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A SERMON,

&c.

EZEKIEL XXXIV. 6.

My flock was scattered upon all the face of the earth, and none did search or seek after them.

THE general argument of the chapter from which the text is taken may be briefly stated. When this prophecy was delivered (about 590 years before the coming of our Lord), Jerusalem had been ruined, the Holy Land laid waste, and the chosen people, God's Flock, scattered or destroyed. The Lord is here represented as exercising his free grace, compassionating the stricken and oppressed, rebuking the negligence and rapacity of the rulers, promising that he himself will search and seek for the scattered ones, "as a shepherd seeketh out his flock;" and pointing to the coming of the Messiah, that "plant of renown," under whose glorious reign the bands of their yoke shall be broken, restoration to peace secured, and "showers of blessings be their portion." The verse selected refers to the flock as God's flock, to its being scattered, and to the neglect of duty by those whose office it was to search and seek after the sheep.

The Bible is replete with such illustrations: for to a pastoral people like the Jews of old, no images were more striking than those drawn in vivid freshness from their every-day life. The Sacred Record, in the very dawn of history, speaks of Abel as "a keeper of sheep," while the Psalms and prophecies abound with figures and allegories, in which God's people are spoken of as "the sheep of his hand;" and our Blessed Lord not only calls Himself the Shepherd of the sheep, but says to Peter, "Feed my sheep." Still, though this is an illustration running through the whole of the Inspired Volume, it is not one that appeals with the same force to a modern as to an ancient audience, to an English as to a Jewish congregation. Our high-pressure age, our science and literature, our commerce and fine arts, our civilization and refinement, prompt a fastidious taste to crave for more highly-seasoned food, and to turn with contempt from the simple imagery of the Hebrew prophets. But with us, I know it is not so. We feel it good to let the mind go back to those early days, and dwell for a time where the shepherds of Israel "fed their flocks:" and to meditate on those sacred scenes from which "shepherds returned, glorifying God." More especially should such associations be interesting to the Clergy, who can never forget that tender and beautiful passage from St John's Gospel, so full of pastoral allusions, read in their hearing on the most solemn occasion of a Minister's career.

Familiar then, as such passages must be to all of us, I need not minutely pursue a parallel which is sufficiently obvious. The Good Shepherd—the Shepherd

that giveth his life for the flock—is our Blessed Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ: “the image of the invisible God, the first-born of every creature;” “perfect God and perfect man; equal to the Father as touching his Godhead, but inferior to the Father as touching his manhood.” Under this good Shepherd, this “head, even Christ,” are the subordinate shepherds, the Clergy, to whom the Lord commits various flocks of his people on earth, charging us through his Church, to be “messengers, watchmen, and stewards of the Lord; to teach and to premonish; to feed and provide for the Lord’s family; *to seek for Christ’s sheep that are dispersed abroad.*” Our Church requires due preparation, tests our qualifications, shows us our responsibilities, exhorts us to earnest prayer, to assiduous study of the Holy Scriptures, to a life of piety, purity and self-denial. She expects from us activity without restlessness; tact without cunning; earnestness without fanaticism, and caution without cowardice. She demands from us readiness to endure hardness as good soldiers of Christ Jesus; to fight manfully under his banner; but she implores us, in the words and spirit of St Paul, to “avoid foolish and unlearned questions;” for “the servant of the Lord must not strive, but be gentle unto all men, in meekness instructing those that oppose themselves.”

The Fold is the Church of Christ, so called in the Bible and in our Ordination Service. The Church of England is no novelty, no schismatic body, no Protestant sect, one of many. She existed as a true branch of the Church Catholic long before the rise of the errors, the superstitions and the usurpations of Rome. She is

a Church, not self-originating, not deriving her authority from the people, but tracing her descent, as she does her doctrines, to the Great Head, to Christ himself; a Church which, freed from much of human error, the encrustations of ages, comes forth in pristine purity, willing to stand or fall by the Bible and the voice of primitive Christianity; a Church which never enslaves the conscience of her children, and which strictly prohibits her clergy from teaching anything to the people as essential to salvation which cannot be proved by Holy Writ.

