

the pulpit on the occasion of their pastor's anniversary; while on another occasion, because a solo was sung, a lively "pillar of the church" got up and walked out. The wonder was that the roof didn't fall in—but it didn't.

Of course there are limits to innovations; but it is well to remember that there is no progress without innovation. Innovation is only a polysyllabic synonym for change, and change in ecclesiastical as well as secular affairs is the spice of life which gives it much of its flavour. But the question naturally arises, shall we have change in our churches? Not for its own sake, nor where it is not called for, certainly not; but for the sake of a pleasing variety desired by young and old;—why not? We demand variety in all that we do, and see, and hear, in our pleasures and occupations; and we should tire of nature were her phenomena ever the same. We do not here plead for ceaseless change and variety; but only for an elasticity and a freedom which shall secure whatever of variety may be desired, which shall welcome all accessories, whether flowers, or decorations, or variety in the service, or a festival, or whatever may make the church in all its appointments a cheery, cheerful, attractive church, fitted to emphasize and commend the joyousness of a joyous and yet solemn Christianity. Such a church will not have to puzzle over the problem where its young people have gone, for it will find them within its own doors.—*Christian at Work.*

PRAYER MEETINGS—MARRED OR MENDED.

The prayer meeting may fairly claim to be regarded as second only to the pulpit in the spiritual life and growth of a Christian church. Some would give it the first place; for, while many churches have managed to keep alive without a pastor, none have ever been able to live long without a public service of prayer. If prayer is the vital breath of the Christian, it is equally the vital breath of a church.

In many congregations the pulpit service on the Sabbath is far in advance of the devotional services during the week. The one depends upon the mental and spiritual sagacity of a single man; the other depends upon the spiritual condition of many people. It commonly requires the presence of several sensible people to make a good prayer meeting; but it is in the power of one or two weak-headed and troublesome people to mar it most wretchedly. Certain persons of this sort will come into a meeting as moths fly into a candle. They stick there like the moths; but, instead of being scorched to death, they nearly extinguish the meeting. Now, it is the imperative duty of the pastor or the conductor of the meeting to deal with such brethren most frankly. If self-conceit makes the brother so troublesome, then that self-conceit should be kindly rebuked. If he offend ignorantly, then his ignorance should be kindly corrected. The man who has not enough sense or conscience to take a hint gratefully will never be of any value to a devotional meeting. Some good people mar a meeting without intending it. For example, one fluent brother gets to monopolizing the time by the inordinate frequency or the inordinate length of his utterances. I once had an excellent church member who spoke regularly at every prayer service (and it requires a very full man to do that profitably). I frankly told him that he was crowding others out of their rights; and also suggested that he might better address the Almighty in petition sometimes, instead of always addressing his neighbours in exhortation. He accepted the hint kindly and reformed. Some good speakers would be listened to more eagerly if they relieved their talks with more frequent "flashes of silence."

A prayer meeting is sometimes marred by aimlessness, both in the addresses to the Lord and to each other. Brother A talks about faith, and brother B about the pestilence at Memphis, and brother C about—no one can exactly tell what; and the prayers go off about as fairly at random as the squibs which the boys fire on the Fourth of July. One method of correcting this aimless diffuseness and of compacting the service is to select and announce beforehand some profitable topic for discussion. This may be even selected by the leader and announced on the previous Sabbath. Then everybody has some definite object to aim at in his remarks. Then the whole service hangs together like a fleece of wool, and there is spiritual instruction afforded, as well as a kindling of devotional feeling by a study of God's truths. If a

company of Christians will carefully discuss such a practical topic as "Obeying the Conscience," or such a passage as the twenty-third Psalm, or the parable of the wheat and the tares, they cannot but be instructed and strengthened. Food for devotion will be furnished and both the praying and the speaking will be directed "at a mark." Of course, this arrangement need not hoop a meeting as with iron, or forbid any one from presenting some special request or some matter of immediate interest that lies near his heart. The moment that any system of management kills the freedom of the family gathering at the mercy seat, then the system should be abated. A cast iron rigidity may be as fatal to the meeting as aimless verbiage. If the Spirit of God is present with great power, there is no danger from either quarter. Therefore the most effectual cure for an invalid prayer meeting is to open the lips and the hearts in fervent supplication for the incoming of the Holy Spirit.

There may be cases in which a meeting is seriously disturbed by the unwelcome utterances of persons whose character is more than doubtful, and who desire to gain a cheap reputation for piety by taking part in prayer and exhortations. Such transgressors should be frankly informed that they had better remain silent until they are ready to open their lips in honest confession. Mr. Moody pitifully says that "a man who pays fifty cents on the dollar when he could pay one hundred cents on the dollar had better keep still." To confess flagrant wrongdoing in a social meeting is no easy thing; but I once heard a man do it in a way that not only thrilled the assembly, but brought a rich blessing on his own soul and reinstated him in the position which he had lost. Sincere confession to God or to our fellowmen fills a prayer room with an odour as sweet as that of the broken alabaster box in the house of Simon, the leper. But there is a species of wordy and windy parading of one's own "awful guiltiness" which only nauseates the auditors and cannot impose upon God. It is a terrible thing to tell lies in the name of the Lord. Whatever else be the faults of our prayer services, let them be delivered from pious fraud and solemn falsehood.

