

HYMN OF PRAISE.

Nearer, my God, to Thee,—
 I cannot be ;
 Christ's blood hath made me nigh,
 Praise, praise to Thee !
Now blest in Christ Thy Son,
 Thy love to Him my own,
 This shall be still my song,
 Praises to Thee !

Pilgrim and stranger here,
 I journey on ;
 Upward my heart now turns,
 Heaven is my home ;
 Thy love constraining still,
 Henceforth to do Thy will ;
 Praises my spirit fill,
 All praise to Thee !

Now, let my walk and ways,
 More Christ-like be ;
 Ever delighting in
 His love to me :—
 Till I shall see His face,
 Owing Thy sovereign grace,
 That brought me to this place—
 Nearness to Thee.

Lessons, on desert sands,
 Now taught by Thee ;
 Causes my heart to sing,
 More praise to Thee !
 Trials thus sent do bless,
 Partaking Thy holiness,
 Peaceful fruits of righteousness,
 Bring praise to Thee.

Sweet is the blessed hope
 Given us by Thee ;
 Glory with Him who died,
 On Calv'ry's tree !
 Oh ! what a song we'll raise,
 Singing His worthy praise,
 When on Himself we gaze—
 And like Him be !

“ AT THAT TIME JESUS ANSWERED. ”

There is one, and only one, life that ever gave forth its unvarying answer to God.

If we think of a David, Jehovah's anointed king over the hosts of Israel, we have in sorrow to read : “ It came to pass . . . at the time when kings go forth to battle, . . . David tarried still at Jerusalem. ” That is to say, he gave up conflict ; and, having so done, we have the record of the sad sequel.

Later on, in the checkered history of that favoured people, we read of another of their kings, Josiah by name, who, in the eighth year of his reign, while he was yet young, began to seek after the God of David his father ; in the twelfth, to purge Judah and Jerusalem from idolatry ; and in the eighteenth, to repair the house of Jehovah his God, displaying great energy as to the keeping of the passover. But, turning to the next page of his history, what meets the eye ? “ *After all this* (2 Chron. xxxv. 20), the one who, at eight years of age, declined neither to the right hand nor to

the left, who from that tender age was characterized as one that sought after the God of David his father, consequently setting his face against idolatry even to the purging of the land and the house ; until, in the eighteenth year of his reign, having cared for the house of Jehovah his God, the passover is kept on the fourteenth day of the first month, and there was no passover like to that kept in Israel from the day of Samuel the prophet ; neither did ail the Kings of Israel keep such a passover as Josiah kept, and the priests, and the Levites, and all Judah and Israel that were present, and the inhabitants of Jerusalem ;—"after all this," of such an one it has to be recorded, that he goes out in a conflict unwarranted by Jehovah his God ; and (as with David, so with Josiah) down he falls. David failing to maintain conflict at the time of conflict, "at the time when kings go forth to battle ;" and Josiah becoming involved in a conflict that brought him into variance with God Himself. (2 Chron. xxxv. 21, 22.) And such is the blotted, besmeared history of the first man, look at it where we may.

Beloved ! what volumes do those three words, "after all this," speak to one's heart ! If perchance, through grace, a measure of steadiness may have marked our pathway hitherto, while many leaders have fallen, what sorrow, if after so much grace shewn us, the Spirit of God should have to write an "after all this" in our history, to chronicle our declension of *heart* (for surely that

is where declension has its start) as exhibited in our ways. Assuredly it is a time of "going forth to battle," "earnestly to contend," "strong in the Lord and in the power of His might." And the conflict has to be maintained, until with a Paul we are given to say: "I have fought the good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith; henceforth"—not conflict, but—"the crown." But if on the other hand we are found meddling with the world in one way or another, even it may be with the view of setting it to rights (as Josiah got involved, as we have seen, with Egypt's King); just as Josiah was brought down under the forces of Egypt, so will we succumb to the forces of the world, and its prince.

