

THE
WORKS
OF
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CONTAINING
AN AUTHENTIC NARRATIVE, &C., LETTERS ON RELIGIOUS SUBJECTS, CARDIPHONIA, DIS-
COURSES INTENDED FOR THE PULPIT,
SERMONS PREACHED IN THE PARISH CHURCH OF OLNEY,
A REVIEW OF ECCLESIASTICAL HISTORY, OLNEY HYMNS, POEMS,
MESSIAH, OCCASIONAL SERMONS, AND TRACTS.

TO WHICH ARE PREFIXED
MEMOIRS OF HIS LIFE, &c.

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SERMON XIII.

THE GREAT SHEPHERD.

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.
ISAIAH, xl. 11.

IT is not easy for those whose habits of life are insensibly formed by the customs of modern times, to conceive any adequate idea of the pastoral life, as it obtained in the eastern countries, before that simplicity of manners, which characterized the early ages, was corrupted by the artificial and false refinements of luxury. Wealth, in those days, consisted principally in flocks and herds, and Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and others, who were, to speak in modern language, persons of high distinction, were likewise shepherds. The book of Genesis, which is an authentic and infallible history of the most ancient times, exhibits a manner of living so different from our own, that, perhaps, few persons are qualified to enter fully into the spirit of the description. The poets seem to have derived their idea of the golden age from some imperfect tradition of this primitive state; and, if we compare it with the state of things around us, methinks we have reason to say, "How is the gold become dim, and the fine gold changed!" Lam. iv. 1. The opulence of Jacob may be conjectured from the present he sent to his brother Esau, Gen. xxxii. 14, 15. Yet Jacob attended his flocks himself, in the drought by day, and in the frost by night. Gen. xxxi. 40. The vigilance, the providence, the tenderness, necessary to the due discharge of the shepherd's office, have been frequently applied in describing the nature and ends of government: and it has been esteemed a high encomium of a good king, to style him the shepherd of his people. This character Messiah, the Saviour, condescends to bear; and happy are they, who, with a pleasing consciousness, can say, "We are his people and the sheep of his pasture," Psal. c. 3.

The passage will lead me to speak of the shepherd, the flock, and his care and tenderness over them.

I. Our Lord expressly styles himself the *Shepherd*, the *good Shepherd of the Sheep* (John x. 11, 14), and the apostle Peter styles him the *chief Shepherd*, 1 Peter v. 4. His faithful ministers have the honour to be under-shepherds; he appoints, and qualifies them to feed his flock. They are the messengers of his will, but they can do nothing without him; they can only communicate what they receive, and cannot watch over the flock, unless they are themselves watched over by him, Psal. cxxvii. 1. For, with respect to efficacy, he is the chief, and indeed, the sole Shepherd. The eyes of all are upon him, and his eye is upon, and over all his flock. The Old Testament church had a shepherd, and their shepherd was Jehovah, Psal. xxiii. 1. Unless therefore the Shepherd and Bishop of

our souls likewise be Jehovah, we fall unspeakably short of the privilege of ancient Israel, if their Shepherd was almighty, and if ours could be but a creature. Surely we could not then say, what yet the apostle affirms, that we have a better covenant, established upon better promises (Heb. viii. 6); since Messiah himself is expressly declared to be the surety and the mediator of this covenant. But would it not be better upon this supposition, with David, who could say, "Jehovah is my Shepherd," than with us, who are entrusted to the care of a delegated and inferior keeper, if Jesus be not Jehovah? Besides, who but Jehovah can relieve the necessities of multitudes in all places, in the same moment, and be equally near and attentive to them in every age? The sinner, who is enlightened to know himself, his wants, enemies, and dangers, will not dare to confide in anything short of an almighty arm; he needs a shepherd, who is full of wisdom, full of care, full of power; able, like the sun, to shine upon millions at once, and possessed of those incommunicable attributes of Deity, omniscience and omnipresence. Such is our great Shepherd; and he is eminently the good Shepherd also, for he laid down his life for the sheep, and has redeemed them to God by his own blood.

