Song of Solomon - Commentaries by Hamilton Smith

The Song of Songs, Canticle 6: The Triumph of Love

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The Daughters of Jerusalem. (Ch. 8:5)

(Vs. 5) “Who is this that cometh up from the wilderness,

Leaning upon her Beloved?”

The previous canticle closed with the desire of the bride to express her love for the Bridegroom before all the world without being despised. In this canticle her desire is gratified. The bride is seen coming out of the wilderness leaning upon the arm of her Beloved, and the daughters of Jerusalem inquire, "Who is this?" In the fourth canticle the bride had sought and found the Bridegroom; in the fifth canticle she had held sweet and secret communion with him; but now, at last, she is displayed before the world in company with Him, but in dependence upon Him. Wilderness wanderings are left behind, the glory shines before her. Thus will it be with Israel, the earthly bride. Jehovah will allure her and bring her into the wilderness; there will He speak to her heart, and there, when restored, the Lord says, "I will betroth thee unto me forever" (Hos. 2:14-23).

So too, when the wilderness journey of the church is past and the marriage of the Lamb is come, she will be displayed in association with Christ in glory, as a bride adorned for her husband, as we delight to sing:

Nor is it otherwise that the Lord acts towards restored saints. We wander and fall, but grace brings us up out of our wanderings leaning upon Christ, just as the bride is seen "leaning upon her beloved." We fall, like Peter, through leaning upon our love to Christ, but in tender grace He lifts us up and brings us to lean upon His great love to us. This was the happy experience of John, of whom we read in John 13:23, "There was leaning on Jesus' bosom, one of His disciples, whom Jesus loved." How slow we are in learning this lesson of dependence. Pride makes it hard to own our nothingness and His fullness, our weakness and His strength, and thus to find all our resources in Him. It was no easy task to learn as sinners that we must come bringing nothing to Christ, and we are equally slow as saints to learn that we must draw everything from Christ, according to the Lord's own words, "Without Me ye can do nothing" (John 15:5). "Leaning" is weakness clinging to strength: "leaning on Jesus' bosom" is leaning on the love of One in whom all fullness dwells.

The Bridegroom. (Vs. 5).

(Vs. 5). “I awoke thee under the apple tree:

There thy mother brought thee forth;

There she brought thee forth (that) bore thee.”

Brought to happy dependence on the Bridegroom's love, the bride is reminded that all the blessings that are hers, from the moment when she was brought forth in weakness, she owes to the Beloved. Never must we forget that we are debtors to grace for all we have and are. Whether it be a backsliding saint restored to communion and public service, or backsliding Israel restored to earthly glory, or a ruined and scattered church displayed in perfection in heavenly glory, all will owe their position to the sovereign grace of the Lord that awakened us, brought us forth out of our degradation and associated us with Himself.

The Bride. (Ch. 8:6-8).

(Vs. 6). “Set me as a seal upon Thy heart.

As a seal upon Thine arm;”

Leaning upon her Beloved, realizing the grace to which she owes her origin, and that never again can she rest in her love to the Beloved, she exclaims, "Set me as a seal upon Thy heart, as a seal upon Thine arm." She does not doubt His love, but she realizes that all her blessing depends upon His love, not hers. Therefore, she seeks evermore a place in His affections, forever to be upheld by His strong arm. He indeed has a place in her heart, but her confidence is that she has a place in His heart. So the restored soul delights to say of Christ, "My confidence is that my name is upon His heart—I have a place in His affections; my name is upon His arm—I have the protection and support of His strong arm." We can trust His heart, and His arm, though we cannot trust our own. We cannot exhaust the love of His heart, and we cannot limit the power of His arm.

(Vs. 6). “For love is strong as death;

Jealousy is cruel as the grave:”

The Bridegroom's love is the ground of the bride's confidence, as the love of Christ is the ground of our confidence. This is a love that has been proved, and found to be strong as death. Death holds men in its strong grip. Death makes sport of all man's puny strength. From the fall onwards, men and death have been in mortal combat, but death has triumphed all along the lines, until at last love—love divine—went down into the dark valley and entered into combat with death. At the Cross love came into conflict with death and love triumphed. Death could not hold back the love of Christ; death could not vanquish the love of Christ. Death took away His life but death could not take away His love.

Love prevailed, for love yielded to death in order that love might triumph over death. "Death stung itself to death when it killed Him."

Jealousy is cruel as the grave. How pitilessly cruel is the grave. It swallows up the young, the loved, the fairest, and the brightest. It knows no pity, and so jealousy would deal without pity against all that would come between the Bridegroom and His bride. Christ must be supreme: "He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of Me" (Matt. 10:37), and therefore the Lord can say, "If any man come to Me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be My disciple" (Luke 14:26). To "hate" has the sound of cruelty, but it is the cruelty of jealous love that brooks no rival. Almost universally men speak of jealousy in an evil sense. Scripture hardly ever so. It speaks even of a "godly jealousy." The Apostle can say of believers, "I am jealous over you with a godly jealousy" for, says he, "I have espoused you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ" (2 Cor. 2:2). His love to Christ, and his love to the saints made him jealous lest anyone, or anything, should come between them and Christ. He had no pity for any who, by false doctrines, would beguile the saints from Christ. If an apostle or an angel from heaven preach any other gospel let him be accursed. This was the cruelty of jealous love.

Love strong as death, and jealousy cruel as the grave are found together. One is the outcome of the other. Love and jealousy may be found in measure in all men. But it is only love strong as death that calls forth jealousy cruel as the grave.

(Vs. 6) “The flashes thereof are flashes of fire, flames of Jah.”

There is heat and consuming fire in love. Do we not see a flash of this consuming fire in the love of the Lord, that could brook no dishonor to the Father, when He drove the moneychangers from the Temple, so that the disciples remembered that it was written of Him, "The zeal of Thine house hath eaten me up" (John 2:17)? We see too the vehement flame of love carrying Paul through that marvelous life, spending and being spent for the saints, leaving home and ease, facing hunger and thirst, cold and nakedness, perils, persecutions and death, constrained by the love of Christ. We see this holy zeal burning like a vehement flame in the long roll of martyrs and persecuted saints. The flame of love that glowed in their hearts triumphed over the flame of the fagots that burned their bodies.

(Vs. 7). “Many waters cannot quench love,

Neither can the floods drown it:

Nothing can quench divine love.”

The Lord Jesus faced the "many waters," but they could not quench His love. He faced the "floods," but they could not drown His love. At the cross "the floods lifted up their voice," only to find that love divine is mightier than the noise of many waters. There the sorrows of death encompassed Him, and the floods of the ungodly made Him afraid, but they could not make Him yield up His love (Ps. 18:4). He could say, "The waters are come in unto My soul" (Psa. 69:1), but they could not drown the love that was in His heart. All the billows and waves of God passed over Him (Jonah 2:3), but His love never passed from Him. The "many waters" could not quench His love for His bride, and the floods could not drown it. His love has triumphed and His love abides. Well may we sing, "Unto Him that loves us, and has washed us from our sins in His own blood...; to Him be glory and dominion forever and ever."

(Vs. 7). “If a man gave all the substance of his house for love,

It would utterly be contemned.”

Love cannot be bought. It is true Christ gave up, as it were, the "substance of His house"; He gave up kingdoms and thrones and crowns, but He gave more, He "gave Himself," and in giving Himself He proved His love, for "greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends" (John 15:13). And in response to this great love He looks for love. Nothing but love from our hearts will satisfy the love of His heart. We may offer the labor of our hands, our silver and our gold, our works of charity and our bodies to be burned, but if there is no love it will be utterly contemned.

The love of Christ begets love. We love Him because He first loved us.

Such is the love wherewith we are loved.

A love that has put us under the shelter of His strong arm.

A love that is strong as death.

A love that is jealous with a godly jealousy.

A love that burns with a vehement flame.

A love that cannot be quenched, and

A love that cannot be bought.

(Vs. 8). “We have a little sister,

And she hath no breasts:

What shall we do for our sister

In the day when she shall be spoken for?”

Restored and happy in the love of the Bridegroom, the bride is free to think of the blessing of others. If, in the strict interpretation of the Song, the bride represents God's earthly people—the Jews—restored and brought into blessing under Christ, the "little sister" will probably represent Ephraim, or the ten tribes. They will, we know, be brought into blessing, but not through the experiences of the Jews in connection with Christ. Their affections for Christ will not have been developed by the exercises and experiences through which the Jew has passed and will yet pass. But the day of opportunity is coming for Ephraim—the day when she shall be spoken for. And what shall be done for her in that day?

The Bridegroom. (Vs. 9).

(Vs. 9). “If she be a wall,

We will build upon her a turret of silver;

And if she be a door,

We will enclose her with boards of cedar.”

Here we have the answer. When Israel is again established on a firm foundation like a wall, then will she be a monument of redeeming grace: "We will build upon her a turret of silver." When she becomes a door—when her heart is opened to Christ—she will come under His protection and care: "We will enclose her with boards of cedar."

While the strict interpretation points to Ephraim, can we not apply the principle to that large class who truly make a confession for Christ, and yet, like Ephraim, their affections for Christ have never been developed by the experiences through which they have passed. How many, alas, are like the "little sister" of the Song! Their lives may be outwardly correct. No grave dereliction from the straight path can be laid to their door. They have never wandered like the bride; they have never been smitten by the watchmen of the city; their veils have never been torn from them by the keepers of the walls; they have been into no dark valley to learn their own hearts, and they have never climbed the mountain heights of Amanah or Hermon to learn the love that is in the heart of Christ. Their affections have not been developed by any deep experimental acquaintance with Christ. What shall be done for them? What they need is to become firmly established in their relations to Christ—to become a wall. And to have their hearts opened to Christ- to become a door. Then indeed they would become a witness of His redeeming grace to others, and their hearts an enclosure devoted to Christ.

The Bride. (Ch. 8:10-12).

(Vs. 10). “I am a wall, and my breasts like towers;

Then was I in His eyes as one that findeth peace.”

By grace the bride can say, "I am a wall." Established in her relationships to the Bridegroom, her affection is the secret of her strength and the measure of her witness before others. A tower is a place of security as well as a landmark to others. The saint whose affections are drawn out to Christ is one indeed who has found peace in the eyes of Christ. Mary, whose affections brought her to rest at the feet of Christ, was one who, in His sight, had found peace, and a peace that He will not have disturbed. "Mary hath chosen that good part, which shall not be taken away from her" (Luke 10:42).

(Vs. 11). “Solomon had a vineyard at Baal-hamon:

He let out the vineyard unto keepers;

Every one for the fruit thereof was to bring a thousand silver-pieces.”

The meaning of Baal-hamon is "Master of a multitude." The passage looks on to the time when Christ—the true Solomon—will reign over all the nations of the earth. The whole earth will become a fruitful vineyard. There will be kings of the earth—the keepers of the vineyard—and they will enjoy the fruits of the earth, but they will be subject to Christ. They will pay tribute.

They will bring, as it were, a thousand silver-pieces.

(Vs. 12). “My vineyard, which is mine, is before me:

Thou, Solomon, shalt have the thousand,

And the keepers of its fruit two hundred.”

But the bride has her own vineyard. Restored Israel will have her special place, and she, too, will gladly own her subjection to Christ. But when she owns all to be His, others will get the blessing. If Solomon gets the thousand pieces of silver, others will get two hundred. Mary's box of ointment, very costly, was wholly expended upon Christ, but others also received a benefit, for "the house was filled with the odor of the ointment" (John 12:3).

Thus at last the soul who has experienced the dark valleys and the mountain heights, city wanderings and garden delights, is brought to rest in the eternal love of Christ (vs. 5); in all its breadth, and length, and depth, and height (vss. 6-7); to think of others (vss. 8-9); to gladly own that Christ will have universal sway (vss. 10-11); and in the meantime to hold every possession at His disposal (vs. 12). Such is the triumph of the love of Christ.

The Bridegroom. (Vs. 13)

(Vs. 13). “Thou that dwellest in the gardens.

The companions hearken to thy voice;

Let Me hear it.”

The Bridegroom is heard for the last time. He delights to own what His love has accomplished. The wanderings of the bride are over: love has brought her to dwell in the gardens. How happy for us when drawn by the constraining love of Christ we find our portion outside this poor world in the company of His people—in the gardens of the Lord. Only from that happy place of fellowship can we bear a true witness to others. But the Lord is not content that others should hear our voice in the way of witness, He Himself would fain hear our voice in the way of worship, and response to His voice. Immediately the bride responds:

The Bride. (Vs. 14).

(Vs. 14). “Haste, my Beloved,

And be Thou like a gazelle or young hart

Upon the mountain of spices.”

The reply of the bride expresses the longing of her heart for the Bridegroom. His desire is gratified, He hears her voice as she says, "Haste, my beloved," words that fall upon His ear with great delight, for they tell Him that love has accomplished its work in the heart of the bride. A love fills her heart that will not be satisfied apart from Him, that can only be gratified by His return. So in our day love has taken us in hand, patiently bears with us in all our wanderings, restores our souls, and revives our drooping affections, brings us into the company of Christ in the garden of the Lord, and there unfolds to us all the treasures of love, and tells us our Beloved is coming for us. And love has accomplished its work in our hearts, when in response to His word, “Surely I come quickly,” He hears the voice of His people sending back the response:

"AMEN, EVEN SO, COME, LORD JESUS" (Rev. 22:20).

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The Song of Songs, Canticle 5: The Witness andd Communion of Love

The previous Canticle closes with the restored bride in happy communion with the Bridegroom in the garden of nuts. In this Canticle two scenes pass before us. In the first, the bride is displayed before the daughters of Jerusalem in all the comeliness the King has put upon her (6:13 to 7:5). In the second, the Bridegroom and the bride are found in happy and unrestrained communion (7:6 to 8:4).

The bride, having been restored, becomes a witness to the affections of the Bridegroom before others. This witness is maintained by a walk in communion with the Bridegroom. So with ourselves, the fruits of restoration are seen in the display of the moral beauties of Christ, and this can be only maintained by a walk in communion with Christ. It was thus in the history of restored Peter. In the early part of Acts 4 he is before the world in a way that leads them to discern that he "had been with Jesus" and in the latter part of the chapter he retires to his "own company" to hold sweet communion with the Lord.

The Daughters of Jerusalem.

(Vs. 13). “Return, return, O Shulamite;

Return, return, that we may look upon thee.”

The scene opens with the daughters of Jerusalem calling upon the bride to return. They had already heard from her lips the rapturous description of the Bridegroom, awakening in their hearts desires after the Bridegroom; then, apparently, she left them to join her Beloved in the garden of spices, and now they plead with her to return. Possibly the secret of their plea is the desire to learn more of the Bridegroom, and who so fitted to witness of the Bridegroom as the bride, for now they recognize she is in relation with the King. For the first time they speak of her as the Shulamite—the name of Solomon in its feminine form.