"After all this," what a relief to the sorrowful heart to turn to the record of that *one* life which in all its minute details met the eye of God, and was well pleasing to Him.

A King truly, yea, the King of Israel (and never had such an one been presented to Israel before); but what glories come before our eyes in the perusal of the pages of *His* sojourn. And, look at His pathway where we may, it is only to discover the unvarying answer to God, not from His lips only, but, in every look of His eye, in His every footstep, yea, in every movement of His heart and hand.

View Him for a moment in Matt. xi.—a King truly, as we have said, but without a kingdom—despised and rejected of His subjects, His testimony

and His mighty works unheeded. What then? "At that time, Jesus answered and said: I thank Thee, O Father." "Answered" to what, beloved, or rather to whom, seeing there was no *audible* voice at the moment? Ah! but here as elsewhere. He recognizes, in circumstances in themselves most untoward, His Father's voice and answers to God in all.

Or if, with adoring reverence, we view Him hanging on the tree, what is it to find? That, while in all the bitterness of that moment, He owns Himself the forsaken One, forsaken of God; yet, in unswerving fidelity, He owns the One who had forsaken Him: "*My God, my God.*" And the very question He raises in the hour of the travail of His soul, He waits not for His God to give the answer to—but, *in all that sorrow*, He Himself answers it, and in answering it, answers to God, and (blessed be His glorious name for ever!) answers to God *for us*. (Psalm xxii. 3.)

Beloved saints of God, what a voice has all this for us! We each, in our individual pathway, have been encountering untoward circumstances, sorrows and trials; but has there been in all, from our hearts and lips, the answering to God?

The Blessed One, who in revealing the Father to us has given us rest, has also graciously made known to us how these—in themselves—commonplace, every day, lives of ours, can yield to the Father the answer our hearts would delight to render; even by taking His yoke upon us and

learning of Him, the One meek and lowly in heart, and thus finding rest unto our souls day by day under His easy yoke.

Ah! Beloved, have we thought of what it is to be under the yoke of Christ?

In 2 Cor. vi. 14-16, we will find a yoke of a very different character described, upon which we will not at present dwell, but simply learn from these verses that a yoke involves: fellowship, communion, concord, part and agreement. So that if I am under the yoke of Christ, I actually enjoy

Fellowship,	} with Christ ;—
Communion,	
Concord,	
Part,	
Agreement,	

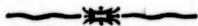
and if so, will not a life, filled with what that gracious yoke brings with it, give forth its answer to God, be the surroundings of that life what they may? Mark! no sooner are we under His yoke than He turns the eye to Himself—"learn of *Me*."

Soon, beloved, we shall have done with the conflict and shall have received the crown; but, in that scene of glory, what is it that will cause us to fall down before the Lamb? Oh! not because *we* have answered to God throughout the pathway here, but listen. A strong angel doing God's commandment raises a question to which *no one in heaven, nor in earth, neither under the earth*, can give answer. Ah! but while a

strong angel proclaims the question, a ransomed sinner ("one of the elders") it is that points to the only One who can answer it. And who is this only worthy One? Oh! who but the meek and lowly King of Matthew xi.—who "at that time" answered, and who now in all that blaze of glory alone can come forward—"the Lion of the tribe of Juda, the Root of David," "a Lamb as it had been slain," He it is who alone—even in heaven, as on earth—can ever give answer to God. He alone—who, as the slain Lamb, sustained the judgments of God—can take the book and execute those judgments.

Oh! "weep not" (Rev. v. 5) then, over what God has to write upon man, whether on earth, or in heaven; but, in the life, the death, the resurrection, the ascension, the present place and offices, and the coming glories of that Blessed One—trace with adoring heart the One, and one only unvarying answer to God.

