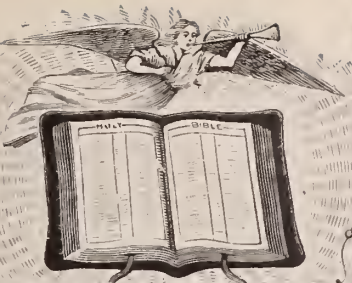


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Re. T. De Witt Talmage, D.D., Editor.

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THE BAZAAR OF THE COPPERSMITHS, CAIRO, EGYPT. (See page 172.)

THE METROPOLITAN PULPIT



THE GOOD SHEPHERD.

A Sermon by Rev. T. DeWitt Talmage, D.D., on the Text: Psalms 23: 1, . . . The Lord is my Shepherd.

WHAT with post and rail fences, and our pride in Southdown, Astrakhan, and Flemish varieties of sheep, there is no use now of the old-time shepherd. Such an one had abundance of opportunity of becoming a poet, being out-of-doors twelve hours the day, and oft-times waking up in the night on the hills. It the stars, or the torrents, or the sun, or the flowers had anything to say, he was very apt to hear it. The Ettrick Shepherd of Scotland, who afterwards took his seat in the brilliant circle of Wilson and Lockhart, got his wonderful poetic inspiration in the ten years in which he was watching the flocks of Mr. Laidlaw. There is often a sweet poetry in the rugged prose of the Scotch shepherd. One of these Scotch shepherds lost his only son, and he knelt down in prayer, and was overheard to say, "O Lord, it has seemed good in thy providence to take from me the staff of my right hand at the time when to us sand-blind mortals I seemed to be most in need of it; and how I shall climb up the hill of sorrow and auld age without it, thou mayst ken, but I dunna."

David, the shepherd-boy, is watching his father's sheep. They are pasturing on the very hills where afterward a Lamb was born of which you have heard much. "The Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world," David, the shepherd-boy, was beautiful, brave, musical, and poetic. I think he often forgot the sheep in his reveries. There in the solitude he struck the harp-string that is thrilling through all ages. David, the boy, was gathering the material for David the poet, and David the man. Like other boys, David was fond of using his knife among the saplings, and he had noticed the exuding of the juice of the tree; and when he became a man, he said, "The trees of the Lord are full of sap." David, the boy, like other boys, had been fond of hunting the birds' nests, and he had driven the old stork off the nest to find how many eggs were under her; and when he became a man, he said, "As for the stork, the fir-trees are her house." In boyhood he had heard the terrific thunder-storm that frightened the red deer into premature sickness; and when he became a man, he said, "The voice of the Lord maketh the fawns to calve." David, the boy, had lain upon his back looking up at the stars and examining the sky, and to his boyish imagination the sky seemed like a piece of divine embroidery, the divine fingers working in the threads of light and the beads of stars; and he became a man and wrote, "When I consider thy heavens, the work of thy fingers." When he became an old man, thinking of the goodness of God, he seemed to hear the bleating of his father's sheep across many years, and to think of the time when he tended them on the Bethelien hills, and he cries out in the text, "The Lord is my shepherd."

It God will help me, I will talk to you of the shepherd's plaid, the shepherd's crook, the shepherd's dogs, the shepherd's pasture, the sheep, and the shepherd's flocks. And first, the shepherd's plaid: It would be a curious thing for a man going out to rough and lonely work to put on a plaid of any other material. The plaid does not wear in color, the fibers would not put up with it, while hanging at her knees; the shepherd comes out with a splendid robe in which to wrap himself in storm and the teeth, and he settles his own on the rocks, and he is glad to have it close about him. The Lord our Shepherd, coming out to tend the lost sheep, put on no usual apparel, "at the palm-branch out of an hourglass." There was no one, pretensions about it. I know the old prophets reemitted a halo around the bare Jesus, but I do not suppose that there was any more halo about that child than about the head of any other babe that was born that Christmas-eve in Judea. Becoming a man,

he wore a seamless garment. The scissors and needle had done nothing to make it graceful. I take it to have been a sack with three holes in it: one for the neck, and two for the arms. Although the gamblers quarreled over it, that is no evidence of its value. I have seen two rag-pickers quarrel over the refuse of an ash-barrel. No; in the wardrobe of heaven he left the sandals of light, the girdles of beauty, the robes of power, and put on the besotted and tattered raiment of our humanity. Sometimes he did not even wear the seamless robe. What is that hanging about the waist of Christ? Is it a badge of authority? Is it a royal coat of arms? No; it is a towel. The disciples' feet are filthy from the walk on the long way, and are not fit to be put upon the sofas on which they are to recline at the meal, and so Jesus washes their feet, and gathers them up in the towel to dry them. The work of saving this world was rough work, rugged work, hard work; and Jesus put on the raiment, the plain raiment, of our flesh. The storms were to beat him, the crowds were to jostle him, the dust was to sprinkle him, the mobs were to pursue him. Oh, Shepherd of Israel! leave at home thy bright array. For thee, what streams to ford, what nights all unsheltered! He puts upon him the plain raiment of our humanity; wears our woes; and while earth and heaven and hell stand amazed at the abnegation, wraps around him the shepherd's plaid:

"Cold mountains and the midnight air, Witnessed the fervor of his prayer."

