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## *The Shepherd and His Flock*

John Ross Macduff



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## **THE SHEPHERD AND HIS FLOCK.**

*By the same Author.*

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# The Good Shepherd.

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The Good Shepherd  
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THE  
SHEPHERD AND HIS FLOCK ;

OR,

*The Keeper of Israel and the Sheep of His Pasture.*

BY

J. R. MACDUFF, D.D.,

AUTHOR OF "MORNING AND NIGHT WATCHES," "MEMORIES OF GENNESARET,"  
ETC., ETC.

"I will feed my flock, and I will cause them to lie down, saith the Lord God."  
EZEK. xxxiv. 15.

"So we thy people, and sheep of thy pasture, will give thee thanks for ever."  
Ps. lxxxix. 18.



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JAMES NISBET AND CO., 21 BERNERS STREET.  
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101. f. 22.

“ Bone Pastor—panis vere,  
Jesu, nostri miserere,  
Tu—nos pasce, nos tuere;  
Tu—nos bona fac videre,  
In terra viventium.  
Tu, qui cuncta scis et vales,  
Qui nos pascia hic mortales,  
Tuos ibi commensales  
Cohaeredes et sodales  
Fac sanctorum civium.”

THOMAS AQUINAS.



*(Free Translation.)*

Good and tender Shepherd, hear us !  
Bread of Heaven, in love come near us !  
Feed us, lead us, and defend us ;  
Make us see whate'er Thou send us,  
In the land of earthly living,  
Is Thy wise and gracious giving !

Thou who feedst us here as mortals,  
Ordering all things that befall us,  
Safe within celestial portals  
Oh ! at last in mercy call us.

Take us to the realms of love,  
Fold us with Thy flock above,  
Let the peerless name be given,  
'Heirs and denizens of Heaven !'



## CONTENTS.

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	PAGE
INTRODUCTORY, . . . . .	3
THE FLOCK ASTRAY, . . . . .	8
THE FLOCK SOUGHT AND FOUND, . . . . .	20
THE FLOCK FOUND, AND ITS RETURN TO THE FOLD, . . . . .	34
THE SHEPHERD OF THE FLOCK SMITTEN, . . . . .	50
THE SHEPHERD GIVING HIS LIFE FOR THE SHEEP, . . . . .	56
THE DOOR INTO THE SHEEP-FOLD, . . . . .	68
THE SHEPHERD GOING BEFORE THE FLOCK, . . . . .	82
THE FLOCK FOLLOWING THE SHEPHERD, . . . . .	90
THE SONG OF THE FLOCK, . . . . .	100
THE GREEN PASTURES AND STILL WATERS WHERE THE FLOCK ARE FED, . . . . .	112
THE PATHS OF RIGHTEOUSNESS IN WHICH THE FLOCK ARE LED,	122
THE SHEPHERD SEEKING THE FLOCK IN THE CLOUDY AND DARK DAY, . . . . .	132
THE SHEPHERD'S GENTLE DEALINGS WITH THE BURDENED OF THE FLOCK, . . . . .	148
THE FLOCK IN THE WORLD, . . . . .	166
THE SHEPHERD'S GIFT TO THE FLOCK, . . . . .	180
THE SECURITY OF THE FLOCK, . . . . .	188
THE CRY OF A WANDERER, . . . . .	204
THE TREMBLING FLOCK COMFORTED, . . . . .	216
THE FLOCK PASSING THROUGH THE VALLEY OF THE SHADOW OF DEATH, . . . . .	228
THE FINAL GATHERING OF THE FLOCK, . . . . .	246
THE ETERNAL FOLDING OF THE FLOCK, . . . . .	262



A

## The Shepherd and His flock.

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"GIVE EAR, O SHEPHERD OF ISRAEL, THOU THAT LEADEST JOSEPH  
LIKE A FLOCK."—PS. LXXX. 1.

## THE SHEPHERD AND HIS FLOCK.

### INTRODUCTORY.

CONSPICUOUS among the literary characteristics of the Bible are its truthful and loving pictures of nature. Prophets and Psalmists, though drinking their inspiration at a nobler fount, seem to revel amid the glories of the outer world. They fetch their grandest and sweetest imagery,—they illustrate and enforce their noblest lessons, from its fields and forests, its woods and streams and rivers. Even its animated tribes—not less than rock and mead, and flower and tree—become, in their hands, consecrated teachers, ministers of truth, interpreters of God.

Were we to select, amid these symbols, one of more frequent recurrence and interest than the rest, it would be the constant and ever-varying representations given us of THE SHEPHERD AND THE SHEEP. Every thought, indeed, of the Hebrew of old was interwoven with pastoral life. Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, David, Amos, were Shepherds. The sheepfold was the prominent object in the landscape; the “pippings of the flocks” was the ever-familiar music. We need not wonder, therefore, to meet the favourite image at every new turn in the inspired Volume. The flock are now browsing on the green pastures, and reclining in tranquil repose by “the waters of comfort:” now following the footsteps of the guiding

Shepherd ; now sprinkled in groups on the mountain side ; now gathered in some sheltered hollow, or under the shadow of rock or terebinth, as a defence from the noontide heat : now a trembling lamb is seen in the Shepherd's arm ; now the bleat of some wanderer is heard on some distant crag ; or the Shepherd is rescuing it with his crook from perilous height, or swollen torrent, or ravening beast : now he is standing, in the gray twilight, by the wicket-gate, to pen his fleecy charge ; now, under the starry heavens, he is watching, in solitary vigil, the entrance of the fold. When the sacred writers seek, amid finite things, the noblest emblem of the Infinite, it is this—“*The Lord is my Shepherd.*” The Bible may be almost said to begin and end with Shepherd picturings. It is a pastoral scene which meets us at the gates of Eden : we see Abel, with the firstlings of his flock, outside the portals of Paradise lost ; and one of the last and most touchingly beautiful of inspired delineations, is that within the gates of Paradise Regained, when, under the same familiar figure, the Great Shepherd is still represented as “leading” and “feeding” God’s Ransomed ; conducting them from fountain to fountain of living water amid the pastures of the blessed. In no less than three of His Parables, besides other incidental references, Christ Himself has thrown an imperishable interest around the Shepherd and his Flock.\* These Divine pictures are photographed in

\* Those who are curious, æsthetically and archaeologically, as well as theologically, may spend some pleasant hours in the library of the British Museum in inspecting a few rare volumes, in which the preponderance, in early Christian art, of the symbol of the Good Shepherd and the sheep is forcibly shown and illustrated. As it has been remarked, “This emblem

every heart. Few among us, I believe, can look, with a Bible-loving eye, even on a flock of sheep reposing in one of our own quiet valleys, or scattered over one of our green mountain sides, without having suggested thoughts and memories of unutterable sacredness. How much more tenderly may we enter into the feelings thus expressed by

has been unceasingly repeated under every possible aspect, and may be almost said to have been worn threadbare." Tertullian incidentally mentions it as being even painted on the communion-cups or chalices of glass in that early age. Conspicuous among the works referred to may be mentioned, "Bosio's *Roma Sotteranea*, (folio,) Roma, 1651," (see also De Rossi's recent volume;) Munter's "Sinnbilder an der Alten Christ," (Altona;) and Didron's "Iconogr. Chrétienne; or, The History of Christian Art in the Middle Ages." The author had marked several of the designs therein embodied, principally taken from rude frescoes and bas-reliefs in the Catacombs, which he thought at one time might appropriately have been incorporated in these pages: (one of the frescoes is believed to be as early as the third century.) On second thoughts, their quaintness deterred him. The spirit of all of them has been caught up and idealised in the beautiful frontispiece facing the title-page of this book. The most salient portions of the last-named of the above works have been translated for the English reader in one of the volumes of "Bohn's Illustrated Library," from which we cannot do better than quote the following condensed description:—"The figured monuments in the Catacombs," says Didron, "the sarcophagi, and more especially paintings in fresco, constantly present the figure of a Shepherd, youthful, beardless, clad in a short tunic, striped with two longitudinal bands. He is standing, and bears upon his shoulders the sheep that had been lost, and that he loved. At his feet are the faithful sheep browsing, or lying down. In one design, taken from a fresco, the Shepherd has in his right hand a Pan pipe of seven reeds, whilst with the left he holds the sheep securely on his shoulders." . . . . "In other drawings given by Bosio," adds the translator, "the Shepherd holds the lost sheep more or less firmly on his shoulders, and seems more or less in fear lest it should a second time escape. In p. 391 of 'Rom. Sott.', the sheep is seated affectionately on the shoulder of the Shepherd, who, from its being so weary and so rejoiced to return to its fold, does not fear that it will again endeavour to escape. The Good Shepherd himself seems sometimes more weary than at others of the burden which he bears upon His shoulders, or with the journey He has made in order to recover His lost sheep; but,

a recent traveller in Palestine :—“ It was while riding through the low hills covered with this vegetation, and coming out on the blighted flats of the Dead Sea, that one of those pictures passed before me which are ever after hung up in the mind’s gallery among the choicest of the spoils of Eastern travel. By some chance I was alone, riding a few hundred yards in front of the caravan, when, turning the corner of a hill, I met a man coming towards me, the only one we had seen for several hours since we had passed a few black tents some eight or ten miles away. He was a noble-looking young Shepherd, dressed in his camel’s-hair robe, and with the litesome, powerful limbs and elastic step of the children of the desert. But the interest which attached to him was the errand on which he had manifestly been engaged on these Dead Sea plains from which he was returning. Round his neck, and with its little limbs held gently by his hand, lay a lamb he had rescued, and was doubtless carrying home. The little creature lay as if perfectly content and happy, and the man looked pleased as he strode along lightly with his burden ; and as I saluted him with the usual gesture of pointing to heart and head, and the ‘Salaam alik !’ (Peace be with you !) he responded with a smile and a kindly glance at the lamb, to which he saw my eyes were directed.

ordinarily, he appears unconscious either of the burden or the fatigue. At other times he is seen sitting actually overpowered with fatigue. . . . Figures of the Good Shepherd are usually placed in the most honourable parts of the Sarcophagi, and paintings in the Catacombs. They occupy the centre of the tomb, or of the vaulting, and are placed in the middle of the archivaults and tympanum.”—P. 346. See also Archbishop Trench on the Parables, p. 379, note, where reference is made to the above volumes.

It was actually the beautiful parable of the gospel acted out before my sight. Every particular was true to the story; the Shepherd had doubtless left his ‘ninety and nine in the wilderness,’ round the black tents we had seen so far away, and had sought for the lost lamb till he found it, where it must quickly have perished without his help, among those blighted plains. Literally, too, ‘when he had found it, he laid it on his shoulders rejoicing.’ It would, I think, have been a very hard heart which had not blessed God for the sight, and taken home to itself, with fresh faith, the lesson that God suffers no wandering sheep to be finally lost from His great fold of heaven. Even though a man may wander to the utmost bounds of his iniquity, yet the Good Shepherd, rejoicing, shall bring the wanderer home; ‘for He will seek till He find him,’ even on the Dead Sea shore.”\*

May the Great Shepherd vouchsafe graciously to lead us, in the following pages, to the green pastures where He himself is found! We desire reverently to listen to the solemn charge He addresses to all His under-shepherds regarding the flock over which the Holy Ghost hath made them overseers: “**FEED THE CHURCH OF GOD, WHICH HE HATH PURCHASED WITH HIS OWN BLOOD.**”

\* See article in *Fraser's Magazine*.

## The Flock Astray.

---

"ALL WE LIKE SHEEP HAVE GONE ASTRAY, WE HAVE TURNED EVERY  
ONE TO HIS OWN WAY."—IS. LIII. 6.

## THE FLOCK ASTRAY.

MOURNFUL is this opening picture. It is composed of no quiet pastoral scene with verdant meadows and glassy waters,—the watchful sheep reposing under the loving eye and guardianship of their Shepherd. Shepherd and fold are forsaken. Bleak desolate mountains or rugged wilds, stretching interminably on every side, are covered with the scattered flock!

The Bible contains many impressive descriptions of our state of alienation from God. The star wandering from its central sun—"wandering stars." The prisoner bound in fetters of iron pining in his dungeon. The vessel driven from its moorings plunging in the tempestuous sea. The prodigal, self-exiled from the joys and amenities of home, feeding on the garbage of the distant wilderness. But we question if any figure more simply yet more graphically delineates the natural estrangement of the heart than that of the stray sheep. There is not only conveyed the idea of our lost condition, but the tendency to wander further and further through the bleak dreary wastes of an ever-sadder ruin. The sheep is proverbially the most helpless of animals. Others, by the power of natural instinct, can succeed in avoiding danger; or, if they lose their way, they can retrace it with ease. The sheep can do neither. When once it has wandered from the Shepherd's eye, and

from the footsteps of the flock, instinct seems to forsake it; it is incapable of return.

What a graphic twofold picture of apostasy is here! "We all like sheep have gone astray." *All* have strayed from the Shepherd, (that is the universal characteristic), and then it is added "We have turned every *one* to his *own way*." Each has some bye-way or separate track of sin, down which, or along which, he rushes, widening his distance from the Shepherd-love of God. You may perchance have seen, in early morning, the shepherd opening the gate of the fold, and the sheep scattering themselves over the mountain side. You can follow in thought a wayward company—some stragglers of the flock—wandering beyond their appointed pasture. For a while they keep together along the green sward or heathy common. But, by and by, they are broken up into separate groups; these again into smaller still; until wanderer by wanderer seems to pursue each its own lonely path of danger. The bleat of each of these lost sheep seems to express its misery and helplessness; its sense of utter loneliness and isolation—away from the flock, and (what was more than all to the sheep of eastern countries) away from the Shepherd; roaming the mountains conscious of the forfeiture of his protection and tender care.

And is this not a picture—a faithful and graphic picture—of every sinner by nature; a spiritual wanderer—away from God—uttering the inward cry of restless misery on the bleak mountains of alienation and sin?

His state is one of utter *loneliness* and *homelessness*. He

has lost his fold and his Shepherd—and in losing his God, he has lost his all.

Suppose that by some fearful catastrophe we were suddenly bereft of all our inlets of physical enjoyment,—the organs of sight and hearing—of taste and smell,—all the avenues by which the manifold pleasures of God's wondrous and lovely world open to us. If that glorious landscape, that azure sky, that gleaming sun, these spangled nightly heavens, were in a moment to be palled in blackness—the shadow of death. If the sweet perfume of flowers, wafted on the breath of the summer winds, were unfelt; if the dulcet tones of the human voice, the song of birds, the music of the waterfall, the wail of the forest, the wild cadence of the murmuring sea,—suppose all these woke no responsive chords on the broken harp—the ear being closed to which they discoursed their melody. Nay, more, let us suppose losses tenderer still. Ye who cling with doting fondness to your household treasures, enshrining them in your heart of hearts,—suppose that, by some fell swoop, your hearth was in a moment swept and rifled; that death severed all you loved on earth from your embrace, and left you in a blighted world, isolated and alone. The son you expected to lean upon as your prop and staff taken from your side,—the loving daughter, whose tender care smoothed the furrow on your brow, parted from you,—her ingenuous ministries of love and tenderness suddenly arrested. How intolerable the desolation resulting from one or all of these physical deprivations and domestic calamities! And *yet*, if we but

pondered it aright, what would *all* be, compared with the thought of being severed from God; He who pities as a father; who loves as a mother; who comforts as a friend; who tends as a shepherd; who is as a God only can be! His favour is not only *conducive* to life, but it is *life*. To quench His light in the soul, is to quench the sun: it would be equivalent to plucking yonder blazing central fount of glory from the midst of its dependant planets, and leaving them to wheel their tortuous way in the blackness of darkness. Bereft of Him, we are bereft indeed. What a reality and deep pathos are there in the Psalmist's appeal—"How long wilt *Thou* forget me, O Lord, *for ever?*" A lost sheep! a lost soul! lost its peace—its rest—its happiness—its eternal safety—"What is a man profited if he shall gain the whole world and *lose* his own soul?"

We know, indeed, that one most sad and fearful feature, in connection with this truth of human alienation and depravity, is the utter recklessness and indifference of the wanderer,—the lost consciousness that he *is lost*; the downward, heedless rush to ruin, without one desire to return. And, doubtless, it is so with vast multitudes. They have become so steeped in forgetfulness and insensibility—they have drunk so deeply of the waters of *Lethe*—that they settle down in these strange pastures in reckless contentment, without one thought of the old paths and the forgotten fold.

But we see also, in the Bible picture of the lost sheep, what is a truer and more faithful delineation of the lost human heart. The strayed sheep *feels* its loneliness. Those who have at times witnessed the living

type in our own mountain glens, may have noted in the plaintive bleatings—the wild restless look—the rushing hither and thither, in hopeless effort, to regain the lost path—that the animal has the one absorbing feeling of estrangement and abandonment. If you could interpret that language of look and sound, you would find that it was the longing for restoration to the fold. Men who have lost God,—forget it and deny it as at times they may,—yet, ever and anon, *do* feel (they **MUST** feel) that, by reason of that loss, they are not happy. Nothing will fill the infinite capacities of the soul of man, but the great Being from whom he has departed. You may try to fill that soul with meaner and baser substitutes. You may lure it away from the heavenly fold by tempting it with the world's choicest pastures, the golden meadows of riches, and the pleasures of sin. It will tell you by a half-stifled bleat of fretful, restless disquiet, that it is not, and cannot be happy. And why? just because it has lost its true fold, its true home—in the friendship and love of God.

We always pity those who have seen "*better days*;" who have been reduced from opulence to chill penury; or, who, from an ample competency and cheerful board, have now to sing their way in rags and wretchedness from door to door in the open street, in order to procure a pittance for themselves and the hungry orphans at their side. We pity the prodigal who had once enjoyed his father's house and hall, now seated at his humiliating fare with the swine of the far country. We pity the bird of the forest that was wont to be singing up to heaven's gate, now lying struggling with broken wing in the furrow.

There is a feeling akin to pity, even in regard to mute inanimate things, which have seen “better times.” The old ancestral keep or castle, where, in the days of chivalry, kings and nobles once held feast and tournament, and within whose tapestried walls minstrels sang; now a deserted ruin where the winds howl at will through silent chambers and broken battlements and blackened hearths; —its only tenant the crawling reptile—its only tapestry, festoons of dank and tangled ivy.

So it is with the sinner. We pity him. Made at first after the image of God, he has truly seen *better days*. His soul, like the glittering patch gleaming under the rags, bears testimony of former dignity and greatness. We pity him; for he too, like that wounded bird, once mounted on soaring pinions. We pity him; for he too, like that ruined castle, has his niches and loopholes and tapestried fragments, peering through the matted weeds and ivy, which still vindicate the grandeur of his original. We pity him; for he too, like that ruined sheep, was once folded in the Divine pastures. That shattered frame, that torn fleece, are not what once they were, when feeding on the Delectable Mountains, reposing under the Shepherd’s love. Do any whose eye traces these pages feel that they are still *astray*;—that they are still far from God,—that they have no happiness where they are, and *can* have none in this state of guilty alienation? Oh, better to *feel* this, than to settle down, in callous contentment, on these distant pastures, without God and without hope, and finally to perish there! Better surely to feel your danger and take timeous means to avert it, than to be like the

ill-fated voyagers approaching all unaware and unwarned the fatal reef, in the midst of music and dancing. One other moment the crash, and then the wild cry—" *We are lost!*"

Go, return to the forsaken Shepherd ! Return to the fold ; and remember, in doing so, you are, in the truest sense, "*going Home.*" Home ! what a gush of thought there is in that word to all of us ! What will the man, long exiled—reluctantly domiciled in the far country—not give to be *at Home* ! How often do home-memories and home-countenances flit before him ! How do time and distance only increase the longings once more to be back amid these cherished haunts ;—to be seated by the trees which boyhood climbed, and by the murmuring streams which sang the first and sweetest music in his ear ! That is *your* home, to be folded in the love and in the heart of God. We have read somewhere, of the wild but touching raving of a maniac, which expressed itself ever in the one utterance—" *I am going Home.*" A thousand questions might be asked, and a thousand expedients employed, to recall dethroned reason from its wild soliloquy. But in vain :—the one key-note of the ever-recurring doleful wailing was—" *I am going Home.*" Ah, it is the indefinite inarticulate longing of wandering humanity. It was the cry of the self-abandoned prodigal "when he came to himself"—when he awoke from his madness,—" *I am going HOME*"—" *I will arise and go to my father.*" I repeat, you cannot be happy in your present state. You are like the troubled sea which cannot rest. These waves of old ocean are a type of your own restless disquietude,

seeking rest, but finding none. The ocean's dimpled bosom is ever "seeking *rest*." These waves that rise and sink, swelling and tossing themselves in a thousand tortuous forms, are only by nice and accurate physical laws trying to rock themselves into a calm. Emblem of the restless soul of man ! Its very heavings and agitations and fretful disquietude, what are these, but just its own giant efforts to rock itself to repose on an Infinite God !

Remember, moreover, what aggravates the guilt and folly of your present departure and dispeace, is the fact that you are yourself alone responsible for "going astray." You were not *driven* from the fold—you *wandered* from it. It was an act of self-exile, self-banishment. That is one of the most touching scenes of Old Testament story, when, in presence of assembled Israel, on a day of high festival, the scape-goat went forth from the camp, "led by the hand of a fit man into the wilderness." We can follow in thought the forlorn animal, wandering, with panting sides and bleating cry through the sandy waste, until it reached the still more desolate shores of the Dead Sea. There it stands, with hot eyeballs and blistered feet; haggard with hunger and travel; faint with thirst; mocked with the waters of the briny lake, which is unsheltered by shrub or rock; the furnace-glow of the sands drying up the juices of its body—the hidden springs of life. That famished creature excites our pity. It was no voluntary exile—no spontaneous desertion of the flocks of its companions which brought it there. It was *thrust* out—it was led resisting from the camp. While, therefore, typical of a reality more solemn and significant still,

the scape-goat is not the type of the lost sinner. We must seek for this rather in some wandering sheep, which, in stupid forgetfulness and wayward folly, has forsaken its pastures—disowned its Shepherd—and rushed on madly and wildly to ruin and death. The Shepherd is not responsible for your present distance and alienation. He says now regarding each individual truant wanderer, as He said of old, from the brow of Mount Olivet, through His tears, regarding a nation of such,—“ How often would I have gathered you, and ye would not.”

But—(although in this we are anticipating the theme of subsequent chapters)—blessed be His name, His mission also was to proclaim, not through His tears but His blood, salvation to the perishing. In the case of the scape-goat of old, there was no possibility of return. It was consigned to a hopeless banishment—a lonely death; the bones of the outcast were left to bleach on the desert sands,—its carcase to be food for the fowls of heaven. But, in the case of the most abject and hapless spiritual wanderer, there is hope—ay, to all who will—there is the glorious certainty of return and restoration. The last clause of our motto-verse unfolds to us the wondrous expedient of mingled love and wisdom. The scape-goat stands forth the awful type of the true Substitute. All the sins of the guilty flock are laid upon Him;—and by Him are borne away for ever into a land of oblivion. “ The Lord hath laid upon Him ” (on the head of a Surety-Saviour) “ the iniquities of us all.” Go ! confess over HIM “ all your iniquities in all your sins.” Hang up, in the gallery of your hearts, the picture of the Scape-goat, bear-

ing the invisible imputed load into the region of forgetfulness; and inscribe under it the New Testament writing and interpretation—(it is a glorious warrant—a gospel contained in a single sentence)—“HE HATH MADE HIM TO BE SIN FOR US WHO KNEW NO SIN, THAT WE MIGHT BE MADE THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF GOD IN HIM.”



## The Flock Sought and Found.

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"FOR THUS SAITH THE LORD GOD: BEHOLD, I, EVEN I, WILL BOTH SEARCH  
MY SHEEP, AND SEEK THEM OUT."—EZEK. XXXIV. 11.

"WHAT MAN OF YOU, HAVING AN HUNDRED SHEEP, IF HE LOST ONE OF THEM,  
DOTH NOT LEAVE THE NINETY AND NINE IN THE WILDERNESS, AND GO  
AFTER THAT WHICH IS LOST, UNTIL HE FIND IT."—LUKE XV. 4.

## THE FLOCK SOUGHT AND FOUND.

Is the Great Shepherd to leave the stray sheep to wander and perish? or is He to pity and reclaim them? Glory can accrue to Him in either way. It is for Him, in the plenitude of His own sovereignty and omnipotence, to decide the alternative.

In the Crimean war of bygone years, there were two ways, very different from each other, in which heroic deed manifested itself. The one was, by our soldiers' indomitable courage in the field,—when brave men stood manfully to their guns, and poured the iron hail against fearful odds;—when a thin gossamer line, as if it had been a rampart of brass, broke a murderous charge, and turned the fortunes of the day;—when, oft and again, the apparently retreating wave, gathering up its strength—rallying its fretted thunder—swept with awful retribution over the ranks of the enemy, leaving the trophies of its might still and silent on the plain! That was the one way; the stern glory of carnage and destruction.

The other unfolds a picture in strange and startling contrast with this. At midnight, in stifled hospital wards, amid the light of dim lamps and moans of sufferers, a gentle Form of pity flitted from couch to couch, with words and looks and deeds of mercy;—pale lips kissing the shadow on their pillows as it passed. Both, I repeat, were

heroic scenes and deeds. On which of the two does the mind love most to dwell? On that field of stern desperate valour; or on these hushed corridors, away from the roar of battle, with the one hero-heart moving like a ministering angel amid the congregated crowd of wounded and dying?

God's way regarding man, (with reverence we say it,) was the latter. He could, indeed, have glorified Himself, in the vindication of the awful righteousness of His nature and of His law, by the destruction of the world;—by leaving the sheep of this distant fold to wander across the desolate mountains, and perish amid the precipices of ruin. BUT “the Son of man came not to *destroy* men's lives, but to *save* them.” We may imagine the two alternatives presenting themselves before the Divine mind. The “ministration of condemnation;”—by the battle of the warrior, with confused noise, and garments rolled in blood, to convert earth into a fearful aceldama to the praise of the glory of His JUSTICE. Or by a wondrous scheme of love and wisdom and pity, to turn it into one vast Hospital, with the inscription on its walls, “*I am the Lord that healeth thee*”—a Magnificent Temple to the praise of the glory of His GRACE. Condemn or not condemn; destroy or not destroy; leave the sheep to perish, or reclaim the wanderer. Leave the revolted orb to travel on in its erratic course, amid the infinite of darkness, or bring it back within the sphere of the divine regards. The resolve is made and proclaimed, “God sent NOT His Son into the world to CONDEMN the world, but that the world, through Him, might be SAVED.”

Let this be our present theme of meditation; that the whole glory of the restoration of the lost sheep belongs to the Shepherd. The whole glory of the sinner's salvation belongs to God.

We may look to this truth, first, in its simplest aspect.

The soul, as we have already noted, is ever and anon manifesting some undefined longing after its lost portion in God. But it has in itself a hopeless *moral* inability to return. It cannot retrace its lost way. Alas ! often there is rather the plunging deeper and deeper amid the pathless wilds of ruin; till, in addition to *inability*, there is added *disinclination* to be restored to the long-lost fold. How often does the sinner become so habituated to these dark mountains of his wandering, as to spurn all thought of return. How sad it is to note the case of the old worldling, who has gone the round of guilty indulgence, who has drunk from every brimming bowl and chalice of earthly happiness. You would expect the dulled appetite and sated eye willingly to turn to a nobler portion; like the flower long drooping under cloudy, weeping skies, lifting its head lovingly to the inviting gleam of heaven's sunshine. But how often is it the reverse ! Anything rather than return to God. The empty chalice must be refilled by some new honeyed earthly potion. The prodigal, rather than dream of restoration to the lost home, must have some new artificial means of staying the rage of hunger, now that the swine's husks are turned from with aversion. The sheep, rather than return to the Shepherd, will go roaming in search of other pastures—increasing its mournful distance from the fold, and bringing it only into more perilous vicinity to the lions'

dens and the mountains of the leopards. Alas! experience thus only too faithfully confirms and endorses the Bible's revealed doctrine of human depravity. Deny it as man may, and refine on the Scriptures as they may, this lies at the foundation of the sinner's wandering, that he dislikes his Shepherd. He does not "like to retain God in his knowledge." It is the would-be creed of his corrupt heart, (though conscience refutes the heterodoxy,—protests against the lying utterance,) "there is *no God*." He lives as if there were none. "Ye have forsaken ME, the fountain of living waters."

How, then, can the sinner be reclaimed? It is manifest that by no self-originated effort can he return. If saved, it must be by another. Himself he CANNOT,—himself he WILL not save. No sheep can effect its own restoration. You may listen to its bleating cry—the utterance of misery and felt dissatisfaction with strange pastures. But back one step of itself it cannot go. It is as helpless as the ship lying aslant, with shivered keel and gaping planks, on the bare rocks. You may patch up these started timbers,—you may replace these broken masts,—but nothing, save the lordly ocean sending in his tidal waves, can lift it from its place, and set it once more a living moving thing on the waters. It is easy enough to wreck that noble vessel. A drunken pilot—a deranged compass—a sunken reef—a sudden storm, may each do so; but not so easy to refit and restore it. It is easy to drive the sheep away from the fold. A base companion—a master lust—indulgence in one guilty passion—some sudden gust of temptation,

may account for a lifetime of wandering; but Omnipotence alone can bring it back. It is easy enough to take the tiara of priceless diamonds, or the necklace of gold, and plunge it down in mid ocean; but it is not so easy to descend through that untraversed barrier—that liquid rampart—which rolls defiant between, and get them up again. The soul, the true casket of lost treasures, by reason of its own sad principle of moral gravitation, sinks easily downward. But it is He alone who “taketh up the waters in the hollow of His hand”—that can rescue it from the depths of ruin and despair.

Here, then, is the gospel’s glorious history of the restoration of the Wanderer;—“God, who is rich in mercy, for His great love wherewith He loved us, even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ; by grace are ye saved.” “Behold I, even I, will both search my sheep and seek them out.” It is not *Angels*. *They* may afterwards be employed subordinately as ministering spirits, encamping round about the lost one, and bearing him up in all his ways,—“sent forth to minister to them who are heirs of salvation.” But it is the almighty Shepherd Himself who has the whole glory of the seeking and finding. The words of St Peter, when he says, “Ye were as sheep going astray, but are now *returned* unto the Shepherd and Bishop of your souls,” are generally misinterpreted. The “return” here spoken of is not used in an active, but passive sense; the return is not the self-originated voluntary return of the wanderer; but it is *brought* back, or *returned*, it knows not how, to the fold of the Good Shep-

herd. “Not unto us, O God, not unto us, but unto thy name we would give glory, for thy mercy and for thy truth’s sake!”

Marvellous condescension—unspeakable grace! He speaks in one of the verses which precede this chapter, as if it were something wondrous,—something wellnigh incredible: “Behold *I, even I.*” The spot is still pointed out with pride, amid the rocky wilds of Dauphine, where an eagle bore in its talons the infant which had been left smiling in fearless innocence in its cradle by the cottage door. One stalwart form after another tried to climb that giddy height for the rescue, but had to abandon it in despair. At last, a fleet and nimble foot spurns all difficulties. Up she climbs, from crag to crag, until, reaching the dizzy eminence, she buries the yet living child in her bosom, saying, as a mother’s tongue in such an hour alone could say, “This my child was dead, and is alive again—was lost, and is found!” But that was a mother’s speechless affection for her offspring. As she brought her “loved and lost” back to her cottage home, and replaced it in the emptied cradle, we would think it strange to hear her saying, “*Behold I, even I,* have done this.” Who could have done it but she? We could imagine a father’s love for a prodigal boy taking him over half the world in the endeavour to seek and find him out. He would forget all the prodigality and sin, in the memories of hallowed “childhood;” when his little one climbed on his knee, or plucked flowers with him in the mead, or walked by his side, and with playful prattle wiled away hours of care and sorrow! We can picture

the soldier's wife out in the starry night and the pale moonshine, gazing wistfully amid the heaps of unburied slain, searching for the silent heart that can respond to her love no more. We can understand many a kind footstep going amid homes of wretchedness on errands of pity and love,—entering the beggar's hovel, or penetrating the alley where filth and crime hold perpetual sway. We can understand how such experience a luxury in doing good;—in lifting up these miserable outcasts from their dens and lives of misery and guilt; recognising under these piteous rags the claim of degraded brotherhood; ay, hearts which, under genial influences, would have been as warm, or warmer than their own !

*But what does the Infinite Jehovah see in us?—What claim have these sheep on this Shepherd of the universe—these sinners on their God?—None!* The natural heart is a den of pollution, a haunt of evil, the nurturing home of rebellion. “I have not rejected *thee*,” he seems to say, “but thou hast rejected *Me!*” I might have ratified your guilty apostasy. I might have left you to perish. I might have stamped eternity on your wanderings from the fold. This would have been the case at any human tribunal; in the dealings of man with his fellow-man. “But my ways are not as your ways, nor my thoughts as your thoughts.” “Behold *I*, even *I*, both search my sheep and seek them out.”

Not only, however, are we called to note and admire God's grace and condescension; but to admire the SOVEREIGNTY of that grace as shown in *the selection of its objects*.

Mankind were not the only fallen family in the universe. Other sheep, not of the earthly fold, had also strayed from the Shepherd. Might we not have expected, that in resolving on the ransom and recovery of any lost ones, He would have made choice rather of a different race of wanderers ! Fallen angels, (the aborigines of Heaven), were greater than man. They were swift of wing in fulfilling the divine behests ; and the very nobility of their natures, which made them glorious in their state of holiness and purity, would make them in proportion, formidable, when they became demons in depravity. For both these reasons, —the excelling in strength, whether for good or for evil, would, (we might have supposed on human calculations), have made the *angelic* nature rather than the *human*,—the lost sheep of heaven, rather than the lost sheep of earth,—the object of the divine restitution. Well may we pause and ponder this wondrous manifestation of sovereign grace in the salvation of sinners of the dust ! Well may we love to gaze on that picture which the Great Shepherd Himself, in His own parable, holds up to view—“ leaving the ninety and nine in the wilderness,” (leaving apostate angels and fallen devils to perish), and Himself “ going after that which was lost,” in this remote corner of His creation. Not the sheep seeking the Shepherd ; but the Shepherd seeking the sheep. Not the dove, with weary wing and wailing cry, traversing the wilderness of waters seeking the Ark ; but the Ark in search of the dove. Not the mendicant coming to your door hanging in rags, with cheeks gaunt with hunger, and shivering in the wintry blast ; but the King going and seeking out the mendicant’s dwelling,

and putting sunshine and joy into his abode of misery. Truly, indeed, this salvation of man is a Story of *grace*. Turn the moral kaleidoscope as we may, the gleaming words still stand radiant before our eyes, "By the grace of God we are what we are." God needed no sheep, no sinners, no angels, no universes to add to His glory. Kings of the earth have to add kingdom to kingdom; they have to give rein to the lust of conquest and aggression to gain themselves renown. The glory of the old Roman conquerors, as, charioted in triumph, they rode up, laurel-wreathed to the capitol, was measured by the uncrowned potentates who walked in chains by their chariot-wheels, or dragged the car of victory up the steeps. But if we can compare the shadowy greatness of earth with that of Him by whom kings reign; who "maketh the clouds His chariot, and who walketh upon the wings of the wind;" worlds on worlds—myriads of blazing stars and systems—could not add one ray to His underived glory. And were these worlds annihilated—blotted out from the map of creation; were these stars of night swept away into nonentity; by Him the blank would be unfelt. He would be once more Alone. Glorious in the unpeopled solitudes of immensity; infinitely happy in His own underived happiness.

Once more. God's grace and compassion are further manifested in His untiring love and patience in the pursuit of the lost, till restoration and safety be insured.

In other words, we have to admire, not only His *free* grace and His *sovereign* grace, but what the old writers call His *irresistible* grace. "*Thus saith the Lord God,*

Behold I, even I, *will both search my sheep and seek them out.*" He will not only search for them, but He will search till He discover them. Or, as this is more beautifully expressed by the lips of the Great Shepherd Himself in His parable:—"He goeth after that which was lost *until He find it.*" *Until!* There is a world of pathos and meaning in that word. It gives us a wondrous glimpse of the Saviour's love, and forms the turning-point in the touching story. *Until!* Its very indefiniteness as to time and toil are expressive. It may be days, weeks, months, years, He has been in unwearied pursuit after the wanderer. It may describe a sad history of scornful rejection, stubborn waywardness, persistent ingratitude. The parable pictures to us the Oriental shepherd climbing over jagged precipices, toiling in the burning sun over unsheltered wilds, or braving the perils of pathless forests;—the wayward sheep rushing on, plunging deeper and deeper into destruction, and lengthening the weary distance he has to carry it back to the fold. When a shepherd in our own country discovers that a member of his flock is missing, how does he generally reclaim the wanderer? He sends his dogs in pursuit of it. You may watch their track as they bound along the mountain-side or up the craggy steep. By and by the panting fugitive, driven before them, enters, trembling, fleece-torn, and weary, the fold from which it had strayed. Not so, however, the Palestine shepherd. He would leave the restoring of his lost one not even to a hireling or servant. He cannot rest till the truant be clasped in his own arms. He grudges not

the labour of a long journey. *On* he pursues his often arduous task, and he *continues* to pursue “*until he find it!*” Touching emblem and parable of the Good Shepherd, and of His persevering love and compassion! Had it been any other than He;—had it been, not God, but *man*, —the pursuit would, long ago, have been abandoned in despair; seeing that, heedless of all entreaties, the sheep seemed to love its own death, and, regardless of the Shepherd’s voice, rushed onwards to destruction. But, unmoved by all its indifference; with an importunity that never wearies, and a love that never grows cold, He still pursues. The forgetfulness and ingratitude of the wanderer only seem to quicken His desire to have it folded in His arms. It does not say how long His importunity is to last. The Saviour’s love is bounded by no distance, is cooled by no difficulties, is repulsed by no obstacles. Many an earthly shepherd goes after his sheep, but he has missed its track; or, if not, he discovers, alas! as he gazes on the bones which strew the mouth of the den, that a fleeter foot than his has found the prize. Not so the Heavenly Shepherd. He not only searches, but “*seeks them out.*” He goeth after “*until He finds.*”

One of the noblest records of true heroism in England’s annals is of comparatively recent date; when a gallant vessel, manned with gallant hearts, went forth amid the frowning icebergs of the Northern Seas, to search for a band of missing explorers. They sailed thither, buoyed with the faint, feeble hope, that the object of their search might still be found, battling bravely with eternal winter. Alas! they went after the lost “*until they found*

them ; " but they found them with the stiffened snow and ice as their winding-sheet ! They brought not back the living, but only some sad mementoes and memorials of the dead. Not so is the journey, not so the pursuit, of the Great Shepherd of the sheep. His omniscient eye follows every wanderer. Those whom He has marked for His own, He will, without fail, bring home. Not one can elude His pursuit, nor evade His loving scrutiny.

Cannot many a wandering sheep rehearse, through tears, all this, as a *personal* story ; how God tracked their footsteps through the bleak moor of their wandering, repelled by no obduracy, chilled by no ingratitude. Think of these journeys after lost sinners, embracing a period of 6000 years ! What an aggregate of human ingratitude ! What a gigantic record of divine patience and mercy ! Oh, if all these journeys of Shepherd-love could be told ! If a volume were to be written with this title—“ *Until He found them,* ” I suppose that all the world could not contain the books that should be written.

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## The flock found, and its Return to the fold.

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"AND WHEN HE HATH FOUND IT, HE LAYETH IT ON HIS SHOULDERS, REJOICING. AND WHEN HE COMETH HOME, HE CALLETH TOGETHER HIS FRIENDS AND NEIGHBOURS, SAYING UNTO THEM, REJOICE WITH ME; FOR I HAVE FOUND MY SHEEP WHICH WAS LOST. I SAY UNTO YOU, THAT LIKEWISE JOY SHALL BE IN HEAVEN OVER ONE SINNER THAT REPENTETH, MORE THAN OVER NINETY AND NINE JUST PERSONS, WHICH NEED NO REPENTANCE."—LUKE XV. 5-7.

