

THE LORD'S SHEEP

THE Lord, in calling his people his sheep, chose a very significant emblem of the character he would have manifested in them. The most noticeable characteristics of the sheep are meekness, docility and obedience to the shepherd to whose care they fully entrust themselves. They are very true to the shepherd: they study his voice, watch for the indications of his will, and trustfully obey him. When they hear his voice, quickly, and without the slightest hesitation or faltering, they run to obey it. But the voice of a stranger they will not follow, for they know not the voice of strangers.

What a lesson is here for the Lord's "little flock," over whom he is the good Shepherd. The weakest lamb in the flock knows his voice and hears him say, "This is the way: walk ye in it." And while there are thousands of voices calling, now in this direction and now in that, the Lord's sheep, acquainted with his Spirit and his Word, turn away from all save the well known voice of the Shepherd. In various ways our Shepherd speaks to his flock of sheep and lambs. His written words treasured up in the heart mark the way of truth continually; his special providences further shape the peculiar course of each individual; and the abiding presence of his holy Spirit makes manifest every intrusion of any other spirit which seeks to beguile and to lead astray. The true sheep will carefully listen for the faintest accents of the voice of the Shepherd – *i.e.*, he will treasure up his words in his heart; he will study his providences; and he will cultivate that communion and personal fellowship with the Lord which are his privilege. Those who thus abide in him can never go astray.

"They can never, never lose their way."

They may not have much learning, and, humanly speaking, would not be able to grapple with all the sophistries of error. But, being so well acquainted with the Master's voice, they quickly perceive that such voices are the voices of strangers, and they will not follow them; for they are loyal and obedient to the Shepherd only.

In such an attitude of mind and heart is our only safety in the midst of all the difficulties and confusion of this evil day. And all such may confidently sing with the Psalmist –

"The Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not want. He maketh me to lie down [to rest – the rest of faith] in green pastures [with abundance of satisfying food]; he leadeth me beside the still waters [deep, refreshing truths]. He restoreth my soul [reclaims it from death]; he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake [because I am his child and bear his honored name]. Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death [The entire journey of life since the fall has been through a vale of tears, upon which rests the shadow of death.], I will fear no evil; for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff, they comfort me." Thy word and providences discipline and guide me in the way. Our Shepherd's providence not only disciplines the true sheep, but protects them from the "wolves" and other foes.

With the Prophet, we also can say, "Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies [for even while beset by Satan and Sin, we are sustained by the Lord's abundant provision for every necessity]; thou anointest my head with [the] oil [of joy], my cup [pleasure] runneth over [even while, as a **R1535 : page 166** pilgrim, I am beset with life's difficulties]." And, in view of the Lord's present and past leading, all, who continue to be truly his sheep, can certainly trust that – "Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me, all the days of my life; and

I will dwell in the house of the Lord [will be recognized as a member of his household, as his child] forever."

Let us seek to cultivate more and more the meek, docile and loyal character of the sheep, that so we may be abundantly blessed by the care of the good Shepherd. Such a disposition does not commend itself to the world – the wayward goat, the bold lion, or the stealthy bear, the subtle serpent and vicious vampires are more fitting emblems of their ideals, and are usually the emblems selected for their escutcheons. But let the world love its own, while we remember that we are not of the world, but are sent forth as sheep in the midst of wolves, and that our safety and spiritual prosperity depend, not upon our own wisdom and sagacity, but depend entirely upon our diligent hearkening to, and patient following of, the voice of the good Shepherd, who will very soon highly exalt his little flock and crown them with an exceeding and eternal weight of glory.