The Sheep are the individual members of this fold, all who have been baptized into the Church of Christ; "the body of Christ and members in particular," in the words of St Paul; or, as the 19th Article says, "The visible Church of Christ is a congregation of faithful men, in the which the pure word of God is preached, and the sacraments be duly administered;" a definition which, rightly interpreted, refutes many prevalent errors, especially that one which makes Clergy and Church equivalent terms, to the implied exclusion of the laity; as if St Peter had never written, "*Ye also* are built up a spiritual house." And again, the Article just quoted, when speaking of the "visible Church" as "a congregation of faithful men," must not be interpreted as maintaining, that mere outward communion with the Church is equivalent to a man's being a true living member of the Body of Christ—the use of the word "visible," plainly implying that there is a Church *invisible*—not only in heaven, but also on earth. For, though by baptism, we are grafted into the body of Christ's Church,

the very prayer that "we may lead the rest of our lives according to this beginning," and the whole tone of our services distinctly show that a fall is possible. Our Church has never taught that baptism and salvation are synonymous words, that is, that *all* the baptized are saved: nor has she declared the baptized "regenerated," in the modern and perverted use of that word, but in its primitive and genuine signification. The visible flock, then, in this world may and must contain the good and the bad. It is God alone who can finally separate the sheep from the goats. *Our* duty as shepherds is to feed *all* that profess to be of the Church; to teach the people committed to our care and charge; to win others to the true fold, and to lead them in peace to the good pasture of the Lord.

And what *is* that pasture? The Word of God, the Holy Scripture, which contains all things necessary, "given by inspiration of God, and profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness." Pre-eminently is the Church of England a Scriptural Church, for not only does she in theory assert the supreme authority of the "Scriptures, which are able to make us wise unto salvation, through faith in Christ Jesus;" but in her practice she prescribes large portions to be read daily in her public service, while her prayers and praises are all in the *spirit*, and nearly all in the very *words* of the Oracles of God. But deeply as she values and venerates the Bible, she does not, as some do, depreciate the Institution of the Church. She believes *both* to be of God; *both* intended by Him for his people's good, or *both* would not have been given.

The great doctrines of the Gospel—the Incarnation, the Atonement, and all that flow from these, must be faithfully and unreservedly declared; there must be no deceitful handling of the word of God, no wresting, no private interpretation, no explaining away of passages that speak unpalatable truths, no undermining the foundations of all our hopes by the secret sapping of rationalism, or “philosophy falsely so called,” no pandering to that spurious liberalism, which, confounding liberty with licentiousness, calls evil good, and good evil; no listening to the voice of the stranger or traitor, who, on the specious plea of adding beauty and dignity to the worship of God, ransacks foreign lands and mediæval centuries, bringing back an eclectic system of forms and ceremonies, decorations and vestments, which make the *representation* more prominent than the *reality represented*, which delude the weak, amuse the frivolous, irritate the rebellious, gratify the scorner, and grieve the soberminded. The times in which we live call loudly on the shepherds “to take heed to *themselves*, as well as to the flock of which the Holy Ghost hath made them overseers;” for we know but too well that “grievous wolves *are* entering in, not sparing the flock.”

But, while these remarks are of general application to the relation between the Christian shepherd and the sheep of Christ, we would solicit your attention to a special view of the subject in reference to those who are *really* as well as *figuratively* dispersed—our fellow-countrymen and our fellow-Churchmen “scattered upon all the face of the earth.” We speak not of those whose

blessed lot it is to find in another hemisphere other folds of the same great fold as well-ordered as our own; but we refer to such, as not being under the colonial Episcopate, are to be found in many detached groups, in scores, or even hundreds, in foreign lands, where literally "*none* do search or seek after them."

