

Visitor Pulpit.

LOVE IN ACTION.

BY REV. C. H. SPURGEON.

"So when they had dined, Jesus saith to Simon Peter, Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me more than these? He saith unto Him, Yea, Lord; thou knowest that I love Thee. He said unto him, Feed My lambs."

It must be noticed that after the fisherman had breakfasted the Lord commenced speaking to them on the shore about sheep and shepherds. Therein they all might learn a lesson—the first work of Christ's servants was composed in that commission—"Go ye into all the world and preach the Gospel to every creature"; or, parabolically, "Launch out into the deep and let down your nets for a draught." First of all, then, they would notice that Christ's servants were fishers of men, and they were not to pick out certain individuals; for all was fish that came to their net; they were to go into the highways and byways; and might they have Divine indication how to do it. "Cast your net on the right side of the ship"; and might they have such a spiritual net as that. With all their takings it would never break. But when that was done all was not done, as some seemed to think. Christ was the Great Shepherd, and He would have under-shepherds. Christ repeated the commands to feed three times over—probably meaning the babes, the young men, and the aged of His flock. But they might be in danger of evangelizing outside men to the forgetfulness of those inside the House of God. It was not every man who was ready at once to become a teacher; so our Lord spent His life most industriously in training the seventy and teaching the twelve. But He had to speak more particularly that morning of that work inside the House of God, that feeding of sheep and lambs. As to that shepherding of Christ, first there was the sphere, secondly the man, thirdly his preparation for the work, fourthly the work itself, and fifthly the motive under which it was to be carried on. The sphere was that evidently indicated by our Lord by His thrice-repeated command, Mr. Spurgeon believed that the Lord meant by "My Lambs" those who were little in grace, those who had but the grain of mustard-seed faith as yet. These needed great care. And weakness was the idea conveyed in the word lambs; and so, in the Church of God, all such are weak—and, alas! how many they were!—all such as were doubting, all those who were as yet babes, and have need to be fed with milk, scarcely knowing how to go, are usually bewildered in doctrine and apt to be stunned—all such they were to watch over in the first place, to comfort the feeble-minded, support the weak, be patient towards all men. They must deal carefully and tenderly with the lambs of the Father, and he thought this was the reason they were committed to Simon Peter, because he had found out that his strength lay not in himself. He had been very weak. Therefore he said once more, Look to the weak ones of the church. But he did not think that was the main idea in the text, the feeding of children; there were old sheep in the great fold who were wonderfully weak. They must look very anxiously and carefully after those who were young in Christ, although they might be old in years. As soon as ever a person was converted and added to the church, it should be the object of his fellow-members to say, "We will look after him. He has but newly come among us; and we must be doubly generous to those who scarcely know our way as yet." Let them follow up the newborn ones, who, like babes, were strong in desires, and strong in nothing else. Still, they must by no means overlook those who were young in years, and had been brought to the Saviour. How they could thank God that they had so many dear children who already knew Christ. They never, as a church, said that a certain age would be necessary before a child could possess faith in Christ. They practiced believers' baptism, not adult baptism. They were not amongst those who were suspicious of youthful piety; they were more suspicious of persons who came into the church late in life.