View it yet again when millennial glories are filling the earth—God's King swaying the sceptre, and—forever, in the eternity that lies beyond, when all things shall have been brought into subjection to Him, and the Son also Himself subject unto Him that put all things under Him, thus giving His eternal answer to the Father, having as its eternal fruit: "God," "all in all."



"The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want."

THE GOOD SHEPHERD.

(Read John x. 1-18 ; 25-30.)

How sweet and precious to the heart, and profitable to the soul, of the believer, to search out and meditate upon any of the characters in which the Lord Jesus comes before us, as recorded by the Holy Spirit, in the word of God. Perhaps there is none more so than that of "The Shepherd."

First, let us see what the significance of that title is, apart from any qualifying word as "good," "great," "chief," which we find used in connection with shepherd, and applied to our Lord, and which we will consider farther on; for in ver. 10, He speaks of Himself as "The Shepherd of the sheep." In Genesis xlv. 34, we read: "Every shepherd is an abomination unto the Egyptians." Does this not furnish us with the clue? Egypt is the type of the world in its natural state, from which the people of God are delivered. A shepherd then is a position despised by the world. Is not that a suitable description of the place that the blessed Lord Jesus took on coming into this world? "He is despised and rejected of men . . . we hid as it were our faces from Him; He was despised, and we esteemed Him not" (Is. liii. 3. See also Is. xlix. 7; Ps. xxii. 6; lxix. 7, 12; Matt. ii. 23; Phil. ii. 7, 8, etc.). How all the incidents connected with His birth into this world

were in keeping with this. Born in a manger because there was no room for Him in the great Inn of this world Was it not also in perfect harmony with this, that, when heaven would announce His birth, those who were selected to hear the "good tidings of great joy" were, not the great people of the world in that day, but "shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flocks by night"? The despised ones of the world, in the simple discharge of their duties. No soul taught of God, but will exclaim, "How suitable!" It is worthy of notice that the Lord Jesus does not speak of Himself as shepherd till he was cast out by the religious world as we see in chap. viii. 59.

If we desire to understand the Lord's teaching on the subject before us; and in any measure to appreciate the beauty of what He brings out, we must divest ourselves of our western notions of a shepherd's life and of everything not in accordance with the Scriptures and the habits of those eastern countries where the events recorded took place.

A sheepfold was a roofless enclosure with a high wall into which the shepherd took the sheep at night to protect them from the attacks of robbers and wild beasts. Judaism was, in one of its aspects, a fold,* being an earthly system of religion

*It is well known to nearly every careful reader of Scripture that the second occurrence of the word "fold," in verse 16, should be "flock," being a different word in the original.

adapted to man in the flesh. The door is the appointed means of entrance to a place. So Jesus entered the Jewish fold by the appointed way. All that Scripture had foretold of the Messiah, He fulfilled. He entered by the door. Now they did not, as is customary in these parts, drive the sheep nor use dogs. Genesis xxxi. 38-40 and Luke ii. 8, give us some idea of a shepherd's life ; showing us that they were with their flocks night and day. What an exquisite picture we have in Isaiah xl. 11 of a shepherd's care. Every little lamb that was born had a name given to it, and when the shepherd wanted any one he simply called it by its name, and it came to him. What vividness and force all this gives to our Lord's words in these verses in John x. How the shepherd being night and day with the sheep, etc., brings before us the unremitting care of Him who, having loved His own which were in the world, He loved them unto the end, knowing each one from its birth, calling it by its name (read Rev. ii. 17), tending, feeding, yea, all that *such* a Shepherd can and does do for His sheep. Oh ! dear reader, how far are your heart and mine enjoying this, and giving Him credit for it all ; and in the confidence which all His love and care should give, and which delights His heart, " casting *all* our care upon Him for He careth for us " (1 Pet. v. 7). How many thoughts suggest themselves to the soul as one ponders over such a subject, and how we realize in some measure the truth of those words, " My

meditation of Him shall be sweet ; I will be glad in the Lord " (Ps. civ. 34).