"FOR YE WERE AS SHEEP GOING ASTRAY; BUT ARE NOW RETURNED UNTO THE SHEPHERD AND BISHOP OF YOUR SOULS."—1 PET. II. 25.

## THE FLOCK FOUND, AND ITS RETURN TO THE FOLD.

IN the previous chapter, we spoke of God's grace manifested in diverse ways in the seeking of the lost; His unwearied patience in tracking the erring footsteps of the wanderers; not content with seeking for them, but searching "until He find them."

In what strange unwonted places and resorts the Shepherd of Israel often finds the members of His flock! As the traveller witnesses, at times, the blue gentian peeping up through the snow-wreaths in the heights of Alpine passes,—a child of summer where winter wears his icy diadem; or, as the antiquary at times discovers some rare bit of carving, or tracery, nestling amid the wreck and debris which encircle the old ivy-clad loop-holed ruin;—so are God's sheep discovered often where we should have least expected them.

Witness Manasseh, that stray wanderer on the hills of Judah. See how God searched him out "amid the thorns," where, we read, he first took refuge; and then in the dungeon vault of Babylon. See how He followed after him, "*until He found him;*" and the long-lost, but finally captured wanderer, leapt into the Shepherd's arms.

Look at Paul of Tarsus, the leader of a devious flock; not content to stray himself, but seducing others to follow.

See how the Shepherd pursues him over the stony wilds of unbelief, self-righteousness, bigotry, and guilt; crying, ‘Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me? It is hard for thee to kick against the pricks. Why longer resist the grace that has marked thee as its own?’ The chief of erring wanderers responded to the call of shepherd-love. With bleating cry, he too rushed panting and trembling to the feet and the fold he never deserted again.

Look at Zaccheus hiding amid the thick branches of the sycamore, until the Saviour passed by. He was the one of all the Jericho flock least likely to be reclaimed. But the Shepherd’s eye penetrated his place of concealment. He cried, ‘Zaccheus! come down! To-day, lost wanderer, thou art to abide in my fold.’

Look at the woman from the city! “Simon, seest thou this woman?” ‘Seest thou this sheep, the brand of infamy on her brow, the stain of lost purity on her fleece?’ If others scorn her bleating cries, the Divine Shepherd, who “gave His life” for her, does not.

Look at the dying thief. It was a sheep in the fangs of the wolf; death was already dimming his eye. It was the unlikeliest time to be saved. But the Shepherd rushes to the rescue, saying—“I have called thee by thy name, thou art mine.” That day he was with Jesus in the fold of Paradise!

And how many, doubtless, can tell the same tale of wondrous patience, forbearance, and love;—that they are miracles of grace;—their history this—“The chief of sinners, but I obtained mercy!” How many and diverse, too, have been God’s method of reclaiming! He has fol-

lowed some with worldly calamity. He spoke to you—He “*searched* you out,”—by sickness,—by making gaps in your household—by sudden and severe bereavements. You would not listen otherwise to your Shepherd’s voice. He had tried you by gentler means;—by tender compassion—unruffled prosperity—abounding mercies. But you spurned His calls; and He had to bring you back “by terrible things in righteousness!” Ah! if we but knew it, how often are these desolating afflictions only the louder tones of the Shepherd’s voice—the wise and needful constraint of the Shepherd’s love? We have heard of the earthly shepherd who failed to induce the sheep to enter the door of the fold. It eluded all his attempts: it persisted in remaining on the outside pastures. After having exhausted every other expedient, his last resort was successful. He took its bleating lamb, and carried it in his arms inside the fold. The mother no longer resisted; obeying the instincts of nature, she followed her offspring. The Shepherd attained His object, and the wicket-gate closed them in against the storms of night. How often does the Great Shepherd take a tender lamb from a parent’s side—a loved child,—set it inside the gate of the heavenly fold, that He may tempt and constrain the other to follow after it!

But to pursue the more special subject of this chapter. We adverted, in the former, to the Shepherd’s going after the sheep *until he found it*. Let us now attend to His dealing with it on finding it, and its restoration to the fold. “*When he hath found it, he layeth it on his shoulders rejoicing.*”

If we spoke of His patient, untiring perseverance as wondrous; there is something surely equally touching and beautiful in this next delineation in the Divine picture. If it had been the kindest and tenderest earthly father, meeting his wayward disobedient child, we could not have been surprised had the story depicted him with a frown on his countenance, displeasure in his eye, the rod of chastisement in his hand. He scarce could conceal or disguise how keenly he felt the filial ingratitude. Kings and despots of the earth, in bestowing their favours and pardons, have done so, too frequently, with every mark of humiliation and disgrace. Edward the Third of England dispensed pardon at the gates of Calais, but it was when the crouching citizens came with halters round their necks—the degrading badges of servitude; and even this act of clemency was extorted by the intercession of his queen. Another sent his pardoned enemy home,—but it was with rayless eyes—emptied sockets, the perpetual memorials of ignominious defeat. How different the ways of God;—the dealings of the Great Shepherd of souls towards the reclaimed wanderer from His fold! The history of these wanderers may have been sad indeed. A history of neglect, rebellion, waywardness. We may expect when the Shepherd overtakes, to hear nothing but words of upbraiding; harsh tones of deserved and merited rebuke. But no! the Lord upbraideth not. If we were to select the most tenderly affecting part of the New Testament parable, it would be, when, in silent love, He lays the lost sheep on His shoulders rejoicing. The past—with all its forgetfulness, and disobedience, and ingrati-

tude, seems to be obliterated. The Shepherd is so immersed in His own joy in the rescue, that He has no leisure to think of its waywardness. Days, and weeks, and years may have been spent in weary pursuit after the erring sinner, but all the distance, and fatigue, and difficulties of the journey seem forgotten in the moment of ecstasy, when the wanderer is clasped in His arms, and when the Shepherd rejoicing, exclaims, "This my sheep was dead, and is alive again ; it was lost and is found."

Mysterious, wondrous silence ! What ! will He say nothing about grace despised, privileges abused, conscience resisted, mercy scorned ? Will He say nothing about those dark memories of sin, that have been ever haunting some, like fearful spectres, driving them onwards and onwards to the black rocks, the hideous precipices of despair ? No ! we listen in vain for words of harshness ; we look in vain for strokes of chastisement. There are none. When He grasps the forlorn, panting fugitive, it is to take it up in His arms. When He *does* break silence—it is to exclaim, "Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep which was lost!"

Let us look at Christ's recorded dealings with some of these. Nor can we do better than take for illustration the very cases to which we have already referred. Let us see, when He finds those sheep, what He says—what He does ;—for as He dealt with them, so is He willing to deal with every lost one still.

Is it the woman in the Pharisee's house ? Who more utterly lost than she ? Scorned and hooted by those in whose company she then was : like the maimed or dis-

eased member of the flock we may have seen on our own mountain-sides—persecuted by the others—thrust aside from their pastures, and set upon with cruelty if daring to venture within reach. She had listened, doubtless, somewhere, to the true Shepherd's voice, He who “ calleth His own sheep by name, and leadeth them out !” She had heard His gentle sayings. She had probably heard Him drop those gracious balm-words of comfort—(Oh, to one whose bleating cry was ever this, “ I have gone astray like a lost sheep,” what could have been more soothing to these weary, wandering feet of sin and wretchedness,) “ Come unto me, and I will give you rest !” She may have heard Him say, “ I am the door, by me if any man enter in he shall be saved.” Might *she* not enter? Yes! others may exclude her,—scornful brows may frown upon her, and bid her away. But she knows that a kinder Shepherd and a better Fold than earth can give her wherein to rest her weary spirit, are at hand. She will throw herself at the wicket-gate, and let her tears plead her suit. The Shepherd sees her; and what says He? Does He dwell upon her flagrant life:—does He mock her anguish by bitter upbraiding? No! with all her foul black stains, He yet lifts her from the dust, throws open the gates of His fold, and tells her to go in and out and find pasture!

Is it Zaccheus? He too was a guilty, aggravated wanderer; his character blackened with extortion and fraud. But the Shepherd calls him to His presence. When the guilty publican heard the name pronounced by that Infinitely Pure One, “ Zaccheus !” the whole unworthy memories of a past

life-time may at the moment have rushed before him. He may have expected to hear from these lips of burning holiness nothing but severe reproach and unmeasured invective. The detected lost one would perhaps gladly have plunged back into the bramble thicket, from which (prompted by curiosity) he had incautiously ventured. But he is also taken and laid on the Shepherd's shoulders rejoicing. Christ has not one angry word to utter. He speaks kindly to him. That poor indurated soul, unaccustomed to one look or word of complacency; scorned,—hateful and hated;—pointed at by his fellows, with the odious title, “*The extortioneer of Jericho!*” When he hears that gracious Healer saying, ‘Zaccheus! I am coming to be a dweller in thy house;—to share thy meal;—to tell thee of better pastures than thy hungry soul has ever fed upon’ he lifts his drooping head, as do the leaves of the flower—to the gleam stealing through the grated dungeon. This trembling sheep leaps into the Shepherd’s arms; and if the crowd around wonder, and raise the unkind taunt; if they whisper aloud the old history of his sins; the Redeemer only lifts His eyes from a scorning earth to a sympathising heaven, as he thus silently addresses the angel spectators, “Rejoice with Me, for I have found My sheep which was lost.”

Is it the Thief on the cross? a sheep bleating in the agonies of death! He sees his Shepherd bleeding by his side;—the Good Shepherd, giving that moment His own life for the sheep. When he cries, “Lord, remember me!” is the Shepherd’s taunting reply—“Yes, I remember thee; —I remember all thy guilty wanderings—thy cursings—thy murders—thy life-long villanies;—perish in righteous

retribution for thy crimes ? ” No ! In that hour of mysterious anguish, the dying Saviour lays the dying thief on His shoulders, and they enter together the golden wicket-gate of the fold of paradise !

Or shall we take, yet once more, a different example. Look at Peter. His, indeed, was but a temporary wandering from the pastures in which he had long reposed, and from the Shepherd he had long loved. Yet, in one sense, this very fact fearfully aggravated the crime of his ingratitude and desertion. But when the risen Saviour meets the trembling Apostate, what does He say ? Does He rehearse all the miseries of that wretched alienation, since the night he broke lose from the fold, when the Shepherd was smitten and the sheep scattered ? Does He recall to him all his plighted, but sadly-broken vows of inviolable fidelity, on lake and mountain, and at quiet communion season ? Does He aggravate the pangs of his sorrowing spirit by recounting the oaths, and curses, and presumptuous falsehood in Pilate’s judgment-hall ? Does He upbraid him for his guilty coward-absence from the foot of the cross, when the bolder hearts of the Marys and the gentle spirit of John confronted that awful scene ? Listen ; “ *Simon son of Jonas ! LOVEST THOU ME ?* ” That broken bosom was not needlessly lacerated by speaking of sins too deeply felt to need being laid bare. The threefold denial draws forth no severer, no more cutting or wounding rebuke, than the threefold challenge of LOVE ‘ Simon ’—as if He said, ‘ I forget the past ;—I bury it in oblivion. Come, stray sheep, into thy Shepherd’s arms. Give the silent promise of faithful obedience for the future. Go back amid the flocks of thy

companions;—teach them by word, and warning, and example, never to stray! When thou art “turned again”—“when thou art ‘converted,’ strengthen thy brethren.” “Simon, son of Jonas! lovest thou Me?” “Feed My lambs—feed My sheep!”

Oh, how tender, how winning is the Great Shepherd in all these and such-like dealings! “The love of Christ constraineth us.” Nothing but love will draw the sinner—melt the heart, and subdue its enmity. The *goodness* of God leadeth to repentance. Sinai—the mount of terror—gives forth its stern utterance, “Thou *shalt* follow the Shepherd:” it threatens its curses on those who fail to follow Him. Calvary gives forth its voice of love; and we love Him and follow Him because He first loved us.

Can it be said of us, “Ye *were* as sheep going astray, but are now returned unto the Shepherd and Bishop of your souls?” If so, how happy our condition! How great the contrast between these hours of bitter alienation and wandering, and those attending this joyous restoration! It is the difference between the furious lava-stream, burning up and blighting everything before it, in its fiery career; but whose surface, a few years hence, is carpeted with verdure, on which purple grapes pillow their ripe clusters. Astray from the fold, away from the Shepherd, you cannot be happy. No! with death and immortality before you, you cannot be satisfied with the poor gilded joys of the present, if you have nothing over and above, (nothing better,) with which to fill the aching voids of your soul. Too truthful and suggestive is the symbolic truth conveyed by a painter in an allegorical picture of the world;—children in a church-

yard, sporting with soap-bubbles by the side of an opened grave! The bubbles are beauteous—lustrous with rainbow tints; but, one by one, they burst, some in the air, others as they touch the fringing grass; the vapoury moisture of all, falling into that dark hollow at their feet. No, no! the true repose of the heart is in *God*. The true rest of the soul is in the clefts of the Rock! To revert to the figure already employed, you cannot detain the eagle in the forest. You may gather around him a chorus of choicest birds;—you may give him a perch on the goodliest pine;—you may charge winged messengers to bring him choicest dainties;—but he will spurn them all. Spreading his lordly wings, and, with his eye on the Alpine cliff, he will soar away to his own ancestral halls amid the munitions of rocks and the wild music of tempest and waterfall! The soul of man, in its eagle soarings, will rest with nothing short of the Rock of Ages. Its ancestral halls are the halls of Heaven. Its munitions of rocks are the attributes of God. The sweep of its majestic flight is Eternity! “Lord, THOU hast been our dwelling-place in all generations!”

Nor let any unworthy doubts, any unbelieving surmises, be harboured as to the Shepherd’s willingness to save. If we have been taught anything by the subject of this chapter, it surely is that blessed truth which is too often overlooked and disowned—“The Son of man is come to seek and to save that which is lost.” Mark, it is Himself in these words who speaks! It is not *man*. Man has too often ‘only a harsh verdict for the penitent. As was the case with the unfeeling guests in the house of the Pharisee, the cruel whisper is often all that goes round when

the trembling sheep is seen crouching at the Shepherd's feet. Too many deal with the outcast and fallen as the watchman in the Song dealt with the weeping bride—tearing off her veil and loading her with reproaches. But the Chief Shepherd is more tender and loving than His undershepherds. He has no words but forgiveness—“Behold *I*, even *I*!”—*I*, Incarnate Purity. *I*, who on account of sin had to shed My life's blood, and therefore who hate it with a perfect hatred. Yet even *I* am ready to say to all who seek My mercy—“Your sins, which are many, are forgiven you!” Every such drooping, withered flower in His garden He tells to lift up its head. It reminds one of the decayed and decaying leaves of the rose, which the gardener would have cast among the rubbish, or left the autumn winds to strew on the ground; but which loving hands gather in baskets, that they may be stored up for years in some treasured vessel to shed perfume through all the house!

Do not think of God in the light of a gloomy and unscriptural theology, as the Romans thought of their Jupiter in the capitol, a wrathful Being, with the bolt in his hand, ever delighting to launch the thunder. Think of Him rather as the *Seeker of the Lost*; “not willing that any should perish;” calling sinners to His feet,—not, as we might have dreamt or expected, with the halter round their neck, the brand on their brow, and the chains dangling at their side,—but speaking to them as a Father—dealing with them as a *Shepherd*; saying to them with the authority of a King—“As I live I have no pleasure in the death of him that dieth.” Mock no longer the Shepherd's

entreaties. His exhortations may even now be addressed to you. He may be pursuing you by the voice of His providence. He may be showing you, as you never saw it before, the desolateness of this wilderness,—the awful isolation of the spirit away from Himself! He may be robbing you of your substance, or blighting your earthly hopes,—opening graves for your children, or putting an impressive mockery on the vain magnificence of a dead and dying world; one or all of these may be the footsteps of the pursuing Shepherd. Do you never pause to think, that the farther you stray from His fold, you are increasing His toilsome journey,—adding to the travail of His soul,—vexing and saddening a loving Saviour's heart? On the other hand, think of the joy which your restoration and return would cause to that Divine Shepherd! Here is His own delineation of that joy—“When he cometh home he calleth his friends and neighbours together, saying, Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep which was lost.” Encouraging, sustaining thought to those who may be now returning back to the fold. You are thereby causing Jesus to rejoice! The breakings of heart—the penitential sighings and tears of the closet—have a glorious counterpart in Heaven. For every sinner that stands weeping at the Cross, there is a Saviour rejoicing on the throne. As He hurries back with you along the wilderness path, in the arms of His everlasting love, He says—“I am glorified in them!” Nay, more,—His own beautiful parable tells us, that it is no common joy which greets the return of the wanderer. “Joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repented,—*more* than over ninety and

nine just persons who need no repentance." This would seem among other suggestive truths to announce to us, that the salvation of the sinner is the marvel of marvels—the prodigy of prodigies. The tears of the lowly penitent are matter of loftier rejoicing, than the songs and adorations and unfaltering obedience of those angels who have never swerved from their steadfastness. From the ninety and nine orbs tenanted by principalities and powers, there rolls not in to the throne of God a tide of glory so wondrous as that from a ransomed world. Hence we read, that when the heavenly inhabitants would find throughout the universe the noblest theme for their praises—the grandest and most august display of Jehovah's glory,—they look, not upward to the throne, but stoop downwards to the cross. This is the burden of their ascription : "The whole EARTH" (not Heaven) "is filled with His glory,"—"Unto principalities and powers in heavenly places, is made known *by the Church*, the manifold wisdom of God."

Finally, ye who are now reposing safely within the sacred enclosure, ever give God all the glory of your restoration. It was He who sought you out when your feet were stumbling on the dark mountains. It was by Him alone that you, lost one, were brought home. This may well be your ever-grateful testimony,—"Unless the Lord had been my help, my soul had almost dwelt in silence ; when my foot slipped, thy mercy, O Lord, held me up." Blessed Saviour, to whom can I go but unto Thee ? The wandering sheep may turn scornfully from its restoring shepherd ; the eagle may cling to its ignoble cage and despise its

rocky fastnesses ; the prodigal may mock a parent's intreaties, and recklessly cleave to his alien home and beggar's fare ; the parched pilgrim may turn with averted head from the gushing stream ; but Thou, Restorer of this lost and ruined soul ! let me never be guilty of the foul ingratitude of forgetting THEE. "Great" (oh, how great !) "is Thy mercy toward me ; and Thou hast delivered my soul out of the lowest hell !"



## The Shepherd of the Flock Smitten.

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"AWAKE, O SWORD, AGAINST MY SHEPHERD, AND AGAINST THE MAN THAT  
IS MY FELLOW, SAITH THE LORD OF HOSTS: SMITE THE SHEPHERD."—  
ZECH. XIII. 7.

## THE SHEPHERD OF THE FLOCK SMITTEN.

IN contemplating, in the preceding pages, the successive pictures of the Flock astray, and its return to the fold, we have been led casually to anticipate the great topic of the salvation purchased by the Shepherd for the guilty and the perishing. We shall make, however, themes of such peerless importance subject of more special and peculiar consideration in this and the following chapter, before passing to other Bible delineations regarding the Sheep.

In the sublime figurative language of the prophet Zechariah, a mysterious summons is heard in the court of Heaven. The sword of Justice, which had slumbered in its sheath ever since the time when rebel angels had swerved from their allegiance, is again awoke. We listen in thought to the most awful words which ever broke the trance of Eternity,—“ Awake, O sword, against my Shepherd, and against the man that is my fellow, saith the Lord of hosts; smite the Shepherd.”

The first thing which strikes us in this remarkable, this tremendous utterance is, that it is God the Eternal Father who gives the decree for the smiting of the Shepherd. It is at the bidding of Jehovah that that awful sword leaps from its scabbard,—“ Awake, O sword, *saith the Lord of hosts.*”

Here, however, we must from the outset guard against aught that would tend to derogate from the character of God as a God of Love. We repeat the remark which we have already made, if there be any teaching which requires to be repudiated more than another, as alike repulsive and unscriptural, it is the unguarded language of those who speak of God much in the same way as they would speak of a heathen Moloch;—a vindictive Being,—an avenging Deity, whose wrath can be appeased and propitiated only by offerings of blood. The love of God is thus falsely represented as something ‘bought,’ extorted at the expense of another, the purchase-price being these untold sufferings of His co-eternal Son!

Ah, it would be a worthless thing that. Love is a thing that cannot be bribed. This noblest of emotions can never be degraded to the level of a marketable commodity—a piece of mercenary barter. Besides, God’s love needed not thus to be purchased. That love was the primal cause of all blessing to His creatures. It existed before the birth of time. Ere ever angel pealed his anthem, or morning star sang responsive to a jubilant sisterhood of worlds; it was that love which, in the Eternity that is past, first devised the amazing scheme of Redemption, and through the Eternity to come, the ascription of the triumphant Church will be, “Thanks be unto GOD for His unspeakable gift.”

The manifestation, however, of Love on the part of a great Moral Governor, must be compatible with the exercise of His moral perfections. God’s Justice, Holiness, Righteousness must be upheld inviolate. While mercy

and truth go before His face, Justice and Judgment must continue the habitation of His throne. Under the specious semblance of exalting the Divine Ruler in the estimation of His loving and adoring creatures, it is easy to talk of His unlimited mercy, His boundless compassion;—that by a mere behest of omnipotence, a volition of His sovereignty, He could have pardoned a rebel world, and gathered back the lost sheep to the fold.

Such declaimers, however, look only to the *Being* of God; they do not think of His *Character*. Doubtless, as the Omnipotent, He could do anything. He could, in the exercise of uncontrolled Almightiness, replace, this hour, Satan and his legion host on archangel thrones. So far as *power* is concerned, He could easily have dispensed with any medium of atonement,—forbade the awaking of that sword, the wearing of that crown of thorns, and reinstated the fallen simply by the proclamation of a universal amnesty. But what God, as the Omnipotent, *COULD* do, God, as the Holy, Righteous, Just, True, could *not* do. He could not promulgate laws, and leave the transgressor to mock them with impunity. He could not compromise His character;—He could not stultify Himself;—He could not degrade His legislative enactments into a mere name and nullity. Had He done so, (rather *could* He have done so,) the pillars of His eternal throne would have tottered to their base.

Was there, then, in the case of guilty man, any possible method, compatible with the exercise of His moral attributes, by which the honour of God's name and character and throne could be preserved intact, and yet the trans-

gressor be saved ? *Reason* is silent here. Unassisted reason can shed no light on the great problem. Nay, rather, had Reason been left to frame the reply, there could have been but one,—“ No hope,”—“ A certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation.” The principle of substitution—the innocent suffering for the guilty—is one undreamt of in earthly philosophy. It is enough for us to accept the glorious *revealed* truth, that the principle is one recognised and sanctioned in the Divine economy ;—that here, at least, is one way, and it is the only one, by which the God who has so solemnly averred that He “ can by no means clear,” *can* clear the guilty ;—ay, and who, moreover, in doing so, can pour the lustre of a high vindication around every perfection of His nature, and every requirement of His law. For awful as would have been the testimony to the Divine Holiness and Justice and Truth, if sinners had been shut up in the fold of destruction, and the cry had been heard, “ Awake, O sword against these sheep;”—not so awful an attestation would it have been, as when from His own lips proceeded the thrilling words, “ Awake, O sword, against my Shepherd, and against the man that is my fellow ! ” The Shepherd *has* been smitten ;—the Divine honour has been upholden. Mercy and Truth have been betrothed before the altar of Calvary ; God hath joined them together for the salvation of the human race, and that marriage-covenant never can be disannulled. Justice is now equally interested with Love in the rescue of the fallen. God is the *just* God, and yet the Saviour. “ Oh, righteous Father,” exclaimed the Redeemer in His valedictory prayer, “ the

world hath not known Thee." "They do not understand the infinite depths of Thy love. But surely when that sword awakes, its gleam will flash the truth upon their souls. It will reveal what the intensity of that Love must have been glowing in Thy heart, which, rather than lose a race of wanderers,—a flock given over to slaughter,—made Thee willing to give Thine Eternal Son as a peerless ransom!" Yes; we may go farther, and boldly aver; if the Father's *Love* had not been infinite, Justice would ere now have been bidden sheathe her sword,—the bands would have been loosed from the head of the Divine Victim,—the Sinless One would have gone free, and guilty myriads been left to perish. But Love triumphs. The command is given, "Bind the sacrifice with cords, even unto the horns of the altar;" "Awake, O sword, against my Shepherd, and against the man that is my fellow; smite the Shepherd!"

# The Shepherd giving His Life for the Sheep.

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"I AM THE GOOD SHEPHERD: THE GOOD SHEPHERD GIVETH HIS LIFE FOR  
THE SHEEP."—JOHN X. 11.

## THE SHEPHERD GIVING HIS LIFE FOR THE SHEEP.

WILL the Shepherd undertake the awful alternative ? Will the Man who is Jehovah's Fellow, His co-eternal Son, be willing to give His own life for the sheep, and accept the tremendous responsibilities implied in such a Suretyship ? Behold the fire and the wood, but what of the Lamb for a burnt-offering ?

“Also I heard the voice of the Lord saying, Whom shall I send, and who will go for us ?”

At that interrogation, we can well imagine there would be silence in Heaven. Each eye would be directed to the sword still slumbering at the foot of the eternal throne, and then upwards to the One glorious Being who could alone undertake the mission, and pay the adequate ransom. The question would pass from rank to rank, “Will He save others, or will He save Himself ? Will He delegate some minister of wrath on the errand of retribution to the flock pent up in the fold, or will He Himself become the Redeemer of a doomed and dying world ?”

They are not kept in suspense. The silence is broken by a voice from the excellent glory, “Behold, here am I, send Me !” The Shepherd, as we have seen, is represented in the parable as leaving the ninety and nine,—the glorious angelic beings who hymned His praises from

all eternity,—and “going after that which was lost.” There is something tenderly true to nature in this description. The ninety and nine occupy, for the time, little of His thoughts in comparison with the one erring wanderer. Have you never observed how the mother’s tenderest care and love are lavished on her little invalid? The rest of the family, the hardier shrubs, are left to battle with the storm, but this nestles in her bosom, and engrosses all her sympathies. Or have you never heard her tell the touching story, as to how all her living treasures are nothing to the one that lies in yonder churchyard? She will tell how wrong she feels it to be, with so many blessings still remaining; but yet, in spite of all, how her anguished heart will go after “that which is lost!”

Jesus is like that parent. He loves the lost more than the ninety and nine. He seems for the moment to forget all the fold in His pitying fondness for the wanderer. “He goeth after it.” Dare we attempt to follow Him in His pilgrimage of incarnate love? What a journey was that, from the heights of glory to the depths of humiliation! Think of the mountains of transgression He had to climb! Think of the valleys of humiliation He had to descend! Think, as He pursues, of the thorns which pierced His bleeding feet! Think of the nights of darkness in which His unpillowed head was denied the rest of the lowliest of His creation! Nothing would daunt Him in His divine heroic purpose. In this respect, how different the Shepherd from His fickle, irresolute, feeble flock! The utterance of one of the latter was this, “Lord, I will even lay down my life for Thy sake.” Alas! when the testing time came, how

the conduct of the renegade apostle belied the words so bravely (too bravely) spoken! The Good Shepherd had made a similar utterance, "I lay down My life for the sheep." "But HE fainteth not, neither is weary." What as the God-man He spake, as the God-man He also performed. "He saved others, Himself He *would* not save." Oh ! there is no more elevating subject of contemplation than the joyful alacrity with which the Great Surety undertook this work, and longed for its completion. "Before the mountains were settled, before there were fountains abounding with water," the Shepherd-Redeemer seemed to take a hallowed delight in coming down to gaze on the fold, the half-formed world which was to become the scene of His redemption. Hear His own expressive words, "Sacrifice and offering" (the poor expiation which man could provide by the blood of slain victims) "thou didst not desire. But a body hast thou prepared me. Lo ! I come!"—(at once the High Priest and Sacrifice, that I may offer the prepared body on the altar of my Divine nature;—the altar which sanctifieth the gift)—"Lo ! I come. I delight to do thy will, O my God !" In another passage He is represented, still as the Shepherd of His people, looking down the vista of ages from these remote eras of a past eternity. He sees the sheep scattered far and wide on the desolate mountains. He sees death and the grave hunting them over the precipices of ruin; and He exclaims, as the bleat of the despairing flock reaches His ear, "I will ransom them from the power of the grave, I will redeem them from death. O death, I will be thy plagues ! O grave, I will be thy destruction!" As the crisis approaches for

the fulfilment of His vast purpose, His desire to give His life for the sheep, and to fulfil His covenant engagement, seems to grow in vehement intensity. Moreover, while the bravest human spirits frequently start and recoil at the thought of death, see how this Great Victim loves often and again to dwell on His approaching sufferings and sacrifice. “I lay down My life,” says He, “for the sheep.” “Therefore doth my Father love me, because I lay down my life, that I may take it again. No man taketh it from me, but I lay it down of myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again.” In the scene of His transfiguration-glory, it is the same wondrous theme which forms the topic of conversation between Himself and the heavenly visitants. They talked, not of His glory as God. They spake of Him, not as the Shepherd of the Universe, calling his worlds, like the sheep of His flock, “by name, by the greatness of His might;”—but they spake of the Shepherd plunging into the torrent of wrath to effect their rescue;—“They spake of His decease which He should accomplish at Jerusalem.” As the hour drew still nearer, the same awful anticipation seems to fill more and more His loving eye and loving heart; as if He had room only for one thought and one sight, that of the flock of wanderers being reclaimed and saved, by the pouring out of His blood,—“I have a baptism to be baptized with, and how am I straitened until it be accomplished.” In His last intercessory prayer, we hear Him exclaiming, as the hour of suffering is close at hand, “Father, the hour is come, glorify thy Son.” And again, under the very shadow of the Cross, He breaks out into these words of triumph,

“ Now is the Son of man glorified, and God is glorified in Him !” In the case of the sacrifices of Pagan Rome, it was considered an evil omen if the victim struggled. If our all-glorious Victim had struggled or staggered in His wondrous work, we *must* have been lost for ever ! But He falters not one moment. On He pursues the blood-stained path, until, stretched on the Tree, He can shout the last glorious word of triumph and of consummated victory, “ *It is finished ;* ” and yielding up the ghost, exclaims, “ Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit.”

Oh ! wondrous, unspeakable condescension ! Matchless, unparalleled self-consecration ! He who had known no relation but that of co-equality with God ; He who is called “ My Shepherd,” “ My Fellow ;” He who was Himself seated on the pinnacles of all Being, and superior to all law, yet is made *under* law ; He voluntarily assumed a place of subordination, and “ took upon Him the form of a servant.” Behold how He loved them ! His whole work is indeed a miracle and triumph of love. We can understand the utterance of the sceptic of a former age, as the gospel plan of atoning mercy was unfolded to him—“ It is far too great—it is far too good to be true.” Yes, measuring the deed of love by human comparisons, or by human antecedents, it is so. Man never so loved his brother man. “ But God so loved the world.” We read in old classic story of a magnanimous patriot sacrificing his life for another. Pylades laid down his life for Orestes his *friend*. “ But God commendeth His love toward us, in that while we were yet *sinners*, Christ died for us.” Well may He be called “ the Good Shepherd.” He, the

true Jacob, can say, “That which was torn of beasts I bare the loss of it. In the day, the drought consumed me, and the frost by night, and my sleep departed from mine eyes!” He, the true Aaron, with the burning coals in his censer of love, hath come between the living and the dead, and the plague is stayed! He, the true David, when the lion and the bear were rushing on his defenceless flock, encountered them single-handed and alone, and rescued them from “the mountains of prey!” He, the true Jonah, flung Himself into the boiling, surging deep, saying—“Take Me up, and cast Me forth into the sea; so shall the sea be calm unto you; and the sea ceased from her raging!” He, the loving Shepherd and Bishop of souls, comes to every lost one, and pointing to the open gate of the fold, says—“Behold, I have set before you an open door!” Justice hath sheathed her sword. The arm of the law is powerless. “There is no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus!” That must have been a wondrous morning when victorious Israel stood on the other side of the Red Sea—making its shores ring with their anthems of triumph. Terrible, too, were these trophies of Divine vengeance that strewed the beach;—the bodies of Pharaoh’s warriors, with the sword still fastened by their side or clutched with the grasp of death. Or awful must have been that kindred spectacle—the mailed legions of Sennacherib—who had, the night before, been gathering up their strength like a proud wave, to dash themselves against the towers of Zion. When the morning dawns, the 180,000 are still there, with sword and spear and helmet and streaming banner; but these banners wave over a

silent camp. The trumpet of battle lies beside silent lips; —the gleaming sword is clutched by powerless hands. It is a camp of *death*. Sword and spear are still intact: but the arms that wielded them are powerless. The angel of death has descended at midnight, and converted the tented field into a sepulchre !

So it is with that sword of condemnation. The curses of the law, like the weapons of Pharaoh or Sennacherib, are still there; each demanding satisfaction, and declaring, "The soul that sinneth it shall die." But the Great Angel has come down at midnight and paralysed these arms. He has, by His own doing and dying, rendered the law powerless to smite. "Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law by being made a curse for us." Ay, and not only are we thereby released from condemnation. It is more than a mere negative salvation which has been secured. An earthly king, by virtue of an act of royal clemency, can open the dungeon doors and let a prisoner go free. He is a pardoned man,—but he is not a justified man;—the old brand is still on his brow, though released from the fear of punishment and death. It is more, however, with the redeemed sinner. Not only is he justified, having the sentence—"Not guilty," pronounced upon him; but he stands also arrayed in the imputed merits of that sinless Saviour. 'The live coal of pardon is taken from the smouldering fuel on the altar where the Great Sacrifice is laid. It touches his lips and he goes forth "clean."

Child of God, member of the ransomed Flock, which He hath purchased with His own blood, "as far as east is

distant from the west, so far hath He removed your transgressions from you." Wondrous picture! You can take the wings of the morning, and make the sun your chariot —traverse intervening oceans and continents till that sun dips his burning wheels in the western wave; and when you take a retrospective view of that magnificent circuit, think of it as God's own emblem of the distance to which He is willing to remove your transgressions from *your* sight and His own!

Seek often, devoutly and reverentially, to contemplate this sacrificial work and atonement of your Great Shepherd. Beware of the theology that is now-a-days creeping stealthily in under subtle disguises and ingenious fallacies, which would rob us of that great central truth of Bible teaching, without which all others would be vain,—the vicarious sufferings of our blessed Lord; Christ our Substitute — wounded for our transgressions; and though personally sinless, yet, as our Surety-Redeemer, said to be "*made sin for us.*" We do not undervalue the precious truth of Christ our Example—Christ, as we shall immediately come to consider Him, as our guiding Shepherd, "going before His sheep," "leading them out" and marking out for them their pasture. But we would place, in peerless importance, in the foreground of these Shepherd-picturings, the *Altar of Sacrifice*, the crown of thorns, and the bitter cross; white-robed Justice with her unsheathed weapon;—Heaven and Earth listening in hushed suspense—in mysterious silence, to the terrific summons—"Awake, O sword, against my Shepherd, and against the Man that is my fellow; smite the Shepherd!"

Let us close these thoughts with a twofold lesson.  
What an awful thing is sin, which cost the Son of God  
so much !

How vile does it seem when brought side by side with the holiness of the Immaculate Surety ! As the lightning, when it leaps from the midnight cloud, makes the darkness more felt ;—as discord is most grating to the ear when it rises in the midst of sublime and beautiful harmony ;—or as those northern battle-fields of olden days and terrible memory, were all the more fearful to look upon, from seeing the blood crimsoning the virgin snow,—so, when we see the crimson and scarlet guilt of His people tinging the snow-white purity of that Spotless Being, how terrible does sin appear ! How fearful must have been His recoil from this the foe of His nature and His universe, during every step of His Divine pilgrimage ;—more especially at the closing scene, when the powers of darkness were gathered around His cross ; and how at that hour must He have longed with holy ardour to rescue from the pit of perdition the millions under its dominion and curse, otherwise doomed to suffer the vengeance of eternal fire ! See that ye trifle not with an offered salvation, purchased at such an expenditure of blood and suffering. Oh, if, on account of sin, God “spared not *His own Son*,” Sinner !—thou who art still nurturing in thy bosom the adder which planted its fangs in the heart of Infinite Purity,—thinkest thou He will spare *thee* ? If God poured out these vials of wrath on the Innocent, what will He do with the guilty ? “If these

things were done in the green tree, what shall be done with the dry?"

The other closing lesson is one which runs like a golden thread through the entire theme we have so cursorily treated. Let it be the last on which the eye rests—*the Love of God*. God—the eternal God—smiting His Shepherd—His Fellow—for the sake of lost sinners! He, even He—could give no costlier proof of love than this. Reader! having given you the greater pledge, you may take it as a guarantee for the bestowment of all lesser blessings. When His providential dispensations at times seem baffling and mysterious;—when there seems no bright light in the cloud, no mercy in His footstep;—when you are apt to say with Gideon, "If the Lord be with us, why has all this befallen us?" revert to that cross—that mysterious smiting! Let it hush every rebellious thought. Did *He* wear that crown of thorns for *thee*? Did *He* pour out His life's blood for *thee*? And wilt thou murmur at aught proceeding from the Great and Good Shepherd's hands?

"Yes! God is love—a thought like this  
May well each faithless doubt remove,  
And turn all tears—all woes to bliss!  
For GOD IS LOVE!"



## The Door into the Sheep-fold.

I AM THE DOOR: BY ME IF ANY MAN ENTER IN, HE SHALL BE SAVED, AND  
SHALL GO IN AND OUT, AND FIND PASTURE."—JOHN X. 9.

## THE DOOR INTO THE SHEEP-FOLD.

IN our rapid survey of these varied Shepherd-picturings of sacred story, we have here reached the truth of all truths : Christ the Door into the sheep-fold ; Christ the Way of salvation, the Entrance-gate to heaven. What the foundation is to a house, what the heart is to the human body, what the roots are to the tree, what the key-stone is to the arch, what the sun is to the circling planets, so does this great theme stand related to all the other doctrines of the Bible system.

The verse which precedes this chapter, offers, in its successive clauses, three different topics for meditation. The Saviour, "*I am the door;*" Faith laying hold of the Saviour, "*If any man enter in he shall be saved;*" and the privileges and blessedness of the saved, "*They shall go in and out, and find pasture.*"

First, we have *The Door*. “*I am the door : by Me.*”

In every age of the world there has been a groping for this wicket-gate, a seeking for the entrance to the true pasturage of life. Men, like the blinded citizens of Sodom of old, have been wearying themselves to find the door ; and manifold have been the human systems and human devices that have sought to mimic the call of the true Shepherd.

*Paganism* has been crying, “*I am the door.*” She has made an approach through hecatombs of human sacrifice —giving the fruit of the body for the sin of the soul.

*Morality* has been saying, and is still saying, “*I am the door.*” Her creed is: ‘Every man is his own door to the fold. Live well, do good, be kind, and amiable, and virtuous, and charitable. With moral principle and unblemished life, you will be independent of all other wicket-gates: you have the means of salvation within yourself.’ As you may have seen the green ivy torn from the old crumbling ruin, to deck up and decorate the triumphal arch; so morality tries thus to deck up her archway into the pastures of peace, with rootless flowers, plucked from the ruins of our fallen nature.

*Ceremonialism* proclaims, “*I am the door.*” She appeared, in our Saviour’s days, amid the wasted forms of Judaism, pointing to ancestral privileges, the old covenant promises. Mitred priests, with their scrupulous ritual observances, their legal washings and outward purifications; Scribes and Pharisees, tithing mint and cummin, gilding the prophets’ sepulchres, and uttering long prayers, stood with broad phylacteries, as sentinels at the entrance, saying, “We have Abraham for our father: none but the children of Abraham, with the seal of circumcision, can pass here!” She has appeared in modern times, making her doorway, at one time through sacramental efficacy; at another, through the Shibboleth of party and denominational distinction. At one time making the drops of water in baptism say, ‘Through *me* ye shall be saved;’ at another, making the minister or priest the custodier of the

soul's safety,—the gate of admission, an entrance built with untempered mortar!

