

is a Spirit ; and they that worship him *must* worship him in spirit and in reality." Feigning will not pass with Him, nor even a forced and spurious emotion. And if we must choose between the utterance of our sincere convictions or the expression of our sincere emotions and the claims of any outward ordinances of religion, we must let the ordinance go, in order that we may be true to ourselves and to God. If even Moses, the Giver of the Law, could admit that inward convictions and emotions were superior to outward formulas, we ought much more frankly to confess that any kind or form of worship is useful to us and valuable in proportion as it enables us to express our sincerest thoughts and desires before Almighty God, or leads us into a more perfect knowledge and obedience of his pure and kindly Will.

S. COX.

THE DOOR OF THE SHEEP.

ST. JOHN X. 7.

ACCORDING to most interpreters, the words, "I am the door of the sheep," describe the safety and blessedness of Christ's people, under a similitude drawn from Eastern pastoral life. The scene, it is said, which our Lord meant to call up was that of a flock of sheep resting at noonday. The door of the fold stands open, and the sheep are passing and repassing through the open door. The door admits them to the surrounding pasture and the neighbouring stream, and it re-admits them to the fold, when they seek for protection or repose. It was thus, it is said, a fitting symbol of "safety and abundance — the two essentials of the prosperity of a flock."

It is certain that one object of the two parables of this Chapter was to describe the blessed condition of Christ's flock. They forcibly recall the description given by the prophets of the Jewish theocracy as Jehovah's flock and Jehovah's fold. And the memorable saying, "I am the good shepherd," and what follows, read like a New Testament rendering of the Twenty-third Psalm. Our Lord had, however, a second object in view, besides that of depicting the blessedness of those under his shepherd care. He desired to warn the people, whom He commiserated, of their unhappy condition under the care and guidance of the Pharisees, and to point out the way whereby it was possible to become true under-shepherds of the flock, and not hirelings, as most of those were who in his day arrogated to themselves the function of guiding the people. This, as it seems to me, was the purpose of the words, "I am the door of the sheep." It was as if our Lord had said, "I am the door of access to the sheep. He who enters by me will be enabled rightly to perform the duties of a pastor. He will go in and out skilfully and wisely, and find for the sheep fitting pasture."

That this, and not the ordinary interpretation, is the true meaning of the words, will be apparent, I think, if we consider the circumstances under which they were spoken. Those to whom Jesus spoke had just witnessed the healing of the man blind from his birth. They had witnessed also the attempt of the Pharisees to discredit the miracle, and Him by whom it had been wrought. The incident was in all respects striking, and, as regards the part taken by the Pharisees, tragical enough. The man on whom the miracle was wrought did not shew himself ungrateful, nor insensible

to the great gift bestowed upon him. But just when he, and others like him, were having their hearts drawn towards the Lord, the Pharisees came forward and endeavoured to change the current of feeling by complaining that the miracle had been wrought upon the Sabbath day. Their purpose of discrediting Jesus was somewhat frustrated by the honesty and courage of the healed man, who sturdily refused to believe any evil of his benefactor; on which he was reviled by the Pharisees, and cast out from the fellowship of the synagogue.

Fully to realize the crisis which this action created, we must remember the position of the Pharisees. They were the shepherds of the people. By the mass of the people they were looked to as infallible guides in matters of faith and morals. It may well have happened, therefore, that not a few who had hitherto been disposed to listen to Jesus, now felt that they must have been in error, and that the Galilean Prophet was after all "a sinner"—an impostor under a fair disguise. Even those who thought it improbable that God would have granted such power to "a sinner," cannot have been otherwise than perplexed by the adverse decision of "Moses' disciples."

Those who had faith in Jesus naturally looked to Him in this crisis, and in the Chapter before us He spoke the needed words. He passed upon the Pharisees the judgment which their act had merited. He said, as we read in Verse 8, "All that ever came before me are thieves and robbers." The words have occasioned much difficulty. Ancient copyists omitted $\pi\rho\delta\ \epsilon\mu\omicron\upsilon$ ("before me"), thinking in this way to lessen the difficulty. Some have translated them "*instead of me.*" The

Gnostics and Manichæans appealed to them as a proof that Jesus rejected the Old Testament; and critics of the Tübingen school cite them as an evidence that the Fourth Gospel was written not by the Galilean Apostle, but by a Gnostic of the second century.

