

THE FORESHADOWING OF THE CHURCH.

(ST. JOHN X. 1-16.)

"The great Shepherd of the sheep, even the Lord Jesus."—Heb. xiii. 20.

"THEY shall become one flock, one Shepherd." These are the concluding, and yet in a sense, the central and determining words of the three parables or allegories of the Good Shepherd, recorded by St. John in the tenth chapter of his Gospel.

The first thing to be noted is that there are three distinct parables. In the first, Christ is the true Shepherd, who seeks admission into the fold, and to whom the porter openeth the door. In the second parable, Christ is Himself the door of the fold, through which all must enter, and still more; for He adds: "By Me if any man enter in, he shall be saved, and shall go in and go out, and shall find pasture" (v. 9). In the third parable, Christ reveals Himself as the Good Shepherd, who knows His own sheep, and who lays down His life for His sheep.

It has been beautifully said that of the three parables, the first picture is bright with the hues of early morning; the second depicts the active midday life and movement in the open pasture; the third is an evening scene, when the flocks find safety in the fold from the attacks of the midnight wolves.¹

But the chief interest of the parables will be found in the circumstances out of which they spring, and which help us to understand their true significance. In these parables Jesus Christ is laying the first stones of the foundation of His Church. They are the first clear notes in this Gospel of a separation from Judaism; and this aspect of them shows their close connexion with the preceding miracle. The blind man, whom Jesus healed, was cast out and ex-

¹ Godet, *ad loc.*

communicated from the Jewish Synagogue. In his hour of distress Jesus found him, and revealed Himself to him as the Son of God. He was one of those who could hear the Saviour's voice, and had power to know Him. Separated from Judaism this man stood alone with Christ as his only refuge. He was the first to show that full discipleship of Christ was incompatible with Pharisaism. Regarded in this light, therefore, this incident is the beginning of the Christian Church. And it is at this point that Jesus sets forth the parables, which teach the same truth. He takes this occasion to draw as in a picture the features of His future Church, and to contrast it with the righteousness of the Pharisees, and the form which they had given to the religion of Israel.

Jesus did not wish to abolish the law. We know that He came to fulfil the law. He came sternly to rebuke the perversion of the law, of which the Pharisees had given a signal instance in their false charge against Him of breaking the Sabbath Day, and in their merciless treatment of the man healed of blindness. They had shown, too, their unworthiness to be the religious guides of the people in their inability to recognize the Son of God, and to understand the significance of the sign by which a man born blind was restored to sight.

In the first parable, then, the fold represents the house of Israel to whom the Christ comes. It is to be remembered that the Oriental sheepfold is constructed with an enclosure of high walls, and is entered by one door only, which is guarded during the night by a porter, who would of course refuse admittance to any one who was not authorized to enter. In the morning the true Shepherd comes and the porter opens, for he knows His voice. In these words Christ claims to be the one true Shepherd of Israel. The porter—whether this is to be understood of God the Father, as some think, or of John the Baptist—

openeth the door and Christ, the true Shepherd, enters. He calleth His own sheep by name and leadeth them out. That is, He founds His Church, in the words of St. Peter, of "as many as the Lord our God shall call unto Him" (Acts ii. 39). This is precisely what happened to the man who received the gift of sight. Jesus found him, and he heard the voice of Jesus and believed. It is to be observed that not all the sheep within the fold heard and recognized their shepherd's voice. All Israel did not hear the voice of Christ. Only those who could say with St. Peter, "Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life."¹

Here the Evangelist notes that those who heard this parable "understood not the things which He spake unto them" (v. 6).

Jesus, therefore, in the next parable becomes more explicit. He says plainly: "I am the door of the sheep . . . By Me if any man enter in, he shall be saved, and shall go in and out, and shall find pasture" (vv. 7, 9). We mark here the significance of these words in face of the existing religious condition in Israel. There was the jealously guarded theocracy. Priest and Levite and Pharisee each claiming to possess the key of knowledge; all prohibiting any entrance into the Jewish Church and community save through themselves. Against these Jesus stands alone, and says: "I am the door." The claim seemed an impossible one, too high to be ever realized. But the history of the Christian Church is the wonderful confirmation of it.