I pass on, however, to the first of the three qualifying words which are used in Scripture in connection with the title "Shepherd," as applied to the Lord, viz ; "*Good.*" Not a heart that knows His love but echoes, Amen ; and when we find it is used in connection with the cross and giving His life for the sheep (vs. 11, 14, 15), the soul is prostrate before Him in adoration and worship.

" Our sins were laid on His sacred head,
 The curse by our Lord was borne ;
 For us a victim our Saviour bled,
 And endured the death of scorn ;
 HIMSELF He gave our poor hearts to win—
 (Was ever love, Lord, like Thine ?)
 From the paths of folly, and shame, and sin,
 And fill them with joys divine."

In Heb. xiii. 20, 21, we find the Lord Jesus, when "brought again from the dead" (resurrection power), spoken of as the "*Great Shepherd* of the sheep." There seems to be an allusion to Ezek. xxxvii. 24. In both passages, it seems to me, the connection is with leading into the path of obedience those once characterized by self-will, see Isaiah liii. 6.

Lastly, when ascended to the glory, He is spoken of as the "*Chief Shepherd*" (1 Pet. v. 4). From that position, He not only watches over His own night and day, but also appoints under-

shepherds, as we see in Ephes. iv. 8-11, where the word translated "pastors" is that usually rendered "shepherd." In 1 Pet. v. 1-4, Peter (or rather the Holy Spirit by him) gives both instruction and warning to those whom the Chief Shepherd has called to act as under-shepherds. In ver. 2, he says to them, "Feed (or rather "shepherd" or "tend," for a shepherd has other things to do as well as feed) *the flock of God.*" In these words we are reminded that there is only one flock (see John x. 16, and note on page 209) and that the flock is God's and not man's. He goes on, "taking the oversight, not by constraint, but willingly." Constraint from man is not allowed, and yet there is a constraint that is according to the mind of God. Read 2 Cor. v. 14, 15, and John xxi. 15-17. A similar line of thought is in both passages. In the former, "The love of Christ *constraineth* us." In the latter, when Peter, in answer to the Lord's question, "Lovest thou Me, etc." says, "Yea, Lord; Thou knowest that I love Thee," he is enjoined by the Lord, "Feed my lambs" (ver. 15), "Shepherd My sheep" (ver. 16), "Feed My sheep" (ver. 17). When the sense of the Lord's love is in power in the heart, it makes that one "willing." Peter then goes on to say, "not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind." How this recalls what the Lord said in John x. 12, 13, where He speaks of one that looks after the sheep for stipulated wages ("the hireling").

In ver. 3, Peter continues: "Neither as lords

over God's heritage, but being ensamples to the flock." Now this takes us back to a scene where Peter was present, recorded Mark x. 34-45. The sons of Zebedee had sought the best places in the kingdom for themselves, and the ten were displeased at them. The Lord uses the occasion to warn them against the spirit that obtains in the world; "Ye knew that they which are accounted to rule over the Gentiles exercise lordship over them but so shall it not be among you and whosoever of you will be the chiefest, shall be servant of all." He then brings Himself, and His own path before them, as the great "Ensample of the flock," "For even the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give His life a ransom for many."

What a contrast the "Good Shepherd" presents to the other, that "will come in his own name" (John v. 43), the anti-christ spoken of in Zech. xi. 17 as the "idol (worthless) shepherd"! And through what is said of him in the previous verse (16) we get by contrast valuable instruction as to the proper duties of a true shepherd. I append a literal translation of the verse, as it brings out the meaning with greater distinctness :

"For lo, I am raising up a shepherd in the land,
 The cut-off he doth not inspect,—
 The wanderer (or 'strayed one') he doth not
 seek,
 And the broken he doth not heal,

The standing he doth not sustain (or 'complete'),

And the flesh of the fat he doth eat,

And their hoofs he doth break off."

Fellow believer, let us ponder over all this and take it to heart, and seek grace from the Lord to be faithful amid the surrounding unfaithfulness.