But "*I am the door*," says a divine Saviour, after the world had in vain, for four thousand years, groped in the dark for the *true way*. All other ways are spurious, all other doors are false and counterfeit. There are many ways that may *seem* right, but the end thereof are the ways of death. "Look unto *Me*, and be ye saved all the ends of the earth, for I am God, and there is none else." It is hard, indeed, for the natural man to surrender all his own efforts and labours, his virtues and goodness, and to be indebted, from first to last, to the doing and dying of Another. Hence the universal striving of the human race to find a door of their own into the fold, going about to establish their own righteousness, and refusing to submit themselves to the righteousness of Christ. There is something, moreover, pleasing to this nature of ours, in the old condition of "work and win." In other things we commend the principle. It is delightful to see a man, by dint of his own talent or indomitable perseverance, climbing his way to eminence and distinction; or, by bold arm and brave heart, sweeping all but insurmountable difficulties aside. It is delightful to see the working artizan, by means of energy, and brain, and toil, rising from the lowly cottage to the pinnacles of society. It is delightful to see the student—the son of peasant or mechanic—asserting the true nobility of genius, and, from lowly birth and obscure origin, becoming a fountain of wisdom; or, in high places, wielding and influencing a nation's destinies. It is noble to see the

soldier, under fearful odds, facing the bristling ramparts, and, amid shot and shell, mounting the breach. But in the matter of salvation,—merit, self-glory, there is none. “Where is boasting?” exclaims the Apostle, “it is excluded.” There is no climbing up by any other door here. There is no other lever by which the soul of fallen humanity can be raised out of the horrible pit and the miry clay. Just as all modern dynamics are puzzled and perplexed to find the lost power by which those colossal stones could have been upheaved in the temples of Memphis, or the Pyramids of Cairo; so all moral dynamics of which man is the inventor, are vain to account for the elevation of the polished stones adorning the Heavenly temple—redeemed saints in glory. It was no inherent power, no effort of human wisdom, no device of human ingenuity, no recompence of human merit, which brought them there. Here is the one only leverage, “CHRIST, *the power of God unto salvation unto every one that believeth.*” “HE hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places.” Neither is there salvation in any other, “for there is none other name under heaven given among men whereby we must be saved.”

Let us pass to the second clause of the verse, or Faith laying hold of the Saviour, “By me, *if any man enter in* he shall be saved.”

Christ, we have seen, is the Door of Salvation. Wide enough too is that door for the admission of all. “*If any man,*” is the superscription on its portals. Whatever be the age, the country, the colour of skin; rich or poor, young or

old, bond or free;—free as that sun in heaven which shines with indiscriminate splendour on mole-hill and mountain, on cottage and palace, on blade of grass and stately palm or cedar: free as that mountain-stream, singing its way, amid birch and heather, to lake or ocean: free as that stream is to the fish that sports in its pools, or to the wild deer of the forest or to the wayside pilgrim to slake their thirst: free as that ocean is to every vessel and every craft, from the rude fisherman's boat and the plank of the castaway, to the iron fortress, carrying its impenetrable sheathing and its sleeping thunders:—so free is that door of entrance into the fold of the Heavenly Shepherd. Around it, rich and poor may congregate together, with this plea, ‘The Lord is the Redeemer of us all.’ It is not like the doors opening into the high places of the world. These are patent only to the favoured few. These can only be opened by the key of influence, or merit, or intellect, or rank, or money (the golden key which fits all locks); while the multitude—the vast majority—stand outside, excluded. But all are warranted and welcome here.

Although, however, this is true, and we glory in the fulness and freeness of the Gospel Salvation, yet its blessings are appropriated *by faith*. We are not mere passive machines, incapable of moral action, to be dragged in by force into the fold. We must reach out the hand of faith to accept the proffered boon. We must “*enter in*” if we would be saved, and enjoy the heavenly pasturage. God gives us Salvation as a beauteous *Flower*. But He does not give us that flower full blown. He gives it to us in seed. He has prepared the soil for it. He holds in

His treasures, the sun, and winds, and rains, and dews that are to nurture it. The glory of that flower will be all His, but if we do not plant it, it will not grow! God gives us Salvation as a *Ship*. He says, ‘There is a vessel. I give you hulk, masts, rigging, helm, sails; water, (the element through which it is to cleave its way;) winds, (to fill its canvas;) a safe and commodious haven to receive it at last. But it is for you to avail yourselves of these. If you misuse them, if you mistime them, if you neglect them: if you cast anchor out when you should be spreading your sails, and thus forfeit the favouring breeze: if you sleep your opportunities away of clearing the harbour, you never can reach the haven where you would be!’ God gives us Salvation as a *Home*. He points the pilgrim, in the blue distance, to the purchased inheritance. He provides him with staff, and scrip, and provender. He gives him feet to walk, and eyes to see, and strength and muscle, and guide-book for the journey. But if he cast these aside, and waste the live-long day in folly or in slumber, the night will overtake him, and leave him unsheltered in the darkness and gloom! God gives Salvation as a *Fire*. He provides the fuel; but He leaves you to kindle it. The means for imparting warmth are all of His own providing. You yourself can neither manufacture wood, nor coal, nor atmospheric air. But the air is given; it is in abundance around you. The fagots are piled up beside the blind hearth; but if you want to get warm, you must heap them together and kindle them. Neglect this, and you will continue shivering in cold, and perish in the midst of plenty! The poor cripple at Be-

thesda, whatever might be the virtues of the troubled pool, had to "step in" if he would be whole of whatever disease he had ; and if others were more alert than he, or if he procrastinated and lingered, he forfeited the cure. Paul, though he had a divine assurance during the storm of Adria, that there would be the loss of no man's life, but only of the ship, yet worked unremittingly at the pumps, and sails, and rigging, as if the safety of every one on board depended on his exertions. Yes, I repeat, Faith, as spoken of by Christ, is a thing of *action*. He never represents it as a dreamy sentiment. Listen to some of the freest and most glorious of His invitations :—“*Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.*” “*Whosoever will, let him take of the water of life freely.*” “*Enter ye in at the strait gate.*” “*Strive to enter in at the strait gate.*” “*If any man enter in, he shall be saved, and shall go in and out, and find pasture.*”

Away, then, with that dishonouring religion that would degrade man into a mere automaton—deprive him of will, choice, and moral responsibility. The wicket gate is open ; —the Saviour-Shepherd is addressing in language of importunate invitation. But it is for you to rise and obey the summons. The ladder of salvation, like Jacob's of old, stretches from earth to heaven. But the ladder must be climbed. You never can enter “within the gate into the city,” if you remain, like the patriarch, slumbering at its base !

What is the reason that so many refuse to obey the invitation and enter in ? It is because they object to comply with the one only binding condition. They enter ;

but they would enter and partake of the heavenly pasturage with their sins too. They would take Christ as a Saviour, but not as a Sanctifier. They would take Christ as a Priest, but not as a King. There can be no admission on such ungodly terms. That door, wide enough to admit all,—is too narrow to admit any carrying the burden of known and indulged sin. Think of a man—a drowning man—escaping from the sinking ship. He has enough to do to buffet his way through tempest and surging sea ;—yet he rushes back to rescue some hoarded gold. He might have reached the rocks girdling the shore, if he had taken nothing to hamper or impede him. But these dead weights have dragged him to his grave in sight of safety. He and his gold perish together !

Ah, remember that solemn truth—that Jesus saves you ~~FROM~~ your sins—not IN your sins. As Paul, in that same threatened shipwreck, counselled that all the vessel's freight and treasures should be cast into the deep; so be it yours to say, with reference to every loved and cherished sin, “Yea, doubtless, and I count all things but loss, for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord.”

There yet remains to be noticed, the description here given of the saved—their privileges and blessedness; they “*shall go in and out and find pasture.*”

This beautifully describes the Christian, in his relation to the world. He “goes in and out from the fold;” he goes to and from the world, with his Lord ever in view. From Christ and His cross he draws his every motive for

duty in the midst of life's labours and occupations. He goes out *to* the world, through Christ "the door." He returns *from* the world through the same. He looks to Him as the alone path of safety. In the words of Zechariah, he "walks up and down in His name."

Happy for the Church and for the believer, if the sense of Jesus' presence and love were thus interfused through all work and toil :—if *out* in the world's bleaker pasturage-ground—as well as *within*, in the quiet of the homestead—the eye were ever directed towards that open door. Jesus is elsewhere personated as *Wisdom*. He is represented as 'opening His voice in the city'—'crying in the chief place of concourse, in the opening of the gates.' And this is true Religion—true Christianity ;—to carry a sense of a living Saviour,—the realised consciousness of our covenant relation and consecration to Him, out amid the world's din and bustle—to the Exchange, the shop, the mart of commerce—as well as to the more consecrated pasture-grounds where His people feed. And the Christian, too, may find pasture in both,—in public and in private—in the field and the fold—in the world and in the closet. In public, he can be sustained by lofty principles. In private, by prayer and secret fellowship with his Lord. "Giving thanks always for all things unto God and the Father, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ." Having his eye on that door, he can say, "I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me."

Thus have we briefly glanced at one of the most precious utterances of the Great Shepherd.

How these, and such like gracious words which proceeded out of His mouth, must have told on the wondering multitudes He addressed;—those who never heard kind sayings before;—who were led to imagine that it was learned scribes, or sanctimonious Pharisees, or austere Sadducees, or stoled priests, who alone had any hope of Salvation! Can we marvel that “the common people heard Him gladly”—when He lifted them up from the dust of degradation;—when He proclaimed boldly—“I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.” I came not to call *you* rich—*you* learned—*you* who pique yourselves on your religious formalism, and self-righteous austerities. But *you* broken-hearted penitents, weeping prodigals, despairing Magdalenes,—*you* the most erring wanderers from the fold, who are really and earnestly seeking to return. “If ANY man thirst, let him come unto me and drink.” “If ANY man enter in he shall be saved, and shall go in and out, and find pasture.”

Reader! say not, ‘This invitation cannot be for me. I cannot enter, just as I am, maimed and fleece-torn, with the memory of countless transgressions.’ Yes! *it is* just because you *are* wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked, that we invite you to come. Come, just as you are. God does not require any previous qualification. It is *because* of your poverty that He so importunately exclaims—“Behold, I have set before you an open door.” When in a season of scarcity and want, thousands thrown out of employment are forced to avail themselves of bread doled out to stay the rage of hunger; they are not heard to say—‘We must have proper clothing *first*. We must

first cover these children's bleeding, frost-bitten feet, before we can venture to appear before the almoners of a city's or a nation's bounty.' No ; if they did so, it would vitiate their plea ;—it would send them home again to a cupboard and hearth, and wardrobe, as empty as they left it. It is *because* they appear in tattered rags, and *because* hunger has written its appeal on their emaciated faces, and in the hollow eyes of the hapless children at their side, that the door opens for relief.

Remember, there is but the *one* door of safety, and no other. There was but one way to the Hebrews of old, for evading the destroying angel—by the sprinkling of blood on the door-posts of their dwellings. There was but one way through the Red Sea from the pursuing hosts of Pharaoh. There was but one way for Rahab escaping the general destruction of Jericho—by hanging out from her window the scarlet thread. There was but one way—by washing in the river of Jordan—that the proud Syrian captain could have his leprosy healed. Israel might have built up Egyptian pyramid on pyramid to keep out the messenger of wrath. It would have been of no avail. Or the million army, passing through the Red Sea, might have piled up its coral rocks to make an avenue through the waters. The wild waves would have laughed them to scorn, and made them the plaything of its tide ! Naaman might have made a toilsome pilgrimage to every river of Asia—from Abana and Pharpar, to the Euphrates and the Indus—but all would have been to no purpose. Nothing but 'the waters of Israel' would prove efficacious in curing his malady.

Arise, then, make sure of safety ; wing your flight to the Rock of Ages. You are only safe when you are found nestling in its crevices. Unmoved by storms, unworn and unsplintered by the destroying hand of time, Jesus, the Living Rock, stands infinite—immutable—all-sufficient;—faithful among the faithless—changeless among the changeable. Yes ! thou who art weary, sick at heart of the vain world which has deceived thee ;—bubble after bubble bursting in thine hands, feeding on the husks of the swine and the rubbish of the wilderness ;—thy Shepherd, with outstretched arms, is waiting to welcome thee back. He is standing, as He did eighteen hundred years ago, by the door of the sheep-fold, saying, “I am the Door,” “Him that cometh unto me, I will in no wise cast out !”

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## The Shepherd going before the flock.

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"HE CALLETH HIS OWN SHEEP BY NAME, AND LEADETH THEM OUT. AND WHEN HE PUTTETH FORTH HIS OWN SHEEP, HE GOETH BEFORE THEM, AND THE SHEEP FOLLOW HIM: FOR THEY KNOW HIS VOICE."—JOHN x. 3, 4.

## THE SHEPHERD GOING BEFORE THE FLOCK.

BEAUTIFUL is the feeling of fondness, we had almost said of affection, which from time to time we see displayed by man towards the lower animals. The cottager on the lonely moor or in the highland shieling has his faithful dog to tend him in his hours of labour, or to share morning and evening his frugal fare and the caresses of his children. Even in the dense city, the poverty-stricken inmate of the garret has her hours of solitude cheered by the tiny warbler hung up with dusky plumage in its cage. It is no simulated sorrow on her part when the note falters and the wing droops ; and the cage is suspended empty and songless by the begrimed windows. The same feeling, on a more remarkable scale still, may be seen in the case of the Hindoo with his elephant, or the Arab with his horse ; and, most of all, in that of the Oriental shepherd with his fleecy companions.

We would require to be among the hills of Judah and Gilead, or amid the vast wadys and forests of Bashan and Hermon, rightly to appreciate and understand the exquisite beauty of the figure which we are now to consider in the Pastoral parable. In these wide sheep-walks and mountain-ranges the shepherd occupies very much the relation of a parent to his offspring. He has a tender solicitude for each member of his flock. He is not the

rough hireling or stern custodier, but the kind protector and provider. He knows every sheep. He has a name for each. By night and by day he is at their side. During the hot months of summer they are taken on the cool mountain heights to a temporary fold, composed of a palisade of intertwined branches of thorn. He sleeps armed in the midst of them. He is ready to give battle to any prowling lord of the forest who (as is sometimes the case) clears at a bound the temporary rampart,—“The wolf cometh and scattereth the sheep.” Instances are on record where he has cheerfully given his life in deadly conflict, either with human plunderers or wild animals, for the protection of his flock. During the continuance of long drought, when the heavens are as brass and the earth as iron—when the herbage is dried and the sheep go bleating and pining over the withered pastures—he climbs the rock to the verdant turf fringing the hidden watercourse, and brings at his own peril a scant handful for the most needy. At other seasons, when the northern forests are alive with flocks gathered underneath the trees, the faithful shepherds mount the branches, and, stripping them of their leaves, cast them down to the companions of their solitude. Can we wonder that the sheep follow the Shepherd;—that they gather round him as their friend—love to hear his voice, and implicitly trust his guidance? Moreover, can we wonder, that to the mind of the Divine Redeemer, this lovely image, so familiar to every Hebrew, should be touchingly suggestive of the trustful love—the hallowed interchange of affection between Himself and His true people?

"WHEN HE PUTTETH FORTH HIS OWN SHEEP HE GOETH BEFORE THEM." Let us gather a few comforting reflections veiled under this symbolism.

There is, first of all, the general truth, that *all our pastures—our lots—our positions and spheres of life—are appointed and meted out for us.* That the Gracious Shepherd of Israel precedes us. That He does not put us outside the wicket-gate of the fold, and then leave us to select our own destiny; but that all which concerns us is His righteous ordination and decree. "The lot may be cast into the lap, but the whole disposing thereof is of the Lord." As surely as the pillar of cloud and fire preceded Israel in their marches, directing every encampment of the pilgrim army, so have we the Invisible Pillar of covenant faithfulness going before us in all our journey. True, it is with us, as with Moses. On his return to the spot in the Sinai desert, where he first saw the bush burning with fire, the bush was probably visible no more. He would look for it in vain. But the sacred flame in which it formerly was enveloped, still lived in the spiral column which rose up before him by night, and in the pillar-cloud by day. Christ in His human nature—Christ the lowly bush of the desert—"the tender plant"—"the root out of the dry ground;" Christ in His humiliation,—"manifest in the flesh"—we can see no more. But the Pillar of fire still remains. The Shepherd of the Flock—the invisible Redeemer is still preceding the camp of His covenant Israel: and we can say with reference to our spiritual journeyings, as it was said of old of

the Hebrew Exodus, “He led them forth by *the right way*, that they might go to a city of habitation.” Oh, it is well for us that we are not left to choose our own pasture—to thread at will the mazy labyrinths of life! “My presence,” He says, “shall go with you, and I will give you rest.” It is the Shepherd going armed before His sheep: not only pointing out the way, but seeing that it is practicable. It is the Master Husbandman going before with the ploughshare, his servants tracking his steps and inserting the seed in the upturned furrow. It is the General going before his soldiers, himself the first to scale the ladder and enter the opened breach, encouraging his troops to follow after him. The Great Shepherd asks us to tread no path which has not already been trodden by Himself. Think of the varied incidents in His life of human love and sympathy and suffering on earth: and, connecting these with every possible diversity of circumstance and experience of sorrow among ourselves, remember “HE goeth before us!” Is it infancy? He went before us here, in being Himself the Babe of Bethlehem! Is it youth? He ‘goeth before us’ in the nurturing home of Nazareth, sanctifying early toil and filial obedience! Is it hours of weariness and faintness and poverty? He ‘goeth before us’ an exhausted traveller to the well of Jacob, ‘weary with His journey!’ Is it temptation we have to struggle with? He ‘goeth before us’ to the wilderness of Judea, and to the awful depths of the olive-groves of Gethsemane, to grapple with the hour and power of darkness! Is it loss of friends? He ‘goeth before us’ to the grave of Bethany to weep there! Is it

Death (the last enemy) we dread? He ‘goeth before us’ wrapped in the cerements of the tomb—descending into the region of Hades—uncrowning the King of Terrors—trampling his diadem in the dust! Is it entrance into Heaven? He ‘goeth before us’ there. Having overcome the sharpness of death, He has opened the kingdom of heaven to all believers. He shows us the path of life leading into His own blessed presence, where there is fulness of joy, and to His right hand, where there are pleasures for evermore.

But it is the individual, personal solicitude of the Shepherd in the wellbeing of each of His people, which forms one of the loveliest inspired touches in St John’s parable-chapter. “*He calleth His own sheep by name.*” As the Oriental Shepherd has a distinguishing name for each separate member of his flock,\* so Christ has His eye on each individual believer,—loves him, leads him, feeds him, “names” him,—as if he were the alone object of His care and regard. It is not as with the husbandman,—who can call his field of grain by name, but cannot discri-

\* “Having had my attention directed last night to the words in John x. 3, I asked my man if it was usual in Greece to give names to the sheep. He informed me that it was, and that the sheep obeyed the shepherd when he called them by their names. This morning I had an opportunity of verifying the truth of this remark. Passing by a flock of sheep, I asked the Shepherd the same question which I had put to the servant, and he gave me the same answer. I then bade him call one of his sheep. He did so, and it instantly left its pasturage and its companions and ran up to the hand of the shepherd with signs of pleasure, and with a prompt obedience, which I had never before observed in any other animal.”—HARTLEY’S *Researches in Greece and the Levant*, quoted in Smith’s Bible Dictionary.

minate each separate stalk. It is not as with the astronomer, who, although he can name some stars or groups of stars, leaves myriads unnamed in the wide field of immensity. It is not as with the general, who, though he can name a few of the more illustrious of his soldiers and officers, knows the rest of his brave thousands only in the mass. But as sheep by sheep passes in review before the Good Shepherd—He knows all their cases, their circumstances, their trials—their sorrows, their joys. He calls them “friends,” “brethren,” “peculiar treasure,”—“I have called thee by thy *name*: thou art mine!” Yes! let us not lose the unutterable comfort of this, by resolving all into the doctrine of a mere superintending Providence:—that God takes a *general* oversight and supervision of His creatures and their actions, but that of the minute circumstances and accidents of their daily life He takes no cognizance. His is a minute, personal, discriminating love. The individual is not lost in the mass or the aggregate. Believer! He loves *you* as if you stood alone in His world, and as if He had none other but you, on whom to lavish His solicitudes! This same Great Leader, on another occasion, takes yet a smaller member of the lower creation, than that spoken of in this parable, to teach the same truth. He points to one of the sparrows of the housetop, lying with fluttering wing in the highway or in the furrow—and He says, ‘Not one of *these* fall to the ground without my Father knowing of it.’ “Fear ye not, therefore, ye are of more value than many sparrows.”

Most comforting and consoling truth! Jesus—the Shepherd-Saviour—the Brother in my nature—“mighty

to save" as God, mighty to compassionate as man, ever preceding me;—marking out all that befalls me; appointing and controlling the minutest events in my personal history, and loving me with an affection of which earth's tenderest relationships afford the feeblest type. See the mother seated by the couch of her suffering child! Watch her tender unremitting care;—the hours and nights of sleepless vigilance, she bends over the cherub form,—smoothing its pillow, and moistening its fevered lips. What a picture! It is earth's most touching symbol of love and sacred affection. God points to that watchful parent and says—"She MAY forget, yet will I not forget thee!"

## The Flock following the Shepherd.

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"AND THE SHEEP FOLLOW HIM, FOR THEY KNOW HIS VOICE."—JOHN X. 4.

"MY SHEEP HEAR MY VOICE, AND I KNOW THEM, AND THEY FOLLOW ME."—  
JOHN X. 27.

## THE FLOCK FOLLOWING THE SHEPHERD.

IF British travellers in Palestine are, with singular unanimity, arrested by the novel spectacle of the Shepherd going before the sheep, still more impressive, to the eye unaccustomed to such scenes at home, seems to be the docility with which the sheep follow the Shepherd. It is a beautiful living picture in the dumb creation of trustful and confiding attachment. One or two truants of the flock may stray into the tempting corn-fields, unhedged and unfenced close by; but the vast majority follow closely the footsteps of their guide. An accurate personal observer of pastoral life in the Judean hills has noted, that if the sheep stoop down to take a mouthful of the grass across which their Shepherd leads them, they lift up their heads to see that he is at hand, fearful of losing sight of him, and of finding themselves beyond reach of his voice. They will even plunge into the stream or swollen torrent if he should lead the way.\*

Is this a feeble figurative description of our docile, trustful following of the Good Shepherd? Can it be said of us in any humble sense, "We have the mind of Christ?"

\* "This simple creature," says Luther, "has this special note among all animals, that it quickly hears the voice of the Shepherd, follows no one else, depends entirely on him, and seeks help from him alone—cannot help itself but is shut up to another's aid."

For what is the great lesson shadowed forth under this figurative language, but that our aim, as His people—the flock of His pasture—should be, to have each thought, wish, feeling, desire, coincident with His holy will. "*Following Jesus*" is just, in other words, doing always those things that are pleasing in His sight. Let us dwell upon this a little more particularly.

To follow Jesus as His spiritual sheep, we must do so *faithfully*. We are (or ought to be) divine artists making the character of the Redeemer our study, seeking to transfer, with scrupulous fidelity to our hearts and lives, a copy—imperfect, indeed, at best it must be—of the glorious Original. The four Gospels are the four corridors of a great picture-gallery, opening into one another. Their walls are crowded and frescoed with delineations from the story of His life on earth:—scenes illustrative of the divine virtues of the Shepherd of Israel—for our imitation and example. Here is one picture of matchless humility—He is washing His disciples' feet. Another—He is weeping with a group of mourners in a Jewish grave-yard. Another—He is bearing unmerited indignities, in meek, unmurmuring silence. Another—He commends, in His dying hour, His sorrowing, bereft parent to the care of a trusted friend. Another—He stretches out the hand of forgiveness to an ungrateful disciple. Another—while the chariot of cloud is waiting to carry Him upwards to His mediatorial Throne, His arms of unselfish love are extended in blessing the bereaved and orphaned men of Galilee! What sub-

lime pictures are these for our study! Let our transcript—poor, marred, blemished at the best—be as faithful an approximation as we can. The nearer the artist is placed to the work of the Great Master, the more exact and successful his copy will be. “Consider,” says the apostle, (literally “gaze upon”) “Jesus Christ.” Study the divine portraiture, line by line, feature by feature, till you transfix on the tablet of your own heart some faint resemblance of His spotless character. “Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus.”

In following the guiding Shepherd, let us do so *joyfully*. The Oriental sheep does not follow with reluctance. It is not driven with the goad of some cruel hireling, or terrified into tractability by the dog baying at its heels. It is a free, voluntary, joyful obedience. It would be unhappy to hear any other voice, or to follow any other footstep. It obeys the call of the Shepherd, because it delights to be near him.

This is the picture of the true believer. He follows his Lord with joy. It is not the cold, hard motive of *duty*—but rather, duty is transformed into delight. If you ask him why he follows his Shepherd, he will reply, “The love of Christ constraineth me!” The flower does not follow the sun grudgingly and under constraint. It does not hide its blushing tints in the shade, or creep under some crevice to escape the light. On the contrary, it is strange to see the efforts it makes to free itself from its nook of concealment, and get refreshment and revival for its leaves and blossoms. The air feeds its invisible vessels; the

dews moisten leaf, and stem, and root; the sun pours upon all its genial warmth ; and the grateful and joyous inanimate thing, pushes upwards, as if it longed to be ever nearer the great dispenser of light and blessing. Why should we creep like unhealthy plants afraid of the sunshine ? "These things," says Christ, "have I spoken unto you, that my *joy* might remain in you, and that your *joy* might be full." "Rejoice," says the noblest of His followers, "in the Lord alway, and again I say rejoice." Be true sheep to your guiding Shepherd, and you will "go on your way *rejoicing.*"

· Endeavour to follow the Great Shepherd *habitually*. The Syrian sheep does not follow its Shepherd by fits and starts ; seeking to be near him only when the wolf is prowling, or when the dog is on its track ;—when the night shadows are falling, or the pasture is diminishing. It is generally found close to its protector and guide. It is an undeviating trustful companionship, in sunshine and storm —in fulness and in drought—in summer and winter.

So it is, or ought to be, with the Believer ;—a constant, consistent, habitual following of his Lord, seeking ever to have a realising sense of His nearness. Not merely, when trouble is nigh ; in the hour of affliction and sad calamity, or of impending death ; but in the midst of life's joyous sunshine, when verdure is on the mountain side, when the rills are singing their way down to the lower valley, and the tinkling bells, answering from fold to fold, tell of nothing but peace, and safety, and repose. It is not great, or special, or extraordinary experiences which constitute in

the best sense the ‘religious character.’ It is the uniform daily walk with God; serving Him in little things as well as great things;—in the ordinary duties and every-day avocations, as well as in the midst of grave and eventful contingencies. As the sublimest symphony is made up of separate single notes;—as the wealth of the cornfield is made up of separate stalks, or rather of separate grains;—as the magnificent texture, with its gorgeous combinations of colour, its pictures cunningly interweaved by the hand or the shuttle, is made up of individual threads;—as the mightiest avalanche that ever came thundering down from its Alpine throne, uprooting villages and forests, is made up of tiny snow-flakes;—so it is with the spiritual life. That life is itself the grandest illustration of the power of  *littles*. Character is the product of daily, hourly actions, and words, and thoughts;—daily forgivenesses, unselfishness, kindnesses, sympathies, charities, sacrifices for the good of others, struggles against temptation, submissiveness under trial. Oh, it is these, like the blending colours in a picture, or the blending notes of music, which constitute “the MAN !” It is when the whole being is in harmony with the Divine will;—this—this is the true “Psalm of Life !” The flower, of which we spoke a little ago, has no set days for following the sun, and drinking in his radiance; neither has it any set days for exhaling its own perfume. It swings its censer of incense in the still air all summer long. So with the Christian. His heart is a true sun-flower, following the Great Spiritual Luminary from dawn to eventide, drooping its head in sadness when the night shadows fall, and ready to expand the folded blossom

again, at the summons of the morning. He does not give God the Sabbath merely, and closes his leaves and petals to holy influences all the week. He seeks to begin it carry it on, and end it under the consciousness of the Divine favour. His morning prayer strikes the key-note of each day. "Give ear, O Shepherd of Israel, thou that leadest Joseph like a flock."

Let us seek, as the Flock of Christ, to follow the Shepherd *only*. No other voice, no other leader ought we to hear. There are other voices to which, in these days, we are apt to listen, rather than that of the Heavenly Shepherd. In these divided modern sheepfolds, we have one saying, 'Paul is my shepherd;' another, 'Apollos is mine;' another, 'Cephas is mine.' We hear the word "toleration" applied among professing Christians more frequently than we should. *Sheep tolerating* one another;—*Shepherds tolerating* one another; ay, and sometimes not even that. Salvation is made to turn on the question of sectarianism. The Jewish sheep and the Jewish shepherds have no dealing with the Samaritan sheep and the Samaritan shepherds. Sheep are excluded—excommunicated from the fold—because they have not some discriminating symbols of human device, apart from God's symbol of holiness of character. Oh, that we had done with these wretched man-made distinctions! They are like the marks the earthly shepherd puts on the wool of his sheep to distinguish them, but which are no test whatever of intrinsic value. As we have seen some of the basest truants of the fold, some poor, haggard, pertinacious wanderers, bearing on their fleece imposing

initials ; so it is by no artificial lettering—no church or denominational symbolism—that we are to discriminate the true sheep of Christ. What says Paul, that noble under-shepherd ? “ Be ye,” he says, “ followers of me”—or followers of Apollos—or followers of Cephas. How ? “ *In as far as we are followers of Christ.*” No further. ‘ Follow us only as we follow the Chief Shepherd. Follow us only if you hear in us His voice.’ God’s mark is that which He set of old on Caleb—“ He wholly followed the Lord his God.” Not that we plead for a condition of the Church which we have no reason either to expect or desire ;—an amalgamating of all the different sects and sections—an absorption of all the different folds into one. We question if this would be the mind of the Chief Shepherd.\* But as on our own hill slopes and mountain sides at eventide, there comes from the pendent bells of many separate folds, a sweet and pleasing harmony of blended sound, so there *might* be (there *ought* to be) *union* if not *communion*—*co-operation* if there be not *incorporation*. “ Whereto we have attained, let us walk by the

\* There is an unfortunate rendering of the original Greek, in the English translation, of that striking and beautiful saying of the Good Shepherd : “ And other sheep I have, which are not of this fold : them also I must bring, and they shall hear my voice ; and there shall be one fold, and one shepherd,” (John x. 16.) The word translated in the last clause “ *one fold,*” should unquestionably rather be “ *one flock.*” It is not *μία αὐλὴ*, but *μία ποιμανή*. May we not from this infer, that in that prophetic millennial ingathering, there is to be—not one exclusive Fold-enclosure, but “ *one flock!*” There may still continue to be many “ *folds,*”—churches still retaining their outward, external symbolism and organisation ; but owning one common pasture ;—animated with one spirit,—“ *one flock,*” under the care and love of “ *one Shepherd.*”

same rule, let us mind the same thing :" recognising a brother wherever we see a true follower of Jesus ; extending Christian sympathy and fellowship wherever we see the unmistakable marks of the spiritual character and life. Feeling that where Christ is, alone there is safety, be this ever our prayer—"Tell me, O *Thou* whom my soul loveth, where *THOU* feedest—where *Thou* makest thy flock to rest at noon, for why should I be as one that turneth aside by the flocks of thy companions." What is the answer of the Shepherd to this suppliant's plaint ? It is not, "Go, and you will find Me in this or that artificial fold ;" but, "Go wherever you see amid sheep or shepherds My own reflected image and character." "Go thy way by the footsteps of the flock, and feed thy kids beside the shepherd's tents."

Up ! and follow the Lord *fully*. The traveller, overtaken in the snow-storm, knows that the longer he dallies, the greater will be his danger. He grasps his pilgrim-staff, and, facing the cutting wind and blinding drift, he pursues his arduous way. It is a blessed promise, "Then shall we know if we follow on to know the Lord." And the nearer we are in conscious fellowship with Christ, the more closely we track His footsteps,—the safer and more joyous and more privileged we shall be. An intelligent observer, in speaking of some sheep who are always nearest the shepherd, says, "These are his special favourites. He is ever distributing to such, choice portions which he gathers for that purpose."\* Near Christ now, He will feed us with the finest of the wheat. Near Him now, we shall be privileged to enjoy nearer access to Him hereafter. Our spiritual condition

\* "The Land and the Book."

and position now will determine our place in the fold above. It is according as we gravitate on earth, near the Great central Spiritual Sun, that our orbit will be fixed in the celestial firmament. While yet, then, still at a distance from the heavenly pastures, be it ours to imbibe the spirit, and to walk in the footsteps of our Shepherd-Redeemer, that when we reach the golden meadows of heaven, when we take our place among the flock of the ransomed, it may still be said of us, in a nobler sense, "THESE ARE THEY WHCH FOLLOW THE LAMB WHITHERSOEVER HE GOETH."

## The Song of the flock.

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"THE LORD IS MY SHEPHERD, I SHALL NOT WANT."—PS. xxiii. 1.

## THE SONG OF THE FLOCK.

WHAT a deathless poem the 23d Psalm is ! It is the psalm of all psalms. Our Bibles would be robbed of their brightest jewel without it; and our memories of a garnered and cherished treasure. What a myriad multitude there would be, could we assemble all who have ever read or sung it ! There would be the sufferer on the sick-bed shortening and beguiling his weary vigils by repeating its consolations. There would be the martyr chanting it at his stake as the flames wrapt their red winding-sheet around him. There would be the soldier in his bivouac on the eve of battle, pondering its majestic solaces, by the smouldering embers of his fire—or his Bible found among the heaps of the slain, with its leaf turned down at the song of ‘the valley of the shadow of death.’ There would be the shepherd, wandering by the green pastures and still waters, warbling the strains of the inspired minstrel of all time, who had thus sanctified his calling. There would be the bereaved mourner stooping over some withered flower—deploring some extinguished light in the earthly dwelling—singing of a house and home where he and his restored loved ones would dwell for ever. It has been sung on the hills of prosperity and in the valleys of woe,—by the tongue of prattling infancy—by manhood in its prime, and by old age with its tottering step, leaning on the

rod and staff of which it touchingly speaks. Little did he who first swept its numbers on his harp, think of the legacy he had thus bequeathed to the Church of the future; when, in some bright moment of his own waning years, he lifted the curtain of life and reposed in thought on the fond images of boyhood, as by day he led his sheep along the mountain sides, and by night folded them in the sheltered hollows; taking these memories of sweet sunshine as hallowed symbols of the shepherd-love and faithfulness of God. The images of this pastoral-song may be of earth, but its pedigree is of heaven—it is a heaven-born psalm. Surely, *Goodness* and *Mercy*, the two guardian angels—sister spirits—spoken of at its close, must have fetched it on shining wings down from the upper sanctuary. For three thousand years has it gladdened, comforted, solaced the Church in the wilderness. “Its line has gone through all the earth, and its words to the end of the world.” And the numbers now singing it in the Church below are nothing to the ransomed tongues in the Church of the first-born to whom its undying cadence is still dear.

Let us at present gather around the opening sentence—the opening strain. “**THE LORD IS MY SHEPHERD, I SHALL NOT WANT.**”

JEHOVAH, “All-sufficient,” the covenant Shepherd of His people;—embarked on their side, and pledged for their salvation. The old patriarch Jacob speaks of the “Shepherd of Israel;” Peter speaks of “the Shepherd and Bishop of souls.” But David uses a loftier—more endearing epithet. That Almighty—all-sufficient—omnipotent Being, says he, is *mine*;—He is *MY* Shepherd; or as he elsewhere sings—“This God

is our God for ever and ever, He will be our guide even unto death." It is not the *promises* of God he leans upon, it is upon God Himself. It is not the streams he drinks of; but, stooping over the Infinite Fountain, he exclaims, 'Behold my covenant portion! God is the strength of my heart, and my portion for ever.' We know not if he shared the beautiful belief of the Hebrews regarding attendant angels hovering over the human pathway from birth to death. But he seems to say, "Here I have a nobler creed—a mightier Guardian,—'The Lord of angels is *my* shepherd.'"

Let us consider, a little more particularly, the words of our motto-verse, as expressive of these three things—Thankfulness for the past, Confidence in the present, and Trust for the future; although these must necessarily be suggestive of some similar consoling truths which we have already dwelt upon, in a preceding chapter.

Let us view this song of the flock of God as expressive of *thankfulness for the past*. Jehovah, All-sufficient, **HAS BEEN** my Shepherd.

Many there are who can see no better law or principle regulating the allotments of their daily life, than accident and capricious fortune. They see the shuttles of apparent chance darting hither and thither in the loom of existence, weaving a web of varied hue—an intricate pattern,—black threads and white threads—joy and sorrow, in strange and fitful alternation. Nay, not so! The shuttle is in the hands of the Great Artificer. Life is not a mere kaleidoscope—its events gliding and shaping themselves into fan-

ciful and wayward combinations. God has a plan, a divine plan, in all. Every mercy is His bestowing; and when mercies are withdrawn, and sorrows take their place, it is equally of His wise, though sometimes mysterious, appointment. Seek, like the psalmist, to see your Shepherd's guiding hand in all the past, and to retain in the remembrance that best blessing—a *thankful heart*: thankful for *small* mercies as well as for *great* ones. As the magnet attracts to itself the tiniest iron grain as well as the largest,—so the redeemed, regenerated soul, magnetised with the love of God, bears away with it the lively remembrance of the *smallest* tokens of the Divine favour as well as the ‘memories of God’s great goodness,’ and feels that no mercies are unworthy of remembrance, for all are undeserved. The proud, worldly, unthankful heart is never satisfied;—all it has, it takes as a matter of course;—and, notwithstanding all it has, it is ever craving for more. The thankful heart, on the other hand, baptized with the new affections of the gospel, delights to traverse in thought the past, and to connect each bright spot in the retrospect with the great Bestower of all good;—saying, in the words of him who wrote this psalm, on another of those occasions of his life which drew forth the acknowledgment of his grateful spirit—“What am I, O Lord God, and what is my house, that Thou hast brought me hitherto!”

This song of God’s ransomed *flock* implies *confidence in the present*. “Jehovah, all-sufficient, is my Shepherd.”

How blessed thus to repose our *present* in God; and to say, as we lie passive in His hands, “Undertake Thou for me!”

He portioning out for us as He sees meet, and having His own infinite reasons for what may appear perplexing to us. We, with an unquestioning and unreasoning faith, fully trusting His Shepherd-power, tenderness, skill, vigilance, love. He does not *consult* our short-sighted wisdom in what He does. The clouds do not consult the earth as to when they shall visit its fruits and flowers—its corn-fields and forests, with their watery treasures. The pining plant does not dictate to the firmament-reservoirs as to when they shall unseal their hidden stores. These give a kindly and needful supply “in due season,” and the earth has never yet, for six thousand years, had to complain of them as niggard almoners of their Creator’s bounty. So it is with the soul : He who maketh the clouds His chariot—who opens and shuts at will the windows of heaven—locking and unlocking the fountains of the great deep—says to all His people, ‘Trust Me; I will give you all needed present blessings ; “I will come unto you as the rain, as the latter and former rain upon the earth.” I do not pledge myself as to *how* or *when* the rain shall fall—but “I will cause the shower to come down in his season : there shall be showers of blessing.” “As thy day is, so shall thy strength be.”’