But the difficulty disappears if we regard the words as intended solely for the occasion on which they were uttered. Our Lord spoke of those who were contending with Him for the guidance of the people, and not of prophets long dead. Of the Pharisees, and of others who in his time gave themselves out as popular leaders, He said they were "thieves and robbers." Severe words, but not too severe. They but truthfully interpreted the meaning of their recent conduct. They had sought to check a beneficent career, and to silence a Teacher whose words, as their consciences must have told them, were always good and wholesome. And they had done this because they feared that the increase of the influence of Jesus would diminish their own influence and that of their order. So greedy were they of honour and popular consideration, that, to maintain them, they did not scruple to sacrifice both the temporal and the spiritual welfare of those of whom they were the guardians. Such conduct proclaimed them to be true successors of those to whom Ezekiel spoke: "Woe unto the shepherds of Israel who feed themselves! Should not the shepherds feed the flocks? Ye eat the fat, and ye clothe yourselves with the wool; but ye feed not the flock."¹

Jesus did not content Himself with condemning the shepherds of Israel: He likewise pointed to the quarter from which pastors after God's own heart would arise.

¹ Ezek. xxxiv. 2, 3.

This He did in the words, "I am the door of the sheep," and in the words of Verse 9, "I am the door: by me if any man enter in, he shall be saved, and shall go in and out, and find pasture." The shepherds of Israel had failed because of their supreme love of self; but those who entered the shepherd's office through Christ were to learn of Him self-denial and self-sacrifice, and the Good Shepherd's supreme care for the sheep. They would also acquire the skill which love teaches, and which would enable them to "find pasture" for their flocks.

It will scarcely be denied that the words, "go in and out, and find pasture," fitly describe the shepherd's vocation, and therefore harmonize well with the interpretation which we advocate. Moses used expressions almost identical when he prayed, "Let the Lord, the God of the spirits of all flesh, set a man over the congregation, who may go out before them, and who may go in before them, and who may lead them out, and who may bring them in; that the congregation of the Lord be not as sheep which have no shepherd."¹

But what of the words, "shall be saved"? Do not they shew that our Lord was speaking of the flock and of personal salvation, and not of the shepherds and of the faithful discharge of pastoral duty? It may seem so at first sight; but often in Scripture we find salvation and the faithful discharge of duty brought into most intimate connection, and this is especially true if we understand salvation in the wider meaning it often bears. St. Paul, it is true, spoke of the foolish builder as saved, "yet so as through fire;" but the complete salvation belonged to him who saved not himself only, but those also who heard him.²

¹ Num. xxvii. 16, 17.

² 1 Tim. iv. 16.

A special reason makes the introduction of the thought of salvation suitable here. The shepherds of Israel, by their conduct to the blind man and the people, were manifestly bringing upon their heads the woe which our Lord pronounced upon them in another place: "Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye shut up the kingdom of heaven against men: for ye neither go in *yourselves*, neither suffer ye them that are entering to go in." ¹ From this woe, and from the shame and dishonour of failing miserably in a high work, those were to be delivered who were willing to enter the pastoral office through the true Door. Such a deliverance might well be called "salvation."

It need scarcely be added that this entering in, of which our Lord here spoke, means much more than a nominal recognition of Him as the "chief Shepherd." It means that a man learn of Him, work under his guidance, drink of his Spirit, and, above all, faithfully tread that path of the Cross in which He walked when upon earth.

If the meaning of the words, "I am the door," have been often misunderstood by interpreters, their lesson has likewise been often disregarded by those for whom it was intended. The history of the Church shews that Christian ministers, as well as Jewish Rabbis, have often been "thieves and robbers," inasmuch as they have sought honour for themselves, and sacrificed the sheep to preserve the privileges of their order. How often has it happened, as in the case of the blind man and the Pharisees, that the instincts of the people have been truer than those of their pastors; and that men

¹ Matt. xxiii. 13.

and movements have been frowned upon with jealous caste prejudices by the latter, when they found much hearty recognition from the former. Such policy however, is in the end dangerous to the authority in whose interest it is employed. The motive of it is ultimately divined; and then the people rise against it, just as the man born blind was goaded by the false pretences of the Pharisees into a rejection of their authority. A modern poet¹ has put into the mouth of an historical character a prediction of what would befall the Christian Church, and how it would

Wax weak, by seeming to be strong ;
 Till there shall be on earth a sight to scare
 Earth's holiest hope from human hearts away :
 A priesthood, purchased by complacent prayer,
 Leagued with earth's pomps, for profit and for pay,
 Against heaven's love ; praisers of things that are,
 Scorners of good that's not : cleaving to clay,
 Strangling the spirit : purblind unaware !
 Contracting, not enlarging, day by day,
 The charities of Christ, with surly care ;
 Till man's indignant heart shall turn away,
 And choose the champions of its faith elsewhere.

Who can deny that all branches of the Christian Church have, at one time or another, contributed fulfilments to the poet's bitter prophecy? JOHN GIBB.

THE DUTIFUL SERVANT.

ST. LUKE xvii. 7-10.

THIS parable of the Dutiful Servant, though not absolutely unknown, is, I imagine, comparatively unfamiliar to most readers of the New Testament ; and that probably for two reasons. (1) It has no setting, no sig-

¹ Lord Lytton.