II. A *shepherd* is a relative name; it has reference to a *flock*. This great and good Shepherd has a flock, whom he loved from everlasting, and whom, having loved, he will love to the end, John xiii. 1. He humbled himself for their sakes, submitted to partake of their nature and their sorrows, took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of sinful flesh. He died for his sheep, the just for the unjust (1 Pet. iii. 18), to redeem them from the curse of the law, from the guilt and dominion of sin, from the power of Satan, and to bring them to God. They, by nature, are all gone astray, everyone to his own way (Isa. liii. 6); but having thus bought them with his blood, in his own appointed time, he seeks, finds, and restores his sheep. By the power of his word and Spirit, he makes himself known to their hearts, causes them to hear and understand his voice, and guides them into his fold. Then they become his sheep in the sense of my text. They are under his immediate protection and government.

Considered as individuals, they are fitly described by the name of sheep. A sheep is a weak, defenceless, improvident creature; prone to wander, and if once astray, is seldom known to return of its own accord. A sheep has neither strength to fight with the wolf, nor speed to escape from him; nor has it the foresight of the ant, to provide its own sustenance. Such is our character, and our situation. Unable to take care of ourselves, prone to wander from our resting place, exposed to enemies which we can neither withstand nor avoid, without resource in ourselves, and taught, by daily experience, the insufficiency of everything around us: yet, if this Shepherd be our Shepherd, weak and helpless as we are, we may be of good courage. If we can say with David, "The Lord is my Shepherd," we may make the same inferences which he did, "Therefore I shall not want;" therefore I need not fear.

Collectively they are a flock. They are not, indeed, in one place. They are scattered abroad, dispersed through different ages and countries, separated by seas and mountains, and, too often, by misapprehensions and prejudices, by names and forms; and only a very small part of the flock are known to each other. But they are all equally known to him, and equally under his eye. In his view they are one flock, one body; they are animated by one and the same spirit; their views, hopes, and aims are the same; and, yet a little while, they shall be all brought together, a number without number, to rejoice and to join in worship, before his throne of glory. For they have an inheritance reserved for them in heaven (1 Pet. i. 4, 5), and they shall be safely kept, while they are sojourners upon earth, for the Shepherd of Israel is their keeper.

III. He shall feed his flock like a shepherd. The word is not restrained to feeding. It includes all the branches of the shepherd's office. He shall act the part of a shepherd to his flock. We have a beautiful miniature description of what he has engaged to do, and what he actually does, for his people, as their Shepherd, in the twenty-third Psalm. And the subject is more largely illustrated in the thirty-fourth chapter of Ezekiel's prophecy. His sheep, from age to age, have been witnesses to the truth of his promises. He has a flock at present who rejoice in his care, and greater multitudes, as yet unborn, shall successively arise in their appointed seasons, and call him blessed, Psal. lxxii. 17. For he is the same yesterday, today, and for ever.

He feeds them.—He leads them into green and pleasant pastures. These pastures are, his word and ordinances, by which he communicates to them of his own fulness; for in strict propriety of speech, he himself is their food. They eat his flesh and drink his blood, John vi. 54. This was once thought a hard saying (John vi. 58) by some of his professed followers, and is still thought so by too many. But it is his own saying, and therefore I am not concerned either to confirm or to vindicate it. The knowledge they receive by faith, of his incarnation and sufferings unto death, of the names he bears, and of the offices and relations in which he is pleased to act for them, is the life and food of their souls. The expression of feeding them, is agreeable to the analogy he has been pleased to establish between the natural and the spiritual life. As the strength of the body is maintained and renewed by eating and drinking; so they who, in this sense, feed upon him in their hearts by faith with thanksgiving, even they live (John vi. 57) by him; for his flesh is meat indeed, and his blood is drink indeed.