We need not here digress to speculate on the origin of dioceses and parishes. We all know the blessings of our Church system—blessings, the purity of whose brightness is rather made conspicuous than diminished by minute spots that occasionally mark its surface. Every English parish has its parish Church, with at least, its Sunday services. There the child is made a member of Christ—there the rite of confirmation is administered—there we are partakers of the Holy Communion—there the Church's benediction is pronounced on the wedded pair—thither the corpse is borne before being "laid into the earth." Every English parish has its parish-priest, "to minister the doctrine, the sacraments, and the discipline of Christ; to drive away erroneous and strange doctrines; to use both public and private monitions and exhortations, as well to the sick as to the whole; to make himself and his family wholesome examples and patterns to the flock of Christ, and to set forward quietness, peace and love among all Christian people, especially amongst those committed to his charge."

But, what a contrast to all this is the state of those to whom I have alluded! Where is the parish Church? where is the parish-priest? Commerce carries off her thousands, either as sea-faring men, or as merchants

settling in foreign parts. War drains away its recruits from many an English village. Emigration pours forth the children of our native land in multitudes every year ; the love of travel, the desire of knowledge, the search after health, and many other causes have scattered and are scattering the sheep of the English fold “upon all the face of the earth.”

Now, were we to apply to this state of things the strong words of the prophecy without due limitation, we might justly be accused of overstating the case. We therefore most willingly concede the unspeakable advantages of our Colonial Bishoprics, and that in many of them there *is* an approximation to a parochial system. We do not forget the great Religious Societies, and the efforts they have made to send Clergymen, Bibles and Prayer-books abroad. We do not fail to recognize the recent attempts, in many cases successful, to provide Chaplains for our emigrants and seamen, not only in British but in foreign ports. Nor do we wish to undervalue the truly Christian exertions of those good men, who remember the soldier fighting his country's battles, and who provide him with the word of God, with Clergymen and with Scripture Readers. Granting then, *all* this, and we do so with thankfulness, that so much is being done ; still it is not to be denied, that the supply is, after all, most lamentably deficient. From personal knowledge in a foreign port, I can testify that our sailors neglect themselves, and are sadly neglected by the Church. Of the four hundred thousand Englishmen connected with the sea, it is believed that not one in ten has a Bible or a Prayer-book.

Chaplains are unknown in merchant-ships, however large ; are rarely found (save as passengers) in emigrant vessels ; and only in the navy on board men-of-war of the largest class. In many foreign ports, *frequented* not only by English *sailors*, but *inhabited* by English *settlers*—the sound of a pure Gospel is unheard. No clergyman near, no prayers, no preaching, no baptism, (except by laymen or a Romish priest), no visitation of the sick, no Holy Communion, “*None* doth search or seek after them.” I would, in proof, point to Spain, a country in which for centuries we have had an embassy and numerous British residents ; and yet at this moment hundreds, perhaps thousands, in that land are without any Clergyman of their own Church ¹.

What *must* be the consequences ? The prophet tells us. “The fold must become meat to all the beasts of the field.” Some fall into utter indifferentism, careless of every religious observance. Others imbibe the sentiments of the thinking and educated, the so-called “enlightened” classes in Spain, who seek relief from popular credulity in private scepticism. Others again, defying in a foreign land that public opinion which would have restrained them at home, rush into every excess, and outstrip even indigenious immorality by their daring licentiousness. While others, horrified by the conduct of their countrymen, find, or fancy they find, that peace and comfort in Rome, which their own

¹ For many years there was no English clergyman settled as chaplain in any part of Spain ! About ten years ago, through the exertions of the British Consul, a chaplain was placed at Malaga. Only last month one was appointed at Madrid, and another at Bilbao.

Church has failed to send them. True it is, that all have not bowed the knee to Baal. There are some bright spots I know of, where perhaps at this very hour the faithful brethren are gathered together in the name of Christ, secretly like the disciples of old, in an upper chamber, for prayer and praise.

Let me now briefly enquire what are the causes, what the remedies of this sad state of things. *The* cause is the apathy in regard to religion, which, even in England, keeps half our people from public worship; and, in a *foreign* land, our rough miners, labourers and sailors, untrained in Christian principles, and suspicious of our motives, are little likely to take the initiative in obtaining the advantage of a Christian ministry. Even the middle and higher classes, from whom we might expect better things, do not always adequately represent our Church: and by some, our national character, as a religious people, is most seriously compromised. In many towns the British Consul is the only chaplain, a room in his house the only Church; the reading of prayers the only service; and in most instances, not even that, for the consuls are either Roman Catholics, or for some other reason will not officiate.

