

Practical Plans.

How to Kill Monotony.

Rev. J. F. Cowan, D.D., in the *Christian Endeavor World* gives the following valuable suggestions, which are worth repeating: Monotony is the result of getting into ruts. In some things ruts are good. Indiscriminate condemnation of them is shortsighted.

Some ruts are in place in a prayer meeting. It is helpful to observe some forms; such as having the leader face the led, as having a certain time to begin and to close, as having every one seated, and as always having prayer in a prayer meeting.

Some things never become monotonous, no matter how often repeated. Breathing does not become monotonous. Your heart-beats are not monotonous. Vital things do not become stereotyped and stale. It is getting into ruts in non-essential things that becomes tiresome. The leader may always face those he leads, but he need not always do it in the same way. The attendance on a prayer meeting would best always be seated, but not necessarily in the same fashion. A prayer meeting should always have prayer, and singing, and Scripture-reading, and testimonies, but not always in the same order, and the same proportions, and the same style.

PUTTING THE MEETING TO SLEEP.

Monotony in a meeting puts it to sleep. The same invariable order of things, it doesn't matter whether it is sing, pray, read, or read, pray, sing, or pray, read, sing, tends to kill interest and make the meeting dull. Mrs. Sangster says, "Nothing is so trying as a home where nothing ever happens. Routine is a hard mistress." We can make things happen in our meetings.

SEVEN WAYS TO GET VARIETY.

1. In the arrangement of the room. If your room is seated with movable chairs, and you have been accustomed to having them always in straight, military rows, ask the janitor for once to arrange them in semi-circles. If it is a rainy night and but few are present, arrange them in a circle in the centre of the room. You will be pleased to notice how every one will open wide his eyes when he sees the change, and this initial shock will insure you an interested hearing at the opening of the meeting. An air of expectancy will pervade the audience.

If the table has always stood to one side of the rostrum, move it to the other; or, if there is a great deal of unsympathetic, frigid, empty space between the leader's stand and the front row of seats, move the table down nearer the audience.

These suggestions ought in turn to suggest other little things that a leader may do to freshen up a room. Some of our meetings need to be turned, just as you turn a dress of which you have become tired, and refresh it and make it almost as good as new by a new pattern, and a little fresh braid and buttons.

Some one has suggested that if a leader can think of nothing else to do that would introduce some variety into a meeting that is dying of monotony, he might at least wear a different coat from the one he is accustomed to wear, or part his hair in a different place. Spring surprises on your meeting—a letter from some far-away member, a message from your county or state president. Novelty for the sake of novelty should never be courted; cheap, clap-trap sensations should never be sprung, but novelty that kindles new interest is sanctified innocuity. Of that we cannot have too much.

HOW TO WAKE 'EM UP.

2. We may introduce variety in the use of the Scripture references. I find by inquiry that the most common method is for the leader to read the entire reference himself. Usually there are no Bibles in the hands of the members. It would be considered a great breach of thoughtfulness if all present were not provided with hymn-books; but if I had to choose between conducting a meeting without hymn books enough to go around, or without enough Bibles to go around, I believe that I should choose to do without the hymn-books. We can dispense with men's books in our meetings better than we can with God's Book.

And the Bibles should be in the hands of the members for use. I can see no reason why the leader should read all the references any more than that he should sing all the hymns alone, and no leader would think of being so lavish with his solos.

There are at least half a dozen ways in which variety may be introduced into the reading of the Scripture references. The leader may have the members read responsively with him. He may have them read in concert with him. He may ask them to recite from memory familiar Scriptures, like the twenty-third Psalm, the Beatitudes, the first Psalm, the thirteenth of First Corinthians. He may have the gentlemen and ladies read alternate verses. He may have those on the front row of seats read the first verse, and each successive row a verse, and so on.

3. The leader may use variety in the use of music and plans to secure the cooperation of members; but each of these topics deserves to be discussed in a separate article.

4. The leader may vary variety by new combinations of elements. Even if one does not feel resourceful enough to introduce much variety in the way of original and bright plans, there is room for almost endless variety in the way you combine the three or four elements that are supposed to enter into every prayer meeting: prayer, Scripture-reading, testimony, remarks of the leader, announcements, etc. Just remember that all our beautiful music, in its endless variety, is the result of new combinations possible with the eight notes of the musical scale, and take courage. You can do wonders with your prayer-meeting scale if you

REARRANGE THE NOTES.

(a) Open in a different way. For instance, if other leaders have got into the rut of always opening the meeting

with a song service, don't you open it that way. "It furnishes some people with an excuse for coming late, because they fancy that the meeting is not really opened until the song service is over. So they form themselves into a side-walk committee, sometimes, and come sauntering in at the close of the praise service. Do you surprise and shame them. Open with prayer, or with Scripture reading.

If it is the unvarying custom to follow the opening with the request, "Now let us have sentence prayers," don't you do it that way. Bring the sentence prayers in some other place. And so with the other parts of the meeting. Just as a clever housewife can make the parlor look like a new room by moving the piano into a new corner, and putting the divan where the piano was, and rehang the pictures, and rearranging the chairs, so that when her husband comes home at night he will think that he has got into the wrong house by mistake, you can make the dry, tasteless, monotonous meeting of your society seem like a new meeting, by using the inventiveness God has given you.

BEWARE OF STOCK PHRASES.

(b) Avoid set phrases. Study to be unstudied. Don't fall into the set way of saying and doing things. If every leader before you has said, "The meeting is now thrown open," don't you say it. Say, "May we not spend this part of the hour in speaking to one another of God's dealings with us," or something that would be natural for you. One of the worst things that can happen to a society is to have a little collection of stock phrases that are handed down from one leader to another until one goes to the meeting knowing in advance just what form of speech the leader will use to introduce a certain part of the service. It makes the meeting like a treadmill.

(c) Pains-taking is better than brilliancy. We must be willing to break away from this monotony, determined to do it, in this way, and in every sensible way. The leader does not need to be a great genius to do this. Patient attention to little details will accomplish it. If I were choosing a leader, and had to decide between some overtopping genius, and some pains-taking plodder who was not afraid to plod in new paths, I should take the little pains-taking plodder. It is attention to details that makes for success, more than brilliant intellects.

METHOD NOT LIFE.

Finally, no one must think, from what has been said, that variety is the only or the most important thing in a meeting. Motive is more important than method. All the new and bright methods that we can think of, without a powerful motive, will be like putting so many new cog-wheels into a piece of machinery, without furnishing the power to run them. Spiritual life is the main end and dependence of all our meetings. You may track out a dead man in all the finery of Paris, and you cannot make him take a step. But life, normal life, always makes itself attractive. It uses means—dress, speech, song, color, grace of motion.