Would that we could learn this lesson of entire confidence in a present, personal God, in whom we live, and move, and have our being ! Behold, the sun of the natural heavens, the great central luminary—a dumb insensate mass of matter—holding its dependant planets in their orbits, controlling their unerring movements ;—they in calm, silent submission, yielding obedience to

the will of this sovereign lord ; how much more may *we* hold on our way in the orbit of undeviating obedience, exulting in God's ever-present power and love ; so that in the remotest solitude as well as the densest crowd, we can say, “ ‘Alone, yet not alone, for my Father and Shepherd is with me !’ ”

A necessary result of this confidence in the wisdom of God's Shepherd-dealings, will be, contentment with our lot whatever it is. We cannot say precisely at what time of his eventful life David wrote this psalm ;—whether it was amid the splendour of royalty, or when a weeping exile amid the glens of Gilead. But he seems in it to rise above all outward experiences,—the pomp and circumstance of life. “ It matters not,” he seems to say, “ what my condition be—crowned or uncrowned—a king or an alien ;—I have a nobler heritage than earth can give me, or than earth can despoil me of. The Lord is my Shepherd, I *want nothing*. ”\* A happy, gladsome motto for us all, in all time of our tribulation, in all time of our wealth. Go to that lowly, despised, downtrodden believer. He has lost his worldly substance, his health, his children. Wave on wave of earthly calamity has swept over him ; and yet, conscious of some hidden, unexplained “ needs be,” and of a nobler reversion,—he can sing through his tears, “ *I want nothing !* ” Aim after this contented spirit ; not fretfully murmuring at your present allotments, or ambitiously aspiring after other positions in life, as if mere change itself would rid of vexation and augment

\* For thus it may be equally well rendered, though in our version it is in the future tense.

happiness. Happiness is dependent, not on place, or sphere, or locality, but on the state of the heart. Wherever God dwells and holiness exists, there must be contentment and peace. As the Christian poet well says :—

“While place we seek and place we shun,  
The soul finds happiness in none,  
But with a God to guide our way  
'Tis equal joy to go or stay.”

And if *we* thus confide in God, He will confide in us. Beautiful are the words of the prophet—“Thou meetest him that rejoiceth and worketh righteousness ; those that remember thee in thy ways.” Those that remember Thee and confide in Thee, “*Thou meetest them !*” The Lord comes out half-way to meet the confiding heart. The Shepherd comes out half-way to meet the timorous yet confiding sheep. The old father comes out half-way to meet his prodigal ; and when He *does* meet him, He has the first tear and the first word of welcome. “Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on Thee ; because he trusteth in Thee !”

This song of the flock expresses *trust for the future*. “*JEHOVAH, All-sufficient, shall be my Shepherd, I shall not want.*”

“*That dark future.*” How many are speaking of it as such ! It is in the Shepherd’s keeping, and we may well leave it there. How beautiful the impress of God’s hand in the works of outer nature. Every blade of grass, every forest leaf, how perfect in symmetry of form, and in tenderness of colour. With what exquisite grace He has pencilled

every flower, delicately poised it on its stalk, or spread a pillow for its head on the tender sod! The God who has "so clothed the grass of the field," will not be unmindful of the lowliest of His covenant family.

But we need not go so far as the dumb volume of nature. We may open the volume of our own experience. Just as the husbandman sees in the flush of green in early spring the pledge of a golden harvest, so we may take the crowded memories of His shepherd-love in the past, as proof, and pledge, and token, that not one thing will fail us of all that the Lord our God hath spoken unto the house of Israel. We can exultingly add with the psalmist in subsequent verses, "I **WILL** fear no evil . . . Goodness and mercy will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever." He seems to love here, as elsewhere, to sit at these windows of covenant faithfulness, looking, at one time, back along the chequered vista behind him, and then casting a glance across the river of death into the shining city. "*Goodness and Mercy*," the two attendant guardian angels that have tracked his footsteps all the bygone way, he sees still at his side. Other messengers, other attendant ones may have met him on the road. *Sorrow*, clad in her sombre attire; *Bereavement*, with her tearful eye; *Pain*, with her languid countenance. But his joyful contented spirit can see none in all the train save two—**GOODNESS** and **MERCY**! In the spirit of the great apostle, he does not give thanks only *sometimes* for some things, but "*always* for *all* things." His motto seems to be, "I have set the Lord *always* before me." Grateful for the past, he still follows the steps of the

guiding Shepherd,—chanting his pilgrim song, “*I shall not want!*”

Let us banish all unholy distrust for the future. “Take no thought,” (that is to say, Be not over-anxious or over-careful) “for the morrow;” that ‘morrow’ is in the hands of One boundless in His resources, infinite in His love. Do not charge Him with insincerity when He says, “All things work together for good to them that love God;” “No good thing will He withhold from them that walk uprightly.” If He leads you along a rough and thorny road, hear His loving voice thus reassuring your faith and lulling your misgivings, ‘Your heavenly Shepherd,—your heavenly Father,—knoweth that ye have need of *all* these things.’ Above all, think of that leading Shepherd as the Saviour who died for you; who Himself, as we have previously seen, was identified with you as the Man of sorrows, in every earthly experience of sorrow and woe, and can enter with exquisite sympathising tenderness into every bleat of His weary, suffering flock. He foresees and anticipates every emergency that can overtake you. He can avert every danger, and disarm every foe. “All power has been committed to Him in heaven and in earth.” Oh, as you may be now surveying the yet untrodden road, leading ‘uphill and downhill to the city of habitation,’ remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how He said, “I will never leave you, nor forsake you.” “Lo I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world.”

How many of us can sing this first note of the song of the Lord’s flock which we have now been considering? All

can do so, who have received the Lord Jesus Christ as their Saviour ;—all who have their feet planted on the Rock of Ages, and who have closed with the terms of offered covenant mercy. Can we say, “He *hath* set *MY* feet upon a Rock, and put a new song into my mouth, even praise unto our God ?” All are warranted to come to that Rock. There is no lip that may not learn to sing that song. There is no wandering sheep that may not come to crop these heavenly pastures. God has made provision not for the strong only, but for the weak, the weary, the tempted, the sorrowful, the suffering ; all may partake of the Shepherd-love of that God, “All sufficient.” The feeblest lamb of the flock can utter its trembling cry of confiding trust. The same Jehovah-Shepherd and Lord—is rich to all that call upon Him. The anointing oil of blessing poured on the head of the true Aaron flows down to the very skirts of His garment, so that the least and lowliest are made partakers of His covenant grace.

Who can give utterance to words akin to those of the psalmist regarding any *earthly* portion ? Who that have made the world and pleasure their chief good, can say, on the retrospect, “*I want nothing ?*” Rather, have you not to tell of great aching voids in your hearts which nothing on earth *can* fill. If we were to analyse the fevered souls to whom these covenant blessings are strange, would not this be the confession, perhaps reluctantly wrung, ‘The Lord not being our Shepherd, we want everything ; yes, everything that is truly worthy to be called a portion ! Our outer life, though thoroughly furnished with all the world can give it—how empty ! These

gaudy treasures of a vain earth, what a hollow mockery, dissevered from the true riches of God's love and favour !' Let it not be ours to barter these glorious realities for things which perish with the using, to return our Shepherd's overtures of kindness with cold indifference, chilling unconcern. Be it observed that all the blessings spoken of in this song of the old Hebrew minstrel are *present* blessings. We do not say that the blessings in reversion—the blessings in store, are not greater still ; that the view, across that river Jordan, of the green hills of Canaan, opens up wondrous revelations of bliss and glory of which we can at present form only the feeblest conception. But that divine Shepherd-love, with all its concomitant blessings, is ours *now*, if we have fled to Christ for safety, and can lay hold by faith on God as our covenant God. "We which have believed do enter into rest." "We also joy in God through our Lord Jesus Christ by whom we *have now* received the atonement." Yes, we can sing the Lord's song, even in this strange land. We shall indeed meet, (we must expect to meet,) with chequered experiences,—seasons of depression, sorrow, suffering. But we need never fear with such a guide. We have an all-sufficient resort when our hearts are overwhelmed ;—"Give ear, O Shepherd of Israel ! thou that leadest Joseph like a flock." And when angels come down to our pillows, to bear us away from the cloud and the storm, to dwell in the hills of glory, we shall carry the old song of the flock on earth, up amid the enduring pastures of the blessed :—"THE LORD IS MY SHEPHERD, I SHALL NOT WANT!"

The Green Pastures and Still Waters  
where the flock are fed.

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"HE MAKETH ME TO LIE DOWN IN GREEN PASTURES: HE LEADETH ME BESIDE  
THE STILL WATERS."—PS. xxiii. 2.

## THE GREEN PASTURES AND STILL WATERS WHERE THE FLOCK ARE FED.

IN the preceding chapter we considered the opening verse, what may be called the key-note of David's beautiful pastoral song. There he had given utterance to the *negative*, now he proceeds, under the same shepherd-symbol, to speak of the *positive* blessings belonging to all God's people.

The picture here presented is that which is often witnessed in our own Highland valleys: a flock of sheep, on a summer evening, reposing by the verdant banks of some limpid stream; having around them, in abundance, the two main requirements of the fold, grass and water. The Eastern or Arabian shepherd is known to wander for days together along the trackless waste, till he find these requisite supplies. The greenest grass would be insufficient without the stream, and the purest water would be unavailing, if its course lay through barren moorlands, or among rank weeds and naked rocks.

In these two expressive emblems of this psalm, we have brought before us the provision which the Great Shepherd has made for the comfort and nourishment of His flock. In other words, the ample supply of grace afforded to the believer in the new covenant, to meet all his spiritual wants. "He maketh me to lie down in green pastures,"

[margin, in the *pastures of tender grass.*] “He leadeth me beside the still waters” [or, “*the waters of quietness.*”]

Taking the words in a more general sense, we may gather from each of the clauses one or two simple thoughts for meditation.

“*He maketh me to lie down in green pastures.*”

The first idea suggested is that of *rest* and *security*. The flock ‘LIE down.’ The posture is indicative of perfect repose. So timid often are sheep, that to pass by them in a meadow is the signal for scattering the whole flock. But here every cause or fear of danger seems removed. No bleat is heard in all the valley. They are moored, like vessels in a quiet sheltered haven, around the feet of the shepherd.

The life of man, as we were led more specially to notice in a former chapter, is a constant striving after rest, repose, satisfaction. Many, indeed, are seeking it in base counterfeits; yet even in the counterfeit-search, we detect the aspiration after a nobler reality. In the very chasing of the shadow we discern the longing after the substance. The miser seeks it in his gold; the ambitious man seeks it as he climbs his giddy eminences; the pleasure-hunter seeks it in artificial excitements; the student seeks it in the loftier aspirations and achievements of his intellectual nature. But true rest can be found in God alone. “*This is the rest wherewith ye may cause the weary to rest; and this is the refreshing.*” “*When HE giveth quietness, who then can make trouble?*” “*HE giveth His beloved sleep*” (*rest.*) It is only when we

have secured possession of the Divine Shepherd's favour and love, pardon and reconciliation through the atoning work and merits of Jesus, that we can "*lie down*." Short of this, there will be a feverish *roaming* after something *other*, something apparently better, but a something which, even when attained, does not and cannot satisfy. Having Him for our portion, we need no other. With every longing of our moral natures answered, we *can* say, "This is my *rest* for ever."

A second idea which the figure of "green pastures" suggests is that of *abundant provision*.

Observe it is not one piece of pasture-ground that is here spoken of, but "*pastures*." There is no scant supply, but on the contrary, an ample variety, to suit the circumstances of each member of the flock. The sheep may roam from field to field, yet still there is enough and to spare. Moreover, the provision is the best of its kind;—not rank or fading, but young and tender grass, as if eternal spring or summer brooded over these meadows.

What diversity there is in God's spiritual provision for His people! Grace for all times, and every time. Each tender blade has its dew-drop of comfort—each pool in "the still waters" has its reflection of love. Countless multitudes have been cropping these pastures in every age, and still they are green—*evergreen*; and the song of the flock is this day what it has been for 3000 years—"The Lord is my shepherd, I want *nothing*." How specially is this true of the pastures of God's holy Word! What variety have we here; doctrine, precept, promise, comfort, consolation, yea, "everlasting consolation." At no time are these pastures

greener to us than in seasons of sorrow; when the world's pastures are burnt up, and its choicest nooks and valleys—those that were wont to be carpeted with flowers and bathed in sunshine—can offer no refreshment or repose. “The grass withereth, the flower fadeth, *but the Word of our God shall stand for ever.*”

Let us pass to the second part of the verse—“*He leadeth me beside the still waters.*” “Still waters!” These words appear to convey, under another figure and symbol, a description just of the same calm and hallowed repose, secured to the believer, which the psalmist had in his mind in the preceding clause:—the soul kept in perfect peace, which is stayed on God. The wicked are compared to the “troubled sea.” But this is an inland river,—a quiet, gentle stream, protected from the boisterous winds which fret the ocean to madness. Strange, indeed, often is the history of the soul before it attains that divine repose; fierce are its struggles before there ensues the calm of victory and rest. Like the patriarch at Jabbok ere he secured the change of name and the divine blessing, it has oft-times a long night of wrestling before the dawning of the day. You may have witnessed such a peaceful meadow as that described by the psalmist of Israel, with its quiet, lake-like stream; so still, that not a ripple bedims its surface; every rock, and sedge, and spear of grass, which fringe its banks, beautifully mirrored in the surface. Yet follow that same river up these mountain ravines, and you see it fretting and foaming over rugged rocks, hurrying impetuously down to where it now sleeps so calmly in the lower valley! That is a picture of

the often long unrest of the soul, ere it has found the peace which passeth understanding; its struggles with inward corruption and outward temptation; the fierce eddying currents and impetuous cataracts of passion and sin, ere it secure its glorious repose in God. Not till it reaches these quiet meadows, with their green pastures, which we have been now describing, can it say—“*Return unto thy rest, O my soul!*”

Here, too, as in the former figure, we have the *abundance* of God’s mercies set forth; not only varied pastures but varied *waters*. The blessings of grace are not like the Nile, one solitary river which receives no tributary all the nine hundred miles it traverses. They are rather like the Jordan, fed by a hundred rills, as it hurries through its rocky gorges. Many streams only flow in winter or spring. When summer comes (the time they are most needed) their channels are dry. But these “still waters” are full even in drought, for they are fed from the everlasting hills. When the world’s streams are emptiest, the streams of grace are deepest and most ample. “The Lord,” says the prophet, “shall guide thee continually, and satisfy thy soul in drought, and make fat thy bones; and thou shalt be like a watered garden, and like a spring of water whose waters fail not.” We have streams of peace, of purity, of pardon, of sanctification,—all exceeding great and precious. Look at the exuberance of God’s mercies in the outer creation. Go to some sequestered nook of tangled loveliness, by brook, or waterfall, or sequestered dell. Study for an hour that one page in the volume of nature, taking the microscope with you to help you in the task.

How wondrous the tints ! How symmetrical the forms ! How lavish the garniture of the tiny worlds of animated being which the lens discloses ! It is a feeble type of the exceeding riches of His grace, in His kindness toward us through Christ Jesus. "Oh, how great is Thy goodness which Thou hast laid up for them that fear Thee, which Thou hast wrought for them that trust in Thee, before the sons of men !"

We may conclude with the reflection suggested by both clauses, that *Religion is happiness*.

The loveliest emblems in nature, "green pastures" and "still waters," are here combined to symbolise the experiences, and depict the reality of the believer's life. The world has its pleasures too, and we do not affirm that they are devoid of attractiveness. Had this been the case, they would not be so fondly and eagerly clung to as they are. But this we can affirm, that while they are certain, sooner or later, to perish, they are fitful and capricious even while they last. They are sand-built, not rock-built. They are, at best, but the passing gleam of the meteor; not like the Christian's happiness, the steady lustre of the true constellation. The joys of the true believer outlive all others. Religion is like a castle on a mountain summit, catching the earliest sunbeam, and gilded by the last evening ray. When low down in the world's valleys, the shadows are falling, and the lights are already in the windows, the radiance still tarries on these lofty peaks of gladness. That castle, moreover, is full of all manner of store. God has furnished it with every attractive blessing that can invite

the weary wanderer in. He has crowded it with love-tokens, wherewith He may welcome back His long-absent children;—just as a mother decks out her room for her absent boy; as every available nook is made gay with flowers and embroidery, crowded with souvenirs of affection, so God has filled that castle with love-pledges. Its walls are tapestried with proofs and promises of His grace and love in Jesus.

Go, wandering one, enter within these gates! Test for yourself the reality of the divine assurance—"The name of the Lord is a strong tower, the righteous runneth into it and is safe." Go, wandering sheep! make proof of the truthfulness as well as beauty of the symbol under which the spiritual existence is here presented—as a reclining on green pastures, and by still waters. Go, take your rest in those meadows of peace. Not, however, a rest of inglorious repose. It is rest *in God*; rest in the blessed assurance of His favour. But it is *not* rest from the activities of a holy life. It is not rest or respite from a perpetual battle with sin. Christianity, we have previously seen, is no condition of selfish inaction. The believer is a *steward*, a *servant*, a *worker*, a member of that royal priesthood who have each their special ministry of duty and love in the *spiritual* temple. Reader, let this rest be yours, the pure rest which follows the consciousness of doing good,—of discharging some lowly unobtrusive offices of love to the Shepherd of souls. We value most the rest of the body when it is the recompense of hard work and toil. He sleeps most sweetly who has worked through the day most bravely. Have you never felt the

sweets of this rest? the pleasurableness experienced after some act of kindness, and compassion, and generous self-sacrifice, by which your fellows have been made the better and the happier, and in the doing of which you have been enabled in some feeble degree to imitate the example of Him whose life was a combination of duty and love? If these deeds are performed quietly and unostentatiously, so much more is it in accordance with the spirit of Christianity, and with the spirit of the emblem we have been now considering:—the still waters, fringed with green, flowing gently, noiselessly, unobtrusively along, manifesting their presence only by the fertility they spread around them. Beautiful picture of the true Christian! the silent flow of life's every-day current, carrying blessings in its course, fertilising as it flows; leaving behind, and on either side, the green margin of faith and love, kindness and benignity, charity and unselfishness. Still waters indicate depth. It is the shallow stream that makes the pretentious noise, gurgling and fretting along its pebbly channel. True religion is too real to be noisy. Its characteristic is deep principle, not fitful ecstacies. It is in grace as in nature: the gentle dew distils on the tender grass: the gentle rain feeds the mountain streams, and these imperceptibly feed the still waters in the lower meadows.

Blessed resort, this sheltered valley of Christ's reposedful love! Hear Him calling you, as He utters the invitation, "Come unto me, and I will give you rest." Having found the Shepherd of these green pastures and still waters, dread everything that would lead you away from

Him, and forfeit the possession of His favour and regard. It is the short but touching epitaph frequently seen in the catacombs at Rome, "*In Christo, in pace*"—("In Christ, in peace.") Realise the constant presence of the Shepherd of peace. "HE maketh me to lie down!" "HE leadeth me!" Be ever near these waters of quietness. Let the current of your daily walk and business run side by side with the heavenly stream. In the world you may and must be. "In the world," says He, "ye shall have tribulation, but in *Me* ye shall have peace." And when you come to die, others may speak of the surges of death, and the swellings of Jordan, but to you it will only be, under the guidance of the great Precursor, a transit through the border-stream, to the better meadows and better Canaan beyond. "When thou passest through the waters I will be with thee." You will be borne through them in the arms of the Shepherd, to rest evermore in the celestial pastures, and to drink evermore of the rivers of His pleasure.

The Paths of Righteousness in which  
the flock are fed.

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"HE LEADETH ME IN THE PATHS OF RIGHTEOUSNESS."—PS. xxiii. 3.

## THE PATHS OF RIGHTEOUSNESS IN WHICH THE FLOCK ARE LED.

THERE is a world of comfort contained in the simple words, "He leadeth me." As we have already had occasion more than once to note in adverting to the same pastoral figure, our lives are no fortuitous concurrence of events and circumstances;—we are not like weeds thrown in the waters, to be tossed and whirled in the eddying pools of capricious accident and chance, our future a self-appointed one. There is a Divine hand and purpose in all that befalls us. Every man's existence is a biography, written chapter by chapter, line by line, by God Himself. It is not the mere cartoon or outline sketched by the Divine Being, which we are left to fill in; but all the minute and delicate shadings are inserted by Him. Looking no farther than our relation to Him as *creatures*, it is impossible for a moment to entertain the thought of our being beyond the leadings of God, and to speak of a life of self-government and self-dependence. The complex machinery of the outer world, dumb inanimate nature in all its integral parts, is upheld by Him. "He weigheth the mountains in scales, and the hills in a balance." "He counts the number of the stars." He guides Orion and Arcturus in their magnificent marchings. If one of these orbs were to be jostled from its place—plucked from its

silent throne in the heavens, it is well known that the equipoise and nice balancing of the material system would be fatally disturbed—anarchy and revolution would reign triumphant. And shall we own Him as the leader of stars and planets, and ignore His sovereignty over the human spirit? Shall we acknowledge that He is Lord in the universe of matter and not supreme in the empire of thought and human volition? Nay, "His kingdom ruleth over ALL." Angel, archangel, cherub and seraph; man, beast, worm, "these all wait upon Thee!"

But it is not the doctrine of God's *general* sovereignty which in the verse selected for meditation we are called to contemplate. It is as the Shepherd-leader of His ransomed flock, and the manner and method of His leading: "He leadeth me in the path of righteousness."

Not only does this proclaim that I am the object of a thought in God's heart, but a loving thought. It is the Shepherd intent on some loving purpose, in every intricate turn of the winding path. Ah! we know, at times, there is nothing more difficult to believe than this. "What!" we say, "God leading me as a shepherd, and leading me in righteousness! How can I reconcile, with all this, so much that is startling and perplexing alike in my own experience and in the world around me, where I see vice pampered and virtue trampled under foot? There is a man, proud, niggardly, profligate, worthless; an extortioner, the oppressor of the poor. God is leading him along one of the world's smiling paths; elevating him to positions of influence and distinction; fame sounding her brazen trumpet before him;—while yonder is a man of sterling integrity

and worth, of high honour and boundless philanthropy—the friend of the friendless—his open hand keeping pace with his generous heart, who can tell of quite a diverse experience. What can it be but wayward capricious fortune that has dandled on its knees him who is thus worthless and mean-souled, and left the other in some luckless moment, stripped and beggared; disappointing his hopes, cropping the wings of honourable ambition, spoiling him of his goods, dashing his ships on the rocks, baring his walls, and leaving his children penniless?" 'Can that' (another will say)—'can that be the path of righteousness, that path which echoes to the mournful tramp of the funeral crowd, as some loved one is borne to the long home? My innocent babe is snatched away; oh, why take the green and spare the ripe? Might He not rather have taken the old gnarled, decrepit tree, with its hollow trunk scathed with the storms of years? Might He not rather have taken the rose with its spent and withered leaves ready to drop to the ground? Why has He plucked the opening bud; left old age with its crutches, and despoiled the cradle of its smiles?'

Hush these Atheist thoughts,—away with these unworthy surmises. He "leads in righteousness." He has an Infinite reason for all He does. It is not for us to attempt to unravel the tangled thread of Providence. God is often, like Jacob of old, blessing the sons of Joseph with crossed hands. We, in our half-blind, short-sighted faith, would presume to dictate to Him, and prejudge the wisdom and rectitude of His procedure. We are tempted to say with Joseph, "Not so, my father." But like the

old patriarch, “He guides His hands wittingly.” As the sheep of His pasture, He may not be leading you along the bright meadow or sunny slope; He may be lingering amid stunted herbage; He may be turning down some bramble thicket,—plunging into gloomy forest glades, while acres of rich sunny pasture are close at hand. But He sees, what *you did not see*; He sees an adder here; He sees a lion there; He sees pitfalls here; He sees a precipice there. He knows you better, He loves you better, than to set you in slippery places, and cast you down to destruction. He sees, if that fortune had been unbroken, that dream of ambition realised, that clay-idol undethroned,—the alienated heart would have gradually, but terribly, lapsed away from Him. Trust Him. In the midst of perplexing dealings say, “I *know*,” (you cannot say “I *see*,”) but let faith say, “I know, O God, that Thy judgments are right, and that Thou in faithfulness hast afflicted me.” It is covenant love that guides you. If you are led up the mountain summits of worldly distinction and honour and prosperity, HE leadeth you; if along the lowly valleys of obscurity and poverty, humiliation and sorrow, HE leadeth you. Your life is a plan of the great God; and this is the leading element in the plan, “*Beloved, I wish above all things that thou mayest prosper and be in health, even as thy soul prospereth.*” Health, sickness, joy, sorrow, successes, reverses, worldly honours, worldly humiliations, receiving, surrendering, suffering, losing;—in all these, He has in view your soul-prosperity. Better not a rood of this world if the guiding Shepherd be with you, than all its broad acres *without* Him. Better the

wasted barrel and the handful of meal, with God, than the full cup and gilded ceilings without Him. Better Lazarus with his crumbs, and his hope of glory, than Dives with his purple, and dainty board, and *no heaven!* Better yonder chained prisoner in the Mamertine, than Nero in his Quirinal palace. The one was the world's undisputed master, with his foot on the neck of subject millions ; the other was an outcast Jew,—a sheep, without fold or pasture on earth which he could call his own ;—yet to his guiding Shepherd he could say, “I have all and abound !” . . . . “All *men* forsook me, notwithstanding the *Lord* stood with me and strengthened me, and I was delivered out of the mouth of the lion.” We own it, that these gracious leadings are often not discernible. We cannot understand His *judgments*, they are a deep, “a great deep.” You may have seen the sombre mountains which descend in abrupt shelving masses into some of our peaceful Highland lakes. Their bases are lost in the unsounded depths of that still mirror ; we see their trembling reflections, no more. But the mountains themselves are patent to view. So, if we cannot discern or understand God’s *judgments*, let us acknowledge the “righteousness” which directs them. Let us say in adoring reverence with the psalmist, who seems to have had this beautiful image in his eye,—“Thy righteousness is as the great mountains, Thy judgments are a great deep.”

What a grandeur and dignity, what a safety and security it would give to life, if we sought ever to regard it as a leading of the Shepherd ;—God shaping our purposes and destinies, that wherever we go, or wherever our friends

go, He is with us! Even in earthly journeyings, if our pathway be the great and wide sea,—“He gives to the sea His decree”—winds and waves and storms are the Shepherd’s voice. If it be careering along the highway, nothing but that tiny iron thread between us and death,—*He* curbs the wild frenzy of the fiery courser; He puts the bit in his iron mouth; He gives His angels charge over us to bear us up and keep us in all our ways. If it be our position in the world; He metes out every drop in the cup, He assigns us our niche in His temple, fills or empties our coffers, makes vacant the chairs of our homesteads. *But* “HE leadeth us!” He will yet be His own interpreter. *We* can take no more than the near, the limited, the earthly view of His dealings: let us pause for the infinite disclosures of eternity. Look at the husbandman labouring in his field. All this deep ploughing is for the insertion of the needful seed. In doing the work, he may appear to act roughly. Ten thousand insects nestling quietly in their homes in the ground are rudely unhoused. All at once, their ceiled dwellings are pulled asunder. Many a happy commonwealth is scattered and overthrown in the upturned furrow,—little worlds of life and being demolished by the ruthless, remorseless ploughshare. So, some of our earthly schemes may be assailed and pillaged,—our staff and beautiful rods broken,—our worldly treasures scattered by the iron teeth of misfortune. But all is preparatory to a higher good, a harvest of rich blessing crowning the soul, as He does the year with His goodness and making its paths drop fatness!

Let us, finally, learn the lesson of our entire dependence on our Shepherd Leader, and our need of His grace in prosecuting the path of the spiritual life. God had just taken some means to revive and quicken that life in the soul of the psalmist, "*He restoreth my soul.*" Thus restored, he clings with greater ardour than before to the great Restorer. He is more keenly alive to his indebtedness to Him for keeping in healthful energy every spiritual grace. His feeling is not "I am revived, and restored, and quickened, I shall be able now manfully to pursue my own way." The next note in his song, after telling of God's *reviving* grace, is to exult in God's *sustaining* grace—" *He leadeth me in the paths of righteousness.*" Reader, make it your prayer to this "God of *all grace*," "Hold up my goings in Thy paths, that my footsteps slip not :" "Lead me in the way everlasting!" And He *will* lead you—He *will* keep you. "The Lord is thy *keeper*, thy stay, and thy strength, on thy right hand." That path is an onward path of blessedness and peace. It is written, "*The righteous shall hold on his way.*" Rejoice then, ye sheep of God! ye shall never perish. All creation may become bankrupt; earth may lock up her furrows, and seasons refuse to revolve; the sun (heaven's great lamp) may be extinguished, and the stars rush from their orbits;—but the Lord will never fail to be, to His people, their "Sun and Shield," giving them "grace and glory."

Meanwhile be it yours to follow after that holiness—that "righteousness"—without which no man can see the Lord. Walk day by day, under the guidance and guardianship of your Shepherd; and in the conscious possession of His

love, you *must* be happy. Trials will turn into mercies; sorrows will be transmuted into joys; losses will be resolved into gains. You will sleep, like the little child through the night of storm, when he feels his parent's hand locked in his. In the very darkest of human hours;—when the wind is sweeping and sighing through the trackless forest: when the tempest has shrouded moon and stars, and you are getting deeper and deeper amid the intricacies of entangling thickets;—with such a Guide, Protector, *Friend*, you need fear no evil. In the words of Ezekiel, you can “dwell securely in the wilderness, and sleep in the woods.” And when the morning breaks—the bright morning of heaven;—when the earthly path is at an end, and you attain the sunlit summit of the everlasting hills, you will be able to retrace, with adoring gratitude, all its windings. The retrospect will afford material for a twofold song—the Song of Providence and the Song of Grace. You will sing “the Song of Moses, the servant of God, and the Song of the Lamb.”



## The Shepherd Seeking the Flock in the Cloudy and Dark Day.

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"AS A SHEPHERD SEEKETH OUT HIS FLOCK IN THE DAY THAT HE IS AMONG HIS SHEEP THAT ARE SCATTERED; SO WILL I SEEK OUT MY SHEEP, AND WILL DELIVER THEM OUT OF ALL PLACES WHERE THEY HAVE BEEN SCATTERED IN THE CLOUDY AND DARK DAY. . . . I WILL SEEK THAT WHICH WAS LOST, AND BRING AGAIN THAT WHICH WAS DRIVEN AWAY, AND WILL BIND UP THAT WHICH WAS BROKEN, AND WILL STRENGTHEN THAT WHICH WAS SICK: BUT I WILL DESTROY THE FAT AND THE STRONG; I WILL FEED THEM WITH JUDGMENT."—EZEK. XXXIV. 12, 16.

## THE SHEPHERD SEEKING THE FLOCK IN THE CLOUDY AND DARK DAY.

IN the closing sentences of the preceding chapter, we indicated the possibility of a change in the experience of the believer—such as that which is now to form the theme for consideration.

In the first of the two verses above selected, there is laid, as it were, the *scene* of this new pastoral picture. Dark clouds are represented, brooding over the landscape; the thunder has burst over the valleys—and the sheep are scattered here and there over the gloomy mountains. Some are entangled in the brakes,—some are lost in the misty shrouds, filling the hollows,—some are lying bleeding and wounded, at the foot of the precipices over which they have fallen. But wanderers and panic-stricken as they are, they are not forsaken. Amid wind and storm, the watchful eye of their Shepherd follows them; and, under new symbols, we have a fresh and tender unfolding of His loving dealings.

Let us briefly consider, in their order, the fourfold classification here given of the scattered sheep. *The lost*, and *the driven away*: *the broken*, and *the sick*. Thus separately grouped, we have a figurative description of the two elements of Sin and Sorrow, which, in the experience of the flock of God, still give rise to “the cloudy and dark day.”

The first in this enumeration are “THE LOST.”

It is not necessary that we attach to this term the meaning it has in other passages already considered—as denoting the Shepherd’s first finding of “the lost sheep,” —the first rescue of the sinner from his state of condemnation and death. We may rather now cursorily notice it as referring, to what will afterwards form the theme of a separate chapter—Christ’s dealing with backsliders ;—truant, who, it may be, have long known the peace and security of the Fold,—but who, by their own hapless estrangement, have forfeited, for a time, alike their happiness and safety. Moreover, we may here regard the figure as descriptive of those who, by little and little, (by imperceptible degrees,) have erred and strayed from the Shepherd’s fold and presence; those who, to use a different Scripture figure, once did “run well,” but who have been “*hindered*.” Once their landscape was bathed in sunshine;—the mountain-tops of God’s faithfulness were clear;—the summits of the heavenly hills sparkled gloriously ;—theirs were the green pastures and still waters,—the Shepherd’s voice to cheer them, and the Shepherd’s steps to guide them. But all is gloomy now;—the storm-clouds have gathered in their once serene sky. The sun cannot disperse, as formerly, these floating vapours; they look around for their Shepherd—He is gone; for the fold—it is hidden in mist and fog; farther and yet farther they stray—going on, in the words of Jeremiah, “from mountain to hill;” but the clouds only seem to gather, and the distance and alienation to increase. And yet, to account for their wandering, there may be no very specific

cause, no bold presumptuous sin. It may arise from their own sluggish unconcern;—a drowsy, sleepy, callous frame,—the result of a gradual, but ever-deepening insensibility to divine things;—a trifling with their spiritual interests;—languor in prayer—conformity with the world—tampering with sins of omission—venturing on forbidden or debateable ground. The issue, at all events, has been a painful, conscious distance from God. Behold them now among the scattered flock, in “the cloudy and dark day !”

The second class described by the prophet are those who are “DRIVEN AWAY.” These have more marked and distinctive characteristics. Some overt act has been the cause of their scattering. Look at David as an illustration. One of the choicest of the flock of God, feeding on the richest pasture, he was in one guilty moment thus “*driven away*,” a wanderer on the dark mountains. “Driven away !” His own guilty passion was the lash that drove him from his Shepherd’s presence and love. His own iniquities separated between him and his God. He never after was the joyous believer he once was. He was indeed restored, pardoned, loved;—but the memory of that sad day followed him to the grave, and mantled his whole moral landscape with clouds, even to the very entrance of the dark valley.

And how many among the true flock of the Shepherd have to tell a similar mournful tale ! Some one guilty deed has laid the foundation of weeks and months—ay, years, of spiritual alienation and distance from the fold. The indulgence of a forbidden sin—a guilty companionship—an ungodly marriage—a resisting or wounding of conscience

—a rejection of God's providential leadings. One or any of these may be the beginning of fatal disaster. How many a youth of fair promise—to take one example,—has been "*driven away*" by evil companions! His opening years were bright with spiritual promise. The earliest psalm, it may be, his infant lips had been taught to utter was the psalm of the green pastures and still waters, and death's dark vale illumined with the Shepherd's presence; and his childhood's vow—the echo of a mother's prayers and tears, was, that from that fold he would never wander. But the siren voice, in a hapless moment, stole upon his ear, and smothered his better and nobler resolves. A godless associate smiled at his conscientious scruples, and mocked his superstitious fears. The forbidden path of wandering once entered,—the clear sunlight of truth and a quiet conscience obscured,—he was soon lost amid the mazy fogs of sin. Driven away by his own guilty forgetfulness of home-teachings and Bible warnings, and of all the fond memories of a childhood and youth of innocence and peace—behold him now, a wreck on a stormy ocean, a shattered, wounded, fleece-torn sheep, in the "cloudy and dark day!"

Thus much for 'the scattered' in the cloudy and dark day of *sin*. We come now to speak of the dark and cloudy day of *sorrow*.

The first of the latter class here described, are "THE BROKEN." How numerous are these! Many of us in the midst of our bright enjoyments—our green and verdant pastures—our full cup—our unininvaded circles—are apt to ignore altogether the existence of breaking and broken

hearts. We see the sunny hill-side, covered with sheep, feeding in reposed security under the Shepherd's care,—morning by morning, listening to the dulcet tones of the mountain-pipe,—at evening quietly penned—protected from summer's draught and winter's cold. But we are apt to forget that the world is not all sunshine;—that there are members of the fold scattered by the wild winds of misfortune—lying wounded and broken—having no joy, no pasture, no rest. Some are “broken” by *calamity*;—penury scattering them in *its* cloudy and dark day. Some are “broken” by bitter *disappointment*; an aching heart-wound too sacred to be revealed, has left them bleeding and desolate, refusing to be comforted. Some are “broken” by *bereavement*. The mother has the bleating lamb plucked from her bosom,—and the lamb goes bleating after the mother she cannot find;—all the wealth of the living fold is nothing to either, because of those “who are not.”

We have still another class in the cloudy day of suffering and sorrow. They are the SICK.

We might take this in a figurative sense; as descriptive of those who are sick at heart,—sad and disconsolate with the trials, and sins, and sorrows of earth, and with the corruptions of their own natures. But why not regard it literally, as applied to those laid on beds of sickness? Many among us who inadequately appreciate the talent of health, are apt also to forget and overlook this large section in God's world;—the “poor afflicted ones,” the maimed members of the flock,—who with drooping heads, and wan countenance, loathe the richest pastures, and can get no

rest or ease in the choicest fold;—whose inward wail is heard in the long hours of wakeful darkness,—“would God it were evening; and in the evening, would God it were morning;”—pining flowers, around whom the sun shines, and the rain descends, and the birds sing in vain: the enervated body exercising a like depressing influence on the mind: the gloomy sameness and silence of the sick-chamber tinging the whole life with inveterate sadness.

To one and all of these cases—to one and all of these “scattered ones”—the Great Shepherd comes. Yes! in the cloudy and dark day—the day He is most needed—“lo! He cometh, leaping upon the mountains.”

He has a special word of comfort for each separate case.

“*Lost!*” He “*seeks*” you. ‘Though you have forgotten *Him*, He has not forgotten *you*. “A voice was heard upon the high places, weeping and supplications of the children of Israel: for they have perverted their way, and they have forgotten the Lord their God. Return, ye backsliding children, and I will heal your backslidings!”

Ye who have been “*driven away*,” He will “*bring you again*.” Ye who, like the Psalmist of Israel, have unwarily left the pastures of peace and security, and entangled yourselves in the midnight forest of danger and sin;—the lion may have you in his fangs, but the grace of Him who first brought you to the fold, is able to bring you back again, and restore to you the joys of His salvation. Hear His own words by the mouth of His prophet, veiled under the favourite Shepherd-symbol, and in which Hemingles judgment with mercy in the restoration of the erring:—

“ I did know thee in the wilderness, in the land of great drought. According to their pasture, so were they filled; they were filled, and their heart was exalted; therefore have they forgotten me. Therefore I will be unto them as a lion: as a leopard by the way will I observe them: I will meet them as a bear that is bereaved of her whelps, and will rend the caul of their heart, and there will I devour them like a lion: the wild beast shall tear them. *O Israel, thou hast destroyed thyself; but in me is thine help.*”

*Broken ones!* Ye who are crushed and mutilated by the thousand ills of suffering and sorrow: rejoice! That Shepherd came to “bind up” breaking hearts; His name is “The Healer of the broken-hearted.” His life was a grand living comment on this the first text and opening sermon of His ministry. Weeping eyes and woe-worn spirits were ever following the wake of this mighty Vessel of mercy. The stranded, hapless barks on the world’s shores He loved to set floating on the ever-flowing tide of His compassion. This was the motto of His life: it is the description of His ever-living love at this hour—“He healeth the broken in heart, and bindeth up their wounds.”

“*Sick!*” Ye pining sufferers in earth’s great hospital! Ye bleating sheep, lying languid and helpless in the fold—He, the Great Shepherd, comes to “strengthen you.” A sick-bed—where the noisy world is shut out—where its cares, and anxieties, and aspirations, and ambitions are no longer present to hamper and harass—what a blessed season for converse with the Infinite:—Then does the Shepherd of Israel specially love to come to the weak

and weary with better than the balm of Gilead ;—fulfilling in the case of many “sick ones whom He loves,” His own promise—“The Lord will *strengthen* him on the bed of languishing.”