Let us also keep before us what Peter says in ver.

4 to encourage faithfulness to *such* a Master ;

"And when the chief Shepherd shall appear, ye shall receive the (not "a" but "the") crown of glory that fadeth not away."

"Yet a little while, and He that shall come will come, and will not tarry."



MEDITATIONS ON THE BOOK OF JUDGES.

(Continued from page 200.)



Difficulties and snares in service.

(Chap. viii. 1-23.)

The moment that we set out to walk with God, and to bear testimony for Him, we may be sure of finding all sorts of difficulties in our path. In the preceding chapter, Gideon and his three hundred companions encountered some. Their conflict was not without suffering, for they had to forego their pleasures and comforts, only taking so much refreshment by the way as would enable

them to attain their object. Chapter viii. shows us other ways in which they had to suffer.

The men of Ephraim contended with Gideon. In the time of Deborah they had been in the post of honour (chap. v. 14), but since then there had been declension, and Gideon, taught of God, had not summoned them; they were fallen to the second rank. This distinction made them jealous of what Jehovah had entrusted to their companions, jealous of the energy of faith and of its results to the others. "Why hast thou served *us* thus?" (ver. 1.) Ephraim, preoccupied with his own importance, thinks of himself instead of thinking of God. This is a frequent source of strife between brethren, and such contentions are far more painful and trying than conflict with the world. It is precious to see the man of God pass through this difficulty in the power of the Spirit. The book of Judges gives us three examples of similar contentions: the case of Gideon, that of Jephthah, and that of the eleven tribes against Benjamin. Here trouble was avoided, and a breach prevented. Later on, it was not so. When altercations arise among Christians, deep humility is their only resource. Gideon had learned this in the school of God, as the preceding chapters relate, so that it was not difficult for him to realize on this occasion how to act. God had made him understand that the courage and strength which he had, did not emanate from himself; and that, in itself, the sword of Gideon was worth as little as a cake of barley

bread. And so, in the presence of Ephraim, the servant that Jehovah had used for this great deliverance, took care not to speak of himself. He devoted his attention to what God had done by the hands of his brethren. "What have I done now," said he, "in comparison of you? Is not the gleaning of the grapes of Ephraim better than the vintage of Abiezer?" He took the lowest place and acknowledged the zeal for God which, after all, they had shown to their honour; and the humility of this servant of God is thus the means of removing a great difficulty. Let us act in a similar way, and, when we speak of our brethren, let us enumerate, not their failures, but what God has wrought in them. Can I not admire Christ in my brother when I see how God is dealing with him, breaking him down so that, at all costs, what characterized the Lord may be manifested in Him? Nothing so appeases contention as seeing Christ in others; it is the result of a normal Christian condition in the children of God.

Gideon and his companions encountered a second difficulty far more trying than the previous one. They were "faint yet pursuing," experiencing, as to the outward man, that daily perishing, which is the portion of believers in their testimony, at the same time pressing forward so as to reach the goal, cost what it may (2 Cor. iv. 16; Phil. iii. 12).

They reached Succoth, a city of Israel which belonged to the tribe of Gad. Succoth rejected

them, refusing even to give them bread. There was thus, in the midst of the people of God, an entire city, bearing the name of Israel, which had renounced all corporate responsibility with those who bore testimony for Jehovah. They said, "Are the hands of Zebah and Zalmunna now in thine hand, that we should give bread unto thine army?" They had confidence in the enemy, and would not compromise themselves by taking part with Israel. There are many in the present day who bear the name of Christ, and yet seek the friendship of and alliance with the world; who, through fear of compromising themselves, make common cause with our enemies, increasing the difficulties of the way for believers, and hindering them from being overcomers. It need not surprise us that a righteous indignation does not stop us in the way to chastise this spirit. Our hearts, like Gideon's, should be wholly in the conflict. The man of God kept on his way; the infamous conduct of Penuel no more arrests him than that of Succoth. Everything in its time for God's witness. Satan seeks to bring in confusion as to this, so as to make obstacles for us. Zebah and Zalmunna must not be allowed to escape; the judgment of the rebellious cities will be executed later. On his return, the man of God exercised discipline in the assembly of Israel, and "cut off the wicked," for God would be dishonoured were evil tolerated in the assembly.