He guides them.—First by his example. He has trodden the path of duty and trial before them; and they perceive and follow his footsteps. Again, by his word and Spirit he teaches them the way in which they should go; and both inclines and enables them to walk in it, Is. xxx. 21. He guides them, likewise, by his providence; he appoints the bounds of their habitations, the line and calling in which they are to serve him, and orders and adjusts the circumstances of their lives according to his infinite wisdom, so as finally to accomplish his gracious

designs in their favour.

He guards them.—It is written concerning him, “He shall stand and feed in the strength of the Lord, in the majesty of the name of the Lord his God,” Micah v. 4. If we conceive of a flock of sheep feeding in the midst of wolves, who are restrained from breaking in upon them, not by any visible enclosure, but merely by the power of the shepherd’s eye, which keeps them in awe and at a distance, it will give us some idea of the situation of his people. He provides them food in the midst of many and mighty enemies (Psal. xxiii. 5), who envy them their privilege, but cannot prevent it. If he should withdraw his attention from the flock for a single minute, they would be worried. But he has promised to keep them night and day (Is. xxvii. 3), and every moment; therefore their enemies plot and rage in vain. Their visible foes are numerous; but if we could look into the invisible world, and take a view of the subtlety, malice, machinations, and assiduity of the powers of darkness, who are incessantly watching for opportunities of annoying them, we should have a most striking conviction, that a flock so defenceless and feeble in themselves, and against which such a combination is formed, can only be kept by the power of God.

He heals them.—A good shepherd will examine the state of his flock. But there is no attention worthy of being compared with his. Not the slightest circumstance in their concerns escapes his notice. When they are ready to faint, borne down with heavy exercises of mind, wearied with temptations, dry and disconsolate in their spirits, he seasonably revives them. Nor are they in heaviness without a need-be for it. All his dispensations towards them are medicinal, designed to correct, or to restrain, or to cure, the maladies of their souls. And they are adjusted, by his wisdom and tenderness, to what they can bear, and to what their case requires. It is he likewise, who heals their bodily sickness, and gives them help in all their temporal troubles. He is represented to us, as counting their sighs (Psal. lvi. 8), putting their tears into his bottle, recording their sorrows in his book of remembrance; and even as being himself touched with a feeling of their infirmities (Heb. iv. 15), as the head feels for the members of the body.

He restores them.—The power and subtlety of their enemies are employed to force or entice them from his rule, and too often prevail for a season. The sheep turn aside into forbidden paths; and whenever they do, they would wander farther and farther, till they were quite lost again, if he were not their Shepherd. If he permits them to deviate, he has a time to convince them, that it was an evil and a bitter thing to forsake the Lord their Shepherd (Jer. ii. 19), and to humble them, and to bring them back. Thus they become more sensible of their own weakness, and of their obligations to his gracious care; for he will not suffer their enemies to triumph over them. He will not lose one of his true flock; not one convinced sinner, who has, in deed and in truth, surrendered and entrusted his all to him. They must, and they shall smart and mourn for their folly; but he

will, in due season, break their snares, and lead them again into the paths of peace, for his own name's sake.

The flock are not all sheep. There are among them lambs. These are especially mentioned, and for these he expresses a peculiar tenderness. He will gather them in his arm, and carry them in his bosom. Though they are weaklings, they shall not be left behind. This is a beautiful and pathetic image. If a poor lamb is weary, and unable to keep up with the flock, it shall be carried. This clause affords encouragement,

1. To young people.—Early serious impressions are often made upon the hearts of children, which we are to cherish, by directing their thoughts to the compassion of the good Shepherd, who has said, “Suffer little children to come unto me, and forbid them not, for of such is the kingdom of God,” Mark x. 14. This high and holy one, who humbles himself to notice the worship of the heavenly host, hears the prayers of worms upon the earth; and his ear is open to the prayers of a child, no less so, than to the prayer of a king.

