

ordered and sanctioned, and, had the Church followed closely her marching orders, the world would have been (humanly speaking) at least five centuries further advanced on the road of progress, and the struggles of the Reformation might have been avoided.

(To be Continued.)

S. M. G.

WEST B. E. RIVER, 13th Feb, 1864.

Prayer Meetings.

A CONGREGATION without a regular prayer meeting is in as bad a state as a congregation without a regular minister. There cannot be much piety in it when it is satisfied to remain without the one or the other. And as with the congregation, so is it with the individual. When there is no family worship in his house, you may infer that he knows nothing of private prayer, and that means, that there is no real piety in his heart. And when he invariably absents himself from the congregational prayer meeting, you may almost surely infer that he raises no family altar, or that he goes through the duty in a cold profunctory manner. No prayer, no piety; no outward, no inward worship, are rules that apparent exceptions only prove. You quote to me Christ's denunciations of formalism, of the Pharisees' long prayers, and his teaching concerning the necessity of worship in spirit. True; but did not Christ attend temple and synagogue services, spend whole nights in prayer, and teach his disciples how to pray? But, granting that congregational prayer meetings are desirable, both as manifesting and as quickening the vitality of the congregation, it must at the same time be admitted that there are few Churches in which we find the prayer meeting in the state in which it ought to be, or doing the work that might reasonably be expected. Fix on the most suitable evening of the week and the most suitable hour, yet as a rule the attendance is scarcely a tithe of what it is on the Sabbath, the attendance of males is not much more than a tithe of the number of females present, there are few young men to be seen, and we are half-disposed to acknowledge that the whole proceedings are not such as to attract the absentee parties. The reason of all which, says the Episcopalian, is that extempore prayers, especially the unconnected effusions of laymen, are weary and unprofitable; that they sound blatant to manly, and irreverent to refined minds; and that they soon become stale and uninteresting to all but to the few who find a soul of goodness in all things, even in twaddle. And truly we have sometimes been doomed to listen to wordy involved iteration, scolding harangues—to aimless, meaningless, wearisome orations, which went under the name of prayers. But still the

objection as an argument against extempore prayers is clearly worthless, when we know that prayer meetings where a liturgy is used fail much more decidedly in all the respects we have alluded to, than our Presbyterian meetings or those of our Methodist friends where free prayer is encouraged. I have gone to services where "prayers are read," and have oftener found the audience consist of only half a dozen or a score of old dames and fashionable young ladies—the former brought there from a sense of duty, the latter from a sense of what is due to the Curate, and both because they had nothing else to do,—than any representative of the true piety and manhood of the congregation. Wherein, then, lies the cause of our comparative failure? I answer,

1st. In the manner in which the service is generally conducted. It is not sufficiently interesting, and it is not sufficiently spontaneous. The minister has not always a clear idea of what he should aim at, and his lay assistants often err still more grievously. The minister errs when he commences with a long regulation prayer, or when he omits the reading of the Word of God, or when he preaches a formal sermon, or—worse still—when he goes entirely unprepared. His address should differ widely from what he gives in his Sabbath services; it should be more conversational and discursive. Once a month he might make it bear on Foreign Missions, giving information respecting some special field, as far as possible a history of its past and present. On the next evening, he might take up some congregational object, the Sabbath School, the amounts raised for various purposes and how and by whom the work is done, or speak of Home Christian work in general, the ragged schools, or other such agencies for good in city or country. On the following week, his address might be from the Psalms, cultivating the devotional spirit of his people by opening up to them those true models of devotion, and stirring them up to a warm earnest Christian life by contrast, by appeal, by anecdote, speaking trustfully to them straight out from his heart. On the fourth week, he could allow himself a considerable latitude; either exchanging with some friend, or taking up some subject of passing interest, or on which he himself feels keenly, or giving an exposition of what our Lord says on prayer, or even a regular sermon. But of whatever nature the address be, it should be genial, practical, devotional, and not exceeding fifteen or twenty minutes in length. But now we come to the errors of the laymen who take part in prayer meetings, and we may sum them all up in the one charge that their prayers are too long. I speak this advisedly, after having had much experience of many kinds of prayer meetings in many Churches. Before we have any right to call our assemblage a prayer meeting, there ought to be prayers from four or