many nails; it will be better for a petitioner to drive one nail home with repeated blows, than to deal one ineffectual tap to them one after another. Let as many as possible take part in the utterance of the Church's desires; the change of voice will prevent weariness, and the variety of subjects will excite attention. Better to have six pleading earnestly, than two drowsily; far better for the whole meeting that the many wants should be represented experimentally by many intercessors, than formally by two or three. As a general rule, meetings in which no prayer exceeds ten minutes, and the most are under five, will exhibit the most fervour and life; in fact, length is a deathblow to earnestness, and brevity is an assistant to zeal. When we have had ten prayers in the hour, varied with the singing of single verses, we have far oftener been in the Spirit, than when only four persons have engaged. This is an observation confirmed by the opinion of our fellow-worshippers; it might not hold good in all cases, but it is so with us, and therefore we thus witness.

3. Persuade all the brethren to engage. If the younger and less instructed members shrink from the privilege, tell them that they are not to speak to man but to God. Assure them that it does us all good to hear their groans and ineffectual attempts at utterance. For our own part, a few breakdowns generally come very sweetly home, and awakening our sympathies, constrain us to aid the brother by our more earnest wrestlings. It gives a reality and life to the whole matter, to hear those trembling lips utter thanks for new life just received, and to hear that choking voice confessing the sin from which it has just escaped. The cries of the lambs must mingle with the bleating of the sheep, or the flock will lack much of its natural music. As Mr. Beecher well says, "humble prayers, timid prayers, half-inaudible prayers, the utterances of uncultured lips, may cut a poor figure as lecture-room literature. But are they to be scornfully disdained? If a child may not talk at all till it can speak fluent English, will it ever learn to speak well? There should be a process of education going on continually, by which all the members of the church shall be able to contribute of their experiences and gifts; and in such a course of development, the first hesitating, stumbling, ungrammatical prayer of a confused Christian may be worth more to the Church than the best prayer of the most eloquent pastor."

Every man feeling that he is to take part in the meeting at some time or other, will become at once interested, and from interest may advance to love. Some of those who have now the best gifts, had few enough when they began.

4. Encourage the attendants to send in special requests for prayer as often as they feel constrained to do so. Those little scraps of paper, in themselves most truly prayers, may be used as kindling to the fire in the whole assembly.

5. Suffer neither hymn, nor chapter, nor address to supplant prayer. We remember hearing seven verses of a hymn, ending in "he hates to put away," until we lost all relish for the service, and have hardly been reconciled to the hymn ever since. Remember that we meet for prayer, and let it be prayer; and oh! that it may be that genuine, familiar converse with God which shall drive out the formality and pomposity which mar so much our public supplications.

6. It is not at all amiss to let two or even three competent brethren succeed each other without a pause, but this must be done judiciously; and if one of the three should become prolix, let the pause come in as soon as he is done.—Sing only one verse, or at the most two, between the prayers, and let those be such as shall not distract the mind from the subject by being alien from the spirit of the meeting. Why need to sing about the temptations of Satan just after an earnest prayer for the conversion of sinners? and when a brother has just had joyous fellowship with Christ in intercession, why drag him down by singing, "Tis a point I long to know?"

Of course, we ought to have said all manner of good things about the necessity of the Holy Spirit, but upon that point we are all agreed, knowing right well that all must be in vain without His presence. Our object has rather been to gather out the stones from the way than to speak of that divine life which alone can enable us to run therein.

Agriculture, &c.

Advice to Tree Planters.

1st. For the orchard site, select if possible, some elevated and naturally well drained location. A good firm soil with substratum of gravel or limestone is desirable. Whatever the aspect, do not have it hemmed in with timber trees so as to prevent the free circulation of air at all times; avoid a closely protected southern exposure.

2nd. Prepare the ground by deep ploughing and subsoiling to the depth of sixteen inches or more, especially if the subsoil is a stiff clay. If the land is level, raise a ridge by successive ploughings of narrow lands, on which to set the trees, so that no surface water may remain near the tree.

3rd. Lay off and stake the margin of the orchard plat correctly before setting a tree, then with the plough run a deep furrow on the line of the row, or on the ridge one way, then stake the other way at exactly right angles, being careful to preserve the margin stakes until the trees are all set.

4th. Purchase only such trees as you are confident will do well in your location. Trust not to seedlings, as three-fourths of them will prove tender—ninety-nine one-hundredths will prove comparatively worthless in fruit, and not one farmer does or will properly top-graft them after coming into bearing. This work should all be done in the nursery. Select for general orcharding only a few well-tried sorts. For the amateur there is a large list of those which from their peculiar qualities may well repay the trouble of planting. Select low-branched stocky trees, two to four years from the graft; the younger the tree, the better the investment usually; look out for young and healthy roots, and plenty of them. Small fibres, called annual roots, or feelers, cannot always be preserved, but they are easily replaced if the main roots are vigorous; hence the necessity of shortening in the top when set out, that the tree sap may not be exhausted before these feeders have got to work again, but never trim up a tree the first year, except suckers which should be rubbed off as they appear.