The Bride.

(Vs. 13). “What would ye look upon the Shulamite?”

In reply to the call of the daughters of Jerusalem the bride expresses wonder that they should desire to look upon her.

The Daughters of Jerusalem. (6:13-7:5).

(Vs. 13). “As it were the dance of two camps.”

This appears to be the answer of the daughters of Jerusalem. The text may be translated, "As it were the dance of Mahanaim." The allusion is probably to the day when Jacob left the land of Mesopotamia to go to the promised land with his wives, his children, his servants and all his goods. In the way "the angels of God met him; and when Jacob saw them, he said, This is God's host: and he called the name of that place Mahanaim [i.e., two hosts or camps]” (Gen. 32:1-2). There the heavenly and the earthly host met, and here the Bridegroom and the bride have met in the garden of the King, and the daughters say, in the language of figure, "We would see the effect of this meeting." How good when others can see the effect of our having been "with Jesus." In response the bride stands before them in all her beauty, and with great delight the daughters of Jerusalem describe her loveliness.

(Ch. 7:1-5). “How beautiful are thy footsteps in sandals, O prince's daughter!

The roundings of thy thighs are like jewels.

The work of the hands of a cunning workman.

Thy navel is a round goblet [which] wanteth not mixed wine;

Thy belly a heap of wheat, set about with lilies;

Thy two breasts are like two fawns, twins of a gazelle;

Thy neck is a tower of ivory;

Thine eyes, [like] the pools in Heshbon,

By the gate of Bath-rabbim;

Thy nose like the tower of Lebanon,

Which looketh toward Damascus:

Thy head upon thee is like Carmel,

And the locks of thy head like purple:

The King is fettered by [thy] ringlets!”

The daughters of Jerusalem thus celebrate the beauty of the bride. Formerly her words had borne bright witness to the King, but now she herself is a witness to all the comeliness the King had put upon her. It is the witness of life rather than lips, of ways rather than words. She had been with the Beloved in the garden of spices and she comes forth from His presence with the beauty of the King upon her. She is hailed as the daughter of the Prince. The stamp of royalty is upon her, and the grace and majesty of the King's presence surrounds her going. So, in a former day the face of Moses shone with the glory of the One from whose presence he came. The world in his day saw, in a man on earth, the result of being in touch with heaven. Again, in a later day Elisha sees the vision of Elijah ascending to heaven and, on his return to Jericho, the sons of the prophets at once recognize that "the spirit of Elijah doth rest on Elisha" (2 Kings 2:15). They had no vision of the rapture, but they discern its effect on Elisha. They saw in a man on earth the spirit of a man that had gone to heaven. So too Stephen, in his day and generation, sets forth the blessedness of a man on earth being in touch with the Man in heaven. "He, being full of the Holy Ghost, looked up steadfastly into heaven, and saw the glory of God, and Jesus" (Acts 7:55). The world had no such glorious vision, but they saw the effect it produced in Stephen. They saw a man who could pray for his murderers, and thus reproduce on earth the grace of the Man that had gone to heaven.

We may well challenge our hearts by these examples of men on earth in touch with heaven. As we journey on our way, can the world see faces shining with the joy of the presence of the Lord after the manner of Moses? Can they discern in us the Spirit of Christ after the pattern of Elisha, or the setting forth of the heavenly Man as with Stephen?

Good for us also, when, by our lives and conversation we proclaim our high origin, and it becomes manifest that we are "a royal priesthood" chosen indeed to show forth the excellencies of Him who hath called us out of darkness into His marvelous light! But alas! how little we know what it is to linger awhile in the garden of the Lord, enjoying the company of the Lord; and then, from that hallowed spot, to come forth bearing before others the impress of His presence, exhibiting the manners of heaven and the graces of the Lord. There is often a coarseness about our manners, a roughness of speech, and brusqueness of bearing, that tells how little we have been "with Jesus." Living so little in His company we learn so little of "the truth as it is in Jesus," and hence the life of Jesus is so little manifest in our bodies. More often we manifest the ways of earth than the manners of heaven. Too often our conversation is seasoned with the wit and humor of this world rather than the wisdom and holiness of heaven.

But with the bride it was otherwise. She had been in the presence of the King. She had met the Bridegroom and she comes forth with the joy of that meeting—"the dance of two companies." She has been in the hands of "a cunning workman" and she wears the jewels His hands had wrought. The beauty of the King is upon her. The daughters of Jerusalem describe the bride in language similar to that used by the Bridegroom, only, viewing her from above, He begins His description with her eyes, whereas, the daughters, viewing her from earth, speak first of her footsteps and end with the hair of her head. By nature, "from the sole of the foot even unto the head there is no soundness in it; but wounds, and bruises, and putrifying sores" (Isa. 1:6), but viewed as of spiritual and heavenly origin—as a prince's daughter—we are all fair from the sole of the foot even unto the head.

The Bridegroom. (7:6-9).

(Vss. 6-9). “How fair and how pleasant art thou, [My] love, in delights!

This thy stature is like a palm-tree,

And thy breasts to grape clusters.

I said, I will go up to the palm-tree,

I will take hold of the boughs thereof;

And thy breasts shall indeed be like the clusters of the vine,

And the fragrance of thy nose like apples,

And the roof of thy mouth like the best wine...”

The daughters of Jerusalem can contemplate the bride as an object to admire; but the King not only admires, He possesses the bride and finds in her a source of personal delight. The daughters as they look upon her, exclaim, "How beautiful!" and the King says "How fair!" but He adds, "How pleasant art thou, O love, for delights." And the two figures used express the two thoughts; viewing her in all her beauty He likens her to the graceful and stately palm: viewing her as an object of delight, He likens her "to clusters of grapes." And the King appropriates and enjoys those delights which others only gaze upon and admire. Others may praise her beauty, but He only can say, "I will go up to the palm-tree, I will take hold of the boughs thereof." In His bride He finds affections that are likened to the clusters of the vine; that which is acceptable and well pleasing likened to the fragrance of citrons: and joys that are likened to the best wine. Thus it will be of the earthly bride in a day to come. Of restored Israel the Lord can say, "I will make you a name and a praise among all people" (Zeph. 3:20); but of the Lord Himself it is said, "He will rejoice over thee with joy; He will rest in His love, He will joy over thee with singing" (Zeph. 3:17). The world will admire and praise, but He will delight in His earthly bride (Zeph. 3:17-20). Nor is it otherwise with the heavenly bride. She will be displayed in glory before

an admiring world, but Christ will see of the fruit of the travail of His soul and be satisfied. So too with a restored soul. Others may see and admire the outward results of restoration, but the Lord finds in the restored soul that which is a delight to Him. David, confessing his sin, says, "Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation," and then, he says, "will I teach transgressors thy ways," but he adds, as he closes his penitential Psalm, "Then shalt thou be pleased." Restored David becomes a blessing to others, but a pleasure to the Lord (Psa. 51:12, 13, 19).

The Bride. (7:9-8:4).

(Vss. 9-10). “That goeth down smoothly for my Beloved,

And stealeth over the lips of them that are asleep.

I am my Beloved's, and His desire is toward me.”

The bride, as she hears the Bridegroom expressing His delight in her, is constrained to speak. If the Bridegroom likens the joy He has found in her to the best wine, she immediately adds, "That goes down smoothly for my Beloved." In times past the affections of the bride may have wandered, but now the restored bride is wholly for her Beloved. Once she has slept upon her bed, and, overcome with sloth, could not respond to the voice of her Beloved; but all the beauty His love has put upon her has awakened her affections and called forth her delight in Him. The best wine has caused the lips of the once sleeping bride to speak. And the words she now utters express the highest experience of her soul. Through all her wanderings and backslidings she has grown in grace. In the course of these experiences her heart had expressed itself with increasing fervor. When desires after the Beloved were first awakened her great longing was to possess the object of her affections, and when gratified she exclaims, "My Beloved is mine and I am His;" but as she grows in the knowledge of His thoughts towards her, she becomes increasingly conscious that she is an object to Him, and, with this thought filling her soul, she is constrained to say, "I am my Beloved's, and my Beloved is mine;" but at last when her affections are revived and she finds His love unchanged, and that instead of reproaches she hears only expressions of delight in herself, she realizes to the full that she belongs to the Bridegroom and that His affections are set upon her, and with great delight she says, "I am my Beloved's, and His desire is toward me."

(Vss. 11-13). “Come, my Beloved, let us go forth into the fields;

Let us lodge in the villages.

We will go up early to the vineyards.

We will see if the vine hath budded, [If] the blossom is opening,

And the pomegranates are in bloom: There will I give thee my loves.

The mandrakes yield fragrance:

And at our gates are all choice fruits, new and old:

I have laid them up for Thee, my Beloved.”

The result of all the King's dealings with His bride is to lead her to think His thoughts, to express His desires, and to share His affections. On former occasions He had said to her, "Come away," and she was slow to respond; but now she takes up His word and says, "Come, my Beloved." She would fain be with Him to enjoy the communion of love. She says, "Let us go forth," "Let us lodge," "Let us get up," and "Let us see." Nevermore would she be parted from Him. Wherever they go, wherever they dwell, whatever they do, whatever they see, it must be together. And she says, "I will give Thee my loves;" in times past her affections may have been drawn away to other objects, but now they are wholly for the King. So in a later day the Apostle Paul could say, "The life which I now live, I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me" (Gal. 2:20).

(Ch. 8:1-3). “O that Thou wert as my brother,

That sucked the breasts of my mother!

Should I find thee without I would kiss Thee;

And they would not despise me.

I would lead Thee, bring Thee into my mother's house;

Thou wouldest instruct me:

I would cause Thee to drink of spiced wine,

Of the juice of my pomegranate.

His left hand would be under my head,

And His right arm embrace me.”

The bride is not content with the secret expression of her love for the Bridegroom. She desires that all might know her love to the King. “Oh that Thou wert as my brother”, she says, then indeed I could manifest my love before all without any impropriety: "Should I find Thee without, I would kiss Thee; and they would not despise me." To express our love to Christ in a world that has rejected Him will call down the hatred of the world; but the time is coming when without hindrance we can publicly witness our love to Christ without being despised.

(Vs. 4). “I charge you, daughters of Jerusalem...

Why should ye stir up, or awaken love till it please.”

The canticle closes with a charge to the daughters of Jerusalem not to disturb the happy communion of love.

The Song of Songs, Canticle 4: The Restoration of Love

The Bride (Vs. 2).

(Vs. 2). “I slept; but my heart was awake.

The voice of my Beloved! He knocketh”

The bridal feast is over; the King has departed to the mountain of myrrh, and to the hill of frankincense, until the day break and the shadows flee away. In the night of the Bridegroom's absence the love of the bride has waned, and she seeks her ease in her own home. How soon she passes from feasting in His presence to sleeping in His absence. In earlier times her love had weakened, but this was a more serious decline; before, she had rested in her home, now she sleeps. If, however, she sleeps, it is but a restless sleep- "I slept," she says, "but my heart was awake."

Alas, like the bride, again and again our love can grow cold even though we have known and enjoyed the love of Christ. How quickly, too, our hearts can change, like the disciples who pass from feasting in the upper room to sleeping in the garden. But such repose is only an uneasy sleep, for the heart that has tasted the love of Christ will ever be restless if it turns aside to seek its ease in this vain world. It has too much of Christ to enjoy the world and too much of the world to enjoy Christ. Sleeping but restless, describes the condition of such.

But the love of the Bridegroom never varies. The bride may sleep, but love gives Him no rest until He has awakened her slumbering affections. And how true are the words of another: "Christ's heart is never wearied, it is as freshly set on the bride as when God chose us in Him before the foundation of the world."

The Bridegroom. (Vs. 2).

(Vs. 2). “Open to Me My sister, My love, My dove, Mine undefiled;

For My head is filled with dew,

My locks with the drops of the night.”

The bride may seek her rest, but not so the Bridegroom. He knocks at her door seeking admission. In love He appeals to her affections, seeking to restore the heart that has grown cold. His touching words, "Open to Me," express the longing of His heart to fill her heart. He lavishes upon her every term of endearment, "My sister, My love, My dove, Mine undefiled." He could have said, "Thy King, thy Friend, thy Beloved," but love takes another way more calculated to reach her heart. He reminds her of all that she is in His sight. Her waning love has not changed His thoughts of her. And then, as a final appeal to her heart, He speaks of His sufferings on her behalf. He has faced the night, the cold, the darkness, and the dew, to awaken her love.

In all this mystic scene can we not see the way Christ takes to restore our wandering affections to the enjoyment of His love? In the night of His absence we may seek our ease in this poor world, but He loves us too well to let us rest apart from Him. Solemn indeed, if the Lord has to say to us, "Sleep on now, and take your rest" (Matt. 26:45). But if we wander, He follows with restoring grace, and knocks at our door. Alas that there could ever come a day that finds the door of our hearts closed and barred to Him, and that our Laodicean lukewarmness should compel Him to say, "Open to Me." How touching these words! What a sorrowful tale they tell of wandering affections, and empty, unsatisfied hearts; and yet, withal, how blessedly they speak of His unchanging love, and His longing to fill our hearts with Himself. It is as if He said, "You have turned to other objects and found no rest; your soul sleeps, but without rest; your heart waketh, but without satisfaction, now open to ME."

But Christ will never force Himself upon the soul. He will not be an uninvited guest. He loves to be "constrained"; and so the word to the bride is "Open." The Bridegroom is waiting and willing to enter, but the bride must "open" the door of her heart. Do we complain of little love to Christ? Let us remember He is willing to fill our hearts if we will but "open" the door and let Him in. The latch is on our side of the door.

And what more calculated to arouse our slumbering affections than the realization that, in spite of all our wanderings, He loves us still; that He is still ready to say, "You are mine," "My sister, My love, My dove, Mine undefiled."

But, further, how must it move the heart that has grown cold, to hear again of the sufferings that Christ has endured for our sakes. What a journey the Bridegroom of our souls has taken to win our hearts! What night of woe He went into; and in that night what dews of sorrow fell on Him to win our love. He broke His heart to win our hearts.

If our hearts have turned aside to other objects; if our love has grown cold, may we get a fresh view of the One who stands at our door and knocks, and may we listen to His pleading voice as He says: -

I want your heart's affections, "Open to Me."

I love you "My sister, My love, My dove, Mine undefiled."

I have suffered for you, "For My head is filled with dew, and My locks with the drops of the night."

