

## OUR CONTRIBUTORS.

### THE HEAVENLY SHEPHERD.

A SERMON BY HUGH LAMONT, D.D., DALHOUSIE MILLS, ONT.

"The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want."—Ps. xxiii. 1.

To the dweller in this western hemisphere the office or vocation of a shepherd is all but unknown.

In countries, whose topography does not present a succession of glen, mountain, and wild-wood, and wherein the allotted portions of land are necessarily small, and protected by fences, the flock in each enclosure are few in number, and do not require the care of a professional shepherd.

Were it not, therefore, for the description of travellers, Americans, and indeed, a large moiety of the inhabitants of Europe would have but a faint practical idea of the status, and the natural, as well as acquired qualifications, of the eastern shepherd—of such a shepherd as the Psalmist spiritualized, when he poured forth exultingly his soul's full confidence in the Lord.

Although there is something, indefinable by ordinary powers of expression, in the words under consideration, "The Lord is my shepherd," that conveys to the sincere and humble believer, in any spot of earth, a glorious and unqualified trust, an elevating confidence and holy hope in his God and Redeemer, yet it may not be out of place to make a brief inquiry into the nature and consequence of the office of a shepherd, as it existed, and still exists, in Palestine,—in that holy land, wherein dwelt the author of this precious song—himself the Shepherd King of Israel.

One writer says of the Bedouins, "They are essentially a pastoral people; their only riches are their flocks and herds; their home is in the wide desert, and they have no local attachments; they seldom remain above one month in one place, but wander about from well to well." In fact, the life of a Bedouin, his appearance and habits, are precisely the same as those of the Patriarchs of old. Abraham himself, the first of the Patriarchs, was a Bedouin; and four thousand years have not made the slightest alteration in the character and habits of this singular people. Read of the Patriarchs in the Bible, and it is the best description you can have of pastoral life in the east at the present day.

In considering and endeavouring to bring out the full import of the sublime exordium of this Psalm, it seems natural to advert to the frequency wherewith this figure—the comparing of our Lord to a shepherd—is used by the sacred writers, and likewise to the beauty and applicability of the metaphor.

We find Isaiah, the prophet, who spoke more of Jesus Christ than the rest, portraying our Saviour in this wise, "He shall feed His flock like a shepherd" (Is. xl. 11). Jeremiah and Ezekiel also describe Christ as a shepherd; and two of the minor prophets refer to the coming Messiah in the character of a shepherd; and Matthew, in giving a prefiguration of the great and final day of account, says, "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" (Matt. xxv. 32).

In the tenth chapter of John's Gospel we have a beautiful allegory, in which the principal character portrayed is the "Shepherd of the sheep."

How convincingly simple and earnest must all this have been to a people, who were hourly conversant with the duties and cares of a chief shepherd.

It would seem as if God, in His providence, had ordered that the life, occupation, and character of the Bedouin shepherds should remain unchanged, to the end that the Christian world should never be at a loss for the full understanding of those passages, in which the "lambs of the flock" are assured of the love and care with which they are tended.

In order that there might exist no dubiety—no wavering faith as to the identity of the "Chief Shepherd," we find St. Peter exhorting the minor shepherds the pastors of the flock which he was addressing, in these words, "Feed the flock of God"—"and when the Chief Shepherd shall appear ye shall receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away (1 Peter v. 2-4).

Pursue the allegory as to its applicability, and how wondrously does it present to us a lively image of the manner in which our Saviour fulfils the duties of His spiritual pastorate.

The earthly shepherd's duties are to find pasture,

food for those helpless ones committed to his care; and what a plentiful repast of soul-food does the Spiritual Shepherd spread out for His flock! He sees that the tender lambs, just initiated into his fold, are supplied with milk fitted for them. When tired with a journey through a world lying in wickedness He takes them in His arms, and carries them heavenward. He spreads the shield of love and protection over those tender believers, whose faith is not yet strong enough to stand against the buffetings and scornings of the world. Their faith is increased day by day from the rich pastures of His word, by the experience of the saints and patriarchs of old, as they grew in grace, by the comforting assurance of David in his inimitable lays of Zion, and by the precepts and examples of the minor shepherds whom He sets over them.

Do they err in conduct, or wander from the fold? The example of the prodigal son, returned, under the influence of true repentance for sin, to his father's house; the penitent David, humbled in dust and ashes on account of his fearful transgression, seeking mercy and obtaining it; the earnest call, "Turn ye, turn ye, why will ye die," resounding in their ears; and mercy for even the chief of sinners unconditionally promulgated, "Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ," bringing hope and comfort to the weak and erring soul—all alike proclaim that the Chief Shepherd willeth not that any should perish, but that all should turn to Him and live; and, as they grow in grace, how lovingly are they tended, how carefully are they trained into a knowledge of their own distinctive names and duties within the fold. From tender sucklings they become leaders in the flock; they know their names, and are recognized by the Chief Shepherd; their duty is not merely to follow His leadership, but to teach others to obey His call; to instruct those, who, as yet, are not acquainted with the times and seasons when fresh pastures are needed; and they are amply provided in those places, whither the Shepherd willeth to lead them. How gradually, but how surely they go on from strength to strength from one degree of grace unto another; until, finally, they are, when overtaken with worldly sorrows, with present want, or future forebodings of evil, enabled to cry out with the Psalmist, in the very ecstasy of exultant faith, "The Lord is our Shepherd; we shall not want."

