

THE
PULPIT COMMENTARY,

EDITED BY THE
VERY REV. H. D. M. SPENCE, D.D.,
DEAN OF GLOUCESTER;

AND BY THE
REV. JOSEPH S. EXELL, M.A.

SONG OF SOLOMON.

Exposition
BY REV. R. A. REDFORD, M.A., LL.B.

Homiletics
BY REV. B. C. CAFFIN, M.A.,
VICAR OF NORTHALLERTON, AND RURAL DEAN;
LATE FELLOW AND TUTOR OF WORCESTER COLLEGE, OXFORD.

Homilies by Various Authors.
REV. PROF. J. R. THOMSON, M.A. REV. S. CONWAY, B.A.
REV. J. D. DAVIES, M.A.

NEW EDITION.

FUNK & WAGNALLS COMPANY
LONDON AND NEW YORK

1907

THE SONG OF SOLOMON.

INTRODUCTION.

THERE is no book of Scripture on which more commentaries have been written and more diversities of opinion expressed than this short poem of eight chapters. That it was held in great veneration by ancient Jewish authorities; that it was received as part of the canon of the Old Testament, not only by the Jews but by all the early Christian writers, with very few and insignificant exceptions; that it is acknowledged by those who are entirely disagreed as to its interpretation to possess features of extraordinary literary excellence, and to be not unworthy, as a composition, of the wise king whose name it bears,—are reasons amply sufficient to justify the largest amount of attention which can be given to it, and to condemn the neglect to which it has been consigned by a great proportion of the Christian Church in modern times. There are difficulties which still beset the interpreter of its meaning; but they are not insuperable. The ingenuity of theorists must be put aside; the fanatical prejudices of allegorists must be disregarded; the solid facts of the case must be kept in view, such as the undoubted canonicity of the book and the almost universal feeling of both the Jewish and Christian Churches that there is valuable spiritual truth conveyed in it. Under such conditions it is not impossible to find an intermediate ground on which to stand, on the one side recognizing the distinctly human characteristics of the work, on the other tracing in it the marks of inspiration, so that it shall be retained as a genuine portion of the Word of God. We propose in this Introduction to lay before the reader the results which have been carefully gathered by the ablest modern commentators on the questions of *authorship and date, form and method, meaning and purpose.*

§ 1. AUTHORSHIP AND DATE.

The title is not decisive, "The Song of Songs, which is Solomon's." It may be later in date than the book itself, and added by another hand;

but the fact that Solomon is not described by any royal title is in favour of the antiquity of the words, and the opinion of critics is almost unanimous that they may be contemporaneous with the book itself. The meaning undoubtedly is, "The song which Solomon composed," not "The song which celebrates Solomon's love." When we examine the internal evidence, however, we are left in little doubt that the work is at least of the Solomonic period, and is more likely to have been the production of one whose literary qualities were equal to it than of an author who, while capable of such a masterpiece, still remains unknown. The opinions of the critics vary, as they always do when variation is possible. Some have ventured to place it in the period after the close of the canon; but they have not attempted to solve the enigma, how such a work of genius could come from a people who had by that time lost so much of their original qualities. To attribute it to the Alexandrian school would be entirely against both the spirit of it and its linguistic features. The tendency of recent criticism is to go back to the early view and connect the work with the age of Solomon. Davidson is inclined to this, and Ewald decides that it must have emanated from the northern kingdom, and been published soon after the death of Solomon. He withholds his assent to the Solomonic authorship chiefly on the ground of his adherence to the peculiar theory of interpretation which supposes it to describe an unsuccessful attempt on the part of the king to secure the person of a young shepherdess, faithful to her shepherd-lover. There are many references in the book which indicate the time of its composition, and which could scarcely be introduced as they are by a writer at a later period. The scene is laid partly in the beautiful northern country and partly in the neighbourhood of Jerusalem, and in both oases there is a peaceful prosperity and abundance which corresponds to the age of the great king. The knowledge of national objects of all kinds and of the whole land of Israel befits the royal pen (see 1 Kings iv. 23; v. 13). The reference in ch. i. 9 to "the steed in Pharaoh's chariots" is eminently suitable in Solomon's lips, as also the description of the palanquin as made of the "wood of Lebanon" (ch. iii. 9). The familiarity with a great variety of lovely objects and scenes, the reference to the splendour of the royal household, and the poetic beauty of the language throughout, make it probable that it was the recollection of the early life of the monarch employed by him at a subsequent time to embody Divine truth. The following are some of the objects introduced: names of plants and of animals in thirty-one instances; works of art in ten instances; spices and perfumes, wine of Lebanon, pools of Hebron, forests of Carmel, tents of Kedar, mountains of Gilead, the beauty of Tirzah and Jerusalem, the royal crown, the royal bed of state, the royal body-guard, the royal espousals and the connection of the queen-mother with them. While such allusions do not absolutely prove that King Solomon himself was the author, they confirm the likelihood that it dates from his age, and

show that it breathed much of his spirit, which was both intensely Jewish and cosmopolitan, dignified and human, profound and poetic.

Again, there is a considerable resemblance between the language of Solomon's Song and that of the Book of Proverbs—especially the first nine chapters and those from ch. xxii. to xxiv. (cf. Prov. v. 15 with Cant. iv. 15, vii. 17 with iv. 14, v. 3 with iv. 11, vi. 30, 31 with viii. 6, 7, xxiii. 31 with vii. 10). This is no proof that Solomon himself wrote Canticles, but is evidence that the two books approach one another in date. The substance of the book accords with the facts of Solomon's history. It is true that the number of queens mentioned, three score, and four score concubines, and virgins without number, seem to differ from the amount given in 1 Kings xi. 3, but that may be explained by the fact that the reference of Canticles is to the early period of Solomon's splendour, when his life was less voluptuous and degenerate. The tone of the book is not that of a corrupt court, but rather of the simple purity of a country maiden blooming in the presence of royal magnificence, transforming for the time being the atmosphere of worldly pleasure into which she is introduced, rebuking the fallen monarch, and setting forth by way of contrast the superior glory of virtue.

The argument for a later date derived from the language itself is of very little force. It is assumed that Aramaic forms certainly betoken the decay of the Hebrew language. But this is by no means the case. In compositions of a highly poetical and lyrical character such forms are found throughout the Old Testament, as in the Song of Deborah (Judg. v. 7), in Job, and in Amos. They were more frequently used, no doubt, in the northern parts of Palestine than in the southern, and would be an evidence of the provincial cast of the book rather than its late origin. This is particularly the case with abbreviated forms such as the שׁ for שׁוֹשַׁן , which we do not find in books of later date such as Jeremiah and Lamentations. Other Aramaisms are שֶׁלֶקֶה in ch. i. 7; נָכַר for נָצַר (ch. i. 6; viii. 11, 12); בָּרַח for בָּרַחַשׁ (ch. i. 17); קָטָו , "winter" (ch. ii. 11), and others; but all these forms are confessedly poetical. There are also some few foreign words, such as *pardes* (ch. iv. 13), *appiryon* (ch. iii. 9), but they are such as do not again appear, and such as we may well suppose to be within the knowledge of such a writer as Solomon. It may be observed of the language generally, that it is much more like the Hebrew of the Augustan age of the language than of times when its native vigour was in decay, and it was rapidly becoming a dead language. There is no work subsequent to the Captivity to be compared with it in literary power, nor can we suppose that all reference to the changes in the national life could have been lacking had it come from a writer of the later times. It is utterly destitute of all philosophical thought, which would certainly have crept into it had it been composed during the Greek period. On the whole, we can scarcely doubt that it is an early work, and the critical authorities who would dispute that conclusion are of no great weight. Umbreit

would ascribe it to the time of the exile. Eichhorn, Bertholdt, and Rosenmüller would date it still later, in the Persian age. Grätz, Hartmann, and some few others would assign it to the Greek period. But against such names we must place the much higher authority of Ewald, Döpke, Hävernick, Bleek, Hengstenberg, Zöckler, Delitzsch, and Davidson, who all agree that it comes from the period of Solomon, though they do not all admit the royal authorship. Had it been of late origin, we could scarcely understand the extreme reverence with which it was regarded in the Jewish Church. "No man in Israel," said Rabbi Akiba in the 'Mishna,' "ever doubted the canonicity of the Song of Songs, for the course of ages cannot vie with the day on which the Song of Songs was given to Israel; all the Kethuvim [*i.e.* the writings of the Hagiographa] are indeed a holy thing, but the Song of Songs is a holy of holies" ('Jadaim,' iii. 5). It seems probable, from the language both of Hosea and Isaiah, and the familiarity of the Jewish people with the fundamental idea of the book, the intimate relation of the truths of religion with the emotions of the human soul, that it was well known from at least as early a period as the eighth century before Christ. There is no direct allusion to it in the New Testament; but the language of the Psalms, especially such as Ps. xlv. and lxxii., corresponds with it; and the cast of the Apostle Paul's thoughts is often in harmony with it; while the appeals of our Saviour himself to the hearts of the people to recognize their loving relation to God and repent of their unfaithfulness, render it at least possible that the tenderness and persuasive beauty of Canticles was not ignored in the religious teaching of his day. He who was, in his own words, the *heavenly Bridegroom*, and who spoke, both by his own life and by those of his apostles, of his bride and her desire towards him, and the joy and glory of his nuptials, can scarcely be said to have left this book unnoticed, although he never quoted from it or mentioned it by name. It stands by itself in the Old Testament, as the Apocalypse stands by itself in the New; but only those who have given it a hasty and superficial reading will long doubt that it contains within itself the mind of the Spirit.

§ 2. THE LITERARY FORM AND METHOD OF THE POEM.

Critics have been almost as much divided on the literary questions arising out of this remarkable book as theological writers have been on the interpretation of its meaning. Some have regarded it as a collection of love-songs, as Herder the great German poet and philosopher, whose interesting and able work on the subject is entitled, 'Love Songs, the most Ancient and Beautiful from the East' (published in 1778). The old name given to the book, 'Canticles,' lends some weight to that view. The fact that no persons are introduced by name, and that the connection between the different parts of the poem is difficult to trace, seems to suggest an anthology of songs rather than a composition with unity of method and

purpose. There have been modifications of this extreme view among the critics which have grown out of the more careful study of the poem. Goethe, *e.g.*, while he once held that it was a mere collection of separate songs, afterwards in the 'Kunst und Alterthum' admitted that there was dramatic unity to be recognized in it. The chief representative of Herder's view in later times is Mundt; but there are few writers of any distinction who would deny that at least one mind is traceable in the ordering and placing of the songs. Bleek, *e.g.*, admits one editor who has put together a variety of erotic compositions referring to different persons and composed at different periods. And some Jewish critics have supposed that while the bulk of the poem refers to Solomon, other songs of a later date have been interpolated. The chief authorities for the unity of the composition are Ewald, Umbreit, Delitzsch, and Zöckler. The following considerations must be acknowledged by every candid reader to be amply sufficient to support the view that the poem is not a mere collection of fragments or isolated songs, but has a definite aim, and is the product, at least in arrangement, of some one superintending mind. The *name of Solomon*, and of "the king," who is plainly Solomon, is prominent in the poem throughout. The different parts seem to be strung together by the introduction of a *chorus* somewhat after the manner of a Greek play; and the lover and his beloved interchange the language of affection in a kind of *dialogue*. The references to *the family of the bride* are consistent throughout. The mother is introduced, never the father, but only the brothers, as though the father were deceased, which would point to a particular history (see ch. i. 6; iii. 4; and viii. 2). Again, the occurrence again and again of the same or similar words as a *refrain*, and the repetition of similar *illustrations* and *figures*, suggest one mind at work. The bride speaks in much the same language several times. In ch. ii. 16 and vi. 3 she says, "My beloved is mine, and I am his." In ch. ii. 5 and v. 8, "I am sick with love," and over and over again she uses the expression, "he whom my soul loves." She is addressed by the chorus in a similar manner throughout. Delitzsch very rightly says, "He who has any perception whatever of the unity of a work of art in human discourse will receive an impression of external unity from the Song of Solomon which excludes all right to sunder anything from it as of a heterogeneous character or belonging to different periods, and which compels to the conclusion of an internal unity that may still remain an enigma to the Scripture exposition of the present, but must nevertheless exist."

But while unity of authorship, composition, and purpose may be substantiated, it is still a difficult question to decide *what is the literary form and method of the poem*. It is a mere abuse of literary language to call it a *drama*. There is, properly speaking, no dramatic action and progress in it. Ewald has gone so far as to maintain that it was designed for representation, and Röttcher and Renan that it actually was exhibited as a play. But all that can be said in favour of such a view is that there

are *dramatic features* in the poem, such as the dialogue between the lover and the beloved, the introduction of the chorus, and the scenic character of some of the descriptions. But, on the other hand, there is no evidence that any such representations took place among the Jews at any time, and the generally idyllic character of the whole makes it extremely improbable that it was intended to be a drama. We can no more call the Song of Solomon a drama than we can give such a title to the Book of Job. Nor can we say, on the other hand, that it is a mere *epithalamium*, or idyllic song prepared for some nuptial occasion and adapted to a musical intention. The literary problems arising out of the mixed character of the composition seem to be solved in the higher question of its aim and purpose. It is the adaptation of human affection and sentiment to religious uses. We need not therefore wait for a satisfactory theory of its literary style, but rather be content to arrange its contents as they dispose themselves by the natural divisions of the subject-matter. It has been observed by Dr. Henry Green, of Princeton (in a note to his translation of Zöckler's 'Commentary'), "The scenes portrayed and the displays of mutual fondness indulged seem to be grouped rather than linked. They stand forth in their distinctness as exquisitely beautiful, and reflecting as much light on each other and on the subject which they illustrate and adorn as though they had been gathered up into the artificial unity of a consecutive narration or a dramatic plot. And this looser method of arrangement or aggregation, with its abrupt transition and sudden changes of scene, is no less graceful and impressive, while it is more in harmony with the Oriental mind and style of composition generally than the vigorous, external, and formal concatenation which the more logical but less proud Indo-European is prone to demand." All that seems necessary to do as a help to the literary appreciation of the poem is to indicate the general principle and method of its arrangement, which may be expressed thus: Love is first set forth simply in its ecstatic fervour of emotion in the *mutual delight* of the lover and the beloved. It is then celebrated as *nuptial love* in the rejoicing of the bridegroom and the bride. And in the second half of the poem, ch. v. 1 to the end, love is set forth as *tried*, for a time in danger of being lost, ultimately recovered and expanding into *the fulness of joy*. There are thus three parts in the poem. Part I. extends from the beginning to the fifth verse of the third chapter, and may be described as *The rapture of first love*. Part II. extends from ch. iii. 6 to v. 1, and may be called *Nuptial rejoicing*. Part III. extends from ch. v. 2 to viii. 14, and may be named *Separation and reunion*. But while these main divisions are traceable in the composition, there are subdivisions which enable us to arrange the whole into a series of lyrical pieces, and to discern in the language some distinction of speakers and some variety of scene and action which give a wonderful life and unity to the poem.

The opening words prepare us for the general scope of the whole work,

which is to set forth the theme of *true love*, and thus to lead our thoughts to the highest ideal of love. "Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth: for thy love is better than wine." We are prepared for the *rapture of first love*, which is poured out in the first part in exquisite dialogue and monologue.

(1) Shulamith, the beloved, is waiting for the arrival of her lover, and, surrounded by the chorus of ladies, pours out her rapture and longing, which is responded to by her admiring companions (ch. i. 1—8).

(2) The royal lover appears, and the rapturous joy of mutual delight is poured out in the banqueting-house (ch. i. 9 to ii. 7), closing with the refrain of serene contentment addressed by the beloved woman to the fair companions of her chamber: "I adjure you, O daughters of Jerusalem, by the roes and by the hinds of the field, that ye stir not up, nor awaken love until it please."

(3) In the bright, pure atmosphere of this new-found rapture the beloved woman sings the episodes of her love, tells how the loved one wooed her, how the first love mingled with the loveliness of the opening spring and summer and the delights of a pastoral life, how the heart longed for him until he was found, and when it found him would not let him go, concluding with the same refrain of satisfied yearning as in ch. ii. 7. This third subdivision of Part I. occupies from ch. ii. 8 to iii. 5, and contains some of the loveliest poetry in the whole composition.

Part II. *Nuptial rejoicing* (ch. iii. 6 to v. 1). Here we have first a description of the nuptial festival, and then the bride and bridegroom rejoicing in one another.

(1) *The litter of Solomon* is seen surrounded with his body-guard advancing towards Jerusalem. The daughters of Jerusalem go forth to meet him. He is crowned with the splendid crown made by his mother for the day of his espousal. It is but a glimpse of the festival, but it suggests the whole (ch. iii. 6—11).

(2) The greater part of the beautiful song which follows (ch. iv. 1—15) is the *address of the bridegroom to the bride*; but the bride responds with a brief rhapsody of delight, in which she surrenders herself entirely to her husband (ch. iv. 16): "Awake, O north wind; and come, thou south; blow upon my garden, that the spices thereof may flow out. Let my beloved come into his garden, and eat his precious fruits;" to which the bridegroom responds with the words of delight and satisfaction (ch. v. 1).

This concludes the first half of the poem. We then pass into another region. The cloud passes over the face of the sun. The brightness of the bridal bliss is obscured for a while. The bride tells of her forgetfulness and the recovery of her peace. This we may call *Separation and reunion*—Part III. (ch. v. 2 to viii. 14). The subdivisions of this concluding portion may be distinguished as follows:—

(1) Under the figure of a dream the bride describes the *temporary separation* of her heart from the bridegroom; her misery; her longing and

searching for the beloved object; and her appeal to her fair companions to help her (ch. v. 2—8).

(2) The *sympathizing companions* of the bride draw out the fulness of her love by their questions, asking "why she so loves him," and whither he is gone from her (ch. v. 9 to vi. 3).

(3) The *royal bridegroom* returns to his bride and rejoices once more in her (ch. vi. 4—9).

(4) The companions of the bride, recognizing the effect of the renewed bliss in the appearance of the bride, burst out into a *song of praise of her beauty* (ch. vi. 10).

(5) The bride responds with a declaration of her *ecstatic delight* (ch. vi. 11, 12).

(6) The companions of the bride pour out their praises as they behold the bride in her *dance of ecstasy* (ch. vi. 13 to vii. 5).

(7) The *royal bridegroom*, approaching the bride, delights in her attractions (ch. vii. 6—9).

(8) The bride, full of satisfaction in the love of her husband, invites him to return with her to *the scenes of her maiden life*, and there his love would beautify all that was familiar to her. In the thought of such bliss she again adjures her companions to acknowledge the perfection of her peace (ch. vii. 10 to viii. 4).

(9) *Bride and bridegroom* are together in the restful joy of a simple country life, exchanging sweet remembrances and confidences (ch. viii. 5—7).

(10) In the peace of the old home others are thought of, and the bliss of the bride overflows upon her *kindred*, to which the royal bridegroom responds and the bride rejoices (ch. viii. 8—12).

(11) The *royal bridegroom*, delighting in his bride, bids her sing (ch. viii. 13).

(12) The poem ends with the sweet melody of *the bride's voice*, inviting the bridegroom to hasten to her side, in one of her familiar love-songs: "Make haste, my beloved, and be thou like to a roe or to a young hart upon the mountains of spices." Thus the voice of the bride, which opens the poem, lingers on the ear in its close, and suggests to us that the whole is as if from *her standpoint the aspiration of an ideal love*, breathing itself out in desire after the beloved objects,—that *the king may delight himself in her beauty*.

§ 3. THEORIES OF INTERPRETATION.

No one can accept the Song of Solomon as a book of Scripture, the canonical authority of which is undoubted, without forming some theory of interpretation which shall justify the position of such a book amongst the sacred writings. It will be evident that our fundamental principles in respect to the nature and authority of inspired books will modify the views

we hold on any particular portion of Scripture. If the sacred writings are no more than a collection of Jewish literature, in which there would naturally be great variety, and not necessarily in every instance a lofty spiritual aim, then we can regard the Song of Solomon as Herder did, as a collection of beautiful Eastern songs, and there is no need to seek in them either unity of purpose or special significance. But it is more difficult to reconcile such a view with the facts than to find a tenable theory of interpretation. It is simply incredible that such a book, if merely of literary or moral worth, should be introduced into the collection of Jewish Scriptures, to be an inexplicable exception to the whole volume. All other books have some distinct and easily recognizable connection with the religious character and peculiar national position of the Jewish people. Not one is where it is because it is a piece of *literature*. Why should the Song of Solomon be an exception? Moreover, the simple fact that Jews themselves have always sought for an interpretation of the book shows that they were not satisfied with the mere literary value of it. We must either eliminate it altogether from the Bible, or we must find some method for its profitable use. Those who have renounced all attempts to explain it have either been impatient with the difficulties, or out of humour with the expositors. No doubt a very large amount of folly has been published by those who have endeavoured to support a theory by ingenious manipulation of the language. We are apt to be revolted by such extravagance, and treat the whole subject with indifference. But there is no more beautiful book in the Old Testament than the Song of Solomon. We cannot be right in leaving it unstudied and unused. We *must* deal with it as a part of Holy Scripture. As far as possible, therefore, we must put it in intelligible relation to the Word of God, as a progressive revelation of Divine truth. We must understand what is the idea of the book, and how that idea is set forth in the form in which the poem is composed. We proceed, therefore, to give an account of the different theories which have been held as to the interpretation of the book, and so to justify that which we accept in the subsequent Exposition.

The theories of interpretation may be classed under three heads. 1. Those which assume that the work is an *allegory*, that the facts contained in it are merely employed for the purpose of framework, the language being mystical and figurative. 2. Those which are founded upon a *naturalistic* basis, taking the literary features of the work as the first in importance, and regarding it as some form of *love-poem* or collection of *erotic songs*. 3. Between these two extremes stands the *typical* view, which, without discarding the historical and literary basis, not to be disputed on the very face of the work, endeavours to justify its position in the Word of God by analogy with other portions of Scripture, in which natural and national facts and interests are imbued with spiritual significance. In each of these points of view there is truth, as there is variety of interpretation. We shall be best prepared to understand the results of the most

able modern criticism by placing these different theories clearly side by side.

1. *The allegorical theory.* This is much the most ancient method of interpretation. It sprang, no doubt, from the rabbinical school among the Jews, in which the verbal inspiration of Scripture was tenaciously held, while, at the same time, all kinds of fanciful interpretations were foisted into the divinely authorized words. If the veil of the language has to be preserved intact, then the only resource of the dogmatist or the speculator is to bring forth from behind the veil that which suits his purpose. It is of no consequence to prove that there were any real persons, such as Solomon and Shulamith, whose love for one another is celebrated in this book. It might be so or it might not be so; these things are an allegory. The deepest truths are set forth in the dress of these words of human affection. Some have found in them *God and his Church* throughout all time. Others the *historical and political relations* of the Jewish people. Others have sought in them profound *philosophical mysteries* and *cabalistic secrets*. There is one point, and one alone, in which all these allegorical interpreters agree, and that is, that nothing is to be made of the book taken literally, that there is no consistency and order in it if we attempt to regard it historically; therefore we have nothing in it but words, which may be applied in any manner which is spiritually or otherwise profitable. Such a view condemns itself, for it deprives us of any ground of confidence in seeking the true interpretation. That surely must be the mind of the Spirit which best accords with the facts of the case. If there is not a foundation of historical truth underlying all the Scripture, then it is a mere unsubstantial cloud which may be blown away by the changes in the atmosphere of human opinion. It is against the analogy of Scripture. It opens the way to extravagance and folly, by removing all bounds and inviting the licence of mere individual speculation. It repels the common sense of the ordinary reader of Scripture, and simply shuts the book which it misinterprets, so that many refuse to look into it at all. "This mode of expounding each separate particular, not with a view to its place in the description in which it stands, but as a distinct reference to the spiritual object typified by it, necessarily leads both to a serious distortion of the lessons to be conveyed, and to a marring and mangling of the symmetry and beauty of the objects depicted." Postponing any further discussion of this principle, we proceed to give a summary of the history of the allegorical interpretation.

There is no evidence that the Song of Solomon was allegorically interpreted among the ancient Jews previous to the Christian era. Had it been a well-known, traditional view, it would certainly have appeared in some of the writings of the Apocrypha, or in the works of Philo. But there is no clear trace of it in either. The allusion which is found in the Fourth Book of Esdras (v. 24, 26), in which the terms "lily" and "dove" are employed of the Church, must be referred to a Christian origin, and dates probably about the end of the first century A.D. There is no decided

evidence of the allegorical theory until the eighth century, when there appeared a Targum on the book itself, with Ruth, Lamentations, Esther, and Ecclesiastes. The allegory is taken to be a figurative representation of the history of the Israelites from the time of the exodus to their final restoration and salvation. The Targum is marked, like most similar productions, by great extravagance and absurd anachronisms. After an interval of several centuries, distinguished rabbis published commentaries which contained references to older interpreters who had followed the Targum in the allegorical view. Such were Rabbi Solomon ben Isaac (or Rashi), who died 1105; David Kimchi (1190—1250); Ibn Ezra (died 1167); Moses Maimonides (died 1204); Moses ben Tibbon; Immanuel ben Salome, and others. Some of these rabbinical writers have used the book to support their peculiar philosophical views and their rabbinical interpretations of Scripture; but most of the Jewish writers have regarded the allegory as veiled history and prophecy.

It was very different, however, with the Christian commentators. Not only did they almost without exception treat the book as an allegory, but they strained the interpretation beyond all limits of common sense and Scripture analogy, so that their example has remained a warning, which has produced a healthy reaction in the Church, and has led to the more reasonable view which is now adopted by all the best critics. The rise of the allegorical method can be traced chiefly to the Alexandrian school, and to its great representative Origen. It was the fruit of philosophy in union with Christianity. Origen wrote two homilies on the Song of Solomon, which were translated by Jerome, and a commentary, part of which still remains in the Latin of Rufinus. The idea of the book, according to Origen, is the longing of the soul after God, and the sanctifying and elevating influence of Divine love; but he varies in his explanation of the allegory, now taking it of the individual and then of the Church. His example was followed by later Christian writers, as by Eusebius, Athanasius, Epiphanius, Cyril, Macarius, Gregory of Nyssa, Basil, Gregory Nazianzen, Theodoret, Augustine, and Chrysostom. There were slight differences among these early Fathers in their application of the method, but they all adopted it. Ambrose went so far as to suggest in his sermon on the perpetual virginity of Saint Mary, that there are allusions to Mary in such expressions as the "locked garden" and the "sealed fountain" (ch. iv. 12); and Gregory the Great regarded the crown wherewith Solomon's mother crowned him as a mystical emblem of the humanity which the Saviour derived from Mary. There were some of the Fathers, however, as Theodore of Mopsuestia, who advocated the literal and historical method of interpretation, and he was challenged by some of his critics for his sensual view of the book.

When we come to the Middle Ages we meet with larger and fuller commentaries, in which the allegorical method is wrought out with great ingenuity. The highest name, perhaps, is that of the mystic Bernard of

Clairvaux (died 1153), who wrote eighty-six sermons on the first two chapters, followed by his scholar, Gilbert von Hoyland, who wrote fifty-eight discourses on another portion. Bernard's discourses are mystical. The soul is seeking her heavenly Bridegroom, and introduced by him into progressive states of privilege—the garden, the banqueting-hall, the sleeping-chamber. The kiss of Christ is explained of the Incarnation. He was followed by Richard de St. Victor, and by the great theologian Thomas Aquinas, Bonaventura, Gershon, and Isidore Hispalensis. The whole mystery of the soul's intercourse with the Saviour is, according to them, represented in the language of the Song. The book was, of course, greedily laid hold of by the Middle Age mystics, as it has been by the mystico-evangelical school of modern times, and amidst a dense cloud of fanciful extravagance there are here and there to be found in their commentaries gleams of highly spiritual discernment and profound thought. The Spanish mystics went to great lengths of absurdity; the "cheeks" of the bride were outward Christianity and good works; her "golden chains" were faith; the "silver points" of the golden ornaments were holiness in the walk and conversation; "spikenard" was redeemed humanity; "the breath of myrrh" was the Passion of our Saviour; "the thorns about the rose" were temptations by tribulations, crimes, and heretics; "the chariot of Amminadab" represented the power of the devil, and so forth.

When we come to the time of the Reformers, when biblical study received an entirely new impulse and direction, we find the allegorical method, while not altogether discarded, somewhat modified by the historical and critical spirit which was growing in the Church. Martin Luther was to a large extent under the influence of mystical writers in the early part of his theological course, but he did not follow them in their allegorical tendencies. He saw the danger, which they had promoted, to the healthy use of Scripture, and the mist they threw around its simple, practical meaning. In his '*Brevis Enarratio in Cantica Canticorum*' he takes the book as written for an historical purpose—to glorify the age and kingly power of Solomon, and so to exalt the theocracy at its highest splendour. It is to help the people to thank God for the blessings of peace and prosperity. God is the Bridegroom, and his people are the bride. Luther was followed in his view by other Reformers. Nicolas de Lyra, in his '*Portilla*,' regards it as a representation of the history of Israel from Moses to Christ, and in the later chapters, of the Christian Church from Christ to the time of the Emperor Constantine. Starke (in his '*Synopsis*,' pt. iv.) sees in it a prophecy in which is represented the coming of Messiah in the flesh, the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, the gathering of the New Testament Church from Jews and Gentiles, and the special trials and providential leadings of the people of God in every age. Bishop Perez of Valentia, in 1507, published a commentary, in which an elaborate system of chronological interpretation is set forth. There are ten canticles setting forth ten periods—the patriarchs, the tabernacle, the voice of God from the taber-

naole, the ark in the wilderness, Moses on Pisgah, the death of Moses, entrance into Canaan, conquest and partition of Canaan, conflicts under the Judges, prosperity and peace under Solomon. To these ten *Old Testament facts* correspond ten *New Testament fulfilments*—the Incarnation, teaching of Christ, his life and miracles, his ascent to Jerusalem, his death on the cross, the ingathering of Jewish converts, the mission to the Gentiles, the conflicts of the martyr Church, prosperity and peace under Constantine. Cocceius (1673), in his ‘*Cogitationes*,’ finds in it the prediction of the events of his own time; and Cornelius à Lapide treats it, in a high Roman Catholic manner, as significant of the glory of the Virgin, while he takes it as a kind of, *prophetic drama*, setting forth the history of the Church.

When we come to more modern times and to the great “Introductions” to the study of the Bible, written by the most learned critics, we see the influence of a closer attention to the structure and language of the book in the gradual decay of the allegorical method, and the attempt to unite the facts which underlie the words with a distinct spiritual significance. In the beginning of this century, the great Roman Catholic theologian and critic Leon. Hug (1813) made a novel attempt to maintain the allegorical view. The bride represented the ten tribes, the bridegroom King Hezekiah, the brother of the bride a party in the house of Judah opposing the reunion of the rent kingdom. He was followed by Kaiser in 1825. Rosenmüller sought to put fresh life into the worn-out theory by analogies brought from Hindoo and Persian poetry; as Puffendorf (1776) introduced in his paraphrase mystical allusions to the grave and the hope of the resurrection, the “virgins” being “pure and chaste souls shut up in the dark grave,” and waiting for the light of the Saviour’s resurrection. Until we come to the time of Keil and Hengstenberg, we have no really sensible defence of the theory put forth, and it is scarcely necessary to make the remark that *their* defence is a virtual surrender, for their use of the *allegorical* method is so moderate that it barely exceeds the *ideal* and *typical* view, and is substantially the same as that of Delitzsch and Zöckler. Keil (‘Introduction to the Old Testament,’ vol. i. p. 503, Eng. transl.) says, “The book depicts in dramatico-lyrical, responsive songs, under the allegory of the bridal love of Solomon and Shulamith, the loving communion between the Lord and his Church, according to its ideal nature as it results from the choice of Israel to be the Church of the Lord. According to this, every disturbance of that fellowship springing out of Israel’s infidelity leads to an ever firmer establishment of the covenant of love, by means of Israel’s return to the true covenant God, and this God’s unchangeable love. Yet we are not to trace in the poem the historical course of the covenant relation, as if a veil of allegory had been thrown over the principal critical events in the theocratic history.” Hahn, *e.g.*, finds allegorically represented “that the kingdom of Israel is called in the service of God finally to overcome heathendom with the weapons of love and righteousness, and to lead it

back to the peaceful rest of loving fellowship with Israel, and so with God again." Hengstenberg, in his 'Prolegomena to the Song of Solomon,' and in his Exposition (1858), argues for the allegorical view from the use of similar erotic language in the Psalms and prophets, as well as in the general tone of the Old Testament. The beloved of the heavenly Solomon is the daughter of Zion; the whole, therefore, must be explained of Messiah and his Church. But he proceeds to attempt an application of this view to the details of the language, in which he shows that it can only be accepted in a modified form—the *hair of the bride like a flock of goats* represents the mass of nations converted to Christianity; the *navel of Shulamith* denotes the cup from which the Church refreshes those that thirst for salvation with a noble and refreshing draught; the *sixty and eighty wives of Solomon*, the admission of the original Gentile nations into the Church, 140 being 7 multiplied by 2 and by 10—the "signature of the covenant," the kingdom of Christ being prefigured by the diverse nations introduced into Solomon's harem! Such follies tend to blind the reader to the substantial truth of the theory, which is that, under the figure of the pure and beautiful love of Solomon for Shulamith, is imaged the love of God in Christ for humanity, both in the individual and in the Church.

The only other names which require mention in connection with the allegorical theory are those of Thrupp, Wordsworth, and Stowe. Joseph Francis Thrupp published a revised translation with introduction and commentary (Cambridge, 1862). The millenarian view dominates his work throughout. It is a prophecy of the coming of Christ. Wordsworth (Christopher), in his 'Commentary on the Bible,' published 1868, also regards the poem as a prophetic allegory, suggested by Solomon's marriage with Pharaoh's daughter, and describing "the gathering" of the world into mystical union with Christ, and its consecration into a Church espoused to him as the bride. Calvin E. Stowe defends the allegorical view in the *Biblical Repository* (April, 1847), giving a partial translation. The fault of all these writers, able and learned as they are, is that they push their theory too far, and that they are led away by it into a misuse of Scripture to support that which does not fairly rest upon it. This is the danger which must always attend upon the allegorical method. The ingenuity of the interpreter is tempted to supply, out of his own creed, what is lacking in the scheme of the allegory. He has liberty to suggest what analogies he discovers. The highly figurative language of such a poem as the Song of Solomon is easily accommodated to the demands of any system of thought to which the wish is father. But while the allegorical method, as a formal treatment, may be erroneous, it recognizes the spiritual meaning and value of the book. The canonical position of such a work requires to be justified. The allegorist attempts to do so. He is certainly right in demanding that a distinct religious purpose shall be the vital centre of any system of interpretation put forth. As Isaac Taylor has remarked, in his 'Spirit of Hebrew Poetry,' "The book has given

animation, and depth, and intensity, and warrant, too, to the devout meditations of thousands of the most devout and of the purest minds. Those who have no consciousness of this kind, and whose feelings and notions are all 'of the earth, earthy,' will not fail to find in this instance that which suits them, for purposes, sometimes of mockery, sometimes of luxury, sometimes of disbelief. Quite unconscious of these possessions, and happily ignorant of them, and unable to suppose them possible, there have been multitudes of earthly spirits to whom this, the most beautiful of pastorals, has been, not indeed a beautiful pastoral, but the choicest of those words of truth which are 'sweeter than honey to the taste,' and 'rather to be chosen than thousands of gold and silver.'"

2. We must now proceed to describe the theories of interpretation which have been based upon a *naturalistic principle*. These may be styled *the erotic*, as they all regard the work as a *collection of erotic songs*, put together simply on the ground of their literary worth and poetic arrangement, religiously used by being idealized, just as the language of secular poetry may be sometimes mingled with sacred, though the original intention of the words had no such application. There are several varieties in the form of this erotic theory. The songs have been regarded by some as separate *idylls of love*, collected together and formed into a poem only by a predominating reference to Solomon, and by the one pervading spirit of pure love. But others have attempted to trace a *dramatic unity and progress* in the whole, and have elaborated a *history* on which to found the drama, while those who have renounced all such attempts to find a drama in Hebrew poetry have yet clung to the idea of an *epithalamium*, composed on the occasion of Solomon's marriage, either with the Egyptian princess or some Israelitish bride, and have endeavoured to justify their view by the literary form of the poem. It is not necessary entirely to reject *the naturalistic basis* in order to find a reason for the position of Solomon's Song in the Bible. There is an element of truth in all the erotic theories. They help us to remember that *human love* is capable of being mingled with *Divine ideas*. That which is so often impure, and which sinks the life of man below that of the beasts that perish, may yet be sanctified, lifted above the evil of a fallen nature, and so may be taken, ideally, as the fitting vehicle by which to convey the Spirit of God to the spirit of man.

The earliest writer whose treatment of the book was based upon the secular view of it was Theodore of Mopsuestia (died A.D. 429). He dealt with all Scripture much in the same way, in the spirit of a rigid literalism, in which he followed the school of Antioch. Like others of the same class, he found only *human love* in the language, and his 'Commentary' was publicly condemned on that account in the Fifth Œcumenical Council (A.D. 553). The Church's anathema crushed this commentary out of existence. The *Middle Ages* were dominated by the allegorical spirit, and no other view was put forth for hundreds of years. Until the free spirit of the Reformation introduced a new criticism, the secular view of Solomon's Song did

not reappear. In the time of Calvin, Geneva was startled by the *brochure* of Sebastian Castellio (1544), who represented Shulamith as a concubine, and denounced the book as unworthy of a place in Scripture—to the great displeasure of Calvin himself, who is said to have compelled Castellio to withdraw from Geneva. The next name in the bibliography is that of Hugo Grotius, who published his ‘Annotations’ on the Old Testament in 1664. In his view the work is a *nuptial song*, with allegorical and typical meanings, which he admits are to be found in it, though he does not himself seek them. R. Simon, J. Clericus, Simon Episcopus, are other instances of the same treatment of the book in the latter part of the seventeenth and the beginning of the eighteenth centuries. The rise of *rationalism* was the revival of the theory. Semler and Michaelis led the way, in the middle of the last century, disparaging the book altogether.

It was only as the literary spirit of German criticism began to deal more fairly with the whole of Scripture, as the remains of a great people, that the poetic merits of Solomon’s Song began to be recognized, and an attempt was made to understand its position in the canon. Lessing, who was the greatest critical mind of Europe at that time, saw that there was great idyllic beauty in these ‘Eclogues of King Solomon,’ as he called them; and compared them with those of Theocritus and Virgil; but the most distinguished name is that of Herder, whose celebrated work on ‘The Spirit of Hebrew Poetry’ did much to revive the interest of the literary world in the Bible. Herder wrote a separate work on Solomon’s Song, treating it as a collection of songs of love, and as intended to describe *ideal human love*, for the purpose of setting forth the example of purity and innocence when it was most needed in the ancient world. His criticism is in many respects valuable and highly æsthetic. He draws attention to the exquisite poetry of the songs, and to their surpassing worth as an ideal of human sentiment. But delightful reading as Herder’s work undoubtedly is, it is yet but little help to the biblical student, as there is no attempt to follow out the religious intimations of the language, or to find in it any parabolical intention. The rationalistic critics have, most of them, regarded the songs as *fragmentary* and isolated, and thus have deprived themselves of their true position as commentators; for if there be no *unity* in the book, it is hard to find any basis on which to rest the explanation of its meaning as a whole. To suppose a sacred work written simply in praise of human feeling, or even to cherish the ideal of human relationship, is to resist the analogy of Scripture. It may be doubted if even the Proverbs of Solomon should be regarded from so wide and general a point of view as that.

There is no need to trouble the reader with an account of the many books which have appeared in Germany, treating not only Solomon’s Song, but every other book in the Bible, in the most flimsy, superficial spirit, as though no deeper meaning need ever be sought in them than that which satisfies the logical understanding of a narrow-minded, pedantic professor. Eichhorn, Jahn, De Wette, Augusti, Kleuker, Döderlein, Velthusen, Gaab, Justi,

Dödke, Magnus, Rebenstein, Lossner,—all such critics have proceeded on the principle of finding a literary explanation of the form, not a spiritual exposition of the matter. Their highest aim is critical, and they have their reward—they shake together a heap of dry bones, and their own dead hearts hear no living voice of response. But there is a little advance upon the barren, dreary emptiness of this rationalistic criticism in what is called the dramatic theory of interpretation, which has received a considerable accession of interest during the present century by the development of a new historical hypothesis by which it is attempted to explain the dramatic unity and progress of the composition. Jacobi, in 1771, led the way, in a work in which he professed to defend the Song of Solomon from the reproaches brought against it, supposing Solomon to have fallen in love with a young married woman, who, with the husband, is brought to Jerusalem. The husband is induced to divorce his wife for Solomon's sake, and she is alarmed at the king's approach, and cries out for her husband's help. The whole is a worthless attempt to work out a baseless hypothesis, which is entirely out of harmony with the pure spirit of the whole book. Other German critics, such as Hezel, Von Ammon, Stäudlin, and Umbreit, have followed Jacobi in endeavouring to unfold the dramatic unity of the poem, but none have gone further than the great historian Ewald, who has translated it with an introduction and critical remarks (1826); see also his work on 'The Poets of the Old Testament' (1866). His view, as set forth in the latter work, is that it was actually prepared for representation. This opinion is supported by the hypothesis that there is an actual love-history at the basis of the poem; a young shepherd, of the north of Palestine, being the real lover of Shulamith, from whom Solomon desires to alienate her affection; and that the main idea of the book is the successful resistance of Shulamith to the allurements of the royal lover and her faithfulness to her first love, to whom she is restored by the king in acknowledgment of her virtue and as an act of homage to faithful affection. This theory has been adopted by many critics in later times, as by Hitzig, Vaihinger, Renan, Reville, and Ginsburg; but it is not only exceedingly improbable in itself, but out of harmony with the place of the work in the canon of Scripture. Even if we could suppose Solomon capable of writing such a history of his own delinquencies, we could still less understand how such a "confession" should be incorporated in the sacred volume. There may be expressions in the mouth of the bride which seem at first sight to favour such a theory, but the position of Solomon throughout is quite inconsistent with the idea of illicit solicitation, or indeed with any other relation to Shulamith than that of chaste and legal marriage. The only forcible argument in favour of this view, which is generally called "*the shepherd*" theory, is the use of language in reference to the bridegroom which supposes him a shepherd; but this is explained by the fact which lies on the surface of the poem, that the bride is one brought up in country life, and who in the purity and simplicity of her heart addresses even Solomon himself as her shepherd. The conclusion

of the poem bears this out, for Solomon is so captivated by the beauty of her character that he follows her to her native region and rural home where he is surrounded by her relations, to whom he vouchsafes his royal favour. It must not be overlooked, that by this highly artistic method not only is the contrast between the royal splendour and the pastoral simplicity heightened, but ample scope is given for the introduction of spiritual analogies, which must be granted to be the main purpose of the book and the justification of its place in the canon. The theory is seen in all its improbability in the form which is given it by Renan, who represents the shepherd following his beloved one to the foot of the tower of the seraglio where she is confined, being admitted secretly by her, and then exclaiming, in the presence of the chorus, in a state of rapturous delight, "I am come into my garden, my sister, my spouse," etc. (ch. v. 1), carrying her home when she is at last released from the king's harem, asleep in his arms, and laying her under an apple tree when she awakes to call upon her lover to set her as a seal upon his arm, etc. The shepherd-hypothesis is also defective in another respect, and that is, that it fails to give a clear explanation of the two dreams which Shulamith narrates, which certainly must both refer to the same object of love, and would seem to imply that there was some defect of love on her part. The spiritual interpretation is perfectly simple and plain; the bride representing the soul of man, and therefore its inferiority to that with which it would be united. But if we suppose Shulamith shut up in a harem, the representation is most forced and unnatural, for she certainly could not have either wandered by night in the city of Jerusalem, nor dreamed of such an adventure. The whole hypothesis is rendered unnecessary by the arrangement which disposes the language among three classes of speakers only—the bride, the chorus of ladies, and the king. Thus the shepherd-lover is identified with the royal bridegroom, and the basis is still left secure on which a spiritual interpretation of the whole can be based. Notwithstanding the very ingenious attempts made by Ginsburg and Reville to defend the theory, it must be given up, with all the erotic explanations, as untenable and lowering to the character of the poem. We can only justify this decisive statement of opinion by setting forth, in opposition to what we oppose, a more excellent way, which we now proceed to do, giving an account, at the same time, of the various shapes which have been given to the *typical view*, which we adopt.

3. *The typical view.* It should be frankly admitted by those who reject both the allegorical and the erotic interpretation of the Song of Solomon, that no theory can be sound which does not recognize what forms the principal distinctive element in each of these views. We cannot overlook the fact that the book is a religious book, and is placed as such in the canon; therefore in some sense and to some extent it must be allegorical, that is, there must be a deeper meaning in it than that which appears on the surface, and that meaning must be in harmony with the rest of

Scripture. So with regard to the various erotic and naturalistic explanations, it cannot be denied that there is an historical basis on which the whole rests, so that as poetry there is an ideal human element running through it which gives it both vitality and form. It is the attempt to carry it out to an extreme which has vitiated the theory in each case. The main principle can be preserved without acceptance of the details. It is true, as Zöckler has observed, that it was "the greatly preponderating inclination of the Fathers in the Middle Ages, which soon obtained exclusive sway, to plunge immediately and at once into the spiritual sense, which stifled at its birth every attempt to assert at the same time an historical sense, and branded it with the same anathema as the profane-erotic interpretation of Theodore of Mopsuestia." But the spirit of the Reformation broke the spell of the allegorists. The desire to know the mind of the Spirit led to a truer searching of the Scriptures. Even in the Roman Catholic Church there were signs of that freedom, especially among the mystics, one of whom, the Spanish mystic Louis de Leon, in the latter part of the sixteenth century, wrote a translation and explanation of the Canticles, in classical Spanish, in which, recognizing the historical basis of the book, he lifted the veil from the spiritual beauties which he said were hidden behind the figures. Others followed in the same track, as Mercerus (Le Mercier), 1573, in his 'Commentary,' and Bossuet in his work on the 'Books of Solomon' (Paris, 1693), and Calmet in his 'Commentary;' but the two great English names in connection with a revival of the study of the book on a more intelligent foundation are John Lightfoot (1684) and Bishop Lowth (1753). The latter, especially in his 'Prelections in Hebrew Poetry,' somewhat after the style of Herder, led the way in this country to a profounder attention to the literary form and critical examination of the Bible. Lowth's view is substantially that which has been adopted by the majority of evangelical writers since his time, that the book is not to be regarded as a "continual metaphor" nor as a "parable properly so called," but rather as a "mystical allegory in which a higher sense is superinduced upon an historical verity." He is certainly wrong, however, in his view that the bride referred to is Pharaoh's daughter. Harmer, the author of the 'Observations on Passages of Scripture,' followed Lowth, in 1778, with a commentary and new explanation of Solomon's Song; but it is merely of a literary kind, no attempt being made to explain the spiritual application of the language, and it is of no great value. Dr. Mason Good, the learned physician, translated the Song with very interesting notes, regarding it as a collection of idylls in praise of Solomon's queen. Charles Taylor has added valuable notes to Calmet's 'Dictionary,' and Pye Smith advocated the merely literary value of the book and its unspiritual character. Hoffmann explained it of Pharaoh's daughter, and Zöckler went back too far towards the allegorical theory. The two great German commentators, Keil and Delitzsch, substantially agree in their view, which, while admitting the allegorical *intent* of the book, refuses to see hidden meanings in every

detail of the historical basis. One would find, more distinctly than the other, reference to the Church of Christ, both in Israel and in the new dispensation, but both agree that the love of Solomon for his bride is idealized, and so used spiritually. Keil sums up his view thus: "It depicts in dramatized lyrical expression, by songs, under the allegory of the bridal love of Solomon and Shulamith, the loving communion between the Lord and his Church, according to its ideal nature as it results from the choice of Israel to be the Church of the Lord. According to this, every disturbance of that fellowship, springing out of Israel's infidelity, leads to an even firmer establishment of the covenant of love, by means of Israel's return to the true covenant God, and thus God's unchangeable love. Yet we are not to trace in the poem the historical course of the covenant relation, as if a veil of allegory had been thrown over the principal events in the theocratic history" ('Introd. to Old Testament,' vol. i. p. 504). The Rev. T. L. Kingsbury, M.A., in the 'Speaker's Commentary,' has accepted the suggestion which seems the most natural—that the history which is involved in the Song is genuine, and that it refers to "some shepherd-maiden of Northern Palestine, by whose beauty and nobility of soul the great king has been captivated; that as the work of one endued by inspiration with that wisdom which 'overseeth all things' (Wisd. viii. 23), and so contemplates them from the highest point of view, it is in its essential character an ideal representation of human love in the relation of marriage; that which is universal and common in its operation to all mankind being here set forth in one grand typical instance." "No allegorical method of exposition," he rightly observes, "which declines attempting to elucidate an independent literal sense, on the plea that such endeavour would involve the interpretation in a succession of improprieties and contradictions," should be accepted. It is both untrue and dishonouring to a sacred and canonical book. The fundamental idea he would take to be "the awful all-constraining, the at once levelling and elevating powers of the mightiest and most universal of human affections; and the two axes on which the main action of the poem revolves are the twofold invitation, the king's invitation to the bride on bringing her to Jerusalem, the bride's to the king in recalling him to Shunem." While we willingly coincide in the general truth of these remarks, we incline to the view which Keil has expressed so moderately, that the main purpose of the book is not to glorify a human sentiment or relationship, which seems out of place in a Hebrew book, but rather, using the ideal human feeling and relationship to lead the soul of man into the thought of its fellowship with God, the condescending privilege which is included in that fellowship, the exaltation of man which it brings with it, and the mutual character of religion, both in the individual and in the Church, as based upon the mystical union of God and his creature and their interchange of communications. We must not be deterred from a moderate and chastened employment of type in the interpretation of Scripture by the abuse which has been only too frequently

made of it. No doubt, if we look above the historical, or natural, or literary aspects of the book, it is easy to find in it the meanings which we may be tempted to put there; but the same thing may be said of the Lord's parables and of all Scripture. The historical, literary, and spiritual aspects blend in one, and that interpretation which is given to the language is most likely to be after the mind of the Spirit, which follows his own method and harmonizes with that which he inspired the man of God to set before us, and his Church to hand down to us with the seal of its approbation upon it. The commentary must always justify, or otherwise, its own main principle; and if as a whole it satisfies the language, it cannot be very far astray.

It has been objected by some that we ought not to employ Solomon as in any sense a type of God or of Christ, because he was a sensual man; but such a principle would simply exclude all types, for they must be inferior in worth to that which they typify. The patriarchs were far from perfect men in their moral features, but they were plainly employed in Scripture typically as well as historically. David himself, the leading typical character and norm of the Old Testament, was guilty of great sins. Moreover, while Solomon appears in the poem itself as a sensual Eastern monarch, there is no reference to the sensuality of his life. Nor need we doubt that, sensualist as he became, and degraded as he was in the latter part of his life, he would in the earlier portion of his manhood be capable of the sincere attachment portrayed in the songs. At the same time, it may be allowed that the facts are idealized. Fundamentally they are historical. For a religious purpose they are lifted up into the region of poetry. To a considerable extent the same may be said of the Book of Job, which builds a splendid poem on a basis of facts.

There remains, then, only, in conclusion, to justify this typical interpretation by showing that it is in analogy with other parts of Scripture. It will not be denied by any one, however much opposed to allegory or type, that the metaphor of marriage is common through the Old Testament in connection with the exhortation to covenant faithfulness. This is so familiar in the prophetic writings that it is quite unnecessary to adduce instances. The fifth, fiftieth, and sixty-second chapters of Isaiah and the first few chapters of Hosea, with the opening words of Malachi, will suffice to remind the reader that it was an illustration which all the sacred writers made use of. It should again be remembered that we have in the forty-fifth psalm an instance of what the title describes as a "Song of Loves," or *Epithalamium*, which no one doubts was composed on the occasion of Solomon's marriage, or on some similar occasion in Israel. It is only a very extreme rejection of typical interpretation which would refuse to such a psalm any higher application than that which appears upon the surface, especially with such language in it as ver. 6, "Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever: the sceptre of thy kingdom is a right sceptre." Admitting that such terms might be at first employed only as

royal adulation and homage, it can scarcely be doubted that their place in the Word of God is due to the fact that the Israelitish king was regarded as the type of him who was called by the believing "Israelite indeed, in whom was no guile," "the Son of God, the King of Israel" (John i. 49). The reference to Messiah was certainly believed by the Jews themselves, as we see from the introduction of it into the Chaldee paraphrase and others of the Jewish writings, and as such it is cited in Hebrews (i. 8, 9). No satisfactory explanation of the psalm can be made out on any other view. If we deny a Messianic reference in such a case, while the New Testament confirms it, our position must be that of dealing with the whole of the Old Testament only as a fragmentary Jewish literature, without proper unity and without inspired authority. In that case we are thrown back upon far greater difficulties than any which the older view meets, for we cannot explain the history and character of the Jewish people as a whole, and we must be prepared to answer the full force of the Apostle Paul's emphatic statement, that "to them were committed the oracles of God" (Rom. iii. 2). Such bold rationalism is now completely out of date, and we must be at the pains to study the language of the Old Testament with a reverent acknowledgment of the purpose of God in unfolding the secrets of his mind and will. Hengstenberg bases his argument for the allegorical interpretation of Solomon's Song on the fact that Solomon himself is the author, and that we cannot otherwise account for the title and place given to the work. Had it been a mere collection of love-songs, it would be a dishonour to the Word of God to call it by such a name and place it side by side with the sublime inspired songs of Moses, Miriam, Deborah, Hannah, and David. There is certainly considerable force in that view. And the close correspondence between the "Song of Loves," the forty-fifth psalm, and the "Song of Songs" seems to confirm the typical character of both. We find, for instance, such language as this, apparently adopted as a religious phraseology, "fairest among the children of men" (Ps. xlv. 3), "chiefest among ten thousand" (Cant. v. 10). "The king," as the highest object of praise; "lilies," as the emblems of virgin purity and loveliness; *loveliness of the lip*, as representing excellence of discourse; *heroic might, majesty, and glory* in the king; the idea which pervades both, of conjugal fidelity, with other minor resemblances, lend considerable weight to the suggestion that the forty-fifth psalm was a kind of adaptation of the Canticles for performance by the sons of Korah in the temple. Hengstenberg mentions many instances in the prophetic Scriptures in which he traces allusion to the language or metaphors of the Song of Solomon, but they are not sufficiently clear to be relied upon as evidence. And the same may be said of the instances which he adduces from the New Testament, which he thinks is "pervaded with references all of them based on the supposition that the book is to be interpreted spiritually." Our Lord refers to "Solomon in all his glory;" can we safely affirm that he alludes to the description in Canticles? Hengstenberg

points to the metaphor in ch. ii. 1, "I am a rose of Sharon, a lily of the valley," but unfortunately he has put those words into the lips of Solomon instead of the bride, which defeats his reference. Most of the other instances are equally unsatisfactory. At the same time, it must be admitted that the use of metaphors formed from the marriage relation and from the language of human affection, in application to the highest intercourse of the soul with the objects of faith, is common both in our Lord's discourses and in the writings of the apostles. It is especially prominent in the Apocalypse. The Church is the bride, the Lamb's wife. Would such metaphors be employed by the Apostle John unless he had found them already in the Old Testament? Would the Apostle Paul have spoken as he does of the mystical meaning of marriage as setting forth the union between Christ and his Church, unless the Scriptures had familiarized the people of God with the symbol?

We entirely sympathize with that revulsion of feeling with which healthy minds turn away from the extravagant fancifulness and arbitrariness of the allegorical school of commentators. But we refuse to follow those who, in their avoidance of one extreme, fly to the other. The book cannot be a mere literary product. We must find for it some true place in the sacred volume. "Shall we then," asks Mr. Kingsbury, in the 'Speaker's Commentary,' "regard it as a mere fancy, which for so many ages past has been wont to find in the pictures and melodies of the Song of Songs types and echoes of the actings and emotions of the highest love, of love Divine, in its relations to humanity; which, if dimly discerned through their aid by the synagogue, have been amply revealed in the gospel to the Church? Shall we not still claim to trace, in the noble and gentle history thus presented, foreshadowings of the infinite condescensions of incarnate love?—that love which, first stooping in human form to visit us in our low estate in order to seek out and win its object (Ps. cxxxvi. 23), and then raising along with itself a sanctified humanity to the heavenly places (Eph. ii. 6), is finally awaiting there an invitation from the mystic bride to return to earth once more and seal the union for eternity (Rev. xxii. 17)? With such a conception of the character and purpose of the poem, we may at any rate sympathize with the glowing language of St. Bernard concerning it. This Song excels all other songs of the Old Testament. They being, for the most part, songs of deliverance from captivity, Solomon for such had no occasion. In the height of glory, singular in wisdom, abounding in riches, secure in peace, he here by Divine inspiration sings the praises of Christ and his Church, the grace of holy love, the mysteries of the eternal marriage, yet all the while like Moses putting a veil before his face, because at that time there were few or none that could gaze upon such glories" (vol. iv. p. 674). It is unworthy of any devout interpreter of such a book to despise and disparage the spiritual element in it. What so many of God's people have recognized must be substantially the mind

of the Spirit. No doubt, as Delitzsch has observed, "no other book of Scripture has been so much abused by an unscientific spiritualizing and an over-scientific unspiritual treatment." But the errors of commentators are generally gropings towards the light. The truth is more likely to be found in the mean between the two extremes. The allegorist gives the reins to his fancy and ends in absurdities; the literalist shuts himself up in his naturalism and forfeits the blessing of the Spirit. We trust that the following Exposition will show that there is a better way.

THE SONG OF SOLOMON.

EXPOSITION.

CHAPTER I.

Ver. 1.—The song of songs, which is Solomon's. This is certainly the title of the book which follows, although in our present Hebrew Bible it is the first verse of the book, preceded by the shorter form, 'The Song of Songs.' The Septuagint has simply the title ᾠδα, so that our English title in the Authorized Version, 'The Song of Solomon,' has no ancient authority. It is well altered in the Revised Version to 'The Song of Songs.' The word "song" (שִׁיר) does not necessarily convey the meaning, composed to be sung to music. If the performance of the words were chiefly in view, the word would have been קַמִּיִר, *carmen*, "lyric poem," "hymn," or "ode." The Greek ᾠδα δαδρω, and the Latin of the Vulgate, *Canticum canticorum*, accord with the Hebrew in representing the work as taking a high place either in the esteem of the Church or, on account of the subject, in the esteem of the writer. Luther expresses the same idea in the title he attaches to it, 'Das Hohelied,' that is, the chief or finest of songs. The reference may be to the excellence of the literary form, but probably that which suggested the title was the supreme beauty of the love which prompted the songs. The title may be regarded as applied to the whole book, or to the first portion of it giving the name to the whole. If it be a collection of separate songs strung together, as some think, by mere resemblance in style and subject, then the words, "which is Solomon's" (שִׁיר שְׁלֹמֹה) apply to the first song alone. But the unity which is clearly to be traced through the book to the end makes it probable that the title is meant to ascribe the work to the authorship of Solomon. This is the opinion of the majority of critics. It must have

SONG OF SOLOMON.

come either from the wise king himself, or from some one of his contemporaries or immediate successors. The preposition is the *lamedh auctoris*. If the meaning were "referring to," another preposition (עַל) would have been employed. It has been remarked by Delitzsch that the absence of any description of Solomon as "King of Israel" or "son of David," as in Proverbs and Ecclesiastes, confirms the view that Solomon himself was the sole author. Some have argued against the authenticity of the title on the ground that the longer form of the relative, שִׁירָא, is used in it, whereas in the book itself the shorter form, שִׁיר, is found, but no dependence can be placed on that argument regarded by itself, for the same writer employs both forms, as e.g. Jeremiah, who uses the longer form in his prophecies and the shorter in Lamentations. The shorter form is, in fact, the older, being Old Canaanitish or Phœnician, שִׁר, which is a lengthened form of שִׁ, and afterwards became שִׁירָא. One writer, however (Fleischer), holds that the relative pronoun has a substantive origin, and compares it with the Arabic *ithe* and the Assyrian *asar*, meaning "track" or "place," like the German *welcher*, which comes from *wo*. But whether this be so or not, it is certainly unsafe to date any book by the form found in it of the relative pronoun. We know that in poetry the abbreviated form is common. It was probably a North Palestine provincialism, as we see in the Book of Kings. It became common in prose writings after the Captivity because of the degradation of Hebrew, but it was not unknown before that time either in prose or poetry. With regard to the exact description of the poetic form of the Song of Songs, the difference among critics is considerable, but the question is scarcely worth discussing. There undoubtedly is unity of

conception in the songs which are brought together, but it cannot be of importance to prove that there is dramatic unity strictly speaking; there is no dramatic procedure, nor can we suppose that there is any ultimate aim at dramatic representation. But the Exposition which follows will suffice to show that there are facts of history in the background of the poem; if the suggestions of the language and scenery be followed, the facts are very beautiful and even romantic—the love of the great king for one of his own subjects, a lovely northern maiden, whose simplicity and purity of character are a great attraction and lend much force to the religious sentiment of the song. In 1 Kings v. 12 we read that “the Lord gave Solomon wisdom, as he promised him.” That divinely inspired wisdom enabled him, notwithstanding his own personal errors, to idealize and sanctify the lovely episode of his life which lies at the foundation of his poem. And the Church of God in every age has appreciated, more or less widely, the inspiration, both of matter and of form, which breathed in it. We are told that Solomon composed one thousand and five songs (1 Kings iv. 32); whether this is a part of that collection or not we cannot certainly say, but that it is a mere *fasciculus*, or collection of separate songs, strung together by their general erotic character, is what we cannot believe. No doubt, as Dr. Mason Good has observed, the Arabian poets were accustomed to arrange their poems in what they compared to a string of pearls, but we can scarcely carry such a fact into the Bible, and deal with sacred books as mere literary remains. There must be a deep religious meaning in such language, and it is in accordance with Eastern usage that amatory songs should be so employed. What the meaning is we must persistently ask, and however much has been wrongly said in the past, while we believe in the Divine authority of the Old Testament we must not renounce the endeavour to find the Song of Songs worthy of its title and its place.

Ver. 2—ch. ii. 7.—Part I. MUTUAL LOVE.
Song of Shulamith in the royal chambers.
Chorus of ladies, daughters of Jerusalem.

Ver. 2.—**Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth: for thy love is better than wine.** Whether we take these words as put in the lips of the bride herself, or of the chorus as identifying themselves with her, is of little consequence. It is certain that the idea intended to be expressed is that of delight in the approach of the royal bridegroom. The future is used optatively, “Let me be taken up into the closest fellowship and embrace.” All attempts to dispense with the amatory phraseology are vain. The “kisses” must

be interpreted in a figurative sense, or the sacred character of the whole book must be removed. The words may be rendered, *with one of his kisses*; i.e. the sweetness of his lips is such that one kiss would be rapture. Some have thought that allusion is intended to the custom among idolaters referred to in Job xxxi. 27, “My mouth hath kissed my hand;” but the meaning is simply that of affection. The great majority of Christian commentators have regarded the words as expressive of desire towards God. Origen said, the Church of the old dispensation longing after higher revelations, as through the Incarnation, “How long shall he send me kisses by Moses and the prophets? I desire the touch of his own lips.” It is dangerous to attempt specific applications of a metaphor. The general truth of it is all that need be admitted. If the relation between God and his people is one that can be set forth under the image of human affection, then there is no impropriety in the language of Solomon’s Song. “To kiss a kiss” (קָרַבְּ קֶרֶב) is the ordinary Hebrew form (cf. “to counsel a counsel”). *Thy love is better than wine.* The plural is used, “loves,” as in the word “life” (חַיִּים)—the abstract for the concrete, perhaps in order to indicate the manifestation of love in many caresses. The change from the third person to the second is common in poetry. The comparison with wine may be taken either as denoting sweetness or exhilarating effects. The intoxicating power of wine is but rarely referred to in Scripture, as the ordinary wine was distinguished from strong drink. Some, as Hitzig and Böttcher, would read קָרַבְּ, changing the pointing, and translating, “Let him give me to drink;” but there is no necessity for a reading so forced and vulgar. The Septuagint, altering the vowels of the word “love,” turn it into “breasts,” and must therefore have supposed it addressed to the bride. The word is connected with the Arabic, and runs through the languages, *dodh* (cf. Dada, Dido, David). Perhaps the reference to wine, as subsequently to the ointments, may be explained by the fact that the song is supposed to be sung while wine is presented in the chamber, and while the perfumes are poured out in preparation for the entrance of the royal bridegroom. We can scarcely doubt that the opening words are intended to be the utterance of loving desire on the part of the bride in the presence of the daughters of Jerusalem. Some have suggested that vers. 1—8 are from a kind of responsive dialogue, but the view of the older interpreters and of Ewald, Hengstenberg, Weissbach, and others of the moderns, seems more correct, that all the first seven verses are in the mouth of Shulamith, and then ver. 8 comes in naturally

as a chorus in reply to the song of the bride. The use of the plural, "We will run after thee," etc., is easily explicable. The bride is surrounded by her admiring companions and attendants. They are congratulating her on the king's love. She speaks as from the midst of the company of ladies.

Ver. 3.—*Thine ointments have a goodly fragrance; thy name is as ointment poured forth; therefore do the virgins love thee.* There is some slight difference among critics as to the rendering of this verse, but it does not affect the meaning. Lovely and delightful thou art. As thy perfumes are so precious, so is thy name; the more it is spread, the more delight is found in it. The idea is that the person is the sweetest, and that his communications are elevating and inspiring. The "virgins" may be taken generally, "Those who are full of the sensibility of youth appreciate thy attractions." The word *almah* is much disputed about, but the meaning is simply that of "young woman," whether virgin or married. "Thou art the delight of all the young." Mason Good renders the verse—

"Rich thy perfumes; but richer far than they
The countless charms that round thy person play;
Thy name alone, more fragrant than the rose,
Glad every maid, where'er its fragrance flows."

Ver. 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 make mention of thy love more than of wine: rightly do they love thee.* This is best taken as all spoken by the bride. It is the language of the purest affection and adoring admiration. "I drew them," God says (Hos. xi. 4), "with cords of a man, with bands of love." "The Lord appeared of old unto me," says Jeremiah (xxx. 3), "saying, Yea, I have loved thee with an everlasting love: therefore with loving-kindness have I drawn thee." In the same sense the Greek word *ἐλκεῖν* is used by our Lord himself of the Father *drawing* to the Son, and of the Son, uplifted on the cross, "drawing" all men unto him (cf. John vi. 44; xii. 32). If the spiritual meaning of the whole poem is admitted, such language is quite natural. The king's chambers are the king's own rooms in the palace, *i.e.* his sleeping-rooms and sitting-rooms—the *penetrabilia regis*. We may take the preterite as equivalent to the present; *i.e.* "The king is bringing me into closest fellowship with himself, not merely as a member of his household, but as his chosen bride." The concluding words have caused much discussion. The meaning, however, is

the same whether we say, "The upright love thee," or "Thou art rightly loved." The intention is to set forth the object of love as perfect. The plural, *קִיְיָרִים*, is used to signify the abstract of the word, thought, or act; *i.e.* "righteous," for "rightly" (cf. Ps. lvi. 2; lxxv. 3); but the best critics think it could not be the abstract for the concrete plural, as in the Vulgate, *Recti diligunt te*. The same use of the word is seen in ch. vii. 9, "The best wine that goeth down *smoothly* for my beloved" (cf. Prov. xxiii. 31). Before going further in the song, it is well to observe how chaste, pure, and delicate is the language of love; and yet, as Delitzsch has pointed out, there is a mystical, cloudy brightness. We seem to be in the region of the ideal. It is not a mere love-song, though it may have been the commemoration of an actual past. The Eastern form of the words may be less suited to our taste than it would be to those who first embraced Christianity, and to the nineteenth century than to the first; but the loving rapture of the Church in fellowship with the Saviour is certainly seeking a more vivid expression in song, and there are many of the most simple-minded and devoted Christians whose joy in Christ pours itself out freely in strains not much less fervid and almost as sensuous as anything to be found in Solomon's Song. Some are beginning to remonstrate against this freedom of devotional language, but the instinct of the Church seems to justify it as the demand of the heart under the influence of the Word of God itself. Perhaps there is a state of religious feeling coming into the experience of Christians which will remove the veil from such a book as the Song of Songs, and we shall yet find that its language is needful and is not extravagant.

Ver. 5.—*I am black, but comely, O ye daughters of Jerusalem, as the tents of Kedar, as the curtains of Solomon.* The word "black" (*שָׁחֹק*) does not necessarily mean that the skin is black, but rather sunburnt, dark-brown, as in Lam. iv. 8, where the same word signifies the livid or swarthy appearance of one who has suffered long from famine and wretchedness. There is certainly no reason to take the word as an argument for the bride being Pharaoh's daughter; but it points to what is confirmed by the rest of the poem—the rustic birth and northern blood of the bride. She has been living in the fields, and is browned with the ruddy health of a country life. The best explanation of the words is that they are drawn out by the fact that the bride is surrounded by her ladies. Some think that they look askance at her, or with indignation at the boldness of her words; but that is quite unnecessary, and would be inconsistent with the dignity of the bride. The country

maiden feels the greatness of the honour, that she is chosen of the king, and with simple modesty, in the presence of courtly ladies around her, sets forth her claim. The simile is not uncommon in poetry, as in Theocritus and Virgil. *Comely*; i.e. attractive, agreeable. *Kedar* (whether from the Arabic, meaning "powerful," or from the Hebrew, "black") designates the tribes of the North-Arabian descendants of Ishmael (Gen. xxv. 13; Isa. xxi. 17), Kedareens, referred to by Pliny, and remaining in Arabia until the time of the Mohammedans. The Bedouin still calls his tent his "hair-house;" it is covered with goat's-hair cloth, mostly black or grey. Whether the reference is to the colour of the goat's hair or to the tents being browned or blackened by the heat of the sun, we cannot doubt that the allusion is to the complexion, and the rest of the simile would then be applicable to the lovely shape and features of the maiden, the curtains of Solomon being the curtains of a pavilion, or pleasure-tent, spread out like "a shining butterfly," i.e. the beautiful cloth or tapestry which formed the sides of the tent or the tent-coverings, the clothing of the framework, or tent-hangings (see Isa. liv. 2; Exod. xxvi. 36; 2 Sam. vii. 1; 1 Chron. xvii. 1, etc.). Egyptian hangings were particularly prized. The custom prevailed among Eastern monarchs of sojourning once in the year in some lovely rural district, and at such times their tents would be very magnificent. The LXX. has, *ὡς δερμαίς Σολομών*, "as the skins of Solomon;" but this is a mistake. The word is derived from a root "to tremble," i.e. "to glitter in the sun." Those who desire to find an allegorical interpretation think there is an evident allusion here to the sojourn of Israel in the wilderness, or the admission of the Gentiles into the covenant; but there is no reason for any such strain upon the meaning. The simile is merely poetical. The soul realizes its own acceptance before God, but ascribes that acceptance to his grace. "The bride, the Lamb's wife," sees the beauty of the Lord reflected in herself, and rejoices in her own attractions for his sake. There is no immodesty in the consciousness of merit so long as that merit is ascribed to him from whom it comes. There is often more pride in the assumption of humility than in the claim to be acknowledged. The same apostle who declared himself less than the least of all saints also maintained that he was not a whit behind the very chiefest apostles.

Ver. 6.—**Look not upon me, because I am swarthy, because the sun hath scorched me. My mother's sons were incensed against me; they made me keeper of the vineyards; but mine own vineyard have I not kept.** The meaning seems to be—Do not let the swarthy complexion lower me in

your eyes. Literally the words are, *Do not see me that I am*; i.e. do not regard me as being, because I am. There is no necessity to suppose any looks of the ladies to have suggested the words. They are the words of modest self-deprecation mingled with joyful sense of acceptance. It is difficult to render the Hebrew exactly. The word translated "swarthy" (*shecharchoreh*) is probably a diminutive from *shechorah*, which itself means "blackish;" so that the meaning is, "that my complexion is dark." The reference to the sun explains the word still further, as pointing, not to a difference of race, but to mere temporary effects of an outdoor life: "The sun has been playing with my complexion;" or, as the LXX. renders it, *Παρέβλεψέ με ὁ ἥλιος*, "The sun has been gazing at me." So other Greek versions. Some, however, include the idea of burning or scorching, which is the literal meaning of the verb, though in Job iii. 9 and xli. 10 it is used in the sense of looking at or upon. The sun is the eye of the heavens (see 2 Sam. xii. 11), and with delicate feeling it is spoken of here as feminine, the bride playfully alluding, perhaps, to the lady seen in the heavens preceding the ladies of the court in gazing on her beauty. It is difficult to explain with perfect satisfaction the next clause of the verse. Doubtless "mother's sons" is a poetical periphrasis for brothers—not "step-brothers," as some have said. Perhaps the mother was a widow, as no father is mentioned. The best explanation is that the bride is simply giving an account of herself, why she is so browned in the sun. The brothers, for some reason, had been incensed against her, possibly on account of her favour in the eyes of the king, but more probably for private, family reasons. They would not have her shutting herself up in the house to take care of her complexion; they would have her in the vineyards. In the word "keeper" (*noterah*, instead of *notzrah*) we have an instance of the northern dialect—a kind of Platt-Hebrew—hardening the pronunciation. *My own vineyard have I not kept* no doubt refers simply and solely to her complexion, not to her virginity or character. She means—I was compelled by my brothers to go into the vineyards in the heat of the sun, and the consequence was, as you see, I have not been able to preserve the delicacy of my skin; I have been careless of my personal beauty. The sun has done its work. The reference helps us to recognize the historical background of the poem, and leads naturally to the use of the pastoral language which runs through the whole. The king is a shepherd, and his bride a shepherdess. Without straining the spiritual interpretation, we may yet discover in this beautiful candour and sim-

plcity of the bride the reflection of the soul's virtues in its joyful realization of Divine favour; but the true method of interpretation requires no minute, detailed adjustment of the language to spiritual facts, but rather seeks the meaning in the total impression of the poem.

Ver. 7.—Tell me, O 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 is veiled beside the flock of thy companions? These words carry on the associations suggested by the previous verse. The bride is longing for the bridegroom; but she cannot think of him yet in any other light than as a companion of her simple country life—he is a shepherd, and she a shepherdess. "Take me into closer fellowship with thyself; let me not remain still only one amongst the many." Perhaps there is intended to be an allusion to the common metaphor—the king as the shepherd and the people as his flock; but the uppermost thought of the bride is separation unto her husband. The soul which longs for the enjoyment of fellowship with God desires to be carried away out of all distractions, out of all restraints, lifted above reserve and above doubt into the closest and most loving union. The idea of the veil may be either the veil of mourning or the veil of modesty and reserve. Probably the latter is the true reference. The LXX. has, *ὡς περιβαλλομένη*. There is some difference of opinion among critics. Ewald thinks it refers to strangeness—"like one unknown," and therefore veiled; Gesenius says, "one fainting;" others connect the word with the root "to roam," "to wander" (see Isa. xxii. 17), which is confirmed by Symmachus, the Vulgate, the Syriac, the Chaldee, Jerome, Venetian, and Luther. The simplest explanation is that the bride compares herself, in her absence from her lord, among the ladies of the court, to a veiled woman travelling beside the flocks of the shepherds, seeking her friend, but not yet brought to him.

Ver. 8.—(*Chorus of ladies.*) If thou know not, O thou fairest among women, go thy way forth by the footsteps of the flock, and feed thy kids beside the shepherds' tents. That another voice is here introduced there can be no doubt; and as it is not like the voice of the bridegroom himself, which is heard in the next verse, we must suppose it to be the chorus of attendant ladies. Delitzsch suggests very plausibly that they are pleasantly chiding the simplicity of the country maiden, and telling her that, if she cannot understand her position, she had better return to her country life. In that case, "if thou know not" would mean—If thou canst not rise up to thy privilege; the

knowledge referred to being general knowledge or wisdom. The delicate irony is well expressed, as in the reference to the kids—"feed thy kids," like a child as thou art. But there may be no intentional irony in the words; rather a playful and sympathetic response to the beautiful simplicity of the bride—If thou art waiting to be brought to thy beloved, if thou art seeking thy shepherd, thou most lovely woman, then go quietly on thy way, like a shepherdess tending the kids beside the shepherds' tents; follow the peaceful footsteps of the flock, and in due time the beloved one will appear. This is better than to suppose the ladies presuming to indulge in irony when they must know that Shulamith is the king's favourite. Besides, the first scene of the poem, which is a kind of introduction, thus ends appropriately with an invitation to peaceful waiting for love. We are prepared for the entrance of the beloved one. The spiritual meaning is simple and clear—Those that would be lifted up into the highest enjoyments of religion must not be impatient and doubt that the Lord will reveal himself, but go quietly and patiently on with the work of life, "in the footsteps of the flock," in fellowship with humble souls, and in the paths of peace, in the green pastures and beside the still waters, ready to do anything assigned them, and the time of rejoicing and rapture will come.

Ver. 9.—(*Entrance of the bridegroom.*) I have compared thee, O my love, to a steed in Pharaoh's chariots. There can be no reasonable doubt that these words are put into the mouth of the king. The "steed" is in the feminine (*קָרָה*); some would point the word with the plural vowels, that is, "to my horses," or a "body of horsea." There is no necessity for that. The reference to a particular very lovely mare is more apt and pointed. In 1 Kings x. 26 we read in the LXX. Version of *τεσσαρες χιλιαδες θηλειαι ιπποι*, which Solomon had for his chariots—fourteen hundred war-chariots and twelve thousand horsemen. The Pharaoh-chariots were those which the king had imported from Egypt (1 Kings x. 28, 29; 2 Chron. ix. 28). It may be that the reference is to the splendid decoration of the trappings. Delitzsch very rightly sees in such a figure a confirmation of the view that Solomon himself was the author. The horses from Egypt were famed at that time as those of Arabia became afterwards. The names both of horses and chariots in the Egyptian language were borrowed from the Semitic, as they were probably first imported into Egypt by the Hyksos, or shepherd-kings. Other examples of the same comparison are found in poetry, as in Horace, Anacreon, and Theocritus. In the last ('Idyl,' xviii.

30, 31) occur the following lines, rendered into English verse:—

"As towers the cypress 'mid the garden's bloom,
As in the chariot proud Thessalian steed,
Thus graceful, rose-complexioned Helen moves."

The idea is that of stately beauty and graceful movements. The old commentators see the Divine love of espousals (Jer. ii. 2), as in the wilderness of the Exodus, and afterwards in the wilderness of the world. The Bible is full of the expression of Divine tenderness and regard for man.

Vers. 10, 11.—Thy cheeks are comely with plaits of hair, thy neck with strings of jewels. We will make thee plaits of gold with studs of silver. This language may be suggested by the comparison first employed—the trappings of the horse. "The head-frame of the horse's bridle and the poitral were then certainly, just as now, adorned with silken tassels, fringes, and other ornaments of silver. *Torim*, 'round ornaments,' which hang down in front on both sides of the head-band or are also inwoven in the braids of hair in the forehead." The strings of jewels were necklaces—three rows of pearls. The ornamentation is, however, quite in accordance with female dress. The king makes the promise of gold and silver decoration as an expression of his personal delight in his bride and acceptance of her. Gold and silver were closely connected; hence silver was called, in the Old Egyptian language, "white gold." The idea seems to be that of silver points sprinkled over golden knobs. Compare the description in 'Faust' of Margaret's delight in the casket she finds in her room. The LXX. and Vulgate have mistaken the word *torim* for a similar word for "doves," taking the simile to be the beautiful colours of the dove's neck. The bride does not seem to reply immediately to the king; but we may suppose that the king takes his bride by the hand, and leads her into the banquetting-chamber. But the next three verses, which are certainly in the lips of the bride, may be taken as her expression of delight in her husband, either while he feasts in the banquet or when it is over. The banquet is a familiar emblem of the delight of mutual love. Hence the feasts of love in the primitive Church were regarded, not only as seasons of fellowship between Christians, but times of rejoicing, when the soul entered into the full appreciation of the Saviour's presence.

Vers. 12-14.—While the king sat (or, *sate*) at his table, my spikenard sent (*sends*) forth its fragrance. My beloved is unto me as a bundle of myrrh, that lieth betwixt my

breasts. My beloved is unto me as a cluster of henna flowers in the vineyards of Engedi. The preterite is best taken poetically for the present. The words are evidently a response to those of the king. As such they refer to present feeling and not to a past state. The bride expresses her delight in the king. The table is used generally. The Hebrew word is from a root "to sit round." The habit of reclining at table was introduced much later, during the Persian, Greek, and Roman period. The spikenard was a powerful perfume, probably of Indian origin, as the Indian word *naladā*, meaning "that which yields fragrance," shows. The Persian is *nārd*, the Old Arabic *nārdū*. It was made from an Indian plant, the *Valeriana*, called *Nardostachys* '*Gatdmānsi*,' growing in Northern and Eastern India. The hairy part of the stem immediately above the root yields the perfume. That it was "very precious" we see from the account of Mary's offering, which was worth more than three hundred denarii, i.e. £8 10s. (Mark xiv. 5; John xii. 2). Horace promised Virgil a whole cask, i.e. nine gallons, of the best wine in exchange for a small onyx-box full of the perfume. The metaphor represents the intense longing of love. *Myrrh* was an exotic introduced into Palestine from Arabia, Abyssinia, and India. Like frankincense, it is one of the amyridæ. The *Balsamodendron myrrha* is the tree itself with its leaves and flowers. From the tree came a resin or gum (*Gummi myrrhæ*), which either dropped from the leaves or was artificially obtained by incisions in the bark. The natural product was the more valuable. It was much prized as a perfume, and employed for many purposes. The Hebrew women were accustomed to carry little bags or bottles of myrrh suspended from their necks and hanging down between the breasts under the dress, diffusing an attractive fragrance round them. The word *tsorer* is, properly, "a little bag," *sacculus*, "that which one ties up," rather than a "bundle." The meaning, of course, is rhetorical.—He is at my heart and delightful to all my thoughts as the fragrance to my senses. The henna flowers, or cypress, in the vineyards of Engedi, is a very beautiful figure. *Copher*, the cypress cluster,—in Greek, *κύπρος*; in Arabic, *al-henna* (*Lawsonia*)—grows in Palestine and Egypt, as we are told by Pliny ('Nat. Hist.,' xii. 24). It is a tall shrub reaching to eight or ten feet, exceedingly beautiful in appearance, and giving forth a delightful odour. It is named from a root "to be white or yellow-white." The Moslem women stain their hands and feet with it to give them a yellow tint. Engedi was a lovely district

on the west of the Dead Sea—Hazezon Tamar, now *Ain Tidy*, where Solomon made terraces on the hillsides and covered them with gardens and vineyards. The allusion confirms the date of the writing as contemporary with Solomon, as the gardens would then be in their perfection. The figure is, perhaps, intended to be an advance in rhetorical force upon that which preceded—the fragrance diffused and almost overpowering, as of a blossoming tree.

Ver. 15.—Behold, thou art fair, my love; behold, thou art fair; thine eyes are as doves; literally, *thine eyes are doves*. The king receives the worship of his bride and delights in her. She is very sweet and fair to him. The dove is a natural symbol of love; hence it was attached by the classical nations to the garden of love, together with the myrtle, rose, and apple, all of which we find introduced in this Hebrew poem. Hence the Arabic name for a dove, *Jemima*, as we see in the Book of Job, was the name of a woman (cf. Columba). The language of the king is that of ecstasy; hence the interjection and repetition. The enraptured monarch gazes into the eyes of his beloved bride, and sees there only purity, constancy, and affection. In ch. vii. 4 the eyes are compared to fish-ponds, no doubt for their clear, liquid depth and serenity. Some have thought that the allusion is to the very lovely eyes of the doves; but there is no need of the limitation.

Ver. 16—ch. ii. 1.—Behold, thou art fair, my beloved, yea, pleasant; also our couch is green. The beams of our house are cedars, and our rafters are firs. I am a rose of Sharon, a lily of the valley. We take these three verses together as being, in all probability, the address of the bride to her royal husband. This was the view taken by the Masoretic editors and preserved in our present pointing of the Hebrew, as we see in the masoulina form of the first word, רִיחַן, which replies to the feminine form in ver. 15, רִיחַן. The seventeenth verse is apparently abrupt. Why should the bride pass so suddenly from the general address of affection, "Thou art fair, thou art pleasant," to a particular description of a rural scene? The explanation suggested by some of the critics is not far-fetched, that Solomon whispers to her that she shall go back with him to her country life if she please, or she reminds him of his promise made at some other time. Undoubtedly the point of Shulamith's response lies in ch. ii. 1, "I am not at ease in this palatial splendour; I am by nature a rose of Sharon, a lily of the valley. Take me to the green couch, and let me lie under the cedars and the firs." The couch is the divan (cf. Amos vi. 4), from a root "to

cover over" (like "canopy" in Greek, *καναπέιον*, so called from its protecting the person under it from the *κάρωπες*, or "gnats"). It is not that the nuptial bed is particularly intended, or even the bridal bower, but the home itself as a bowery resting-place. "Our home is a sweet country home; take me, there, beloved one." The word "green" is very suggestive in the Hebrew. It is said to "combine in itself the ideas of softness and juicy freshness, perhaps of bending and elasticity, of looseness and thus of overhanging ramification, like weeping willow. *Beams*, from a root "to meet," "to lay crosswise," "to hold together." But the meaning depends upon the idea of the whole description. Some would render "fretted ceilings," or "galleries;" but Dr. Ginsburg gives it, "our bower is of cedar arches," which excludes the idea of a formal structure made of cedar beams. The same meaning is conveyed in the last clause, "our rafters are firs." The word rendered "rafters" (עֲרֻכִּים) literally signifies "a place upon which one runs" (like עָרַב, a "street"), i.e. a charming or pleasant spot. The *beroth* is the cypress tree, an Aramaic word, or one used in the north of Palestine. The meaning is, "our pleasant retreat is cypresses"—is beautiful and fragrant with the cypress tree. Delitzsch, however, and others would take it differently as describing the panels or hollows of a wainscoted ceiling, like *parva*, *lacunæ*, *lacunaria*, and the LXX., *παρνωάδρα*: Symmachus, *παρνωαίς*: Jerome, *laquearii* (cf. Isa. lx. 13). But the concluding words would then be unfitting. The bride is not describing a splendid palace, but a country home. "I am a tender maiden," she says, "who has been brought up in retirement; take me to a forest palace and to the green, fragrant surroundings, where the meadow-flower, the valley-lily will be happy." We are so accustomed to the rendering of ch. ii. 1, which our Revised Version has adopted from the Authorized, that it would be wrong to destroy the effect which it borrows from long familiarity unless it were absolutely necessary. The word *chavatsseleth*, however, has been differently translated; it is literally any wild flower—rose, saffron crocus (*Colchicum autumnale*), tulip, narcissus, lily. The crocus is, perhaps, nearest to the meaning, as the name is probably derived from a root "to form bulbs" or bulbous knolls. It occurs only once again, in Isa. xxxv. 1, where it is rendered "rose" in the Authorized Version; LXX., *ῥόδος*: Vulgate, *ros*. Some derive it from the root *chavaz*, "to be bright," with *z* as termination. *Sharon* may be here a general denomination of the open field or plain, from שָׁרָן, "to be straight, plain." There

was a district called Sharon on the coast from Joppa to Cæsarea. There was another Sharon beyond the Jordan (see 1 Chron. v. 16). According to Eusebius and Jerome, there was yet another, between Tabor and Tiberias, and this, as being in the north, may be referred to. Aquila renders "a rosebud of Sharon." The lily (*shoshannah*) is only found as here in the feminine form in the Apocrypha. The red and white lily were both known. Some would derive the word from the numeral (*shêsh*) "six," because the liliacæ are six-leaved, while the rosacæ are five-leaved; but it is pro-

bably akin to *shêsh*, "byssus," *shayish*, "white marbles" (cf. Hos. xiv. 5, "He shall bloom as a lily"). Our Lord's reference to "the lilies of the field" reminds us that they were in Palestine both very beautiful and very abundant. Zöckler thinks it is not the strongly scented white lily (*Lilium candidum*) to which reference is made, but the red lily (*Lilium rubens*); but either will convey the same idea of a flower of the field which is meant. "My beauty is the beauty of nature—artless and pure."

HOMILETICS.

Vers. 1—4.—*The prologue.* I. THE INSCRIPTION. 1. *The title.* We are told (1 Kings iv. 32) that the songs of Solomon were a thousand and five. This is the chief of all, the Song of Songs. It stands alone in the Old Testament. It is a pastoral drama of singular loveliness. It shows a delight in the beauties of nature such as we might look for in him who "spake of trees, from the cedar tree that is in Lebanon even unto the hyssop that springeth out of the wall; of beasts also, and of fowl, and of creeping things." It exhibits a touching picture of early affection gradually ripening into the blessed love of wedlock—that love which, when pure and unselfish, tends more than anything that is of this world to elevate and refine the soul. And it has a higher meaning. Holy men of widely different times have seen in it the spiritual converse of the Church, or of the individual soul, with the heavenly Bridegroom. A famous Jewish rabbi, after saying that all the books of the Hagiographa are holy, describes the Song of Songs as a holy of holies; and a great Father of the Church says that in this book the perfected, who have the world beneath their feet, are joined to the embraces of the heavenly Bridegroom. Thus it combines all the elements which give a charm to poetry—beauty of form and elevation of thought; a delicate appreciation of the attractions of external nature; a deep sense of the sweetness and power of the most universal, the most dominant, of human affections; and an uplook to higher things, an uplook from that love which is of God—for such surely is the love of husband and wife (see Eph. v. 25—28)—to God who is love. Thus the title is abundantly justified. There are great difficulties here and there; but yet much of the Song of Songs has ever sounded to believing souls like far-off echoes of the new song which only the redeemed from the earth could learn (Rev. xiv. 3). There are few passages of Holy Scripture sweeter to the Christian heart than those thrice-repeated words, "My Beloved is mine, and I am his." 2. *The authorship.* "Which is Solomon's." The Hebrew preposition may be translated "of" or "for." In the titles of Ps. lxxii. and cxxvii. it is rendered in our Authorized Version "for Solomon," "of Solomon" standing in the margin. Ps. cxxvii., like the rest of the "songs of degrees," is almost certainly post-Exilic; and in Ps. lxxii. the LXX. translators are probably right in regarding Solomon as the subject, not the author, of the psalm. If the Song of Songs was written by Solomon himself, we have in it a most awful warning of the fickleness, the sinfulness, of the human heart. Solomon, who knew so well what is the sweetness of pure and holy love, was led astray by that sensual passion which usurps the name of love. Solomon, who was called Jedidiah, "the darling of the Lord," whom "the Lord loved" (2 Sam. xii. 24), who himself "loved the Lord" (1 Kings iii. 3)—that same Solomon "loved many strange women" (1 Kings xi. 1), and "when he was old, his wives turned away his heart after other gods." "Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall;" "Ye that love the Lord, see that ye hate the thing that is evil." The soul that would live in the love of Christ must hate, and reject with horror and loathing, the very smallest beginnings of that sin of impurity which separates a man from God utterly and with a fearful rapidity. If, on the other hand, it was written by some prophet or poet of Northern Palestine in Solomon's time, we have an explanation of those peculiar words which some scholars regard

as Aramaic, others as dialectic peculiarities of the Lebanon country; and we have a warning not to trust too much in human leaders. We must not put our trust in man, but only in God. When men, once honoured and esteemed, fall into sin, we cannot but be distressed; but we must not allow our faith to waver. God is the truth; he continueth faithful; we must trust in him. The internal evidence of the song itself points to a time anterior to the separation of the northern and southern kingdoms; this is not the place to discuss the arguments for a later origin. 3. *The meaning.* The song seems to rest on an historical basis; its many details, its geographical notices, its many references to circumstances of Solomon's time, to its peace and prosperity (such a period of peace and prosperity as perhaps never occurred again during the chequered history of Israel), to its commerce, its magnificence, point to a groundwork of actual fact. It relates the love of the great king for some innocent country maiden—a love that was returned, that for a time at least brought happiness to both, and seemed to refine and elevate the characters of both, as a pure love which leads to a blessed marriage ever does. But holy men of old were led by the Spirit to incorporate this beautiful narrative into the canon of Holy Scripture. That fact invests the song with another and a higher meaning. Jewish rabbis regarded it as a parable of the relations between God and Israel. Many of the Christian Fathers have seen in it the love that is between Christ and his Church; the longings of the Christian soul for the presence of the heavenly Bridegroom; the vicissitudes of the spiritual life; the blessed union of the bride, the Lamb's wife, with the Lord of her redemption at the last. There are great difficulties in the spiritual interpretation of some passages; but when we consider the position of the song in the sacred book; when we remember that "every Scripture inspired of God is also profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for instruction which is in righteousness;" when we remember the great value which many of God's saints have set upon this book, the great spiritual benefit which they have derived from it, we feel that it must be right to regard it as a parable of Divine love, to see under this earthly story a deep and holy heavenly meaning.

II. THE FIRST SONG. 1. *The bride's longing for the beloved.* The three verses (2—4) are often regarded as the song of a chorus of virgins, the companions of the bride; perhaps the mingling of the singular and plural pronouns seems rather to suggest that we have in this first song the voice of the bride herself blended with the strains of her virgin-friends. The bride yearns for the embrace of love. In the pure love of Christian man and maid, the maiden long desired gives at last the full treasure of her love in answer to that love which had with earnest devotion sought for her affection. Ancient writers see in these words the longing of the Jewish Church for a closer union with God, for the fulfilment of the promise given through the prophet (Hos. ii. 16), "In that day, saith the Lord, thou shalt call me Ishi ['my Husband'], and shalt call me no more Baali ['my Lord']." The Christian Church, the Christian soul, longs for the enjoyment of the Saviour's love. We notice the abrupt beginning, "Let him kiss me." The bride is speaking of one well known, greatly loved. There is no need of exact description; the pronoun is enough; there is only One whose image is ever present to that loving heart. When the Christian, taught by the Holy Ghost, is learning, slowly and imperfectly (as, alas! it must be here), to fulfil the first of all the commandments, he will yearn above all things for that manifestation of himself which the Lord promises to them that love him (John xiv. 21, 23). The traitor's kiss, treacherous as it was, shows that such a token of affection was usual in the intercourse between our Lord and his apostles. His love is unchanging, everlasting; still the Christian soul may say, "The Son of God loved me, and gave himself for me;" still the soul longs for the sense of that blessed love; "the love of Jesus, what it is, none but his loved ones know." The woman that was a sinner kissed the Saviour's feet. The kiss of peace was in apostolic times the token of the love which Christians had one towards another. The kiss of pure and holy love is a parable of the blessed love which is betwixt Christ and his Church. That love is better than wine. Now the bride speaks to the Lord. "Thy love," she says; she feels that he is coming in answer to the call of love. Earthly joys are poor indeed when compared with that joy which is in the Lord. St. Paul contrasts them in the Epistle to the Ephesians (v. 18, 19). Excess in wine brings degradation, misery. The Christian soul needs not this spurious excitement; it has a source of joy higher beyond all comparison. It is filled with the Spirit, and the fruit of the Spirit is

joy—joy which manifests itself in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs. 2. *The response of the chorus.* The attendant virgins assent. The love of the Bridegroom is better than wine, better than the fragrance of the sweetest of perfumes, sweeter than ointment poured forth which sheds its scent around. The odour of the precious ointment which Mary poured upon the Saviour's head filled the house; the sweet odour of the name of Jesus fills the whole Church; it sheds its penetrating influence everywhere throughout the Church; "therefore," the chorus sings, "do the virgins love thee." The plural number seems to remind us that the love of Christ is personal, individual. The bride, the Lamb's wife, is, indeed, the whole company of the elect. But the Lord's love is not only general; it does not bless only the Church as a whole, an aggregate; he loves all and each; the whole Church and each separate Christian soul; therefore each separate Christian soul, all who take their lamps and go forth to meet the Bridegroom, rejoice in the Bridegroom's love, and desire above all things to return it. "We love him, because he first loved us." 3. *The blended voices of the chorus and the bride.* (1) The request: "Draw me, we will run after thee." The bride is listening for the bridegroom's call; she is ready to answer. Her virgin-companions join in assenting chorus; they will accompany her. The Christian soul longs for the fulfilment of the Divine Word, "I drew them with cords of a man, with bands of love" (Hos. xi. 4); it pleads that gracious promise, "I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me."

"Break up the heavens, O Lord! and far,
Thro' all yon starlight keen,
Draw me, thy bride, a glittering star,
In raiment white and clean."

It seems too much to ask; none feel their unworthiness, their guilt, so keenly as those whom the Lord is calling nearer to himself. But faith hears his voice and believes in his power. If only he will draw us, we shall run after him. Love is the magnet of love. When God deigns to shine into his people's hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ, when the blessed word, "We have seen the Lord," is realized in the heart, then the soul runneth in ever-deepening desire to respond to that condescending love. None can come to Christ, we know, "except the Father who hath sent me draw him" (John vi. 44); therefore that prayer, "Draw me, we will run after thee," is often in the Christian's heart, often pleaded by the Christian's lips. We are weak and helpless; but when he draws us with that holy invitation, "Come unto me," we must arise, we must run after him. To look back is ruin. "Remember Lot's wife." And his call giveth strength to follow, to run after him. So St. Augustine says in well-known words ('Conf.,' ix. 1), "How sweet did it at once become to me to want the sweetness of those toys; and what I feared to be parted from, was now a joy to part with! For thou didst cast them forth from me, thou true and highest Sweetness. Thou castedst them forth, and for them enteredst in thyself, sweeter than all pleasures, though not to flesh and blood; brighter than all light, but more hidden than all depths; higher than all honour, but not to the high in their own conceits." (2) The answer. The prayer is heard; we hear the voice of the bride: "The King hath brought me into his chambers." Christ loved the Church, and gave himself for her, that he might present her to himself a glorious Church. The chorus answers, "We will be glad and rejoice in thee." Individual believers make up the great Church of Christ. Once we were afar off; now we are brought near; we are "fellow-citizens with the saints, and of the household of God." In proportion as we realize our Christian privileges of access unto God we learn to rejoice in the Lord. The fruit of the Spirit is joy; that joy passes all earthly pleasures. Believers will remember the tokens of the Saviour's love, dwelling on them in holy thought; they will leave no place in their hearts for sensual delights; they will love the Lord in uprightness, in sincerity, and truth.

Vers. 5-8.—*Dialogue between the bride and the chorus.* I. THE BRIDE'S SENSE OF UNWORTHINESS. 1. "I am black." The country maiden loved by the great king feels her own imperfections; she artlessly describes her misgivings to the daughters of Jerusalem, who constitute the chorus; she has been accustomed to rustic occupations; she has been ill-treated; the sun has embrowned her cheeks till she is black as the

tents of Kedar, the tents of goat's hair in which the wandering Arabs lived. The Christian soul knows its guilt. Worship begins ever with confession; when we draw near to Christ, we are most sensible of the plague of our own hearts. Christians will find help and comfort in communion with the like-minded; they will tell them their spiritual troubles; but such holy communion can be held only with the like-minded, with the daughters of Jerusalem. Christians sometimes have home troubles; they seem unable to keep their own vineyard, to attend to their own spiritual needs, because other work is forced upon them, because their time is taken up in matters which seem not to belong to their peace; they must be patient and meek, and wait for the Bridegroom's call. 2. "*But comely.*" In her artless simplicity she mentions her own beauty: she is fair as the curtains of Solomon. The king, we may suppose, had a stately pavilion in the Lebanon country, near the dwelling of the bride. The Christian recognizes with humble and adoring thankfulness the working of the Spirit of God within his soul. "By the grace of God I am what I am: and his grace which was bestowed on me was not in vain; but I laboured more abundantly than they all: yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me." If God is drawing us nearer to himself we must know it. True unaffected humility recognizes his working in our unworthy hearts, and longs to be found in Christ, "not having mine own righteousness, which is of the Law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith." The bride compares herself to the curtains of Solomon; the Christian owes whatever he may possess of the beauty of holiness to his communion with the King of saints.

II. THE BRIDE'S LONGING FOR THE BRIDEGROOM'S PRESENCE. 1. *Her seeking love.* He is not with her now, but her soul goeth forth to him; she apostrophizes her absent lord, and pours forth her yearning in the presence of her companions. (1) The address: "Thou whom my soul loveth." It is an expression of intense affection, repeated several times in the song (ch. iii. 1, 2, 3, 4). The love of Christ is the life-spring of the Christian heart. That love, when real and true, makes the Christian seek always, every day and every hour, the blessed presence of the Saviour. That love is the soul's love. It is not a thing of words and phrases, not a matter of outward form and observance; it is treasured deep in the heart; it is the mainspring of life and action; it comes to Christ with the question, "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?" and that in the ordinary concerns of life, in the trifles, the little joys and sorrows of everyday life, as well as in the emergencies that come now and then, the dangers and distresses which cross our path from time to time. That true, deep love is exceedingly precious; it is the perfect love that casteth out fear; it can answer like St. Peter, "Lord, thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I love thee." It is of all graces the holiest and the best; it is the first of the fruits of the Spirit; it is granted to the believer in answer to fervent persevering prayer. May we whose hearts have long been so cold and dead seek it, and gain it to be our own through the forgiving mercy of our God! (2) She asks where he feeds his flock. The King of Israel is represented as a shepherd like his father David. The bride thinks more of his love than of his magnificence; she would have loved him with the same entire devotion had he been in her own lowly position. Perhaps it was a relief to her to regard him sometimes not as a king, but as a shepherd; perhaps the great king had been pleased to assume such a character for a time to give pleasure to his beloved one. The bride seems sometimes to hint that this description is figurative (ch. ii. 16; vi. 2, 3); she speaks of the son of David in language like that which David himself had used of Almighty God (Ps. xxiii. 1, 2). The Lord Jesus Christ is the good Shepherd; he laid down his life for the sheep; he knoweth his own, and his own know him. He is King of kings and Lord of lords; but it is a relief to the soul, dazzled by the awful glory of the Godhead, to remember that he laid his glory by that he might save us; and to think of him as made like unto us in all things, sin only excepted, and therefore touched with the feeling of our infirmities, and able to succour them that are tempted. She asks where he feeds his flock. It is like the aspiration of Job, "Oh that I knew where I might find him! that I might come even to his seat!" The Christian soul yearns for the good Shepherd, to draw ever nearer to him, to share his love and mercy. He maketh his sheep to lie down in green pastures; he leadeth them beside the waters of rest. He feeds them; for he is the Bread of life—the Bread that came down from heaven to give life unto the world. Their prayer is, "Lord, evermore give us this bread." They feed on him in the daily life of faith, and in the blessed

sacrament. His presence in the heart is the food, the life of the soul. "He that cometh unto me," he saith, "shall never hunger, and he that believeth on me shall never thirst." And he maketh his flock to rest at noon. In the hot sultry noon of life, amid troubles and anxieties and cares, he giveth rest. The weary and the heavy-laden accept his gracious invitation; they find rest—rest for their souls. There is no other rest for this restless, anxious soul of ours, but only that rest which he giveth—rest in the Lord. He can give rest in the midst of trouble, rest even in the busy noon of life; such rest as Daniel found in his many cares, when he kneeled upon his knees and made his supplications three times a day; such rest as St. Paul found when he had learned to count all things as loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus his Lord. 2. *Her fears.* Compare Gesenius, s.v., "Lest I be as one who faints by the flocks of thy companions; lest I should wander in search of thee from flock to flock, languid even to fainting through the noontide heat." The bride seeks the king himself. His companions may be kind and good, but they are not the beloved. The soul seeks the good Shepherd. Other shepherds may be doing what they can to feed the flock of God (see 1 Pet. v. 2—4), but they can only bring the flock to the chief Shepherd. He is the Desire of all nations; he only is the Saviour; without him we can do nothing. It is not safe to wander from flock to flock, to heap up to ourselves teachers (2 Tim. iv. 3). We must seek Christ himself, for the true sheep are his; they hear his voice and follow him. They that are his shall never perish; no man is able to pluck them out of his Father's hand. But they must not listen to other voices which are not his; they must watch with earnest attention for the voice of the good Shepherd, and attend to every intimation of his will; they must ask him with loving entreaty—"O thou whom my soul loveth"—by what way, in what path, he is to be found; they must not weary themselves in wandering from teacher to teacher, seeking always, like the Athenians, to hear some new things; they must walk in the old paths, where is the good way; and they will find rest, for they will find, not Solomon, whose name means "peace," but the Prince of Peace himself, who giveth peace, the peace of God, to all who seek his face with faithful and true hearts.