The Bride. (Vss. 3-8).

(Vs. 3). “I have put off my tunic, how should I put it on?

I have washed my feet, how should I pollute them?”

The bride, though not insensible to this touching appeal, knows not how to cast off her sloth. She finds it easier to put off the tunic than put it on, easier to ungird the loins than to gird them up. To respond to this appeal calls for energy and sacrifice. Selfish ease has enfeebled the bride, and twice she asks, "How should I?" She has to learn, indeed, that, left to herself, she cannot throw off her lethargy. So, too, when affection for Christ grows cold and we, like the bride, settle down in our own things, we may, indeed, be interested and moved somewhat by some touching appeal, and yet know not how to cast off our spiritual languor. If, however, we cannot restore our souls, He can, and He does. "He restoreth my soul" (Psa. 23:3) is the experience of the Psalmist. And in the scene that follows we see the way love takes to work the restoration of our wandering affections, a way that may indeed be painful to the flesh but leads to a blessed end.

(Vs. 4). “My Beloved put in His hand by the hole [of the door];

And my bowels yearned for Him.”

Already He has spoken, but now the Bridegroom stretches forth His hand to the bride, and this silent appeal fills her with yearnings after the Bridegroom. Such also was failing Peter's experience when in the very moment of his denial the Lord "turned and looked" upon him. It was a look that, speaking more effectively than words, seemed to say, "You have denied Me, but I love you." And that look, like the Bridegroom's hand in our Canticle, began the work of restoration, for "Peter went out, and wept bitterly" (Luke 22:62). And do not our hearts burn within us when the Lord stretches out His hand towards us in our failures, that hand with the wound-marks that tell of His unchanging love?

(Vss. 5-6). “I rose up to open to my Beloved;

And my hands dropped with myrrh,

And my fingers with liquid myrrh,

Upon the handles of the lock.

I opened to my Beloved;

But my Beloved had withdrawn Himself; He was gone:

My soul went forth when He spoke.

I sought Him but I found Him not;

I called Him, but He gave me no answer.”

This appeal has overcome the lethargy of the bride. She rises to open to her Beloved. The door at which He had sought an entrance was redolent with His presence, but He Himself had withdrawn. This, however, was the way love was taking to awaken her affections. If, when He drew near, the bride would not respond, He will now withdraw, but only to quicken her affections by His absence. And how effectual the way He takes. The bride is thoroughly aroused, "I rose up," "I opened to my Beloved," "I sought Him," "I called Him," is the language of her heart. Every expression proclaims the renewed energy of her affections. But for the moment all in vain. He was gone, and He gave her no answer. The Beloved was at first the seeker; not finding any response from the bride, His love takes another way which turns the bride into the seeker, to find, in her turn, no response from the Bridegroom. Had then the love of the Bridegroom changed? Had He given up His bride? Ah no, it was not the love, but the manner of expressing the love, that had changed. The bride must learn that the communion of love is easily lost but only recovered through humbling experiences.

And after this same fashion love deals with the "slow hearts" of the two disciples on the way to Emmaus. They wandered, but the Lord followed, and so dealt, in restoring grace, with their affections that He turned their "slow hearts" into "burning hearts," and, having awakened their affections, “He vanished out of their sight” (Luke 24:31). The One who sought them withdrew from them, and in so doing left behind Him two seekers after Him in place of two wanderers from Him. For that same hour of the night, they rose up and returned to Jerusalem. They sought the Lord, and they found the Lord, in the midst of His own.

The Lord loves to be sought after, and those that seek will not be disappointed, even though they have to pass through painful experiences before their wandering hearts are restored to the enjoyment of the love of Christ. Such was the experience of the bride in her further search for the Bridegroom.

(Vs. 7). “The watchmen that went about the city found me;

They smote me, they wounded me;

The keepers of the walls took away my veil from me.”

Loss of affection means the loss of the company of the Bridegroom. But further it exposes the bride to the dealings of the city watchmen, and the keepers of the walls.

The business of the watchmen is to keep order in the city. How comes it that they find the bride wandering in the city at night, without the Bridegroom? This is contrary to order and they rightly rebuke her. They "wounded" her, but "faithful are the wounds of a friend" (Prov. 27:6). Again the keepers of the walls have to protect the city from attacks of the enemy, and in following their calling must needs challenge all comers, to distinguish friends from foes. They are true to their work in their dealing with the bride. They must discover if she is really what she professes to be, and therefore they strip her of her veil. When we wander do we not expose ourselves to rebuke from those who watch for souls? It is often thus the Lord carries on His restoring work through the means of others. May we not say that Paul was doing watchman's work when he had that sharp contention with Barnabas in regard to John Mark? And again, was he not doing the work of a keeper of the walls when he withstood Peter to the face and exposed his dissimulation; thus, as it were, taking away his veil. But painful as such experiences may be, they work recovery in the true soul. And so, with the bride; the dealings of "the watchmen," and "the keepers," awakened in the bride deeper longings of heart after the Bridegroom—yearnings of heart that she cannot conceal from others.

(Vs. 8). “I charge you, daughters of Jerusalem.

If ye find my Beloved...”

What will ye tell Him?

- “That I am sick of love.”

Unable to contain the longings of her heart, the bride charges others, if they find her Beloved, to tell Him she is sick of love. She supposes that all would know to whom she refers. To those, however, to whom she appeals the Bridegroom is as one unknown.

The Daughters of Jerusalem. (Vs. 9).

(Vs. 9) “What is thy Beloved more than [another] beloved,

Thou fairest among women?

What is thy Beloved more than [another] beloved,

That thou dost so charge us?”

They have never known the intimacy of love with the Bridegroom, and cannot understand the affections that fill the heart of the bride. They ask, "What is thy Beloved more than another beloved?" But this is only another step in the restoration of the bride. Her motives must be searched. Is her Beloved more to her than another? It hardly appeared so in the eyes of others. She had taken her ease without the Bridegroom, and when He knocked she could not even bestir herself to let Him in.

Peter professed great love for the Lord when he said, "Although all shall be offended, yet will not I" (Mark 14:29). But Peter evinced little love for the Lord when he slept in the garden, and no love for the Lord when he denied Him in the palace. How seemly it is that in the way of his restoration Peter must be searched with the thrice repeated question, "Lovest thou Me" (see John 21).

The bride, in response to this searching question, proves the reality of her affection by pouring forth all that is in her heart concerning the Bridegroom.

The Bride. (Vss. 10-16).

(Vss. 10-16). “My Beloved is white and ruddy,

The chiefest among ten thousand.

His head is as the finest gold;

His locks are flowing, black as the raven;

His eyes are like doves by the water-brooks,

Washed with milk, fitly set;

His cheeks are as a bed of spices, raised beds of sweet plants;

His lips lilies, dropping liquid myrrh.

His hands, gold rings set with the chrysolite;

His belly is bright ivory, overlaid [with] sapphires;

His legs, pillars of marble, set upon bases of fine gold:

His bearing as Lebanon, excellent as the cedars;

His mouth is most sweet:

Yea, He is altogether lovely.

This is my Beloved, yea, this is my Friend,

O daughters of Jerusalem.”

This lovely description is but another step in the awakening of love, for as the bride unfolds the perfections of the Bridegroom to others, her heart, engaged with Himself and His glories, is afresh stirred to its depths. To witness to others of the glories and perfections of Christ will most surely kindle afresh one's own affections for Christ.

This glorious imagery can alone apply to Christ. It is His perfections that pass before us. He alone is "white and ruddy, the chiefest among ten thousand." Whatever others may be, He is the "chiefest": however many there may be, He is "the chiefest among ten thousand."

His divine majesty passes before us in the head as the most fine gold.

His locks are flowing and black, betokening the vigor of manhood. No white hair, no trace of age or decay will ever pass on Him. Where all grows old, He never grows old. His years shall never fail.

His eyes, as the eyes of doves, speak of His tender compassion. "Washed with milk" speaks of purity. "Thou art of purer eyes than to behold evil, and canst not look on iniquity" (Hab. 1:13). "Fitly set" speaks of the perfection of His vision before whom "all things are naked and open"

(Heb. 4:13).

The cheeks speak of beauty and attractiveness. The world saw no beauty in Christ, and smote Him on the cheek. Judas professed attraction to Christ but only to betray Him by kissing Him on the cheek. The believer, on the other hand, can delight in the beauty and attractiveness of Christ as a bed of fragrant herbs calls forth the admiration of the passer-by.

His lips are likened to lilies dropping sweet-smelling myrrh. The lily may speak of purity and the sweet-smelling myrrh of grace. Isaiah had to confess he was a man of unclean lips, but the lips of Christ were pure; no guile was found in His mouth. And of Christ it could be said, "Grace is poured into Thy lips" (Psa. 45:2). As He passed through this world, words of grace were ever dropping from His lips like sweet-smelling myrrh.

His hands are likened to rings set with beryl. The ring is the emblem of authority (Gen. 41:42; Esther 3:10), and the token of love (Luke 15:22). Man expressed his hatred to Christ by nailing His hands of love to a cross, but the believer delights to recognize that all power is in the hands of Christ, but the hand that wields the power is moved by love.

His belly, or body, is likened to bright ivory overlaid with sapphires. The whiteness and smoothness of the ivory may indicate the perfection of Christ without blemish or spot, and the sapphires the preciousness of Christ. Peter presents this twofold view of Christ when in one place he speaks of Him as "without blemish and without spot" and in another writes, "Unto you, therefore, which believe He is precious" (1 Peter 1:19; 2:7).

His legs as pillars of marble, set upon sockets of fine gold, speak of the stability and strength of purpose that ever marked the Lord Jesus. The base of fine gold may indicate that all the steadfastness and strength of Christ had its foundation in divine righteousness.

His countenance or "bearing" signifies "not the face only but the entire aspect." It is likened to Lebanon, a figure which brings before us the excellence and dignity of Christ.

His mouth is most sweet. In the imagery of the song, it is the kiss rather than speech that is connected with "the mouth." This clause in the bride's glowing description would therefore serve to set forth the sweetness of the love of Christ.

"He is altogether lovely." In Christ we have a perfect object, One who is altogether lovely. Here the heart can rest with satisfaction. In Daniel's image the head was of fine gold, but the toes were of iron and clay. Here the head of the Bridegroom is likened to fine gold, and the legs of marble are set upon bases of fine gold. In the Beloved there is no deterioration. His whole bearing is majestic, He is altogether lovely.

And having closed her description the bride can add, "This is my Beloved and this is my Friend." So too each of the redeemed can say of Christ, "He is my Beloved, He is my Friend" even while they unite to sing:-

The Daughters of Jerusalem. (Ch. 6:1).

(Vs. 1). “Whither is thy Beloved gone,

Thou fairest among women?

Whither is thy Beloved turned aside?

And we will seek Him with thee.”

The lovely description of the Bridegroom raises a further question in the minds of the daughters of Jerusalem. They had inquired, "What is thy Beloved more than another Beloved?" Now they ask, "Whither is thy Beloved gone?" The full revival of the bride's affections lies in the answer to these two questions. If our love to Christ has grown cold, let us but answer the two questions, "Who is He?" and "Where is He?" and once again, as we are occupied with Him, our cold hearts will be warmed with the glow of His love.

The Bride. (Ch. 6:2-3)

(Vss. 2-3). “My Beloved is gone down into His garden, to the beds of spices

To feed in the gardens and to gather lilies.

I am my Beloved's, and my Beloved is mine:

The bride has dwelt with rapture on the perfections of the Bridegroom, and occupation with Him has so quickened her intelligence that she can at once tell whither the Beloved is gone. She had sought him in the city but He was not there. "My Beloved," she says, "is gone down into His garden," a fragrant spot where He can feed and gather lilies. There are none that minister to the heart of Christ in this world but "His own which [are] in the world" (John 13:1). With them is all His delight. There only He finds the bed of spices. The garden of the Lord is composed of His loved ones, and the restored soul knows full well that Christ can be found with His people. It was thus with the two disciples of Emmaus. When restored they rose up the same hour and returned to Jerusalem (Luke 24).

The Bridegroom. (Ch. 6:4-9).

(Vs. 4) “Thou art fair, My love, as Tirzah,

Comely as Jerusalem,

Terrible as troops with banners:”

Step by step the bride is led on until she finds herself in the presence of the Bridegroom, and at last hears His voice. The first words that fall on her astonished ears are, "Thou art fair, My love." What more touching to the heart that has wandered and grown cold than to be drawn again into His presence; there to realize, in all its sweetness, that, in spite of all our wanderings it can still say, "I am His and He is mine," and to hear those words pregnant with grace to a restored soul, "Thou art fair, My love." Just when the heart is ready to reproach itself with having

wandered from such a Savior, at the very moment when the restored soul is so sensible of its own unworthiness, how sweet to hear Him say, "Thou art fair, My love." When my heart may well feel how truly I have merited a word of reproach, how touching to be greeted with a word of appreciation. Do we not recall a scene like this on the Lord's resurrection day? His own were gathered behind closed doors and "Jesus Himself stood in the midst" (Luke 24:36). Some of them had slept in the hour of His agony, all of them had forsaken Him in the presence of His enemies and fled from Him in the day of battle. We may well ask, therefore, will He be against them in this the day of His victory? Ah no! the first words He utters are "Peace be unto you" (Luke 24:36).

The Bridegroom continues to express the attraction He finds in the one who had cost Him so much. Earth's fairest cities, and the world's bravest display are pressed into service to figure the beauty of the bride.

(Vss. 5-7). “Turn away thine eyes from Me,

For they overcome Me.

Thy hair is as a flock of goats

On the slopes of Gilead.

Thy teeth are like a flock of sheep

Which go up from the washing;

Which have all borne twins,

And none is barren among them.

As a piece of pomegranate are thy temples

Behind thy veil.”

In spite of her wanderings the thoughts of the Bridegroom towards His bride have not changed. The same figures are used to describe her perfections as in a former canticle (ch. 4:1-3). She is thus assured there is no change in His heart.

(Vss. 8-9). “There are threescore queens, and fourscore concubines,

And virgins without number:

My dove, Mine undefiled, is but one;

She is the only one of her mother,

She is the choice one of her that bore her.

The daughters saw her, and they called her blessed;

The queen and the concubines, and they praised her.”