Next I mention the shepherd's crook. This was a rod with a curve at the end, which, when a sheep was going astray, was thrown over its neck; and in that way it was pulled back. When the sheep were not going astray, the shepherd would often use it as a sort of crutch, leaning on it; but when the sheep were out of the way, the crook was always busy pulling them back. All we, like sheep, have gone astray, and had it not been for the shepherd's crook, we would have fallen long ago, over the precipices.

Here is a man who is making too much money. He is getting very vain. He says, "After a while I shall be independent of all the world. Oh, my soul, eat, drink, and be merry." Business disaster comes to him. What is God going to do with him? Has God any grudge against him? Oh, no. God is throwing over him the shepherd's crook and pulling him back into better pastures. Here is a man who has always been well. He has never had any sympathy for invalids; he calls them coughing, wheezing nuisances. After a while sickness comes to him. He does not understand what God is going to do with him. He says, "Is the Lord angry with me?" Oh, no. With the shepherd's crook he has been pulled back into better pastures. Here is a happy household circle. The parent does not realize the truth that these children are only loaned to him, and he forgets from what source came his domestic blessings. Sickness drops upon those children and death swoops upon a little one. He says, "Is God angry with me?" No. His shepherd's crook pulls him back into better pastures. I do not know what would have become of us if it had not been for the shepherd's crook. Oh, the mercies of our troubles! You take up apples and plums from under the shade of the trees, and the very best traits of Christian character we find in the deep shade of trouble.

When I was on the steamer, coming across the ocean, I got a cinder in my eye, and seven persons tried to get it out very gently, but it could not be taken out in that way. I was told that the engineer had a remedy in such cases. I went to him. He put his large, sooty hand on me, took a knife, and wrapped the lid of the eye around the knife. I expected to be hurt very much, but without any pain, and suddenly, he removed the cinder. Oh, there come times in our Christian life, when our

spiritual vision is being spoiled, and all gentle appliances fail. Then there comes some giant trouble, and black-handed, lays hold of us and removes that which would have ruined our vision forever. I will gather all your joys together in one regiment of ten companies, and I will put them under Colonel Joy. Then I will gather all your sorrows together in one regiment of ten companies, and put them under Colonel Breakheart. Then I will ask, Which of these regiments has gained for you the greater spiritual victories? Certainly that under Colonel Breakheart.

In the time of war, you may remember, at the South and North, the question was whether the black troops would fight; but when they were put into the struggle on both sides, they did heroically. In the great day of eternity it will be found that it was not the white regiment of joys that gained your greatest successes, but the black troops of trouble, misfortune and disaster. Where you have gained one spiritual success from your prosperity, you have gained ten spiritual successes from your adversity.

There is no animal that struggles more violently than a sheep when you corner it and catch hold of it. Down in the glen I see a group of men around a lost sheep. A ploughman comes along and seizes the sheep, and tries to pacify it; but it is more frightened than ever. A miller comes along, puts down his grist, and caresses the sheep, and it seems as if it would die of fright. After a while some one breaks through the thicket. He says, "Let me have the poor thing." He comes up and lays his arms around the sheep, and it is immediately quiet. Who is the last man that comes? It is the shepherd. Ah, my friends, be not afraid of the shepherd's crook. It is never used on you, save in mercy, to pull you back. The hard, cold iceberg of trouble will melt in the warm gulf stream of divine sympathy.

There is one passage I think you misinterpret: "The bruised reed he will not break." Do you know that the shepherd in olden times played upon these reeds? They were very easily bruised; but when they were bruised they were never mended. The shepherd could so easily make another one, he would snap the old one and throw it away, and get another. The Bible says it is not so with our Shepherd. When the music is gone out of a man's soul, God does not snap him in twain and throw him away. He mends and restores. "The bruised reed he will not break."

When, in the overhanging heavens of fate, The threatening clouds of darkness dwell, Then let us humbly watch and wait; It shall be well, it shall be well. And when the storm has passed away And sunshine smiles on flood and fell, How sweet to think, how sweet to say, It has been well, it has been well.