III. THE COUNSEL OF THE DAUGHTERS OF JERUSALEM. 1. *The address.* "O thou fairest among women." The bride is addressed by the chorus in the same words in two other places (ch. v. 9; vi. 1). She had described herself as "black, but comely." The daughters of Jerusalem see in her the fairest among women. Jerusalem was the holy city, the dwelling-place of the great King. Her daughters are the saints, the children of the kingdom. The true Christian knows his own sinfulness, though he feels with thankfulness the work of grace within his heart; other Christians recognize in him the beauty of holiness. There must be no jealousies among the people of God; they must not dispute among themselves, as even apostles once did, who should be the greatest in the kingdom of heaven; they must gladly acknowledge the workings of the grace of God in other Christian souls; they will do so the more generously, the nearer they themselves are to the Lord. 2. *The direction.* "If thou know not," they say; as if to intimate that one so highly favoured must surely know the way herself. They can but guide her to the old way where all the saints have walked; she must follow the tracks of the sheep, the footsteps of the flock. They have followed the good Shepherd; she must do the like. "Be ye followers of me," said St. Paul, "even as I also am of Christ." It is good to read the lives of the saints, to study the graces of holy men. Holy Scripture bids us to follow their faith, considering the end of their conversation. But the bride is also told to feed her kids beside the shepherds' tents. We shall most surely find the Lord in faithful work for him. If he is to us what he was to the bride, "O thou whom my soul loveth;" if we can say in truth, "Lord, thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I love thee," we shall surely hear his voice speaking in our hearts, "Feed my lambs;" "Feed my sheep." Those who, like St. Paul, labour most abundantly for Christ (if only that labour is wrought in faith and love) are sure, like St. Paul, themselves to win Christ and to be found in him. "He that watereth shall be watered also himself;" "They that turn many to righteousness shall shine as the stars for ever and ever." Christ is most surely found by those faithful servants who do their best to bring others to the Lord.

OF THE BRIDEGROOM. 1. *His address.* He compares the bride to a beautiful mare of his own in the chariots of Pharaoh. The words come fitly from the lips of the speaker. He was the first king of Israel who took delight in horses and chariots, and he imported them from Egypt. The words are thought to have suggested a similar comparison in Theocritus ('Idyll,' xviii. 30); they indicate the stateliness of the bride's beauty; they remind us of Ps. cxlvii. 10, 11, "He delighteth not in the strength of a horse. . . . The Lord taketh pleasure in them that fear him, in those that hope in his mercy." Men like Solomon take delight in horses; the Lord in the graces of his people. The king calls the bride "my love," or "my friend;" the word is derived from a verb which in its secondary sense means to take delight in the companionship of those whom we love. We are reminded of the Lord's gracious words, "Henceforth I call you not servants; for the servant knoweth not what his lord doeth: but I have called you friends; for all things that I have heard of my Father I have made known unto you" (John xv. 15). The king proceeds to commend the graces of the bride; he promises costly gifts. She was wearing the simple ornaments of a country maiden (the words "jewels" and "gold" are not in the original of ver. 10). "We will make thee," he says (that is, his servants will make at his order), "borders of gold with studs of silver." Whatever graces the Church possesses come from the gift of the heavenly Bridegroom; it is he who will "present her to himself a glorious Church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing;" but holy and without blemish (Eph. v. 27). It is only God who can "keep us from falling, and present us at the last faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy" (Jude 24). The fine linen, clean and white, the wedding-garment of the bride, is the Bridegroom's gift (Rev. xix. 8). 2. *The bride's delight in the bridegroom.* The king is come; he sitteth at his table in the midst of the circle of his friends. We are reminded that the presence of his father David was once required to complete such a circle. "We will not sit around" (the literal translation of Samuel's words) "till he come hither" (1 Sam. xvi. 11). The bride (like Mary afterwards) anoints him with "ointment of spikenard very costly;" the house is filled with the odour of the ointment. While the heavenly Bridegroom is present in the blessed sacrament, or in the circle of true worshippers, whenever two or three are gathered together in his Name, the sweet odour of prayer and adoration giveth forth its fragrance. Such worship, worship in spirit and in truth, is always acceptable. "My Father," he saith in his condescending love, "seeketh such to worship him." It is his presence which draws forth that holy worship. While he is with us, in the circle of worshippers, the heart goeth forth unto him. "Lord, it is good to be here;" "Thy Name is as ointment poured forth." It is sweet to the believer; it refreshes his soul in sorrow, and in the hour of death; therefore do thy people love thee. The King's presence is very sacred; those whom he deigns to visit must respond with their heart's love, with the sweet odours of true spiritual worship. 3. *What the bridegroom is to her.* The odour of her spikenard is pleasant to him; he is to her as a bag of myrrh, or a cluster of henna flowers. So, in Ps. xlv. 8, the royal Bridegroom's garments smell of myrrh, aloes, and cassia. The bag of myrrh was kept in the bosom for its sweetness and its medicinal properties; the henna flowers which grew abundantly among the vines of Engedi were highly esteemed for their fragrance. The Saviour's presence in the heart sheds a fragrance through the soul. "He that hath the Son hath life;" a principle of life which preserves the soul from the corruption of sin, which heals its diseases, which prepares it for the hour of death. The Saviour's body lay for a while in the mixture of myrrh and aloes which Nicodemus brought; that holy body needed not the earthly unguent. The Christian needs the preservative virtue which the Saviour giveth. No flowers of earth, no earthly fragrance or beauty, can compare for one moment with the blessedness which his presence bringeth.

II. THE CONVERSE OF THE BRIDEGROOM AND THE BRIDE. 1. *The voice of the beloved.* He commends the beauty of the bride; her eyes, as they look on him, are like doves, gentle, innocent, loving. So, in Ps. xlv., the king greatly desires the beauty of the bride. She "is all glorious within: her clothing is of wrought gold." The Lord would have the Church, his bride, to be "a glorious Church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing;" but holy and without blemish. Alas! in the visible Church the evil are ever mingled with the good, and there is none that sinneth not. But just in proportion as the Christian walks in the light (in the light of his presence who is the

Light of the world), the blood of Jesus Christ is cleansing him from all sin, and he becomes in his poor measure a light, shining with the reflected light of the Saviour's holiness. Christ is made unto his people wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption; whatever beauty of character they possess comes only from communion with him. "Beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, they are changed into the same image from glory to glory." They must be harmless as doves, gentle, humble, innocent. The Lord in his condescending love accepts their imperfect service. "I know thy works, and thy love, and faith, and ministry, and patience; and that thy last works are more than the first." 2. *The answer of the bride.* Perhaps they have now gone forth into the air; they are sitting together, as the words seem to imply, on a green couch, on some grassy slope in the Lebanon country, under the interlacing boughs of cedars and fir trees. The bride enjoys the fair prospect around her; she delights still more in the presence and love of the bridegroom. She calls him "my beloved;" the Hebrew word is another form of the name of the king's father, David, which means "beloved." He is very fair in her eyes; yea, pleasant. The Lord is fairer than the children of men; to the Christian there is no vision of earthly beauty which will bear one moment's comparison with the tender loveliness of the Saviour's character, the exalted beauty of his self-sacrificing love. The Christian soul delights in the fair beauty of the Lord; it is to him the one thing to be desired above all others. "One thing have I desired of the Lord, that I will seek after; that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the Lord" (Ps. xxvii. 4). So Isaiah, who alone of the prophets uses the bride's word of endearment, "my Beloved" (Isa. v. 1), has the blessed promise, "Thine eyes shall see the King in his beauty" (Isa. xxxiii. 17). The king is pleasant also; not only fair to look upon, but possessed of every charm, of all spiritual grace. We have the same word applied to God in Ps. xxvii. 4 and xc. 17. May God "shine into our hearts, to reveal to us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ"!

HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Ver. 1.—"*The Song of Songs, which is Solomon's.*" What does this mean?

I. AS TO THE TITLE? "*The Song of Songs.*" It affirms that this song is the most excellent of all songs, the incomparably beautiful song, a song beside which, as one writer says, "all others hide their heads."

II. AS TO THE NAME AFFIXED TO IT? *Not that Solomon was the author.* For the very title would convict him of egregious vanity. A writer would hardly thus speak of his own productions. But it would be quite lawful that another should so speak; hence the poem might be Solomon's and the title be added on by another writer. But even then we question his authorship of this song. For: 1. *If we take the literal interpretation of it*, as well-nigh all modern competent Bible scholars do, in greater or less degree (cf. Ginsburg, Ewald, Maurer, Stanley, 'Speaker's Commentary,' Hartwell Horne's 'Introduction,' etc.),—then, since it represents Solomon as foiled and frustrated in his endeavours to persuade the maiden Shulamith, whose constancy and fidelity the poem celebrates, to become his bride, it is hardly likely that he would depict himself in such an unlovely light, or in such undignified guise as that in which, in this song, he certainly appears. Or, if we take the most ancient and most common interpretation of the song, *the spiritual and allegorical*, which affirms that the bride—though there is no bride in the song at all, but only one who is betrothed—represents the Church; and that Solomon, whom this interpretation identifies with "the beloved," is a type of our Lord Jesus Christ; and that the poem is intended to set forth the mutual love of Christ and his Church;—then we say that Solomon is in no sense a fit type of the Lord Jesus Christ, for he was not a man after God's own heart, but very far from it. Moreover, he was not the man to write a spiritual poem of such exalted character. They were "*holy men of old*" whom the Spirit inspired. But, certainly, Solomon can lay no claim to *that* character. Then: 3. David and Solomon are both *spoken of in such manner as would hardly be likely if Solomon were the writer.* (Cf. ch. iii. 9, 11; viii. 11, 12.) It is the manner of one speaking of them, telling facts concerning them; but it is not as they would

speak themselves. 4. And even if the words, "which is Solomon's," be held to mean that he was the author, *such ascription need have no more value* than the titles of many of the psalms, which are allowed to be of no authority. 5. But we read the words as "*concerning Solomon*." True, the poem literally understood has nothing to say in his favour; for what was there to say? But if he be a type at all, and we think he is, it is of that greedy, selfish, soul-corrupting world, which would draw away the faithful from the pure love of God, and seek to replace that pure love by its own. Shulamith loved and was beloved. Solomon tried by all manner of enticements to draw her from that love. But he utterly fails. So that the poem is a parable of the faithful soul and its constancy to its true Lord. By means of a beautiful earthly story, the yet more beautiful fidelity of the soul truly affianced to God is set forth—a fidelity tried so as by fire, and therefore more precious than all gold (cf. 1 Pet. i. 6, 7), which might be taken as a text for the interpretation of very much in this book. It was written, probably, near the age of Solomon, but we think subsequently; and by some Israelite belonging to the northern tribes; and from the absence of all praise of Solomon, and the conduct it ascribes to him, the writer was probably hostile to him, perhaps one of those who in Rehoboam's day raised the cry of "To your tents, O Israel!" and broke away from the kingdom of Judah altogether. The poem is sensuous, but not sensual, unless it be where Solomon is to be understood as speaking, when such speech would be in character. It is Oriental, of course, and not to be interpreted by those far different canons of taste which prevail in our more Northern and Western lands. And it is not a mere story of a maiden's constancy. Were it so, however beautiful (and for remarks on its beauty cf. Isaac Taylor's 'Spirit of the Hebrew Poetry'), still it would not, we think, have found a place amongst the sacred writings. We hold it to be an allegory or parable of *the soul's true love to God*, and, so read, it is like the rest of Holy Scripture, "profitable for doctrine, for reproof," etc. He who has no love of God in his heart, or even little, will never understand it, and had better leave it alone. But to the pure, devout, and Christ-loving heart the vision of him who is for them the "altogether lovely" is seen everywhere in it, and delighted in wherever seen. That vision may we see!—S. C.

Vers. 2—4.—*Desire after God*. Translated into language more congenial to our ordinary Christian thought, these verses may be taken as a parabolic setting forth of the blessed truth contained in the well-known words of the psalm, "My soul thirsteth for God, for the living God; when shall I come and appear before God?" It surely would be speaking blasphemy, and an abasement of the Bible, if we were to look on the sensuous words with which these verses begin as meaning nothing more than they say in their ordinary plain and literal meaning. We, therefore, feel bound to lift them up from such low level, and to look upon them as telling—no doubt in a vivid, Oriental way—of the soul's desire after God, the holy thirst of which the verse from the psalm is the expression. And we observe—

I. THAT THE CONSCIOUS POSSESSION OF THE LOVE OF GOD IS THE SOUL'S DEEP NEED AND DESIRE. Men try all manner of other delights, but they turn out mere apples of Sodom. He who wrote the Book of Ecclesiastes had left untried no single source of earthly joy. All were within his power, and he did his best to get their best out of them. And no doubt he succeeded. But what then? Was he satisfied? did they content him? "Vanity of vanities; all is vanity!"—that is his verdict upon them all. And his experience is that of myriads more, all which goes to prove that the love of God alone can satisfy. "Nostrum cor inquietum est donec requiescat in te." This saying of St. Augustine's is the sober truth, which finds such impassioned expression in our text. And the soul's desire for that love is the fruit of that love. "I, if I be lifted up, will draw all men unto me," said our Lord; and it is because of his gracious drawings, the mighty lure with which he attracts our wills, that we are possessed by this desire.

II. THE DIVINE LOVE IS THE EXHILARATION OF THE SOUL. "Thy love is better than wine." "Be not drunk with wine, but be filled with the Spirit," says St. Paul; and he thereby teaches us, as does the text, that there is a likeness between the two—wine and the Spirit of God. And the resemblance lies here—in the stir and joy of heart which wine for a while causes; and this, though in no mere physical sense, is the blessed

effect of the Spirit of God. For his office it is to shed abroad the love of God in our hearts, and that causes joy indeed.

III. AND IT IS FRAGRANT WHEREVER IT DWELLS. It is likened to "perfume poured forth," and it fills "all the house."

IV. THE PURE IN HEART LOVE IT. "Therefore do the virgins love thee." The desire for the Divine love is not universal—far from it. But "the pure in heart" "see God," and hence their desire.—S. C.

Ver. 3.—*Christ's Name*. "His Name is as ointment poured forth." We apply the text to him. It cannot be shown that such application is wrong. Perfumes largely used in the East—in acts of worship; in entertainments, as marks of favour to honoured guests (cf. Ps. xxiii.; John xii.). The Name of Christ is here likened to such precious perfume, the sweet odour of which fills the whole house, as did that which Mary poured on the Lord. The "Name" stands for all that Christ is to us. The comparison is appropriate if we consider concerning such perfumes—

I. THEIR COSTLINESS. They were on this account exceeding precious, large sums of money being demanded for them (John xii. 3). But does not this tell of the "*precious blood of Christ*," and how "God so loved the world"? Think of the cost of the "*unspeakable Gift*" of Christ: 1. *To the Father*. Was the heart of God unmoved by the sorrows of the Son? Is not the touching story of Abraham's offering up of Isaac, and of his anguish at having to surrender his son, his only son Isaac, "whom thou lovest," brought before our minds when we read how "God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son"? Does it not tell of the anguish of the Divine mind in that sacrifice? A God that cannot know sorrow or joy, that is not "touched with the feeling of our infirmities," is not the God of the Bible, "our *Father* which art in heaven." Therefore what of uttermost sorrow must he not have known when he beheld the "beloved Son, in whom he was well pleased," expire in agony on the cross? 2. *To Christ himself*. Was he not "the Man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief"? "Come, see if ever there was sorrow like unto my sorrow"—to whom do these words apply as to him? Cf. Ps. xxii., that psalm which was in the mind and on the lips of our Lord as he hung upon the cross. The parable of the pearl of great price and of the treasure hid in the field may have other meanings than those commonly given to them. May they not tell of our salvation, and how our blessed Lord was set upon obtaining this, and therefore, though "he was rich, yet for our sakes he became poor," that he might obtain this, to him, most precious pearl, this treasure of untold worth. 3. *To the Holy Spirit*. For he it is who takes of the things of Christ and shows them unto us; who seeks men, and woos and wins them for Christ. The whole of the Passion of our Lord is patterned forth and perpetuated in the grievings and outrages, in the Gethsemane-like "groanings which cannot be uttered" (Rom. viii.), which tell of what he suffers to save men. 4. And if we think of the Gift itself, *the very Son of God*—no creature, no man, no angel or archangel, but he who was one with the Father—that sacrifice was the cost of our redemption. All comparison fails, no matter what of worth and value in earthly things are thought of; they can but faintly image the worth and preciousness of Christ.

II. THEIR COMBINED EXCELLENCE. The choicest perfumes were composed of many ingredients. Cf. the sacred anointing oil (Exod. xxx. 31-38). And so Christ is "made unto us," not one thing only, but many—"wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption" (1 Cor. i. 30). Whether we think of the combined excellences that are in his own nature and character, or of those which he bestows upon us—so many, so manifold, so precious all of them—the comparison is true.

III. HOW GRATEFUL THEY ARE TO THOSE ON WHOM THEY ARE POURED. To this day Orientals delight in such perfumes. They deem them to be as healthful as they are pleasant; and still they are given to honoured guests, as Simon should have given them but did not, but as the Magdalen and Mary of Bethany also did to our Lord. "Thou anointest my head with oil," tells in the twenty-third psalm of the exuberance of joy that the believer has in his Lord. "How sweet the Name of Jesus sounds!" so still his people love to sing. And what they sing is true.

IV. THEIR DIFFUSIVE FRAGRANCE. "Poured forth," released from the vessel which contained it, and in consequence spreading its sweet odours all around. Again the

comparison is just. Has not human life become sweeter in innumerable places because there the Name of Christ has been poured forth? Heaven is heaven because there his "Name is above every name."

V. THAT THEY MAKE FRAGRANT AS WELL AS ARE SO IN THEMSELVES. By this may we know whether we are Christ's. If character, temper, spirit, life, be of ill odour, how can we have known Christ's Name?—S. C.

Vers. 4-8.—*The Christian soul, its trials and triumphs.* The maiden who speaks has been separated unwillingly from her beloved, after whom she incessantly mourns; she is kept in the king's chambers, the apartments of the women in his palace at Jerusalem. They ridicule her swarthy look, and she tells how her half-brothers had been unkind to her, and had made her work in the drudgery of the vineyards, beneath the scorching sun. Those about her wonder and scoff at her persistent affection. The story may be taken as telling of the Christian soul, its trials and triumphs.

I. ITS TRIALS. The Christian soul may be: 1. *Unwillingly deprived* of conscious enjoyment of her Lord's presence. How often in the psalms do we find the complaint of the Lord being "far from me," of the failure to realize his presence and his love! And how often the same thing occurs now! Our sun is hidden behind a cloud, and the soul grieves over her absent Lord. 2. *Despised.* This is another though a less trial. The child of God is a poor kind of creature in the world's esteem, and it is not slow to let the believer know and feel its contempt. And with many this is a terrible thing. Not a few who would lead a forlorn hope and do any deed of daring that required only physical courage, will shrink and quail beneath the world's scorn. 3. *Persecuted and ill-used* also, as she was who is spoken of here. So, too, is it and has been with the Christian soul. And often a man's foes are they of his own household. Our Lord told us it would be so, and so they have found it; but have found also, as here, that he knows how to sustain his servants in this trial. 4. *Mockery* likewise has to be reckoned with. For though ver. 8 tells a truth which has very real and blessed meaning in regard to the soul's way to God, yet it seems to us to have been spoken mockingly, bidding her to whom it was spoken track the footprints of the sheep if she wanted to know where her beloved was, if she would persist in being so foolish. Such is the force of the words rendered, "If thou know not." They are contemptuous, and contain a sneer. But "cruel mockings" have been the lot of Christ's people in all ages, and when we have to bear them we are not to be surprised "as if some strange thing had happened" unto us. But these verses tell not of trials alone, but of—

II. ITS TRIUMPHS. For: 1. *Her soul still clave unto her beloved.* (Ver. 4.) And so, notwithstanding the Christian soul may be by one cause or another held in captivity and "walk in darkness," yet it will all the more cry out after him whom it loveth, and remember his love more than any of the joys of earth. Thus the very design of her adversary is baffled, for her heart beats true to Christ still. 2. *She is certain that Christ delights in her.* Those about her may despise her because she is "black," because she seems contemptible in their sight. But she knows that the Lord looks upon her with different eyes, that in his sight she is "comely." Others may think what they will, but his estimate is everything to her, and that is as she would have it be. 3. *She desires and obtains yet more of happy communion with him.* (Vers. 7, 8.) Often is it with the faithful soul that as the frown of Christ's foes and her own deepen, the light of Christ's countenance shines on her more steadily, brightly, and fully than ever. He drew her (ver. 4) by her need of his grace, and she ran after him, seeking that grace and finding it. 4. *She knows that her present lot of hardship and trial is not her true portion.* "Why should I be as one that is veiled?" (margin), that is, one despised and despicable. She knows that such portion is not hers. 5. *She cannot be moved.* She is conqueror. So will it ever be.—S. C.

Vers. 4-7.—*The soul's joy in the love of God.* "The king hath brought me into his chambers," etc. If we may take this book as only an allegory, we find suggested in these verses this subject of the soul's joy.

I. SUCH JOY IS BECAUSE OF THE KING'S CHAMBERS. He has opened for her the unsearchable riches of his grace, "filled with all pleasant and precious riches" (cf. Prov. xxiv. 4).

II. IS VERY GREAT. She will be glad and rejoice. She will "remember" his "love more than wine." That is, the soul's joy is more than any earthly means of delight and exhilaration can afford.

III. IS SHARED IN BY ALL THE SAINTS OF GOD. "The upright love thee." "No good thing will he withhold from them that walk uprightly." Our joy is heightened by the fact that those whom we most esteem count it their joy also.

IV. HER OWN UNWORTHINESS DOES NOT SHUT HER OUT FROM IT. "I am black."

"Since therefore I can hardly bear
What in myself I see,
How vile, how black, I must appear,
Most holy God, to thee!

"But oh! my Saviour stands between,
In garments dyed in blood;
'Tis he instead of me is seen
When I approach to God."

The remembrance of her own unworthiness serves as a foil to set off the comeliness with which inwardly he has endowed her. "The king's daughter is all glorious within" (cf. Ezek. xvi. 14). And as she thinks of her unworthiness she tells how it came to be so with her—by the cruelty of others and her own neglect. They made her serve in such way that she became "black." How often our foes are they of our own household! But she, too, was neglectful. "My own vineyard have I not kept." Nevertheless, the king loved her.

V. HENCE SHE WILL BE SATISFIED WITH NOTHING LESS THAN HIMSELF. "Tell me where thou feedest?" etc. (ver. 7). She appeals to him to bring her where he is. She desires to know the rest he can give. His "companions" will not compensate for him (cf. "Whom have I in heaven but thee?" etc.; cf. Ps. xlii. 9; Ezek. xxxiv.; Ps. xxv. 4, 5; xvi. 2, 3).—S. C.

Ver. 6 (part).—*The pastor's peril.* "They made me . . . I have not kept." If we were to understand these words literally, then what is told of might be without either blame or loss. For if, as seems to have been the case, the speaker's neglect of her own vineyard was forced upon her in order that she might keep the vineyards of others, then no fault attached to her. She could not help herself; she was made to work for others: She might grieve, as it is plain she did, to see her own fair vineyard neglected, and, in consequence, overgrown with weeds, and all prospect of fruit gone; but no blame belonged to her, though there might be loss. And it is quite comprehensible that there might be neither blame nor loss, although her own vineyard was neglected. For it might be far more profitable to cultivate the vineyards of others than one's own; and if so, why should there be blame, and how could there be loss? But when we come to the spiritual suggestions of our text, when we look upon it as telling of those whose office and duty it is to cultivate the *vineyard of the soul*, then the conduct told of here can never be without blame and loss both; blame to the vineyard-keeper who kept not his own whilst keeping others, and loss both to him and them. For—

I. MEN'S SOULS ARE GOD'S VINEYARDS. They were created to bring forth fruit for his glory, and for the strengthening, cheering, and every way helping of the souls of their fellows. For this purpose, also, were they redeemed, and for this end are they supplied with manifold Divine gifts—the influences of the Holy Spirit, the aid which the Church, the Scriptures, and the ministers of Christ are appointed to render. Now, such—

II. PASTORS ARE THE KEEPERS OF THESE VINEYARDS. They are to watch over them continually. They are to cultivate them with all diligent care. They are to aim ever to render help to those committed to their care in the formation of that character, and in the exercise of those graces which God regards and rejoices in as fruit. They are to remember always that the vineyards are for fruit, and that whatever else they may yield, if they yield not this, their work has failed. Now, this verse suggests that—

III. THERE IS A GREAT PERIL WHICH DESETS THESE KEEPERS OF THE VINEYARDS. It

is this, that whilst keeping the vineyards of others, their own they should not keep. Now, that this is a very real peril is evident from: 1. *Their own confessions.* The words of our text are a confession, and a sorrowful one. And they have been adopted by such vineyard-keepers again and again. Before God, on their knees, they have owned how marred and faulty their work has been, owing to the ill-prepared condition of their own souls. Pastors, teachers, and all who toil for Christ, in striving to tell of him to their fellow-men, and to persuade them to come to him, have mourned—oh, how often!—that their lips have outrun their hearts; that they have uttered words to which their hearts often gave but faint response. They have declared truths which, alas! they have failed to realize. They have spoken of the love of Christ, and had but little consciousness of it within them. As we read the biographies of such men, or as, in the confidence of friendship, they confess how it has been with them, or as we think over our own experiences, who is there of us that may not make the confession of the text our own? It is the perpetual struggle of the right-minded servant of God to maintain the balance between the spoken words and the inward thought; and the struggle is never easy, but often the reverse. These facts show how real the peril is. 2. *And it is evidently possible to be guilty of that which is here said.* For words and work are both external to us, and they can be assumed and adopted even when there is but little or even no spiritual reality behind them. A man can drill himself into saying or doing almost anything. He can become official, perfunctory, and a mere actor in the way of expressing sentiments in which his soul has no share. This is a dreadful possibility, from which may God graciously deliver us all! And our Lord, and the Scriptures generally, declare and denounce such conduct. God says to the wicked in the fiftieth psalm, "What hast thou to do to declare my statutes?" It is certain, therefore, that wicked men can do this and have done it. Our Lord utters his awful warning to those who say "Lord, Lord," prophesy in his name, and in his name do many wonderful works, to whom at the last he will say, "I never knew you." Yes, God's Word is very plain as to the possibility of this sin and its fearful results. 3. *And it is without excuse.* There is no need for it. No amount of busy activity in keeping the vineyards of others need hinder our duly keeping our own. On the contrary, diligent care here will help us mightily when we strive to do good to others and to keep their vineyards. For when we remember that it is the spirit which breathes through what we say or do, rather than the words and deeds themselves, which more than aught besides influences our fellow-men, it is evident that the right cultivation of our own spiritual life is of unspeakable importance. As one has said, "A holy minister is a mighty instrument in God's hand for the conversion and sanctification of souls." Therefore whatever of time and energy we give to the keeping of our own vineyard is the very best preparation and aid in keeping the vineyards of others. Moreover: 4. *Not to give this is fatal to our work.* There is nothing men detect so soon or despise so much as unreality, want of sincerity. The words may be true and well ordered, and lit up with fine imagination and beautiful illustration; be very interesting to hear, and command rapt attention; but if they be lacking in the indispensable quality of sincerity, they will be nothing but words after all, and will have no real effect. Religion must be a reality to ourselves, or we shall never persuade others to become religious men. "Si vis me flere dolendum est." And not to be thus real ourselves is: 5. *Most perilous for our own souls.* Being so busy in keeping others' vineyards, caring for the interests of others' souls, what can we lack? Must it not be well with us? And people praise and flatter us, and count us to be all we should be: what wonder, then, that we should be deceived? And all the while the holy truths we tell of, like the heated iron that the blacksmith handles, affect us less and less; we scarcely feel them though we talk so fluently about them. And we have already referred to Scripture which make plain the mind of God on this matter. "The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination unto the Lord." Such is the perpetual language of the Word of God. May he help us to remember it, and that always!

IV. BUT IT IS A PERIL INTO WHICH THEY NEED NOT FALL. For Christ, who called us to keep and cultivate the vineyards, our own and others', which he has entrusted to our charge, will help us therein if continually we look to him. Without him, indeed, we can do nothing; but with him what cannot we do? Therefore, see to it that our souls are committed to him, that day by day we do our all unto him. Only let us abide in

him, and then all our outer service will be the natural product of our inner life; not mere fruit fastened on, but fruit grown, produced naturally by our life. And so shall we find that the inner and the outer act and react one upon the other for the mutual good of each. So, whilst we keep the vineyards of others, our own vineyard will also be kept.—S. C.

Ver. 6 (part).—*Not faithless, yet not faithful.* “They made me the keeper of the vineyards . . . kept.” Text a sorrowful confession, but it is not the most sorrowful of all. *That* will come from those who cannot say even as much as is said here. For there was, we may readily suppose, the keeping of the vineyards of others, though the speaker’s own was not kept. But the confession suggests sin of a deeper dye, a condition of things more sad than this. Let us speak of it first, and consider—

I. **THOSE WHO KEEP NEITHER**—the vineyards of others nor their own. We take (see previous homily) the vineyard to represent the soul of man. Now, we are all of us, and some especially, appointed to keep the vineyards of others—to watch and tend the spiritual interests of those entrusted to our care; such as our children, our class, our congregation. And all of us, not merely some, are appointed to keep our own vineyard, to care for our own souls. Now, our text speaks of those who did fulfil one part of this duty—they kept the vineyards of others, though they did not keep their own. But partial failure is less terrible than entire failure. And it is of this we speak; of those who keep neither the souls of others nor their own, who neglect both alike. Deplorable is it for those for whom they were appointed to care. What chance have such neglected ones? The mightiest influence that can possibly bear upon them—I speak especially of our children—the influence of parental love and care to train their souls for God, is kept back. What wonder that in such neglected vineyards “ill weeds grow apace”? But yet more deplorable will it be for those thus guilty to such neglect. What will they say when at the last great day it is asked of them what they have done with the vineyards they were appointed to keep? And of course such persons, as a rule, keep not their own vineyards. The same indifference to spiritual things which made them neglect the vineyards of others makes them neglect their own. They have no hunger after God, no thirst for the living water which Christ alone can give. They care not for any of these things. And so the rank undergrowth which the world, the flesh, and sin propagate, spreads over all their spiritual being, and over that of those whom they were appointed to keep. Godless parents have godless children; they have not sought that it should be otherwise. And the teacher who knows not Christ for himself will never persuade his class to yield themselves to Christ. And the unholy minister—ah! what will *his* congregation be? Oh, dreadful will it be for those who have kept neither the vineyards of those others that have been entrusted to them, nor their own. But our text tells especially of—

II. **THOSE WHO HAVE KEPT BUT ONE.** They have kept the vineyards of others, but not their own. Or it might have been, for it often is, the other way—They might *have kept their own, but not others’*. Let us speak of these first. There are many of them. They think only about their own poor wretched souls, and how they can make them secure. For this they keep up certain religious habits and do many things. But it is all self-contained; it is mere selfishness, for it all centres in the man’s own soul. This is the sin of the Church to-day. Its members are so busy keeping each their own vineyards that they care but very little indeed for those of others. But such selfishness brings with it its own proper punishment, as it ought to and cannot but do. “The liberal man deviseth liberal things, and by liberal things he shall stand.” But the churlish common Christianity of our day fails to devise liberal things, and therefore does *not* stand. For is it standing high in men’s esteem? Is its odour fragrant; its name, like his of whom we read in ver. 3, as “perfume poured forth”? And does it stand strongly, firmly on its faith? Is not that faith faltering in many places? and do not many fall away, and that daily? If we would have our own vineyard yield large luscious fruit to our Lord, care for the vineyards of others as well as our own. 2. But the text tells chiefly of *those who kept others and not their own*. Of this we have spoken already in the former homily. Therefore we come to speak of that most desirable and blessed condition which is found in—

III. **THOSE WHO KEEP BOTH**—the vineyards of others and their own. Yes, the one we

should do, but the other we should not leave undone. Certainly begin with your own. It may be an awful peril to begin with others. But having committed your own soul into Christ's blessed keeping, and found him your very Lord and Saviour, now go straight away and try and persuade others to do just what you have done. Then you shall find fulfilled for you that parable of reward which all nature is full of. See that running brook. How merrily it rattles over the pebbles that form its bed, as it speeds away to render up its little tribute to the larger river, which will bear it on to the great and wide sea at last! The merry pond hard by the brook sneers at it, and says, "You haven't got so much water that you can afford to let it all run away in that wasteful fashion; you should take care of what you have got as I do." But the brook took no heed, and went on singing merrily just as before. And the hot summer came round at last, when, lo! the pond was dried up almost to its last puddle; but the brook went on as before, bright and clear and merry, sparkling and dancing along its appointed way. And we all know the reason why. The brook gave up its strength to the river, and that to the sea; but the sea gave back in vapour all that she had received, and so the fountains from which the brook flowed forth were filled again, and the brook was glad and not sorry that she had given her strength to others, for now her waters had not failed like those of the pond, but were renewed to her day by day. And so, when the water of life flows into our souls, if we let it flow out again to bless the souls of others, be sure that he who first gave us of this grace will give us yet more grace, and we shall find that there is that which scattereth and yet increaseth. The life of the merry healthful child spends itself in the vigorous activity of which it never seems to tire; but that active exercise replenishes the child's life, and it makes increase in strength daily. So, then, as to the vineyards of your own soul and those of others, resolve and pray that you may not be found amongst those who keep neither. Pray, too, that you be not so unhappy as to be a keeper of but one, and especially if that one be not your own. But let this last condition of which we have been telling be yours. Keep your own vineyard *and* your brother's too.—S. C.

Ver. 8.—*How to find God.* The daughters of Jerusalem—the inmates of Solomon's harem—who scornfully addressed these words to the faithful girl who was mourning after her beloved, never meant to utter a great spiritual truth when they thus spoke; any more than Caiaphas did when he said, "It is expedient that one man die for the people." The doctrine of the atonement is in that Caiaphas-speech; and so, sacred suggestions for souls that seek their Lord are found in these words of Jerusalem's daughters. The parallel passage, or comment on this verse, is Heb. xi. 12, "Be ye followers of them who through faith," etc. Now, it is suggested by this verse that if we would find God—

I. WE MUST GO FORTH. (Cf. Heb. xiii. 13, "Let us go forth unto him," etc.) We cannot stay (1) in the world; or (2) in any known sin; or (3) amid the common religionism of the day.

II. OUR WAY MUST BE THE WAY OF THE LORD'S TRUE PEOPLE. We must go by "the footsteps of the flock." As to who the flock are, cf. John x. They are the true sheep of Christ; those whom he calls "my sheep." They consist not of those who are indifferent, still less strangers, and, least of all, hostile to him; but of those who have followed him, and do follow him "whithersoever he goeth." It is good, oftentimes, when we are in doubt as to what we should do, to ask ourselves what some sincere follower of Christ whom we have known would have done in like circumstances. Such people leave footprints, and they are clearly discernible, and if we track them we shall come where they are.

III. WE MUST FEED OUR SOULS UPON THE WORDS OF THE LORD'S SHEPHERDS. (Cf. Heb. xiii. 7, "Remember those who have the rule over you, who have spoken unto you the Word of God," etc.) Such words are spoken in the Scriptures, and from many a Christian pulpit, and they who seek the Lord have ever found strength and help in the preaching of the Lord's true pastors. It is easy to joke and jibe at the pulpit, and to say it is time that it were put away amidst old lumber; but let the pulpit be filled by a real Christ-given pastor, the words that are uttered from it shall still feed the flock of God. But especially let us feed upon the Word of him who is "the good Shepherd." We shall never find him whom we seek unless we obey these counsels.

IV. THOSE WHO WOULD THUS FIND HIM ARE VERY DEAR TO HIM. The speaker had addressed him as "thou whom my soul loveth," and now he addresses her as the "fairest among women." She had said of herself, "I am black," but he says to her, "Thou fairest," etc. All this suggests what so many Scriptures teach as to the children of God being "beautiful" in his sight, and as to his rejoicing over them.—S. O.

Ver. 9—ch. ii. 7.—*Love assailed, but steadfast.* According to the interpretation we have taken of this poem, Solomon is here introduced as endeavouring to win the maiden's consent to become his wife by flatteries and promises of rich gifts of jewels and adornments; but he altogether fails. The above-named subject is therefore suggested. Note, therefore—

I. LOVE ASSAILED. 1. *By flatteries.* Solomon compares her to whom he is speaking to the "horses of Pharaoh's chariot." This comparison is not so coarse as it sounds. It was not unusual amongst the ancients to compare beautiful women to splendid horses (cf. Exposition). The ideas intended are those of grace in form and movement, courage, generosity, rare beauty. Then (ver. 15) he tells her that her eyes are like "doves' eyes." Then (ch. ii. 2) he disparages all other women in comparison with her. They are as thorns, whilst she is amongst them as the lily. All this is just such flattery as Solomon may be well conceived as employing. And it suggests how the soul affianced in God is often assailed. The world seeks to flatter it, that so it may be the more readily bent to evil. What is the self-satisfaction, the pride, the serene content with itself, in which many souls are weak, but just the effects of the world's flatteries? Satan suggests them to the soul, and his servants repeat them continually, and his victims believe them. Flattery, what harm has it not wrought? So seductive, so powerful, so ruinous always when listened to. If we believe what the world, the flesh, and the devil whisper to us about ourselves and our own excellences, such as they are, we shall never think we need the grace of God, or, if for a while we have thought so, we shall soon give up such thoughts altogether. 2. *By promises that the world makes of its pomps, adornments, and wealth.* So Solomon here tries to win her to whom he speaks. "Rows of jewels," for head-dress, strings of pearls for her neck, gold chains studded with silver (vers. 10, 11). Such gewgaws and finery would he give her. Homer tells ('Odyssey,' lib. xv.) how attractive and tempting such things are—

"A man of theirs, subtle and shrewd, produced
A splendid collar, gold with amber strung,
With deep delight my mother and her maids
Gazed on it."

And thus Solomon appealed to the natural love of adornment in a young maiden all unused to such rich presents. How many a woman's heart has been won by them! how the love of them has made many a home miserable by the extravagance to which they have been the temptation! how many a fair character has been blasted and lives ruined by their deceitful glitter! And are not such facts parables of one of the chief temptations of the soul, whereby it is sought to seduce it from God? Jewels and pearls and gold, how they flash and sparkle! how they dazzle and delight poor human nature! Types are they of more terrible things still—the pomps and vanities of this wicked world, for the sake of which all too many men are only too ready to sell their souls. How Moses was tempted by them! How brilliant was the career offered him! he, the cast-out child of a slave, to be adopted into the house and family, the possessions and honours, of the imperial dynasty, the Pharaohs of Egypt! How our Lord was tempted in like manner! "All these things"—all the kingdoms of the world and the glory of them—"will I give thee if," etc.

II. LOVE STEADFAST. Solomon did not prevail with her whom he tried to win. All his flatteries and fineries failed. Not one word such as the royal tempter would fain have heard did she address to him, though many to her absent beloved. As showing her steadfastness, note here: 1. *How at once her heart turns to him she loved.* (Ver. 12.) The king has left her alone, has gone to his banquet. At once the sweet memories of her beloved fill her soul as with the fragrance of myrrh (ver. 13). "While the king is in his circle, my spikenard sendeth forth," etc. Her heart is always perfumed with

these memories, and is bright therewith as well as fragrant, as with fair flowers and myrrh. 2. See, too, how *she transfers all praise from herself to him*. The king had told her she was fair (ver. 15). Her thoughts fly away to him whom she loves, and she gives the praise to him (ver. 16). 3. And her love *consecrates all the scenes* where she has been with him. The soft green turf (ver. 16), on which they had cast themselves down beneath the cedars and fir trees, whose branches over them were as the beams and rafters of a house. 4. And makes her *think all lowliness of herself but very loftiness of him*. She is—so she says—but as a common field-flower (cf. ch. ii. 1), just nothing at all. But he, her beloved, was as the citron tree, fragrant, stately, fruitful, affording refreshing shade (ver. 3). Travellers tell of the beauty of this tree. And amid the leafy arcades of the vine, and beneath its o'erarching branches, she had loved to linger with him (ver. 4); for with him, because of his dear love for her, she was safe as if under the protection of an army, following the banners of a mighty chief. 5. *And these are ever the effects of a steadfast love*. "Not I, but the grace of God which was in me:" so does Paul transfer praise from himself to God. Places where fellowship with Christ have been enjoyed are consecrated by that fact. And love is lowly. "Less than the least of all saints:" so speaks Paul of himself. But of Christ, what does he not say of him? What is not Christ to him, and all such? Fruit, and shade, and safeguard sure.

III. THE SECRET OF ALL THIS. The heart possessed by the love of Christ. There is no other antidote that will serve as does this against the flatteries and the bribes of the world. Nothing else will make us so deaf to its appeals, so blind to all its blandishments.

"Lord, let thy fear within us dwell,
Thy love our footsteps guide;
That love shall all vain love expel,
That fear all fear beside."

S. C.

Vers. 9—11, 15.—*Characteristics of those whom Christ loves*. We need not mind who said what is written in these verses; or why it was said, according to their literal interpretation. But we may consider what is said, for it is true of all people who are "of the Lord beloved."

I. THEY ARE HIS BELOVED. This more than justice; for that would have regarded them as they were in themselves—the reverse of well-pleasing to him. It is more than mercy; for that, though it may have spared the wrong-doer, would not have received him into affection. It is grace abounding. And Christ does thus regard his people. "Henceforth I call you not servants, but friends." What rich store of consolation to all cast-down souls there is in this!

II. THEY ARE AS "A COMPANY OF HORSES IN PHARAOH'S CHARIOT." (Cf. Zech. x. 3, "The Lord hath visited his flock, and hath made them as his goodly horse in the day of battle.") And such comparison is frequent both in the Scriptures and in the ordinary literature of that age. In this song the ideas intended are their alacrity and vigour, swiftness, strength, grace, courage, etc. The image suggests: 1. *The alacrity and vigour of the believer's service*. (Cf. Ps. cxix., "I will run in the way of thy commandments when thou shalt enlarge my heart.") And what so enlarges the heart, so causes it to swell with delightful emotion, as the consciousness that the Lord's love rests upon us. 2. *Their courage*. (Cf. Job's description of the battle-horse—how he "paweth in the valley," and "rejoiceth in his strength," "mocketh at fear, and is not affrighted;" "suffereth the quiver to rattle against him, the glittering spear and the shield.") And how often the dauntless courage, of which the horse is a symbol, has been found in God's servants (cf. Daniel; the three Hebrew youths; Paul; and many more)! Think of the martyrs who

"Mocked the cross and flame,
They met the tyrant's brandished steel,
The lion's gory mane."

And in less marked and tragic, but in equally real way, has this courage been shown—is shown—in our own day. Illustrate: Arthur kneeling in prayer before the whole

room at Rugby (see 'Tom Brown's School-days'). And such courage is yet needed, and, thank God, is yet found. 3. *The exquisite symmetry of form* for which the choicest Arabian steeds were famous tells of that *moral symmetry* and harmoniousness of character which will one day, and should now, distinguish his Church and people. It is the same idea as in St. Paul's image of the symmetry of the perfected Church. Hence he tells of its "breadth, and length, and depth, and height," which "all saints" are to "comprehend," because they shall share in and exhibit it. 4. *His people's unity* is also suggested by the comparison with "a company" of horses. The Church is militant here upon earth, and therefore the idea of a war-chariot is appropriate. But the company of steeds who draw it, are they not so esteemed because of their ordered obedience? Not struggling hither and thither as each wills, nor each struggling to get its own way and so pulling in different directions. Alas! it is a sarcasm to liken the Church of our day to "a company of horses in Pharaoh's chariot." Would to God it were not, and that what is may not much longer be!

III. THEY ARE BEAUTIFUL WITH ADORNMENTS. (Ver. 10; cf. Prov. i. 8, 9, "My son hear, . . . For they shall be an ornament of grace unto thy head, and chains about thy neck.") What, therefore, these adornments are is evident. They are the graces wrought by the Spirit; what St. Paul calls, "the fruits of the Spirit"—love, joy, peace, etc. These are the golden links of the chain, added one by one, each connected with and dependent on its fellow. Frequently is the adornment of the soul set forth in Scripture under the imagery of the adornment of the body. We read of "the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit," etc. And thus Christ will array his Church and each individual believing soul.

IV. THEY SHALL RECEIVE "GRACE FOR GRACE;" that is, grace upon grace—grace in addition to grace already given (cf. ver. 11, "We will make thee," etc.). And this is so. We are bidden "grow in grace;" and the soul does thus advance, does receive more and more of those beautiful adornments which are the Spirit's workmanship, those good works for which we were created in Christ Jesus.

V. THE LOVELINESS OF THE HOLY SPIRIT IS SEEN IN THEM. This the suggestion of ver. 15, "Thine eyes are doves." We read of the "evil" eye (Matt. xx. 15); of "eyes full of adultery" (2 Pet. ii. 14); and of the "high look and proud heart" (Ps. ci. 5). But what a contrast to all these have we here! Eyes of gentleness, of purity, of heavenly-mindedness; eyes through which the Holy Spirit—whose chosen emblem is the dove—looks and is seen. What a description! Would that all we who profess and call ourselves Christians corresponded to it far more than we do!—S. C.

Ver. 12.—*Holy Communion.* The form of expression in this verse has suggested thoughts on this theme to so many devout students of this book that, whilst not admitting their interpretation as correct, we may nevertheless avail ourselves of such suggestions in order to set forth some precious and important truths concerning it—the soul's communion with Christ. And we note—

I. THE ORDINANCES OF THE GOSPEL ARE CHRIST'S TABLE. (Cf. Rev. iii. 20, "If any man will open the door, I will come in to him, and sup with him, and he with me.") In such communion we have the "feast of fat things full of marrow" of which the prophet speaks (cf. also our Lord's words, "Come, for all things are ready; my oxen," etc.). Now, such communion is had : 1. *In prayer.* Not mere saying prayers, but in true prayer. 2. *In the worship of the Church.* How often have we found this to be so! On the sabbath, and in the sanctuary, how often we have there found that

"The cares which infest our day
Have folded their tents, like the Arabs,
And as silently steal away!"

3. *The table of the Lord* is especially the King's table. Hence to our service there the name of "holy communion" has been pre-eminently given. All these are opportunities of such communion, and were designed so to be. But—

II. THEIR VALIDITY AND VALUE DEPEND ON THE KING'S PRESENCE. "While the King sitteth," etc. How poor and wretched are our prayers if there be no realization of the presence of Christ! And the worship of the Church, what an empty form! And

at the table of the Lord not to "discern the Lord's body," that is to make the service worse than useless; it is to incur his judgment and condemnation. Let us never come to this or to any season of communion without invoking his presence.

III. AND ARE MANIFESTED BY THEIR EFFECTS. "While . . . my spikenard sendeth forth," etc. "It is in seasons of communion with the Lord that the graces of the Spirit are called forth in most lively exercise." A holy fragrance, a "sweet smell," well-pleasing and acceptable, is yielded at such seasons by the heart of the Lord's servants. And: 1. *To the Lord himself.* Our prayers rise up before him "as incense, and the lifting up of our hands as the evening sacrifice." He is well pleased. He told Nathanael, "When thou wast under the fig tree I saw thee;" there, where he had poured forth his fervent prayer. And in our assemblies for worship, where that worship is real, the Lord loveth such "gates of Zion." Of such worshippers it is written, "The Lord hearkened and heard, and a book of remembrance was written before him." And of them he says, "They shall be mine in that day when I make up my jewels." And at his table, if we do indeed commune with him, the faith and hope and love, the contrition and humility and self-surrender, all which the soul then and there offers to him, these are fragrant indeed, sweet and precious as were the anointings of his sacred body by the penitent Magdalen and by Mary of Bethany. 2. *And many others* are conscious of, and share in that fragrance. Our fellow-guests. What a source of true blessing and manifold help to any Church is the presence of those who live in constant communion with their Lord! What a hallowed influence such exert! what real good they do! Like their Lord's, in their measure and degree, the name of such is "as ointment poured forth." And all those with whom such persons have to do—their children, servants, neighbours, associates, and the world generally—will, as it was with the apostles, "take knowledge of them that they have been with Jesus." 3. *And they themselves are blessed.* For is it not good to have all that is pure and holy and Christ-like in us quickened, confirmed, strengthened, as is the case through communion with our Lord? Moses' face shone after he had been in the presence of the Lord. The spiritual help which comes to the real worshipper is so great, and has always been so recognized, that for the sake of having opportunity for such communion Christ's people have risked everything. If they would only have kept their religion to themselves no one would have said anything; but they would not. They would come together for worship and for communion; and hence, all over the world, they have been led "as sheep to the slaughter," and for Christ's sake they "have been slain all the day long." What proof and evidence this is of the real blessedness of communion with Christ! May he help us to add each one our testimony to this same sure truth!—S. C.

Vers. 13, 14.—*What Christ is to his people.* He is here said to be as—

I. *"A BUNDLE OF MYRRH."* See Exposition for explanation of ancient customs alluded to by this "bundle," or small box, or other such receptacle for perfumes. Its religious teachings are such as arise from the fact that: 1. *Myrrh was used in the "anointing oil"* with which Aaron and the priests were anointed. It was "the oil of gladness" with which Christ was anointed above his fellows (cf. Ps. cxxiii. 2). The teaching, therefore, is that Christ is the Joy of his people. Cf. "Then will I go unto the altar of God, unto God my exceeding Joy" (Ps. xliii. 4). Then: 2. *Myrrh was largely used for incense.* Cf. in the Revelation the vision of the angel to whom "was given much incense." It represented the acceptableness of the prayers of God's saints. And it is Christ's Name that gives worth and validity to our poor prayers. We join them on to his all-availing intercession, and we find ourselves "accepted in the Beloved." 3. *Myrrh was used for embalming*, so as to prevent corruption and decay. And this is just what Christ is to us. He prevents the moral corruption which would destroy our souls having power over them. It would fasten upon them as it does on those in whom Christ is not; but he arrests its power, and preserves our souls in life. And he will, he does, stay the corruption of the grave. That does, indeed, fasten on the poor cast-off garment of the soul; but on the soul itself Christ suffers corruption to have no power, for he clothes it with the spiritual body, so that "mortality is swallowed up of life," and "this corruptible puts on incorruption." But note: 4. In order to be all this to us, *he must ever abide in our hearts.* (Cf. "He shall lie always on my bosom.") So

speaks the maiden who is the type of the believing, Christ-loving soul. Can we each, then, say of Christ, "He is 'my Beloved'?" If so, we may go on and say, "He is unto me as myrrh."

II. "A CLUSTER OF CAMPHIRE." (Ver. 14.) Such flowers were used for the decoration of rooms and for personal adornment. It is not easy to fix what precise flower is meant. We are told its habitat, but not its special characteristics, amongst the many flowers amid which it is found. But its name is very significant. It is the same word that elsewhere is rendered "propitiation," or "atonement." The Jewish rabbis took it as a type of the Messiah. Hence they rendered this verse thus: "My beloved is unto me the man who propitiates all things." And is not this a most true and beautiful rendering? For is not this just what our blessed Lord does for us? Is not his cross the antitype of that tree which Moses had shown to him, and which, when he had cast it into the bitter waters of Marah, made those waters sweet? The cross of Christ is the sweetener of life's bitter waters. Well, therefore, might the flower which bore the name of "the propitiation" be taken as telling of him. Is it not he who, by his grace, propitiates the worries and cares of life, so that they no longer irk and fret my will; and the perplexities and mysteries I everywhere meet with, so that they no longer bewilder and beat down my faith; and the temptations which would defile my soul, so that they no more work me such harm; and the sin for which I might have been condemned, so that it is silent for ever against me; and the grave and its corruption, so that they will not hold me therein? True, his gracious work is done on me; but it is as if the mouths of the lions themselves were stopped, so powerless to do me harm are they if Christ be to me my Propitiation. Oh, most sweet and blessed flower! May it ever beautify my home, my life, my heart!—S. C.

Vers. 16, 17, and ch. ii. 4.—*The house of the Lord.* Before the soul delightedly tells of the house of her Lord, she speaks—

I. OF THE LORD OF THE HOUSE. She declares not only that he is fair, but pleasant also. How many of his people fail here! Some are fair, but not pleasant. Some are pleasant, but not fair. Alas! some are neither. But of him supremely can it be said that he is fair and pleasant. Not only fair in outward seeming, but pleasant in his spirit, temper, and demeanour.

II. OF HIS HOUSE. The soul says "our" in speaking of his abode. And so closely are we united with him, that his people may, though out of reverence they seldom do, speak of that which is his as theirs also. The picture drawn in these verses (16, 17) is one of rural delight—the soft and verdant turf, the o'erarching and umbrageous trees, the noble cedar, the stately fir, beneath which those spoken of have cast themselves down. The ideas suggested are those of happy rest. Ps. xxiii., "Thou makest me to lie down in green pastures," etc., tells substantially of the same spiritual rest. And the house of the Lord is the place of such blessed rest of heart and soul and mind. Because of this, we find those many impassioned expressions in the Psalms as to the psalmist's delight in the house of the Lord; how he had rather be a doorkeeper there than hold any place of worldly honour or pleasure, however exalted (Ps. lxxiv.). The agitations and cares of the mind hush themselves to rest there. The psalmist tells in one place how the mystery of the Divine rule over men—wicked men often prospering and good men cast down—how this distressed, dismayed, and all but destroyed his faith in God, "until," he says, "I went into the sanctuary; then I understood." Yes, the house of the Lord should be, and often is to his people, what this beautiful picture of rest on the green grass, beneath the cool, refreshing shade of fragrant and stately trees, presents to us—a place of pure delight, rest, and refreshment of heart.

III. ITS PROVISIONS. It is a "banqueting-house." It is so when the Lord brings us there and is with us there (cf. on ver. 12).

IV. ITS DEFENCE. "His banner over me is love." That is, the soul's protection and guard, so sure and strong as that of a banner-led host, is the Lord's love. Is it not so? What guards us there and everywhere but his love? What is the defence of the home but the father's love? What the safeguard of the wife but her husband's love? Love is always a mighty protector, a sure defence, a strong bulwark. "How doth the hen protect her brood," but by her love? And love ever guards the beloved ones. And so with our souls, the Lord's love is their defence.—S. C.

Vers. 1—4.—*The Bridegroom and the bride.* Love's native language is poetry. When strong and happy feeling dominates the soul, it soon bursts into a song. As young life in a fruit tree breaks out into leaf and blossom, so the spiritual force of love unfolds in metaphor and music. Among the lyrics composed by King David, those which celebrate the Messiah-Prince have the richest glory of fervour, blossom most into Oriental imagery; and inasmuch as Solomon inherited somewhat the poetic genius of his father, it was natural that he should pour out in mystic song the heart-throb of a nation's hopes. The deep and inseparable union between Christ and his saints is by no one set forth so clearly as by Jesus the Christ; hence love is strong and tender, because love's Object is noble, winsome, kingly, Divine.

I. THE BRIDEGROOM'S CHARMS. 1. *The love of Christ is incomparably precious.* "Thy love is better than wine." All true love is precious—a sacred thing, a mighty force. The love of Jesus is absolutely perfect, without any admixture of alloy. Love is the mightiest force in the universe, a magnet whose attractive power reaches from the throne of God to the very gates of hell. And love is as precious as it is potent. It makes a desert into a paradise; changes base metal into gold; transforms foul rebels into loving sons. It is a banquet for the heart; a perpetual feast; a fountain of purest joy. What the rarest wine is for a fainting body, *that* the love of Jesus is to a burdened soul. 2. *The love of Christ is diffusive.* It is as "unguent poured forth." The love of God's Son existed long before it was manifested. That love is seen in all the arrangements of creation. That love is unfolded in all the methods of daily providence. "By him all things consist." That love is shed abroad in the believer's heart "by the Holy Ghost." As the flowers in our gardens pour out their essential life in their sweet fragrance, so the love of Christ is Christ's life poured out for us. All the love which angels cherish is Christ's love diffused. He is the "Firstborn of the creation of God." All the parental love that has ever glowed on the altar of human hearts is the love of Christ diffused. All practical benevolence for the well-being of mankind is the outflow of Immanuel's love. The love that constrains me to compassionate deeds and to intercessory prayers is the love of Christ diffused. Discovering the heavenly savour inspires our hearts with joy. Heaven is knit with silken cords to earth. 3. *The love of Christ is condescending and gracious.* "The King hath brought me into his chambers." Had we been told that God admitted into his presence-chamber the unsinning angels, we should not have been so profoundly moved. They are meet for his service. But to admit the base and degenerate sons of men into his intimate friendship, *this* reflects a singular glory upon his kindness; this is a miracle of love. By such familiar intercourse he trains us in kingly conduct, communicates to us Divine wisdom, moulds us into his own image. Beyond this deed of grace not even God can go. As there was no depth of humiliation to which he was not willing to stoop for sinners, so there is no height of excellence from which he would exclude us. Such love no human thought can measure. It is higher than heaven: how shall we scale it? It is deeper than hell: how shall we fathom it?

II. THE BRIDE'S RESPONSE. 1. *Her love originates in the high renown of his love.* "*Thy Name* is as ointment poured forth." So long as this strong force of love was confined within the heart of Christ, no human soul could suspect its existence. On what ground could any dweller on earth conjecture or imagine that he was the object of Immanuel's love? That love must be unfolded, declared, made clearly known. And this is what Jesus has done. Not content with warm protestations of his affection, he has stooped to perform impressive deeds of kindness—yea, prodigies of compassion. All the romantic stories of heroic love Jesus has immeasurably surpassed. His renown is sung in all the courts of the heavenly palace. He has made for himself a "Name above every name," human or angelic. This high reputation warrants our approach, our admiration, our trust, our responsive love. "We love him, because he has first loved us." 2. *Our love craves a closer fellowship with his Person.* "Draw me!" We have made such discoveries of excellence in our Immanuel that we long for larger acquaintance. To us he is a vast mine of spiritual wealth, and the deeper we go the rarer jewels do we find. His charms seem infinite, and no fear troubles us that we shall exhaust them. We are troubled that our own love is so inadequate, so unworthy; hence we desire a closer approach, that his spiritual beauty may quicken our languid affection. Feeling the magnetic power of his love, we too may be magnetized. We

cannot command, by a mere volition or a mere resolve, that our love shall flow out. So the only way to intensify our love is by coming into fuller contact with his. Only life can generate life, and only the love of Christ can stir into activity the principle of true love in us. Therefore we pray, "Draw us into nearer fellowship, into more vital union!" 3. *Our love desires a prompt obedience.* "We will run after thee." We love to walk in his footsteps, and when we discover where his haunts lie, we run to seek him there. So sincere is our love, that we long to do his will promptly and heartily. We wish to hear every whisper of his commands. We deprecate that anything on our part should chase the smiles from his face. We long that his thoughts may be *our* thoughts, his dispositions *our* dispositions, his purposes *our* purposes; so that between Christ and us there may be perfect concord. As said Ruth to Naomi, so say we, "Whither thou goest, I will go; and where thou dwellest, I will dwell." We can do without food, we can do without friends, we can do without health, but we cannot do without Christ. Wrote Samuel Rutherford to a friend, "If hell-fire stood between you and Christ, you would press through in order to reach him." All service is delight when the feet are winged by love. 4. *Love brings us into the best society.* "The upright love thee." The love that draws the best men near to Christ likewise draws them near each other. As the spokes of a wheel get near to the hub they get into closer proximity to each other. The more love we give out the more substantial good we get. The friendship of the pious is a precious treasure; their wisdom enlightens, their piety stimulates, their love enkindles, ours. In their society we are elevated and gladdened. The story of their experience inspires us for new endeavour; their triumphs awaken our most sacred ambitions. With Moses, we learn meekness; with Elijah, we learn how to pray; with Job, we learn endurance; with Martin Luther, we learn courage. The society of saints throws into the shade the society of sages or of kings. 5. *Love treasures up the recollection of past favours.* "We will remember thy love more than wine." What Jesus Christ has done for us in the past he will do again. Since his love is infinite, he has not exhausted his love-tokens in the past; he has more costly things yet to give, richer dainties yet to place on his banquet-table. Still, there are times when we cannot realize a present Saviour, when the conscious possession of his love is suspended, and at such times it is a cordial to our spirits to bring out the memorials and tokens of past affection. Our memory is a vast chamber, hung round with ten thousand mementoes of Immanuel's love. Thus, in a dark hour of depression, King David sang, "Yet will I remember thee from the land of Jordan, and of the hill Mizar." In winter's dark days we will feast upon the fruits of well-remembered summer. 6. *Love creates the purest joy.* "We will be glad and rejoice in thee." Joy arises when a felt want is satisfied; but so long as we are sensible of needs and cravings for which no supply is at hand we are miserable. A thirsty man upon a scorching desert, leagues removed from any well, is a stranger to gladness. The misery of lost spirits, doubtless, arises from passionate cravings for which there is no supply. On the other hand, when we can feel that Christ is ours—ours in bonds which nothing can sever—we feel that every want is met, every ambition is realized, every aspiration fulfilled. "Then shall I be satisfied, when I awake, in thy likeness." Therefore, although outward surroundings may tend to depress, we can always find in the fulness of Christ sources of hope and joy. "With him is the fountain of life."—D.

Vers. 5, 6.—*Low estimate of self.* A genuine Christian will take a modest estimate of himself. "He has learnt not to think more highly of himself than he ought to think." Many Christians undervalue themselves; and though this practice is not so obnoxious in the eyes of others as over-valuation, yet this also is a fault. It is better to pass no judgment on ourselves; it is seldom called for; it is often a folly.

I. EXTERNAL BLEMISH. "I am black." 1. *This blemish (if it be one) is very superficial; it is only skin-deep.* A strong comparison is employed to convey more vividly the impression—"black as the tents of Kedar." These were manufactured from camel's hair, and, from long exposure to sun and dew, were in colour a dingy black. So when a Christian views himself as he appears externally to others, he sees, perhaps, his ignorance, his poverty, his imperfections, his obscurity, the contempt with which he is regarded by others. If the heavenly Friend should view him only in his

outward appearance, he is devoid of attraction, destitute of ordinary beauty. 2. *This blemish arises from the hard treatment of others.* "My mother's children were angry with me; they made me keeper of the vineyards." Compulsion was used. The speaker had been coerced into employment which was menial and exhausting. It demanded long exposure to scorching sun and to chilling dews. The effect was to mar the beauty of the countenance. Yet the eye of love would detect beneath the surface a richer beauty—the beauty of patient obedience and un murmuring submission. Men of the world may oppress and persecute; they cannot injure character. Earthly kings and magistrates may scourge and imprison the bride of Christ; they may despoil her of much external comeliness; but in the eye of reason—in the eye of God—she is more comely than before. Only the dross is consumed; real excellence of soul comes clearer into view. 3. *Or this may be a real blemish through self-neglect.* "My own vineyard have I not kept." Possibly, in the endurance of such hardships, it might have been possible to escape the blemish. Suitable precautions were not taken. Under stress of cruel compulsion, there had been a feeling of self-abandonment—a weak yielding to despair. It is hard to maintain a heavenly temper under daily provocations; yet it can be done. It is hard to cultivate the Christian graces amid scenes of suffering and mockery; yet it ought to be done. The King Omnipotent has said, "My grace is sufficient for thee." We shall render the most faithful and useful service to others when we maintain in vigour our own piety. The healthful face of a holy character must under no circumstances be neglected.

II. INTERNAL BEAUTY. Though black (*i.e.* sun-browned), she was yet "comely"—yea, beauteous "as the curtains of Solomon." Likely enough, there is in this poetic drama a conversation, the parts of which are not distinctly marked. Likely enough, the daughters of Jerusalem here interject the remarks, "comely;" "as the curtains of Solomon." 1. *The judgment of others respecting us is often more equitable than self-judgment.* Some persons, confessedly, have a sad habit of overrating their virtues; but others are diffident and over-modest—they are given to self-deprecation. Through a jealousy for truth, or through a fear of self-delusion, they underrate their real goodness. As we can judge the merit of a painting or a statue a little distance removed, so a judicious onlooker can often more accurately judge us than we can judge ourselves. It is better for our comfort and for our usefulness neither to under-rate nor to overrate ourselves. Very precious is the inward spirit of truth. 2. *Internal beauty is preferable to external.* It is not so apparent to the eye of man, but it is more prized by God, by angels, and by the best class of men. It is superior in itself, because it belongs to the soul. It is more influential for good. It brings more joy to the possessor. It is permanent, and outlasts all changes of time and pain and death. The genuine Christian may be poor in earthly wealth, but he is endowed with the treasures of heaven. He may wear coarse and homespun apparel, yet his soul is clothed in a robe of perfect righteousness. His face may be marred with suffering and ploughed with the effects of arduous toil, yet is he comely with holiness and beautified by the hand of the great Artificer. 3. *Internal beauty is obtained through self-sacrificing service.* The bride was really comely, though she had been compelled to work, like a slave, in the vineyards; yea, she was comely in character, as the result of this toil. Very true is it that no persecution can injure us; it brings, sooner or later, real advantage. The noblest characters have been fashioned and burnished in the furnace of suffering. Even of the Son of God we are told that "he learned obedience by the things which he suffered." The statue is not perfected until it has felt ten thousand strokes of the chisel. The diamond does not sparkle at its best until it has been well cut on the wheel of the lapidary. The pearl of great price is the fruit of pain. The verdict of experience records, "It was good for me that I was afflicted." Suffering is God's lancet, whereby he produces health. A vital lesson is here taught. Without personal piety there can be no permanent usefulness. A man's character is the mightiest instrument for recovering and elevating others. If we long to see the vineyards of others fair and fruitful, our own vineyard must be a pattern of good culture. Our first duty is respecting ourselves. If we are full of light, we can lead others along the path to heaven. Personal holiness is the great desideratum.—D.

Vers. 7—9.—*Seeking and finding.* The Christian pilgrim has to pass through a

variety of fortunes in his passage to the celestial city. His fluctuations of joy and sorrow, hope and fear, resemble an April day. Sunshine alternates with storm. *Now* he is on the mountain-top; *now* in the valley of humiliation. *Now* he looks into his Master's face, and sees a smile of heavenly love; *now* that gracious face is hid, like the sun during eclipse.

I. WE HAVE A SENSE OF DESERTION. This is a matter of personal feeling, not an external reality. God does not undergo any change, nor does he ever forsake his friends. But it sometimes happens that we cease to realize our vital interest in Jesus; we lose for a season the enjoyment of his favours. The sun is as near the earth—yea, nearer—in December as in June; yet, because our northern hemisphere is turned away from the sun, flowers do not bloom, nor do fruits ripen, on our side the globe. So we may unintentionally have drifted away from Christ; our hearts may have flagged in devotion or in zeal; the bloom of our love may have vanished; some cloud of earthliness may have intervened, some mist of doubt may have risen up, and we no longer see the radiant face of our Beloved. In proportion to our appreciation of our heart's best Friend will be the sorrow we shall endure. No earthly good will compensate for the loss. No other joy can take its place. It seems as if the natural sun were veiled; as if earth were clad in mourning; as if all music had ceased, because Jesus is not a Guest in the soul.

II. HERE, NOTWITHSTANDING, THERE IS AN UNDER-CURRENT OF HOPE. We find yet, within the soul, strong love to Jesus, although we no longer realize his love to us. This is solid comfort; for it is evident that our love is real, and not simply a desire for self-advantage. It is not a refined form of selfishness, inasmuch as our love to him abides, although it brings no enjoyment. And we still perceive and appreciate his office. We still regard him as the great Shepherd of the sheep. As such he will not allow a single lamb to stray. It is the part of a good shepherd to care for each member of the flock, and to restore the wanderer. Though we no longer bask in the sunshine of his favour, we are sure that others do, and we love him for his compassion to them. Further, we are sure that he is not far away. He is busy with his flock, feeding them, caring for their needs; so we will seek him out. We will not sullenly wait until he shall come to us; we will search for him, for we are sure that he will approve our search. If we heartily desire him, this is hopeful.

III. WE HAVE ALSO AN EAGER INQUIRY. "Tell me where thou feedest, where thou makest thy flock to rest at noon." So fully conscious is the soul of its loss and injury, that it longs to end this sad experience. Its main difficulty is what to do, what step to take. No hindrance in the way of finding Jesus shall be allowed to remain. If we have been guilty of any misdeed or neglect, we will confess it honestly. One question only perplexes us—Where shall we find our Well-beloved? We want information, guidance, light. Yet this same Jesus is our All in all. He is our Light. He will reveal himself. In due time he will give us light. So we speak to him directly, and we employ a very discreet argument: "For why should I be as one that turneth aside by the flocks of thy companions?" In other words, "Why should I seek for satisfaction elsewhere but in thee?" If I seek, I shall find only disappointment. These fancied joys will be as apples of Sodom, as the grapes of Gomorrah. I must have *some* object on whom to expend my love. Let it be no other object, no inferior object, than thyself. Only show me *thy* chosen haunt, and I will find thee out. Distance shall be annihilated. Mountains shall be levelled.

IV. A GRACIOUS RESPONSE. "Go thy way forth by the footsteps of the flock, and feed thy kids beside the shepherds' tents." Prayer for light is especially acceptable to God. In him is no darkness, and nothing is further from him than to keep us in darkness. Most of all does he delight in the prayer which yearns after him. It has been his business all through the past eternity to reveal himself, and to come into nearer union with the human soul; hence our prayer is only the echo of his own wish, our desire is *his* desire, and response is ready. How tender is his rebuke of our ignorance! "If thou know not." It is as if he said, "Yet surely you ought to know. You have found the way to me aforetime. It is the same way still, for I change not." Or, "If thou canst not find the way to me directly, then act as my friends act. Learn from the successes of others. I have instructed others how to find me. They have found me, and now they are patterns and helpers for all seekers. Observe the 'footsteps

of the flock.'” If we are earnest in our search after Christ, we shall use all and every means likely to ensure our success. Very often it is not more light we want, but a humble and diligent readiness to use the light we have. Unfaithfulness to our light is a common failing. The instruments employed to convey the electric current must be scrupulously clean, and every law must be delicately observed, or the mystic force refuses to act. Our spiritual sensibilities are far more delicate, and a neglect, which may seem minute or insignificant, will defeat our purpose, and rob us of our joy. They who desire intimate fellowship with Jesus must be companions of the friends of Jesus, and must learn lessons in the humblest school. The footprints of other pilgrims we must carefully note and faithfully follow. Jesus is no respecter of persons. Others have found him: why should not we? They have not exhausted his love; they have merely tasted a sip of the infinite ocean. I may, if I will, drink more deeply than any mortal yet has done.—D.

Vers. 12—17.—*Reciprocal esteem.* Love, manifested and known, will always beget love. As every plant has in its womb seed of its own kind, so, too, love has within itself generative power. If any human heart does not love our Immanuel, it is because that heart is ignorant of him, its eyesight is blurred, its vision is obscured. No sooner is Jesus known as a true and substantial Friend, than love in some form springs up. In the form of gratitude it first appears; then in the form of admiration; then in delight; then in intimacy; then in passionate devotion. Jesus known is Jesus loved.

I. OBSERVE THE CHRISTIAN'S LOVE FOR JESUS CHRIST. 1. *The soul esteems him as its Sovereign King.* As love is the mightiest force in the human breast, love's object is at once promoted to the supreme place. No elevation is too great for our Beloved. It would be a restraint upon our love—yea, a pain—if we did not give to Jesus the highest throne. We perceive that he has all the qualities of a king, and that it is for our own advantage that he should rule within. And when we make the experiment we find such rest, such security, such triumphs, that we would fain exalt him to a higher place. To be the servant—ay, the slave—of such a King is honour infinite, joy ineffable. 2. *The renewed soul desires to have the closest friendship with Jesus.* Where the heavenly King comes, he always spreads a feast for the soul. Out of his fulness he freely bestows. As a fountain spontaneously sends up its limpid waters, so doth Christ our Lord. To be in his presence, to listen to his ripe wisdom, to realize all the advantage of his friendship, this is a spiritual feast. The wisdom he has, he gives. His everlasting righteously he shares with us. His heavenly peace he conveys to us. His own love is shed abroad in our hearts. All the wealth of his kingdom he conveys to his chosen. We are “heirs of God, joint-heirs with Jesus Christ.” The friendship of Immanuel is a perpetual feast. They who daily eat at the same table enjoy the closest intimacy with each other. 3. *The presence of Jesus Christ draws out our hidden graces.* “My perfume sends forth its sweetest odours.” Just as the summer sun draws out the essence of our garden flowers, so the energy of the Saviour's love stirs into activity the hidden forces of our souls. In every man is a principle of imitation. If we see a splendid deed of generosity, we are impelled to copy it. When the heart is free from sinful bias, it aspires to imitate every excellence it beholds. So, when the glories of Christ's nature are unfolded, like graces begin to unfold in us. Repentance, gratitude, humility, faith, patience, devoted love, are drawn out in the sunny atmosphere of Jesus' presence. Fragrant flowers and spicy herbs, which had lain long hidden in the frozen soil, spring up and send out a rare perfume. When Jesus dwelt in the house, Mary was constrained to break the alabaster box, and to set free the delicious odour; and when Jesus dwells in our hearts, every restraint gives way, and the essence of our graces yields a sweet perfume. 4. *We esteem the love of Jesus for its constancy.* The bundle of myrrh abides with us “all night.” Our beloved Friend is not easily offended. “He hates putting away.” In darkness as well as at noon, in times of pain and calamity as in days of prosperity, his love remains unchanged. If for a season we should neglect him, and be absorbed in other pursuits, he does not abandon us. He may visit our folly with chastisement, and to the soul there may be temporary night, yet the remembrance of his love will be a sweet and reviving cordial. It will have a healing efficacy. We shall be touched with a sense

of shame; and as myrrh soothes and quiets pain, so will the fragrant breath of our Immanuel heal us. 5. *The friendship of Jesus satisfies every want.* "My Beloved is unto me as a cluster of camphire in the vineyards of Engedi." The cluster of camphire flowers had a renown both for beauty and for fragrance. So the excellence of Jesus has a fascination for every sense of the renewed man. Every organ is a channel through which Christ's life flows. We *look* unto Jesus, and we are charmed with the beauty of his character. We *listen*, and his words of promise kindle in us a holy rapture. His deeds and sacrifices for us have a sweet-smelling savour. His intercession for us is like the temple incense. "We taste that the Lord is gracious." He is to us heavenly manna—"the Bread of life." The coming of Christ is like autumn abundance. "He is all our salvation and all our desire;" "My God shall supply all your need, according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus;" "He that cometh to me shall never hunger; he that believeth on me shall never thirst." Nothing so enchants and satisfies the soul like Jesus. Amongst the verdant and generous vineyards of Engedi, the cluster of camphire was distinguished for fragrance and for usefulness; so among the charms of nature, among the genial society of human friends, Jesus stands out prominently the most precious and the most prized of all. There is nothing on earth we can compare with him. He is without a rival.

II. OBSERVE THE REGARD WHICH JESUS CHRIST HAS FOR HIS FRIENDS. 1. *He fully esteems all the good there is in them.* "Behold, thou art fair, my love." The eye of friendship will discover many virtues in a man which the eye of malice can never find. It is not love that is blind; it is malice that is blind. Love has eyesight keener than an eagle, keener than an archangel. The eye of Jesus sees in us excellences which he himself has created; and though as yet these are only in tiny germ, yet, with the magnifying power of love, Jesus beholds them as they shall be, full-orbed and beautiful. There is no future to him. What *to us* is in the future is with him present. He looks with tenderness upon the tiny blade of pious love, and lo! already 'tis a cedar of Lebanon, among whose branches the feathered minstrels sing. If only a heavenly ambition begins to stir within the breast, he hastens to foster it. Says he, "It is well that it was in thine heart." 2. *He repeats the commendation in order to confirm it.* "Thou art fair; thou art fair, my love." The conscience of the Christian, filled with light from heaven, is painfully sensible of its faults, and asks in astonishment, "Lord, didst thou call me fair?" Then, to banish doubt and to pierce to the heart unbelief, Jesus repeats his approval, "Behold, thou art fair, my love." "Though it may be that our hearts condemn us, God is greater than our hearts, and knoweth all things." Full clearly he sees the young germ of new-born love, and this he will make to grow until it shall fill the soul with beauty. Hence he already says, "Thou art fair, my love." Under the magic wand of love, the nature that had sunk into a beast becomes incarnate beauty. Love creates. Love transfigures. 3. *Love makes like unto itself.* Because Christ our Lord is beautiful, we shall be beautiful. Because Christ is pleasant, we shall be pleasant. Every quality of mind and heart that Jesus possesses he will communicate unto us. "He emptied himself" that he might fill us. It is a special pleasure to discover a new excellence in our Immanuel, inasmuch as that excellence shall be ours. "We shall be like him when we see him as he is." 4. *Jesus identifies himself completely with his ransomed ones.* The couch, or resting-place, in the palace garden is said to be "ours." "Our bed is green." It is a verdant oasis in this world's desert. Or, if the palace is described, it is *our* house. To all the possessions of the Bridegroom the bride is encouraged to lay claim. It is always the result of the marriage-tie that the interests and fortunes of the two are identical. One is the complement of the other. Neither is complete alone. There could be no shepherd unless there were sheep. There can be no bridegroom without a bride. There can be no king without subjects. Nor can there be a Saviour unless there are also the saved. The glory of Jesus Christ is seen nowhere but in his ransomed Church. Therefore Jesus completely and generously identifies himself with us. All his possessions are to be our possessions. All his noble qualities are to be our noble qualities. His purity is to be our purity. His throne is to be our throne likewise. It is his everlasting purpose that we shall be "joint-heirs," "They shall have *my* joy fulfilled in themselves."—D.

Ver. 1.—*Holy lyrics.* There are many songs in Old Testament Scripture—the song of deliverance from the Red Sea (Exod. xv.); the song of the well (Numb. xxi. 17, 18); the song of Moses (Deut. xxxii.); the song of Deborah (Judg. v.); the song (pre-eminently such) of David, in Ps. xviii.; and the song of Isaiah (v.). But this of Solomon is described as the Song of Songs, *i.e.* of all the most excellent, as it is the richest in imagery, the intensest in feeling, the most complete in poetic form. Although there is something dramatic in the structure of this poem, inasmuch as several speakers are introduced, uttering varying moods of feeling, still the poem is mainly lyrical, inasmuch as its spirit is pre-eminently sentiment. Song expresses—

I. FEELING GENERALLY; AND FEELING OCCUPIES A PRE-EMINENT PLACE IN RELIGIOUS LIFE. True religion has its root in knowledge and belief; a God not known cannot be truly worshipped, a religion not understood cannot be acceptably practised. Yet religion is not merely an exercise, a possession, of the intellect. Our strongest convictions are naturally accompanied by our deepest emotions. The measure of feeling will, indeed, vary with individual temperament, but a religion with no sentiment is mechanical and unlovely. Now, it is in accordance with human nature that feeling should break forth into song. Cheerfulness finds utterance as in the carol of the lark, and melancholy as in the plaintive warble of the nightingale. The Bible without the Canticles would not correspond with the whole constitution of man.

“The Church delights to raise
Psalms and hymns and songs of praise.”

The words of inspiration, exact or paraphrased and adapted, have ever given shape and form and utterance to the profoundest emotions of God's worshippers.

II. LOVE, WHICH IS THE CHARACTERISTIC ELEMENT OF THE RELIGIOUS LIFE. Human love is the copy, always faint and imperfect, yet not illusive, of love Divine. The love of the Hebrew king and his mountain bride figures forth, as does all true wedded affection—the love which exists between the Eternal and his intelligent creatures, between the Church and the adorable Bridegroom who deigns to address her as his spouse. The language of the Canticles has often seemed to cold natures extravagant, and so unreal. “Love's language is a foreign language to those who do not love.” We have the foundation of the Song of Songs laid in the forty-fifth psalm—the “song of love.” Christianity is admitted to have introduced into religion an element of deeper personal feeling than was known before. The love of Christ is declared to “pass knowledge;” and love which passes knowledge, which cannot express itself in propositions, must pour itself forth in song. The nuptials of the soul, of the Church, with Christ, demand a poetic epithalamium. How thoroughly in place, so regarded, seems the “Song of Songs”!

III. JOY, WHICH SPRINGS FROM LOVE FELT AND RETURNED. The history of love is not always one of uninterrupted prosperity and gladness. “Our sweetest songs are those which tell of saddest thought.” And even in the Canticles we have varying moods; shadows lie upon the land for a season as clouds obscure the face of heaven. Yet the main current of feeling throughout this book is a current of gladness; the music is of the nature of a carol of spontaneous sweetness, a chorale of triumphant delight. The king and the bride alternately give utterance to their joyful emotions, for heart finds heart. So with the relations with the redeeming Lord and those whom he has saved. God rejoices over that which was lost but is found; and man rejoices in the great salvation. It is thus that the lyrics, though sacred, are glad, breathing a “joy unspeakable and full of glory.”—T.

Ver. 2.—*Love better than wine.* The desire of the soul awakened to the higher life is a desire which earth cannot satisfy; it is a desire for God, for the manifestations of Divine favour, the proofs of Divine affection. As one has said, “The Christian is not satisfied, like Mary, to kiss the Master's feet; he would kiss the Master's face.” The enjoyment of God's kindness enkindles a desire for more knowledge of God, a closer intercourse with God. This is the result of a sense—an imperfect but genuine sense—of the incomparable preciousness of Divine friendship and favour. “Thy love is better than wine.”

I. GOD'S GIFTS ARE GOOD. He is good unto all. Every good gift and every perfect
SONG OF SOLOMON. D

boon must be traced to his bounty. Wine is used here poetically as one of the evidences of Divine provision for man's needs. Wine maketh glad the heart of man, oil maketh his face to shine, bread strengtheneth his heart. Heaven bestows in abundance gifts which men often accept with ingratitude or misuse to their own detriment.

II. GOD'S LOVE IS BETTER. Material possessions, temporal enjoyments, the pleasures of sense, are contrasted with what enriches, purifies, and rejoices the spirit. To the spiritual man the favour of Heaven yields more true joy than he experiences in the time when corn and wine increase. 1. This follows from the very nature of man, who is a being made originally in the Divine image, endowed with an immortal nature. Such a being cannot find satisfaction in any lower source of happiness. 2. It follows especially from the fact of man's sin and salvation. As a dependent being, man is a recipient of Divine bounty; but, as a being who has departed from God, and has been restored by forgiving mercy to favour and fellowship, he is especially in need of constant revelations of Divine love. And as Christians we gratefully recognize that, in bestowing upon us his own Son, God has given unto us that love which is better than wine. 3. In partaking of Divine love we are in no danger of excess. It had been better for many a professing Christian had God's providence withheld the gifts which have by the abuse of worldliness been prized above the Giver himself. Not wine only, but the wealth and luxuries of life generally, have too often been the occasion of forgetting and departing from God. But Divine love is a draught of which none can drink in excess. 4. The love of God is a lasting blessing, a perennial joy. The gifts of Divine bounty perish, for they are of the earth. The love of God is imperishable as God himself.—T.

Ver. 3.—*The fragrant name.* The sense of smell furnishes much of the imagery of this poetical book. Perfumes not only gratify the smell, they awaken the emotions, and have a remarkable power of reviving, by association, bygone scenes and far-distant friends and companions, in whose society the fragrant wild flowers or blooms of the garden have been enjoyed. Perfumed unguents were in the East employed for anointing the body, for health and comfort. Their use was associated with hospitable reception and entertainment. The Name of our Saviour is as the unguents poured upon his form, diffusing sweet fragrance abroad.

I. THE NAME OF CHRIST IS FRAGRANT TO THE SPIRITUAL SENSE OF HIS PEOPLE. In fact, the Christ is "the Anointed," who, by his appointment and devotion, is marked out as the beloved Son of God, and the honoured Saviour of the world. The perfume of Divine grace, treasured up from eternity, was poured forth in abundance upon the Word when he "became flesh, and dwelt among us."

II. THE NAME OF CHRIST HAS A COSTLY, PRECIOUS FRAGRANCE. It is well known that large sums of money were lavished on the scented unguents stored in vessels, bottles, and vases of alabaster and other expensive materials. The perfumes used were brought in many cases from distant lands; they were distilled from rare and beautiful flowers; they were purchased by the wealthy and used by the luxurious.

III. THE NAME OF CHRIST POSSESSES A DELIGHTFUL AND REFRESHING FRAGRANCE. As the mere mention of the king's name was welcome to the bride and to her companions, so is the Name of our Saviour, when pronounced in the hearing of his friends, the occasion of delight. The Name of Jesus is music to the ear, and is as "ointment poured forth." It dispels the lassitude, the discouragement, the despondency, which are sometimes apt to steal into the soul of the disciple during the Master's bodily and temporary absence. It is a "Name above every name." "Ointment and perfume rejoice the heart."

IV. THE NAME OF JESUS DIFFUSES A FAR-REACHING FRAGRANCE. The penetrating power of odours is well known. Poets tell of the "spicy breezes" that "blow soft o'er Ceylon's isle;" how "filled with balm the gale sighs on, though the flowers are sunk in death." Thus the precious Name of Christ sheds its sweetness far and wide, bringing life, hope, and salvation to those in remotest lands. The Plant of Renown which was bruised upon the soil of Palestine has given forth perfume of blessing which has reached the uttermost ends of the earth, reviving those ready to perish with its refreshing and reinvigorating power.

V. THE NAME OF CHRIST DIFFUSES A LASTING AND PERMANENT FRAGRANCE. It is known that some perfumes, such as musk, will continue to pour forth their sweetness

day after day and year after year, diffusing effluvia unceasingly, and yet suffering no perceptible loss of bulk, no diminution of power to give forth their special odour. Similarly is it with the power of Christ to bless mankind. Generation after generation has found healing, life, and blessing in the gospel; yet is its freshness undimmed and its power undiminished. And to-day more are rejoicing in the ever-fragrant Name than at any former time. Nor shall that Name ever lose its sweetness or its power.—T.

Ver. 4.—*Divine attraction.* There is evidence of attraction throughout the physical universe. The earth draws all things upon it towards its centre; it draws the moon and keeps it revolving round itself. The sun draws the planets, which in their regular orbits unconsciously yield to the influence which he unconsciously exerts. We cannot study any bodies, however distant and however vast, without perceiving the power of attraction. And this power is as manifest in the molecule as in the mass; there is attraction in the smallest as in the greatest of material bodies. As the planets by gravitation are held in their courses by the sun, so are souls led to feel the attraction of our Saviour-God. But whilst material things obey unwittingly, it is for spiritual natures consciously and voluntarily to yield to the spiritual attraction of him who is the Centre, the Law, the Life of all.

I. THE SPIRITUAL DRAWING OF THE KING OF LOVE. 1. The language reveals a dread of being far from God. The soul cries, "Quicken me! lest I remain in death; turn me! lest I continue in error; draw me! lest I live at a distance from thee." 2. The language reveals a recognition of authority. The cry is to the King. Many are the attractions of the world. *Trahit sua quemque voluptas.* Yet these attractions should always be suspected, should sometimes be resisted. But when God draws, his is the drawing of royalty and of right. 3. The language reveals the power of love. "I drew them with cords of a man, with bands of love." "I will draw all men unto myself." Such are the declarations of infinite grace. Those whose souls they reach and touch cannot but seek to be laid hold of by the silken chains, and led and kept near their Lord.

"O Christ, who hast prepared a place
For us beside thy throne of grace,
Draw us, we pray, with cords of love
From exile to our home above."

II. THE OBEDIENT FOLLOWING OF THOSE WHO FEEL THE DIVINE ATTRACTION. 1. The drawing of the King proves its own effectiveness. "With loving-kindness have I drawn thee." The charm is felt, the summons is obeyed, the presence and society which bring spiritual blessing are sought. 2. There is eagerness and haste in the response.

"He drew me, and I followed on,
Glad to confess the voice Divine."

Running denotes interest and zeal. The willing following becomes a diligent and strenuous race. The soul finds in Christ a Divine Friend and Lover and Spouse, and in his society satisfaction that never cloy, and joy that never fails.

APPLICATION. Here we have the history of the Divine life in man, related in a few words. In providence, in revelation, in the incarnate Word, in the power of the spiritual dispensation,—in all this God is drawing us. And every movement of the spirit, every impulse towards holiness, every true endeavour after obedience, may be regarded as the practical yielding to the Divine attraction. God's work on earth is just "drawing" us; our religious life is just "running" after him.—T.

Ver. 4.—*The joyful celebration of Divine love.* The king is represented as conducting his friends and guests into his splendid palace, admitting them to the apartments reserved for his most intimate and favoured courtiers, and thus revealing to them his condescension and affection. Such treatment awakens their joy, and calls forth the celebration of his love. The whole scene is symbolical of the privileges and the sacred delights of those who share in the "shining of God's countenance."

I. DIVINE LOVE IS WORTHY OF BEING CELEBRATED. 1. It is undeserved love, and therefore love of pure compassion. 2. It is condescending love, on the part of the King of heaven towards poor, ignorant, and sinful man. 3. It is too often ill-requested love. 4. Yet it is bountiful and beneficent love. 5. It is sacrificing love—love to display which costs God much. 6. It is forbearing, patient, constant love.

II. THERE ARE MANY WAYS IN WHICH REDEEMED MEN MAY CELEBRATE THE DIVINE LOVE REVEALED TO THEM. 1. Its pre-eminence may be maintained. There may be other prerogatives and privileges which we may be tempted to make our boast and cause of rejoicing, but we must ever keep before our minds the supreme excellence of the love of God; "more than wine," and more than blessings far more desirable and precious than this. 2. Its most glorious proof may be commemorated. First and foremost among the meanings of the eucharistic meal celebrated in the Church of the Redeemer is its beauty and justice as a memorial of that love "whose height, whose depth unfathomed, no man knows." 3. Its natural power to awaken joy and praise should be practically confessed. To "be glad and rejoice" in God is only just and becoming; and Christians should not so steadfastly contemplate their own unworthiness as to lose sight of the infinite worthiness of him to whom they owe their salvation. 4. Love may be celebrated in the exercise of willing obedience. There is on our part no response to God's kindness so acceptable as consecrated service. "The love of Christ constraineth us;" this is the practical principle of the new life. There is a world of meaning in the language of the text, "In uprightness do they love thee."—T.

Ver. 6.—*The keeper of the vineyards.* Men have put into their charge responsibilities concerning others, and these they may to some extent worthily observe. They may promote the interest of their family, the comfort of their household and dependants. They may even give time and money to advance schemes of benevolence and religion. But the question suggested by the language of the text is this—What are they the better for regarding the welfare of others if they neglect their own? if, being guardians of vineyards, they must acknowledge in all sincerity that their own vineyard they have not kept?

I. OUR RELIGION IS LIKELY TO CONSIST, TO A VERY LARGE EXTENT, IN A SENSE OF OUR PROPER RESPONSIBILITY FOR THE WELFARE OF OUR FELLOW-MEN. 1. The very position of Britain among the nations of the world favours this view. Our range of influence is immense, our power is vast, our work of colonizing and of governing is heavy and serious. How can we serve our generation according to the will of God? 2. Add to this, the efforts which are called for on behalf of the ignorant and irreligious millions around us, and which seem to demand all the attention and zealous energies of the Church of Christ. 3. Hence a conception of the Christian life as one of constant activity and progressive usefulness.

II. THIS VERY SENSE OF RESPONSIBILITY FOR THE WELFARE OF OUR FELLOW-MEN MAY OCCASION THE NEGLECT OF PERSONAL DEVOUTNESS AND SPIRITUALITY. To explain the action of this principle it may be remarked: 1. When we care for others, we naturally take it for granted that all is well with ourselves. In any work and enterprise, if we are engaged in teaching and in leading others, it is natural that we should overlook the importance of examining our own qualifications. 2. The opinion of others acts as an auxiliary in bringing about this state of feeling. Not only do we take it for granted that all is well with ourselves; others do the same, and their attitude encourages us in our good opinion of ourselves. 3. Time and thought may be so taken up in the service in which we are engaged, that attention is drawn away from our own condition, our own obligation to ourselves. A man may awaken to the fact of his own foolish and sinful neglect of his own spiritual state, and may cry aloud, in anguish and remorse, "They made me keeper of the vineyards, and *mine own vineyard* have I not kept!"

III. YET THERE IS NO NECESSARY CONNECTION BETWEEN USEFULNESS TO OTHERS AND NEGLECT OF ONE'S OWN SPIRITUAL SAFETY AND GROWTH. One duty does not conflict with another. It is in the cultivation of our own hearts that we gain strength and wisdom to be of benefit and service to others. Works of Christian benevolence are to be undertaken, not under the influence of superficial excitement, not under the contagion of enthusiastic example, but from sober conviction, and with a clear under-

standing of the law that only those who themselves have received can to any purpose give to others.

APPLICATION. Let those whose position is described in the text bestir themselves at once, apply with diligence to their proper work, restore the hedges, dig about the vine-roots, take the "foxes that spoil the grapes," and climb the watch-tower, that they may discern the approach and resist the incursions of their foes. Then shall they be privileged to present, even from their own vineyard, some fruit which shall be acceptable to the Divine Master and Lord, to whom all must at last give in their great account.—T.

Vers. 7, 8.—The shepherd's care. As the beloved maiden or bride seeks her shepherd-lover who is yet the king, she makes use of language which gives an insight into pastoral duty and care, and which serves to suggest the relations borne by the flock to the good Shepherd who gave his life for the sheep.

I. THE GOOD SHEPHERD FEEDS THE FLOCK.

II. THE GOOD SHEPHERD PROVIDES NOONDAY REST FOR THE FLOCK.

III. THE GOOD SHEPHERD PROTECTS THE FLOCK, KEEPING HIS SHEEP NEAR THE WELL-GUARDED TENTS.

IV. THE GOOD SHEPHERD GUIDES HIS SHEEP, LEADING THE FOOTSTEPS OF THE FLOCK ACCORDING TO HIS OWN KNOWLEDGE AND WISDOM.

V. THE GOOD SHEPHERD CARES FOR THE KIDS—THE YOUNG OF THE FLOCK.—T.

Vers. 9—15.—Love and admiration. It requires imagination and a knowledge of Oriental habits of thinking fully to appreciate the language of this passage, which otherwise to our colder and less fanciful natures may appear extravagant. But expressions which may be open to the charge of extravagance as applied to ordinary human affection, may well come short of the truth if interpreted as indicating the emotions which distinguish those spiritual relations of absorbed delight subsisting between Christ and his spouse, the Church. Beneath the rich metaphors of the poet we discern certain principles which are of deepest moment and beauty.

I. CHRIST'S INTEREST IN HIS PEOPLE IS INTEREST IN HIS OWN WORKMANSHIP, IN HIS OWN PURCHASE AND POSSESSION. The descriptions of the charms of the beloved, couched in the figurative language of Eastern poetry, can only be applied in any sense to the Church of the Lord Christ upon the distinct understanding that whatever excellences she may possess she owes to the Divine care and munificence of the heavenly Spouse. She owes her existence to his power, her safety to his faithful watching, her gifts and excellences to the provision of his love and care, her position to his compassion. Nothing has she which she did not receive from him; nothing of which she can be vain, of which she can boast. For all, her lowly acknowledgments of gratitude are for ever due to her Almighty Lord.

II. CHRIST'S PERFECTIONS DESERVE AND DEMAND THE ADORING AND AFFECTIONATE ADMIRATION OF HIS CHURCH. 1. She admires him for what he is in himself. In him is all that is excellent and valuable, sweet and lovable. His beauty is spiritual, incomparable, delightful, unfading, and unwearying. 2. She adores him for his treatment of herself and his regard for her. The Church knows, from her Lord's own revelation, that he holds her dear, precious, fragrant; that, having laid down his life for her redemption, he never can or will forget her, or cease to cherish towards her the affection of his Divine and loving heart. 3. Hence she commemorates his love in the Eucharist, honours him by her obedience, and by her witness and her praise commends him to the world.—T.

EXPOSITION.

CHAPTER II.

Ver. 2.—As a lily among thorns, so is my love among the daughters. The king responds, taking up the lovely simile and

giving it a very apt and charming turn, "My love is beyond comparison the chief and all around her are not worthy of notice beside her." The meaning is not thorns on the tree itself. The word would be different

in that case. Rather it is thorn-plants or bushes (*choach*); see 2 Kings xiv. 9. *The daughters*, i.e. the young damsels. The word "son" or "daughter" was commonly so used in Hebrew, the idea being that of simplicity, innocence, and gentleness.

Ver. 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.* That these are the words of the bride there can be no doubt. The apple tree is noted for the fragrance of its blossom and the sweetness of its fruit; hence the name *tappuah*, from the root *naphach*, "to breathe sweetly." The trees of the wood or forest are specially referred to, because they are generally wild, and their fruit sour and rough, and many have no fruit or flower. The Chaldee renders, "citron;" Rosenmüller and others, "quince." The word is rare (see Prov. xxv. 11; Joel i. 12). It is sometimes the tree itself, at other times the fruit. It occurs in proper names, as (Josh. xii. 17), "The King of Tappuah," etc., and that shows that it was very early known in Palestine. It occurs frequently in the Talmud. The word is masculine, while "lily" is feminine. "I sat with delight" is expressed in true Hebrew phrase, "I delighted and sat," the intensity of feeling being expressed by the piel of the verb. By the shadow is intended both protection and refreshment; by the fruit, enjoyment. Perhaps we may go further, and say there is here a symbolical representation of the spiritual life, as both that of trust and participation. The greatness and goodness of the tree of life protects and covers the sinner, while the inner nature and Divine virtue of the Saviour comes forth in delicious fruits, in his character, words, ministry, and spiritual gifts. If there is any truth in the typical view, it must be found in such passages as this, where the metaphor is so simple and apt, and has been incorporated with all religious language as the vehicle of faith and love. Hymnology abounds in such ideas and analogies.

Ver. 4.—*He brought me to the banquet-house, and his banner over me was love; literally, to the house of the wine.* Not, as some, "the house of the vines"—that is, the vineyard. The Hebrew word *gayin* corresponds with the Æthiopic *wain*, and has run through the Indo-European languages. The meaning is—To the place where he royally entertains his friends. Hence the reference which immediately follows to the protection with which the king overshadows his beloved. He covers me there with his fear-inspiring, awful banner, love, which, because of its being love, is terrible to all enemies. The word which is used for

"banner" (*ḥay*) is from a root "to cover," that which covers the shaft or standard; the *pannus*, "the cloth," which is fastened to a shaft (cf. pennon). Her natural fear and bashfulness is overcome by the loving presence of the king, which covers her weakness like a banner. Some versions render it as an imperative. There can be no doubt of the meaning that the banner is the military banner, as the word is always so used (see Ps. xx. 6; Numb. i. 52; ii. 2). Perhaps there is a reference to the grandeur and military strength in which the young bride felt delight as she looked up at her young husband in his youthful beauty and manly vigour. The typical significance is very easily discovered. It would be straining it too much to see any allusion to the ritual of the Christian sacraments; but whether we think of the individual soul or of the people of God regarded collectively, such delight in the rich provisions of Divine love, and in the tender guardianship of the Saviour over those whom he has called to himself, belong to the simplest facts of believing experience.

Ver. 5.—*Stay me with raisins, comfort me with apples; for I am sick of love.* Again the intensive form of the verb is chosen. She is almost sinking; she cries out for comfort. The food for which she longs is the grape-cakes—the grapes sufficiently dried to be pressed together as cakes, which is very refreshing and reviving; not raisins as we know them, but with more of the juice of the grape in them. So date-cakes are now offered to travellers in the East. "Refresh me; for I am in a state of deep agitation because of the intensity of my love." Ginsburg thinks the cakes are baked by the fire, the word being derived from a root "to burn." The translation, "flagons of wine," in the Authorized Version, follows the rabbinical exposition, but it is quite unsupported by the critics. Love-sickness is common in Eastern countries, more so than with us in the colder hemisphere. Perhaps the appeal of the bride is meant to be general, not immediately directed to the king, as if a kind of exclamation, and it may be connected with the previous idea of the banner. The country maiden is dazzled with the splendour and majesty of the king. She gives up, as it were, in willing resignation of herself, the rivalry with one so great and glorious in the expression of love and praise; she sinks back with delight and ecstasy, calling upon any around to support her, and Solomon himself answers the appeal, and puts his loving arm around her and holds up her head, and gives her the sweetest and tenderest embraces, which renew her strength. We know that in the

spiritual life there are such experiences. The intensity of religious feeling is closely connected with physical exhaustion, and when the soul cries for help and longs for comfort, the presence of the Saviour is revealed; the weakness is changed into strength. The apostolic seer in the Apocalypse describes himself as overcome with the glory of the Saviour's appearance, and being brought back to himself by his voice (Rev. i. 17).

Ver. 6.—His left hand is under my head, and his right hand doth embrace me. We may render the verb either as indicative or imperative. The hand gently smooths with loving caresses. The historical sense is more in accordance with the context, as the next verse is an appeal to the attendant ladies. Behold my happiness, how my Beloved comforts me!

Ver. 7.—I adjure you, O daughters of Jerusalem, by the roes, and by the hinds of the field, that ye stir not up, nor awaken love, until it please. The fact that these words occur again in ch. iii. 5 and viii. 4 shows that they are a kind of chorus or refrain. It is also evident that they are in the lips of Shulamith the bride. Some have suggested that they are uttered by some one else, e.g. the queen-mother subsequently referred to, Solomon himself, the heavenly Bridegroom, the shepherd-lover from whom Shulamith had been taken. But all these suggestions are unnecessary and unsupported. The natural and simple view is that the same voice is speaking as in ver. 6. But what is the meaning of this adjuration? Is it merely, "I throw myself on the sympathy you have already expressed"? Ewald well remarks, "In common life people swore by things which belonged to the subject of conversation or were especially dear to the speaker. As, therefore, the warrior swears by his sword; as Mohammed by the soul, of which he is just about to speak (see Koran, ch. xci. 7); so here Shulamith by the lovely gazelles, since she is speaking of love." The Israelites were permitted to adjure by that which is not God, but they would only solemnly swear by God himself. Delitzsch thinks this is the only example of direct adjuration in Scripture without the name of God. The meaning has probably been sought too far away. The bride is perfectly happy, but she is conscious that such exquisite happiness may be disturbed, the dream of her delight broken through. She compares herself to a roe or a gazelle, the most timorous and shy of creatures (see Prov. v. 19). The Septuagint has a peculiar rendering, which points to a different reading of the original, ἐν δυνάμεσι καὶ ἰσχυράσι τοῦ ἀγροῦ, "by the power and virtues of the field." Per-

haps the meaning is the same—By the purity and blessedness of a simple country life, I adjure you not to interfere with the course of true love. It is much debated whether the meaning is, "Do not excite or stir up love," or, "Do not disturb love in its peaceful delight." It certainly must be maintained that by "love" is meant "the lover." The reference is to the passion of love itself. A similar expression is used of the feeling of jealousy (Isa. xlii. 13). The verb קָיָוָה (piel) is added to strengthen the idea, and is always used in the sense "to excite or awaken," as Prov. x. 12 of strife; Ps. lxxx. 3 of strength or power. We must not for a moment think of any artificial excitement of love as referred to. The idea is—See what a blessed thing is pure and natural affection: let not love be forced or unnatural. But there are those who dispute this interpretation. They think that the main idea of the whole poem is not the spontaneity of love, but a commendation of pure and chaste conjugal affection, as opposed to the dissoluteness and sensuality fostered by polygamy. They would therefore take the abstract "love" for the concrete "loved one," as in ch. vii. 6. The bride would not have the beloved one aroused by the intrusion of others; or the word "love" may be taken to mean "the dream of love." Whichever explanation is chosen, the sense is substantially the same—Let me rejoice in my blessedness. The bride is seen at the close of this first part of the poem in the arms of the bridegroom. She is lost in him, and his happiness is hers. She calls upon the daughters of Jerusalem to rejoice with her. This is, in fact, the key-note of the song. The two main thoughts in the poem are the purity of love and the power of love. The reference to the roes and gazelles of the field is not so much to their shyness and timidity as to their purity, as distinguished from the creatures more close to cities; hence the appeal to the daughters of Jerusalem, who, as being ladies of the metropolis, might not sympathize as they should with the country maiden. The rest of the poem is a remembrance of the part which illustrates and confirms the sentiment of the refrain—Let the pure love seek its own perfection; let its own pleasure be realized. So, spiritually, let grace complete what grace begins. "Blessed are all those who trust in him."