Here the Bridegroom no longer speaks to the bride, though He speaks about her. He is not content to assure the heart of the bride of his unchanging love and appreciation, but He goes further; He will vindicate her before others. All the world shall know that He has loved her, and that she has a unique place in His affections. There may be other queens and other wives, but His bride holds a supreme place in His affections. None can compare with her, and by unfolding before others all that she is to Him, He secures the praise of the world for His bride. Thus will it be with restored Israel among the nations in a day to come. And thus will it be when at last the wanderings of the church are over, according to those touching words of the Lord, "I will make them to come and worship before thy feet, and to know that I have loved thee" (Rev. 3:9). And is it otherwise with a restored soul? Not only is failing Peter restored in secret to communion with the Lord, but he is publicly owned and honored in the service of the Lord.

The Daughters of Jerusalem. (Ch. 6:10).

(Vs. 10). “Who is she that looketh forth as the dawn,

Fair as the moon, clear as the sun,

Terrible as troops with banners?”

The Bridegroom has said that the daughters should bless the bride and the queens should praise her, and now they unite to celebrate her glories. The Bridegroom had used the fairest cities of earth to set forth her beauty, and now the daughters of Jerusalem use the most glorious objects in the heavens to express their praise of the restored bride. All trace of failure and wandering days are passed, and she comes forth fresh as the morning, pure as the light of the moon, and glorious as the sun.

The Bridegroom. (Ch. 6:11-12).

(Vs. 11). “I went down into the garden of nuts,

To see the verdure of the valley,

To see whether the vine budded,

Whether the pomegranate blossomed.”

The canticle closes with the Bridegroom's satisfaction as He sees of the fruit of the travail of His soul. Our Beloved has been into the valley of death to secure His bride. We too, like the bride of the Song, have been, in our wilderness journey, into the valley of humiliation, but at last Christ will gather "the fruits of the valley." He will take His place in His garden, in the midst of His own, and find fruit sweet to His taste. Time was when He came into the midst of His earthly people seeking fruit but finding none. When He comes seeking fruit in the day of His glory, will He find fruit? Will the vines bud and the pomegranates blossom? The answer immediately comes: -

(Vs. 12). “Before I was aware

His willing people at once yield to Him the place of victory and glory. They set Him upon the chariots. They can say in the language of the Psalm, "In Thy majesty ride prosperously because of truth and meekness" (Psa. 45:4). Time was when the bride repelled the Bridegroom, but now He is received with acclaim. He may indeed work so wondrously that His people will receive the praise of all the world but, after all, it is He who is the victor. He is the One that is exalted to the chariots of His willing people. Restored Israel will say "He hath done this" (Psa. 22:31). The glorified church will cast their crowns before Him, saying, "Thou art worthy, O Lord" (Rev. 4:11). All the redeemed, whether earthly or heavenly, will at last unite to exalt the Lord. In different times and in different ways the Lord will be set upon the chariots of His willing people.

The Song of Songs, Canticle 3: The Communion of Love

The Daughters of Jerusalem.

(Ch. 3:6). “Who is this that cometh up from the wilderness

Like pillars of smoke,

Perfumed with myrrh and frankincense,

With all the powders of the merchant?”

In this canticle we no longer see the bride resting upon her bed, calling forth the grace of the Bridegroom to arouse her flagging energies and awaken her waning love. She is rather presented as enjoying the communion of love and coming up from the wilderness on her way to share the glories of the King. The daughters of Jerusalem inquire, "Who is this?" or as it can be translated, "Who is she?"

Strictly the scene presents a beautiful picture of Israel, of whom the Lord could say, "I found Israel like grapes in the wilderness," and again, "I did know thee in the wilderness, in the land of great drought" (Hos. 9:10 and 13:5). It is true that Jehovah "drew them with cords of a man," and "with bands of love," into a land flowing with milk and honey, but they turned from the Lord and went after strange gods. Yet in the days to come God will again bring Israel into the wilderness, will there "speak to her heart," and from thence open to her "a door of hope" that will lead to the kingdom glories of the true Solomon (Hos. 2:14-23).

The Church, too, has her wilderness journey -the time of her earthly pilgrimage—before the end is reached in heavenly glory. In this lovely canticle we see the unfolding of this journey, not in its weakness and failure, but according to the thought of God, taken in the communion of love. For the wilderness has its privileges as well as its privations, and this the Song presents, for the journey is made in the King's palanquin. Moreover, the very privations become the occasion of calling forth a sweet odor, just as the path of the bride is marked by the smoke of ascending incense, and perfumed with myrrh and frankincense, and with all powders of the merchant. There is spiritual significance in the fact that the powders of the merchant are compounded from plants gathered in the wilderness. The trials, the testings, and the privations of our wilderness journey, when taken from the hand of God, become the occasion of developing the graces of Christ, which ascend as "an odor of a sweet smell" even now, and will be found unto praise and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ. It is this aspect of the wilderness journey that the Song presents, not the wilderness with our infirmities and God's provision, as in the Epistle to the Hebrews, but the wilderness with its privations and its privileges, as in the Epistle to the Philippians. Paul has to taste the privations of the wilderness, but he rejoices greatly in the Lord that his trials become the occasion of calling forth the grace of Christ in the saints as "an odor of a sweet smell, a sacrifice, acceptable, well pleasing to God" (Phil. 4:18). And we, like Paul, can turn our privations into privileges if we but see that every trial is a God-sent opportunity to call forth some Christian grace. Alas, how often the trials by the way call forth some ugly exhibition of the flesh—its tempers and its violence, its envy and its pride, its impatience and its murmurings. We open the door to the flesh by letting our wilderness circumstances come between our souls and God. Let us but keep God between ourselves and our circumstances and then indeed they will call forth the graces of Christ. Faith, hope, love, meekness, lowliness, long-suffering and patience will be the outcome of the trials, and our journey through the wilderness will be fragrant before God with "myrrh and frankincense" and "all powders of the merchant."

Friends of the Bridegroom. (3:7-11).

(Vss. 7-8). “Behold his couch, Solomon's own:

Threescore valiant men are about it,

Of the valiant of Israel.

They all hold the sword, experts in war:

Each hath his sword upon his thigh

Because of fear in the night.”

The bed, or litter, on which the bride journeys through the wilderness is provided by the King. In like manner the Christian has not to travel at his own charges, or according to his own thoughts, but in the way that God has provided. This, however, entails conflict, and hence the wilderness journey, while developing Christian graces, also calls for Christian warfare. For this we need the "valiant men." Paul not only

exhorts Timothy to "be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus," but He also says, "Endure hardness as a good soldier of Jesus Christ" (2 Tim. 2:1-3).

And the soldiers that accompany the litter are well equipped. They "all hold swords"; they are "expert" in the use of their swords; and they are ready to use them, for "every man hath his sword upon his thigh because of fear in the night."

So too the good soldier of Jesus Christ is armed with "the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God" (Eph. 6:17). Paul reminds Timothy that "all Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness" (2 Tim. 3:16).

But to have Scripture is not all that is needed. We must be expert in the use of Scripture, and so Timothy is further exhorted to have "an outline of sound words ... rightly dividing the Word of truth" (2 Tim. 1:13; 2:15).

Moreover, we must not only be "armed" and "expert" but ready—every man with "his sword upon his thigh." It was so in Nehemiah's day. "Every man had his sword girded by his side, and so builded" (Neh. 4:18). The moment of attack will give no time for girding on the sword. We must be ready to "preach the Word ... in season, [and] out of season" (2 Tim. 4:2).

(Vss. 9-10). "King Solomon made himself a palanquin

Of the wood of Lebanon.

Its pillars he made of silver,

The base of gold, its seat of purple,

The midst thereof was paved with love

By the daughters of Jerusalem."

The introduction of the valiant men is followed by the description of the palanquin, or litter, which they are called to defend. In the details of the palanquin do we not see set forth great truths as to the Person of Christ—the support of our souls and the foundations of our faith? The cedar wood speaking of His perfect humanity, fragrant and incorruptible; the pillars of silver telling of His redeeming power; the gold, of His divine righteousness; the purple, of His royalty; and the pavement of love, of divine love, the foundation of all. Love comes last: as one has said, "There is something beyond gold, there is nothing beyond love."

These are the vital truths that the enemy is opposing and Christendom giving up, but for which the good soldier of Jesus Christ must contend.

(Vs. 11). "Go forth, daughters of Zion,

And behold King Solomon

With the crown wherewith his mother crowned him

In the days of his espousals,

And in the day of the gladness of his heart."

The daughters of Jerusalem had been occupied with the bride and the bridal procession, but now they are called to behold the King. Our wilderness journey with its trials and conflicts will end in the Kingdom glories. We have known the King in this wilderness world with the crown of thorns, but we shall yet behold Him in the day of espousals with the crown of glory. The wilderness journey will soon be past. The day of espousals is coming when His people will be presented to Him "a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing" (Eph. 5:27). Then indeed will be "the day of the gladness of His heart," when "He shall see of the travail of His soul, and shall be satisfied" (Isa. 53:11).

The Bridegroom. (4:1-16).

(Ch. 4:1-5). "Behold, thou art fair, My love; behold, thou art fair,

Thine eyes are doves behind thy veil;

Thy hair is as a flock of goats,

On the slopes of Mount Gilead.

Thy teeth are like a flock of shorn sheep,

Which go up from the washing;

Which have all born twins,

And none is barren among them.

Thy lips are like a thread of scarlet,

And thy speech is comely;

As a piece of pomegranate are thy temples

Behind thy veil.

Thy neck is like the tower of David,

Built for an armory

A thousand bucklers hang thereon,

All shields of mighty men.

Thy two breasts are like two fawns, twins of a gazelle,

Which feed among the lilies.

If the others are occupied with the glories of the King, He, on His part, delights to dwell upon the beauties and perfections of His bride. The bride delights to speak to others of the glories of the King, but it is His joy to unfold to the bride His thoughts about herself. It is blessed to witness to others of the glories of Christ, but for the establishment of our hearts in solid peace and joy, it is necessary to hear from the lips of Christ His own thoughts about His people. It is this that gives the prayer of John 17 such exceeding preciousness, for there we are permitted to hear His thoughts about His own.

The King repeats twice over, "Behold thou art fair," but is not content with a general expression of His appreciation of His bride, He dwells upon her several features. For us, doubtless, these different features set forth the moral graces that Christ sees in His people.

(1) The eyes are the windows of the soul expressing its character and moral condition. Likened to doves would set forth gentleness, purity, and devoted affection, but combined with modesty, for the eyes are seen behind the veil.

(2) The hair is likened to the black glossy hair of the goats seen in all the profusion that a flock would present on the slopes of Mount Gilead. Hair is used in Scripture as the symbol of "subjection" (1 Cor. 11), separation from the world, and consecration to God.

(3) The teeth likened to sheep coming up from the washing would indicate purity; the twins, uniformity, and none barren, completeness, nothing lacking, all qualities that Christ delights to see in His people.

(4) The lips like a thread of scarlet proclaim the healthy condition of the body, just as wholesome speech, of which the lips are a symbol, set forth the condition of the heart, for "out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh" (Matt. 12:34). The Lord Jesus was full of grace and truth, and hence we read of Him, "Grace is poured into Thy lips" (Psa. 45:2); and of the bride the King can say, "Thy speech is comely." If the love of Christ is in our hearts, the praise of Christ will be upon our lips, and the grace that was poured into His lips will be expressed by our lips.

(5) The temples. The forehead is used in Scripture to express either modesty or boldness. The prophet had to say of Israel, "Thou art obstinate... and thy brow brass" (Isa. 48:4). Jehovah asks, "Were they ashamed when they had committed abomination?" and the answer is given, "They were not at all ashamed, neither could they blush" (Jer. 6:15; 8:12). In contrast, the bride is marked by modesty. She can blush, so that her forehead becomes red "like a piece of pomegranate," but it is "within thy locks," or as it may read "behind thy veil." Under the outward symbol of subjection there was genuine modesty. Not outward subjection, and inward rebellion. Modesty found with subjection is a precious quality in the sight of Christ.

(6) The neck. The King viewing the neck of the bride adorned with precious jewels likens it to the tower of David adorned with a thousand shields that spoke of David's victories. So too Christ is going to be glorified in His saints and admired in all them that believe.

(7) The breasts set forth the affections. The figure of the roe is used in the same connection in Prov. 5:19, to indicate that which is pleasant. The "young" roe sets forth that which is fresh. In the eyes of Christ His people are marked by love that is truly pleasant and that will never grow old.

(Vs. 6). “Until the day break, and the shadows flee away,

I will get me to the mountains of myrrh,

And to the hill of frankincense.”

Night is coming and the King must leave His bride until the marriage morn. However blessed the communications of love by the way, yet the day of the gladness of the Bridegroom's heart is still future. The bride is in the wilderness; the marriage day is yet to come. Until that day dawns the Bridegroom will go to His own country, reminding us, in mystic language, that during our wilderness journey it is the night of the absence of Christ. He may commune with us by the way; He may give us very blessed realizations of His presence with us in a spiritual sense, but personally He has gone to the mountains of myrrh and the hill of frankincense, until the day break and the shadows flee away.

(Vs. 7). “Thou art all fair, My love;

There is no spot in thee.”

If, for a time, the bride is left behind, it is not because of any lack in herself. In the eyes of the King she is all fair and without spot. And in like manner the Lord's people, viewed in the light of the Lord's purpose, are "holy and without blame before Him in love" (Eph. 1:4).

(Vs. 8). “Come with Me, from Lebanon, My spouse,

With Me from Lebanon -

Come, look from the top of Amanah,

From the top of Shenir and Hermon,

From the lions' dens,

From the mountains of the leopards.”

If for a time the bride is left in the wilderness, and the Bridegroom departs to the mountains of myrrh, He would at least carry with Him the affections of the bride. "Come with me," He says, "look from the top of Amanah." In like manner we are called to "seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God" (Col. 3:1). Earth has no fairer scenes than Lebanon and Amanah, Shenir and Hermon; but hidden dangers lurk beneath earth's brightest prospects. The lion has his den, and the leopards roam, in the excellent places of the earth. The well-watered plain of Jordan may appear fair as the garden of the Lord, but Sodom and Gomorrah are there. Let us beware of looking back, like Lot's wife, but rather may we "look from," and beyond, all "created excellencies," setting our affections on things above, and not on things of the earth.

(Vss. 9-11). “Thou hast ravished My heart, My sister [My] spouse!

Thou hast ravished My heart with one of thine eyes,

With one chain of thy neck.

How fair is thy love, My sister [My] spouse!

How much better is thy love than wine!

And the fragrance of thine ointments than all spices!

Thy lips [My] spouse, drop [as] the honeycomb;

Honey and milk are under thy tongue;

And the smell of thy garments is like the smell of Lebanon.”