And in all this, let us mark the gracious adaptation of Christ’s dealings to the different wants, and trials, and necessities of His people. He “*seeks*” the *lost*; and on finding them, a look of love suffices to bring the conscience-stricken wanderers back. He “*brings again*” the *driven away*. Those cowering in terror at their own wilful blindness and apostasy, their deep ingratitude and heinous guilt, need help, encouragement, guidance;—they need being carried in the Shepherd’s arms. Peter dreads to meet the Lord He has so injured; but He “*brings him again*,” first with a gentle message, and then with a gentle word. He “*binds up*” the *broken*; He stanches the bleeding wound with the application of tender restoratives—the balm-words of His own exceeding great and precious promises. He, the Brother born for adversity, teaches the wounded spirit, as He alone can, how to “bear” in this “dark and cloudy day;” He turns the shadow of death into the morning. He “*strengthens*” the *sick*—those who for years on years have been laid on couches of languishing—secluded from the gladsome light of day, on whose ear the tones of the Sabbath bell fall only to tell of forfeited privileges. They can best bear attestation, how a mysterious, sustaining strength, not their own, is imparted to them, which makes them wonders to themselves. Indeed, were we to go in search of the most touching proof of the Shepherd-Redeemer’s upholding grace, it would be

to the chamber of that wan and sickly sufferer. See him bowed down with paroxysms of excruciating pain;—the iron ploughshare leaving deep furrows on his cheek, and banishing sleep from his pillow,—yet all the time, while the cold drops are standing on his brow, and every nerve has become a chord of agony—no murmur escapes his lips. See how patience has her perfect work. Hear how the prayer trembles on his lips—“Father, Thy will be done!” And say, can this be his own strength? No, it is the Shepherd coming with healing balm to the prostrate sheep of His fold. It is supporting grace given for the day of suffering. It is the Lord coming to the couch of languishing, and, in the expressive words of Scripture, “making all his bed in his sickness.” There is no more beautiful study either in Holy Scripture or in the Scripture of experience, than this diversity of dealing on the part of God towards His people;—His wise and discriminating treatment of each case, according to what He sees they require. It is said of some oriental kings, that they never appear in the same garment to those who seek an audience. Moreover, that whatever be the garment in which they are attired themselves, their attendants have a duplicate gift ready to present to the stranger or suppliant. It is even so with the Shepherd-King of Israel! He ever comes to His needy people, arrayed in the garb of some new promise or specially adapted blessing. He comes with the robe of righteousness to the spiritually naked. He comes with a garment of healing for the bruised and broken. He comes with the garment of praise for a spirit of heaviness. For

every sorrowing thought of the heart He has a counterpart and corresponding comfort: "In the multitude of my thoughts within me," says the Psalmist, "Thy comforts delight my soul." It is not one fountain only, but "*springs*" of water, the Shepherd has for His flock;—according to the beautiful description of the Prophet Isaiah—"They shall feed in the ways, and their pastures shall be in all high places. They shall not hunger nor thirst; neither shall the heat nor sun smite them: for he that hath mercy on them shall lead them, even by the springs of water shall he guide them."

Let us close with two practical reflections.

The first is a consoling one—*the all-sufficiency of the Shepherd's power and love*. There is no case He cannot meet. *Lost ones, driven ones, broken ones, sick ones*. It seems to exhaust the circle of human wants and necessities. He seems to anticipate every supposable case, so that none dare say "that Shepherd-love does not include *me*." It reminds us of that wondrous expression of the Great Apostle—that verse with its grand redundancy of words—its significant and touching tautology—"Now unto Him that is able to do exceeding abundantly, above all that we ask or think." See how the gradation rises. See how he mounts to his magnificent climax. What a golden ladder is this verse! Christ is "able to do"—Christ is "able to do abundantly"—Christ is "able to do abundantly, above all that we ask or think." And then, as if he had not unburdened his soul of the full truth, the "*goodly matter*" his heart was

inditing, he adds another stone to the pyramid—" *Exceeding* abundantly, above all that we ask or think." Rejoice in such a full Saviour as this, sufficient for all temporal and all spiritual necessities ; who can bind up the broken body; who can bind up the broken soul; ease the aching head, and quiet the aching spirit; who can reclaim the wandering and save the lost. What earthly friend can help us so ? Who else, save He, can fill with His presence and love the gap in the sorrow-stricken heart ? But He can ; He *does !* Lover and friend may be put far from us; all we once cherished and doated on may be smitten with inevitable change ; the roof where childhood revelled may be a heap of ruins, or habited by strangers ; the trees, under whose shadow we reposed, may have long been felled to the ground ; the parents' arms that clasped us as we lisped our infant prayer, or which smoothed our pillows in sickness, may be mouldering in the dust ; voices that cheered us on the pilgrimage, may be hushed in awful silence. But *here* is One who is Father, Brother, Physician, Friend, Shepherd, Home, *ALL !* No one can fell the Tree of life ! No storm can overturn that Home of unblighted love ! No envious whisper can estrange that true Friend ! No King of terrors can paralyse the Everlasting Arms ! "The Lord liveth, and blessed be my Rock, and let the God of my salvation be exalted." Oh, blessed it is for the broken, blighted, downcast, bereft, in that moment of their sorest agony, when returning from the grave to the silent house of bereavement—entering the lessened fold, and marking the blank in the flock,—blessed it is

to feel the *Abiding Friend* filling the empty place and the aching heart. The sheep has gone, but the SHEPHERD remains!

Our concluding practical reflection is one of *warning*.

This precious passage, so full of tenderness and love to the erring, the backsliding, the suffering, ends with a brief but most solemn utterance of "*judgment*" on the impenitent, the self-righteous, and unbelieving. "He that has rest for disquieted saints," says Matthew Henry in his comment on this verse, "has terror to speak to presumptuous sinners." That Shepherd of Israel adds, (it is a thrilling postscript) "*But I will destroy the fat and the strong; I will feed them with judgment.*"

This seems to refer to those who are living in guilty independence of God; disowning His hand—resisting His grace;—self-satisfied and self-contented;—fancying themselves rich and increased with goods, and having need of nothing;—no tear of penitence in their eye—no consciousness of distance from the fold—no longings for return. How many such there are! And strange it is, those often who are the most abundant recipients of the Shepherd's love,—on whom worldly prosperity has most richly descended,—"*the fat and the strong,*" are frequently most apt to live this life of guilty atheism, saying in their hearts, "Who is the Lord that we should obey Him." "*Jeshurun,*" we read, "*waxed fat and kicked.*" Like a bullock unaccustomed to the yoke, fed and pampered in the stalls of earthly prosperity, that prosperity has often proved a curse. It has nurtured a rebel, restive, ungovernable spirit. The gifts which should have drawn upwards to the Giver, have, alas! drawn downwards

to perdition. "I will destroy" such, says God. Judgment, indeed, does not often descend now, under a present economy. These obdurate are suffered to live on, "*feeding*,"—"nourishing their hearts for the day of slaughter." But that day of retribution will come; and the Great Being, whose love they have slighted, and whose pleadings they have scorned, will be true to His own solemn declaration—"He that, being often reproved, hardeneth his neck, shall suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy!"

"Turn ye, turn ye, why will ye die?" God is "not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance." Presume not, however, on his forbearance and mercy. Ye lost ones!—wandering up and down the desert of the world seeking rest and finding none—see that ye refuse not Him that speaketh. The Shepherd may now be abroad seeking you in some cloudy and dark day; but remember, these "seeking" seasons dare not be lightly tampered with. They are the days of His "merciful visitation." If they be allowed to pass by unimproved, the echoes of His voice may be heard no more. The clouds may only gather more deeply and lour more gloomily, and you may be hopelessly lost amid the dark mountains of your wandering. David's men, when they heard "the sound of going in the tops of the mulberry trees," rushed on to battle, and discomfited the host of the Philistines in the valley of Rephaim. If they had neglected the preconcerted signal,—if they had delayed till that wild music had died away,—the victory would have been forfeited—the sun would have set on their vanquished and panic-stricken ranks,—the opportunity

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would have been lost. Oh, how many neglect the voice of God “in the mulberry trees!” How many miss and forfeit the sanctified use of affliction! The Spirit of God is moving amid the rustling foliage;—to advance would be to conquer; resolute deed would end in spiritual advantage. But the day of grace, the hour of solemn pleading is allowed to pass. They have become weak as other men, who out of weakness might have been made strong, waxed valiant in fight, and turned to flight the armies of the aliens. While that gracious Shepherd of the flock is now abroad, seeking to gather in the weary, the wandering, the perishing,—while judgment still lingers, let us not be among the number of those who continue to wander deeper, and yet deeper amid the cloudlands of sin,—to whom, at last, will be reserved the mist of darkness for ever; and on whose forlorn graves will be inscribed the mournful epitaph—(words which the Great Shepherd Himself uttered, through His tears, over the doomed fold of Israel,) “*Thou knewest not the time of thy visitation.*”



# The Shepherd's Gentle Dealings with the Burdened of the Flock.

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"HE SHALL FEED HIS FLOCK LIKE A SHEPHERD ; HE SHALL GATHER THE LAMBS WITH HIS ARM, AND CARRY THEM IN HIS BOSOM, AND SHALL GENTLY LEAD THOSE THAT ARE WITH YOUNG."—ISAIAH XL. 11.

## THE SHEPHERD'S GENTLE DEALINGS WITH THE BURDENED OF THE FLOCK.

ONE of the leading ideas in these beautiful words is, *the strong supporting the weak*: Omnipotence stooping to sustain feebleness: the mighty God—the Shepherd of Israel—feeding the helpless and dependent,\* bearing the lambs in His arms, and gently leading the weary and burdened. In nature we have often examples of the strong being thus the prop of the fragile and tottering. The old tower or keep, that has sustained the fierce assaults of armies, holds out its massive arm to the feeble, clinging ivy. The ocean, puissant to sweep down navies in its gloomy caverns, supports on its dimpled bosom the tiny skiff, or the branch

\* We have incidentally referred, in a previous chapter, to the graphic picture which Dr Thomson gives in his interesting volume; but as a special illustration of the present passage of Scripture, we transcribe it here in full:—"In ordinary circumstances the Shepherd does not *feed* his flock, except by leading and guiding them where they may gather for themselves; but there are times when it is otherwise. Late in autumn, when the pastures are dried up, and in winter, in places covered with snow, he must furnish them with food, or they die. In the vast oak woods along the eastern sides of Lebanon, between Baalbek and the Cedars, there are there gathered innumerable flocks, and the shepherds are all day long in the bushy trees, cutting down the branches, upon whose green leaves and tender twigs the sheep and goats are entirely supported. The same is true in all mountain districts, and large forests are preserved on purpose. The ring of the axe, the crash of falling trees, the shout of the shepherds, the tinkling of bells, and the barking of dogs, wake a thousand echoes along the deep wadies of Lebanon."—*The Land and the Book*, p. 204.

washed from the shore. These, and such-like, are dumb parables in the outer world, shadowing forth a nobler verity,—“ For thus saith the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is Holy ; I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones,” (Isa. lvii. 15.)

It is different with man. The great ones of the earth generally associate alone with the great. They are like the eagle which holds little converse with the low, misty valley, when it can get up amid the blue skies and granite peaks. It is the powerful—the rich—the strong—the titled, who are the deified and worshipped. The weak, and poor, and powerless get but a small fraction of regard. These are too often left unpitied and uncared for; to endure the rough struggle of existence as best they may. And the world has accordingly shaped its divinities after this its own ideal. We see the embodiment of that ideal chiselled in the old slabs of Assyrian marble, where the winged bull or lion is depicted trampling its enemies in the dust; the strong trampling on the weak. The early Christians had also *their* truer and nobler symbol, which, as previously noted, they have left in rude device in the catacombs at Rome;—the oft-recurring representation of a Shepherd—the Great Shepherd of the sheep—the Mighty God—carrying on His shoulder a feeble lamb.\*

\* It may here be noted, that in the remarkable prophecy of Micah, quoted in the second chapter of St Matthew’s Gospel, the *Shepherd*-character of the coming Messiah is specially referred to. “ And thou Bethlehem in the land of Judah, art not the least among the princes of Juda; for out of thee

It is the perfect Humanity of Christ which forms the bond of union between omnipotence and weakness ; He being alike the Everlasting God, and the Babe of Bethlehem. In this respect, indeed, the emblem of the Prophet, impressive as it is, is partial and incomplete. There is wanting perfect identity of nature between the earthly sheep and their shepherd to insure complete sympathy. For however closely the keeper of the fold, in olden times, on these wild Syrian hills or plains, may have associated with his flock,—sharing their companionship by night and day,—still, a vast interval in the scale of being separated the two. “How much,” says our Lord, “is a man better than a sheep.” But different is the bond of sympathy which unites the Great Shepherd with His spiritual flock. He became one of the flock Himself. Inhabiting eternity, He nevertheless pitched His tent among earthly tabernacles : He was bone of our bone, and flesh of our flesh. There being thus identity of nature, there is identity of feeling and experience. “In all things He was made like unto His brethren.” While, however, in this point of view the accuracy of the shepherd-symbol fails, we must not omit to mark how beautifully it illustrates the leading truth with which we started, viz.,—the love of a higher nature to inferior natures. The Palestine shepherd in a sense *loves* his sheep. As we have oft before noted, he protects them—defends them—risks his life for them—enters into their very gambols, and joys in their joy. It is an expressive picture of the love of the Creator to His creatures ; or rather of a covenant

shall come a governor that shall rule [lit. ‘who shall *act the part of a SHEPHERD*,’ δοῦλος ποιησαντεῖ] over my people Israel.”

God to His believing people. The mightiest of Beings stooping to be the Protector, Defender, ay, Friend of redeemed man. “HE shall feed His flock like a Shepherd!” Who is this? It is that God whose throne is immutability—whose power is boundless—whose dominion is immensity—whose life-time is eternity. Yet He, with a shepherd’s love and tenderness, attends to the wants of the humblest and weakest of His enormous family;—feeding all His flock, and marking the peculiarities of all. There is no subject of contemplation, indeed, more marvellous, than the unceasing attention and care lavished by Deity on *small* as well as on *great*; that the vast provinces of His giant empire do not withdraw His thoughts and care from the feeble and insignificant; that He who wheels the planets in their courses, and lights up the blazing suns of the firmament, can watch also the sparrow’s fall and feed the young ravens when they cry! Just as the mountain supports the tiny blade of grass and the modest floweret, as well as the giant pine or cedar: just as that ocean bears up in safety the sea-bird seated on its crested waves, as well as the Leviathan vessel: so while the Great Keeper of Israel can listen to the archangel’s song and the seraph’s burning devotions, He can carry in His bosom the feeblest lamb of the fold, and lead gently the most sorrowing spirit. The Psalmist delights to celebrate these two thoughts in conjunction;—God in the vastness of His omnipotence, and God in the condescending tenderness of lowly love to the feeble and fallen. “Thy kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, Thy dominion endureth throughout all generations”—“The Lord upholdeth all that fall, and raiseth up all those that

be bowed down!" "He telleth the number of the stars; He calleth them all by their names"—"He healeth the broken in heart, and bindeth up their wounds."

Let us at present advert to a few of the cares and weaknesses and burdens of the flock, whom Jesus, the Great and Good Shepherd, so tenderly gathers, and so gently leads.

The first burden we may refer to is the burden of *Sin*. Blessed are they,—those weary ones—who feel this burden, and long to get rid of it. Blessed are they to whose spiritual eye the Holy Spirit unfolds the existence and reality of this burden,—and permits them to get no rest, till, like the load of Bunyan's Christian, it falls from their back at the foot of the cross. We have previously seen how gently the Saviour of old dealt with burdened sinners. Never once did He spurn penitence and anguished tears from His feet. Never once did He say, "Go, child of the devil—thy sins have placed thee beyond the pale of mercy, thy case is hopeless, thy burdens cannot be removed—weary me no longer with thy pleadings!" On the contrary, His whole ministry and teaching were a significant comment on the prophetic utterance—"A bruised reed He will not break." Simple, but expressive emblem! The most fragile thing in nature is the shivering reed by the river side. The Eastern shepherd tending his flock by the streams where these reeds grow, appears to have used them for his rustic pipe. When one of them was bruised or broken, he never made the attempt to mend it. By inserting it among the

others he would make his instrument discordant, and accordingly he threw it aside as worthless. Not so the Great Shepherd. When a human soul is bruised and mutilated by sin, He casts it not away. That bruised reed "He will not break." He repairs it for its place in the heavenly instrument, and makes it once more to show forth His praise. Go, burdened one, to this Shepherd of Souls! Go, weak and weary lamb of the flock;—and as thou liest in His bosom, hear His word of comfort and consolation,—"I will remove thy shoulder from the burden :—"—"O Ephraim, thou hast destroyed thyself, but in me is thy help :"—"JEHOVAH ROPHI, I am the Lord that healeth thee :"—"Neither do I condemn thee, go and sin no more!"

Another burden of the flock of God is the burden of *Doubts*. Blessed are they who bring these burdens too, to Christ. They are heavy burdens. We must not deal harshly and unkindly with those who bear them. Happy, indeed, are the receptive spirits who can apprehend the truth as little children;—who can open their hearts like the sun-flower to the sun—and drink in, all at once, from his radiance. Others, however, from constitutional and mental temperament, are cautious—slow of heart. They must have a reason for all they hear, and all they believe. They arrive at the truth by slow processes. The sun's beams have to force their way through the closed calyx. They remain with shut, imprisoned blossoms long after their floral compeers have been basking in his light, displaying their beauty and dispensing their fragrance.

Now those who doubt for the sake of doubting ;—who encourage and feed the carpings of a speculative mind,—can expect no gentle leadings or dealings from the Shepherd. He will release no such burdened ones :—their Unbelief is not their misfortune but their sin :—they incur a heavy risk and penalty by fostering and encouraging doubts, as they would encourage spiders, to cover with their webs the windows of the soul, and hide out the spiritual landscape. Doubt will, by and by, in such cases, pass into free-thinking, and free-thinking into cheerless infidelity. But those whose doubts are the trembling misgivings of anxious inquirers ;—those who are really in earnest in seeking the truth ;—feeling their way cautiously but surely, step by step up the ladder,—seeking to “*do God's will*,” at the same time that they seek to “*know of the doctrine*;”—these the Shepherd is ever willing to receive and lead, and to make good in their experience His own promise, “*Then shall we know, if we follow on to know the Lord.*” Nicodemus was one who had such a burden. He stole by night, when the streets of Jerusalem were hushed in silence, to the abode of the Great Teacher, to *unburden* his burdened heart, and to be instructed in the things of the kingdom. Many of the new doctrines were startling and repugnant to this cautious man of the Pharisees. He honestly avowed that they crossed his preconceived opinions. “*How can these things be?*” The Great Shepherd kindly received and kindly instructed him ; and, at the close of their conversation, gave a significant hint as to the reason why, in contrast with such honest seekers as he, many brooding doubts, in the case of others, settle into unbelief

and scepticism :—“Light is come into the world, and men love darkness rather than light, because their deeds are evil. For every one that *doeth evil* hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reproved. But he that doeth truth cometh to the light.” What was the result of this “doer” of the truth bringing his darkness to the light, and his burdens to the Shepherd of souls? It was this; that from a state of anxious doubt, he became strong in faith, giving glory to God. For when the Shepherd was smitten, and the other sheep scattered, that once trembling spirit gloried in the public avowal of his faith in Jesus, and in the broad light of day came and boldly demanded of Pilate the body of his Lord! Thomas was another still more heavily oppressed with this burden. When the other apostles willingly credited the fact of a risen Saviour, attested by trustworthy witnesses—he would not believe unless he had ocular proof,—unless he saw and handled the spear-wounds of the mangled body. How did the Lord treat this doubting apostle? He knew his peculiar temperament:—He had tested before, the sturdy heroic faith of the man, who had at a recent crisis-hour, boldly proposed to his fellow-apostles to perish with their Master:—“Let us also go that we may die with Him.” He will not spurn him now. No! even though his doubt is unreasonable and indefensible;—yet He will make due allowances for a naturally hard, severe, rationalistic, speculative nature;—a man slow and guarded to a fault in the reception of evidence,—yet firm as a rock when once the truth has got hold of his mind. “Reach hither thy finger,” said He, “and behold my

hands; and reach hither thy hand and thrust it into my side: and be not faithless, but believing." The Good Shepherd, who thus gently led that burdened one out of his doubts into strong faith, had no harsher reproof than this—"Thomas, because thou hast seen me, thou hast believed; blessed are they who have not seen and yet have believed." The apostle never, to his dying day, forgot being thus carried in these gentle arms. A future life of zeal and hard labour atoned for the passing hour of hesitancy, and showed that the "My Lord, and my God," uttered by adoring lips, was no formal ejaculation,—no empty, hollow protestation of love and devotedness. Yes! it is a cheering consolation, that He who suggested the merciful excuse for the sleepers in Gethsemane—"the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak," He will "gently lead" the Little-faiths and Ready-to-halts—as well as the Samsons and Asahels of His flock. Often does He come in the night-seasons of their darkest doubt, and lights the dim candle of faith and hope and loving confidence. Just as a mother, when her child awakes at midnight, frightened and scared with visions, strikes a light and illuminates the chamber, smoothing the ruffled brow, and kissing every fear away: so doth the Lord remove the gloomy misgivings of His children:—"Thou," says the Psalmist, "wilt light my candle, the Lord my God will enlighten my darkness."

Another burden of the Lord's flock, is the burden of *Sorrow*. How many are weak and weary, and weighed down with this! Few, comparatively, may have the burden of

doubt, but many are the children of affliction—many more than the world knows of. For the saddest sorrows are secret ones, with which a stranger doth not intermeddle.

God *gently* leads such. He takes them in His arms. He will not conduct them over a rougher road than they are able to bear. He adapts His consolations to them. As the Refiner of Silver, He is seated by the furnace of His own lighting, regulating the fury of the flames. “I will correct thee,” says He, “in *measure*.” All will be *meted* out. “He will stay His rough wind in the day of His east wind.” That Great Shepherd, who has “shorn the lamb,” has “the winds in His fists,” and He will temper them accordingly. He will give the oil of joy for mourning, and the garment of praise for a spirit of heaviness. Oh, thou who art burdened with life’s manifold afflictions, think of the strong Arm that bears thee! We have heard of the seaman grasping the infant from the sinking ship in one hand—and cleaving the roaring breakers with the other—bringing it safe to shore. That is a picture of thy God. Omnipotence sustaining weakness. “Trust in the Lord for ever, for in the Lord Jehovah is everlasting strength.” Through all the billows of this mortal life, He will bring thee to the desired haven. “The Lord on high is mightier than the noise of many waters; yea, than the mighty waves of the sea!”

Let us suggest, in conclusion, one or two brief thoughts from this description of the Saviour’s dealing with His weary and burdened flock; gathering the lambs with His

arm, carrying them in His bosom, and gently leading those that are with young.

This language speaks of *safety*. Where is a lamb so safe as in its shepherd's arms? The wolf may be prowling close by;—the flooded stream may be threatening to sweep away the rest of the fold;—but that weak and helpless creature is secure. Before you can injure or destroy it, you must destroy the shepherd. The feeblest member of the flock of God, is safe in the arms of Covenant love and faithfulness. His throne must first be shaken, before the interests of the humblest believer can suffer. The life of Jesus is the pledge and guarantee for the life of His people. “Because I live, ye shall live also!”

The words speak of *affection*. An Eastern traveller tells us, that the Syrian shepherd is often seen surrounded by some favourite lambs which do not mix with the rest of the flock—but are to be seen at one time borne in his arms, or frisking and fondling at his heels. Or, shall we look again at that higher symbol of earthly affection—the child nestling in its mother's arms—confiding in that mother's tenderness—whispering its little tale of sorrow or joy in its mother's ear, and she, in return, singing over its couch her lullaby of love? Both are feeble pictures of the affectionate intercommunion between Christ and His chosen. “The secret of the Lord is with them that fear Him, and He will show them His covenant.” Ay, and there is this difference; the shepherd *may* forsake—the mother *may* forget—“yet,” says the Good Shepherd, “yet will I not forget thee!”

This beautiful saying of the Prophet speaks still fur-

ther of *sympathy* :—gathered in His arms—borne in His bosom : it tells how near we are to Christ ;—how closely we are brought into endearing union with Himself, and especially in our burdened seasons—our times of trial and sorrow. There is no more precious truth upon which the mind can repose, than this infinitely pure and exalted sympathy of the Great Shepherd of the Sheep. He Himself—the Prince of Sufferers—having borne our griefs and carried our sorrows—as He bears us in His arms through the wilderness, can tenderly enter into every pang which rends our hearts. It has been observed, with regard to the Eastern shepherd and his flock, that there is a mysterious sympathy which grows up between them, on account of their sharing common dangers. This has a deeper and truer meaning in the relation of the Chief Shepherd to His people. In every thorny thicket of their wilderness He has been ;—every midnight of storm and tempest that has environed the sheep has environed Him ;—the loneliness and desolation of the loneliest of His flock has been shared in a far intenser severity by Him. “In all points He was tempted like as we are.” “In that He himself hath suffered being tempted, He is able to succour them that are tempted.”

Let us finally learn *the blessedness of reposing in Christ*: trusting Him implicitly in all the vicissitudes and exigencies of life. We ourselves cannot calculate on the future. We cannot predict one turn in the highway of existence. The morrow is a blank and enigma : we cannot point our finger to one of its hours and say, ‘So and so it shall be with us.’ We know in our libraries

where to find a book;—we know in our gardens where to find a flower;—we know in the mountain we have oft ascended where to pause for the view, and to look in the distance for the blue smoke of some loved hamlet;—we know where to look in the heavens for a favourite star—or where to direct the telescope to view a brilliant planet. We can with confidence predict the march of the seasons,—when spring will tread on the heels of winter, and flowers appear on the earth, and the time of the singing of birds may come. But we cannot predict or foresee the manifold changes of this manifold existence. The flowers in life's garden may wither in a moment. We may look up in vain on life's firmament in search of an extinguished star. Ours is at best an April day—showers and sunshine. We never can tell when the shadows will sweep across the landscape;—when the clouds may gather and the birds cease to sing, and the sun of happiness be swept from the meridian. But it is our comfort to be assured—that He who feeds His flock like a shepherd—who marshals the sun and planets—knows every flower of life's garden, counts every tree of its forest, and every leaf of every tree! All that concerns us and ours is in His hands.

“Father, I know that all my life,  
Is portion'd out to me;  
And the changes that are sure to come,  
I do not fear to see.”

And it is not His *sovereignty* merely, we have to exult in,—(that is the lesser—or least comforting portion of the great truth)—but it is His *Paternal* or *Shepherd-love*—

His covenant-interest in us. "He shall feed His flock" (not like a sovereign, who often rules his people with a rod of iron, but) "like a shepherd," who gently leads them with rod and staff of love. In all the periods and stages, too, of life, "He is faithful that promised." Youth has few burdens : mid-age—the glory of manhood,—although associated with "the *burden* and heat of the day," has, generally speaking, at all events, strong shoulder and agile limb to bear its burdens. But some whose eyes trace these pages, may, with fragile step, be tottering under the *burden of old age*—the burden of declining years. The keepers of the house may be trembling, and the strong men bowing themselves—fears may be in the way, and the grasshopper may be *a burden*. To such the Great Shepherd draws near, and says, 'Fear not! I will gently lead you. "Even to old age I am He, and even to hoar hairs will I carry you. I have made and I will bear, even I will carry and will deliver you"' When the decrepit enfeebled body is fast failing—when the outer casement is fast crumbling to decay—how beautiful is it often to see the inner shrine of the soul lustrous as ever,—as if the very rents in the house of the earthly tabernacle were only opening a way for the transmission of the rays of the coming heavenly glory! Ay, and often too, when memory is hazy and clouded for every other theme—there is *one* Name which cleaves imperishably to its tablets—the name of Jesus!—the music of that name refreshing and cheering at the hour of departure—as if the aged Christian really felt himself upborne in the Shepherd's arms as he passed through the floods of Jordan. Would those who may be feeling that the vigour of man-

hood is past—that their sun is fast westerling—that having long ago reached the top of the hill, they are now descending the shady side into the valley,—would they know in time, how to be eased of their burdens, and to sing in old age as in the days of their youth? It is by walking at their Shepherd's side, and breathing the prayer for conscious nearness—“Abide with us, for it is toward evening, and the day is far spent!”

Go, then, burdened one, whatever be the diversity in your age and experience, lean on your Shepherd's bosom. “His gentleness will make you great.” Earthly friends—earthly shepherds—may deceive you—they may prove summer shepherds—summer friends: at your side when all is sunshine: but when the winter's blast comes, and the trees are stripped, and the brooks fail, and their protection is most needed, they may leave you unsheltered to the sweep of the storm. But *He* will not! Omnipotence loves to stoop to weakness. The royal Shepherd of Bethlehem, who laid in the dust the giant of Philistia, could also weep tears of love and tenderness over a tiny, pining flower in his own palace. So is it with the true David. He combines the might and majesty of Godhead with the tenderness of weeping humanity. The same hand that upholds the world, *could* take and *can* take the little child into His arms and bless it. He may lead you along the wilderness by a way that you know not, and by paths that you have not known. But trust Him:—He will feed and lead His flock “*like a shepherd;*” succouring the faint, carrying the weary, sustaining the burdened. This description of the people He led of old out of Egypt will be

the history of every member of His flock still, when safe gathered within the heavenly fold :—" He found him also in a desert land, and in the waste howling wilderness—He led him about, He instructed him, He kept him as the apple of His eye. As an eagle stirreth up her nest, fluttereth over her young, spreadeth abroad her wings, taketh them, beareth them on her wings : so the Lord alone did lead him." In the quaint words of an old writer—" He will lead you in—He will lead you up—He will lead you through—He will lead you HOME ! "

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## The Flock in the World.

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"BEHOLD, I SEND YOU FORTH AS SHEEP IN THE MIDST OF WOLVES."—  
MATT. X. 16.

## THE FLOCK IN THE WORLD.

THE figure employed by the Good Shepherd, which is to form the theme of consideration in this chapter, is one that would be familiar to all His hearers. "The sheep in the midst of wolves:"—The wolf coming and "scattering the sheep," were apposite symbols of the fierce temptations with which His disciples then, and His people in every age, might expect to be assailed.\* Who can attempt to describe these wolf-like temptations? Apart from those more peculiar to the world around us,—the countless absorbing influences and interests of sense and time,—a man's worst foes are too often those of his own household. We have wolves in our own hearts, lurking insidiously:—fettered vices, longing to burst their bands, and go forth on missions of death and ruin. There are the wolves of temper—envy—jealousy—hatred—malice,—each hidden in his covert—crouching in his lair—ready to make the spring when temptation offers. *Covetousness*—the wolf with the golden fleece—how it has strewed earth's highway with the bones of men! Even our daily busi-

\* "Leopards and panthers, exceeding fierce, prowl about these wild wadies. They not unfrequently attack the flock in the very presence of the shepherd, and he must be ready to do battle at a moment's warning. The faithful shepherd has often to put his life in his hand to defend his flock. I have known more than one case in which he had literally to lay it down in the contest."—*The Land and the Book*, p. 203.

ness and avocations may become to us a dangerous foe. Our very prosperity may turn into a ravening wolf. But we cannot attempt to particularise. Wherever we look, the world is bristling with temptations. Wolves lurk on every side :—“The lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eye, and the pride of life,” each the leader of a hungry pack waiting for their prey. When we think of the earth as in the hands of Satan,—as one of the old writers expresses it, “the preserves and hunting-ground of the god of this world,”—these wolves ready at his bidding to pursue and devour,—do not the words of our motto verse seem strange and startling ? Do we not rather expect to hear the Shepherd giving directions as to surrounding His fold with lofty walls or secure enclosures, to prevent the possibility of the sheep falling a prey to the Destroyer ? Would it not have been better—we are apt at first sight to think—had He either made provision for keeping His flock safely within the fold of earth, or for at once translating them to the fold of heaven ;—sanctifying and glorifying them at the moment of their justification ? Would it not be in every respect preferable for the believer ;—would it not conduce to a saintlier, more heavenly life,—if away from the world’s perilous snares—‘the loud stunning tide of human care and crime’—shut up in peaceful and secluded retirement —holding converse with pure nature,—like Elijah at his Cherith, lulled asleep by brook, and waterfall, and song of bird—gazing on golden skies and everlasting mountains ;—would not all this, it might be thought, be safer and better for the Christian, than having his spirit soiled with the degrading contacts of a debased and debasing

world ;—confronting temptation in its thousand forms—open profligacy—mean-souled selfishness—pitiful jealousies—superficial follies—frivolous excitements—debasing pleasure ?

Such, we know, was the theory of the early church ; such was the development of Christian life in those successive ages, when the deserts of Palestine and Syria, and many parts of Europe, not excepting our own country, were crowded by hermits' cells and monastic establishments. Mistaken visionaries ! We do all honour to the purer motives of these earlier anchorites and devotees. They were the victims of a devout delusion. Theirs, however, was not the ideal of the saintly life as prescribed and portrayed by their Lord and Master. Christ's description of His Church—the Shepherd's description of His flock is this :—“ *These are in the world :*”—“ I pray not that thou shouldest take them out of the world, but that thou shouldest keep them from the evil :”—“ Behold, I send you forth as sheep in the midst of wolves.” We see the same truth illustrated and embodied in one of the acted parables—if we may so designate one of the many incidents which occurred in the course of His life and ministry, and which veiled, under the outward drapery, some great moral or practical lesson ;—He specially commanded His disciples to launch forth on the tempestuous sea of Galilee. We might suppose at first that they would have been exempted from the “ toiling in rowing ”—the contrary wind—the midnight storm. They might have gone with their Lord to the quiet adjoining mountain-top, or accompanied the multitude, peacefully and without peril,

along the shore to Capernaum. No! “*Jesus constrained them to get into the ship.*” It was a miniature picture of the Christian life;—the spiritual Voyager reaching the distant haven, through wind and storm and buffeting waves; the sheep reaching the fold of heaven through a desert haunted by beasts of prey.

We may profitably inquire for a little, into the reason and wisdom of such an appointment. Why is the Christian thus called on to mingle with the world, and grapple with its fierce temptations? Why, instead of granting to the flock immunity from all assaults of evil, why has Jesus “sent forth His sheep into the midst of wolves?”

Many reasons might be assigned. At present we shall confine ourselves to one. Jesus sends forth His people into the world *for the nurturing of their Christian graces.*

The plant or shrub is hardened, not by being secluded from outer influences—shut up in the hot-house—but by being left to wrestle with wind, and rain, and storm. The soldier is hardened, not by being pillow'd in luxurious ease in camp or barrack, but by the stern discipline of trench and night-watch. So it is with the Christian. He reaches the crown by the way of the cross. He enters heaven, not like Elijah, borne up in his fiery chariot, but rather battling his way, inch by inch, step by step, up the typical ladder of an older saint. When the man out of whom Christ had cast the legion of devils came and threw himself at the feet of his Deliverer, with the importunate request to be permitted to follow Him, the reply was a decided negative. He wished at once to be housed in the fold; but the Good

Shepherd sent him back to the wilderness of temptation,—to the old (and likely adverse) contacts of his own home. When Peter, on the Mount of Transfiguration, in the ecstasy of his joy, would have had three permanent tents erected for his Lord and the two Heavenly Envoys, the proposal was immediately rejected. It was seeking the crown *before* the cross. It was seeking to reach the haven by overleaping the intervening billows. Earth had its duties still to be performed. The morning light found Master and disciple once more descending the hill; and the crowd at the foot of the mountain too plainly told them they were back again amid the old world of misery, and sin, and sorrow—the appointed training-ground for a sinless, sorrowless heaven.

Take one other Scripture illustration. Many would have condemned the saints in Nero's household, as being out of their places and sphere, while remaining in that godless palace. ‘Wrong and perilous,’ many would have said, ‘for these sheep to continue in the midst of wolves,—these Christians to be under the roof of a heathen master, whose golden crown and sceptre cannot gild or mask his villany and crime. Let them come out forthwith, and be separate, and touch not the unclean thing.’ Not so thought Paul. He sends his “chief” greetings to these very saints. Noble was it in subsequent years, to hear the bands of devoted believers, shut up in the Roman catacombs, singing hymns of faith and hope in subterranean dungeons. But equally noble and saintly is the spectacle of these early Christians, retaining their unflinching fidelity to a higher Power while resident within the palace of the Quirinal;

who, despite of the unscrupulous persecutors—ravaging wolves around them—could keep faithful to their Great Shepherd, rendering to Cæsar the things that were Cæsar's, while they rendered to God the things that were God's. Paul was not the man to send honied words, unmeaning and unmeant salutations. His bold and honest tongue would have been the first to denounce to these courtiers or servants of the Roman palace their adherence to place and pay, if this was inconsistent or incompatible with the profession and practice of the religion of Jesus. But from the very warmth and speciality of his greetings, he would seem to assure them, that if faithful to their great principles, theirs was Christianity in its loftiest type and form. “*In the world, and yet not of it.*” Cæsar's servants, but the uncompromising haters of Cæsar's sins ! His great general deliverance on this subject, he gives in one of the Corinthian epistles :—“Let every man wherein he is called, therein abide with God.” And this *is* religion's loftiest manifestation—its most difficult triumph,—to maintain, it may be, in the midst of an ungodly circle of worthless associates, a holy, pure, upright heavenly life :—for the Christian merchant to remain the merchant still, and yet to infuse a gospel spirit into daily business transactions. The shopkeeper to remain behind his counter still, but to show the power of gospel motives in determined hate of underhand dealings, equivocal ways, immoral bargains, illicit trade, knavish practices. The soldier to remain the soldier still,—earth's noblest specimen of generous self-sacrifice for the good and safety of others,—but to show, by purity of conduct, loftiness of principle, kindness and for-

givingness, that he is a good soldier of Jesus Christ. All professions may thus be hallowed and consecrated. Whatever our worldly callings may be, let us not be guilty of uttering the vain and futile wish, ‘If my lot had been cast otherwise, I would have better served my God.’ Serve Him where you are. Show how your Christian graces and principles can grow and flourish, despite of all difficulties and temptations.

It is a remarkable saying of Moses in his farewell address to the tribes—“Rejoice, Zebulun, in thy going out, and Issachar in thy tents.” Zebulun was the maritime tribe. Their possessions lay along the shores of the Mediterranean. They had their commercial port—their sailors—their traders. “They went to sea in ships, and did business in great waters.” Moses does not say to them, ‘I cannot bid you God speed until you abandon that sailor life—that seafaring existence.’ Nay. He says, ‘God bless you in your pathway through the deep! God speed your sails! God waft your vessels to the ports of the Great Sea! May you see the works of the Lord, and His wonders in the deep, and may He bring you to a quiet haven! Go—stretch your canvas to the gale.’ “Rejoice, Zebulun, in thy going out!”

Issachar was at one time in Hebrew history a tribe of husbandmen, at another a tribe of warriors. What says he to them? Is it ‘Ye vine-dressers and ploughmen, if ye would serve God, ye must cast the pruning-hook and sickle away! Ye warriors, if ye would get to heaven at last, these battle plains must be abandoned;—sword, and shield, and spear must be thrown aside; religion is compatible only

with the arts of peace.' Nay! "Rejoice," he says, "Issachar, in thy tents." Let the husbandman and the vine-dresser cultivate his vineyard, but let him glorify all the while the Great Husbandman, "whose vineyard is the house of Israel, and the men of Judah His pleasant plant." Let the ploughman cleave the furrows, and sow the seed, and reap his harvests, and think all the while of Time as the seed ground of Eternity. Let the warrior of Issachar come forth, like his brave ancestors, by the great river—the river Kishon. Let the chariot-wheels roll over the plain as in the heroic chivalrous age of Barak and Deborah. But let him "fight the good fight of faith, and lay hold on eternal life." Let not Zebulun covet Issachar's tents, as if he could serve God better in them than in his ships. Let not Issachar covet Zebulun's commerce and active life—as if he could serve God better there than under the vine and fig-tree. Let each rejoice in their God-appointed calling and lot.

