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Poetry.

For the Christian Messenger.
Farewell.

It is Earth's watchword, how its sad tones tell
Of anguish buried deep within the heart,
It tells us that the strongest ties must break,
It tells us that the dearest Friends must part.

Farewell; forget not that my fervent prayers
Through all thy life will fondly follow thee,
They come to thee upon the passing wind,
And in the solemn murmur of the sea.

I know that angels stoop to hear their sound
The Saviour takes them to the Eternal Throne,
I will not fear for thee, for thou art safe,
Wrapped in the love of the Almighty One.

Our dim eyes cannot pierce the veil of Time,
Nor gaze into the dread Eternity,
'Tis hidden deep within the mind of God,
We cannot understand Life's mystery.

It may be thine to suffer pain and loss,
It may be thine to face the world's dark frown,
For God has bid thee bear the martyr's cross,
That thou may'st nobly wear the martyr's crown.

Farewell; yet 'tis but for a little while,
Life's hill is steep, yet calmly we go on,
For we shall shortly join the ransomed band,
We soon shall meet to sing the angels' song.

This hope can sweetly dry the burning tear,
And chase away the deepest human pain,
'Tis this gives comfort in the parting hour,
The thought that we, ere long, shall meet again.

ALICE SHURLAND EMMS.
Sussex, N. B., Sept., 1880.

Religious.

The Prayer-Meeting.

BY REV. A. H. MUNRO.

The Circular Letter of the Ottawa Association, June, 1880.

The Prayer-meeting has always been an important feature in the Christian church. One of the things by which that Divine institution has been known among men from the earliest times, has been that of its members meeting together to offer prayer in the name of Christ. Indeed this and the singing of hymns and observance of the Lord's Supper were for a long period the only element of its worship. Could the history of the prayer-meeting be written, it would be one of the most valuable portions of religious literature. It would show, among other things, that the prayer-meeting ever has been a trustworthy indication of the spiritual condition of the church; the evidence of its life, the sign of its decay, or the proof of its death. When the prayer-meeting has been cherished in a way that declared how greatly it was loved and valued, the Word has been preached in the power and demonstration of the Spirit. When worship has been an effort to please an æsthetic taste by means of ritualistic forms and ceremonies, intoned prayers have been substituted for the united supplications of believers; and when idolatrous rites have been the travesty of Christian worship, the invocations of saints have been the epitaph of the prayer-meeting. It is a pleasing and hopeful sign of the present state of religion among evangelical churches that the prayer-meeting is more highly prized and more wisely used than it was in days not very distant. Who does not remember a former style of prayer-meeting! Nominally there was a fixed hour for its being held, but it was generally understood that the real time of meeting was fifteen or twenty minutes after that, and somewhat depended upon who were there, and what private, interesting matters they had to talk about. Probably the pastor himself was late. There was no need to be punctual, it was only a prayer-meeting. There was a general tacit understanding that the right time to begin the meeting was when people stopped coming in. That moment, having apparently arrived, the meeting was opened with a long hymn, read through, from beginning to end, very slowly, and then sung, still more slowly, to a sepulchral

tune whose notes seemed to send the chill of the graveyard to one's very bones. Then a long chapter was read, and the pastor, or some one else, made, what he was pleased to call, a few remarks, but which too often were like the bones in the prophet's vision, very many and very dry. Then followed the prayers. Who does not remember them! Alas, how could one forget them when during successive years he had heard them repeated every week! Who cannot recall the prayer of the brother who was always asking for the windows of heaven to be opened; and that of him whose favorite metaphor of the oil, flowing from vessel to vessel, seemed like a faint reminiscence of the story of the forty thieves in the Arabian Nights' Entertainments, and so the meeting that should have been an attraction, a joy and a blessing, dragged and flagged and wearied and repelled till at last it came to an end, not because the hour for closing had arrived, but because the stereotyped few, in the stereotyped manner, had said what they had to say in what they thought the proper way of saying it, and no one else had ventured or was expected to take part in the meeting. It is one of the proofs of the vitality of Christian churches that they have been able to exist with such accompaniments. Existed they have, but with little honor to God or power and blessing to men. For these results a very different kind of prayer-meeting must be maintained. Let us imagine or rather recall it. As the hour approaches the people begin to flock to the place of meeting, and soon it is apparent that this is not merely a church prayer-meeting, but a prayer-meeting of the church, and the church is coming to it. The old and young, the standard bearers and burden bearers of many years, the recent converts, and growing strength and hope of the church are there, and soon their voices will speak forth the sanctified wisdom and experience, prosperity or affliction of some, and the devoted energy and enthusiasm of others.