I am not sure that I have sufficiently noticed, in

all this history, the way in which the two characteristics, humility and energy of faith, were united in Gideon. Energy, to gather and purify the people for battle and for pursuit of the enemy; humility, which delivered from all self-confidence and led to implicit reliance on Jehovah. And yet it was on the side which seemed to have the least need of watchfulness, that the enemy was about to lay a snare for him, finally bringing about the moral ruin of this eminent leader in Israel.

The vanquished kings were not sparing in their praise of Gideon (ver. 18-21), which was all the more dangerous because there was apparently no interested motive. He asked them, "What manner of men were they whom ye slew at Tabor? And they answered, "As thou art, so were they; each one *resembled the children of a king.*"

Let us distrust the flattery of the world. A moment's reflection before the Lord would tell us, that the world flatters to enfeeble us, and to deprive us of the weapons with which we fight against it.

It does not appear as if Gideon was turned aside from God's path by this speech, but he seems to have lost a true sense of the power of the enemy, and to have despised rather than feared it. This was not the case with Joshua when he made prisoners of the five kings (Josh. x. 22-27). Far from underrating the strength of the enemy in the eyes of the men of Israel, he said to them: "Come near, put your feet upon the necks of these kings;"

then he added : " Fear not, nor be dismayed, be strong and of good courage ; " so much did he realize at the same time the power of the world and the strength of Jehovah. Two things become us when we are fighting with the enemy—fear and trembling as to ourselves ; and full assurance as to God, excluding all alarm, for we know that Satan and the world are vanquished foes. Gideon realized these things imperfectly. He entrusted to his son Jether, the task of killing these two kings. " But the youth drew not his sword, for he *feared.*" In chap. vii., Jehovah had separated those who were afraid and withdrawn them from the conflict. Here Gideon, committing to a child the destruction of an enemy he despised, did not act in keeping with the ways of God, who does not call those that are but children in the faith to perform publicly brilliant actions ; a child goes to school and not to war.

Then those kings said : " Rise thou, and fall upon us ; for *as the man is, so is his strength.*" A fresh flattery, against which Gideon ought to have protested, for he had learned a totally different lesson in the school of God. In reality, his strength was exactly the opposite to that which was of man. Did he not know it when the angel of Jehovah said to him (the least of his father's house), " Go in this thy might ? " Had he not realized it on that solemn night when God had revealed to him, that a cake of barley bread was about to overthrow all the tents of Midian ?

In his better days, Gideon would not have accepted this flattery, nor have allowed the adversary to plant a germ of self-confidence in his heart.

But we see him exposed to a fresh snare (ver. 22-23). It is no longer the flattery of the world, but that of the people of God. The men of Israel said unto Gideon : " Rule thou over us, both thou and thy son and thy son's son also, for *thou* hast delivered us from the hand of Midian." They put their leader in the place of Jehovah and offer him the sceptre. " Rule thou over us." None are more prone to clericalism than the people of God. It is not only the bane of Christendom, it is also the innate tendency of the natural heart of believers. The fact of ministry being blessed is apt to lead us to make of the servant a " minister" in the human sense, thus losing sight of God. By the grace of God, the faith of Gideon escaped this danger. He said resolutely, " I will not rule over you, neither shall my son rule over you ; *Jehovah shall rule over you.*" The object of his ministry was that God should have the pre-eminence and lose nothing of His authority over His people.

(*To be continued, D. V.*)



" God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble. Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time." —1 Pet. v. 5, 6.