If the Bridegroom desires to carry away the affections of the bride, it is indeed because He can say to her, "Thou hast taken away my heart." Twice he repeats, "Thou hast taken away, [or "ravished"] My heart." It is well for us to have our affections delighting in Christ, but nothing so establishes the heart and fills it with adoring joy as the realization of the delight that Christ finds in His people. Few and poor are our thoughts of Christ, but we may say with the Psalmist, "Many, O Lord my God, are ... Thy thoughts which are to us-ward: they cannot be reckoned up in order unto Thee... they are more than can be numbered" (Psa. 40:5). Little wonder if our hearts were ravished with Christ, but that His heart should be ravished by His people is indeed a world's wonder.

And what could the King see in the bride that His heart should be ravished? No great thing as men speak. It was but a glance of the eye and a chain of the neck. But that look was a look of love, and the chain spoke of the adorning that He Himself had put upon her. As we should say, "We love Him because He first loved us" (1 John 4:19). The glance of the eye speaks of the love of the heart, and the chain of the neck proclaims that the love of the heart is the fruit of His own love.

Of the Bridegroom's love the bride has already said it is better than wine, and His name as ointment poured forth, and now the King, using the same figures, but with increased intensity, expresses His delight in the love of the bride. Not only is her love better than wine, it is "much better," and the fragrance of her ointments exceeds all spices. So to the heart of Christ, His people's love is much better than all earthly joys, and the graces of His people beyond compare with all that can minister delight in nature. Simon may spread a sumptuous feast for the Lord, but the uninvited guest—the nameless woman that was a sinner—a yet greater feast for the heart of the Lord "for she loved much." As one has well said, Our Lord Jesus takes special notice of the frame of the heart; He lays more weight on our lives than on our works, though true love can never be without works."

But not only the look of the eye and the chain of the neck proclaim the love of the bride, but the "lips," the "tongue" and the "garment" all minister delight to the King's heart. Of the wicked it is written, "the poison of asps is under their lips" (Rom. 3:13), but of His own He can say, "honey and milk are under thy tongue." Words fall from their lips that are sweet to the Lord, and the practical righteousness of the saints—their garments—are like the smell of Lebanon, the cedar wood that speaks of human perfection.

(Vss. 12-15). “A garden enclosed is My sister, [My] spouse;

A spring shut up, a fountain sealed.

Thy plants are a paradise of pomegranates, with precious fruits;

Henna with spikenard plants;

Spikenard and saffron;

Calamus and cinnamon, with all trees of frankincense;

Myrrh and aloes, with all the chief spices:

A fountain in the gardens,

A well of living waters,

Which stream from Lebanon.”

Having expressed His delight in the bride, the King proceeds to liken her to a garden enclosed, thus setting forth how completely the bride is set apart for His delight. In the midst of a barren desert the King has His garden enclosed wherein there are fountains of water and pleasant fruits for the pleasure of the King.

From the beginning of time, it has been God's purpose to have a garden in this world for His pleasure. In accord with this desire the Lord God placed a garden eastward in Eden. And in that garden, there were trees pleasant to the sight and good for food, and a river that watered the garden and flowed from thence to the world around. But sin entered and the garden was marred and brought forth thorns and thistles.

But again, in the course of time, the Lord planted a garden. He chose Israel from among the nations and likened them to a vineyard in a very fruitful hill. Separating them from the nations, He "made a wall about" His vineyard, and gathered out the stones, and planted it with the choicest vine, and He looked for fruit. But again, sin marred the garden, and it brought forth only wild grapes, and the garden was laid waste and became a place of briars and thorns (Isa. 5:1-7).

Moreover to-day the Lord has His garden upon the earth, for the Apostle can say of the Christian assembly, "Ye are God's husbandry," and in this garden one may plant and another may water, but God giveth the increase (1 Cor. 3:6-9). But, alas, once again the garden has been marred, for "while men slept" the enemy has sown "tares among the wheat" (Matt. 13:25), with the result that God's broken and scattered people present but faint traces of the garden of the Lord.

But when we turn from the people of God to the Word of God, we find enshrined in the Song of Songs a perfect description of the garden that is suited to the Lord. And as we linger within the precincts of this fair garden we realize not only what is suited to the Lord, but how little we answer to the desire of His heart.

Let us first remember that the garden of the Lord is "a garden enclosed." This speaks of separation, preservation, and sanctification. Under the eye of God this world is but "the barren place where Jesus died;" but in this waste there are those whom the Lord can call "His own," and as we listen to the desire of the Lord for His own as expressed in the great prayer of John 17 we begin to realize the deep spiritual meaning of "a garden enclosed." If "a garden enclosed" involves separation from the surrounding desert, then, in like manner, we hear the Lord telling the Father that His own are not of the world even as He is not of the world. If "a garden enclosed" has in view the preservation of the tender plants, then, in accord with this thought, we hear the Lord praying that His people may be kept from evil. And lastly, if "a garden enclosed" implies a spot set apart for the owner's enjoyment, then, in harmony with this, we hear the Lord's desire that His people might be sanctified.

Such are the desires of the Lord; to have a company in this world, definitely separated from the world, preserved from the evil of the world, and set apart for His pleasure, to form for Him "a garden enclosed."

But the garden of the King is not only "a garden enclosed," it is a watered garden. Israel in their decline are likened to "a garden that hath no water," but in the day of their future restoration the Prophet can say to Israel, "Thou shalt be like a watered garden, and like a spring of water, whose waters fail not" (cf. Isa. 1:30 and 58:11). And so, the garden of the King has its "spring shut up, and fountain sealed." It is not dependent upon the surrounding desert for its supply, the spring is within the garden. And so, with the Lord's people; they have a secret source of supply, the Holy Spirit, "whom the world cannot receive, because it seeth Him not, neither knoweth Him" (John 14:17). He indeed is the "Spring," but let us not forget the Spring must be "shut up." It is possible to grieve the Spirit into silence, and then how parched our souls become, how unfruitful the Lord's people, when the Spirit is quenched. We need to carefully keep the door "shut" against the intrusion of the flesh, lest the Philistines once again stop the wells with earth as in the days of Abraham.

Moreover, the "spring shut up" is "a fountain sealed." A spring yields an unfailing supply, a fountain an abundant supply rising up to its source. The Holy Spirit is not only an unfailing spring, abiding with us, and meeting all our needs throughout our pilgrim path, but He is also a fountain within the believer springing up into everlasting life (John 4:14). Moreover, the fountain is set apart for the King—it is "sealed." As the Spring, the Holy Spirit is occupied with us and our needs, as the Fountain, He is wholly occupied with Christ and engaging our hearts with Him.

Furthermore, the garden of the King is a fruitful garden. The plants of this garden form a paradise of pomegranates, with "precious fruits" and "trees of frankincense" and "all chief spices." The plants may vary in size and beauty, in fragrance and fruitfulness, but all are for the delight of the King. And so, in the garden of the Lord; no two saints are alike, but all minister to His delight.

And lastly, the King's garden not only ministers to His delight, but it is a source of blessing to the regions beyond, it is like "a well of living waters, which stream from Lebanon." And so, if the garden of the Lord is "enclosed," if it is watered with "a spring shut up, a fountain sealed," if it yields its precious fruit for the Lord, then indeed it will be a source of blessing, to the world around, a channel for "rivers of living water" to flow to dying men.

How good for our souls to linger awhile within the garden of the King and seek to learn the spiritual significance of the walls by which it is enclosed, the spring by which it is refreshed, the fruits and spices which grow therein, and the streams which flow forth to the barren lands beyond.

And we need every lesson of the garden, for our service is ofttimes poor and partial. We are apt to expend much labor on one part of the garden to the detriment of another portion. Thus, in the history of the Lord's garden it has often come to pass that some have been so busy "hedging and ditching" that they have neglected the flowers and fruit. Such have almost wholly confined their labors to the maintenance of separation from the world and the exclusion of evil from the garden of the Lord, and have had little time for the care of souls, with the result that they have indeed secured an exclusive garden, but in it, little fruit for the Lord and little blessing for the world around.

Then, again, others have forgotten to keep the spring "shut up." The flesh has been allowed to work unhindered in the garden of the Lord, and so, the Holy Spirit has been grieved and hindered, and in this way the garden has ceased to yield its pleasant fruit to the Lord.

Others, again, have been so attracted by the flowers and the fruit that they have overlooked the hedges and the ditches, with the result that the encircling walls have fallen into disrepair, and evil has entered through the breaches, and the garden of the Lord has been choked with weeds and become unfruitful.

Finally, there are others who have been so engrossed with the streams that flow forth to the world around that they have overlooked the plants that grow within, and thus the garden has ceased to yield fruit to the Lord.

Let us remember the garden is not ours but the Lord's, as the King can say in the Song "My garden" (vs. 16). It is "enclosed" for the Lord; the spring is to water His garden; the precious fruits are for His delight; and if the streams of living water flow from the garden it is only to rear plants for the garden. Keeping this in mind, how careful should we be of any neglect that would render the garden of the Lord unfruitful.

(Vs. 16). "Awake, north wind, and come [thou] south;

Blow upon My garden, [that] the spices thereof may flow forth."

The King calls for the cold blast from the north, and the scorching wind from the south, to blow upon His garden and thus make the spices thereof flow forth. Thus, it is the Lord often calls for the contrary winds of this world to blow upon His people to call forth from them the precious fruits of His own grace. The plants in His garden have ever increased most and thrived best in times of hottest persecution.

The Bride. (4:16).

(Vs. 16). “Let my Beloved come into His garden,

And eat its precious fruits.”

The bride, taking up the figure used by the King, seems to say, "If I am a garden, and if the King can see in His garden a paradise of precious fruits, then let my Beloved come into His garden, and eat its precious fruits." In the eyes of the bride the garden would be but a poor place without the presence of the King. And we may say, "What would heaven be without the presence of Christ? What would paradise be without the Lord? And what the assembly of His people on earth without Himself in the midst?" What gave all the blessedness to that garden enclosed when the "disciples were assembled" on that first day of the week in the upper room with the doors shut for fear of the Jews? Was it not that "then came Jesus and stood in the midst?" And do we not read of that same visit to His garden that one disciple "was not with them when Jesus came?" It was the coming of Jesus into the midst of His own that turned His garden into a paradise.

The Bridegroom. (Chapter 5:1).

(Vs.1). “I am come into My garden, My sister, [My] spouse;

I have gathered My myrrh with My spice;

I have eaten My honeycomb with My honey;

I have drunk My wine with My milk.

Eat, O friends; drink, yea drink abundantly, beloved ones!”

How gladly the Bridegroom responds to the invitation of the bride. And may we not say Christ delights to be constrained by His willing people? The Emmaus disciples "constrained Him, saying, Abide with us." And with what immediate grace the Lord responds, for we read, "He went in to tarry with them" (Luke 24:29). And having come into the garden, the King not only partakes of the fruits of the garden but He spreads the feast, for He can say, "Eat, O friends; drink, yea drink abundantly, beloved ones." We may spread our little feast for the Lord as in the home at Bethany, but how rich a feast He spreads for us. If He found delight in the midst of His own, yet it was His presence that filled their hearts with gladness, for we read, "Then were the disciples glad when they saw the Lord" (John 20:20). Thus, again and again, as we journey on, He delights to come into His garden, set apart from this wilderness waste, and sup with us and we with Him, "until the day break and the shadows flee away." Then at last we shall sit down to the marriage supper of the Lamb in His own home of heavenly glory, to go out no more.

The Song of Songs, Canticle 2: The Awakening of Love

The Bride. (Vss. 8-9).

(Vs. 8). “The voice of my Beloved! Behold, He cometh.”

The first canticle presents a day scene with the King sitting at His table: in the second canticle the enjoyment of love in the presence of the King is past, and it opens with the bride reposing in her home in the plains, with its latticed windows. In the absence of the Bridegroom, she has turned back to her own home, in her own land; like Peter, in a later day, who said, in the absence of Christ, "I go a-fishing." He turned back to circumstances that once he had left to follow Christ. Others follow him, only to find on "that night they caught nothing." The bride is aroused by hearing the voice of her Beloved, which tells that He is coming. Then in the distance He is seen approaching over the mountains: a little later He stands behind the wall of the house, then He shows himself through the lattice.

How often, in the history of the Lord's people, a time of great joy and blessing is followed by a season of spiritual torpor. The banqueting house of the King gives place to the latticed home of the bride. Communion with the King at His table is followed by the solitary longings of the bride in her own home.

How soon the early freshness of the church passed away. When "the multitude of them that believed were of one heart and of one soul;" when the saints were marked by "great power " and "great grace;" when they continued daily with "one accord," "breaking bread from house to house," and "did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart" (Acts 2:46), may we not say, they were in the banqueting-house, with the King at His table. But when this early freshness passed away, when all sought their own, and not the things of Jesus Christ, must we not admit that spiritual night had fallen upon the saints, that they had lost all sense of their high calling, and settled down in their own homes in the plains of the world?

And what is true of the church as a whole is often true, alas, of the individual. After the early freshness of first love how often the young convert settles down at a low spiritual level, in which, though the outward routine of service may be kept up, yet the constraining love of Christ—the true motive for all service—is lacking.

Such are the conditions portrayed in this second canticle. But further, we see the way love takes to meet this condition, how the King reawakens bridal affections in the heart of the bride. And herein there is rich instruction for our souls, to which we do well to take heed.

The affections of the bride are first awakened by the voice of the Bridegroom. Drowsy though she may be, at once she recognizes the voice of her beloved. So with the Lord's sheep: they may wander from Him, but it ever remains true "they know His voice" (John 10:4). Peter, and those who follow him, may turn back to their poor fisherman's life; but when recalled by the visit of the Lord, at once they discern "it is the

Lord."

The voice proclaims that He is coming. Could anything awaken the affections like the news that He is coming? What would so quicken the affections of a wife as the knowledge that at last her husband from overseas is coming? What will quicken the affections of Israel's godly remnant, in the day to come, like the glorious announcement, "The King is coming"? "Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion; shout, O daughter of Jerusalem; behold, thy King cometh" (Zech. 9:9). So, too, the affections of Christ's waiting church are awakened by the truth that He is coming. All the majestic unfoldings in the Revelation, by elders and angels, of solemn events, of coming glories and eternal blessings, are heard with calm if rapt attention; but when every other voice is hushed, and we hear Jesus Himself saying, "Surely I come quickly," then, at last, the affections of the church are aroused, and the cry goes back, "Even so, come, Lord Jesus" (Revelation 22:20-21).

(Vss. 8-9). Leaping upon the mountains,

Skipping upon the hills,

My beloved is like a gazelle or a young hart.

