

Our Best.

BY ADA W. FRANK.

We sat in the gathering twilight,
At the close of a short winter's day,
We had laughed and sung and told
stories,
As the daylight had faded away.

"Tell us one more story, dear auntie,"
Begged Mary, the pet of them all,
"We will be so good and so quiet,—
Hurry, quick, before mamma shall call."

So I told them the tale of the hero,
Who from out Lake Michigan's wave,
Had saved near a score of his fellows
From the fate of a watery grave.

And when his strength was exhausted,
Kind hands raised him up as one
dead;
With the spark of life yet remaining—
"Did I do my best?" he said.

A deep silence followed my story.
Then the children all ran out to tea,
Saw Mary, who lingered a moment—
"My best,—I promise," said she.

'Twas a morning in early summer,
When the cry of "Fire!" rent the air,
"Tis the schoolhouse! O God, save the
children!"
Shrieked the mothers, near crazed with
despair.

At last in my arms they placed Mary,
So burned and mangled and sore,
I just did my best, darling auntie;
Oh, tell me, could I have done more?

"I did what I could to save her,
That blind little Margaret West;
I carried"—the sweet voice grew fainter—
"Are you sure that I did my best?"

And I thought of that other Mary,
Whose life was a lesson for good;
Whose crown was the words of the
Saviour:
"For she hath done what she could."

THE GOOD SHEPHERD.

BY THE EDITOR.

Over and over again, among the shepherds of Palestine, have I seen striking illustrations of the beautiful passages in Isaiah 40. 11, "He shall feed his flock like a shepherd; he shall gather the lambs with his arm, and carry them in his bosom, and shall gently lead those that are with young;" and of Psalm 80. 1, "Give ear, O Shepherd of Israel, thou that leadest Joseph like a flock." In the loose folds of the abba, or outer garment, the weak or weary lambs are still tenderly carried, almost as a mother would carry her babe, as shown in our cut.

I remember once seeing a shepherd with seemingly intense solicitude counting his flock as they were folded by night. As this is not always done, it would seem that he was fearful that one of them had gone astray. It brought vividly to my mind the beautiful passage, "If a man have an hundred sheep, and one of them be gone astray, doth he not leave the ninety and nine, and goeth into the mountains, and seeketh that which is gone astray?"

"There were ninety and nine that safely lay

In the shelter of the fold,
But one was out on the hills away,
Far from the gates of gold—
Away on the mountains wild and bare,
Away from the tender Shepherd's care.

"Lord, thou hast here thy ninety and nine:

Are they not enough for thee?
But the Shepherd made answer: "This of mine
Has wandered away from me:
And altho' the road be rough and steep,
I go to the desert 'o find my sheep."

No words in any literature of any land are more beautiful and touching than those in that sweet Hebrew idyl of which the world will never grow tired, the twenty-third Psalm. Lipped by the pallid lips of the dying, throughout the ages, it has strengthened their hearts as they entered the valley of the shadow of death. To it also our Lord lends a deeper tenderness by the parable of the Lost Sheep. Small wonder that to the persecuted flock of Christ in every time, to the Church in the Catacombs, to the little flock in the midst of ravening wolves, to the harried Covenanters, to the multitude "of whom the world was not worthy, who wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins, being destitute, afflicted, tormented,"—small wonder that this was the favourite type of that unwearying Love that sought the erring and wandering and brought them to his fold again. This symbol very happily sets forth the

entire scope of Christian doctrine. It illustrates the sweet pastoral representations of man's relationship to the Shepherd of Israel who leadeth Joseph like a flock and his individual dependence upon him who is the Shepherd and Bishop of all souls. But it especially illustrates the character and office of our Lord, and the many passages of Scripture in which he represents himself as the Good Shepherd, who forsook his eternal throne to seek through the wilderness-world the lost and wandering sheep, to save whom he gave his life that he might bring them to the evergreen pastures of heaven. "No animals," says Dr. Thompson, "are more helpless than sheep that have strayed from the flock. They become utterly bewildered, for sheep are singularly destitute of the bump of locality. This peculiarity seems to be implied in the confession and prayer of the Psalmist. "I have gone astray like a lost sheep; seek thy servant." The strange expression in Micah 7. 14, "Feed thy people with thy rod, the flock of thine heritage," alludes to the shepherd's crook or staff, which he invariably carries. It is often bent or hooked at one end, which gave rise to the crook or crozier of the Christian bishop. With this the Shepherd guides the flock and defends them

3. The Good Shepherd, v. 11-16.

Time.—Probably A.D. 29.

Place.—Probably the immediate vicinity of Jerusalem.

Rulers.—Herod in Galilee, Pilate in Judea.

Connecting Links.—This parable is closely connected with an address on blindness which Jesus preached after curing the blind man and warning the multitude against the Pharisees as blind leaders of the blind.

LESSON HELPS.

1. "The sheepfold"—Usually a stone-walled inclosure, with a well-roofed pen at one end. "A thief"—What we would call a "sneak thief." "A robber"—A brigand.

2. "Entereth in by the door"—The shepherd must enter the same way as his flock. "There is not one salvation for the teacher and another for the taught." The seventh verse tells us that Jesus is "the door."

3. "Calleth his own sheep by name"—Asiatic sheep readily distinguish the voice of their shepherd, and sometimes each sheep has a name of his own, and knows it.

4. "They know his voice"—The true disciple lives in fellowship with the Mas-

ter to us in holy things." "A hireling" is he that serves for hire merely, and uses the church to forward his secular interests. "Whose own the sheep are not"—Who does not feel a personal responsibility for the sheep. "The wolf"—Any sudden emergency or danger. "Fleeth"—Deserts his sacred trust.