Moreover, the assurance conveyed in the second affirmation of the sentence is of mighty import.

In a few short words it conveys a world of comfort to the human soul. With the majority of the sons of Adam the dread of even the want of things temporal is a constant and mind-harassing feeling.

Our daily bread is a matter of paramount importance to the great mass of human beings.

The primeval annunciation, "In the sweat of thy brow thou shalt eat bread," has been fulfilled to the very letter. Millions of the sons of Adam cannot obtain, even by the sweating of their brows, a sufficiency of bread; yet, even among the lowliest of the lowly, men and women have been found, who were, and are, unquestionably members of the same flock with King David, who amid the privations of daily penury and toil, can utter in heartfelt assurance "The Lord is our Shepherd; we shall not want."

The first partakers of divine grace, under the dispensation of the Gospel, were the lowly fishermen of Galilee. The religion of Christ is pre-eminently the religion of the lowly-born. It is not among the high ones of the earth that the brightest triumphs of His grace have been found. Amid trials and temptations, amid sorrow and persecution, down in the caves of the earth, and aloft on the inaccessible mountain-top, the sheep of the Saviour's fold have been enabled to cry in sincerity and truth, "The Lord is our Shepherd; we shall not want;" and to testify by their heroic sufferings to the truth of that religion, which enables the sufferer in the cause of righteousness to taste of the exceeding riches of grace, even when enduring the severest tortures, when tied to the stake, and surrounded with the fires of torment; or stretched on the rack, and their torments multiplied by the mocking exhortations of the myrmidons of Antichrist.

"Shall not want!" How short, how simple the words, yet how strong, how comforting the faith expressed. "Shall not want!" What? Food to eat, and raiment to put on, in times of ordinary trial of the soul's faith; shall not want a covert from the storm, nor a refuge from the tempest, when nature rages and is convulsed in elemental war; but, above

and beyond all things earthly, shall not want consolation and soul-strength, when Satan and his legion emissaries wage demoniac war for the eternal possession of man's immortal existence.

"Shall not want!" After time and all its shadows shall have fled, they shall not want a bright home in heaven,—the great fold of the Chief Shepherd—wherewith His sheep shall pass, "by Him," and laud His name throughout the ages of eternity.

There is no such word as *want* in the vocabulary of heaven; there all is sunshine and enjoyment, and there shall all the sheep and lambs, who are truly of His fold on earth, reign and sing in an everlasting and never ending hallelujah.

There is only one legitimate way of admission into this great and glorious fold: it is only by the door, and under the recognition of the "Chief Shepherd," that the true sheep find access. Goats may, and do get in by the window, and pass among men as sheep, but the "Chief Shepherd" can, and will "separate the sheep from the goats."

Many there are, who know not Christ, but, after the manner of Simon Magus, seek to purchase the Holy Ghost, and secure places in heaven through the influence of money. They build and endow churches, they are exemplary in their waiting on ordinances, and in all outward observances true lambs of the flock; but, just as surely as they have not entered in by the door,—by an humble and unqualified belief in the merits of a crucified Redeemer,—they will be rejected from the joys of the Redeemer.

This is a great point to be always borne in mind by those who seek towards Zion: for, "there is none other name given under heaven, whereby we must be saved, but the name Christ Jesus."

It may be profitable to contemplate briefly the various circumstances and periods, at which different individuals are induced to seek towards heaven, to gain an entrance into the earthly fold of the Redeemer, and secure for themselves an interest in the great atonement.

Some there are who, like Timothy, know the Scriptures from their youth; and through the infinite grace of God, combined with the instructions and example of pious parents, who are themselves sheep of the fold, attain to a saving faith at an early age. Such minds must be capable of entertaining a true estimate without proving it experimentally, of the hollow rottenness of worldly pleasures, and of their utter inadequacy to satisfy the desires and wants of an immortal soul. They are peculiarly favoured of the "Chief Shepherd:" they taste and see that the Lord is gracious, without going through the trying ordeal, which, with all men who are not given over irreclaimably to Satan, eventuates in feeling the utter vanity of all earthly pleasures and possessions, when weighed in the balance with the unsearchable riches of Divine grace.

Some are called within the fold in the very heyday of youth and pleasure: a sudden bereavement, the pining away and dropping into the grave of a beloved associate, the bringing nigh of themselves to the gates of death, or the warning voice of a faithful minister of Jesus calls their attention from the fleeting vanities of time, and teaches them the great lesson, that they have immortal souls, that can only be fed and satisfied with spiritual food.

Others there are, who, by a practical demonstration of the perishable nature of worldly wealth, by the failure of some well-schemed enterprise, see, not only, that they are not on the road that leads to eternal safety, but, that the Chief Shepherd is displeased with them, and are graciously guided and strengthened to seek the strait and narrow way that leadeth to life: to seek and find the door of the fold, which alone affords the true way of entrance upon the Christian pilgrim's path.

And again, there are many, who, only at the eleventh hour, are induced to set their faces seriously towards Zion. They are those, who could not possibly be convinced of the utter worthlessness of the pleasures of the world, but by tasting and proving them in their own individual experience: men of robust body, of daring intellect, of subtle reasoning powers become proud of these natural gifts, and, instead of being humbly thankful for them, amid the hills of science and the depths of philosophy seek to find a satisfying pasture for the cravings of their immortal souls,—and seek in vain.

But, how vain their aspirations! how miserable their delusions! they are forced by the promptings