

## THE LORD OUR SHEPHERD.

## A SERMON.

BY REV. JOHN MACNEILL.—Psalm xxiii.

On Wednesday evening, dear friends, we sought to prepare ourselves for the Communion by sitting down at the Master's feet—at the feet of our risen Lord, and listening to His own word, as He said to us, His disciples of to-day, the word that He spoke to His disciples on that morning, beside the Lake of Galilee, "Come and dine." I feel that in taking up this sweet spiritual, pastoral Psalm this morning, we are keeping ourselves in line with whatever the Holy Spirit brought to us then, and whatever He may have brought to us since, of what is helpful for a Communion Sabbath in the meditations of our hearts within us. I shall try to be brief, and get to the Table as quickly as possible, for that is the centre of attraction to-day. We long to be there, to cease from man, and to have once more in our hands those precious memorials of the death of the Great Shepherd of the sheep. What shall we say more about this Psalm than has been said already? The finest-minded saints who have ever lived since it was written have exhausted themselves in describing its beauties. All are agreed that this beauty is of a quiet, tender, spiritual type. May we enter into its beauty to-day!

"Oh, may my heart in tune be found,  
Like David's harp of solemn sound."

Sometimes the preacher's voice has to be rough, strong, keen, and somewhat cutting. He has to cry aloud and spare not: to lift up his voice like a trumpet, and to show God's people their transgressions and sins, and warn them, that they be not partakers of coming judgments. But on an occasion like this, and with a Psalm like this, we could wish that we had the tongues of men and of angels. May our whole soul, may our very voice, to-day, like the dyer's hand, be subdued to what it works in! May the Spirit Himself breathe the sweet gracious Psalm into your heart and mind.

The prevailing note that throbs through it all is the Lord's presence with us. There are just two words on which the changes are rung, "I" and "Thou"—"He" and "Me". Martin Luther said that the most of experimental religion lay in the pronouns—the possessive pronouns and the personal ones. Certainly that remark is illustrated by this Psalm, which he again called "a little Bible." I and Thou, He and Me. "The Lord is my Shepherd. He leadeth me. I will fear no evil, for Thou art with me." And just because it is of that quiet kind,

just because it is a stream which, like the waters of Siloah, go softly, the Psalm, I might say, is a test and a touchstone of spirituality—of true spiritual experience. I do not think that Mr. Talkative would like this Psalm. It is too quiet. And I do not think that your argumentative, very logical Christian gets a great deal of marrow and fatness out of this Psalm. I am reminded of what McCheyne said about the Song of Solomon, and I would apply it to this Psalm. He said that the Song of Solomon is such a touchstone because the man who is rather logical in his turn of mind, whose religion is in his head rather than his heart, would not get much good out of it; so I would say that he would not get much good out of this Psalm.

There is logic in it, there is argument in it; but it is not great and solid and massive. There are little links, little argumentative links, which, like hooks of steel, bind the theme into a unity. There is that; but not broadly and strongly and massively, like the piers and spans, shall I say, of the rising Forth Bridge. Then, again, for those who are very fond of the imaginative—the soaring and the fanciful, there is not much here. There is imagination in it, but it is very quiet, very simple. It is a very quiet singing bird, and there are those who are not spiritual at all, who will find far grander flights of imagination in this same Psalm book. There is nothing in literature, for example, for a description of a thunderstorm better than David's great Psalm on that subject, when he describes the rending heavens, and the forests being laid bare, and the Lord's voice upon the waters, and the God of Glory thundering. Here all is very quiet; very subdued. It is the song, very likely, of an aged man, who had been a shepherd, and a courtier, and a king. He had come through great trials, and in his old age is musing much over all these things, and singing to himself this sweet and heavenly melody. It begins, "The Lord is my Shepherd;" and it ends, "I shall dwell in His fold for ever." Ah! to-day, at the Lord's Table, especially do we enjoy it all the more for its sweet, profound simplicity. It is a Psalm of which as you read, you say to yourself, "I might have written that myself: 'that is the touch of genius in it. 'I might have said that myself. Why could not I have said it: 'The Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not want: He makes me to lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside the still waters?' I am sure we all agree with what Henry Ward Beecher has said most beautifully about this exquisite little Psalm. I cannot give the exact words; but here is the substance. "Blessed be the day," he says, "when this