Brevity should be rigorously enforced in the prayer meeting, except in those rare cases where an individual is speaking so evidently under the Divine Wisdom that it would be a sin to apply the gag-law. Five minutes is commonly long enough for an address and three minutes for a prayer. The model for our petitions which our Lord has taught us does not consume half a minute; and even that wonderful intercessory prayer which He offered for His followers on the night of His betrayal, occupied just twenty-six sentences. We ministers too often transgress in monopolizing time at our people's devotional meetings. It is their meeting. We have ample opportunity for Bible exposition on the Sabbath. If the social meeting has broken down under the weight of long, heavy preachments, it is time it were mended. An energetic leader can do this by a prompt tap of a bell or a kind word of monition. When the service takes too continuously the form of exhortations, he may prudently suggest that "some brother (or sister, in Christ should offer prayer." The face of a prayer meeting should always be kept toward the throne. *Theodore L. Cuyler, D.D.*

PAUL NEVER DISENCHANTED.

But there are no complaints, no murmurs—there is nothing querulous or depressed in those words of St. Paul. If the Pastoral Epistles, and above all this one, were not genuine, they must have been written by one who not only possessed the most perfect literary skill, but who had also entered with consummate insight into the character and heart of Paul—of Paul—but not of ordinary men, even of ordinary great men. The characteristic of waning life is disenchantment, a sense of inexorable weariness, a sense of inevitable disappointment. We trace it in Elijah and John the Baptist; we trace it in Marcus Aurelius; we trace it in Francis of Assisi; we trace it in Roger Bacon; we trace it in Luther. All in vain! We have lived, humanly speaking, to little or no purpose. "We are not better than our fathers." "Art thou He that should come, or do we look for another?" I shall die, and people will say, "We are glad to get rid of this schoolmaster." "My order is more than I can manage." "Men are not worth the trouble I have taken for them." "We must take men as we find them, and cannot change their nature." To some such effect

have all these great men, and many others, spoken. They have been utterly disillusioned; they have been inclined rather to check the zeal, to curb the enthusiasm, to darken with the shadows of experience the radiant hopes of their younger followers. If in any man such a sense of disappointment—such a conviction that life is too hard for us, and that we cannot shake off the crushing weight of its destinies—could have ever been excusable, it would have been so in St. Paul. What visible success had he achieved? The founding of a few churches of which the majority were already cold to him; in which he saw his effort being slowly undermined by heretical teachers; which were being subjected to the fiery ordeal of terrible persecutions. To the faith of Christ he saw that the world was utterly hostile. It was arraying against the cross all its intellect and all its power. The Christ returned not; and what could His doves do among serpents, His sheep among wolves? The very name "Christian" had now come to be regarded as synonymous with criminal; and Jew and Pagan—like "water with fire in ruin reconciled," amid some great storm—were united in common hostility to the truths he preached. And what had he personally gained? Wealth? He is absolutely dependent on the chance gifts of others. Power? At his worst need there had not been one friend to stand by his side. Love? He had learnt by bitter experience how few there were who were not ashamed to own him in his misery. And now after all—after all that he had suffered, after all that he had done—what was his condition? He was a lonely prisoner, awaiting a malefactor's end. What was the sum total of earthly goods that the long disease, and the long labour of his life, had brought him in? An old cloak and some books. And yet in what spirit does he write to Timothy? Does he complain of his hardships? Does he regret his life? Does he damp the courage of his younger friend by telling him that almost every earthly hope is doomed to failure, and that to struggle against human wickedness is a fruitless fight? Not so. His last letter is far more of a *psalm* than a *miserere*. For himself the battle is over, the race is run, the treasure safely guarded. The day's work in the Master's vineyard is well nigh over now. When it is finished, when he has entered the Master's presence, then and there—not here or now—shall he receive the crown of righteousness and the unspeakable reward. And so his letter to Timothy is all joy and encouragement even in the midst of natural sadness. It is the young man's heart, not the old man's that has failed. It is Timotheus, not Paul, who is in danger of yielding to languor and timidity, and forgetting that the Spirit which God gave was one not of fear but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind. "Bear then, afflictions with me. Be strong in the grace of Jesus Christ. Fan up the flame in those whitening embers of zeal and courage. Be a good soldier, a true athlete, a diligent toiler. Do you think of my chains and of my hardships? They are nothing, not worth a word or a thought. Be brave. Be not ashamed. We are weak and may be defeated; but nevertheless God's foundation stone stands sure with the double legend upon it—one of comfort, one of exhortation. Be thou strong and faithful, my son Timothy, even unto death." So does he hand to the dear but timid racer the torch of truth which in his own grasp, through the long torch-race of his life, no cowardice had hidden, no carelessness had dimmed, no storm had quenched. "Glorious Apostle! would that every leader's voice could burst, as he falls, into such a trumpet sound, thrilling the young hearts that pant in the good fight, and must never despair of final victory." Yes, even so:

"Hopes have precarious life;
They are oft blighted, withered, snapped sheer off
In vigorous youth, and turned to rottenness;
But faithfulness can feed on suffering,
And knows no disappointment."

—*Farrar's St. Paul.*

THE movement against expensive funerals seems to be rapidly gaining ground in the States. The clergyman of St. Louis, of various denominations, we observe, have lately adopted resolutions on the subject, in which they express their regret that bereaved families should be subjected to unnecessary expense by the prevailing funeral customs. Mere condemnatory resolutions, however, will do little good unless some effectively practical steps be taken. In Canada there is as much need for some movement of the kind as elsewhere. No one, however, seems inclined to make a beginning.