

history appallingly has illustrated, and which philosophy, instructed by history, has amply explored. These dangers are dangers alike to the priest and to the people.

Now you will naturally be tempted to indulge yourself overmuch in learning the private life of your parishioners. There will be the sordid motive of mere curiosity. To this motive in its bald, undisguised form, we shall assume that you will be easily superior. But there will be, besides, the motive of sympathy, leading you to ease others of burdensome secrets for the sake of their own relief. Again, there will be the still higher motive of strengthened influence on your own part for good. If you were a bad man, or even a doubtfully good man, it would be useless to advise you here, for you might pervert advice to what ends you chose. For the greater enlightenment, and consequent greater security against temptation, of men who, though good, are yet temptible, we will add, that seduction toward ends of base self-indulgence will sometimes naturally result to you from the possession of a certain order of secrets concerning others. The discovery of weaknesses and lapses on the part of persons in whom you would perhaps have least expected such things, will be an occasion for the devil, who goeth about seeking whom he may devour, and who watches us all. It asks great purity, great strength, greater purity, greater strength than any of us possess, to make a creature of flesh safe in receiving the indiscriminate disclosure of his fellow-creature's frailty. We use the image of another when we say that you cannot be the sewer or the cess-pool to a multitude of sinning souls and not be soiled by the filth that you receive.

Against the motive of curiosity, the motive of sympathy, the motive of good influence even, above all,

the motive, however remote and subtle, of indulging yourself in doubtful dalliance—against all these motives leading you to welcome the confidences of your people, you should exercise prudential caution. Encourage your people to unbosom themselves with all freedom to Christ. Teach them to make confessions of fault committed against others directly to those others against whom the fault was committed. Sins against God alone, tell them, they should confess alone to God. Refuse to be a priest to your people. Do not be casuist for them, if you can in any way avoid it without shirking your pastoral duty. Induce them to settle for themselves their own cases of conscience. In the last resort you may sometimes do this for them. But let it be at the end of much sincere effort on your part to get them to do it for themselves. Then, generally, if you decide, decide with some indecision. Most consciences need to be kept tender by a little wholesome uncertainty as to their own rightness. It is extremely useful for us all to remember that we may be wrong, even when we try to be right. It tends to a good humility, and to sharp searching of our own hearts. Still you, as pastors, must make a difference. There is such a thing as morbid sensitiveness of conscience. Be heedful not to aggravate such a moral disease, if it exist in any member of your congregation. But there is all deceptableness of unrighteousness in consciences. A conscience will sometimes affect, affect without distinct consciousness of doing so, an unnatural and exaggerated sensibility for the very sake of reacting against itself in view of that, and securing greater latitude and freedom. We know of nothing requiring so much experience and so much disciplined spiritual discernment, as does the art of what we