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Not a Teaching Service.

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The prayer-meeting is not primarily nor chiefly a teaching service, though more or less it will impart instruction, and the devout in spirit will always be learning in its circle. It is emphatically for worship; to feed the heart-hunger of pious spirits; for a spiritual refreshing of the weary and heavy-laden, storm-tossed and sea-beaten by the cares, vexations, and disappointments of life. That for one short hour, at least, they may find rest to the soul. The main function of the pulpit is instruction. That must be the chief element in every really good sermon. That service is the preacher's hour. There his dominion is supreme. There is no one to object or to question. He speaks, and the people listen. Whatever they may think, they say nothing. But the prayer-meeting is the people's meeting; though the pastor may lead it, it is not his meeting. But this fact few pastors comprehend, and too often usurp the rights and assume the prerogatives of the members, usually to the injury of the service.

The prayer-meeting is not for preaching, nor for a lecture, though the leader will naturally make some remarks on a given topic, or some portion of the Scripture read. This should be brief, not consuming more than ten minutes at the most. But some leaders expend—waste—twice that length of time, and thus unjustly infringe the rights of others. The service is not a Bible class, though Bible truth may be expounded just enough to make clear a topic, or a text for the use of those who follow. The prayer-meeting is not a "singing school," though a good deal of singing—appropriate singing—may be used. Singing both inspires and expresses devotion. Strictly speaking, singing is the only part of ordinary religious service that can truly be called worship. But music should not overshadow fellowship in things spiritual and divine. A service conducted by a prearranged program, with appointed speakers or readers, may secure a full attendance and be of interest, and not without profit in the discussion of religious or semi-religious subjects; but it is not a prayer-meeting, and fails to meet the heart-hunger of devout souls, sore from the conflicts of life. A composite service of this kind is sometimes resorted to, to obviate or atone for a want of interest in the prayer-meeting.

The term, prayer-meeting, is commonly used to designate the midweek church service, though it is not expected to consist wholly, or perhaps mostly, of prayer. The old New England designation is truer to its intent: "The prayer and conference meeting." That pastor takes poor account of his own best good and the success of his work, who does not magnify the prayer-meeting; who does not make it a point of conscience, and of religious policy to prepare himself well for it; not mentally only, or chiefly, but spiritually and sympathetically. As a child, wearied with its hard task, discouraged and yearning for sympathy, finds rest and cheer in the loving embrace of a mother, so many a weary and discouraged saint, some of whom are always in the prayer circle, "like one whom his mother comforteth," heart sad for sympathy, will find that hunger fed by the Spirit through the ministry of others of similar experience, by their prayers and exhortations. It is greatly desirable that the prayer-meeting should be fully attended, as it ought to be, and will be, only when spirituality suffers a marked decline; but infinitely more important than numbers it is that the Spirit shall be there, in the hearts of God's people, vitalizing the service with a savor of spiritual godliness. The prayer circle and the secret closet are the two most conservative vital forces in keeping the pulpit true to its sacred mission, and the church alive from a dead formalism.

The greatest misfortune the average prayer-

meeting has to bear, is *too much talk* from the leader. And that misfortune the average prayer-meeting does have to bear, greater than any other, save the absence of the Spirit. In opening the meeting, giving out hymns, reading the Scriptures, incidental remarks, and then the "opening remarks," one-half the time devoted to the service is usually consumed by the leader, perhaps more. Commonplaces, that produce no effects, and start no current of devotion to move the sluggish sensibilities of others. Having nothing in particular to say, he talks, and talks, and keeps on talking, hoping something will come to him worth saying, to start the meeting. When tired himself, and the people equally so, he stops and adds: "Now, brethren, the time is yours. Improve it promptly. Don't wait. Be brief. The time is short." Whether this advice, so common, be a joke or a sarcasm, is not material, but after that no one feels like speaking or praying. And often a pause, as demoralizing, though not as lengthy as the leaders talk. One or two, to save the service from utter failure, offer prayer,—the old, oft-repeated prayer,—perhaps one or two "add a few remarks," and the meeting closes. No heart is warmed or fed, no spiritual vitality is imparted, no fresh fellowship is enjoyed. But the integrity of the service is maintained. So much is good. Much complaint is heard about the long and tedious prayers and exhortations of the brethren. But a quickened religious life in the church will cure all that. But what can correct the greater evil of too much talk from the pastor? Of course, all churches and all pastors are not alike, fortunately.