Another cause is the indifference of the Church at home, partly from ignorance of the facts, and partly from the opinion that the conversion of the heathen *to* the fold is a more imperative duty than the preservation of our own countrymen *in* the fold of Christ.

A third cause may be found in the intolerance of the Romish priesthood, acting through the civil power, and imposing restrictions which amount almost to pro-

hibition ; such as, that no *public* worship other than the Roman Catholic shall be permitted, and that not more than twenty persons shall be allowed to assemble for Divine service, even in a Consulate or private house ; an intolerance which is intensified by the well-meant but mistaken efforts of pious people to interfere with the religion of the country, in which, after all, let it not be forgotten, we are but guests. An injudiciousness which reaches its climax, when persons are found maintaining that the duty of an English Chaplain resident in a Roman Catholic country consists quite as much in converting the natives, as in ministering to his own countrymen—a fatal combination, injurious to both causes, and, in a recent instance, producing a most painful result.

Here, then, surely is a case in which the Church of England is deeply concerned, in which her responsibility is great. “I will require my flock at their hand.” The evil is evident ; what are the remedies ? One is the immediate employment of missionaries, acting under episcopal sanction, to visit all the towns with British settlers, officiate as frequently as possible, and encourage the people to unite for the purpose of obtaining resident clergymen. Combined with this, or rather preceding it, a more decided action of the venerable Society for the Propagation of the Gospel, not merely a *passive* encouragement (as at present) but an *active* promotion of missions to *our own people*, one of its original and prominent objects. An amendment, too, of the Foreign Chaplaincy Act is much required, as the present regulations under it admit British subjects

of all creeds on a mere money qualification, to vote in the election and dismissal of the chaplains, independently of the Bishop ; an arrangement which deters many clergymen from accepting consular chaplaincies. Further, it has been suggested, that the sums at present lavished on attempts to proselytise, would be much better employed in providing clergymen for our own people, who, abandoned by the Church of England, seek refuge in Rome. And finally, the cessation of all violent attacks on Romish error, trusting rather to the silent eloquence of the principles and practices of our Church, when duly represented ; and believing that the exhibition of her true character will be of inestimable service to many darkened but enquiring minds. To such the knowledge of the fact, that it *is* possible to shake off human error, and yet remain a member of the *Catholic* Church—I mean of course in the true sense of that word—would be a boon of which *we* have but little conception ; for many Spaniards are made to believe that the word Protestant is but another term for Atheist ; and that there is no resting-place between Superstition and Infidelity. Show the intelligent classes of Roman Catholic countries, that there *is* a pure branch of the Church, at once Catholic and Protestant—Catholic, in maintaining the great positive truths of our most holy faith—and Protestant, in opposing the admixture of human follies ;—show them this, and more good will be done, and in a better way, than by all the expensive and irritating machinery at present in operation. And at this blessed season, while we remember the Advent of our Lord, let us hope and pray that our Church, if not in her collective capacity,

at least through her societies and individual members, will take means to wipe away this reproach. Let her hold out the right hand of fellowship to those of our countrymen, who, scattered in foreign parts without the means of grace, wonder why the "Priest and the Levite" of their own Church of England "pass by on the other side," and cry, but hitherto in vain, "come over and help us;" or are silent in indifference and despair. Let us no longer neglect those lonely outposts of our Church, holding out bravely for "the truth, as it is in Jesus," struggling against famine within and the foe without: but let us tell them their prayers have been heard, that help is coming, that the day of their deliverance is at hand, that "they shall be no more a prey," but "they shall dwell safely, and none shall make them afraid." They shall then know the realization of the consolatory promise:—"As a shepherd seeketh out his flock in the day that he is among his sheep that are scattered: so will I seek out my sheep, and will deliver them out of all places where they have been scattered in the cloudy and dark day. Thus they shall know, that I the Lord their God am with them, and that they are my people, saith the Lord God."

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