

CHRIST SHEPHERDING HIS FLOCK

Theodore L. Cuyler

One of the most beautiful improvements of the new Revision of the Testament is that which makes the seventeenth verse of the seventh chapter of the Revelation to read thus: "The Lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall be their Shepherd, and shall guide them unto fountains of waters of life." This carries on into the heavenly world one of the most tender and profound relations which Jesus bears to His redeemed followers. To us, in our land and times, this Oriental figure loses much of the vividness that it has to one who visits Palestine and sees a Judean shepherd among his flock. He is the master of a household of sheep,—as much attached to his fleecy friends as daily intercourse and nightly watchings and personal exposures for them could make him. He searches out fresh pasturage for them; if a sheep is caught in a thicket, he hastens to rescue it; if a lamb falls into a swollen torrent, he is at hand to lift it out; if a wild beast shows himself at night near the sleeping flock, the shepherd seizes club or crook and gives him battle. Not only the savage beast, but the Bedouin robber must sometimes be encountered. Dr. Thomson, in his "Land and Book," says that one faithful fellow, between Tabor and Tiberias, instead of fleeing, actually fought these Bedouins, until he was hacked to pieces with their khanjars, and died among the sheep he was defending.

"I am the Good Shepherd. I lay down My life for the sheep." This is the supreme act of His devotion to His flock. To analyze the theology of the Atonement is for most believers as bootless as an attempt to analyze the maternal feeling before a mother who has just given the parting kiss to a dying daughter. The Christian's heart understands the Atonement better than the Christian's head. It is a difficult doctrine for the brain, but a sweet and simple one to the affections. Jonathan Edwards himself could not apprehend the Atonement one whit more clearly or feel it more intensely than the Dairyman's Daughter, when she sang to herself,—

"How glorious was the grace

When Christ sustained the stroke!

His life and blood the Shepherd pays,

A ransom for the flock."

True faith simply believes what Jesus said, and rests implicitly on what Jesus did for us and will do for us to the end. This is the core of my practical theology, and so it is with millions of others. All we were but sheep going astray, and God hath laid on Him, the Divine Shepherd, the iniquities of us all. This tells the whole story as to the ground of my hope for salvation; this, too, establishes such a relation between me and my Shepherd, that I am under supreme obligation to follow Him whithersoever He leadeth. If we ever expect to be guided by Him to fountains of waters of life in heaven, we must learn here to submit to His guidance completely.

Three things our beloved Shepherd assures us. The first one is, "I know Mine own sheep." He does not recognize them by any churchmark, for some persons may hide an unbelieving, unrenewed heart beneath a false profession; others, who never have enrolled themselves in any visible church-membership, may belong to the blood-bought flock. Jesus recognized the penitent sinner through her

tears as distinctly as He saw through Judas behind his treacherous kiss. It is a precious thought to a true believer, however obscure in lot or however overlooked or misunderstood by others,—“My Master knows me. He has me on His heart. He is a brother to my griefs. He knows what pasture I require; yes, and He understands when I need the chastising stroke. He detects my sins; therefore let me be watchful against temptation. He sees all my tears or my heartaches; therefore let me be cheerful under sharp trials.”

The second thing our Shepherd assures us is: “Mine own know Me.” This knowledge is gained by a sacred instinct. His own know Him by the witness of the Spirit that witnesseth with their spirits. How do I know my mother? By somebody else's description of her picture, by an analysis of her mental qualities? No; I know her by the instincts of love. I have tasted her sweet fidelities. I believe in her both for what she is to me and what she has done for me. The sincere Christian has a heart-knowledge which is gained by being sought out by the Shepherd, saved by the Shepherd, and by trusting and following the Shepherd. Of this experimental knowledge no scoffer can outwit him and no enemy can rob him. He has heard Christ's voice when He “callesh His own sheep by name and leadeth them out.” No one can counterfeit that voice. Sometimes in Palestine or Syria a stranger will try to mimic the shepherd's call; but the flock pay no heed to it. As soon as the genuine voice is heard every head is up and the flock is in motion.