Ver. 8—ch. iii. 5.—Part II. SONG OF SHULAMITH IN THE EMBRACE OF SOLOMON. Recollections of the wooing-time in the north.

Ver. 8.—The voice of my beloved! behold, he cometh, leaping upon the mountains, skipping upon the hills. There can be little doubt as to the meaning of this song. The

bride is going back in thought to the scenes of her home-life, and the sweet days of first love. "The house stands alone among the rocks and deep in the mountain range; around are the vineyards which the family have planted, and the hill-pastures on which they feed their flocks. She longingly looks out for her distant lover." The expression, "The voice of my beloved!" must not be taken to mean that she hears the sound of his feet or voice, but simply as an interjection, like "hark!" (see Gen. iv. 10, where the voice of the blood crying merely means, "Hark how thy brother's blood cries!" that is, "Believe that it does so cry"). So here, "I seem to hear the voice of my beloved; hark, he is coming!" It is a great delight to the soul to go back in thought over the memories of its first experience of the Saviour's presence. The Church is edified by the records of grace in the histories of Divine dealings.

Ver. 9.—**My beloved is like a roe or a young hart; behold, he standeth behind our wall, he looketh in at the windows, he showeth himself through the lattices.** The *tsévi* is the gazelle, Arabic *ghazāl*. Our word is derived through the Spanish or Moorish *gazela*. The young hart, or chamois, is probably so called from the covering of young hair (cf. 2 Sam. ii. 18; Prov. vi. 5; Heb. iii. 19). Shulamith represents herself as within the house, waiting for her friend. Her beloved is standing behind the wall, outside before the house; he is playfully looking through the windows, now through one and now through another, seeking her with peering eyes of love. Both the words employed convey the meaning of searching and moving quickly. The *windows*; literally, *the openings*; i.e. a window broken through a wall, or the meaning may be a lattice window, a pierced wooden structure. The word is not the common word for a window, which is *shēvākā* (now *shabbāka*), from a root meaning "to twist," "to make a lattice." Spiritually, we may see an allusion to the glimpses of truth and tastes of the goodness of religion, which precede the real fellowship of the soul with God.

Ver. 10.—**My beloved spake, and said unto me, Rise up, my love, my fair one, and come away.** The word "spake" conveys the meaning in answer to a person appearing, but not necessarily in answer to a voice heard. We most suppose that Shulamith recognized her beloved, and made some sign that she was near, or looked forth from the window. As the soul responds, it is more and more invited; the voice of the Bridegroom is heard calling the object of his love by name, "I have called thee by thy name; thou art mine" (Isa. xliii. 1).

Vers. 11—13.—**For, lo, the winter is past,**

the rain is over and gone; the flowers appear on the earth; the time of the singing of birds is come, and the voice of the turtle is heard in our land; the fig tree ripeneth her green figs, and the vines are in blossom, they give forth their fragrance. Arise, my love, my fair one, and come away. Winter; i.e. the cloudy stormy time (*sethauv*). The Jews in Jerusalem to this day call rain *shataā*. The rain; i.e. the showers. The flowers, or the flowery time, corresponding with the singing-time. Several versions, as the LXX. and other Greek, Jerome in the Latin, and the Targum and Venetian, render, "the time of pruning," taking the *zāmīr* from a root *zamar*, "to prune the vine." It is, however, regarded by most critics as an onomatopoeic word meaning "song," "music," like *zīmrah*, "singing." The reference to the voice of the turtle-dove, the cooing note which is so sweet and attractive among the woods, shows that the time of spring is intended. Ginsburg says wherever *zāmīr* occurs, either in the singular or plural, it means "singing" (cf. 2 Sam. xxiii. 1; Isa. xxiv. 16). The form of the word conveys the idea of the time of the action, as we see in the words for "harvest" (*asiph*) and "ploughing-time" (*chārish*). The fig tree and the vine were both employed as symbols of prosperity and peace, as the fig and grape were so much used as food (see 1 Kings v. 5; 2 Kings xviii. 31). The little fruits of the fig tree begin, when the spring commences, to change colour from green to red (cf. Mark xi. 13, where the Passover-time is referred to). The word "to ripen" is literally, "to grow red or sweet." The blossoming vines give forth a very delicate and attractive fragrance. The description is acknowledged by all to be very beautiful. The invitation is to fellowship in the midst of the pure loveliness of nature, when all was adapted to meet and sustain the feelings of awakened love. The emotions of the soul are blended easily with the sensations derived from the outward world. When we carefully avoid extravagance, and put the soul first and not second, then the delights of the senses may help the heart to realize the deepest experience of Divine communion. But the bridegroom first solicits the bride. We reverse the true spiritual order when we place too much dependence on the influence of external objects or sensuous pleasures. Art may assist religion to its expression, but it must never be made so prominent that the artistic pleasure swallows up the religious emotion. Love of nature is not love of Christ. Love of music is not love of Christ. Yet the soul that seeks him may rejoice in art and music, because they blend their attractions with its devotion, and help it to be a joy and a passion.

Ver. 14.—O my dove, that art in the clefts of the rock, in the covert of the steep places, let me see thy countenance, let me hear thy voice; for sweet is thy voice, and thy countenance is comely. The wood-pigeon builds in clefts of rocks and in steep rocky places (see Jer. xlviii. 28; and cf. Ps. lxxiv. 19; lvi. 1; Hos. vii. 11). The bridegroom is still addressing his beloved one, who has not yet come forth from the house in the rocks, though she has shown herself at the window. The language is highly poetical, and may be compared with similar words in Homer and Virgil (cf. 'Iliad,' xxi. 493; 'Æneid,' v. 213, etc.). The Lord loveth the sight of his people. He delighteth in their songs and in their prayers. He is in the midst of their assemblies. Secret religion is not the highest religion. The highest emotions of the soul do not decrease in their power as they are expressed. They become more and more a ruling principle of life. There are many who need this encouragement to come forth out of secrecy, out of solitude, out of their own private home and individual thoughts, and realize the blessing of fellowship with the Lord and with his people.

Ver. 15.—Take us the foxes, the little foxes, that spoil the vineyards; for our vineyards are in blossom. There is some difficulty in deciding to which of the persons this speech is to be attributed. It is most naturally, however, assigned to the bride, and this is the view of the majority of critics. Hence she refers to the vineyards as "our vineyards," which the bridegroom could scarcely say. On the other hand, it must be acknowledged that the words are abrupt regarded as a response to the beautiful appeal of the lover. The following are the remarks of Delitzsch on the subject: "This is a vine-dresser's ditty, in accord with Shulamith's experience as the keeper of a vineyard, which, in a figure, aims at her love-relation. The vineyards, beautiful with fragrant blossoms, point to her covenant of love, and the foxes, the little foxes, which might destroy those united vineyards, point to all the great and little enemies and adverse circumstances which threaten to gnaw and destroy love in the blossom ere it has reached the ripeness of full enjoyment." Some think that Shulamith is giving the reason why she cannot immediately join her beloved, referring to the duties enjoined upon her by her brethren. But there is an awkwardness in this explanation. The simplest and most straightforward is that which connects the words immediately with the invitation of the lover to come forth into the lovely vineyards. Is it not an allusion to the playful pleasure which the young people would find among the vineyards in chasing the little foxes? and may not the lover take

up some well-known country ditty, and sing it outside the window as a playful repetition of the invitation to appear? The words do seem to be arranged in somewhat of a lyrical form—

"Catch us the foxes,
Foxes the little ones,
Wasting our vineyards,
When our vineyards are blossoming."

The foxes (*shuḏlīm*), or little jackals, were very numerous in Palestine (see Judg. xv. 4; Lam. v. 18; Ps. lxxiii. 11; Neh. iv. 3; 1 Sam. xiii. 17). The little jackals were seldom more than fifteen inches high. There would be nothing unsuitable in the address to a maiden to help to catch such small animals. The idea of the song is—Let us all join in taking them. Some think that Shulamith is inviting the king to call his attendants to the work. But when two lovers thus approach one another, it is not likely that others would be thought of. However the words be viewed, the typical meaning can scarcely be missed. The idea of clearing the vineyards of depredators well suits the general import of the poem. Let the blossoming love of the soul be without injury and restraint. Let the rising faith and affection be carefully guarded. Both individuals and communities do well to think of the little foxes that spoil the vines.

Ver. 16.—My beloved is mine, and I am his; he feedeth (his flock) among the lilies. These are the words of the bride. The latter clause is repeated in ch. vi. 2, with the addition, "in the gardens," and it is evident that Solomon is lovingly regarded as a shepherd, because Shulamith delights to think of him as fully sympathizing with her simple country life. She idealizes. The words may be taken as either the response given at the time by the maiden to the invitation of her lover to come forth into the vineyards, or as the breathing of love as she lies in the arms of Solomon. Lilies are the emblem of purity, lofty elevation above that which is common. Moreover, the lily-stalk is the symbol of the life of regeneration among the mystical medievalists. Mary the Virgin, the *Rosa mystica*, in ancient paintings is represented with a lily in her hand at the Annunciation. The people of God were called by the Jewish priests "a people of lilies." So Mary was the lily of lilies in the lily community; the *sanctissima* in the *communio sanctorum*. There may be an allusion to the lily-forms around Solomon in his palace—the daughters of Jerusalem; in that case the words must be taken as spoken, not in remembrance of the first love, but in present joy in Solomon's embrace. Some would render the words as simply praise of Solomon himself, "who, wherever

he abides, spreads radiancy and loveliness about him," or "in whose footsteps roses and lilies ever bloom." At least, they are expressive of entire self-surrender and delight. She herself is a lily, and the beloved one feeds upon her beauty, purity, and perfection.

Ver. 17.—Until the day be cool, and the shadows flee away, turn, my beloved, and be thou like a roe or a young hart upon the mountains of Bethel. This is generally supposed to be the voice of the maiden addressing her suitor, and bidding him return in the evening, when the day cools, and when the lengthening shadows fall into night. Some have seen in such words a clear indication of a clandestine interview, and would find in them a confirmation of their hypothesis that the poem is founded on a romantic story of Solomon's attempt to draw a shepherdess from her shepherd. But there is no necessity to disturb the flow of the bride's loving recollections by such a fancy. She is recalling the visit of her lover. How, at first, she declined his invitation to go forth with him to the vineyards, but with professions of love appealed to him to return to the mountains, and in the evening come once more and rejoice in her love. But the words may be rendered, "during the whole day, and until the evening comes, turn thyself to me," which is the view taken by some critics. The language may be general; that is, "Turn, and I will follow." "The mountains of Bethel" are the rugged mountains; *Bethel*, from a root "to divide," "to cut," i.e. divided by ravines; or the word may be the abstract for the

concrete—"the mountains of separation," i.e. the mountains which separate. LXX., *ὄρη τῶν κοιλωμάτων*, "decussated mountains." The Syriac and Theodotion take the word as for *bēshāmim*, i.e. offerings of incense (*θυμιαμάτων*). There is no such geographical name known, though there is Bithron, east of Jordan, near Mahanaim (2 Sam. ii. 29). The Chaldees, Ibn-Ezra, Rashi, and many others render it "separation" (cf. Luther's *scheideberge*). Bochart says, "Montes scissionis ita dicti propter *ῥωμοὺς* et *χασμάτα*." The meaning has been thus set forth: "The request of Shulamith that he should return to the mountains breathes self-denying humility, patient modesty, inward joy in the joy of her beloved. She will not claim him for herself till he have accomplished his work. But when he associates with her in the evening, as with the Emmaus disciples, she will rejoice if he becomes her guide through the new-born world of spring. Perhaps we may say the Parousia of the Lord is here referred to in the evening of the world" (cf. Luke xxiv.). On the whole, it seems most in harmony with the context to take the words as preparing us for what follows—the account of the maiden's distress when she woke up and found not her beloved. We must not expect to be able to explain the language as though it were a clear historical composition, relating facts and incidents. The real line of thought is the underlying connection of spiritual meaning. There is a separation of the lovers. The soul wakes up to feel that its object of delight is gone. Then it complains.

HOMILETICS.

Vers. 1-7.—*Converse of the bridegroom and the bride continued.* I. THE VOICE OF THE BRIDE. 1. *The rose of Sharon.* They were sitting, it seems, in a forest glade at the foot of some lofty cedar, sheltered by its embowering branches; beneath was their grassy seat, bright with many flowers. The bride feels that she is as one of those fair flowers in the bridegroom's eyes. "I am the rose of Sharon," she says, in her artless acceptance of the bridegroom's loving approval. We cannot identify the flower called here and in Isa. xxxv. 1, the rose. Our rose, we are told, was brought from Persia long after the time of Solomon; it is first mentioned in the Apocrypha (Ecclus. xxiv. 14; xxxix. 13; 1 8). The rose of the canonical Scriptures may be, as many have thought, the narcissus, which is very common in the Plain of Sharon, and is still the favourite flower of the inhabitants. The word "Sharon" may mean simply "a plain;" but, as it has the article, it probably stands here for the famous Plain of Sharon, so celebrated in ancient times for its fertility and beauty. The bride is like a lowly flower of the field, not majestic like those lofty cedars, but yet lovely in the bridegroom's sight. The Christian is humble of heart; he is helpless and short-lived as a flower. "All flesh is as grass, and all the glory of man as the flower of grass." But because Christ hath loved him and died for him, he knows that he is dear to his Saviour. 2. *The lily of the valleys.* Here, too, there is an uncertainty. The word rendered "lily" (*shushan*, the name of the famous Persian city, the "Shushan the palace" of the Book of Esther) is used of many bright-coloured flowers. We infer from ch. v. 13 that this lily was red; hence some

writers identify it with the scarlet anemone, which is very abundant all over Palestine. Solomon's bride compares herself to the lily; but even Solomon himself, the Lord said, "in all his glory was not arrayed as one of these." The Lord bids us "consider the lilies." When we look up to the heaven, to the vast distances, the enormous magnitude of the heavenly bodies, in their ordered movements, we think, as the psalmist thought, "Lord, what is man, that thou art mindful of him?" But when we consider the lilies, we see that he who framed the universe in its vastness regards things small and humble. The delicate pencilling, the gorgeous colouring of the flowers of the field, the complicated structure of many of them, the arrangements, for instance, for fertilization, show a wisdom, an exact accommodation of means to ends, as astonishing as the celestial mechanism; a great and loving care, too, for us men, in providing us not only with the necessities of life, but also with objects of rare and exquisite loveliness, to give us pure and innocent pleasures, to teach us lessons of truthfulness. He who thus clothes the grass of the field, which to-day is, and to-morrow is cast into the oven, will surely clothe us, though, alas! we are of little faith. The bride is as one of these flowers, frail as they are; she trusts in the bridegroom's care. The Christian must learn to cast all his anxiety upon God. He careth for us.

II. THE REPLY OF THE BRIDEGROOM. The king takes up the words of the bride. She is to him as a lily; other maidens, when compared with her, are but as thorns in the bridegroom's eyes. Alas! there are tares in the Lord's field, barren fig trees in his garden. They are as thorns; his chosen are as lilies. The thorns set forth by contrast the beauty of the lily; the deformity of sin brings into sharper contrast the beauty of holiness. But whatever beauty the Christian soul possesses comes only from the Bridegroom's gift; he gives it. In his infinite love he condescends to be pleased with that which is truly his, not ours; we hope to be "found in him, not having our own righteousness, which is of the Law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith" (Phil. iii. 9).

III. THE GRATITUDE OF THE BRIDE. 1. *The excellence of the bridegroom.* He had compared the bride to a lily among thorns; she compares him to an apple tree among the trees of the wood. As the apple tree with its sweet fruit and its fragrant smell excels the barren trees of the wood, so the bridegroom excels all other men in the eyes of the bride. It is uncertain what the *tappuach*, called in our version "apple tree," really is; it has been identified by different writers with the quince, the citron, or the orange. It is enough for our purpose to know that it excels the trees of the wood, that its foliage gives a pleasant shade, that its fruit is sweet and fragrant and possesses certain restorative properties. The fact that it is five times mentioned in the Book of Joshua (xii. 17; xv. 34, 53; xvi. 8; xvii. 7) in connection with the name of various towns or fountains, Beth Tappuach or En Tappuach, shows that in the old times it must have been widely cultivated and greatly valued. It excels other trees; so does the beloved excel all other men in the estimate of the bride. Christ is very dear to the Christian soul. He is the Treasure hid in the field, the Pearl of great price; those who have found him and known him by a real spiritual knowledge count other objects of human desire as nothing worth in comparison with him. "What things were gain to me," says St. Paul, "those I counted loss for Christ;" and again, "I do count them but dung, that I may win Christ, and be found in him." 2. *The bride's delight in him.* The tappuach offered a pleasant shade; the bride delighted in it; she sat down beneath its bower of foliage; its fruit was sweet to her taste. We think of the holy women who stood by the cross of Jesus (John xix. 25). The shadow under which the Church finds rest must be the shadow of the cross. The Lord Jesus Christ is to the believer "a refuge from the storm, a shadow from the heat;" "the shadow of a great rock in a weary land" (Isa. xxv. 4; xxxii. 2). He bids the weary and heavy laden to come to him that they may find rest—rest for their souls. There is no other true and abiding rest for these restless, dissatisfied souls of ours, but only the rest which he giveth—rest in the Lord. But it was the agony and bloody sweat, the bitter cross and passion, which made the Lord Jesus what he is to the believer; it is the exceeding great love of our Master and only Saviour manifested forth in that sacred suffering; it is the blessed atonement for the sins of the world wrought once for all through the virtue of the precious blood;—it is this which makes the Saviour's cross a place of rest and refreshment for the weary soul, which causes the Christian to take delight in the shadow of

Christians to the blessed sacrament is the love of Christ. The banner tells of battle and of victory. We are told that after the conflict between Israel and Amalek in Rephidim, when the victory was won through the sustained persevering prayer of Moses, "Moses built an altar, and called the name of it Jehovah-nissi: for he said, Because the Lord hath sworn that the Lord will have war with Amalek from generation to generation" (Exod. xvii. 15, 16). Moses said, "Jehovah is my Banner;" the bride says, "His banner over me is love." The Hebrew words, indeed, are different, but the thought is similar. Jehovah will have war against the enemies of his people. "When the enemy shall come in like a flood, the Spirit of the Lord shall lift up a standard against him" (Isa. lix. 19). The Lord is his people's banner, their rallying-point, the centre round which they range themselves in the hour of danger, when trials and temptations thicken, and the fiery darts of the wicked one are most frequent and most deadly. The banner is the Lord himself—his presence, his love. But as the standards round which our troops have fought are cherished and honoured, and reverently preserved in our cathedrals; so the royal banner which had led the soldiers of the cross to victory floats over the banqueting-house of the King. It is the token of his presence. He is there with his faithful ones; he receives them to his board; his banner is love. His love, which was their strength in the day of conflict, is the joy of their souls in the blessed hour of holy communion with their Lord. But the words run, "His banner over me was love;" "The Lord is *my* Banner." We seem to see here a foreshadowing of those very precious words of Holy Scripture, "The Son of God loved *me*, and gave himself for *me*." The love of the Lord Jesus Christ is a personal, an individual love. "The Lord knoweth them that are his;" he knows them one and all. His banner is over each of them as he brings them into his banqueting-house, as he draws them ever nearer to himself; and that banner is love. That unutterable love is their defence in times of danger, their joy and delight in seasons of spiritual enjoyment. Their earnest effort is so to lift up their hearts unto the Lord that they "may be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height; and to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge." The banqueting-house to which he brings the faithful here is the ante-room of the true presence-chamber of the King. "Here we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: here we know in part; but then shall we know even as also we are known." That banqueting-house is the house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. There also his banner, which is love, will be over his elected saints. But it will no longer lead them to the battle, to hard and difficult struggles; it will tell of victory and glory, and of the unveiled presence of the King. Heart of man cannot tell what is the joy of those who in that banqueting-house sit down at the marriage supper of the Lamb. Then the bride shall be arrayed in fine linen, clean and white, the fine linen which is the righteousness of saints (Rev. xix. 8). Then each true soldier of the cross, who with that banner floating over him has fought the good fight of faith, shall see that banner in all its glorious beauty, and sit beneath it very near the King; for it is written, "To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in his throne." 4. *The bride's longing.* She is sick of love. The joy of the bridegroom's love is too great and overwhelming; she is fainting in delight too sweet for her powers. She asks for restoratives, "cakes of raisins" (as the word seems to mean, not "dragons") and other fruits which were supposed to possess strengthening or reviving powers. When the Christian comes into the very presence of the King, he is oppressed with the deep sense of his own unworthiness, his own cold unloving heart, and the King's awful holiness and adorable, incomprehensible love; he needs the support of the fruit of the Spirit; he needs to be strengthened with all might by the Spirit in the inner man. When God reveals his great love to us, it makes us feel all the more the depth of our ingratitude, the coldness, the hardness, of this stony heart of ours.

"O Love Divine, how sweet thou art!
 When shall I find my willing heart
 All taken up by thee?
 I thirst, I faint, I die to prove
 The greatness of redeeming love,
 The love of Christ to me."

The bride longs for yet tenderer tokens of affection. Perhaps the words of ver. 6 would be better rendered as a wish or prayer, as in ch. viii. 3, where they occur again: "Oh that his left hand were under my head, and his right hand should embrace me!" The Christian longs to be drawn ever closer into the Lord's embrace; he longs to lie in spirit, as the beloved apostle once actually lay, "on the breast of Jesus." Especially he hopes and prays to be supported in those tender, those protecting arms, when he must pass through the dark valley of the shadow of death; then it will be sweet to feel that "the eternal God is thy Refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms" (Deut. xxxiii. 27). "Blessed are the dead that die in the Lord," in his presence, in his embrace. But if we would have the holy comfort of that dear embrace in our dying hour, we must try to live "in the Lord" now, to walk with him all our days, to cling to him with the embrace of faith. The Hebrew verb "embrace" is that from which the name of the Prophet Habakkuk, the prophet of faith, is derived. He longed for the Lord's coming; he ever watched to see what the Lord would say to him; he had learned to rejoice in the Lord in the midst of great distress; he taught us the holy lesson which St. Paul so earnestly presses upon us, "The just shall live by his faith." Such holy souls, being justified by faith, shall have peace with God through Jesus Christ our Lord. 5. *The bride's charge to the chorus.* There is an error in the old version of this thrice-repeated charge (ch. ii. 7; iii. 5; viii. 4). The bride is not cautioning the chorus not to awake her love, the bridegroom; she is adjuring (the literal translation) them not to awaken love, that is, the emotion, the affection, of love till it please, till it rise spontaneously in the heart. Hence the adjuration by the gazelles and the hinds of the field. They are gentle, timid creatures. Such is love true and pure; it is retiring; it shrinks away from observation; it is a sacred thing, between the lover and the beloved. The bride longs for the bridegroom's love, but the daughters of Jerusalem must not try to excite it; it is more delicate, more maidenly, to wait till love pleases to stir itself, till it springs up spontaneously in the heart of the beloved. The relations of the soul with Christ are very sacred; they may be mentioned only to the like-minded, and even that with a certain awe and reserve. And there are communings of the heart with the heavenly Bridegroom which may be divulged to none, not even to the nearest and dearest. And we must wait in patience for the Bridegroom. If for a time we cannot see him, or discern the tokens of his love, we must wait for his good time. "The vision is yet for an appointed time," wrote the prophet of faith; "at the end . . . it will surely come, it will not tarry" (Hab. ii. 3). God's people must not be impatient; they must trust; they must believe that "he who hath begun a good work in them will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ" (Phil. i. 6); that he will at last "fulfil all the good pleasure of his goodness, and the work of faith with power" (2 Thess. i. 11).

Vers. 8—17.—*The visit of the beloved.* I. THE BRIDE'S NARRATIVE. 1. *The description of his first coming.* The bride seems to be relating to the chorus the circumstances of her first meeting with the bridegroom. The King of Israel sought her in her humble home among the mountains of Lebanon; there he wooed and won her to be his bride. So the heavenly Bridegroom, the true Solomon who built the spiritual temple of living stones, came from his glory-throne to seek his bride, the Church; so he cometh now to seek and to save that which was lost. The bride hears the voice of the beloved; "my beloved," she says. In that little pronoun lies a great meaning. If we can only say in sincerity "my Saviour," "my Lord and my God," "my King," "my Beloved," then we can realize more or less the language of this holy Song of Songs, and see the spiritual meaning which underlies its touching parable of love; then we shall often look back with wondering gratitude and tender joy to the days of our first conversion, when we first heard the Saviour's voice calling us to himself; when we first felt that "he loved me, and gave himself for me;" when we first tried to give him that poor love of ours, which in his blessed condescension he sought in return for his own exceeding great love. The beloved is seen bounding over the mountains; he is like a gazelle or a young hart, fair to look upon and graceful, fleet of foot; he stands by the clay-built wall of the humble cottage; he looks in at the windows. So the Lord came to this poor earth of ours to seek the Church, his bride; he despised not the stable or the manger. So now he seeketh his chosen often in the lowliest homes; he looks for them shining (such is one possible interpretation of the word) through the lattice, bringing

brightness into the poorest abode; the true Light "lighteth every man" (John i. 9).

2. *The call.* Those first words of love are treasured up in the memory of the bride; she remembers every tone of the bridegroom's voice, the place, the time, all the surroundings. The Hebrew word is that which the Lord used when he called the little daughter of Jairus from the sleep of death; "Talitha, cumi." So now he calls his chosen one by one: "Rise up." They that have ears to hear listen to the gracious voice, and, like Matthew the publican, rise and follow Christ. The soul must sleep no longer when that call is heard; it is high time to awake out of sleep, for now is our salvation near at hand. When he bids us rise, we must be up and doing; we must ask, "Lord, what wouldest thou have me to do?" we must follow whither he is leading, and give him the love which in his love he desireth. His call is sweet, exceedingly full of gracious love: "My love, my fair one." "My love," perhaps better, "my friend" (see ch. i. 9). The Lord would have his Church "a glorious Church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing." The Church, alas! is not without spot; it is stained with many sins; it numbers many evil men within its fold. But the Lord said of the twelve, the first germ of the Church, "Ye are the light of the world," "Ye are the salt of the earth," though there was a Judas among them; and so now his great love for the Church makes the Church with all her faults fair in the Bridegroom's eyes. Whatever beauty of holiness she possesses comes only from his beauty, who in his love has chosen her, and brought her near to himself, making her shine with the reflection of his light, who is the true Light. But the call comes, not only to the Church in the aggregate, but in God's good time to each elect soul. The Lord knows his own; he calls them by their name. "Jesus said unto her, Mary." And they who answer, "Rabboni, my Master," are fair in the Bridegroom's sight. Each awakened soul, as it rises and comes to Christ, and sees something of his heavenly beauty, and of its own deformity and unworthiness, is filled with thankful wonder. There are, alas! so many stains of sin, and yet he says, "My fair one;" so much weakness and unbelief and selfishness, and yet, "My fair one;" so much ingratitude and hardness of heart, and yet, "My fair one." It is the Saviour's great love which makes our sinful souls fair in his sight. If there is any answering love in our hearts; if we rise when he bids us and come to him; if we can say in any sincerity, though, alas! it must be with trembling and a deep sense of sin, "Lord, thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I love thee;"—then the soul that gives its love to Christ, though feebly and imperfectly, is fair in the sight of the Bridegroom. For it is our love that he seeketh. Love covereth a multitude of sins: "Her sins, which are many, are forgiven; for she loved much." The soul that hears the Bridegroom's call must rise and come away; it must give the whole heart to Christ, and come away from other masters, saying, "Rabboni, my Master," and giving itself wholly to the one Master's love; it must come away daily from every little thing which tends to impede its communion with the Lord, or to deaden its sense of his love and presence; it must part with lower ambitions, lower desires, if it is to win the pearl of great price, the hidden treasure. So we are told in Ps. xlv., which is so like the Song of Songs, "Hearken, O daughter, and consider: incline thine ear; forget also thine own people, and thy father's house; so shall the King have pleasure in thy beauty." The soul comes; for the Lord's call is very sacred, and touches the heart with thrilling power. The soul comes; for the joys to which he invites us are beyond all comparison more blessed and holy than all besides. The winter is past when the Lord's voice is heard—the winter of coldness and indifference and unbelief; the spring of hope and holy joy begins; the heart singeth unto the Lord, making in itself a melody which is the foretaste of the new song which only the redeemed of the Lord can learn; the voice of the holy Dove is heard in the heart, which then becomes "our land"—the kingdom of God.

"And his that gentle voice we hear,
Soft as the breath of even,
That checks each fault, that calms each fear,
And speaks of heaven."

When the Holy Spirit dwelleth in the heart, the fig tree is no longer barren, the Lord's vineyard no longer bringeth forth wild grapes; there is promise of the fruits of the Spirit in ever fuller abundance. Again the Bridegroom calls in the earnestness of his

blessed love, "Arise, my love, my fair one, and come away." It may be that in that second call we may discern an anticipation of the midnight cry, "Behold, the Bridegroom cometh; go ye forth to meet him." Then he will call his chosen into that blessed Paradise, the true garden of the Lord, into which he led one forgiving soul on the day of his own most precious death. Then the winter will be past indeed; the eternal spring will begin to shine; angel-voices will welcome the redeemed into that blessed rest which remaineth for the people of God. They that are ready shall enter in; and they will be ready who have listened to the first call of the heavenly Bridegroom, who have arisen in answer to his bidding and come to him, giving him their heart's best affections, and forsaking for his dear love's sake earthly desires and earthly ambitions.

II. THE BRIDEGROOM AND THE BRIDE. 1. *The voice of the bridegroom.* He has climbed the steep rock by the ladder-like path, he has found the secluded cottage; he calls the bride his dove; he desires to see her and to hear her voice. The King of Israel climbed the rocks of Lebanon in search of the maiden whom he loved. The heavenly Bridegroom climbed the steep ascent of the awful cross that he might draw to himself the love of the Church, his bride (John xii. 32). The bridegroom had already compared the eyes of the bride to doves (ch. i. 15); now he says, "O my dove." It tells us how dear the Christian soul is to the Lord; it tells us what that soul ought to be—"harmless as doves." The rock-dove lives in clefts of the rocks. The soul which the Lord in his holy love condescends to call his dove, must dwell in the clefts of that true Rock which is Christ. The Rock of ages was cleft for us; the Christian soul must hide itself therein; there only are we safe. The dove is in the secret place, which can be reached only by climbing up the precipitous path. There is a steep ascent to be climbed before we can be hidden in the clefts of the Rock, before we can live that hidden life which is hid with Christ in God, before we can be safe, hidden in the wounded side of our dear Lord. That ascent is the path of self-denial, leading ever upward, ever closer to him who trod the way of the cross for our salvation. That life is hidden. "In the secret of his tabernacle shall he hide me; he shall set me up upon a rock" (Ps. xxvii. 5). The saint-like character is like the dove, retiring, shrinking from observation; some of God's holiest saints live silent, humble lives, in lowly circumstances, unseen of men. But our Father which seeth in secret knows their prayers, their charity, their self-denials; he will reward them openly. The heavenly Bridegroom deigns to see a sweetness and a beauty in a lowly Christian life; such a life is comely in his eyes, for it hath the beauty of holiness—a beauty derived only from communion with him who is the eternal Beauty. The voice of hymn and psalm ascending from that lowly dwelling is sweet in the Saviour's ear. The loftiest melodies of choir and organ, if love and faith and reverence are absent, cannot reach to heaven; but the heart that is practising the new song in thankfulness and adoration maketh a melody which causeth joy in the presence of the angels of God. 2. *The song of the bride.* "Take us the foxes, the little foxes." Some scholars regard this as a fragment of a vintage-song. The bride sings it in order to intimate to the bridegroom, as she does more plainly in ver. 17, that the care of the vineyards (see ch. i. 6) must prevent her from joining him till the shadows lengthen in the evening. The foxes waste the vineyards, and the vines are in blossom; therefore the little foxes must be caught. The little sins as they sometimes seem to us, the small neglects, the prayer carelessly said, the worldly thought, the idle word,—these things spoil the vineyard of the Lord, which is the Christian soul; they check its blossoming, and so prevent the fruit from being formed. The believer must watch, for these things are enemies of his soul; they may seem to be like little foxes, small and of no strength, but they mar the beauty of the Christian character, and tend to check the promise of the fruit of the Spirit. Therefore they must be caught and destroyed by diligent watchfulness, by earnest persevering prayer. The little foxes do not, indeed, root up and devour the vineyard like the wild beasts of Ps. lxxx., but they check its fruitfulness. And the small transgressions, if they do no worse, at least prevent the Christian from attaining that saintliness to which we are called. The little foxes hide and skulk about; the small sins are apt to escape detection. Therefore there is need of constant watchfulness and of very careful and diligent self-examination. For we are "called to be saints" (1 Cor. i. 2; Rom. i. 7); we are bidden to follow after holiness, to aim at perfection, to walk in the light. The little hindrances must be overcome, the little shadows must be driven away. 3. *The happy*

union of love. "My beloved is mine, and I am his: he feedeth his flock among the lilies." The favoured maiden, it may be, could not at the moment join her royal lover; but her heart was wholly his, and she knew that his love was fixed upon her. She describes him as a shepherd, but her words are figurative; he feedeth his flock, not in common pastures, but among the lilies of his garden, the garden of spices mentioned again in ch. vi. 2. She delights in dwelling on the union of their hearts; three times she repeats the happy words (ver. 16; ch. vi. 3; vii. 10). The Church is the Lord's. He loved her, and gave himself for her, and presenteth her to himself as his bride (Eph. v. 25, 27); and he is hers, her Bridegroom, her King, her Lord. The Christian soul is the Lord's. "Whether we live or whether we die, we are the Lord's" (Rom. xiv. 8). He gave himself to each one of us individually when he called us to be his own; we give ourselves to him at the moment of our first spiritual awakening; we renew the gift continually in the hour of prayer, in the holy communion: "We offer and present unto thee, O Lord, ourselves, our souls and bodies, to be a reasonable, holy, and lively sacrifice unto thee." "My Beloved is mine, and I am his"—to know that with the knowledge of personal experience is the highest of spiritual blessings. He gives himself first to us, and by that gift he enables us, cold and selfish as we are, to give ourselves to him. None can tell the blessedness of that inner spiritual union with the Lord save those happy souls to whom it is given; and they to whom he has manifested himself must very jealously keep their souls from any unfaithful leaning to other masters, that they may be wholly his, that no unfaithfulness may mar the pure clear truth of their heart's love for him who loved them even unto death, and deigns now to irradiate their hearts with his most sacred presence. He is their Lord, and he is their good Shepherd; he knoweth his own, and his own know him. Once he gave his life for the sheep; now he feeds them, and leads them on their way, till they come to the lilies of Paradise, the garden of the Lord. 4. *The adieu of the bride.* She has expressed her confidence in her lover's affection and her own devotion to him; but now, apparently, she repeats the intimation of ver. 15 in plainer words: her duties in the vineyard will occupy her time till the evening. She wishes her lover to continue his hunting excursion on the mountains of Bethel, or, it may be, "of separation"—the mountains which for the time separate the lovers. She invites him to return when the day is cool, when the day breathes; that is, when the breeze comes in the evening, and the shadows lengthen and flee away (see Jer. vi. 4). The Christian must not neglect the ordinary commonplace duties of life; he must not allow himself, like the Thessalonians, to be so distracted with spiritual excitement as to be unable to attend to the pursuits of his calling. The bride tends the vineyards which have been committed to her charge; the Christian must do with his might whatever his hand findeth to do. He must not neglect his duties even for the sake of giving all his time to religious exercises. *Laborare est orare.* If, whatever he does, he does all to the glory of God, Christ is his, and he is Christ's, as fully in the midst of daily work as in the hour of prayer. Daniel, who kneeled upon his knees, and prayed and gave thanks three times a day, was faithful in all things to the king his master; no error or fault could be found in the administration of his arduous office. The bride will welcome her lover back in the cool of the evening, when she has finished her work; the Christian will take delight in his evening prayers when the tasks of the day have been performed.

HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Ver. 1.—*The rose and the lily.* We have suggested here the self-consciousness of the renewed soul as to its true character and condition. It is the maiden who speaks, not her beloved, who in the next verse lovingly responds to what she says of herself. She likens herself—

I. TO THE ROSE OF SHABON. That is, to a common field flower, not rare or distinguished, but of the lowliest if also of the loveliest kind. 1. *It is the utterance of humility.* (Of Paul's word of himself as "less than the least of all saints.") Lowly thoughts of themselves are ever the characteristics of saints. It is not so strong an expression as the "I am black" of ch. i. 5, but it is of similar order (cf. on ch. i. 5)

2. *But not of false humility.* For though a lowly it is yet a lovely flower. The rose of Sharon was that "excellency of Sharon" which Isaiah couples with "the glory of Lebanon." Here, too, the resemblance between this and the "but comely" of ch. i. 5 is evident. And the saintly soul is lovely—in the sight of its Lord, in the sight of the Church, and in the sight of men. Of our Lord it is said that "the grace of God was upon him," and that he grew "in favour with God and man." And this is so with his people, for he makes them beautiful and precious in his sight. She who is here the type of such soul is called "the fairest among women." 3. *And the rose is also fragrant.* True, to it as to others the poet's lines apply—

"Full many a flower is born to blush unseen,
And waste its fragrance on the desert air."

But the saintly soul is what it is because it is its nature to be so, whether admired or not (cf. on ch. i. 12). And such souls are: 4. *The glory of the places where they are found.* The Plain of Sharon is remembered in the minds of men for this its "excellency"—the roses that grow there. The world would not say that the glory of a place was its saints. It would point to its popular heroes, and those whom it calls its great men. But by the side of such flowers Solomon in all his glory fades by comparison. How plainly the Divine estimate of men is seen in God's choice of Israel—a small, insignificant people, contemptible in the eyes of the great empires of ancient and modern days! But because in them, as in none other, the saints of the Lord were found, therefore on them and on their land the eyes of the Lord rested night and day. According to our character, according as we are governed by the faith, the fear, and the love of God, are we a blessing and an honour to our land and age. And they: 5. *Delight in the sunshine of his love.* The rose is the child of the sun. Its bright rays must rest upon it or its radiant beauty will not be revealed. And we are to "walk in the light," and to be "children of the light."

II. *THE LILY OF THE VALLEYS.* This is another emblem of the saintly soul. 1. *Of their character.* Purity, sweetness, power of self-multiplication. What numbers of them there are! Bushnell speaks in his 'Christian Nurture' of "the out-propagating power of the Christian stock," by which he means the power given to Christian faith to reproduce itself beyond the like power possessed by that which is unchristian. And it has been so. How soon was the whole Roman empire converted to Christianity! It is the truth taught in the parable of the mustard seed (Matt. xiii.). And it will be so yet more. "The earth shall be filled with the knowledge of the Lord." 2. *Their home is in the "valleys."* (1) The lowly places. They "mind not high things." They "learn of" him who said, "I am meek and lowly in heart;" and, "When thou art bidden to a feast, take the lowest place." It is in such valleys that some of Christ's fairest flowers are found. Amongst the poor. The afflicted. The persecuted. (2) Where, though exposed to much peril, they are yet preserved. How wonderful has been the preservation of the Church when we think of the perils it has had to encounter! As sheep amongst wolves Christ sent them. But yet the sheep outnumber the wolves, and have long done so. The lilies liable to be plucked by any passer-by, trampled on or devoured by any beast, yet they live on, and each spring sees the valleys covered with them again. 3. *They are found where the living streams abound.* The well-watered valleys are the lilies' natural home. And so with the saintly soul. It lives by that river the streams whereof make its home glad. So, then, here is another portraiture of such a soul. Do we behold *our face* in this glass?—S. C.

Ver. 2.—*The Lord's response to the lily.* "As the lily among thorns."

I. *HE DOES SET HIS LILIES AMID SUCH SURROUNDINGS.* By the thorns we may understand: 1. *The world of the ungodly.* "Among them that are set on fire, even the sons of men, whose teeth are spears and arrows, and their tongue a sharp sword" (Ps. lvii. 4). "The saint must expect to find himself, while in this world, among uncongenial and hostile spirits." 2. *Trials and temptations.* (Cf. Paul's "thorn in the flesh.") 3. *Hindrances to our growth and peril to our life.* "The thorns sprang up and choked them" (Matt. xiii.). 'Tis a wonder, when we think of it, how any of these lilies live at all. 4. *All others than they who are the Lord's.* The speaker in text

compares all other daughters with her, and classes them all with the thorns as compared with her. If whatsoever be not of faith be sin, then, whatsoever it be, it comes under this ill-sounding name of "thorns." Such are the surroundings of the saintly soul.

II. **NEVERTHELESS, THEY GROW THERE.** As a fact, they do and increase. And the reason is that given to Paul when he "besought the Lord thrice" concerning his thorn: "My grace is sufficient for thee: . . . my strength is made perfect in weakness." There is no other account to be given of the matter. It is all a marvel but for that.

III. **AND IT IS IN HIS GRACE AND WISDOM THAT THEY ARE WHERE THEY ARE.** How many wise and holy ends are secured by it! 1. *God's grace is magnified in and by them.* It is easy to grow amid favourable surroundings, where much helps and but little hinders. Growth there is not remarkable. To be Christ's servants where such service is general, and even popular, is no hardship. But if amid thorns, amid all that hinders, all that makes it difficult to serve Christ, if there we serve him, then is his grace magnified. 2. *The world is kept from being hell.* From being all thorns, dry, barren, hurtful, fit only for the fire. What would this world be if God's saints were taken out of it? Life would, indeed, then be not worth living. It would be better had men never been born. 3. *The thorns may be led to become lilies.* Of course, this is impossible in the natural world, but, thank God, not in the spiritual. And such transformation often occurs, and that it may, God places his lilies where they are. "As the Father hath sent me, so send I you," he said to his disciples. But the Father sent the Son to save the world. This, therefore, in their measure is the mission of his people, and hence they must be where they are.

IV. **BUT IT WILL NOT BE SO ALWAYS.** The lilies shall be transplanted that they may bloom for ever in the Paradise of God. And the thorns!—what is fit for such will be done. Therefore if we be of the blessed number whom the lilies of the valleys represent, let us not murmur, but remember what our mission is, and seek to fulfil it. And let each one of us ask—Which am I, lily or thorn?—S. C.

Ver. 3.—"*His shadow.*" St. Bernard takes this as telling of the Passion of Christ, and especially of the time when, as he hung on the cross, there was "darkness over all the land." Now, it does not mean this, but rather, as the whole context of the verse tells, of the cool shelter from the sun's fierce heat and glare which the speaker enjoyed beneath the overarching of the boughs of the tree under which she had seated herself. Hence it tells of "the shadow of the Almighty," of which Ps. xci. so fully speaks. Therefore let us take this—

I. **ITS TRUE MEANING.** "Man is born to trouble;" he needs shelter continually. The sun smites him by day; the fierce heat of life's cares and distresses often make him faint and weary. Now: 1. *There are other shelters which men often choose.* The world offers many. (1) Its riches. Men think, if they can only get these, they will be protected from all harm, both they and theirs. Hence men struggle after them incessantly. (2) Its friends. If we can gather round us a sufficient number of these, and of the right kind, we sit down under that shadow with great delight. (3) Its pleasures also. Men plunge into them as into some leafy covert, where they can hide themselves from the darts of all kinds of pursuing pains. But are not all these what the prophet calls "walls daubed with untempered mortar;" or, as in another place another prophet speaks, "battlements" which are "not the Lord's"? 2. *But what harm they do us!* They are short-lived, and when our sorest need comes these Jonah-gourds have all withered. And at the best they are but imperfect. They can for a while affect our circumstances, but the soul, the true seat of all trouble, they cannot better, but only make worse. For they do us this wrong also—they come between us and man's only true Shelter, "the shadow of the Almighty." They hinder our seeing and our seeking it, and then, sooner or later, do assuredly fail us themselves. Under the image of "cisterns, broken cisterns, which can hold no water," and for the sake of which men in their folly forsake the fountain of living waters, Jeremiah mourns the same infatuation. 3. *But the Lord is alone man's true Defence.* The failure of others, the unvaried protection that this affords, is proof incontestable. This blessed shadow, whilst Israel rested in it, sheltered them from all evil; and it does so still for every one that "dwelleth in the secret place of the Most High"—every one, that is, who abides in the trust of him of whom the secret place told. That secret place was the inner chamber in the

tabernacle which was known as the most holy place, and which was emphatically secret, for it was never entered but once a year, and then by the high priest alone. But it told of man's need of God's grace, and of that grace provided for him. To trust, then, in that God was, and is, to dwell "under the shadow of the Almighty." May that happy lot be ours!

II. THE MEANING IT HAS SUGGESTED. The shadow of the cross, the shadow into which our Lord entered during his Passion especially. 1. *It was his shadow.* See the agony in the garden; hear the cry from the cross, "My God, my God, why hast," etc.? Read Ps. xxii., which tells of those dread hours. We read, once and again, in the Gospels of his being troubled, of his sighing, of his tears. Anticipating his death, he said, "Now is my soul troubled." Yes, what wonder that he feared as he entered that dark shadow! 2. *But we may sit under it "with great delight,"* and its fruit is sweet to our taste. (1) For that shadow has flown away. The cross is taken down. In its special form the Passion is past. Now, "on his head" is not the crown of thorns, but the "many crowns" of his people's love. With great delight do they think of this. (2) And dark as that shadow was, it was the background on which shone out resplendently the love of the heart of God. Man had never really seen that love but for that shadow. (3) And because of all that has come forth from that shadow. Who can reckon up in order or number the sweet fruits of that tree on which the Saviour hung? Have they not been, are they not, and will they not yet more be, blessed for man? What of redeeming force for all men was not set in motion by that act of redemption? Well, therefore, may even those who look not upon our Lord as we do, nevertheless sing, "In the cross of Christ I glory." 3. *But his shadow may, will, must, be ours.* For we also are to take up our cross and follow after him. We have to "know the fellowship of his sufferings, and to be made conformable to his death."

"All that into God's kingdom come
Must enter by this door."

In some this fellowship with his sufferings has been manifest to all in that which they have been called upon to endure. In others, outwardly, there may not have been much, if anything, to tell of such fellowship. But there is the spiritual cross, as real, as sharp, as heavy, as repellent to our nature, as the outward and visible one. And who may escape that? But: 4. *We may sit under such shadow with great delight.* (1) Men have done so (cf. "I glory in tribulations also"). And St. Paul again, throughout the Epistle to the Philippians, whose key-note is joy. Yet he was in prison and in peril of his life all the while. And his experience has been that of "a great multitude which no man can number, out of," etc. (2) Why is this? Because it has been *his* shadow. The reason of suffering is the measure of its power over us. Does the fond mother, watching night after night by the bed of her fever-stricken, darling child, think much or complain of her sufferings? Does she not glory in them if they can but help her child? And so if our shadow be his shadow, that which he has bidden us bear, then because it is his we shall "sit down under it with," etc. St. Paul sprang towards it, counted all things but loss that he might attain to the excellency of its knowledge; so he speaks of it with almost rapture, with certainly no complaint. He was one of those who "sat down under . . . to his taste." Then let it be our sole care to see that the shadows which draw over all lives, and which will darken ours sometimes, be *his* shadow, and then all will be well.—S. C.

Vers. 5—7.—*Faint for love.* Keeping to the spiritual, not the historical, interpretation, these verses suggest what is common to all, but confessed here only by the saintly soul.

I. CHRIST SHARES IT. He said when on the cross, "I thirst," and that told not alone of his physical thirst, but of that sacred, insatiable, and still unsatisfied thirst for the love of human hearts. He could say, "I am faint for love." And yet he yearns for that love, though much he already possesses, and will more and more. The Passion was but as a picture thrown upon a sheet to make clear and conspicuous to all what else they had not seen. So the sufferings of Christ serve to show not what was once, but what eternally is, in the heart of Christ—this yearning for man's love. The Holy Spirit, the unseen and spiritual Christ, is yet on earth amongst men; and yet, as he

pleads with them, is grieved and done despite to, as he was in the days of his flesh. His thirst is not yet satisfied; all the loving invitations of the gospel prove this. It is our joy to believe that the day will dawn when, though now, as ever in the past, faint for man's love, he will "see of the travail of his soul, and be satisfied." Be it ours to hasten that day!

II. THE WORLD ALSO, BUT KNOWS NOT WHAT IT NEEDS. The love of Christ is what the world wants, though it wanders wearily off, as it has done from the beginning, after what it foolishly deems will satisfy its need. All the unrest, the agitation, the seething discontent, the wild rush after this scheme and that, which promise its betterment,—all show how great its need, and how yet that need remains unmet. If the Church of Christ on earth were but what its name professes, soon would the weary world see where all its wants would find supply, and turn to him for whose love it is that it faints, and is so wretched and woebegone. It needs that love to be the animating principle of Christian people, in their conversation, conduct, habits, business, and ways; which assuredly it is far enough from being at present, else why is society as it is? why are there "submerged tenths" and "darkest Englands," as we know there are? Is this the outcome of a *Christian* civilization? No; only the natural product of a civilization which is everything but Christian. And yet more, the world needs Christ's love in themselves. For lack of that it is as it is.

III. BUT SPECIALLY THE CHRISTIAN SOUL. And the confession of faintness for his love may be true: 1. *In a sad sense.* If such soul be faint, as many are, incapable of real service, weakly, ineffectual, and impoverished, is not the true and sad cause revealed in this confession? As plants cannot grow without the light and warmth of the sun, so Christian souls cannot prosper that do not come into and "continue in" Christ's love. But the confession as made here is not in a sad sense, but: 2. *In a very blessed one.* It is the very presence of his love in the soul that leads to the longing for deeper enjoyment of it. "My soul breaketh for the longing that it hath after thy commandments at all times;" "My soul longeth, yea, even fainteth, for the courts of the Lord;" and Ps. lxxiii. 1, are all similar expressions. Great saints have all of them known this holy longing, this going out of the soul after God in great vehemency of desire; and blessed, blessed indeed, are they. My soul, be thou of their number! And such revelations of the Lord's grace often affect the body as well as the soul, causing faintness and overwhelming emotion (cf. Dan. x. 8-19; Judg. vi. 22; Rev. i. 12-18; 2 Cor. xii. 7, in illustration of this). 3. But in such faintness *the soul craves support.* This is suggested by the request made (ver. 5), "Stay me with cordials, comfort me with citrons." These were the refreshments she had enjoyed when "under his shadow," and when she ate of the "fruit sweet to her taste" (ver. 3). Translated into their spiritual meaning, they tell of those precious truths and teachings which come from and cluster round the cross of Christ. The soul would drink again of such "cup of salvation," and eat of the fruit of such "tree of life." It was the power of those truths, brought home by the Holy Spirit, that heretofore had quickened and sustained the soul, and hence they are desired again. And they seem to have been partaken of (cf. Ps. cxxxviii. 3; Prov. xxxi. 6), and the soul to have been thereby brought again to the rich enjoyment of the Divine love. And: 4. *It finds what it has so earnestly desired.* (Ver. 6.)

"As in the embraces of my God,
Or on my Saviour's breast."

This sacred enfolding of the soul in the love of God is the meaning of the verse, or, at least, the designed teaching. Think what must have been the joy of the penitent prodigal when, after his weary journey, he found thrown around him, in loving welcome, the arms of his father, against whom he had so sinned; and on his brow the father's kiss. That rapture of the soul when it is filled with the sense of the Divine love,—these are the embraces of God and the fulfilment of the well-known words, "He fell on his neck, and kissed him." That part of the parable which tells of the prodigal's yearning for home, the weary journey, and then the welcome, may be taken as the gospel commentary on these verses. And the soul shall be enfolding in this Divine love; it shall not be faint for it, and ever continue so. For the next verse tells: 5. *How the soul is anxious not to be disturbed* in its blessed condition until the Lord will. The maiden

of the song is represented as addressing a passionate adjuration to her companions, "by the roes and hinds"—that is, by all beautiful, loving, timid, and easily startled things, as these were—that they should not awaken her beloved from his repose until he will. And so the soul that rests in the realization of God's love would linger therein.

"My willing soul would stay
In such a frame as this."

And this side of heaven there is no such joy to be realized as this. Alas! how rare it is, or rather, how rarely we find it, though we might if we would! Still, the soul knows that its life is not to be all enjoyment. Service has to be rendered. The disciples would have liked to stay on the Mount of Transfiguration; they said, "It is good to be here;" but the poor lunatic lad down below needed healing, and therefore neither their Lord nor they might linger where they were. Hence, though the soul would rest always in the joy of his realized love, yet it may, probably will, as with Paul, be sent forth to stern duty and patient toil. Therefore it is added, "until he please."

"O Love Divine, how sweet thou art!
When shall I find my willing heart
All taken up by thee?"

S. C.

Vers. 8—17.—*The soul wooed and won.* In this lovely pastoral the literal meaning is, we think, as stated in introduction to homily on ver. 15. But it may be taken as setting forth how Christ woos and wins the souls he loves. The various stages are shown.

I. **THE SOUL HEARS HIS VOICE.** "The voice of my Beloved" (ver. 8). It is as said in John x., "My sheep hear my voice." *They hear it* in the loving exhortations of those who would win them for Christ; in his Word; in the silent pleadings of his Spirit; in his providence. *And it is gladly heard.* The tone of this ver. 8 shows that she who hears is pleased to hear. There is the response of her heart; cf. "My sheep hear . . . and follow me;" "Speak, Lord; for thy servant heareth."

II. **THEN THE SOUL SEES HIM COMING.** "Behold, he cometh leaping upon," etc. Christ says to his Church, "Behold, I come quickly." There, as here, his coming is: 1. *Swiftly.* Conversions to Christ very rarely are sudden, but they often seem so (cf. those of penitent thief, Paul, Philippian gaoler). The conviction that Christ alone can save us, and that he will, is borne in upon our souls all in a moment, as it were; the truth rushes in upon us. 2. *No distance can keep him back.* The soul has been distant enough from him; "over the hills, and far away." How we have kept aloof from him! What space we have put between him and ourselves! Gone, maybe, into some "far country." 3. *Difficulties do not daunt him.* Mountains and hills—he leapeth upon them. What impossibilities have sometimes seemed to stand in the way of a soul's salvation! Take the instances above named. What human probability was there that they should be won for Christ? But he makes nothing of them; they cannot hinder him. "Who art thou, O great mountain? before Zerubbabel," etc. (Zech. iv. 7). 4. *Very near.* "He standeth behind our wall." Just outside (cf. "Behold, I stand at the door, and knock"). Often the soul when sought by the Saviour is conscious of his nearness, and that he is seeking her. Sometimes when we are alone and in serious thought; sometimes in sacred services, when his Word has been preached with power.

III. **KNOWS THAT HE IS SEARCHING FOR HER.** "He looketh in at the windows" (ver. 9). He will find her if she is to be found, and so his eyes search for her. This, too, the soul often knows. "Thou God seest me" (cf. Ps. cxxxix. 1—12, "O Lord, thou hast searched me," etc.). Our hearts' inmost secrets, unknown to our nearest and dearest earthly friend, are known to him; for all our hearts have windows through which his eyes often keenly glance. Conscience shows us those "eyes of the Lord which are in every place." (For illustration of this loving search, cf. parables in Luke xv.)

IV. **IS AFFECTIONATELY ENTREATED BY HIM.** He: 1. *Addresses her as his much-*

loved one. "My fair one." Such name of endearment tells the truth as to what our souls are to him. So also "my dove" (ver. 16). We should not call them fair—no, indeed! But love invests all it loves with beauty. What mother does not think her child lovelier than everybody else's? Other people do not see it; she does. And so Christ sees in our souls what we certainly cannot see. 2. *Bids her "rise up and come away."* (Cf. "He arose and came to his father.") How many would be saved willingly if only they could stay where they are—in self-indulgence, in gainful trade, in worldly conformity, in allowed sin! But it may not be. The soul *must* "rise up," etc. We must leave our sins behind us when we come to Christ. 3. *He encourages her* by telling of the pleasure he desires for her. He would have her go forth with him in delightful walk amid the flowers and fragrance, the sunshine and song, of a lovely spring morning. No more exquisite description of such a morning was ever penned. And so the Divine wisdom moves us, saying, "Her ways are ways of pleasantness," etc. And we are taught that the course of the soul should be as a going forth amid the loveliness of such a morning in spring. It is not through a vale of tears, but amid what is here told of. Joy should be a chief element in the soul's life in Christ. 4. *He bids her cast away her fear.* (Cf. as to her fearfulness, on ver. 15.) Young souls are often fearful—of themselves, of the world, of the cross. Christ would dispel such fears. 5. *He asks for response.* He would hear her voice. The voice of the soul in prayer, in praise, in self-surrender,—that is the voice Christ loves to hear.

V. IS FINALLY AND FULLY WON. (Cf. ver. 16.) See how gladly: 1. *She confesses him*, openly avowing that he is the Beloved of her heart, and that she is altogether his (cf. "She fell down before him, and told him all the truth"). Confession is the law of love. 2. *She declares that he dwells in her heart.* Those pure graces, the lilies of his creating, are those amongst which he takes delight. Christ dwells in our hearts through faith. 3. *She desires that whilst her life lasts he may come to her as he has done.* (Ver. 17.) So long as the night of life lasts, and until the eternal dawn breaks, will she welcome his presence and rejoice in his coming.

CONCLUSION. Christ does so woo our souls, especially those who, as the one told of here, are young. May he win them as he won this!—S. C.

Vers. 11, 12.—*Spring.* According to St. Paul, God's natural world was intended to be—might, would, and should have been, but for man's sin—the Bible for the great part of mankind. "Nevertheless," said he to the men of Lycaonia, "God left not himself without witness, in that he did good, and gave us rain from heaven, and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness." And again (Rom. i.), he declares that "the invisible things of God from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead." Not the Bible alone, then, but nature also, was intended to reveal God, and men ought, as we are assured, to have seen God in the things that he made. But instead of being a revelation of God, it has been perverted into an impenetrable screen to hide and to conceal him; or, still worse, to distort, misrepresent, and dishonour him. So that, left to nature only, men have sunk lower and lower, as all experience proves. This is true of mankind generally. *But it is not universally true.* Long ere the written Scriptures were given, and in parts of the world where they never came, there have been those who by Divine illumination have learnt much of God through the works of God. Doubtless many of those of whom St. Paul speaks as having by nature done the things of the Law, though they never had the Law, these learnt from the great Bible of nature—that page having been, even as the written page must ever be, opened up to them by the teaching of the Spirit of God. Hence was it that their consciences became so enlightened as to approve or condemn according as they did good or evil. But if it was expected of them who had not, as we have, the written Word, but only nature to teach them, that they should understand God and his ways, how much more will be expected, and justly expected, of us! There are many who rejoice in the natural world as a revelation of God. What a proof we have of this in that glorious Ps. civ.! There the devout writer goes over the whole of God's creation, animate and inanimate; that which has, and that which has not, the gift of reason. And he ends his devout meditation saying, "Bless thou the Lord, O my soul. Praise ye the Lord." Here, then, is a worthy model for us to follow in contemplating the works of God. Let us try to imitate so good an

example. Our text is a short but beautiful description of an Eastern spring. In that land of the sun it is true, as it is not always here, that in the spring-time "the winter is past, the rain is over and gone . . . heard in the land." But let us listen to some few out of the many holy and helpful lessons which this season of the year is ready to teach us, if only our hearts be open to receive them. These teachings of the spring, then, what are they? Well, one of them is surely this—

I. "REST IN THE LORD, AND WAIT PATIENTLY FOR HIM." Try to imagine, if you can, what your thoughts would have been during the dark winter-time, supposing you had no idea of spring. It is difficult for us even to conceive that we could ever have not known that winter gives way to spring, and that the seasons follow in their orderly round. But suppose one waking up to consciousness for the first time at the beginning of winter. He would have seen the days getting shorter and shorter, the cold becoming more intense, every leaf stripped from well-nigh all trees, and their unclothed, skeleton-like branches quivering and moaning in the wintry wind. He would see the bare, brown fields stiffen and become rigid under the icy blast and the imprisoning frost; and from time to time the whole land would put on its white shroud of snow as if it were indeed dead. He would see all this and the many other familiar features of winter; and had he never known or heard of spring, would he ever think that such a season would come—that all the present dreariness would give way to brightness, the sad silence to the joyful song of birds, and the gloomy grey tints of winter to the brightness of the foliage, the blossoms, and the flowers of spring? I do not think he would. For this is how many of us feel and speak, notwithstanding perpetual reminders to the contrary, *when winter reigns in the heart*. Hearken to Jacob, "All these things are against me," etc.; Moses, praying God to kill him out of hand because he could not bear the people nor endure his wretchedness; Elijah, too, making the same request; and Job, and many more. Are they not all instances of that mournful tendency in our minds, to think that when like sad wintry times are upon us so they will always be? Surely, then, the teaching of the spring is that we should "rest in the Lord," etc.; for spring declares of him that he is *the gladness-giving God*; that though there be winter, yet it has to give way to the bright and joyful spring. In the natural world the "oil of joy is given for mourning, and the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness." God does turn Nature's mourning into dancing; he puts off her sackcloth and girds her with gladness. "The winter is over and past," etc. Therefore may we not be well assured that so it will be with the winter of our hearts, the sadness and the silence there, if only we will "rest in the Lord," etc.? Let our prayer, then, be—

"Lord, let thy love,
Fresh from above,
Soft as the south wind blow,
Call forth its bloom.

.
"Now when thy voice
Makes earth rejoice,
And the hills laugh and sing,
Lord, teach this heart
To bear its part,
And join the praise of spring."

II. THE INFINITE TENDERNESS OF GOD. We go forth into the country, and we note all around us the first springings of that plant-life which when matured is to be of such vast value to us all. But how fragile everything looks! How little it would take to destroy the whole of it! A too-severe storm, an over-rough wind, a frost, any out of a thousand casualties, would destroy all. But yet God takes care of it. He will not suffer the too-violent storms to come, but only gentle showers; not the rough wind, but the milder gales. Thus with infinite tenderness he rears up the young plants. 1. Now, how all this *rebukes the hard thoughts of God* which many have held and taught and maintained, in books as innumerable as dreary. We wonder at the heathen, in view of the loveliness of nature, fashioning their gods so cruel and relentless as they did. But that we, with nature and the gospel, should so conceive of God is sad indeed. We little know the mischief such hard representations do, the alienation and the bitter-

ness towards God which they foster. It is the source of the Madonna and saint worship of Rome, and of worse things still. For men become as the gods they worship. 2. *It shows us how to deal wisely with all young life*, especially the beginnings of the Divine life in the soul: how to train our children. 3. *And it bids us trust God*. Will God be so gracious to birds and blossoms and not tenderly care for us? Impossible.

III. "WITH HIM IS PLENTIFUL REDEMPTION." Spring teaches that our God is the redeeming God. For spring is the redemption of outward nature, its regeneration and resurrection. She was dead, but is alive again; was lost, but is found. Darkness has given place to light, barrenness to fruitfulness, and the "hills rejoice on every side." The vision of Ezekiel is put before us as oft as the spring comes round. "Can these dry bones live?" said he. "Can all this seeming deadness live?" say we. And the spring is our answer. And we are told further of *our dependence upon God* for such redemption. Who can bring about the renewed life of spring but God? and who that yet higher life of the soul? And *how visible the life is!* See all around the proofs of the presence of the spring. Not less visible are the fruits of the spring-tide of the soul. And *as the spring is promised, so is the better gift of redemption*. Each blade, blossom, and bud seems to say to us, "Shall God redeem me, and will he not redeem thee?" And *the mystery of the cross* is shown. For what is spring but life out of and through death? Redemption must imply a Redeemer, and the life of spring coming forth out of the death of winter patterns forth how the Christ must needs suffer and be raised again. And for ourselves it tells of him who said for us, "I am the Resurrection and the Life," and bids us say, "I know that *my Redeemer liveth*."

IV. "PUT YE ON THE NEW MAN." All Nature does this at spring-tide. We in our dwellings and in our dress try to imitate her and do the like. They who can, get new garments; they who cannot, try to make the old look new. Let us learn the lesson in things higher still. Is there not much room for it? In too many even Christian people the remains of what Paul calls "the old man" are too plentifully visible—in homes, in habits, in speech, in thought, in temper. How much we need yet to be created anew in Christ Jesus, to "put on the new man"! And he who maketh "all things new" is ready to help us herein if we will have his help.

V. BE DILIGENT. Spring is a time of great activity. The husbandman dare not waste those precious hours if he would rejoice when harvest comes. So with this life of ours, all which is given us for preparation for the great harvest-time. Then let the activities of the spring remind us that we, too, must be diligent if we would be found at the last faithful before the Lord.—S. C.

Ver. 15.—"The little foxes." This verse is part of the description which Shulamith, the betrothed, gives of her beloved. In the verses preceding she relates (ver. 8, etc.) how he was wont to come to her home after her, bounding and leaping over the hills in his loving haste, like a young hart. And how, when he had reached the house, he would "look in at the windows," and beg her to come forth to him. And to entice her he would sing the beautiful song of the spring, "The winter is past, the rain is over and gone; the flowers appear on the earth, and the time of the singing of birds is come." And then, because she was still slow to come forth, she tells how he would call her again, and by the tender name of his timid "dove," that hides itself, because of its fear, in the clefts of the rocks, and amid the inaccessible crags and crevices of lofty cliffs; and then how he would ask her to sing to him her song of the foxes, "Take us the foxes, the little foxes . . . grapes." Such seems to be the circumstantial setting of this verse; but, like the whole poem of which it forms part, had it no more meaning than lies on the surface it would not, we believe, have found place amongst the sacred Scriptures, the Bible of the people of God. If, then, the words suggest to devout minds, as they have done in all the centuries since they were written, truths which belong to the region of the soul, to our relationships with God more than to any relationship of earth, surely we may believe that they were designed so to do; and earthly as the story may be on which such truths are grafted, like the parables of our Lord, it has a heavenly meaning, and is designed to help us on our heavenward way. Now, of some of these suggested truths let us speak. One word as to the imagery of this verse. "Foxes, jackals, little foxes, are very common in Palestine, and are particularly fond of grapes. They often burrow in holes in hedges round the gardens, and, unless strictly watched,

would destroy whole vineyards. Their flesh was sometimes eaten in autumn, when they were grown fat with feeding on grapes. Thus Theocritus says—

“‘I hate the foxes with their bushy tails,
Which numerous spoil the grapes of Mecon’s vines
When fall the evening shades.’

And Aristophanes compares soldiers to foxes, because they consume the grapes of the countries through which they pass” (Burrows). But now as to the spiritual teachings which are contained in these words. We have brought before us here—

I. A SAD POSSIBILITY. Vines that promised well, spoiled. Translated into the language of the Spirit, they speak of blessed beginnings of the Divine life in the soul not realized. *Few things are more beautiful than the beginnings of the Divine life.* The promise and hope they give rise to of matured and rich and Christ-like character fill the devout-minded observer—especially if he himself has prayed and watched and toiled for such beginnings—with a deep and sacred joy. What does he not anticipate from them? What of influence on others, in the Church, the home, the business, the world generally? What of service for Christ and truth and all goodness? Hence when he sees that tenderness of conscience, that prayerfulness, that gentleness and humility, that alacrity in service, that delight in worship, all which mark these beginnings, how can he but be glad? or how can any one who has a Christ-like heart in him? *But few things are more sad than to see all this hopefulness and promise spoiled.* And such things do happen. “Ye did run well; who did hinder you?” so said St. Paul to the foolish Galatians who had so bitterly disappointed him. And how often in our Lord’s ministry had he to bear this disappointment! Again and again there would come to him those about whom bright hope might have been cherished—amiable, well-disposed, warm-hearted, intelligent, pure-minded, generous, much esteemed, kindly, lovable, and beloved. Such people were irresistibly drawn to him, and for a while they would follow him; but then after a while we find something offending them, and they go away. Christ drew their portrait in his parable of the sower, where he likens such to the seed sown on the stony ground. Quick to spring up and present the appearance of vigorous life, but as quick to wither away when the sun’s scorching heat smote them as it smote all else. And surely, in the spoiled vines told of in our text, we have another of these Bible portraitures of the same, or a similar class. And where there is not the actual destruction and perishing of what is good, *there is yet the spoiling.* The vines are not cut down, they are not hindered from bringing forth *any* fruit; the foe told of “spoils,” which is less than to destroy. And how often we have to mourn this “spoiling of the vine”! Neither we nor others come up to that elevation of Christian character which might fairly have been expected. Many people are, in the main, worthy; there is very much that is excellent in them, but their characters are sadly marred. They are ineffectual; they do not tell for any real or large amount of good in any one, anywhere. Their type of life is low; they have the name and the form of godliness, but all too little of the power. They are respectable, decorous, outwardly religious, and live, as we say, consistently with their profession. But if you come to know them, how little of their real life is touched by their religion; what a mere veneer it is on their ordinary existence! How little it does for them in making them really holy or happy, or powerful for good! They began well, but they have sunk and settled down to this. He who looks that these people should bring forth their fruit in due season—plentiful fruit, much fruit, the best fruit—will assuredly be disappointed. “And what hinders them? Now, mark you, it is not said here, as in that mournful psalm, ‘The wild boar out of the wood doth root it up, and the wild beasts of the field devour it.’ It is not said here, ‘It is burnt with fire and cut down, and they shall perish at the rebuke of thy countenance.’ It is not said here, ‘Why hast thou then broken down her hedges, so that all they that go by pluck off her grapes?’ No; it is the foxes, the little foxes, that spoil the tender grapes.” Therefore let us now look at this—

II. ITS TOO MUCH NEGLECTED CAUSE. It is the little sins, the small faults, the slight self-indulgences, what we count as trifles and think nothing, or almost nothing, of—these are the little foxes which spoil the tender grapes. All sins waste and destroy the soul. Not merely the wage but the work of sin is death. Some there are so notorious that they are as St. Paul says, “open beforehand, going before to judgment.”

They are as the wild boar out of the wood and the beasts of the field, told of in the psalm we quoted just now. High-handed, bold, Heaven-defying sins, bringing down on the doers of them, sooner or later, the dread judgments of God. But there are other masters of the soul, spoilers of the grapes of God,—those sins which here are pictured to us as “the little foxes.” “*Little*,” so we call them, and others call them so too; and hence, though we be all wrong together in so calling them, we have come to think them little as well as call them so. And *fox-like*, which we often forget, for they skulk and lurk and hide; they have, as our Lord said, “their holes,” and there they burrow and bury themselves out of sight. And many of them have other characteristics of the fox—deceit, cruelty, foulness; true vermin of the soul are they. And they all of them often feign death as the fox does. And we think them dead, and lo! they spring to life again, and are as active as ever. Hence we do indeed need to be on our guard against them. But it is the *littleness* of these sins to which our thoughts are chiefly turned by the vivid image of the little foxes. Their littleness, like charity, covers a multitude of them, and so conceals them from our own censure and that of others. And if the great adversary of our souls can persuade us not to mind these little sins, he has almost all he cares for. For then he knows that we shall never be what he most of all hates, that is, great saints. 1. For *such have ever shunned them* with holy care. It has often been pointed out how Daniel might have prayed to God notwithstanding the king's decree, and yet never have incurred the awful peril of the lions' den, if he would only have shut his window when he prayed. But he must needs open it, and so, of course, he was seen. But he would not compromise with what he deemed his duty to God even in so slight degree as this. And the martyrs, too. The Roman judges used perpetually to remind them how trifling was the concession asked for—just sprinkling a grain or two of incense on an altar, that was all. “Now, if men have been able to perceive so much of sin in little transgressions, that they would bear inconceivable tortures rather than commit them, must there not be something dreadful after all in these little sins?” If we would have fellowship with the great saints of God, the eminent and true disciples of our Lord, we must give no quarter to these so-called trifling sins. They did not, or they would not have been what they were. 2. *And the little foxes grow into great ones.* Has not the indulgence in one glass of intoxicating liquor often led on to the liking for two, and that to the taking of three, and that has been followed by the man's becoming a drunkard and a sot? “*Tremblez, tyrans; nous grandirons!*” was the shout of the young French lads who, drilled and dressed as soldiers, marched, in the days of the Revolution, through many a town and village in France. They bade the tyrants that oppressed their nation tremble, because they, though but little lads now, would one day be grown up into men. And might not our souls be well made to tremble as they contemplate one of these little sins? for it, too, will grow up, and then will be no longer little, but great and strong. Scarcely more surely does the boy grow into the man than does a little sin tolerated grow into a great one. It is one of the ways of burglars, in effecting an entrance into a house, to attack a small window not nearly large enough to admit a man. But they bring a boy with them, and him they thrust through, and he then undoes larger windows or doors, and so the men enter too. Yes, my brother, if you are allowing yourself in what you are pleased to call a little sin, it may be but the boy getting in at the window who will let in the greater thieves as soon as he is safely in himself. Let us remember that. 3. *And how these little sins multiply themselves!* Great sins are rare. Tremendous transgressions we are guilty of but now and then—but once in our lifetime, it may be; or God's grace may always keep us “innocent from the great transgression;” we trust it will. But these little ones—they are like the myriad insects in our gardens. How they swarm! The more minute they are the more they multiply, until they devour everything if they be let alone. They never come singly, but in troops. And so is it with these little sins that are like them. A man will think it but a trifle if he utter a profane expression, he counts it a very small matter; but it soon comes to pass that he can hardly open his mouth anywhere or anywhen without some miserable profanity dropping from it. A little temper may come to mean an explosion half a dozen times a day, until it is said of the man that he is always in a temper. That great Zuyder Zee, on which Amsterdam is built, was once a fair fertile land covered with farms, villages, and hamlets; a strong embankment shut it off from the Northern Sea. But that embankment had, no doubt,

somehow began to yield in very slight degree, when one stormy winter night the whole gave way, and now the once fruitful land is turned into barrenness, and has been so for centuries past. Oh, take heed of these small beginnings of sin. Yes, they "are like the letting out of water: first there is an ooze, then a drip, then a slender stream, then a vein of water, and then at last a flood, and a rampart is swept before it and the whole land is devoured." God help us, therefore, to be on our guard. And, indeed, if we will think of it, *they are not little*. There may be but a handful of men cross the frontier of a state, but that is as much an act of war as if an army had come. There are people who never cease to ridicule the idea that "death and all our woe" were the result of man's once eating the forbidden fruit. But there the fact is, all the same. It was the violation of the Divine Law, and it did not matter how it was done. And so with all those sins which we are pleased to call little. They are as much outrages on the Law of God as if they were acts so flagrant and enormous that all men should denounce them. Broken law is broken law, no matter whether the breach be great or small. Moreover, these sins which we call little *are often greater than those which we call great*. "If you have a friend and he does you a displeasure for the sake of ten thousand pounds, you say, 'Well, he had a very great temptation. It is true he has committed a great fault, but still he has wronged me to some purpose.' But should your friend vex and grieve your mind for the sake of a farthing, what would you think of that? 'This is wanton,' you would say. 'This man has done it out of sheer malevolence towards me.'" And must not the same verdict be passed when, for the sake of one of these trifles, as we term them, we grieve the Spirit of God and outrage his holy Law? And, remember, if you be a Christian, *these sins will ruin your peace with God*. You cannot be happy in him whilst you walk contrary to his will. And if you be not a Christian, these same sins will lessen the likelihood of your ever becoming one. They may be but as small stones, but they will build up a strong and high wall of separation between you and God, which will more and more effectually shut you off from him. Every way they are deplorable things. Therefore consider—

III. THE SURE REMEDY. These "little foxes" must be taken and destroyed. You must search them out by prayerful and diligent self-examination. You must drag them forth into the light of conscience and the judgment of God by full and penitent confession of them; and by vigorous acts of a will inspired by the Spirit of God you must slay them before him. "These mine enemies which would not that I should rule over them, bring them hither and slay them before me." These are our Lord's words, and he who spoke them will, if you do really desire it, give you grace to obey them. May he help you so to do!—S. C.

Ver. 16.—*He mine; I his*. This verse is the oft-repeated and rapturous utterance of her who is the type of the redeemed soul concerning her beloved. Of course, we regard it as telling of the soul's joy in Christ.

I. HE MINE. Let us ask three questions. 1. *How?* (1) By his free gift of himself. "He loved me, and gave himself for me." (2) By believing appropriation. Faith has this marvellous power. (3) By joyful realization of his love to me. His love has been shed abroad in my heart by the Holy Spirit. "I know whom I have believed." How unspeakably blessed such realization is! But it is not universal nor even common. A little child will cry even in its mother's arms. But the arms are there all the same. And so is Christ's love. 2. *What for?* "He is mine to look upon, to lean upon, to dwell with; mine to bear all my burdens, discharge all my debts; mine to answer all my accusers, mine to conquer all my foes; mine to deliver me from hell, mine to prepare a place for me in heaven; mine in absence, mine in presence, mine in life, mine in death, mine in the grave, mine in the judgment, and mine at the marriage of the Lamb" (Moody Stuart). 3. *What then?* (1) All that is his is mine. His righteousness, acceptableness, worthiness; his incarnation, atonement, resurrection, and intercession. (2) I ought to know it if I do not. It is all-important to me if he be mine. (3) I ought not to be so anxious about other things. (4) Let me take care not to lose him. It is possible (cf. ch. v. 6).

II. I HIS. We ask the same three questions. 1. *How?* (1) By creation. "It is he that hath made us" (Ps. c.). (2) By the purchase of his blood. (3) By the conquest of his Spirit. (4) By my own free choice. (5) By open avowal. 2. *What for?* To

work and to witness, to suffer and to live, and if needs be to die, for him. To care for those for whom he cares, and to minister as he ministered. 3. *What then?* (1) All that is mine, a sad inheritance indeed, is his. My sin, my guilt, my sorrow, my shame. And he has taken them on himself and away from me for ever. (2) Others should know it. I may not be a secret disciple. (3) He will be *sure* to take care of me, teach me, perfect me, and bring me to himself. (4) I will be his even when I cannot realize that he is mine. (5) I will try to win others to him.—S. C.

Ver. 2.—*Eminent piety seen in contrast.* Some similarities must exist, or the contrast could not be seen. The godly and the ungodly are both men, or we could not put their characters in contrast. Thorns are rooted in the same soil as the lily. They are nourished by the same sun, watered by the same rain, enjoy the same course of the seasons. But the inner life of the lily deals differently with the natural elements than does the inner life of thorns. So the ungodly live in the same land as the godly; they have the same access to God's truth; they dwell amid the same forth-puttings of the Spirit's power; yet, for want of self-appropriation, they are barren of good results. They are as noxious thorns compared with the lily. This eminent goodness of the lily implies—

I. **LOWLINESS.** In the previous verse, the king's bride had designated herself as a mere "lily of the valley." And now the king responds and says, "It is so; but others are as thorns compared with thee." Humility is the distinctive mark of all the godly. Native pride is crucified on the cross. The Christian longs to have a just estimate of himself. He will not "think of himself more highly than he ought to think." If he discovers any goodness in himself, he attributes it to the active grace of his Benefactor. He is content to take the lowest place in the kingdom. If only he may belong to the chosen race, he is ready to be a "hewer of wood and a drawer of water." Hence he sings—

"The more thy glories strike my eyes
The humbler I shall lie."

II. **PURENESS.** The white colour of the lily is a pure white. It has approved itself universally as the best emblem of innocence. All over the world it is a silent messenger from God. As every plant reaches out toward perfection, so the noblest yearning of the human soul is for purity. I may be learned and rich and renowned, but if I am lacking in purity, I despise myself; my heart refuses joy. I have fallen from my high estate. Other virtues in me are only leaves and blossoms; purity is the proper ripe fruit, which the owner longs to see. Yet, so full of grace is our Immanuel, that he sees, not only what is now actually in us, but what is coming—the perfect holiness which is slowly developing. As the whiteness of the lily is produced by its reflecting back again *all* the rays of light that fall upon it, and is whitest under the full blaze of the summer sun, so the Christian gains his purity by reflecting all the love and grace from the Sun of Righteousness.

III. **FRAGRANCE.** The lily of the valley is noted for its delicious odour. The subtle essence of the flower flows out in a perpetual stream of blessing. Its very life is expended in doing good. It cannot do much; it cannot bear clusters of juicy fruit; but what is possible for it to do, *that* it freely does. Is not this a portrait of a genuine disciple? Does he not count it his meat and his drink to spread blessing on every side? And can he prevent the sweet savour of his Master's grace flowing out day and night? However obscure and insignificant he may be, his piety will diffuse a heavenly fragrance, and men will feel his influence.

"As some rare essence in a vase of clay
Pervades it with a sweetness not its own;
So when thou dwellest in the human soul,
All heaven's own fragrance seems around it thrown."

IV. **BEAUTY.** The lily charms the eye no less than it pleases the nostril. The eye has a native instinct for beauty, and through the eye the soul is enchanted. "A thing of beauty is a joy for ever." And nothing in human character is half so beautiful as genuine piety. Heroism is beautiful, philanthropy is beautiful, parental love is

beautiful; but the quality of godly love transcends them all. It has a sublimity which cannot be described. It has a potent influence which ennoble the whole man. It is immortal in its duration, and has a splendid sphere for growth. Well may we think of it as the amaranthine flower that blossoms in the Paradise of God. "Blessed are the pure in heart."

V. **THIS EMINENCE IS REACHED THROUGH DIFFICULTY.** This lily has grown up "among the thorns." They robbed it of the nutriment that dwelt in the soil. They hindered the free circulation of the balmy air. They shut out some of the quickening sunshine. Yet, in spite of hindrances, the lily grew and flourished. So it happens with the pious love of the Christian. It has to contend with hostile influences. Formidable opposition bars its growth. We have to resist the chilling influence of an ungodly world. Yet these very difficulties have their uses. Difficulties rouse our latent energy; difficulties put us on our mettle; difficulties give scope to heroic effort. No one of us is seen at our best until we are coping with gigantic opposition. As storms root the oak more firmly, so the opposition of the world blows up the fires of our piety into a white heat of sacred fervour. Thank God for the opposition of the world. Out of antagonism springs the noblest life.—D.

Ver. 3.—*The pre-eminence of Immanuel.* In Eastern lands, far more than in Western, men are dependent on ripe fruit to allay their hunger. A man may walk all day among the oaks of Bashan or among the cedars of Lebanon, and find no food. To discover an apple tree or a citron tree among the trees of the forest would come as a surprise—as a meal direct from Heaven. Equally true is it that men wander from teacher to teacher, from one religious system to another, in quest of saving knowledge, and find it nowhere, until they find Jesus, the Christ. In search of soul-rest and soul-purity, men try practical morality, asceticism, bodily mortification, Church sacraments; but they are doomed to disappointment. For Jesus, the Son of God, is the only Saviour, and, apart from him, the soul is starved, diseased, undone. "As the citron tree among the trees of the wood, so is my Beloved among the sons."

I. **THE SUPERLATIVE EXCELLENCE OF JESUS CHRIST.** 1. *Here is the idea of rareness.* The event was rare to find a citron tree among forest trees. So Jesus stands alone. As Adam stood alone, the head of a new order of life, the Head of the human race; so Jesus is without a parallel, the covenant Head of the new family. He is "the only begotten Son." By nature and by right, as well as by transcendent goodness, he is unapproachable. In him alone "dwells the fulness of the Godhead bodily." He is the God-Man: "God manifest in the flesh." "Let all the angels of God worship him." 2. *Here is implied delicious fragrance.* The blossom of the citron is not only beautiful to the eye; it is sweet and refreshing to the nostril. And it is a constant perfume. While ripe fruit is found on some branches, fresh blossoms are adorning others. Impressive emblem *this* of the rich fragrance of Immanuel's love. With the sweetness of his disposition nothing can compare. It spreads to-day from the frozen plains of Greenland to the sultry cities of Burmah. From the equator to the poles, the fragrance of the Saviour's love is diffused. It refreshes the fainting; it revives again those "who are ready to perish." Some kinds of apples are named "nonpareils." Jesus is the real "Nonpareil;" he has no equal. 3. *The figure suggests fruitfulness.* This is a theme that will loosen into eloquence every Christian tongue. Every part of Christ's nature is fruitful. The woman, afflicted with old disease in Canaan, found fruitful blessing even in the hem of his garment. He is fruitful as a Teacher, for his words dispel all the perplexities and fears of the human family; he is fruitful as a Healer, for his gracious virtue cures every disease of body and of soul; he is fruitful as our Priest, for his one sacrifice atones for every sin; he is fruitful as Intercessor, for his righteous pleadings always prevail; he is fruitful as a King, for his reign brings order, contentment, righteousness, peace; he is fruitful as a Friend, for all that he has he shares with his saints. For fruitfulness he is the Vine.

II. **THE SUPERLATIVE USEFULNESS OF JESUS CHRIST.** "I sat down under his shadow with great delight, and his fruit was sweet to my taste." Jesus is not simply excellence in his Person; his virtues are suited to the needs of men. 1. *There is shady rest.* The dwellers in the temperate zone can little appreciate what shade is to dwellers in the tropics. The fierce heat of noon means exhaustion, pain, fever. Rest in cool shade

is like life from the dead. And the rest which Jesus gives is more precious yet. It is rest from the gloomy fear of hell; it is rest from the drudgery of sin; it is rest from slavish toil to work out a personal righteousness; it is rest from anxious, worldly care.

2. *This fruitfulness of Christ is life-giving.* All other trees in the wood are impotent to sustain life. This is the tree of health—the tree of life. This is the grand prerogative of our Immanuel: “I am the Resurrection and the Life;” “I am come that ye may have life, and have it more abundantly;” “I give unto my sheep eternal life, and they shall never perish;” “Because I live, ye shall live also.” And Jesus has always acted up to his word. A myriad human souls in heaven to-day join in the testimony, “Once we were dead; now, by Christ’s grace, we live.” “Thanks be unto God for his unspeakable Gift.”

3. *Jesus Christ, as the citron tree, imparts joy.* “I sat down under his shadow with great delight.” It is an unusual joy, an overflowing blessedness. The joy which Christ gives is real, pure, ennobling, abiding. He gives to men “his own joy.” Do men rejoice when pain yields to medicine, and new health flows in? Do men rejoice in the brightness of spring, or amid the plenty of autumn? Do men rejoice on their marriage-morn, or when fortune crowns their toil with large success? In Christ’s smile all joys are rolled into one. He who has Christ has a pledge of heaven. This joy is a “joy unspeakable.”

4. *Jesus Christ is eminently adapted to our needs.* As the ripe fruit of the citron tree was exquisitely suited to travellers in those hot climes, so Jesus is precisely suited to our necessities. You cannot mention a want of yours which Jesus is not competent to satisfy. He is Light for our darkness, Strength for our weakness, Food for our hunger, Rest for our weariness, Freedom for our bondage, Pardon for our guilt, Purity for our uncleanness, Hope for our despondency. As a well-made key fits a lock, so Jesus fits all my needs. I want no other Saviour. He “is all my salvation, and all my desire.” Fitness is God’s sign-manual.—D.

Ver. 4.—*Royal generosity.* The testimony of personal experience is specially valuable. We may argue from *à priori* data what generous love must reside in God, in order to harmonize with his perfection; and such a line of reasoning has its value. Or we may argue from analogy, that since fervent love stirs in the human breast, purer love and mightier glows—an uncreated flame—in the heart of God; and this form of argument leaves a comforting impression on the mind. But personal testimony has a tender force all its own. If God has dealt generously and graciously to one member of the human family, no more deserving than I am, it is evident that he will deal with equal generosity of love toward me. For he is impervious to change. If it brought him joy and renown to show practical love to fallen men centuries ago, it will contribute to his renown and to his joy of heart now. If it added to his glory to save a lost soul in Palestine, it will add to his glory to save me. One deed of the heavenly King is a sample of all his deeds. *Ex uno, omnia disce.*

I. THE ROYAL GRACE OF CHRIST PROVIDES A BANQUET OF GOOD. It is everywhere a mark of friendship if a king invites a man to a banquet; and, through every part of Scripture, God represents himself as providing for penitent men a “feast of fat things.” Resentment and vindictiveness towards his frail creatures are things not to be thought of; they are sentiments familiar in hell, but unknown in heaven.

1. *Here is the idea that hunger is satisfied.* At a banquet the primal want of the body is met. And there is no hunger of the soul so widespread, so deep, as the craving for reconciliation with God—the craving for pardon. What bread is to the bodily appetite, God’s mercy is to the convicted soul; it is “the one thing needful.” Well, God has provided this gift in no stinted fashion. It does not come to us as a bare measure, just enough to meet the case. It is a banquet; it is supplied in sumptuous abundance. Nor is it pardon alone that the heavenly King supplies. It is a banquet of all kinds of substantial good; luxuries gathered from far and near. Wisdom, mercy, righteousness, sonship, hope, victory, eternal life, are some of the viands spread. The Son of God “has given himself for us.” And ever and anon we hear the voice of the King himself, “He that cometh to me shall never hunger; he that believeth on me shall never thirst.”

2. *Here is also the idea of renewed friendship.* To eat together is an act of friendship. It is a seal impressed in public that a covenant of friendship exists. To have our several bodies nourished from the same meal, from the same loaf, is a beautiful bond of attachment. It was an aggravation of Iscariot’s sin, that “he who had eaten bread with Jesus had

lifted up the heel against him." If the king invites us to a banquet, it means that he finds a pleasure in our society; he wishes to draw closer the ties of sacred intimacy. Thus Jesus acts. He wants to come into closer fellowship with us. He calls us, not servants, but friends. He undertakes to be our Surety, our Advocate with the Father. He will keep nothing from us, not even his throne. Other friendships may languish; the friendship of Jesus shall eternally abide. From his love nothing shall separate us. 3. *Here is the idea of exuberant joy.* A banquet is not spread, and lavishly embellished with beauty, simply to allay bodily hunger. It is a royal device for promoting joy. And he, who has given to us a great capacity for joy, intends to fill that capacity to the very brim. If there are occasions on earth when joy flows in upon us like a rising tide, these are only prophetic moments of the ineffable and eternal joy of heaven. Desire gratified—this is joy; effort successful—this is joy; hope realized—this is joy; development complete—this is joy. To be with God, to be like God,—this is noontide gladness; this is the "fulness of joy."

II. THE ROYAL GRACE OF CHRIST USES GENTLE CONSTRAINTS. "He brought me into his banquet-house." A man's worst enemy is usually himself. He cannot persuade himself that such generous love is intended for him. Others may perhaps be invited, but not he. Nor does he see that this unbelief is a fresh act of sin. If I discredit a person's word, I may do him a great injustice. If I doubt the promise of a friend, it is an insult. And if I question the faithfulness of my King, I give him pain. 1. *He sometimes uses the rough messenger of affliction to bring us to his banquet-hall.* Many a pardoned man will say with David, "Before I was afflicted I went astray." Saul's blindness made him sensible of Christ's nearness. The peril of Jonah taught him to say, "Salvation is of the Lord." When Manasseh was in affliction he sought unto Jehovah. In times of earthly prosperity men are often self-sufficient; they have all that heart can wish; they have no sense of soul-hunger. But when argosies are wrecked, or harvests fail, or death sweeps, with black pinions, through the house, then they discover their impotence, and long for the heavenly supply. Often has a pitiless storm driven despairing men to the Refuge on Calvary; often has affliction, in some form, been the messenger employed to bring men to the gospel-feast. 2. *Sometimes Christ uses his gospel-heralds to bring men in.* Our heavenly Friend has seen fit to employ renewed men, though imperfect, to persuade the prodigals to return. He does not so employ the angel-bands. Pardoned men know what are the burdens of sin, and what are the seductions of the tempter. Pardoned men have tender sympathies for their fallen fellows. And pardoned men know by experience the joy of acceptance; the blessedness of God's friendship contrasted with his frown. Cleansed and consecrated men are specially fitted to bring sinners to Christ's banquet. Thus Jesus has brought many. 3. *His own Spirit, the Comforter, is the great Agent in filling the banquet-hall.* Said Jesus, prior to his crucifixion, "He shall testify of me;" "He shall take of mine, and show it unto you." To him belongs the prerogative of enlightening the mind, arousing the torpid conscience, convicting of sin, and quickening into life dead souls. He "strives" with the opposition of a rebellious will. By his Divine anointing, men are empowered to use the arts of heavenly persuasiveness. Jesus, the soul's Bridegroom, has furnished the sumptuous banquet; now it is the mission of the Holy Spirit to persuade the perishing to come. Have we not heard his "still small voice" within us, imploring us to accept the generous offers of a Saviour's grace? Have we not put off his pleadings again and again with the promise that we would before long come? And has not our promise been as often violated? Thrice happy is the man who can say, "He has conquered." "He brought me into his banquet-house."

III. THE ROYAL GRACE OF CHRIST VOUCHSAFES NEW TOKENS OF AFFECTION. "The device on his banner is love." The beginning and middle and end of the banquet is love. This is the solution of every problem. Whence originated the feast? In love. Why are the guests rebellious and fallen men? Love! What methods are employed to induce them to come? Love! What end is contemplated in the feast? Love! On every banneret the symbol is love. 1. *This banner implies triumph.* It was the banner which our great Champion carried in the war. If we are at the banquet-table, we have been captivated by Immanuel's love. This love pursued us in our wanderings, convinced us of our folly, bore with us patiently, sweetly induced us to lay down our arms and to submit. We were softened and subdued by love. Now "we love him,

because he first loved us." 2. *This banner means devotement.* We adopt it as our own. We have sworn to serve our Master under this peaceful banner. At the banquet we enlist ourselves on the side of the righteous King. Constrained by love, we freely devote to him all we have, all we are. We must be trained and disciplined for this noble warfare in the school of love. The love that has conquered us shall, through us, conquer others. Love is the heavenly steel from which we fashion all our weapons. Love moulds and inspires our life. "The banner over us is love." 3. *This banner means security.* If I am the object of Immanuel's love, I am safe; no harm can befall me. The brood under the wing of the parent hen cannot be pierced by foeman's arrow, unless that arrow pierce the parent's wing; so the blow which falls on me must strike my Protector first. Whatever apparent evil fall upon me, it is by the permission of infinite love; therefore is only apparent. It is simply disguised blessing; a sweet kernel in a rough shell. If over me floats the banner of Immanuel's love, I have a charmed life. Every foe, visible and invisible, is disarmed.

"And so, beside the silent sea,
I wait the muffled oar;
Assured no harm can come to me,
On ocean or on shore."

D.

Vers. 8—13.—*Christ's coming makes a new epoch in our history.* Nature is a mirror in which God is seen, and all the processes of nature are samples of God's works in us. Such analogies we ought to expect, because all the forces in nature are the projections of God's thoughts and purposes. The same God who works so mightily in the material world works with mighty grace in us. If, in the visible creation, he gives life to dead matter, so does he likewise give life to dead souls. The sun which rides in royal majesty across the heavens is a picture of the great Sun of Righteousness, who arises on the soul "with healing in his beams." As the coming of spring makes a new epoch in the material world, so the coming of Immanuel is the opening of a new era to the soul. It is nothing short of a spiritual evolution. We pass out of winter into spring; out of death into life.

I. *THIS LANGUAGE IS A PICTURE OF CHRIST'S INCARNATION.* "The voice of my Beloved! behold, he cometh leaping upon the mountains," etc. 1. *He overleaps all difficulty.* Principles of eternal righteousness stood in the way of man's redemption. The interests of Divine government stood in the way. The peace and welfare of the heavenly hosts seemed to be obstacles. Man's enmity was a tremendous barrier. But the Son of God was deterred by no obstacle. Although the temporary renunciation of his glory and dignity was required, he did not hold back. Immeasurable condescension was demanded; yet to this he cordially submitted. In view of the splendid result, he triumphed over every hindrance. 2. *His coming was a joyful act.* "Leaping upon the mountains, skipping upon the hills." With the affectionate purpose to save men strong in his breast, he felt a joy in self-humiliation; a delicious pleasure in self-sacrifice. "His delights were already with the sons of men." Lo! said he—"lo! I come to do thy will, O God; yea, thy Law is within my heart." When our globe was fashioned, there was new gladness in heaven; "the sons of God shouted for joy." And when the Son of God appeared on earth as its Redeemer, a multitude of the heavenly host broke upon the midnight silence of Bethlehem with the song, "Glory to God in the highest!" Although to execute his task he was "the Man of sorrows," nevertheless in his heart there glowed the fire of sacred rapture. "For the joy that was set before him, he endured the cross, and despised the shame." As a noble Bridegroom "he rejoices over his bride." In his completed work "he shall be satisfied." 3. *His coming was discerned only by his chosen.* The bulk of men knew nothing about his coming; cared nothing about it. To Herod it was a perplexity and a terror. "He came unto his own, and his own received him not." Yet a few chosen ones "waited for the hope and consolation of Israel." Andrew and Simon Peter and Nathanael had been pondering the old prophecies, and were looking hither and thither for signs of fulfilment. Old Simeon's heart overflowed with gratitude when, embracing the holy Child, he said, "Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace." Not to the eye of man was he revealed. Outwardly, "there was no beauty in him that men should desire him." To

many he was known through his voice of wisdom—through his voice of tender invitation and generous love. "The voice of my Beloved." "Faith cometh by hearing." To the heart Jesus Christ still speaks. The sweet tones of his love win us to obedience. 'Tis not only a voice, but "the voice of my Beloved."

II. THIS LANGUAGE IS A PICTURE OF CHRIST'S COMING AT OUR CONVERSION. In the day of our personal regeneration, Immanuel came into our heart to dwell. Then all the mountains of opposition were levelled, and all the abysses of degradation were filled up. We straightway passed out of darkness into light, out of bondage into liberty, out of banishment into sonship. If it were not a time of harvest, when men gather up the ripe sheaves of plenty, it was a spring-time, when young life appears, and gives fair promise of growth and fruitfulness. So we could sing, "For, lo, the winter is past, the rain is over and gone." 1. *A surprising change.* If ever a miracle has been wrought on earth, our regeneration is a miracle. It is a new departure in life. We, who once loved sin, now hate the abominable thing. We had "sold ourselves for nought;" now we are redeemed with priceless blood. We were righteously condemned; now we are righteously accepted. We are brought into covenant relationship with God. In that day hell was exchanged for heaven. It was a day of jubilee. Through all the ranks in heaven a thrill of gladness ran. The barrenness and death of winter were gone, and spring, fresh with life and hope, filled the soul. The heavenly Bridegroom had arrived. 2. *Varied beauty is here represented.* "The flowers appear on the earth." Bright and fragrant flowers are fit emblems of Christian virtues. The early flowers of meekness and penitence send forth a goodly smell, and the spicy beds of obedience produce a rich aroma. Some Christians are like violets, unconscious of their sweetness; some are like snow-drops, lacking character; some are full of sacred enthusiasm, rare roses, like Augustines and Ambroses and Luthers. The brightest and noblest specimens of men are found in the Church. 3. *And fruitfulness is also foreseen.* "The fig tree putteth forth her green figs." True religion is not mere sentiment; it is practical; it is beneficial to mankind. Whence sprang our hospitals, our asylums, our penitentiaries, our almshouses? They have all sprung from Christ, as the Root. When the Spirit of the Lord anointed Jesus, he preached good tidings to the poor; he announced "liberty to the captive, and the opening of the prison to those who were bound." No life has been so fruitful in good results as the life of Jesus Christ, and every true disciple aspires to be fruitful too. In the first age of Christianity, Paul saw many excellent fruits—"love, joy, peace, long-suffering, meekness," etc. And the catalogue has been growing from that day to this. 4. *Gladness is another feature in the coming of the Bridegroom.* "The time of the singing of birds is come." If any event on earth can awaken joy, surely this must in a superlative degree. If, on the return of spring, lark and linnet and thrush trill their notes afresh, and fill the woods with music, can we restrain our joy when the spring is within us—a new incoming of heavenly life? This joy is joy of the richest quality. It is the cream of all joy. It is joy akin to that which floods the heart of God. We did not know what joy was until Christ visited the heart. Said Rutherford, "Hold, Lord! it is enough. The vessel cannot contain more." "It is meet that we should make merry and be glad." Let nature share in the gladness! It is the birthday and bridal of the soul in one! 5. *This new love is held precious by Christ.* "Sweet is thy voice, and thy countenance is lovely." We cannot understand why our attachment and our loyalty should be so highly esteemed by Jesus; yet so it is. He "rests in our love." He "rejoices over us with singing." He calls us "his jewels—his treasures." He has his "inheritance in the saints." Where the disciples meet, he delights to come. "Whoso offereth praise glorifieth him." And such complacent joy does he find in his consecrated servants, that he says, "I am glorified in them." In the visions of heaven vouchsafed to St. John, the redeemed of earth occupied a place nearer to the throne than the unfallen angels. They are styled "messengers," "servants;" but consecrated men are designated "brethren."

III. THIS LANGUAGE IS DESCRIPTIVE OF REVIVAL AFTER TEMPORARY DEADNESS. The coming of Christ to the soul is like a restoration to life after fainting, or like new life after sleep. 1. *The novelty of spiritual life, arising from contrast, does not abide.* The joy that springs from pardon does not remain, just as the freshness of spring does not continue all the year. When the new experience becomes a settled thing, the gladness that could not at first but break into a song subsides into a calmer delight.

At conversion the change was so great, the contrast with the former state so striking, the deliverance so welcome, we could not restrain our joy. But the festivities of marriage do not remain perpetual. The rosy hues of dawn do not continue all the day. So the rapture of the new birth does not remain all through the pilgrimage. 2. *The Christian, too, has seasons of dark desertion.* There are seasons when dark clouds gather round him, and the face of his best friend is hidden. Doubts, like malignant spirits, haunt his mind, and rob him of his peace. Satan entangles him in his enchantments, and lures him into the thickets around Doubting Castle. They "cannot read their titles clear to mansions in the skies." They miss the warm sunshine of Immanuel's face. And they are perplexed. If they are the Lord's, why this painful discipline? Why this loss of conscious favour? And in sad despondency they ask, "Will God cast off for ever? Will he be favourable no more?" 3. *Then the return of the Bridegroom brings new life and joy.* "He restoreth my soul." Possibly there was some fault in us that required chastisement, or some rival to our best Beloved may have appeared in the heart not to be tolerated. Whatever was the cause of this temporary eclipse, certain it is that the reappearance of the sun will be a festive day—a jubilee, a resurrection-morn. While under that dark cloud, there may have been some needed preparation of the soul for higher service, as with the fields of earth under wintry skies. Larger fruitfulness may result. The friendship of Jesus will be more prized. "Absence makes the heart grow fonder." Where silence and sadness just now reigned, mirth and music have stirred the echoes. Despondency has given place to hope. The dark shadows of night have fled before a new dawn; and again we can sing, "For, lo, the winter is past, the rain is over and gone."—D.