With the energy of a gazelle or a young hart, leaping form rock to rock on the mountains and the hills, so the earnest desire of the King, to claim His bride, is presented as overcoming every obstacle. The bride may sleep, but not so the King. Israel may sleep, but "He that keepeth Israel shall neither slumber nor sleep." Four times over does the Lord say to His church, "Behold I come quickly;" and does not this word "quickly " bespeak the earnest desire of the Lord for that great day when "the marriage of the Lamb is come"?

(Vs. 9). “Behold, He standeth behind our wall,

He looketh in through the windows,

Glancing through the lattice.”

Not only does the King awaken the affections of the bride by the sound of His voice, but, in patience, He stands waiting at the wall of the house; and then, showing Himself through the lattice, attracts her by the beauty of His person. Was it not thus that Christ dealt with those two disappointed saints on the way to Emmaus? He first made their hearts burn within them as He talked with them by the way. Then He stands at the threshold of their house as a wayfaring man, and at last He reveals Himself to them -just a glance, as it were, through the lattice -and He is gone. And in like manner He deals with His beloved people to-day. He awakens our drooping affections by making His still small voice of love to be heard in the secret of our souls, and in wonderful patience He often stands at our doors, even as He stood at the door of the poor Laodicean, waiting to show Himself and attract our hearts by His excellencies.

The Bridegroom. (Vss. 10-15).

(Vs. 10). “My Beloved spake and said unto me,

Rise up, my love, my fair one, and come away.”

Hitherto the bride could only catch the sound of His voice, but now she hears the words of His mouth, and gladly repeats what her Beloved says. The King would no longer be without His bride; He would call her away from the dark wintry plains to fairer, brighter scenes. His first word would arouse her from her circumstances: "Rise up." His next word proclaims how precious she is in His sight: "My love, My fair one." And lastly, she hears the clear, definite call: "Come away"—telling of the longing of His heart.

And is it not thus the Lord is speaking to His people to-day? Can we not hear His voice saying to us, "Rise up," as He seeks to arouse us from the spiritual torpor that overcomes us and holds us down to earth? Is He not saying to us, "Arise ye, and depart; for this is not your rest" (Micah 2:10)? And again, we are reminded by the Apostle, "Now it is high time to awake out of sleep: for now is our salvation nearer than when we believed" (Romans 13:11).

But further, does not the Lord remind us how precious we are in His sight when He tells us how He loved the church and gave Himself for it, that He might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, that He might present it to Himself a glorious church? Should it not move our hearts to their very depths to hear Him still call His bride, "My love, My fair one," in spite of all our coldness, our wanderings, and our breakdown?

Moreover, do we not hear Him calling us away from this poor world, as He says, "Ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world" (John 15:19)? And shall we not very soon hear His voice saying, "Come away," as He calls us to meet Him in the air?

(Vss. 11-13). “For, lo, the winter is past,

The rain is over and gone;

The flowers appear on the earth,

The time of singing is come,

And the voice of the turtle-dove is heard in our land.

The fig-tree melloweth her winter figs,

And the vines in bloom give forth their fragrance.

Arise, My love, My fair one, and come away!”

The King not only calls the bride from her home in the plains, but He unfolds to her a new world of blessing, where neither storm nor winter's blast can ever come, where all is beautiful to the eye, sweet to the ear, and pleasant to the taste—the land of flowers and singing, the land of green figs and the new wine. The presence of the bride is all that is lacking to complete the blessedness of that scene, and therefore the King

concludes with the call, "Arise, My love, My fair one, and come away!"

When the Lord gathered His sorrowing disciples around Him, on that last sad night before He left the world, He poured comfort into their troubled hearts by unfolding before them another world, a home that He was going to prepare, beyond this world's wintry night. The storm that was over our heads was about to burst on His Head, and He can look beyond the darkness and the judgment and open to our vision a new home, where faith will be changed to sight—the flowers will appear; where the time of weeping will be past, and the time of singing will be come; where the voice of the dove will be heard, as the saints join to sing the new song of glory to the Lamb. There indeed we shall feed on heaven's fruit and drink of the new wine. And to complete the blessedness of that scene there only wants the presence of the bride, the Lamb's wife. Long has been the waiting-time—the patience of Christ—but ere He went He said, "I will come again and receive you unto Myself" (John 14:3), and soon, very soon, the winter-time will be past, the waiting-time will be over, He will come to fetch His bride, and we shall hear His call, "Arise, My love, My fair one, and come away!" Well may we sing, with such a prospect before us: —

(Vs. 14). “My dove, in the clefts of the rock.

In the covert of the precipice,”

The King has told the bride of a land of sunshine and song, when the winter will be past and the rain will be over and gone; but in the meantime, she is yet in the land of winter and storm. But the One who is coming for her is the One who protects her. He likens His bride to a dove hiding in the cleft of the rock, and finding shelter from the storm in the covert of the precipice. And even so to-day, while waiting for the Lord, His people have enemies to oppose, and storms to face; but grace has provided a hiding-place and a covert from the storm. As we read, "A Man shall be as an hiding-place from the wind, and a covert from the tempest; as rivers of water in a dry place, as the shadow of a great rock in a weary land" (Isa. 32:2). In the cleft of that Rock—the Man Christ Jesus, with the pierced side—how safe from the storm are the Lord's poor people, who may truly be likened to a timid dove. Well may we sing: —

“Let me see Thy countenance, let me hear thy voice;

For sweet is thy voice, and thy countenance is comely.”

Through the lattice of her home, the King had revealed Himself to the bride, and spoken to her; but this will not satisfy His heart. He would fain see her countenance, and hear her voice. To His ear her voice is sweet, and in His sight her countenance is fair. May we not say the Lord is not content to reveal His glories to His people and converse with them? He longs for the day when His people will be presented to Him all-glorious, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing—perfect through the comeliness that He has put upon them. And He longs to hear them unite in saying, "Blessing, and honor, and glory, and power, be unto Him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb forever and ever" (Rev. 5:13).

(Vs. 15). “Take us the foxes,

The little foxes, that spoil the vineyards;

For our vineyards are in bloom.”

The King has expressed His longing to see the face of His bride, and to hear her voice; but as the foxes, with their young, spoil the vineyards as they break into bloom, so oftentimes evils, of a secret and subtle nature, may be at work which hinder the bride from yielding refreshment to the heart of the King.

Christ longs for the company of His people, His desire is to sup with them and they with Him. To sit at His feet and hold communion with Him, is the " one thing needful." Our busy service He can dispense with, but our company He will not be without. Mary yielded this pleasant fruit to the Lord, but not so Martha. For the moment a fox had made her unfruitful. And how often our case is like Martha's. Some fox—it may be, as nature counts, a little fox—is allowed to work unheeded in the secret of our hearts. Pride, covetousness, lust, unkind and bitter' thoughts, murmuring and discontent, irritability and impatience, jealousy and envy, or vanity and levity, may be allowed unjudged, and communion is hindered, and the life becomes unfruitful. We need to keep a sharp watch against the inroads of these foxes, and expel them with ruthless hand if they appear.

The Bride. (Vss. 2:16-3:5)

(Vs. 16). “My Beloved is mine, and I am His.”

The King had paid a brief visit to His bride and was gone; but in that short interview He had awakened her affections, even as in a later day -a resurrection day—the Lord, at another short interview, could turn "slow hearts" into burning hearts. The King had revealed Himself to the bride through the lattice; He had poured into her ear the report of a land of sunshine and flowers, a land of rest and song, a land of joy and plenty; He had called her to arise and come away to that happy land; He had disclosed the longings of His heart to see her face and hear her voice, and as she listens to those wonderful unfoldings, her heart is stirred, her love is awakened, and in the realization of His love and devotion, she exclaims, "My Beloved is mine, and I am His." He becomes the absorbing object of her heart, through the realization that she is an object to Him. And thus it is that Christ deals with His own to-day. He reveals Himself to us; He unfolds to us all that His heart has purposed for us; He tells us how He longs to have us with Him face to face, and to hear our voices as we raise the new song, and thus once again, as He talks with us by the way, He makes our slow hearts burn, and gives us the deep consciousness that He is ours and we are His. And thus, not through the bare statement of a truth, but, through the experimental realization of His love He speaks to our hearts in such wise that each one is compelled to own with great delight, "My beloved is mine, and I am His."

(Vss. 16-17). “He feedeth among the lilies.

Until the day break, and the shadows flee away.”

The King has already likened the bride to the lily, and has unfolded to her all the thoughts of His heart, and thus she is brought to realize that His food and His delight is in herself. During the night of His absence and until the marriage-day, "He feedeth among the lilies." During the

night of Christ's absence what is there to minister to His heart save His beloved people? It is still true, "He feedeth among the lilies, until the day break and the shadows flee away." He would indeed have us with Himself in the glory where He is according to His prayer, "Father, I will that they also, whom Thou hast given Me, be with Me where I am" (John 17:24), but, during the time of shadows, He delights to come to His own, according to that other sweet word, "I will not leave you comfortless: I will come to you" (John 14:18). How true are the words of an old divine, "The believer hath a heartsome life, and a rich inheritance, Christ here, and Christ hereafter."

(Vs. 17). “Turn, my Beloved: be thou like a roe, or a young hart,

Upon the mountains of Bether.”

The bride expresses the longing of her heart for other visits from the King even as the roes and the harts come down from the mountains by night to feed in the plains. So, indeed, may we welcome every occasion on which the Lord comes into the midst of His people as they pass through this dark world.

(Ch. 3:1). “By night, on my bed,

I sought Him whom my soul loveth:

I sought Him, but I found Him not.”

The night visit of the King has awakened the affections of the bride. But it was only a visit; He had revealed Himself through the lattice; He had unfolded to His bride the vision of another and a brighter world—a world of sunshine and song; He had called her to arise and come to that good land beyond the mountains and the hills; and then, having awakened her affections, He had withdrawn to His own place, and the bride is left behind in the night. She has heard of the day and looks forward to the daybreak, but she is yet in the night. The presence of the King will bring the day, even as His absence makes the night. So too we may say it is the presence of Jesus makes our day, and it is the absence of Jesus makes our night. But if the bride is left behind in the night, she is left with deep yearnings of heart for her Beloved. She has been aroused from her slumbers. Love has been awakened, and now she delights to speak of her Beloved as the One that her soul loveth. Four times over she uses the expression, "Him whom my soul loveth."

But awakened love is not content without its object. Love makes her a seeker. Hitherto the Bridegroom has been the seeker, but now at last the bride is the one that seeks. As with a hardened sinner, so with a sleeping saint. Christ must first be the seeker. There would be no seeking sinner, if there was not first a seeking Savior. If the Son of Man had not first come to seek and save the lost, we never should have heard of the poor publican who "sought to see Jesus." If "Jesus Himself " had not drawn nigh to the two sorrowing saints on the road to Emmaus, they never would have returned to Jerusalem, that same night, to find "Jesus Himself" in the midst of His own.

Further, we do well to remark that it is the Bridegroom Himself that is sought by the bride. It is not the daybreak, the time of singing, or the land of song, that she seeks; it is a person, Himself that she longs to see. In her eyes, He is fairer than the fairest land, and better than all the blessings that He brings when love is awakened.

Christ alone can satisfy the heart of the Christian. As home-sick saints we welcome the thought that soon the last tear will be wiped away, the last sorrow will be passed, and the last enemy overcome; but as love-sick saints we want "Jesus Himself." To the dying thief, saved by grace, the Lord could not only say, "To-day shalt thou be in paradise," but "Today shalt thou be with Me in paradise" (Luke 23:43). The heavenly city, with its walls of jasper, its gates of pearl, and its streets of gold, would be no heaven without Christ. There, indeed, will be "songs and everlasting joy" (Isa. 35:10), but Christ is the theme of the song and the source of the joy. "The Lamb is the light thereof" (Rev. 21:23).

But this seeking bride will yield us further instruction. Love has been awakened; love has made her a seeker, but she does not at once obtain the object of her quest. Though she sought the Bridegroom she has to admit, more than once, "I found Him not." Why is this? Is she not seeking the right person? Indeed she is, but at first she seeks Him in a wrong way. She says, "On my bed, I sought Him." She sought Him, but, at the same time, she sought to retain her ease. She was not at first prepared to forego her own comfort in the quest of her Beloved. How many of us would like to have Christ if we could spare the flesh. The love of Christ would impel us to follow after Christ, but the love of ease would hold us back. We seek Him, as it were, on our bed; and therefore, we find Him not. We forget the word which declares, "If any man will come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me" (Luke 9:23).

(Vs. 2). “I will rise now and go about the city,

In the streets and in the broadways

Will I seek Him whom my soul loveth:

I sought Him, but I found Him not.”

The power of love prevails with the bride, and she says, "I will rise now and go about the city." She overcomes her love of ease, but only to fail again. She had sought her Beloved in a wrong way, she now seeks Him in a wrong place. He is not to be found in the city streets and broad highways; He feeds among the lilies. And we too may fall into the same snare. We would like to have Christ, but, we would like to have Christ and the broad highways of this world. But if we cannot have Christ and spare the flesh, neither can we have Christ and retain the world. If the cross witnesses to the dying love of Christ, it also expresses the undying hatred of the world to Christ. Cast out by the world, He has "suffered without the gate," and if we would find Christ we must "go forth, therefore, unto Him without the camp, bearing His reproach" (Heb. 13:12-13).

(Vs. 3). “The watchmen that go about the city found me:-

For the third time the bride fails in her quest. She has sought the Bridegroom in the wrong way, she has sought Him in the wrong place, now she appeals to the wrong people. The business of the watchmen is to govern and keep order. They may administer righteousness, but they cannot help in the quest of love. "If it were a matter of wrong or wicked lewdness," the Gallio’s of this world will deal with it; but if it is a matter of "love" and "Jesus," then, in the world's sight, it is only "a question of words and names," and the world "will be no judge of such

matters" (Acts 18:14-15). Or if at times they turn judge in such matters, it will only be to persecute the seeker after Christ. In vain, therefore, do we appeal to an arm of flesh, though Christians from early times have fallen into this snare, only to learn that the princes of this world have crucified the Lord of glory. Like the blind man of Bethsaida, with his partly restored sight, we are apt to view men out of all proportion to their true importance. We "see men as trees, walking" (Mark 8:24). But the love of Christ would bring us, like the disciples of old, to see "no man any more, save Jesus only" (Mark 9:8).

(Vs. 4). “It was but a little that I passed from them,

When I found Him whom my soul loveth;

I held Him, and would not let Him go

Until I had brought Him into my mother's house,

And into the chamber of her that conceived me.”

