

and feeling as you have reason to believe will be of profit to the minds and hearts of your hearers. The question then is, How are you to know what they need? I answer, only by seeking their intimacy, and especially by entering with them into those experiences, whether of joy, solicitude or sorrow, in which their hearts are open, and they will be glad for you to have their confidence. I am grieved to know that in many quarters the pastoral relation has become less close than it used to be. Its direct benefit is contingent on personal endowments, which many excellent ministers lack. But did one do absolutely no good in going from house to house, it is worth much more than the time it costs in the direction and help thence derived for the pulpit. It saves the preacher from "drawing his bow at a venture"—from "fighting as one that beateth the air." If you are going to heal souls stricken with sorrow or with sin, you must see and know your patients. If you are to give counsel worth heeding, you must take some cognizance of those who need your counsel,—must learn how and why they need it. If you are to be an instructor in religion and in ethics, you ought to ascertain at what points there is special lack of knowledge or of wisdom, what erroneous conceptions prevail, what influences adverse to your own are at work.

As regards matters not necessarily within the range of your preaching, yet not unlikely to become so (and what may not become so?), you ought to have actual knowledge of the demand for your pulpit intervention. Thus, if yours is a quiet country parish, whose members discharge their functions as citizens without giving or taking bribes or countenancing illegitimate practices, it is worse than superfluous for you to preach against corruption that prevails elsewhere; while there are parishes where there can be no more imperative Christian duty than the denunciation of the gross immorality which is making popular suffrage a pretence and a farce, and threatening to bring about a condition of things from which we might welcome an escape into a benevolent despotism. Where people have for the most part an undisturbed religious belief; and there is no active skeptical propagandism by speech or in print, it is harmful to wage war in the pulpit against unbelief; for you may raise more doubts than you can quell. But if the doubts exist, it is your province to meet and refute them. If your people are not concerned about problems of cosmogony, as must be the case in many of our bucolic communities, it is absurd for you to preach evolutionism, or anti-evolutionism either, if you could honestly do so. But if they are readers of the popular science of the day, you must, of course, show them that the fabric of their faith rests not on a literal exegesis of Genesis, or on any cosmogony other than that of its opening words, "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth." By knowing your people you can avoid preaching on any subject or class of subjects before it is necessary or desirable so to