The third thing that Jesus assures us is, that “He goeth before His sheep, and they follow Him.” Ah, what pathways of trial He sometimes appoints to us! Never has He promised us an easy road or a smooth road, or such a road as our selfishness may select. He never consents that the flock shall decide as to the lot in which they shall be pastured, or over what steep hills He shall conduct them, or through what valleys of the death-shade they shall walk, listening to His voice through the dark. More than once faith stumbles and falls, but He lifts up and restores. Sometimes the burden breaks down; but He says tenderly, “Cast that burden on Me.” Sometimes we cry out in anguish for some lost treasure of heart and home; but His firm reply is, “Your treasure I will take care of. FOLLOW ME.” Whom He loves He chastens, and in proportion to the love is the discipline. The trial that tests graces and purifies character must be something more than a pin-scratch. It must cut deep, it must try us; and sharply too, or it does not deserve the name. It is hard to be poor while others prosper; it is hard to lie still and suffer while godless mirth goes laughing by the door; it is hard to lose our only wee lamb while our neighbor's fireside is surrounded by a group of rosy-cheeked children; it is hard to drink the very cup that we prayed might pass from us: but the loving Shepherd comes very near at such times, and puts His arm about us and says: “I know Mine own, and Mine own must trust Me. If Mine, then an heir to all I have. Where I am, there, thou shalt be; let not thy heart be troubled. What is poverty, or failure, or sickness, or bereavement to thee? Follow Me. If thy feet are sore, the green pastures will be all the softer by and by. If thy cross is heavy, I have borne a heavier one. Let Me share this with thee. Shall the disciple be above his Master? Shall the sheep fare better than the

Shepherd?”

And so through every step in life the Shepherd offers to guide us, if we will but hear His voice and follow Him. He never promises us smooth paths, but He does promise safe ones. When we obey His voice, we may often be called to severe toils and self-denials, to encounter opposition and to perform services of love to the unlovable and the thankless; but we shall never be called to sacrifice a principle or commit a sin. Our Shepherd will never lead us to a precipice of error or into a quagmire of doubt. He will never lead us into sensual temptations or up dizzy heights of vain-glory. If we follow Him we may find the steepest cliff a “path of pleasantness” and the lowest vale of humiliation a highway to peace. Brethren of the flock, we may have some hard climbing yet before we reach heaven. Let us keep close to the Shepherd and take short views. If we look down, we may get dizzy; if we look too far on, we may get discouraged. With steady grasp on the Great Shepherd, let our hearts continually pray,—

“Keep thou my feet; I do not ask to see
The distant scene; one step's enough for me.”

OBEDIENCE IS BETTER
THAN SACRIFICE

(Continued from Page 3)

life pretty much demanded upon its ability to obey, and it had never been taught obedience. That weakness which denied the child the chance to learn obedience, is really wickedness.

But it is not children alone who need to know obedience. We all need to learn this lesson well. I need it just now myself. Now when deep sorrow has become my lot, I find my best consolation in obedience. For no matter who sends or what comes, as an obedient child of God nothing can get to me except it come through God's active or permissive will, and so by the time it reaches me, it is His will, and it is mine but to obey. If active duty is involved, I must obey. If passive longsuffering is the demand, then too I must obey. And I am realizing anew the truth of Samuel's words that God prefers obedience to sacrifice, and to hearken rather than to receive the richest gift at our hands.

WHEN YOU PRAY

Long prayers and long sermons tend to quench the fire instead of kindling it. Brethren, in all things has our Lord Jesus given us the best example—also in regard to praying. When with His disciples, His prayers were of medium length. In the midst of a large crowd, as at Lazarus' grave and the feeding of the five thousand. His prayer was short. When He was alone with His Father, in the Garden or on the Mount—then He prayed all night.

So ought ye also to do, dear brethren. Among God's children, make your prayer medium long, as Jesus did when He was about to be crucified. When in a crowd or with the sick or dying or the unfortunate, short. When you are alone with your Father in your secret closet, pray as long as you please.

—C. H. Spurgeon

“Trust in the Lord with all thine heart and bow **not** unto thine own understanding.”

“Commit thy way unto the Lord, trust also in Him, and He shall bring it to pass.”