2. To young converts.—These, at whatever age, are children in the Lord's family, lambs in his flock. They are, as yet, weak, unsettled, and inexperienced. Almost every day brings them into a new and untried situation. They often meet with opposition and discouragement, where they have promised themselves help and countenance. Perhaps their nearest friends are displeased with them. They are liable, likewise, while they are enquiring the way to Zion, to be perplexed by the various opinions and angry contentions prevailing among the different religious persons or parties to whom they may address themselves. They are frequently discouraged by the falls and miscarriages of professors, some of whom, it is possible, they may have admired, and looked up to, as patterns for their own imitation. Add to these things, what they suffer from new and unexpected discoveries of the evil and deceitfulness of their hearts; the mistakes they commit, in judgment and practice, for want of a more solid and extensive knowledge of the scriptures; and the advantage the great enemy of their souls derives from these their various difficulties to assault their peace and obstruct their progress. What would become of them in such circumstances, if their faithful Shepherd had not promised to lead, and uphold them, with the arm of his power?

There is, likewise, particular mention made of “those who are with young.” These he will gently lead. If we take the word according to our version, it may signify a state of conviction or trouble. Many are the afflictions of the righteous (Psal. xxxiv. 19), by which they are often wearied and heavy laden. But when their spirits are overwhelmed within them, he knoweth their path. Jacob would not permit his cattle that were with young to be over-driven for one day, lest they should die, Gen. xxxiii. 13. Much less will this good Shepherd suffer the burdened among his flock to be hurried and tempted beyond what they are able, or what he will enable them to bear.

But the word signifies, those that have young, rather than those that are with young. Two sorts of persons in the Lord's flock, who come under this description, feel an especial need of his compassion, tenderness, and patience.

1. He only knows the feelings of the hearts of parents; what solicitude and anxiety they have for their young ones, the sucklings, if I may so speak, of the flock, which mingle with all their endeavours, to manage rightly the important charge committed to them, and to bring their children up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.

2. Ministers, likewise, have painful exercises of mind. The apostle Paul speaks of travailing in birth again, till Christ be formed in our hearers, Gal. iv. 19. When we know of any newly awakened, and beginning to seek his salvation, how solicitous is our care to bring them forward, to comfort them, to warn them against the devices of their hearts, and of their enemies! And how piercing our grief and disappointment, if they miscarry! How much is felt in sympathy for the trials of the flock! What wisdom, faithfulness, courage, meekness, and unction from on high, are necessary to the due discharge of what we owe to the flocks of which we have the oversight! Who is sufficient for these things! And when we have done our best, our all, what defects and defilements have we to mourn over! But this is our great consolation, that he, who knows us, and leads us, considers our frame, and remembers that we are but dust.

In this delineation of the character and conduct of the great Shepherd of the sheep (Heb. xiii. 20), we have an affecting exemplar and pattern, for the imitation of those who act in the honourable office of under-shepherds, and are called, by their profession and engagement, to feed his sheep and lambs. Whether there be any ministers in our assembly, or not, you will at least permit me to speak a word to my own heart; which may, I hope, at the same time, impress your minds with a sense of our great need of your prayers. Brethren, pray for us! (1 Thes. v. 25) and pray to the Lord of the harvest, that he may send forth more faithful labourers into his harvest, Matth. ix. 38. For it is his work alone. It is not necessary, that a minister of the gospel should be in the first line of those who are admired for their abilities or literature; much less that he should be distinguished by such titles, honours, and emoluments as this world can give. But it is necessary, and of the last importance to his character and usefulness here, and to his acceptance in the great day of the Lord, that he should have a shepherd's eye and a shepherd's heart. He must serve the flock, not for filthy lucre, or by constraint (that constraint, which the apostle attributes to the love of Christ, only excepted), but willingly, and with a view to their edification, 1 Pet. v. 2, 3. And he must, indeed, serve them, not acting as a lord over God's heritage, but as an example to the flock; not preaching himself (2 Cor. iv. 5), perverting his sacred office to the purposes of ambition or vain glory, or the acquisition of wealth; but preaching Christ Jesus the Lord, and employing all his powers to turn sinners from the error of their ways. He who winneth souls is