He thought the "Feed My sheep" alluded to those who were not mere children in years; those who wanted governing as well as feeding. But why should doctrines of grace be kept from children? If a doctrine be too sublime for a child, it is rather due to the teacher's conception of it. He was afraid many of their sermons often went over the heads of the young folks, who might be as true christians as the old folks. He thought they ought especially to feed the young because the work is so profitable. They were glad to welcome those who came into the fold late in life, but they had scarcely taken up their spade and pruning-hook before it was time to lay them down, and the time spent in their training was scarcely rewarded by the short space of time they were in service. Nay, rather, begin to teach the child early; for early piety often became eminent piety; and the child has probably a long stretch of years in which, through him, God may be glorified and others blessed. Then it was most profitable work because it also trained the teacher's humility. If they wanted "big" solid men, let them look for them amongst those who were much with the lambs. Secondly, who was the man to do this work? The true christian, and he would never get too big for his place of seeing after children unless he was swallowed up with pride. Let them look to it that they did see to the children who were in the Lord Jesus Christ. Peter was a warm-hearted man, and probably had the charge addressed to him on that account. He was a leading man. Children, they knew, would always gather eagerly where there was a warm heart, as did the flies on the wall in the sunshine. And Simon was now a greatly indebted man. According to that rule of the kingdom, "he loved much because he had been much forgiven." Oh, that many of the elder ones amongst them who might do it well, would, in the fact of schools who were doing work in a lame way for want of teachers, rouse themselves and say, "Hitherto I have left it to the young fold, I will do so no more. I will go and join these workers, and will endeavor to seek also to feed the lambs." And they would notice too that when the Lord called a man to a work He prepared him for it. God gave Peter the practice before He gave him the commission. They could not feed children unless they fed themselves. Especially must a teacher prepare for teaching children by being much with the Master, as Peter was. An hour's communion with Christ was the best preparation for teaching the young or the old. It was the preparation of self-examination; and it never hurt a true-hearted man to search his spirit; it was only the hypocrite who finched from such an ordeal. A genuine man wanted to know whether he really loved Christ or not, so he looked thus at his heart to settle the question. The best preparation for teaching the lambs was to have love for them and love for Christ. A shepherd who did not love his sheep was a hireling, and not a true shepherd, and would flee away in the time of danger. But a true shepherd of the sheep would love them to the utmost of his life, and then lay it down if need should be. They preached and taught love; and how could they do that if they had not love in their own hearts? Their object, was or should be, to create love to Christ in the hearts of men and women, and to foster it where it already existed in the lambs of the flock. How could he or she convey the love of Christ to another if he had it not himself? He went to the children's service chilled, as if he were a stream of water or a wet blanket to put it out, rather than a flaming fire to kindle it. It was certainly the grandest preparation for the ministry, whether exercised in the pulpit or in the Sunday-school, for a man to have in his heart love to Christ and love to those about to be taught. He had now spoken of the sphere, the man, and the preparation; he would now briefly allude to the work. "Feed My lambs." With the newly converted, with the young children, their principle business was that of feeding them with the Word of Life. Every sermon, every lesson, should be a feeding process. He did

not think it was any particular use to thump on the table and say, "Believe, believe," and nobody know what it is he is to believe. There must be imparted some sound, solid Gospel doctrine—real feeding. When there was food they generally rang the dinner-bell; but it was no use doing so unless there was something to eat. By all means let the lambs have something solid to sustain them; for the lambs of Christ could not be fed on anything they liked to give them, and they might half poison them by bad teaching. Therefore they should be very cautious. And they must be fed more than once a week, not merely on Sundays; lambs in the country would soon die if a shepherd only fed them once a week. So the spiritual lambs of Christ needed continual feeding; their teachers should be careful about their children's souls day by day, and should be prayerful about their children's souls even when they were not teaching them. The feeding work must be continuous; the teachers must be busy as the shepherd on the farm during the lambing season. He took it that there was nothing which so engrossed every faculty of man as that of the care of souls. They must be seeking all the week to get something fresh to say, and they must study the way in which it was to be said; if the food was to be put before the lambs so that they could really receive it, they should labor at it. The motive should be the concluding thought. "Lovest thou Me? Feed My lambs." The work was to be done for the Master and not for themselves. When the Lord gave a man something to do, He also gave him something to suffer, and He had trusted them with the care of His lambs and His sheep, and the motive for doing such work was to be that of love. First, as a proof of love, "If ye love Me keep My commandments." "If ye love Me, feed My sheep." If they really loved Christ let them lay themselves out to help others, that Christ might have joy of them.

CHRISTMAS EVANS ON THE ATONEMENT.

It seemed that I saw a huge cemetery, in which were lying an untold number of Adam's race; the place was full of caves, and a thick cloud enveloped the whole, so that the light of the sun, the moon, or a candle could not be seen there; the doors were a thousand times stronger than the brass doors of this world, and they were safely locked up with immortal locks and bars, by divine justice, so that there was no hope of ever escaping from this dark place. "In Adam all die."

At the dawn of the morning I saw Mercy descending from heaven in the chariot of the early promise, and accompanying it was a person like the Son of Man, or seed of the woman. Mercy called at the iron gate, saying: "My brother Justice, thou art here keeping a watch over this cemetery, and hast sealed the deadly stone with God's seal." "Yes, I am, did not love his sheep was a hireling, and not a true shepherd, and would flee away in the time of danger. But a true shepherd of the sheep would love them to the utmost of his life, and then lay it down if need should be. They preached and taught love; and how could they do that if they had not love in their own hearts? Their object, was or should be, to create love to Christ in the hearts of men and women, and to foster it where it already existed in the lambs of the flock. How could he or she convey the love of Christ to another if he had it not himself? He went to the children's service chilled, as if he were a stream of water or a wet blanket to put it out, rather than a flaming fire to kindle it. It was certainly the grandest preparation for the ministry, whether exercised in the pulpit or in the Sunday-school, for a man to have in his heart love to Christ and love to those about to be taught. He had now spoken of the sphere, the man, and the preparation; he would now briefly allude to the work. "Feed My lambs." With the newly converted, with the young children, their principle business was that of feeding them with the Word of Life. Every sermon, every lesson, should be a feeding process. He did

Then Mercy turned her cheerful face—a glance of which was enough to produce a ray of hope in the cemetery—and the Seed of the woman was standing by her side. "My brother, Justice, wilt thou take a bondsman, till the time come to shed it, that I might have the key of death's gate to enter into them?" "Yes, I will," answered Justice, "only to have him related near enough to the Lawgiver, and to the inhabitants of this cemetery; for he must have been brought up in the court above, as it regards his person, and his going forth must have been of old, from the days of eternity; his human nature must be born in Bethlehem, inside the cemetery, and brought up on the breast of the Vir-

gin, from here, and live within the limits of the cemetery, and to be sacrificed on a tree within this enclosure."