Ver. 16.—*Marriage jointure.* Marriage is a mutual identification of personal interests, therefore it fully represents the mystic union between Jesus and the believer. We may not have always the conscious sense of our Friend's nearness to us, still we can always say, "My Beloved is mine." For this is an established fact—a fact revealed—and this fact is ascertained by faith, and treasured in the memory, whether we experience it at the moment or not. If dark clouds hide the face of our Sun of Righteousness, we know still that he is affording us light and heat and life, and still we say, "My Beloved is mine."

I. THE HEART'S CHOICE. The door has been opened to Christ, and he has been admitted to the innermost shrine. He has become the soul's Husband and King by sacred covenant. 1. *This choice is an effect, not a cause.* "We love him, because he first loved us." Said Jesus to his first disciples, "Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you." His light has shined into our minds. His spirit has given sensibility to our conscience. He has made us sensible of our need. He has restrained us from further rebellion. He caused us to walk in the King's highway. "By the grace of God I am what I am." 2. *This choice of Christ is our supremest wisdom.* To have made Jesus our soul's Portion is an act of pure wisdom. It is the only right thing to do. He has a right to the chief place, and it would be sacrilege to give our best love to another. Yet, alas! many do. There are men who make money, or social rank, or fame, or pleasure, the best beloved of their heart. The world is their beloved, or their children occupy the place which should be Christ's. We may sincerely congratulate ourselves if we can say, "Jesus is my Portion." 3. *Christ has been chosen because of his excellence.* Who, in heaven or on earth, can be compared for worth with Jesus? A person is always more precious than a thing. A man is "more precious than the gold of Ophir." And among all persons Jesus is superlatively precious. Who can compare with him for wisdom? Who has dominion over nature and over the lower world like the Sun of God? Who can impart strength like him? Can any one convey life but Immanuel? Or who has such influence for us in heaven as our gracious Intercessor?

"Infinite excellence is thine,
Almighty King of grace."

4. *Christ has been chosen by virtue of his love.* Even if he did not possess so many excellences, we should have chosen him for his love. His condescension is wonderful. His sweet compassion has captivated our souls. As soon as we realized his tender, strong affection for us, we felt that we must have his friendship. As the echo responds

to the speaker's voice, our love responded to his love. Or as the flowers respond to the summer sun, so our hearts gave out the fragrance of their love, under the quickening influence of his grace. For his love is not a vapid sentiment. His love is an everlasting force, ever active, beneficent in ten thousand ways. His practical love persevered with us, touched us in a hundred points, and finally melted our ingratitude. Love has made us subjects, servants, slaves. Such love, when known, is irresistible.

II. THIS CHOICE INCLUDES PROPRIETORSHIP. "My Beloved is *mine*." As I say, "This coat is mine," or "This land is mine," so I can say, "Christ is mine." No one can dispossess me. It is an inalienable possession. 1. *Mark the nature of this possession.* I do not possess it simply with my hands. It is not something outside me, from which I alone can derive advantage. It is a possession within me. It becomes part and parcel of my being. It enters into my very life. I am a totally different being, by virtue of this possession. Jesus is identified with me, and I with him. He is my Life, my Hope. "Christ liveth in me." We possess him, as the branch possesseth the root. 2. *The extent of the possession.* As the bride becomes by marriage participator of all the lands and estates and honours of the bridegroom, so is it with every believer. The righteousness of Christ is mine. All the excellences of Christ are mine. The wealth of Christ is mine. "I am joint-heir" with him. He has chosen to share with me all that he has. His friends are my friends. His servants are my servants. His world is my world. His throne is my throne. "All things are ours, for we are Christ's." 3. *The utility of this possession.* Does it not bring me great and present advantages? Does it not make me rich indeed? "He is mine to bear all my burdens; mine to discharge all my debts; mine to answer all my accusers; mine to conquer all my foes." He is "mine in absence, mine in presence; mine through life, mine in death; mine in the judgment; mine at the marriage-supper of the Lamb." I am secure and honoured and happy, because "Christ is mine."

"With him I'm rich, though stripped of all beside;
Without him poor, though all the world were mine."

III. THIS CHOICE INCLUDES DEVOTEMENT. "I am his." As Jesus has given himself entirely and unreservedly to me, I have given myself wholly and without reserve to him. It is a real surrender. 1. *The dignity of self-devotement.* The man who devotes his whole self to his king or to his country does not degrade himself thereby. He rises in the scale of being; he rises in honour. Much more does the devoted servant of Jesus Christ rise to the dignity of true living. Better be prime minister of England than king in Dahomey. And nobler far is it to be a servant in Immanuel's kingdom than to boast of vain independence, and be in reality a vassal of Satan. To serve is noble, royal, Divine. Jesus is a King because he stooped to be a servant, and the only road to kingliness is hearty service. The heraldic motto of our Prince of Wales is, "I serve." Devotement to Jesus Christ is eternal honour. 2. *The extent of self-devotement.* It embraces our whole nature, our entire life. The claim of Christ is complete. There is no organ of our body, no faculty of mind, no moment of time, no particle of our wealth, which does not of right belong to him; therefore we can keep back nothing. We are "not our own." On the grounds of creation, sustenance, redemption, Jesus has a triple claim. And above all, he has our personal consent. By a sacred covenant, we have freely surrendered all we have to his kingly service. The consecration must be complete. 3. *This devotement brings supreme satisfaction.* There is no joy for the human soul like the joy of entire consecration. This is our proper place, and we cannot find our rest elsewhere. On our death-bed, will the review of our life bring us satisfaction, unless that life has been spent, and wholly spent, in the service of our Redeemer? Can we dare to appropriate to ourselves all that belongs to Christ, if at the same time we do not give up all to him? As you cannot put pure water into a vessel that is already full of other things, so you cannot put Christ's treasures into a soul until it is emptied of self. To do my Master's will I must surrender all to him. To become like Christ I must be wholly consecrated to his kingdom. Then shall his joy be my joy. Then shall I discover the truth, and shall sing—

"I'm in the noblest sense my own
When most entirely thine."

Vers. 1, 2.—*Wild-flower beauty.* The scene which suggests this imagery is one abounding in rural delights. In a remote country retreat, the lovers are seated on a couch of verdant turf, decked with lovely flowers. It seems as though nature has prepared for them a pleasant house whose rafters and galleries are formed by the lofty cedars and firs above them. The dialogue is coloured by the suggestions of the rustic spot. To the praises of the lover the bride responds with simplicity and humility: "I am as the wild flower of the vale"—the crocus or the rose. He accepts the comparison. "Yes; as a lily among thorns, so is my love among the daughters." Thus love glorifies and hallows the place of meeting, and transforms it into all that is beautiful. If this world is to the poet a gift of the Eternal Father, a revelation of his character, a means and aid to piety—yea, an earnest of heaven itself—then we may well see in the rose of Sharon, in the lily of the valley, an emblem of true virtue and excellence, especially as apparent in the Church, which is the garden of God's delight. Such spiritual excellence is characterized by—

I. **BEAUTY.** The mind is fashioned so that it must recognize and admire that which is beautiful, both in the natural and in the spiritual realm. There is a beauty, a charm in goodness more to be admired than the crimson petals of the rose or the lily's snow-white chalice. It is given to the spiritual to apprehend the ideal loveliness of virtue and Christian purity. As the flowers of the field and of the forest tell of the Creator's delight in shapeliest forms and fairest hues, so the graces that adorn the Christian character are witnesses to that Spirit, whose workmanship and design and whose vital creation they surely are.

"Thus beauty here is like to that above,
And loveliness leads up to perfect love."

II. **PURITY.** The wild flowers speak to the poet's mind of stainless goodness; the lily is especially the emblem of maiden pureness. Well may such blossoms, blooming far from the city's defilements, serve to symbolize that moral excellence which is uncontaminated by sin and by a sinful world. Where the holy Christ is himself spiritually present, his presence creates a purity akin to, because derived from, his own.

III. **FRAGRANCE.** The Song of Songs contains many references to the delicate and delightful odours which abound in the plains and gardens of the East. To the sense of smell there is an ethereal side, an aspect of sentiment; and to this the royal poet delights to appeal. The exquisite aroma which breathes from the scented blossoms tells of their nearness and suggests their beauty. There is a perfume in the pure and unselfish character which diffuses itself near and far, witnessing to the Divine grace and power that ever live and work in the spiritual garden of the Lord. This fragrance betrayeth itself, and cannot be hid.

IV. **PRE-EMINENCE HEIGHTENED BY CONTRAST.** The lily is pictured as "among the thorns," by whose neighbourhood its fairness and sweetness are enhanced. The thorns are a foil to the flower. The plants which our heavenly Father hath planted in this world are hard by the useless and noxious growths of sin. Who has not seen a pure and gentle member of a coarse, worldly, and selfish circle—a family or a community—showing, all unconsciously, as a lily among thorns, more beautiful and charming for the uncongenial surroundings?

V. **ATTRACTIVENESS.** The rose and the lily draw to them the innocent child, the maiden gathering flowers with which to decorate the lowly home, the poet whose heart is open to the sacred sweetness of nature's symbols. Where there are spirits susceptible to beauty, the flowers will not be unheeded or unsought. A like attractiveness is exercised by the pure, the devout, the benevolent, and sympathizing. No wonder that Christ himself has been named the Rose of Sharon. Those who share his spirit and witness to his love are the ornaments of his garden, joining to render it the congenial resort, the chosen home, of all who are sensitive to the appeal of Divine love, and responsive to the summons of Divine holiness and authority.—F.

Ver. 3.—*Shadow and fruit.* Pleasant was it at noon to quit the close tent pitched upon the open plain, and to seek the shelter of the spreading tree; pleasant, beneath this refuge from the scorching heat, to partake of the cool and juicy fruit plucked from its boughs. No wonder that the Church has delighted to find in the apple or citron

tree, chief in value among the trees of the grove, an emblem of that "Plant of Renown," the Lord and Saviour himself, who has sheltered multitudes beneath his guardian presence, and supplied multitudes from his abundant sufficiency.

I. CHRIST'S SUPREMACY ASSERTED. As the noble citron in the orchard towers above the lesser trees, so is the Saviour exalted above all human teachers and leaders of men, and even above all inspired seers and prophets. This supremacy (1) results from his very nature; (2) is affirmed upon Divine authority; (3) has proved itself in the history of the Church; and (4) is made evident in the experience of every individual friend and disciple of the Lord.

II. CHRIST'S PROTECTION EXPERIENCED. The bride not only looked up to her royal bridegroom with reverence and with pride; she placed herself beneath his guardian care. He was her husband, in whose palace she abode, and in whose keeping she felt secure. He was to her as the spreading tree which protects from noonday heat. So the spiritual spouse of the Divine Bridegroom rests secure beneath the guardianship of her rightful Lord.

"Oppressed with noontide's scorching heat,
To yonder cross I flee;
Beneath its shelter take my seat—
No shade like this for me."

III. CHRIST'S SWEETNESS ENJOYED. The tree that yields the shelter supplies also the fruit, which is "sweet to the taste." And the soul partakes of Christ, feeding upon him by faith. As the fruit enters into the body, is assimilated, and refreshes the system, in like manner our Divine Lord condescends to become the life and nourishment of his people. His sacramental love brings health and nourishment, vigour and revival, satisfaction and joy, to the spiritual nature of such as participate by faith in his sacrifice and in his spirit. Such are happy, for they "taste and see that the Lord is good."—T.

Ver. 4.—*The banquet of love.* Both in the Old Testament and in the New the blessings of the gospel are set forth, by anticipation or in reality, under the image of a feast. The composite nature of man gives point and effectiveness to this metaphorical language. The soul is led by the Saviour into his banqueting-house, where hunger is satisfied, and where the provisions of bounty and of love are partaken and enjoyed.

I. IT IS CHRIST WHO BRINGS THE SOUL TO HIMSELF. He does not wait for the needy and poverty-stricken spirit to find him and to come to him. He came in pity to seek and to save. And as when he was upon earth Jesus sought out many a sinner, many a sufferer, so does he still and ever, in the exercise of his Divine compassion, lay his hand upon needy outcasts, and lead them into his banqueting-house.

II. IT IS CHRIST WHO PROVIDES FOR THE SOUL A BOUNTIFUL ENTERTAINMENT. It is not merely bread for the hungry that the gospel offers; it is, in the language of Scripture, a "feast of fat things." Salvation means something more than deliverance from destitution. God comes to us in Christ, saying, "All things are yours." The beggar may be relieved at the gate; but the guest is welcomed to the banquet-hall, and has his place assigned him at the board of the Divine and blessed Host himself. He whom Christ leads to his own fellowship shall not want any good thing; wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption, all are assured to him.

III. IT IS CHRIST WHO REVEALS TO THE SOUL THE MYSTERY OF DIVINE LOVE. The banner or standard is the sign of the presence of the king or the commander. Even over the "house of wine" there floated the symbol of the royal bridegroom. Thus for the soul that Christ finds and leads, that Christ supplies from the stores of his spiritual bounty, is there an assurance that the King himself keeps guard over its safety. There is the pledge, not only of the king's faithfulness, but of the bridegroom's love. The soul may feast in security and peace, may enjoy the companionship of Christ's friends; for high over the banqueting-house floats the banner, which is the emblem of a Divine presence, and the earnest of an unchanging, an eternal love.—T.

Vers. 8—10.—*The approach of the beloved.* How poetically does this language picture the rural maiden in her mountain home—the lover climbing the hill like a young

hart for strength and swiftness, looking in through the lattice window, calling to his beloved, and inviting her to join him amidst the beauty, the fragrance, and the freshness of the spring! So comes Christ unto the soul.

I. THE VOICE OF THE BELOVED. Jesus speaks in his Word and gospel, and his utterance is (1) Divine; (2) authoritative; (3) gracious; (4) encouraging; and (5) welcome. There is no voice like his; he "spake as never man spake."

II. THE GLANCE AND GAZE OF THE BELOVED. 1. Our Saviour's regard is one of interest. Never is his Church forgotten or neglected by him; never does he withdraw his attention or treat with indifference and neglect those for whom he died. 2. He makes himself acquainted with our state and our wants. 3. He looks with affectionate kindness upon those who are dependent upon his favour and bounty. 4. Christ's gracious regard awakens in the minds of his people a desire to know him more intimately. To see him once is to wish to see him again; to see him now and here is to hope for the nearer and perfect vision hereafter.

III. THE INVITATION OF THE BELOVED. We may notice in the tenth verse: 1. The address—remarkably kind, familiar, and affectionate. 2. The appeal: "Rise up!" Is there slothfulness and inactivity? The summons of the Lord is enough to rouse to earnestness and animation. 3. The entreaty: "Come away!" Thus Christ calls his people to himself, and bids them seek his society, accept that spiritual companionship, desire that affectionate intercourse, which are the prerogative of those whom he loves. Even if to act upon this invitation be to leave all that earth can offer, still there is more than compensation for such loss in the joy and privilege of the peerless friendship of the Son of God.—T.

Vers. 11—13.—*Spring-time.* In this poetical language there is an anticipation of that delight in rural scenery which we are accustomed to regard as distinctive of modern feeling and modern literature. But there is no doubt of the power of ardent love to colour all nature to the eye of him who yields himself to the strong emotion—the power of ardent love to make all this world melodious, fragrant, and fair. Emotion gives keenness to the sense and vigour to the imagination. And he whose mind is open, not only to the power of nature to elicit sentiment, but to its power to suggest spiritual truth, the seasons of the year and the shifting panorama of earth speak of a Divine presence and of a thousand sacred realities.

I. WHAT SPRING-TIME BANISHES. "The winter is past, the rain is over and gone." There is a spiritual winter—the winter of darkness and gloom, of ignorance and error, of sterility and death, of vice and crime and sin. It was beneath the rigour and the depression of this winter that the world lay, in seeming hopelessness, until the Sun of Righteousness arose upon the world with healing in his wings. It is well, whilst in the enjoyment of the blessings of the spiritual dispensation, to look back upon the winter of humanity, from whose dreariness we have been delivered.

II. WHAT SPRING-TIME BRINGS. "The flowers appear on the earth; the time of the singing of birds is come, and the voice of the turtle is heard in our land." There is a blessed spiritual spring, bringing beauty and fragrance as of flowers, and sweetness as of the music of the grove. Life is the distinctive note of the new and spiritual economy; and with spiritual life all good things come to us. The beauties and all the treasures of the spring are emblems of peace and joy, of purity and glad service, of obedience and praise. The Easter of humanity is the season for thanksgiving and triumph, for radiant hope and for inspiring song.

III. WHAT SPRING-TIME HERALDS. "The fig tree ripeneth her green figs; and the vines are in blossom, they give forth their fragrance." The blossoms of the spring tell us of the coming fruit in abundance and lusciousness. Far off as the world's spiritual summer may seem, the mission of the Son of God and the mission of the Comforter assure the faithful mind that there is a harvest yet to come. He who could call life out of death, could banish the winter of humanity, can and will, in his own time, bring his work to perfection. The blossom shall mature into fruit, the green of spring shall mellow into autumn's gold. Fruits of the Spirit shall abound, and the heavenly Vinedresser and Husbandman shall be satisfied and glorified.—T.

Ver. 15.—"The little foxes." The maiden sings a vintage-song, or repents the

admonition of her brothers, who have left her in charge of the vineyard. It is her duty to protect the precious plants and fruits from the incursions of enemies, even of those which seem the most unworthy of notice. It has been usual to regard these "little foxes" as emblematic of evil powers which perhaps insidiously threaten the welfare of the spiritual vineyard.

I. THE CHURCH OF CHRIST IS THE SPIRITUAL VINEYARD WHICH GOD HAS PLANTED IN THE BARREN SOIL OF THE WORLD. As in the Old Testament Israel is often compared to a vine (Ps. lxxx.) or to a vineyard (Isa. v.), so in the New Testament the spiritual society which the Son of God has founded is exhibited under the same similitude.

II. THE CHURCH OF CHRIST EXISTS FOR THE SAKE OF SPIRITUAL FRUIT. The vineyard may be beautiful to behold; it may be a charming addition to the landscape; its gracefulness and verdure may afford pleasure to the passer-by: yet it exists for the sake of fruit. So with the Church, which is indeed an element of interest in history, an important factor in the state, an admirable illustration of the higher capacities of man's being; but which yet exists for the sake of that holy life, those deeds of justice, mercy, and devotion, which are the true fruits of the Spirit, the very vintage of God.

III. THE CHURCH OF CHRIST IS OFTEN ASSAILED BY MISCHIEVOUS INFLUENCES. Like the enemies of the vineyard, evil powers enter in, and damage the spiritual blossom and threaten to destroy the spiritual vintage. False doctrines, heresies, and schisms, delusions, human ambitions, selfish habits, gross corruptions, sins of worldliness and unspirituality,—such are some of these influences which portend disaster to the work which has been undertaken for God upon earth.

IV. THOUGH APPARENTLY TRIFLING, THESE MISCHIEVOUS INFLUENCES MAY DO GREAT HARM. Like the "little foxes," the power of harmful influences must not be measured by appearances, by magnitude. Defections from truth or from virtue may appear at first slight and insignificant; but the entrance of evil into Christ's Church is like the letting in of water; what is at first a leak becomes a flood. To change the figure, the disease may in its first approach appear unimportant, yet it may grow until it threatens not only health, but life itself. The vineyard, if left open to the incursions of vermin, will soon give evidence of ravages most serious, if not disastrous. Let no one concerned for the safety and welfare of Christ's Church be indifferent to the insidious commencement of harm. No one can say whereunto the thing may grow.

V. THESE EVIL INFLUENCES SHOULD, THEREFORE, BE VIGOROUSLY ATTACKED AND SPEEDILY EXTIRPATED. "Take us the little foxes;" wage war against even apparently insignificant foes. Not by way of force or of fraud, but by the presentation of truth, by admonition and exhortation, openly, feelingly, and prayerfully. It is a duty which at some time or other, and in some way or other, every Christian is called upon to fulfil. The ministers of Christ's Church are especially bound to be upon their guard against the introduction of false doctrine, and of lax and sinful practice; they are set "for the defence and confirmation of the gospel," and it is their office to withstand every foe that threatens the security and the vitality of the Divine society on earth.—T.

Ver. 16.—*Mutual possession.* One-sided affection is incomplete, unsatisfying, and unhappy; it may be disastrous. Real friendship and true marriage imply mutual love, reciprocal kindnesses. So is it in those personal relations between Christ and the Christian soul, which are the foundations of the spiritual life of mankind. It is only well when the friend of the Saviour can truly say, "My Beloved is mine, and I am his."

I. THE CLAIM MADE BY THE CHRISTIAN TO A SPIRITUAL PROPERTY IN CHRIST
1. Our Lord and Saviour is ours, to exercise in our favour his mediatorial offices, as our Prophet, Priest, and King. 2. He is ours, to reveal his intimate affection to our heart.

"The opening heavens around me shine
With beams of heavenly bliss,
While Jesus says that he is mine,
And whispers I am his!"

3. He is ours, to impart a value and a charm to all our other possessions. These, whether material or spiritual, are altogether different from what they would otherwise

be; they are irradiated and dignified by the glory which shines upon them from our Divine Friend. "All things are ours."

II. THE CLAIM MADE BY CHRIST TO A SPIRITUAL PROPERTY IN THE CHRISTIAN.

1. The Saviour regards his people with an especial favour and affection. In a sense, all men are Christ's; he assumed the human nature which is common to us all, and he died for all. But in a peculiar manner they are his who acknowledge his mission, receive his gospel, confide in his mediation, obey his commandments. Towards such his regard is one of complacency and personal affection. 2. The Saviour regards his people as his to care for, to protect, and to save. Having loved his own, he loves them unto the end. There are no circumstances in which he will not remember them, interpose upon their behalf and for their deliverance. 3. The Saviour possesses his people in order to exercise over them a peculiar authority. As the husband is the head of the wife, and as his affection does not destroy his authority, but makes it benign and welcome; so our Divine Lord, who loves his spouse, the Church, which he purchased with his precious blood, directs and governs the object of his tender interest with kindness which is yet authoritative. It is the prerogative and joy of Christ's people to take their Lord's will as the binding law of their individual and social life.

APPLICATION. It is for every Christian to remember that in this relation the Lord Jesus is the superior. "We love him, because he first loved us." This fact should infuse gratitude into our affection, and should urge us to responsive consecration and obedience.—T.

EXPOSITION.

CHAPTER III.

Ver. 1.—**By night on my bed I sought him whom my soul loveth: I sought him, but I found him not.** The bride is probably relating a dream. The time referred to is the close of the day on which she had been visited by her lover. She is retired to rest, and dreams that she searches for the beloved object in the neighbouring city (cf. Job xxxiii. 15). It is another way of telling her love. She is always longing for the beloved one. She had been waiting for him, and he came not, and retired to rest with a heart troubled and anxious because her lover did not appear as she expected at the evening hour. The meaning may be "night after night (לַלַיִל)" (cf. ch. iii. 8), or the plural may be used poetically for the singular. Ginsburg observes that "by night on my bed" is opposed to midday couch (cf. 2 Sam. iv. 5), merely to express what came into her thoughts at night in her dreams or as the result of a dream. It is difficult to avoid the conclusion that the bride intends to represent herself as suffering from self-reproach in having grieved her lover and kept him away from her. In that case the typical meaning would be simple and direct. The soul grieves when it is conscious of estrangement from him whom it loves, and the sense of separation becomes intolerable, impelling to new efforts to deepen the spiritual life.

Ver. 2.—**(I said) I will rise now, and go about the city, in the streets and in the broad ways; I will seek him whom my soul loveth: I sought him, but I found him not.**

Delitzsch renders, "So I will arise, then."

The words of the maiden are quite inconsistent with the hypothesis of a shepherd-lover, for in that case she would seek him, not in the streets, but outside the city. Some think the city referred to is Jerusalem with its markets and streets—the royal city (cf. Prov. vii. 11). If it is a dream, it will be unnecessary to decide to what city the words refer. The idea of the speaker would seem to be either that she was at the time within the walls of the city referred to, or that she was in some dwelling near. But a dream is not always consistent with the real circumstances of the dreamer. Taking it as a reminiscence of first love, it seems better to understand the city as only imaginary, or some neighbouring town in the north.

Ver. 3.—**The watchmen that go about the city found me: (to whom I said) Saw ye him whom my soul loveth?** The simplicity of these words is very striking. They confirm the view that the bride is recalling what occurred in her country life. The watchmen make no reply, and do not treat her ill, as in the dream related in ch. v. 7, where they are keepers of the walls, and smite her and wound her. In a small country town she might have been recognized, or known to be really in trouble. But such incidents must not be pressed too much in a poem. The allegorical view finds considerable support in the fact that it is difficult on any hypothesis exactly to explain the language as descriptive of real occurrences. In such instances as Ps. cxxvii. 1 and Isa. lii. 8 the reference to watchmen in

the city shows that such a metaphor would be familiarly understood. Whether adopted from Solomon's Song or not, the figure of a city watched and guarded, and the people of God as watching for the glory of Zion, was common in the prophetic writings. The soul seeking for its object and for the restoration of its peace calls in the aid of the faithful guardians of the holy city, the friends alike of the Saviour and of those who desire to be his.

Ver. 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. This verse plainly points to the search referred to in the previous verse being limited to the neighbourhood of Shulamith's home. The lover was not far off, though he had delayed his coming. Possibly it is a real occurrence which is related. In that case we must suppose that the night was not very far advanced. But the hypothesis of a dream is the most natural explanation. The word *cherer*, which is used of the house, denotes the inner part, *penetralia*. The modesty of the last clause is very beautiful. The mother would, of course, at that time be in her sleeping-chamber. There alone would the maiden receive her lover at such a time. The mother would gladly welcome the young man, and thus the love which Shulamith declares is set upon the ground of perfect chastity and homely purity. The object of this little episode introduced by the bride into her song as she lies in the arms of Solomon is to show that, ecstatic and intense as her devotion is, it is not the lawless affection of a concubine, but the love of a noble wife. The religious emotions are always presented to us in Scripture, not as wild fanaticism or superficial excitement, but as pure offering of the heart which blends with the highest relations and interests of human life, and sanctifies home and country with all their ties and obligations. The mother and the child are one in the new atmosphere of bridal joy. No religion is worthy of the name which does not bring its object into the chamber of her who conceived us. We love all that are bound with us in life not the less, but the more, because we love Christ supremely. We revere all that is just and holy in the common world the more, and not the less, because we worship God and serve the Lord. What a rebuke to asceticism, monasticism, and all unsocial religion!

Ver. 5.—I adjure you, O daughters of Jerusalem, by the roses, and by the hinds of the field, that ye stir not up, nor awaken love, until it please. This is the refrain which divides the poem. We thus perceive that the whole of the preceding passage has been uttered

by the bride in the presence of the ladies. There is no occasion to connect a refrain very closely with the words which go before it. Like the ancient Greek chorus, it may express a general sentiment in harmony with the pervading feeling of the whole composition. In this case it seems to be a general note of praise, celebrating the preciousness of pure, spontaneous affection. There have been several beautiful and celebrated imitations of this first part of Solomon's Song, though they all fall far short of the original. Paul Gerhard has caught its spirit; Laurentius has copied it in his Advent Hymn. Watts, in bk. i. 66—78 of his 'Divine Songs'; 'Lyra Germanica'; Schaff's 'Christian Song'; and Miss Havergal, in some of her compositions, will furnish examples. Delitzsch quotes an ancient Latin imitation—

"Quando tandem venies, meus amor?
 Propera de Libano, dulcis amor!
 Clamat, amat, sponsula. Veni, Jesu;
 Dulcis veni Jesu."

This ends Part II., which sets before us the lovely beginning of this ideal love. We must then suppose that the writer imagines himself in Jerusalem, as though one of the court ladies, at the time that Solomon the king returns from the north, bringing with him his bride-elect. We pass, therefore, from the banquetting-chamber, and recall the scenes which accompanied the arrival of Shulamith at Jerusalem. The remainder of the poem is simply the celebration of married love, the delight of the bridegroom in the bride and of the bride in her husband. The whole book concerns a bride, and not one who is about to be made a bride. Here the dream which is introduced is not the dream of a lover awaiting the beloved one, but the dream of a young wife whose bridegroom tarries. The third part is the nuptial rejoicings; the fourth part is the reminiscence of love-days or of the early married life; and the fifth part, which is a conclusion, is a visit of Solomon and his bride to the country home of the latter, pointing to the depth and reality of the influence which this pure maiden had upon his royal nature.

Ver. 6—ch. v. 1.—Part III. NUPTIAL REJOICINGS.

Ver. 6.—Who is this that cometh up out of the wilderness like pillars of smoke, perfumed with myrrh and frankincense, with all the powders of the merchant? This may be taken as spoken by a single voice, one of

the ladies or inhabitants of Jerusalem, or it may be regarded as the exclamation of the whole population going out to see the splendid sight—a gorgeous procession coming towards the city. “Who is this coming?”

(הַלֵּלָהּ, feminine); that is, “Who is this lady coming?” There could be no difficulty in discerning that it was a bridal procession which is seen. Curiosity always asks, “What bride is this?” “Who is *she*?” not, “Who is *he*?” A maiden from Galilee is being conducted to Jerusalem; the procession naturally passes through the valley of the Jordan (Ghôr). There is splendour and majesty in the sight. It must be some one coming to the royal palace. The censers of frankincense are being swung to and fro and filling the air with fragrant smoke. Columns of dust and smoke from the burning incense rise up to heaven, and mark the line of progress before and after. “The spices of Arabia” were famous at all times. Hence the names of the perfumes are Arabic, as *murr*, *levona*, and the travelling spice-merchant, or trader, was Arabic (cf. the Arabic elixir). We can scarcely miss the typical colouring in such a representation—the wilderness, typical of bondage and humiliation, sin and misery, out of which the bride is brought; the onward progress towards a glorious destination (see Isa. xl. 3; Hos. i. 16; Ps. lxxviii. 8). The Church must pass through the wilderness to her royal home, and the soul must be led out of the wilderness of sin and unbelief into everlasting union with her Lord.

Ver. 7.—Behold, it is the litter of Solomon; three score mighty men are about it, of the mighty men of Israel. The litter, or palanquin, is easily recognized. The word is *mittâh*, which is literally “bed,” or “litter,” but in the ninth verse we have another word, *appiryon*, which is a more stately word, “the royal car.” It is the bringing home of the bride which is described. In the forty-fifth psalm the idea seems to be that the bridegroom betook himself to the house of the parents and fetched his bride, or that she was brought to him in festal procession, and he went forth to meet her (see 1 Macc. ix. 39). That was the prevailing custom, as we see in the parable of the ten virgins (Matt. xxv. 1—13). In this case, however, there is a vast difference in rank between the bride and bridegroom, and she is brought to him. The long journey through the wilderness is implied in the mention of the body-guard (cf. Isa. iv. 6; xxv. 4). The intention evidently is to show how dear the bride was to Solomon. His mighty men were chosen to defend her. So the Church is surrounded with armies of guardian attendants. Her Lord is the Lord of hosts. The description reminds us of the exquisite lines in Shake-

spere’s ‘Antony and Cleopatra,’ in which he describes the lovely Egyptian in her barge “like a burnished throne,” lying “in her pavilion (cloth of gold, of tissue),” with the smiling cupids on each side, while

“ . . . from the barge,
A strange invisible perfume hits the sense
Of the adjacent wharfs.”

(Act ii. sc. 2.)

The word *mittâh*, “a bed, or litter,” comes from a root “to stretch out,” and is also used of a bier (see 2 Sam. iii. 21). The idea is that of a portable bed, or sitting-cushion, hung round with curtains, after the manner of the Indian palanquin, such as is still found in the Turkish caïques or the Venetian gondolas. It was, of course, royal, belonging to Solomon, not to any nobleman or private person; hence its magnificence. The bearers are not named. The body-guard, consisting of sixty chosen men, forming an escort, were one-tenth part of the whole royal guard, as we see from 1 Sam. xxvii. 2; xxx. 9. Delitzsch suggests that in the mention of the number there may be a reference to the twelve tribes of Israel—60 being a multiple of 12. The term, “mighty men,” is explained in the next verse as warriors, that is, men “held fast by the sword” (מַחֲבֵרֵי הַחֶבֶרֶת), i.e., according to Hebrew idiom, men practised in the use of the sword; so it is explained by some; but others take it as meaning that they “handle the sword;” hence our Revised Version.

Ver. 8.—They all handle the sword, and are expert in war: every man hath his sword upon his thigh because of fear in the night. The guard of warriors round the litter secured the bride from any sudden alarm as she travelled through the wilderness, and so gave her quiet rest. The journey from Shunem to Jerusalem would be about fifty miles in a direct course, and it was therefore necessary to pass at least one, if not two, nights on the way; the course being through a wild and solitary region. The Church of God may be often called to pass through dangers and enemies, but he that loveth her will provide against her destruction—she shall have rest in the love of her Lord. He will surround her with his strength. “My peace I give unto thee”—provided by me, coming from myself, the fruit of my self-sacrificing love.

Vers. 9, 10.—King Solomon made himself a palanquin of the wood of Lebanon. He made the pillars thereof of silver, the bottom thereof of gold, the seats of it of purple, the midst thereof being paved with love, from the daughters of Jerusalem. The palanquin is described, that the attention may be kept fixed awhile on the bridal procession, which, of course, forms the kernel of the whole poem, as representing the perfect union of

the bride and bridegroom. The Greek versions translate *φανεῖον*: the Vulgate, *ferculum*. We read in Athenæus (v. 13) that the philosopher and tyrant Athenon showed himself on "a silver-legged *φανεῖον* with purple coverlet." There probably is some connection between the Hebrew *appiryon* and the Greek *phoreion*, but it is exceedingly doubtful if the Hebrew is merely a lengthened form of the Greek. Delitzsch derives the Hebrew from a root *pārāh*, "to cut or carve" anything of wood. The Greek would seem to be connected with the verb *φέρω*, "to bear," "carry." The resemblance may be a mere coincidence. The rabbinical tradition is that the Hebrew word means "couch, or litter." Hitzig connects it with the Sanscrit *paryāna*, meaning "saddle," "riding-saddle," with which we may compare the Indian *paryang*, "bed." Others find a Chaldee root for the word, *רָץ*, "to run," as *currus* in Latin, or from a root *רָץ*, "to shine," i.e. "to be adorned." At all events, it would not be safe to argue the late date of the book from such a word as *appiryon*, on account of its resemblance to a Greek word. The "wood of Lebanon" is, of course, the cedar or cypress (1 Kings v. 10, etc.). There may be a covert allusion intended to the decoration of the temple as the place where the honour of the Lord dwelleth, and where he meets his people. The frame of the palanquin was of wood, the ornaments of silver. The references to the high value set upon silver, while gold is spoken of as though it was abundant, are indications of the age in which the poem was composed, which must have been nearly contemporaneous with the Homeric poems, in which gold is spoken of similarly. Recent discoveries of the tomb of Agamemnon, etc., confirm the literary argument. The palanquins of India are also highly decorated. The daughters of Jerusalem, i.e. the ladies of the court, in their affection for King Solomon, have procured a costly tapestry, or several such, which they have spread over the purple cushion. Thus it is paved, or covered over, with the tokens of love—while all love is but a preparation for this supreme love. (For the purple coverings of the seat, see

Judg. v. 10; Amos iii. 12; Prov. vii. 16.) The preposition *בְּ* in the last clause is rendered differently by some, but there can be no doubt that the meaning is "on the part of," that is, coming from. The typical interpreter certainly finds a firm ground here. Whether we think of the individual believer or of the Church of God, the metaphor is very apt and beautiful—we are borne along towards the perfection of our peace and blessedness in a chariot of love. All that surrounds us speaks to us of the Saviour's love and of his royal magnificence, as he is adored by all the pure and lovely spirits in whose companionship he delights.

Ver. 11.—Go forth, O ye daughters of Zion, and behold King Solomon, with the crown wherewith his mother hath crowned him in the day of his espousals, and in the day of the gladness of his heart. This seems to be an appeal to a larger company of those who will rejoice in the bride and her happiness. The daughters of Zion are perhaps intended to represent the people generally as distinguished from the ladies of the court, i.e. let all the people rejoice in their king and in his royal bride. The mention of the royal mother seems to point to the beginning of Solomon's reign as the time referred to. The crown, or chaplet, with which the proud mother adorned her son, was the fresh wreath round a young king's head, a wedding coronet, no doubt made of gold and silver. It was not the crown placed on the head of Pharaoh's daughter, which would not be so spoken of. According to the Talmud, the custom remained even to later times. There can be no doubt of Bathsheba's special delight in Solomon (see 1 Kings i. 11; ii. 13). We must not, of course, push too far the typical interpretation of such language, which may be taken as the poetical form rather than the spiritual substance. And yet there may be an allusion, in the joy and pride of Bathsheba in her son's gladness, and the consummation of his nuptial bliss, to the Incarnation and the crowning glory of a Divine humanity, which is at once the essential fact of redemption, and the bright expectation which, on the head of the Saviour, lights up eternity to the faith of his people.

HOMILETICS.

Vers. 1—5.—*The dream of the bride.* I. THE ABSENCE OF THE BELOVED. 1. *The bride's distress.* In the last chapter the bride related to her female friends some of the incidents of her early love; here she seems to be relating a dream of those same well-remembered days. The whole narrative, like that of ch. v. 2—8, has a dream-like character. The circumstances are not such as would be likely to occur in real life; but the longing, the wandering, the search, represent in a vivid truthful way the images of dreams. She was lying asleep on her bed; her thoughts were full of the absent bridegroom. "I sought him," she says, "but I found him not." We notice the dream-like

repetition, the dwelling upon phrases. Four times in these five verses we have the fond description of the bridegroom, which occurred for the first time in ch. i. 7, "him whom my soul loveth." Twice we have the utterance of unsatisfied longing, "I sought him, but I found him not." She was sleeping, but (as in ch. v. 2. "I sleep, but my heart waketh") her thoughts were busy and active. Her whole heart was given to her beloved. Those oft-repeated words, "him whom my soul loveth," imply a very deep affection, a great love. The believer remembers God in the watches of the night. The psalmist says, "In the night his song shall be with me, and my prayer unto the God of my life;" and again, "I call to remembrance my song in the night: I commune with mine own heart: and my spirit made diligent search" (Ps. xlii. 8; lxxvii. 6). If our heart is given to the heavenly Bridegroom, we shall think of him as we lie on our beds; our first waking thoughts will be of him. Alas! our love for Christ is not like the bride's love in the Song of Songs. How few of us can in truth speak of the Saviour as "him whom my soul loveth"! The bride dwelt upon those words as the simple truth, the sincere expression of her feelings. We dwell upon them, too; but, alas! with a sense of much coldness and ingratitude, a remembrance of much insincerity and unreality.

"God only knows the love of God;
Oh that it now were shed abroad
In this poor stony heart!
For love I sigh, for love I pine;
This only portion, Lord, be mine,
Be mine this better part."

The Christian dwells on the words, longing for grace to make them his own, the utterance of his inmost heart. Here is the spiritual value of the Song of Songs. We see what a great love is; how it absorbs the heart and fills the soul. Such should be our love to Christ; such should be our "songs in the night" (Job xxxv. 10). The bride sought her beloved in the visions of the night. We seem sometimes in our dreams to be going on long trackless journeys, wandering ever in search of something we know not what. So the bride could not find him whom her soul loved. Such are sometimes the experiences of the Christian soul. So Job once complained, "Oh that I knew where I might find him! that I might come even unto his seat! . . . Behold, I go forward, but he is not there; and backward, but I cannot perceive him" (Job xxiii. 3, 8). The Lord has said, "Seek, and ye shall find;" "Every one that seeketh findeth." But he has also said, "Strive to enter in at the strait gate; for many, I say unto you, shall seek to enter in, and shall not be able." Those who seek shall surely find at last; but the seeking must be diligent seeking, patient, persevering; there must be striving too, struggling to overcome obstacles, wrestling against the spiritual enemies who would bar our way. It is not enough to seek by night on our beds; there must be effort, sustained effort, not mere dreamy aspirations; and that not only by night, not only in the hour of darkness: "in the day of my trouble I sought the Lord" (Ps. lxxvii. 2). We must seek the Lord always; in the hour of health and strength, in the days of our youth; giving him our best, doing all things to his glory. Such seeking will surely find him.

2. *The search.* "I will rise now," she says. The Hebrew tense is cohortative. She is addressing herself, arousing herself. Dreaming as she is, she feels that this is not the way to seek; she must leave her bed, she must rise. Perhaps she remembered the bridegroom's words spoken in the freshness of their first love: "Rise up, my love, my fair one, and come away." She seems to rise; in her dreams she goes about the city in the streets, seeking him whom her soul loved. We must arise and seek the Lord; we must not lie still in careless slumber; we must seek him wherever his providence has set us, whether in the quiet country or in the bustling, crowded city. We may find him in any place, provided it be one where a Christian may safely tread; in any employment, provided it be lawful and innocent; in the city, in the streets, and in the broadways.

"There are in this loud stunning tide
Of human care and crime,
With whom the melodies abide
Of th' everlasting chime;
Who carry music in their heart
Through dusky lane and wrangling mart,
Plying their daily task with busier feet,
Because their secret souls a holy strain repeat."

Still the bride found not the beloved; she repeats her first lament like a plaintive refrain: "I sought him, but I found him not." The soul does not always find the Lord at once when it first feels its need of the Saviour. We try one plan after another; we make effort after effort; but for a time all our efforts are vain. We know that he may be found, that others have found him and have felt the blessedness of his love. But the search seems long fruitless. God would have our search to be sincere, thoughtful, earnest. Therefore he tries our faith. He proves us, as once he proved Abraham; as the Lord Jesus tried the faith of the Syro-Phœnician woman. Again and again she sought his help, but for some time there was no response; silence at first, then what seemed to be a stern refusal. Still she persevered, she urged her prayer; her case was like that of the bride—she sought him, but she found him not. We must follow her example, remembering the Lord's teaching, that men ought always to pray, and not to faint. We must imitate the bride in her dream, and seek on, though for a long season our search may seem unsuccessful—though we find him not.

II. THE ULTIMATE SUCCESS OF THE BRIDE'S SEARCH. 1. *She meets the watchmen.* The watchmen found her (as again in ch. v. 7). She asks them the question which was so near her heart, "Saw ye him whom my soul loveth?" They were going about the city; they might be able to guide her to the object of her search. But they were like the watchman of Ps. cxxvii., waking but in vain for the bride's purpose, unable to help her. It is not always that Christian friends, or the ministers of God's holy Word and sacraments, who "watch for our souls" (Heb. xiii. 17), can help us in our search for Christ. We ask them, we seek their help; it is right to do so; sometimes they can help us. But each soul must find Christ for itself. "Work out *your own* salvation," St. Paul said to the Philippians; and that, "not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence" (ii. 12). 2. *She finds the bridegroom.* The watchmen could give her no good tidings; but she did not faint; she did not return home or throw herself down in despair; she continued her search alone. She would search on till she found the beloved of her soul. And her search was rewarded at last. "It was but a little that I passed from them, but I found him whom my soul loveth." God is not far from us even in the hour of deepest gloom, when we seem to strain our eyes through the darkness, and can see no light. If we seek him earnestly we shall surely find him at the last; for he, we know, is seeking us. The Lord Jesus Christ came to seek and to save that which was lost. He seeketh the lost sheep until he find it. He giveth his life for the sheep. Then we may be quite sure that he who loved us with such a love, a love stronger than death, will not suffer any penitent soul that seeketh him in faith, in sorrow for the past, in earnest painful longings for forgiveness, to lose its way, to wander on without finding, to inquire everywhere without result, "Saw ye him whom my soul loveth?" He will surely manifest himself according to his blessed promise, as he did to the two disciples who on the first Easter Day were mourning for their lost Master, and would not be comforted by the words of the women who "had seen a vision of angels, who said that he was alive." He will come in his gracious love, and then our heart will burn within us as he manifests himself, and our eyes shall be opened, and we shall know him; and that knowledge is eternal life (John xvii. 3). 3. *She brings him to her home.* The long wanderings of the dream were over. She had found him whose love filled her waking thoughts, of whom her dreams were full when she slept. She would not let him go. The anguish of that long, almost despairing search should not be in vain. She held him fast, and brought him to her own home, into its inmost chambers. The soul that once has found Christ clings to him with the strong embrace of faith. He may "make as though he would go further" (Luke xxiv. 28), to try our faith, that we may feel our need of him. But as the two disciples then "constrained him, saying, Abide with us, for it is toward evening, and the day is far spent," so the soul holds him and will not let him go. The soul, weak as Jacob was weak, struggles with the strength that the sense of weakness gives. "I will not let thee go, except thou bless me."

"Yield to me now, for I am weak,

But confident in self-despair:

Speak to my heart, in blessings speak;

Be conquered by my instant prayer:

Speak! or thou never hence shalt move,

And tell me if thy name is Love.

**"My prayer hath power with God : the grace
 Unspeakable I now receive ;
 Through faith I see thee face to face—
 I see thee face to face, and live !
 In vain I have not wept and strove :
 Thy nature and thy name is Love."**

This noble hymn of Charles Wesley's expresses the feelings of a soul that has found Christ. We must not let him go, not for any perplexities, not for any temptations. St. Paul tells us that no difficulties can draw us back from him if we really give him our heart. "I am persuaded that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Rom. viii. 38, 39). Then we must cling very closely to him, not letting go any one desire to serve him better and to love him more. We must stimulate every such desire into activity by actual self-denying effort. We must try with all our heart to realize his presence always, at all times and in all places, in our business, our amusements, our intercourse with friends and relations, as well as in the hour of private prayer or public worship. We must try with conscious effort to please him always ; seeking, indeed, to serve him much, like Martha, but still more to please him perfectly, like Mary. And we must bring him into our home, into the very inmost chambers of our heart, opening them all to him, dedicating them all, every purpose of ours, every hope, every aspiration, to him, beseeching him to accept our imperfect offering, to make our hearts his temple, to fulfil in us his blessed promise, "If any man love me, he will keep my words : and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode [our dwelling, our abiding-place] with him" (John xiv. 23). And now we have again the adjuration of ch. ii. 7. The bride has related her dream to the daughters of Jerusalem. The subject of that dream was love—pure and innocent love ; its sorrows and its joys ; separation and blessed reunion. It is a sacred thing. The daughters of Jerusalem were to listen in silent sympathy ; they were not to praise or to blame ; they were not to endeavour to stimulate or increase the love of bride or bridegroom ; they were to leave it to its free spontaneous growth in the heart. Human love is a holy thing. The love that is between Christ and his Church, the love that is between the Lord of our redemption and every elect soul, is holier yet by far. It is not to be much talked of ; it is to be treasured in the heart ; it is the inmost spring of that life which is hidden with Christ in God. It must not be stirred by irreverent talk or disclosure ; it must rest unseen "till it please"—till the fit time shall come for speaking of its blessedness.

Vers. 6—11.—The espousals. I. THE APPROACH OF THE BRIDE. 1. The question. "Who is this?" We have here one of those refrains which form a striking characteristic of the song. The question, "Who is this?" (the pronoun is feminine, "Who is she?") is three times repeated (ver. 6 ; ch. vi. 10 ; viii. 5). It indicates always a fresh appearance of the bride. Here the words seem to be chanted by a chorus of young men, the friends of the bridegroom. They are struck with admiration at the beauty of the bride, and the royal state bestowed upon her by the king. She is coming up to Jerusalem from the distant Lebanon country, here described as the wilderness—which word in the Hebrew Scriptures often means, not a desert, but a thinly populated country, fit for feeding flocks, a pasture-land. She comes like pillars of smoke perfumed with myrrh and frankincense. Perfumes are burned around her in such profusion that pillars of smoke appear to attend her progress. The marriage of the Lamb is come, and his wife hath made herself ready. She is prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. She comes up from this lower world to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem. The incense of adoration and thanksgiving rises as she moves onward. She is the holy Catholic Church, the great congregation of Christian people dispersed throughout the whole world. But the Church is made up of individual Christian souls. And that the Church may come as a whole to Christ the Bridegroom, each soul must come personally, individually. The soul cometh up out of the wilderness, out of the far country, where the world, the flesh, and the devil rule ; up to

Mount Zion, to the city of God, where is the true temple, where God is worshipped in spirit and in truth, where he manifests himself to them that seek him. And the prayer of the faithful, as they draw ever nearer, is set forth in God's sight as the incense, and the lifting up of their hands as the evening sacrifice. The Lord is pleased, in his infinite condescension, to regard our poor prayers when lifted up in faith as holy incense (Rev. viii. 3, 4), because the great High Priest is praying for us. Our poor prayer joins itself through the power of faith with his prevailing prayer, and therefore rises up before the throne as a pillar of sweetest incense-smoke, acceptable to God through Christ. The thought that God is pleased so to honour the prayers of the faithful, that he condescends to *seek* such worship, worship offered up in spirit and in truth, makes prayer a very sacred thing. The approach of the Christian soul to God is very solemn. The soul cometh out of the wilderness, away from its old haunts; it is ascending up to Mount Zion, to the presence-chamber of the King of heaven; it must come with reverence and godly fear, remembering that God's presence is very awful as well as very blessed; it must come with the perfume of holy thoughts and heavenly aspirations, with the offering of prayer and praise rising up like the smoke of holy incense before the mercy-seat. 2. *The bed of Solomon.* The chorus calls attention to the litter (for such seems here to be the meaning of the word) in which the bride is borne in her progress to the royal city. "It is his litter," they say. They add the royal name itself, "Behold his litter, which is Solomon's," to give emphasis to the honour bestowed upon the bride. The king has sent his own litter to convey his bride to the palace, the palanquin in which he himself was carried. It was King Solomon's; it is the bride's, for the king has given it to her. God has given us all things, St. Paul says (Rom. viii. 32). If only we are Christ's, then all things are ours—the world, life, death, things present, things to come (1 Cor. iii. 21, 22). And the Lord himself says, "The glory which thou gavest me, I have given them" (John xvii. 22). It is his will that his chosen should be with him where he is. He gives them now all that is necessary to convey them thither. "God rode upon a cherub" (Ps. xviii. 10). The Lord will "send his angels . . . and they shall gather together his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other" (Matt. xxiv. 31). The angels carried the soul of Lazarus into Abraham's bosom. But we may learn here another very solemn lesson. The litter of Solomon bore the bride up to Mount Zion; the cross of the Lord Jesus Christ brings the Christian soul to heaven. The Lord was lifted up upon the cross. Several ancient writers tell us that in Ps. xcvi. 10 the earliest reading was, "The Lord hath reigned from the *wood*." The cross is his throne; it drew, and still draws, all faithful souls to him; it has lifted him up to reign over the hearts of all the best and truest. It behoved him first to suffer, and then to enter into his glory. "He humbled himself even unto the death of the cross; *wherefore* God also hath highly exalted him" (Phil. ii. 9). And he brings his elect to God by the same way which he trod himself. The cross lifts the Christian soul to God.

"Nearer my God, to thee,
Nearer to thee;
E'en though it be a cross
That raiseth me."

The Christian is "crucified with Christ" (Gal. ii. 20). He is lifted up by the cross of atonement, the cross of the Lord Jesus Christ, and then by the cross of spiritual self-sacrifice, the cross borne with Christ, into the very presence of the King. Nothing else can bear him thither. He must pray, "Thy will be done," before he asks, "Give us this day our daily bread." He must learn from the suffering Lord the inner meaning of his own holy prayer. "Not my will, but thine be done." He must remember that the cross is the cross of Christ; that the Lord, who was himself lifted up upon the cross, sends the cross to his followers to lift them also upwards; that, purified and refined by holy self-denials, and by suffering meekly borne, they may at length be with him where he is, and behold his glory, and sit with him in his throne (Rev. iii. 21). 3. *The guard.* The king had sent his own guard to escort the bride to her new home. King David had a guard of thirty mighty men; Solomon, it seems, had double the number. All were expert in war; all bore the sword because of fear in the night. From Ps. x., especially vers. 7—10, we learn that parts of Palestine were in David's

time dangerous from bands of brigands. The king had cared for the safety of the bride; the escort was not given her merely for honour. So now the Lord giveth his angels charge over his people to keep (to guard) them in all their ways; so now "the angel of the Lord encampeth round about them that fear him, and delivereth them" (Ps. xci. 11; xxxiv. 7). They "shall not be afraid for the terror by night" (Ps. xci. 5), for "they that be with us are more than they" that be against us (2 Kings vi. 16). The description of the armed guard reminds us that we too have to fight the good fight of faith, that we have to wrestle "against the world-rulers of this darkness, against the spiritual hosts of wickedness" (Eph. vi. 12). We have to take to ourselves the panoply of God, the armour of light; like the mighty men of Israel who guarded the bride, we must take "the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God." That sword will save us from the "fear of the night," because it is "through patience and comfort of the Scriptures" that we have hope (Rom. xv. 4). Thus the Holy Scriptures are not only the sword of the Spirit; they furnish us also with hope, the hope of salvation, which is the helmet of the Christian warrior. To gain that sword and that helmet we must study the Word of God in faith; that living faith which (St. Paul tells us) is the shield whereby we may "quench all the fiery darts of the wicked." If we do our part, quitting ourselves like men, fighting manfully under the banner of the cross, we need fear no evil. Our angel-guard, sent forth because of them that shall be heirs of salvation, called in Holy Scripture "their angels," because they have charge over them, as well as God's angels, because he is their God and King, will ever encamp around us and keep us till we appear before God in Zion.

II. THE KING GOES FORTH TO MEET THE BRIDE. 1. *The chariot of the king.* The bride approaches in a litter sent for her by the king. Solomon himself goes forth to receive her in his car of state. He had had it made according to his own plans, with that artistic skill and magnificence which were characteristic of him. It was made of the fragrant and imperishable cedar-wood brought from Lebanon, the country of the bride. Its decorations were of the richest—gold and silver, and the costly Tyrian purple; in the midst was a tessellated pavement, a gift of love from the daughters of Jerusalem. The bride, the Lamb's wife, shall have the glory of God (Rev. xxi. 9, 11). When she is "prepared as a bride adorned for her husband," then, we are told, "the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God" (Rev. xxi. 3). When Christ, the true Solomon, the Prince of Peace, shall bring his bride, the Church, to the heavenly Jerusalem, the foundation of peace, he will manifest himself to her in his glory. Now he is interceding for us, that then we may be with him where he is, that we may behold his glory. Then, if we are his indeed, we shall see him as he is, and shall be made like unto him (1 John iii. 2). It was a great thing for the poor bride from the Lebanon to be brought into the court of the king whose magnificence filled the Queen of Sheba with wonder and delight. But "eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him" (1 Cor. ii. 9). None can tell the blessedness of those happy souls who, having washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb, "shall see the King in his beauty" (Isa. xxxiii. 17); shall sit with him in his throne amid the glories of the golden city; shall see his face, and his Name shall be in their foreheads. Heart of man cannot conceive the exceeding great joy of that moment of most entrancing bliss, when the heavenly Bridegroom shall bring home the Church, his bride. King Solomon issued out of Jerusalem in royal pomp to meet his betrothed. When the marriage of the Lamb is come, "the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord" (1 Thess. iv. 16, 17). 2. *The glory and great joy of the king.* The chorus calls upon the daughters of Zion to go forth and see the splendour of the royal espousals. King Solomon has brought home his bride; his heart is glad; his mother has crowned him with the royal diadem; he is happy in the love of his bride. The Prophet Isaiah comforts Zion with the blessed promises that "as the bridegroom rejoiceth over the bride, so shall thy God rejoice over thee." "Thou shalt no longer be termed Forsaken; neither shall thy land any more be termed Desolate: but

thou shalt be called Hephzi-bah ['my delight is in her'], and thy land Beulah ['married']; for the Lord delighteth in thee, and thy land shall be married" (Isa. lxii. 4, 5). So the Lord "Christ loved the Church, and gave himself for her; that he might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the Word; that he might present her to himself a glorious Church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that she should be holy and without blemish" (Eph. v. 25-27). It was for the joy set before him that Christ endured the cross (Heb. xii. 2). The Lord bringeth home the lost sheep rejoicing. He saith, "Rejoice *with me*; for I have found my sheep that was lost." "Rejoice *with me!*" And they do rejoice, the Saviour of the world and the holy angels round his throne. The Lord's exceeding great love for our poor dying souls makes the salvation of those souls very precious in his sight. Nothing can show the depth and tenderness of the blessed love with which he yearned for our salvation except the great agony of Gethsemane, the awful anguish of the cross. Therefore the day of the resurrection of the blessed will be a day of joy in heaven. "Let us be glad, and rejoice, and give honour to him: for the marriage of the Lamb is come, and his wife hath made herself ready" (Rev. xix. 7). He is King of kings, and Lord of lords; on his head are many crowns (Rev. xix. 12, 16). His virgin-mother saw him once wearing the crown of thorns; now he wears the crown of boundless sovereignty. He had come down from heaven to seek his bride; now she is with him in his glory. "He shall see of the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied" (Isa. liii. 11).

HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Vers. 1-5.—*Love's dream.* It is a dream that is told of in these verses. It was natural for her who tells it to have dreamt such a dream. Lifting up the story to the higher level of things spiritual, what these verses say suggests—

I. CONCERNING DREAMS GENERALLY. They are often revelations of life and character. Sometimes they are mere folly, the misty vapours exhaled by a gross and over-fed body. But at other times, as here, they have a deeper meaning. They show the manner of a man's life, the bent of his inclinations, the character of his soul. Our dreams never play us false. The motives that govern their acts are the motives that govern ours. A man dreams about the sins he loves too well; about the sorrows that haunt his life; about the joys on which his heart is set. Dreams have played a large part in God's governance of men. They often show us what we should avoid and what we should seek after. Though some are foolish, we cannot afford to despise them as if all were so.

II. CONCERNING THIS DREAM. In both its stages it reveals the fervent love of the dreamer. 1. *It began sorrowfully.* She thought she had lost her beloved (vers. 1, 2). This the deepest of distresses to the renewed soul (cf. Ps. lxxvii. 1-4). If heaven would cease to be heaven, as it would were Christ's presence withdrawn, how much more must this life be all dark and drear if we have him not! And she tells how she sought him. (1) In the city, amid the business and turmoil of men. But it is but little that he is there. They would most probably crucify him if they found him, so deadly is the hate the world hath for him. It is not true that virtue needs only to be seen to be loved. As our Lord was dealt with, so would it be. (2) And in the assemblies, in society. And we cannot be surprised that he was not there. Society! does that word summon up the idea of a community who would cherish Christ's presence? (3) But even the watchmen could not tell her of him. How wrong this! Zion's watchmen, and not know where Christ is to be found! They had found her, and very likely found fault with her, but they could not help her to find him. Such pastors there are, and to them "the hungry sheep look up, and are not fed." We can picture the soul's distress when these failed her. To have gone to the house of God hungering for direction Christwards, and to come back with none at all—that is a sorrow not unknown nor slight. But her dream did not end so. 2. *It ended joyfully.* (1) Her beloved revealed himself to her. She "*found him.*" But what is our finding other than his showing? (cf. the four findings of Christ told of in John i.). How often when we have "passed from" Sundays and services and sermons, and have not found Christ, he is found of us in some other season, place, and circumstances! If he be

found of them that seek him not—as he says he is—how much more will he fulfil his word, “They that seek me shall find me”! (2) And she clave to him. “I held him,” etc. The soul thus holds her Lord by her prayers, her trust, her communion, her service, her self-surrender. These grasp the Beloved, and will not let him go. (3) And she will be content with nothing less than the full assurance of his love (ver. 4). We should resolve to have a religion that makes the soul happy. The religion that does not do this does but little at all. Cf. the elder son in the parable of the prodigal. He had a religion, but it was all gloom. Let us not be satisfied so. And if we seek, and find, and cleave, and so continue as set forth here, the joy of the Lord shall be ours.

III. CONCERNING THE AWAKING. Ver. 5 shows that she is awake, and conscious of the love of her beloved, and would not be torn therefrom until he pleased (cf. on ch. ii. 7). But, awake, the soul finds that what was sad in her dream was but a dread, but what was joyful is an abiding reality. We cannot lose Christ really, though we may think we do; and the soul that seeks him shall find him.—S. C.

Ver. 3.—*The watchmen.* In this verse very much that it concerns Christ’s ministers to give heed to is suggested.

I. THE WATCH THEY HAVE TO KEEP. Christ’s ministers are meant (Isa. lii. 8; lxii. 6; Ezek. xxxiii. 7). Their watch is to be over themselves, over their teaching, over the Church of God.

II. THE REASON OF THEIR APPOINTMENT. It is night, when men sleep, when the foe takes advantage; hence the need of watchmen (Isa. xxi. 11, 12).

III. THE DUTY THEY HAVE TO DISCHARGE. “To go about the city.” The ways and windings of the human heart. The highways of the Word of God. The streets of the city of God, the Church. They need to be acquainted with all these.

IV. WHAT THEY WILL MEET WITH. Such as they found here. They “found me;” that is, a wearied and sorrowful soul. They find such through their preaching or their pastoral work (1 Cor. xiv. 24, 25). So souls are found. True watchmen are sure to find such.

V. THE QUESTION THEY WILL BE ASKED. (Cf. John xii. 21, “Sir, we would see Jesus.”) This the suggestion of what we read here. “Saw ye him whom my soul loveth?” And this is what such souls need; and the more they are directed to him, the more will the watchmen be valued and their word heeded. This is what our congregations want from us, and the question which in reality they put to us.

VI. THE IMPORTANCE OF THEIR ANSWER. Had they told her where he was whom she sought, she would have passed from them with gratitude and joy; as it was, because they could not tell her, she went away in deep distress. Such issues depend upon their word. It is good when they have seen Jesus for themselves. It is better when they can direct seeking souls to him. But it is sad indeed if they have neither seen him nor know how to direct inquirers to him. So was it with these watchmen; so let it not be with us.—S. C.

Vers. 6—11.—“*Solomon in all his glory.*” (For explanation of details in these verses, see Exposition.) We have set before us here such glory as pomp and splendour, strength and power, great riches and sensual pleasure, could give. All that in which Solomon delighted, and for which his name became famous. Now, these things suggest—

I. A GREAT TEMPTATION. They were so: 1. *To Solomon*, for he yielded to it. All that these things could do for him he enjoyed to the full. The tradition of “Solomon and all his glory” came down through the centuries that followed. And the like things are a great temptation to men now. What will they not do for them? They were the last of the temptations with which Satan tempted our Lord. And to the good, the temptation of them lies in the suggestion that was doubtless made to the mind of our Lord—so much good may be done by them; they will so help in establishing the kingdom of God. His mind was, we may well believe, absorbed with the question how the great work he had come to do, the establishment of this kingdom, could be accomplished. And here was the point and force of this temptation. To yield to it would have been as if he had fallen down and worshipped the evil one. Hence he spurned both it and him. And still “in the multitude,” not of “words”

only, but even more of riches, "there wanteth not sin." Therefore these things are not to become the object of desire in a good man's soul. 2. *They were designed to tempt her of whom this song tells.* Solomon would dazzle her with his splendour and wealth, and so would make her "forget" her "kindred" and her "father's house;" for the king desired her beauty. And in like manner the same temptation is held out still. For the sake of these things what sacrifices are made of loyalty and truth and goodness! She resisted by the might of her affection for her "beloved;" the power of her true love enabled her to overcome. And only the presence in our hearts of a higher love, and, best of all, the highest, even the love of God, will drive out and overcome all lower and evil love.

II. A GREAT LACK. There is nothing in all this glory of pomp and wealth which marks the presence of those Godward riches which alone are real; nothing to satisfy the soul of man or to help it in its life. The soul might starve, as Solomon's did, in spite of all this glory; and, on the other hand, the soul can prosper well though it can call none of this glory its own. We cannot help desiring earthly riches—they are designed in due measure to attract and stimulate us; and they will do us no harm if we are careful, all the while we seek them, to be rich towards God; to possess, as we may, "the unsearchable riches of Christ." But poor and miserable is that soul, though he have all Solomon's glory, if he have not these.

III. A VIVID TYPE. This is what expositors in all ages have mostly seen in the pomp these verses describe. Some have seen a *setting forth of the glory of Christ* on his return to heaven. He comes up out of the wilderness of this dreary world. The incense of praise, fragrant and precious, is given to him. He is borne in stately triumph (cf. Ps. xxiv. 7—10). He is attended by his angel-guards. He has prepared a place for them that love him, and will receive them unto himself. All who love him are to go forth and behold his glory. Thus the triumph of Jesus, the King of Zion, is shown forth. Others have read in these verses *the unseen glory of the redeemed soul.* He comes up out of the wilderness, as Lazarus was carried by angels into Abraham's bosom. The entrance into glory is with joy and praise. Angel-guards surround. The King hath prepared a place, a throne—his own throne—on which the redeemed with their Lord shall sit. Love—Christ's love—has paved all the way. The vision of Christ in his glory which the redeemed shall enjoy. In such ways as this have devout souls found this Scripture full of profit; in this or in other ways may we find it likewise.—S. C.

Vers. 1—4.—*The search for the true King.* When once the Spirit of truth has begun his work in the heart, there is a strong yearning after Jesus. In fulfilling his mission as the Revealer of Christ, the Spirit excites within us intense longings to have the friendship of Jesus. We take this as clear proof that a work of grace has begun in us if we feel that none but Christ can satisfy. Now we can part with all we have to obtain this goodly pearl. As the man who had inadvertently slain a fellow flees with lightning speed toward the city of refuge, feeling that the blood-avenger is at his heels, so the convicted sinner has an eye for only one object—Christ. This persistent search for the Saviour is a token for good. The tree that does not easily languish in summer drought, but grows, blossoms, unfolds its fruit, has most certainly deep roots in the soil; so, if under manifold discouragements we steadily seek after Christ, we may be sure that we are planted in the soil of grace by the Lord's right hand. Three main thoughts are in this text.

I. JESUS SOUGHT. "I sought him whom my soul loveth." 1. *True love to Christ flows brightly even in his absence.* Genuine love is of all things the most unselfish. We love him not so much for the benefit to be obtained; we love him because he is lovable. Having once known him, we cannot restrain our love. To give the shrine of the heart to another would be self-degradation, idolatry. On this account it may be that Jesus keeps away. He sees some growing rivalry within. He sees some need for our self-purging. He wants the soul to realize a deeper need. He wants to make his love more prized. Many worthy reasons has Jesus for hiding himself. 'Tis a temporary winter in order to bring about a more prolific harvest. So, whether we have any assurance of his love or not, we will love him; we will seek after him. 2. *The absence of Jesus makes midnight for the soul.* "By night, . . . I sought him," If Jesus has

been our Sun of Righteousness, then his departure makes our night. All the things relating to the spiritual world are dark to us if Jesus be absent. We cannot see the face of our Father. We cannot read our titles clear to the heavenly inheritance. There is no growth of holy virtues in us. We cannot run the heavenly race. It is a time of wintry darkness and wintry barrenness if Jesus keeps away. No artificial light can take the place of Immanuel. 3. *There is sound resolution.* The soul has reached a noble resolution. "I will rise now." Some resolutions which we make are worthless. They are made under excited feeling, or from a passing fear, or they are the outcome of a shallow nature, which lightly esteems a pledge. But a resolution made in the strength of God is a firm step taken in advance. It is the first step in a series; for the strength of God is behind it. Genuine resolution never waits. It moves onward at once. No sooner had the prodigal boy resolved to return, than "he arose and came to his father." So here the bride says in the same breath, "I will seek him. . . . I sought him." The future is instantly translated into the present. Good resolution is not a pillow to sleep on; it is a horse which we should instantly mount. 4. *There is active and persistent search.* No journey is too great if we can only find our Beloved. Thousands travel every year over hot sands to Mecca in the hope of getting nearer to Mohammed, and so gaining his empty favour. Sharp privations are gladly endured in order to purchase this worthless merit. Gold-seekers will voyage to the antipodes, and will run a thousand risks to obtain the virgin ore. Then does not highest wisdom impel us to seek the "unsearchable riches of Christ"? Shall the common adventurers of earth put us to shame? We must seek everywhere, in all likely places. If in one search we have been disappointed, we must try another. Columbus was not easily daunted when he was on the search for a new continent. Many noble lives have been sacrificed in the effort to find a sea-route over the North Pole. Joseph and Mary did not easily abandon the search for the child Jesus. Pressed down with sorrow, they sought him in one company after another, nor gave up their effort until they found the lad.

"The subtle chemist can dissect
And strip the creature naked till he find
The callow principles within their nest.
What hath not man sought out and found
But his dear God?"

5. *First disappointments will not deter us.* "I sought him, but I found him not." The earnest seeker after Christ is not easily daunted. The first hindrance will not depress him, nor the second, nor the twentieth. Delays in finding Jesus only whet his appetite, and spur him on to fresh search. Failure in finding Christ is in no sense a defeat. It is a gain in knowledge. It is helpful in experience. It is part of the process in the attainment of success. Difficulties make the man. If one road does not lead to righteousness and rest, another road will; for there *is* a road. And Christ is watching us carefully to see if we are faint-hearted. The first experiment to utilize electricity for illuminating a city did not succeed, nor the second; yet mechanics persevered until they reached the goal. And every awakened sinner is resolved to find Christ, or to die in the attempt. Our own blunders, as a rule, are the cause of delay. 6. *There will be inquiry for Christ from qualified persons.* "The watchmen that go about the city found me: to whom I said, Saw ye him whom my soul loveth?" These watchmen fitly represent the pastors of the Church. They know the haunts and habits of the Prince. They know the proneness of man's heart to err. They know the subtleties of the adversary and the deceitfulness of sin. Therefore a faithful pastor is a good guide for seeking souls. These under-shepherds are ever on the look out for Christ-seekers. We read, "They found me." Then they were searching for such. This is their business. As a man who has navigated a ship a hundred times through an intricate rocky channel makes the best pilot, so they who have themselves found Christ and walk daily with him are best qualified to lead wanderers into his fold. Shrink not from asking counsel. Avail yourself of every help.

II. JESUS FOUND. "I found him whom my soul loveth." 1. *Jesus uses consecrated men to bring his chosen ones into his presence.* Those who know him best are honoured

to be chamberlains in his palace, and to introduce guests to his banquet-table. His employment of us in this sacred and noble work is an unspeakable honour. A consecrated man is sure to become a guide to others, whether he fill an office in the Church or not. The pious women who talked with each other of Christ in the cottage porch at Elstow led John Bunyan into the friendship of Christ. As men who have travelled through a *terra incognita* erect guide-posts for those who may follow, so every friend of Christ will find a heavenly pleasure in guiding wayward feet into the right way. Never was Paul the apostle a nobler man than when he put into words the burning desire of his heart, "I could wish that myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh." 2. *Diligent search is always rewarded.* If, in self-diffidence, we follow the light of Scripture, sooner or later we are sure to succeed. "Then shall we know, if we follow on to know the Lord." Men have searched long for the philosopher's stone and for the secret of perpetual motion—have searched long, and searched in vain. But no sincere lover of Christ yet sought him and failed to find him. Not more surely may you expect a harvest where you have sown good seed than success from seeking Christ. It prevails with the uniform regularity of law. "Then shall we find him when we seek him with all the heart." When there is a seeking sinner and a seeking Saviour, they are sure to meet ere long. Calvary is an old trysting-place. 3. *Genuine love appropriates Christ.* "I held him." We naturally value anything a great deal more if we have taken many pains to acquire it. A jewel is valued for its rarity as well as for its intrinsic beauty. There is but one Christ; hence when we find him we hold him fast. But in what way can we hold him? We hold him by frequent communing with him. We hold him fast when we hourly try to please him. We hold him if our love is strong and fragrant. We hold him if in our heart-garden there are ripe fruits of holiness. We hold him if there is harmony of purpose, will, and life. He loves companionship. 4. *Every attempt of Jesus to depart is energetically resisted.* "I would not let him go." In this way Jesus often tests our love. We have displeased him, and he rises to depart. Then will we confess the evil thing? Will we make some fresh self-sacrifice in order to detain him? He is not easily offended. He hateth putting away. But he loves to see in us a delicate sensitiveness of feeling. He delights to find a tender and childlike affection. It is for our highest good that he should be appreciated. As he did at Emmaus he sometimes deals with us: "he made as though he would have gone further; but they constrained him." And now he gladly yields to our constraints. It brings him delicious joy to feel the embraces of our love. If he can only strengthen and elevate our love, he has conferred on us the very highest good. If love grows, every grace will grow. If love grows, we grow like Christ. And this is love's firm resolve, "I would not let him go."

III. JESUS MADE KNOWN. "Until I had brought him into my mother's house." 1. *We wish our best friend to accompany us everywhere.* The genuine disciple desires to take Jesus with him into every circle and into every occupation. He is not content to have Jesus only on sabbath days and on special occasions. He wants Jesus always at his side—yea, better, always in his heart. He has no friend whom he cannot introduce to Jesus. He has no occupation, no recreation, he wants to keep from the eye of Jesus. Into every chamber of the house Jesus is welcome. He is a fitting Guest for every room, a fit Companion on every journey, a fitting Partner in every enterprise. We do all things in the name of Jesus. 2. *This language suggests benevolent effort for our households.* Love is generous. Having found such spiritual treasure in Jesus, we want every member in our household, viz. children, parents, servants, to share in the "unsearchable riches." "I brought him into my mother's house." Happy the man who can testify *that*! If we are under tremendous obligations to earthly parents, how can we better discharge the debt than by making them partakers of Christ? 3. *This language suggests our usefulness to the Church.* As we give to the imagery of this book a spiritual interpretation, so may we properly regard our mother's house as the Church on earth. This is our true *Alma Mater*. We bring the Bridegroom with us into the Church. We cannot enjoy our piety alone. We inspire the whole Church with a nobler life. Our sacred love to Jesus is a contagion. Others feel the heavenly charm, and they desire to have Jesus too. And from the Church the benefit extends to the whole world. Would that all men knew our Lord!—D.

Vers. 6—11.—*The King coming to his capital.* In Asiatic lands wheeled carriages were rare, and are rare still. This is accounted for by the absence of roads. To construct and maintain roads through a hilly country like Palestine required more engineering skill than the people possessed; and further, there was a general belief that to make good roads would pave the way to military invasion. Hence all over Palestine the pathways from town to town were simply tracks marked out by the feet of men and beasts. Over the level plain of Esdraelon Ahab might ride in a chariot; but if Solomon brought up wheeled chariots from Egypt he had a prior undertaking, viz. to make a road from Beersheba to the capital. Therefore travelling princes rode in a covered palanquin, which served to screen from the hot sun by day, and became a bed at night. Owing to the scorching heat, much of the journey would be taken during the cool hours of night, and hence the need for a strong body-guard. Before the rapt imagination of the sacred poet such a scene passed. The stately procession arrested his attention, and he asks, "Who is this?" What great king is this? Such is the poetic imagery. Now, what is the religious instruction? It is the march of Christ through the ages—a march beginning with the wilderness and terminating with his coronation in the new Jerusalem. Though he has been long hidden, the day is coming when the King of Zion shall be revealed to the eyes of men, and he shall "be admired by all who love his appearing."

I. OBSERVE THE MARCH OF CHRIST TO HIS GLORIOUS THRONE. 1. *His lowly beginning is indicated.* "He cometh out of the wilderness." This is how he appeared to the onlooker. His prior state was hidden from mortal eye. So far as men saw, Jesus began his strange career in the cattle-manger of a stable. The world to him was a wilderness, void of all attractiveness. In this respect he followed the fortunes of ancient Israel, for they too had first the wilderness, then the "land flowing with milk and honey." When Jesus began his mission, human life was a veritable wilderness. The beauty and joy of Eden had departed. On every side raged jealousies, hatreds, strifes. The civilized world was under the iron despotism of Rome. The prophets of God had ceased to speak. Hope of a golden age had almost died out, except in a few believing hearts. The glory of Greece and Tyre had waned. The human race was on the verge of reckless despair. Our earth was reduced to a desert. 2. *Christ's coming was fragrant with heavenly hope.* Even in the loneliest desert there are some living plants, and these oftentimes possess aromatic essences. The shrubs are storehouses of fragrant spice. The sweetest perfumes come from the Arabian desert. Such things abate the mischief of noxious miasma. Rare perfumes refresh the senses, and betoken noble rank. The mightiest King did not despise the sweet odours of myrrh and frankincense. So neither did Jesus Christ treat with contempt the simple virtues and courtesies of the people. He stooped to learn from the lips of Jewish rabbis. He gave his benediction to the wedding-feast. He was pleased with the gratitude of a poor leper. He commended the brotherliness of the despised Samaritan. He accepted the hospitality of peasant women. He praised the generosity of a poor widow. A sweet and refreshing savour pervaded all his words, all his deeds. From his cradle to his grave he was perfumed with frankincense and myrrh. 3. *His coming was a conspicuous thing.* The procession was seen afar off. Possibly the flame of torches during the night-march sent up in front and in rear huge pillars of smoke. Or possibly clouds of dust from that dry soil rose from the feet of the host, and in that clear, transparent air was seen thirty or forty miles away—even from the hills of Zion. Anyhow, the procession is seen from a distance. Curiosity is aroused. Many eyes are turned to the novel spectacle, and the question leaps from lip to lip, "Who is this?" So, too, the progress of Jesus through our world has excited the wonder of successive generations. When he read the Scripture in the rustic synagogue of Nazareth, men asked, "Who is this?" When he fed the five thousand on the mountain-side, or ruled nature with a nod, they asked, "Who is this?" When, on the Day of Pentecost, the whole city was thrilled with astonishment, men asked, "Who is this?" At Corinth, at Ephesus, at Antioch, when multitudes left their idols for the new faith, men asked, "Who is this, whose onward march is so kingly, so triumphant?" And still they ask in the bazaars of India and in the temples of China, "Who is this?" His march is the march of a Conqueror: the King of kings, because he is the Prince of Peace.

II. OBSERVE HIS BODY-GUARD. 1. *This is a token of peril.* But the peril is not that of open war. If a bannered host should oppose his march, he would meet it with his invincible forces. Michael and all the powers of heaven would fight his battle. It is not open war. The foes in the desert are Ishmaelites. They seek for plunder. They make sudden and covert attack in the night. So has it been in the progress of our Immanuel. From the band of his own disciples the traitor came, and came by night. The priests of Jehovah were his worst foes. Professed friends, like Ananias and Sapphira, have stabbed his cause in secret. The persecutors of his gospel have usually laid their plots in the dark. Atheists and hypocrites have been his bitterest foes. The enemies to the cause of heavenly truth still lie in ambush. 2. *Variety of service can be rendered to our gracious King.* There were some who bore on their shoulders his palanquin; some who carried torches; some who perfumed his Person; some who wielded swords in his defence. And various service is needed still. If one cannot be a general on the battle-field, he may be an armour-bearer. He who cannot fight in the ranks can be a sentinel at the gate or a watchman on the tower. The child wanting yet in martial strength may be fleet of foot as a messenger. If too old for field-service, we can be mighty at the throne. 3. *The life-guards are well equipped.* "They all hold swords." And in the service of Immanuel the sword is keen and has a double edge. In the olden time a Damascus blade had great renown; but the sword of truth is forged and furbished in heaven, and has a penetration which is irresistible. If once we get this sword of truth into a man's conscience, it does exploits there. The tongues with which we speak winsomely and graciously of our King is a two-edged weapon. The pen is mightier than the sword, and the tongue of fire is mightier than the pen. The Word of the Lord is invincible. 4. *All service is useful in this King's progress.* It made the march a more imposing spectacle. It silenced the murmurers and the scornors. Does Jesus Christ require human service? He has chosen such plans of warfare as require various agencies of man. He prefers to work through feeble and imperfect men, for thereby he confers blessing on friends and on foes at once. Through exercise our spiritual energies become more robust. Through service our faith and love are tested. The more fervid zeal we bring to our Master's cause, the more honour crowns his head. We serve the King, we serve the human race, we serve ourselves, at one stroke. Loving service is the richest spiritual perfume.

III. NOTE HIS PALANQUIN. It is made of cedar-wood from Lebanon; the bed is gold, the pillars are silver, the curtains are resplendent with imperial purple. 1. *This carriage, or palanquin, may fitly represent for us the covenant of grace.* In this our Immanuel rides triumphantly. In order to set this forth so as to impress the dull senses of humanity, the most precious things of earth are used as metaphors. As cedar is the richest and hardest among timber, as gold and silver are the costliest of metals, as the purple colour was selected for royalty, these material splendours feebly adumbrate the eternal covenant of redemption. Nothing on earth can adequately express it. It is notable for its antiquity; notable for its rarity; notable for its splendour; notable for its usefulness. As the palanquin must be made worthy of a king, the covenant of grace is well worthy of our God. To save is his eternal purpose. 2. *The curtains were the handiwork of virgins.* "Worked by the daughters of Jerusalem." All through the East, women are despised, down-trodden, treated as an inferior race. If in Western lands women are ennobled and honoured, it is wholly due to the grace of our King. So from the very beginning Jesus intimated that the service of women would be acceptable. He was dependent on an earthly mother's care. Once and again, women ministered to him "of their substance." The deed which he predicted should be known throughout the world was the deed of a woman. Women gathered round his cross in sweetest sympathy, while others laughed and jeered. Women performed the last acts of care for his dead body. Women were the first to greet him on the resurrection-morn. "In Christ Jesus there is neither male nor female." 3. *These curtains and carpets are adorned with emblems of love.* Our version says, "paved with love." It should rather be, "inwrought with symbols of love." Just as in our day men use the form of a heart, or the figure of a fire, to denote warm and genuine love, so some device of love was interlaced in the manufacture of these curtains by the deft fingers of devoted women. It is not more true that we rest in Christ's love than the converse, "he rests in our love." "If any man love me, he

will keep my commandments: and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and will make our abode with him." To the same effect we read, "that Christ may dwell in your hearts." Love has a thousand devices for expressing itself.

IV. MARK THE ADORATION WHICH BEFITS THE KING. "Go forth, ye daughters of Zion, and behold King Solomon." In some respects David was the type of Christ. "He was despised and rejected of men," and yet a mighty king. But, in respect to the magnificence of his kingdom and the peacefulness of his reign, Solomon better prefigures Jesus. 1. *To appreciate Jesus as King we must know him.* "Go forth, then, and behold him." Look into his excellences. Examine his claims to Kingship. Note carefully the unstained purity of his character. Behold his hands, bearing the marks of the nails—marks of love! Behold his feet, firm "as fine brass; as if they glowed in a furnace," and set upon the serpent's head. Behold his heart, still pulsating with everlasting love for the fallen sons of men. Learn well all his kingly qualities; for no true loyalty, no complete consecration, can spring up in us until we know him. 2. *Not especially that he is crowned.* He is appointed to this supreme throne as the world's King by the Eternal Father. "By the right hand of God he is exalted." Yet the symbols of his reign we place upon his head. On his head are already "many crowns." Every ransomed sinner is another ornament in the diadem of our King. Never did king wear such a crown as this. He is crowned already with world-wide renown. Every thorn in that crown, which impious mockers thrust upon his brow, is now transmuted into a ray of peerless glory. To-day kings and princes bow before him, and already his "enemies lick the dust." From a hundred empires the shout ascends, "Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord!" We do not hail and welcome him simply as the Victim of the cross; we bow to him as our soul's true King. 3. *This coronation of Jesus is attended with gladness of heart.* It is not always so. Sometimes the heir to a nation's crown is very unfitted to wear it. He is too young to sustain its cares. He would prefer a life of pleasurable ease. Or the crown itself may be disgraced. The throne is planted with sharpest thorns. The empire is reeking with discontent. That coronation may be no better than a crucifixion. Not so with King Jesus. To be crowned means success for his great redemptive mission. "For the joy that was set before him he endured the cross." As his grief was unexampled, so shall be his joy. The globe shall be his empire. Because his capacity for joy is infinite, his joy shall rise until the capacious heart is full. The joy will be eternal, because the triumph can never be reversed.—D.

Ver. 1.—*The soul's love.* This whole book is a glorification of love; it teaches that human love, if true, is sacred, ennobling, and inspiring; it shows the excellence of human love, that it is worthy of being the emblem of that love which is spiritual and Divine. As St. John has taught us, "He that loveth not knoweth not God: for God is love." The Object of the Christian's love is Christ, in whom the love of God has been revealed and communicated to us.

I. THE GROUNDS OF THE SOUL'S LOVE TO CHRIST. The soul that loves the Redeemer is not prompted by blind, unreasonable impulse; such love as that expressed in the language of the text is rational and justifiable. 1. The soul loves Christ for his own Divine, unapproachable excellence, for what he is in himself. He is worthy above all to be thus loved. With an "intellectual love," as the English Platonist phrased it, does the illumined and living soul love him who is the Effulgence of the Father's glory and the Revelation of the Father's heart. 2. The soul loves Christ in gratitude for Divine compassion, ministry, and sacrifice. The cycle of Christian doctrine concerning the Person and mediation of the Redeemer is an exhibition as much of God's love as of his holiness and his wisdom. What our Saviour has done for us is an appeal to the soul which awakens the response of grateful affection. 3. The soul loves Christ because of the revelations of Divine friendship made to the individual nature. The language of the Canticles is rich in portraying the personal element in the relation between the Lord and humanity as redeemed by him. And every Christian is prompted to affection by those intimate displays of Divine affection which experience records in the recesses of the spiritual nature.

II. THE PROOFS OF THE SOUL'S LOVE TO CHRIST. An emotion such as this cannot take possession of the mind, and dwell in the mind, without becoming a principle,

controlling and inspiring the nature, and prompting to manifestations of marked, decisive import. 1. The soul keeps him whom it loveth in perpetual memory. 2. The soul takes an ever-growing delight in his society; places the highest happiness in spiritual fellowship with Christ. 3. The soul proves the sincerity of its love to Christ by treasuring up his precepts, by seeking to live under the inspiring influence of his presence and character, by yielding to him a cheerful, constant, and unquestioning obedience. Whom the soul loveth the hand serveth, the tongue witnesseth unto, the whole life honoureth by obeying and glorifying.—T.

Vers. 2—4.—*The soul's quest rewarded.* The romantic incident here poetically related has usually been regarded as a picture of the experiences through which many a soul is permitted to pass during this state of probation and Divine discipline.

I. THE SOUL'S SEARCH. 1. The appreciation of Christ involved in this quest. Men seek for gold because they value it; they dive for pearls and dig for precious stones. Multitudes are indifferent to the Saviour because they know him not; because their spiritual susceptibilities are not awakened. But those to whom he is chief among ten thousand cannot be satisfied until they possess him and enjoy his fellowship. 2. The quest may be both earnest and prolonged. The desire for highest good is amongst the noblest and purest of all human characteristics. And seeking is good, even though finding be better. A search which is sincere and patient is in a sense its own reward. And there are those whose spiritual experience can only thus be justly described. It is a low view of human nature which looks upon such high quest with contempt; which takes for its motto, *Nul admirari*—"Not to desire or admire." The young and ardent will do well to make the search after God's truth, after God himself, the occupation of their life.

II. THE SOUL'S DISTRESS. 1. Seeking does not always issue in speedy finding. The soul may seek with a mistaken purpose, or in the wrong way, or with a misguided aim, or at the wrong time, i.e. too late. 2. The absence of the sought Saviour is the cause of distress and complaint.

"This is the way I long had sought,
And mourned because I found it not."

There is no repose for the heart until Christ be found. "*Cor nostrum inquietum est, donec requiescat in te,*" says St. Augustine—"Our heart is restless till it rests in thee." There is something of mystery in the providential arrangement that the lot of man should so often be one of seemingly fruitless search and disappointed endeavour. Yet this is discipline for which many have had reason to give thanks; it has called forth courage, it has braced to patience, it has stimulated aspiration, it has sweetened success.

III. THE SOUL'S DISCOVERY. 1. A delayed discovery. The soul has followed hard after him. The moment of revelation has been again and again deferred. The call has been loud, but has met with no answer but the echo. 2. A promised discovery. The word has gone forth from heaven, "Seek ye the Lord while he may be found." The promise has been proclaimed by Christ himself, "Seek, and ye shall find." He does not say, "Seek ye my face in vain." 3. A gracious discovery. "I found him whom my soul loveth." How condescending the revelation! How joyful the sight, the apprehension, the hope's fulfilment! 4. A discovery which the soul uses for its own lasting satisfaction. As the bride in the poem "held" her spouse, grasped him by the arm in the fulness of her joy, and "brought him into the house," there to enjoy his society, so when the soul finds Christ it finds in him One who satisfies every deep craving of its nature. And to find him is to retain him, not as a wayfaring man who tarrieth for a night, but as an inmate never to be displaced from the heart, a friend to go no more out for ever.—T.

Vers. 6—11.—*The bridal entry.* The pomp of Oriental poetry is nowhere more dazzling and imposing than in this passage, where is depicted the procession of the royal bride, who is escorted with magnificent accompaniments, and welcomed into the metropolis with universal and cordial joy. Expositors have seen in this gorgeous picture a description of the dignity and beauty of the Church, the bride of Christ.

The incense rising in perfumed clouds heralds the approach of the bridal procession. The palanquin which contains the bride is of the cedar of Lebanon; silver pillars support its canopy of gold, and the hangings and drapery are of costly purple. The palanquin itself is the provision of the king's munificence, and the ornaments are the gift of the wealthy ladies of Jerusalem. Accompanying the festive procession is an escort of armed and valiant warriors, not only for security, but for state and dignity. The royal bridegroom meets and joins the *cortège*, having upon his head the crown of festivity and happiness, for it is the day of his gladness of heart. The daughters of Jerusalem go forth from the city to join in the welcome, and to swell the number and add to the dignity and attractiveness of the bridal train. "Which things are an allegory."

I. THE CHURCH IS SUMMONED TO QUIT THE WILDERNESS OF THE WORLD, AND BECOME THE BRIDE OF CHRIST.

II. THE CHURCH IS INVESTED BY DIVINE LIBERALITY WITH ALL THAT CAN CONTRIBUTE TO HER SPIRITUAL GLORY.

III. THE CHURCH IN HER PASSAGE THROUGH EARTH IS ACCOMPANIED WITH THE INCENSE OF DEVOTION AND OF SERVICE.

IV. THE CHURCH IS ENVIRONED WITH DIVINE PROTECTION.

V. THE CHURCH IS THE OBJECT OF CHRIST'S AFFECTION AND THE OCCASION OF HIS JOY.

VI. THE CHURCH IS REGARDED BY ANGELIC INTELLIGENCES WITH THE DEEPEST INTEREST AND SATISFACTION.

VII. THE CHURCH IS ASSURED OF AN ETERNAL HOUSE IN THE FAVOUR AND COMMUNION OF THE DIVINE KING.—T.

EXPOSITION.

CHAPTER IV.

Ver. 1.—Behold, thou art fair, my love; behold, thou art fair; thine eyes are as doves behind thy veil; thine hair is as a flock of goats, that lie along the side of Mount Gilead. We commence, at this verse, the loving converse of the bridegroom with the bride, which we must suppose is heard as they travel together in the bridal procession. The words of adoring affection are chiefly spoken by the bridegroom, as is natural in the circumstances, and the reference to the journey, and its consummation in ver. 8, make it certain that the intention is to carry us in thought to the palanquin and the breathings of first love in bridal joy. The poetry is exquisite and truly Eastern, while yet absolutely chaste and pure. The praise of the eyes is common in all erotic poetry. Her eyes gleam, in colour, motion, and lustre, like a pair of doves from behind the veil; showing that the bride is thought of as travelling. The bride was always deeply veiled (see Gen. xxiv. 65), as the Roman bride wore the *velum flamineum*. The LXX. have mistaken the meaning, rendering, ἐκπὸς τῆς σιωπῆσός σου. The veil might typify silence or reserve, but the word is *tsammāh*, which is from a root "to veil," and is rightly rendered by Symmachus κάλυμμα. The hair was long and dark, and lay down the shoulders uncovered and free, which added much to the graceful attraction

of the bride. In later times it was customary for the hair to be adorned with a wreath of myrtle or roses, or a golden ornament representing Jerusalem. The goats in Syria and the neighbouring countries are mostly black or dark brown, while the sheep are white. Delitzsch says, "A flock of goats encamped upon a mountain (rising up, to one looking from a distance, as in a steep slope and almost perpendicularly), and as if hanging down lengthwise on its sides, presents a lovely view adorning the landscape." It would be especially lovely amid the romantic scenery of Gilead. The verb rendered "lie along" is otherwise taken by the LXX., ἀνέκαλυψεν, and by the Vulgate *ascenderunt*. The rabbis differ from one another in their renderings. One says, "which look down;" another, "make bare," "quit," or "descend;" another, "are seen." The modern translators vary. Luther says, "shorn;" Houbigant, "hang down;" Kleuken and Ewald, "shows itself;" Gesenius and others, "lie down;" Ginsburg, "rolling down," "running down." Our Revised Version gives, *lie along*, which is a very probable meaning. The reference is to the luxuriance and rich colour of the hair. Gilead would be a recollection of the bride's native place.

Ver. 2.—Thy teeth are like a flock of ewes that are newly shorn, which are come up from the washing; whereof every one hath twins, and none is bereaved among them. The

simile is very apt and beautiful. Thy teeth are perfectly smooth, regular, and white; the upper set corresponding exactly to the lower set, like twin-births in which there is no break (cf. ch. vi. 6). The moisture of the *saliva dentium*, heightening the glance of the teeth, is frequently mentioned in love-songs. The whiteness of wool is often used as a comparison (see Isa. i. 18; Dan. vii. 9; Rev. i. 14; Book of Enoch xli. 1). Some think that קְשׁוּרֹת should not be rendered "newly shorn," but "periodically shorn" (see Ginsburg)—a poetical epithet for קְשׁוּרֹת. The newly shorn would be washed first. דָּמָּ, "to be double," "to be pairs," in the hiph. is "to make double," "to make pairs," "to appear paired." Perhaps the reference is to the sheep being washed in pairs, and going up side by side from the water. This would seem almost more exact than the idea of twin-lambs, because the difference in size between the ewe and the lamb would suggest irregularity. The word נֶזְכֵּל, "deprived," "bereaved" (Jer. xviii. 21), may point merely to the loneliness of the single sheep going up by itself, suggesting one tooth without its fellow. Ginsburg says, "all of which are paired." Each keeps to its mate as they come up from the pool. This is a decided improvement on the Authorized Version. But the figure is clear with either rendering, and is very striking and suggestive of the pleasant country life to which the bride was accustomed.

Ver. 3.—Thy lips are like a thread of scarlet, and thy mouth is comely; thy temples are like a piece of a pomegranate behind thy veil. *Scarlet*; that is, shining, glistening red colour. *Thy mouth* (פִּיךָ). Thy mouth as speaking. So the LXX., Jerome, and Venetian, "thy speech," *eloquium*, conversation. But this is questioned, as it should then be פִּיךָ. The word *midbār* undoubtedly means "the mouth," from *dāvār*, "to speak" with the ב preformative, as the name of the instrument. It is the preterite for פָּ, but perhaps as referring specially to speech. *Thy temples*; Latin *tempora*, from the adjective בָּר, "weak," meaning the thin piece of skull on each side of the eyes, like the German *schläfe*, from *schlaff*, "slack." The inside of the pomegranate is of a red colour mixed and tempered with the ruby colour. Ginsburg, however, thinks that the cheeks are intended, and that the comparison is with the outside of the pomegranate, in which the vermilion colour is mingled with brown, and resembles the round cheek; but then why say, "piece of a pomegranate"? חֶבֶה, from the root "to cut fruit" (see 1 Kings iv. 39), certainly must refer to the cut fruit and the appearance of the inside. The

meaning may be a segment, that is, so as to represent the roundness of the cheek. Possibly the reference may be to blushes on the bride's cheek, or to ornaments which appeared through the veil. We can scarcely expect to make out every particular in an Eastern description.

Ver. 4.—Thy neck is like the tower of David, builded for an armoury, whereon there hang a thousand bucklers, all the shields of the mighty men. There is an evident change here in the character of the similitudes. The royal bridegroom does not forget to praise the majesty of his bride. The description now suits a royal queen. She is full of dignity and grace in her bearing. The tower referred to was no doubt that which was sometimes called "The tower of the flock" (Micah iv. 4), that from which David surveyed the flock of his people (cf. Neh. iii. 16, 25)—the government building erected on Mount Zion which served as a court of justice. The word *talpiyoth* is an ἀπαξ λεγόμενον: LXX. θάπρωθ, as if a proper name. Hengstenberg would render it "built for hanging swords," supposing it composed of two words—*tal*, from a root "to hang," and *piyoth*, "swords." But the word *piyoth* does not mean "swords," but the "double edges" of the swords. Kimchi renders, "an erection of sharp-cornered stones." Gesenius takes it from two roots, "to perish" and "to go," that is, *exitialibus armis*, which is very doubtful. Ewald's explanation seems the best, "built for close troops, so that many hundreds or thousands find room therein," taking it from a root, connected with the Arabic, meaning, "to wrap together." Delitzsch, however, observes that both in Aramaic and Talmudic Hebrew words occur, like this, in the sense of "enclosure," i.e. joining together, one working into the other, so that it may be taken as meaning, "in ranks together." This view is supported by Döderlein, Meier, Aquila, Jerome, Vulgate (*propugnacula*), and Venetian (ἐπιδέεις). If this be accepted, it may mean "terraced," i.e. built in stories one above another. This would convey the appearance of the tall, straight neck better than any. Surrounded with ornaments, the neck would so appear. There is another suggestion, supported by Ginsburg and taken from Rashi and Rashbun, Jewish writers, that the word is a contraction for a noun meaning "instruction," and means "the model tower"—the tower built for an architect's model. It would be rendered, "built for the builder's model." The meaning "armoury" takes it as composed of two words, *tael*, "a hill," and *piyoth*, "swords." It was decorated with a thousand shields, which was a customary adornment of towers and castles (see Ezek. xxvii. 11). *All the*

shields of heroes. We can scarcely doubt the reference in such words to the time of Solomon, and therefore to his authorship, as the allusion to heroes, or mighty men of valour, would be customary soon after the time of David.

Ver. 5.—*Thy two breasts are like two fawns that are twins of a roe, which feed among the lilies.* This is a beautiful and yet perfectly delicate figure, describing the lovely equality and perfect shape and sweet freshness of the maiden's bosom. The meadow covered with lilies suggests beauty and fragrance. Thus the loveliness of the bride is set forth in seven comparisons, her perfections being sevenfold. "A twin pair of the young of the gazelle, lying in a bed covered with lilies, representing the fragrant delicacy and elegance of a chaste virgin bosom, veiled by the folds of a dress redolent of sweet odour" (cf. ch. i. 13). The bridegroom, having thus delighted himself in praise of his bride's loveliness, then proceeds to declare his desire for her sweet society, but he is interrupted by the bride.

Ver. 6.—*Until the day be cool, and the shadows flee away, I will get me to the mountain of myrrh, and to the hill of frankincense.* If this be the language of the bride, which most modern interpreters think, the meaning is to check the ardour of her lover, in the modesty of her fresh and maidenly feeling—*Let me retire from such praises. They are too ardent for me. It is only a moment's interruption, which is followed by still more loving words from the bridegroom. We must naturally connect the words with ch. ii. 17, where the bride certainly speaks.* Louis de Leon thinks that the meaning is general, "shady and fragrant places." Anton (1773) suggests that she is desiring to escape and be free. It cannot be included as a description of the neighbourhood of the royal palace. She might, however, mean merely—*Let me walk alone in the lovely gardens of the palace until the shades of night shall hide my blushes.* It is unlikely that the words are in the mouth of Solomon, for then it would be impossible to explain their use by Shulamith previously. She is not referring to Lebanon and its neighbourhood, and there can be no idea of looking back to a lover from whom she is torn. The interpretation which connects it with maidenly feeling is certainly the most in harmony with what has preceded. Perhaps the typical meaning is underlying the words—*Let me find a place of devout meditation to feed my thoughts on the sweetness of this Divine love into which I have entered.*

Ver. 7.—*Thou art all fair, my love; and there is no spot in thee.* The bridegroom speaks. The sweet humility and modesty

of the bride kindles his love afresh. He praised the loveliness of her bodily form, and she by her response showed the exceeding loveliness of her soul. It must not be forgotten that, whether borrowed from this book or not, such language is undoubtedly employed in Scripture of the Church, the bride, the Lamb's wife, who is described as "not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing" (Eph. v. 27). It should be noticed that the king immediately addresses his love as "bride," and "sister-bride," to show that there is more than admiration of her person in his thoughts. She is his by assimilation and by eternal union, and he invites her to enter fully into the new life which he has prepared for her, as in Ps. xlv., "forgetting her own people, and her father's house." It is not enough that feeling should be stirred, or even that it should take possession of the soul, if it be only feeling; it is required of us that our inner life of emotion should become practical devotedness, "counting all things but loss" for the sake of him we love.

Ver. 8.—*Come with me from Lebanon, my bride, with me from Lebanon:* look from the top of Amanah, from the top of Senir and Hermon, from the lions' dens, from the mountains of the leopards. This seems to be simply the bridegroom rejoicing over the bride, the meaning being, "Give thyself up to me"—*thou art mine; look away from the past, and delight thyself in the future.* Delitzsch, however, thinks that the bridegroom seeks the bride to go with him up the steep heights of Lebanon, and to descend with him from thence; for while ascending the mountain one has no view before him, but when descending he has the whole panorama of the surrounding region lying at his feet. It is stretching poetical language too far to take it so literally and topically; there is no necessity to think of either the lover or his beloved as actually on the mountains, the idea is simply that of the mountainous region—*Turn thy back upon it, look away from it.* This is clearly seen from the fact that the names connected with Lebanon—Amanah, Senir, Hermon—could have no reference to the bride's being in them, as they represent Anti-Libanus, separated from Lebanon by the Cœle-Syrian valley, stretching from the Banius northwards to the plain of Hamath (see 2 Kings v. 12, where Amanah is Abana, overlooking Damascus, now the Basadia). Senir, or Senir, and Hermon are neighbouring peaks or mountains, or possibly different names for the same (see Deut. iii. 9). In 1 Chron. v. 23 they are mentioned as districts. Hermon is the chief mountain of the range of Anti-Libanus on the north-east border of Palestine (Ps. lxxxix. 12). The wild beasts

abounded in that district, especially lions and panthers. They were found in the clefts and defiles of the rocks. Lions, however, have now altogether disappeared. In the name *Amana* some think there is an allusion to truth (*amen*) (see Hos. ii. 22); but that would be too obscure. The general intention of the passage is simple and plain—Leave the rough places, and come to my palace. The words “with me” (אִתִּי) are taken by the LXX. and Vulgate as though written אִתִּי, the imperative of אָמַן, “to come,” as a word of invitation, δεῖξά. The use of the verb בָּרַךְ, “thou shalt come,” i.e. thou hast come and be content, renders it improbable that such should be the reading, whereas the preposition with the pronoun is quite in place. The spiritual meaning is not far to seek. The life that we live without Christ is at best a life among the wild, untamed impulses of nature, and in the rough and dangerous places of the world. He invites us to go with him to the place which he has prepared for us. And so the Church will leave its crude thoughts and undeveloped life, and seek, in the love of Christ and in the gifts of his Spirit, a truer reflection of his nature and will (see Eph. iv. 14—16). The Apocalypse is based upon the same idea, the advancement of the kingdom of Christ from the place of lions and panthers to the new Jerusalem, with its perfection of beauty and its eternal peace.

