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PRAYER MEETINGS.

Among other questions asked at our Presbyterian examinations, there is this one:—"What is the state of religion in your congregation?"—a question that is confessedly difficult to answer, and yet that ought, if possible, to be answered. Doubtless many things are to be taken into account in endeavouring to give the reply. We are to look at the attendance on the Sabbath day services, at the state of the Sabbath School, at the liberality of the people, &c., but we believe there is no more important element in the case than the state of weekly prayer meeting. If it is good—if the numbers attending it are large, if the interest manifested in it is lively and constant, if the people love the place and prize the hour of prayer as a "sweet hour,"—then there is reason to believe that the congregation is in a healthy and prosperous state.

The prayer meeting is the exponent of the piety of a congregation; as private prayer is the index of the piety of a Christian. Now, what are our prayer meetings like? Are they such as to warrant us in believing that we have life—spiritual life, among us? Or are they such as to lead us to conclude that while we have a name to live, we are dead? Let us look at one of them. On a given evening a company assembles, say 60 in number, in a room that will hold comfortably three times as many. One sits here; another yonder. The 60 are scattered all over the room; and the leader of the meeting is away up at

one end by himself. A psalm is given out it is sung, the people dragging terribly. A prayer follows—and it is long and diffuse—a chapter succeeds, consisting, let us say, of 30 verses; another psalm is sung; another prayer is offered up—and then comes an exhortation, sound, sober, good in its way, but dull and somewhat stale. And so, with these exercises alternating, the meeting goes on until the hour is up. The people go away feeling, "well! that's done." Nobody is edified—nobody is cheered or exhilarated—nobody feels the better of the service. But it is duty attended to.

Now, this is no fancy picture. It can be seen in a score of places within the bounds of our church. It is no marvel that such prayer meetings are not well attended. The wonder is that any body at all goes.

What is a prayer meeting? It is a social religious gathering the place where Christian men and women (for women have the large majority in our modern prayer meetings) meet to commune with God and to excite each other, and instruct and strengthen each other, by the free and familiar development of their religious emotions. Of course there should be a leader, but he should not do all, nor anything like all the speaking. Nor should the elders monopolize the time. The prayer meeting is the people's meeting. Every one should contribute something according to his ability. As a general rule, our prayer meetings are too conventional. They are too "proper." It is supposed that a man must not speak unless he can speak well, and he must not pray unless he can do so