Next I speak of the shepherd's dogs. They watch the straying sheep, and drive them back again. Every shepherd has his dog—from the nomads of the Bible times, down to the Scotch herdsman watching his flocks on the Graupian Hills. Our shepherd employs the criticisms and persecutions of the world as his dogs. There are those, you know, whose whole work it is to watch the inconsistencies of Christians, and bark at them. If one of God's sheep gets astray, the world howls. With more avidity than a shepherd's dog ever caught a stray sheep by the flanks or lugged it by the ears, worldlings seize the Christian astray. It ought to do us good to know that we are thus watched. It ought to put us on our guard. They can not bite us, if we stay near the Shepherd. The sharp knife of worldly assault will only trim the vines until they produce better grapes. The more you pound marjoram and rosemary, the sweeter they smell. The more dogs take after you, the quicker you will get to the gate.

You have noticed that different flocks of sheep have different marks upon them; sometimes a red mark, sometimes a blue mark, sometimes a straight mark, and sometimes a crooked mark. The Lord our Shepherd has a mark for his sheep. It is a red mark—the mark of the cross. "Blessed are they that are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."

Furthermore, consider the shepherd's pasture-grounds. The old shepherds used to take the sheep upon the mountains in the summer, and dwell in the valleys in the winter. The sheep being out-of-doors perpetually, their wool was better than if they had been kept in the hot atmosphere

of the sheep-cot. Wells were dug for the sheep and covered with large stones, in order that the hot weather might not spoil the water. And then the shepherd led his flock wherever he would; nobody dispute his right. So the Lord our Shepherd has a large pasture-ground. He takes us in the summer to the mountains, and in the winter to the valleys. Warm days of prosperity come, and we stand on sunny Sabbaths, and on hills of transfiguration and we are so high up we can catch a glimpse of the pinnacles of the heaven city. Then cold wintry days of trouble come, and we go down into the valley, sickness, want, and bereavement, and say, "Is there any sorrow like unto this sorrow?" But, blessed be God, the Lord sheep can find pasture anywhere, between two rocks of trouble a tuft succulent promises; green pastures beside still waters; long sweet grass between bitter graves. You have noticed the structure of the sheep's mouth? It is sharp that it can take up a blade of grass or clover-top from the very narrow spot. And so God's sheep can pick comfort where others can gather no. "The secret of the Lord is with them that fear him." Rich pasture, founts, fed pasture, for all the flock of the Good Shepherd.

The hill of Zion yields A thousand sacred sweets Before we reach the heavenly fields, Or walk the golden streets.

Lastly: Consider the shepherd's fold. The time of sheep-shearing was a very glad time. The neighbors gathered together, and they poured wine and danced for joy. The sheep were put in a place inclosed by a wall, where it was very easy to count them and know whether any of them had been taken by the jackals' dogs. The inclosure was called the sheep-fold. Good news I have to tell you that our Lord the Shepherd has a sheep-fold, and those who are gathered in shall never be struck by the storm, shall never be touched by the jackals of temptation and trouble. It has a high wall so high that no troubles can get in high that the joys cannot get out.

It is time we got over these moral ideas of how we shall get out of this world. You make your religion an undertaking, you play coffins and driving hearses. Your religion smells of the varnish of a funeral casket. Rather let your religion to you come out and show you the sheep that God has provided for you. Ah, you say, there is a river between this and it. I know it; but that Jordan is only for the sheep-washing, and they shall go up to the other banks snow-white. They follow the great Shepherd. They heard his voice long ago. They are safe now—one and one Shepherd!

In June, 1815, there was a very noble party gathered in a house in St. Jan's Square, London. The Prince Regent was present, and the occasion was made fascinating by music and banqueting and jewels. While a quadrille was being formed, suddenly all the people rushed to the windows. What is the matter? Henry Percy had arrived with the news that Waterloo had been fought, and that the land had won the day. The dances were abandoned; the party dispersed; ladies, and musicians rushed into the street, and in fifteen minutes from the first announcement of the good news the house was emptied of all its guests. They who are seated at the banquet of this world, or whirling in its gayereties and volities, if you could hear the sweet strains of the Gospel trumpet announcing Christ's victory over sin and death and hell, you would rush forth, glad in the eternal deliverance! The Waterloo against sin has been fought, and our Commander-in-Chief would rush forth, glad in the eternal deliverance! I do not care what metaphors you use, what comparison you have; bring me, that I may use it. Amos shall in one simile, Isaiah another, John another. Beautiful with pardon. Beautiful with peace. Beautiful with anticipations. Or to return to the pastoral figure of my text, come out of the poor pasturage of this world into the rich fortunes of the Good Shepherd.

The shepherd of old used to play beautiful music, and sometimes the sheep would gather around him and listen. To-day my heavenly Shepherd calls to you with the very music of heaven, bidding you to leave your sin and accept his pardon. Oh, that all this flock would be the piping of the Good Shepherd.