Reader, whatever be your trade, profession, worldly circumstances, take them as His appointments; use them so; and hear His voice bidding you speed, and saying, "Rejoice!" Zebulun, rejoice in your going out! If yours be like Zebulun, an active life, consecrate that activity to God's glory. If your business take you from home and country to traverse foreign shores, and live in distant climes—rejoice! God's own way is said to be in the sea, and His path in the deep waters. He will be with you; and if temptations assail you, the Shepherd of Israel will be with His own sheep in the midst of wolves. "Issachar, rejoice in your tents!" If yours be a sedentary life,

if you tarry at home to divide the spoil,—saved the perils, and temptations, and hardships of distant lands,—rejoice in your quiet tents, your peaceful home-habitations, and pursuits. Temptations there will be everywhere; and the grand thing is to carry the fear of God and an eye to the glory of God along with you in the midst of these temptations. When you hear the howling of the ravening wolves, keep close by the guiding footsteps of the Shepherd. It is the great aim of apostolic teaching, and it ought to be the main aim of what is called Christian training, to inculcate principles;—to store the youthful mind especially, with lofty motives of action, the fear of God and the love of God,—and the identity of holiness and purity with happiness. So that, even though the gate of access be left open to the forbidden haunt, he may be deterred from entering, by having been taught the grand heroic lesson of self-restraint, “How can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God!” Let Christians try to be Christians despite of the world’s allurements. “In the world ye shall have tribulation” “If any man will come after me, he must deny himself.” The lily raises its head among thorns. The sheep goes onwards to the heavenly pastures in the midst of wolves. No shipowner would ever dream of keeping his vessel locked up in harbour in case of storms: It would lie there a worthless, useless thing. What does he? He equips it well. Before leaving dock, he sees that every timber and bolt and rivet is in its place. He provides it with helm and compass, strong masts, sails, and rigging; and, more than all, an experienced pilot. Forth it goes on its mission, to grapple with

storm and tempest and wild tornado! So it is in the Christian life. No spiritual vessel would ever reach heaven by lying inert—sleeping on its shadows in the earthly harbour. The Heavenly Pilot sends it out in the midst of these moral hurricanes, saying, as He does so, “Fear not, it is I, be not afraid!” “Behold, *I* send you forth;” and it is well worth noting, that the “*I*” of this verse is specially expressed in the original Greek: as if He would have His disciples then, and His people still, to extract comfort and encouragement from the fact, that *He* sends them on the warfare, and that they go not that warfare on their own charges. Yes, trembling sheep of the fold of God, that Shepherd will not forsake you. He will not suffer any temptation to go too far, but will, with the temptation, make a way of escape that you may be able to bear it. He will not suffer the wolf to devour. He holds every such wolf, as it were, in a chain. They can approach no farther than He permits. “Simon, Simon, Satan hath desired to have thee, that he might sift thee as wheat; but I have prayed for thee that thy faith fail not!” “I will be a wall of fire around,” says He, speaking of His flock. As the shepherds in Eastern countries, by night, encircle their folds with fires to scare off the wild beasts, ‘I,’ says Christ the Great Shepherd, ‘will be like that fire!’

Believer, privileged member of His fold, if He be faithful to you, be ye faithful to Him. Make no compromises to conciliate the world, abjuring your lofty principles, submitting to a temporising policy, rushing headlong into temptation. How many seem to love walking, as near as

they can, to the wolf-thickets ! How many venture to wander in strange pastures, where the dews of heaven rarely if ever fall ! Remember it is said, "Whosoever is a friend of the world is the enemy of God." Let these wolf-temptations rather drive you closer to the Shepherd. "Come with *Me*," says Christ, in the Song, "Come with Me from Lebanon, look from the top of Amana, from the top of Shenir and Hermon, from the lions' dens, from the mountains of the leopards." Lebanon was the border mountain. It formed part of the border land between Palestine and Syria, between Israel and heathendom. It was there the haunts of the wild beasts were,—the roaring lion and the treacherous leopard. And it is the "border-country" of which it becomes Christians specially still to beware,—neutral territory,—the border-country of Satan,—the confines between the kingdoms of light and darkness. "Come with Me from Lebanon;" He repeats it, "with Me from Lebanon." He is the true "Tower of the Flock."\* There would be no hope for us but for His promised strength and guidance. The sheep has no chance in the unequal conflict with a wolf, nor the dove with the vulture. But He that is for us is greater than he that is in the world. The Intercessory Prayer of Christ was a prayer to His Father to 'keep' His sheep in the midst of wolves. The whole burden of the prayer is this: 'They

\* "In certain localities, towers were erected for the double purpose of spying an enemy at a distance, and protecting the flock. Such towers were erected by Uzziah and Jotham, (2 Chron. xxvi. 10, xxvii. 4,) while their resistance in earlier times is testified by the name *Migdal-eder*, (Gen. xxxv. 21,) A.V., "tower of Edar;" (Mic. iv. 8,) A.V., "tower of the flock."—*Smith's Bible Dictionary*.—Art. "Shepherd."

have no strength of their own. Father, keep them ! Keep, through Thine own Name, those whom Thou hast given Me !’ And, in the midst of these fiery trials and conflicts, think of the consolatory truth we spoke of in last chapter, of the Great and Good Shepherd Himself being exposed to these ravening wolves ;—think of these same temptations assaulting the soul of that spotless Saviour ;—and let this nerve you in passing through kindred experiences of trial. Follow the print of His suffering footsteps,—“ Consider Him that endured such contradiction of sinners against himself, lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds.” Feel honoured in thus having, in any feeble degree, fellowship with Him in His sufferings. Hear Him pointing you away from the haunts of wild beasts to the unassailable security of the Heavenly fold. How will the rest and peace of these celestial pastures be enhanced and augmented, by contrast with the dangers and temptations of the earthly wilderness,—the corruptions of the world, which will then be “ clean escaped ! ”

“ Jesus, blessed Mediator !  
Thou the trial-path hast trod,—  
Thou the Judge, the Consummator,  
Shepherd of the fold of God.

“ Blessed fold ! no foe can enter,  
And no friend departeth thence;  
Jesus is their sun, their centre,  
And their shield Omnipotence ! ”



## The Shepherd's Gift to the Flock.

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"AND I GIVE UNTO THEM ETERNAL LIFE."—JOHN x. 28.

## THE SHEPHERD'S GIFT TO THE FLOCK.

IN unfolding some of the more vivid Bible delineations of the Shepherd of Israel and the Flock of His pasture, we have hitherto spoken mainly, if not exclusively, of their *present* relationship to Him :—reclaimed from their wanderings; entering the Door of the Fold; following His footsteps; He preceding them; leading them by the green pastures; marking out for them paths of righteousness; seeking them in the cloudy and dark day; tenderly bearing in His arms the weak and the burdened. In this chapter, we are on the threshold of grander truths. The green pastures and the still waters of earth, are but the earnest of more enduring realities. Here we have the Good Shepherd Himself announcing the bestowment on His people of a limitless future of being and bliss—“*I give unto them ETERNAL LIFE.*”

Retaining, for a subsequent occasion, the consideration of the nature and elements of this peerless gift, we may meanwhile meditate briefly on the three thoughts which, in connexion with it, the words of the Shepherd suggest.

It is a **FREE** gift. “*I give.*” Believers have themselves no share in the purchase. Man, in bestowing his gifts, has generally reference to some loving or lovable qualities in the objects of his beneficence. But it was from no attractiveness on their part,—no foreseen good works

or virtues, that the Good Shepherd was induced to procure and bequeath the priceless heritage. It is a munificent bestowment of sovereign grace and redeeming love. “*I give*”—it is theirs in unqualified, inalienable possession,—a glorious freehold. The Ransomed Flock reposing in the heavenly paradise are spoken of as having “*a right to the tree of life*.” It is the right of the slave who has had his freedom purchased. It is the right of the son who has been infest in his patrimonial inheritance. It is the right of the conqueror dividing among his soldiers the honours and trophies of victory which his own valour has won. And as it was His free sovereign love which led Him to *pay* the ransom-price, so it is the sovereign, irresistible grace of the Shepherd which keeps His flock every hour from destruction, and will present each member of it at last faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy. Let us not lapse into a loose and indefinite theology, by speaking of the “inherent power of the new nature.” That is nothing. It is a shadow—a name—apart from the grace of Christ and the indwelling, upholding energy of the Spirit of God. Why was Paul enabled to stand firm when the messenger from Satan was sent to buffet him? Why did not the thorn in the flesh get the better of his nobler self? It was because that free grace which had “predestinated” and “called” and “justified,” was, in the hour of trial and temptation, made sufficient for him;—God’s strength “perfected in weakness,” yea, overcoming weakness. Let us ever admire, with adoring wonder, this unmerited, undeserved, sovereign freeness, from first to last, of the great salvation. Christ is the true

Zerubbabel, who has laid the foundation, and who also will finish it. Seek to trace His hand in each part of the spiritual building ;—beginning, carrying on, completing ;—the Alpha, the Omega ; the Justifier, the Sanctifier, the Glorifier. “Thanks be to God,” says the apostle, “who always causeth us to triumph in Christ.” As the pearl would remain for ever in the depths of the ocean unless the diver descended for it, so, unless He who purchased us as gems and jewels for His crown had taken us from the depths, there we should have remained for ever. And as He rescues the pearl, so He keeps it, polishes it, and finally inserts it in His mediatorial diadem. As His is the glory of the *commencing* work and the *sustaining* work, so His is the glory of the crowning and consummating work. The branch cannot live severed from the vine. The limb cannot live severed from the body. The Christian lives only by virtue of “Christ his life.” It is not our repentance or our prayers, or our habits of grace, or our long standing in grace, which keeps us,—but the sustaining arm of an omnipotent Saviour. “The Lord is thy *Keeper*.” “He that *keepeth Israel* doth not slumber.” Take, then, the gift of eternal life, but take it as Christ gives it—a “*present*”—a benefaction—a free heritage of sovereign love ;—its charter and title-deeds written in His own blood. “The *gift* of God is eternal life, through Jesus Christ our Lord.”

It is a PRESENT gift ;—a gift not in reversion but in possession. Not, “I shall give,” but “I give.” It is the life of grace now, preparatory to the life of glory hereafter. Scripture, in manifold passages, attests the same truth.

"He that believeth on the Son of God **HATH** everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation, but is passed from death unto life." "Who **HATH** raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ." "Our lives **ARE** hid with Christ in God." "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who **HATH** blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ." Think of this!—this eternal life—the purchase of sovereign love—is begun here. The feeble rill commences here, which expands at last into the river that maketh glad the city of God. The first notes of the new song are hymned in the Church militant, though the full chorus be reserved for the Church triumphant. The bird, though still within its mortal cage, is gifted with the wings of a nobler being: it only waits the opening of the door to soar away to the heights of its bliss. The prisoner has obtained his reprieve: life—dear life—is once more his;—he only needs the unlocking of the prison-gate fully to realise the boon, the conscious possession of which has already kindled the fading lustre of his eye. The paralysed cripple has felt fresh energies creeping into his frame: he only waits till the swathing bands be unloosed and he be freed from his couch, that he may enter the porches of the new Jerusalem-Temple, walking and leaping and praising God! Ours indeed is still the life of sense—the natural life. We move in the scenery of the lower world. We mingle in its bustle;—we pursue its avocations, and grapple with its grovelling, carking anxieties and cares. But let us seek that all this lower life be blended with the higher. Let the life of time be inter-

woven and interpenetrated with the life of eternity. "This *is* life eternal, to know Thee the only true God and Jesus Christ whom Thou hast sent." The vision and fruition of God—that is Heaven. By seeking to have the knowledge of God *now*, we lisp the alphabet of Heaven. Delighting in God now—walking in His ways, doing His will, spending life in His service, is the spring of a glorious autumn. He who is enabled in some feeble measure to make the averment, "I live for God,"—that man's higher being—his eternal existence and eternal happiness are already begun. His feet are on earth—but his citizenship is in heaven!

It is a GREAT gift. It is "*Eternal* life." Eternity! —who can fathom that word? What mortal thought or figure can compass its meaning? An old writer has thus illustrated it, (we do not give his exact language, but the idea is this:) Suppose this globe of ours to be composed of sand. Suppose at the close of every million of years, *one* grain were to drop from the enormous mass. Yet when the round orb of sand has exhausted its countless grains and its countless millions of years, that measureless lapse of ages will (compared to Eternity) be only as one swing of the pendulum! What a heritage this,—these years of deathless bliss! We are in a perishable world. The proud monarchs of the past—where are they? The sceptres waved over prostrate kingdoms, and the hands which grasped them, where are they? Cities with the murmur of a swarming population—temple and tower rising to heaven—where are they? relics of perished magnificence—the owl and

the satyr hooting desolation to the passer by! Every form and object around us, animate and inanimate, has the wrinkle on its brow. The most colossal works of nature are hastening to decay and dissolution. The day is coming when the sun itself shall grow dim with age,—when the moon's silver lamp shall cease to burn,—when the stars in the great temple of night shall quench their altar-fires,—when the ocean shall be swept from its channel,—when the forests shall be charred into blackness—the mountains crumble into dust, and the hills become as chaff. And after these present material heavens shall have passed away, there may be new suns and systems—new forms and conditions of matter, to take their place. There may be new volumes in the history of God's universe, whose pages are eras, and their chapters millenniums. But there will be no break, no gap in the believer's limitless life: no cancelling of the irreversible word, "*They shall never perish.*" They shall reign *for ever and ever*. Eternity! Yes, believers, this is the measure of your happiness—the duration of your bliss;—a duration, in comparison with which, all time, all history, all past cycles and ages, from the song of the morning stars till now, is but as a dream when one awaketh! Existence coincident with that of the Infinite Jehovah!—the lifetime of the Almighty—the years of God!

He who thus purchased, with His own precious blood, this magnificent inheritance, turns to each one of us and says,—“He that believeth in me, though he were dead yet shall he live: and whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die. *Believest thou this?*” Let each direct

that question to himself, “Believest *thou* this?” Seek to make it matter of *personal* concernment. Think of the dread alternative—Eternal life or Eternal death!—a heritage of joy or a heritage of wrath! For while it is said, “He that hath the Son hath life,” it is added, “He that hath not the Son of God shall not *see* life, but the wrath of God abideth on him.” Abideth! Yes, “*abideth!*” As life—eternal life—in the case of the believer, is now begun;—as we have even in this world, the first instalment of that life which is never to die;—so, if we have *not* the Son of God—if we have no saving interest in Christ—what is our position,—what our inheritance? Is it a fearful looking for of *prospective* future judgment and fiery indignation? Nay, it is more than this: it is *worse* than this. It is a *present* retribution. It is the first instalment of everlasting death;—the first gnawings of the worm—the first kindlings of the everlasting fire! “The wrath of God *abideth*.” It is not the brimstone cloud hanging over us,—but that cloud already burst;—the wrath of God *already* “revealed from heaven!” Seek without delay a saving interest in Him who came that “we might have life, and that we might have it more abundantly.” Flee—oh, flee from the wrath to come! And here is a blessed—a glorious Shelter from that wrath: they are words uttered by the lips of the great Life-giver Himself—“God so loved the world, that he gave his only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life !”

## The Security of the flock.

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**"AND I GIVE UNTO THEM ETERNAL LIFE : AND THEY SHALL NEVER PERISH,  
NEITHER SHALL ANY MAN PLUCK THEM OUT OF MY HAND."—JOHN X. 28.**

## THE SECURITY OF THE FLOCK.

Is this gift of Eternal Life—the great gift of the Divine Shepherd of the sheep, which we have considered in the preceding chapter—placed beyond the possibility of risk or forfeiture? Passing unscathed through all perilous contacts, will His people reach with certainty the heavenly fold at last? That existence of endless bliss, so dearly purchased, is inalienably and irrevocably secured. Once within the Shepherd's fold, they are in the fold for ever, —in the possession of a life deathless and imperishable as His own. Jacob, in his touching appeal to exacting Laban, tells of sheep that had been stolen by night and day, and torn by wild beasts. How striking the contrast with the Great Shepherd, when He makes the protestation, “Of them which thou gavest me I have lost none.” He hushes every fear and misgiving as He utters the glorious guarantee—“I give unto them eternal life, and *they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand.*”

This negative form of statement repeats, by implication under a new figure, the truth we have incidentally alluded to in a previous chapter, that there is in the world an adverse Power or Powers, whose aim is to accomplish, if possible, the ruin and destruction of the Elect; that there is an Enemy lurking in the vicinity of the fold, and watching

his opportunity to pluck the sheep out of the hands of the Shepherd. Satan is that great counterworker. "We are of God," says St John, speaking as the representative of Christ's people,—"and the whole world lieth in *the wicked one*."<sup>\*</sup> In combination with his legion emissaries, he is ever engaged in storming a citadel. That citadel is the heart of man—the heart of the *believer*. A citadel, not like many of the forts or citadels we see in our own country, where the engines and implements of war are suffered for years on years to remain unused and undisturbed—the cannon waking their sleeping thunders only on days of commemorative joy—sentinels pacing their rounds, but only keeping mock vigils, for no enemy is at the gates, and the flag of peace hangs quietly on the battlements. But that heart is in a state of perpetual siege. By storm, and mine, and stratagem, the giant adversary is plotting its overthrow. And it is not the Little-hearts and Feeble-minded only, against whom he directs his missiles. It is against the Valiant and the Great-hearts too. He knows that the more signal and illustrious will be his triumph if he can succeed in capturing some veteran in the field, or in demolishing some fortress of renown. Hear one of such veterans telling his experience, (what a representation it gives us of the *reality* of this spiritual warfare)—"We *wrestle*" (WRESTLE! It is a personal struggle—foot to foot—hand to hand)—"We wrestle—not against flesh and blood—but against principalities and powers—against the rulers of the darkness of this world—against spiritual wickednesses in high places." What a picture have we here of the believer in the heat

\* *τὸν τῷ πονηρῷ*.

of conflict ! Christ giving him the noble gift of life ;—Satan trying with every accursed wile and weapon to rob him of the priceless jewel. Christ leading him to heaven, step by step up the ladder of salvation ;—Satan watching the moment when he may find him off his guard to hurl him down. It is darkness seeking to extinguish light. It is death seeking to trample out life. It is the two antagonist forces of the material universe at work in spiritual things : the one drawing towards the central sun—the other drawing away into devious orbits. But He who is the great focus of divine life and light and being, countervails, in the case of all His own people, the might of “the prince of the power of the air.” ‘ Pluck my ransomed Church,’ He seems to say, ‘ from its orbit of light and love, and draw it away into the regions of hopeless darkness and blank despair, you cannot.’ “ My sheep shall never perish.” “ Neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.”\*

\* “ What shall I do, Lord ? I strive and tug what I may with the *spiritual wickednesses in high places*, which set upon my soul ; but sometimes I am foiled, and go halting out of the field. It is thy mercy that I live, being so fiercely assaulted by those principalities and powers : it were more than wonder that I should escape such hands without a wound. Even that holy servant of Thine, who strove with Thine angel for a blessing, went limping away, though he prevailed. What marvel is it that so weak a wretch as I, striving with many evil angels for the avoidance of a curse, come off with a maim or scar ? But, blessed be Thy name, the wounds that I receive are not mortal ; and when I fall, it is but to my knees, whence I rise with new courage and hopes of victory. Thou who art the God of all power, and keepest the keys of hell and death, hast said, *Resist the devil*,

What are the grounds of this inviolable security of the believer's bliss?

*God, the eternal Father, sets His seal to the words, "They shall never perish."* The attributes of His nature—His Power, Love, Faithfulness, Immutability, all render the destruction of one member of the ransomed fold impossible. "My Father who gave them me is greater than all, and none is able to pluck them out of my Father's hand." "Thou," says Christ, addressing the Father with reference to Himself, "Thou hast given Him power over all flesh, that He should give eternal life to as many as Thou hast given Him." "Those whom Thou gavest me I have kept, and none of them is lost." "That by two immutable things," (His oath and promise) "in which it was impossible for God to lie, we might have a strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us."

*Christ, the adorable Son, sets His seal to the words, "They shall never perish."* He has a personal interest and responsibility in the salvation of each member of His chosen flock. They are made over to Him of the Father. He can say as Jacob, on that same occasion to which we have just referred, said of his flock to Laban, "That which is torn of beasts, . . . I bear the loss of it; of my hand dost thou require it."

*and he will flee from you. Lord, I do and will, by Thy merciful aid, still and ever resist: make Thou my faith as steadfast as my will is resolute. Oh, still teach Thou my hands to war, and my fingers to fight; arm Thou my soul with strength; and at last, according to Thy gracious promise, crown it with victory.*"—*Bishop Hall's "Breathings of the Devout Soul,"* p. 176.

*God the Holy Spirit sets His seal to the words, “They shall never perish.” “And grieve not the Holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption.” “In whom also, after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that Holy Spirit of promise, which is the earnest of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession unto the praise of His glory.”*

In addition to these immutable guarantees of each of the Three Persons in the adorable Trinity, we have a more special ground of security arising out of that sublime and ennobling truth so frequently dwelt upon, directly and indirectly, in the inspired epistles,—*the believer's spiritual union with his Lord*. Incorporated into the mystical body of which He is the Head, to perish is impossible. We are accounted one with Him. Our lives are hid with Christ in God. “If we perish,” says Luther, “Christ perisheth with us.” Identifying Himself with His people, He may be supposed to say, as David said to Abiathar, “Abide with me, for he that seeketh thy life seeketh my life, but with me thou shalt be in safeguard.” And what is this safeguard? It is the Deity of the Redeemer. He who gives me life, and who promises that that life is imperishable, is “*the Mighty God*.” My hope of eternal life, promised before the world began, stands on the Rock of Ages. Divinity gives it strength. He who is able to keep me from falling, is the “only wise GOD our Saviour.”

But, it may be asked, does fact or experience warrant all these strong assertions? *Are the sheep of Christ never plucked from the hand and bosom of the Shepherd?* Do we never see them lamentably stumbling and falling, and

in some cases, so far as we can judge, perishing, and perishing irrecoverably? Nay, not so with one *true* member of the Saviour's fold. Such apostates may have *seemed* to be of the flock—but it was only in semblance, not in reality. They may have *seemed* to be true coin, from the divine mint; but they were counterfeit metal—gilded alloy;—they wanted the true ring of the currency of heaven. And if such apparently have perished;—if such sheep have apparently been plucked from the Shepherd's hands;—here is the Shepherd's own explanation, “They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would no doubt have continued with us: but they went out, that they might be made manifest that they were not all of us.” It is true, indeed, the life of the most devoted believer has its ebbs and flows: his safety, by reason of his own backslidings, corruptions, and unwatchfulness, may seem at times to be endangered: the sheep of Christ, as we shall note in the succeeding chapter, may in some moment of temptation, be found, and *are* found, wandering along the dark glen, entangled in brier thickets, or carried down the swollen stream. But as the shepherd among ourselves puts a mark on the various members of his flock that he may know his own; so the sheep of Christ bear upon them, what the old writers call “the blood-mark of the covenant;”—and of these the Great Shepherd says, (when they may be themselves uttering the cry of despair,)—“All that the Father giveth me shall come to me, and him that cometh unto me I will in nowise cast out.” Their life and safety may apparently be endangered, but it is only as the flow

of the majestic river is *apparently* impeded by the mass of opposing rock in its channel. It is fretted for the moment; but after clearing the temporary barrier, it dashes onwards, with grander impetuosity, in its way to the ocean. So with the believer. The rocks of temptation may obstruct and arrest the smooth current of his spiritual and eternal life; but it is only for the moment;—He that hath begun a good work—He that hath begun the new life—will carry it on until the day of the Lord Jesus. You may as soon dream of stemming a river—damming up the mountain torrent as it plunges over rock and cataract in its way to the shoreless sea—as arrest the flow of that God-given life. Remember the apostle's golden chain—“Whom he did predestinate them he also called, and whom he called them he also justified, and whom he justified them he also glorified!” We may lose sight of the links of the chain, but it never can be broken. We love this doctrine of the perseverance of the saints. We cannot believe in the possibility of a man being regenerated to-day, and unregenerated to-morrow. As Christ's blood has purchased, so will His grace sanctify and His power save. “Having loved His own which are in the world, He loves them to the end.” If we are ever tempted to doubt or despond,—if ever led to fear that as wandering sheep we may be fatally swept down the mountain-torrent, or fall a prey to the evening wolves—let us think of a living, life-giving, life-sustaining Intercessor on the throne of Heaven;—the Shepherd's eye watching us from the mountains of myrrh and the hills of frankincense! Israel could never have coped with the disciplined

chieftains of Amalek, but for the uplifted hands of their interceding head on the mount at Rephidim. They would have been scattered as chaff,—and their bones left to bleach in the wilderness. Joshua with all his fiery courage, as column after column swept along the valley beneath, would have been nothing, had not Moses been pleading on the hill. Blessed be God, we have *One* on the heavenly mount, whose arms never faint—whose hands never grow weary. His words have a perpetual meaning—a perpetual music—“*I have* prayed for thee—I *am* praying for thee—that thy faith fail not.” Ye who are the sheep of Christ’s pasture, see the secret of your preservation,—your perseverance;—see the secret of this marvellous triumph of your weakness over Satan’s strength,—the “worm Jacob” in the strength of his Saviour-God “thrashing the mountains, and beating them small, and making the hills like chaff;”—the spiritual David, with a few brook-pebbles laying low the giants of sin and unbelief and temptation! Yes, indeed, it is a mighty marvel, the security and final safety of every member of the fold. This poor plant—beaten with wind and hail, rain and tempest, out-living all, and destined to flourish in eternal luxuriance and beauty. This fragile vessel—the sport of ten thousand adverse influences—buffeted by the waves of temptation—left for nights on the starless ocean—grazing with its keel the sunken rocks,—yet outriding the storm, and entering peacefully the desired haven. This vile heart with its legion-foes confederate with Satan,—Pleasure in its Proteus-shapes—Worldliness with its hydra-headed power—the archers of Mammon with their golden

arrows—our own sins—each individual sin we commit, a foul attempt on our part to pluck us out of the Saviour's hand :—yet the battle is certain to end in victory. In earthly battles, victory trembles in the scale often for long hours of ensanguined fight;—neither side can predict the results. By some apparent accident—some trifle—the fortunes of the day may be decided,—the destiny of a country altered, the liberty of a people lost or won. But no such uncertainty hovers over this spiritual conflict;—triumph is sure;—no trophy will be lost;—no straggler will be left to perish;—as with Israel in quitting Egypt, “not a hoof will be left behind.” You will not only be conquerors, but “*more* than conquerors through Him that loved you!” “*I give unto you,*” says He, “eternal life.” Your names are imperishably engraven on this Heart of love—on this priestly Breastplate,—and they never can be erased !’

Let us conclude with a word of explanation, of encouragement, and of warning.

A word of *explanation*. Let not any misinterpret the truth, by imagining from what has been advanced that we reduce believers to irresponsible machines,—like yonder engine careering on the iron highway, or ploughing the waters;—a dumb, sluggish, inert, soulless piece of mechanism, which is reined in, or which plunges on, in obedience to the intelligence which guides it, but which has no will, or purpose, or choice of its own. Let none say that they are the mere passive subjects of a predestinated purpose—an irresistible destiny—which

renders their salvation a certainty; and who are, therefore, relieved from the necessity of all individual exertion in the work of their high calling: that being saved by an irreversible decree, they may live as they list; that final perdition being impossible, they may face and encounter what temptations they may;—they can even hold parley with sin, or suffer it at times to gain the mastery; it matters not—they will be saved at last. None is able to pluck them out of the Shepherd's hands!

Nay, God deals with His elect as rational, free, responsible agents. They are "*kept*," it is true—so the apostle Peter beautifully expresses it, (1 Pet. i. 5)—"*kept*" (as in a citadel or garrison)—"by the power of God." But how, says he, are they kept?—"By the power of God, THROUGH FAITH, unto salvation." "*Through faith*." As it has been well said, the eye of faith and the ear of faith, and the feet of faith, are all on the watch against the incursions of the enemy. This active, living, influential principle is ever on the alert; working by love, purifying the heart, and overcoming the world. Does St Peter regard the purchased safety and absolute security of the believer as an argument for unwatchfulness? —that having in possession the gift of eternal life, the Christian may cast aside the spiritual armour, and fight and wrestle no more? Hear his own words, in the first chapter of his second epistle—he speaks to those who "*have obtained like precious faith, through the righteousness of God;*"—who have become "*partakers of the divine nature.*" How does he address such? "*Wherfore the rather brethren, give diligence to make your calling and*

election sure; for *if ye do these things* ye shall *never fall*; for *so* an entrance shall be ministered unto you abundantly, into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ." Never let any say, that these distinguishing doctrines of sovereign grace lead to unguardedness—unwatchfulness; or, what is worse, to licentiousness;—that we may continue in sin because this electing and saving grace abounds. Holy living, and holy walking, are the test and proof of election:—unholy living, and unholy walking are Satan's (nay, they are our own) brand of reprobation. The law and the gospel enunciate the same great principle—"To them who by patient continuance in well-doing, seek for glory, and honour, and immortality," (He will render) "eternal life." "But to them that are disobedient, and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness" (He will render) "indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish."

We may draw a lesson of *encouragement*. What a glorious prize is this set before us—what a glorious incentive for our immortal energies! *Life!* the only thing worth calling life—the life of God in the soul,—a life whose infancy is on earth, and its perfected manhood in heaven. What is there worthy of aspiration in comparison with this? What though other earthly blessings be wanting, if you have this everlasting possession? What though outward things may elude your grasp, and perish in the very using, if you have "the better part" which is indestructible? What would the sculptor care though his packing-case be broken, if the priceless

marble group which it contains escape uninjured? What would the mother care though her cradle be burnt in the flaming house, if her loving child, her loving treasure be spared? What though the thief have escaped with the casket, if the jewel remain? "Let the moveables go," says a good man—"the inheritance is ours!" Be indifferent to what the world gives or withholds. Learn that a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth. Life is not, as the world estimates it, composed of wealth, riches, honours, possessions; these are but the accidents of life—the outer shell—the perishable and corroding gilding. But it is the *inner* wealth of peace with God,—the assurance of His love,—a pure heart, a peaceful conscience, the humble hope of eternal fellowship and communion with Him above. "Our cause," says Luther, "is in the very hands of Him who can say with unspeakable dignity, 'No one shall pluck it out of my hands.' I would not have it in our hands—and it would not be desirable that it were so. I have had many things in my hands, and I have lost them all—but whatever I have been able to place in God's hands I still possess." "The world passeth away, and the lust thereof, but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever!"

Finally, let us hear a word of *warning*. This eternal life hangs on the small thread of the present. *As we are* now, so *shall* we be for ever. Eternal life is a synonym for character. "The child," it is said, "is the father of the man." This has a more solemn and awful—a more significant and

truthful meaning with regard to a world to come. The childhood of time will determine the manhood of eternity. The passing moments of the present will colour the infinite future. Life in this world is the cartoon—the dim shadowy outline—which will be filled up and embodied in the life hereafter. What an untold value all this gives to the present! And what! Have we been letting its consecrated moments filter like sand through our fingers? Have we been “seeking our portion in this life?” toiling up the hill after a fancied something, which turns out to be an airy nothing?—seeking to gain the world, and to pay that awful price for it—the losing of our own souls? Have its pleasures—its riches—its ambitions—its vanities—been dimming to our souls their nobler destinies? Have the things that are seen, been supplanting and superseding the things that are not seen?

And if the eye of any who know not God,—who are yet strangers to the fold and to peace, should fall on these pages,—let them not wrest the words of this scripture unto their own destruction. Mark, He who utters them, does not say regarding you and your sad condition,—“I give unto them *eternal death!*” Nay, nay. God gives—God apportions to no one so terrible a destiny. This *is* what He gives. He gives you vessel—oars—sails—chart—compass—rudder;—He points you to the distant harbour;—He warns you of the environing and approaching storms. But He tells you, if you sail by His chart you will outride them all, and cast anchor in the heavenly harbour. What is the conduct of many, in the face of all these provisions to insure safety and peace? They

fling their ballast into the depths of the sea. They hoist their sails, but they are *passion*. They are guided by a compass, but that is the world's *opinion*. They steer by a helm, but that is *base expediency*. God has given them His Bible as their lighthouse, but they are lured by the balefires of sin. Unhappy castaway! had you yielded to heavenly influences, your sails would have been filled with propitious breezes, which would have wafted you safely to the haven. But can you wonder—can you upbraid God with your ruin, if you are now found rudderless; with tattered sail and leaking hulk and splintered masts—drifting, drifting onwards, amid the howling winds and wintry sea of a dark and cheerless eternity? Therefore, while we congratulate Christ's true people on their noble heritage of *eternal life*, see that all this may not be to you the forecasting and foreshadowing of eternal darkness—of sin, and shame, and everlasting contempt! See that ye are not yourselves responsible for being among the hapless ones, who are shut out and excluded for ever from the heavenly fold! “Many,” we read, on the great day, “shall seek to enter in, and shall not be able.” The entrance to the sheepfold is open this hour. It is open to all who seek it. “By me,” says Christ, “if *any man* enter in he shall be saved.” But once that final day is come, and you are found standing without the fold, Omnipotence itself cannot unlock its closed gate! The door is shut;—the invitation is withdrawn;—mercy can plead no more. “They cannot pass that would come from thence!”



## The Cry of a Wanderer.

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"I HAVE GONE ASTRAY LIKE A LOST SHEEP; SEEK THY SERVANT."—PS.  
CXIX. 176.

"TELL ME, O THOU WHOM MY SOUL LOVETH, WHERE THOU FEEDEST, WHERE  
THOU MAKEST THY FLOCK TO REST AT NOON: FOR WHY SHOULD I BE AS  
ONE THAT TURNETH ASIDE BY THE FLOCKS OF THY COMPANIONS?"—  
SONG OF SOL. L. 7.

## THE CRY OF A WANDERER.

WE have just been considering, in the preceding pages, that elevating subject, the imperishable life of the believer;—the inviolable safety and security of the flock of the Great Shepherd.

But, as it has been well remarked, there is often only a step between the third heavens and the thorn in the flesh. The child of God, triumphing at times in the indestructible privileges and blessings of the covenant—saying with the psalmist, “The Lord is my life and my salvation, whom shall I fear? the Lord is the strength of my life, of whom shall I be afraid?”—may, like that same psalmist, by reason of the seductions of temptation from without, or from remaining corruption within, be brought to wail through anguished tears—“ My soul cleaveth unto the dust;” “ Iniquities, I must confess, do prevail against me!”

Sad fitfulness and waywardness of the vacillating, even though regenerate heart! The sheep that has been rescued from the pit of destruction,—carried back in the arms of the Good Shepherd, caressed and fondled by its Divine Deliverer; with every conceivable motive to follow His steps and “ abide in His love;” yet, once more a truant from the fold! This is our only comfort amid human changefulness—the ebbings and flowings in the tide of the spiritual life,—that we can repose in the faithfulness, veracity,

and immutability of Him “with whom is no variableness neither shadow of turning.” The vessel may, for a while, drift from its moorings, but the Rock is immovable. “Though he fall, he shall not be utterly cast down ; for the Lord upholdeth him with His hand.” “The LORD liveth, and blessed be my ROCK, and let the God of my salvation be exalted.”

In the two portions of Scripture which head this chapter, we have the record and utterance of such an experience;—the bleat of a wanderer who has strayed from the fold—the cry of a child who has strayed from the paternal home. Mournful is the theme, to trace the history of such aberration ;—to go down with a torch into the dark chambers of the soul, and discover the guilty secret of this quenching of its light. The humbling thing about spiritual declension, as we previously incidentally noted, is the oft-apparent triviality of its cause. Just as a child’s breath on the window is sufficient to dull and obscure the loveliest landscape,—or as that same child’s breath puts out the lamp or candle as effectually as would the sweeping storm; so, little sins obscure the windows of the soul,—dim the spiritual and heavenly landscape,—put out the lights of faith and love, and leave the whole moral being in gloomy darkness. How many can trace a long and dreary period of alienation to one unhappy incident—one omitted duty—one ebullition of temper—one tampering with conscience. Any of these may, like the little jutting stone in the path, turn the sheep aside from the footsteps of the flock, and from the voice and leading of the Shepherd. Slowly, imperceptibly, the

retrograde movement proceeds—slowly, the lethargy steals over the spirit. The backslider says, like Samson, “I will go out as at other times, and shake myself; and he wist not that the Lord had departed from him.” Yes, in the case of not a few, that decay of moral health and energy, by means of many counterfeits of spiritual life, hides its own sad reality from the subject of it. It is like that specious and fatally common complaint, which simulates so many of the outward symptoms of health:—the bright glow in the cheek, and the lustre in the eye;—while all the time, the strength is being undermined, and disease is sapping the foundations of the natural life. So it is with this consumption of the soul. There is often the appearance of spiritual health; and many are content with this name to live, while they are dying or dead—deceiving others, and deceiving themselves: the homely figure of ~~A~~ the prophet Hosea true to the letter—“Gray hairs are here and there on Ephraim, *and he knew it not.*”

With others, however, the fatal truth cannot be hidden or dissembled. The misery of this spiritual declension and apostasy cannot be concealed. The soul is only too conscious of the self-forfeiture of all its former spiritual blessings. From being once well fed—sitting under the Beloved’s shadow, and catching the falling fruit from the laden branches;—now it is forced to cry with no sembled anguish—“My leanness, my leanness!” Once it was like those flowers which open their petals to drink in the dews of heaven; but now blighted and drooping, the cup closes, and the dew trickles down and falls unblessed on the earth;—or like those plants, once covered with leaves and

blossoms, but which have been imprisoned in the dark cellar—shut out from air and sunlight, now stretching their sickly tendrils towards every chink in the wall—gasping and sighing for the genial, loving influences from which they are excluded.

Among other fruitful causes, how often does *worldly prosperity* tend to this lapsing of the soul from God! How often do our very outward mercies and blessings superinduce this spiritual languor and decay! It is with believers individually, as with the Church collectively;—they are never in a condition less favourable to spiritual health and advancement, than when they have no trial or cross, to brace their energies and invigorate their graces. The soldier gets supine after battle. History tells us how the bravest veterans of the great Carthaginian general got demoralised and degenerate, when, (victory over,) they sat down to rejoicing and revelry, before the gates of Capua; they never were the same heroes again.

On the other hand, *trial* is often made the means of rousing the lethargic soul. Affliction, in its many forms, is often instrumental in prompting the cry and the confession—"I went astray like a lost sheep." Then are we brought to see secret sins before undetected;—pride, vanity, rebellion against God,—unowned and unacknowledged mercies, of which we have been the daily recipients. We can imagine that it was in the cold, bleak night of the far country—when the sun had gone down—in the deep silence of some dreary solitude, that the prodigal first began to ponder his wretchedness. In that murky background, the gleaming memories of happier days were

contrasted with the husks of the swine, and the garbage of the wilderness ;—there it was, that awaking suddenly to the consciousness of his misery, he started from his stony pillow with the cry, “ I perish with hunger ! ” And so it is in the dark night of sorrow—in the solitude of the death-chamber and the stricken heart, that many a man awakes to the first feeling of the wretchedness of his alienation from God, and that the blessed resolve is formed, “ I will arise, and go to my Father.” “ Before I was afflicted I went astray.” “ Though I walk in the midst of trouble, Thou wilt revive me.” The mount of “ revival ” is reached, not by walking along the flowery mead, but the steep thorny path of “ *trouble !* ”

But let us pass from the wanderer and the wandering, to consider more particularly the wanderer’s cry.

Cast down, he is not destroyed. The child is still conscious of the yearnings of home-love. The prodigal has not buried the remembrances of home affection. The sheep, as it roams over the mountains, has not forgotten its shepherd’s voice and fold—“ Tell me, O thou whom my soul loveth, where thou feedest—where thou makest thy flock to rest at noon.”

Backslider! in the midst of thy guilty departures, canst thou make this averment—“ O thou *whom my soul loveth ?* ” “ Lord, thou knowest all things ; thou knowest that *I love thee.* ” “ Seek,” not a stranger, but “ seek thy servant.” ‘ I have longed for many things in my seasons of estrangement, but none, O Saviour God, have ever satisfied me but Thee. I have gathered pearls from many oceans, but none have

been like the Pearl of Great Price. I have culled sweets from many flowers, but no perfume is like that of the Rose of Sharon. I have fled to many shelters,—many bowers of earthly pleasure have spread over me their canopy, but none can compare to the *True Refuge* from the storm and covert from the tempest !'

