

VISITING AS PART OF A CLERGYMAN'S WORK.

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I AM not here to utter either encomiums or criticism, or to say what is or what is not the duty of my reverend brethren, in regard to the question which forms the subject of this paper. If my views are erroneous on this question, I crave the benefit of the criticism and advice of those who have had larger experience than has as yet fallen to my lot.

In order to make visiting a success it must be reduced to a system. I will not try to prove the necessity of systematic visiting—that you all agree with me in this particular, I take for granted. We must have regular plans on which to work, if we intend to labor with effect. These plans each one makes to suit his own circumstances. It must be admitted of course, that we cannot always follow one plan of work, but when there is a time and place for everything in our daily life, it is astonishing how much more we can accomplish than where a system is lacking. Parochial visiting may be divided into three heads: I. Visiting the sick. II. Regular pastoral visiting. III. Sociable or "neighbourly" visits.

I. Visiting the sick stands first as being the most important, and at the same time the part of parochial work which requires the greatest depth of spiritual life. I feel sure there can be but one opinion in regard to visiting the sick, and that is, we cannot very well be too assiduous in our attentions to them. The importance of this work cannot be calculated. It is at the sick bed that golden opportunities arise with ever increasing rapidity and force. At such times the clergyman's visit is welcomed and desired even by the careless and indifferent. Those who perchance would manifest coldness and indifference at other times are now, as a rule, open to impressions for good. An influence may be exerted upon them, on such an occasion, that could be exercised at no other time. It is in the presence of sickness, if the pastor's heart is overflowing with love for the souls of sinners, that he has an opportunity of speaking from heart to heart, from life to life, in loving kindness, till the hard flinty heart has been softened, the sluggish sinner awakened, the indifferent and careless aroused, and the soul led to *know itself*. When it comes to a knowledge of itself it will be wearied and grieved with the burden of its sins, it will be alive to the danger in which it has been living, it will be awake to the temptations which lie around, increasing more and more until it cries out for very disquietness of heart. As the Psalmist says it will go down into the depths. This is the pastor's opportunity to encourage it to cry out of the depths to the God of mercy, with whom is *plenteous redemption*, to bring it to the *knowledge of God* and of His love for sinners, and to lead the poor distressed soul to take fresh courage, and by the help of God's Holy Spirit to open up the heart to repentance and conversion, to faith

and love. A word on preparation for visiting the sick. We have an excellent form in the Prayer Book—"The Visitation of the Sick." I don't, however, always use that, but take it as the best model to guide us in preparing for this important work. A sick chamber ought not to be entered by a clergyman, without prayerful and careful preparation beforehand. Some suitable passages of Scripture may be selected to recite without the book. A prayer may be arranged, adding while in the sick person's presence anything which may arise from the exigencies of the case.

Always bring cheerfulness to a sick-bed—the cheerfulness befitting a messenger who has joyful tidings to deliver. Do not plunge abruptly into very solemn strains. Study the temperament of the invalid, his habits of thought and the state of his spiritual life. Sound the spiritual disease before you apply the healing balm, just as a competent medical man would study the physical condition of his patient before he administers his medicines. When his moral state has been ascertained, lead him gradually to dwell on sacred things and the awful reality of life and death.

Short addresses of instruction in the religious life should be given. For the addresses, we have excellent models in Bishop How's "Pastor in Parochia." Long visits should be avoided. The responsibility of visiting the sick is a terrible one. We can but approach a sick-bed with fear and trembling. An immortal human soul is there waiting to be fed with food, which our office and ministry supposes us to be able to give. How ill the best of us are fitted for this responsible duty.

II. We come now to regular pastoral visiting. This branch of parochial work stands next in importance to visiting the sick.

My rule is to visit everybody under my charge regularly twice a year. In those visits a great deal may be done, but it must be done with tact. Apply the rule of common sense, however, and we need not fear the result. If we bear in mind that we are doing Christ's work, and endeavor to do it as He would have it done, we cannot go far wrong in this part of our duty. As a rule, it is not a difficult matter to lead the conversation into the desired channel. I generally read a portion of scripture, catechize the children, make a few remarks suitable to the occasion, and pray in accordance therewith. I have seldom found apathy very prominent at such times. The first visit may not be so successful as desired, but in nine cases out of ten the second or third will break the icy barrier of indifference. At all events watch for opportunities. If we do we seldom watch in vain. An opportunity may arise when we least expect it for speaking some comforting word, some cheering portion of scripture, which shall help lighten the burden of some heavy laden heart. Some weary soul, through God's help, may be led to Christ, by a kind and loving word spoken in season. Who can tell how much may be done by such visits? God works in a silent, mysterious way, and we know not when He may be making the greatest use of us, His unworthy servants. If our

hearts are filled with love to God, what is there we shall not be willing to do, in order to lead to Christ His lambs that are straying amid the pomps and vanities of this wicked world, seeking to quench their thirst at dry fountains. Out of the fulness of a loving heart we should bear our faithful testimony to them, and lead them to the haven of rest to find that peace in Jesus which he alone can give. We ought, remembering the declaration we made before we were ordained, the solemn responsibilities we took upon ourselves, and the exhortation given us at that time, to make it the grand object of our pastoral visiting to promote spiritual life and devotedness amongst our parishioners. I am one of those who believe in beautiful services for the worship of God. Make the ritual as beautiful, solemn and impressive as we can. Let it be seen that it is not a dead, formal thing, not a dumb show. A beautiful and attractive service is the principal thing, but it is not enough. The services will benefit those only who attend them. They may be the grandest, the most solemn, the most devout and hearty, and the preacher may set forth the words of truth and soberness with inexpressible power and pathos of voice, but if the careless and indifferent are not present, how are they to be edified? What is to be done then? Why, if they do not come to us, we must go to them. "Go out into the highways and hedges and compel them to come in." Our Church services do not cover all the ground. We must go out into the field where the work is to be done. The work to be done is saving men's souls, the conversion of sinners, —the careless and indifferent—whom no system of services can reach. We may meet with many disappointments. The work may be discouraging—almost hopeless, perhaps,—but whom do we serve? Christ died for *all*, and for *all* we must work. We may meet with coldness, lack of sympathy and want of appreciation. Need we never look within for a solution of this difficulty? May there not be a little fault on both sides? What is the relationship between priest and people, teacher and taught? These are questions which every clergyman may be called upon to answer for himself in connection with the results of his work. The circumstance which influences more than any other the success or otherwise of a pastor's work is the relationship existing between the clergyman and people. We are sometimes too ready to turn towards the congregation for the explanation of the cause of that lack of acceptance which in some cases characterizes our sacred functions. Oftentimes it is not indifference on the part of the people that is to blame so much as some want of sympathy between the leader and led—between shepherd and flock. If the clergyman throws himself, heart and soul, into the daily lives, the trials and troubles, and the happinesses of his congregation, if he is ever holding out the right hand of genial friendship and hospitality, and going in and out amongst them as a loving sympathizing friend, and not always endeavoring to impress upon them his dignity and importance, and their littleness, there must of