

THE
GOSPEL MAGAZINE.

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“COMFORT YE, COMFORT YE, MY PEOPLE, SAITH YOUR GOD.”

“ENDEAVOURING TO KEEP THE UNITY OF THE SPIRIT IN THE BOND OF PEACE.”

“JESUS CHRIST, THE SAME YESTERDAY, TO-DAY, AND FOR EVER. WHOM TO
KNOW IS LIFE ETERNAL.

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P R E F A C E .

JESUS CHRIST, THE SAME YESTERDAY, TO-DAY, AND FOR EVER, strikes us as the most suitable language wherewith to open our Preface, or yearly salutation.

Brethren, beloved, it is scarcely possible to take a retrospective glance of the revolvings of a year, without being impressed with its manifold changes and vicissitudes; hardly two days, out of three hundred and sixty-five, have been alike. Circumstances have varied—feelings have changed—hill and dale, clouds and sunshine, have marked the pilgrim's route, and he stands gazing backward upon the scene—the twelvemonth's scene—gone, for ever gone—with thoughtfulness, with astonishment, with gratitude! Yet Time carries not—no, not even to gratify our momentary musing.

Hence, as he travels on with rapid stride, we stand—we contemplate his flight, and ask ourselves the question, “What tidings does he bear? what new scenes is he commissioned to unfold?”

But, beloved, the subject-matter of inquiry being so enwrapped in mystery, gladly we leave it to ponder on a higher theme.

The Church of Christ is most beautifully compared to sheep, Himself the good Shepherd; and, in the kindly character in which the shepherd stands to the fold beneath his care, our good Shepherd says, "when He putteth forth his own sheep he goeth before them." Hence, beloved, we have a most glorious contemplation in the person of our adorable Christ, as going before his sheep—his dear blood-bought Church—into all the unseen—unknown—vicissitudes of another year; and since the relation in which He stands to his Church is so dear, so blessed, we do find it most encouraging to consider that as superlatively wise, He cannot—will not—err, in the choice of any one of the appointed spots where he designs his fold should tarry; knowing well the country through which they have to pass, with consummate wisdom, he selects the spot best suited for their temporary sojourn. Blessed be God, it is to be but a temporary stay, for that expression of our Jesu's will, "Father, I will that all they whom thou hast given me be with me where I am," standing as firmly now as when first dropped from his lips, we have the fullest assurance that our Almighty Surety will never rest satisfied until he has gathered home to himself every object so chosen by the Father, and received at his hands, to be everlastingly saved in Himself!

The language, "when he putteth forth his own sheep," is very blessed, when we contemplate the entire possession which Jesus, as the good Shepherd, has of his spiritual flock. His absolute control over them is herein so sweetly set forth. Notwithstanding all their peevishness and self-will, still He guideth them by the skilfulness of his hands; He leads them hither and thither as seemeth good in his sight. Like silly sheep, they skip, or caper, or break out of the path; but He hedges up their way with thorns, and by his well-known voice, quickly brings them back. Yes, "He calleth his own sheep by

name," and "the sheep follow him, for they know his voice." It is "the voice of their Beloved! behold, He cometh leaping upon the mountains, skipping upon the hills."

Furthermore—not merely does He "put them forth," this were a precious mercy; but, as previously hinted, "He goeth before them;" He leads the way; He opens the path; He encounters the difficulties first; He removes the barriers, treads down the briars and thorns, and frightens away all that would injure or molest; and then—and not until then—"the sheep follow him."

And this good Shepherd is "JESUS CHRIST, THE SAME YESTERDAY, TO-DAY, AND FOR EVER," What he has been through the "YESTERDAY" of our time-state, that He is "TO-DAY;" and surely, with what He is "TO-DAY," we have no fault to find, for he fulfils his promise, "Thy shoes shall be iron and brass; and as thy days, so shall thy strength be;" "Thy bread shall be given thee, and thy waters shall be sure;" "The barrel of meal does not waste, neither does the cruse of oil fail." Adored be his name! And what He was "YESTERDAY,"—what He is "TO-DAY," that, as the unchangeable I AM, He will be "FOR-EVER." What David declared, we never so much believed to be a truth as we do now. In the opening of that ever-memorable twenty-third psalm, he breaks forth, "The Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not want;" and at its close, he adds, "Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life; and I will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever."

Beloved, do you believe the word of the Lord? Hath he yet sent it home with power into your hearts? Why, He will as assuredly accomplish it in your happy experience as He did for David. David (though declared to be a man after God's own heart), was not more loved of the Lord his God than you are; therefore, in the winding up of

the present year, and at the threshold of all the unseen and changing circumstances of a new one, may our dear Father give us grace to sing, even though it be with a faint heart and a trembling voice,

**" This God is the God we adore,
Our faithful, unchangeable Friend:
Whose love is as large as his power,
And neither knows measure nor end:**

**'Tis Jesus the first and the last,
Whose Spirit must guide us safe home ;
We'll praise Him for all that is past,
And trust Him for all that's to come."**