

ONE FLOCK, ONE SHEPHERD

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It is inevitable that the war that is now convulsing the world must be in the background of our thoughts. We are under a great shadow, and it is of the gravest consequence that we should realize as never before the greater war between right and wrong, between light and darkness—that war which culminated in the crucifixion of the Son of God. The greatest war that ever was fought ended at the cross, and ended in apparently irretrievable disaster! In the midst of the anxiety and sorrow and distress of nations we are here assembled in this bright "sunshine after rain" to dwell for a little while together upon the unity of the one Flock and the one Shepherd. I desire, by the grace of God, to speak to you in the mind and spirit of the Good Shepherd Who laid down His life for the sheep. May there be in the message, if it please God, by the grace of the Holy Spirit, something of the attractiveness of the good, the beautiful Shepherd, Who draws after Him by the irresistible attraction of His love His beautiful flock.

Let us first of all look back to the very beginning of human history, and let us remember that, no sooner had man fallen than God came forth in the character of the Good Shepherd to seek and to save the lost. At that time His flock consisted of only two sheep, and they were both lost. They had no thought of seeking Him; His presence, which before had been their greatest delight, now filled them with shame and terror, and they endeavoured to flee from Him and to hide amongst the trees of the garden. It was not they who sought Him, but it was He Who sought them, and in the character of the Good Shepherd came forth at the very beginning of man's misery to seek and to save the lost. From Genesis to Revelation you have the figure more and more clearly revealed.

THE LIVING GOD AS THE GOOD SHEPHERD.

We do not only see Him in the 10th Chapter of the Gospel according to St. John, as He speaks to us through His incarnate Son—we see Him, if we have eyes, just as clearly all along the course of the Old Testament history. We are so familiar with the 23rd Psalm that we almost forget that it belongs to the Older Dispensation. "The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want. . . . 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."

In Ezekiel 34, the Good Shepherd is as full of Christ's sweet beauty as in St. John 10, for one finds there the thought that God has always, from the foundation of the world, dwelt with mankind through His Son. In the fullness of time He clothed Himself in our nature, and appeared amongst us wearing our own flesh and blood. He tells us in that glorious chapter, St. John 10, that He is the good, the beautiful Shepherd, Who lays down His life for the sheep.

There is no one who revels more in the Word of God, I trust, than I do, but we have reason at times to remember that the English Bible is, after all, only a translation. One of the strangest mistranslations that was ever made, fraught, too, with baneful consequences, is that which is found in St. John 10: 16. In the Old Version, we read: "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." But the Lord Jesus did not say that there would be one fold, one shepherd. There is no question here of learning, for one who knows anything at all of the Greek knows that what He said was this: "Other sheep I have which are not of this fold; them also I must bring, and

they shall hear My voice, and they shall become one flock, one shepherd." There is a vast difference between the fold and the flock—for one thing, the fold is a lifeless thing, however beautiful it may be; the flock is composed of living sheep, in spiritual relationship with the Good Shepherd, knit to Him in living union and communion over which death has absolutely no power!

The Lord Jesus, in speaking of the fold, said: "Other sheep I have which are not of this fold." He was obviously referring to the fold of the Jewish Church, and the other sheep to which He referred were the Gentile sheep—the flock scattered amongst the nations. "Them also I must bring," He said, "and they shall hear My voice,"



Mr. Hare in the Patients' Waiting Room.

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and both Jew and Gentile shall become in Christ Jesus one flock under one Shepherd.

There is danger in this substitution of "the fold" for "the flock." It has caused endless mischief in the Church of Christ, because it has brought before us a false idea. Christ never said that there would be "one fold." He did say that there would be "one flock." One cause of mischief that has arisen in connection with this mistranslation is the confusion of thought in many good people's minds, leading them everlastingly to strive after a church union that shall embrace all those who profess and call themselves Christians in one vast ecclesiastical organization, that shall for ever be the longed-for answer to the Saviour's thrice-uttered prayer in St. John 17: "That we may all be one."

Let us remember that for a thousand years of Christian history, the Church in that sense was practically one. We have heard of the Catholic Church—the unbroken Church of the East and West before the division—but there is no one who

knows anything of Church history who would for a single moment undertake to maintain that that unity was the one for which Christ prayed. I verily believe that the Lord has allowed the Roman communion to be a standing object lesson to all those who have eyes to see that that is not the unity for which He prayed.

It is difficult to make clear the vision that fills both mind and heart. Did or did not the Saviour receive the answer to His cry: "That they all may be one; as Thou, Father, art in Me, and I in Thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that Thou hast sent Me?" Was that prayer answered or was it not? The vast majority of Christians say that it has never been answered, and that our numerous divisions go to prove it, but I would most humbly and reverently maintain that it has been answered from the beginning; from that hour until the present time the Good Shepherd has always had His one flock. No mortal eye can see that one flock, all the wisdom of the wisest men in Christendom to-day could not by any possibility

gather together the members of that one flock, so that we could say, "there they are" with certainty. The flock is scattered through all the ecclesiastical folds, but it is perfectly known to the Good Shepherd. A multitude that no man can number that flock has grown into now. Many of the members are lodged safe in the Good Shepherd's care in Paradise. It is perfectly obvious that all who pass out of this world of sorrow and struggle pass into union with the one flock of the one Shepherd, if they belong to Christ in reality. There is but one flock in Paradise with the Good Shepherd, and to that one flock all belong who are one in Christ Jesus. There is a vast difference between that one flock and what is known as the Catholic Church, those who, after baptism, profess and call themselves Christians.

We are perfectly familiar with what is called the Roman Catholic Church, but the Holy Catholic Church no human eye has ever seen. The reason that we profess our faith in the Holy Catholic Church is because we see it by faith, not by sight. We believe in the Holy Catholic Church, but we do not see it—we believe in the one flock of the one Shepherd, but we do not see that flock. Those who are, therefore, striving to bring about a great united ecclesiastical organization, as if that would be the answer to the Saviour's prayer, and the revelation of the flock that should convince the world that the Redeemer is the Son of God, are indeed under a vain delusion. Even if we could have all who profess and call themselves Christians—Romans, Greeks, Anglicans, Nonconformists—united in one vast ecclesiastical congregation, we know that they would not be the Holy Catholic Church; we know that it would be, according to the Saviour's own Word, composed of wheat and tares, or, to use the figure nearest to our own subject, of sheep and goats, of sheep and wolves in

sheep's clothing. The counterfeit members of the flock are inseparably mixed with the genuine flock all through our earthly progress. We are not waiting for that sort of Christian unity to convince the world that Christ is the Son of God; we had it over one thousand years, and the world was anything but convinced.

When is the world to be convinced by the revelation of the one flock and the one Shepherd that Christ is really the Son of God? When the Shepherd comes with His flock, then will the world be assured that He did not shed His blood in vain. My friends, He is coming, and He may be nearer than we think. There is no one that can say with certainty that He shall not come this very night. If He were to come, what would happen? "In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye," all His beautiful flock would flock to meet Him—from East and West, from North and South, from the living and from the dead, and from all the ecclesiastical folds, the flock would rise to meet the Shepherd with exceeding joy. The Shepherd