When every hindrance is overcome—the bed, the city, the watchmen—it was but a little ere the bride found her Beloved. And when found she "held Him, and would not let Him go." And may we not say, in our day, the one great need of the Lord's people is this same energy of love, which, overcoming every hindrance, links the soul to Christ, and will not let Him go. But alas, in the light of the prevailing apathy and lack of affection for Christ, we have once again to cry with Isaiah, "There is none... that stirreth up himself to take hold of Thee" (Isa. 64:7). In the day of His presence on earth there came a time when many professed followers "went back and walked no more with Him"; but the twelve "held Him, and would not let Him go." The Lord asks, "Will ye also go away?" And they reply, "Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life." And in these days of His absence in glory, when the love of many grows cold, when hands hang down, and knees grow feeble, when again many turn back and walk no more with Him, how imperative it is that we should stir ourselves up "to take hold of Him;" and, having taken hold of Him in the affection of our hearts, refuse to let Him go.

In the close of the first canticle, the Bridegroom conducts the bride into the banqueting house of the King, but in this closing scene the bride conducts the Bridegroom into her mother's house. For the earthly bride the mother represents the nation of Israel (Rev. 12). Not until God's earthly people give the King His rightful place in connection with the nation will they come into blessing. For Christians, Jerusalem, which is above, is the mother of us all. We may attempt to bring Christ back to earth—in other words, we may seek to connect Christ's name and authority with this world—but it will be in vain. Christ is not to be found in the city and broadways of this world, and if He is not found here, He cannot be enjoyed here. He can only be known, and enjoyed, in connection with the heavenly scene where He is and to which we belong. If, as we have seen, He can only be found "without the camp," the "mother's house" would teach us that He can only be enjoyed "within the veil" (Heb. 6:19).

(Vs. 5). “I charge you, daughters of Jerusalem

By the roes, and by the hinds of the field,

The canticle closes, like the first, with the earnest appeal to the daughters of Jerusalem, that nothing should be allowed to disturb the enjoyment of love between the Bridegroom and the bride. And in like spirit we may well sing:-

The Song of Songs, Canticle 1: The Assurance of Love

The Bride. (Vss. 2-7).

(Vs. 2). "Let Him kiss me with the kisses of His mouth."

The song opens with the voice of the bride.

Her first words express the ardent longing of her heart for a pledge of the Bridegroom's love. This is not the language of a stranger to the Bridegroom, nor of one who is indifferent to His love. These are the words of one who has been attracted by the Bridegroom, and longs for, yet lacks, the assurance of His personal love.

At the close of this first canticle she obtains the desire of her heart, for she can say, with great delight, "His left hand is under my head, and His right hand doth embrace me." The desire expressed at the outset is realized at the end. She will have other lessons to learn in the course of the Song, but she has obtained the assurance and enjoyment of the Bridegroom's love. This then is the great theme of the first canticle—The way love takes to confirm the heart of the bride in the love of the Bridegroom.

To lack the assurance of the love of Christ is far indeed from true Christian experience, and yet at the outset of our history with God our souls are not always confirmed in the love of Christ. And when the assurance of His love is possessed it is not always enjoyed; and thus the language of the bride expresses the longing of many a child of God. But the enjoyment of the love of Christ is the secret of all true devotedness. As we trace the devoted life of the Apostle Paul, the persecutions he suffered, the perils he faced, and the hardships he endured, we ask, what was the hidden secret of this marvelous life? And we hear him answer, "The life which I now live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave Himself for me" (Gal. 2:20). Here was the hidden spring of his life, a heart kept in the assurance and enjoyment of Christ's individual love. How deeply important that our souls should be thoroughly assured of the love of Christ. There are other loves in this world, but His love alone can satisfy the heart,—"Let Him kiss me." For satisfaction of heart His love must be consciously known, and this is the import of the kiss,—"Let Him kiss me." But, further, His love must be known as an individual and personal love,

(Vss. 2-3). "Let Him kiss me.

2. For Thy love is better than wine.

3. Thine ointments savor sweetly;

Therefore do the virgins love Thee”.

Addressing the Bridegroom, the bride discovers to us the secret of her desire for the assurance of His love. She has learned the preciousness of His love and the excellence of His name. The thought of His love fills her heart with a deeper gladness than "wine which maketh glad the heart of man." His love is better than wine, and His name is like an ointment poured forth. It is the soul's discovery of the infinite worth of Christ that creates the longing for the assurance of His love. His love is better than all earthly joys, of which wine is but the symbol; and His name, when revealed, is like an ointment poured forth. In the Bethany scene of John 12 we see the happy result of the ointment poured forth. In the alabaster box the odor was confined, but when poured forth, "the house was filled with the odor of the ointment." Prophets, priests, and kings, had foretold the coming of Christ and the names He would bear, but in their day the odor of His name was confined, as it were, to the alabaster box. When, however, Christ became incarnate and dwelt among us full of grace and truth, then indeed His name was poured forth: then the name of Jesus stood revealed as the perfect expression of meekness, gentleness, patience, longsuffering, holiness, and love. Other names may stink in the nostrils of men by reason of the cruelty and wickedness of those that bear them, this name is fragrant with every grace. The odor of this name filled the little company gathered around Him on earth; it fills the courts of heaven with its fragrance; it will become excellent in all the earth; it will fill the new heavens and the new earth. But it is only the virgins -the pure in heart—who value His name, and appreciate His love. "Therefore do the virgins love Thee." They love because of His love. "We love Him because He first loved us" (1 John 4:19).

(Vs. 4). “Draw me, we will run after Thee!

- The King hath brought me into His chambers -

We will be glad and rejoice in Thee,

We will remember Thy love more than wine.

The preciousness of His love, and the excellence of His name, not only create the longing for the assurance of His love, but also the desire for His company. The bride expresses this desire, as, in company with the virgins, she says, "Draw me, we will run after Thee." She is loved into loving and drawn into running. And, thus drawn, the Bridegroom leads into the secret place of His presence—the chambers of the King. In due time the bride will be a worshipper of the King at His table (vs. 12), and yet a little later she will rest with infinite delight in the banqueting house of the King (2:4); but first she must be a learner in the chambers of the King. In that secret place she forgets herself, rejoices in the Bridegroom, and remembers His love. There the King is loved with a pure love—they love Him uprightly. Thus it is that Christ becomes exceedingly attractive to our souls; He draws us after Him; He brings us into His presence, that, alone with Him, we may forget ourselves and rejoice only in Him and His love.

(Vs. 5). “I am black, but comely, daughters of Jerusalem,

As the tents of Kedar,

In the presence of the Bridegroom, the bride can only rejoice in Him and His love; but, as the result of having been in the King's chambers, she gets a true estimate of herself, so that before others she owns her true condition. Discovering what we are in the presence of all that Christ is, we can use the language of the bride and say, "I am black,"—black as the tents of Kedar. But if we learn what we are in the presence of Him who is the King, we also learn what His grace has made us, and thus while owning we are black we can also add, "but comely" like the beautiful curtains of Solomon's temple. These are lessons that all God's people have to learn. In the presence of God, Job had to say, "I am vile." In the sanctuary, the psalmist had to say, "I was as a beast before Thee." In the presence of the glory, Isaiah says, "I am unclean"; and, as a result of being in the chambers of the King, the bride has to own, "I am black." The soul will be restless and the assurance and the enjoyment of the love of Christ be lacking, until, in the secret chambers of the King, we have learned these three great truths: (1) The infinite worth of Christ and His love: (2) the utter vileness of all that we are by nature; and (3) the comeliness His grace has put upon us.

(Vs. 6). “Look not upon me, because I am black;

Because the sun hath looked upon me.

My mother's children were angry with me:

They made me keeper of the vineyards;

Having seen the King in His beauty and herself in her blackness, she has no desire to attract attention to herself. If she speaks of herself, it is not to draw attention to herself. "Look not upon me," she says, "because I am black." The heat of this world's trials, persecution from those that were nearest to her, slavery in the vineyards of others and neglect of her own things had all left their mark upon her. And in like manner, having discovered our blackness in the light of Christ's perfection, we realize that we are no pattern for others. As we think of our many failures under fiery trials, how often we have broken down in the presence of the opposition of men of the world, how much we have slaved in the world's vineyards, and how much we have neglected our own things, are we not constrained to say with the bride, "Look not upon me"? And yet how often our words and ways betray the vanity of our hearts which practically says, "Look upon me." The effort to attract to ourselves tells how little we have been in the chambers of the King.

(Vs.7). “Tell me, Thou whom my soul loveth,

Where Thou feedest [Thy flock],

Where Thou makest it to rest at noon;”

“For why should I be as one that turneth aside by the flocks of Thy companions?”

The bride, who has been speaking to the daughters of Jerusalem, now turns to the Bridegroom—the one whom she loves. Questions may arise in her heart as to His love for one who is so black, but she has no doubt as to her love for the King. She does not say, "Thou whom my soul ought to love," or even "desires to love," but "Thou whom my soul loveth." And loving Him she desires to feed where He feeds and rest where He rests. Attracted by His love she has no desire to turn aside. And so with ourselves, it is the love of Christ filling the heart, that alone can keep us from turning aside. And yet, alas, have we not each to confess that too often, we are “as one that turneth aside” to seek our food and rest in earthly things. And then we wonder why we make such little progress, and yet, if feeding on the husks of this poor world, the wonder would be if we made any spiritual growth. The philosophy, science and literature of this world will not attract, still less feed, the souls of the lovers of Christ. If we truly say, "Thou whom my soul loveth," we shall surely desire the heavenly food and the divine rest; and the ardent desire for spiritual food is the best antidote against turning aside to earthly supplies.

The Bridegroom. (Vss. 8-11).

(Vs. 8). “If thou know not, thou fairest among women,

Go thy way forth by the footsteps of the flock,

Here for the first time we hear the Bridegroom's voice. He addresses the bride as the "fairest among women." Black in her own sight she may be, hated too and persecuted by others, but in His sight, she is the "fairest among women." Nothing will alter Christ's estimate of His people. Neither the failure of the saints, nor the slander of the world, will alter His appreciation of His own. He ever views them in all the value of His own work, and according to the counsels of His grace. Would we know where to find food and rest for our souls we must follow in the footsteps of the flock. Christ has His flock and His shepherds in this world. And Christ, the chief Shepherd of the sheep, leads His flock into green pastures. Would we be fed, then let us follow in the footsteps of the flock. But there is further instruction for the bride. Let her feed the lambs beside the shepherd's tents, and in feeding others she will herself be fed. What is this but the anticipation of that last scene in the gospel of John with the Lord's touching words to a restored backslider, "Follow Me," and "Feed my lambs." To feed the lambs we must follow Christ, and if we follow Christ we shall delight to feed the lambs. The secret of obtaining rest and food for our souls is found in following Christ and feeding His lambs.

(Vss. 9-11). “I compare thee, My love,

To a steed in Pharaoh's chariots.

Thy cheeks are comely with bead-rows,

Thy neck with ornamental chains.

We will make thee bead-rows of gold

With studs of silver.”

Having answered her questions, the Bridegroom is free to express the thoughts of His heart concerning the bride. Like a horse in Pharaoh's chariot, adorned with all the trappings of royalty, so the bride was comely, in His sight, with the beauty He had put upon her; as the Lord can say, by the mouth of Ezekiel, "I decked thee also with ornaments, and I put bracelets upon thy hands, and a chain on thy neck" (Ezek. 16:11). Does not Christ delight to unfold His thoughts of love towards His own? And more, to let us into the secret of things which God hath prepared for them that love Him—things that eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man? And so the Bridegroom not only expresses His present delight in the bride, but lets her into the secret of all the glory that is purposed for her, "We will make thee bead-rows of gold with studs of silver," doubtless referring to the crown she shall yet wear. There is the present comeliness in which Christ sees His people—for as He is so are we in this present world; and there is the future glory in which the saints will be displayed, when the marriage of the Lamb is come. Beautiful are the saints in His sight even now, but the crowning day is coming by and by.

The Bride. (Vss. 12-14).

(Vss. 12-14). “While the King is at His table,

My spikenard sendeth forth its fragrance.

A bundle of myrrh is my Beloved unto me;

That passeth the night between my breasts.

My beloved is unto me a cluster of henna-flowers

While the King sitteth at His table, the worship of her heart ascends as a sweet odor. The King at His table gives us a lovely picture of Christ in the midst of His own. Not Christ with the girded loins, in lowly service, washing sin-soiled feet; not Christ as the Captain of the Lord's host leading His own in the fight with the powers of evil; not Christ with the tears of divine compassion comforting a sorrowing heart, but Christ at rest, finding joy and delight in the midst of His own. Not Bethany with its sorrow, but Bethany with its feasting—that happy moment when loving hearts "made Him a supper." It was not often in this sad world that anyone made a supper for Him. Once in the house of Levi a feast was made that Christ might bless poor sinners, and once in the home at Bethany that Christ might commune with saints. There at last they spread a feast for Him who spread a feast for all the world. There the King sat at His table, and there the spikenard of the bride sent forth its fragrance. It was blessed to sit at His feet as a learner and hear His word, but Mary's spikenard sent forth no fragrance there. It was blessed to fall at His feet in the day of sorrow and receive the comfort of His tears, but it drew no fragrant spikenard from Mary's broken heart. But when the King sat at His table in the midst of His own,—no longer sustaining them in the pathway, comforting them in their sorrows, dealing with their weakness or correcting their mistakes, but now resting in His love in holy communion and intimacy with His own,—then indeed the suited moment had come to bring forth the alabaster box and pour out the precious spikenard upon the King, and the house was filled with the odor of the ointment. It is the presence of the King at His table that calls forth the worship of His own. Only a heart set free from its sorrows, and its exercises, and busy service, can worship in the presence of the King.

To learn at His feet is good, but learning is not worship. To be comforted by His tears of sympathy is sweet, but comfort is not worship. In learning, I am conscious of my ignorance, in comfort, I am thinking of my sorrow. But when we spread a feast for Christ—when the Kings sits at His table—it is no time for instruction or comfort. There we leave our sorrows, our ignorance, our daily cares behind, and at His supper, He alone engrosses the mind and holds the affections; and when the heart is filled with Christ we worship—"[Our] spikenard sendeth forth its fragrance."

Worship is the overflow of a heart filled with Christ. When Christ fills the heart we can say, in the language of the bride, "A bundle of myrrh is my Beloved unto me." The myrrh speaks of Christ, but not Christ as an object before our gaze, but Christ dwelling in the heart by faith. Myrrh does not attract by its beauty, like the flower. It is a resin precious by reason of its sweet odor. The myrrh, too, is wrapped in a bundle; it is unseen but its fragrance is enjoyed. Such was the beloved to the bride, and such is Christ to the believer when dwelling in his heart by faith. And, says the bride, the bundle of myrrh shall lie all night between my breasts. All through the darkness of this world's night, until the dawn of endless day, the believer has Christ enshrined in the secret of his affections.

