

## A PLEA FOR PASTORAL VISITATION.

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HAVING recently completed the visiting of the families in the two congregations under my care, I have found my mind during these past months specially directed to this subject of Pastoral Visitation. The conviction of the importance and necessity of this part of ministerial work has been deepened within me. Some ministers, it is true, may be naturally predisposed to the work of the Pastor, rather than to that of the Preacher. They may be of free, and hearty disposition, inclined to social intercourse, possessed of good conversational ability, and so they are inclined to neglect study and the careful preparation of sermons, and to aim more at dealing privately and personally with men. But on the other hand the tendency with very many ministers is to be reserved in manner, to shrink from direct personal intercourse with individuals, and so to give themselves up to study and to preaching, to the neglect of the Pastor's work.

And when we stand face to face with the difficulties of carrying on the work, especially in a country charge—the long drives—the bad roads—the uncertain weather—the apparent waste of precious time—and many others—the temptation is very strong to neglect this work, or to hurry it over in a careless and unsatisfactory manner.

And so I feel, and I am sure many of my brethren feel, the need of being stimulated to diligence in the discharge of pastoral duty. And I shall be satisfied, if by the writing of this short paper I may give such stimulus to myself and others. I can hope to present nothing new on this subject to the minds of those who have read carefully in the department of pastoral theology, and who have had even a

limited experience in actual pastoral work. But it is well for us to bear in mind that even duties and obligations which we acknowledge, and with which we are familiar, are apt to be neglected by us unless we repeatedly make them the subject of thought, and constantly stir ourselves up to their discharge.

I. *As ministers, therefore, we should seek to keep before us the true idea of pastoral visitation.*

The pastor's visit should be *more than a mere friendly call for social intercourse and general conversation.* We cannot hide from ourselves the fact that merely social visits will be most relished by many families. And it is no doubt true that such visits may be a means of good, both to minister and people. The minister needs recreation. And an hour spent in friendly social intercourse in the bosom of some of the families of the congregation, may give him just the recreation which he needs. And if the minister be careful to avoid useless and hurtful gossip, and seeks then, as at all times to be an example to the flock, he may do much good by the friendly intercourse of such social calls.

But surely the earnest minister will not let these calls pass as an apology for the visiting, which as a pastor, he should do. To make a friendly call, and spend a while in general conversation is surely not the true idea of the pastor's visit.

On the contrary, as ministers, *we should regularly and systematically visit our people in our special character as ministers of the Gospel, going into their homes as a messenger of God, and as we may have opportunity dealing privately and personally with families and individuals as to the concerns of the soul, and the*