

Pastoral Visitation.

"PASTORAL relationship" might be better—the shepherd caring for the needs of the flock. The pastor is the shepherd; we know it with our intellect, but we forget it in our hearts. But the word "shepherd" always reminds us of "the Good Shepherd," who laid down His life for the sheep, and it helps us to realise that our ministry is a continuation of His. "As My Father hath sent Me, even so send I you." We often hear it said, "He is a good pastor but no preacher," or "A good preacher but no pastor." The true minister is both. Feeding the flock is an indispensable part of the shepherd's work.

When Mr. Spurgeon read to us John xxi. 15-18, he drew our attention to the Revised Version. Twice Jesus said "feed," once He said "tend," and Mr. Spurgeon added, "That is the right proportion—twice the importance of feeding to tending. If you don't feed them on Sunday they won't want to see you during the week." But feeding and tending are both included in shepherding. If

. . . the hungry sheep look up and are not fed,
the tending will be of no avail. Mr. Spurgeon was accustomed to say, "*Tie them by the teeth.*"

The minister is both an evangelist and a pastor. Peter was called "to catch men" (Luke v. 10), and also received the charge "Feed My lambs, tend My sheep, feed My sheep." We are not called simply to preach—we are called to save. "Your business," said John Wesley, "is not to preach so many times and to take care of this or that society, but to save as many souls as you can." An evangelist first, last, always, and in everything, always keeping the one end in view—to bring men to God. And to Peter also was given the charge to feed and tend the sheep. No suggestion of failure. "Lovest thou Me?" asked the Master, and to the one who could answer, "Yea, Lord, Thou knowest all things, Thou knowest that I love Thee," Jesus entrusted His sheep. Doddridge asks:

Is there a lamb in all Thy flock
I would disdain to feed?

I would rather ask, Is there one I might be privileged to feed?
And Jesus answers, Only to those who love Me is the sacred charge given.

And love is the condition of success. These are my Lord's sheep. I might be careless if they were mine. But they are His. We may not be able to keep all. The Master Himself lost one,

and the minister may not be blameworthy because he does not keep all. But if he loves he will endeavour to do so. No sacrifice will be too great.

And none of the ransomed ever knew
How deep were the waters crossed,
Or how dark was the night that the Lord passed through
Ere He found the sheep that was lost.

We think of Paul as the greatest of the apostles. Do we think of him as the greatest of all the pastors? *How he loved!* Great in intellect, he was greater in heart. Col. ii. 1 (Dr. Moffatt): "I want you to understand my *deep concern* for you and for those at Laodicea, for all who have never seen my face, that ye may learn to know the open secret of God the Father of Christ, in whom all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge lie hidden." And to the Ephesian elders (Acts xx. 31): "Remember how for three whole years I never ceased night and day to watch over each one of you with tears." "*Each one of you.*" No excuse for lack of time. The apostle who had the care of all the churches never neglected the individual.

The last sentence we can trace to the pen of St. John is "Salute the friends by name," and the last letter of Paul closes with a paragraph which reveals his love for each member of the household of God: "Salute Prisca and Aquila," etc. And when Jesus came back from the grave He appeared first to Mary Magdalene, then to Peter, and next Lord's day to Thomas. He manifested Himself to the disciples as a body, but He also appeared to the ones and twos to recover them from doubt and despair, and assure them of His love and trust.

I know it is difficult. It is harder to speak to an individual than to a congregation. The fear of man is much more subtle than the fear of men.

It was a noble type of courage which inspired Paul to "fight with beasts at Ephesus," but it was a nobler courage with which he confronted the Apostle Peter when he "withstood him to the face because he was to be blamed."

But the obligation is laid upon us, and we cannot neglect it without imperilling the health and welfare of immortal souls and without destroying our own peace as shepherds of Christ's flock. Dr. Whyte wrote to one of his assistants: "Never fall behind with your pastoral work, *the remorse is indescribable.*" Certainly he never did. Nor Dr. Clifford, nor Dr. Jowett. Dr. Jowett says: "I remember the first battle royal I had with the temptation." But he fought and won, and saved one who was "giving way to drink" from "the horrible pit and the miry clay."

As to method—I fear I am no guide. Mere visitation of the

people may be a pathetic waste of time. Mr. Collier writes: "I found the people wished me to call for tea and gossip, and I would rather break stones than dance attendance on people of that sort." But he did visit. One of his colleagues wrote: "He gave scores of people the feeling that he was as much interested in them as if there were no other people in the world. *He cared for his people.* His one mission in life was to save and keep, and love never faileth." I knew Dr. Clifford as well as most, and I can honestly say I never knew him to fail in anything. Certainly not as a brother, and not as a pastor. Dr. Jones said: "This Cromwell of the Free Churches would bring with him into the sick room an atmosphere of green pastures and still waters."

And the value of the visit all depends on the visitor. Ian Maclaren said that when Henry Drummond entered a room it seemed as though the temperature was changed. Paul said of Onesiphorus: "He oft refreshed me." How many could have said that of Paul! But Paul himself needed to be refreshed.

The Christian life is not easy. It is hard. Even the strongest needs the help of his brethren. Ian Maclaren says: "The chief end of preaching is comfort. Never can I forget what a distinguished scholar who used to sit in my church said to me: 'Your best work in the pulpit has been to put heart into men for the coming week.'" Dean Stanley said of Canon Kingsley: "His ministry at Westminster has only been for two brief years, but he has left a glow upon our hearts like the after-glow upon the mountains." If I had a testimony like that I would feel I had walked with God. Every minister has found that it is better to go to the house of mourning than the house of feasting. As Burns says:

There's wit there you'll get there,
You'll find no other where.

It has often proved the minister's best academy. Fellowship with the people in failure, in sorrow, and suffering has often made the preacher. Dr. Jowett says: "It's a blessed calling, frowning with difficulty, beset with disappointments, but its real rewards are sweeter than honey and the honeycomb. There is no joy on earth comparable to his who has gone out with the Great Shepherd, striding over the exposed mountain and through deep valleys of dark shadow, seeking His sheep that was lost; no joy, I say, comparable to His when the sheep is found and the Shepherd lays it on His shoulder and carries it home to the fold. 'Rejoice with Me, for I have found My sheep which was lost.' And everyone who has shared in the toil of the seeking shall also share in the joy of the finding. Partakers of the sufferings, we shall also be partakers of the glory. We shall assuredly 'enter into the joy' of our Lord." JOHN WILSON.