Then He adds with clear reference to the Pharisees and other misleading teachers: "All that came before Me are thieves and robbers. . . . The thief cometh not but that he may steal, and kill, and destroy: I came that they may have life, and may have it more abundantly" (v. 10).

¹ St. John vi. 68.

This is to put into the language of parable and metaphor what Jesus expresses in other words when He says to the Pharisees: "Ye make void the word of God by your traditions."¹ Or what St. Paul means when he says: "The letter killeth, but the Spirit giveth life."² That is, the letter of Pharisaism killeth, but the Spirit of Christ giveth life.

These words, then, are the condemnation of a system which had overpowering influence in the Jewish community at the time—the influence which, more than any other, brought about the condemnation and death of Jesus Christ, and which, for a long time, even in the Church itself, was a force to be battled against with all the energy and power of a St. Paul. The spirit of Judaism was the most formidable danger to the Church of Christ, and to the purity of Apostolic preaching. It was this, then, which by one calm word the Lord of Life condemns. "I am the door." From the moment of that utterance it was determined that the entrance into the Catholic Church is not through Judaism and circumcision, but by Christ alone, through baptism into His name.

The closing words of this verse furnish a further note of the Church. For the moment the imagery is partly dropped, and the underlying reality is revealed³: "By Me if any man enter in, he shall be saved, and shall go in and go out, and shall find pasture" (*v.* 9). The thought is one of Christian freedom and Christian dominion. The man going in and going out to wander beyond the fold into the spreading pasture lands symbolizes the Christian, of whom the Apostle could say, "All things are yours" (1 Cor. iii. 22); and who was heir to all that was best and most worthy in the gathered experience of the ancient world (Phil. iv. 8). He "found pasture" in the thoughts and literature of Greece, and in the laws and discipline of Rome,

¹ Mark vii. 13.² 2 Cor. iii. 6.³ Comp. Ezek. xxxiv. 31.

as afterwards in the strength and earnestness of the Teutonic character.

In the third parable (*vv.* 11–16) there is another and a still more beautiful revelation of the Christ—a further condemnation of the enemies of true religion and a third note of the Church of the future.

“I am the good (*καλός*) Shepherd.” In the first parable Jesus revealed Himself as “the Shepherd of the sheep”—the true Shepherd that is recognized by the porter and by His own sheep. Here He is “the Good Shepherd,” not only morally good, but in a complete and beautiful way fulfilling all the duties of a shepherd—not only, as in the first parable, coming early to His own flock and leading them out from the fold; or, as in the second, giving free and open pasturage and the gift of salvation to men—but caring for His sheep, and even laying down His life for them. This was a great revelation. It foretold the cross, and the foundation of the Church on the sacrifice of its Founder. It foretold, too, the strength and efficacy of that sacrifice, as an evidence of the courage and love of the Good Shepherd.

And who, in view of this interpretation, are the hirelings, who in the hour of danger “flee from the wolf,” and are contrasted with the Good Shepherd, who lays down His life for the sheep? They are certainly not to be identified with “the thieves and robbers who enter in to steal and kill and destroy” (*v.* 10). On the contrary, they are men, who are expressly hired to safeguard and protect the flock, to ward off danger even at the risk of their lives. This duty seems to correspond to that of the Jewish priests and Levites, on whom was imposed the charge of sustaining the spiritual and religious life of Israel, and keeping it free from deadly and corrupting influences. This the priests and Levites had failed to do. They had allowed, without protest or resistance, the teaching of the Pharisees to pre-

vail, and the law to be made of none effect; they had failed to preserve the purity of the Jewish Church, and had betrayed the high trust committed to them.

This interpretation is strengthened by what seems to be an allusion to this parable in the charge of St. Paul to the elders of the Ephesian Church, who met him at Miletus.¹ "I know," he says, "that after my departing grievous wolves shall enter in among you, not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves shall men arise speaking perverse things to draw away the disciples after them." The Christian ministry had now taken the place of the Jewish priesthood. It is for the ministers of the Church to be true to their charge; to defend the flock of Christ from the false teachers—the grievous wolves—who threatened the Church; and not to be like the hirelings who fled on the approach of danger. A reference to the later history of the Church of Ephesus will show that the warning was not unheeded. That Church, though it had left its first love, still is commended because it could not "bear evil men," because it had put to the test some "who called themselves Apostles and found them false," and because it hated the Nicolaitans.² These are the marks of a Church which had heeded the warning of Christ, and His Apostle.