Kindly glances are exchanged and friendly words whispered, till the pastor at the exact moment appointed, rises and gives out a few verses of a hymn of inspiring sentiment which is sung with zest to a tune of cheerful strains: for these people have not come here to groan and drone, but to sing and pray, and to do both as if they loved and enjoyed the doing of them. A short prayer is offered, just a few sentences of earnest, heartfelt, heart-reaching supplication and thanksgiving, all about one thing, that prayer meeting, God's presence in it and God's blessing on it. Nothing has been said in that prayer about the Jews, or Foreign Missions, Sunday Schools, or institutions of learning, back-sliders or hardened sinners, but a petition has been sent up to God, so definite, earnest, simple and touching, that, as it was uttered, all who heard it thought of one thing, and joined in the brief, earnest prayer for it. And verily as they prayed their prayer was heard. God is in that prayer-meeting, and has already blessed it, and His people know it and are glad. Then follows another short hymn, one verse or two, then a few verses of scripture are read, appropriate to the special subject for the meeting, for a subject has been chosen and announced, and all keep it in memory in their prayers and addresses, every one of which is pointed, brief, hearty and spiritual. As each one has prayed one has felt it easy and sweet to pray with him. So rapidly has the time flown by, so unconscious have all been of its flight, that it is with surprise and regret the pastor is seen rising to pronounce the benediction, for they are as prompt in closing, as in opening the model prayer-meeting.

What has that prayer-meeting done? It has made spiritual things nearer and more real in their grandeur, solemnity and blessedness. It has cheered and refreshed the pastor, it has drawn him nearer to his people and made him more truly one with them. It has given hints, side-lights and suggestions of

which he will make good use of in his ministry. It has blessed all present in various ways and measures. The most frivolous have been impressed; the saddest have received some comfort; and while the aged have felt as if they had spent an hour in one of the ante-chambers of heaven and that it would be no shock or surprise for the door to open and let them in, to go out no more, the younger members have received a nobler idea of what personal religion may be and should be; and all have been lifted up to a fuller self-consecration. They will all live better, sin less, pray and work and endure and hope more, because of what that meeting has been to them.

Now a few hints as to what we may do to make this the normal character of all our prayer-meetings. First, let there be a time for the prayer-meeting fixed, and unalterable. Let its hour be as sacred as its consecration, by the members of the church, as the Sabbath day itself. Let it be a matter of course that nothing but absolute necessity shall excuse absence from the church prayer-meeting.

Second. Every prayer-meeting should have a topic previously selected and published. Otherwise there can be no claim to the fulfilment of the Saviour's promise to do for His people whatever two or three should agree upon to ask Him. The selection of a topic and its announcement will give definiteness and unity to the prayers and addresses, and tend to impart to them more interest and earnestness, and perhaps we might add, sincerity.