But further, the bride likens the Bridegroom to the beauty of a cluster of henna-flowers in the vineyards of Engedi. She would delight in her beloved in the secret of her affections, but she would also enjoy him as the object of her enraptured gaze. So too we need Christ not only dwelling in the heart by faith, but as the attractive Object of our souls, that gazing upon Him with unveiled face we may behold the glory of the Lord and be changed into the same image from glory to glory.

We need Christ to draw forth the fragrance of the spikenard at the feast; we need Christ as the bundle of myrrh throughout the long dark night; and we need Christ as the cluster of flowers in the vineyards of Engedi—enshrined, as it were, in His own glory.

The Bridegroom. (Vs. 15).

(Vs.15). “Behold, thou art fair, My love;

The spikenard of the bride has sent forth its fragrance, expressive of her delight in the Bridegroom; now He expresses His delight in the bride. She had said, "I am black," but the Bridegroom says, "Behold thou art fair." Christ, ever viewing His people in the light of His purpose, and on the ground of His work, can say of each one, "Thou art fair." Thus, the Apostle John can write, "As He is so are we, in this world."

Moreover, the King adds, "Thou hast doves' eyes." The dove mourns and languishes when separated from its mate. Hezekiah could say in his sickness, "I did mourn as a dove." The dove has no eye but for its loved object; and it is those who have before them one object—and that object Christ—of whom He can say, "Thou hast doves' eyes."

The Bride. (Vss. 1:16-2:1).

(Vss. 16-17). “Behold, Thou art fair, my Beloved, yea, pleasant;

Also our bed is green.

The beams of our houses are cedars,

The Bridegroom had said, "Behold, thou art fair, My love;" and with great delight the bride at once responds, "Behold, Thou art fair, my Beloved." Her comeliness is the counterpart of his. Is Christ fair? So are His people. The beauty of the Lord God is upon us (Psa. 90:17). But not only does the bride say, "Thou art fair," but she can add, "Yea, pleasant." Of others it may be said, many are "fair" that are not "pleasant," and some are pleasant that are not fair. Christ is not only fair to look upon, but He is wholly pleasant to engage the thoughts. How "pleasant" was Christ to the Psalmist when he said, "My heart is welling forth with a good matter;" and how "fair" when he added, "Thou art fairer than the children of men. (Psa. 45)"

Well we may sing,

But more. Not only is the King "fair" and "pleasant," but in His presence there is rest, security, and shelter. "Our bed is green." The bed refers to the couch on which the King and the bride recline at the King's table, and gives the thought of rest. When Christ takes His place in the midst of His own there is found a green spot in this barren world. In His presence there is rest. But it is “our bed”, the rest is mutual. I with Him, and He with me. In His presence, too, we shall find security and shelter. "The beams of our house are cedar, and our rafters of fir." The "beams" support the building and make it secure, the “rafters” support the roof and make it a place of shelter. In the presence of the King we have security and shelter. What kind of setting has the Bethany scene, when the King sits at His table? Immediately before we read of the great ones of the earth consulting to put the King to death, immediately after Judas covenants to betray Him for thirty pieces of silver. Outside the storm is rising, inside there is shelter and security from the coming storm. One, indeed, will find fault with Mary, but at once the sheltering care of the Lord is seen: "Let her alone, she hath done what she could." No power of the enemy can touch the one of whom the King says "Let her alone."

(Vs. 1). “I am the rose of Sharon,”

The King has said, "Thou art fair," and in response to His "Thou art" she can rightly say "I am." "I am the rose of Sharon." Faith expresses what grace has made her in His sight—fragrant as a rose and beautiful as a lily of the valleys. Not a lily in some crowded city for the admiration of the world, but a lily for the Bridegroom's delight in some secluded valley. There is no presumption in accepting the place that Christ, by grace, has given us before Himself. Rather is it presumption, when Christ says, "Thou art fair," to say "I am unworthy." The prodigal could speak thus in the far country, but when the Father's arms were around him and the Father's kisses covered him all was changed. And, in the presence of the King at His table, we may well take up the words of the bride, not indeed to exalt ourselves, but to magnify the grace of the One who has put His beauty upon us.

The Bridegroom. (Vs. 2).

(Vs. 2). “As the lily among thorns,

So is my love among the daughters.”

This is the response of the King. He affirms what the bride has said. She is the lily; but in the valley where the lily grows there are thorns which serve as a background to bring out the beauty of the lily. In the dark valley of this world there are those who have none of the beauty of Christ upon them, thorns for the burning, thorns that would only wound Him. But there are also His own, those in whom Christ can delight—the excellent of the earth—lilies among the thorns. They are Christ's sanctified ones, and He has put His beauty upon them. Their excellencies are the more displayed by reason of their dreary surroundings. To have His lily Christ had to descend into the valley of the thorns, yea, He must wear the thorns to win His bride. It is by His "one offering He hath perfected forever them that are sanctified" (Heb. 10:14).

The Bride. (Vss. 3-7).

(Vs. 3). “As the apple tree among the trees of the wood,

So is my Beloved among the sons.

I sat down under His shadow with great delight,

And His fruit was sweet to my taste.”

The response of the bride is immediate. If the King sees excellence in the bride above all the daughters of women, the bride sees in her Beloved the only one among the sons of men in whom she can find rest, and shade, and fruit. Thus she likens Him to the citron tree with its dense shade and luscious fruit. Many trees of the wood may appear more imposing to the eye of man, even as men esteem their fellows of more account than the despised and lowly Jesus. Other trees of the forest may give shelter, but yield no fruit; some, too, may yield fruit but give no shade, but this tree alone meets every need. Christ is the true citron tree. Christ is the tree of life. To man's eye, as He passed through this world, merely a root out of a dry ground, without form or comeliness, but to the believer that lowly Man is the only one among the sons of men that can afford shelter, and refreshment, and rest in this dry and weary world. If, with faith's transpiercing gaze, we look on to the New Jerusalem we see the tree of life in the midst of the street, by the river of life, growing in its native soil, and there indeed shall we find eternal rest and perennial refreshment. Like the bride we shall say, "I [sit] down under His shadow with great delight, and His fruit [is] sweet to my taste."

(Vs. 4). “He hath brought me to the house of wine,

In the Bridegroom's presence the bride has found rest from toil, shelter from the heat of the day, and fruit sweet to her taste. Now her experience deepens; her needs all met she is led into the full enjoyment of the bounties provided by the King. She is brought into the house of wine, to taste the fullness of His joy and the rapture of His love. Not now "His shadow," nor "His fruit," but Himself.

So, in the experience of our souls; we sit down under the shadow of Christ, and in His presence find rest from toil, relief from the burden and heat of the day, and refreshment and nourishment for our souls. But, great as these blessings are, they have in them a measure of relief; and beyond the blessings that bring relief there are others that carry with them richer, deeper experiences -experiences into which no thought of relief can enter, but only the infinite enjoyment of His fullness. Experiences which answer to the house of wine and the banner of love. Setting us free from earthly things Christ would lead us into His heavenly things. He would give us a taste of the fullness of joy and the pleasures for evermore, there to find His banner over us is love. The banner tells of the conqueror and of victory gained. The love of Christ has conquered. And what a victory has Christ gained for His people! Not a victory such as the poor clay kings of this world gain, who wade to their thrones through the blood of millions of their fellowmen, this mighty Conqueror gains His victory by the shedding of His own blood—by Himself becoming the Victim. And having gained His victory He unfurls His banner, and His banner is love. Love made Him the willing victim; love held Him on His way as He descended in the valley of thorns; love held Him on the cross—no nails of man's forging could hold the Christ of God upon the cross—love that the many waters could not quench or the floods drown held Him there. Love divine, eternal, unquenchable, all-powerful, has gained the mighty victory, and the banner that declares His victory is inscribed with His love.

(Vs. 5). “Stay me with flagons,

Refresh me with [citrons];

The ecstasy of the house of wine is more than the Bride can sustain. There are spiritual experiences too deep for these weak vessels of clay. Was it not thus with the Apostle when caught up into the third heaven? He heard unspeakable words, not possible to utter. Little indeed may such experiences be the common lot of the Christian life, but at times the Lord grants to His people such an overwhelming sense of His love that we are constrained to cry out in such language as a dying saint once used, "Lord, hold Thy hand; it is enough, thy servant is a clay vessel and can hold no more." One of the later Puritans well expressed such an experience when he wrote:

(Vs. 6). “His left hand is under my head,

And his right hand doth embrace me.”

This is the answer to the bride's call for sustaining power. The banner of love is over her, and the arms of love are around her. She has attained the longing of her heart expressed in the opening of the canticle. She has reached the assurance and enjoyment of the Bridegroom's love. How happy when the saint finds every longing of the renewed nature satisfied by the love of Christ.

(Vs. 7). “I charge you, daughters of Jerusalem,

By the roes, and by the hinds of the field,

The canticle closes with an appeal to the daughters of Jerusalem not to disturb the rest of love. The slightest movement would disturb the timid and sensitive roe or hind of the field. With the banner of love over her, and the arms of love around her, the bride dreads the slightest intrusion that would mar the enjoyment of love. And well may the saint, in the enjoyment of the love of Christ, dread any intrusion that would break up or mar that intimacy of love that may exist between him and his Savior.

1. The Song of Songs, Which Is Solomon's.

Christ is the great theme of all Scripture, and, in its several parts, the Holy Spirit delights to set forth. special aspects of Christ and His glories. Here, in the Song of Songs, His great object is to present the love of Christ for His people.

To set forth this love the Spirit of God has employed the bridal relationship as a figure. In a series of Canticles we have unfolded to us the love of an exalted Bridegroom for a bride of low degree, together with the varied experiences by which she is brought into full relationship with him, and the enjoyment of his love.

The Bridegroom is a king called Solomon or Shelomoh. The bride is a shepherdess called The Shulamite or Shulamith,—the feminine form of Shelomoh.

The song is mainly composed of a series of dialogs between the Bridegroom and the bride. There are other characters introduced, for instance, the daughters of Jerusalem occasionally speak; also we have the city watchmen, the keepers of the walls, and the little sister, but these characters take little or no part in the dialogs. In the course of these dialogs we have, first, the unfolding of the infinite and unchanging love of the Bridegroom; second, the development and growth of the love of the bride, and how she is established in relationship with the Bridegroom, brought into the enjoyment of his love and raised from her lowly position to share the throne of the king—her exalted Bridegroom.

Few will question that in the Bridegroom we have a figure of Christ. Some may have more difficulty in the interpretation of the bride. Strictly, however, there can be little doubt that the bride is used as a figure of God's earthly people Israel (or more exactly, the godly remnant of the Jews in a future day, who will represent Israel) and the experiences by which they will be finally established in relationship with their Messiah.

The Bridegroom and the bride are figures frequently used by the prophets to set forth this relationship. The prophet Isaiah, looking on to this time, can say, "As the bridegroom rejoiceth over the bride, so shall thy God rejoice over thee" (Isa. 62:5). The Lord, speaking through the prophet Hosea, and looking on to Israel's future restoration, touchingly says, "I will allure her, and bring her into the wilderness and speak to her heart," and then, her affections having been awakened, He can say to her, "I will betroth thee unto Me forever; yea, I will betroth thee unto Me in righteousness, and in judgment, and in loving kindness, and in mercies. I will even betroth thee unto Me in faithfulness: and thou shalt know the Lord" (Hos. 2:14,19, 20). In the Song of Songs, it is these very wilderness experiences, wherein the Lord speaks to the heart of His people, that pass before us in figure.

While however the prophets are concerned mainly with the exercise of conscience by which the godly remnant of the Jews will be led to repentance for having rejected and crucified their Messiah, it is reserved for this one book—the Song of Songs—to present their exercise of heart, and the awakening of their affections by the unfolding of Christ's devoted love—the love which once they had spurned.

This interpretation requires for its acceptance some acquaintance with the future history of Israel as set forth in the Old and New Testament prophecies. Therein we learn that the Jews will go back to their land in unbelief, hoping thereby to find deliverance from oppression, and rest from persecution. In result they will find themselves in such trouble as never was since there was a nation, and never will be again. The northern powers will press upon them from without, and "the Beast" (Rev. 13:4), will oppress them within. Having rejected Christ, they will accept the rule of Antichrist, who, not regarding the God of his fathers, will set up "a god whom his fathers knew not." With the "abomination of desolation" standing in the holy place, they will fall into the grossest idolatry, their last state being worse than their first.

But in the midst of the apostate nation there will be a remnant with whom the Spirit of God will work. This remnant will be afflicted, hated of all nations for the sake of Christ's name which they confess, and many of their number killed. Because of these persecutions some will be offended, and the love of many will wax cold. But God will work on their behalf, and for their sakes the days of the great tribulation will be shortened.

Now it is this remnant that comes before us, under the figure of the bride, in the Song of Songs, and the way in which God, in the midst of all their sorrows, will speak to their hearts and awaken their affections.

But while such is the strict interpretation of the Song of Songs, this by no means hinders its application to the church—the heavenly bride—or to the individual believer. For in God's dealing with all His people there are principles in common. Speaking of the Canticles another has said, "Christ loves His assembly, He loves His earthly people, He loves the soul that He draws to Himself, so that there is a moral application to ourselves which is very precious" (J.N.D.) It is this moral application to the individual believer that is mainly in view in the following exposition.

The Song can be divided into six Canticles, the subjects of which may be summarized as follows:

Canticle 1. (ch. 1:2-2:7): The assurance of love.

Canticle 2. (ch. 2:8-3:5): The awakening of love.

Canticle 3. (ch. 3:6-5:1): The communion of love.

Canticle 4. (ch. 5:2-6:12): The restoration of love.

Canticle 5. (ch. 6:13-8:4): The witness of love.

Canticle 6. (ch. 8:5-14). The triumph of love.

Thus, it will be seen, LOVE is the great theme of the Song of Songs—the love of Christ. Under the figures of the Bridegroom and the bride it speaks of all those sweet affections that Christ kindles in the hearts of His own. What more important than having the affections drawn out to Christ! We often mourn that there is little love among the Lord's people, but, alas, this tells a tale of little love to the Lord Himself. And if there is little love to the Lord, is it not because there is little appreciation of the Lord's love to us? The measure of our love to the Lord, is the

measure in which we realize the Lord's love to us. Herein is the great value of the Song of Songs. It awakens our love by unfolding His love. There are other songs in Scripture, songs that celebrate creation, songs that speak of victory, and songs of praise and thanksgiving, but the theme of this song is LOVE—the love of Christ—and therefore is it called THE SONG OF SONGS.

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