Are there any perusing these pages, who feel such to be their experience ;—who are sensible of the misery of their departure from God ;—who, in the retrospect of their spiritual life, have the sunny memories of other and brighter days,—the spring-time of love, when the garden of the heart was green with promise ;—whilst now all seems stunted, blanched, blighted, barren; like the significant description given by the Psalmist—"As the grass upon the house-top which withereth before it groweth up, wherewith the mower filleth not his hand, nor he that bindeth up the sheaves his bosom ?" Melancholy, indeed, is your history. Dare I attempt to sketch it? Once you soared on eagle pinions of faith ; but these have collapsed—they have become leaden wings—and you have fallen powerless to the earth. Once you loved communion with God,—the unspeakable privilege of fellowship with your Heavenly Father. That is now cold and dead, —a piece of lifeless formalism. Once you loved prayer ; you delighted to touch the golden sceptre, to lay hold of the angel and wrestle; but now the soul's sinew is shrunk, —your wrestling power is gone ;—the sceptre is still there, but you are impotent to reach it. Once you loved the Word, —the Scriptures read in the closet and in the sanctuary ;—the simplest of sermons in which Christ was preached were prized by you. Now the Bible gathers dust on your shelves;

—the sanctuary is attended more to criticise than to profit—to indulge the itching ear, rather than to benefit the needy soul. Once you spent blessed hours of hallowed contemplation at the foot of the cross, or walked in Emmaus's journeys with your Lord—your heart burning within you, while, conscious of His invisible presence and love, He talked to you by the way, and opened to you the Scriptures. Now the world has hidden out the cross,—its din and bustle have drowned and overcome the Saviour's voice. You call God still your Father; but you have no longer the filial, loving, childlike spirit which you once had. The tenderness of conscience is impaired; genuine spirituality is gone. The creature has vaulted on the throne of the Creator. Harsh thoughts of God have taken the place of loving ones. Unkind misconstructions of His ways and dealings have taken the place of reverent acquiescence in His sovereign will. The scroll of your life of faith, once all illumined with red and gold, is now covered with black lettering. “O Lucifer, son of the morning, how art thou fallen!”

But despond not. See, in both motto verses, the secret of such a wanderer's return. We have spoken of the sad *case*; let us look to the *cure*. The means of restoration is *Prayer*. It is by seeking anew the long deserted and unfrequented mercy-seat. “*Seek thy servant.*” “*Tell me, O thou whom my soul loveth, where thou feedest.*” In the language of Hosea, addressed to backsliding Israel, “*Take with you words, and turn to the Lord. Say unto him, Take away all iniquity, and receive us graciously.*” At that crisis hour of his history, when David was the most abject of wanderers, it was *prayer* which brought

him back. His beautiful Fifty-first Psalm is the liturgy of a penitent backslider, the loud and agonising cry of a wandering sheep. And the Shepherd heard it! God restored his soul; and made good in his experience, as in the experience of all wanderers, His own promise, "Return unto me, and I will return unto you." Do not keep back. Do not repress these penitential emotions, because of the sadness of your declension, and the extent of your divergence from the footsteps of the flock. Mountains of transgression may seem to separate you from the Shepherd. It matters not. If David had been influenced by a consideration of the enormity of his sin, before coming, in broken-hearted penitence and conviction to confess it, he might well have seen in it a wall of separation—an unbridged chasm, proclaiming eternal severance from the fold. Listen to his plea. Listen to the backslider's suit. It is a strange and remarkable one, "Pardon mine iniquity, FOR IT IS GREAT." Most transgressors would deem the greatness of their iniquity the very reason for God's withholding pardon. We might have expected to hear this presumptuous transgressor wailing out, through tears of despair, 'Lord, if my sin had been less heinous and aggravated, *then* I might have dreamt of forgiveness. If I had been untaught from my youth,—untutored and undisciplined in Thy ways, there might have been excuse or palliation for my offences, and room to hope on Thy part for compassion and pardon. But I, guilty abuser of privileges, quencher of heavenly light, faithless requiter of abounding mercies, cannot expect, cannot *ask* Thee, to forgive these crimson iniquities. I must be content to be

an outcast from thy fold for ever.' No ! He makes the very greatness of his sin, his plea for the extension of God's mercy. With man it would have been different. The turpitude of the crime would have closed the door of human sympathy and human hope. But God's ways are not man's ways, nor God's thoughts man's thoughts. "Let me fall into the hands of God, for great are *His* mercies, but let me not fall into the hands of man." "After *Thy* loving kindness, have mercy upon me. According to the multitude of *Thy* tender mercies, blot out my transgressions." "God, be merciful to me, a sinner." "For *Thy* name's sake, O Lord, pardon mine iniquity, FOR *it is great !*"

Reader, are you conscious that your iniquities have thus separated between you and your heavenly Shepherd ? Are you conscious that you are not now as once you were ? that you enjoy no longer, as once you did, sensible nearness to the mercy-seat ? that you are restraining prayer before God ? that the fine edge of conscience is blunted ? that, in one word, you have lost ground in the Christian life ? Arise, confess your sin, mourn your backsliding, and cry for mercy. Making a full and unreserved confession, the Great Shepherd will not spurn you away. He is waiting to be gracious. In the words of the woman of Tekoah, " Yet doth He devise means that His banished be not expelled from Him." The Shepherd devises means for the reclamation of His erring sheep. He pities the backslider ; just as the general on the field of battle pities the wounded who are carried bleeding by their comrades to the rear. " Go and proclaim these words towards the north,

and say, Return, thou backsliding Israel, saith the Lord, and I will not cause mine anger to fall upon you ; for I am merciful, saith the Lord, and I will not keep anger for ever." May it be yours to experience the blessedness of this true repentance ! Yes. Strange as the expression may seem, the "*blessedness* of repentance." You have seen, when the rain and the storm had spent their fury on some landscape ; when the thunder-cloud had passed, and blue vistas had again opened in the sky, and the sun had shone forth, silvering the dripping branches,—how the woodland grove rang with the song of birds;—all the sweeter and more gladsome seemed the notes of music, succeeding the gloom which had so long repressed them. Such is the image of the happiness and joy of the soul, in the hour of its restoration. Let this be *your* "new song," on being brought up from the miry clay, and your feet again set on the Rock of Ages, " O Lord, open thou my lips, and my mouth shall show forth thy praise!"—"The flock of thy heritage which dwell solitarily in the wood in the midst of Carmel, let them feed in Bashan and Gilead, as in the days of old," (Micah vii. 14.)

We close with a sentence of solemn admonition. Write " Beware" on every page of your future spiritual history. Wanderers once, see to it that you may not be wanderers again. " Be watchful and *strengthen* the things which remain, that are ready to die." If threatened with shipwreck once, before again putting to sea, " strengthen your mast,"—if decoyed once within the grim bars of Doubting Castle, be on your guard against the tempters with which Giant Despair has in these days studded the pilgrim's way. Hear the voice

of God saying, as to the Church of Ephesus, "Remember, therefore, from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works." Beware of forfeiting, even for a time, God's affection and love. In the case of human affections, after the sacredness of a friendship has once been broken, it is hard to reunite that broken link. It is hard to forget the treachery of a trusted friend, or to repose confidence where confidence has been misplaced and cruelly abused or wronged: it is easier to form a new affection than to patch up an old one. The same is true with regard to our relationship to God. It is hard for us to feel the tenderness of a first love again, if that love, on our part, have undergone coolness or lukewarmness. The bitter personal remembrance of having wounded the Highest, Truest, and Best of Friends, can never be obliterated. Peter (fully forgiven, and loving all the more because forgiven) could never cancel from his own memory the story of his denial,—the deep wound he had inflicted on his loving Master; and he would carry that scar on his heart of hearts till the hour of his death! Beware, too, of tampering with aught which may have perilled your peace or dulled and deadened the life of God in your soul. Beware of walking on the edge of the precipice. You *may* escape falling; but the wiser plan is not to attempt it. Beware of walking too near the fire. You *may* escape the flames; but better not to run the peril of contact. Beware of navigating too near the rocks. You *may* carry your vessel through unscathed; but better not run the risk of making shipwreck of faith and of a good conscience. Beware of worldly associates;—those whose principles and

fellowship are apt to act as drags on the wheels of the spiritual life, and to retard the soul's advancement Godward and heavenward. Cultivate the friendship of Christ's true people. What was the reply to this wail of the wanderer in the Song, when, in pursuit of her lost Shepherd and Lord, she exclaims, "Why should I be as one that turneth aside by the flocks of thy companions?" It was this—"Go thy way by the footsteps of the flock, and feed thy kids beside the shepherds' tents."

And while distrusting yourself, be it yours, with the Psalmist, to look away from your own weakness and wandering, to the Shepherd of Israel, as alike your *Restorer* and *Keeper*. How precious the double name,—the double assurance! He is the *Restorer*. "Seek thy servant," says the penitent suppliant. Well did he know that if the lost one is to be found,—if the wandering sheep is to be brought to the fold again, the arms of the Good Shepherd can alone effect the restoration,—"*He restoreth my soul.*" But He is more than this. "*Seek Thy servant,*" and after seeking, *keep* Thy servant! "*The Lord is thy Keeper.*" "*He that keepeth Israel shall not slumber!*" What can we desire more than this? All-sufficiency to restore, and All-sufficiency to keep; mercy to pardon, and grace to help. "*Give ear, O Shepherd of Israel, thou that leadest Joseph like a flock; thou that dwellest between the cherubims, shine forth. Before Ephraim, and Benjamin, and Manasseh, stir up thy strength, and come and save us!*"

Backslider! a gracious Saviour thus gently chides thee, "*Will ye also go away?*" "*Ye did run well, who did*

hinder you?" No longer hazard your safety, or endanger your peace. "There are some sheep," says a traveller familiar with every phase of modern Palestine life, "incurably reckless, who stray far away, and are often utterly lost. I have repeatedly seen a silly goat or sheep, running hither and thither, and bleating piteously after the lost flock, only to call forth, from their dens, the beasts of prey, or to bring up the lurking thief, who quickly quiets its cries in death." Although we cannot think of any true believer, however sad his wanderings, as perishing finally,—consigned to hopeless and irremediable ruin; the earthly picture and symbol may well suggest solemn thought to all who are "ready to die," and who, by their own reckless waywardness and backsliding are madly braving the perils of distance and alienation from the fold of God. Return, without delay, to the seeking Shepherd; rekindle the smouldering fires on the forsaken altar. If it has been for a time, winter,—spiritual winter, with your soul,—all apparently lifeless and dead—every living grace drooping under the conscious absence of the true Sun;—anticipate the springtime of reviving energy. Cease not until you can respond to the gladdening notes of the revival hymn of the olden Church, "The winter is past, the rain is over and gone; the flowers appear on the earth; the time of the singing of birds is come, and the voice of the turtle is heard in our land."

## The Trembling Flock Comforted.

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"FEAR NOT, LITTLE FLOCK; FOR IT IS YOUR FATHER'S GOOD PLEASURE TO  
GIVE YOU THE KINGDOM."—LUKE XII. 32.

## THE TREMBLING FLOCK COMFORTED.

HERE is another of the many precious “voices of the Shepherd.” It may be regarded as an answer to the cry of the wanderer, which formed the subject of last chapter. A *little* flock; a *fearful* flock;—such is Christ’s own description of “ His people and the sheep of His pasture.” But He lulls their trembling apprehensions, by pointing them away from the sorrowing present, and the chequered future of earth, to the bright, unsinning, unsorrowing, glorious future of Heaven :—“ It is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom.”

There is something striking and significant in the mixed metaphor which is here employed. Though our Lord in these solacing words to His disciples, and to His Church in all ages, addresses them as His “ *Flock*,” He does not add, “ It is your *Shepherd’s*,” but “ it is your *Father’s* good pleasure.” The two favourite emblems of Old and New Testament are thus brought in conjunction. The well-known pastoral symbol of the one, is coupled with the paternal symbol, which belongs pre-eminently, we may almost say exclusively, to the other. “ Give ear, O Shepherd of Israel, thou that leadest Joseph like a flock,” was the form of adoration familiar to the saints and patriarchs of the former economy ; and while, as we have abundantly seen, that Shepherd-emblem is not superseded in the gospel,

but rather retained and lovingly enshrined in the utterances alike of inspired apostles and their Lord; there is yet superadded this new formula of invocation for "the *children* of the kingdom," "Our FATHER, who art in heaven."

"It is your *Father's* good pleasure!" Had that kingdom of future bliss been the bestowment of God as a munificent Sovereign, we could not have failed to prize the honour. But how is its value enhanced, when it comes to us as the gift and pledge of a *Father's* love; when the feelings which the Almighty Donor wishes those whom He has served heirs to its riches to cherish regarding Him, are not those of awe towards an august Potentate, but of love and affection towards a tender Parent. "I will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty."

We shall not reiterate, what has been fully dwelt upon in former chapters, the various kinds and occasions of misgiving and "fear" which tend to discourage and terrify the little flock in "the way of the wilderness." Many of these form a necessary portion of their probation discipline. As shadows and half-tints are needed to give boldness and strength to the brighter parts of a painting, so in the spiritual life-picture, these are the shadings required to give expression and depth to the whole.

We shall only advert, at present, to one additional cause of apprehension which not unfrequently exercises a depressing influence on the minds of God's people, in the prospect of their Father's kingdom—viz., *the sense of their utter unfitness and unworthiness to enter it*;—the discrepancy be-

tween the holiness which becometh that kingdom, and the *unholiness*,—the remanent corruption and vileness, of their imperfectly sanctified hearts. This is oftentimes their inward musing,—the soliloquy of no feigned humility:—‘ How can we, with all our wretched frailties and shortcomings, dream of admission into a heaven of unsullied purity, undimmed and undefiled by the intrusion of one unhallowed thought ! The great Shepherd-Father may admit other sheep into His Eternal Fold, other children to His Eternal Home ; but we stand debarred for ever from entering its gates, or expatiating in its bliss.’

Nay, “ fear not ;” for,

*First*, amid all your conscious unworthiness, remember, *you are His children*. The soiled garments of earth which you may carry to the very portals of glory, cannot alter a Father’s feelings towards you, or lead Him to belie or forego His promises. If there be joy in heaven (and that joy deepest in the *Father’s heart*) over the sinner in the hour of his *repentance*; what will be that joy in the hour of his glorification, when, stripped of his travel-worn, sin-stained raiment, all his truant - wanderings, and estrangements, and backslidings at an end, he enters the threshold of the paternal Home !

We have read somewhere a story in real life, regarding a long missing child, the heir to vast estates. The tale described, how this innocent little one had been decoyed from the parental roof, and was last seen when a tribe of gypsies had been prowling about the neighbourhood of his princely home. Golden bribes had a hundred times been offered for his restoration ; but the cruel mystery remained

hopelessly unsolved, all efforts were in vain to recover the valued life. The anguished parents, seeing the pride and hope of their household wrenched from their grasp, abandoned themselves to inconsolable grief. One day, as the family carriage was, at a little distance, bearing along the highway these two saddened hearts, a gang of the wandering race were passing by. In their midst, with a heavy burden on his shoulders, and attired in tatters, an eye and a countenance met theirs which could not be mistaken. A shriek of mingled terror and delight was heard ; the mother, leaping in frantic joy from her seat, had, in a moment, that aggregate of rags and squalor in her arms ; her son, who had been long dead, was alive again ; long lost, he was again found. What signified to her these years of degradation ! It was her beloved boy, by whose cradle she had, in days gone by, sung her lullaby, and weaved visions of fond hope ; and though the golden ringlets were now matted with filth, the tiny hands hardened and begrimed with boyish drudgery, and the face browned and weather-beaten by exposure to the hot sun by day, and the cold, dewy, houseless night ; yet *there* he was, her own, her only one. Yonder castle, looking forth on the wide demesne, kept high festal holiday that evening. Servants were gathered, and menials were feasted, and the firesides of the poor were made brighter and happier by the recovery of the wanderer !

So shall it be with the children of the heavenly kingdom, in entering the heavenly Home. What though, to the last, by these rags and tatters of nature,—these souls begrimed with the remains of sin, we belie our lofty birth-

right, and render ourselves all unworthy of so glorious an inheritance;—"doubtless thou art our FATHER, though Abraham be ignorant of us, and Israel acknowledge us not." That hallowed word is beautifully represented by the Prophet Jeremiah as forming the passport to the little flock at the gate of heaven:—its utterance, in the case of those destitute of all personal claims to admission, unlocking the golden portals, and conferring right of entrance. "How shall I put thee among the *children*, and give thee a pleasant land, a goodly heritage of the hosts of nations? And I said, Thou shalt call me MY FATHER!"

But farther, "Fear not, little flock," for *your Shepherd-Father will prepare you for the kingdom*. A glorious change will pass on your now partially renovated spirit at death. "It doth not yet appear what we shall be, but we know that when He shall appear, we shall be like Him." These, at present, drooping, lagging, grovelling souls, will, by a transforming process which we cannot now venture to imagine or comprehend, be made meet for the holy Heaven of a holy God.

Go to the garden, from which winter has just been removing its icy mantle—and over which the first breath of genial spring has been passing. Watch on the gravel-walk or nestling on the rockery, that hideous, repulsive insect;—you half wonder how God, the infinite Architect, in the plenitude of His skill, could not have devised something more beauteous than that little mass of inert life. But bend your steps to that same sunny nook when

the balmy zephyrs of a July morning are wafted by. What see you now? That black torpid shell has unlocked its secret :—that little prison-house has sent forth a joyous captive, radiant with beauty. See it with spangled body and golden wings, revelling amid the luscious sweets and the play of sunshine—each flower opening its cup and making it welcome to its daintiest treasures. What a feeble image of the transformed, metamorphosed spirit, in that hour when, life's winter-storms all past, it bursts its prison-bars—“leaves its encumbering clay;” and, gifted with angel-wings, soars aloft to “summer high,” in the bliss of the beatific presence! Meanwhile, fear not. “O thou of little faith, wherefore dost thou doubt?” “God will perfect that which concerneth you.” In that last solemn moment—“in the twinkling of an eye”—He will fit you, by “the working of His mighty power,” for taking your place among the spirits of the just made perfect, and for being one of the rejoicing multitude who are “without fault before the throne.” The gifted author of the “Pilgrim’s Progress” represents Mr Feeble-mind and Mr Ready-to-halt, after all their timorous thoughts, as safe at last. He describes the post as sounding his horn at their chamber doors. “I am come to thee,” says the postman, addressing the latter—“I am come to thee from Christ, whom thou hast followed on crutches. He expects thee at His table to sup with Him in His kingdom;” and then he pictures him, on reaching the brink of the river, as throwing away his crutches. So will it be with many of God’s true people, who are indulging needless apprehensions, because of the oppression of the enemy. If

fearful now, the day is coming when, like the pilgrim Hebrews of old, you will stand triumphant on the further shore, exulting in the truth of your heavenly Father's assurance, which you may at present be so slow to credit—"Your enemies whom ye have seen to-day, ye shall see them again no more for ever." You may now be wailing, in notes of sadness, your weakness and feebleness. Like some captive bird, you may fancy that your wings are disabled, your energies cramped and paralysed, your song silenced. But not so. In God's own time the cage will be opened, and on new-born wings of faith and love, you will go singing up to the gate of Paradise!

Finally.—Believers, rejoice in the assurance, not only of certainty that you shall enter the heavenly fold, but that once entered, "ye shall go no more out." The Father who "gives" you the kingdom will *keep* you in it. Not one member of the little flock will ever stray from the celestial pastures;—not one member of the glorified family will ever be missed from the household;—none will ever go forth weeping as from the gates of the first Eden. How different our Father's house on high—from the father's home on earth!—As years roll on, how sad and mournful the family blanks! The empty arm-chair, where the venerable parent used to sit, tells of *one* vacancy: the closed book-case with the dust-covered school volumes tells of another: the unused toy—(most touching of all)—tells of another: that portrait on the wall, on which ever and again a tearful glance is cast, tells of another. The once joyous register in the old family Bible is blotted and saddened with many a mournful entry;—or rather, these

are transferred to the marble memorials of buried affection, crowding the silent land of forgetfulness. But not so in that blessed kingdom. There, there will be no blanks—no missing names—no harrowing separations—no memories of buried love. No citizen of the new Jerusalem will ever be called to surrender his charter-rights. The road to the city and the streets of the city, are paved with golden promises of the God who cannot lie;—golden tower on golden tower of immutability and truth render inviolable the safety of its glorified inhabitants. Not only will an abundant entrance at last be ministered, but once ministered, it will be for ever secured. The saying of the Good Shepherd regarding the flock on earth, will be equally applicable to the flock of heaven—“Even so, it is not the will of your Father which is in heaven, that one of these little ones should perish!”

One word in closing. Though this kingdom—this heritage of the little flock, as we have seen, is a covenant-gift—sealed and secured by the eternal love and promise of God the Father, we repeat the caution and qualification stated in a recent chapter; its privileges and immunities can be enjoyed only by those who “strive to enter in.” “The kingdom of heaven,” says the Divine Purchaser, “suffereth violence, and the violent take it by storm.” The processes in the kingdom of grace, as in the kingdom of nature, are developed and matured by the diligent use of appointed means. Indeed, the commonest occurrences and transactions of every-day life remind us that we are under an economy of means, and that by foregoing or reject-

ing the employment of these, we are sure to forfeit the end. A rope will save a drowning man,—but he must stretch out his hand to grasp it,—otherwise he is lost. The fire-escape will save a man enveloped in the flames : the iron ladder is shot up by the side of the burning pile—and the sleeper, roused by the crackling fires, is told to rush to the provided means of safety : but saved he cannot be, if he fold his arms in indifference, and resign himself to his fate. The man basking on the sea-beach on a summer day, when the tide is out, is warned that if he continue where he is, and fall asleep, the rising waters will inevitably overtake him : were he so foolish as to laugh to scorn the warning, we know that nothing could prevent the relentless, remorseless waves sweeping him away. God puts us, like Jacob, at the ladder's base, and says—‘*There* is the ladder of salvation ; but if you would reach heaven, you must climb it.’ In providing a Zoar for Lot, He could easily have commissioned the angels to bear him miraculously through the air, and deposit him in safety on the adjoining hill. But He tells him to arise ; and, staff in hand, to climb to the refuge,—“ Haste thee, flee for thy life.” Reader, be up and doing ; while the gift of the kingdom is God’s, yet, in one sense, it rests with ourselves whether we are to be crowned or beggared. The throne of that kingdom God promises only “ to him that overcometh.” “ Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life.”

## The Flock passing through the Valley of the Shadow of Death.

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"YEA, THOUGH I WALK THROUGH THE VALLEY OF THE SHADOW OF DEATH,  
I WILL FEAR NO EVIL: FOR THOU ART WITH ME; THY ROD AND THY  
STAFF THEY COMFORT ME."—PS. xxiii. 4.

## THE FLOCK PASSING THROUGH THE VALLEY OF THE SHADOW OF DEATH.

THERE is perhaps no verse in Scripture with which we are more familiar than that which heads this chapter;—no Bible figure which has made a more lasting and indelible impression. The picture of life, with a dark valley at the end of it, was hung up long ago, in the halls of memory, when infancy first learned to repeat or sing the Shepherd-psalm. Other mental scenes and pictures have come and gone,—other Bible symbols may have made a transient impression,—but this remains. And as Luther ever associated the appearance and scenery of the figurative Death-valley with that of his own vale of Augsburg, so each Bible reader has doubtless had his own mental picture suggested by some scene of his youth,—perhaps some dark, lonesome Highland glen, with mist and rain-clouds muffling the mountain-tops, and a sluggish stream, amid the deepening shades of eventide, wending below.

We need not stop to inquire or conjecture what spot or locality suggested to David the world-wide emblem;—what his prototype was of that Valley which, through his inspired lips, has now found an enduring place in all Christian teaching and symbolism. His thoughts may possibly have reverted to some scene memorable in the days of his boyhood, when he fed his father's flocks in the

valleys around Bethlehem ;—some deep gorge among the mountains of Judah, through which amid gloom and storm he had himself conducted his fleecy charge.\* Or if, as some are disposed rather to conjecture, the psalm were written in his declining years, during the rebellion of Absalom, when he took refuge beyond Jordan,—he may have thought of some glen amid the fastnesses of Gilead, through which he had seen a shepherd conducting his flock out to the pastures of the wilderness. Or in the same spot of his exile, where the border river frets its way along a tortuous valley overhung with precipices, he may have seen the patient shepherd with the sheep slung on his shoulder, and with rod and staff in hand, fording the impetuous stream. One or all of these familiar incidents may have presented to his mind the picture of Death —as a dark valley through which the flock of God have to pass, on their way to the heavenly fold.

But be this as it may, the image, at all events, has passed into all languages and all hearts. How many

\* “ Soon after leaving the plain of Sharon, and beginning to ascend the ‘hill country of Judea,’ we entered Wady Aly. We pursued our course here for some time along the dry bottom of the valley, over which a torrent flows in winter. It is a long, deep ravine, extremely wild and dreary on both sides. It is sometimes so narrow as scarcely to allow the traveller to pass between the rocky walls which enclose it. In some places these mount up so high with overhanging crags, and are so thickly shaded at the top with clumps of bushes, as to spread a gloom—a sort of twilight—over the chasm below. It may have been David’s familiarity with such scenes which led him to employ the expressive imagery of the 23d Psalm. . . . The appearance of Wady Aly brought to mind the psalmist’s language the more readily, because I noticed here and there, on the hill sides, flocks of goats and sheep feeding on the shrubbery, or wandering from place to place under the eye of the watchful shepherd.”—*Professor Hackett’s Illustrations.*

tears has this one verse dried ! How many eyes, when dimmed by the haze of death to other familiar scenes,—when the faces of loved relatives were eclipsed in the gathering darkness ;—how many eyes have gazed on this valley, made radiant with a presence and companionship better than all earthly friends ! How often has the ear drunk in the heavenly music of this sublime soliloquy, or the faltering tongue lisped it, until the note of the earthly psalm blended with the songs of the seraphim !

Come and let us gaze on the picture. Let us stand by the mouth of this Valley, under the solemn conviction that we must one day tread it. Shall it be with or without the Heavenly Guide ? The other expressions of the psalm may *not* come home to us. We may, alas ! know nothing of “the Lord our Shepherd.” We may be strangers to “the green pastures and still waters ;”—the restoring of the backslider; and the leading in the paths of righteousness and peace. But “the Valley of deathshade” all must tread. We imagine it, with reference to ourselves, (and so it is,) a solitary valley; but in reality it is ever densely thronged,—filled with a continuous stream of human beings. It is computed, that every hour upwards of 3000 of our fellow-creatures cross its entrance. 3000 pallid pilgrims are hourly crowding and hurrying along its silent gorges ! Let us visit the place, and ponder whether *we* be ready to join that band of silent travellers.

The verse suggests three topics for consideration : *The Valley, the Presence, and the Twofold Prop.*

**THE VALLEY.—“The valley of the shadow of death.”**

Death is a gloomy experience even to the believer. They are false to the deepest and truest emotions and sensibilities of humanity, who would venture to aver otherwise. We must not attempt, even in the case of those who have "gotten the victory over death," falsely to gild the tomb, and to strew flowers around the sepulchre. Death, as the wages of sin, even to the Christian, is an enemy. All have a natural dread of death—a natural shrinking from dissolution. You may get at times some bold, defiant spirits—some hardened desperadoes in guilt—who, with seared consciences, can meet their end without a shudder. Such wicked "have no bands in their death, their strength is firm." But these exceptional cases do not affect the great law of common humanity—"Skin for skin, all that a man hath will he give for his life." It must be, it *is* a solemn thing, when that which we have often spoken of, thought of, tried to realise, has really overtaken us. When we feel the dimming of the eye, the dreamy insensibility, the gathering darkness, the prospect of severance from all that has long bound us to life; and going on the long voyage to that strange land, from which no voyager that ever set sail has returned. It is not poetry, but nature which dictates the words—"It is a dread and awful thing to die." But, whilst the believer, as a member of our common humanity—a child of our common nature—instinctively recoils from death: as a child of God, a child of grace, he can say, "*I will fear no evil.*" Observe how beautifully and significantly the psalmist speaks of death while looking to his Covenant-Shepherd. He calls it not "the Valley of death," but the "Valley of the *shadow* of death."

The substance of death is taken away, and the shadow only remains. To the believer, the King of Terrors is a vanquished enemy. The iron crown has been plucked from his brow and rolled in the dust. We know not if he who sang this Shepherd-song knew by prophetic teaching all the wondrous secret of that conquest; but *we*, at least, in taking his words into our lips, can weave into them a gospel meaning. We can go to the sepulchre of Jesus and see the grim foe chained as a trophy to the chariot wheel of the conquering Saviour. Blessed truth! Christ, by dying, has taken the sting from death and cast it into the flames of His sacrifice. He is sublimely represented, in the ages of a past eternity, as looking down the long vista of the future; His eye settles on a world loaded in chains, and its millions doomed to everlasting destruction. In holy ecstasy He exclaims, as longing, if possible, to annihilate intervening ages, in order that He might complete the conquest, "I will ransom them from the power of the grave; I will redeem them from death. O death, I will be thy plagues! O grave, I will be thy destruction!" By His vicarious sacrifice and sufferings as a Surety-Saviour, He has flooded the Valley with light. The dark rolling mists have resolved themselves into golden clouds. The apostle, in speaking of the wages of sin, takes no account of temporal death—the death of the body—the crumbling of the outward, perishable, corruptible framework. That is a mere transient incident in the believer's existence;—what the best of the old commentators calls "a parenthesis in his being." With *eternal* death and death's Conqueror in his eye, he exclaims,

“Jesus Christ, who hath ABOLISHED death!” Can we say, in the prospect of that solemn hour, “I will fear no evil?” It is seated at the foot of the cross of Calvary, and entering the Saviour’s vacant tomb, that we can echo the same apostle’s challenge, “I am persuaded that . . . *death* shall not separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.” “Thanks be to God who giveth us the victory, through our Lord Jesus Christ!”

Our next topic is the SHEPHERD’S PRESENCE—“*THOU art with me.*” Here is another element of support in passing through the Valley;—not merely the blessed persuasion that the curse of death, as one of the penal consequences of the fall, has been removed and cancelled, but there is the promised assurance of a real companionship in that closing scene. The Shepherd, who has gone before the flock in the wilderness, will not forsake them in the swellings of Jordan.

And this is no mystical figure—no mere poetical or sentimental illusion. It is a wondrous fact. Thousands who have passed through the Valley can bear witness to it, —*the felt nearness of the Saviour.* No one who has had any experience of deathbeds but can testify, that there is often the sublime consciousness of a PRESENCE there—as if the dying pilgrim rested on a living Arm, and that Valley became a Peniel, where, like the patriarch, the wrestling soul saw God face to face!

How can we with sure warrant look forward to a similar experience? It is by having God as our Shepherd *now*, if we would have Him as our Shepherd *then.* What was it that gave David this confidence in the prospect of treading

the Valley of death? It was the conscious nearness—the realised presence of that Shepherd in life. He was even then rejoicing in this companionship and love. See how near he felt Him to be! Observe the phraseology of the verse—the form of utterance of this sheep of the ancient Hebrew fold. It is not “I will fear no evil, for Thou art *to be* with me,” nor is it “for God is with me,” but “*Thou art* with me.” He seems to look up with confiding faith to Him who was even then at his side. He speaks not of a remote Being, who would meet him at the valley-gates,—a mere guide through the gloom of that strange gorge at the end of life, but who at other times is unknown and distant. It is the Friend he has known and confided in so long. It is the Shepherd of whom in the opening strain of the song he said, that Shepherd is mine—“The Lord is *my* Shepherd.” It is He whose guiding hand had led him by the green pastures and the still waters, and the paths of righteousness. Let us not delude ourselves with the thought that a God unknown and unsought now, will be found at a dying hour; that we can insult our Shepherd by refusing His guidance and companionship till we reach the very confines of the Valley, and then give to Him the dregs of a worn life—the remnants of a withered love! If we would have peace and comfort in the thought of that last day’s journey, let us test ourselves with the question—“Can I even now look up to the face of the Lord my Shepherd and say, ‘Thou ART with me?’”

And who is this who is specially the Shepherd and Companion and Guide of His flock in their journey through the valley-gloom? It is He of whom we have

found it elsewhere said, “ He goeth before them.” Cheering thought to the dying believer—there is ONE with him who has known that valley, by having Himself trodden it ; One who has experienced far more terrific shadows than ever can fall upon His people. When He trode it—He trode the wine-press—He trode the valley—“ alone.” No star glimmered on His path—no rainbow gleamed through the misty storm-clouds. The words awoke only their own lonely echoes,—“ My God ! my God ! why hast thou forsaken me ?” Christ has sanctified that Valley ;—He has left in it the print of His footsteps ;—He has been there, as elsewhere, a Brother man. He stoops from His throne in Heaven, and whispers in the ear of every pilgrim of mortality, “ Fear not ! I am He that liveth *and was dead !*” \*

Let us pass to the remaining topic—THE TWOFOLD SUPPORT. “ *Thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.*” Oriental

\* “ Come down to the river. There is something going forward worth seeing. Yon shepherd is about to lead his flock across . . . Some enter the stream boldly and come straight across. These are the loved ones of the flock, who keep hard by the footsteps of the shepherd. . . . And now others enter, but in doubt and alarm. Far from their guide, they miss the ford and are carried down the river—some more, some less, and yet one by one they all struggle over and make good their landing. The weak one yonder will be swept quite away. . . . But no : the shepherd himself leaps into the stream, lifts it into his bosom, and carries it tremblingly to the shore. . . . Can you watch such a scene, and not think of that Shepherd who leadeth Joseph like a flock, and of another river which all His sheep must cross ? He, too, goes before ; and, as in the case of this flock, they who keep near Him fear no evil. They hear His sweet voice saying, ‘ When thou passest through the waters I will be with thee; and through the floods, they shall not overflow thee.’ With eye fastened on Him, they scarcely see the stream or feel its cold, threatening waves.”—*The Land and the Book.*

writers tell us that the shepherds of the East have generally two staves—one for counting the sheep, the other, with a crook at the end of it, to assist in rescuing them from any perilous position, if they fall over the precipice or are swept down the stream.

These two props may be taken symbolically to denote the *rod of Faith* and the *staff of the Promises*. As Moses smote the waters of the Red Sea with his rod, and these divided, so that the people went through dry shod ;—so when the believer comes to the typical Jordan in the Dark Valley, *Faith* smites with its all-conquering rod the threatening waves, and he passes through.

“ Let Faith exalt her joyful voice,  
And thus begin to sing,  
O Grave, where is thy triumph now,  
And where, O Death, thy sting ? ”

And what is this Faith which thus waves her triumphal rod, and sings her triumphal song ? but just that elevating principle elsewhere spoken of as “ the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen ;” which enables the believer to penetrate the future, and to regard death and its accompaniments only as a narrow river lying between him and the true land of Promise ?

But besides the Rod of Faith, there is the Staff of the Promises. Without something to guide us in crossing the muddy, swollen stream, we may cut the feet on the rugged rocks, or slip on the rounded stones, or sink in the deceptive hollows. The staff enables us to find sure footing, and in safety to reach the opposite bank. So it is with the Christian in the turgid river of death. Without his

staff he might be engulfed by the raging waters. But this staff of God's promises ensures his safety. He feels step by step for the solid rock. "The Lord upholdeth him with his right hand!"

And here again, let us observe, it was the *present* leaning on the rod and staff which gave David the sure guarantee of comfort at the last. He does not say, "They *shall* comfort me,"—as if this rod and staff were something unknown in the wilderness, which the Angel of Death gave to help him through the closing scene of all. No. "They *comfort* me." 'They are mine now. I am leaning on them every step of my heavenward way; and the props I so value now, will not fail me then.'

And was the psalmist deceived? Did this song of life prove a delusion when the hour of death came? Could he sing it so long as his journey was carpeted with flowers, and radiant with sunshine? but did his faith forsake him, and his rod and staff give way, and his song melt into a wail of terror, when the shadows fell around? We have his last words recorded. We have the very hymn which this Hebrew minstrel sang, when the valley-gloom was beginning to darken his path, and the sound of the waters of death fell on his ear;—"He hath made with me an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things, and sure. This is all my salvation, and all my desire."

And God is still faithful who promised, "As thy days, so shall thy strength be." There is no part of that promise more faithfully fulfilled than in His giving dying grace for a dying day. Often have we seen those who, during life, shrank at the thought of the dark valley,—who

trembled as they grasped the staff in the prospect of dissolution,—through fear of death, all their lifetime subject to bondage,—yet, when the Valley is reached, the clouds seen in the distance are glorified with heavenly light; their terrors are at an end; the storm is changed into a calm; they “fall asleep.” The fruit drops when it is ripe. As we have seen it somewhere finely said, God gives a parable in nature for those who have an unnecessary dread of death. Try to wrench the foliage off a tree—strip it of its verdant leaves where summer is “*not yet*.” They resist your efforts; or, if they be removed, you leave a gash and wound where the immature unripe leaf has been forced away. But suffer these same leaves to grow, till autumn has covered them with golden glory and they have fulfilled their uses, and see how gently they fall! No rude blast is needed to sweep among the branches of the forest: at the touch of evening’s gentle zephyr they strew the ground. So it is with believers ripe for heaven, who have finished and fulfilled their earthly destiny. In life’s autumn evening death comes, but he comes like a gentle zephyr. The golden leaves drop without effort from the earthly bough. How gentle that dismissal of the spirit in the silent chamber of dissolution! “Our friend Lazarus sleepeth.” “He was not, for God took him.”

We close with two practical thoughts.

1. *Ponder our personal interest in this subject.* Let each think, ‘That Dark Valley must be trodden by *me!* I may not have another inch or acre in this world I can call my own; but that common heritage shall at last be mine,

“the house appointed for all living.” Ay, and not only so; but, in a solemn sense, we have all already entered that Valley. Life is but a highway leading to death. Sin has served us heirs to these gloomy mansions. That infant’s wailing cry is the first projected shadow of the Valley. That playful child’s tottering steps are on the way to the Valley. That youth in the pride of early life, if he had eyes to see it, could descry the Valley in the blue hazy distance, and, as he proceeds on the journey, it will get nearer and nearer. The path of honour—riches—ambition—glory—‘leads but to the grave !’

And you who have passed life’s mid-day, how befitting especially that you should often and solemnly meditate on the gradual approach of that night of darkness! How important now, really to ascertain whether you have in truth found your Shepherd-Guide: how important to cleave more closely to Him as the evening shadows are beginning to fall! The sheep, in broad day and in the open common, fancies itself independent of the shepherd. But when the sun is set, and the howl of the wolf is heard, and night dulls the landscape, how needful to keep near his side! So be it with you. As the shadows of life’s closing day are beginning to fall, seek to cling more closely to your never-failing Protector and Guide. Have the staff of promises ever nigh at hand; that, when, like aged Jacob, you come to a dying hour, you may lean on that staff, recounting the Divine faithfulness—glorying in the Divine presence—saying, “I have waited for thy salvation, O God.”

*2. Connect the Valley with the Heaven to which it leads.*

That Valley of the Shadow of Death is like the Valley of Achor, spoken of in Hosea :—It is “a door of hope.” Achor was one of the entrance-ravines from the wilderness to the Promised Land. Death is the valley leading to the true Canaan : or, to employ a homely illustration, it is like emerging from some long tunnel, after miles of gloomy darkness, into the bright sunshine of some festive city, whose bells are ringing their merry peals, and in whose streets gay groups are gathered. It is the great festive day of heaven—“the city which hath foundations.” A moment before, in closing our eyes on the earthly scene, our ears listened to stifled sobs ; now, we hear the bells of glory ringing the joyous chime,—“there shall be no more death, neither sorrow nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain, for the former things are passed away !” Let us ever view death as the entrance into life—the exodus of the soul from its bondage to the true Canaan. Let us not misname death by calling it “dissolution ;” and the grave, “the long home.” Our loved and lost, if they have died in Christ, have only then in truth begun their real life. Death is to them the birthday of their everlasting joys. A dying chamber is generally full of tears. To them it is rather full of angels. We do not call that dying in nature, when we see the beauteous virgin blossom of early spring fall from the fruit tree. That fruit is not destroyed. It has not perished. Nay, the dropping of these delicate blossoms indicates only a step in its further development—a step onward in its progress to perfection. So, when loved ones drop their blossoms in the grave, it is only that they may expand in fuller and nobler

proportions in a heavenly world. The blossoms of the earthly spring-time are gone. They lie withering in the ground. But the immortal fruit remains, and that is imperishable!

