

The Shepherds of the Delectable Mountains

A Pastoral Episode

Ralph Vaughan Williams



Colour Guide

Shepherds = text from the **Shepherds of the Delectable Mountains** episode

Shepherds = text from the PP episode depicting the crossing of the river of death

Shepherds/Shepherds/Shepherds = text from MANY different sources throughout PP

Shepherds = Biblical text, especially from **The Book of Psalms** (in one instance, quoted in the text of **Pilgrim's Progress**)

(On several occasions Vaughan Williams adapts and even 'recreates' PP/Bible material)

The curtain rises on the three Shepherds

First Shepherd: Whoso dwelleth under the defence of the Most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty. He shall defend thee under his wings, and thou shalt be safe under his feathers. For he shall give his angels charge over thee, that thou hurt not thy foot against a stone. Whoso dwelleth under the defence of the Most High, shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty.
[Psalm 91]

Enter a Pilgrim

Pilgrim: Whose delectable mountains are these? And whose be the sheep that feed upon them?

Second Shepherd: These mountains are Emmanuel's land, and the sheep also are his, and he laid down his life for them.

Pilgrim: Is this the way to the Celestial City?

Second Shepherd: You are just in your way.

Pilgrim: How far is it thither?

Second Shepherd: Too far for any but those who shall get thither indeed.

Pilgrim: Is the way safe, or dangerous?

Second Shepherd: Safe, for those for whom it is to be safe, but many shall fall therein.

Pilgrim: Is there in this place any relief for pilgrims that are weary and faint in the way?

Third Shepherd: The Lord of these mountains hath given us a charge not to be forgetful to entertain pilgrims, therefore the good of the place is before you.

The Shepherds welcome the Pilgrim

Third Shepherd: I perceive that you are a wayfaring man, whence come you?

Pilgrim: I come from the City of Destruction and am going to Mount Zion.

Third Shepherd: What is it makes you so desirous to get to Mount Zion?

Pilgrim: Fain would I be where I shall die no more in the Paradise of God. There to be with my King all the days of eternity.

Second Shepherd (pointing off stage): Look southward, there you can see the gates of the City builded of pearls and precious stones; see, the whole region is full of chariots and horses, of trumpeters and pipers to welcome the pilgrims.

Pilgrim (hiding his eyes): O, I cannot look on that glory [origin uncertain], at the sight thereof I fall sick with desire. When shall I come to appear before the presence of God? [Psalm 42]

Third Shepherd: **Be comforted. The bitter is before the sweet. We would that you should stay with us here awhile and solace yourself with the good of these delectable mountains.**

First Shepherd: Here the air is very sweet and pleasant, here you shall hear continually the singing of birds, and shall see every day flowers appear in the land.

Pilgrim: **I am content to stay.**

Voice of a Bird: **The Lord is my Shepherd, therefore can I lack nothing. [Psalm 23. And following]**

Pilgrim: **What is it that makes that melodious note?**

Voice of a Bird: **He maketh me to lie down in green pastures, he leadeth me beside the still waters. He restoreth my soul, he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake.**

First Shepherd: **It is our country birds, they sing these notes in the spring when the flowers appear and the sun shines warm and then you may hear them all day long; they make the woods and groves and the solitary places, places desirous to be in. Prudence**

Voice of a Bird: **Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; for thou art with me, thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.**

Pilgrim: **They fill the air with their melodious sounds.**

The Shepherds: **Thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.**

Voice of a Bird: **Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life.**

The Shepherds: **And I will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever.**

Enter a Celestial Messenger

Celestial Messenger: **Hail, Pilgrim! I bring thee tidings that the Master calleth for thee, and expecteth that thou shouldst stand in his presence this day in clothes of immortality. I give you here a token that I am a true messenger and bid you make haste to be gone. An arrow with the point sharpened with love, let easily into thy heart, that at the time appointed thou must be gone.**

The messenger ceremonially pierces the Pilgrim's heart with an arrow

Pilgrim: **I come, Lord, to be with thee and bless thee. When shall I pass over and the trumpets sound for me on the other side?**

Celestial Messenger: **Even now you are in sight of the gate; but between you and the gate there is a river, and the river is very deep. You must go through, or you cannot come at the gate.**

Pilgrim: **We have need to cry to the Strong for strength.**

The Shepherds come forward bringing spices

First Shepherd: Here grow camphire, spikenard and saffron, frankincense, myrrh and aloes.

Second Shepherd: With these must your body be anointed to prepare you to go over the river.

They anoint the Pilgrim who kneels. He then rises and takes the hand of the Messenger

Third Shepherd: The Comforter be always with you to guide you in the way that leads to the City.

The Shepherds stand watching. (A long pause)

The Messenger points out the way to the Pilgrim and leaves him. Both exeunt in different directions

Pilgrim (off stage, distant): I sink in the deep waters, all the billows go over my head, all the waves go over me; let not the water-flood drown me, neither let the deep swallow me up. [Psalm 69]

The Shepherds: Be not thou far from him, O Lord; thou art his succour, haste thee to help him [Psalm 22]. When thou passest through the waters and through rivers they shall not overflow thee. Be not thou far from him, O Lord. [Psalm 43, quoted in PP]

Trumpets off stage, distant

Chorus: Alleluia!

The Shepherds: O by what tongue can their glorious joy be expressed? PP1 now across the river Blessed are they that dwell in thy house, they shall always be praising thee. [Psalm 84]

The Shepherds move slowly back to their original places

Chorus (more and more distant): Alleluia!

The stage gradually becomes quite dark.

Curtain

Recording of The Shepherds of the Delectable Mountains

Hyperion (1990s). Sole recording available.

Pilgrim: Bryn Terfel

First Shepherd: Alan Opie

Second Shepherd: Adrian Thompson

Third Shepherd: Jonathan Best

Celestial Messenger: John Mark Ainsley

Voice of a Bird: Linda Kitchen

Corydon Singers/City of London Sinfonia/Matthew Best, conductor