wise, Prov. xi. 30. If it be wisdom to propose the noblest end, the faithful minister is wise; the end at which he aims, in subordination to the will and glory of God, is the salvation of souls; and the recovery of one immortal soul to the favour and image of God, is, and will at length be found, a greater and more important event, than the deliverance of a whole kingdom from slavery or temporal ruin. If it be wisdom, to pursue a right end by the fittest means, he is wise; he knows the gospel of Christ to be the power of God, the appointed, the effectual, the only sufficient mean for his accomplishing his great purpose; therefore, however unfashionable it may be, he is not ashamed of it, he preaches it, and he glories in it. If it be an effect of wisdom, not to be deterred from the prosecution of a great and noble design, by the censure and dislike of weak and incompetent judges, the faithful minister is truly wise. He loves his fellow creatures, and would willingly please them for their good, but he cannot fear them, because he fears and serves the Lord. He looks forward, with desire, to the day of that solemn and general visitation, when the Shepherd and Bishop of souls shall himself appear, 1 Pet. ii. 25; v. 4. And if he may then stand among those who are pardoned and accepted in the Beloved, and receive the crown of life, which his Lord has promised to them that love him (2 Tim. iv. 8),—this thought fully reconciles him to the trials of his situation; and however depreciated, misrepresented, opposed, or ill-treated here, he can say, “None of these things move me, neither count I my life dear to myself, so that I may finish my course with joy, and the ministry which I have received of the Lord Jesus, to testify the gospel of the grace of God,” Acts xx. 24.

There is a counter-part to this character described in strong and glowing language by the prophets. There are idol-shepherds, who feed not the flock, but themselves (Ezek. xxxiv. 2); who neither attempt to heal the sick, to strengthen the feeble, to bind up that which is broken, nor to recover that which has been driven away; shepherds (Isa. lvi. 10, 11), who cannot understand, greedy, lovers of gain—and who, by a change of metaphor, are compared to slumbering watchmen, and dumb dogs that cannot bark. The New Testament teaches us to expect that such persons, under the name of ministers, will be found likewise in the visible church of Christ: men of corrupt minds (1 Tim. vi. 5; Rom. xvi. 18), destitute of the truth, who serve not the Lord Jesus, but their own belly; men who are of the world (1 John iv. 5), and speak of the world; and therefore the world heareth and favoureth them. But, alas!—neither the wretched slave who toils at the galley-oar, nor he that is doomed to labour in a deep mine, where the light of the sun never reaches him, nor the lunatic who howls in a chain, are such emphatical objects of our compassion, as the unhappy man who prostitutes the name and function of a minister of Christ to the gratification of his pride and avarice; and whose object is not the welfare of the flock, but the possession of the fleece (Ezek. xxxiii. 7, 8); who intrudes into the post of a watchman, but gives no alarm of the impending danger. If the scriptures be true; if the gospel

be not indeed, as Pope Leo X. profanely styled it, *a lucrative fable*; the more he accumulates riches, the more he rises in dignity, the more his influence extends, the more he is to be commiserated. He may have the reward he seeks. He may be admired and flattered; he may for a season, be permitted to withstand and discountenance the efforts of the Lord's faithful servants; he may shine in the accomplishments of a scholar or a courtier: But nothing less than repentance, and faith in the Redeemer, whose name and cause he has dishonoured, can finally screen him from the full effect of that terrible denunciation—"Wo to the idol-shepherd that forsaketh (or neglecteth) the flock: The sword shall be upon his arm, and upon his right eye: His arm shall be clean dried up, and his right eye shall be utterly darkened, Zech. xi. 17.