

Jesus so described the Oriental sheep-tender that we are able to read into this description much of which we would otherwise be ignorant. "He lays down his life for his sheep." He is guide, protector, provider, sympathetic companion. He knows his sheep, and calls each by its name; he knows the wild, frisky ones, the senseless, unsteady ones, the staid and obedient followers; he loves all, proposes to save each, and "no man can snatch them out of his hand." "Fear not, little flock," he says. **I shall not want.** This is the true logical conclusion. Most men would like to say, "I have a large bank account; I shall not want. I own a block of houses; I shall not want." To such God's Spirit says, "Thou fool." But the true servant of God hears that God cares for him, and "faith desires no more." (1) *God knows what sort of provision is needed by his flock—milk for babes, strong meat for robust men, medicine for the sick, chastisement for the wayward.* (2) *Right views of God's knowledge, power, and love prevent foolish fear and sinful murmuring.* (3) *If God is our source of supply we cannot want.* (4) *God cares for us as individuals.*

2. He maketh me to lie down in green pastures. He takes me from the desert sands to oases of verdancy. (5) *Every man needs days in which to "lie fallow."* (6) *Now and then God makes a Christian to lie down until the lessons of experience and the memories of God's word enter deeply into his nature.*—M. R. Vincent. **He leadeth me beside the still waters.** "Rest-giving waters;" the thought is not so much of quiet pools as of refreshing draughts.

3 He restoreth my soul. "Reviveth;" bringeth back to youthful vigor. "He does not only give us comfort; that would weaken character. He gives us power."—Stopford Brooke. (7) *The true Comforter is the strengthener in pain as truly as the remover of pain.* **He leadeth me.** Dr. Thomson calls attention to the fact that the Oriental shepherd does not ordinarily feed his flock, but guides them where they may gather the best food for themselves. **Paths of righteousness.** There are no paths, but the merest foot-tracks in the wide wildernesses of the East, and sometimes half a dozen of these run unevenly alongside of each other. Which is the straight path the unguided sheep cannot determine; he needs a shepherd. So does the human soul in this world of doubt, where half a dozen different courses are open to him, every one of which at times may seem equally desirable and right. Who can show us the right path? "The Lord is our Shepherd." **For his name's sake.** Not because we deserve it, but because he loves us and is pledged to our salvation. Dr. Perowne asks a very pertinent question: Does this remarkable promise refer to secular or spiritual mercies? and replies, "The God

of providence is the God of grace, and who can tell where the one ends and the other begins?" (8) *Providence runs up into grace, and grace loses itself in providence.*

4. Yea. Also; moreover. **The valley of the shadow of death.** Some dark ravines whose shadows threaten imminent ruin. There are many such in the East, and behind the rocks often the enemy is lurking. This refers not only to the death-bed, but to every great sorrow of life. **I will fear no evil.** Evil will come, and it will hurt me, but I will not fear it, because the grace of God is sufficient for every trial, and (9) *"Our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory."* **Thou art with me.** Seen in providence, heard in Scripture, felt by the heart. **Thy rod and thy staff.** In the East the shepherd always carries a staff, one end of which is often hooked or pointed. With this he catches the sheep if they wander away, beats off the dogs, guides his flock, and punishes those that are stubborn. **They comfort me.** (10) *The government of God brings comfort to the obedient soul, never annoyance.*

5. Thou preparest. Spreadest. **A table.** The psalmist has left the figure of a shepherd now, and is thinking of himself as a pursued wanderer suddenly received by a powerful king as a guest, and abundantly welcomed. **In the presence of my enemies.** They have hunted and hounded him to the gates of the palace, but they can come no nearer, and inside, secure from attacks, he enjoys the rich providence of his royal host. **Thou anointest my head with oil.** Dr. Moll says the sprinkling of the hair and beard in ancient times with sweet-smelling oil preceded the festival meal. **My cup runneth over.** "My mercies are boundless." There is an excess of goodness.

6. Surely. Beyond peradventure. **Goodness and mercy.** Happiness and grace. **All the days of my life.** (11) *God's riches can never be exhausted.*

"E'en down to old age all my people shall prove My sovereign, eternal, unchangeable love; And when hoary hairs shall their temples adorn, Like lambs they shall still on my bosom be borne."

I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever. The first reference of this phrase may be to the tabernacle of God on Mount Moriah. But the deeper meaning is unquestionably here also—the psalmist will remain forever in close relation to his heavenly Father. The scholar should be impressed with the blessed truth that it is only impossible for a saved soul to fall from grace and be ultimately lost by dwelling forever in the house of the Lord, and by living in communion with God.