14. "Know my sheep"—Know their ever; trial, weakness, hope, and fear, all the vicissitudes of their experience. "Known of mine"—Trusted in fully.

16. "Other sheep I have"—His sincere but unsheltered followers in heathen lands. "One fold"—This should read "one flock." All alike must be brought into Christian fellowship.

HOME READINGS.

M. Christ the good Shepherd.—John 10. 1-10.

Tu. Christ the good Shepherd.—John 10. 11-18.

W. Safety of the sheep.—John 10. 19-31.

Th. Hireling shepherds.—Ezek. 34. 1-10.

F. Seeking and feeding.—Ezek. 34. 11-16.

S. Safe folding.—Ezek. 34. 22-31.

Su. My Shepherd.—Psalm 23.

QUESTIONS FOR HOME STUDY.

1. The Sheepfold, v. 1-6.

Who is here called a thief and a robber?

Who is the shepherd of the sheep?
Who at once know the shepherd?
Whom does he know by name?
Why do the sheep follow the shepherd?
Whom will they not follow, and why?
How well was he understood?

2. The Door of the Sheep, v. 7-10.

Who is the Door of the sheep?
What were they who came before him?
What would they find who entered the true door?

3. The Good Shepherd, v. 11-16.

Who is the Good Shepherd? Golden Text.

How did he show that he was such?
How does the hireling act when in danger?

Why does the hireling fly?
What knowledge marks the Good Shepherd?

What says Jesus about other sheep?

Jesus, in the lesson, tells what he is like. He is not like a thief, who comes climbing into the fold, but he is the one who owns the fold, or the safe place where the sheep are kept, and when they go out he goes before, as a good shepherd



"HE SHALL GATHER THE LAMBS WITH HIS ARM AND CARRY THEM IN HIS BOSOM."

from their enemies. It is to this that David alludes in the twenty-third Psalm, "Thy rod and thy staff, they comfort me."

The shepherd in the East is generally the owner, or son of the owner, of the flock; or if it be the property of some rich man or village sheikh, he is paid, not by a day's service, but by a fixed proportion of the produce, that is, the lambs, the wool and the cheese. The "hireling" is the man who happens to be hired for fixed wages merely for a day, who is not interested in the flock, nor cares to risk his skin for its defence. Hence, "the hireling fleeth, because he is an hireling, and careth not for the sheep."—John 10. 13.

LESSON NOTES.

FIRST QUARTER.

STUDIES IN THE GOSPEL BY JOHN.

LESSON XII—MARCH 19.

CHRIST THE GOOD SHEPHERD.

John 10. 1-16. Memory verses, 14-16.

GOLDEN TEXT.

I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep.—John 10. 11.

OUTLINE

1. The Sheepfold, v. 1-6.
2. The Door of the Sheep, v. 7-10.

ter and hears his voice speaking in the silences of the soul.

5. "A stranger"—One of the "thieves and robbers." "Will flee from him"—Travellers in the East have often noticed that when they attempt to call the flock, using the words of the shepherd, the sheep will run from them.

6. "They" (the Pharisees) "understood not"—Their notions of the dignity of the priests and rabbis and the insignificance of the common people were radically different from the Christian conception of "pastor" and "flock."

7. "I am the door"—"Whosoever cometh to preach any other gospel comes to rob the sheep of their Saviour and salvation."

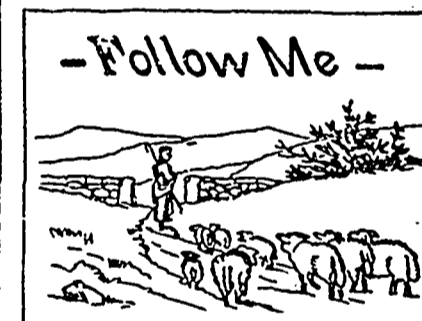
8. "Before me"—Claiming precedence in rank or authority over me. "Robbers"—The Pharisees, who held Jesus in contempt because he belonged not to their schools, were brigands, ready to raven the flock of Christ.

9. "I am the door"—There is no other door. "Pasture"—Food for the spiritual nature.

10. The "thief" is the enemy of souls, whether as the false teacher, the persecutor, or the opposer of the Gospel.

11. "The good shepherd"—Our beautiful and bountiful Care-taker and Provider. "Giveth his life"—Jesus sacrificed his life by living as really as he did by dying.

12. "He that is a hireling"—This does not mean, "he that is hired." The Bible tells us that "the labourer is worthy of his hire," and it is right and dutiful to pay wages to the men of God who "min-



would, to lead and to clear the way. The sheep that belong to the shepherd will follow him, Jesus says, for they know his voice. Now, even little lambs can tell the shepherd's voice, and little children, who are the Saviour's lambs, know when he speaks to them in their hearts; they can tell what Jesus wants them to do, and they can follow, too, as well as the sheep, which means the grown-up people.

We will spell out what our Shepherd is like, using the letters in the word for the beginning of other words, so:

Our Shepherd

S eeks us out,
H elps us,
E ases us,
P ities us,
H olds us fast,
E nfold us,
R estores us,
D ied for us.

We never would know the way to the heavenly fold if Jesus did not seek us out. We never could get there alone, but he helps us. He is so sorry for our weakness, and pities us so when we are sorry and sinful, or in any need at all, that surely we know he loves us dearly. He held us fast. The Shepherd Psalm, the twenty-third, says, "He restoreth my soul." Then our Shepherd died for us. "The good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep."

What kind of sheep and lambs does Jesus do all this for?

Timid sheep; forgetful sheep; weak sheep; wandering sheep.

Oh, how good our Shepherd is! We never can pay him, but we can please him. So let us love, trust, and follow the Good Shepherd.