Ver. 9.—**Thou hast ravished my heart, my sister, my bride; thou hast ravished my heart with one of thine eyes, with one chain of thy neck.** The bridegroom still continues his address of love, which we must not, of course, press too closely, though it is noticeable that the language becomes somewhat more sober in tone, as though the writer were conscious of the higher application to which it would be put. Some translators take the first clause as though the word “ravished” should be rendered “emboldened.” Symmachus, ἐθαρσύνας με. The Hebrew word נָצַח, literally, “heartened,” may mean, as in Aramaic, “make courageous.” Love in the beginning overpowers, *unhearted*, but the general idea must be that of “smitten” or “captured.” So the LXX., Venetian, and Jerome, ἐκασθίνας με, *vulnerasti cor meum* (cf. Ps. xlv. 6). *My sister, my bride*, is, of course, the same as “my sisterly bride,” a step beyond “my betrothed.” Gesenius thinks that “one of thine eyes” should be “one look of thine;” but may it not refer to the eye appearing through the veil, as again one chain of the neck may glitter and attract all the more that the whole ornamentation did not appear in view? If but a portion of her beauty so overpowers, what will be the effect of the whole blaze of her

perfection? As the Church advances in her likeness to her Lord, she becomes more and more the object of his delight, and as the soul receives more and more grace, so is her fellowship with Christ more and more assured and joyful.

Vers. 10, 11.—**How fair is thy love, my sister, my bride! How much better is thy love than wine! and the smell of thine ointments than all manner of spices! Thy lips, O my bride, drop as the honeycomb; honey and milk are under thy tongue; and the smell of thy garments is like the smell of Lebanon.** The expression of thy love, that is, the endearments, the embraces, are delightful. The allusion to the lips may be a mere amplification of the word “love,” but it may also refer to speech, and we think of the nineteenth psalm and the description of the words and testimony of the Lord, “more to be desired than gold, and sweeter than honey and the droppings of the honeycomb” (cf. Gen. xxvii. 27; Hos. iv. 7; Ps. xlv. 9). The words of pure, inward joy flowing forth from the lips may be so described. So the Lord has said, in Isa. lxiii. 5, that he rejoiceth over his people as the bridegroom rejoiceth over the bride.

Ver. 12.—**A garden shut up is my sister, my bride; a spring shut up, a fountain sealed.** We must bear in mind that these words are supposed to be spoken on the journey in the marriage procession. The bride is not yet brought to the royal palace. She is still travelling in the royal palanquin. The idea of a paradise or garden is carried from the beginning of Scripture to the end, the symbol of perfect blessedness. The figure of the closed or shut-up garden represents the bridegroom's delight in the sense of absolute and sole possession—for himself and no other. The language is very natural at such a time, when the bride is being taken from her home. We may compare with the figures here employed those in Prov. v. 15—20.

Vers. 13, 14.—**Thy shoots are an orchard 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. Thy shoots; i.e. that which comes forth from thee, thy plants, or, as Böttcher puts it, “all the phenomena and life-utterances of her personality.” All the plants had their meaning in flower language. They are mostly exotics. But it is difficult now to suggest meanings, though they may have been familiar to Jewish readers at the time. The *pardes*, “park, or enclosure,” was adorned especially with foreign and fragrant plants of great beauty. It is an Old Persian word, perhaps, as Delitzsch suggests, from *pāiri* (περί) and *dēz* (Pers. *diz*), “a heap.”**

Precious fruit; literally, *fructus laudum*, "fruits of renown" or excellence (cf. *Syriac magdo*, "dried fruit"). The *carcom*, or saffron, a kind of crocus (Ind. *safran*), yields the saffron colour from its dried flower-eyes, used both as a cosmetic and as a medicine (cf. Sansc. *kuakuma*). The *calamus*, simply a reed, the sweet reed, a corn indigenous to the East. *Cinnamon* (*Quinnamom*), *Laurus cinnamomum*, is indigenous on the east coast of Africa and Ceylon, found later in the Antibes. The inner bark peeled off and rolled together forms the cinnamon bark (see Pliny, bk. 12). There are seven spices mentioned. We need not trouble ourselves to identify them all, as they are mostly Indian, and such as Solomon would fetch from the far East in his celebrated ships. The description is highly poetical, and simply means that all sweetness and attractiveness combine in the fair one. But symbolically we may see an allusion to the spread of the Church over the world, and "all the glory and honour of the nations" being introduced into it. So the graces of the individual soul expand themselves under the influence of Christian truth and fellowship.

Ver. 15.—*Thou art a fountain of gardens, a well of living waters, and flowing streams from Lebanon.* Referring, of course, to the clear, cool streams coming down from the snowy heights. The sweet freshness of the country maiden suggested this. May we

not see a symbol of the spiritual life in such language (cf. John vii. 38)? Ethically, at least, the blending of the freshness of a mountain stream with the luxuriance and fragrance of a cultivated garden is very suggestive. To an Eastern monarch, such purity and modesty as Solomon found in his bride must have been a rare excellence which might well be made typical.

Ver. 16.—*Awake, O north wind; and come, thou south; blow upon my garden, that the spices thereof may flow out. Let my beloved come into his garden, and eat his precious fruits.* This is the answer of the bride to the lavish praises of her husband. I am all his. She is yet unworthy of the king and of his love until the seasonal changes have developed and unfolded and spread forth her excellences. The north represents cold; the south, heat. Let the various influences from different quarters flow gently over the garden and call forth the fragrance and the fruits (cf. Esth. ii. 12). There is rich suggestion in such words. Whether we think of the individual soul or of the Church of Christ, the true desire of those who delight in the love of the Saviour is that all the gifts and graces which can be bestowed may make them worthy of him who condescends to call his people his delight. Surely it is no mere romantic idyll that is before us. Such significance cannot be a mere coincidence when it is so transparent and so apt.

HOMILETICS.

Vers. 1—6.—*The bridegroom with the bride.* I. HIS PRAISE OF THE BRIDE. 1. *The earthly bridegroom.* The bridegroom rejoices over the bride. She is wholly his. He enumerates her beauties; they are very precious to him; his great love leads him to dwell on every point. The love of the espousals (Jer. ii. 2), the young love of the newly wedded, is a beautiful thing, very tender and touching; it leaves a fragrant memory behind—a memory treasured still after the lapse of many years, when the love of wedlock has become, not less true, not less blessed, but calmer and more mellow; and perhaps even more blessed, when no jealousies, no quarrels, have tended to put asunder those whom God hath joined together, but love has continued to increase with increasing years, with less and less of earthly passion, but more and more of holy tenderness and mutual self-denials for the loved one's sake. Such, alas! was not the love of Solomon. The fair promise, so very bright and beautiful at first, was soon blighted. *Corruptio optimi pessima.* Nothing in this world is more beautiful and blessed than that holy estate of matrimony which was instituted of God in the time of man's innocence, which God has consecrated to such an excellent mystery that in it is signified and represented the spiritual marriage and unity betwixt Christ and his Church. And, on the other hand, nothing is more degrading and ruinous than that sensual passion which is the caricature of wedded love. The early goodness of Solomon, the bright promise of future happiness and usefulness which gilded his youth, excites an interest in him so personal, that it makes us feel a real grief and disappointment when we read that "King Solomon loved many strange women;" that "when Solomon was old, his wives turned away his heart;" that "he went after Ashtoreth, the abomination of the Zidonians;" that he "did evil in the sight of the Lord." And so it came to pass that that bright beginning ended in utter gloom, in the mournful cry of dis-

appointment. "Vanity of vanities, saith the Preacher; all is vanity." He could not find satisfaction in his wisdom when he had begun to fall away from God. He found that "in much wisdom is much grief, and he that increaseth knowledge increaseth sorrow" (Eccles. i. 18). And so the wisest of men betook himself to pleasure. "I said in my heart, Go to now, I will prove thee with mirth;" "I got me servants and maidens, and had servants born in my house;" "I gat me men-singers and women-singers;" "Whatsoever mine eyes desired I kept not from them, I withheld not my heart from any joy" (Eccles. ii. 1, 7, 8, 10). He found, as they that are lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God always find sooner or later, that all this was "vanity and vexation of spirit," nothing better than "striving after wind." "Therefore," he says, "I hated life; because the work that is wrought under the sun is grievous unto me: for all is vanity and vexation of spirit." And this is King Solomon, who surpassed all the kings of the earth for glory and riches; who was wiser than the wisest of his time; who had won in his youth the love of the pure and innocent Shulamite; who (and this is the saddest thought of all) once loved the Lord: "Solomon loved the Lord, walking in the statutes of David his father" (1 Kings iii. 3). While he continued to love the Lord, he was true, we must believe, to the wife of his youth. One who walks in the light of the love of God cannot love the works of darkness, cannot admit into his heart that taint of impurity which so utterly shuts the soul away from the love of God. We wonder whether Solomon repented as his father David did. We know that God warned him, and chastised him for his sins, but we know also that much will be required from those to whom much has been given, and that to fall from such grace as had been bestowed upon Solomon must be a grievous fall indeed; to disobey God who had given him such abundant blessings showed a depth of ingratitude which utterly startles us, till we learn to know in penitence and self-abasement what Solomon impressed upon others, whether he felt it himself or not, "the plague of our own hearts" (1 Kings viii. 38). The pure love of wedlock is maintained in ever-growing affection when husband and wife both live near to God. "If we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another" (1 John i. 7). That fellowship which "is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ" (1 John i. 3) involves of necessity the holiest grace of charity in our mutual relations with our brother Christians; especially those whom God hath joined together must and will, if they are living as the children of God, live together in holy love unto their lives' end. We wonder whether the fair Shulamite lived to experience the change in her royal bridegroom; if she did, the loss of his affection must have been a bitter trial indeed. Perhaps God in his mercy took her to himself before that trial came. 2. *The heavenly Bridegroom.* It is the will of the Lord Jesus to present the Church unto himself as a glorious Church, holy and without blemish. The Lord shall rejoice in his works. Through the cleansing power of his most precious blood, through the grace of the Holy Spirit, which he giveth to his chosen, the Church, his bride shall at the last be "all glorious within;" for he is able "to present us faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy" (Jude 24). Then shall there be joy in heaven, when the Lord, who endured for the Church's sake the great agony of the cross, sees the reward of his bitter Passion; when he looks upon the Church, a glorious Church indeed, no longer marred and stained by sin and strife and error, but cleansed and purified "even as he is pure" (1 John iii. 3), made like unto him in the vision of his love and holiness. Then he will rejoice over her as the bridegroom rejoiceth over the bride. "In that day it shall be said to Jerusalem . . . The Lord thy God in the midst of thee is mighty; he will save, he will rejoice over thee with joy; he will rest in his love, he will joy over thee with singing" (Zeph. iii. 16, 17). The heavenly Bridegroom will rejoice over his bride; he will see in her the beauty of holiness; he will rejoice in her graces. She is very dear to him, for she is the reward of that long anguish, the agony and bloody sweat, the bitter cross and Passion. And now she is wholly his; she has left all other masters, and given her whole heart to the Lord who bought her, with the full, pure, holy love which she has learned of him—the infinite love. 3. *The bride must make herself ready.* (Rev. xix. 7.) Without holiness no man can see the Lord. The holiness of the Church consists in the holiness of its members. We must follow after holiness, holiness of heart and life; for without the wedding-garment, the white robe of righteousness, none can be admitted to the marriage-supper of the Lamb. We must, each

one of us, make ourselves ready and prepare to meet our God. The Lord rejoices in the holiness of his people. We must learn, not to seek glory from one another, not to set so much store on human praise, but to seek that glory which cometh from the only God (John v. 44). There were some who would not confess the Lord Jesus because "they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God" (John xii. 43). We must look onwards to the praise which the heavenly Bridegroom will bestow on the Church, his bride; then shall the true Israelite, who is a "Jew inwardly," "whose praise is not of men, but of God" (Rom. ii. 29), have praise of God (1 Cor. iv. 5). We must seek that praise with a single heart, walking with God, living to his glory, looking for the blessed hour when we trust to see the heavenly Bridegroom face to face.

"He lifts me to the golden doors;
The flashes come and go;
All Heaven bursts her starry floors,
And strews her lights below,
And deepens on and up! the gates
Roll back, and far within
For me the heavenly Bridegroom waits,
To make me pure of sin.
The sabbaths of eternity,
One sabbath deep and wide,
A light upon the shining sea—
The Bridegroom with his bride!"

II. THE ANSWER OF THE BRIDE. 1. *She must withdraw for a while.* She repeats in her modesty the first clause of her own words in ch. ii. 17. Then, apparently, she asked her lover to leave her till she had fulfilled the routine duties of the day. He was to return when the day should be cool, and the shadows should lengthen in the evening. Now it is she who will leave her Lord for a time. Perhaps she felt herself almost overburdened by his commendations; the poor country maiden, true and simple as she was, could scarcely understand such praises from the great and magnificent king; they were too much for her; she must retire to collect herself. When the Lord commends the faithful, and glorifies their works of love as done unto himself, they seem oppressed, as it were, for a season by the greatness of his praise. They were only doing their duty; they did it, all of them, more or less imperfectly; they did not regard those poor works of theirs as so exceeding beautiful; they did not think that they had been conferring benefits upon the Lord himself, that they had so greatly pleased him; they were humble, self-distrustful; they seem almost to shrink from the praises of the King. The grace of humility is a very holy thing; it lies at the entrance of the kingdom of heaven; it is the first of the Beatitudes. "Not he that commendeth himself is approved, but he whom the Lord commendeth" (2 Cor. x. 18). 2. *Whither the bride retires.* "I will get me to the mountain of myrrh and to the hill of frankincense." The words may, taken literally, signify some retired place in the palace garden, as many scholars think; but myrrh and frankincense are words of frequent occurrence in Holy Scripture, and are often used with a more or less mystical meaning. The Wise Men from the East brought gold and frankincense and myrrh as offerings to the infant Saviour; wine mingled with myrrh was given him on the cross; his sacred body was laid in a mixture of myrrh and aloes brought by the faithful Nicodemus. The mountain of myrrh seems to suggest the necessity of purification before the soul can dwell always in the presence of the Lord. The maidens from among whom the Queen of Persia was to be chosen had to go through a time of purification, "six months with oil of myrrh" (Esth. ii. 12). It tells us also of the bitter draught, the cup of sorrows, which they who are to be nearest Christ must take. "Are ye able to drink of the cup that I must drink of?" Those who aspire to the highest places in the kingdom of heaven must learn the deepest lessons of humility, the severest lessons of entire submission of will to the holy will of God. They must get them to the mountain of myrrh, to the cross. Our self-denials are small and unworthy; the cross of Christ sets before us a mountain of self-sacrifice, a height that reaches unto the heavens. We must draw nearer and nearer to the cross in daily self-denial and self-abasement, if we are to realize at last the full, deep joy of uninterrupted communion with the Lord. And if myrrh means

self-denial, the dying unto sin, frankincense means worship. The sweet odour of the incense going up from the golden altar is a meet emblem of the prayers of the saints (see Rev. viii. 3, 4). We must learn the blessed lesson of worship on earth before we can join the choir of happy worshippers around the glory-throne. We must get ourselves to the hill of frankincense, to the Lord's house, where the incense of prayer and thanksgiving ever ascends, where he himself is in the midst, among those who are gathered together in his name. There we may be trained, if we come in the Spirit as Simeon came when he found the Lord Christ, in that holy worship, worship in spirit and in truth, which is the true preparation for the glad adoring worship of triumphant saints in heaven. Till the evening of life comes, till the shadows lengthen into the night, we must get ourselves to the work which the Lord has given us to do—the work of self-discipline, the work of worship here below, that we may be ready when he cometh to take our part in the never-ceasing worship of heaven, and there to be ever with the Lord.

Vers. 7-16.—*Further conversation.* I. THE WORDS OF THE BRIDEGROOM. 1. *His entire love for the bride.* If the view of ver. 6 indicated above gives the true meaning, the bride has left the bridegroom for a time. In the evening they meet again, and the king again expresses his affection: "Thou art all fair, my love; there is no spot in thee." Such shall the Church be in the eyes of Christ, when he has sanctified and cleansed her with the washing of water by the Word; when she is clothed in the fine linen, clean and white, which is the righteousness of saints; when he "of God is made unto her Wisdom, and Righteousness, and Sanctification, and Redemption" (1 Cor. i. 30). Such shall the saints be in his eyes when they have "washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb;" "they are without fault before the throne of God" (Rev. xiv. 5). But it is Christ who has cleansed them. They were stained with many sins, as David was when he cried in the anguish of his deep penitence, "Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean: wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow" (Ps. li. 7). We have sinned so long and so greatly, we have so often fallen back into sin after imperfect repentance, that to be "whiter than snow" seems a hope altogether too high for us, out of our reach. But we have the sure Word of God. He is able to "present us faultless before the presence of his glory;" he is able to "cleanse us from all unrighteousness;" "the Lamb of God taketh away the sins of the world." Indeed it is true that "we are all as an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags" (Isa. lxiv. 6), but we may have, if we come to Christ in faith, "that righteousness which is through the faith of Christ;" that righteousness which is his, not our own; and yet, if we abide in him, it becomes through his grace our own; for it is given to us, imparted to us, infused into us by the indwelling influences of the Holy Spirit of God. Then we may dare to hope for that spotless righteousness; we may, we must, long for it and strive after it. Not to do so is not humility, but unbelief; not distrust of ourselves, but distrust of God; for we have the sacred word of promise, "Blessed are they that do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled." 2. *His invitation.* The Hebrew words are full of life: "With me from Lebanon, O bride, with me from Lebanon shalt thou come." The bride is henceforth to be with the bridegroom, with him always: she is to forget her own people and her father's house (Ps. xlv. 10, 11). She is to come away from her old haunts—from Amana, Shenir, and Hermon; for even Hermon in all its grandeur is but a "little hill" in comparison with the spiritual glory of Mount Zion, where God is pleased to dwell (see Prayer-book Version of Ps. xlii. 6). She must come from the lions' dens, from "the violence of Lebanon" (Hab. ii. 17), to Jerusalem, the foundation of peace. The Church, the bride of Christ, shall be in the eternal blessedness "for ever with the Lord." She shall come away from her old habitation, the earth which is filled with violence (Gen. vi. 11); away from the raging of the roaring lion, who walketh about, seeking whom he may devour (1 Pet. v. 8), to the heavenly Jerusalem, the city of the living God. And the Christian soul, which looks forward in living hope to the inheritance of the saints in light, must now come with Christ away from other masters, from the lusts of the flesh and the lust of the eye, and the pride of life. "To depart and to be with Christ," St. Paul says (Phil. i. 23), "is far better"—"by much very far better," for such is the full meaning of the emphatic words. Then the soul that hopes to be

with Christ in Paradise must be much with Christ now; with him in the daily life of faith, in prayer and praise and frequent communion. He bids us come. "Come unto me," he says, "and I will give you rest." He only can give peace. "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you." If we listen to his voice, and come with him away from Lebanon, which, though fair to look upon, with grand and wide-reaching prospects, was yet the haunt of noisome beasts; if we leave the love of the world, with its enticements and its dangers, for the blessed love of Christ, we shall have all that we need for our soul's peace and safety. "Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid." 3. *His praises of the bride.* He calls her repeatedly, "My sister-bride." His heart is hers; every little thing about her, the very smell of her garments, is dear to him; her love is by much better than wine; her voice is sweet as honey. He dwells now less on graces of person, as in vers. 1—5, than on her looks of affection, the depth and beauty of her love, the music of her voice. These words tell of a great love; but the love of Christ for his Church is beyond the power of language. Solomon left his first love—he loved many strange women; but the love of Christ for his Church is "an everlasting love" (Jer. xxxi. 3), unchangeable, unutterable. "Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends;" but "God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us" (Rom. v. 8). And because he loved the Church with so great a love, the responsive love of the Church is very dear to him. "He is not ashamed to call us brethren" (Heb. ii. 11). The voice of the Church lifted up to him in prayer and praise, making melody in the heart unto God, is sweet to the Saviour. He praises the graces of the Church, though those graces come all from him; they are his gift. He praises in the Book of the Revelation the Churches of Smyrna and Philadelphia; he sees the beauty of holiness in those afflicted and despised Churches: "I know thy works, and tribulation, and poverty, but thou art rich;" "Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life;" "They shall know that I have loved thee;" "Him that overcometh will I make a pillar in the temple of my God, and he shall go no more out: and I will write upon him the name of my God, and the name of the city of my God, which is new Jerusalem, which cometh down out of heaven from my God: and I will write upon him my new name" (Rev. ii. 9, 10; iii. 9, 12). 4. *He compares her to a garden enclosed.* She is like a garden shut up, barred against intruders, kept sacred for its master's use; she is like a spring shut up, a fountain sealed as with the royal signet which none but the king can touch. The garden, or paradise, is full of the choicest fruits, flowers, and spice-bearing plants, the produce of many countries, some of them brought in Solomon's time by his navy from Arabia or India. The fountain is a well of living waters, fresh as the gushing mountain-streams of Lebanon. Solomon praises the bride not only for her beauty and her rare endowments, but also for her purity and faithfulness. The "garden enclosed," the "fountain sealed," remind us of our marriage vow: "Wilt thou . . . forsaking all other, keep thee only unto him so long as ye both shall live?" Such should the wedded pair be each to the other; such was not Solomon. We cannot but think and believe that the bride, innocent and artless as she is described, kept herself pure unto the end. The Church, which is the bride of Christ, should be as a garden enclosed, kept sacred for the one Lord. The garden of Eden was a garden enclosed, but Satan marred its sanctity; he, in the words of Milton,

"At one slight bound high overleaped all bound
Of hill or highest wall, and sheer within
Lights on his feet. . . .
So elomb the first grand thief into God's fold:
So since into his Church lewd hirelings climb."

The Lord has said, "He that entereth not by the door into the sheepfold, but climbeth up some other way, the same is a thief and a robber." Again he has said, "I am the Door: by me if any man enter in, he shall be saved, and shall go in and out, and shall find pasture." They who are called to minister in the Church of God must ever remember that it is God's Church, that "he hath purchased it with his own blood" (Acts xx. 28); that it should be "a garden enclosed," kept for the Master, tilled and watered for him; that every barren tree should be carefully tended, that it may

bring forth fruit before the awful word goeth forth, "Every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire." The trees in the Lord's garden differ much from one another. There are pomegranates with their pleasant fruit, henna with its fragrant flowers, spikenard with its costly perfume, frankincense for sacred uses; all manner of sweet spices—myrrh and aloes, which tell of the bitter healing cup of sorrow, which point to death and burial. The saints of God differ much from one another. Enoch, Abraham, Moses, Daniel, St. Peter, St. John, St. Paul, have each his own place in the garden of the Lord. All bring forth the fruits of the Spirit, but in different forms and degrees; one we call the apostle of love, another the apostle of faith, a third the apostle of hope; "but all these worketh that one and the selfsame Spirit, dividing to every man severally as he will" (1 Cor. xii. 11). It is the Lord himself who giveth the Spirit. Mary Magdalene, on the first Easter Day, supposed him to be the gardener (John xx. 15); and in a very true sense he is the Gardener of the garden enclosed. And here we may remember that it was in a garden that he suffered that dread agony, when his sweat was as it were great drops of blood falling down to the ground. That blood taketh away the sins of the world; it waters the garden enclosed with its cleansing stream. And again we are told that "in the place where he was crucified there was a garden; and in the garden a new sepulchre, wherein was never man yet laid. There laid they Jesus" (John xix. 41). The Lord suffered in a garden; he has purchased with his own blood the Church to be his own, his garden enclosed. But the Church is also "a spring shut up, a fountain sealed;" shut up in a sense, sealed with the Master's signet, as his own sacred tomb was sealed in the garden of Joseph, but yet (ver. 15) "a fountain of gardens, a well of living waters, and streams from Lebanon." The fountain is sealed, for it is the Lord's; it hath "this seal, The Lord knoweth them that are his. And, Let every one that nameth the Name of Christ depart from iniquity" (2 Tim. ii. 19). But its living waters go forth to fertilize the Lord's garden. The healing waters which the Prophet Ezekiel saw in his vision issued out from under the threshold of the temple; they brought fruitfulness wherever they went "because their waters they issued out of the sanctuary" (Ezek. xlvi. 1, 12). In a true sense the whole world is the Lord's field: "The field is the world" (Matt. xiii. 38); and the Church has the Lord's commandment, "Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature" (Mark xvi. 15). The well is the Lord's; it is sealed with his seal; but the living waters of that sacred well must issue forth, that "the wilderness and the solitary place may be glad for them: that the desert may rejoice and blossom as the rose" (Isa. xxxv. 1). And as the Church, the bride of Christ, is for him "a garden enclosed, a fountain sealed," so must every Christian soul be wholly his. "We are Christ's," St. Paul says. "Whether we live or die, we are the Lord's;" and again, "God, whose I am, and whom I serve" (Acts xxvii. 23). Each Christian soul must keep itself as "a garden enclosed" ("barred," or "bolted," is the literal meaning of the Hebrew word). We must strive earnestly to keep out earthly passions, earthly ambitions, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God. We must keep the gate barred against the entrance of the evil one. And we must take heed that the house be not left empty; it must be kept for "a habitation of God through the Spirit" (Eph. ii. 22). We must strive to keep out worldly cares, coming to God in all our troubles, whether great or small, that so the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, may keep (guard, protect) our hearts and thoughts through Christ Jesus. The garden must be barred; the peace of God must rule there (Col. iii. 15); and it must bring forth fruit, the blessed fruit of the Spirit, which is "love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance" (Gal. v. 22). The tree that beareth not fruit must be hewn down at last; it cumbereth the ground; "every branch that beareth not fruit is taken away." How carefully, then, we ought, every one of us, to watch for the fruit of the Spirit in our daily life, to see in diligent self-examination whether we are exhibiting these holy graces in our Christian walk and conversation; and if, alas! we find them not, how earnestly we ought to pray, with fervent, untiring supplication for the help of the Holy Spirit of God to work within us, to assist our prayers, to make intercession for us with groanings that cannot be uttered, to lead us nearer to Christ, that we may evermore abide in him, without whom we can bear no fruit, without whom we can do nothing! The garden needs the living water; the saint of God is a fountain sealed.

The living water is the Lord's; it bears his seal. The Lord himself is, in the truest sense, the "Fountain opened . . . for sin and for uncleanness" (Zech. xiii. 1); with him is "the fountain of life" (Ps. xxxvi. 9). He leadeth his redeemed to living fountains of waters (Rev. vii. 17). But they who have received from him the living water become themselves fountains, as the Lord hath said, "Whoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life." And again, "If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink. He that believeth on me, as the Scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water" (John iv. 14; vii. 37, 38). The saint of God is indeed "a fountain sealed," sealed with the Lord's seal, dedicated wholly unto him; "a spring shut up" from all other waters save only the living water which the Lord giveth, not "a fountain which sends forth at the same place sweet water and bitter" (Jas. ii. 11). But he must be "a fountain of gardens" (ver. 15); he that is watered of God must water the thirsty ground (Prov. xi. 25). St. Paul, who had received the gift of the Spirit from the Lord, passed on the living waters to Apollos; Apollos watered the garden of the Lord at Corinth (1 Cor. iii. 6). So must all God's people do. They know in their own hearts more or less of that holy calm and blessedness which the living waters of the indwelling of the Spirit (John vii. 39) bring to the faithful; they must do their best to extend to others the blessings which they have themselves received; they must pray and labour for the spiritual well-being of those nearest to them, within the sphere of their personal influence; they must do their best to help missionary work through the world, resting not till "the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea" (Isa. xi. 9). But each must keep himself as "a fountain sealed" for the Lord and the work of the Lord, that at the last he may be sealed with the seal of the living God, and stand on the Mount Zion among the mystic hundred and forty and four thousand who have the Lamb's Name and his Father's Name written in their foreheads (Rev. vii. 2, 3; xiv. 1).

II. THE VOICE OF THE BRIDE. She accepts the bridegroom's parable. She is a garden enclosed. She calls upon the winds, north and south, to blow upon the garden, that the fragrance of its spices may flow forth to give pleasure to the bridegroom. The garden is hers; for it is herself, her love. And yet it is the bridegroom's, for she has given herself, her love, to him; she invites him to come into his garden, and eat his pleasant fruits. So the Church, the bride of Christ, longs for the heavenly Bridegroom; so each Christian soul seeks the Saviour's presence. The soul that would give itself wholly to the Lord as a garden barred against all other masters, and enclosed for his use, strives ever to please him more and more; she would have her inward life of prayer and meditation and spiritual communion with him to become more and more pleasing to him, more and more fragrant. Therefore she calls for the north wind as well as the south to blow upon the garden, that the spices thereof may flow out. She is willing to submit to the cold blasts of adversity, as well as to be refreshed with the soft breezes of joy and holy gladness. She knows that God will make all things, joy and sorrow alike, to work together for good to them that love him (Rom. viii. 28). Therefore she prays only that his will may be done in her, whether by chastisements or by spiritual joy and blessing. She would have the garden bring forth more fruit, even though it must be purged with the pruning-knife of affliction. For the garden, though it is herself, her own heart, is yet the Lord's; for she has given it to the heavenly Bridegroom; therefore she yearns for his irradiating presence, praying him to enter into his garden, and eat his pleasant fruits.

HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Vers. 1—7.—*What Christ sees in those who love him.* As a mere story, these verses may be taken as a further attempt on the part of King Solomon to win her to whom he speaks for himself. Therefore he extols her beauty. Her eyes like the beautiful eyes of the Syrian dove; her dark glossy hair like that of the goats that browse on the slopes of Mount Gilead; her teeth white as the newly cleansed wool, as even and regular as is the fleece that has been first shorn, and perfect as is the breed of sheep

he tells of; her lips ruddy; her mouth so comely; her cheeks rosy red, like the opened pomegranate; her neck graceful, and adorned with precious jewels; and so on. Even her home, because it is her home, is as a hill bearing trees of myrrh and frankincense, and thither would he resort. And he sums up his description by declaring that she is "all fair"—that there is no blemish in her. Now, on such flattery, cf. on ch. i. 9—ii. 7. But had these verses no other meaning than this literal one, we cannot think they would have found place in the Holy Scriptures. Therefore we take them as setting forth, under their rich Oriental colouring, the blessed truth that, in the sight of their Lord, his people are without blemish, "all fair." It is the same truth as was meant by that at present unloved phrase, "imputed righteousness." And that it is unloved is owing to the fact that its meaning has been grossly perverted, and made to stand for ideas dishonouring to God and disastrous to the spiritual life of men. But in reality the phrase means just that which in these verses is allegorically set forth. In interpreting these verses it is not the right or reverent way, though many have followed it, to affix some definite meaning to every detail of the description given, but to take the description as a whole, as attesting the beauty of the redeemed in the sight of their Lord. Therefore, though some have interpreted the dove's eyes as the eyes that are ever towards the Lord in holy desire; and the hair as the unshorn locks of the soul's consecration to Christ; and the teeth, undecayed and perfect, as the faith which feeds on Christ; and the lips as those of one once leprous, but now purified by the precious blood of Christ, and so like a scarlet thread; the blushing temples no longer bold and brazen, but suffused with crimson as the pomegranate, telling of the soul's true repentance; the neck, tall, stately, graceful, strong, telling of the liberty and courage Christ has given the soul; the breasts of the twin graces of faith and love, which Paul says are the believer's breastplate;—all this (cf. Stuart), though interesting and ingenious, appears to us unnecessary and, in some hands, injurious. We therefore take the description generally, and note—

I. THE FACT THAT CHRIST DOES REGARD AS BEAUTIFUL THE REDEEMED SOUL. She is spotless in his sight. He says, "The glory thou gavest me I have given them." Christ is made unto us "Righteousness and Sanctification." He shed his blood that his Church might be "a glorious Church, not having spot," etc. (Eph. v. 27). He will present us "faultless before the presence of his glory" (Jude 24). "Now ye are clean through the word which I have spoken unto you," said our Lord (cf. also 1 Cor. vi. 11). And if he did not so regard his people and count them "precious in his sight" (Isa. xliii.), wherefore should he have done and suffered for them all that he has? Whatever we make sacrifices for we count beautiful. Our love pierces through the outer husk of circumstance and evil habit, and sees the beauty within; and it is for that we will make sacrifice if need be. And so with our most blessed Lord—his eye of love pierced through the often hideous husk of men's vile habits and ways to the soul on which his heart was set, that he might redeem and save it, and make it beautiful, like his own. And when that soul turns to him in trust and penitence, then at once that soul is "all fair" in his sight, and "there is no spot in" it.

II. WHY SHOULD HE NOT? Men say, "It is wrong to represent God as seeing otherwise than according to the truth of things. Therefore to say of a soul, 'There is no spot in it,' when we know that 'from the sole of the foot to the crown of the head there is no soundness in it' (Isa. i.), this is to introduce unreality and make-believe into the most sacred regions." But look at the mother's joy in her babe. Whence comes that? Is it not largely the loving onlook she takes into the future of that child? She sees, or at least believes she sees, that child grown up in purity, intelligence, goodness, and all that is lovely and lovable. She is a believer, and you cannot move her, in imputed righteousness; for what is she doing but imputing all that righteousness to her babe? See the shipbuilder in his yard. There is a ship in its earliest stages of construction. You can see nothing but chips and dirt and confusion. But he sees that ship in her completion—in all her strength, the beauty of her lines, and all the perfectness which he intends shall belong to her. And he "imputes" to her all that. And so with our Lord. He sees all that the soul shall be when he has perfected the "good work" which he has already begun for and in it. This is why, even now, it is fitting that he should see and say, "There is no spot in thee."

III. AND WHAT IF HE DOES? There is: 1. *All consolation for the anxious, mis-*

trusting soul. The soul is, as it well may be, often overwhelmed with the sense of its own vileness and sin. It clings to Christ with the grasp of all but despair. What a help to know that Christ's estimate of us is not our own! How often we are able to help a man up by letting him see that we believe in him, notwithstanding he has done wrong! Arnold's word, "Trust a boy, and he will become trustworthy," is most true. The fact we are considering is not only full of consolation, but full of help to us poor sinful men. 2. *Inspiration for the better life.* If Christ thinks me so, I will strive to become so. Is this his ideal for me? I will, in his strength, strive to realize it. 3. *The enkindling and constant rekindling of our love for Christ.*—S. C.

Ver. 6.—*Where Christ is now.* "Until the day break," etc.

I. BY THIS IS MEANT THE PRESENT LIFE. It does not matter whether the words be taken as telling of the time until the day break or until the day close. In the former case, the speaker would mean that all the night long he would be on the mountains of myrrh, etc.; but in the latter, he would mean that until the day were done he would be there. It matters not, for the present life may be likened to either night or day. *If to the night*, then night-time is meant to suggest the darkness in which men live. As to knowledge: "We see through a glass, darkly." As to happiness: "Man is born to trouble." As to the use of life: men choose to walk in darkness. The land sits "in darkness and in the shadow of death," because they who dwell in such land are in that deep spiritual darkness of which the prophet tells. *If to the day*, then as the time for toil, the season for diligent work, the period during which the busy affairs of men are transacted—such is our life so long as it continues. On either interpretation the present life is meant.

II. THE PLACE WHERE DURING THIS LIFE WE MAY FIND CHRIST. On "the mountains of myrrh," etc. By this is meant, not heaven, for we cannot ascend into heaven; and the place told of here is evidently a place accessible. Therefore we take the "mountains of myrrh," etc., to mean *the Church* (cf. Isa. ii. 2). And there are many other Scriptures in which the Church is likened to hills or mountains (Ps. lxxviii. 15, 16; lxxxvii. 1—3, etc.). Some have thought that the throne of grace, the place of prayer, is meant—and so it is; but more than that is included. Nothing less than the Church of Christ. And the similitude employed here is just. For *the Church is as a mountain*. 1. *For elevation.* The Church should be above the world. Hence, in the magnificent minsters which adorn this and other lands, the sacred fabric towers in lordly height far above all the dwellings that cluster around it. It symbolizes this very truth. Our Lord said, "Ye are a city set on a hill." 2. *For visibility.* "Which cannot be hid." Goodness ever betrays itself; like him from whom it comes, and of whom it was said, "He could not be hid." Does the visibility consist in anything else but character? Is not the Church the company of all the good? 3. *For its majesty.* It is God's viceroy here on earth. By it "kings rule, and princes decree justice." Kings were its nursing fathers and queens its nursing mothers (cf. Isa. lx.). 4. *For its immovability.* (Ps. cxxxv. 1.) "The gates of hell shall not prevail against it," said our Lord. And here it is to-day, and it never seemed more likely to continue than it does to-day. 5. *For its fruitfulness.* The mountains and hills told of are not mere rocky heights, stony and barren, but rich and fruitful, their sides covered with noblest trees. "They that be planted in the house of the Lord," etc. 6. *For its delightfulness.* Myrrh and frankincense are the product of its trees, and make the whole place fragrant, precious, full of delight to him who dwells or comes there (cf. "The Lord loveth the gates of Zion more than," etc.). Christ loves to be there, and his people love to meet him there. For it is the place of accepted prayer, of hallowed communion, of adoring worship, of manifold spiritual help. *And there Christ is to be found.* He is there according to his Word, in his unseen but real presence, and in his gracious power. Myriads attest this. Therefore—

III. WE SHOULD SEEK HIM THERE. The verse seems to be a suggestion to this effect. To forsake the assemblies, communion, and fellowship of the Church is to suffer great loss. Some say, "We can pray at home;" and when they *must* be at home no doubt they can, but when they need not be we doubt if many do. And when we think of the treasure-store of help that is gained by them who seek the Lord in his

Church, who get them to the mountain, etc., where he is, we commiserate, even whilst we condemn, those who never get themselves there at all.—S. C.

Ver. 7.—*The immaculate soul.* “Thou art all fair, my love; there is no spot in thee.” This word has many parallels; cf. “Ye are clean through the word which I have spoken unto you;” “Ye are washed, justified, sanctified;” “Ye are complete in him;” “There is no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus,” etc. Now, how can all this be? We reply—

I. THROUGH THE ESTIMATE WHICH LOVE FORMS OF THAT WHICH IT LOVES. (Of former homily, on vers. 1—7.)

II. THROUGH THE BLOOD OF CHRIST, WHICH “CLEANSETH US FROM ALL SIN.” Christ is our Representative, the second Adam. Our connection with him becomes vitalized when our hearts trust in him. But he, in and by his death—his blood—made perfect confession of our sins, and in that confession absorbed them (cf. McLeod Campbell on the Atonement). Forgiveness, therefore, follows for all in him; and thus we are cleansed.

III. THROUGH THE POWER OF THE HOLY GHOST. He is ever acting on our hearts, to lead them along the various stages that will bring us to perfect purity, to complete sanctification. He works in us that deep sense of sin which leads to a genuine repentance. He reveals Christ to us, which leads to a living trust. He inspires us with love to Christ, which leads to the surrender of our will. He prompts us to and aids us in prayer, which perpetuates and deepens every holy purpose. He keeps us in touch with Christ, which bars the entrance of sin to our souls. He makes all the means of grace full of help to our souls. Thus step by step the blessed work is done.

IV. THROUGH CHRIST’S GRACIOUS ANTICIPATION OF THE COMPLETED WORK. He looks on us, not as we are, but as we shall be, and predates what has yet to, but certainly shall, be realized.

CONCLUSION. What a motive all this supplies to our earnest striving to come up to our blessed Lord’s ideal!—S. C.

Ver. 8.—*The beautiful but dangerous world.* For once the literal and allegorical interpretation largely agree. For both represent the places spoken of here as full of peril, and both desire the beloved one to “come away” from them, and promise deliverance if she will come. Let the peril of delivering her be what it may—as dens of lions and leopards—yet will he accomplish it. Allegorically we may read here—

I. CHRIST’S DESCRIPTION OF THE WORLD. It is: 1. *Beautiful to look upon.* Some of the finest scenes, the most glorious landscapes the world can show, are to be seen from the mountain summits named here. The view is entrancing, so travellers say. And the world is to the young soul fair indeed. But: 2. *It is full of peril also.* The dizzy heights, the steep cliffs, the lofty crags of mountainous regions, demand a steady head, well-balanced nerves, a sure foothold. The inexperienced may not venture there. Death and destruction track the footsteps of the traveller on such heights, and if he be not well trained, they have him for their prey. The spiritual analogy is illustrated by only too many sad experiences. To preserve the soul’s balance on the heights of the world’s prosperity, how difficult for all! how impossible for most! “How hardly shall they that have riches enter into the kingdom of heaven!” “Man, vain man, dressed in a little brief authority,” etc. But the special perils named here are *the beasts of prey*. These have their haunts in these mountains (cf. Exposition). In all languages and literatures the designation of evil men by the name of some noxious beast is common (cf. Psalms; also our Lord’s word, “Go, tell that fox;” and in the Scriptures *passim*). And the world is full of such creatures—pitiless, cruel, fierce, ravenous, terrible. Smooth and soft and sleek as a leopard, so long as you are able to defy them; but fall down, be at their mercy, and what mercy will you get? “The tender mercies of the wicked are cruel;” yes, cruel as lion, leopard, or any beast of prey. Ask the world’s victims what mercy they have received. Let the soul once give the world a chance, and the world will drive it hellward with relentless cruelty. There is no mercy there. What a contrast to “the mountains of myrrh” (ver. 6)! “No ravenous beast shall be there;” “They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain” (Isa. xxxv. 9).

II. CHRIST'S PROMISE OF HELP. "Come with me." His Word is full of such promises and of the records of their fulfilment (cf. histories of Joseph, Moses, Nehemiah, Daniel, etc.). And it is the experience of every Christian soul. Christ does not take us out of the world, but he keeps us from the evil. He keeps us "as the apple of his eye;" hides us "under the shadow" of his wing (cf. Ps. xci.). He knows what he will do, therefore he says, "Come with me."

III. THE CONDITION OF THAT HELP. We must "come with" him. Some wonder that he invites us at all; that, loving the soul as he does, he should leave it any choice as to whether it will or will not come; that he does not deal with us as a father who would compel, not merely invite, his child to come out of the burning house. So some wonder that Christ does not compel the soul, carry it off by force. No doubt, in the literal story of this song, he who spoke was prepared to do this by her whom he appeals to. But Christ says, "Come with me." He solicits, entreats, invites. For there can be no deliverance of the soul unless there be the response of its own will. Even Christ cannot save without that. If, as is the case so sadly often, men "will not come unto" him that they "might have life," they have it not. And that response of the will is from faith in Christ's Word as to our peril and his loving power. Then ponder that Word; pray to know the truth; the Divine Spirit shall teach you, and soon the response Christ desires will be given.—S. C.

Vers. 9—15.—"*Cur Deus homo?*" In these verses the beloved tells her whom he has come to deliver wherefore he would run all this risk and endure so much for her sake. And reading them as an allegory, we may take them as setting forth why and wherefore God became Man; why "he who was rich for our sakes became poor." And amongst these reasons are—

I. HIS INTENSE LOVE FOR US. The speaker tells in ver. 9 how but a small portion of the beauty and of the adornments of her whom he so loved had "ravished" his heart, had filled him with intense desire for her. And translated into the style and teaching of the gospel, this tells of the heavenly joy (Luke xv.) over the repentance—the very beginning, the smallest portion of the beauty, of Divine grace in the soul. "Behold, he prayeth," was said of the persecuting Saul to the Christ-taught Ananias, who immediately rejoices, and is ready to receive as "brother" him who had been but a few hours before as a wolf coming to make havoc of the flock of Christ. A very little thing—the mere beginnings of grace—and yet the Spirit of Christ in Ananias leapt for joy.

II. THE SOUL'S RESPONSE. (Ver. 10.) That which Christ sees in the souls he has redeemed gratifies, refreshes, and delights him. As wine, as perfumes, as all spices. Precious is the soul's response of love to Christ. See how he asks for it. "Lovest thou me?" was thrice said to Peter. It is to him "the greatest thing in the world" (cf. 1 Cor. xiii., "The greatest of these is love"). What argument this is for the love that is in Christ! We reason back from the known likings and preferences of a man to what he is himself. So reasoning, what will not our Lord appear?

III. HER GRACIOUS WORDS. (Ver. 11; cf. parallels, Prov. xvi. 24; Ps. cxix. 103.) It is out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh. And the utterances of loving adoration, of contrite confession, of pleading prayer, of grateful praise—these are well pleasing in his esteem. How true the sabbath evening hymn—

"And not a prayer, a tear, a sigh,
Hath failed this day some suit to gain;
To those in trouble thou wert given—
Not one hath sought thy face in vain."

Yes, as the honeycomb, sweet; as milk and honey, delicious and healthful, so are the fruits of the lips of the redeemed soul to Christ. We, therefore, can give him delight. It must be so. For we know we can "grieve" him; but if we can grieve him, we can also give him joy; and it is thus we do so.

IV. THE FRAGRANCE OF HER LIFE. "The smell of thy garments is," etc. (ver. 11). The garments are the symbol of those outward acts and deeds which, as it were, clothe and characterize the man. We know men by their dress; their garb bespeaks their occupation, tells what their work is. Now, the holy deeds of the redeemed soul are

as fragrance, full of a sweet acceptableness to Christ (cf. Matt. xxv., where it is told how the loving acts of his people done to the poor and needy for his sake are, though so trifling in themselves, so wonderfully recompensed). Thus the lives of his people diffuse a fragrance most acceptable to him in whose name they are done.

V. *HER FIDELITY.* (Ver. 12.) The soul of the believer belongs to Christ. It is his possession—a garden closed, open only to him. All manner of intruders seek to find entrance there, and some of them seem for a while to succeed; but Christ sees that in deed and in truth the soul owns only him as her Lord. You can force the needle of a compass right round, so that it should point the reverse of its right direction; but take your hand off, and back it swings to where, if left to itself, it always would be. And so with the soul of the believer. The violence of the world, the flesh, or the devil, or all combined, often make the soul seem to belong to any one rather than Christ. But he sees how it is, and knows that when that violence is withdrawn the soul will surrender itself again to him, with cries and prayers and tears that it may nevermore belong to any but to him, and him alone.

VI. *THE SOUL'S RICH FRUIT.* (Ver. 13.) What these are, are told of here under the imagery of the fruits of an Oriental garden; and in Gal. v. 22 as the fruits of the Spirit. Like the fruits this ver. 13 speaks of, they are precious, fragrant, healthful, abundant, delightful, varied, beautiful, and spontaneous. Such are the fruits he desires; and, "supposing him to be the gardener," such as he would surely have in his garden.

VII. *THE MINISTRIES OF THE SOUL.* (Ver. 15.) The grace of the redeemed soul is not confined to itself; it flows out to others. Allusion seems to be made in this verse to the fountains of Solomon, which were "fountains of gardens." And we are reminded of our Lord's words as to the "well of water" which should be in his people, and which should spring up in them "unto everlasting life." And because our Lord foresaw that through the souls he redeemed so many others should be blessed—each one becoming "a fountain of gardens," a well of living waters for the help and salvation of others—herein is another reason why God became man. It was part of "the joy set before him," for which he "endured the cross, despising the shame." Ruskin tells how in the slime taken from a city lane you have clay, soot, sand, and water. Submit these to the laws of crystallization, and the clay becomes sapphire, the sand becomes opal, with blue green, and golden hues; the soot becomes a lustrous diamond, and the water crystallizes into that thing of beauty, a snow-star. And more than science sees in any city slime Christ sees in the soul, sunken in the mire of sin though it be, which he redeems. Already he sees the flashing of the jewels into which he will transform it, and will place in his diadem for ever: such is part answer to the question, "Cur Deus homo?"—S. C.

Ver. 16.—"*Even so, come, Lord Jesus!*" This is the state of mind produced by the consciousness of Christ's gracious estimate of us. We can scarce believe that it is as he says, but that he counts us such makes us long to be such. Therefore in this verse we may hear the cry of the soul, that he would make us to be what he says we are. "*Even so, come,*" etc. Note—

I. *WHAT THIS ASPIRATION OF THE SOUL CONFESSES.* 1. *The power of Christ to produce all this.* Hence the appeal, "Awake, O north wind," etc. 2. *That power actually at work.* There are various precious plants of his own planting; his garden is not a wilderness. And there are the heavenly gifts of sun and rain and dew. 3. *But nevertheless the full results of his grace are not forthcoming.* The fragrance so delightful and desirable is not yielded; there are fruits, but not yet ripened, so that they might be pleasant to him who eats them. The soul lives, but does not flourish. It has life, but not abundant life. How common all this is! Hence how ineffectual the lives of many Christians are! 4. *And the causes of this are indicated.* The gloom and mist, the clouds so earth-born and dense, which overhang the garden of the soul and hinder it from yielding its fragrance and fruit as it otherwise would. So the sin-and-sorrow-laden clouds, and those which doubt and unbelief produce—these will mar the soul's life, and make it ineffectual for joy or help.

II. *FOR WHAT IT IS WILLING.* 1. *For the north wind.* (Cf. Prov. xxv. 23; Job xxxviii. 22.) The north wind, often stern and terrible, and very trying to plant-life. Yet here it is invited to come. The spirit of the well-known lines—

"Nearer, my God, to thee,
Nearer to thee;
E'en though it be a cross
That raiseth me"—

is in this invocation to the bitter blast—the north wind. And the Christian soul is willing for whatever of trial and distress God may be pleased to send, so only as it may lead to more full likeness to God. As the inhabitants of the Valais, in Switzerland, love the strong, stern winds which, sweeping wildly down their close gorges and shut-up vales, scatters and drives away the miasma, bred of the stagnant air, which for far too long a time broods over them, unchanged, and hence full of evil, until the welcome wild wind tears down the valley, and then the bad air is driven away, and that which is healthful comes instead; so the soul, conscious that its health and joy are hindered, would welcome that which corresponds to the north wind told of here (cf. Rom. v. 3—5). 2. *The south wind.* (For its effects, cf. Job xxxvii. 7.) The soul knows that without the genial influence of Christ's love realized in her she cannot prosper. Therefore she prays for this also.

"He sendeth sun, he sendeth shower—
Alike they're needful for the flower;
And joys and tears alike are sent
To give the soul fit nourishment."

III. WHAT IT SUPREMELY DESIRES. "Let my beloved come into his garden," etc. This, translated, means that the soul's supreme solicitude is, as Paul's was, to be accepted of her Lord. (cf. 2 Cor. v., "I labour, whether present or absent, to be accepted of him"). The renewed soul seeks to be well pleasing to her Lord; she cares little for any other approval (cf. Paul, "It is a small thing to me to be judged of you, or by man's judgment; he that judgeth me is the Lord"). "To give pleasure to those whom we love, to know that any achievements of ours will gratify them, is a greater pleasure than any derived from the applause of strangers, however numerous or distinguished. The lad laden with prizes at his school is pleased enough with the clapping, and the praise of masters and fellow-pupils; but his real pleasure is to come, when he gets his prizes home and shows them to his loved ones there. To see his mother's eyes glisten with gladness, that is better than all the other praise, were it from all the world beside. And so to be approved of Christ, to please *him*, that, to souls like Paul's, is everything."

IV. THE BLESSING IT OBTAINS. Such supreme solicitude cannot exist without obtaining for the soul that cherishes it some of the choicest favours of God. 1. It will be *an ever-present regulating force* in our souls. It will act as a law to ourselves, prompting, checking, directing, impelling, as needs be. 2. It will win *blessed freedom from the tyranny of the world*. Such soul will fear neither the world's frown—so formidable to well-nigh all—nor court the world's favour, all but universally coveted though it be. The Son will have made him free, and he will be free indeed. 3. It will *make every cross light*. Such cross being his cross, borne for him, its sharpness, weight, shame, vanish. 4. *Death is abolished*. It becomes for him "an abundant entrance into the kingdom" of Christ. Freedom, strength, peace—these are some of the blessings which that soul wins whose supreme desire is to be accepted of Christ. —S. O.

Ver. 6.—*Night and morning.* In the experiences of the heavenly life in the soul there are fluctuations of health and joy as great as the fluctuations of the seasons, as great as the change from night to day. Our globe is as near to the sun at dead of night as at noon, but, being turned away from the sun, loses the enjoyment of his beams. So Jesus may be equally near to us in our times of depression, though unbelief hides him from our eyes.

I. THIS LANGUAGE WELL DENOTES THE PURPOSE OF A MAN IN A STATE OF INTELLECTUAL DOUBT. The gloom of night has fallen upon him. 1. *Note his difficulties.* Grave doubts haunt his mind whether there be a personal God. The probabilities for and against seem to him fairly equal. In the busy world honest men often suffer. Innocent children sometimes starve. The righteous are crushed to the wall, or are

ping in a gaol. Is this consistent with the jurisdiction of a benevolent God? Or if there be a God, the man has serious doubts whether the Bible can be accepted as a revelation to men of God's plans and designs. Evidently the book is marked with imperfections, traceable to man. Or he is perplexed with the theories respecting Christ's atonement. Is it possible for one person to bear the penalty of another's guilt? Or he is in darkness touching man's future state. Will there be a resurrection of the body? Will the identical man have a second life? What will become of the ungodly? How can redemption be a success if the majority of men perish? He is compassed and overborne with these shadows. What shall be his course? 2. *Note his conduct.* "I will take me to the mountains of myrrh," etc. Now, mountains are the emblems of substantial durability. Changes may pass over the plains of earth, but the hills abide. So amid all this flux of doubt some things are certain. It is certain that I ought to be truthful. I must ever follow the truth, and must hate falsehood. It is certain that I ought to be meek, patient, industrious, sober, chaste; a diligent inquirer after the truth, a champion of righteousness. These are our "mountains of myrrh," and on these we will dwell until clearer light dawns upon our path. 3. *Mark his expectation.* Certainly these shadows of night shall in due time vanish; the day of perfect certitude will dawn. Perhaps the mind itself, as an instrument for discerning truth, may grow more perfect. Perhaps some element of probability has been underrated. Perhaps personal inclination has biased judgment. Very likely new light from some quarter will break upon us touching the destiny of mankind. We will calmly wait. We will keep our minds open to instruction, open to correction, and light will assuredly come. We find a sweet and healthful fragrance in a life of conscientious service, and we are in the best position to catch the first rays of the morning sun.

II. THIS LANGUAGE DESCRIBES THE PURPOSE OF A MAN WHO ASPIRES TO A HIGHER PLANE OF CHRISTIAN LIFE. He is now among the mists of the valley; he resolves to dwell in the clear bracing air of the breezy hills. 1. *Note his lamentations.* He is in darkness respecting his personal relationship with God. He questions the reality of his faith. His religion is devoid of joy. Now and again some old lust reasserts its power. The old life and the new still struggle for the mastery. He makes no progress in holiness or in self-conquest. He finds no liberty in prayer, no sweet sense of the Brother's friendship. He is impotent. He waits for light and help from above. 'Tis a dark and wintry night. 2. *Observe his purpose.* "I will betake me to the hills of frankincense," etc. There are some things he cannot do for himself. But there are some things he can do. He cannot create light, but he can climb into the place where the light is best seen. He will act as a dependent servant, and carefully do his Master's will. He will deny himself all evil indulgence. He will dwell upon the fragrant mountains of Divine promise. He will be a devout searcher of the Scriptures. He will confess his every sin before God, and cherish a temper of self-humiliation. He will hope for clearer proof of sonship. He will aspire for the full light of God's countenance. What God has done for others, he will surely do for him. 3. *Note his outlook.* "Until the day breaks," etc. Most certainly "we have not yet attained." There is a higher experience to be reached, greater conquests to be gained. It is possible to have closer and more joyous friendship with God. It is possible for the principle of generous love to be fully dominant in the soul. There is fine scope for the development of faith. We want a more entire consecration to our Lord. In a word, we want the heavenly King to reign in us more manifestly. And that spring-morn of consecration and of gladness shall come. The "shadows shall flee away, the day shall break."

III. THIS LANGUAGE WILL EXPRESS THE CHRISTIAN'S HOPE RESPECTING THE TRIUMPH OF CHRIST'S KINGDOM. Now darkness and light commingle in the world like a thick mist in the valley. But presently the light shall conquer. 1. *Observe the present condition of Messiah's cause.* In some empires that cause moves forward, in others it apparently retrogrades. Once flourishing Churches are now dead. The Churches of Antioch and Samaria and Carthage have disappeared. Waves of ritual superstition have swept over some regions where once godly Churches flourished. Forms of faith have disappeared. The seraphic zeal of one age yields to spiritual stupor in the next. We scarcely know whether the kingdom of grace is on the ebb tide or on the flow

The outlook is checkered. 2. *Observe the Church's present duty.* In this case duty is clear. She should resort to the mountain of prayer—to the spicy hills of a new devotion. Sensible of her weakness, she must get into closer union with the eternal Source of strength. The methods which have been successful in the past must be plied in the future. We must be better instructed in the will of God. Perhaps our zeal has been sectarian and selfish in the past, and we want a purer purpose, a simpler aim. We must be ready for greater sacrifices in the Master's cause. To please the Bridegroom must be our supreme motive. 3. *The outlook of faith.* The day shall certainly dawn. Great is the truth; it must prevail. The prophecies of saintly seers shall certainly be fulfilled. The covenant with Christ must be observed. "To him every knee shall bow." The heathen is "given to him for an inheritance." "He shall see of the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied." We can afford to wait. Jesus "must reign." Love is the mightiest force in the universe, and must conquer. In due time the sun of conquest shall rise on man's vision, and the light shall expand into the glories of the perfect day.

IV. THIS LANGUAGE SERVES TO ILLUSTRATE THE CHRISTIAN'S PROSPECT OF HEAVEN.

1. *His present depression.* At present he does not perceive any organic difference between himself and unconverted men. He may have a livelier taste for religious pursuits. He may find more enjoyment in prayer. Yet he cannot discover any radical difference to warrant the sublime expectation that he shall be claimed as a son, and join in the occupations of angels. Daily he feels the power of evil principles within him. Certainly the realities of righteousness and the things of the spiritual world do not absorb his thoughts. He is of the earth, earthy. When and how shall the great change pass over me, to fit me for the society of the redeemed? When will the glorified body be assumed? Will it be developed out of the present organism, or will it be a new creation? What will be my location and my experience immediately after death? Will the eternal state be totally different from anything I have expected? Such things disquiet me? 2. *Present duty.* "I will get me to the hills of frankincense." I will get away from secular pursuits as much as I can, and will get into familiar fellowship with God. Inasmuch as his presence is the centre of all joy and activity in heaven, it is well to have his society and fellowship now. The veil that hides him from me is not on his side, but on mine; it is the veil of unbelief. I will get me to the mount of communion, and in close heart-fellowship with God I shall await with calm composure the tremendous change. I want purity of heart wherewith to see God. 3. *Note the glorious prospect.* "The day shall break, and the shadows shall flee away." All dark thoughts of God and of God's dealings shall by-and-by disappear. All his mysterious ways will be illuminated in the blaze of noon. Whereas now we feel some of our earthly conditions hard to bear, then shall we discover that these were ordered by the ripest wisdom, combined with tenderest love. Every puzzling doctrine shall be made plain. Paradoxes will blend in perfect harmony. Gracious reasons will appear for every disappointment, every sorrow, every conflict, we endured on earth. The mysteries of pain and sin and death will all be solved, and God's great plan for training men will be pronounced the best. So on "the mountains of myrrh and on the hills of frankincense" we will cheerfully abide, in filial fellowship with Jesus, "until the day breaks, and the shadows flee away."—D.

Vers. 10, 11.—*Christ's appraisalment of believers.* The interest which God takes in men is marvellous. Why he should have designed to save men from sin's curse, at such personal cost, is a mystery, and must remain so. It is equally a mystery why Jesus should have set such strong love on the fishermen of Galilee. Notwithstanding their glaring misconduct, "he loved them to the end." In like manner Jesus speaks in this passage of his high appreciation of his people's love. The love of Christ to us is a theme on which any Christian may well become eloquent. But to hear that Christ sets high store on our poor love to him, this staggers our thoughts, and almost seals our lips. Nevertheless it is a fact. Full of blemish and imperfection as we are, he counts us his jewels, his choicest possessions. He finds "his inheritance in the saints." With his generous heart he discerns all the goodness there is in us. He sets high value on our love, and in this way encourages us to give him more.

I. NOTE CHRIST'S HIGH APPRAISEMENT OF A CHRISTIAN'S LOVE. 1. *The very*

indefiniteness of the language is instructive. "How fair!" He does not say how precious it is. It is not the language of precise, calculating logic. It is the language of strong feeling. It is the generous ejaculation of the heart—"How fair!" This is spoken after the manner of men. When the intellect is overborne by emotion, we break into an exclamation, and say, almost in a spirit of inquiry, "How lovely! how fair!" As if we would say, "We cannot measure the worth; if any one else can, let him say." 2. *It is the love of tender relationship.* "My sister, my spouse." This mention of earthly relatives is used by way of comparison. What form of love among us is winsome, valued, precious? For sweetness and purity, what love is like a sister's? For strength and generosity, what affection like that of a wife? Jesus combines these both in his thought. Blend the love of sister and wife into one, and even then this poorly represents the love which Jesus discovers in us glowing for himself. He sets more value upon our love than we set upon the love of our most intimate friend. 3. *The language impresses us by a comparison.* "It is better than wine." As at a banquet one's bodily sensations are refreshed and quickened and gladdened with choice wine, so Jesus finds a cordial more refreshing, more inspiring, in his creature's love. To his inmost soul this love of man is a luxury. He has many sources of enjoyment in heaven, but this enjoyment is his choicest. The love of his ransomed is his rarest, sweetest joy. When in his lifetime he sat down to meat at the Pharisee's table, the tears of the penitent harlot were more delicious fare than Simon's choicest wine. It is possible that, though the angels "excel in strength," they may be deficient in love. Anyhow, our shallow, inconstant, imperfect love is precious in the eyes of Immanuel; it is a fountain of joy to his heart.

II. OBSERVE CHRIST'S APPRECIATION OF OUR HOLY INFLUENCE. How much better is "the scent of thy perfumes than all spices"! In the East the dwellings are not so sweet as in our own land. Want of general cleanliness, want of water, want of drainage, will account for this. As a consequence, unguents and perfumes about the person are very common. So in the hallowed savour of our piety there is a delicate fragrance very acceptable to Jesus. Our influence over others is something undefinable, yet very potent. It pertains to every habit of life, to every tone of voice, to every expression of countenance. It lives in a smile or in a tear; and results, begun in the minutest circumstance, stretch far away into the great eternity. Jesus highly esteems this quiet, mystic influence. It is a fragrant atmosphere created by love, and, like the savour of Mary's spikenard, it fills the house. Obdurate men may ridicule our pious words; they cannot ridicule nor resist the influence of a holy life. Our humility, our heavenly-mindedness, our consecrated zeal, diffuse a delicate perfume, like the subtle scent of roses, which every man of refinement appreciates, and in it Jesus finds delight. It is richer and rarer than all the spices of Araby.

III. MARK THE FACT THAT JESUS GREATLY ESTEEMS A CHRISTIAN'S TESTIMONY. "Thy lips drop as the honeycomb." The gift of speech is a noble endowment conferred on us by God. It distinguishes man above the animals. The human voice, either in oratory or in song, has potent enchantment for men. Speech is man's glory. By it he rules a nation. By it he enlightens and inspires the young. By it he moulds the destinies of mankind. Jesus loves to see this endowment consecrated to his cause. He loves to hear our testimony to his goodness. He loves to hear our pious songs. On one occasion Jesus cast out a demon from a man who was dumb, and immediately the dumb man spake. So, when Jesus "sheds abroad his love in our hearts," our lips cannot be silent. The desire to speak of his grace will be like a fire in our bones. A strange impulse stirs within to make all men know of his mighty virtue, and the tongue of the dumb will be unloosed. As the richest, sweetest of all honey is that which drops freely and first from the honeycomb, so the words of our fresh, warm love are very sweet in the ear of Jesus. He intertwines the welfare of his kingdom with human speech, for he has ordained preaching to be his great weapon in the sacred crusade with sin. If we did but remember that Jesus is always a hearer—a generous, appreciative hearer—of all that drops from our lips, should we not take care that he heard only what was true and kind and beautiful? Should we not be eager to "order our conversation aright," and to have our speech like the droppings of the honeycomb?

IV. MARK THAT JESUS APPRECIATES OUR PURPOSES TO PLEASE HIM. When David conceived the thought that he would build a substantial temple to Jehovah, and the

plan began to ripen into resolve, God sent his prophet to say *this* to David, "It was well that it was in thine heart." We loudly applaud the man who makes heroic self-sacrifice for the cause of Christ; but very likely there is a purpose burning in the soul of some gentle woman to do battle for Christ more noble still, yet which cannot be realized. Well, that secret purpose is sweet as honey to Christ. His searching eye sees it all—sees every right motive, every heavenly disposition, every upward aspiration; and the sight is a delicious joy. It is the fruit of his incarnation. It is the work of his Spirit. Just as every man finds peculiar delight in his work, be it a building, or a painting, or a mechanical invention; so, and much more, does Jesus find exquisite pleasure in his successful work of making us godlike and Divine. "Honey and milk are under thy tongue." Thy secret thoughts and purposes bring me joy.

V. JESUS CHRIST APPRAISES HIGHLY EVERY DISCIPLE'S SERVICE. "The smell of thy garments is like the smell of Lebanon." The scent of pine trees and of cedar forests is peculiarly pleasant, and in this respect Lebanon surpassed all other forests in Palestine. It is in keeping with the symbolism of the Bible to employ "garments" as an emblem of human actions. We have a similar figure in our own language, for we use the word "habit" to denote one kind of apparel, and also to denote a constant line of action. Acts frequently performed become habits. So the "garments of a Christian are his everyday actions—the things he wears wherever he goes." The lesson here is that Jesus finds pleasure in everything we do, however trivial and insignificant. For there is nothing insignificant. You may read a man's character more clearly in the hourly business of every day than in his conduct on Sundays, or than in some great action of his life. The serving-woman in a shop, or the drudge in the scullery, or the hodman on the scaffolding, can serve Christ as well as the bishop in the pulpit. Jesus loves to see how faithfully we do little things. In his sight there is nothing little. It gave him untold pleasure to see the farthing which a poor widow dropped into his treasury. He counts every hair upon our heads. He notes when a sparrow falls. This is a mark of true greatness that it never overlooks the tiniest things. If from a disposition of love, and with cheerful temper, we sew a garment or drive a nail, we bring new pleasure to our Lord. "Therefore," says the apostle, "whatsoever ye do, whether in word or in deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus." Sweetly does old Herbert sing—

"A servant with this clause
Makes drudgery Divine;
Who sweeps a room as for thy laws
Makes *that* and *th'* action fine."

D.

Vers. 12—16.—*The King's garden.* The Church of Christ is fitly likened to a garden. It is a piece of territory separated from the rest, enclosed from the beaten road of this world's traffic. The distinguishing mark of a Christian Church is separation; i.e. separation from evil, separation as a means of blessing. As in a garden a king finds great delight and solace, so in this sacred garden Jesus Christ has a special joy. He calls it "my garden." We do not hear him say, "My star; my snow-capped mountains; my veins of gold;" but we do hear him say, "My garden; my people; my sister; my spouse." Such language is not merely the language of proprietorship; it is the language of endearment. Every plant and tree in this garden has been planted and pruned by himself. The unfolding of every blossom on the fruit trees he has watched with delight; and when the blossom has matured into fruit, his delight has become an ecstasy. One high ambition fills him, viz. that his garden may bear much fruit.

I. OBSERVE THAT THIS EMBLEM OF A GARDEN SUGGESTS MANY TRUTHS. 1. *There is the fact of separateness.* In this text the writer lays emphasis on this point. Every garden is more or less marked off from other ground, but *this* is specially described as "a garden enclosed." It is made inaccessible to thieves, to cattle, and to wild beasts. Boars out of the wood would soon lay it waste. So is it with the life of God in the believer's soul. He is thereby separated from the ungodly world. The chosen of God are separated by God's eternal decree. Their names are registered in the book of life. They have been separated by redemption. "Christ has redeemed us from the curse of

the Law." They are separated by virtue of the new birth. They are separated by their own personal choice. They have gone to Christ "without the camp, bearing his reproach." They are no longer "conformed to the world." As Jesus "is not of the world, neither are they." "My kingdom is not of this world." 2. *There is the idea of secrecy.* This is not altogether the believer's choice; it is inevitable. The new life of the Christian is "hid with Christ in God." As a spring or fountain has its source out of sight—yea, far down in secret caverns of the earth—so the believer has the roots of his new life in Christ. He has experiences now which others do not share, and which he had not aforetime; but these are entirely hidden from the public eye. New fellowship with God; new aims in life; new motives and impulses; new peace and hopes; new springs of joy he has, with which a "stranger cannot intermeddle." As the wind in its vagaries defies all the predictions of man (none can "tell whence it cometh, or whither it goeth), so is every one that is born of the Spirit." "The natural man cannot understand the things of the Spirit; they are foolishness unto him." All life is mysterious; spiritual life is specially so. 3. *There is set forth the fact of security.* As a shepherd guards his flock, so the great Husbandman secures from adversaries his garden. "No wolf shall be there, nor any ravenous beast." The enclosure resists successfully even the "little foxes," who spoil the precious vines. The Christian is secure against the world, the flesh, and the devil; for all the attributes of God envelop him for his protection. He dwells under the shield of the Almighty. The omnipotence of Jehovah is his fortress. God is "a wall of fire round about him." Hence "no weapon that is formed against him can prosper." As a garden enclosed, he enjoys impregnable security. 4. *Here is the idea of sacredness.* The enclosed garden is set apart for the use of the king. It is devoted to one person and to one purpose. So Jesus claims this garden as his own, and what is true of the Church is true of every person composing that Church. The believer is a sacred person, a priest consecrated to holy service. He is God's man, attached to the court of heaven. Jesus said that he had "sanctified (or consecrated) himself, that they also might be sanctified (or consecrated) through the truth." Every part of the Christian is consecrated, viz. his endowments, his learning, his property, his time. For "we are not our own; we are bought with a price." Our business is to serve the kingdom. "For us to live is Christ." We are part of the "sacramental host of God's elect."

II. OBSERVE THAT THIS GARDEN IS FAMOUS FOR FRUITFULNESS. "Thy plants are an orchard of pomegranates, with pleasant fruits," etc. 1. *Abundant fruitfulness is asserted.* It was the earnest longing of Jesus Christ that his disciples "should bear much fruit, and that this fruit should abide." Very soon rich clusters of fruit did appear in his Church. The prayerfulness culminating on the Day of Pentecost; the generous communism of the saints; the courage and zeal of many; the fervid piety of Stephen; the practical sympathy for the poor; the magnanimity of Barnabas; the whole-hearted consecration of Paul;—these were the firstfruits of discipleship. And from that day to this fruit has abounded in the Church. The noble qualities of mind and heart; the splendid virtues; the patience, fortitude, and zeal; the consecrated heroism of believers, have been the admiration and astonishment of the world. "Whosoever things are lovely, excellent, pure, and of good report," these have been conspicuous in the Church. The *élite* of mankind is within the Church. 2. *There is also variety of fruit.* In nature God has made his goodness most manifest in the vast variety of fruits with which our earth teems. Equally in the Church may we find a splendid variety of gifts and graces. The early fruits of humility and repentance and tenderness of conscience soon appear. The spice trees of prayer and sympathy send forth a goodly odour. The trees of righteousness and holiness bear large stores of precious fruit. In each succeeding age new excellences have appeared, new fruits have made this garden famous. Here and there you will find a gnarled and crooked tree that bears little fruit. But this is the exception; a blot upon the garden. You will find even in a royal garden some withered branch, some rank shoot that is unlovely and unfruitful. Still, we do not on that account condemn the whole garden. All temperance reforms, all hospitals and asylums, all plans for the betterment of humanity, all alleviations of misery and woe, have appeared among us as the fruits of Christ's life. The fruit abounds in variety almost endless. 3. *Mark the utility of this fruit.* The fruit was choice; the rarest fruits were there. Some were full of cooling juice, pleasant

to the taste in hours of scorching heat. Some had a value as medicines for the cure of disease, and for soothing burning pains. Some yielded rich perfumes (as spikenard), and added to the joy of royal or marriage banquets. Others produced myrrh and frankincense, and were consecrated to Divine worship. Others, again, conferred a delicious flavour to human food. Each and all had a mission of usefulness among mankind. So is it also in the Church of Christ. You cannot put finger on a genuine Christian who is not more or less a blessing to the race. His piety has a delicious savour in the circle in which he lives. His prayers bring blessing upon a thousand bosoms. As God blessed Egypt for Joseph's sake, as God blessed Israel for David's sake, so for the Church's sake he often blesses the world. Every Christian is a light, illuminating the world's darkness. "Ye are the salt of the earth." Since Christ lived, and because he now lives in others, the moral and social aspects of the world are changed. Tyrannies have disappeared. War has lost its barbaric rigour. Industry is productive of substantial good. Agriculture prospers.

III. OBSERVE THE DEPENDENCE OF THIS GARDEN UPON SOURCES OF PROSPERITY OUTSIDE ITSELF. It needs the "fountain;" "the well of living waters;" "the streams from Lebanon." 1. *This may well teach us that the Church needs God in the way of providence.* While yet the Church remains on the earth it needs earthly good. It needs, at least, toleration or sufferance from earthly governments. It needs human teachers, and all the aids of human learning. It needs the use of books and printing. It needs material buildings for public worship. It needs earthly wealth to carry on all the agencies of instruction and of blessing. Likewise the individual disciple receives much from God in the way of providence. We have the priceless ministry of angels. We have the pillar of cloud, and the pillar of fire. We have the stimulating influence of godly companions. We have the benefits of parental teaching and holy example. We have the inspirations that come from the biographies of heroic men. These are wells in the desert; "streams from Lebanon." All that is requisite to make this garden fertile, rich in umbrageous shade, rich in luscious fruits, rich in aromatic spices, has been lavishly supplied. No lack can be found in the thoughtfulness of the husbandman. 2. *Equally the Church needs God in the way of spiritual gifts.* "Awake, O north wind; and come, thou south; blow upon my garden, that the spices thereof may flow out." The Hebrew word for "wind" means also "breath," or "spirit;" hence we have here a striking emblem of the work of the Divine Spirit. To him belongs the sole prerogative to impart life to the trees of the garden. We invoke his presence because he is the Lord and Giver of life. For the largest prosperity of the Church the good Spirit of God is needed in all his offices, in all his fulness of power. A blustering gale from the north scatters noxious blight, but the soft wind from the south will quicken the flow of vital sap, and will nurse the tender blossoms into ruddy fruit. So do we often need that the Spirit of God should come like a northern tornado, and scatter to the ground our false hopes and flimsy errors and earthly ambitions. And we need him also as the Comforter, who shall reveal to us the virtues of our Divine Healer, and shall melt us into sweet obedience by the warmth of Immanuel's love. As the fragrant odours of flowers lie hidden in their tiny cells until the fresh south wind coaxes them forth, so, too, the precious graces of the Christian remain concealed and slumbering within until the Spirit of life and power brings them forth, and diffuses them through the Church. Then do the disciples of Christ become "living epistles, known and read of men." "Awake, O north wind; and come, thou south; blow upon my garden."

"Come as the wind, the dew, the rain;
Come, make this heart thy temple-home;
Spirit of grace, come as thou wilt,
Our souls adjure thee—only come!"

D.

Ver. 16.—ch. v. 1.—*Prayer and its quick response.* "Let my beloved come into his garden, and eat his pleasant fruits." "I am come into my garden." It is a sign of spiritual health when we heartily desire God's best gifts; when our prayer is the prayer of faith; when we ask and have. But it is a sign of higher attainment yet

SONG OF SOLOMON. 1

when we have but one desire, viz. the desire to have the Giver with us rather than his gifts. A wife highly prizes the love-tokens she receives from her absent lord, but she values far more highly his personal return. So, if we are wise, we shall more desire to have Christ in our hearts than any gift of light or strength. "Let my Beloved himself come." To have the source of life is better than having the streams. If Christ is with me I shall want nothing.

I. THE CHURCH'S INVITATION TO HER LORD. 1. *She addresses him by an endearing title, "My Beloved."* In dealing with Jesus we need make no reserve of our affection. He will never resent our largest confidence. The mere suggestion borders on the profane. If we know anything, we know whether we love the Saviour. Love to him is the same thing in kind, as love to an earthly friend. We may stand in doubt whether Jesus has love to us personally, although such a doubt is sin. But we need never be in doubt whether love to him glows in our hearts. Many tests are available; and when love, however scanty, is found, Jesus delights to hear himself thus addressed, "My Beloved!" Then is he King within, firm seated on the throne. 2. *She recognizes the garden to be his property.* Yes; and not only is the garden his, but each particular tree, each separate fruit. Every holy principle within us he himself planted. It was planted by his own right hand. It has been trained and pruned by his watchful care. Every blossom has been under his protection. The fruit has been stored with juice from his treasures. It is a delicious joy if I can feel that every grace in me is the handiwork of Jesus. Am I prayerful? Jesus has been teaching me. Am I meek and self-forgetting? Jesus has been busy in me, and has gently moulded my nature. Much trouble has he taken to bend my proud will. No earthly gardener has such labour to produce fruit in his trees as Jesus has to make us fruitful in holiness and love. And the more abundant our spiritual fruits are, the more readily shall we ascribe all the praise to him. 3. *Here is a strong desire to give our Master pleasure.* "Let him come; let him eat his pleasant fruits." This is spoken after the manner of men. It is a peculiar joy for a man to walk in his own garden, and to eat the ripe fruit he himself has carefully nurtured. A similar joy our Lord tastes. But is any virtue or goodness in us so ripe and sweet that Jesus can find joy in it? What generous condescension does he show in partaking of our meekness, and patience, and faith, and sacred zeal! Just as a father finds peculiar pleasure in listening to the first imperfect lisplings of his child, and hears sweet music in the broken words, so Jesus sees in our imperfect graces the promise of future good, the promise of illustrious service, the promise of high attainment. Never did a friend show such generous appreciation of our loyalty. To be fruitful in Christian graces is in itself an ample reward, but to know that every attainment in goodness we make adds to our Saviour's joy is a higher reward still. Who will not brace every nerve to bring new pleasure to Immanuel! We seek our joy in the heavenly paradise; Jesus seeks his joy in us. "I am glorified in them."

II. THE BRIDEGROOM'S PROMPT RESPONSE. "I am come." 1. *Observe how swift is the reply.* No advantage, in this case, will come from silence or delay. The Church has asked the best thing, and she shall at once have it. Here he has acted up to his own promise, "Before they call I will answer." That selfsame desire to have Christ's presence was a desire planted and nourished by himself, therefore he answered the desire before it developed into spoken prayer. Already he had visited that garden, and sowed the seed of noble ambition. Now it has grown to fruitage, and he has come to enjoy it. We have never to wrest this gift from a clenched hand; it is a gift waiting our acceptance. Before the invitation is despatched he is knocking at the door. "I am come." 2. *Mark the harmony of feeling and purpose between Christ and his people.* The Church has learnt a lesson of selfishness from her Lord. Aforetime she had desired him to come for her profit, or for her pleasure; now she asks him to come for his own gratification. She thought that he would find delight in the graces and excellences which flourish in the Church, and her spiritual instincts were true to fact. This is a delightful discovery. When our thoughts harmonize with Christ's thoughts, when our dispositions are the counterpart of his, when one mind, one will, one aim, dwells in the Saviour and the saint, then is heaven begun on earth. This is joy unspeakable; the foretaste of beatific rest. This is the completion of the sacred covenant. This is his seal impressed on us. 3. *Note the satisfaction which Jesus finds*

in his saints. This series of metaphors is suggestive of many meanings. In our holy principles, in our sacred dispositions, in our prayers and our praises, in our words and self-sacrificing deeds, Jesus takes delight. The myrrh and spice may indicate the perfume of our intercession, or the pleasure which he finds in our harmony of praise. Since he has constructed all musical harmonies, and fashioned the human voice to produce this minstrelsy, surely he is moved to delight when love to him stirs all the powers of song. Every endeavour to please him, every aspiration after holiness, every noble purpose, every act of self-denial, all efforts toward a freer communion with him, —these are fruits of the Spirit, in which Jesus finds delight. Blurred as these are with imperfection, we count them very unworthy, and perhaps too much underrate them. If Jesus appreciates them, and derives satisfaction from them, is not this great encouragement to bring forth more fruit? Many products of nature are here brought into service to illustrate a Christian's spiritual fruitfulness. One has said that wine may represent those labours of ours which result from deep thought, self-denial, and generous consecration, for wine must be pressed from the grape with toil and care. But milk is a natural production, and may represent those little deeds of kindness which flow from a quiet outgushing of daily love. A vigorous fancy will find a hundred suggestions in these similitudes. The essential lesson is *this*, that the Son of God has a large accession of joy from all forms of genuine piety. His people are his vineyard, his inheritance, and in them he finds delight.

III. A GENEROUS PARTICIPATION. "Eat, O friends; drink, yea, drink abundantly, O beloved." The satisfaction which Jesus finds, he forthwith shares with his chosen. If there be a smile on the Bridegroom's face, it will soon communicate itself to the bride. If the Head have gladness, so will all the members in the mystical body. 1. *Jesus uses very tender titles to designate his saints.* He calls them "friends." The old explanation of a friend suits well in this place, viz. one soul dwelling in two bodies. Jesus completely identifies himself with us. Once we were aliens, enemies, rebels, but the old enmity is changed into a sacred and inseparable friendship. Jonathan gave proof of his friendship with David when he stripped himself of raiment and put it upon his friend. But our Immanuel has surpassed all orders of creatures in his practical deeds of kindness. Further, he calls them his "beloved." He presseth into service every human form of speech. May I take this word as addressed to me? Most certainly I may, for I am not excluded. No saint has attained to this rapturous privilege by any personal merit. "He died for the ungodly." Though the chief of sinners, "he loved me; he gave himself for me." Yes; mystery though it is, it is also plainest among facts, that into my penitent heart Jesus comes to dwell, and into my ear he whispers this endearing word, "Beloved." 2. *Observe the provisions prepared.* They are of two kinds, viz. food and drink. Very properly may we regard the food as revealed truth. To appreciate the eternal facts of God's redemption, this is solid food. This is the manna which cometh down from heaven. The only food for the hungry soul is truth.

"Christ said not to his first conventicle,
 'Go forth and preach imposture to the world,'
 But gave them truth to feed on."

This is heavenly nutriment, and is indispensable. And what else can the drink be, but the mercy of our God, flowing from the fount of his eternal love? All truth and all grace are in Jesus; hence he says to us, "He that cometh to me shall never hunger, and he that believeth on me shall never thirst." 3. *Mark the fulness of the entreaty.* "Drink; yea, drink abundantly." No generous host likes to see his guests making pretence of eating or drinking. It implies that they doubted his welcome, and took care to have a meal before they came. This is dishonouring to the giver of the feast. And Jesus will have none of that. He knows well that the thirst of the soul can be allayed nowhere but from him. He knows well that no one can have a surfeit of his mercy. Of other things we may eat and drink more than is for our good, but of the love of Christ we cannot have too much. The love we partake in shall become in us "a well, springing up unto everlasting life." However much we take, we do not diminish the supply. Trembling at his table, I have sometimes said, "Lord, I am too unworthy to sip a drop of thy mercy. My sin is unusual, crimson, aggravated." But

he straightway replies, "For thee it is provided. Drink; yea, drink abundantly, O beloved."—D.

Vers. 1—5.—*The charm of true beauty.* The bride is now in the palace which is to be her residence of state. The veil is removed from her countenance, and as her royal lover and spouse gazes upon her form and features, he is filled with admiration, and breaks forth in a poetical commendation of her loveliness. The language is the warm language of love, and the figures employed are more Oriental than those which would be used amongst ourselves. But all is natural to an Eastern imagination, which revels in eulogium, that to our colder taste would seem extravagant. The beauty of the figure and the face may be taken as emblematical of that higher beauty which attracts and satisfies the spiritual discernment. The description has been taken as applicable to "the bride, the Lamb's wife," faultless and flawless in the view of him who has purchased his Church unto himself.

I. THE SPIRITUAL BEAUTY WHICH CHRIST DISCERNS IN HIS CHURCH IS HIS OWN CREATION. There is no excellence in man apart from God. The highest excellence to be found in human character and history is the effect of the Divine interposition of grace. God in Christ has created anew, and in his own likeness, those whom he has visited with his favour. The beauty of regenerate character and consecrated life is the beauty which the Holy Spirit has imparted. It is Divine grace which bestows upon the human soul the virtues and graces which make that soul admirable and invest it with a spiritual charm.

"Nought God in us but his own gifts doth crown."

II. THIS SPIRITUAL BEAUTY IS AKIN TO CHRIST'S OWN. The influence is well known which the marriage state exercises in the gradual assimilation to one another in character and habits of those wedded for long years. The resemblance between the Divine Head and his spouse the Church is so striking that none can overlook it. They who accept Christ's doctrine, place themselves beneath his guardianship, cherish his love, cultivate his society, are hereby transformed into his likeness. Who has not seen in faithful and devoted friends of Jesus traits of their Lord's spiritual character, lineaments unmistakably his? The sympathy, beneficence, the purity and tenderness, the patience and self-denial, which are "notes" of the true Church, are evidently Christ's; from the Divine Lord, and from no lower source, have all these virtues been derived.

III. HENCE THIS SPIRITUAL BEAUTY YIELDS SATISFACTION AND DELIGHT TO THE SAVIOUR HIMSELF. If it seems at first an extravagance to suppose that the Lord of all can find joy and complacency in beholding his Church on earth, the explanation must be sought in the principles just stated. Humanity was originally created in the image of God and for the glory of God. The purpose of Eternal Wisdom in creating this human race was that his own attributes might be visibly and manifestly embodied and displayed, according to the measure of the creature, in his own highest handiwork on earth. Nor has this purpose been defeated by sin. The image sin has marred, the grace of God in Christ has restored. And it may be that the work of redemption brings out the moral and spiritual beauty in which God himself delights, with a bloom and charm and perfection which would otherwise have been impossible. Christ sees of the travail of his soul, and is satisfied.

APPLICATION. The Church of Christ may well be encouraged and cheered by the assurance that the Divine Spouse appreciates those spiritual excellences which are due to the operation of his own Spirit. "Behold, thou art fair, my love," is the language of the Bridegroom as he looks upon his beloved. And our Saviour is not insensible to those signs of grace, those revelations of spiritual beauty, which he daily discerns in his own. Those who would please Christ may well be animated by the knowledge that he never looks with indifference upon the proofs of sincere affection, upon the evidences of spiritual assimilation to himself. Well may the Christian adopt the language of St. Augustine, "Take from me, Lord, all that injures me and displeases thee, and give me all that is requisite to please thee; give me words, affections, desires, and works which may draw upon me thine eyes, thy delight, and thy love!"—T.

Ver. 7.—"Without spot." Purity is an element of beauty, and to a mind judging justly

is also an element of attractiveness. In the maiden he had brought from her mountain-home on the slopes of Lebanon, the royal bridegroom admired a purity like that of the snow that clothes the summit of Hermon. She was meet to be the spouse of the king, who (speaking not only of the absence of any blemish of form or feature, but of the qualities of the mind and heart) exclaimed, as he looked upon her fairness, "There is no spot in thee!"

I. THE PURITY OF THE CHURCH IS IN CONTRAST WITH THE SINFULNESS OF THE NATURAL, UNREGENERATE STATE.

II. THE PURITY OF THE CHURCH IS EFFECTED BY THE MEANS OF THE SAVIOUR'S REDEMPTION.

III. THE PURITY OF THE CHURCH IS WROUGHT BY THE CLEANSING POWER OF THE HOLY SPIRIT.

IV. THE PURITY OF THE CHURCH RENDERS HER THE ACCEPTABLE AND SUITABLE SPOUSE OF HER HEAVENLY LORD.

V. THE PURITY OF THE CHURCH IS A WITNESS AND REBUKE TO THE MORAL DEFILEMENT OF A SINFUL WORLD.

VI. THE PURITY OF THE CHURCH ON EARTH IS AN EARNEST AND PREPARATION FOR THE STAINLESSNESS OF THE ETERNAL STATE OF FELICITY—THE NUPTIALS OF HEAVEN.—T.

Vers. 8—11.—*Heart calls to heart.* The richness of imagination for which the Song of Songs is justly renowned is especially remarkable in this passage. All the senses are summoned to deepen the impression. The sight is charmed by visible beauty, by the glances of "eyes darting love," by the necklace lying on the fair white neck. Perfumes and unguents, spices, and cedars of Lebanon, address the sense of smell. The taste is appealed to by the pleasant wine, the honey of exceeding sweetness. And what is the emotion which links itself with beauty, sweetness, and fragrance? It is love, with which all this opulence of poetry seems most harmonious. Beneath all this vesture of splendour are certain principles which may well be brought into clearness of knowledge.

I. ALL LOVE INVOLVES LEAVING. The bride is invited to quit her mountain-home, the scenes of grandeur with which she was familiar, the lonely sources of historic rivers, the romantic home of the lion and the leopard. No power but love could have made her think with acquiescence of such a change as that to which she was now urged. Ever must love come down from its proud heights, from its vaulted splendours, from its ancient scenes. It is so with human love; and how willingly is the call obeyed which bids to forsake the surroundings, the very joys and excitements, of the past! It is so with Divine love; and no soul that recognizes the sweet authority of the Saviour's voice will hesitate to quit the scenes and the society which may previously have afforded pleasure, and like the bride to forget her father's house. It is a sound test, and a fair: "Come with me from Lebanon."

II. ALL LOVE INVOLVES HEART-LOSING. "The heart is where it loves, and not where it lives." The lover here avers, "Thou hast ravished my heart with a look from thine eyes." Common language recognizes the distinction between him who is "heart-whole" and him who has "lost his heart." If nothing is lost, nothing is gained. It is the same in the spiritual life. Christ gives his very heart to his people, and he expects and receives from them their hearts in return. As he has loved us with an everlasting love, no wonder that his appeal is, "Give me thy heart."

III. ALL LOVE INVOLVES PREFERENCE. The language of love is the language of comparison. No similitudes are ample or rich enough to set forth the surpassing charm and attractiveness of the bride. Better than all glories and all gifts, better than all rivals, is the chosen of the heart. Certainly in the religious life this is a noticeable characteristic. The Saviour prefers the soul of man to all that ease and pleasure and worldly dignity can offer. Such is the teaching of his humiliation and obedience on earth. And the soul that knows Christ's love deems him chief among ten thousand and fairer than the sons of men. None can compete, none can compare, with him.

IV. ALL LOVE INVOLVES DELIGHT IN MUTUAL SOCIETY. It does not matter whether life be passed in the cottage on the mountain-side, in the tent on the plain, or in the palace in the metropolis, if only it be passed in that companionship which is congenial,

in uninterrupted fellowship with the chosen of the heart. However imperfect in its character is this fellowship, however it be suspended in its enjoyment, the communion of the soul with Christ is subject to no such drawback.

“They who once his kindness prove,
Find it everlasting love.”

Nothing in Christ can mar the perfection of spiritual intimacy, or can bring that intimacy to a close. The love of Christ is the purest possession, and the one unfailing source of strength and joy.—T.

Vers. 12-15.—*The garden and the fountain.* The bride's beauty, purity, sweetness, and delightfulness are set forth in these verses of the song with all the richness of Oriental imagery. The poet's fancy takes him to the sunny garden of the half-tropical Engedi, to the breezy heights of Lebanon, whence flow the streams that convert the desert into a paradise. Orchards of pomegranates, gardens redolent with spicy odours, murmuring fountains, all serve to suggest the charms of the peerless one whom the king claims as his own.

I. THE CHURCH IS THE GARDEN OF THE LORD. This similitude occurs constantly both in Scripture and in uninspired Christian writers, and has given a tinge of poetry to many a sacred hymn.

“Thy vineyards and thine orchards are
Most beautiful and fair,
Full furnished with trees and fruits
Exceeding rich and rare.
Thy gardens and thy gallant walks
Continually are green;
There grow such sweet and pleasant flowers
As nowhere else are seen.”

1. The Church, like the garden, is the scene and home of life. The world is the arid wilderness, the stony waste. The Church has been breathed upon by the Eternal Spirit, whose influence has called into existence the living plants that adorn the garden of Christ. 2. The Church, like the garden, is a spectacle of beauty. But in this case the beauty is spiritual.

“The lily white that bloometh there is purity;
The fragrant violet is surnamed humility;
The lovely damask rose is here called patience;
The rich and cheerful marigold is obedience;
But one there is that bears a crown the rest above,
A crown imperial, and this flower is holy love.”

3. The Church, like the garden, is fruitful. There are not only the lovely flowers, there are precious fruits. The fruits of the Spirit have been described by the apostle. These are they which afford the deepest satisfaction to the Lord of the vineyard himself. 4. The Church, like the garden, is a secure seclusion and a sole possession. Such a representation sometimes, in our active, bustling, philanthropic age, arouses resentment. Yet it contains a delightful truth. The “garden walled round” is secure from the assaults of the foe and the incursion of the wild beast. The Church is indebted to Divine protection; here is its only security. The wall encloses the domain. The Church is Christ's, and his alone. The garden of the Lord has “a wall without, a wall within.” It is the sacred and exclusive property of him who planted it for his own glory.

II. THE CHURCH IS THE FOUNTAIN OF THE LORD. The garden seems to suggest the fountain, which in the Eastern climate was necessary to keep the enclosure moist, verdant, and fertile. And the garden well-spring gushing forth and watering the many-coloured and fragrant beds, seems to suggest the mountain-springs far up in the northern heights of Lebanon, beyond the early home of the fair bride herself. Such springs are a suitable figure of the living Church of Christ, which to set forth in all her excellence needs all things fair, bright, and fragrant that earth can offer. The Church

of Christ, like the fountain, (1) brings from an unseen source the blessings to be diffused; (2) yields an abundant and perpetual supply of these spiritual gifts; (3) freely and generously diffuses knowledge and purity, life and true refreshment, amongst all around; (4) produces results of beneficence immediate and remote, for which thanksgiving must ever be rendered to God. (5) It may be noted that, as in the similitude of the garden, so here, there is an assurance of ownership and guardianship. As the well-spring was covered with a great stone, sealed with the owner's signet, so the Church is marked by its Divine Lord as his own. "It hath this seal, 'The Lord knoweth them that are his; and, Let every one that nameth the Name of the Lord depart from iniquity.'"—T.

Ver. 16.—*The response of love.* The impassioned encomium of the bridegroom is not disregarded, is not ineffectual; it not only yields satisfaction and pleasure to her who is the object of unstinted praise; it elicits the response of appreciative gratitude and affectionate welcome. If Christ delights in the Church, the Church also delights in Christ, and yields to him the tribute of loyal obedience.

I. DIVINE INFLUENCES ARE ENTREATED. The breath of the Spirit of God passing graciously and gently and yet mightily over the Christian society alone can call forth all its spiritual fragrance. The silent, unseen, benignant influences are to be sought with fervent, earnest prayer: "Awake, O north wind; and come, thou south; blow upon my garden!"

II. THE EXHALATION OF SPIRITUAL FRAGRANCE IS DESIRED. "That the spices thereof may flow out." Because the Church is Christ's, it has great capacities for good; yet the actual exhibition of the vital qualities, in proofs of piety, in deeds of holiness, in services of benevolence, is dependent upon the "Lord and Giver of life," whose quickening grace is the greatest privilege of the Christian dispensation. There is an aroma of spiritual excellence in the Church of the Lord Jesus which is beyond comparison the sweetest and divinest quality which human society has ever manifested.

III. THE PRESENCE OF THE LORD HIMSELF IS REQUESTED. "Let my beloved come into his garden." True, he has given his Church the promise, "Lo, I am with you always." He is among his people to know their works, to accept their service, to inspire their devotion. He ever visits his vineyard; comes, "seeking fruit." The Church speaks of itself as both "my" garden and "his" garden; and it is both. When the Lord is invited and welcomed, it is to his own chosen and congenial possession.

IV. THE FRUIT THAT IS DUE TO THE LORD IS OFFERED. 1. In what do these precious, pleasant fruits consist? Praise, devotion, love, obedience. 2. To what are they owing? To Divine care and protection; to the tilling of the wise and forbearing Master; to the genial influences of the Holy Spirit. Hence they are "his" fruits. The weeds are ours; the fruits are his. 3. How are they regarded? Christ delights in them, for they are the results of his purpose and of his sacrifice. Christ "eats" of them; *i.e.* uses them in his condescension. His people may well say to him, "Of thine own have we given thee." There is no satisfaction possible to Christ's people so great and so pure as that they feel when their Lord accepts their offering and approves their endeavours.—T.

EXPOSITION.

CHAPTER V.

Ver. 1.—I am come into my garden, my sister, my bride; 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, O beloved. *My myrrh with my balsam* (see 1 Kings x. 10). There were celebrated plantations at Jericho. The Queen of Sheba brought "of spices very great store;" "There came no more such abundance of

spices as these which the Queen of Sheba gave to King Solomon." Is there a reference to the conversion of the heathen nations in this? The wine and milk are what God offers to his people (see Isa. lv. 1) without money and without price. *Οἰοῦσα* is what Ohloe gives to Daphnis (cf. Ps. xix. 6). It would seem as though the writer intended us to follow the bridal procession to its destination in the royal palace. The bridal night intervenes. The joy of the king in his bride is complete. The climax is reached,

and the rest of the song is an amplification. The call to the friends is to celebrate the marriage in a banquet on the second day (see Gen. xxix. 28; Judg. xiv. 12; Tobit xi. 18; and cf. Rev. xix. 7 and xix. 9). A parallel might be found in Ps. xxii. 26, where Messiah, at the close of his sufferings, salutes his friends, the poor, and as they eat at his table gives them his royal blessing, "Vivat cor vestrum in æternum!" The perfect state of the Church is represented in Scripture, both in the Old Testament and in the New, as celebrated with universal joy—all tears wiped away from off all faces, and the loud harpings of innumerable harpers. Can we doubt that this wonderful book has tinged the whole of subsequent inspired Scripture? Can we read the descriptions of triumphant rejoicing in the Apocalypse and not believe that the apostolic seer was familiar with this idealized love-song?

Ver. 2.—ch. viii. 4.—Part IV. REMINISCENCES OF LOVE-DAYS. *The bridegroom rejoicing in the bride.*

Ver. 2.—*The bride's reminiscence of a love-dream. I was asleep, but my heart waked. It is the voice of my beloved that knocketh, saying, Open to me, my sister, my love, my dove, my undefiled: for my head is filled with dew, my looks with the drops of the night.* There is a resemblance between this account of what was apparently a dream, and that which is related in ch. iii. 1—4; but the difference is very clear. In the former case the lover is represented as dismissed for a season, and then the relenting heart of the maiden sought after him and found him. In this case he "stands at the door and knocks," coming in the night; and the maiden rises to open, but finds him gone, and so is drawn after him. The second dream is much more vivid and elaborate, and seems to be an imitation and enlargement of the other, being introduced apparently more for the sake of dwelling on the attractions of the beloved one and his preciousness in the eyes of the maiden than in self-reproach. Is it not possible that the poem originally concluded at ch. v. 1 with the marriage, and that the whole of the latter half was an amplification, either by Solomon himself, the author of the first half, or by some one who has entered into the spirit of the song? This would explain the apparent repetition, with the variations. But, at all events, the second part certainly is more from the standpoint of married life than the first. Hence the bride speaks at great length, which she does not in the earlier portion. Delitzsch thinks that this second love-dream is intended to represent what occurred in early married life; but there are two objections to that—*first*, that the place is evidently a country

residence; and *secondly*, that such an occurrence is unsuitable to the conditions of a royal bride. It is much more natural to suppose that the bride is recalling what occurred in her dream when the lover, having been sent away until the evening, as on the former occasion, returned, and in the night knocked at the door. "My heart waked" is the same as "My mind was active." The "heart" in Hebrew is the inner man, both intellect and feeling. "I was asleep, but I was thinking" (cf. Cicero, 'De Divinatione,' i. 30). The lover has come off a long journey over the mountains, and arrives in the night-time. The terms with which he appeals to his beloved are significant, denoting (1) equal rank—*my sister*; (2) free choice—*my love*; (3) purity, simplicity, and loveliness—*my dove*; (4) entire devotion, undoubting trust—*my undefiled*. *Tammanthi*, "my perfection," as Arabic *tam, teim*, "one devoted to another," as a servant. Similar passages are quoted from heathen love-poetry, as Anacreon, iii. 10; Propertius, i. 16—23; Ovid, 'Amor,' iii. 19, 21. The simple meaning of the dream is that she is full of love by night and by day. She dreamed that she was back in her old country home, and that her lover visited her like a shepherd; and she tells how she sought him, to show how she loved him. When we are united to the Saviour with the bonds of a pledged affection, we lose the sense of self-reproach in the delight of fellowship, and can even speak of our own slowness and backwardness only to magnify his grace. We delight to acknowledge that it was his knocking that led us to seek after him, although we had to struggle with the dull heart; and it was not until it was moved by his approach, by his moving towards us, that we hastened to find him, and were full of the thought of his desirableness. There are abundant examples of this same interchange of affection in the history of the Church's revivals and restorations.

Ver. 3.—*I have put off my coat; how shall I put it on? I have washed my feet; how shall I defile them?* Evidently the meaning is, "I have retired to rest; do not disturb me." She is lying in bed. The *cuttoneth*, or *χιτών*, was the linen garment worn next the body—from *cathan*, "linen." The Arabic *kutun* is "cotton;" hence the French *coton*, "calico, or cotton" shift. Shulamith represents herself as failing in love, not meeting the condescension and affection of her lover as she should. Sloth, reluctance, ease, keep her back. "Woe to them that are at ease in Zion!" The scene is, of course, only ideally true; it is not meant to be a description of an actual occurrence. Fancy in dreams stirs up the real nature, though it also dis-

turbs it. Shulamith has forsaken her first love. She relates it with sorrow, but not with despondency. She comes to herself again, and her repentance and restoration are the occasion for pouring out the fulness of her affection, which had never really changed, though it has been checked and restrained by self-indulgence. How true a picture both of the individual soul and of the Church in its decline! "Leave me to myself; let me lie at ease in my luxury and my smooth, conventional ways and self-flattering deceit."

Ver. 4.—**My beloved put in his hand by the hole of the door, and my heart was moved for him.** The door-hole is a part of the door pierced through at the upper part of the lock, or door-bolt (סַךְ־חֹר), that is, by the opening from without to within, or through the opening, as if, *i.e.*, to open the door by pressing back the lock or bolt from within. There was some obstacle. He failed to open it. It had not been left so that he could easily obtain admittance. The metaphor is very apt and beautiful. How much he loved her! How he tried to come to her! As applied to the Saviour, what infinite suggestiveness! He would be with us, and not only knocks at the door, but is impatient to enter; tries the lock, and too often finds it in vain; he is repelled, he is resisted, he is coldly excluded. *My heart was moved for him.* יָפַ, "my inner being" (cf. Isa. lxiii. 15, where the same word is used of God). It is often employed to express sympathy and affection, especially with tender regret. The later authorities, as the older translations, have "to him" (יָפָה), *i.e.* over him, or on account of him, in the thought of his wounded heart.

Ver. 5.—**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 bolt.** The meaning seems to be that the lover had come to the door perfumed as if for a festival, and the costly ointment which he brought with him has dropped on the handles of the bolts. Similar allusions may be found in Lucretius and other heathen writers. This description is, of course, inapplicable to the shepherd-theory. It would not be a rough country swain that came thus perfumed; but Solomon is thought of as at once king and lover. It would be stretching the poetry too far to suppose that Shulamith meant the natural sweetness of her lover was the perfume. Neither is there any probability in the explanation that she dipped her hand in perfumed oil before she opened the door. That would destroy all the form and beauty of the dream. It is her lover whose fragrance she celebrates, not her own. Whether he brought perfumes with him, or the innate personal sweetness of his

presence left its fragrance on that which he touched, in either case it is the lover himself who is spoken of. His very hand, wherever it has been, leaves behind it ineffable delight. His presence reveals itself everywhere. Those who go after him know that he is not far off by the traces of his loving approaches to them. The spiritual meaning is too plain to need much exposition.