Then the Seed of the woman stepped forward, and said: "Wilt thou take me as a bondsman?" Justice scanned him closely and said: "Yes, willingly, and for a hundred millions more, if necessary, because thou hast been brought up in the court of the Lawgiver, from eternity; and thou wilt be the seed of the woman; I see thy bloody heel."

"Justice, what is thy demand?" "Humiliation for exaltation, a life for a life, and death for death." "Here am I," said the Seed of the woman, "putting my hand in thine, and writing my name in the roll of the book which I give thee, that I will make an atonement, whose virtue will counterbalance the sin of the world. And give thou the key of the cemetery to Mercy. Say thou, the great Justice of heaven, what time shall I put down in the bond, which I give in the name of my whole church? When wilt thou have me appear as one of the inhabitants of the dead city?"

"At the end of four thousand years after closing this up." "Very well, I am willing; and herewith I give you a document under my hand: 'Lo, I come! Here is one copy for thee to keep in the great office of justice; and another copy for the patriarchs, prophets, and Moses, as the chief custodian.'" "And here am I," said Justice, "placing the key in the hands of Mercy." "And for the purpose of showing the nature of the payment, the necessity for it, and to work faith and expectation in my church for the ransomed year of this cemetery, I set up the ceremonial law in my name, and as a shadow of me, in its sacrifices, and its atoning feasts, to remind of sins, and to show forth the true sacrifice, and that I will not change my mind."

The fire which burned the Jewish sacrifices came originally from heaven, and was a sign of God's avenging anger against sin; and the blood that was offered, was a sign that nothing could extinguish the curse of the law, but the blood of Jesus Christ. Great and long was the contest between the blood and the fire on Israel's altars. But the myriads of dumb beasts whose blood was shed in the flames of the altars, were as nothing in strength, value, or virtue, to put them out. But in the fulness of time, the Messiah was born, of one of the daughters of the cemetery, and he appeared, within it, as the Lamb of God, and the fourteenth day came to take him, and bring him to the altar. He was taken in Gethsemane—he submitted as a lamb for the slaughter; the altar was set, not in the temple, but outside the gates of Jerusalem, on the place of dead skulls. He, himself, was the priest, the sacrifice and the altar. He was bound to the horns of the altar, about 9 o'clock in the forenoon—a day to be remembered forever; the Fire took hold of him like a devouring plague, saying:—"I am Justice, I will spare none; justice I must have; I have burned myriads of Israel's lambs, and if I am not extinguished by burning the Lamb of God—who alone can take away the sins of the world—I shall burn the whole cemetery, bodies and souls, in hell below."

The devouring flames of the curse continued to swallow, and burn; and the blood to drop down into the flames, until some thought that the fire would conquer. The contest was unparalleled from the 6th to the 9th hour, and during this time of questionable victory, there was nothing but silence over all the mountain. But, at 3 o'clock in the afternoon, after the avenging fire had burned through all the feelings of humanity, it touched the altar of the God-head, and, then, it was extinguished. The sun darkened with astonishment; the rocks rent, the earth shook, the graves opened, the dead arose, because they saw God, in human nature, dying on a tree!

In the old sacrifices there was nothing but a reminding of sins, without paying anything; but Christ appeared according to the agreement; and he was seen, with the bag of

gold on his back, going from Gethsemane through the streets of Jerusalem, up to meet the bond he gave. He cried before the office: "Father, the hour is come: here is the bag of gold and I am emptying it on the reckoning table."

"Enough, my Son! I have found a ransom, and here is the bond that was against thy people to live, given up to thee; it shall lay no longer in Moses' office, on Sinai; take thou it, and do with it as thou seeest fit."

What did he do with it? Did he tear it up and throw it to the wind? He put it in a safer place—he nailed it to the Cross; when he went from there in his stead, and gave the Cross to the twelve apostles and the true preachers, to carry it through the world—with the handwriting nailed and the debt paid. It is not Christ that is on it now, but the old debt, which had been against us, and underneath it, written in dazzling characters:—

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