5th. When you take your trees from the nursery or package, never expose them unnecessarily to the sun and wind; heel them in immediately, and take up only as many and as fast as wanted to plant. Never dig a hole deeper than the plough runs, unless you dig to a porous subsoil. Make the ground one vast hole with the subsoiler either before or after planting.

Beware of deep planting and cramped roots, but fill up the first year with mulch or manure sufficient to preserve a continual moisture; after that good cultivation with winter mulching will do. Put no raw manure under or near the roots, but good surface soil all round them; a little good compost is excellent if the soil is lean—also manure on the surface.

Use no stakes, but cut back until the tree will stand alone. Watering is of little use, unless in large quantities.

6th. Plant your orchard the first year with rootcrops; never sow grain in it unless the trees are heavily and broadly mulched—better to cultivate them annually and carefully, early in the season, giving them a moderate top dressing of manure if the soil is lean.

Never turn your trees out to grass if you would be a successful fruit grower.

The foregoing is the advice given by Plumb, Willey & Co., in their catalogue for 1860 and 1861.

CHEESE-MAKING IN SWITZERLAND.—The manner in which the peasants combine to carry on cheese-making by their united efforts deserves to be noted. Each parish in Switzerland hires a man, generally from the district of Gruyere, in the canton of Freyburgh, to take care of the herd

and make the cheese; one cheeseman, one pressman, or assistant, and one cow-herd are considered necessary for every forty cows. The owners of the cows get credit each of them in a book daily for the quantity of milk given by each cow. The cheeseman and his assistants milk the cows, put the milk altogether, and make cheese of it, and at the end of the season each owner receives the weight of cheese proportionable to the quantity of milk his cows have delivered. By this co-operative plan, instead of the small-sized, unmarketable cheeses only, which each could produce out of his three or four cows' milk, he has the same weight in large, marketable cheeses, superior in quality, because made by people who attend to no other business. The cheeseman and his assistants are paid so much per head of the cows in money or in cheese: or sometimes they hire the cows, and pay the owners in money or cheese. A similar system exists in the French Jura.—Notes of a Traveller.

COB MEAL FOR COWS.—R. F. Bingham, of Ellsworth, Ohio, writes to the Ohio Farmer of an experiment made in feeding a meal of corn, oats, and rye, in comparison with corn and cob meal, to dairy cows. He fed of the first, six cents' worth per day to a cow for a week—she gave 138 lbs. of milk, making 6½ lbs. butter.—He then fed six cents' worth of cob meal per day, for a week—she gave 157½ lbs. of milk, making 7lbs. 7oz. of butter. He then tried the cob meal scalded, for a week—the cow gave 156½ lbs. of milk, yielding 6lbs. 6oz. of butter. The weather was very cold; mercury below zero several times during the trial, excepting the last week, when it became more mild and thawed some. Since then, he has tried other kinds of feed, but finds none equal to corn and cob meal for dairy cows.

Correspondence.

For the Christian Messenger.

Biblical Interpretation.

"Thou shalt not kill." This command is absolute. It extends to all kinds of killing; and unless clearly limited and restricted by the Great Law-giver himself, no one could lawfully take life under any circumstances. The life of even the meanest insect, the worm, the fly and the gnat, would be as effectually protected, as that of man. But the Lawgiver has made exceptions clear and unequivocal. Even human life may be—certainly *might* be once—taken without infringement of the command. But it by no means follows that all the commandments, and all commands are to be therefore moulded and modified to suit human views. He, for instance, who asserts that the seventh and the eighth Commandments are not absolute, is bound to cite the examples, and shew the cases, and these must be clear and explicit, as in the case just mentioned, wherein it is lawful and right to "commit adultery" and "to steal." If no such cases can be found, as certainly they cannot, he who sets aside these commands by merely reasoning from analogy, is guilty of wresting the Scriptures to his own destruction. The same holds true of all the commandments of the New Testament. Absolute statements, such as "Take no thought for the morrow," "labour not for the meat which perisheth" &c., cannot be limited and modified by guess work, or by human reasoning or caprice. We must have clear and explicit Scripture testimony, to assure us that such directions and commands are to be modified and restricted. When this can be done, we proceed safely and surely, making Scripture the interpreter of scripture.—Where it cannot be done, it seems but the part of honesty and integrity to yield implicitly to the word of God.

CONSTRUCTION.

For the Christian Messenger.

Prince Edward Island.

Our fertile isle is gaining ground; the population is increasing; education is encouraged.—The Prince of Wales College is in active operation, and every branch of a thorough Collegiate education can be acquired there. At the end of every two years there are four competitors chosen from each county for examination at the College, six of whom, those deemed the most competent, are privileged to remain for the term of two years, twenty pounds being granted by Government for Board &c. We can find many youthful aspirants in this emerald Island, whose brows bear the stamp of genius, who will gain laurels for themselves, and lasting honours for the land of their nativity. This being our present condition, may we not expect great things for the time to come? The progress of our Island is built upon a sure foundation, whence all that is great and useful emanates; and decidedly favourable to the spread of undefiled religion. The day is not far distant, even now we feel its reflected rays falling upon us, when the mists of ignorance shall be dispersed and succeeded by