Ver. 6.—**I opened to my beloved; but my beloved had withdrawn himself, and was gone. My soul had failed me when he spake: I sought him, but I could not find him; I called him, but he gave me no answer.** The meaning is this—The voice of my beloved struck my heart; but in the consciousness that I had estranged myself from him I could not openly meet him, I could not offer him mere empty excuses. Now I am made sensible of my own deficiency. I call after him. I long for his return, but it is in vain (cf. the two disciples going to Emmaus, Luke xxiv., "Did not our heart burn within us," etc.?). Similar allusion to the effect of the voice of the beloved is found in Terence, 'And.' i. 5. 16, "Oratio hæc," etc. The failing or departing of the soul at the sound of the voice must refer to the lack of response at the time, therefore it was that she sought him and cried out after him. *When he spake; literally, in his speaking; i.e.* when he said, "I will not now come because at first refused;" cf. Prov. i. 20—33, the solemn warning against the loss of opportunity. It is a coincidence between the two books of Solomon which cannot be disregarded. If there is any spiritual meaning at all in Solomon's Song, it certainly is a book which he who wrote the first chapter of Proverbs is likely to have written.

Ver. 7.—**The watchmen that go about the city found me, they smote me, they wounded me; the keepers of the walls took away my mantle from me.** The intention is to show into what evil she fell by having to seek her beloved instead of being with him. She is mistaken and misjudged; she is smitten and wounded with reproaches and false accusations, as though she were a guilty and evil-minded woman. She is subjected to abuse and ill treatment from those who should be her guardians. She had hard work to escape, leaving her robe behind her (cf. Gen. xxxix. 12). The *redhidh*, like *ridhā* in Arabic, is a plaid-like upper garment thrown over the shoulders—so says Aben Ezra; but it is derived, no doubt, from the root "to make broad or thin," "to spread out"—perhaps, therefore, "a thin, light upper robe" which was worn over the chiton, a summer overdress, a cloak (LXX., *θερίστρον*; Jerome, *pallium*; Luther, *Schleier*). If we take the dream thus described, and which seems to conclude at this point, as related to the sur-

rounding ladies, then we must suppose that it is introduced for the sake of what follows. The bride feels that she does not love her beloved one half enough; she is so conscious of deficiencies, that she might even have acted as her dream represented. It had entered her soul and made her ill with inward grief and self-reproach. She might so act, she might so treat her husband. So she adjures her companions to tell him how much she loves him. The spiritual application is not difficult to see. When the soul loses its joy in Christ, it becomes the prey of fears and self-accusations, and even of reproaches from Christ's servants and the guardians of his Church. For when our religion ceases to be a spontaneous delight to us, we are apt to carry on even the active work of our life in a manner to be misunderstood by sincere believers around us. Yes, the very efforts we make to recover peace may bring reproach upon us. Any Christian minister who has had to deal with religious despondency will quite understand this dream of the bride's. We may often smite and wound, and even deprive of the garment of reputation and esteem, those who are really seeking for Christ, because we have misunderstood them.

Ver. 8.—I adjure you, O daughters of Jerusalem, if ye find my beloved, that ye tell him, that I am sick of love. This appeal to the ladies suggests that the bride is speaking from her place in the royal palace; but it may be taken otherwise, as a poetical transference of time and place, from the place where the dream actually occurred, to Jerusalem. It is difficult, in a poem of such a kind, to explain every turn of language objectively. We cannot, however, be far wrong if we say the bride is rejoicing, in the presence of her attendant ladies, in the love of Solomon. He has just left her, and she takes the opportunity of relating the dream, that she may say how she cannot bear his absence and how she adores him. The ladies enter at once into the pleasant scheme of her fancy, and assume that they are with her in the country place, and ready to help her to find her shepherd-lover, who has turned away from her when she did not at once respond to his call. The daughters of Jerusalem will, of course, symbolically represent those who, by their sympathy and by their similar relation to the object of our love, are ready to help us to rejoice—our fellow-believers.

Ver. 9.—What is thy beloved more than another beloved, O thou fairest among women? what is thy beloved more than another beloved, that thou dost so adjure us? This, of course, is poetic artifice in order to give the opportunity to the bride to enter upon a glowing description of the object of

her love. She wishes to say that he is perfect, everything that he can be.

Ver. 10.—My beloved is white and ruddy, the chiefest among ten thousand. The mingling of colours in the countenance is a peculiar excellence. The word *tsachach* (cf. Lam. iv. 7), means a bright, shining clearness; it is not the same as *lavan*, which would mean "dead white." So in Greek *λαυρος* differs from *λευκος*. The red *adhom*, from the root *dām*, which means "to condense," is dark red (*rouge puce*), no doubt as betokening health and vigour. The pure, delicate white among the Caucasians denotes high rank, superior training, hereditary nobility, as among ourselves the "aristocratic paleness" (cf. Hom., 'Il.,' iv. 141, 'ivory with purple;' Virg., 'Æn.,' xii. 65; Ovid, 'Am.,' ii.; 'Eleg.,' v. 39; Hor., 'Od.,' i. 13, etc.; Tibull., 'Eleg.,' cxi. 4, etc.). The chiefest, that is, the distinguished one, the chosen (so the Greek versions, Syriac, Jerome, Luther). The LXX. has *ἐκλεκτοχισμῆνος*, *e. coloris selectus*. Another rendering is "bannered," furnished with a banner or pennon (לָחָי) hence the word לחי as a past participle (so the Venetian *σεσμαιωμένος*). The numeral (*rcvānā*) "ten thousand" is simply used to represent an innumerable multitude; "myriad" is so used among ourselves (cf. Ezek. xvi. 7).

Vers. 11—16.—His head is as the most fine gold, his locks are bushy, and black as a raven. His eyes are like doves beside the water-brooks; washed with milk and fitly set. His cheeks are as a bed of spices, as banks of sweet herbs; his lips are as lilies, dropping liquid myrrh. His hands are as rings of gold set with beryl; his body is as ivory work overlaid with sapphires. His legs are as pillars of marble set upon sockets of fine gold. His aspect is like Lebanon, excellent as the cedars. His mouth is most sweet; yea, he is altogether lovely. This is my beloved, and this is my friend, O daughters of Jerusalem. This description, which is complete in itself, is best regarded in its unbroken perfection. We must not expect to find a meaning for each separate part of it. There are ten corporeal excellences enumerated. We naturally recall the descriptions in Daniel and in the Apocalypse, which certainly have reference to this, and manifestly combine the attributes of greatness and beauty in the Son of man. Solomon, no doubt, as the son of Bathsheba, was distinguished by his personal attractions. Some of the details of description are differently rendered by different commentators. Delitzsch regards the description of the hair in ver. 11 as compared to a hill or hilly range—"his locks hill upon hill," i.e. "his hair, seen from his neck upwards, forms in undulating lines hill upon hill." The black colour is no

doubt mentioned as a contrast with the fair, white complexion. The eyes are not only pure and clear, but with a glancing moistness in them which expresses feeling and devotion. So Plutarch has *ὀφθαλμοὶ τῶν ὀμυδρῶν* to denote a languishing look, and we find the same figure in the 'GitaGovinda' and Hafiz, and in Ossian. So Luther, "Und stehen in der Fülle." The pureness of the white of the eye is represented in the bathing or washing in milk. They are full and large, "fine in their setting," referring no doubt to the steady, strong look of fine eyes. "The cheeks" are compared to towers of plants; that is, there is a soft elevation in them. LXX., *ψύσσαι μωφικὰ*: Jerome, *Sicut areolæ aromatum consistit pigmentariis*. The Targum says, "Like the rows of a garden of aromatic plants, which produce deep, penetrating essences, even as a (magnificent) garden aromatic plants"—perhaps referring to the "flos juventutis," the hair on the face, the growth of the beard. "The lips" are described as the organs of speech as well as inviting to embrace. They drop words like liquid fragrance. "The hands" may be differently described according as they are viewed. Delitzsch says, "His hands form cylinders, fitted in with stones of Tarshish." Gesenius thinks the comparison is of the closed hand and the stained nails, but that seems far-fetched. Surely it is the outstretched hands that are meant. The form of the fingers is seen and admired; they are full, round, fleshy like bars of gold. The word "Tarshish" may mean clay-white, as in the Greek versions; that is, *topaz*, called Tarshish from Tartessus in Spain, where it is found. The description of the body is of the outward appearance and figure only, though the word itself signifies "inward parts." The comparison with ivory-work refers to the glancing and perfect smoothness and symmetry as of a beautiful ivory statue, the work of the highest artistic excellence. The sapphire covering tempers the white. The beautiful blue veins appear through the skin and give a lovely tint to the body. So in the description of the legs

we have the combination of white and gold, the white marble setting forth greatness and purity, and the gold sublimity and nobleness; intended, no doubt, to suggest that in the royal bridegroom there was personal beauty united with kingly majesty, as in the following description of his general aspect, which, like the splendours of the mountains, was awe-inspiring and yet elevating and delightful (cf. Ps. lxxx. 11 (10); Jer. xxii. 7 Isa. xxxvii. 24). His mouth, or palate, is sweetness itself; that is, when he speaks his words are full of winning love (cf. Prov. xvi. 4; Ps. lv. 16). We may compare with the whole description that given of Absalom, Solomon's brother, in 2 Sam. xiv. 25, 26. It has been truly remarked by Zöckler that "the mention of the legs, and just before of the body, could only be regarded as unbecoming or improper by an overstrained prudishness, because the description which is here given avoids all libidinous details, and is so strictly general as not even to imply that she had ever seen the parts of the body in question in a nude condition. It merely serves to complete the delineation of her lover, which Shulamith sketches by a gradual descent from head to foot, and, moreover, is to be laid to the account of the poet rather than to that of Shulamith, who is in everything else so chaste and delicate in her feelings. Certainly it would be much less delicate regarded as the description of a shepherd-lover who is seeking to obtain possession of the maiden taken from him, than of the royal bridegroom to whom Shulamith is at all events affianced, if not already married. The highest spiritual feelings of loving adoration of the Saviour have welcomed some parts of this description, and adopted them into the language of "spiritual songs." To some minds, no doubt, it is repellent; to those to whom it is not so, the warmth and glow of Eastern language is by no means too realistic for the feelings of delight in the Lord which express themselves in rapturous music.

HOMILETICS.

Ver. 1.—*Response to ch. iv. 16: the bridegroom accepts the bride's invitation.* He calls her again by the endearing title, "my sister-bride." He comes, as she bids him, into the garden which was hers and yet his. He takes delight in its produce, in the entertainment which she has prepared for him. He invites his friends to share his enjoyment. He addresses, apparently, the chorus of young men, his companions, who have already appeared in ch. iii. 6—11, calling them "O friends," and "O beloved ones;" unless, indeed, the last clause be translated, as the Hebrew at least permits, "Drink abundantly of love." The heavenly Bridegroom accepts the offering of the Church, his bride. He loved her, and gave himself for her; therefore her love is very precious to him. He comes into her garden. He calls it his—"my garden"—in gracious acknowledgment of the bride's gift. He uses the same pronoun of all its varied

products. They are his, each and all. He gave them to the bride. She offers them back to her Lord. He invites his friends to share his joy. He said once to his friends in his holy parable, "Rejoice with me; for I have found my sheep which was lost;" so now he says, "Eat, O friends; drink, yea, drink abundantly of love." "Blessed are they which are called unto the marriage supper of the Lamb" (Rev. xix. 9). So the Lord listens to the call of the Christian soul that thirsts for him. He answers the cry, "Even so, come, Lord Jesus." He will come with the Father, and make his abode with them that love him (John xiv. 23). He graciously accepts the offerings of love. He welcomes the beauty and sweetness of the fruits of the Spirit in the believing soul. They are his, for it was he who gave the Spirit, who watered the growing fruits with the dew of his grace; his, again, because the heart that gives itself to God gives with the gift of self all its belongings, gladly owning that whatever it has of good comes from his only gift. He acknowledges their imperfect efforts: "I know thy works, thy labour, and thy patience." He saith unto his friends, "Rejoice with me;" and "there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over each sinner that repenteth." Then if our love gives joy to the dear Lord who gave up the glory of heaven for us, and for us endured the long torture of the cross, how very earnestly we Christians ought to try to make our heart indeed a "garden enclosed," wholly dedicated unto him, and separated from all profane uses! If our poor growth in holiness pleases him, how earnestly we ought to pray and strive to grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ; how earnestly we ought to try never to grieve his Holy Spirit, but to give him our whole heart, with all its affections and desires, that we may be wholly his—his for ever!

Vers. 2—8.—*The second dream of the bride.* I. THE BRIDEGROOM AT THE DOOR. 1. *The voice of the beloved.* The bridegroom is absent; the bride is alone. There is a temporary separation, something approaching to an estrangement; yet the old love is not lost. The bride is sleeping when she should be awake and watching for the bridegroom's approach. Yet her heart waketh. She has a dreamy consciousness of what is going on around her; she seems to hear in her dream the voice of her beloved. So the Church sometimes sleeps—leaves her first love—lapses into something like spiritual apathy; yet her heart waketh. The Lord never leaves himself without a witness. At the worst times of indifference there has always been some dim consciousness of his presence, some faint love for him who loved the Church and gave himself for her. So the soul sometimes sleeps when it is high time to awake, when the night is far spent and the day is at hand. The heavenly Bridegroom will not let us slumber on without a warning. He knocks at the door of our heart. "Behold," he saith, "I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me" (Rev. iii. 20). The Church of Laodicea was lying wrapped in a deep sleep: the Lord sought to arouse her. So he knocks at the door of our hearts now by his Word, by his ministers, by his chastisements, by the warnings of his Spirit. If we can in truth call him "*my Beloved*;" if we have really set our love upon him, and given him our heart in answer to his seeking love, we shall hear him. We shall know his voice, recognizing it in judgments and in mercies, in warnings and in consolations. When duty calls us, even if it be, as it will sometimes be, hard and displeasing to flesh and blood, we shall say, "It is the voice of my Beloved." It is the Master's call; he speaks. The heart waketh to listen. Does he come with stern reproof for indifference and coldness of heart? No; his words are full of tenderness. "Open to me, my sister, my love, my dove, my undefiled." It is the Lord's great love for the souls of men that produces those utterances of yearning affection. He still calls the bride "*my sister*," as he had done before the cloud had come upon her love. He still says "*my love, my dove*," as he said before; and he has a fresh term of endearment, "*my undefiled, my perfect one*." We know, alas! that we are not undefiled, we are not perfect. ("Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect," says even the great apostle, St. Paul.) But what the Lord would have us to be, what he will make us at the last if we abide in him, that he is graciously pleased to call us now. How those holy words of deep tenderness should excite in us repentance for the past, and earnest effort to become by his grace less unworthy of those most gracious and loving titles! He asks us to open, that he

may enter in. He has been wandering in the darkness, and as when he came unto his own there was no room for him in the inn, and as during the days of his earthly ministry he had not where to lay his head, so now he knocks at one heart after another, and heart after heart is closely barred against him. They will not open, that he may enter in and make his abode with them. He comes now to the sister bride of old times, asking her as if for his own sake (such is the unutterable depth of his infinite, self-abasing love), "Open unto me, my sister, my love, my dove, my undefiled." Ah, how can any of those souls of men whom he loved even unto death shut up their hearts against that call of unspeakable affection! He pleads as for himself, as if needing shelter: "My head is filled with dew, and my locks with the drops of the night." Alas! the bride, still half asleep, scarcely heeds the bridegroom's call, does not realize its meaning—

"For none of the ransom'd ever knew
How deep were the waters cross'd;
Or how dark was the night that the Lord pass'd through
Ere he found his sheep that was lost."

It cost more to redeem our souls than our poor thoughts can comprehend. When we try to realize the Lord's sufferings, we seem to stand afar off beholding, like the people who came together to that sight of awe, who smote their breasts (Luke xxiii. 48). The Church pleads those bitter sufferings in her solemn Litany: "By thine agony and bloody sweat, by thy cross and passion, good Lord, deliver us." "Remember, good Lord Jesus," we say in the ancient hymn, "that it was for me thou didst undertake that long, weary journey; in that long search for me thou didst sit faint and exhausted; it was to redeem me that thou didst endure the cross. Let not that toil and labour be in vain, O Lord." But here it is the Lord himself who pleads with us in our hardness; he so longs for our salvation. He bids us remember what he endured for us. It is the expression of his intense yearning love. He would have us comprehend with all saints something of the breadth, and length, and depth, and height of that great love; to return it in our poor way, to open our heart to him, that he may enter in and take that heart to be his own which he bought with the price of his most precious blood. 2. *The answer.* The bride does not realize the deep, solemn meaning of the bridegroom's call. She is half asleep still. She lies dreaming in her bed. She makes excuses to herself. And we, alas! far too often do the like when the Lord calls us to work, to deny ourselves for his sake. We slumber on in careless sleep; we forget what he did for us. We do not hear his voice; or, if we hear, we listen dreamily, lying still in spiritual sloth, not thinking that when the Lord calls it is time to bestir ourselves, to be up and doing, to "pass the time of our sojourning here in fear: forasmuch as we know that we were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold . . . but with the precious blood of Christ" (1 Pet. i. 18). We must not make vain excuses, like those that were bidden in the parable (Luke xiv. 18), for the time is short. It is our eternal salvation that is at stake. It is Christ the Son of God who is calling us; and he loved us, and gave himself for us (Gal. ii. 20). Alas! the bride, whom the bridegroom loved with so great a love, makes poor excuses in her dream. She will not rise and open till it is too late; she will not take a little trouble for his sake. 3. *The repentance.* The beloved put his hand through the hole of the door; he sought to open it. The bride's heart was moved at last by his earnest appeals. "My bowels were moved for him," she says, as she repeats her dream. She thought of her past love for him, of his great love for her, of the hardships he had gone through in seeking her. She wonders how she could have forgotten all this even in a dream; she rose up to open to her beloved. So the soul that has made many excuses, that has slumbered long, that has spent its time as in a dream, forgetting the solemn realities of life, hears at last through the long-suffering grace of God—listens to the patient call of the heavenly Bridegroom. Then our heart burns within us when we think that he has indeed been talking with us, opening the Scriptures (Luke xxiv. 32); our bowels are moved for him. We think that it is the Saviour of the world, our Saviour, who is standing without, waiting for us to answer; that the hand with which he seeks to open the door was once pierced through for us, nailed upon the cross for our souls' sake. We listen to his voice—

"O Jesu, thou art pleading
 In accents meek and low:
 'I died for you, my children,
 And will ye treat me so?'
 O Lord, with shame and sorrow
 We open now the door;
 Dear Saviour, enter, enter,
 And leave us never more."

The bride opens to her beloved. The bridegroom's hand had been dipped in oil of myrrh. Some of the unguent remained upon the bolt; it dropped upon the fingers of the bride. It was a token of the bridegroom's presence. He had gathered his myrrh (ver. 1) from the "garden enclosed" before this passing shadow had fallen upon their love. It may be, too, that we may see in the myrrh a parable of self-denial. It may be regarded as a loving warning left by the bridegroom to teach the bride a necessary lesson. She must not slumber on; it is time to wake and to work. Working for Christ is sometimes like the wine mingled with myrrh (Mark xv. 23); it has a bitter taste to our pampered palate. But if we take the cup which the Lord gives us to drink, we shall find at last that the smell of it is sweet; even as his yoke, hard at first, becomes easy in the discipline of obedience, and his burden, heavy at first, becomes light when he bears it with us. For self-denials meekly borne for him bring us nearer and nearer to him who bore the supreme self-sacrifice of the cross for us; and in his presence there is a depth of sweetness which takes away the bitterness. 4. *It is too late.* The beloved had withdrawn himself. "My beloved withdrew himself, was gone," she says, in the plaintive wailing of disappointment (there is no conjunction in the original). "My soul went forth," she continues, "as he spake." My soul, my heart, my affections, went forth to him at the sound of his voice. The well-known tones aroused the old love. She had once given her heart to him; and now, though in her dream her love seemed to have been chilled, and she seemed to lie heedless, unwilling to rouse herself to exertion, yet now his words at last reached her heart. Her soul went forth to him in response to his calling. Or the Hebrew words may rather mean, as in the Revised Version, "My soul had failed me when he spake." The same words are used in describing the death of Rachel: "It came to pass, as her soul was in departing" (Gen. xxxv. 18). His words awoke in her soul the fear lest she should lose him by her coldness and selfish neglect. The thought was like death to her. "Love is strong as death" (ch. viii. 6). Her soul went forth; it failed her. For the moment she was helpless—prostrate as in a death-like swoon. Then she aroused herself. It was time to act, to bestir herself. He was gone; she might lose him for ever; and her heart was bound up in him. To lose him was death—worse than death. She sought him, but she could not find him; she called him in her dream, but he gave her no answer. The dream of the bride is a parable of the Christian life. The soul sometimes sinks into a state of listlessness and apathy. There is no actual transgression, perhaps—no open sin. The evil spirit is not there; the house is empty (Matt. xii. 43, 44). But the Bridegroom is absent, and love has grown cold. There is no recollection of the absent Lord—no regret, no longing for his return. The soul lives on, as it were, in a dream, not realizing the solemn meaning of life, not thinking of the awful future. But God in his gracious mercy will not let us dream away our lives without a warning. He calls us by his blessed Son: "Behold, I stand at the door, and knock." Sometimes, alas! we will not hear; sometimes we listen dreamily, half-conscious, recognizing in a sense the Bridegroom's voice, but not realizing the solemn, holy meaning of the call; not thinking of his love and of our ingratitude, his promises and our broken vows, what he did for us and what return we have made to him; not thinking of his grace and our responsibility, his longing for our salvation and our fearful danger. That lethargy, that slumber of indifference, creeps over us all from time to time when we have not been watchful—when we have neglected our prayers and other blessed means of grace. But the dear Lord seeketh that which is lost until he find it. He "is long suffering to usward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance" (2 Pet. iii. 9). He comes again and again, calling us, sometimes in the gentle tones of entreating love, sometimes in the sterner language of reproof and chastisement. Sometimes he makes as though he would force his way. He puts his

hand in at the hole of the door; he lays the cross upon us; he reminds us of the burden which he bore for us; he teaches us that the cross is the very badge and mark of his chosen—that whosoever doth not take up his cross cannot be his disciple. At last we are stirred in our slumbers. We rise from our sleep. But perhaps we are only half awake, half-hearted. Our will goes back to our old slothful rest. We say, like the sluggard in the Proverbs, "Yet a little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to sleep" (Prov. vi. 10). Then the Lord deals with us as a wise physician of the soul. He would have us feel our weakness, our danger. "They that be whole need not a physician, but they that are sick" (Matt. ix. 12). He would have us feel our need of him. He withdraws himself; and when we open to him he is gone. He makes as though he would go further, as he dealt with the two disciples on the way to Emmaus (Luke xxiv. 28). Then our soul goes forth to him. It faints within us; we feel how helpless we are without him; we feel that without him life is not worth living; and we try to constrain him, like those two disciples, saying, in their words, "Abide with us; for it is toward evening, and the day is far spent." We seek him in earnest prayer, sometimes with strong crying and tears. But for a time we cannot find him. We call him, but he gives us no answer. It is in love that he thus deals with us, to arouse us, to make us feel the need of exertion, of active effort. He cannot be found without diligent search. The bride said, in relating her first dream, "By night on my bed I sought him whom my soul loveth" (ch. iii. 1). It is not thus that the soul should seek for Christ, still lying, as it were, upon the bed of spiritual sloth, thinking dreamily of Christ, pleasing itself, perhaps, with the poetry of religion, with the beauty of the Saviour's life, with the comfort which the Scriptures offer. Religion is not a dream; it is not mere poetry, mere love of beauty; it is a life—a life of action and energy—a prolonged effort to imitate Christ, to please Christ, to follow Christ's holy example. The first cry of the really awakened soul is, "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?" (Acts ix. 6). The soul that answers in earnest to the Saviour's call knows and feels instinctively that God has work for us; that that work must be done even in fear and trembling by his help, who worketh in us both to will and to do. The Lord would have us realize this truth; therefore sometimes he withdraws himself, to make us feel that life is blank without him—to make us cry like Job, "Oh that I were as in months past, as in the days when God preserved me; when his candle shined upon my head, and when by his light I walked through darkness; as I was in the days of my youth, when the secret of God was upon my tabernacle!" (Job xxix. 2—4). The contrast makes us feel that God was certainly with us then, even if we cannot feel his presence now. Therefore we seek him, even though for a time we cannot find him. It was so with Job for a season. "He hideth himself," he said; "I cannot see him." He trusted God even in the midst of darkness. "But he knoweth the way that I take: when he hath tried me, I shall come forth as gold" (Job xxiii. 9, 10). So we must believe in his love even when he seems to hide his face from us and not to listen to our prayers. He seemed long to disregard the supplications of the Syro-phenician woman, but at last there came the gracious answer, "O woman, great is thy faith: be it unto thee even as thou wilt."

II. THE SEARCH. 1. *The bride goes forth in her dream.* Again, as in ch. iii. 2, she goes about the city seeking the beloved; again the watchmen found her. They had not been unfriendly in the first dream, though they were not able to guide her in her search. Now they seemed to treat her with cruelty. They smote her, and wounded her, and took her mantle from her. Difficulties will always arise in our search after Christ—sometimes dangers and persecutions: "We must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God." We may perhaps also see another lesson here. The bride has more trouble now in her search than she had on the former occasion. She has been more blamable. Then she had been for a time listless and slothful; now her sin had been not only sloth, but selfish disobedience. She refused at first to open to the beloved; she did not heed his call; she did not heed the hardships which he had suffered. So it is in the Christian life. To sin against light is very grievous; repeated sin makes repentance each time more difficult. We must be watchful always, as the Saviour bids us: "Watch ye therefore: for ye know not when the master of the house cometh, at even, or at midnight, or at the cockcrow, or in the morning: lest coming suddenly he find you sleeping. And what I say unto you I say unto all,

Watch" (Mark xiii. 35—37). We must learn the prayer of the child Samuel, "Speak, Lord; for thy servant heareth." Each time we refuse to listen the old torpor steals more and more over our souls, our slumber becomes deeper, the difficulty of awakening us becomes greater, and repentance more doubtful, more encompassed with dangers, calling for more exertion of will, more determined effort. 2. *The charge.* The bride cannot find her beloved. She seeks the help of the chorus of maidens, the daughters of Jerusalem. She adjures them in her eager anxiety, "If ye find my beloved, what will ye tell him? That I am sick of love." She had used the last words once before (ch. ii. 5), but in a different connection. Then his banner over her was love; then the joy of his love was almost too great for her; she was sick of love. Now it is her longing for the absent bridegroom which produces the heart-sickness which she describes. She fondly thinks that if he only knew her yearning for him he would return; he would forgive all that was past, and bring her again under the banner of his love. So the Christian soul, awakened out of sleep, longs for the Saviour's presence. She feels that she is sick. She needs the great Physician. Without him all is dark; without him there is no spiritual health, no joy, no hope. She seeks him in earnest prayer. She asks for the intercession of Christian friends; she would have them bring her distress and longing before the throne. "My God, my soul is cast down within me;" "My soul thirsteth for God, for the living God;" "Why art thou cast down, O my soul? and why art thou disquieted within me? hope in God: for I shall yet praise him, who is the health of my countenance, and my God."

Vers. 9—16.—*The bride's praise of the bridegroom.* I. *THE QUESTION OF THE DAUGHTERS OF JERUSALEM.* 1. *The bride.* The bride is dreaming still. The chorus seem in her dream to address her again as they had done in ch. i. 8. She is still to them the fairest among women. They are daughters of Jerusalem, the children of the kingdom; and to them the Church, which is the bride of Christ, must appear exceedingly fair. She is not, alas! without spot or blemish now. She recognizes her own faults, her many shortcomings. But the children of the kingdom remember the holiness of the saints departed. They see traces of the beauty of holiness existing always in the Church. Being themselves children of God, they are learning that grace of charity which "believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things; which rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth." And so they regard the beauty of the bride rather than her blemishes; they think more of her yearning love for the Bridegroom than of her past shortcomings. It is a sad mistake, a sin against charity, to refuse to recognize the real goodness of Christian people who have from time to time fallen into various inconsistencies. 2. *The bridegroom.* What is he more than others? "What is thy beloved more than another beloved . . . that thou dost so charge us?" The daughters of Jerusalem know King Solomon well, but in her dream the bride seems to hear them asking the question of the text. She has always loved the bridegroom for himself, not for his crown, his magnificence. She fancies that the maidens of the chorus take the same view of wedded love, and ask what are the distinguishing merits of her beloved. Sometimes, indeed, that question is asked in scorn or in temptation, "What think ye of Christ?" What is he more than other masters? Those other masters have their attractions; they offer more of earthly pleasure, more of present ease. What has Christ to offer? What are his attractions? What are the rewards of his service? "What is thy Beloved more than another beloved?" men say sometimes to the Christian. "What is thy Master to us, that thou dost so adjure us?" But the daughters of Jerusalem, in this second dream of the bride, do not ask the question in scorn or irony. It is asked with a dramatic purpose to give the bride an occasion for dwelling upon the glorious beauty, the many endowments of her beloved. She gladly takes advantage of it.

II. *THE BRIDE'S ANSWER.* 1. *The bridegroom is the chiefest among ten thousand.* "My beloved," she says, "is white and ruddy." We think of him whose "garment was white as snow," and "his throne like the fiery flame" (Dan. vii. 9). Ancient writers have applied the description to our Lord. He was white in his spotless purity; his sacred body was reddened with the precious blood. These are the first thoughts of the Christian when he meditates upon the Lord's perfections—the perfect beauty of his most holy life, the glory of self-sacrifice which sheds a golden light upon his atoning

death. His life exhibited a picture of holiness such as the world had never seen, such as none of its greatest sages had ever imagined. It stands alone in its pure beauty, unique, unapproachable. We know that no human intellect could have imagined such a life; no merely human pen could have described it. It is unlike the accepted moral ideals of the time; it stands apart by itself, immeasurably higher than all beside. But it was his death, he said, that should draw all men unto himself. It was the great love manifested upon the cross that would constrain the best and noblest hearts of all times and countries to live no longer to themselves, but unto him who died for them and rose again (2 Cor. v. 14, 15). Therefore he is our Standard-bearer (as the word rendered "chiefest" seems to mean), our bannered One. He is the Captain of our salvation. He goeth before us, bearing the banner of the cross. The thousands of his disciples follow. And he is the chiefest among ten thousand, marked out and distinguished (as the word may perhaps mean) from all others by his unapproachable holiness, by the infinite power and majesty of his self-sacrificing love. The bride enumerates the various points of excellence which together make up the completeness of the bridegroom's beauty. The Christian loves to meditate upon the various graces which make up the holy beauty of the Saviour's character—his lowliness, his gentleness, his long-suffering kindness, his holy wisdom, his absolute unworldliness, his unselfish devotion to his sacred mission, his meekness, his forbearance, his patience with the many mistakes, the obstinate misunderstandings of his disciples, his endurance, his calm and lofty courage, the majestic bearing which forced even Roman soldiers to exclaim, "Truly this Man was the Son of God." 2. *He is altogether lovely.* The bride sums up her praises of the bridegroom. "His mouth is most sweet: yea, the whole of him is desires" (for this is the literal translation). The Prophet Haggai, using another form of the same Hebrew word, says, "The Desire of all nations shall come" (Hag. ii. 7). Daniel is called three times "a man of desires" (Dan. ix. 23; x. 11, 19). The Lord Jesus Christ is the Desire of all nations. He is the Messiah, the Consolation of Israel, for whose coming so many faithful hearts had yearned. He spake as never man spake. His mouth was all sweetnesses (the literal rendering), both his holy words and his gracious looks. How often we are told significantly that Jesus looked upon his disciples as if that look was (as indeed it must have been) a thing to be remembered all one's life, full of heavenly meaning, full of Divine love! We know what power his words had, what power they have now. The very tones of that most sacred voice must have had an indescribable sweetness. "Jesus said unto her, Mary." That one word was enough. It brought sweet comfort to the penitent, joy unutterable, heart-felt gladness to the mourner. And who can tell the entrancing sweetness of those most blessed words which with all our heart's deepest yearning we long one day to hear, "Come, ye blessed children of my Father"? Therefore we desire his presence now. "The whole of him is desires." Therefore God's people have "a desire to be with Christ" (like St. Paul, Phil. i. 23); for they know that to be with him here, and still more to be with him in the paradise of God, is "far better"—by much very far better, than the greatest of earthly joys. "The whole of him is desires." Every one of those holiest graces which adorn his perfect character should be to us a subject of loving study and adoration, with a longing desire to imitate it and to work it in our poor way into our own hearts by the help of the Holy Spirit. He hath all things who hath Christ. He hath enough, and more than enough, to satisfy all his desires, to fill all the yearnings of his heart. He will count all things else as dross—as very dung—in comparison with the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus his Lord. Then how earnestly we ought to pray that by the grace of God we may be enabled to make those last words of the bride our very own, "This is my Beloved, and this is my Friend, O daughters of Jerusalem." If he is indeed ours, our Beloved, our Friend, our Saviour, then we have all that we can need for our soul's truest blessedness, both for this life and for the life to come.

HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Ver. 1.—*Christ's response.* "I am come," etc. Here we have for the second time the name of "sister" prefixed to that of "spouse," and it seems to teach that this song is
SONG OF SOLOMON. K

not to be understood in any mere dry, literal, earthly sense; but is to be regarded in such spiritual way as, in fact, most readers have regarded it. How prompt Christ's answer is! Cf. Isa. lxxv. 24, "Before they call I will answer," etc. The soul hears the knock of Christ, opens the door, and at once he comes in (Rev. iii.). Cf. Jacob, "Surely the Lord was in this place, and I knew it not;" Mary Magdalene at the sepulchre: "She knew not that it was Jesus." In this verse we learn—

I. SUCH SOUL IS CHRIST'S GARDEN. For it has been chosen, separated, watered, cultivated, adorned, made fruitful.

II. IT HAS CHRIST'S PRESENCE AND IS HIS DELIGHT. 1. The aspirations of such soul proves *his presence*. They are his footprints, though not perceived to be so. Cf. "Their eyes were holden, that they should not know him" (Luke xxiv.). He is the unperceived Author of its holy desires and purposes. 2. *And he delights in it*. He calls it "my garden" (cf. on ch. iv. 9—15).

III. THE ANGELS ARE SUMMONED TO SHARE IN HIS DELIGHT. "Eat, O my friends." Not that we say this address to his "friends" proves this truth, but suggests it. We know that "there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over," etc. (Luke xv.); and see Revelation, *passim*, where the joy of Christ is ever shared in by all heaven. They know what transpires here, and they rejoice in what is joyful. They are the "great cloud of witnesses" by which we are surrounded and surveyed. And what gladdens Christ must gladden them. They "enter into the joy of their Lord." The good conduct of those whom we behold makes *us* glad. Can it be otherwise with them? What great encouragement, therefore, we have in our Christian life in knowing that we can further the joy of our Lord and of the holy angels! Be it ours so to do.—S. C.

Ver. 2.—*The flesh and spirit*. "I sleep, but my heart waketh." The body sleeping, the heart awake.

I. SOMETIMES, AS HERE, BUT ONE OF THESE IS AWAKE. 1. *Here it was the spirit*. (1) This fact an argument against materialism, which insists that the spirit is altogether dependent upon the body. Hence that death ends all. But, as here, the body may be weighed down with sleep, but the mind is active; the body is dead, but the mind alive. Surely, therefore, the mind is something more than some special arrangement of the molecules of the brain. (2) It is well that, if the spirit be willing, the flesh should be weak. As a general rule it is well, for else, unless the wholesome drag of the body were put on, brain-workers would not live out half their days. (3) But it is at times the occasion of much harm. It was so here. It was so to our Lord through his disciples yielding to the sleep that weighed on them. And the flesh is a tyrant which will, if allowed, enslave the spirit. Hence we need to "keep under the body." For: 2. *Often it is only the flesh that is awake*. This a fearful condition. Cf. St. Jude, "These be sensual, not having the Spirit." Men may, do, sink down into gross animalism. It is horrible as well as disgraceful. It was that which led to the destruction of Sodom, of the Canaanites, etc. It is a dread possibility threatening very many. God keep us therefrom!

II. SOMETIMES NEITHER ARE AWAKE. There are many people of whom one would have much more hope if they were a little better or a little worse than they are. They are such as we have just named. They are generally decent people outwardly; they never offend against the conventionalities; they are to be found in all Churches, more's the pity; for they are but caricatures of the Christian character. They are dull, cold, selfish, hard, and spiritually dead. What is to be done with such? They are the despair of the earnest Christian, who would almost be willing that they should fall—were it possible—into some miserable sin if so only their present self-content could be shattered and they made to wake up.

III. SOMETIMES BOTH ARE AWAKE. This the ideal condition. It is that, and more than that, which is meant by the "*Sana mens in corpore sano*." For wherever this condition is, the spirit will, as is right, rule the flesh, having it well in hand, causing it like a properly trained dog to come to heel at once at the word of command (Huxley). The body will be the active, faithful servant of the master will, the spirit of the man. And when that spirit is inspired by the Spirit of God, then that is salvation, which means "health." May such health be ours!—S. C.

Vers. 2—8.—*The dream of Gethsemane.* Under the imagery of this dream devout students have seen pictured forth the pathetic facts of the garden in which our Lord was in agony, and his disciples slept (cf. Matt. xxvi. 40—43 and parallels). We have—

I. THE DISTRESSED SAVIOUR. (Ver. 2.) He desired his disciples to watch with him. He needed and desired their sympathy and the solace which their watchful love would have given him. His soul was troubled. He was as he who is told of here, and to whom the cold drenching dews and the damp chills of the dreary night had caused much distress, and who therefore asks the aid of her whom he loved. So did Jesus seek the aid of those he loved. He had right to expect it. He said to Peter, "Simon, sleepest thou?"—thou so loved, so privileged, so loud in thy profession of love to me, so faithfully warned, sleepest thou? And still the like occurs. The Lord looking for the aid of his avowed disciples, distressed by manifold causes, and that aid not forthcoming, though he has such right to expect it. But he too often finds now what he found then—

II. HIS DISCIPLES ASLEEP. (Ver. 3.) So the spouse here, as the disciples there, and as man now, had composed herself to sleep. The repeated calls of him who by voice and knock sought to arouse her failed. And so did the repeated visits of Jesus to his disciples fail. And he finds the same still. The poor excuses of ver. 3 serve well to set forth the excuses of to-day when he calls on us now to aid and sympathize with him. Who really rouses himself for Christ, and puts forth earnest self-denying endeavour to help his work? No doubt the disciples had their excuses, and Christ then, as now, makes all allowances. But the fact remains the same. Christ wants us, and we are asleep. The sleeper told of in this dream evidently was filled with self-reproach. It can hardly have been otherwise with the disciples, and it is so with us now when in our holier moments the vision of our Lord in all his love for us comes before our hearts. Then we confess, "It is high time to awake out of sleep."

III. THE SORROWFUL AWAKENING. The sleeper told of here awoke (ver. 5) to find her beloved gone. And in Gethsemane the disciples awoke at last. In this song (ver. 5) we are told how he had thrust in his hand by the latch-hole (see Exposition). But he had withdrawn it, as she whom he had appealed to had not awaked; and, finding this, her heart was touched, and she rose to open to him. And doubtless when the disciples saw the gleam of the lanterns and heard their Lord's word, "Arise," and the tramp of the armed multitude who had come to arrest him, then their hearts were touched, and they arose. But it was too late. And like as the sleeper here (ver. 5) did not withhold tokens of her affection—she richly perfumed herself, her hands especially, in token thereof as the Oriental manner was—so, too, the disciples in their way made plain their love for their Lord. They would have fought for him—Peter drew his sword at once—had he let them. But the opportunity for real service was gone. The sleeper of this song tells how her heart smote her when her beloved spoke, and we may well believe that it was so when the disciples heard their Lord's voice. But in both cases it was too late. Who does not know the sorrow that smites the soul when we realize that opportunities of succouring, serving, and making glad the heart of some beloved one have been allowed to pass by us unused, and now cannot be recalled? Oh, if we had only been awake then!

IV. THE UNAVAILING SEARCH. (Ver. 6.) Cf. Peter's tears; the sorrow of the disciples. The reproaches of conscience—they were the watchmen who met and sternly dealt with her who is told of here, and made her ashamed. Such failures in duty are followed by unavailing regrets and prayers. "Oh that I knew where I might find him!" Conscience, the Word of God, faithful pastors,—these are as the watchmen who meet such souls, and scant comfort is or ought to be had from them, but only deserved rebuke and reproach. It is all true. What is told of in this verse must have happened then, does happen now. Our Lord has left us, our joy is gone, we cannot find him, tears and prayers and search seem all in vain.

V. THE HELP OF THE HOLY WOMEN. (Ver. 8 and ch. vi. 1.) It was wise of the sleeper, now awake, to solicit help from the friends of her beloved. And in the Gospel narrative it is plain that the holy women who loved and ministered to our Lord when on earth were a great help to his sorrowing disciples. They were last at the cross and first at the sepulchre; they first brought the glad tidings that he was risen. They represent

his true Church. And the sorrowing soul cannot do better than seek the sympathy and prayers of those who love the Lord. Restoration often comes by such means. Here is one of their intercessions: "That it may please thee to strengthen such as do stand, to comfort and help the weak-hearted, to raise up them that fall, and finally to beat down Satan under our feet." Blessed is he who hath intercessions such as that offered for him. But better still not to need them.—S. C.

Ver. 9.—*The supremacy of Christ.* "What is thy beloved more," etc.? *The world asks this question.* Upon the answer the Church gives depends whether the world remains as it is—alienated from Christ or drawn to him. If the Church makes it evident that Christ is "chiefest among ten thousand" and "altogether lovely," then the blessed era of the world's conversion will be at hand. *The Church asks this question* of those whom she receives into communion. It should be clear that Christ is enthroned in the hearts of those whom she receives. They are not really members of the Church unless it is so. *We should ask ourselves this question*, so that we may see to it that we are giving him the chief place in our hearts, and that in all things he has the pre-eminence. *The question may be answered in various ways.* As for example—

I. BY COMPARISON OF CHRIST WITH THE OBJECTS OF WORSHIP IN OTHER FAITHS. (Cf. Hardwick's 'Christ and other Masters.') There have been and are "gods many and lords many;" it is well to compare and contrast with them the all-worthiness of him whom we serve. Missionaries to heathen lands do well to make themselves acquainted with the points of contrast and resemblance—"the unconscious prophecies of heathendom"—which they will find in the faiths they seek to supplant by the pure faith of Christ. Often will they find in such study that he is "the Desire of all nations."

II. BY COMPARING THE OBJECTS OF MEN'S PRESENT PURSUITS AND AFFECTION WITH CHRIST, who is the Beloved of the believer's heart. Some set their affections only on earthly things—wealth, power, pleasure, fame, the favour of men. Some on those whom God has given them to love—wife, lover, children, friends. It is well to see how Christ surpasses all these, and deserves the chief place in our hearts: such place, when given to him, will not consign to a lower one than they before filled those objects of our lawful love; but, on the contrary, will uplift and enlarge our love for them, making it better both for them and us. But we prefer to take—

III. THE ANSWER GIVEN IN THIS SONG ITSELF. See vers. 10—16, translating its rich imagery into the plain language of "the truth as it is in Jesus." She who was asked this question replied by giving the description of her beloved which we have in these verses. And, translated, they suggest these reasons for counting Christ chief of all. 1. *He is the perfect Pattern and Sacrifice that my soul needs.* (Ver. 10.) It is a representation of the beauty of perfect physical health: "white and ruddy" (cf. 1 Sam. xvi. 12; xvii. 42). Fit type, therefore, of that perfect moral and spiritual health which we behold in Christ, and which constitutes him our all-perfect Pattern. His perfect sacrifice also has been seen in this same description, and it has been compared with that similar description of him in Rev. v. 6, "a Lamb that had been slain." Not alone the whiteness of purity, but "ruddy" as with the stain of his precious sacrificial blood. 2. *He is God in his essential Person.* (Ver. 11.) Gold is, in the sacred symbolism of Scripture, ever associated with that which is of God. The head of fine gold suggests, therefore, that which St. Paul says (1 Cor. xi. 3), "The head of Christ is God." 3. *Yet he consecrated himself for our sakes.* The unshorn hair, "his locks are bushy," was the sign of consecration (cf. the vow of Nazarite). 4. *And is evermore mighty to save.* Youth and strength are signified by the "raven" hair. Whilst others wax old as doth a garment, he is "the same yesterday, and to-day, and for ever" (cf. Ps. cii. 27). 5. *Gentleness, purity, and the love and light of the Holy Spirit beam in his eyes.* (Ver. 12.) Cf. New Testament notices of the look of our Lord—how he looked with compassion, how he "looked upon Peter" (Luke xxii. 61). 6. *To see his face is heaven.* (Ver. 13.) To walk in the light of that countenance, to behold it fair and fragrant as sweet flowers. 7. *And from his lips drop words of love.* Men wondered at the gracious words which he spake. "Never man spake like this Man." "Grace is poured into thy lips" (Ps. xlv. 2; Isa. l. 4). 8. *He is invested with the authority of God.* (Ver. 14.) "His hands are rings of gold," etc. The ring was the signet and seal of authority. "He spake as one having authority;" "I by the finger of God cast out devils;" "All

things are put under him." 9. *Stainless purity and heavenly mindedness marked his life.* (Ver. 14.) The body, or rather the robe that covered it, as bright ivory, tells of the purity and perfectness of his life; the heavenly blue of the "sapphires" is the type of heaven. His conversation was in heaven. He walked with God. 10. *He was firm and steadfast in God.* (Ver. 15.) The legs, as "pillars of marble," tell of his steadfast strength; the "sockets of fine gold," of the Divine basis and foundation of that strength. 11. *Full of majesty and beauty,* as Lebanon and its cedars. Cf. his appearance at the Transfiguration; to the guards at his rising from the dead. 12. *And yet full of grace and benignity.* (Ver. 16.) "His mouth"—his smile—"most sweet." The little children nestled in his arms. The poor fallen women read the benignity of that look. Publicans and sinners crowded round him, irresistibly drawn by his exceeding grace. 13. *No human tongue can tell how fair he is.* "Yea, he is altogether lovely." The words tell of the giving up the task, of ceasing from the hopeless endeavour, to fitly fully set forth her beloved. She could only say, "He is altogether," etc.

CONCLUSION. Such was the answer given when asked, "What is thy beloved more," etc.? (ver. 9). And such answer is the best. The testimony of the loving heart to what Jesus is to such heart is more convincing than any argument. May such testimony be ours!—S. C.

Ver. 16.—"*Altogether lovely.*" We apply these words to the Lord Jesus Christ, and affirm that they are true of him. May he grant us grace to see that they are so! And we remark—

I. THAT WHETHER WE BELIEVE THEM OR NOT, THEY ARE ASSUREDLY TRUE. *All generations* have confessed them true. The hero of one age is not the hero of another; but Christ is the Beloved of all ages. Abraham saw his "day and was glad." Prophets and psalmists beheld him, and to them all it was a beatific vision. They sang of him as "fairer than the children of men;" they exhausted all imagery of beauty and delight to tell of him. And since he came, apostles, martyrs, and generation after generation of those who have loved and toiled, and often died, for him, have confessed the truth of our text. And to-day myriads of souls are aglow with love to him, and gladly take up the same confession. "The goodly fellowship of the prophets, the glorious company of the apostles, the noble army of martyrs, the holy Church throughout all the world, doth acknowledge" him. And so *will all ranks and classes of men.* The rich and the poor, the lofty and the low, have met together in this confession. And *all ages*, the young and the old. And *all lands*, north, south, east, and west. And *all characters and dispositions.* See how varied the characters of those who gathered round our Lord, and of the saints of the Bible, and of all ages. And seen *in all aspects*, he still receives the same confession. As a child, as a man, as a teacher, as a sufferer, in his death, in his resurrection, in his intercession for us in heaven. With the choicest works of art, with the fairest scenes of nature, with the most glorious buildings that men have reared, all depends on the point of view from which we behold them. Seen from the right standpoint, they are beautiful and glorious; seen from another, they excite no admiration, they may appear the reverse of beautiful. And so with the characters of men. They may be excellent in some things, but the best of men are but men at the best. There are faults and flaws in the fairest human soul. But with our Lord, see him how, when, and whence we may, to the heart that loves him he is still "altogether lovely." The testimony has come from every quarter, from every age; it is full, clear, complete, varied, reiterated, and has been tested and tried and found true always and everywhere. The holiest saints gaze on the perfect loveliness of their Lord as the one model to which they would be conformed, but from which they own they are far removed. His enemies themselves being judges confess that "they find no fault in him." He is as a lamb without blemish and without spot. But, alas! *to many he is not this*; they see in him no form or comeliness, no beauty that they should desire him. Therefore we say of these words of our text—

II. THAT SINCE THEY ARE TRUE WE OUGHT TO SEE THEM TO BE TRUE. If beautiful music, or works of art, or scenes in nature, do not impress men with their beauty, we pity such persons, we deem them lacking in a great good. And if they have no appreciation of moral beauty, we do not merely pity, but we blame. What, then, must we say of those who fail to see any beauty in him who is "altogether lovely"? But what

is it that hinders in any soul that fails to see in Christ what the holiest and best of men always and everywhere have seen in him? Well, *if men will not look* they will not see. And this is one hindrance. The portraiture of Christ is given perfectly in the Gospels, but if men will not look into them, read them, and consider them, what wonder that they fail to see? And to see him as *altogether* lovely, that demands that we *look long and attentively*, that we study the portraiture that is given, and that we seek to be rid of all that would hinder the truth of our seeing. But these persons never do this. Moreover, to see him as he is, we must *stay with him*. You cannot know a fellow-man by a short interview. To know a man you must live with him. And so if we would really know Christ and see him as his saints have seen him, we must live with him, keep in his company, commune with him and be in daily intercourse with him. And we must be *in right relationship to him*; we must serve him, for that is his due. And then as we work for him, his true character will dawn upon us more and more; and we, too, shall come to see him as altogether lovely. Therefore—

III. LET US RESOLVE THAT WE WILL THUS SEE HIM. To encourage us herein let us think of the results and recompenses of such beholding him. We shall come: 1. *To resemble him*. For we shall come to love him, and nothing so assimilates character as love. 2. *To rejoice in him*. Of common earthly things the well-known line says, "A thing of beauty is a joy for ever." But of our Lord to behold *him*, it is the very joy of heaven. For there "they shall see his face." 3. *Rest*. The worries and frets of life will vanish in that beatific vision, like as even an unlovely landscape looks beautiful when the bright sun shines upon it. And so will it be with what is unlovely in life, that in itself irks and distresses us. If we see *his face*, if that vision of perfect loveliness shines before us, all will share more or less in that. 4. *Reap for him*, as never we did before. With our souls full of his love, even the stammering tongue will become eloquent, and our words will tell, and we shall wonder and rejoice to see how our children, our people, our friends and neighbours, listen to us and believe, and turn to him from whom we cannot and would not turn away. And at last we shall be: 5. *Received by him* into his own blessed presence, where we shall own that "the half was not told" us, and even the best of our seeing was but as through a glass, darkly.—S. C.

Ver. 2.—*Languid life*. The experiences of the saints are useful guide-posts on the heavenly road. They help by way of counsel, caution, inspiration, comfort, warning. Some experiences recorded serve as lighthouses, some as beacons. A wise pilgrim will not despise any one of them. If a traveller is about to cross Africa from west to east, he will not fail to ask what were the fortunes and experiences of those who have already made that perilous journey. He will learn from their mistakes and their sufferings what to avoid. He will learn from their successes how far he should tread in their footsteps. The journey is not so difficult now as it was to the first adventurer. A similitude this of the heavenly pilgrimage. Others have passed this way before us. We are indebted to them for the record of their checkered fortunes. They tell us how they climbed the hill Difficulty. They tell us how they were overtaken with the foe unwarily. They tell us how they fought, and by what methods they conquered. They tell us how at times spiritual drowsiness crept over them; how they bemoaned their folly; how they aroused themselves afresh. Then we discover that this infirmity is not peculiar to ourselves. We do not deny ourselves the consolation that we really belong to Christ, though we have been foolish enough to sleep in his service. There is blight upon the tree, and a reduction of fruitfulness; nevertheless, the tree has life in its roots. Blemishes are upon me; still I am in Christ.

I. HERE IS A STATE OF INSENSIBILITY CONFESSED. "I sleep." It is a figure of speech borrowed from the sensations of the body. Our physical nature needs periodic sleep. But many indolent persons sleep when they do not need it; and it is this needless sleep—this ignoble sleep—that is here described. Unlike the body, the soul requires no sleep. 1. *It is a state of inaction*. For the time being sight and hearing are suspended. All bodily sensations are awaiting. The sleeper is unconscious of all that is occurring round about him. Sleep is the brother of death. So, if the soul sleeps, it is a transient death. Our best Friend is near, but we cannot see him. If he speaks, we do not hear his voice. We have no enjoyment of his friendship. The sun of God's favour may shine

upon our path; we do not perceive it. We have no conscious communion with Jesus. We find no nourishment in the sacred Word. The ordinances of the sanctuary have lost their charm. We do not grow in grace. We make no progress heavenward. It is inglorious inaction. 2. *It is a blamable condition.* We are servants of God, and to sleep is to waste our Master's time. It is an act of unfaithfulness. The Son of God has entrusted to us the campaign against error and sin; yet, lo! we sleep on the battlefield. Tens of thousands round about us know nothing of God's salvation; and yet we sleep. Satan is busy ensnaring men in the pitfalls of vice; and yet we sleep. The heathen world is waiting to hear Heaven's gospel; now and again a voice booms across the sea, "Come over and help us!" yet we sleep. Our own crown is imperilled; yet we sleep. This brief life is slipping from us; the day of service will soon terminate; the great assize is close at hand; yet we sleep. Is it not matter for self-condemnation? 3. *It is a state of peril.* A time of sleep is the time for robbers to do their evil work; and we imperil the heavenly treasures when we slothfully sleep. Our wily adversary lies in wait for our unguarded moments. If he can breathe upon the Church a spirit of slumber, he has gained a great advantage for himself. To lull Christians into sleep is his most successful stratagem. In one of his parables Jesus tells us that "while men slept, the enemy sowed his tares." Saul, the King of Israel, exposed his life to imminent danger when he slept in the cave. If a man is insensible to the deadly paralysis that is creeping over him, he is not far from death. And if we Christians become insensible to our sin, or insensible to our dependence on Christ, or insensible to God's claims, we are in great danger. What if God should say to us, "They prefer their sleep: let them alone"! Then our sleep would deepen into the collapse of death. 4. *Spiritual sleep entails loss.* How much of spiritual blessing the eleven lost, when they slept in Gethsemane, no tongue can tell. We lose the approval of a good conscience, and that is a serious loss. We lose the approving smile of Christ, and that is a loss far greater. We lose the vigour of our piety. We lose the freshness of enthusiasm. We lose courage. We lose spiritual enjoyment. We lose self-respect. A sense of shame sweeps over the soul. The temperature of our love has gone down. Instead of pressing forward, we have gone backward. It is a loss immeasurable.

II. HERE IS A VERY PROMISING SIGN. "My heart waketh." How true is this record to the facts in ourselves! The heart is the spiritual organ that wakes first. For the heart is the seat of feeling, desire, and affection. The heart must move before the will, and the will before the feet. 1. *This language denotes disquietude.* The man is neither quite asleep nor quite awake. This is an uncomfortable state. It denotes a divided heart. It is not altogether with Christ nor altogether with the world. We cannot endure the thought of leaving Christ, and so forego the hope of heaven. We like some of the experiences of religion. But then we love self in about an equal proportion. We grasp as much pleasure as we can. Hence this vacillation. This is a great loss of Christ's friendship; a sin to treat Jesus thus. This self-indulgence now will produce a large fruitage of remorse by-and-by. 2. *It is a good sign that this indecision is recognized.* It might have been otherwise. The sin might have been unfelt. Conscience might have been drugged with the opiate of self-confidence. When a Christian perceives his own imperfections, and confesses them, there is manifestly some spiritual life within. His state is not hopeless. God's Spirit has not withdrawn his activities from that man. If he will diligently follow the light which he has, it will lead him to his true home and rest. 3. *This language indicates desire for a better state.* The heart is the seat of desire, and, thank God, the heart is awake. If this desire be not overpowered by stronger desires of an evil sort, all will yet be well. This desire, unhindered, will work like leaven, till it has leavened the whole man. It will disturb the man's peace until it is gratified. This desire is the work of God's good Spirit; and, if we will only yield to his quickening influence, he will make desire ripen into resolve, and resolve into action. A man's desires are a gauge of the man's character. "As a man thinketh in his heart, so is he." 4. *It is another good sign when a sleepy Christian recognizes Christ's voice.* "It is the voice of my beloved that knocketh." The bride in our text not merely heard a sound, but she was so far awake as to know that it was her lover's voice. It is a fact that we hear the voice of one we know, and of one we love, much sooner than we hear the voice of a stranger. A mother will hear the cry of

her babe sooner than she will hear the cry of another child. If we hear our Master's voice, then faith is not asleep. "Faith cometh by hearing." Of all Christ's sheep *this* is a sure mark; they hear Christ's voice. "A stranger will they not follow, for they know not the voice of strangers." We know well that if any one strives to arouse us out of sleep, it will be our best Friend. No one else will take such pains to bless us. Ah! if I hear in my soul a rousing voice, if I am moved to holier aspiration, I instinctively say, "It is the voice of my Beloved that knocketh." Then ought I most gladly to respond, "Speak, Lord; for thy servant heareth."

III. HERE IS A GRACIOUS CALL. This is the reason why the Christian's heart is awake: Jesus calls and knocks. A Christian cannot sleep under such an appeal. 1. *Christ's whole Person engages in this call.* He not only speaks with his voice; he knocks with his hand. He knocks by the preaching of faithful ministers. He knocks by the counsels of a pious friend. He knocks by his afflictive providences. He knocks by his royal bounties. Every fresh gift is a fresh appeal. He knocks by many a startling event that happens about us. He knocks at the door of memory, at the door of feeling, at the door of conscience, at the door of affection. He tries every door, if so be his kindly errand may succeed. He has too much earnest love for us easily to desist. Such love is born, not on earth, but in heaven. 2. *He not only knocks; he speaks.* He appeals to our intelligent nature. He will not use force or compulsion. That were unseemly on the part of love. Jesus will use measures equally potent, but of a winsome, spiritual sort. He speaks to the heart of saints in a "still small voice." There is a latent power in his gentleness. When God spake to despondent Elijah in the desert, he did not speak in earthquake, or in thunder, or in whirlwind, but in a soft human voice. No sound breaks on the ear; the message goes straight to the conscience and to the heart. Have we not, in hours of retirement, often heard the music of his voice, gently chiding us for neglect, or sweetly moving us to closer fellowship? We may resist the appeal, but, alas! we increase our guilt; we cheat our souls of joy. 3. *He addresses us by the most endearing epithets.* "My sister, my love, my dove, my undefiled." Every argument that can move us to a better life he will employ. The whole vocabulary of human speech he will exhaust, to assure us of his interest. He reminds us of our many professions of attachment. He brings to our remembrance our plighted troth. Did we not at one time say that we were his? Have we not pledged ourselves to be faithful over and over again? What an array of perjured vows lie on his book? Can we think of them without self-condemnation? 4. *He appeals to us on the ground of his deeds and endurances.* "My head is filled with dew, and my locks with the drops of the night." It is the pathetic picture of a friend who has been refused customary hospitality, and who has spent the cold night appealing for admission. This is the picture, and the meaning thereof is plain. Jesus Christ has to endure hardship and pain through our self-indulgence and our spiritual stupor. Alas! we shut him out from his own temple. We shut out our best Friend. After all that he has done for us, yea, suffered for us, in proof of his strong affection, shall we treat him with cold neglect, with heartless contempt? Shall he be all ardour, and shall we be frigid as an iceberg? Shall his nature be all love, and shall ours be all selfishness? Then we are not like him. Is not this to "crucify our Lord afresh, and put him to open shame"? Surely here is a test of character. He who can hear these gracious appeals unmoved, hath never felt the stirrings of the new life; he hath no part in the covenant of grace.—D.

Vers. 9—16.—*The personal excellences of Jesus.* A man is always greater than his works, for his best work is only a part of himself. As there is more virtue in the tree than ever comes out in the fruit, so there is some quality in the man that has not come forth in his deed. The same is true in larger measure with respect to God. If there is sublimity in his works, how much more in himself! The redemptive work of Jesus is stupendous, yet his love is more stupendous still. That love of his was not exhausted in the great atoning act; it was only disclosed, and made visible. We admire his incarnation, his benevolent labour, his voluntary suffering, his humiliating death, his strange ascension. We love him in return for his great love to us. Yet his greatest claim to our admiration and our praise is, not his deeds of kindness, but himself. His character is so inlaid with excellences that it demands all the worship

of our hearts. "He is altogether lovely." Not simply is his doctrine nourishing, his example inspiring, his self-sacrifice attractive, his compassion winsome, but his very Person is an enchantment and a charm. At the outset of our acquaintance we "shall love him, because he first loved us;" nor will his compassion ever fail to be a spiritual magnet, which shall win and hold our hearts. Yet we gradually rise to a higher level of appreciation. We prize him for what he is in himself, even more than for what he has been unto us. Our best love goes out to him, because he is so transcendently good; so worthy to be loved. Love of gratitude comes first—an early fruit of the Christian life; but by-and-by, under the culture of the Divine Husbandman, there shall be the sweeter, richer love of complacent delight.

I. WE HAVE HERE A PERTINENT INQUIRY. "What is thy beloved more than another beloved?" 1. *This may be the language of intellectual curiosity.* The inquiry about Jesus is more eager and widespread to-day than in any epoch since his birth. During the last twenty-five years more than twenty-five lives of Jesus Christ have appeared in the English language. Some inquiries are of a sceptical sort—are not honest searches after truth. Some inquirers hope to reduce Jesus of Nazareth to the level of a common mortal. In a past age, Lord Lyttelton and Gilbert West essayed to demolish the Divine credentials of Jesus; but they were conquered by the evidence, and became disciples. Many inquirers simply attempt to solve an old and curious question, "Is Jesus more than man?" They are not seeking any practical issues. Hence they obtain no success. 2. *Or it may be the language of simple surprise.* The kingdom of Christ hath in it many nominal adherents. For earthly advantages come from professing an attachment to Christ. It wins respect from men. It brings good reputation. It aids success in our worldly calling. Therefore many persons avow outwardly an indolent belief in Jesus Christ as Lord who yet can give no reasonable account of their belief. These see with wonder the ardour and zeal of genuine disciples. They smile when they hear the effusive and familiar language of true saints. They deem it religious extravagance. They label Christ's friends as fanatics. "Our Christ," say they, "is a Being far removed from us. We offer him our set praises and our set prayers on the sabbath. We hope for his rewards by-and-by. What is your Beloved more than ours?" 3. *Or it may be the language of nascent desire.* The speaker has seen what a real and present Friend Jesus is to his adopted. To them his friendship is sweeter far than the friendship of a thousand others. His name is music, fragrance, health, life. His help is a real blessing, which gladdens every hour. His favour is a present heaven. They consult him in their distress, and he brings to them prompt sympathy and unerring wisdom. They find in him a restfulness of spirit under every circumstance, a peace of soul no one else can impart. Having Jesus within them, their life is transfigured. This is a mystery to the bulk of men. So one and another yearn to attain this joyous life, and they ask in a spirit of sincere desire, "What is thy Beloved more than another beloved?"

II. WE HAVE HERE A PARTICULAR DESCRIPTION OF THE BRIDEGROOM'S PERSON. "My beloved is white and ruddy, the chiefest among ten thousand;" "He is altogether lovely." 1. *Generally, he is pre-eminent.* "Chiefest among ten thousand." Among all the tribes of men he stands alone, for he is sinless. He is pre-eminent among the angels, for they are only servants of the great King; and, when the Father "brought his Only Begotten into the world, he said, Let all the angels of God worship him." Among the gods of the nations he stands pre-eminent in power and in righteousness. They are dumb vanities, while he is absolute Power, eternal Righteousness, essential Love. In respect of the Godhead, he is eminent for condescension, for tender sympathy, and for self-sacrifice. Among all friends he stands pre-eminent, for "he is a Brother born for adversity." Among all orators he is pre-eminent for eloquence, for "never man spake like this Man." Among philanthropists he takes the highest place, for "he gave himself for us." "For our sakes he became poor." "In all things he has the pre-eminence." 2. *He is altogether lovely as the Son of God.* Such perfect Sonship was never before seen. His reverence for his Father was unique, was beautiful. At the tender age of twelve, his delight was "to be about his Father's business." His spirit of childlike trust was perfect. He is "the Leader and Finisher of faith." During all the years of his busy life he "had not where to lay his head," yet he declared that it was his "meat and his drink to do the will of his Father in heaven." His own

explanation of his ceaseless benevolence was this: "I do always the things that please him." As he entered the black cloud of the final tragedy, he interrogates himself thus: "What shall I say? Father, save me from this hour?" But instantly he adds, "Father, glorify thy Name." Filial reverence, filial trust, filial love and submission in him were complete—things till then unknown on earth. "Though he were a Son, yet learned he obedience by the things which he suffered." Upon such sacred Sonship the Father expressed audible and public approbation—expressed it again and again: "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." "My Beloved is white and ruddy"—the quality of perfect health. 3. *His personal qualities transcend all comparison.* Every virtue, human and Divine, blossom in his soul. There's not an excellence ever seen in men or in angels that is not found, the perfect type, in Jesus Christ. For nearly nineteen centuries shrewd men have turned their microscopes on the Person of Jesus, if haply they could find the shadow of a spot. The acutest eye has failed, and Jesus stands before the world to-day a paragon of moral perfection. His character is better known and better appreciated to-day than in any previous age. Modern criticism confesses at the bar of the universe, "I find no fault in him." As all the colours of the prism meet and blend in the pure rays of light, so all noble qualities blend in our beloved Friend. As in a royal garden or in the fields of nature there is unspeakable wealth of flowery bloom, all forms and colours composing a very paradise of beauty, so is it in the character of Jesus. Other men were noted for some special excellence—Moses for meekness, Job for patience, Daniel for constancy; but Jesus has every quality of goodness, and has each quality full-orbed and resplendent. "Whatever things are true, pure, just, lovely, honourable, of good report," they all unite in Jesus. Ransack all the homes of humanity if you will, cull out all the excellences that embellish the seraphim, and you shall not find a single grace that does not adorn our Immanuel. Yea, his soul is the seed-bed of all the goodness that flourishes in heaven or on earth. "He is the Firstborn of every creature." The unfallen, no less than the fallen, adore him as worthy to be worshipped. "He has by inheritance a more excellent name than they." As the stars of heaven pale their ineffectual fires when the sun rises, so in the presence of Jesus Christ even Gabriel veils his face and bends his knee. Human thought fails to reach the height of this great theme, and we can simply repeat the ancient words, "Altogether lovely." 4. *He is incomparable in all the offices he fills.* A splendid theme for contemplation is Jesus in his manifold offices. As a Teacher he has no rival, for he still speaks "as one having authority." "In him are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge;" and, with infinite patience, he unfolds these treasures to us in picture and parable, as we "are able to hear them." Who is so competent to teach us heavenly things as the living Truth? "The words he speaks are spirit and life." "His lips are as lilies, dropping sweet-smelling myrrh." As a Priest, does he not excel all who went before him? Other priests had to offer oblation first for their own sin. Jesus had no personal sin. Other priests "could not continue by reason of death." Jesus has no successor; his priesthood is perpetual. The best of earthly priests could only appear in material temples, gorgeous in marble and in gold though some of them were. Our great High Priest has gone on our behalf into the very presence of God. Our Advocate with the Father cannot fail, because he is "Christ the Righteous." And, as a King, Jesus has no compeer. The sceptre belongs to him by eternal right. He is a King by birth. He is a King by reason of inherent fitness. Every fibre of his nature is kingly. He is a King through conquest. Every foe is, or shall be, vanquished. He is a King by universal acclamation. Angels and men combine to accord to him the highest place—"King of kings, and Lord of lords." As the good Shepherd, he has given his very "life for the sheep." As the Husband of his Church, he is perfect in fidelity; for "having loved the Church, he gave himself for her, and has cleansed her for himself a glorious Church, not having spot, nor wrinkle, nor any such thing." View our Master in any aspect or in any office, and he is full of inexpressible charm. "He is altogether lovely."

III. WE HAVE HERE THE IDEA OF INTIMATE RELATIONSHIP. "This is my beloved, and this is my friend, O daughters of Jerusalem." 1. *This means high appreciation.* The believer in this passage means to say, "I have endeavoured to describe my heavenly Friend, but I have failed. I have mentioned some of the features of his character, yet I scarce think that *these* are the most precious. The theme is above me.

I cannot do it justice. Mayhap I shall only lower Jesus in the estimation of mankind. Still, I have said enough to establish his superlative excellence, and to account for my enthusiastic love." Ah! who can adequately portray the Person of God's dear Son? Can Gabriel? Can Michael? Can Paul, after centuries of sweet companionship with him in heaven? I trow not! "What think ye of Christ?" is a question, likely enough, often asked one of another among the dwellers in glory. By-and-by we "shall see him as he is." At present we have only imperfect glimpses of his glorious Person; nevertheless, we know enough to warrant our profound admiration, to awaken our unflinching faith, and to excite into activity our most passionate love. 2. *This means appropriation.* This Being of transcendent excellence I claim as "my Friend." Many of his august perfections seem to forbid my bold familiarity. Sometimes it seems like presumption to say this. But then his simple condescension to me, his genuine sympathy, his unlimited grace, his covenant with the fallen, "without respect of person," his repeated assurances of love for me—yes, for me—encourage me to call him mine. He has said to me, "Thou art mine;" is not, therefore, the converse also a fact? Must he not be mine? And if at present I am quite unworthy to claim this relationship, will he not, by his great love, make me worthy? His love would not find full scope for its exercise, if it were not for such an unworthy object as I. Though deserving of hell, I should cast fresh dishonour on his royal goodness did I not believe his promise, did I not accept his friendship. Yes, "he is mine." 3. *This means the public avowal of Christ.* "This is my Beloved, and this is my Friend." It is as if the Christian meant to say, "I have chosen Jesus to be my Friend, and I call the universe to witness the fact. No other being was competent to save me, and I publicly pledge myself loyalty to serve him." Such avowal is a fine trait in a renewed soul. To profess loyalty to Jesus while no love glows for him in the breast—this is an offence to him, a smoke in his eyes, a spear-thrust in his heart. Nothing to him is so odious as hypocrisy. But when there is sincere love to our Immanuel, though it be accompanied with self-diffidence and timidity, there ought to be an open avowal of our attachment. It is but little that we can do to make the Saviour known and loved by others, therefore that little should be done with gladness of heart and with unwavering fidelity. Nor can we ever forget the words of our Well-beloved, "Whosoever shall deny me before men, him will I also deny before my Father which is in heaven."—D.

Ver. 1.—*Hospitality and festivity.* This verse is the central stanza of the Song of Songs. It brings before us the wedding-feast, the crisis of the dramatic interest of the poem. The bride is welcomed to her regal home; friends and courtiers are gathered together to celebrate the joyful union; and festivity and mirth signalize the realization of hope and the recompense of constancy. Under such a similitude inspired writers and Christian teachers have been wont to set forth the happy union between the Son of God and the humanity to which, in the person of the Church, he has joined himself in spiritual and mystical espousals.

I. THE PRESENCE OF THE DIVINE BRIDEGROOM AND HOST. "I," says he, "have come into my garden." It is the presence, first visibly in the body, and since invisibly in the Spirit, of the Son of God, which is alike the salvation and the joy of man.

II. THE GREETING OF THE DIVINELY CHOSEN BRIDE. The language in which this greeting is conveyed is very striking: "My sister-spouse." It is the language of affection, and at the same time of esteem and honour. It speaks of congeniality of disposition as well as of union of heart. Christ loved the Church, as is evident from the fact of his giving himself for it and to it, and as is no less evident from his perpetual revelation of his incomparable kindness and forbearance. "All that I have," says he, "is thine."

III. THE PROVISION OF DIVINE BOUNTY. How often, in both Old and New Testament Scripture, are the blessings of a spiritual nature which Divine goodness has provided for mankind set forth under the similitude of a feast! Satisfaction for deep-seated needs, gratification of noblest appetite, are thus suggested. The peculiarity in this passage is the union of the two ideas of marriage and of feasting—a union which we find also in our Lord's parabolic discourses. We are reminded that the Divine Saviour who calls the Church his own, and who undertakes to make it worthy of him—

self, provides for its life and health, its nourishment and happiness, all that infinite wisdom itself can design and prepare.

IV. THE INVITATION OF DIVINE HOSPITALITY. "Eat, O friends; drink, yea, drink abundantly, O beloved!" Thus does the Lord of the feast ever, in the exercise of his benevolent disposition, address those whose welfare he desires to promote. This invitation on the part of the Lord Christ is (1) sincere and cordial; (2) considerate and kind; (3) liberal and generous.

V. THE FELLOWSHIP OF DIVINE JOY. True happiness is to be found in the spiritual companionship of Christ, and in the intimacy of spiritual communion with him whom the soul loveth. The aspiration of the heart to which Christ draws near in his benignant hospitality has been thus well expressed: "Pour out, Lord, to me, and readily will I drink; then all thirst after earthly things shall be destroyed; and I shall seek to thirst only for the pleasures which are at thy right hand for evermore." The spiritual satisfaction and festivity enjoyed by the Church on earth are the earnest and the pledge of the purer and endless joy to be experienced hereafter by those who shall be called to "the marriage supper of the Lamb."—T.

Ver. 2.—*The heart that waketh.* Thus opens the recital of a dream—a dream which was the confused expression of deep feelings, of affection, of apprehension, of anxiety. The expression is poetical; the body slumbers, yet the mind and its feelings are not altogether asleep. A slumbering heart is inaccessible to the Divine approach, the Divine appeal, the Divine mercy. It is well when the heart waketh, for the wakeful heart is—

I. PROMPT TO HEAR THE VOICE OF HEAVEN. The mother awakes at once when the babe cries; the surgeon wakes at once when the bell rings; the nurse wakes at once when the patient asks for medicine or for food. When the heart is awake, the ear hearkens, the eye is ready to uncloze, the sleeper is half alert and prepared to rise. The heart that loves the Saviour is prompt to hear any word of his, whether it be a word of encouragement, a word of admonition, a word of command. "Speak, Lord; for thy servant heareth," denotes the vigilant attitude, the true preparedness of the soul.

II. PROMPT TO RESPOND TO THE LOVE OF CHRIST. The true heart is not wakeful to every call, to every presence, to every appeal. It is mutual love that ensures a heart that waketh. The Christian gives love for love. "We love him, because he first loved us." Hence the very sound of Jesus' name enkindles upon the devout and grateful heart the flame of pure and fervent affection. Nothing that concerns the Lord is indifferent to the Christian; for his heart is awake to every token of the Divine presence, and eager for the spiritual communion which is the privilege of the friends of Jesus.

III. WATCHFUL AGAINST THOUGHTS AND PURPOSES OF EVIL. The deep slumber into which the careless may fall is likely to render them a prey to the assaults of the tempter. Christ found his three nearest friends sleeping in the garden whilst he was enduring his bitter conflict. "Watch and pray," was his admonition, "lest ye enter into temptation." As soldiers during a campaign must take rest in sleep, yet, as it were, with one eye and one ear open, so that they may spring up, and fly to arms, if the foe approach them under cover of the darkness; so must the Christian take even his refreshing rest and recreation as upon the alert, and as ready to resist an approaching enemy. Watchfulness and prayer must guard him against surprise. The heart must be ever wakeful. "Keep thy heart with all diligence."

IV. READY TO ENGAGE IN ALL REQUIRED SERVICE. The service of the hands, of the lips, alone is unacceptable to our Divine Lord, who desires above all things the devotion and loyalty of the heart. This, if the heart slumbers, cannot be given. But a wakeful heart, being ready to receive impressions, is ready also to obey commands, to summon all the powers of the nature to engage in that service which combines dignity with freedom, and submission with joy.—T.

Vers. 2—5.—*Open to the beloved who knocketh.* This dream, so significant of fervent affection, and so full of tender pathos, is emblematic of the relation between the Divine Saviour and Lord and those whom he approaches in his grace and kindness, to whom he proffers the blessings of his presence and his love.

I. THE SUMMONS. 1. Its nature. There is the *knock* which demands attention, and there is the *speech* which articulately conveys the appeal. Christ comes to the world, and comes to the heart, with such tokens of Divine authority as demand that heed should be given to his embassy. The supernatural arrests the attention even of the careless and the unspiritual. That in Christianity which is of the nature of potent, the "mighty works" which have been exhibited, summon men to yield their reverent attention to a Divine communication. But the miracle is a "sign." The display of power is revelation of a wisdom, a love, which are deeper and more sacred than itself. The knock that arouses is followed by the speech that instructs, guides, comforts, inspires. Authority is not blind; it accompanies the appeal to the intelligence, to the heart. 2. The danger of neglecting it. To give no heed to the Divine appeal, to sleep on when God himself is calling,—this is to despise the Highest, to wrong our own soul, to increase our insensibility and to confirm ourselves in spiritual deadness, and to tempt the departure of the heavenly Visitor. 3. The duty of welcoming and responding to it. This appears both from the dignity of him who knocks, his right to the affection, gratitude, and devotion of the soul; and from the complete dependence of the soul upon his friendship for its highest welfare.

II. THE RESPONSE. When Christ "stands at the door and knocks," there is but one thing to do—to open wide to him, the Beloved, the door of the heart. This is the true response, and it should be: 1. *Glad.* His absence is mourned, his presence is desired; his summons, therefore, should be joyfully acknowledged. The heart may well beat strong with gladness, high with hope, when the voice of Jesus is heard; for it is "the voice of the Beloved." 2. *Grateful.* The picture is one of poetic pathos and beauty. The head of the Beloved is filled with dew, his locks with the drops of the night. How suggestive of what the Saviour has endured for our sake, of his earthly humiliation, of his compassionate sacrifice! The contemplation of Christ's weakness and weariness, distress and anguish, all endured for us, is enough to awaken the strongest sentiments of gratitude on our part. To whom are we indebted as we are to him? Who has such claims upon our heart's gratitude and devotion? What language can justly depict the moral debasement of those who are unaffected by a spectacle so touching as that of the Redeemer, the "Man of sorrows," appealing for admission to the nature he died to save and bless? 3. *Immediate.* Delay is here altogether out of place. The sensitive and responsive nature is forward to exclaim, "Apparitio tua est apertio!"—"To see thee is to open to thee!" The hesitation and apologies described in the dream are introduced to show, by suggestion of contrast, how utterly unsuited they are to the circumstances and the occasion. 4. *Eager and expectant.* "My heart was moved for him; I rose to open to my Beloved." The hope is fulfilled, the prayer is answered, the vision is realized, Christ has come. With him all Divine blessings approach the soul. The prospect of his entrance into the spiritual nature is the prospect of a fellowship and intimacy fraught with purest joys and tenderest consolations—a fellowship and intimacy which will never fail to bless, and which no power on earth can avail to darken or to close.—T.

Ver. 6.—The dream of distress. No passage in the Canticles is more pathetic than this. Whilst the prevalent tone of the Song of Songs is a tone of joyful love, we meet here with the sentiment of anxious sorrow. We are reminded of the grief of Mary, when, on the resurrection-morn, she exclaimed, "They have taken away my Lord, and I know not where they have laid him." A true transcript of the moods to which experience is subject! And not without spiritual lessons which may be turned to true profit.

I. A TRANSIENT ESTRANGEMENT AND BRIEF WITHDRAWAL. There have been periods in the history of the Church of Christ, resembling the captivity of Israel in the East, when the countenance of the Lord has been hidden from the sight of his people. The heart, which knoweth its own bitterness, is now and again conscious of a want of happy fellowship with the best and dearest Friend. But it is not Christ who changes. When the sun is eclipsed, it does not cease to shine, though its beams may not reach the earth. And when Christ is hidden, he remains himself "the same yesterday, and to-day, and for ever." But something has come between the Sun of Righteousness and the soul which derives all its spiritual light from him, and the vision is obscured.

Selfishness, worldliness, unbelief, may hinder the soul from enjoying the Saviour's presence and grace. The fault is not his, but ours.

II. DISTRESSING SYMPTOMS OF SUCH ESTRANGEMENT AND WITHDRAWAL. How simple and how touching is the complaint of the bride! "I sought him, but I could not find him; I called him, but he gave me no answer." Yet it is the nature of Christ to delight in the quest and the cry of those he loves, to reveal himself to such as ever ready to approach and to bless. There may, however, be a reason, and faith cannot question that there is a reason, for the withholding of an immediate response. There may be on the Saviour's part a perception that a stronger confidence, a more evident desire, a truer love, are needed, and are thus only to be called forth. It may be well that for a season the soul should suffer for its sin, that it may be encouraged to deeper penitence and to more fervent prayer.

III. AFFECTIONATE YEARNING THE EARNEST OF SPEEDY RECONCILIATION AND RENEWED HAPPINESS. The parable represents the bride as sad and anxious, as enduring bitter disappointment, as oppressed by the heartless insult and injury of those indifferent to her woes; yet as retaining all her love, and only concerned as soon as may be to find her beloved. A true picture of the devout and affectionate friend of Christ, who is only drawn to him the closer by the sorrowful experiences and repeated trials of life. When the Christian offends his Lord, it is a good sign that he is not really forsaken, it is an earnest of the restoration of fellowship, if he ardently desires reconciliation, and takes measures to recover the favour which for a season he has lost. The beauty of Christ appears the more inimitable and supreme, the fellowship of Christ appears the more precious and desirable. And this being so, the hour is surely near when the face of Christ shall appear in unclouded benignity, when the voice of Christ shall be heard uttering Divine assurances and promises in tones of kindest friendship.—T.

Ver. 10.—"*Chiefest among ten thousand.*" The figure here employed by the bride to depict the superiority and excellence of her royal husband is very striking. In reply to the inquiry of those who mock and taunt her in the season of her sorrow and her loss, asking what her beloved is more than another, she replies that he is the banner in the vast embattled host, rising conspicuous and commanding above the thousand warriors by whom he is encompassed. Christians are often reproached with their attachment to Christ. Men who are willing to acknowledge him as one of many, to rank him with "other masters," cannot tolerate the claims advanced by his Church on his behalf, and ask what there is in him to entitle him to adoration so supreme, to devotion so exclusive. The answer of Christ's people is one which gathers force with the lapse of time and the enlargement of experience. Christ is "*chiefest among ten thousand.*" He excels all other teachers, leaders, saviours of society, in every respect.

I. IN THE PROFUNDITY OF HIS INSIGHT INTO TRUTH, AND IN THE CLEARNESS WITH WHICH HE REVEALS TRUTH. Among the sages and philosophers who have arisen in ancient and in modern times, and to whom the world is indebted for precious communications, for great thoughts, which it will not willingly let die, there is none who can compete with Christ. His sayings are more original in their substance than those of others, with regard both to the character and service of God and to the duty and hopes of men. In fact, he is "*the Truth,*" proved to be such by the persistence of those utterances which have sunk into the minds of men, enlightening and enriching humanity with its choicest treasures.

II. IN THE EFFECTUAL COMPASSION WITH WHICH HE RECOVERS THE MORALLY LOST. The Lord Jesus is not merely a wise Teacher; he is a mighty Saviour. He knew well that little good is done by communicating truth, unless at the same time the heart can be reached and the character moulded anew. During his earthly ministry he put forth his moral power in many and most memorable instances, and rescued the sinful, the degraded, those abandoned by men, restoring them to integrity, to purity, to newness of moral life. And since his ascension he has been exercising the same power with the same results. His Name, by faith in his Name, has made many whole. His gospel loses none of its efficacy, his Spirit exercises the same energy of grace, as generation succeeds generation. Ten thousand attempt what Christ alone performs.

III. IN THE SPIRITUAL POWER WITH WHICH HE RULES OVER HUMAN SOCIETY. If a

comparison be made between Christ and other founders of religious systems and Churches, it will be seen that the superiority rests with him, in the sway wielded over the true nature of men. Compare him, for example, with Gautama, the founder of Buddhism, or with Mohammed. What is the result of such a comparison? There can be no question that, in the matter of spiritual authority, it will be to establish the supremacy of the Son of man. He lays hold, as none other has done, of the affections, the moral susceptibilities and convictions, the inner principles, of men's being, and thus controls and inspires their true life. In this respect ten thousand are inferior to him; but he stands alone—his banner towers above the host.

IV. IN THE WELL-FOUNDED PROSPECT WHICH HE IMPARTS TO THE WORLD'S FUTURE. Every well-wisher to his race, in looking forward to what shall be after him, must often be assailed with fear and foreboding. There is much to make the outlook gloomy and stormy. And there is no principle which can subdue such natural anxiety, which can inspire confident and sustaining hope with regard to the future of human society, except the principle of Christianity, *i.e.* the personal and spiritual power of the Lord Christ to govern and to guide mankind to glorious issues.—T.

Ver. 16.—“*Altogether lovely.*” In the verses from the tenth to the sixteenth, the bride sets forth in detail the excellences and the attractiveness of her spouse. In similitudes according with Oriental imagination she describes the charm of his person, and accounts for the fascination he exercises. And she sums up the characterization by the assertion that he is “altogether lovely”—“*totus est desiderabilis, totus est amor.*” Augustine, in language dictated by the fervour of his heart, expresses the spiritual truths enshrined in this exclamation: “My soul is a sigh of God; the heart conceives and the mouth forms the sigh. Bear, then, my soul, the likeness of the heart and of the mouth of God. Sigh thou for him who made thee!”

I. CHRIST IS ALTOGETHER TO BE LOVED AND DESIRED FOR WHAT HE IS IN HIMSELF. In his Person and character Christ is a Being who commands and attracts the love of all who are susceptible to the charms of spiritual excellence. There is beauty beyond that which is physical, beauty of which the charms of feature and of form are the appointed symbols. And for this beauty in most perfect manifestation we must look to Christ. Others have their excellences, but they have also their defects. In him alone every virtue is present and complete, in him alone every blemish is absent. He is at once above all praise and free from all blame. The soul that can recognize and delight in moral excellence finds all scope for such recognition and delight in him who is “fairer than the sons of men.”

II. CHRIST IS ALTOGETHER TO BE LOVED AND DESIRED FOR WHAT HE HAS ACTUALLY AND ALREADY DONE FOR HIS FRIENDS. These know that he loved them, and that he loved them even “unto the end,” that he “gave his life for his friends;” and this knowledge is ever in their memory, is ever affecting their hearts, is ever influencing the attitude of their whole being towards him. Nothing eukindles love like love. “We love him, because he first loved us.”

III. CHRIST IS ALTOGETHER TO BE LOVED AND DESIRED AS THE SAVIOUR OF THE WORLD. He who is possessed with the Spirit of Christ is not selfish in his affections. He feels the spiritual power of his Saviour's self-sacrifice. He loves his Lord, because that Lord has pitied and has died for men. Our love to Christ is not pure, is not perfect, until it springs from a grateful and sympathetic recognition of what he has done who “came into the world to save sinners.”—T.

EXPOSITION.

CHAPTER VI.

Ver. 1.—Whither is thy beloved gone, O thou fairest among women? Whither hath thy beloved turned him, that we may seek him with thee? The dialogue still continues, possibly because, as Delitzsch sug-

gests, the effect of the dream which Shulamith narrates is not passed away in the morning. Under the influence of it she goes forth and meets the daughters of Jerusalem, who offer their assistance. But there is no necessity for this. The poetry merely demands that the idea of the dream should

be still kept before the mind of the reader. The scene is still in the palace. The ladies playfully carry on the bride's cue, and help her to pour out her feelings. The bridegroom, they know, is near at hand, and is coming to delight himself in his bride; but the bride has not yet drawn him back completely to her side. This is evident from the fact that there is no distress in the language of the bride. She is not complaining and crying out in agony under a sense of desertion; she is waiting for the return of her beloved, and so she calmly sings of his love and his perfect truthfulness, even though absent from her. He is where his perfect beauty and fragrance might well be.

Vers. 2, 3.—My beloved is gone down to 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: he feedeth his flock among the lilies. In Eccles. ii. 5, 6 Solomon says, "I planted me vineyards; I made me gardens and parks, and I planted trees in them of all kinds of fruit; I made me pools of water, to water therefrom the forest where trees were reared." In Rev. vii. 17 it is said, "The Lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall be their Shepherd, and shall guide them unto fountains of water of life: and God shall wipe away every tear from their eyes." We can scarcely doubt that the meaning is—The bridegroom is not gone far; he is where he is congenially employed; where his pure and lovely nature finds that which is like itself—beauty and fragrance and innocence. It is his resort, and it corresponds with his perfection. Delitzsch thinks "thoughtfulness and depth of feeling are intended" (cf. Pa. xcii. 5). "His thoughts are very deep." But it would seem more fitting, in the lips of the bride, that she should dwell on the aspects of her beloved which correspond with her own feelings. She is one of the lilies. The king is coming into his garden, and I am ready to receive him. The shepherd among his flock. They are all like lilies, pure and beautiful. The bride has nothing but chaste thoughts of her husband, because she knows that he is hers, and she is his. Surely such language is not inaptly applied to spiritual uses. Tennyson's lovely poem, 'St. Agnes' Eve,' has caught the spirit of Shulamith. A few of his lines will illustrate this—

"The shadows of the convent towers
Slant down the snowy sward,
Still creeping with the creeping hours
That lead me to my Lord.
Make thou my spirit pure and clear
As are the frosty skies,
Or this first snowdrop of the year
That in my bosom lies.

He lifts me to the golden doors;
The flashes come and go;
All Heaven bursts her starry floors,
And strews her lights below,
And deepens on and up! the gates
Roll back, and far within
For me the heavenly Bridegroom waits,
To make me pure of sin.
The sabbaths of eternity,
One sabbath deep and wide,
A light upon the shining sea—
The Bridegroom with his bride."

Vers. 4—7.—Thou art beautiful, O my love, as Tirzah, comely as Jerusalem, terrible as an army with banners. Turn away thine eyes from me, for they have overcome me. Thy hair is as a flock of goats that lie along the side of Gilead. Thy teeth are like a flock of ewes which are come up from the washing, whereof every one hath twins, and none is bereaved among them. Thy temples are like a piece of a pomegranate behind thy veil. The king is not far off. The bride knows that he is near. She prepares herself for him with words of love. He is coming among his "rosebud garden of girls." His voice is heard as he approaches. And as he enters the chamber he bursts forth with lavish praises of his bride. Tirzah and Jerusalem, two of the most beautiful cities of the world, are taken as symbols of the surpassing beauty of the bride—doubtless also with an intended reference to the symbology of Scripture, where the people of God are compared throughout to a city. Tirzah was discovered by Robinson in 1852, on a height in the mountain range to the north of Nablus, under the name *Tullizah*, high and beautiful, in a region of olive trees. The name itself signifies sweetness, which might be so employed even if there were no actual city so called. Jerusalem is said to have been "the perfection of beauty" (Pa. xlviii. 2; 1. 2; Lam. ii. 15). Cities are generally spoken of as females, as also nations. The Church is the city of God. The new Jerusalem is the bride of the Lamb. If the prophets did not take their language from this Song of Solomon, then the phraseology and symbology which we find here must have been familiarly known and used among the people of Israel from the time of Solomon. The beauty of the bride is overwhelming, it is subduing and all-conquering, like a warrior-host with flying banners going forth to victory. Solomon confesses that he is vanquished. This, of course, is the hyperbole of love, but it is full of significance to the spiritual mind. The Church of Christ in the presence and power of the Lord is irresistible. It is not until he appears that the bride is seen in her perfection. She hangs her head and

complains while he is absent; but when he comes and reveals himself, delighting in his people, their beauty, which is a reflection of his, will shine forth as the sun for ever and ever. The word which is employed, "terrible," is from the root "to be impetuous," "to press impetuously upon," "to infuse terror," *LXX.*, ἀνατρεφῶν, "to make to start up," referring to the flash of the eyes, the overpowering brightness of the countenance. So the purity and excellence of the Church shall delight the Lord, and no earthly power shall be able to stand before it. Heaven and earth shall meet in the latter days. Wickedness shall fly before righteousness as a defeated host before a victorious army. Is there not something like a practical commentary on these words in the history of all great revivals of religion and eras of reformation? Are there not signs even now that the beauty of the Church is becoming more and more army-like, and bearing down opposition? The remainder of the description is little more than a repetition of what has gone before, with some differences. Mount Gilead is here simply Gilead. The flock of shorn sheep is here the flock of ewes with their young. Perhaps there is intended to be a special significance in the use of the same description. The bride is the same, and therefore the same terms apply to her; but she is more beautiful than ever in the eyes of the bridegroom. Is it not a delicate mode of saying, "Though my absence from thee has made thee complain for a while, thou art still the same to me"? There is scope here for variety of interpretation which there is no need to follow. Some would say the reference is to the state of the Church at different periods—as e.g. to the primitive Church in its simplicity and purity, to the Church of the empire in its splendour and growing dominion. The Jewish expositors apply it to the different stages in the history of Israel, "the congregation" being the bride, as under the first temple and under the second temple. Ibn Ezra, and indeed all expositors, recognize the reason for the repetition as in the sameness of affection. "The beloved repeats the same things here to show that it is still his own true bride to whom he speaks, the sameness in the features proving it." So the Targum. The flock of goats, the flock of ewes, the piece of pomegranate, all suggest the simple purity of country life in which the king found so much satisfaction. He is wrapt up in his northern beauty, and idolizes her. One cannot help thinking of the early Jewish Church coming forth from Galilee, when all spoke of the freshness and genuineness of a simple-hearted piety drawn forth by the preaching of the Son of Mary—the virgin-born Bridegroom whose

SONG OF SOLOMON.

bride was like the streams and flowers, the birds and flocks, of beautiful Galilee; a society of believing peasants untouched by the conventionalities of Judæa, and ready to respond to the grand mountain-like earnestness and heavenly purity of the new Prophet, the Shepherd of Israel, "who feedeth his flock among the lilies." There is a correspondence in the early Church, before corruption crept in and sophistication obscured the simplicity of faith and life among Christians, to this description of the bride, the Lamb's wife. There must be a return to that primitive ideal before there can be the rapturous joy of the Church which is promised. We are too much turned aside from the Bridegroom to false and worthless attractions which do not delight the Beloved One. When he sees his bride as he first saw her, he will renew his praises and lift her up to himself.

Vers. 8, 9.—There are three score queens, and four score concubines, and virgins without number. My dove, my undefiled is but one; she is the only one of her mother, she is the choice one of her that bare her. The daughters saw her, and called her blessed; yea, the queens and the concubines, and they praised her. The account given us of Solomon's harem in 1 Kings xi. 3 represents the number as much larger. Is not that because the time referred to in the poem was early in the reign? The words are an echo of what we read in Prov. xxxi. 28 and Gen. xxx. 13. Perhaps the general meaning is merely to celebrate the surpassing beauty of the new bride. But there certainly is a special stress laid on her purity and innocence. There is no necessity to seek for any exact interpretation of the queens and concubines. They represent female beauty in its variety. The true Church is in closer relation to the Bridegroom than all the rest of the world. Even in the heathen and unconverted world there is a revelation of the Word, or, as the ancient Fathers of the Church said, a λόγος σπερματικός. He was then as light, though the darkness comprehended him not. The perfection of the true bride of the Lamb will be acknowledged even by those who are not professedly Christian.

Ver. 10.—Who is she that looketh forth as the morning, fair as the moon, clear as the sun, terrible as an army with banners? This, of course, is the praise which comes from the lips of the queens and concubines, the ladies of the harem, the daughters of Jerusalem. The word rendered "looketh forth" is literally "bendeth forward," i.e. in order to look out or forth (cf. Ps. xiv. 2), *LXX.*, ἐκκυντῶσα: Venet., παρακυντῶσα (cf. Jas. i. 25, "stooping down and looking into the Word as into a well"). The idea seems to be that of a rising luminary, looking forth from the background,

breaking through the shades of the garden, like the morning star appearing above the horizon (ὁ ἑωσφορος, Venetian) (cf. Isa. xiv. 12, where the morning star is called קֶדֶשׁ). The moon is generally זָהָב, "yellow," but here נָהָב, "white," i.e. pale and sweet, as the lesser light, with true womanly delicacy and fairness; but the rest of the description, which plainly is added for the sake of the symbolical suggestiveness of the figures, removes all idea of mere weakness. *Clear* (or, *bright*) *as the sun*. And the word for "sun" is not, as usual, *shemesh*, but *chammah*, "heat," the warming light (Ps. xix. 7; see Job xxxi. 26; Isa. xlix. 2). The fierce rays of the Eastern sun are terrible to those who encounter them. The glory of the Church is a glory overwhelming as against all that opposes it. The description is pure hyperbole as applied to a fair bride, referring to the blazing beauty of her face and adornments, but symbolically it has always been felt a precious contribution to religious language. Perhaps no sentence in the Old Testament has been more frequently on the lips of devout men, especially when they have been speaking of the victories of the truth and the glowing prospects of the Saviour's kingdom.

Vers. 11, 12.—*I went down into the garden of nuts to see the green plants of the valley, to see whether the vine budded and the pomegranates were in flower. Or ever I was aware, my soul set me among the chariots of my princely people.* There cannot be much doubt as to the meaning of these words. Taking them as put into the lips of the bride, and as intended to be a response to the lavish praises of the bridegroom, we may regard them as a modest confession that she had lost her heart immediately that she had seen King Solomon. She went down into her quiet garden life to occupy herself as usual with rustic labours and enjoyments, but the moment that her beloved approached she was carried away—her soul was as in a swift chariot. Delitzsch thinks that the words refer to what occurred after marriage. He supposes that on some occasion the king took his bride with him on an excursion in his chariot to a plain called Etam. He refers to a description of such a place to be found in Josephus, 'Ant.' viii. 7. 3, but the explanation is far-fetched and improbable. The nut or walnut tree (*Juglans regia*, Linn.) came originally from Persia. The name is very similar in the Persian, Æthiopic, Arabic, and Syriac. One cannot help comparing the lovely simplicity of the bride's description with the tender beauty of Goethe's 'Herman and Dorothea.' The main point is this, that she is not the mere captive of the king, taken, as was too often the case with Eastern

monarchs, by violence into his harem; she was subdued by the power of love. It was love that raised her to the royal chariots of her people. She beholds in King Solomon the concentration and the acme of her people's glory. He is the true Israel; she is the glory of him who is the glory of God.

Ver. 13a.—*Return, return, O Shulamite; return, return, that we may look upon thee.* Shulem is the same as Shunem (see 1 Kings i. 3; 2 Kings iv. 8; Josh. xix. 18). Shulamite will, therefore, mean "lady of Shulem." It is the first occurrence of the name. It cannot be a pure proper name, says Delitzsch, because the article is attached to it. It is a name of descent. The LXX. has ἡ Σουναμίτις, i.e. "she who is from Shunem." Abishag was exceedingly beautiful, and she came from the same district. It is the country in the tribe of Issachar, near to little Hermon, to the south-east of Carmel and south of Nain, south-east of Nazareth, south-west of Tabor. It is found at present under the name *Saulam*, not far from the great plain of Jiszeal (now *Zer'in*), "which forms a convenient way of communication between Jordan and the sea-coast, but is yet so hidden in the mountain range that the Talmud is silent concerning this Sulem, as it is concerning Nazareth." It is impossible to resist the impression of the fact that this part of Galilee so closely associated with our Lord and his ministry should be the native place of the bride. Delitzsch thinks that the Shulamite is on her way from the garden to the palace. That the words are addressed to her by the admiring ladies can scarcely be disputed; hence the "we" of the address. "The fourfold 'come back' (or, 'turn') entreats her earnestly, yea, with tears, to return thither (that is, to the garden) with them once more, and for this purpose, that they might find delight in looking upon her." But Delitzsch is scarcely right in thinking that the garden of nuts to which the bride referred is the garden of the palace. She is, perhaps, turning to leave the company of ladies, Solomon himself being among them, although she would escape from their gaze, which is too much for her in her simplicity, and the ladies, seeing her intention to leave them, call her back. Another view is that the word "return" is for "turn round;" that is, "Let us see thee dance, that we may admire the beauty of thy form and movements." This would explain the appropriateness of the bride's reply in the latter half of the verse. Moreover, the fourfold appeal is scarcely suitable if the bride was only slightly indicating her intention to leave. She would surely not leave hastily, seeing that Solomon is present. The request is not that she may remain, but that they may look upon her. It would be quite fitting in the mouth of lady-companions. The whole

is doubtless a poetic artifice, as before in the case of the dream, for the purpose of introducing the lovely description of her personal attractions. Plainly she is described as dancing or as if dancing. Delitzsch, however, thinks that the dance is only referred to by the ladies as a comparison; but in that case he certainly leaves unexplained the peculiarity of the description in ch. vii. 1—5, which most naturally is a description of a dancing figure.

Ver. 13b.—**Why will ye look upon the Shulamite as upon the dance of Mahanaim?** The Shulamite, in her perfect modesty and humility, not knowing how beautiful she really is, asks why it is that they wish still to gaze upon her, like those that gaze at the dance of Mahanaim, or why they wish her to dance. But at the same moment, with the complaisance of perfect amiability, begins to move—always a pleasure to a lovely maiden—thus filling them with admiration. Mahanaim came in later times to mean “angels,” or the “heavenly host” (see Gen. xxxii. 3), but here it is generally thought to be the name of

a dance, perhaps one in which the inhabitants of Mahanaim excelled, or one in which angels or hosts were thought to engage. The old translators, the Syriac, Jerome, and the Venetian, render, “the dances of the camps” (*choros castrarum*, *θλασων στρατοπέδων*), possibly a war-dance or parade. The word, however, is in the dual. Delitzsch thinks the meaning is a dance as of angels, “only a step beyond the responsive song of the seraphim” (Isa. vi.). Of course, there can be no objection to the association of angels with the bride, but there is no necessity for it. The word would be, no doubt, familiarly known in the age of Solomon. The sacred dances were often referred to in Scripture, and there would be nothing degrading to the dignity of the bride in dancing before the ladies and her own husband. “After throwing aside her upper garment, so that she had only the light clothing of a shepherdess or vine-dresser, Shulamith danced to and fro before the daughters of Jerusalem, and displayed all her attractions before them.”

HOMILETICS.

Vers. 1—3.—*Dialogue between the bride and the daughters of Jerusalem.* I. THE QUESTION OF THE MAIDENS. The dream is past. The bridegroom is absent for a time, but the bride is not anxious; she knows where he is, and that he will soon return. Perhaps it was such a short absence which filled her thoughts before, and was the occasion of those narratives which are so dream-like, which recall so vividly reminiscences of dreams such as most men have probably experienced. The chorus again address the bride as “fairest among women.” They recognize her beauty and graces. They do not see the bridegroom with her; they ask, “Whither is he gone?” They offer to seek him with her. So we sometimes ask others who have more Christian graces, more love of Christ, than we have, where we may find the Lord. We want to seek Christ with them; we ask for their prayers; we will join our prayers with theirs.