Third. It is quite consistent with this suggestion to give great freedom and variety to the prayer-meeting. The list of appropriate topics is almost endless. And while adhering to its topical nature the meeting may be greatly modified in character. On different occasions it may have its prayers and remarks made with special reference to some thing of local interest, and at another, to what concerns all God's people. A Bible reading in which the pastor reads all the passages selected and comments upon them, prayers and hymns being interspersed, a Bible reading in which the passages are read by the members and commented upon by the pastor, or in which a few members read passages and make remarks upon them, may be a leading feature of the meeting, or it may be devoted to special prayer and speaking in relation to particular classes of persons, or departments of church work. The preaching of the Word. The Sunday School young members. Backsliders. Non-progressive who are hearers. Home Missions and Foreign Missions may all furnish topics. The latter two ought to be the special subjects of a monthly prayer-meeting. There are several ways of making a Church Missionary prayer-meeting interesting and profitable. A mission field as China, India, Africa, or the life and work of a missionary, such as Carey, Moffat, Johnson, Duff, may be chosen. Extracts may be read from one or more first-class missionary publications. Any of these with short prayers and lively hymns, will make the missionary prayer-meeting attractive. Other prayer meetings may have for their speciality favourite passages of God's Word; Promises, etc.; or favourite hymns; or the meeting may be a Praise meeting, or a Consecration meeting, etc.

Fourth. Two general principles should be deemed inviolable. The prayer-meeting should be kept sacred to its main purpose,—communion with God and His people. It is not the time or the place for lectures or discussions by the pastor, or any one else,—but is intended to lift up the hearts of weak, tempted, erring, but God-fearing, Christ-living men and women—to that place where the rays of the Saviour's light and the warmth of His love will fall upon and bless them, giving them the strength of faith and comfort of hope. The tone of the prayer-meeting should not be controversial disputations, nor even didactic, but simple, humble, spiritual, tender, thankful, and supplicatory.

All its exercises should be brief. In

no case should any address exceed five minutes except the opening one which should be limited to ten minutes. No prayer should be more than two minutes in length. It would be better if it were but one minute in length. A minute is a long time. In London five hundred trains pass a single station every day. It is found possible to stop a train, discharge its passengers, fill it with others, and let it proceed on its way in forty seconds. How much can you ask God for in two minutes. The Fulton street prayer-meeting owed the length of its life very much to the shortness of its prayers. At the best prayer-meeting I ever attended twenty-four persons took part, and it lasted just an hour—an hour that seemed incredibly short, but wonderfully blessed.

The Tenderness of Christ.

Here is another! He is the most bruised and broken of all; one who had imagined himself strong in faith, giving glory to God—but who had ignominiously bent before the blast of temptation and had denied his Divine Master with oaths and curses. Can there be aught of tenderness manifested towards the renegade apostle? Surely he has placed himself, by his heinous guilt and craven cowardice, beyond the pale of forgiveness. No; when we might have thought the heart he had ungenerously wounded was alienated from him forever, there was first a "look" of infinite love—a melting glance, which sent him forth to weep bitter tears over foul ingratitude; and subsequently a message entrusted to the angel guardian of the sepulcher and conveyed by him to the three women. "Go your way, tell his disciples and Peter," Mark 16: 7. "Go, tell the most faithless of my followers that even for him there is still a place in my tender regard. Go, tell this wandering bird, with drooping wings and soiled plumage, that even for him there is a place of shelter still open in the clefts of the Rock." Nay, more; when Jesus met him subsequently on the shores of Gennesaret, instead of dragging afresh to light painful memories of abused kindness and broken vows, all now too deeply felt to need being recalled, no severer utterance for unworthy apostasy was pronounced than the gentle rebuke conveyed in the thrice repeated challenge "Lovest thou me?"