It is hardly possible to close this paper without calling attention to the remarkable parallelism between these parables, taken in connexion with the preceding miracle, and the prophecy against the shepherds of Israel in the thirty-fourth chapter of Ezekiel. For although commentators have referred to various passages in the Old Testament, and to other analogies in illustration of these parables, the peculiar appropriateness of Ezekiel's definite prediction has not been sufficiently observed. That appropriateness consists not only in the realization of the

¹ Acts xx. 18 f.

² Rev. ii. 1 f.

ideal Shepherd in Christ, but also in the contrast between the cruel and disloyal shepherds of the Lord's flock and the good Shepherd brought together in a single passage. And not only that, but in the contrast between the Church corrupted and ruined by false teachers and unscrupulous rulers, and the Church perfected by the presence and guidance of the Divine Shepherd.

In Ezekiel, "the sheep were scattered because there was no shepherd, and they became meat to all the beasts of the field" (v. 5). In St. John, "the hireling leaveth the sheep and fleeth, and the wolf snatcheth them, and scattereth them" (v. 12). In St. John, the blind beggar is rejected by the Jews and *found* by Christ—the incident which gives the key-note to the parable—so in Ezekiel the Lord God will require His sheep at the hand of the evil shepherds (v. 10); and, "I myself, even I, will search for my sheep, and will seek them out" (v. 11). As Christ came that His sheep "might have life, and have it abundantly" (v. 10), so the Lord's flock "shall lie down in a good fold, and on fat pasture shall they feed upon the mountains of Israel" (v. 14). But the most remarkable and instructive parallelism is between Ezekiel's prediction—"I will set up one shepherd over them, and he shall feed them, even My servant David; he shall feed them, and he shall be their shepherd"—and the words of Christ: "I am the good Shepherd . . . they shall hear my voice; and they shall become one flock, one Shepherd" (vv. 14, 16).

This is the last and the most important note of the Church of the future contained in these parables. Other notes of the Church shadowed forth in these parables have reached fulfilment. But for centuries it has seemed as if the ideal of Unity, predicted by Ezekiel, confirmed by Christ, and longed for by His faithful disciples—the sheep of many folds—has been irretrievably shattered. Instead of unity men have had to witness not only division in the

Church of Christ, but bitterness of hatred even between Churches and Christian communities which are at this day fundamentally agreed, but are paying the penalty of forgotten controversies and past negligence.

But however this may be, the promise and prediction of the Master hold, that unity is a note of His Church. If history has taught anything, it has taught that in this unity there must be diversity—diversity of practice, and even of organization. From the first there have been differences arising partly from national character and tradition; partly from individual temperament and education; but still more frequently from misconception. There are pages of ecclesiastical history which, in the interests not only of peace but of truth, should be re-written or unwritten, because they are filled with controversy about things unproveable or unessential. At times a glimpse of desired fulfilment flashes from utterances in unexpected quarters. One of the latest words of Pope Leo XIII. is an instance of this. On the first day of his fatal illness the dying Pope composed some Latin verses, the conclusion of which recalls some expressions in Psalm xlii:—

Quid te tanta premit formido? (Eviqve peracti
 Quid seriem repetens tristia corde foves.
 Christus adest miserans, humili veniamque roganti
 Erratum—ah fidas—eluet omne tibi.

“Wherefore art thou vexed with fear? Wherefore is thy soul so heavy as thou thinkest on the past? Trust thou in Christ. He is at hand to pity thee, His lowly and penitent servant. He will wash out thy every sin.” Words like these form the bed-rock of Christianity. And it is on such a basis that an essential unity may be built, possibly before this century is reckoned with the past, possibly *long* before that, so that the words of the Master may yet be fulfilled, “One flock, one Shepherd.”

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