Reader, again let me ask, Are you prepared for that solemn hour, which must sooner or later come, when life with all its opportunities and responsibilities is at an end;—when we shall feel that our moments are numbered—that the sand-glass has reached its last grain—that the die is about to be cast, and cast for ever? You may not, as yet, have had any startling warnings on the subject of mortality. Death may have been going his rounds elsewhere, but your circle is unbroken. Disease has blanched other cheeks—the arrow from the last enemy has paralysed other arms—but you are still strong. Others have been hovering for years at the entrance to the Valley,—but life to you is still blooming with flowers. “Death’s dark vale” is in the far horizon. But come it *will*, come it *must*. It *may* be suddenly—it *will* be unexpectedly. Do not imagine that, as you get older, you will be more disposed to think of your preparation for your great change. Alas! if that preparation be neglected now, we fear with most, as life advances, there will be a growing disinclination to believe death to be nearer. They are like men walking backwards to the grave that they may not see it—that the unwelcome thought may not disturb the dream of the present. Oh, terrible will it be to tread that Valley with the curse alike of temporal and eternal death brooding over it. To have alike the *shadow* of death and the *reality* of death.

Death, denuded of his sting, is still formidable. What must it be to confront the last enemy with the sting un-plucked away:—DEATH and what is AFTER DEATH! Speaking of the wicked, the Psalmist says, (Ps. xlix. 14) “Death shall feed upon them;” [or, as that has been more literally rendered, “Death shall lead them into his pastures.”] Death, which conducts the believer through the dark Valley to the pastures of the blessed, drives the ungodly into his own pastures—the bleak and dreary wastes of an immortality undone! That Achor, that Valley—which to the believer is ‘the door of hope,’ is to the unbeliever the gloomy portal of despair. It decides his fate. An infinite future is from that moment sealed. It is literally “the Valley of Decision.” He that is unjust will remain “unjust still,” and he that is filthy will remain “filthy still.” Be it ours now to flee to Him who hath vanquished death. Let us be able personally to appropriate the words of the sweet Psalmist of Israel, “Yea, though I walk through the Valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil.” “The Valley of the shadow of death!” It is the portico of our Father’s house. As we stand under the porch, the archway over our heads projects a shadow. We are for a moment out of life’s sunshine. But the next! the door opens; and better than the blaze of earthly sun is ours. The darkness is past, and the true light shineth!

O change—O wondrous change!  
Burst are the prison bars:  
This moment there, so low  
In mortal prayer, and now,  
Beyond the stars.

O change—stupendous change !  
Here lies the senseless clod ;  
The soul from bondage breaks,  
The new immortal wakes,  
Awakes with God !



## The final Gathering of the flock.

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"WHEN THE SON OF MAN SHALL COME IN HIS GLORY, AND ALL THE HOLY ANGELS WITH HIM, THEN SHALL HE SIT UPON THE THRONE OF HIS GLORY. AND BEFORE HIM SHALL BE GATHERED ALL NATIONS: AND HE SHALL SEPARATE THEM ONE FROM ANOTHER, AS A SHEPHERD DIVIDETH HIS SHEEP FROM THE GOATS: AND HE SHALL SET THE SHEEP ON HIS RIGHT HAND, BUT THE GOATS ON THE LEFT. THEN SHALL THE KING SAY UNTO THEM ON HIS RIGHT HAND, COME, YE BLESSED OF MY FATHER, INHERIT THE KINGDOM PREPARED FOR YOU FROM THE FOUNDATION OF THE WORLD. . . . THEN SHALL HE SAY ALSO UNTO THEM ON THE LEFT HAND, DEPART FROM ME, YE CURSED, INTO EVERLASTING FIRE, PREPARED FOR THE DEVIL AND HIS ANGELS. . . . AND THESE SHALL GO AWAY INTO EVERLASTING PUNISHMENT: BUT THE RIGHTEOUS INTO LIFE ETERNAL."—MATT. xxv. 31-46.

## THE FINAL GATHERING OF THE FLOCK.

WE have just had our thoughts directed to the beautiful inspired picture of the Shepherd conducting His flock through the Valley of the Shadow of Death.

The next delineation of Christ's pastoral relation to His Church and people is a pre-eminently sublime one. The Shepherd-love and leadings of the wilderness are at an end. Earth's diverse experiences,—its green pastures and still waters,—its rough and rugged paths,—its places of temptation,—its lairs of wild beasts,—its cloudy and dark days,—and the Valley of death-shade terminating all,—these are over and past. The flock is now seen on the Great day of Judgment, as depicted in the magnificent imagery of the passage which heads this chapter,—a passage which stands almost unrivalled in sacred Scripture for its pathos and grandeur.

Viewing Christ as the Great Shepherd of the Sheep, the time and circumstances in which He uttered the words are remarkable. It was but a few days previous to the fulfilment of the awful prophetic announcement, “Awake, O sword, against my Shepherd!” when the Shepherd was to be smitten, and the sheep to be scattered. He was now seated, with His disciples, on the brow of the Mount of Olives, over against the temple, mingling predictions of the doom of Jerusalem with delineations of the end of the

world and the great assize. Possibly on some of the slopes of that mountain, or down in one of the ravines at their feet, His eye may have fallen on one of the many flocks of sheep and goats that were wont to browse on its pastures. The scene is suggestive. It affords an apposite symbol to illustrate those themes on which He had just been discoursing. That flock of mingled sheep and goats, with their shepherd seated on one of the grassy knolls or rocky eminences hard by, forms an impressive parable and picture of the hour, when the Almighty Shepherd, so soon to be smitten by the sword of Justice, and to give His own life for the sheep, should appear in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory, to dispense the awards of unerring equity to the countless multitudes “gathered before Him.”

A volume would be needed to exhaust the topics embraced in this stupendous description of the Shepherd-judge: we can do no more than sketch a feeble outline. But as we do so, let it be under the impressive conviction, that it is a scene in which each one of *us* has an individual and solemn interest. It contains the story of *our* future. This chapter will be to each one of us yet, matter of *personal* history. Oh, how do all other events dwindle into insignificance, when brought side by side with “*that Day!*” How do all other facts seem tame and unimportant compared with this—“So then, every one of *us* must give account of himself to God!”

In taking, then, a cursory glance of the passage, let us note—

**THE SHEPHERD'S NAME.** It is twofold.

He is called "*The Son of man*," (verse 34,) "when *the Son of man* shall come in His glory." In that scene of unutterable majesty, when the Heavens and Earth are fleeing away, and there is no place found for them; when the trumpet of the archangel is sounding, and the cry of ten thousand times ten thousand is heard, "He cometh! He cometh! to judge the earth." When the eye, in trembling emotion, is lifted to see who this august Being can be, whose approach is thus heralded,—Lo! it is *the Son of man!* The glorified humanity of the Christ of Nazareth stands, as it were, in bold relief in the foreground of the picture. If we could imagine the myriad ranks breaking the silence of the scene with a burst of praise, it would be in the old prophetic words—"a MAN" is "an hiding-place from the wind, and a covert from the tempest!"

How often is this encouraging truth, not only of Jesus being our Judge, but our Judge as *the Son of man*, unfolded to us in Scripture, both by our blessed Lord himself, and by His inspired apostles.

"We must all appear before the judgment-seat of *Christ*." "The Father hath committed all judgment unto *the Son*." "He hath given *Him* power to execute judgment also, *because He is the Son of man*." "He hath appointed a day in the which he will judge the world in righteousness by *that man* whom he hath ordained." Precious assurance! that when startled from the long sleep of ages by the final trumpet, the first object that shall arrest the gaze of the rising dead will be "the living Kinsman"—the Brother in our nature,—the once help-

less One of Bethlehem—the wearied One of Sychar—the tempted One of Gethsemane—the weeping One of Bethany—the suffering One of Calvary! The Saviour of the Throne of Judgment will be the very Saviour we formerly loved and trusted on the Throne of Grace. How shall every jewel of the crown about to be bestowed on us be augmented in value by the thought—‘It is given by JESUS!’ The whisper will circulate through the throng of the ransomed, as they gaze on their Judge, “He loved me, and gave Himself for me.”

But there is yet another title given here to the Shepherd. It is a royal one—(verse 34.) “Then shall the *King* say unto them;”—and *as a King* (it is said in verse 31,) “He is to come in His *glory*,”—and to “sit on the *throne* of His *glory*.” It is the only passage in His Gospels where He assumes the name and title of King. The Shepherd and the Fold for the moment melt from the view, and we see a Monarch seated on His tribunal or judgment-seat. The rod and the staff have dropped from His hand,—and the sceptre of equity takes their place. He is about to pronounce a regal sentence;—the insignia of royalty are around Him;—He has “prepared His *throne* for judgment.” He is about, not only for Himself to enter on His final mediatorial reign and kingdom, but also to grant to His ransomed Church investiture with their royal rights and prerogatives. “The children of Zion are joyful in their KING.” On His vesture and on His thigh is seen written, “King of kings, and Lord of lords.” What that glory here spoken of is to be, it is not for us to conjecture or attempt to depict. We may believe it will far

transcend our present feeble comprehension. The universe will accumulate its rarest treasures to enhance the magnificence of that advent, and to swell the shout of jubilant welcome. If creation hid her face in darkness at the hour of the crucifixion,—if the reeling earth was convulsed in paroxysms of anguish, and the sun put sackcloth on his disc, at the spectacle of that shameful death,—shall not that creation, which thus mourned His humiliation and suffering, array herself in holiday-attire to grace His triumph?—Putting off her sackcloth, shall she not be girded with gladness, to the end that her glory may sing praise to her Redeeming Lord, and not be silent? What a contrast!—that once buffeted and forsaken Man, whose infant dwelling was canopied by the rude rafters of a Judean stable;—whose unpillowed head was oft denied the meanest shelter afforded to beast or bird;—whose sceptre was the rod of mockery, and His only throne the bitter cross;—What a contrast with THE KING, on whose head shall be “many crowns,” and whose hand shall grasp the rod and sceptre of universal empire! The lofty summons of the Psalmist will then receive its full response—“Make a joyful noise before the Lord, *the King!* for He cometh to judge the earth; with righteousness shall He judge the world, and the people with equity.” “Thy THRONE, O God, is for ever and ever!”

We have next to note HIS RETINUE, (ver. 31.) “*All the holy angels with Him.*” These blessed beings are represented as profoundly interested in the gradual unfolding of the plan of Redemption. When the amazing scheme

was first broached in the counsels of Heaven, “the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy.” During the progress and development of the mediatorial kingdom on earth, either singly or in groups and companies, they came down to visit the theatre of the coming Saviour’s sufferings. A vast throng congregated at the lawgiving on Sinai;—“The chariots of God are twenty thousand, even thousands of angels; the Lord is among them as in Sinai, in the holy place.” We read of “a multitude of the heavenly host” praising God in the plains of Bethlehem. In these and similar instances, however, we have only (so to speak) delegates and representatives from the great celestial army. But, on this great Day, “*all* His holy angels” are to be with Him. Dominions, principalities, powers, are for the time to vacate their thrones to crowd the firmament of judgment. He is to “call to the heavens from above, and to the earth, that he may judge his people.” With what delight will these blessed Beings respond to the invitation, “Let us be glad and rejoice, for the marriage of the Lamb is come, and his wife hath made herself ready.” If they came, with joyful alacrity, to sustain the adorable Sufferer on the mount of temptation,—to wipe the blood-drops from His brow in Gethsemane,—to guard His vacant sepulchre, and pronounce the victory of Redemption achieved,—with what gladness will they go forth on His great Coronation-day, with the sound of their trumpets, to gather in His elect from the four winds of Heaven !

Angels constitute the brilliant retinue of the Great

Judge—His assessors on the final Day of reckoning. Our attention is next called to the throng ranged in front of His tribunal, (ver. 32.) "*Before him shall be gathered ALL NATIONS.*" What a convocation! no unit missing of the countless millions. All that have ever lived—from Adam to the last of the human family. We have read in history, sacred and profane, of vast assemblages of human beings. The hosts of Israel as they mustered on the night of the Exodus;—the mighty concourse of the Hebrew nation, as Solomon dedicated his temple,—this same Mount of Olives, where Christ delivered the words we are now considering, densely thronged to its summit with the awe-struck worshippers. We have read of the hosts of Xerxes and Alexander, of the invading hordes,—the figurative locust-multitudes of Alaric and Attila. But what are these, and many others? insignificant nothings, in comparison with the ranks of this multitudinous army who have in a moment burst from their graves, their pulses beating with immortality! *The sea* shall give up *its* dead:—the thousands who filled its caverns in the days of the flood—the millions who, since that time, have in every age been gathered into its rapacious holds by storm and tempest;—the proud hosts, which, like Pharaoh's, perished in the waves;—the crews of stranded navies;—and the lonely wasted invalid, who has been let down, in slow, solemn burial over the ship's side,—the rippling waters chiming his requiem! *The Earth* shall give up its dead;—the tenants of the unknown, and unnoted heaps of the village churchyard,—those whose winding-sheet has been the snows of the mountain, or who lie uncoffined in the

mounds of the battle-field ;—kings and princes from their pyramids and cenotaphs. Earth and sea shall seem like two gigantic mausolea ; the buried dust of all ages and all climes, so long in their custody, shall be gathered, moulded, re-adjusted ;—disembodied spirits hastening to re-inhabit their new resurrection-tabernacles. “ All nations ! ” Egypt with her crouching slaves—the children of Edom and the children of Abraham ;—the subject-millions of Babylon and Assyria—martial Rome with a vassal world at her feet—Greece waking up from the dreams of her false philosophy—rude Savages of the hyperborean regions bursting their ice-bound tombs ;—effeminate Pagan tribes from the climes of the Sun,—hordes of cannibals from the Isles of the Pacific,—roving tribes from the forests and prairies of the far west,—Britain with her million-peopled cities, and the children of her gigantic colonies—and thus, all at once and together—“ the dead, small and great, shall stand before God.” Yes, and more solemn than all—as has already been observed, the eyes which now trace these pages shall gaze on the unutterable majesty of the descending Judge. These ears shall listen to that trumpet peal—these feet swell the tread of these deathless thousands !

Observe, next in order, THE SEPARATION, (ver. 32.) “ *He shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divideth his sheep from the goats.* ” To understand this figure aright, we must bear in remembrance that in Palestine, the long hairy wool of the sheep makes the animal so

similar in appearance to the goat, that an unpractised eye, in looking at the flock browsing on the same meadow, would be at a loss to distinguish betwixt them. But the discriminating shepherd has no such difficulty;—he can tell at a glance “the one from the other;” and before folding them for the night, can easily effect their separation. So it is with the Great Shepherd and Bishop of souls. At present,—in this our earthly condition,—the sheep and goats—believers and unbelievers—righteous and wicked—good and bad—are so intermingled, that often the most discriminating human eye cannot detect the difference. The tare, or spurious wheat, mingles with the true grain. The hypocrite and formalist, under the mask of religious profession, passes for the true Christian;—separation is often impossible. But on *that Day*—the final separation shall take place. The possibility of pretence and appearance will be at an end. The shibboleth of party will be heard no more. Here, we have the Church of Christ split up and severed into endless divisions,—those of “Paul, and those of Apollos, and those of Cephas.” We have society, too, with its conventional grades and distinctions;—rich and poor, master and servant, learned and unlearned. There will then be two, and only two classes;—the sheep and the goats—the wheat and the chaff—the vessels unto honour, and the vessels unto dishonour—those who are Christ’s people, and those who are not—those who love Baal, and those who love God. “*He shall set the sheep upon his right hand, and the goats upon the left.*” Each shall stand in his own lot at the end of

the days. There will be no middle ground :—no place of compromise. Between the two separated multitudes “there is a great gulf fixed !”

We have next, THE SHEPHERD’S ADDRESS TO THE SHEEP,—the King’s welcome to His Church, (ver. 34.) “*Then shall the King say unto them on his right hand, Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you, from the foundation of the world.*” “COME !” What music in that word ! It is the old, blessed, gospel utterance to which they first listened in the depths of ruin and despair, when sin-burdened and sorrow-burdened,—“*Come unto me, all ye that labour, and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.*” As that word was His *first* invitation of love in the day of espousals, so it is His last invitation and welcome in this the day of final triumph. He spake it from the cross, He now speaks it from the throne ! It is taken up by the concentric ranks of surrounding angels. All Heaven echoes and bids the ransomed welcome. “COME !” It contains the essence of their Heaven : for it tells them that they are to be the sharers and companions of His own glory. What if He had slightly altered the formula ? What, if, instead of “*Ye blessed ones, Come,*” He had said rather, “*Ye blessed ones, Go, to a kingdom I have provided for you. Angels ! conduct from My presence this ransomed people I have redeemed. Furnish them with crowns and thrones in that distant celestial city ; and since I am to be no longer with them, be ye to them a holy brotherhood,—make them partakers of your joys !*” How would every face droop in sadness ! Heaven would have a blight

passed over it. Its ransomed worshippers would exclaim—‘Our thrones are denuded of their glory—our crowns of their lustre, O Saviour, without Thee!’ But it is not so. His very opening declaration dispels their dread. “*Come!*” Wherever *your* heaven is, it is to be a heaven with ME: we are to share our crowns and thrones together. “Him that overcometh will I grant to sit with ME on MY THRONE.” “Enter thou into THE JOY OF THY LORD.”

And in connexion with this invitation, observe further, the *Heritage* bestowed, “Inherit *the Kingdom*.” He is seated on that throne as a Shepherd-King, and it is a Kingdom that is His gift. We have spoken elsewhere of heaven as the many mansions of His Father’s house. But now it is a joint-kingly inheritance with Himself, the elder Brother. By virtue of their adoption into the covenant family, they are heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Jesus Christ. Nor is the investiture with these mighty and amazing privileges any sudden and capricious mark of the divine favour. It is a kingdom which had been “*prepared for them from the foundation of the world*.” God had destined them, from all eternity, for surpassing honours. He is only now fulfilling the purposes of His own infinite, everlasting love. As the fond mother, in the prospect of welcoming her absent son from a distant land, has his chamber bedecked and furnished with every memorial and souvenir which love and affection can devise,—so has God, the Infinite Father of His people, been providing for the reception of His long absent children. He has been “preparing” a kingdom fitted to meet and satisfy the amplest longings and aspirations of their immortal natures. “I saw,” says

John, "the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband!"

We shall not enter on the awful antithetical portion of this passage, when the Judge of mankind turns to the left hand to pronounce sentence on the wicked. "DEPART," He says. And in that one word, lies the fearful element of their condemnation. They are banished from His presence. The "Come" of the righteous, stands in marked contrast with this exile of the *unrighteous*. "Depart, ye *cursed!*" what a saying to issue from the lips of supreme Benignity, Kindness, and Love! It is the first and the last curse of Christ. It is the first and last malediction uttered by Him, whose mission was "not to destroy men's lives but to save them." And their doom is *everlasting*;—"everlasting fire." Men may torture that expression as they may, to extract a limited and modified meaning. They may try to reason themselves into a less gloomy theology. But the Word of God in too many unmistakable passages closes their lips. "These shall go away into everlasting punishment." "He which is filthy, let him be filthy still." "Their worm dieth not, and their fire is not quenched." "Who among us shall dwell with the devouring fire,—who shall dwell with everlasting burnings!"

And yet once more:—Observe *the great judicial principle in the awards of the Shepherd-Judge*. It is the *works* of those at His tribunal. The test enunciated is—"Inasmuch as ye *did* it," or, "inasmuch as ye did it *not*."

Justified by faith, they are to be sifted, proved, and judged by deeds. It is those who, in the first instance, have found pardon and peace in the efficacious merits and sacrifice of the Divine Redeemer,—who have sat under the shadow of His cross, and exulted in the assurance that the blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth from all sin,—to whom He will address the invitation—‘Come, inherit the blood-bought kingdom!’ But He thinks also of the cup of cold water—the clothing of the poor—the sheltering of the orphan—as being evidences of love to Himself;—or He thinks of the evading of all these works of mercy by the selfish professor, as the too truthful test of the lack of that love. ‘I,’ says He, ‘am the sick One—the homeless One—the naked One—the captive One;—ye *did* it—or ye did it *not* to ME! ’

Let us remember this; it is “*charity*” in the true sense of the word,—*love to God*, generating all those loving virtues, of which love is the parent, which will decide our final bliss or woe. Religion, if true, can never be quenched in an unloving, selfish life. The criterion on “that day” will not be, what we have well said, or well thought, or well intended, but what we have “well *done!*” Semblances will be nothing then;—party distinctions will be nothing then;—*appearing* to be a Christian will be nothing then;—flaming orthodoxy, the most evangelical creed in Christendom, apart from a loving nature, will be nothing then. It will be *doers* alone who will be justified. The demand will be, “Show me thy faith by thy works.” Not that these works will unlock the gate of heaven. God forbid! In themselves, and as pleas of merit, they will

be but as “wood, and hay, and stubble.” It is evident in this passage, and well worth noting, that from the righteous expressing their astonishment at the Judge’s commendation,—*they* at least deemed these works and charities utterly valueless as a ground of justification and acquittal. “We thy sheep,” they seem to say to their Shepherd, “what have *we* done?” But Christ *does* see, and *does* accept, what has been by them done to His people, as if it had been done to Himself. “He commends not the works as such, but the love which prompted them.”\* And when He turns to those on His left hand, who are destitute of all such evidences of life and love, it is as if He said, ‘Ye have been selfish, and niggardly, and unfeeling, and avaricious;—ye cannot have kept the first table of the law, and loved your God, seeing ye have broken the second to your brother.’ “Be not deceived, God is not mocked; for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap.”

The theme of this chapter, of which we have given the feeblest outline, is a most solemn one. The oldest recorded preacher,—in the oldest recorded sermon, takes this very subject for his text and discourse. “Enoch also, the seventh from Adam, prophesied of these, saying, Behold the Lord cometh with ten thousand of his saints, to execute judgment upon all, and to convince all that are ungodly among them, of all their ungodly deeds which they have ungodly committed.” Every fresh age should give augmented emphasis to these words of thrilling warning. Each

\* See Alford’s Greek Testament, *in loc.*

day we live, the shadow of that Throne is deepening on our path;—the noise of the approaching chariot-wheels becomes more audible. “ Yet a little while,” (and that ‘little while’ is becoming less every day,) “ and He that shall come, will come, and will not tarry.” Are we ready to meet Him? Are we ready for the “ Come ” of welcome? Could we say in looking upwards to His advent-throne, “ Lo! this is our God, we have waited for Him ?” Would He be to us the true Melchizedek, King of Salem, coming to *bless*? Or, terrible alternative! have we no portion in that advent-scene but the *Curse* and the *Depart* ! Despise that first “ Come ” of pardon and love—and the second “ Come ” of welcome cannot be ours. Reject the Saviour on the Throne of grace, and when the Throne of judgment is set, and the books are opened, there can be no more blessings. The reign of mercy is over. The priestly intercession is at an end. The prayer for the cumbering fig-tree, “ spare it ”—is no longer heard;—the pleading Voice is silenced;—the door is shut. The Shepherd can no longer gather;—the Shepherd’s crook can no longer rescue;—these terrible words alone linger on the Shepherd’s lips—“ Ye are not of my sheep !” Great God, avert from us such a doom ! Gather us to Thy fold of grace, ere we be overtaken by the hour of eternal separations ! “ The Lord grant unto us, that we may find mercy of the Lord on THAT DAY ? ”

## The Eternal folding of the flock.

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"FOR THE LAMB, WHICH IS IN THE MIDST OF THE THRONE, SHALL FEED THEM, AND SHALL LEAD THEM UNTO LIVING FOUNTAINS OF WATERS; AND GOD SHALL WIPE AWAY ALL TEARS FROM THEIR EYES."—REV. VII. 17.

## THE ETERNAL FOLDING OF THE FLOCK.

IN the preceding chapter, we contemplated that majestic scene,—the Shepherd-King seated on the throne of His glory, at the great final gathering of His flock; separating the sheep from the goats;—and apportioning to each their several awards.

One, and only one additional theme remains. But it is that towards which all the others point and converge. It is the assembling of the flock within the Fold of Heaven. The world's long day is now over;—Time's curfew-bell is tolling, proclaiming that evening has come—that earth's fires are to be put out, and the flocks to be *folded*. Or rather, the long spring-time of everlasting bliss and glory has begun. The bleak herbage of the wilderness—the brookless channels—the falling snows—the angry tempests—the roar of the ravening wolves—are known no more. It is a glorious picture of unbroken sunshine;—gleaming pastures;—pellucid waters,—living fountains!

The passage selected for these concluding meditations, suggests some thoughts, alike regarding the SHEPHERD and the SHEEP.

I. The SHEPHERD: It is evidently the vision of a *pastoral* scene which is now in the eye of the Apostle of Patmos. We have all the accessories of such a scene.

First, in the words of contrast;—where the picture of a flock is brought before us—bleating amid arid pastures —panting defenceless under the fierce rays of a burning sun—and turning oft their languid eyes towards waterless courses ;—“They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more, neither shall the sun light upon them, nor any heat.” And then observe his *positive* description of the bliss of the ransomed. It is a flock feeding on the meadows of Heaven, and reclining by its perennial streams. They are “*fed*” on these abiding pastures;—and “*led*” to “the living fountains of waters.”

We look for the completion of the picture. We see the rejoicing sheep browsing on the everlasting hills. But we gaze in vain for the great central Figure. We expect to see the glorified Shepherd seated on some sunny eminence overlooking “the multitude which no man can number,” and which He has purchased with His own blood. Jesus *is* there; we see Him. *But*, strange mixture of metaphor; —it is not as a SHEPHERD, but as a LAMB He precedes the flock;—feeding them and leading them. It is one of those singular, dream-like transitions common in prophetic symbol;—but which, when we come to examine them, are so significant and full of meaning. We have in a previous apocalyptic vision, (chap. v.,) a similar startling and remarkable figuration; startling, from the same powerful (we had almost said violent) change of metaphor. The apostle had been speaking of Christ as the “Lion of the tribe of Judah,” breaking the seals of the prophetic roll—and unfolding the destinies of the Church and the world. In most magnificent language, he further describes all

Heaven, redeemed and unredeemed—"ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands"—gathered in to do homage to this August Being who had "prevailed to open the book, and to loose the seven seals thereof." When we gaze, amid the stupendous throng, for the object of this adoration—lo! we are arrested by the sight, not of a *Lion*, but of a **LAMB**! It is the same in this beautiful pastoral vision. We lose sight, for the moment, of the Shepherd;—or, if in reality He still remains, the beloved evangelist at all events describes Him under a different symbol and epithet. It is the name which he himself knew so well,—that by which the Great Shepherd was first pointed out to him;—He loves it still—"Behold the Lamb of God!"

But there must have been some greater truth hidden under this change of simile than the mere association of the writer. Let us briefly inquire what that truth is;—in other words, what we may deduce from this apparently singular metaphor, of **THE LAMB** leading the flock to their pastures of blessedness.

The description implies, that *there will be a continual remembrance on the part of the ransomed, of the death and sufferings of their Shepherd*. In that same remarkable passage to which we have just adverted, it is not only a Lamb that is represented as receiving the homage of countless worshippers, but it is specially noted and delineated, "*a Lamb as it had been slain;*"—a Lamb with the blood-marks upon it;—wounded and smitten. A Lamb slain! Strange symbol, in the place where suffering never enters, and death is unknown! What

is this, but in the most expressive figurative language to tell us, that Christ's sacrificial death will ever be present to the thoughts of the Redeemed;—that Calvary's Cross and Calvary's Sufferer,—the sword awaking from its scabbard and smiting the Shepherd, will continue the theme of eternity. Yes, though all remembrance of death and suffering will otherwise be banished from Heaven; — no pang known—no pain capable of being either felt or feared ; it would appear, there shall, through all coming ages, be *one* exception ; *one* memory of ignominy and superhuman anguish. The once smitten Shepherd will be there, with wounds in His hands. “And one shall say unto Him, what are these wounds in thine hands ? Then He shall answer, those with which I was wounded in the house of my friends !” He wears the sign and memorial of suffering on His glorified body ; and as the Redeemed flock gaze on the significant emblem, they will cry to one another—“The great love wherewith He loved us !” “The Good Shepherd gave His own life for the sheep !” \*

A second truth we may gather from this figure of the Lamb leading the ransomed in the Heavenly world is, *the perpetuity of Christ's exalted human nature*. It is not as a *kingly* Shepherd He leads, but as one of the flock Himself—wearing their nature. In an earlier portion of this volume, we dwelt at some length on the holy humanity of the Son of God ;—how when He came down to

\* See this thought powerfully expounded and illustrated in one of Canon Melvill's Sermons, “The Lamb Slain in the midst of the Throne.”

tabernacle on earth, He set up His own tent among human tents. "The Word was made flesh, and dwelt" (literally, tented or tabernaclled) "among us." "In all things He was made like unto His brethren." He was Brother in our nature,—"bone of our bone, and flesh of our flesh!" What of His Divine Person, now that He is exalted? How in this respect will He stand related to His ransomed flock and fold to all eternity?

He is, and ever will be "*that same Jesus*," unchanged and unchangeable. John, when he first saw Him in his Resurrection glories in Patmos, "fell at His feet as one dead." On many antecedent occasions, it had been otherwise with that favoured disciple. He had oft times enjoyed with Him, confiding, endearing fellowship. He had pillow'd his head on His bosom at the last Supper;—He had received the last injunction and benediction of love from His lips on the cross. Now, however, when He beheld the lustre of His ascended majesty;—His feet like burning brass—His eyes like a flame of fire—His voice like the noise of many waters—the bright blaze of unearthly glory projected on His path,—he fell prone to the ground, awe-struck and speechless. But a gentle Hand is laid upon him;—a gentle Voice restores his confidence. It is the *Lamb of God* still!—The Brother with His changeless human tenderness! "He laid his right hand upon me, saying, Fear not; I AM He that liveth and was dead, and behold I am alive for evermore." And in the vision we are now considering, he sees the *Lamb*—the glorified Redeemer—still retaining the identical nature in which He suffered, "leading" His people in the realms of everlasting

day! Christ's mediatorial kingdom, with regard to His saints, shall continue for ever. With respect to His enemies—after their final trial and doom, that reign shall cease. It is said, "Then shall He deliver up the kingdom"—(that portion of His sovereignty which has reference to the wicked)—"to God, even the Father:"—(into the hands of God absolute.) But it is different with His reign over His ransomed and triumphant Church—"of the increase of His government and peace there shall be no end." God hath given Him "length of days for ever and ever." The Lamb, "slain from the foundation of the world," is still, in the glories of exalted Humanity, to lead His Redeemed to the living fountains of waters. In name, and nature, and love, Jesus Christ is "the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever!"

Let us pass now from the glorified LEADER to the glorified FLOCK. Let us gather a few thoughts, from what is here said, regarding the Redeemed in glory. The Lamb feeds them, and leads them to living fountains of waters, and God wipes away all tears from their eyes.

The first thought these words suggest is—that *all the joys of the ransomed Flock will be associated with the love and companionship of their Shepherd.* He feeds—He leads—He wipes away all tears from their eyes;—and in a previous verse, (15,) under a different figure, it is said, "*He that sitteth on the throne shall dwell among them.*" Heaven would be no heaven without Jesus. Take Him away! It would be to blot out the sun from the celestial

firmament;—every star would hide its face;—the angel would disrobe him of his shining attire, and stand in sackcloth before the vacant throne! Take *Him* away! let the Shepherd leave His Redeemed Church,—and you might give the flock heaven's choicest pastures,—you might sentinel the heavenly fold with archangels,—it would be no compensation for the loss. The long forgotten cry would ascend piteously amid the fairest landscapes of Paradise Regained;—“Tell me, O Thou whom my soul loveth, where THOU feedest, where THOU makest Thy flock to rest at noon!” But He, the Shepherd-King, whose invitation on the throne of judgment was,—“*Come, ye blessed,*”—will be true to His word. As He was with them in all places whither they were scattered in the cloudy and dark day,—so, in the bright and *cloudless* day of glory; in all places He will be with them. We may take the words of a beautiful parallel passage of Old Testament, and give them a heavenly meaning;—“Their pastures shall be in all high places; they shall not hunger nor thirst, neither shall the heat nor sun smite them; for *He* that hath mercy on them shall lead them—even by the springs of water shall *HE* guide them.” “Leading” them, “feeding” them,—wiping the very tear-drops from their eyes. What figurative language could express nearer, closer, more intimate fellowship and communion! The fellowship of the believer and his Saviour on earth,—alas! how fitful, intermittent, transient! He is too often “like a stranger in the land, and like a wayfaring man, that turneth aside to tarry for a night.” But in Heaven, in the full vision and fruition of a Saviour-God,—the song

lisped here, often with trembling lips and stammering tongue, will rise triumphant from an ever-present experience of its bliss—"Who shall separate me from the love of Christ?" "Thou wilt show me the path of life. In Thy presence there is fulness of joy!"

Oh what a motive for holiness of life and character does this thought supply! Heaven, an eternity with Jesus. Heaven, everlasting companionship with infinite purity, tenderness, love. To *enjoy* Him, I must be *like* Him. Earthly friendships are formed and cemented by identity and similarity of tastes, pursuits, and enjoyments. What should be my life-long aspiration now, in the prospect of living for ever in the presence and fellowship of THE HOLY ONE? "*Let every man that hath this hope in him purify himself, even as He is pure!*"

This description would seem to denote, *an infinite progression in the joys and felicities of the Ransomed flock*. The Shepherd is seen leading them from pasture to pasture, from fountain to fountain, from eminence to eminence,—higher and yet higher up the hills of God. On earth, the pilgrim company are represented as going "from strength to strength." It will be so, in a nobler sense, in Heaven. As the loftier we ascend a mountain, the wider is the landscape that is spread before us;—so the higher the heavenly pilgrim mounts in his ever-upward ascent—the wider will be the horizon and circumference of his joys. His song will be the true "Song of degrees." He will be attaining ever new views of God;—new unfoldings, and revelations of the Divine purposes;—new motives

for the ceaseless activities of his holy being. Heaven will thus, in the language of the old divines, be “a rest without a rest.” “They rest.” “They rest not.”

Such is the beautiful delineation here given in the vision of the Seer of Patmos. The Lamb is represented first as “*feeding*” His flock. They lie down at His side, in restful repose, by the green pastures of His love,—basking under the sunshine of His smile. Next, the Lamb is represented as “*leading*” them. The rest is for the time over. He leads them deeper and yet deeper, through these sunlit meads, along these glorified valleys, to new living fountains of water;—ever advancing, yet never reaching the plenitude of bliss;—satisfied to the full, and yet ever new satisfaction;—pastures ever greener—waters ever clearer—the sun of their joy ever climbing the sky and never reaching the meridian. The plummet-line let down, and yet the cry ever the same, ascending from the unsounded infinite of love—“Oh the depth !”

The figurative language of the evangelist further indicates, that *there will be an unfolding of the Shepherd's wisdom and faithfulness in His earthly dispensations*. Not only is the Lamb to feed them with gracious views of the Divine dealings, and to lead them from fountain to fountain of wisdom, and goodness, and grace;—but by a beautiful and most expressive symbol, God is represented as wiping away all tears from their eyes. As if, when they entered glory, some lingering tears were still there. As if the eye had not recovered from the night of earthly weeping. But, ere long, no remaining vestige of

sorrow will be found. As in a forest, after a drenching thunder-shower, every bough, and blade, and leaf is dripping with rain; for a considerable time after the sun has shone out, and the sky is blue, and the birds of the grove are singing,—the lingering drops gem the branches, and sprinkle the sward. But the sun is up: and his genial rays are drinking up the moisture—nature's tear-drops. One by one they evaporate,—slowly, gradually; and the refreshed forest rejoices, and basks in the sun's radiance. So with the great Sun of Deity in heaven. One by one, earth's remaining tears vanish before the radiance of that Sun of Wisdom and Love. Weeping can be no more;—the fountain of weeping,—the *memory* of weeping, are gone for ever! Beautiful as are the preceding representations of the Lamb leading, and feeding,—we love to dwell on this finishing touch in the inspired picture—“God wiping away all tears from the eyes.” Do you wonder, Reader, at your Shepherd's dealings? Are you apt, with misgiving heart, to ask—why that desolation of the earthly fold? why that angry hurricane—that hoarse night-wind—that pelting rain, which destroyed the choicest pasture, and maddened into foaming torrent the calm still water—sweeping loved ones down the resistless flood? Yes! and you may carry these tearful eyes with you as you enter heaven. But there is a gracious Hand waiting there to wipe each one of them away. These lingering drops will be crystal lenses, through which, as you enter glory, you will see in vivid manifestation the loving-kindness and faithfulness of your Heavenly Father. Are you wondering now why that wolf of the forest was

allowed to prowl upon your path? You will see *then*, that it was to lead you nearer, and keep you nearer the Great Shepherd. Do you wonder why these springs and rills of earthly happiness were withdrawn, or dried in their channels?—why a blight was suffered to pass over your earthly pasture? It was to lead you to feel and to exclaim—‘O God, all my happiness,—all my springs, are in Thee!’ Do you wonder now why that lamb of the flock was early taken? You will see *then*, that it was in order to lead *yourself* through the wicket-gate. He emptied thy home, and thy heart, and thy Fold on earth—that He might lead thee and thine to the better Fold above. Following the steps of the Heavenly Shepherd, as one by one in the fold of the ransomed—these “loved and lost ones”—will be revealed to your sight, one here, one there, reposing in the celestial pastures;—when you see to what a blessed land you had early sent your children,—how will the once tear-bedimmed eye have its every tear wiped away;—and at the contemplation of God’s wisdom and love, in what appeared at the time the dark providences of earth—the ever deepening song will ascend—“So we Thy people and sheep of Thy pasture, will give Thee thanks for ever!”

Yet once more, this description would seem to indicate, that *there will be a variety and diversity in the joys of Heaven, suited to the various capacities and tastes of the Redeemed.* It is not to *one* fountain to which the Lamb is said to lead them; they are “*living fountains of waters.*” Like the four-branched river in the first earthly Eden, there

will be, from the *one* great river of Deity, *streams* which make glad the city of God. There will be **SOME** streams of calm, pellucid, peaceful meditation ;—some that leap from rock to rock, singing their way onward, bearing in their course refreshment and joy. The pastures will be different. Some will delight to feed on the pastures of knowledge ;—some to repose on the pastures of love ;—some to climb the mountain in the ceaseless activities of holy ardour,—their truest rest will be worship—their highest joy, holy work and labour. We delight to think of the Flock of Heaven—each member of it perfect in the full measure of its own bliss—but each under the Shepherd's eye, thus following the pasture, or climbing the mountain-steep, or browsing by the streamlet, it most loves. And yet, all the Fold, in these separate and distinctive ways, combining to glorify their Shepherd-King.

Flock of the ransomed ! while yet out in the lower valley,—not unfrequently, it may be, overtaken by the cloud and the storm,—cleave more and more closely to your Divine Shepherd. He has promised to give you “grace and glory ;”—admission to the Fold on earth, and an everlasting entrance into the better Fold above. Some who read these pages may possibly be scattered far and wide, feeding on different pastures, penned in different earthly folds, and tended by different under-shepherds. May we meet at last, an undivided Flock, under the *ONE Shepherd*, amid more enduring pastures ! Make sure now of your personal and saving interest in His Shepherd-love. Enter by the one door into the sheep-fold. Follow with unwaver-

ing eye His footsteps ;—repose on Him your burdens ;—confide to Him your misgivings and fears. Let life be a happy, peaceful reclining by the green pastures and still waters of His love. Let Death's anticipated valley-gloom be dispelled by a present and habitual leaning on the rod and staff of His immutable promises; “**AND WHEN THE CHIEF SHEPHERD SHALL APPEAR, YE SHALL RECEIVE A CROWN OF GLORY, THAT FADETH NOT AWAY !”**

---

“Now

The God of Peace,

that brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus,

that

Great Shepherd of the Sheep,

through the blood

of the Everlasting Covenant,

make you perfect in every good work, to do his will,

working in you that which is well-pleasing in his sight,

through Jesus Christ;

to whom be glory for ever and ever.

Amen.”

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