—*Watchman.*

His Mother's Picture.

The following touching story concerning Admiral Dewey has just been published: Just before the battle of Manila, when the order was given to strip for action, the smallest powder-boy on the flag ship dropped his coat overboard. He asked permission to jump after it, but was refused.

He went to the other side of the ship, dropped overboard, recovered the coat, and was promptly arrested for disobedience.

After the battle he was tried and found guilty. When the sentence was submitted to Commodore Dewey for his approval, he became interested in the case, as he could not understand why the boy should risk his life for a coat just before the battle. He had the boy brought to him. He spoke kindly to the youngster, who broke down and told the Commodore that the coat contained his mother's picture, which he had just kissed, and he could not bear to let it be lost.

Dewey's eyes filled with tears, he fairly embraced the boy and ordered him to be released, saying:

"Boys who love their mothers enough to risk their lives for her picture cannot be kept in irons on this fleet."

At Which Value.

A teamster settled in a town where he was a stranger and soon afterwards subscribed fifty dollars for the church expenses. An official, supposing he had made a mistake, said to him: "You mean fifty cents, do you not?"

"No, sir," was the reply. "I value the Gospel at more than fifty cents."

As far as money is concerned, it may not always be possible for us to value the Gospel by dollars. But our daily lives will show the world whether we set a high or low value upon the blessed message.

Seeing the Invisible.

It is often said in praise of certain modern types of Christianity that they have transferred the emphasis from the present to the future, and made it quite as important that human beings should be happy in this world as in any other world. But are we not sometimes in danger of forgetting that the best inspirations and satisfactions in this world are the product of those hopes and faiths that look forward to the spiritual life, in which we shall possess the glorious realities that underlie the visions of the Revelation?

In a little poem that was widely circulated a year or two ago, some children were represented as watching a blind weaver at his task in a squalid cellar. They pity his labor and suffering, but the inner sight of the laborer is cleansed.

His form is famine gaunt and bowed,
His aged hands have lost their skill;
But, like the moon within a cloud,
A hidden light his soul doth fill.

It shineth through his careworn face,
And o'er his sordid garb it flings
The viewless mantle of a grace
Not found in palaces of Kings.

On journeys high his spirit fares,
Of realms of sunless light is free;
The triumph of the saints he shares,
He stands beside the Crystal Sea.

He hears the mystic anthem tone;
He mingles with the tearless throng
Who meet before the Great White Throne;
His voice uplifts the Wedding Song.

In making religion utilitarian and practical, are we not robbing it of its chief power to strengthen and exalt human life, if we eliminate from it the vision of heaven, of the blessed Society, of the final triumph and rest and glory?

And beyond this, the chief sources of patience and courage are in this persuasion of the future life and blessedness. It is not necessary to be more ethical than Paul. He did not scruple to say: "If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable." It is rightly said that we ought to do right because it is right. We can all respond to the nobility of that sentiment, but how greatly the authority of righteousness is enhanced, what unique and strong motives are brought to bear upon the man who sees the will of a personal God in the law of righteousness; who is conscious that he is pleasing Him; who anticipates in another life His intimate and blessed fellowship. Always a main resource, for patience, courage, and fidelity must be the inner sight of spiritual realities. The secret strength of even Moses' character was that "he endured as seeing Him who was invisible." There is a type of "other worldliness," as George Eliot called it, which dissipates human energy, and weakens the motives to virtue; but there is a narrowness of spiritual outlook, an imprisonment of the soul in the tangible and material, that robs human life of its noblest hopes and strongest motives.—*Watchman.*

What Sympathy Will Do

Harland Page went to church early. There he discovered a stranger sitting alone. Going to him he shook hands warmly, and seated himself by his side. A conversation followed. The stranger was so affected by the gracious manner and cordiality that he was melted into penitence before the service opened. "Before now," said the visitor, "Christians always held me at arm's length."

More Bible knowing will lead to more Bible living.