II. THE ANSWER. 1. *The bride knows where her beloved may be found.* She has no doubts now, no anxieties, as she had in her dream. She answers without hesitation, “My beloved is gone down into his garden, to the beds of spices, to feed [his flock] in the gardens, and to gather lilies.” She invests her beloved with the ideal character of a shepherd, as she had done before (ch. i. 7). We see that the words are not to be taken literally; he is no shepherd in the ordinary sense. He is said, indeed, to be feeding (his flock), but not in ordinary pastures. He is gone to his garden, a garden of costly spices; and he is gone to gather lilies, apparently for his bride. The bride never dwells on the wealth and magnificence of her royal lover as the chorus do. Such thoughts, perhaps, were to her oppressive rather than attractive; she loves to think of him as a shepherd, as one in her own condition in life. The grandeur of the king was dazzling to the country maiden. So the Christian loves to think of the Lord Jesus as the good Shepherd. We know, indeed, that the kingdoms of this world are his; that he is King of kings and Lord of lords; that he is the Word who in the beginning was with God, and himself was God; that all things were made through him, and without him was not anything made that was made. We know that he will come again in majesty and great glory to judge the quick and the dead. But when our souls are dazzled by the contemplation of his glory; when we shrink, as sinful men must shrink, from the thought of the great white throne and him that sitteth on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven flee away (Rev. xx. 11);—it is a relief then

to our weakness to remember that the great King humbled himself to our low estate, that he was made as one of us, that he shared all our human infirmities, sin only excepted; that he who is the Life of the world humbled himself for us unto death, even the death of the cross. And of all the titles by which he has been pleased to make himself known to his people, there is none so full of comfort as that of the Shepherd, the good Shepherd, who calls his sheep by name, who guides them and feeds them, who knows his own and his own know him, who once laid down his life for the sheep. Now he feeds them in his garden, the garden enclosed (ch. iv. 12), which is the Church, among the beds of spices, which are the fruit of the Spirit. There he gathers the lilies one by one, the souls of his redeemed, the souls which he has tended and cared for, and glorified with a beauty of holiness which is a faint reflection of his own heavenly beauty. Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of those precious lilies. He gathers them one by one when they have grown into that spiritual beauty for which he planted them at the first, and carries them into a better garden, the true Eden, the Paradise of God, there to blossom into purer and holier beauty.

2. *She is wholly his.* "I am my beloved's, and my beloved is mine: he that feedeth [his flock] among the lilies." She repeats the happy assurance of ch. ii. 16, only she inverts the order of the clauses, and adds the description. "He is feeding his flock among the lilies: but I am his, and he is mine." There is no jealousy, no doubt now, as there seemed to be when she dreamed of his absence. The shepherd is her shepherd, the lilies are for her, she is his. She thinks first now of her gift to the bridegroom. In ch. ii. 16 she put his gift first. He had given his heart to her in the first happy days of their young love; and that gift had won from her the responsive gift of her affection. She knew now that her heart was wholly his; she delights in owning it. And she was sure of his affection. His heart was wholly hers. "We love him, because he first loved us" (1 John iv. 19). It is the love of Christ manifested in his blessed life and precious death, revealed into the believer's heart by the power of the Holy Spirit,—it is that constraining love which draws forth from our cold and selfish natures that measure of love, real and true, though unworthy and intermittent, with which the Christian man regards the Lord. At first we are more sure of his love than of ours. He loved us, that is certain; the cross is the convincing proof. But we are not sure, alas! that we are returning his love. We have learned from long and sad experience to doubt these selfish hearts of ours; we are afraid that there is no real love in them, but only excited feeling, only transitory emotion. But if by his grace we persevere in the life of prayer and faith, little by little his love given to us, manifested in our souls, draws forth the response of earnest love from us; little by little we begin to hope (oh, how earnestly!) that we may be able at last to say with St. Peter, "Lord, thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I love thee." But to say that, with the knowledge that his eye is on us, that he is reading our heart, involves much awe, much heart-searching, as well as much hope, much peace. We can only pray that "the God of hope may fill us with all joy and peace in believing, that we may abound in hope through the power of the Holy Ghost" (Rom. xv. 13). And if that love, though weak, as, alas! it must be, is yet real, we may make the bride's words our own: "I am my Beloved's; I belong to him. My heart is his; I am giving it to him; and he, blessed be his holy Name, is helping me to give it by first giving himself to me. I am my Beloved's, and my Beloved is mine." Therefore the Christian soul may say, "I hope one day to see him face to face, and to be with him where he feedeth his flock among the lilies of Paradise."

Vers. 4—9.—*The bridegroom's praise of the bride.* I. RENEWED ENUMERATION OF HER GRACES. 1. *General praise of her beauty.* Her beauty is compared to the beauty of Tírzah or Jerusalem. She is beautiful as Tírzah, which word means "grace" or "beauty;" comely as Jerusalem, the habitation or foundation of peace. The bridegroom mentions Tírzah as well as Jerusalem, which seems to imply that the song was written before the division of the kingdom. The bride is beautiful as Tírzah was to the inhabitants of Northern Palestine—a fair city in a fertile country, deriving its name from the attractive graces of the surrounding scenery. She is comely as Jerusalem was to every loyal Israelite. "Beautiful for situation, the joy of the whole earth, is Mount Zion, on the sides of the north, the city of the great King;" "Walk

about Zion," the psalmist continues, "and go round about her: tell the towers thereof. Mark well her bulwarks, consider her palaces; that ye may tell it to the generation following" (Ps. xlviii. 2, 12, 13). Zion was to the Israelites "the perfection of beauty" (Ps. l. 2; Lam. ii. 15). The exiles in the days of the Captivity sang in plaintive strains, "If I forget thee, O Jerusalem, let my right hand forget her cunning. If I do not remember thee, let my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth; if I prefer not Jerusalem above my chief joy" (Ps. cxxxvii. 5, 6). The great delight in returning from their long captivity was to think, "Our feet shall stand in thy gates, O Jerusalem." "Pray for the peace of Jerusalem," they would say: "they shall prosper that love thee. Peace be within thy walls, and prosperity within thy palaces" (Ps. cxxii. 2, 6, 7). And what Jerusalem was to the Israelites, that the Church is to the heavenly Bridegroom. Her salvation was "the joy set before him," for which "he endured the cross, despising the shame" (Heb. xii. 2). He tells her towers; for "the Lord knoweth them that are his." He knows every living stone of the spiritual temple, the Church, which he hath built upon the Rock of ages. He never forgets her. He intercedes for her, and is preparing a place for her, that hereafter "the nations of them which are saved may walk in the light of her" (Rev. xxi. 24). He prays now for her peace, and giveth her his peace—"the peace of God, which passeth all understanding." She is beautiful with the reflection of his perfect beauty. He will cleanse and purify her, and at the last present her to himself a glorious Church. And if the Church is fair in the Bridegroom's eyes, so in a degree is each converted and sanctified soul; in each such soul he sees something of that beauty of holiness which comes from the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit of God. For they who love him, and seek to live in that fellowship which is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ, must, while they "behold as in a glass the glory of the Lord, be changed into the same image from glory to glory" (2 Cor. iii. 18). And if the dear Lord is pleased with the poor holiness of his people, how earnestly we ought to strive to purge ourselves from all pollution of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God! Earthly beauty is but a poor endowment; it soon fades and passes away. The inner beauty of a holy soul abides and increases continually, and is very precious and sacred; for such fair souls, washed and made white in the blood of the Lamb, shall see the King in his beauty, and dwell in the light of the golden city.

2. *She is terrible as an army with banners.* The bride is beautiful not only for her attractive gentleness; she has a queenly dignity that could repel any presumptuous advances. The beauty of the Church is a severe beauty, like the martial beauty of a bannered host. For, indeed, the Church is an army, the army of the living God; the banner of the cross shines in the van, advancing ever forward.

"The royal banners forward go,
The cross shines forth in mystic glow."

That bannered host is terrible to the enemy. "Our wrestling is not against flesh and blood, but against the principalities, against the powers, against the world-rulers of this darkness, against the spiritual hosts of wickedness" (Eph. vi. 12).

"They march unseen,
That sacred band, in serried ranks arrayed,
Each cheering on his brother to the fight.
The Spirit-sword flashes in each right hand;
The shield of faith protects each steadfast breast;
The red cross banner glitters in their van,
As they press ever forwards: breathing all
The selfsame prayer, the selfsame Presence high
Abiding in each heart, the selfsame hope,
The glory-crown in heaven, sustaining all."

Each Christian soul has its place in that vast army; each is a sworn soldier of the cross; each such soul is terrible to the enemy, because Christ is the strength of his people, and they are more than conquerors through him who loved them.

"Satan trembles when he sees
The humblest saint upon his knees."

Then we must pray for grace to follow the banner of the cross with loyal heart and steadfast purpose, that our service may be acceptable to the Captain of our salvation, and pleasing in his sight, as a bannered host marshalled and ordered, as each noble warrior well equipped and disciplined, is a sight that gives pleasure and joyful pride to the commander. 3. *The bridegroom repeats the praises of ch. iv. 1—6.* But first he says, "Turn away thine eyes from me, for they have overcome me." He had praised her eyes again and again; they were as doves' (ch. i. 15; iv. 1, 9). Now he says, in the tenderness of a great love, "they have overcome me." We may compare the Lord's gracious wonder at the faith of the centurion (Luke vii. 9). He condescended to "marvel at him, and turned him about, and said unto the people that followed him, I say unto you, I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel." The bridegroom goes on to praise the various features of the bride's beauty. He had done so already in the love of their first espousals. His affection continues unabated; he repeats the same praises in the same words. The heavenly Bridegroom loves his bride the Church with "an everlasting love" (Jer. xxxi. 3). The terms of affection which are bestowed in the Old Testament upon the ancient Jewish Church are repeated in the New Testament, and applied to the Christian Church, the Israel of God. Thus St. Peter (1 Pet. ii. 9) calls Christians "a chosen generation;" the same title (in the Greek of the Septuagint the words are exactly the same) is given in the Prophet Isaiah (xliii. 20) to the Jewish people. St. Peter calls Christians "a royal priesthood;" in Exod. xix. 6 the Israelites are called "a kingdom of priests" (here again St. Peter has used the exact words of the Septuagint). St. Peter calls Christians "a holy nation;" the same thing is said of the Israelites in Exod. xix. 6. St. Peter describes Christians as "a peculiar people;" his words represent Deut. vii. 6, translated in our old version "a special people," in the new version, "a peculiar people." He applies to the Christian Church the words which the Prophet Hosea had used of the Jews, "Which in time past were not a people, but are now the people of God; which had not obtained mercy, but now have obtained mercy" (1 Pet. ii. 10; Hos. ii. 23). The Lord Jesus loves his Church with a love that changes not. Almost at the beginning of the New Testament stands the holy promise, "Thou shalt call his name Jesus: for he shall save his people from their sins;" and almost at the end we read the blessed words, "Whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely." Each faithful Christian may trust his Saviour's love, for it is written, "I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee;" and again, "He which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ" (Phil. i. 6).

II. COMPARISON OF THE BRIDE WITH OTHERS. 1. *They are many.* David had had sixteen wives. Solomon had early followed that unhappy example; already he had, it seems, "three score queens, and four score concubines." He had transgressed the commandment of Deut. xvii. 17, where it is said of any future king, "Neither shall he multiply wives unto himself, that his heart turn not away." Solomon, alas! broke the commandment of God, and incurred the awful peril denounced against disobedience. "He had seven hundred wives, princesses, and three hundred concubines: and his wives turned away his heart. For it came to pass, when Solomon was old, that his wives turned away his heart after other gods" (1 Kings xi. 3, 4). Now he was young, but even in his youth the evil desire was strong within him. His love for the pure country maiden might have saved him; for a time, perhaps, it did check his sensual passions. But, alas! if it was so, the evil spirit that had been cast out soon returned, and brought with him seven other spirits more wicked than himself, and the last state was worse than the first (Matt. xii. 43—45). 2. *She is one alone.* "One is she, my dove, my undefiled; one is she to her mother; the choice one is she to her that bare her." Such is the literal rendering of the touching words. The bride was an only daughter; she was the joy and darling of her mother. The good daughter makes a good wife. She was the bridegroom's dove, his undefiled one, and she stood alone in his affections; no other came near to her. So good was she and so lovely in character as well as in person, that even those who might have been expected to regard her with envy praised her and called her blessed. The luxurious monarch seems to have a glimpse of the blessedness of purity; he seems almost to feel that "to love one maiden and to cleave to her" is the ideal of human love. Alas! "his goodness was as a morning cloud, and as the early dew it passed away" (Hos. vi. 4).

The evil spirit of sensuality returned. When he was old, his wives turned away his heart; and he did evil in the sight of the Lord, and built high places for the worship of idols in the hill that is before Jerusalem (1 Kings xi. 4, 6, 7). How earnestly we ought to strive to retain in our souls those happy feelings, those aspirations after purity and holiness which God sends from time to time, like angels' visits, into our hearts! They can only be fixed and wrought into our characters by immediate action. In themselves they are transitory, and rapidly pass away. But hold them firm, make them the basis of real effort, the beginning and occasion of the healthy discipline of self-denial,—then God will help us to keep them alive in our souls; the little seed will grow till it becomes a great tree; the little leaven will spread through the whole life with its quickening powers. Very precious are those moments of holy emotion; very solemn, too, for they involve a great responsibility. To let them go is perilous exceedingly, to use them aright brings a priceless blessing.

Vers. 10—13.—*Conversation between the chorus and the bride.* I. ADDRESS OF THE CHORUS. 1. *The question.* "Who is she?" This question occurs three times in the song. In ch. iii. 6 it is asked apparently by a chorus of young men, the friends of the bridegroom; here and in ch. viii. 5 it seems to be put into the mouth of the chorus of maidens, the daughters of Jerusalem. It is an expression of admiration. The maidens meet the bride after an interval, and are startled by her surpassing beauty; at once graceful and majestic. Her happy love has shed a new grace around her; she is clothed in queenly attire; it is a vision of rare loveliness. It is the love of Christ which gives the Church whatever beauty she possesses. Christ's love for her, drawing forth her responsive love for him, gives her whatever graces she may possess. She is his creation. He built his Church upon the rock; all that she is, and all that she has, comes only from his gift. 2. *The description.* She looks forth as the dawn. The bride's sudden appearance is like the early dawn, coming forth in its beauty, tinging sky and clouds with rosy light. She is fair as the moon, clear and pure as the sun (poetical words are used here, as in Isa. xxiv. 23; xxx. 26; the moon is the white, the sun the hot luminary); and the comparison of ver. 4 is repeated; in her queenly majesty she is terrible, awe-inspiring, as a bannered host. Christ is the Bright and Morning Star (Rev. xxii. 16); He is the Sun of Righteousness (Mal. iv. 2); He is the true Light of the world. The true Light lighteth every man (John i. 9); and they who believe in the Light, and walk as children of light, reflect something of its brightness; so that the Lord, in his condescending love, says of them, "Ye are the light of the world" (Matt. v. 14); and so St. Paul says of his Philippian converts that "ye shine as lights [luminaries] in the world" (Phil. ii. 15). "God is light, and in him is no darkness at all." Christians must strive, by his grace and the illumination of his Spirit, to walk always in the light, as he is in the light, that so they may have fellowship with one another in the light of holy love, and that the blood of Jesus Christ may cleanse them continually from all sin, making their souls white and clear in the transparent truth of that purity in heart which must, by the Saviour's compassionate mercy, belong to them who shall see God (Matt. v. 8).

II. ANSWER OF THE BRIDE. 1. *Her lowliness.* The maidens praise her beauty and stateliness; she reminds them of her former low estate. She seems to be looking back to the hour of her first meeting with the bridegroom. She had no thought, country maiden as she was, of the elevation that awaited her. She was engaged in her ordinary occupations. She had gone down into the garden to tend it and to watch the budding of the fruit trees; there she first saw the king. Whatever graces the Church possesses come from the favour of the heavenly Bridegroom. "Through him we have access by one Spirit unto the Father. Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellow-citizens with the saints, and of the household of God" (Eph. ii. 18, 19). The Gentiles were strangers and foreigners; they knew not the King; they were not looking for him. As the Lord God called Adam and Eve when they were hiding themselves among the trees of the garden, so the Lord called the Gentiles by the mission of his apostles. In the infancy of the human race it was the protevangel, the promise of the Seed of the woman who shall bruise the serpent's head, that first shed light upon the gloom of sin and misery. And in the fulness of time it was the Lord's gracious mission, "Go ye into all the world, and preach the

gospel to every creature," that first called the Gentiles into the city of God. Till he calls us we are like the bride in the song, immersed in worldly pursuits and earthly cares; he brings us into the new Jerusalem and makes us fellow-citizens with the saints. We must remember always that "By the grace of God I am what I am;" that whatever we may have done of good or right, it was "Not I, but the grace of God which was with me" (1 Cor. xv. 10). "By grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God" (Eph. ii. 8). The bride was poor in this world's goods; we Christians must be "poor in spirit." That holy poverty, that sense of our own helplessness and need of the Saviour, is very blessed; it has the first place in the Beatitudes. 2. *Her exaltation.* "I knew not," she says, "my soul made me the chariots of my people, a princely [people]." She uses a military figure, perhaps suggested by the words twice addressed to her in this chapter, "Terrible as an army with banners." In a sense she accepts the metaphor. Elijah and Elisha had been severally called "the chariot of Israel and the horsemen thereof" (2 Kings ii. 12; xiii. 14). So now the bride had been raised to a lofty position, and was awe-inspiring in her majesty, like a bannered host, or the chariots of a princely people. Her soul, she says, had made her this; she means her soul's love for the bridegroom, whom she so often describes as "him whom my soul loveth" (ch. i. 7; iii. 1, 2, 3, 4). The king saw her and loved her. His love won her innocent heart; and that pure, artless love of hers, the love which filled her soul, the seat of the affections, had lifted her up into the very highest place in the affections of the king, so that now in her queenly majesty she was not only fair as the moon, but awe-inspiring as a bannered host, as the war-chariots of a princely people. So it is love that makes one man better than another in the sight of God; not riches, or refinement, or learning, but love. There is, as it were, a hierarchy of love in the universe. Good men love, angels love more, but God is love—the infinite, everlasting Love. "He prayeth best, who loveth best." He is nearest to God who by his Spirit has learned the great grace of love. "God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life" (John iii. 16). The love of Christ draws forth the love of his people. Their love, given in response to his most holy love, lifts them nearer to the King; it makes them take up the cross and follow him as his faithful soldiers, quitting themselves like men in the good fight of faith; it makes them terrible to the powers of evil as a bannered host, as the war-chariots of iron were in the days of the Judges (Judg. i. 19; iv. 3).

III. *SHORT DIALOGUE CONCLUDING THE CONVERSATION.* 1. *Request of the chorus.* The bride retires; the maidens of the chorus eagerly call her back; they desire to look again upon her beauty. They call her for the first and only time, "O Shulamite!" What is the meaning of the word? Is it equivalent to Shunamite? Was the bride a native of Shunem in the Plain of Esdraelon, where Elisha afterwards was wont to sojourn (2 Kings iv. 8—12)? And if so, can it be that the historical basis of the song is the love of Solomon for Abishag the fair Shunamite of 1 Kings i. 3? Or, again, is it possible, as some scholars have suggested, that the Hebrew name Shulamith may have been chosen as a near approach to the feminine form (*Shelomith*) of Solomon (*Shelomoh*), signifying the bride's relationship to the great monarch? But the bride seems to belong to the Lebanon district; and wives were not then accustomed to take their husband's name. Again, Shulamith may possibly have been the original name of the maiden, though it occurs nowhere else as a proper name. It is enough for our purpose that the word suggests the meaning "peaceful;" the Vulgate rendering is *pacifica*. The bride is modest and quiet, she is peaceful; such should Christians be. 2. *Question of the bride.* She repeats the name given to her by the chorus, and asks, "What will ye see in the Shulamite?" The question is asked in modesty. The last clause of the verse, whether taken as part of the question or as the answer of the chorus, is exceedingly difficult. The word translated "company" is the second part of Abel-meholah ("the meadow of the dance"), the home of Elisha (1 Kings xix. 16). The Hebrew for "two armies" may be the name of the town in Gilead, "Mahanaim," so called by Jacob when "the angels of God met him" there (Gen. xxxii. 2). Hence the translation of the Revised Version, "Why will ye look upon the Shulamite as upon the dance of Mahanaim?" as if the chorus was inviting

the bride to dance some stately measure called from the Gileadite town. Some commentators who take this view understand the bride's words as a modest refusal; others, that she complies with their request. But the second Hebrew word has the definite article, which would scarcely be used here if it were the name of the city. And if the first word must mean "dance," as it elsewhere does, may it not be taken in connection with the preceding titles of praise, "the bannered host" and "the chariots of a princely people," as a martial dance, or as the stately and well-ordered evolutions of two bands of warriors? This interpretation, which is suggested with much doubt, may perhaps be regarded as yielding a more suitable explanation than that of the dance, though this last is the view of many accomplished scholars. The chorus looks upon the bride with the interest and delight with which they would watch the evolutions of two hosts with banners and chariots. Warlike images occur several times in the song (ch. i. 9; vi. 4, 10, 12). To the Christian the words recall the onward march of the army of the soldiers of the cross with the attendant escort of angels, the two hosts (Mahanaim) of Gen. xxxii. 2. For the angels of God still, as in the times of old, encamp round about them that fear him to deliver them (Ps. xxxiv. 7). And still, if our eyes were opened, we should see, as the servant of Elisha once saw, "chariots and horses of fire round about" the faithful. "They that be with us are more than they that be with" the enemy (2 Kings vi. 16, 17).

HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Vers. 1—3.—*Earnest inquirers after Christ.* The conversation still goes on between her who has lost her beloved and the daughters of Jerusalem. She has just poured out her heart to them in the description of him whom her soul so loved, and these verses give their response. We learn—

I. THAT THERE IS A SPIRITUAL LOVELINESS IN THE SOUL THAT EARNESTLY SEEKS CHRIST. (Cf. ver. 1, "O thou fairest among women.") It is not merely that Christ sees this loveliness, we know he does; but others see it likewise. It is not the beloved who speaks here, but the daughters of Jerusalem. (Cf. 2 Cor. vii. 10, 11, where are set forth some of those graces of character and conduct which are found in the seeking soul.) And that humility, tenderness of conscience, zeal, devoutness, holy desire, and gentleness of spirit which accompany such seeking of Christ—how beautiful these things are! And, like all real beauty, there is no self-consciousness in it, but rather such soul mourns that it is so little like what Christ would have it be.

II. IT WILL WIN SYMPATHY AND HELP, WHICH ONCE IT DID NOT POSSESS. At the beginning of this song it is plain that the maiden who speaks did not have the sympathy but rather the contempt of the daughters of Jerusalem (cf. ch. i. 5, 8). But now all that is altered. They are won to her love. Great love to Christ will blessedly infect those about us. We can hardly live with such without coming under the power of its sweet and sacred contagion. Cf. Jethro, "We will go with you, for we see that the Lord hath blessed you." See, at the Crucifixion, how Joseph of Arimathea, Nicodemus, the centurion, and others ceased from their cold neutrality or open opposition, and showed that they felt the power of Christ's love.

III. IT WILL BECOME THE WISE INSTRUCTOR OF OTHERS. This inquiry of ver. 1 had its fulfilment when Christ lay in the tomb. Those who sought him mourned, but found him not. Cf. Christ's words concerning his absence, "Ye shall have sorrow, but your sorrow shall be turned into joy. Also Mark ii. 20. And the reply of ver. 2 had part fulfilment at that same period. Cf. "This day thou shalt be with me *in Paradise*" (Luke xxiii. 43). Yes, the Beloved had gone down into his garden (ver. 2). But we may also understand by the garden *his Church* (cf. on ch. iv. 6). And thus the soul we are contemplating instructs others. She tells them: 1. *Where Christ is to be found.* In his garden, the place he has chosen, separated, cultivated, beautified, and whither he loves to resort. And: 2. *What he delights in there.* The spices—the fragrant graces of regenerated souls, the frankincense of their worship and prayers. The fruits on which he feeds—the holy lives, the manifestation of his people's faith and love. The lilies—the pure, meek, and lowly souls that spring and grow there. 3. *What he does there.* He "feeds" there. "He shall see of the travail of his soul and be satis-

fed." As his "meat and drink" when here on earth was "to do the will of" the Father, so now his sustenance is those fruits of the Spirit which abound in his true Church. And he "gathers lilies." "He shall gather the lambs in his arms, and carry them in his bosom" (Isa. xl.). Whenever a pure and holy soul, like those of children and of saints, is transplanted from the earthly garden to the heavenly, that is the gathering of the lilies. "O death, where is thy sting?" Thus doth the soul that loves Christ instruct others.

IV. GAINS THE OBJECT OF ITS SEARCH. (Ver. 3.) "I am my Beloved's . . . mine." It is the declaration of holy rapture in the consciousness of Christ's love. They that seek him *shall* find him. There may be, there are, seasons when we fear we have lost him, but they shall surely be succeeded by such blessed seasons when the soul shall sing in her joy, "My Beloved is mine," etc. (ver. 3).—S. C.

Vers. 4—10 and ch. vii. 1—9.—*The friendship of the world.* Those who take the literal and historic view of this song see here a repetition of Solomon's attempts to bend to his will the maiden whom he sought to win. It is a repetition of ch. iv. 1—5. And in the extravagance of his flattery, his mention of her terribleness, his telling of his many queens and concubines, his huge harem, all of whom he says he will set aside for her—all this is like what he would say. Now, it all might be, as it generally has been, taken allegorically, as we have taken it in ch. iv. 1—5, and as setting forth Christ's estimate of his Church. But here the representations are yet more extravagant and even gross, so that we prefer to take them as telling of that which is evil rather than good; as the language, not of Christ, but of the world, his foe, in attempting to win from him those who are his. Let it, then, teach us concerning this friendship of the world—

I. FLATTERY IS EVER ONE OF ITS FORMS. It is compelled to adopt this in order to hide away the fatal issue of its friendship. Like as the vampire is said to fan its victim with its wings, soothing and stupefying it so that it may the more surely destroy it, thus the world soothes and sends asleep by its flatteries the soul it would destroy.

II. THIS FLATTERY HAS MARKED CHARACTERISTICS. 1. It is *extravagant*. Cf. what is here said in the verses selected concerning her of whom they speak. How monstrous are the representations as addressed to any maiden! And are not the conceits the world engenders in men's souls of this order? 2. It is *always fearful of losing its prey*. (Ver. 4, "Terrible as an army;" also ver. 10.) These expressions seem to indicate consciousness that the soul was as yet anything but fully won. 3. *Has no originality*. It says the same things over and over again. See about her "hair," her "teeth," her "cheeks" (vers. 5, 6, 7; cf. ch. iv. 1—5). And still every poor fool that the world successfully flatters is plied with the same worn-out arguments, and, alas! yields to them. 4. *Sensuous and sensual*. (Cf. ver. 8 and ch. vii. 1—9.) The baser instincts are the world's happy hunting-grounds. It knows that it can get a response there when there is none elsewhere. 5. *Ruthless and cruel*. (Ver. 9.) The flatterer professes, but let all such professions be doubted vehemently—that he would sacrifice all the rest for her whom he would now win. For her, the "dove," whom he, the hawk, would devour, the three score queens and the four score concubines and the virgins without number (ver. 8) should all be set aside and lose favour. Anything, no matter how unjust, so Solomon may please his sensual phantasy. They who are ruthless in winning will be ruthless when they have won (cf. poor Anne Boleyn). Oh, the all-devouring world! Its "words are smoother than butter," but "the poison of asps is under its lips."

III. TRUE LOVE WILL REJECT IT. Such love is the Ithuriel-like spear which detects at once what it is. So this maiden, type of the redeemed soul, will have none of it (cf. ch. vii. 10). And here is suggested—what, indeed, is the theme of the whole song—the invincible strength of the true love of Christ in the soul. Let us have that, and no flatteries or blandishments of the world, nor its fierce frowns either, shall seduce us from him whose we are and whose we hope ever to be. Such love will be "terrible," must be so, to all who would come against it. Christ's love to us is so infinite that, therefore, nothing less than these many dread words of his about the everlasting fire can serve to tell of his wrath against that and those who would destroy us for whom he died. And if we love him as we should, we shall give no quarter to sin; it will be to us "the abominable thing which I hate," even as to him. Oh, may this love dwell in us richly and for evermore!—S. C.

Ver. 10—ch. vii. 9.—*How souls come into perilous places.* “Or ever I was aware.” This section contains—so the literalists say—the account of the speaker’s coming to Solomon’s palace. (For right rendering of text, see the Revised Version and its margin.) She relates how she met the king’s court (ver. 11). She was dwelling at home, and occupied in her customary rural labours, when Solomon, on a pleasure tour (ch. iii. 6, etc.), came into the neighbourhood of her town, Engedi. There the ladies of the court saw her, and were greatly struck with her beauty (ver. 10). Bewildered, she would have fled (vers. 12, 13), but thought the royal chariots were those of the nobles of her country (ver. 12). The ladies of the court beg her to return (ver. 13), and when she asks what they want of her (ver. 13), they request, and she consents, that she will dance before them, as the maidens of her country were wont to do. Thus Solomon sees her, and is enraptured with her, and begins to praise her in his gross way from her feet upwards (ch. vii. 2—9; Müller, *in loc.*) as he had seen her in dancing. And he seems to have brought her to Jerusalem and to his palace there, where she relates all this. Such appears to be the history on which this song is founded. It is likely, natural, and enables us, whilst still regarding it allegorically, to avoid assigning to Christ language and conduct which far more befit such a one as Solomon was. From the narrative as above given we may learn that—

I. NO PLACES ARE FREE FROM SPIRITUAL PERIL. This maiden is represented as at home and occupied in her usual and proper employ, when suddenly all happened as is here told. And what places are there in which the world, and Satan, do not seek the soul’s harm? At home, in our lawful calling, in the Church, everywhere.

II. THOSE WHOM THE WORLD HAS ENSNARED ARE USED TO ENSNARE OTHERS. The women of Solomon’s court are represented as actively engaged in trying to secure this maiden for him. It is a true picture of how worldly souls try to make others as themselves.

III. MISTAKES HAVE OFTEN AS HURTFUL CONSEQUENCES AS SINS.

“Evil is wrought
By want of thought
As well as want of heart.”

It was so here. There was mistake as to who the people were; as to the motive of the request made her; in not at once escaping; in yielding to their requests. It does seem very hard that when there is no intention of evil, evil should yet come, and often so terribly (cf. 1 Kings xiii. 11, etc.). But it is that we may learn by our mistakes. We learn by nothing so well, and they are never suffered to have irreparable consequences.

IV. THE PERIL OF PARLEYING WITH SPIRITUAL FOES. Had she who is told of here fled away as she intended, none of her after-trial would have followed. To hold converse with a spiritual enemy is next to giving up the keys of the fortress. See how prompt our Lord was in repelling the suggestions of the tempter.

V. THOUGH WE FALL WE SHALL NOT BE UTTERLY CAST DOWN. The tempter in this history was baffled after all. She whom he tried so much kept her faith and love. The soul that loves Christ may wander and fall, but shall assuredly be brought back. “He restoreth my soul.” Faithful love will soon reassert its power.—S. C.

Vers. 1—3.—*Successful quest after the chief good.* The inquirer has taken a step in advance. Awhile he asked, “What is there in Jesus that makes him so attractive?” To this question the loving disciple had responded. He had answered the question fully. He had given a full description of the sinner’s Friend. He had testified to the worth and excellence of the heavenly King. And now the inquirer asks further, “Where may I find this gracious Friend? My heart craves the good which this Friend alone can bestow. I fain would have him too. Tell me where I may find him.”

I. HERE IS SUGGESTED A DILIGENT SEARCH FOR JESUS. 1. *Spiritual life and joy in one attract others.* Genuine piety acts like a magnetic charm. A well-kept garden, stocked with fragrant flowers, has strong attractions for a thousand men, and the fragrant graces of true piety have a like fascination. If “a thing of beauty is a joy for ever,” the life of a true Christian, being of all things the most beautiful, is an abiding joy. There is nothing so capable of manifesting beauty as character. If all Christians were as gracious and loving as they might be, what a benign effect would this have on the ungodly! This is Christ’s method for propagating his gospel. “I am glorified in them.” By which

he meant to say, "All the charm of my character and all the fruit of my redemption shall be seen in the lives of my disciples." This will win the world's attention. 2. *Christian Churches are the objects of the world's respect.* This is not true of every community that styles itself a Church. But every true Church commands the respect and homage of mankind. And as a Church is simply an assemblage of individuals, a genuine Christian has a similar influence over men. The bride of Christ is here addressed as "the fairest among women." Purity and magnanimity of character command universal respect. Prejudiced men may malign and slander consistent Christians; they may envy their high attainments; yet in their heart of hearts they do them homage. They crave a good man's benediction. 3. *Active search is needful if we would find Christ.* It is quite true that Jesus seeks the sinner. He came to "seek the lost." This first desire to have the friendship of the Beloved has been awakened in the heart by the good Spirit of Christ. Nevertheless, there is a part we must perform, or we shall not gain success. We must strive to enter into the kingdom, or the portals will not open. The salvation of the soul is not to be attained by indolent passivity. There must be search, exertion, intense effort. We must break away from old companions. We must forego former indulgences. We must gain knowledge of Christ. We must search the Scriptures. We must be much in prayer. We must watch the stratagems of the tempter. We must seek if we would find. 4. *To find Christ it is best to have an experienced guide.* "That we may seek him with thee." The man who has found Christ, and knows well all the favourite haunts of Christ, is the best guide for others. No qualification in a guide is so good as personal experience. Nothing can take its place. No titles, no diplomas, no amount of intellectual learning, will take the place of experience. The pilot who has navigated a hundred ships through the rocky straits, though he may not be able to read a word in any language, is the best guide to bring us safely into port. It is a foolish act to refuse the practical counsels of faithful Christians. A learned man once accounted for his eminent acquisitions by the fact that he had never hesitated to ask questions respecting the unknown. To find Christ is eternal life, therefore let us use every wise measure in order to gain so great a boon.

II. VALUABLE COUNSEL. "My beloved is gone down into his garden." 1. *Here is confident assurance upon the matter.* On the part of a real Christian there is no doubt where Christ can be found. His knowledge is clear, for it is well-founded. As surely as men know in what part of the heavens the sun will rise or will set, so the friend of Jesus knows where he can be found. So he speaks in no doubtful tones. There is no peradventure. "My Beloved is gone down into his garden." There he had always found the Saviour, when devoutly he had sought him. For "his delights are with the children of men." And his gracious promise to his Church has never been broken, "Where two or three are gathered together in my Name, there am I in the midst of them." 2. *In the society of living and fruitful saints Jesus will be found.* He has gone "to the beds of spices." However imperfect and insipid our graces seem to ourselves, Jesus finds in them a sweet savour. The organ through which Jesus discovers these graces, and enjoys their fragrance and sweetness, is far more highly developed in him than in us. To his sensitive nature there is a fine aroma in our lowliness and patience, in our love and praise, which we had not suspected. Nor do the sweetest songs of angels attract him so much as the first lisps of a penitent's prayer. The nearer we get to Jesus the richer joy do we attain. There is a rare delicacy in the gladness, easier felt than described. So in our fresh passionate love, and in our simple zeal, and in our childlike trust, Jesus finds profoundest satisfaction. In the midst of such virgin souls he delights to dwell. These hold him, and will not let him go. What spice-beds are to every lover of innocent pleasure, the piety of true saints is to Jesus. Near such he may at any time be found. If any man longs to find the Saviour, he will find him in the vicinity of genuine believers. He is gone to the "beds of spices," perchance to some bedside, where deep-rooted love is blossoming and bearing fruit. 3. *Purity of heart wins Christ's presence.* He is gone "to gather lilies." Using Oriental language to convey heavenly truth, he is described as a Shepherd who feeds his flock "among the lilies." In the former chapter we read, "His lips are like lilies." To express his fondness for purity, he portrays his bride as "a lily among thorns." In the use of all such language he utters his strong affection for that which is pure in moral character. If he stoops in his pity to save a polluted sinner, he at the same time makes it clear that he

loathes and abhors sin. His companions shall be spiritual virgins. Until a man is new-born he cannot see the kingdom of heaven, much less can he see the King. Purity of life may not yet be reached, but if in the central heart the purpose and firm resolve be for purity, then Jesus will soon be found. "Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God."

III. FAITHFUL TESTIMONY. "I am my beloved's, and my beloved is mine." 1. *Religion is essentially a matter of the heart.* This title of endearment, "My Beloved," implies that he has won the affections of the heart. True piety is not simply a matter of conviction. It is not merely a doctrine or a creed. It is not a set of forms and ceremonies. It is an affair of the heart. It moves and holds the whole man. Feeling, desire, choice, strong affection, enter into the warp and woof of true religion. I may be very incompetent to set forth Christ's claims to the homage of mankind. But one thing I know—Jesus is supreme in my heart. None is so worthy of the central shrine as he. I have given myself to him, as the only possible return for his love. 2. *This testimony is the outcome of vigorous faith.* The bride of Christ had used this language before, but now she reverses the order. The order of events is not always the order of our experience. There are times when the Christian loses the assurance that he is loved by Christ. The sunshine of the Master's smile is hidden. Yet even then the language of faith is, "Come what may, I give myself afresh to him. Whether he count me worthy of a place in his regards or not, he is worthy of a place in mine. I am his. Therefore faith says (though I do not realize it now), 'My Beloved is mine.'" 3. *This renewed testimony is required by new circumstance.* The daughters of Jerusalem were inquiring where this Friend of sinners might be found. The bride of Christ undertakes to guide into his presence. Then she wishes to make it plain upon what terms Jesus will reveal himself to seekers. So she means to say, "I gave my whole self to him. I opened to him my heart, and made him Monarch there. Do you likewise, and you shall find the Saviour too." Jesus Christ craves the human heart. "Lovest thou me?" is his inquiry still. Even the city harlot, sick of sin, and opening her heart to Jesus, found in him sympathy and pardon and a new life. "She loved much, therefore her sins are forgiven her."—D.

Vers. 4—10.—*Christ's picture of his Church.* The value of an encomium depends on the qualification of the speaker. If a man is a master of eloquent phrases, and knows but little of the person he eulogizes, his encomium is little worth. If, on the other hand, the speaker is a skilful judge of character, and knows well the person, and speaks from pure motives, his estimate is priceless. Now, the best judge of the quality of a wife is her own husband, for no one else has such opportunities of knowing her virtues. If we regard the language in the text as the language of Christ, then he has all the qualities needful to be an accurate judge. As the Bridegroom, he has intimate acquaintance with his bride; and so righteous is he that he will neither exaggerate nor detract in his delineation. He will gauge with perfect accuracy her merit and her worth. Others may not acquiesce in his judgment. She herself may deem it a flattering portrait. But Jesus is an unerring Judge, and we accept with perfect confidence his description of his Church.

I. THIS LANGUAGE PLAINLY CONVEYS THE IDEA OF SPIRITUAL BEAUTY. "Thou art beautiful, my love, as Tirzah; comely as Jerusalem." Tirzah was a city on the mountains of Samaria, that had a wide renown for beauty. The name meant "a delightful place." God has given to the human soul a faculty that discerns and appreciates what is beautiful. We detect what is beautiful in material nature, viz. symmetry of form and harmony of colour. We discern also what is beautiful in human character and in human conduct. All beauty springs from God, the Fount. He is perfect Beauty, as much as perfect Righteousness. The constituent elements of spiritual beauty are humility, holiness, and love. These, wisely blended, form a comely character. It is always unsafe, because an inducement to pride, to praise the bodily beauty of a maiden within her hearing. But one of the elements in spiritual beauty is lowliness; hence public praise is an advantage rather than a peril. For commendation is a spur to fresh effort, and whatever quickens our exertion in the culture of humility and holiness is a boon to be prized. Nor is this spiritual beauty evanescent. It is a permanent acquisition. It will develop and mature towards perfection, as the ages roll on. The sun

will be quenched in darkness, the stars will disappear or else assume new forms; but the ransomed saints will be rising in excellence, and adding to their spiritual adornments, world without end. This high estate of beauty may not as yet be *in esse*, but it is *in posse*. It is not yet an actual possession. But it is in course of development, from the bud to the open flower. It is clearly seen in its perfectness by the prescient eye of our Immanuel.

II. THIS LANGUAGE BETOKENS THE UNITY OF THE CHURCH. "My dove, my undefiled, is one." In all God's works we find unity amid diversity. Throughout all material forces we discover system. Part is subordinated to part. Everything is linked to everything else. All forces work together for the well-being of the whole. There is organic unity. The universe shows the presence of one Master-mind. God loves order. Confusion, conflict, anarchy, are an abomination to him. Yet variety is not displeasing to him. Very clearly Jesus has not ordained a system of rigid uniformity in his Church. That would not add to her beauty nor to her usefulness. But the heart of Jesus is set upon unity. In his great prayer to his Father, prior to his crucifixion, he pleaded, "That they all may be one, as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee." In opinions and beliefs it is next to impossible for the Church to be one. For God has created such diversities of taste and temper in men's minds, that for the time present truth presents itself under many aspects. Likely enough, this will continue until the human mind can more easily grasp the system of truth as a whole. Yet, while opinions and beliefs may vary, Christians can be one in feeling, one in love, one in loyalty to their King, one in aggressive service. This unity of life and love, amid diversities of belief and methods of service, will add to the Church's beauty and the Church's success. All the imagery which God has employed in Scripture to set forth his Church conveys this idea of unity. Is the Church a vine, springing out of Christ the Root? Then the manifold branches and twigs imply a united whole. Is a human body employed as an illustration? Then all the members and organs working in harmony imply unity. So, in our text, the bride is the representative of all saints, in all lands and in all ages. A dominant note of Christ's Church is unity. "There are many members, yet are they one body."

III. THE LANGUAGE DENOTES FAME. "The daughters saw her, and blessed her; yea, the queens and the women praised her." High and noble qualities of character are sure to command fame. Fame is a doubtful good. Counterfeit excellence, like tinselled brass, sometimes gains currency, and imposes on credulous people. Successful wickedness will, now and then, obtain a transient fame. Nevertheless, real and permanent honour belongs only to substantial goodness. Sooner or later the true Church will secure high renown. "God is in the midst of her." "The highest himself shall establish her." Her spiritual beauty and her beneficent influence shall win for her immortal praise. Beyond all human institutions, the Church will be found the bond of human society, the bulwark of freedom, the inspirer of intellectual life, the guardian of the nation's welfare. Fame is of secondary importance, yet fame must not be despised. For fame is power. Fame is large opportunity for doing good. Fame, as the result of generous and heroic service, is inevitable. Yet the Church will not keep her fame for herself. She will lay it at the feet of her Lord, to whom all belongs. For the present the Church may inherit the world's scorn rather than the world's fame; but when her hidden light and power shall break forth, "the Gentiles shall come to her light, and kings to the brightness of her rising." Resplendent fame is her sure reversion, "for the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it."

IV. HERE IS FURTHER THE IDEA OF HOPE-CREATING. "Who is this that looketh forth as the morning?" Morning is the dawn of hope to the benighted and the shipwrecked. Such are the evils that infest human society, that many thoughtful men have become pessimists. "Is life worth living?" many ask. If, after all the struggles and toils and endurance of this life, there is only extinction, or if the future is a dark enigma, then may not suicide be true wisdom? Hope, the backbone of all energy, is destroyed. The great questions are—Is there any desirable future for the human race on the earth? Is there a certain prospect of a better life for righteous souls after death? Now, there is no oracle, outside the Church, that can respond to these queries. The Church is the apostle of hope, the champion of humanity. The Church is a pledge of a better future for mankind. The Church proclaims a universal brotherhood. The Church is the foster-mother of all the useful arts; the foster-mother of progress, learning, social order,

and peace. She changes deserts into gardens, and prisons into palaces. Where dark despair awhile reigned, she comes like the light of morning, and opens a new day.

V. **HERE IS THE IDEA OF USEFULNESS.** "Fair as the moon, clear as the sun." As the luminaries of night and of day perform an office of unspeakable usefulness to mankind, so does the true Church. In some respects the Church most resembles the moon. Her light is borrowed, and hence is enfeebled. She passes oft through manifold phases. The world often obstructs her light. It is only now and then that her light is full-orbed and at its best. This shall not always be. Her light shall be soft and gentle, like the light of the moon; yet for clearness and brilliance she shall be like the sun. Who can measure the potent usefulness of light? How destitute of beauty and of life would our earth be without light! If to-morrow the sun should not rise, what consternation would prevail in every home of man! The wheels of commerce would stand still. Agriculture would be suspended. Food would speedily be exhausted. All artificial light would soon come to an end, and, before many months had sped, all animal and vegetable life would expire. Equally useful, yea, more beneficent still, is the Church in the moral world. Apart from the truth embodied in the Church, what would mankind know of God, or his relationship to men, or his purposes of redemption, or his provision for a higher home? Or what would men know of themselves, their spiritual capacities, their Divine origin, their possible developments, or the resources of Divine help open to them? If you could blot out from existence the Church of Christ, this world would speedily sink into darkness and ruin. Within a single generation of men it would be a chaos, a pandemonium. Usefulness is predicated.

VI. **A FURTHER IDEA IS DEVELOPMENT.** "Who is this that looketh forth as the morning?" The morning is a promise and a pledge of perfect day. Light and warmth advance by regular stages until noon is reached. It is a picture of certain progress—advancement along an appointed way. Such is the destined life of the Church. At her birth she was feeble. Political arrogance at Jerusalem thought to crush out her life. But she steadily grew, passed safely through the stages of infancy and childhood, until now she appears a full-grown, ruddy maiden. Development is evidently God's order. He places trees at zero, and from the lowest point gives them opportunity to reach the highest. At the present hour the Church's development is an impressive fact. She grows in intelligence, in vigour, in power, in influence, in usefulness, day by day. At no period in her history was the Church of Christ so highly developed as she is to-day. Her progress is assured.

VII. **HERE IS ALSO THE IDEA OF CONQUEST AS THE RESULT OF CONFLICT.** "Terrible as an army with banners." The metaphor imports a majesty of active power that moves onward with confident step to overthrow its foes. "Terrible as a bannered host." The Church on earth is a Church militant. Many regiments of believers make up one army. This consecrated host of God's elect is commissioned to fight against error, ignorance, superstition, vice, and all immorality. Until the day of complete triumph dawns, she must station her sentinels, discipline her recruits, boldly contend with sin, and lead men captives to the feet of Christ. In proportion to her internal holiness and unity and zeal she will be "terrible" to ungodly men. The main secret of her terrible-ness is the fact that Jehovah dwells in her midst. As the Canaanites of old feared the host of Israel because the rumour of their power had spread on every side, and the mystic presence of Jehovah was with them, so is it still. The more that evil men discern the tokens of God's presence in the Church, the more they tremble. On the banner of the Church, men see the pattern of the cross. This inspires courage in the army, but terror among opponents. And the old battle-cry of the Crusaders is still the battle-cry of the Church, "By this we conquer!"—D.

Vers. 1—3.—*True love is true knowledge.* Knowledge of phenomena and of physical laws is scientific, and is of the intellect. It is not so with knowledge of persons, which is largely intuitive, and depends upon the qualities of the heart. It is sometimes seen that a character, misunderstood by the learned and clever, is apprehended by a very child. A man who is not loved is not truly known; but as love grows warmer, it may well be that knowledge grows clearer. It is certainly so with our experimental acquaintance with our Saviour and Lord.

I. **CHRIST IS NOT REALLY KNOWN BY THOSE WHO STUDY HIM AT A DISTANCE.** HOW

is it that the Lord Jesus is so utterly misunderstood by many able and distinguished men? that some such class him with impostors or with fanatics? that others are evidently at a loss to explain the hold he has over the heart of humanity? How many distressing representations of the Saviour's character, sayings, and ministry are to be met with in the writings of even learned and thoughtful men! The explanation is to be found in a law which governs all our knowledge of persons as distinct from our knowledge of phenomena. These latter we may study from without, as cool spectators. But no great man is to be comprehended if studied in such a spirit; far less any man of remarkable moral character and influence. He who will not *sympathize* with such a person must be content to be ignorant of him; for he is only to be known upon a nearer view, a closer acquaintance, and by means of a profound and tender association with him of feeling and of confidence.

II. CHRIST IS, HOWEVER, KNOWN BY THOSE WHO LOVE HIM, AND ARE UPON TERMS OF INTIMATE FRIENDSHIP WITH HIM. The peasant woman who is, in this Song of Songs, pictured as the beloved of the king, cherished for her husband the warmest affection; he was everything to her—ever in her memory when absent, and ever in her heart. Hence she knew him better than others; and those who wished to know of his character and his movements did well to inquire of her. In this simple fact we discern the operation of an interesting and valuable moral principle. To whom shall we go for an appreciative estimate of the character and the work of Immanuel? We shall go in vain to those among the learned and the critical who care not for Christ save as for an object of speculative, psychological, or historical inquiry. We shall fare better if we appeal to the lowly and the unlearned, if only they are persons who feel their personal indebtedness to Christ, who have "tasted that the Lord is gracious," who have learned by their own personal experience what he can do for those who put their trust in him. It is those who, like Mary, can exclaim, "*My Master*;" who, like Thomas, can address him as "*My Lord and my God*;" who, like Peter, can appeal to him, saying, "Lord, thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I love thee;"—it is such that can tell of the mystery of the Saviour's love, and the gracious wisdom of the Saviour's ways.

APPLICATION. These considerations are a rebuke to those who despise the experience and undervalue the testimony of lowly and unlettered disciples of Jesus Christ. And they point out to all who desire intimate knowledge of Christ, that the true method for them to adopt to that end is to yield to him their heart's warmest affection and unreserved, ungrudging confidence. By the way of love we may come to enjoy clear knowledge, and to give effectual witness.—T.

Ver. 4.—*The spiritual beauty of the Church of Christ.* There is such a study as the æsthetics of the soul. Beauty is not wholly material; it has a spiritual side appreciable by the spiritual sense. There is beauty of character as well as of form—"beauty of holiness," in which the holy delight. In the human countenance may now and again be seen, shining through symmetrical features, the loveliness of high emotion and aspiration. And in the spiritual society of the redeemed, even where churches are lowly, services inartistic, the ministry far from brilliant, the discerning mind may nevertheless often recognize glimpses of moral majesty, or comeliness, or attractiveness, speaking of a Divine favour and a Divine inspiration.

I. THE REALITY AND NATURE OF SPIRITUAL BEAUTY. It is not merely imaginary, like that

"Light that never was on sea or land,
The consecration and the poet's dream."

Though not physical, it exists, and partakes of the character of moral excellence. It is not discernible by the thoughtless, the insusceptible; it may be passed unnoticed by the haughty and the worldly. Yet it is observed by the enlightened and morally sensitive; such contemplate it with a satisfaction deeper than that of the artist who gazes entranced upon a noble statue or a fascinating picture.

II. THE SOURCE OF SPIRITUAL BEAUTY. The Church does not claim to be in possession of such a quality in its own right, to take credit for it as for something due to its own innate power and goodness. On the contrary, it acknowledges that all

moral excellence is due to Divine presence and operation. The beauty which adorns the Lord's spiritual house is the Lord's own workmanship, the expression of the Lord's own wisdom and love. It is derived, and it is reflected—the mirrored image of the purity and benignity which are essentially and for ever his own. It is sustained and developed and perfected by the same grace by which it was originally imparted. The language of the Church's prayer is accordingly, "Let the beauty of the Lord our God be upon us," and the language of the Church's grateful praise, "Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but unto thy Name give glory."

III. THE IMPRESSIVENESS AND ATTRACTIVENESS OF SPIRITUAL BEAUTY. There are, indeed, unspiritual natures for whom it has no interest and no charm. But it is dear to Christ, who delights in it as the reflection of his own excellence. The King desires and greatly delights in the beauty of his spiritual spouse, the Church; to him she is beautiful and comely, fair as the moon, and clear as the sun. And all who share the mind of Christ take pleasure in that which delights him. The purity and unity, the Christ-like compassion and self-sacrifice of God's people, have exercised an attractive power over natures spiritual, awakened, and sensitive. By his living Church the Lord has drawn multitudes unto himself. And thus the beauty of the Church, reflecting the beauty of Christ, is the means of winning souls to the fellowship of immortal love.—T.

Ver. 4.—*The terribleness of the Church of Christ.* There is nothing inconsistent in the assertion that the same living society is possessed of beauty and of terribleness. To the susceptible mind there is ever something awful in beauty; it is felt to be Divine. There is a side of beauty which verges upon sublimity. We feel this in gazing upon the headlong cataract, the glorious sea. It sometimes seems to us as though God draws near to our souls when we suddenly behold a noble woman's grace and charm and pure ethereal expression. So there is in Christ's Church a severity as well as a winningness of beauty; we are conscious in some phases of Christian life of an aspect of deep and unspeakable awe. How is this to be explained?

I. THE SPIRITUAL CHURCH IS TERRIBLE AS THE DEPOSITARY OF THE MYSTERIOUS AND SUPERNATURAL GRACE OF GOD. It is the scene of the "real presence" of him who ever fulfils his own assurance, "Lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world."

II. AS POSSESSING IN HOLINESS OF CHARACTER A SUBLIMITY WHICH APPEALS TO THE CHASTENED AND APPRECIATIVE IMAGINATION. Moving with spotless garments amidst the world's defilement and contamination, the true Church presents to the enlightened vision a spectacle of true sublimity, and commands our reverence as that which on earth is most truly sublime.

III. AS REDUKING AND FORBIDDING ALL THAT IS MORALLY EVIL. To penitents the attitude of the Church of Christ is, as was the Master's, benignant and compassionate; but to hardened sinners and to contemptible hypocrites there is a sternness and severity in its demeanour which may well make its presence terrible.

IV. AS POSSESSED OF MILITANT PROWESS AND POWERS. "Terrible as an army with banners." The Church has to confront the hosts of ignorance, of error, and of sin; its attitude and its equipment must, therefore, partake of the nature of a warlike force. As an army, the Church of Christ acknowledges the leadership of the Divine Captain of our salvation; is supplied with weapons, not carnal, but mighty to the pulling down of strongholds; is distinguished by a duly martial spirit, shrinking from no conflict to which it is called, by steady discipline and by just order. Well, then, may it be likened to an embattled host, with banners floating on the breeze, and the voice of the Commander ringing through the ranks. The spectacle is grand and awe-inspiring—an earnest of victory, an omen of empire.—T.

Vers. 11, 12.—*Spiritual promotion.* The Shulamite is now the queen; but she has not forgotten her early home, her youthful training, occupations, and companionship. She takes a pleasure in looking back upon bygone days, and calling to mind the remarkable manner in which, through the king's admiration and favour, she was raised from her lowly condition to the highest position amongst the ladies of the land. The contrast may be used to illustrate the change which takes place in the experience

of the soul which has been visited by the mercy of God in Christ Jesus, and has been raised from a state of pitiable depression and hopelessness to participation in the fellowship and the life of the Son of God.

I. THE SOUL'S FIRST STATE OF HUMILIATION.

II. THE INTERVENTION OF THE DIVINE FRIEND UPON THE SOUL'S BEHALF. 1. The several *steps* of this interposition may be connected with the facts of this simple and beautiful narrative. Christ visits the soul, bringing himself before the attention of the object of his merciful regard. He loves the soul, and makes his affection known by words and by deeds. He appropriates the soul as his own chosen possession. He thus elevates the soul by bidding it share his own nature and life. 2. The *manner* of the Saviour's approach in many instances corresponds with the king's revelation of his love to the Shulamite maiden. It may be sudden and impressive, and yet at the same time unspeakably welcome and appreciated.

III. THE DIGNITY TO WHICH THE OBJECT OF DIVINE CONSIDERATION IS ELEVATED. The change of condition experienced by the maiden from Northern Palestine, when she became the consort of Solomon, may serve to set forth the elevation of the soul that Christ has, in the friendship of his Divine heart, made partaker of his spiritual life. Such a condition involves: 1. Fellowship with the King himself. 2. Congenial society. 3. Dignified occupations. 4. Honour from all associates. 5. Imperishable glories.

APPLICATION. The soul that rejoices most gratefully in the immunities and honours of the spiritual life and calling will do well to recollect the state of error, sin, and hopelessness from which the human race was delivered by the compassion and power of the Divine Redeemer. The Divine communion to which Christians are admitted is a privilege which was forfeited by sin, and which has been recovered and restored through the clemency and loving-kindness of him who is love, and whose love is nowhere so conspicuous as in the salvation of his people. There are many cases in which there is danger lest this obligation should be overlooked. It is well that the polished stone in the temple of God should look back to "the hole of the pit whence it was digged."—T.

EXPOSITION.

CHAPTER VII.

Ver. 1.—How beautiful are thy feet in sandals, O prince's daughter! The joints of thy thighs are like jewels, the work of the hands of a cunning workman. To the ladies who are looking on the bride appears simply noble and royal. The word *naudhib* which is used, translated "prince's daughter," means "noble in disposition," and so in birth and rank, as in 1 Sam. ii. 8; Ps. cxiii. 8; so in ch. vi. 12, "the princely people." The description, which is perfectly chaste, is intended to bring before the eye the lithe and beautiful movements of an elegant dancer; the bendings of the body, full of activity and grace, are compared to the swinging to and fro of jewelled ornaments made in chains. The cunning workman or artist is one who is master of that which abides beautiful. *ppx*, like, *pp*, "whose truthful work can be trusted." The description passes from the thighs or loins to the middle part of the body, because in the mode of dancing prevailing in the East the breast and the body are raised, and the outlines of the form appear through the clothing, which

is of a light texture. We must not expect to find a symbolical meaning for all the details of such a description. The general intention is to set forth the beauty and glory of the bride. The Church of Christ is most delightful in his sight when it is most full of activity and life, and every portion of it is called forth into manifest excellence. "*Arise, shine*," is the invitation addressed to the whole Church, "shake thyself from the dust," "put on thy beautiful garments," be ready for thy Lord.

Ver. 2.—Thy navel is like a round goblet, wherein no mingled wine is wanting: thy belly is like a heap of wheat set about with lilies. It must be remembered that ladies are speaking of one who is in the ladies' apartment. There is nothing indelicate in the description, though it is scarcely Western. The "round goblet," or basin, with mixed wine, i.e. wine with water or snow mixed with it, is intended to convey the idea of the shape of the lovely body with its flesh colour appearing through the semi-transparent clothing, and moving gracefully like the diluted wine in the glass goblet. The navel is referred to simply as the centre

of the body, which it is in infants, and nearly so in adults. Perhaps Delitzsch is right in thinking that there may be an attempt to describe the navel itself as like the whirling hollow of water in a basin. In the latter part of the verse the shape of the body is undoubtedly intended. "To the present day winnowed and sifted corn is piled up in great heaps of symmetrical, half-spherical form, which are then frequently stuck over with things that move in the wind, for the purpose of protecting them against birds. The appearance of such heaps of wheat," says Wetstein, "which one may see in long parallel rows on the threshing-floors of a village, is very pleasing to a peasant; and the comparison of the song every Arabian will regard as beautiful." According to the Moslem Sunnas, the colour of wheat was that of Adam. The white is a subdued white, denoting both perfect spotlessness and the purity of health. The smooth, round, fair body of the maiden is seen to advantage in the varied movements of the dance.

Ver. 3.—*Thy two breasts are like two fawns that are twins of a roe.* So in ch. iv. 5; but there the addition occurs, "which feed among the lilies." This is omitted here, perhaps, only because lilies are just before spoken of. The description is now in the lips of the ladies; before it was uttered by the king himself.

Ver. 4.—*Thy neck is like the tower of ivory; thine eyes are as the pools in Heshbon, by the gate of Bath-rabbim; thy nose is like the tower of Lebanon which looketh toward Damascus.* This is plainly a partial repetition of the king's description. The ivory tower was perhaps a tower well known, covered with ivory tablets, slender in structure, dazzlingly white in appearance, imposing and captivating. No doubt in the lips of the court ladies it is intended that this echo of the royal bridegroom's praises shall be grateful to him. Heshbon is situated some five and a half hours east of the northern points of the Dead Sea, on an extensive, undulating, fruitful, high table-land, with a far-reaching prospect. "The comparison of the eyes to a pool means either their glistening like a water-mirror or their being lovely in appearance, for the Arabian knows no greater pleasure than to look upon clear, gently rippling water:" cf. Ovid, *'De Arte Am.'* ii. 722—

"*Adspicies oculos tremulo fulgore micantes,
Ut solis liquida sæpe refulget aqua.*"

The nose formed a straight line down from the forehead, conveying the impression of symmetry, and at the same time a dignity and majesty inspiring with awe like the tower of Lebanon. The reference is perhaps to a particular tower, and in the time of

Solomon there were many noted specimens of architectural and artistic splendour. "A tower which looks in the direction of Damascus is to be thought of as standing on one of the eastern spurs of Hermon or on the top of Amana (ch. iv. 8), whence the Amana (Barada) takes its rise, whether as a watch-tower (2 Sam. viii. 6) or only as a look-out from which might be enjoyed the paradisaical prospect."

Ver. 5.—*Thine head upon thee is like Carmel, and the hair of thine head like purple; the king is held captive in the tresses thereof.* Carmel is called the "Nose of the mountain range" (*Arfel-jebel*). It is a promontory. The meaning, no doubt, is the exquisite fitness of the head upon the neck, which is one of the most lovely traits of personal beauty. Some, however, think that the reference is to colour—Carmel being derived from the Persian, and meaning "crimson." This is rejected by Delitzsch, as the Persian would be *carmile*, not *carmel*. The transition is natural from the position and shape of the head and neck to the hair. The purple shell-fish is found near Carmel (cf. Lucian's *πορφύρεος πλάκαμος* and Anacreon's *πορφύραι χάρταις*, and similar expressions in Virgil's *'Georgics,'* i. 405, and Tibullus, i. 4. 63). The locks of hair are a glistening purple colour, i.e. their black is purple as they catch the lights. Hengstenberg, however, thinks that the reference is to the temples, and not to the hair itself; but the use of the term in classical poets is decisive. The lovely head shaking the locks as the body moves gracefully in the dance fills the king with delight and admiration. He is quite captivated, and the ladies, having finished their description of the bride, look at the bridegroom, and behold him quite lost in the fascination—"held captive in the tresses." Delitzsch quotes a similar expression from Goethe, in the *'West Ostliche Divan,'* "There are more than fifty hooks in each lock of thy hair." The idea of taking captive is frequent in Hebrew poetry (cf. Prov. vi. 25; Sirach ix. 3, 4). Thus ends the song of the ladies in praise of the bride. We must suppose that the king, who is probably present, then takes up the word, and pours out his heart.

Vers. 6—9.—(*Song of the bridegroom rejoicing over the bride.*) *How fair and how pleasant art thou, O love, for delights! This thy stature is like to a palm tree, and thy breasts to clusters of grapes. I said, I will climb up into the palm tree, I will take hold of the branches thereof; let thy breasts be as clusters of the vine, and the smell of thy breath like apples; and thy mouth like the best wine, that goeth down smoothly for my beloved, gliding through the lips of them that are asleep. The*

abstract "love" is plainly here used for the concrete, "O loved one." It is just possible that the meaning may be—How delightful is the enjoyment of love! but the bodily description which follows suggests that the words are addressed directly to Shulamith. We certainly have in 1 Cor. xiii. an apostolic apostrophe to love, which Delitzsch calls the Apostle Paul's spiritual song of songs. But it would be somewhat irrelevant here. The king is deeply moved as he watches the beautiful figure before him, and delights in the thought that so lovely a creature is his own. The rapture which he pours out may be taken either as a recollection of how he was captivated in the past, or the past may be used for the present, as it frequently is in Hebrew. The meaning is the same in both cases. The palm tree may be selected on account of its elegance, but it is commonly employed in Eastern poetry as the emblem of love. The mystical writers use it to denote the Divine manifestation. The comparison of the breasts to clusters of grapes is quite natural, but no doubt reference is intended to the fruit as luscious and refreshing. Both the palm and the vine in the East are remarkable for the abundance and beauty of their fruits. In the case of the palm—"dark brown or golden-yellow clusters, which crown the summit of the stem and impart a wonderful beauty to the tree, especially when seen in the evening twilight." The palm and the vine are both employed in Scripture in close connection with the Church. "The righteous shall flourish as the palm tree;" "The vine brought out of Egypt" (Ps. lxxx.), and the "vineyard of the beloved" (Isa. v.), and the "true vine," to which the Lord Jesus Christ compares himself, remind us that the illustration was perfectly familiar among the Jews; and we can scarcely doubt that the reference in this case would be understood. The Lord delighteth in those "fruits of righteousness" which come forth from the life and love of his people. They are the true adornment of the Church. The people of God are never so beautiful in the eyes of their Saviour as when they are covered with gifts and graces in their active expression in the world. Then it is that he himself fills his Church with his presence. The ninth verse is somewhat difficult to explain. The words are no doubt still in the lips of the king. There is no change of speaker until ver. 10, when Shulamith replies to the king's adoring address. Ginsburg says, "Her voice is not merely compared to wine because it is sweet to everybody, but to such wine as would be sweet to a friend, and on that account is more valuable and pleasant." The Authorized

Version is supported by some critics as the best, "causing the lips of those that are asleep to speak." Delitzsch adheres to this. The LXX. renders it thus: *ικανονμένους χεῖρας μου καὶ ὀδοῦσιν*, "accommodating itself to my lips and teeth." So Symmachus, *προσπιδέμενος*. Jerome, *Labiiusque et dentibus illius ad ruminandum*. Luther strangely renders, "which to my friend goes smoothly down and speaks of the previous year" (pointing *לְשׁוֹן* as *לְשׁוֹן*). Another rendering is, "which comes unawares upon the lips of the sleepers." Some think it refers to the smacking of the lips after wine. "Generous wine is a figure of the love-responses of the beloved, sipped in, as it were, with pleasing satisfaction, which hover around the sleepers in delightful dreams, and fill them with hallucinations." Another reading substitutes "the ancient" for "them that are asleep." The general meaning must be wine that is very good and easily taken, or which one who is a good judge of wine will praise. It is possible that there is some slight corruption in the text. The passage is not to be rendered with absolute certainty. Delitzsch and others think that it is an interruption of the bride's, but they have little support for that view. The bride begins to speak at ver. 10.

Ver. 10.—I am my beloved's, and his desire is towards me. So in ch. vi. 3 and ii. 16. It seems possible that a portion of the bride's speech may have dropped out—"My beloved is mine"—or she may wish to adopt the language of Gen. iii. 16, and represent herself as a true wife, whose husband is wrapt up in her love. By "desire" is intended the impulse of love, *רָצוֹן*, from a root *רָצַח*, "to move or impel." The thought seems to be this—As my beloved is full of worshipping affection, and I am wholly his, let his love have free course, and let us retire together away from all the distractions and artificiality of the town life to the simplicity and congenial enjoyments of the country, which are so much more to my taste. The more real and fervent the religious emotions of the soul and the spiritual life of the Church, the more natural and simple will be their expression. We do not require any profuse ceremonies, any extravagant decorations, any complicated and costly religious services, in order to draw forth in the Christian Church the highest realization of the Saviour's fellowship. We want the Christianity we profess to take possession of us, body and soul. And so it will be as Christians learn more of Christ.

Vers. 11, 12.—Come, my beloved, let us go forth into the field; let us lodge in the

villages. Let us get up early to the vineyards; let us see whether the vine hath budded and its blossom be open, and the pomegranates be in flower: there will I give thee my love. All true poets will sympathize with the exquisite sentiment of the bride in this passage. The solitude and glory and reality of external nature are dearer to her than the bustle and splendour of the city and of the court. By "the field" is meant the country generally. The village or little town surrounded with vineyards and gardens was the scene of Shulamith's early life, and would always be delightful to her. The word is the plural of an unused form. It is found in the form *copher* (1 Sam. vi. 18), meaning "a district of level country." Delitzsch renders, "let us get up early," rather differently—"in the morning we will start"—but the meaning is the same. The word *dodhai*, "my love," is "the evidences or expressions of my love" (cf. ch. iv. 16; i. 2). No doubt the bride is speaking in the springtime, the Wonnemond of May, when the pulses beat in sympathy with the rising life of nature.

Ver. 13.—The mandrakes give forth fragrance, and at our doors are all manner of precious fruits, new and old, which I have laid up for thee, O my beloved. The *dudhai* after the form *Lulai*, and connected probably with דוד, are the "love-flowers,"

the *Mandragora officinalis* (Linn.), whitish-green in colour, with yellow apples about the size of nutmegs; they belong to the order of Solanaceæ, and both fruits and roots were employed as *aphrodisiæ*, to promote love. We are, of course, reminded of Gen. xxx. 14, where the LXX. has, *μῆλα μανδραγόρων*, when the son of Leah found mandrakes in vintage-time. They produce their effect by their powerful and pleasant fragrance. They are said to be only rarely found in the neighbourhood of Jerusalem, but they were abundant in Galilee, where Shulamith was brought up. The Arabs called them *abd-el-sal'm*, "servant of love" — *postillon d'amour*. We are not wrong in using that which is perfectly natural and simple for the cherishing and increasing of devout feeling. The three elements which coexist in true spiritual life are thought, feeling, and action. They support one another. A religion which is all impulse and emotion soon wears itself out, and is apt to end in spiritual vacuity and paralysis; but when thought and activity hold up and strengthen and guide feeling, then it is scarcely possible to endanger the soul. The heart should go out to Christ in a simple but fervent worship, especially in praise. There are no Christians who are more ready to devote themselves to good works than those who delight much in hearty and happy spiritual songs.

HOMILETICS.

Vers. 1—5.—*The chorus of maidens praise the beauty of the bride. I. THE PRELUDE.*
1. *The address.* They address her as, "O prince's daughter." She is not a king's daughter, like the bride of Ps. xlv., but she is of honourable extraction. Though she lived in the retired district of Lebanon, and had been brought up there in rustic occupations, her family was one of some distinction. So Joseph, the carpenter of Nazareth, was recognized by the angel Gabriel, and was known among men by the testimony of accepted genealogies as "the son of David." The bride always speaks humbly of herself (as in ch. i. 5, 6), but the daughters of Jerusalem praise her. Such praise was common at nuptial festivals; the literal translation of Ps. lxxviii. 63, "Their maidens were not given in marriage," seems to be, "Their maidens were not praised." The daughters of Jerusalem do not regard the bride with envy; they do not despise her because of her former low estate; they rather bring forward every point that may tend to her praise. We should be like them in this respect. Jealousy is one of the most common of evil tempers; even the Lord's apostles were jealous of one another, and that in the very presence of the Master; again and again they disputed among themselves which should be the greatest (Matt. xviii. 1; Luke xxii. 24). We must covet earnestly the blessed grace of charity—charity which "envieth not, vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up, doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil, rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth." We must pray fervently, "From envy, hatred, and malice, and all uncharitableness, good Lord, deliver us." 2. *The bride's approach.* "How beautiful are thy feet with shoes!" The word here rendered "feet" more generally means steps; this has been taken as an argument in favour of "the dance of Mahanaim," mentioned above. It is used also for "feet;" but even if we take it in its more common sense, the words of the chorus may be well understood of the

approach of the bride, and perhaps also of the queenly grace of her movements. The opening words remind us of the prophecy of Isaiah, quoted by St. Paul in Rom. x. 16, "How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him that bringeth good tidings, that publisheth peace; that bringeth good tidings of good, that publisheth salvation; that saith unto Zion, Thy God reigneth!" (Isa. lii. 7). We have learned to see in the bride of the Song of Songs a figure of the Church, which is the bride of Christ. The mission of the Church is to "make disciples of all nations, baptizing them into the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost; teaching them to observe all things whatsoever the Lord commanded" (Matt. xxviii. 19). The heavenly Bridegroom is with the bride while she obeys his precept; for he adds, "Lo, I am with you all the days, even unto the end of the ages." Therefore "the Spirit and the bride say, Come" (Rev. xx. 17). The Church, taught and strengthened by the Holy Spirit, calls men to the knowledge of Christ. Her feet are beautiful as, "shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace" (Eph. vi. 15), she moves ever onward, bringing the light of truth into the regions that were lying in darkness and the shadow of death. Missionary work is a most important part of the duty of the Church; when carried on in faith and love and forgetfulness of self, it is beautiful in the sight of God.

II. PRAISES IN DETAIL. 1. *Of her clothing.* The chorus begins by praising, not simply the feet, but the sandalled feet, of the bride; they admire her sandals. From this we may infer that other terms used here relate rather to the clothing which covered the various parts of the body. It is the royal robes, with their ornaments and embroidery, which are like rows of jewels, or like a round goblet (see the word translated "round" in Isa. iii. 18, where it is rendered, "round tires like the moon"), or like a heap of wheat set about with lilies. Comp. Ps. xlv. 9, 13, 14, "Kings' daughters were among thy honourable women: upon thy right hand did stand the queen in gold of Ophir." "The king's daughter is all glorious within: her clothing is of wrought gold. She shall be brought unto the king in raiment of needlework: the virgins her companions that follow her shall be brought unto thee." So the bride, the Lamb's wife, shall be "arrayed in fine linen, clean and white: for the fine linen is the righteousness of saints" (Rev. xix. 8). "The king's daughter is all glorious within." The Hebrew word, indeed, means "within the palace," in the inner apartment. But we know that the adorning of the Church, when she appears "as a bride adorned for her husband" (Rev. xxi. 2), is "not that outward adorning of plaiting the hair, and of wearing of gold, or of putting on of apparel, but the hidden man of the heart" (1 Pet. iii. 3, 4). She will then be all glorious within, in the spiritual sense of the word, a glorious Church, holy and without blemish; and the Christian soul must even now put on that white linen which is the righteousness of saints, with the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit, which is in the sight of God of great price. Indeed, "our righteousnesses are but as filthy rags" (Isa. lxiv. 6); but Christ "of God is made unto us Wisdom and Righteousness" (1 Cor. i. 30); and St. Paul teaches us that "as many as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ" (Gal. iii. 27). We must "keep ourselves pure" (1 Tim. v. 22); we must take jealous and anxious heed so to live in the faith of Christ and in the communion of the Holy Ghost as to keep that white robe unspotted from the world (Jas. i. 27). And if we have marred and stained it, as, alas! we too often do, by carelessness and sin, we must come to God in humble penitence and confession, asking him to give us grace to wash our robes and make them white in the blood of the Lamb; for we believe that the blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth from all sin, and that even they who have fallen into grievous sin may, if they turn to God in sorrow and contrition, be made "whiter than snow" (Ps. li. 7). The king's daughter must be all glorious within; she must put on the wedding-garment of righteousness. Let us seek that costly robe to be our own; we may gain it through the grace of Christ if we earnestly desire it, hungering and thirsting after it. 2. *Of herself.* Her neck was white as the ivory which King Solomon imported and used largely for purposes of decoration (1 Kings x. 18, 22); her eyes in their liquid beauty were like the pools at Heshbon; her brow stately as the tower of Lebanon; her head beautiful as the summit of Carmel; her hair like the deepest shade of Tyrian purple—the king (the chorus continues) is held captive in its tresses. The beauty of the bride is a stately, regal beauty; her neck and her brow are compared to

towers, her head to the mountain so famous in the history of Elijah. So in the Book of the Revelation, when the angel had said to St. John, "Come hither, I will show thee the bride, the Lamb's wife," "he carried me," the evangelist continues, "away in the Spirit to a great and high mountain, and showed me that great city, the holy Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God" (Rev. xxi. 9, 10). Here, again, the bride, which is the Church, is compared to a city, a city built upon an exceeding high mountain, according to the Saviour's prophecy, "Upon this rock I will build my Church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it" (Matt. xvi. 18). St. John dwells in ardent words upon the heavenly beauty of the bride, which is the city of the living God; he tells us of her stately gates, of her vast dimensions, of her jewelled foundations, of her "streets of pure gold as it were transparent glass." The glories of that heavenly city draw the Christian soul mightily with a constraining power, as King Solomon was held captive in the dark tresses of his bride. The Lord "loveth the gates of Zion" (Ps. lxxxvii. 1); the heavenly Bridegroom loved the Church, and gave himself for it. Christians, taught by him, set their affection on the heavenly city; they love to meditate upon its glories; they count its towers and mark its palaces, the many mansions in our Father's house; confessing that they are pilgrims and strangers here, they seek the continuing city, which is to come. "Blessed are they that do his commandments, that they may have right to the tree of life, and may enter in through the gates into the city" (Rev. xxii. 14).

Vers. 6—13.—*Dialogue between the king and the bride.* I. ENTRANCE OF THE KING.
1. *His praise of love.* Perhaps the last words of the chorus were overheard by the king as he approached the bride. He assents; he is content to be held captive in the tresses of the bride's hair; for love is fair and pleasant above all delightful things. The bridegroom is not here using the word with which he so often addresses the bride (as in ch. i. 9; iv. 1; vi. 4), which is translated, "O my love," or perhaps better, "O my friend." In this place we have the word ordinarily used for the affection of love; and perhaps it is best to take it in that sense here. Among all delightful things there is nothing so beautiful, so fair to contemplate, so full of interest; there is nothing so pleasant, nothing which gives so much comfort and peace and joy as true and faithful love. The king is happy in the bondage of which the chorus had spoken. Indeed, true love is not bondage in any proper sense of the word. It was God himself who said, "It is not good for man to be alone;" God who said, "I will make him an help meet for him." God gave man affections. When he made man after his own image, he set in his heart a reflection of that love which more than any other of his attributes enters into the very being and essence of Almighty God. That love needs objects on which to exert itself; the love of parent, child, or wife is a preparation, a training for the highest form of love, the blessed love of God. Loneliness, as a rule, is not good; it tends to concentrate a man's thoughts upon himself. He finds no outlet for the affections which God has given him: some of them, and those among the best and highest, are in danger of sinking into atrophy; there is great risk of his becoming a prey to selfishness, and the bondage of selfishness is hard and grinding and joyless. Sensual love is not love in the true sense; it is one of the worst and most unfeeling forms of selfishness; it thinks only of selfish pleasure, and recks nothing of the misery and ruin which it brings upon others; it makes a man the slave of evil passions; it tends to wretchedness. The service of God is perfect freedom; so, in a lesser sense, is the service of any pure and holy affection. True wedded love tends to set a man free from the bonds of selfishness; it gives him scope for the exercise of his best affections, and helps him to rise upwards towards that highest love which alone can give abiding happiness. Love, the bridegroom says, is among all delightful things the fairest and the most pleasant. The bride in the next chapter expresses the same belief, "Love is strong as death." "Many waters cannot quench love, neither can the floods drown it: if a man would give all the substance of his house for love, it would utterly be contemned." Wedded love is a parable of the holy love of God. The king in the song is led captive by the love of the bride. The saints of God, like St. Paul, St. James, St. Jude, delight in describing themselves as "the servants of God," "the slaves of God." God so formed our nature for himself that the soul can find an adequate object for its supreme affections only in him. Therefore he bids us love him with all

our heart, with all our soul, with all our mind, and with all our strength, because our highest powers can find their proper exercise only thus; and it is in the exercise of the highest powers that the highest happiness is found. It is the love of God that sheds glory and joy and blessedness through heaven, his dwelling-place, because the blessed angels love him perfectly, and, dwelling in love, do his holy will with a glad, undoubting obedience. And so in various lower degrees it is the love of God which makes religion what it is to his people, very blessed and holy; which makes life worth living; which gives them in the midst of their shortcomings glimpses more or less vivid of that holiest joy which is the blessedness of heaven. Joy in the Lord is one of the fruits of the Spirit; it follows immediately upon the highest grace of love; it issues out of it (Gal. v. 22). And because it issues out of love, it is enjoined upon us as our duty as well as our highest privilege; for "the first of all the commandments is this, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God;" and a corollary of that first commandment is, "Rejoice in the Lord alway; and again I say, Rejoice" (Phil. iv. 4). Among earthly delights the pure love of wedlock is, as the king says, the fairest and the most pleasant; and of all highest joys that the human soul can attain unto, the supreme, the transcendent joy, comes from the holy love of God. 2. *His praise of the bride.* He compares her to a palm tree, to a vine. Both are fair to look upon, both have sacred associations. The image of the vine recalls to our thoughts the holy allegory in John xv. The Saviour is the true Vine; his people are the branches. They must bring forth fruit, for the branch that beareth not fruit is taken away; and in order to bear fruit they must abide in him, in spiritual union with the Lord, who is the Life. The palm tree also occurs in Scripture imagery: "The righteous shall flourish like the palm tree" (Ps. xcii. 12). Several characteristics make the palm tree an apt emblem of the faithful servant of God. There is its tall and graceful appearance, its evergreen foliage, its fruitfulness, and perhaps especially the fact that both fronds and fruit grow at the topmost height of the tree, high above the earth and as near as possible to heaven. An apt illustration by St. Gregory the Great ('Moral,' on Job xix. 49) is quoted in Smith's 'Dictionary of the Bible': "Well is the life of the righteous likened to a palm, in that the palm below is rough to the touch, and in a manner enveloped in dry bark, but above it is adorned with fruit fair even to the eye; below, it is compressed by the enfoldings of its bark; above, it is spread out in amplitude of beautiful greenness. For so is the life of the elect, despised below, beautiful above. Down below it is, as it were, enfolded in many barks, in that it is straitened by innumerable afflictions; but on high it is expanded into a foliage, as it were, of beautiful greenness by the amplitude of the rewarding." 3. *The bride continues the bridegroom's words.* "I said, I will go up to the palm tree, I will take hold of the boughs thereof." These words have been regarded by some commentators as spoken by the bride. In the next verse certainly the bride interrupts the bridegroom and finishes his sentence. It may well be that here also she corrects the similitude of the bridegroom, and applies it to him rather than to herself; the words, "I said," seem perhaps to favour this view, and to suggest a different speaker. The bridegroom is the palm tree rather than the bride; she modestly and humbly transfers the similitude to him. The palm tree resembles the king in its lofty stateliness and beauty. And certainly this view best lends itself to spiritual applications. The palm tree to the Christian represents the cross. We think of St. Peter's words, "His own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree" (1 Pet. ii. 24). We remember the old traditional reading of Ps. xcvi. 10, "The Lord hath reigned from the tree." We recall his own words, "I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me" (John xii. 32). The Lord reigned from the tree; above him was the title, "This is Jesus, the King of the Jews." He is the King of the true Israelites, the Israel of God. And the cross is the throne of his triumph; it displays, as nothing else could do, the Divine glory of holiness and entire self-sacrifice and self-forgetting love, which are the kingly ornaments of the Saviour's lofty dignity. The Saviour's precious death has made the cross a thing most sacred, most awe-inspiring, most dear to Christian souls, most constraining in the power of its Divine attraction. It draws around itself all the elect of God, all who have ears to hear and hearts to feel the blessed love of Christ. All such say in their hearts, "I will go up to the palm tree, I will take hold of the boughs thereof." The first words, "I said," seem to remind us of many faithless promises, of

many broken resolutions. It is easy to say, very hard to persevere in bearing the cross. How often we have promised, at our baptism, at our confirmation, in the Holy Communion, in the hour of private prayer and self-examination—how often we have said, “I will go up”! But the ascent is steep and difficult; the palm tree is high, there are no branches to assist the climber; the fruit is at the very top, high out of our reach; there is need of effort, continued persevering effort—effort sometimes very hard and painful to flesh and blood. But we must lift up our hearts, we must look upward. The Lord was lifted up, and his disciples must follow him; they know the way (John xiv. 4). We must set him ever before us, and think of his agony and bloody sweat, his cross and Passion, when we are tempted to regard the cross as hard and painful, and to relax our efforts in the religious life. We must go up. God’s saints have gone before us.

“They climbed the steep ascent of heaven
Through peril, toil, and pain.”

We must do the like; “we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom” of God. And if we would persevere in well-doing we must go up to the cross of the Lord Jesus; it is only there, in spiritual communion with the crucified Saviour, in his strength which strengthens all who trust in him, through a living and true faith in him, that the Christian can find strength to bear the burden of the cross. It is a heavy burden to flesh and blood, but the Lord makes it light to all who come to him in obedience to his gracious invitation. For he gives to his chosen power to become the sons of God; he strengthens them with all might by his Spirit in the inner man; he bids them cast their burden upon him (Ps. lv. 22), he bears it with them. But they must go up to the palm tree; they may have many times said they will do so, and perhaps many times have failed. They must go up with sustained effort. The Lord, indeed, draws us, but it is by the attraction of love and the motions of his Spirit, not by forcing our will. We must go up, yielding up our will to him, asking him to give us grace to pray aright that holy prayer, “Not my will, but thine be done.” And we must take hold of the boughs thereof, clinging to them with the embrace of loving faith. It is not enough once to go up to the tree; the Lord himself has taught us our need of continual perseverance: “Abide in me, and I in you.” We must take hold of him with the earnest prayer of Jacob, “I will not let thee go except thou bless me.” And we must learn of him who endured the cross for us to take up the cross ourselves, to crucify the flesh with the affections and lusts, so that, like St. Paul, we may be crucified with Christ, and, dying unto the world, may ever live with him. We may well take to ourselves the words which tradition puts into the mouth of St. Andrew when he first saw the cross on which he was to suffer, “Hail, precious cross, that hast been consecrated by the body of my Lord! I come to thee; receive me into thy arms, take me from among men, and present me to my Master, that he who redeemed me on thee may receive me by thee.” The cross goeth before the crown. We must go up to the tree, and that with pains and striving, before we can reach the fronds at the summit. They are the prize of victory. The great multitude that no man could number stood before the throne clothed with white robes, and palms in their hands. That blessed vision may, indeed, be understood as a vision of the true Feast of Tabernacles in heaven; but the palm has ever been regarded as the martyr’s prize; we must look upwards to it. “Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but this one thing I do, forgetting those things that are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus” (Phil. iii. 13, 14).

4. *The bridegroom continues his praises.* He repeats the comparison of the vine, and adds that the breath of the bride is fragrant as the smell of the choicest fruits, and the tones of her voice sweet as the best wine. Here the bride interrupts the king, adding the words, “that goeth down smoothly for my beloved.” We mark the loving controversy; each seeks to put the other first. If the king compares the bride to a palm tree, she stops him with the answer that he is to her the stately tree; she will go up to the palm tree, she will take hold of its boughs. If he compares her voice to the flavour of the sweetest wine, she adds, interrupting him, that that wine is for her beloved, to please and refresh him with its sweetness; her joy is to feel that

she is wholly his, to delight in his love, to try always to please him. It is a sweet picture of the happiness of wedded love, when each seeks to please the other, when each puts the other first. Then Christian marriage is indeed a holy estate, a great help in the religious life, representing to the wedded pair the union that is between Christ and his Church, so that having in their own mutual relations a parable of that holy union, they may be drawn continually nearer to Christ, as they learn continually to love one another with a purer and deeper love, and in their daily self-denials for the loved one's sake find how blessed is self-sacrifice for his sake who loved us and gave himself for us.

II. **THE BRIDE'S ANSWER.** 1. *The mutual love that binds them together.* She repeats the assertion of ch. ii. 16; vi. 3. As in ch. vi. 3, she puts first her own gift, the gift of her whole heart, to her beloved. She knows now, with a confident and happy knowledge, that her heart is his. Perhaps at first there had been some coyness, some hesitations, some doubts; now there is none. She has given her heart, and she knows it. She dwells on the happy truth; she rejoices in repeating it. Blessed is the Christian soul that can say the like, "I am my Beloved's," "I am Christ's." Blessed above all others are they who can say in sincerity that they have given him their whole heart; that they desire only him, his presence, his love; that their one highest hope is to please him better, to live nearer and nearer to him, and at length to see him face to face. Such, in the ancient times, was the hope of the Psalmist Asaph. "Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon the earth that I desire beside thee. My flesh and my heart faileth: but God is the Strength of my heart, and my Portion for ever" (Ps. lxxiii. 25, 26). And the bride is sure of the bridegroom's love: "his desire is towards me." She is as sure that his heart is hers as that hers is his. She applies to him the Divine words of Gen. iii. 16. As Eve's desire was to her husband, so now the king's desire was toward his bride. The heavenly Bridegroom loved the Church; his desire is toward his people; their salvation was the joy set before him, for which he endured the cross. He said to his little flock, "With desire I have desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer" (Luke xxii. 15). His desire is toward his bride, that she may be washed and cleansed, that he may in his own good time present her to himself a glorious Church, holy and without blemish (Eph. v. 25-27). 2. *The bride's invitation.* The king had invited her to his royal city at the time of their espousals. "Come with me from Lebanon, my spouse" (ch. iv. 8). She seems here to be inviting the king to visit in her company her old home, the scene of her labours in the vineyards. "Come, my beloved," she says, "let us go forth into the field." So the heavenly Bridegroom calls to himself the souls whom he so dearly loved: "Come unto me, and I will give you rest;" so the Christian, in answer to the Lord's gracious invitation, responds, "Even so come, Lord Jesus." He bids us come to him, and as we come we pray him to come to us, for without him we can do nothing; we cannot come unless he draws us by himself coming to us (John vi. 44; xii. 32). We pray him, "Let us go forth into the field, let us get up early to the vineyards;" for we need his presence always; we cannot do the work which he has given us to do; we cannot work in his vineyard as he bids us without his help. Therefore we ask him to be with us always, according to his gracious promise, "Lo, I am with you all the days, even to the end" (Matt. xxviii. 20); that we may have grace to get up early to the vineyards, not to stand all the day idle, not to wait to the eleventh hour, but to give the best of our life to God, to remember our Creator in the days of our youth, to do with our might whatsoever our hand findeth to do (Eccles. ix. 10). The word here rendered "get up early" is several times figuratively used for "to be earnest or urgent." God calls us to work, to labour for his Name's sake, but not to leave our first love, like the Church at Ephesus (Rev. ii. 3, 4); to work out our salvation with fear and trembling, but all the time to ask him to come and help us, and to remember that it is he who worketh in us both to will and to do of his good pleasure (Phil. ii. 13); for without that inward work of his within our souls we can do no acceptable work for him. But work we must, for he bids us; and it is in that work, wrought ever in faith and in dependence upon him, that the Christian soul keeps itself in the love of God (Jude 21). So the bride says, "There [in the vineyard] will I give thee my loves." It is in working for God that we prove our love for him. "Lovest thou me?" the Saviour said; then "feed my lambs, feed my sheep." "If ye love me, keep my commandments."

Then he will pray for us, sending the gracious Spirit, the Comforter, to strengthen and to help us; then, he promises, he will come himself. "I will not leave you comfortless: I will come to you" (John xiv. 15—18). Then the blessed Spirit will help us to bring forth the fruit of the Spirit—the fruit which is "love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, faith, meekness, temperance"—that like the bride in the song we may have "all manner of pleasant fruits, new and old," and may add, in her words, "which I have laid up for thee, O my Beloved." These fruits are treasures laid up in heaven, and we know that he is able to keep that which we have committed unto him against that day (2 Tim. i. 12).

HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Vers. 10—13.—*Christian missions.* "I am my beloved's," etc. The scene is still in "the king's chambers" at Jerusalem. What Solomon has said to her whom he would win is of no avail; her heart is true to her beloved. This emphatic redeclaration of her love for that beloved one is all the response that the king's flatteries have obtained. She speaks as if she were already away from the palace and back at her country home; once more occupied in her usual occupations and enjoying her former happy intercourse with her beloved. But the going forth to her work suggests the idea of going forth in spiritual work, and the language she uses points to the manner in which such work may be successfully done. We may take the section as an allegory concerning Christian missions. It suggests—

I. WHAT PROMPTS THEM. (Ver. 10.) The profound and delightful realization of Christ's love towards and within us. Such work, if done only because we are afraid of the judgment-day, when we all must give account of our stewardship; or from mere sense of duty; still less when the motive is ecclesiastical ambition; or even when pity for the ignorance and general sad condition of the heathen is the motive;—all such promptings have but partial, some very partial, power. The true motive is that which the rapturous expression of ver. 10 reveals—

II. HOW THEY SHOULD BE CARRIED ON. "Come, my Beloved, let us," etc. 1. *The presence of Christ should be invoked.* (Ver. 11.) "Let us go forth," etc. Then: 2. *There should be the going forth.* Away from accustomed haunts, away from the place of ordinances and privileges, to where none of these things are enjoyed. 3. *With diligence.* "Let us rise early" (ver. 12). 4. *With watchfulness,* not alone in planting, but for growth and progress.

III. THEIR TRUE NATURE. (Ver. 12.) "There will I give thee," etc. They are an acceptable offering of our love to Christ and its true manifestation. A love to Christ that is not expansive, that does not go forth to bless others, is no true love, but something very different (1 Cor. xv. 10).

IV. THEY SHALL BE REWARDED WITH DELIGHTFUL SUCCESS. (Ver. 13.) May not the lack of this—though, indeed, it is not entirely absent—be owing to some grave defect in motive or manner?

V. ALL THE GLORY WILL BE RENDERED TO CHRIST. "Which I have laid up for thee." (Ver. 13.) Cf. the account of the first missionary meeting and report (Acts xiv. 27).—S. C.

Ver. 10.—"*I am my beloved's.*" (Of. on ch. ii. 16).—S. C.

Vers. 11—13.—*Useful service.* Earth is a great picture-gallery, full of illustrations of heavenly things. This material universe is the projection of God's thoughts; the visible expression of his dispositions; the blossoming of his love. The God of nature is the God of religion; hence the same lessons appear in both. As we have seen in the home of a great artist the handiworks of his genius adorning parlours and halls, corridors and bed-chambers—works in all stages of development—so is it in God's world. Pictures of him abound. Every garden is a lesson-book for humanity; every well-kept garden is a portrait of a saint; every fruitful vineyard is an emblem of Christ's Church. Said the Prophet Isaiah to the godly man, "Thou shalt be as a well-watered garden." "My Well-beloved hath a vineyard in a very fruitful hill." The

highest fruitfulness is the result of patient culture. Prosperity is threatened by many foes. Human agency must co-operate with Divine power in order "to bring forth fruit unto perfection." Every flower and blossom is an outburst of God's glory. Earth is crammed full of heavenly things.

1. IN ALL HOLY SERVICE THE MOTIVE POWER IS LOVE. "Come, my beloved." Thus Jesus speaks. 1. *God's works spring from love.* We cannot conceive any other reason why the eternal God should have begun to create, unless that happiness and love might be multiplied. Love would not permit him to keep all good within himself. Love impelled him to produce various orders of sentient life. His joy is increased by witnessing the joys of others.

"Yes, he has gemmed with worlds the abyss,
Filled them with beauty, life, and bliss,
Only the wider to dispense
The gifts of his beneficence.
Oh yes! creation planned above
Was but for mercy's stream a vent,
The outgushings of eternal love—
Ay, this is love's embodiment."

2. *This love in us springs from our assurance of Christ's love.* The love that is fruitful in service realizes the personal friendship of Christ. If I am tormented with doubts touching my acceptance by Christ, I shall have no energy for service. I have only a limited capacity of power, and if I expend this in solving difficult questions, or in calming my own fears, I shall be unfit for service. If the Master is saying to me, "Son, go work to-day in my vineyard," and if I reply, "Lord, I know not if I be a son," I shall not accomplish any good. But when I know that I am "accepted in the Beloved," there is a mainspring of love within that stirs all the energies of my soul. Then my daily prayer will be, "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?" Then, "the love of Christ constraineth me." "For to me to live is Christ." It would be a painful restraint on my new nature if I did not render him service. Then his "service is perfect freedom." 3. *True love hears Immanuel's voice.* "Come, my beloved." Love moves into healthful activity every organ. It not only gives activity to the feet; it gives sensitiveness to the ear. The voice of Christ is not addressed to the bodily organ; it is addressed to the soul. It is a spiritual communication; a "still small voice." As in the days of his flesh the multitude did not understand the speech that came from heaven—"I have both glorified it, and will glorify it again;" they thought that it thundered, or that an angel spake; so is it still. The Christian hears a voice that no one else can hear. The passing crowd may hear a faint hum, as the wind passes through the telegraphic wires, but the message conveyed through the wire is understood only by the person trained to receive it. So the voice of heavenly authority and the voice of heavenly friendship is heard only by wakeful, tender love. 4. *Love craves to give itself expression.* Love is an expansive power. It is a law of its nature to spread; to go out in practical forms. Like the force of steam, it cannot be held in restraint. The hotter steam becomes, the more it expands. The present motive power in commerce, and in swift locomotion, results from the expansive power of steam. So all human philanthropy and all missionary enterprise are the outcome of fervent love. It would be painful to love if no service were permitted. She is girt and sandalled, waiting to scale rugged mountains, waiting to cross tempestuous seas, waiting to traverse perilous deserts, in order to tell the perishing that Jesus can save. Love never wearies. Service is her delight. There is within an irresistible instinct to do good.

II. IN HOLY SERVICE WE HAVE DIVINE COMPANIONSHIP. "Let us go, . . . let us lodge." 1. *This is a real experience.* To many persons the presence of Christ is a fiction; it may be a part of their creed, nothing more. They read of it as a promise, but they have never realized it. Yet they may. For on the part of a faithful servant of Christ his presence is a real enjoyment. Every inspiration of benevolent desire is from him. He talks with us by the way. We ask for strength, and he gives it. We lack courage, and he supplies it abundantly. He makes our dumb lips eloquent. As truly as we hold intercourse with an earthly friend—yea, more truly—do we have real and joyous

intercourse with Jesus. If he spake the promise, "Lo, I am with you alway," certainly he will fulfil it. Why should he not? Is anything too hard for him to accomplish? Some imagine that the real presence of Christ is to be found only in the sacrament of the Supper. This is a delusion. His real presence is ever in the spiritual temple, *i.e.* in the temple of a Christian's heart. Saith he, "I will never leave thee, I will never forsake thee;" so that we may boldly say, "The Lord is my Helper." 2. *This companionship with Jesus is a real honour.* When, in olden time, the King of England went out in person to war, every peer in the realm counted it an honour to go with him. It was dishonourable to stay at home. Every duke and earl would rather dwell amid hardship and danger on the battle-field, if the king were there, than amid the luxuries of their own castle-halls. To be near the person of the king was counted high honour. Yet this honour was as nothing—an empty bubble—compared with companionship with Jesus Christ. To be companion with the King of heaven is real honour and real advantage. It is Christ alone who can teach us what honour is. Honour is inseparable from righteousness, and he is Perfect Righteousness. And Christ is a Worker. He is the good Shepherd, ever going out in search of lost sheep; so, if we wish to have companionship with Jesus, we must be workers too. Service is honourable. It is in service that we shall find Christ nearest us. There is a legend of a pious monk in the Middle Ages, who had a vision of the Saviour. The man was ravished with holy joy. It was a season of hallowed communion with his Lord. At that moment the bell rang, and it was the duty of this monk to distribute food to the poor. There was a struggle in his mind. Should he leave this vision, and break up this sweet fellowship? The bell called him to a sacred duty, and he responded and went. At the end of an hour he returned, and lo! the vision was still there. Then the lips of the Master moved, and he said, "Unless thou hadst fulfilled thy call of duty, I had departed." If Jesus is with us, almighty strength is assured. Unerring wisdom is ours; sweetest sympathy cheers us; certain success is in sight. "I will go in the strength of the Lord God."

III. IN HOLY SERVICE THERE WILL BE SELF-DENIAL. "Let us go forth into the field; let us lodge in the villages; let us get up early to the vineyards." Now, this language does not seem natural or customary in the lips of an earthly king. But it is natural and seemly in the lips of the Prince of heaven. For it is his delight to humble himself, and to become the Servant of all. 1. *Discomfort and hardship are foretold.* "Let us go into the field." Jesus is very frank and outspoken. Not on any account will he hide from us the hard conditions of his service. Plainly did he tell his first disciples what toils and persecutions they would have to endure. And the Word still abides, "They that will live godly in Christ Jesus must suffer persecution." Paul was forewarned of the perils that awaited him in every city. But the real friend of Jesus is prepared for self-denial. Apart from self-denial, his service would not be like the service of Jesus. "The disciple is not greater than his Master, nor the servant than his Lord." The Son of God says to us, "Let us go forth into the field." We must leave for a time the fair palaces of our Prince, and lodge in narrow tenements. Yet is there any ground for lamentation? Any roof which covers us, however humble, shall be a palace of delight if only Christ be with us there. The palace does not make the dweller therein a king; but the presence of the King makes the house a palace. Difficulties and self-denials will be quietly borne if we are on Christ's errands. Yea, they will be welcome, if love to Jesus prevail. "They have put me," said Rutherford, "into a prison; but Immanuel came and made it into a banquet-house." Yes, if Jesus come with us into our lowly cottage, forthwith "the doors shall be pearls, and the windows agates," and the fence shall be made of all kinds of precious stones. 2. *We shall be willing to continue in this self-denying work.* "Let us lodge in the villages." We must not grow weary in this well-doing. Many a man will rouse his courage to face some herculean task or to fight in some sharp conflict, who will yet faint under the weariness of a long campaign or fail in patient endurance. The service to which Jesus calls us is lifelong, and the discomfort may be long continued. Still, we will embrace it with joy. "He that endureth to the end, the same shall be saved." The Christian missionary who goes into a foreign field to sow the heavenly seed, must be prepared for long-continued sacrifice. So should every true servant of the King. For self-denial is not long-continued pain. The joy of

pleasing Christ, and the blessedness of his company, nullifies the pain and overcomes the discomfort. Soon the self-denial loses its sting. The loss becomes a gain, and every thorn blossoms into a rose. "Out of the eater comes forth meat, and out of the bitter comes forth sweetness." The love of Christ changes everything. It makes our hell into heaven. 3. *There will even be eagerness for this arduous work.* "Let us get up early to the vineyards." To enter upon this hard toil in company with Jesus, we shall be ready to forego comfortable sleep. Soon as morn breaks, soon as the opportunity allows, we shall be ready to leap forth to the task. Our old inclinations are overcome and supplanted with new desires and new endeavours. We are burning with ardour to show Jesus our love. We shall feel ashamed if our zeal does not in some measure resemble the zeal of our Immanuel. He was consumed with holy and intensest ardour to do us good. Said he, "How am I straitened till it be accomplished!" He panted to reach the cross. And now he has commissioned us to take his place and to carry out his work. As his Father had sent him into the world, so has he sent us. His love is to be perpetuated through us. His devotion to humanity must reappear in us. His self-consuming zeal must glow in our breasts. As he could not represent among men the everlasting love of his Father except by incessant toil, humiliating suffering, and a death of public shame, so neither can we adequately represent the saving grace of Christ before men except by enthusiastic zeal and completest consecration. There will be a constant watchfulness for every opportunity of service. To do Christ's work will be our meat and our drink. A principle of sacred earnestness must possess us. As the hallowed fire on the temple-altar was not allowed to expire, so must not the fire of holy zeal ever expire on the altar of our hearts. "We are not our own;" we belong to another; "we are bought with a price;" therefore duty demands that we glorify our Master "with our bodies and with our spirits, which are his."

IV. IN HOLY SERVICE THERE IS GREAT VARIETY OF USEFULNESS. "Let us see if the vine flourish, whether the tender grape appear, and the pomegranates bud forth." 1. *Christ's work is the pattern of ours.* The work of Jesus among men was manifold. He opened blind eyes, unstopped deaf ears, straightened paralyzed limbs, fed the hungry, brought the dead back to life, pardoned men's sins, purified corrupt and vicious lives, led the erring into light. We dwell in the same world in which Christ dwelt. We are encompassed with suffering humanity. We have the same motives for labour. Here there is scope for every capacity. If you cannot preach to great assemblies, you can speak to a wayfarer for Christ. If you cannot vindicate the truth against the assaults of the scoffer, you can feed a hungry child, or console a sorrowing widow, or visit the bedridden, or pray for the outcasts. The youngest disciple may find something to do for Christ's kingdom in this world of sin and suffering. "As ye have opportunity, do good unto all men;" "Freely ye have received, freely give." In nature each drop of falling rain produces a distinct effect, so in the kingdom of Christ a cup of cold water given to a thirsty child obtains its reward. 2. *Concern for the young is here suggested.* "Whether the tender grape appear." Every living Church will have special agencies to gain the young. They have special claims on us. The heart is as yet unoccupied. Character is plastic. Feeling is fresh. There is eager inquiry after the truth. Labour among the young is full of promise. In the young Jesus Christ feels special interest. Every parent should see to it that their children's hearts are opening to Christ. We ought to see conversion to God very early. If faith be the great essential, then very early do children put faith in a parent or in a friend, and such faith they can as readily place in Jesus the Saviour. Parents have special promises from God to encourage their hope. "I will pour my Spirit upon thy seed, and my blessing upon thy offspring." Jesus has special love for the lambs in the flock.

"The flower, when offered in the bud,
Is no vain sacrifice."