Indeed, when pronouncing some of his most impressive woes and threatenings, Christ appears, at times, as if he dreaded lest any broken-hearted one might misinterpret his sayings, and construe his wrath against sin and hypocrisy as indicating a want of consideration to the penitent. Take as an example the occasion when he had been proclaiming stern words regarding the contemporary "sinful generation": more especially rebuking them for their blind unbelief in the midst of light and privilege; declaring that for those cities which had scorned his message (Chorazin, Bethsaida, and Capernaum,) it would be more tolerable in the day of judgment for Sodom and Gomorrah than for them. He seems suddenly to pause. The storm has exhausted itself. Possibly, amid the crowd who had just listened to these vocables of wrath, his omniscient eye discerned some trembling outcast—some brittle reed or sapling bending beneath the hurricane. He will not suffer it to be broken. He will not permit the wind and earthquake and fire to pass, without being followed by a "still small voice"—and then it is that the words (unparalleled in their tenderness and beauty among all he ever spake) come like a gleam after the tempest, or like a rainbow encircling with its lovely hues the angry skies. "Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest."—Clefts of the Rock.

I cannot see why women are so desirous of imitating men! I could understand the wish to be a boa-constrictor, a lion, or an elephant; but a man! that surpasses my comprehension.—Gautier.

John Ploughman's Pictures.

A BLACK HEN LAYS A WHITE EGG.

The egg is white enough though the hen is black as a coal. This is a very simple thing, but it has pleased the simple mind of John Ploughman, and made him cheer up when things have gone hard with him. Out of evil comes good, through the great goodness of God. From threatening clouds we get refreshing showers; in dark mines men find bright jewels; and so from our worst troubles come our best blessings. The bitter cold sweetens the ground, and the rough winds fasten the roots of the old oaks. God sends us letters of love in envelopes with black borders. Many a time have I plucked sweet fruit from bramble bushes, and taken lovely roses from among prickly thorns. Trouble is to believing men and women like the sweetbriar in our hedges, and where it grows there is a delicious smell all around if the dew do but fall upon it from above.

Cheer up mates, all will come right in the end. The darkest night will turn to a fair morning in due time. Only let us trust in God, and keep our heads above the waves of fear. When our hearts are right with God everything is right. Let us look for the silver which lines every cloud, and when we do not see it let us believe that it is there. We are all at school, and our great Teacher writes many a bright lesson on the black-board of affliction. Scant fare teaches us to live on heavenly bread, sickness bids us send off for the good Physician, loss of friends makes Jesus more precious, and even the sinking of our spirits brings us to live more entirely upon God. All things are working together for the good of those who love God, and even death itself will bring them their highest gain. Thus the black hen lays a white egg. Since all that I meet shall work for my good, The bitter is sweet, the medicine is food; Though painful at present 'twill cease before long, And then, oh how pleasant the conqueror's song!

FOOLS SET STOOLS FOR WISE MEN TO STUMBLE OVER.

This is what they call "a lark." Fools set stools for wise men to stumble over. To ask questions is as easy as kissing your hand; to answer them is hard as fattening a greyhound. Any fool can throw a stone into a deep well and the cleverest man in the parish may never be able to get it up again. Folly grows in all countries, and fools are all the world over, as he said who shot the goose. Silly people are pleased with their own nonsense, and think it rare fun to quiz their betters. To catch a wise man tripping is as good as bowling a fellow out at a cricket match.

Folly is wise in her own eyes, Therefore she tries Wit to surprise.

There are difficulties in everything except in eating pan-cakes, and nobody ought to be expected to untie all the knots in a net, or to make that straight which God has made crooked. He is the greatest fool of all who pretends to explain everything, and says he will not believe what he cannot understand. There are bones in the meat, but am I to go hungry till I can eat them? John Ploughman is not of that mind. He is under no call to doubt, for he is not a doctor: when people try to puzzle him, he tells them that those who made the lock had better make the key, and those who put the cow in the pound had better get her out. Then they get cross, and John only says—You need not be crusty, for you are none too much baked.

After all, what do we know if all our knowing was put together? It would all go in a thimble, and the girl's finger, too. A very small book would hold most men's learning, and every line would have a mistake in it. Why, then, should we spend our lives in perplexity, tumbling about like pigs in a sack, and wondering how we shall ever get out again? John knows enough to know that he does not know enough to explain all that he knows, and so he leaves the stools to the schools and the other—ools.