

## The 'Novelty' of Prayer Pauses

(from the life of William and Catherine Booth)

In November, 1870 Mr. Booth had called together a few of the principle evangelists and members to consult with him as to the internal organization of the Mission....

A novelty existed in the shape of a timekeeper, whose business it was to break in upon the consultation every hour, when a interval of singing and prayer would follow, ordinarily lasting for about five minutes, but frequently extending over a quarter of an hour. This had the effect of cutting short long speeches, and preserving the spirituality of the meeting from being marred either by acrimonious debates or dull business details. The fact that the sittings usually lasted from ten in the morning till ten at night, and were spread over two or three successive days, made such intervals the more refreshing.

Mr. Railton, who was the Secretary of these conferences, thus describes these prayer pauses:

*"The regulation was that the singing and prayer were altogether to occupy about ten minutes, and very often the limit was not exceeded; but I remember a few occasions of the kind when the whole Conference did appear to be for the time completely merged into heaven. It mattered not what the subject under discussion immediately before might have been, or what the division of opinion; the perfect union, the rapid rush together to the one Lord during these intervals were beyond all description. Perhaps I should come nearest to it if I asked you to imagine a lot of school-boy souls let out for their ten minutes from lessons. The wisest men seemed in a moment to forget that they were anything but God's dear children. The slowest and most embarrassed minds suddenly saw the clear, open road before them, and away went everybody, in prayer and thanksgiving, like so many horses whose feel had suddenly touched the heather. The wonder was that we were able to get back to business again at all; and we did not always succeed within the regulation time, for many an evangelist or delegate who had sat silently for hours would burst out in prayer, and, but for the solemn determination of the president to get the business finished, I doubt if less than half an hour would often have contented the Conference when once on its knees.*

*O why were not those faces photographed some time before and after prayers, especially in the later hours of a long day's sittings, when faces had grown pale and dull beneath the continued strain of steadfast close attention? How those ten minutes of prayer transformed them! Everybody would get up looking as though they had just found something. And so they had. They had discovered once more the glorious fact of their nearness to God and their power to overcome the devil and the world; and that made everything sunshine. Men from different parts of the country, who had scarcely any opportunity to speak to one another before, would rise up feeling as if they had lived round the same fireside all their lives; and the speaker who was addressing the house before prayer, or the new one who rose immediately after it, would feel as if he had gained almost a new audience. With joy every one of those men and women drew water out of the wells of salvation; and it was easy to understand how they could and would go on pouring out streams of living water all the year round and wherever they went."*

Perhaps one of the special advantages of this custom was the opportunity it afforded to the more spiritually minded of those present to bring their influence to bear upon the assembly. There was never a gathering of the kind in which there were not some present who were especially remarkable for the Divine unction and power in prayer. While some knotty question was being debated, or business transacted, they had little to say, and there were others who by their superior smartness eclipsed them; but when the "alarm bell of the soul" had sounded its first note, then, in a moment, their spiritual supremacy asserted itself.

p.305-307 'The Life of Catherine Booth' by F. de L. Booth-Tucker Vol.II

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