3. *Pious care for all inquirers is indicated.* "Let us see whether the pomegranates bud forth." It is a hopeful sign of grace when one is inquiring after the light. Already there is a stir in that dead soul. The deep sleep of sin is broken. The man is awaking. Possibly, like some inveterate sluggard, he may turn over on the other side, and fall into deeper sleep than before. Such a thing often happens, both in nature and in grace. Now is our opportunity while he is half awake. Now

let the alarm-bell of the gospel sound in his ear. Such methods as true wisdom and love can devise should be vigorously employed. How precious is the moment! Anon it will have fled. There is much to be done. Impression has to be made, instruction given, feeling aroused, conviction wrought, desire excited, resolution taken. Every inquirer after God should be sought out—should be the object of the Christian's concern.

V. IN HOLY SERVICE THERE IS A PRESENT REWARD. "The mandrakes give a smell, and at our gates are all manner of pleasant fruits, new and old." 1. *The reward is the outcome of natural law.* As the fruit is already in embryo in the seed, so is reward already in the service, though as yet undeveloped. As hell is the ripe fruit of sin, so heaven is the ripe fruit of holy service. The faithful steward of ten talents shall have ten talents more entrusted to him: this is his reward. The pleasant fruits of the garden shall be the reward of the faithful husbandman. Such fruits are "old and new." Others preceding us have sown good seed, done noble work in the vineyard. We enter upon the results, and gather in the fruits. Old fruit at times is preferable to new. Apples and nuts mellow with age. So the ripe wisdom of old saints is a spiritual banquet. The promises given to Abraham have a good flavour. The faith that has been of long standing—the faith of Elijah and Paul, e.g.—is a very pleasant fruit, while fresh zeal and fresh courage are equally delightful. "Fruits old and new." 2. *God's provision for us is ample.* If we go diligently about our Master's work, be sure that he will provide. He had said, "Let us get up early, and go forth into the vineyards;" and lo! when noon came and hunger looked for a meal, here at the gate was a royal provision. So Jesus taught his first disciples, that if they attended to his business he would take the responsibility for their wants. He gave to Peter and his comrades a miraculous draught of fishes; then he said, "Feed my sheep;" "Go into all the world, and preach the gospel;" "My God shall supply all your need, out of his riches in glory by Jesus Christ." 3. *Jesus provides a reward suitable to every taste.* "All manner of pleasant fruits, new and old, which I have laid up for thee." When our Immanuel spreads for us a banquet, nothing shall be wanting. Is there a fruit anywhere in God's universe that will meet a want of mine or satisfy a longing? It shall be given me. "He will give thee the desires of thy heart;" "In his garden is all manner of pleasant fruit." 4. *Present rewards are the pledge of greater.* 'These fruits are found "at our gates." It is as if our Immanuel had said, "This is only the beginning of good. There's more to follow." And this is most assuredly true. Present possessions are only pledges and earnestings of higher and richer good. The love of Christ in the heart is an entrancing joy, but I shall have a larger experience of it by-and-by. These attainments of piety and excellence are "treasures of the kingdom," but I shall grow richer yet. My knowledge of God in Christ is a precious possession, but the "half has not been told me." Jesus has many things to reveal to me, but I cannot bear them yet. No! "Eye hath not seen, nor hath ear heard, nor has it entered into the heart of man, what God has prepared for them that love him."

VI. IN HOLY SERVICE WE GAIN FULLEST ASSURANCES OF IMMANUEL'S LOVE. "There will I give thee my love-presents." Toward the close of his ministry Jesus said to his disciples, "He that keepeth my commandments, he it is that loveth me; and he that loveth me shall be loved of my Father, and we will come unto him, and will make our abode with him." This is the love-token, or the love-present, which our Immanuel gives us, viz. his abiding presence in our hearts—the sunshine of his love. The idler in God's vineyard need never be surprised if he lack the full assurance of his sonship. It had never been promised him. To give this love-present to such a one would be a premium upon indolence. Mark that it is in the field of service that Jesus gives his love-tokens. It is to earnest and faithful labourers he confers the full assurance of hope. The consensus of observation testifies that in seasons of apathy and slothfulness we lose the assurance of heaven. But when we run with alacrity in the path of service, then heaven opens to us, and we read our title clear. Is it a real joy to us when we look into the face of an earthly friend and realize his tender sympathy? Must it not be a greater joy to look into the face of Jesus and feel that he is our Brother? Do the minstrels of the woods pour out a fresh tide of song when the genial sun of May shines upon them? And when we come into the warm sunshine of Immanuel's love, and know that he has made with us an everlasting covenant, shall

not our hearts be all aglow with joy? For nothing on earth is more sure than *this*, that if I give my whole self unreservedly to Jesus, he has impelled me to do it, and upon me he confers the wealth of his eternal friendship. "My Beloved is mine, and I am his."—D.

Ver. 6.—*The fairness of love.* The commendations of the bride's beauty, which occur in the early verses of this chapter, lead up to the exclamation—so much in harmony with the whole spirit of the Canticles—concerning the fairness, the pleasantness, the delightsomeness, of true love.

I. THE BEAUTY AND GOOD SERVICE OF LOVE, AS A SENTIMENT IN THE HUMAN HEART AND AS A BOND IN HUMAN SOCIETY. As distinguished from mere carnal passion, that conjugal love which is pictured as subsisting between the king and his spouse is justly in this Song of Songs represented as of the purest and highest excellence. It is true that religion and morality put a restraint upon the natural impulses, and the Bible abounds with warnings against yielding to the temptations which are favoured by human nature and by sinful society. But if the way of virtue be a narrow way, it is not without flowers by its borders, both fair and fragrant. The path of self-government and self-denial is a path which has pleasures of its own. And one aim of this Book of Canticles, one justification for its place in canonical Scripture, appears to be its effective depicting of the pure joys of human affection. Where marriage is the result of personal preference and sincere attachment, and where it is entered upon under the guidance of sober reason and forethought, it may well be expected to yield delights. Toil, anxieties, mutual forbearance and self-sacrifice, the endurance in common of life's cares and sorrows, so far from extinguishing love, may refine and hallow it. And maturity of character and spiritual discipline and strength will prove more than a compensation for the abandonment of the "primrose path" of pleasure, in which the unspiritual find their joys. The family and the home are the scene and the embodiment of wedded love. And they are the very basis of human society, the condition and means of true human progress, the earnest of a higher state of Christian civilization in the future.

II. HUMAN LOVE IS THE EMBLEM OF THE DIVINE LOVE WHICH UNITES THE SOUL AND THE SAVIOUR, AND WHICH IS THE SOURCE OF SPIRITUAL AND HEAVENLY JOYS. The highest purpose of that affinity which binds heart to heart is to elicit emotions, and to lead to relations with which our highest welfare here and hereafter is associated. They who read this Book of Canticles without recognizing the divinely appointed connection in question miss not only a literary charm, but a spiritual truth and law. It is to be feared that in the view of some, human love, such as should exist between husband and wife, appears a profane and common, if not a foolish, thing. But God is not honoured by the disparagement of his own provisions and plans. If he has made love so important a factor in human life, he has done so, we may be sure, with a purpose worthy of himself, his wisdom, and grace. As earthly love is elevated and purified by the Divine discipline of this earthly existence, it comes to symbolize, with ever-growing force, the profound affection which subsists between Christ and his Church. And this significance is recognized in the language of St. Paul and St. John regarding the bride and spouse of the Saviour. With reference to the emotions which are cherished by Christ towards his chosen and beloved people, and by his people towards him to whom they are indebted for all they have and for all they hope for, how appropriate is the exclamation, "How fair and how pleasant art thou, O love, for delights!" Divine love is the source of Divine joy. It is immortal love which is the earnest of "pleasures for evermore."—T.

Ver. 9.—*The sweetness of speech.* The figurative language here employed by the royal lover to eulogize the voice and the utterances of the bride is to our colder and more measured habits of thought Oriental extravagance. Yet it is in harmony with the highly coloured character of the book as a whole. And human speech does often awaken within the heart emotions not easily expressed in cool and justifiable panegyric. The human voice is of all music the sweetest, and speech is sweeter even than song, uttering as it does, not the studied and artificial sentiment of the musical composer, but the spontaneous and natural emotions of the speaker's heart.

I. CHRISTIAN SPEECH IS SWEET AS TESTIFYING TO THE CHARACTER OF THE SPEAKER.

1. Sincerity is the first condition of all acceptable speech; it is above all things desirable that there should be no discordance between the utterance and the heart. The flatterer at court and in general society speaks only to please; and in the case of those who know his aim and his motives, he fails of the very object he has in view. The Church is bound to speak "words of truth and soberness," as remembering the sacredness of the gift of utterance, and the responsibility attaching to its exercise. To a just mind sincere words are welcome, even though they be less honeyed than the words of the time-server and men-pleaser. 2. Love prompts to words which are a delight to hear. Whilst the tones of hatred are harsh, and the utterances of coldness are repugnant, kindness, sympathy, affection, give a sweetness to every utterance. Welcome as the words which come from the heart of the beloved, telling of the depth of unchangeable affection, are those Christian declarations in which the Church gives expression to her love for her Saviour and her pity for the world.

II. CHRISTIAN SPEECH IS SWEET WHEN IT TESTIFIES TO THE LOVE AND FAITHFULNESS OF THE LORD. There is no exercise more congenial to Christ's people, more acceptable to Christ himself, than this. The powers of speech cannot be more holily and honourably employed than in uttering forth the high praises of God, in lauding and magnifying the redeeming love of Christ. The hymn which is lisped by the little child, the anthem which rings through the cathedral aisles, the quiet word of witness in which the friend commends the Saviour to him who is dear to his heart,—these are but some of the forms in which language may show forth the greatness, the goodness, the wisdom, of the Eternal. What theme so worthy of the tongue, "the glory of the frame," as this? The voice of praise and thanksgiving is dear to the heart alike of God and man.

III. CHRISTIAN SPEECH IS SWEET WHEN UTTERING TESTIMONY TO THE GOSPEL OF GOD'S LOVE. Men's hearts have to be reached and to be affected by the tidings of Divine mercy and compassion. It is most condescending and gracious on God's part that he deigns to employ human agency in the service of his own Divine beneficence. If men avail themselves of all the resources of human rhetoric in order to obtain earthly ends—power, wealth, and fame—how much more ready should they be to use all the faculties they possess, all the arts and means they can acquire, to bring before their fellow-men the tidings of heavenly and immortal love! Well may every preacher and every teacher of Divine truth put up the prayer—

"Jesus, confirm my heart's desire,
To work, to think, to *speak* for thee:
Still let me guard the holy fire,
And still stir up thy gift in me!"

T.

Ver. 10.—*The desire of the beloved.* The assurance of mutual possession and affection occurs in an earlier part of the poem; but its repetition here is not without significance. Love has not lessened as time has passed; it has rather deepened, as experience has revealed, to each of the married lovers, the faithfulness and kindness, the purity and devotion, of the other. Hence the bride adds to this later exclamation, "I am my beloved's," the statement which is the expression of experience, "His desire is toward me." Transferring the language to the relations and sentiments distinctive of the mutual attachment of Christ and his people, we observe here a declaration—

I. OF THE GOOD WILL AND COMPASSIONATE AFFECTION OF CHRIST FOR HIS CHURCH.

1. The Lord takes a deep satisfaction in his people, and regards them with a holy complacency. 2. He desires that they should participate in his character and reflect his image. Spiritual fellowship with him tends to bring about this result, than which nothing can be more to the mind of the Head of the Church. 3. He desires that they may be qualified witnesses to himself, and agents in promoting his cause and glory upon earth. And this, for his own sake indeed, yet also for the Church's sake, and for the sake of the world for whose salvation he lived and died on earth.

II. OF THE RESPONSE OF THE CHURCH, HER SURRENDER OF HERSELF COMPLETELY TO HER SPOUSE AND LORD. This attitude of heart has been beautifully expressed in these words: "I attach myself to God, I give myself to him; and he turns to me

immediately; his eyes look upon me with favour; his Spirit is attentive to my good; his great heart bows itself and stoops to my nothingness; he unites his heart to mine; he heaps upon it new graces, to attach it more strongly to him. Devote thyself, O my soul, wholly to thy God." 1. Spiritual receptiveness is the just response to Divine desire. If it is the will and pleasure of the Saviour to take possession of the whole nature and life of his people, it is equally their will and pleasure to abandon all other aims in life, and to devote themselves to this, with the view of becoming his only, his altogether, and his for ever. 2. Spiritual consecration completes this just response. Human nature is not merely passive; it is energetic. Human life is an opportunity, not only for getting, but for giving. The Church must indeed receive from the Divine Head every qualification which can fit for the discharge of duty, for the rendering of service. But it is hers to prove her gratitude and her fidelity to the trust reposed in her, by devoting herself to those high ends with a view to which she has been chosen, loved, and redeemed.—T.

Vers. 11, 12.—*Divine companionship.* Man was made, not for solitude, but for society; not for selfishness, but for love. This principle of human nature and life is taken up by religion, and is employed for man's highest, spiritual, immortal interests. The soul which yields itself to Christ delights in his fellowship, and finds therein its true satisfaction. Like the bride who is represented in this poem as saying to her spouse, "Come, my beloved, let us go forth into the field," etc., the soul craves the society of the Saviour, and longs for his perpetual companionship.

I. THE NATURE OF THIS COMPANIONSHIP. 1. It is companionship to which Christ invites his people. None could address him thus unless first assured of the Lord's interest, friendliness, and love. 2. It is spiritual companionship. The twelve who were with him in his earthly ministry were admitted to close, delightful, and profitable intimacy. They saw his form and heard his voice. Yet, in our case, though we cannot perceive him as they did, the association is equally real; for he is with his people always. 3. It is companionship in which he is the superior, and we are the dependent. It is true he says, "Abide in me, and I in you;" but he is the Vine, and we the branches.

II. THE OCCASIONS AND MANIFESTATIONS OF THIS COMPANIONSHIP. Observe under this consideration how Christ's friendship appears superior to every merely human association. We may enjoy his society: 1. In our occupations, whatever be their special nature. 2. In our enjoyments, which are all hallowed by his gracious presence and approval. 3. In our sufferings, when we perhaps most need him, and when his sympathy is peculiarly precious, consolatory, and helpful. 4. In our services; for how can we do his work, except beneath his direction and the encouragement of his smile?

III. THE BENEFITS OF THIS COMPANIONSHIP. When Christ is with us, in the varied scenes and experiences of our earthly life: 1. Our gratitude to him will be livelier. 2. Our love to him will be warmer. 3. Our conformity to his will and character will be more complete. 4. Our inseparability from him will be more assured. "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?"

"His is love beyond a brother's,
Faithful, free, and knows no end.

T.

Ver. 13.—*Garnered fruits.* When the bride invites the king to revisit the home of her childhood and the scenes of their early acquaintance and attachment, among other alluring representations she assures him that there will be found, laid up for his use by her thoughtful affection, all manner of precious fruits, new and old. A suitable emblem this of the gathered and garnered spiritual fruits which in this earthly life Christ's people are expected to prepare for him at his coming, and which it will be their delight to offer to him as the expression of their grateful love. Properly understood, the main purpose of the Christian life is the growing, gathering, and garnering of precious fruits for the approval and service of the Lord.

J. WHAT THESE FRUITS ARE. 1. They are the fruits of spiritual life and experience.

2. They are the "fruits of the Spirit"—the virtues especially Christian, fruits of righteousness, those qualities of character which are the peculiar growth of grace. 3. They are fruits of service; not things enjoyed so much as things achieved.

II. WHY ARE THEY LAID UP FOR CHRIST? Because: 1. They are the fruit of his own garden, the growth which testifies to the care and culture of the Divine Husbandman. 2. They are of a nature to yield a peculiar satisfaction and pleasure to him. 3. They are such as he will use for his own purposes, and for the display of his own glory and praise.—T.

EXPOSITION.

CHAPTER VIII.

Vers. 1—3.—Oh that thou wert as my brother, that sucked the breasts of my mother! When I should find thee without, I would kiss thee; and none would despise me. I would lead thee, and bring thee into my mother's house, who would instruct me; I would cause thee to drink of spiced wine, of the juice of my pomegranate. His left hand should be under my head, and his right hand should embrace me. The meaning seems to be this—Let our relation to one another be the highest and the purest and the most permanent possible. The sisterly relation is not merely one of affection, but one of blood. The bond between husband and wife may be broken by the caprice and weakness of human feeling, but nothing can destroy the bond of blood. "A friend loveth at all times, and a brother is born for adversity" (Prov. xvii. 17); "There is a friend that sticketh closer than a brother" (Prov. xviii. 24). The brotherly bond represents the strength of the blood-relation-ship. When to that is added personal affection, then the tie is perfect. Shulamith means that she would have their love freed from all the uncertainties of human fickleness. As symbolically interpreted, therefore, we take this whole passage to signify that the Church, when it is desiring the closest fellowship with the Saviour, would be lifted above all the temptations of earthly life, which so often lower the standard of Christian feeling and service. The words are specially impressive in the lips of the bride of Solomon. It is a testimony to the inspiration of the whole book that the voluptuous monarch, whose life fell so far below the ideal of a godly king, should yet, indirectly though still powerfully, condemn and rebuke his own departure from God, setting clearly before us the surpassing excellence of pure love and the sanctity of married life. In the king's address to his bride he called her "sister" and "sister-bride;" she now virtually returns his own sentiment and calls him "brother." She shows that she has risen in her love far above the more fleshly desires—"the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the

pride of life." She would blend her whole existence with that of her Lord, *I would kiss thee; yea, and none would despise me.* Nothing can more exquisitely and delicately express the fulness of affection. It is not merely a return for that which is given; it is free and spontaneous. So should our spiritual feelings be. They should be the natural outpouring of the soul towards the Saviour; not a worked-up, artificial, spasmodic impulse, not a cold, dead formalism, not an unsympathetic service of conscience; but "doing the will of God from the heart." "Love is the fulfilling of the Law;" "Faith worketh by love." The second verse is differently rendered by some. Jerome, Venetian, and Luther take it as referring to the bride's dependence on her husband's superior wisdom—"Thou wouldest instruct me;" which, of course, is a very suitable sentiment as addressed to the wise King Solomon. The Targum expounds it thus: "I would conduct thee, O King Messiah, and bring thee into the house of my sanctuary; and thou wouldest teach me to fear God and to walk in his ways." Hitzig and our Revisers take the verb as in the third person feminine, and applied to the mother. "She would teach me as a mother teaches a young bride, from her own early experience." The old view that the bride is the personification of wisdom seems quite refuted by this speech of Shulamith's. She desires and waits for instruction. Solomon is wisdom. She is the soul of man, or the Church of God, delighting to sit at his feet and learn of him. Whichever rendering we choose, whether the mother or Solomon be regarded as teacher, the meaning is the same. It is, as Delitzsch has observed, a deep revelation of Shulamith's heart. "She knew how much she yet came short of being to the king all that a wife should be. But in Jerusalem the bustle of court life and the burden of his regal duties did not permit him to devote himself to her; in her mother's house, if he were once there, he would instruct her, and she would requite him with her spiced wine and with the juice of the pomegranates." The "spiced wine," *vinum conditura*, aromatic wine, probably grape wine "mixed with fragrant and pungent

essences," as in the East. The juice, or pressed juice, of the pomogranate is a delicious drink. There is no allusion to any love-symbol. The grains of the pomogranates were said by the Arabians to be from Paradise (cf. the *potrys*, or "vinum de punicis quod roidem vocant" in Dioscorides and Pliny). Perhaps this reference to exchange of gifts may be taken as symbolizing the happy state of the Church when she pours out her treasures in response to the spiritual blessings which she is freely receiving. The meaning is something beautiful and precious. And that is the highest state of religious life when the service we render and the gifts we place on the altar are felt to be the grateful sacrifices of our hearts under a sense of Divine love. When the Church of Christ depends for its support on such fellowship between itself and the Saviour there will be no limits to its attainments, no achievements beyond its powers. "All that see" such a state of the Church "shall acknowledge" the glory of it, "that they are the seed which the Lord hath blessed" (see the whole of the sixty-first chapter of Isaiah, which breathes the very spirit of Solomon's Song). The rejoicing bride then gives herself up to the thought of her husband's affection. In that beautiful simplicity and purity of her childhood's life she would realize the bliss of her new relation. Delitzsch describes her state of mind thus: "Resigning herself dreamily to the idea that Solomon is her brother, whom she may freely and openly kiss, and her teacher besides, with whom she may sit in confidential intercourse under her mother's eye, she feels herself as if closely embraced by him, and calls from a distance to the daughters of Jerusalem not to disturb this her happy enjoyment." Perhaps the sense of weakness and dependence is meant to be expressed. The bride is conscious that her lord is everything to her. In that identification which the highest love brings vividly into the soul, there is the joy of exultation. "All things are ours; and we are Christ's, and Christ is God's."

Ver. 4.—I adjure you, O daughters of Jerusalem, that ye stir not up, nor awaken love, until it please. This, of course, as the refrain of the song, must be taken as a general sentiment. Love is its own lord. Let it have free course. Let it perfect itself in its own best way. The form of the adjuration is abbreviated in this case. The omission of the words, "By the roes and by the hinds of the field," is not without its significance. Is it not intended to intimate that the *natural* love, to which reference was made by the introduction of the beautiful wild creatures of the field, is now no

more in the thoughts of the bride, because it has been sublimated into the higher sisterly love of which she has been speaking? She is not merely the lovely woman on whom the king dotes because of her personal beauty; she is his companion and dearest friend. He opens his heart to her. He teaches her. He lifts her up to his own level. She participates in his royal dignity and majesty. The *eros* of her first estate of love is now exalted into the *agape*, which is the grace never to be without its sphere, abiding for ever. We must not press too closely the poetic form of the song. Something must be allowed for the framework in which the main ideas are set before us. It may not be possible to answer the question—Who are intended to be symbolized by the daughters of Jerusalem? There is no necessity to seek further into the meaning of the whole poem than its widest and most general application. But the daughters of Jerusalem are in a lower position, a less favoured relation to the bridegroom, than the bride herself. We may, therefore, without hesitation, accept the view that by the adjuration is intended the appeal of the higher spiritual life against all that is below it; the ideal love calling upon all that is around it and all that is related to it to rise with it to perfection. The individual soul is thus represented claiming the full realization of its spiritual possibilities. The Church of God thus remonstrates against all that hinders her advancement, restrains her life, and interrupts her blessedness. Jerusalem has many daughters. They are not all in perfect sympathy with the bride. When they listen to the adjurations of the most spiritual, the most devoted, the most heavenly and Christ-like of those who are named by the Name of the Lord, they will themselves be lifted up into the bridal joy of "the marriage supper of the Lamb."

Vers. 5—14.—Part V. CONCLUSION. THE BRIDEGROOM AND THE BRIDE IN THE SCENE OF THEIR FIRST LOVE.

Ver. 5a.—Who is this that cometh up from the wilderness, leaning upon her beloved? We must compare this question with the corresponding one in ch. iii. 6. In that case the inhabitants of Jerusalem are supposed to be looking forth, and behold the bridal procession approaching the capital. In this case the scene is transferred to the country, to the neighbourhood of the bride's home, where she has desired to be with her lord. The country people, or the group of her relatives, are supposed to be gazing at the pair of lovers, not coming in royal state, but in the sweet simplicity of true affection, the bride leaning with loving confidence on the

arm of her husband, as they were seen before in the time of their "first love." The restoration of "first love" is often the prayer of the disciple, feeling how far he falls short of the affection which such a Master should call forth. The first feelings of the heart when it is won to Christ are very delightful.

"Where is the blessedness I knew
When first I saw the Lord?
Where is the soul-refreshing view
Of Jesus and his Word?"

It is a blessedness when we come up from the wilderness. It is a joy to ourselves and a matter of praise to our fellow-believers when we are manifestly filled with a sense of the Saviour's presence and fellowship. The word *midhbaur*, translated "wilderness," does not, however, necessarily mean a desolate and barren desert, but rather the open country, as the Valley of Jezreel. The LXX. had either a different reading in the Hebrew or has mistaken it. They have rendered the last clause "clothed in white," which perhaps Jerome has followed with his *deliciis affluens*. The word is, however, from the root *rauvag*, which in the high. is "to support one's self." The meaning, therefore, is, "leaning for support." It might, however, be intended to represent the loving confidence of married life, and therefore would be equivalent in meaning to the Greek and Latin renderings, that is, "Who is this? Evidently a young newly married wife with her husband." Perhaps this is the best explanation of the words as preparing for what follows, as the bridegroom begins at once to speak of the first love. Some think that the road in which the loving pair are seen to be walking brings their footsteps near to the apple tree over against Shulamith's house where they had first met. But there is no necessity for that supposition. It is sufficient if we imagine the apple tree to be in sight.

Ver. 5b.—Under the apple tree I awakened thee; there thy mother was in travail with thee; there was she in travail that brought thee forth. *I awakened thee*; i.e. I stirred thee up to return the affection which I showed thee (cf. ch. ii. 7). The Masoretic reading prints the verb *וַיִּתְּקֶנָּה*, as with the masculine suffix, but this renders the meaning exceedingly perplexed. The bride would not speak of awakening Solomon, but it was he who had awakened her. The change is very slight, the *ת* becoming *י*, and is supported by the Old Syriac Version. It must be remembered that the bridegroom immediately addresses the bride, speaking of her mother. The apple tree would certainly be most naturally supposed to be situated somewhere near the house where the bride was born, perhaps overshadowing it or branching

over the windows, or trained upon the trellis surrounding the house. The bridegroom points to it. "See, there it is, the familiar apple tree beside the house where thy dear self wast born. Thero, yonder, is where thy mother dwelt, and where thou heardest my first words of affection as we sat side by side just outside the house under the shade of the apple tree." The language is exquisitely simple and chaste, and yet so full of the tender affection of the true lover. The spot where the first breathings of love came forth will ever be dear in the remembrance of those whose affection remains faithful and fond. The typical view certainly finds itself supported in these words. Nothing is more delightful and more helpful to the believer than to go over in thought, again and again, and especially when faith grows feeble, when the heart is cold and fickle under the influence of worldly temptations and difficulties of the Christian course, the history of the first beginning of the spiritual life. We recall how dear the Lord was to us then, how wonderful his love seemed to us, how condescending and how merciful. We reproach ourselves that we faint and fail; we cry out for the fullness of grace, and it is given us.

Vers. 6, 7.—Set me as a seal upon thine heart, as a seal upon thine arm: for love is strong as death; jealousy is cruel as the grave: the flashes thereof are flashes of fire, a very flame of the Lord. Many waters cannot quench love, neither can the floods drown it; if a man would give all the substance of his house for love, he would be utterly condemned. Is this to be regarded as the reply of the bride to the tender allusion of her husband to their first love; or is it, as some think, only the first words which belong to the bride, while the rest of the two verses are a kind of chorus echoing her loving appeal, and bringing the general action of the poem to a conclusion? It is difficult to decide this, and the meaning is not affected either way. Perhaps, however, it is best to take it as spoken by the bride, who continues her address to the end of the eighth verse. She is full of joy in the return of perfect confidence; she prays that the full tide of affection may never cease to flow, that there be no ebbing of that happy feeling in which she now delights; and then sings the praise of love itself, as though a prelude of praise to a long and eternal peace. The seal is the signet-ring, *chothâm*, from a root "to impress." It was sometimes carried by a string on the breast, and would, therefore, be near the heart (see Gen. xxxviii. 18). It was sometimes worn on the hand (see Jer. xxii. 24; and cf. Gen. xli. 42; Esth. iii. 12). It was not worn on the arm like a bracelet (2 Sam. i. 10). Probably it was not the signet-ring which is referred to in the second clause: "Set me as a seal on thine

heart, and as a bracelet on thine arm." The same simile is not infrequent in the prophets. The desire of Shulamith was to escape all possibility of those deceptions of which she had spoken before. "Let me never be out of thy thoughts; let me never go back from my fulness of joy in thy love." The true believer understands well such language. He knows that the maintenance of devout affection is not a matter of mere desire and will. The Lord himself must help us with his blessed gifts, the influence of his gracious Spirit to overcome the feebleness and fickleness of a fallen heart. We want to be close to the heart of the Saviour; we want to be constantly in his eye, and so diligently employed in his service, so closely associated with the work of his mighty arm, that we shall be ever receiving from him the signs and evidences of his approval and affection. The purity and perfection of true love are the theme of every sincere believer. The priceless value of such love is described in the Book of Proverbs (vi. 30), in Numb. xxii. 18, and 1 Cor. xiii. 3. It is an unquenchable flame—nothing can resist it. We cannot but recall the rapturous language of one who himself was an example of the highest devotedness to the Saviour, who rejoiced over death and the grave in the consciousness of victory through him from whose love nothing can separate us (Rom. viii. 38; 1 Cor. xv. 54). Certainly the history of the sufferings and trials of the true Church form a most striking commentary upon these words. Floods of persecution have swept over it, but they have not quenched love. The flame has burst forth again and again when it seemed to be extinguished, and it has become a very "flame of the Lord." The bush has been burning, but has not been consumed. By jealousy is intended love in its intensity not bearing a rival. The "flame of the Lord" may be compared with "the voice of the Lord," which is described in Hebrew poetry as connected with the fury of the storm. The flame, therefore, would be lightning and the voice thunder. The whole of this passage, which forms a kind of key-note of the poem, is more like a distinct strain introduced to give climax to the succession of songs than the natural expression of the bride's feelings. It has been always regarded as one of the sublimest apostrophes to love to be found anywhere. The enemies of God and of humanity are represented as falling before it, death and the grave. Its vehemence and force of manifestation are brought vividly before us by the comparison of the flash of lightning. It is remarkable that this exaltation of love should be included in the Old Testament, thus proving that the Mosaic Law, with its formal prescriptions, by no means fulfils the whole purpose of God in his reve-

lation to the world. As the New Testament would not have been complete without the message of the beloved disciple, so this Old Testament must have its song of love. Nor is it only the ideal and the heavenly love which is celebrated, but human affection itself is placed very high, because it is associated with that which is Divine. It is a more precious thing than mere wealth or worldly honour, and he that trifles with it deserves the utmost scorn and contempt of his fellows. It is well to remark how consistently the poetic framework is maintained. There is no attempt to leave the lines of human relations even at this point, where evidently the sentiment rises above them. The love which is apostrophized is not removed from earth in order to be seen apart from all earthly imperfections and impurities. We are invited rather to look through the human to the Divine which embraces it and glorifies it. That is the method of the Divine revelation throughout. "The Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us." We do not need to take Solomon's Song as an allegory. It is a song of human love, but as such it is a symbol of that which is Divine.

Ver. 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? The term "little" refers, of course, to her tender age, as in 2 Kings v. 2, the "little maid;" and in Gen. xiv. 20, "a child of his old age, a little one," referring to Benjamin. "She hath no breasts" is equivalent to saying she is not yet mature, of marriageable age (see Ezek. xvi. 7). The question which the bride asks of King Solomon refers to the promise which he is supposed to have made, and which he is virtually pledging himself to fulfil by this visit to the country home of his queen. "What shall be done for the advantage of my little sister? Let us consult together" (cf. Gen. xxvii. 37; 1 Sam. x. 2; Isa. v. 4). "The day when she shall be spoken for" is the day when she shall attract the attention of a suitor. It must necessarily be difficult to find satisfactory interpretations for every detail in such a poem of human love as this. It might be sufficient to see in this reference to the younger sister the general idea of love's expansion. Those who are themselves the objects of it, being full of exquisite happiness, desire to call others into the same joy. This is true both of the individual and of the Church. *What shall be done for others?* That is the question which is awakened in every heart where true love is at work. There is no need to explain the language further. But the allegorists have been very ingenious in attempting to find meanings for every allusion of the poem. Who is the little sister? What is her virginity? What

Is the day in which she shall be spoken for? Some have said that the little sister represents the firstfruits of the Jews and Gentiles received into the Christian Church immediately after the time of our Lord's ascension, as Beza and others. Some, again, take it to mean the whole body of Jews and Gentiles yet to be converted. Others would see in it those that are weak in faith, the beginners in Christian life. And, again, it has been regarded as pointing to the "daughter of Zion" at the time of the first beginnings of her conversion to the heavenly Solomon, which is the view of Hengstenberg and others. There is no end to such fancies. The broad general meaning is all that we can rest upon. The bride naturally thinks of her sister. It is a lovely incident in a perfectly idyllic poem. The visit to the home is quite in harmony with the fresh, pure, and simple life which reveals itself in all the utterances of the bride, and is honoured by the devoted attention of the splendid monarch. It is a real touch of nature when the young bride, in her family life once more, asks what shall become of her sister. It is an exquisite type of that sisterly solicitude with which all true Christians will care for the souls around them. Delitzsch thinks that the question which is asked by the bride is answered by her brothers, as they were the actual guardians of the little sister (see Gen. xxi. 50, 55; xxxiv. 6—8). But there is no necessity to introduce any new interlocutors at this point. The words are certainly addressed to Solomon. It is quite natural that he should reply to them in a royal style, with the *pluralis majestatis* which suits the corresponding position of the bride as a suppliant for her sister.

Ver. 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. The interpretation which Delitzsch suggests of these words is that the "wall" represents firmness of character, and the "door" weakness and insecurity. If she firmly and successfully withstands all immoral approaches, then we will bestow high honour upon her, as a tribute to her maidenly virtue and constancy. The turret or castle of silver would mean rewarding her with increase. Silver is the emblem of holiness, gold of nobility. The meaning may, however, merely be, "We will endow her with plenty." The boards of cedar are supposed to be special protections, as cedar is noted for its hardness and durability. But is not the meaning much simpler and more natural? It would be rather a far-fetched use of the figure of a door that it should suggest seduction, and would be rather unsuitable in the lips of the bridegroom when speaking of the little sister of his own bride. May not

the meaning be no more than this?—She may become one of the most substantial parts of the building, like a wall; in that case all that she can be she shall be; we will put the highest honour upon her. She may be a door, that is, though not so great and substantial as the wall, still in the very front of the building and before the eyes of all. In that case we will beautify her with costly and fragrant adornment. The gate shall be enclosed in cedar-wood. "The wall and the door," says Zöckler, "are mostly understood of the steadfast and faithful keeping of the Word of God and of its zealous proclamation to the Gentiles (1 Cor. xvi. 9, etc.); but some also explain them of the valiant in faith and the weak in faith, or of the learned and simple, or of faithful Christians and such as are recreant and easily accessible to the arts of seduction. And then, according to these various interpretations, the 'silver bulwarks' are now the miracles of the first witnesses of Jesus, now the distinguished teachers of the Church, now pious Christian rulers, now the testimonies of Holy Scripture by which faith is strengthened. And, again, by the 'cedar boards' are sometimes understood the ten commandments or the Law, sometimes Christian teachers, sometimes the examples of the saints, sometimes the salutary discipline of the cross and sufferings for Christ's sake," etc. All such attempts at detailed interpretation fail to give satisfaction. Their effect is to repel many from the study of the book altogether, just as the follies and extravagances of the interpreters of prophecy have greatly hindered the study of the prophetic Scriptures. The *wall* and the *door* need not be taken as opposed to one another, as they are not in our conceptions of a city. They fulfil different functions. The *wall* is for *defence*; the *door* is for *admission*. In the one case we think of *strength*, and in the other case of *beauty*. The application of the symbols is very easy if the general meaning alone is regarded. There is a variety of capacity and function in the Church of Christ. There are differences in the forms of Christianity among different nations. But the Lord will receive and bless all. Some are not fitted to be built upon as strong walls, but they may still be beautiful examples of Christian graces in the eyes of the world, through whom many gladly enter into the truth and into the fellowship of Christ.

Vers. 10—12.—I am a wall, and my breasts like the towers thereof: then was I in his eyes as one that found peace. 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 pieces of silver. My vineyard, which is mine, is

before me: thou, O Solomon, shalt have a thousand, and those that keep the fruit thereof two hundred. The meaning seems to be affectionate approval of the method just described. Solomon says, "If the young sister be worthy of love, she shall receive more and more of defence and honour; she shall be all that I can make her." The bride takes up this thought. "So it is with me, and, in the spirit of thankful acknowledgments and praise, I will respond to all the favour of the king. King Solomon has loved me, and now I am rising higher and becoming more and more glorious because of his love." The typical reference can scarcely be missed. The Church, the bride of the Lamb, shines only in the light of him whose favour is life, and whose loving-kindness is better than life. The comparison to a city with the walls and towers, while it would seem a little far-fetched in a love-song, is quite in place if the typical intention was in the mind of the writer. He was thinking of the city of God, "beautiful for situation, the joy of the whole earth." "One that findeth peace" is the same as "one that findeth favour," that is, one who is the object of his affection. There are several references which confirm this, such as Esth. ii. 17; Deut. xxiv. 1; Jer. xxxi. 2; Ps. xli. 10. The word "peace" (*shalôm*) is in all probability purposely chosen in this case as a kind of play on the name *Solomon*, which appears immediately afterwards. "The king of peace delights in me because I am peace in his eyes." The Church is after the image of the King. His likeness in her makes her beautiful. Men take knowledge of Christians that they have been with Jesus (see 1 Chron. xxii. 9). It is scarcely necessary to point out that this language of the bride is entirely against the shepherd-theory. She could not have talked of finding peace in his eyes if she was torn from her true lover. The bride then goes on to express her devotedness to the king and her desire to bring forth abundance for him. She uses as an example, which perhaps was typical in her time and country, some remarkably fruitful vineyard of the king's. She will, in like manner, realize all his highest wishes. All that she has shall be his. The name Baal-hamon (בַּעַלְחָמוֹן) in the LXX. Βελαμών (cf. Judith viii. 3), designates probably a place near to Sunem, somewhere to the north, on the further side of the Plain of Jezreel. The produce of the vineyard must have been very large, as every keeper was to bring in for himself a thousand shekels of silver. It is not stated how many keepers there were, but the word which is employed is not "servants," but "watchers, or overseers." A vineyard was divided into portions, with a certain definite

prescribed number of vines in each portion. In Isa. vii. 23 we read, "And it shall come to pass in that day that every place where there were a thousand vines at a thousand silverlings shall even be for briars and thorns." Now, a thousand silverlings was one shekel, so that if this passage can be taken as throwing light on what the bride says, it would imply that, instead of one shekel for every thousand vines, every keeper brought a thousand shekels. That would seem impossible, so that the parallel can scarcely be strict. Perhaps the largeness of the vineyard is referred to, and each of the keepers would have many thousands of vines under his inspection. The general meaning, however, is not obscure. The vineyard was a celebrated one, and was taken as a typical instance of fertility and abundance. When the bride speaks of her vineyard which is before her, there may be an allusion to her previous manner of life as a rustic maiden employed in the vineyards, and to her own position as a keeper or as one of the family. But this is not intended to be prominently expressed. The whole spirit of the poem justifies the view that she is speaking of her person. She invited Solomon to rejoice in the beauty and fragrance of her garden, to pluck the fruits, to revel in the delights. Everything that is pleasant and lovely is before him (see ch. iv. 12; v. 1). *Before me*; that is, in my power is all this delight, and my desire is to my husband; all that I have is his. Like the far-famed keepers of Baal-hamon, I will give the king a thousand shekels, that is, the utmost that the vineyard can produce, and "those that keep the fruit thereof" shall have two hundred—perhaps meaning a hundred each, that is a tenth, which was the ancient tithe due to the priests. It may be, however, that a double tithe is intended. The king shall be satisfied, and all those who labour for the king shall be more than ever rewarded. If we take such words as typical, they point to a state of things in the history of the kingdom of God when the spiritual and the temporal shall be perfectly adjusted. The keepers of the vineyard have often made sad havoc of the vineyard itself because of their greedy discontent. The fruits which have been yielded by the Church have fallen very far short. The husbandmen have ill treated the Lord's servants. But all the judgments which have been poured out both upon ancient Jews and upon the corrupt Christendom of later times have been directed to one end, to make the vineyard of the Lord more fruitful, to remove the things which are offensive in his sight, to satisfy him whose soul travailed for his people; for herein is the Father glorified in the Son, when those

who bear the name of the Beloved "bear much fruit." Then the keepers of the vineyard will themselves rejoice, not that they reap a larger harvest of this world's good, not "for filthy lucre's sake," but because their hearts are one with his whose vineyard they keep, and to see the fruit abound is to fill them with joy. Surely we shall recognize in such language an anticipation of the many allusions which are found both in the prophets and psalms and in the discourses of our Lord himself. "The vineyard of the Lord of hosts is the house of Israel, and the men of Judah his pleasant plant" (Isa. v. 7).

Ver. 13.—**Thou that dwellest in the gardens, the companions hearken for thy voice; cause me to hear it.** There cannot be much doubt that these are the words of the bridegroom. They are addressed to the bride. She is the dweller in the gardens; that is, one who is at home in the gardens, whose beauty blends with the rural loveliness around her. The king wishes his bride to understand that she is only acceptable in his sight, and that all that she asks shall be granted. It is delightful to him to hear her voice, as it is delightful to those who have been accustomed to that voice from her childhood. "Dear country girl, sing to me, and let me revel in the sweetness of thy music. 'Thy companions hearken for it'—thy former associates, the playmates of thy youth. And while they gather round us, and you and I rejoice in one another, let the sound of thy voice mingle with the peaceful beauty of this earthly paradise." There is an exquisite tenderness in this conclusion of the poem. The curtain falls, as it were, upon a scene of mutual confidence and affection, the simplicity of the bride's early home being lifted up into the royal splendour of the king's presence, the companions beholding and praising, while, in the midst of all that sunny bliss and peaceful content, the voice of the bride is heard singing one of the old, familiar strains of love with which she poured out her heart in the days when her beloved came to find her in her home. It is impossible to conceive a more perfect conclusion. It leads up our thoughts to the land of light and song, where "the Lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall be the Shepherd" of those who shall "hunger no more, neither thirst any more; neither shall the sun strike upon them, nor any heat;" "and he shall guide them unto fountains of waters of life: and God shall wipe away every tear from their eyes" (Rev. vii. 16, 17). It is sad to think that Solomon himself fell from such an ideal of human affection, and was unfaithful to such a bride. But there is no need to trouble the clear, transparent beauty of this typical poem by any reference to the incidents of the

writer's own history. He placed it on the altar of God, no doubt, at a time when it represented sincere feelings in his heart, and because he was inspired to see that it would be profitable to the people of God as a mirror in which they could behold the reflection of the highest truth. But though he himself fell away from his high place as a prophet of God, the words which he left behind him were still a precious gift to the Church. It is otherwise with him who is typified by the earthly monarch. He who is the heavenly Bridegroom has himself to lift up the weakness and fickleness of his bride by fellowship with her, until she is above the reach of temptation, and partaker of his own glory. And he does so, as this exquisite poem reminds us, by the power of his love. It is the personal influence of the Lord Jesus Christ which must glorify the Church and restore it to its original simplicity and spirituality. The scene into which we are led in this story of bridal affection typifies a state of the Church when the artificiality of court life shall be abandoned, the magnificence of mere external pomp and ritual shall be left behind, and the bride shall simply delight herself in the Bridegroom among the pure and peaceful surroundings of a country home. The Church will realize the greatness of her power when she is delivered from that which hides her Saviour, when she is simply human and yet entirely spiritual; then the Lord of her life, the second Adam, the perfect Man, who is from heaven and in heaven, but still on earth, changing earth to heaven by his love, will fulfil his promise. "He not merely concludes the marriage covenant with mankind, but likewise preserves, confirms, refines, and conducts it step by step to its ideal consummation, which is at the same time the palingenesia and perfection of humanity."

Ver. 14.—**Make haste, my beloved, and be thou like to a roe or to a young hart upon the mountains of spices.** This is a snatch of the old love-songs which the bride used to sing when love was fresh and young. She sings it now at the request of her bridegroom himself, and in the delighted ears of her companions. She goes forth from among them leaning on her beloved, to rejoice in the beautiful scenery and rural pleasures with him whose presence heightens every joy, the life of her life, the soul of her soul, "all her salvation, all her desire." The bridegroom and the bride are seen disappearing-together over the flowery hills; and the music of the Song of Songs dies away in the sweet fragrance of that closing scene; the vision of love has, gazelle-like, leapt from point to point, and vanishes away at last among the mountains of spices. It is well to notice that what were before "mountains of Bethel," that is, of "separation," are now "mountains of

Besamin"—balsam mountains. There is no more word of separation. Henceforth the only note is one of peaceful enjoyment. "*My beloved is mine, and I am his.*" Our home and haunt is the same. The concluding words, we cannot doubt, are intended to open a perfect future to the eye. Yet the

poet, with consummate art, connects that future with the past and the present by the voice of the bride heard singing the love-song with which she first expressed her love, now lifted up into anticipation of the everlasting hills of fragrant and joyful life.

HOMILETICS.

Vers. 1—4.—*Wishes of the bride.* 1. *That she had known the bridegroom always.* The bride continues the address of ch. vii. She is still speaking to the king, telling him of her love. He had again and again called her his sister—his sister-bride. She now wishes that he were to her as a brother; that they could have been children of the same mother; that they could have known one another from infancy. So in the close union of love between husband and wife there comes sometimes such a longing, a desire that each could have known the other from the beginning; that instead of the years in which they were strangers, and never heard one another's voice, or touched one another's hand, they had always lived together, and known one another through and through in all the varied experiences of child-life, of girlhood or of boyhood; sometimes there comes a sort of innocent envy of the brothers or sisters who then knew one or other of the wedded pair when they were unknown to one another. The bride wishes that she had always thus known the bridegroom; that she could have loved him always with a sisterly affection; that their mutual endearments might have been, like those of brothers and sisters, without shame, attracting no observation. How often the converted soul longs with an intense longing that it had always from the beginning known and loved the heavenly Bridegroom! How utterly wasted and lost those years now seem which were spent without that knowledge of Christ which is eternal life! How ardently we wish that they could be blotted out of our remembrance, with all their ignorance and all their sins, as we humbly hope that through the atonement of the precious blood they are blotted out from the handwriting "that was against us, that was contrary to us" (Col. ii. 14)! Blessed be God we have his holy promise, "I have blotted out, as a thick cloud, thy transgressions, and, as a cloud, thy sins: return unto me; for I have redeemed thee" (Isa. xlv. 22). We know that in his gracious mercy he so putteth away the sins of them that truly repent that he remembereth them no more (Jer. xxxi. 34; Heb. viii. 12; x. 17). But though we believe in the forgiveness of sins, and thank God heartily for that blessed revelation of his love, yet we cannot but long—and that the more earnestly the nearer we draw to him—that we had always known him with the knowledge of faith and love, that we had always remembered him, that we had kept our heart pure from other loves, and loved him always. There is a difference between the love of the forgiven penitent and the love of saints like Enoch or Samuel, who, as far as human imperfection allows, have always in the main bent and purpose of their lives striven to walk with God. The love of the penitent is more demonstrative, more passionate—if the word may be used, more enthusiastic; the love of men like Samuel is calmer, quieter, fuller, dominating the entire life in all its pursuits and amusements; and just because it is not intermittent, but uniform, it is not so much observed of men. The still waters run deepest; the interpenetration of the heart by the long-continued influences of the Holy Spirit, without any marked and sudden change visible to the eyes of men, produces a very high type of Christian character. Enoch seems to have walked with God all his life. "He was not, for God took him;" "He had this testimony, that he pleased God" (Heb. xi. 5). It is a poor offering to give the dregs of our life to God, when the temptations of youth have lost their power over us; "when the evil days come, and the years draw nigh when thou shalt say, I have no pleasure in them" (Eccles. xii. 1). A life dedicated to God from early childhood must be a thing well pleasing in his sight, as Holy Scripture tells us it was in the case of Enoch. Such a life is very rare, and we may well be full of thankfulness to Almighty God for his

gracious promises to the penitent sinner. He "will not despise the broken and the contrite heart." "If the wicked will turn from all his sins that he hath committed, and keep all my statutes, and do that which is lawful and right, he shall surely live, he shall not die. All his transgressions that he hath committed, they shall not be mentioned unto him: in his righteousness that he hath done he shall live." We thank God for these gracious words. If we have been called at the sixth or at the eleventh hour, it is enough to fill us with adoring gratitude; we wonder, as we look back upon the past, that God bore with us so long in our sin and unbelief; we thank him with all our heart for his long-suffering mercy. But when we remember that sin and that unbelief, we cannot but long that we had given to God those lost and wasted years; that we had remembered our Creator in the days of our youth, and not grieved the Holy Spirit of God by so many transgressions, so much coldness and hardness of heart.

2. *That she had brought him into her mother's house.* Those lost years involved the loss of many opportunities of doing good to others. The bride, had she known the bridegroom in early youth, would have brought him, she says, into her mother's house. There (she adds in what seems to be the best reading) "*thou shouldst instruct me.*" How much good we might have done in our families, among our friends, if we had given our earliest years to God, if we had lived then as in his presence, and had carried the consciousness of that presence, with all the feelings of awe and reverence and love which attend it, always with us in our family life, in our dealings with relations and friends; if we had given him of our best, and willingly offered up for his service all that we most prized and valued, how much calmer, holier, happier, our life would have been! For he would have instructed us. He bids us learn of him. He is the great Teacher, the Master. "All thy children," he says, "shall be taught of the Lord: and great shall be the peace of thy children" (Isa. liv. 13).

3. *The bride repeats the aspirations of ch. ii. 7.* If we had listened to that instruction from the time when we were first made his disciples, if we had given him from the beginning that for which he thirsted—our affections, our heart's love—then he would now be wholly ours; "his left hand should be under my head, and his right hand should embrace me." That blessed union with the Saviour, growing ever nearer and closer, is the object of the deepest longings of the Christian soul. We think sometimes that if only we had always loved him and walked with him, our walk now might be very close with God; we might have attained to that calm and serene trustfulness which is the privilege of his saints; we might have found rest for our souls in the embrace of his holy love. But though we have greatly sinned, and have lost much through past neglect and unbelief, yet even now that blessed rest is not beyond our grasp. It was to Mary Magdalene, out of whom the Lord had cast seven devils, that those words were said which seemed at first severe and forbidding, but really involved the promise of a holier union, "Touch me not; for I am not yet ascended unto my Father." She was about to embrace his feet, to cling to the human form of him who had done such great things for her. The Lord implies a promise of a better, spiritual communion. When he had ascended into heaven, when he had sent down the blessed Spirit that he might abide for ever with his Church, then the believing soul might touch him with the touch of faith; might cling to him with a holier, a more blessed embrace; then he would be with us all the days, guiding, strengthening, comforting, his left hand under our head to support us when we seem to be ready to fall, his right hand embracing us to shield us from all evil, to assure us of his love.

4. *The thrice-repeated charge to the daughters of Jerusalem.* The bride's longings for the tokens of the bridegroom's love again arouse her feelings of maidenly reserve: as in ch. ii. 7 and iii. 5, she bids her virgin-friends not to stir up or awaken love until it please to manifest itself. The Christian's aspirations after the abiding presence of God arouse in him feelings of reverential awe. He will remember the Lord's caution, "Touch me not;" he will avoid expressions of love which savour too much of merely human tenderness; he will shrink instinctively from any approach to familiarity; he will remember that the Lord Jesus is the Word of God, the King, the Judge of all; he will be reverent in all his approaches to the Saviour; he will endeavour to instil reverence into those around him by example, by tone, by manner, by word. We must wait on the Lord until he pleases to manifest himself; we must not be impatient; we must learn to say with the psalmist, "Why art thou cast down, O my soul? and why art

thou disquieted within me? Hope thou in God: for I shall yet praise him, who is the health of my countenance and my God" (Ps. xlii. 11).

Vers. 5—14.—*Entire union of wedded love.* I. COMMUNION OF THE BRIDEGROOM AND THE BRIDE. 1. *Approach of the bride.* "Who is this?" The question is asked for the third time (see ch. iii. 6; vi. 10). In ch. iii. 6 the chorus of youths asks the question as the bride is borne in royal state to meet the king in the city of his kingdom; it occurs again in ch. vi. 10, when the maidens of the chorus are struck with admiration of her queenlike, majestic beauty. Now, apparently, we have a narrative of a visit to the scenes of the bride's early life, according to her invitation in ch. vii. 11; and the question, "Who is this?" is repeated once more. Here the circumstances are changed; there is no magnificence as in ch. iii.; the bride is alone with the king; she is seen coming up from the wilderness, leaning on her beloved. So the Church, the bride of Christ, cometh up from the wilderness, leaning on the heavenly Bridegroom. So the Church of the Old Testament went up from Babylon when the wilderness was glad for them, when the ransomed of the Lord returned and went up with singing to Zion. So the Church of the New Testament came up from the wilderness of persecution, leaning on the strength of Christ; so the same Church shall come up at the call of the same holy Saviour to the heavenly Zion when that blessed promise is fulfilled, "Upon this rock will I build my Church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it." Hades, the abode of the dead, shall not be able to retain within its grasp the bride of Christ. For he saith, "I will ransom them from the power of the grave [Sheol, or Hades]; I will redeem them from death: O death, where are thy plagues? O grave, where is thy destruction? Repentance shall be hid from mine eyes" (Hos. xiii. 14). And so now each Christian soul cometh up, one after another, out of the wilderness, leaning upon her Beloved. When he calls us and bids us come to him, we feel that the world is indeed a wilderness; that it hath nothing to satisfy our cravings, our needs. And the soul cometh, drawn by the Saviour's love. "I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me." The soul cometh up; it is a continual ascent. As the Lord was lifted up from the earth, so the soul cometh up, away from the world, nearer to the cross. Christ is calling us upwards. The holiness to which he bids us aspire is very high; it seems above our reach; it can be reached only by persevering effort; by climbing, little by little, ever higher; by making all the little matters of daily life opportunities of self-denial, means of disciplining our human wills into submission to the holy will of God. The effort must be continuous, conscious, real; there must be no looking back to the wilderness; no hankering after the flesh-pots of Egypt; no longing for the other masters, the world, the flesh, and the devil, which we renounced when we gave our heart to Christ. The soul cometh up from the wilderness. It is a solemn thing; a sight which causes joy in heaven, for the angels know the meaning of that ascent; they know the perils of the wilderness, the utter vanity of its seeming pleasures; they know the toil, the difficulty of that ascent; they know the great glory and gladness reserved for those that have achieved it; they know, too, how very precious every Christian soul is in the sight of the Lord, who bought it with his blood. At rest in heaven themselves, they watch with a deep interest the heavenward progress of each true disciple of the Lord. The long procession upwards of the ransomed saints must be a spectacle of varied and intense interest in the presence of the angels of God. And they see what was once seen by the King of Babylon, "Behold, I see four men loose, walking in the midst of the fire, and they have no hurt; and the form of the fourth is like the Son of God" (Dan. iii. 25). The angels see that each soul that cometh up is leaning on her Beloved. The journey is long and wearisome; the ascent is steep and rugged; but the soul that has found Christ, and clung to him with the embrace of faith—the soul that can say, "My Beloved is mine, and I am his," is not left alone in its weakness. There is a strong arm, unseen by the outward eye, but felt and realized by faith; there is a hand stretched forth to help—the hand that once caught the sinking Peter, and lifted him up out of the depths. Each faithful soul leaneth on her Beloved. We need that support always, at every point of the long, wearisome path; at every step of the toilsome, upward climbing. Without Christ we can do nothing; we sink backwards; we become listless and slothful. But while we feel his presence,

while by faith we lean upon him, resting our weakness on his strength, then our progress is assured. We need that presence always, in all the little trials of our daily lives, in the greater sorrows and perplexities that emerge from time to time. That presence transfigures our life, turning troubles into blessings; making sorrows so many steps upwards, ever nearer to God. To realize that presence, the Lord Jesus must be "*my Beloved*;" I must give him my whole heart; I must know him with that holy knowledge with which the true sheep know the good Shepherd; and to gain the excellency of that blessed knowledge I must be content, like St. Paul, to count all things else as dross, as very dung, that I may win Christ, and be found in him.

"I need thy presence every passing hour:
What but thy grace can foil the tempter's power?
Who like thyself my guide and stay can be?
Through cloud and sunshine, Lord, abide with me.

"I fear no foe, with thee at hand to bless;
Ills have no weight, and tears no bitterness;
Where is death's sting? where, grave, thy victory?
I triumph still, if thou abide with me."

2. *The voice of the bridegroom.* According to the present pointing of the Hebrew, the second clause of ver. 5 is an utterance of the bride. Many of the Fathers and other Christian writers assign it to the bridegroom. This last arrangement seems by far the most natural. The king points out the birthplace of the bride; he recalls to her remembrance an incident of their early attachment—he shows her the tree under which they first met. So man and wife now, when united in a happy marriage, love to visit the early haunts of one another, and especially the places endeared to both by the memory of their first vows and promises. So to the Christian those places must be always full of sacred interest where the heavenly Bridegroom first won the love of his bride, the Church—Bethlehem, Gethsemane, Calvary. So to each Christian soul those spots are hallowed ground which are connected with events in our own religious life—our baptism, our confirmation, our first communion; or associated with any great and abiding impressions or influences for good which Almighty God has been pleased to grant to us from time to time. 3. *The response of the bride.* The bride is leaning on the bridegroom's arm; perhaps she was reclining her head upon his breast. She would ever remain in that dear embrace, near to him as the seal which was attached to the arm or neck. The seal of the king had great weight and value; it gave his authority to the document which bore it (Dan. vii. 17); it was precious and sacred, and would, of course, be jealously guarded. The king himself would wear it; it would be fastened on his arm, or it would be suspended from his neck and rest upon his heart. There the bride would ever be, encircled with her husband's arms, pressed close to his heart; it is her rightful place, for she is bound to him by the indissoluble ties of holy wedlock. So the Church, the bride of Christ, clings to her Lord. Without him she can do nothing; but, borne up in the everlasting arms, she hath a strength not her own. She would be near to him as a seal. She hath the seal of God, for she is "sealed with that holy Spirit of promise, which is the earnest of our inheritance" (Eph. i. 13, 14). She is God's foundation upon the holy hills (Ps. lxxxvii. 1), built upon the Rock of ages; and "the foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal, The Lord knoweth them that are his. And, Let every one that nameth the name of Christ depart from iniquity" (2 Tim. ii. 19). So each Christian longs to be borne up in the arms of Christ—those arms that were opened wide upon the cross, as if to fold his chosen in the embrace of his love; so each Christian longs to rest, as once St. John rested, upon the Saviour's breast; to be near to him, cherished as a seal that lies in its owner's bosom; so each Christian hopes to bear the impress of that sacred seal stamped more and more deeply into his inner life, that being now sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise, he may one day stand among the blessed, sealed with the seal of the living God upon his forehead (Rev. vii. 3). 4. *Her praise of love.* Why does she desire to be so close to the bridegroom, to be as a seal upon his heart? Because, she says, "love is strong as death." She has given him her love, and that love entirely fills and dominates her soul; she has taken him to be her husband till death; she

loves him with a love like that of Ruth: "The Lord do so to me, and more also, if aught but death part thee and me" (Ruth i. 17). That love, strong as death, the love of those wedded souls who in true affection have plighted their troth, either to other, "till death us do part," is a figure of the holy love that is betwixt Christ and his Church. Indeed, the love of the heavenly Bridegroom was stronger than death; stronger than a death of lingering torture, a death of ignominy and horror. "We love him, because he first loved us." His Church, drawn by the constraining power of his most holy love, has striven to return it. Many of his saints have loved him with a love strong as death; they have proved by the martyr's death the strength of their love. How should we have acted if we had lived in those days of fiery trial? It is a question which we should often and earnestly press upon ourselves, for the Lord has taught us that "he that loveth his life shall lose it, and he that hateth his life in this world shall keep it unto life eternal" (John xii. 25). St. Stephen, and the long line of saints who followed him, the noble army of martyrs, loved not their lives unto the death. How would it be with the many half-hearted, careless Christians who come to church, and call themselves disciples of the crucified Saviour, but have not learned to take up the cross and deny themselves for his sake—how would it be with them if they were suddenly summoned to choose between Christ and death? Which of us would be faithful unto death? Which of us would deny his Lord? It is an awful question—a question full of the deepest interest; for it is only such a love, a love strong as death, which can give us strength to overcome temptation, and to fight the good fight of faith. He who for the love of Christ endures hardness now, who puts aside his own wishes, and does habitually for Christ's sake things which but for the love of Christ he would not have done; he who habitually for Christ's sake leaves undone things which but for the love of Christ he would have gladly done,—he is learning to love Christ with a love strong as death, a love which is giving him strength to kill out of his heart worldly thoughts and earthly ambitions, so that, dying unto the world, he may live unto Christ. We must all pray and strive for that love strong as death; it should be the object of our highest ambition, our most fervent longing. We need it now as much as the saints and martyrs of the Lord needed it in the old times. For if they had to lay down their lives for Christ, we have now to give him our hearts, our lives; and to do that always, in times of anxiety, or sickness, or lassitude, requires a great love; a love strong as death; a love which we can only learn of the Master who loved us with a love stronger than death, who himself set us the high example of self-sacrificing love, and now helps and teaches us by the gracious influences of the Holy Ghost, the other Comforter, whom he sendeth to abide for ever with his people. Love is strong as death, and jealousy is hard as the grave (Sheol, or Hades). Death is strong; he is the last enemy, the king of terrors. Hades is hard and stern; it is rapacious; it hath never enough; it holds its prisoners firm. But love is strong as death and Hades. Christ, who is Love, hath overcome death, and opened unto us the gate of everlasting life; the gates of Hades shall not prevail against his Church. Neither death nor life can separate from his love those who love him with a true love, a love strong as death; they, too, are more than conquerors through him who loved them. And when love is strong as death, the jealousy (in the good sense of the word), which is one of its developments, is hard, tenacious, as Hades. God is love, the infinite love, and he is a jealous God. "Thou shalt worship no other God: for the Lord, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God" (Exod. xxxiv. 14). He asks for our whole heart; he is jealous of a divided service; he will not accept a service to be shared with another master. Such a service is stigmatized in Holy Scripture with the stern name of adultery. "Ye adulteresses," says St. James, in language of awful severity, "know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? . . . Do ye think that the Scripture saith in vain, The Spirit which he hath made to dwell within us, jealously yearneth after us?" or, as the words may also be rendered, "he jealously yearneth for the spirit which he made to dwell within us" (Jas. iv. 4, 5). God once breathed into man's nostrils the breath of life. He gave to man as his distinguishing possession a spirit. "I pray God," says St. Paul to the Thessalonians, "that your whole spirit and soul and body may be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Thess. v. 23). That spirit, his special gift, should be wholly his. It is that part of our complex nature which is receptive of the Holy Spirit of God, which, when illumined

by his presence, can attain unto such knowledge of God as is now granted to us ("Now we see through a glass, darkly . . . now I know in part," 1 Cor. xiii. 12), and dwell in communion with God. God jealously desires the possession of that spirit. Therefore the Christian's love for God must be a jealous love; he must be very jealous of the intrusion of other loves, other ambitions, into the heart, which should be given wholly to God; he must keep his heart for God with a godly jealousy (see 2 Cor. xi. 2)—jealousy stern as that with which Hades retains its prisoners. And this holy jealousy is ardent, too—ardent as flames of fire; "a very flame of the Lord" (ver. 6, Revised Version). For its ardour comes from him; it is he who gives that ardent zeal—that zeal for the Lord which has urged his holiest servants to do and dare such great things for his love's sake. The great love of the Lord Jesus for our souls calls for something more than the lukewarmness of Laodicea. "Be zealous," it says to us; "be zealous and repent" (Rev. iii. 19). The name of God occurs only in this one place in the song; we read it here in the shortened form (*Jah*) of the adorable name, as if to teach us the sacred lesson of the disciple whom Jesus loved, that "God is love: and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him" (1 John iv. 16). Holy love comes only from him. "Love is of God, and every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God" (1 John iv. 7). Such love cannot be quenched. It is so even with pure human love. "Many waters cannot quench it, neither can the floods drown it." The many waters of trouble, suffering, old age, cannot stifle love; it lives on still. It cannot be bought. "If a man would give all the substance of his house for love, he would utterly be condemned." Love cannot be bought or forced; it is essentially free and spontaneous; it springs up spontaneously in the heart ("when it pleases," ver. 4; also ch. ii. 7; iii. 5), in response to love, at the presence of an object capable of calling it forth. So it is with the holy love of God. God's love for us cannot be quenched. The many waters of our unbelief, ingratitude, and sin have not—blessed be his holy Name—quenched his gracious love. It cannot be bought; we cannot buy it with earthly gifts, with gold or silver, or external good works; it is given freely, graciously, and it abides in those who live in the faith of the Son of God. Our love for God is a faint reflection of his blessed love for us. It is called forth by that holy love. "We love him, because he first loved us." The waters of trouble and sorrow and temptation cannot drown it if it is true and real. These verses are the Old Testament psalm of love (see Ps. xlv., title), corresponding to 1 Cor. xiii. or the First Epistle of St. John, in the New Testament. They have a singular power and beauty; they are treasured in the memories of God's people; they have brought peace and comfort to many a death-bed.

II. INTERCESSIONS OF THE BRIDE. 1. *For her sister.* The bride has a sister not yet of marriageable years. What shall be done for her? If she be a wall, firm and steadfast, she shall be richly dowered; but if she be a door, too easily opened, too accessible, she must be carefully guarded. The bride herself is a wall, strong and steadfast in her virtue; therefore it was that she found peace in the bridegroom's eyes. There may possibly be an allusion here to the name Solomon, which follows in the next verse: the bride found peace in the eyes of the peaceful one. The bride is the Church, the little sister perhaps the Gentiles. Those Gentile Churches that will be steadfast in the faith, like Smyrna or Philadelphia, shall be built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief Corner-stone (Eph. ii. 20). Those that are like Thyatira, Sardis, or Laodicea, still open to those other masters, the world, the flesh, and the devil, must be treated with wholesome severity; they must be carefully guarded and fenced in, and closed against the enemies of the Lord. The bride intercedes for her little sister. She herself has set a good example. Christian people must make intercession for the heathen, that they may be converted; for missionary work, that it may be prospered; and while they pray, they must be very careful to set a good example themselves, that the great work may not be hindered by any fault of theirs, but may go on and prosper till the earth be filled with the knowledge of God as the waters cover the sea. 2. *For her brothers.* She had spoken of their harshness (ch. i. 6). "They made me," she said, "keeper of the vineyards; but mine own vineyard [literally, as here, 'my vineyard, which is mine'] have I not kept." Now she intercedes with the king for them. She would have them to be keepers of her vineyard, and to receive a suitable recompense. She compares King Solomon's

vineyard with her own. The king, she says, had one of great extent and value; every one of the keepers was to bring him a thousand shekels. Then she adds, "My vineyard, which is mine, is before me." Her vineyard was small; it lay before her eyes. It now passes into the hand of Solomon; it is his. He must have a thousand shekels from it. She wishes the keepers (her brothers, apparently) to have two hundred. The greater than Solomon, the heavenly Bridegroom, has a vineyard. It is the world (comp. Matt. xiii. 38, "The field is the world"). Solomon's vineyard was at Baal-hamon, which means "the Lord of the multitude." We may perhaps see in the word an allusion to him who is called in Holy Scripture "the prince of this world" (John xiv. 30). The Lord has a vineyard in the world, which Satan strives to rule. And men have still, as in Elijah's time, to choose whom they will serve. "If the Lord be God, follow him: but if Baal, then follow him" (1 Kings xviii. 21). But though Satan is called the prince of this world, and in one place (2 Cor. iv. 4) "the god of this world," he is a usurper; the vineyard is the Lord's. And the Lord has done all that could be done for his vineyard: "he has hedged it round about, and digged a winepress in it, and built a tower, and let it out to husbandmen" (Matt. xxi. 33). The husbandmen were to bring him in due time of the fruits of his vineyard. They *were* to do so, but, alas! they did not; they served Baal, many of them, rather than the Lord. The Church's vineyard is before her; it lies within a comparatively narrow space; it does not cover a third of the population of the world. It belongs now to the heavenly Bridegroom, for the Church is his. He loved the Church, and gave himself for her; and that unspeakable gift, that stupendous ransom, has made her and all that she has wholly his. The fruits which that vineyard brings forth must be paid duly to the Lord of the vineyard. Those fruits are souls converted, sanctified, saved. The keepers too, if they are found faithful, have their reward. The souls saved through their means, their warnings, their example, their preaching, their labours, are their best and most precious reward in this world (1 Cor. iii. 14), and in the world to come, "when the chief Shepherd shall appear, they shall receive a crown of glory which fadeth not away" (1 Pet. v. 4). Each Christian soul is the Lord's vineyard; it must be cultivated for him, not for Baal. It may be a vineyard in Baal-hamon, set among a multitude who follow the prince of this world; but it is the Lord's, bought with his most precious blood. It must not bring forth wild grapes, fit only for the world, the flesh, and the devil; it must bring forth good fruit—fruit meet to be rendered to the Lord, to be treasured in his granary; the fruit of the Spirit—love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance. And the soul itself which keepeth the fruit; the soul that treasures up the graces of the good Spirit of God, that listens with reverent attention to his gracious warnings, and follows his guidance; the soul that worketh out its own salvation with fear and trembling through the grace of God, who worketh within both to will and to do,—that soul shall receive of the fruit; for "blessed are they that do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled." Love, trustfulness, obedience rendered to Christ, bring their own great reward in the irradiating presence of the Saviour. "If any man love me, he will keep my word; and my Father will love him, and we will come to him, and make our abode with him."

III. FINAL WORDS OF LOVE. 1. *The voice of the bridegroom.* He addresses the bride as "Thou that dwellest in the gardens," meaning, apparently, the vineyard which she had just mentioned. She has done her best for it. He accepts her past service. Now the king and his companions were listening for her voice; it was sweet to hear. "Cause *me* to hear it," the king says, meaning, it seems, that the voice of the bride was very sweet to him; he loved to hear it; and perhaps also implying that he was ready to grant any request that she might make, as well as that which she had already made. When the Church does her duty, dwelling in the gardens of the Lord, tending his vineyard, then there is joy in heaven, joy in the presence of the angels of God; they hearken to the prayers and praises of the Church. The Lord himself, the heavenly Bridegroom, delights to hear the voice of the bride; her prayers and adorations are as the holy incense, acceptable to him (Rev. viii. 3, 4). The Lord would have all Christian men to pray, and that constantly. His will is that men should pray always, and not faint. He graciously listens to the voice of his people when they speak to themselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, when they

make melody in their hearts unto the Lord (Eph. v. 19). And he grants their requests. "If ye ask anything in my Name," he says, "I will do it;" "Ask, and ye shall receive, that your joy may be full;" "Whatsoever ye ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive." We must claim his blessed promise; we must make him hear our voice while we are "dwelling in the gardens," while we are labouring in the Lord's vineyard. True prayer leads to faithful work; faithful work stimulates prayer, and gives it energy and devotion. He will hear our prayers for ourselves, our intercessions for others, if only they are offered up in faith, in the Name of Jesus Christ our Lord.

2. *The response of the bride.* The king sought to hear the voice of the bride. She in response repeats the last clause of her song in ch. ii. 17; but she makes one important change—the mountains are no longer "mountains of Bether," which means "separation," but "mountains of Besamin" ("spices"). Perhaps there is a reference to "the mountain of myrrh and the hill of frankincense" in the royal gardens (ch. iv. 6). The bride no longer thinks of the possibility of separation. Formerly her beloved was separated from her for a while in his hunting excursions; now he is to be as bright and exultant as of old, but with her in their common haunts. The Church prays, "Thy kingdom come." Her prayer is that God of his gracious goodness would be pleased shortly to accomplish the number of his elect, and to hasten his kingdom. The Christian prays and longs for the coming of the Lord, beseeching him in ever-deepening earnestness to come, first in the kingdom of grace, into his people's hearts, then in the kingdom of glory, when the kingdoms of this world shall become the kingdoms of God and of his Christ, and he shall reign for ever and ever, King of kings, and Lord of lords.

HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Vers. 1—4.—"*Oh that men would understand!*" Such seems to be the sentiment of these verses. She who speaks grieves that those about her did not see how natural and right was her love for her beloved. She could almost wish he were her brother instead of her betrothed, for then those who saw her love for him would not, as now they did, despise her for it. She could not have been already a bride, as is so constantly assumed, for in that case her love could not have awakened scorn. But they despised her for clinging to one who, compared with Solomon, was in their esteem despicable. We may take the section as in part parallel to the sentiments in Rom. ix. 1—3; x. 1. She who speaks *could* not wish to be not betrothed, and only as a sister. Some, therefore (Newton), have regarded these verses as an address to the unconverted and unsaved. Others have held that the "brother" means only an infant brother. But we take it that as Paul could wish himself unsaved for Israel's sake, so here, she who speaks could even wish that she did not hold so dear a relationship to the beloved, but only that of a sister, so that those about her, etc. (cf. *supra*). The words in Romans and here are to be regarded as hyperbolic expressions, telling of strong desire for others' good, but not to be regarded *au pied de la lettre*. We note that—

I. MEN WILL ACCEPT THAT WHICH THEY REGARD AS NATURAL. The expression of affection between brother and sister all understand, allow, and approve. And some expressions of religious feeling they will also admit, provided they are marked by what they deem sobriety and conformity to general usage. All beyond that they despise.

II. BUT THE VEHEMENT AFFECTION OF THE SOUL FOR CHRIST THEY DESPISE. Several marks of such affection are suggested here. 1. *Open avowal of love to him.* "The religion of every sensible man," said one, "is that which every sensible man keeps to himself." Therefore such confession as is suggested by ver. 1, "When I should find . . . I would kiss thee," is of course extravagant and to be despised. 2. *Proselytizing in the family.* (Ver. 2.) "I would bring thee into my mother's house." Sincere religion is often deprecated as bringing strife into households, and it is difficult to see how our Lord's word, "I came not to send peace on earth, but a sword," can be escaped under such circumstances. And even if there be not absolute proselytizing, the mere presence of an earnest disciple in a house troubles those therein who have no or but little love for Christ. 3. *The habitual heed to his teaching.* (Ver. 2.) "That thou mightest instruct me" (Revised Version, margin). She would,

like Mary, sit at her Lord's feet and listen to him. And even good people like Martha think such conduct not "a good part," and that opportunity for it ought to "be taken away from her." 4. *The giving to him of her best.* This the meaning of "the wine prepared from the pomegranate" (ver. 2). Such a sincerely loving soul will not be content with mere ordinary and routine service, but the best of all she has to give she will offer to him. 5. *But all this wins scorn and dislike.* She who speaks here was evidently "despised" for her devotion to her beloved, and so it is still when the like is seen towards Christ.

III. OUR AIM SHOULD, THEREFORE, BE TO SHOW MEN THAT WHAT THEY DESPISE IS ALTOGETHER REASONABLE AND RIGHT. That men might see this is what is so desired here. But men are as a child playing on a railway line in front of an advancing train. Some kind bystander rushes forward and clutches the child and puts it out of danger before the train is upon it. The child probably only stares displeasedly at him who has roughly interrupted its play; no spark of gratitude is there. So men now do not see what Christ has done for them and is willing to do, and so their hearts are cold to him. The truth, therefore, that "God so loved the world" must be held up, insisted on, and shown by lives consecrated to him under the sense of that love.—S. C.

Ver. 5.—*The home-coming.* "Who is this that cometh up," etc.? The end of this pastoral song is approaching. The speaker in the former verses has finished her recital with words telling of her yearning love for her beloved, and an adjuration to those listening to her that they should not attempt to alter her mind towards him (vers. 3, 4). They are the same as in ch. ii. 7; iii. 5. And now the scene changes. She has been rescued from or permitted to leave her gilded but none the less hated captivity in Solomon's palace, and with her beloved is returning to her old home. A band of friends exclaim, "Who is this," etc.? Applying the words spiritually, we may take them of the soul's home-coming. And they tell—

I. *WHITHER SUCH SOUL COMES.* It is ever an upward coming. For all the characteristics of the soul's true home are far above the soul's natural condition. For here, assuredly, *we have not peace.* "Man is born," not to peace, but "to trouble." Who knows not that? For sin is the great troubler. Therefore, for the soul to have what it so desires, it must come up and away from the wilderness. *Purity*, likewise. How here can we keep ourselves undefiled? Who amongst men unregenerate and unsaved ever does so? But as the soul in coming home enters into the peace of God, so also shall it partake of his purity. *Rest.* The trials, crosses, and disappointments of life, its manifold adversities, all ceaselessly proclaim to the soul, "This is not your rest." But "there remaineth a rest for the people of God." And the soul, uprising in faith and love towards God, does even here know much of the truth of Christ's promise, "I will give you rest." And then there is *the course and consummation of all these* in the presence of God eternally in heaven. Here we have pledges and foretastes, but there only are we made perfect.

II. *WHENCE.* "From the wilderness." How fit that word for the soul's condition here ere it is redeemed by Christ! Are not the distress of conscience, the sense of guilt, the tyranny and cruelty of sin, the trials of life, and at length the grave,—are not all these wilderness-like things? But when the soul comes home, it comes away from all these. It is not a coming to them, as every soul has to make acquaintance with them when it is born into the world; nor is it a coming through them—that is what we are occupied in now whilst we linger here; but it is coming from them, leaving them all behind. Oh, blessed home-coming of the soul!

III. *How.* "Leaning upon her beloved." This tells of the *soul's relation to Christ.* He is "her Beloved." Of its *union with him.* As it were linked lovingly together as the soul leans upon him. Of its *dependence upon Christ.* It is a long, rough, lonely, and difficult way that the soul has to traverse. It needs, therefore, that the Lord should be her "arm" every day (Isa. xxxiii. 2). Of its *communion with Christ.* Note the affectionate converse of the next verse. The maiden is represented as coming to a particular tree where once she had awaked him from a noonday slumber, and where, too, he had been born. "In Oriente non raro accidit ut mulieres in aperto pariant" (cf. Gen. xxxv. 16). And they talk of these reminiscences. It was natural, and tells of the familiar intercourse, the happy communion, which the soul enjoys with Christ. Yes,

it is thus that we make our way homeward, heavenward. In union, in dependence, in communion, with Christ. Thus we come up from the wilderness leaning on our beloved Lord.—S. C.

Ver. 6.—*Love's prayer.* "Set me as a seal," etc. 1. That she may be *precious in Christ's esteem*. As a seal, a signet-ring, of great value. 2. That she may *dwell in his love*. "On thine heart." Also: 3. That she may *enjoy the benefit of his intercession*. There is allusion, apparently, to the jewels engraved as a signet, and which were on the breast of the high priest of Israel (Exod. xxviii. 15—30). 4. That she may be *defended by his might*. "On thine arm." 5. That she may *express and satisfy his will*. As a seal does this for any writing on which it is impressed. Let not our "Amen" be lacking to such a prayer.—S. C.

Vers. 6, 7.—*Love's characteristics.* These verses may be regarded as the theme of the entire song. All its chief incidents are illustrative of the vigour, vehemence, and victory of true love. The literal story tells of the triumph of such love as seen in the maiden and her beloved, and as has often been seen in like human love. But as a parable or allegory, it tells of the love of the soul to Christ, and of his to us.

I. ITS STRENGTH. "Strong as death." Death reigns. Who can resist his will? "Pallida mors," etc. (cf. Ps. xc.). *So love is all-powerful.* It is a universal passion. It bears away all men in its might. It is an irrepressible force. This is true of human love. And in the love of the redeemed soul for Christ it has proved itself again and again "strong as death." Every one of the noble army of martyrs has faced death and vanquished it. "They loved not their lives unto the death;" "For thy sake we are killed all the day long." And yet more in *Christ's love for us*. Physical death, even the death of the cross, could not daunt him. Spiritual death, even that in which we all were—dead in trespasses and sins—has not been and shall not be too strong for him, though sometimes it seems to be so. His love is surely as strong as that death. "Where sin did abound, grace," etc.

II. ITS TENACITY. "Jealousy," or, rather, ardent, intense love—this is what is meant, not the mean passion which is known as jealousy. The same love is spoken of all through. And it is "cruel," or rather firm, tenacious, unyielding, "as the grave," as Sheol. Does hell ever give up its dead? Can we call back any from the grave? Can they who are there come back thence? So love holds fast that which it loves. The story of this song, as many a beautiful human story, proves the tenacity of true love. And the story of the Christian Church, in her love for her Lord, shows the same. What has not been done to compel redeemed souls to give up their love for Christ? And his love for us above all. "My sheep shall never perish, neither shall any pluck them out of my hand" (John x.).

III. ITS VEHEMENCE. "The coals thereof are coals of fire," etc. Think of what such fire is and does. How it melts, fuses, and subdues that which comes under its power! How, as in volcanoes, it struggles for the mastery until it finds vent in victory! How it burns, consumes, tortures! Apply all this to intense human love—to the soul's love for Christ, and his for us. Are not many sinful souls conscious of Divine love's torturing power? See Peter when his Lord's look of love drove him forth in agony from the scene of his denial. Listen to Christ's word to Saul, "It is hard for thee to kick against the pricks." The baptism of the Holy Spirit is a baptism of fire (cf. Luke xii. 49, 50).

IV. ITS UNQUENCHABLENESS. "Many waters," etc. There were such "many waters" which tried, in the beautiful human story of this song, but they could not quench the maiden's love for her beloved. And so has it been again and again in human experience. And think of the waters that sought to quench, and the floods to drown, the love of Christ in saintly souls. And they have failed, and will fail. And think of the like that could not extinguish, though so many more and fiercer far, the love which Christ bore towards us. Think of them, and see if Christ's love does not pass knowledge.

V. ITS INCORRUPTIBILITY. "If a man would give," etc. It is not for sale; it cannot be bought or bribed. Again, apply this test to the three forms of love we have spoken of—human, Christian, Christ's. And apply all these tests to our own love, and see if it will endure them. If it will, be thankful indeed, and make it evident to all that it is so.

If it will not—and this is the sadder and more probable truth—behold, gaze on, contemplate earnestly, Christ's love to us; and then for us, too, it may come to pass, "whilst I was musing, the fire burned."—S. O.

Vers. 8, 9.—*The little sister.* This verse seems to be an inquiry on the part of those who are heard speaking in ver. 5. They probably knew the story of her who was now returning with her beloved, and their question shows their surprise. Then they listen to her entreaty addressed to him whom she so loved (ver. 6), and to her recital of the characteristics of such love as hers. They now interpose with the question in ver. 8 concerning a younger sister, who is not merely young, but, from the answer given (ver. 9), seems also to have been of uncertain and unsatisfactory character. But the question may be taken as addressed to the beloved by her who has just been speaking. Many think this; that it is she who is telling of her little sister, and asking what shall be done for her. If so, then the question and answer lend themselves as parables of great spiritual truths. It is not likely that these verses have been or will be often preached upon; but should they be, they may, perhaps, be profitably used by spiritualizing them as telling of the concern for others which the redeemed soul cherishes. When the woman of Samaria found Christ, she sought that others should find him too. The Prophet Ezekiel says, "Thy younger sister is Sodom" (xvi. 46). Hence we may take this sister as telling of the whole heathen world, and that world in its worst state. If so, then we may learn—

I. THAT THE HEATHEN, EVEN THE VILEST, ARE, AS WE ARE, CHILDREN OF ONE FATHER. "We have a sister." "Christ stands in the relation of an elder Brother to the Gentile as well as to the Jewish Church; therefore these two must be sisters." All men are to say, "Our Father which art in heaven."

II. CHRIST WILL CALL FOR THEM TO BE HIS OWN. There will come a "day when she shall be spoken for." Cf. "Other sheep I have" (John x. 16); "Ask of me, and I shall give thee the heathen for," etc. (Ps. ii. 8).

III. THEY ARE NOT READY FOR HIM. Not ready for that spiritual union with Christ into which his Church shall enter. How certain this is! They are sunk in sin.

IV. THIS IS A MATTER OF MUCH CONCERN TO THOSE WHO ARE CHRIST'S. "What shall be done for her?" This has been the impulse of all true missions, of all endeavours to bring in others to Christ.

V. THEY ASK AND GAIN COUNSEL FROM HIM. Ver. 9 gives his answer to the inquiry, "What shall be done?" "If she be a wall," etc. In the literal story this probably refers to her steadfastness in virtue (cf. ver. 10), and the "door" to an opposite character. We may take the words as telling: 1. *Of preparedness to receive the truth.* There is amongst some people a preparedness for the faith which greatly facilitates its reception. That preparedness is as a wall which shuts out the inroads of the vile vices which too commonly belong to heathenism, and, as a wall, strengthens them in the maintenance of many excellences. Where this is, there Christ will build a glorious Church (cf. Ps. xlviii. 12, 13). 2. *Of ordinary heathenism,* which is as a door, in and out of which come and go all manner and kinds of evils. If it be so, then, as in Rom. ii. 7, then she should be shut in, enclosed with sacred restraints, as with boards of cedar. And the providence of God has in the past and will in the future so work that it will restrain the grosser practices of heathenism. For often is it seen that even where the heart is not yielded to Christ, yet the sacred restraints of religious custom do tend to regulate conduct and hinder it from much evil. See the influence of Sunday on our national life. The counsel suggested, therefore, as to what to do in regard to those as yet not Christ's, is that where there is preparedness, encourage it; and where not, restrain the practice of evil, make sin difficult so far as you can.—S. C.

Vers. 10—12.—"*Gaudeamus igitur.*" The question has been asked and the answer given in reference to the "little sister." It was not clear what should be done, because it was not certain what her disposition might be. In contrast to such uncertainty, she who gave the answer speaks with joyous decision about herself that she is as a wall—not at all as a door—yea, as a strong tower; for though she might be assailed, her love could not be conquered. Her word here is like Paul's, "I have fought a good fight . . . I have kept the faith," etc. (2 Tim. iv. 7). Solomon had

sought by every means in his power to bend her will to his, but she had remained faithful to her beloved. She tells of his great estate and of the wealth he obtained from it; but—speaking of her own love—she says she has kept her vineyard, and that it needed no guardian. King Solomon may keep his wealth, and his tenants theirs. She desired neither, but was glad and thankful, her heart was filled with joy, that, tried as she had been, she had yet remained true. Taking all this as a parable, we may learn that—

I. THE CONSCIOUSNESS OF SPIRITUAL VICTORY IS FULL OF JOY. (Cf. ver. 10.) What exultant tone there is in it: like that of the psalms which celebrate victory over enemies! The battle may often have wavered, defeat may have been very near, the struggle very severe; all such considerations invest the victory, when it comes, with great joy. To have kept ourselves unspotted from the world, how blessed this! And our own experience, we trust, has often known this union of joy with victory. The calm of spirit, the sense of the Divine approval, the “Well done!” of conscience, the sunshine in the soul when we have overcome some spiritual foe, all attest what we have said.

II. TOWARDS SUCH VICTORS ENEMIES BECOME FRIENDS. “Then was I as one that found peace.” The meaning seems to be that the king, finding all his attempts to win her to be in vain, and struck, it may be, also, with admiration of her constancy, ceased from his solicitations, and let her depart. How often the like of this is witnessed! True, there may be foes who will remain so, though they cease from their temptations. Satan so ceased because he found he could not prevail when he tempted our Lord. But there may be those who cease their persecutions because they have ceased to be our foes. The centurion at the cross confessed, “Surely this was a righteous Man.” And they who, returning from “that sight,” smote their breasts in sorrow and repentance,—they would gladly have undone the work which that morning they had helped to do. And in the history of the Church, how perpetually was it the case that the constancy and fidelity of her martyrs won over those who before had been her foes; so that the saying went forth, “The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the Church!” And similar fidelity still wins similar triumphs; foes become friends (cf. history of Daniel).

III. THE POSSESSION OF ONE'S OWN SOUL IS BETTER THAN ANY OTHER POSSESSION BESIDE. (Cf. *supra* as to the probable meaning of these verses, which tell of Solomon's vineyard and her own.) She spurned all his wealth, but she prized her own truth and faithfulness. She had striven as Paul had, and succeeded in having a conscience void of offence. And no earthly honour or wealth can be put on a level with such possession, and can never compensate for its loss. Judas lost it, and went out and hanged himself. Hence the Bible says, “Keep thine *heart* with all diligence, for out of it,” etc. Not only the kingdom of God, but your own kingdom—that which is your own indeed, and the source of your well-being—is *within you*.—S. C.

Vers. 13, 14.—*The last appeal*. These verses are spoken not by but to the beloved. Literalists say that it is the beloved who speaks, and asks his betrothed to sing to him, and that she complies, and sings to him her song, which we have in ch. ii. 17. But we prefer to understand the whole as her appeal to him. Note, therefore—

I. THE TITLE SHE GIVES HIM. “O thou that dwellest in the gardens” (ver. 13). The gardens are the souls of his loving people. Rightly are they so called, for he chose them for himself, loves to dwell in them, and it is needful for them that he should. (Cf. sermon by C. H. Spurgeon on ‘Supposing him to be the Gardener.’)

II. THE PLEA SHE PUTS FORWARD THAT SHE MAY HEAR HIS VOICE. “The companions hearken to thy voice.” We regard these companions as the angels “that do his commandments, hearkening to the voice of his word” (Ps. ciii. 20). They hear his voice; then why should not the soul that loves him? Doubtless *we deserve it less than they*, but *we need it more than they*. Theirs is not, as ours, the perverse and unruly will; theirs is not, as ours, the daily need to confess sin and to seek its forgiveness, for they are holy as we are not. But then all the more we need to hear his voice causing us to know the way wherein we should walk. And *we love it as much as they*. “Sweeter is thy Word to me than honey,” etc.; “The law of thy mouth is better unto me than thousands,” etc. (and cf. Ps. cxix.). And *we will strive to obey it even as they*; therefore may each soul plead, “Cause *me* to hear it.”

III. **HER EAGERNESS FOR HIS COMING.** (Ver. 14.) Of last verse of the Revelation, "Amen, come quickly. Even so, come, Lord Jesus" (cf. ch. ii. 17). Wherefore this eagerness? Because to the soul aglow with love to him all joy is sorrow without him, and all sorrow joy with him. The kingdom of evil needs to be subdued, the kingdom of God to be set up. Therefore would the soul have it that Christ should come swiftly as the bounding hart or the springing roe. That saintly soul, Samuel Rutherford, thus writes on this verse, "Oh, how long is it to the dawning of the marriage-day? O sweet Jesus, take wide steps! O my Lord, come over the mountains at one stride! 'O my Blessed, flee as a roe or young hart upon the mountains of separation!' O time, run, run, and hasten the marriage-day, for love is tormented with delays!" And what is St. Paul's word but an echo of this? "Our conversation is in heaven, from whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ." Thus "looking for and hastening unto the coming of the Lord" may we ever be! —S. C.

Ver. 5.—*The Christian pilgrim.* Life with every man is a journey; a march from the cradle to the grave. To the pious man this journey is religious; it has a moral character. It is not simply the inevitable moving on from year to year; beside this, it is a progress in knowledge, faith, holiness, and usefulness. The grave is not the Christian's goal. His goal is perfection—perfect excellence and perfect joy. Every day's experience is related to the great eternity. Each duty well discharged, each sin conquered, each trouble patiently endured, is a distinct step heavenward. It is not merely a movement onward; it is also a movement upward. The journey of the Hebrews through the wilderness to the earthly Canaan furnishes many instructive analogies with the Christian's passage to the skies. We, who possess the new life within, "seek a country, that is, a heavenly."

I. **OBSERVE THE CHRISTIAN'S FORMER STATE.** It is described as a "wilderness." 1. *It is a wilderness on account of its barrenness.* So in our unregenerate condition there was in us no fertility and no beauty. There may have been a few barren stalks of common morality; but they yielded no fragrance, they bore no fruit. In this wilderness there was nothing to satisfy the desires and aspirations of the soul. This world has its possessions, its pleasures, its honours, its shows, but none of these please or elevate the soul. We aspire after righteousness, after moral excellence, after the friendship of God; and with respect to these things this world is barren and empty. No man can lie down fully contented in it. It is not suitable for us as a possession; so that most men, burdened with care and infirmity, sigh out, "I would not live always." "He that loveth silver shall not be satisfied with silver." The vapid joys of this world soon pall upon the appetite. They do not increase the capacity for joy; they diminish it. And many a man who has taken his fill of this world's pleasure concludes life with this dismal verdict on his lips, "Vanity of vanities; all is vanity!" 2. *Moreover, this wilderness is infested with foes.* If in the Arabian desert the Hebrews were exposed to human foes, to wild beasts and fierce serpents, so in this world many foes infest the way. Many and subtle are the snares which the enemy sets for our feet. We are liable to ten thousand annoyances. Evil men tempt us with a view to ruin us. "Satan goeth about as a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour." We have need for perpetual watchfulness. We have to fight with many adversaries. Clearly "this is not our rest."

II. **MARK THE CHRISTIAN'S PRESENT ASCENT.** "He cometh up." 'Tis an ascent. 1. *Progress is the only way to perfection.* It is true that God might have brought about perfection by some other way; but, as a fact, he has ordained this way, and this only. All the similitudes employed in Scripture to set forth the Christian life describe it as a thing of progress. The progress may be slow or more rapid; nevertheless, if there is life there is growth. In some believers the processes of enlightenment, conversion, and edification may be more rapid than in others (just as in some climates the processes of budding, blossoming, and ripening in fruit trees are more rapid than in our own land); still, in every instance perfection is attained by distinct stages. The life of every Christian is a progress along the heavenly way. 2. *Discomfort is incident to a pilgrimage.* No one expects to find the same comforts on a journey which he finds at home. On a journey one is content with the bare necessities of existence.

Would it not be madness to encumber one's self with soft couches and luxurious indulgences while on a journey? Would not such things seriously impede our progress? And is it not the one desire of a pilgrim to advance as rapidly as possible? To reach the end of his pilgrimage at the earliest hour is the uppermost desire of every true pilgrim. Therefore needless burdens are left behind. This is how ordinary pilgrims conduct themselves. And should not every Christian be more eager to advance along the way than to cumber himself with lands, or houses, or worldly honours? He who is bent on heavenly progress is bent also on self-denial. To grow like Christ, that is the Christian's daily business. Every day another step. 3. *The pilgrim often pursues a solitary path.* He is much alone. In the vision of the text only one is seen "coming up from the wilderness." She had left the broad path where many were found. She had left her old friends and companions. More and more the Christian has to walk alone. When first he resolved to follow Jesus he had to abandon former acquaintances; and, as often as he essays to reach a loftier level, he has to part with some comrades. He has learnt the art of personal decision. If others will not ascend with him to the higher planes of holy living, he must go alone. He would rather miss the company of a hundred than lose the company of his Well-beloved. Hence the frequent solitariness of the pilgrim. So far as outward connection with Christ's disciples is concerned, he will not separate himself. He cultivates all possible bonds of unity. He fosters Church life. But with regard to the inner life of his soul, *i.e.* his personal fellowship with Jesus, he is much alone. Yet, when most alone, he has the best society.

III. NOTE THE CHRISTIAN'S HELPFUL COMPANION. "Leaning on her Beloved." 1. *This leaning implies a sense of Christ's nearness.* We cannot lean upon anything that is not close at hand, yea, in actual touch with us. Though we cannot perceive Jesus with the organ of the body, we have a stronger proof still of his nearness. The experience of the soul is far more real and far more reliable than any sensation of the body. No organ is more easily deceived than the eye. Certainly our Immanuel gains immediate entrance to the heart. This fact is contained in his name, "God with us." So, without the intervention of words or other vehicle, he imparts good cheer and strength straight to the soul. He comes nearer than any human friend can come. He knows all the secret doors by which to pass in. He touches all the secret springs of life and reanimates them. He comes "to give life, to give it more abundantly." 2. *Leaning means the transference of all our weakness to Jesus.* To lean is to find support in another. If I am too weak to walk a distance of fifty miles, and I take a seat in a railway train, I transfer my weakness to that steam-engine, and I take the benefit of its strength. At the outset of our Christian life we laid the whole weight of our sin upon our Substitute. We said, "God be merciful, for the sake of Jesus!" This was the foundation of our hope. As we grow in grace we learn more and more to leave our burdens in the hand of Jesus. We overcome the tempter, not by our own native strength, but through Christ, "who strengtheneth us." "I live," said St. Paul: "yet not I, but Christ liveth in me." This righteousness I have is Christ's righteousness. This love for sinful men is Christ's love "shed abroad in my heart." This wisdom to instruct and guide others is Christ's wisdom. I am "leaning on my Beloved." He takes on him all my weaknesses. He imparts to me his all-sufficient strength. It is a sacred and a vital partnership. Faith is perpetual dependence. 3. *This leaning implies that Jesus is a consenting Party.* He loves to be used, loves to be trusted. Our weakness can never be a strain upon him, for his strength is omnipotence. He cannot fail, for such faithfulness was never seen among men—no, nor among angels. I could not trust to him for my eternal well-being if I did not know that he shared in the Godhead. Clearly he is fully competent to take the whole weight of my salvation. And equally certain is it that he is willing. His love is as great as his power. His patience has often been severely tried, but it has proved abundantly adequate. The sun may cease to shine, the mountains may bow their snowy crests, the sea may vacate its bed; yet his loving-kindness and his faithfulness eternally abide—these cannot fail. It is to him a real delight to help the weak and needy. After fifty or sixty years' experience of his tender grace, he says to us, "You have never half used me yet; you have never trusted me half enough. Hitherto you have asked nothing, comparatively nothing. Ask, and ye shall receive." So that our response ought to be spontaneous, "My soul, wait thou only upon God; for my expectation is from him."

As the ivy clings for support to the oak, or as the limpet clings to the solid rock, so may we in our native weakness cling to the eternal Strength. As our faith grows, so will grow our love; and love, again, will encourage faith. There is a beautiful interaction. We lean upon Jesus because he is our Well-beloved.—D.

Vers. 6, 7.—*Prayer for full assurance.* The marrow and essence of true religion is love. If there is no love to God, there is no religion. If I am not the object of God's love, I have no solid hope of a blissful immortality. Hence it is our primary and supreme concern to ascertain whether we have a place in God's affection. Has God a care for me? Has he put my name on his book of life? Is he engaged by solemn covenant to be my Friend eternally? I want to know this. If I am left in suspense, it is, of all things, most painful. It robs me of the inspiration and the stimulus of hope. It weakens my endeavour after holiness. It damps my zeal. It checks my cheerfulness, and kills my inward peace. Unless the warm sunshine of Immanuel's love encircle me, I shall not produce the ripe fruits of goodness. Will my love be steadfast? Shall I hold out to the end? Well, all is secure if I know that I share in the love of Christ; for that love is endearing, unchanging, tender, all-victorious, everlasting. If my name is on the heart of my Saviour, then my eternal fortune is certain. No ill can come to me through time or through eternity. Therefore this prayer, "Set me as a seal upon thy heart."

I. NOTE THE SUBSTANCE OF THIS PRAYER. 1. *It is a plea for love.* Unless God had revealed to us the fact that in his heart there glowed a vehement flame of love for sinning men, we could never have surmised it. We might have carefully noted his many arrangements in nature for ministering to our happiness. We might have reasoned in our mind that, since he had given us the capacity to love, the spring and fount of that love must be in his own breast. Yet this would have been at the best conjecture. We could not have built on it any hope of enjoying his personal friendship, or of sharing his society eternally. But he has given us a veritable gospel. He has assured us that his highest love centres in men. He has given us plain and practical proofs of the ardour of his love. He has given us the sure pledge that his love is a permanent force in his nature; yea, an attribute of his Godhead. Therefore this love kindles our hope, excites our profoundest desire. God loves me; hence I can become a better man. I can rise out of the mire of sin. I can emerge out of the grave of dark despair. I can become a child of God, a prince in the kingdom of heaven. My heart is deeply moved. I love him who gave himself for me. I want to love him more. But he must soften my nature, and draw out my love. Will he condescend to do it? Will he have pity on undeserving me? I want to have this question solved. Jesus, I pray thee make me thy friend! 2. *It is a petition for the assurance of Christ's love.* The language is very probably borrowed from an impressive scene in the temple. It was a part of the duty of the high priest, when he went into the holy place, and came into immediate contact with God, to wear upon his breast and upon his shoulders the names of the tribes of Israel. These names were graven upon precious stones, and this ceremony indicated the affectionate interest which the high priest felt in the welfare of the people. He lived for them. He made oblation for their sins. He interceded with God on their behalf. Their misfortunes and their falls became his misfortunes and his burdens. He identified himself completely with the people. So his influence with God was used for them. Now, we too have a great High Priest; not a frail, erring man like Aaron and his successors. We have a perfect Mediator, even the Son of God himself. He has passed into the heavens as our Representative. If he will identify himself with me, and undertake my salvation, I am fully content. For so excellent is he that his pleading always does and must prevail. Can I be sure that he feels an interest in me? Yes, it is possible. If I ask for this blessing I shall have it. Hence I pray, "Set me as a seal upon thy heart." 3. *This also is a plea for practical help.* "Set me as a signet upon thine arm." The love of Jesus is not an inactive sentiment. It is sympathetic; it is personally helpful. His love puts into gracious operation all the energies of his being. I want the protection of a mighty arm. I want superior help. My heart has grown very insensible through sin, and I want him to soften it. I want him to eradicate from me the old roots of lust and folly. I want him to break off my fetters of evil habit. I want him

to remodel and revitalize my whole nature. No one else can do it. His strength is almightiness. If he will use his Divine power for my good, I shall be emancipated and purified and ennobled. I shall run gladly in his ways. And he is willing to do it. He delights in saving men and in doing good. So I will pray, "O Saviour, let thy great power work in me. Put forth thy strength on my behalf. 'Set me as a signet on thy arm.'"

II. OBSERVE THE ARGUMENT IN THIS PRAYER. "For love is strong as death." The Christian has large hope and has large expectation, because the principle or quality in God concerned about his salvation is love. So he argues with his heavenly Friend in this way: "It is for my eternal good that my name should be engraven on thy heart, for this I know that love is strong; yea, the mightiest thing in the world." 1. *This plea for the assurance of God's love is founded on the power of love.* Commentators have differed whether the writer had in view here Immanuel's love to us, or our love to him. But it is evident that the inspired writer is thinking about love in the abstract. Real love everywhere is strong. The timid bird, that usually flees from man or dog, will, to defend its young, risk its own life and attack its fiercest foe. Love is strong. What peril has not a human mother faced to save her child? Can we measure the strength of love by any known test? Can we express it by any metaphor? I cannot conceive any difficult feat too formidable for love. I think of love as I observe its working among men. I think of it as I experience its strength in me. It is next to omnipotent in man. It will readily confront death and grapple that mysterious foe. Amongst men, it is strong as death; yea, stronger, mightier! What, then, must love be in our Immanuel? Here, it exists in perfect form, in uncreated measure, without a flaw or blemish. If love in Christ be the same sort of thing as love in my breast (and it is), then that love will endure anything to save its object. If my name is on Jesus' heart, this is my best-founded security for all good, present and eternal. 2. *The argument proceeds on this ground, that baffled love is poignant pain.* "Jealousy is cruel as the grave." This, again, is spoken of jealousy in the abstract. If I love, and my love is encouraged, and for a time reciprocated, until it burns with ardour; then, if a rival comes between me and my object, what pain, what fierce indignation, follows! Such jealousy springs out of injured love, that the heart-passion is uncontrollable. It overleaps all barriers of law, all limits of reason. You cannot hold it in check. "It is cruel as the grave;" cruel as hell. Now, if Jesus has set his heart upon me; if he has sacrificed much on my account; if he has attested his affection by the cross and by the grave; then will he allow any rival to supplant him? Would there not be a feeling of intense pain, akin to jealousy, burning in his breast if anything came between him and the object of his love? Hence, for his own sake, he will not cast me off. For his own sake he will not cease to love me, nor cease to win my love in return. We are told that "he hates putting away." Here, then, is a very forceful argument, that for his own peace of mind, for his own honour, he will give me—poor, unworthy me—a larger place in his heart. "Having loved his own, he loves them unto the end." 3. *The argument proceeds on love's unchangeableness.* Literally translated, it is, "The coals thereof are the coals of God." This flame never decreases; it is fed from a storehouse of infinity. Changeableness is incident to man, but it has no place with God. We may love a person under a false estimate of that person's excellence. The charms may be plausible and pretentious rather than real. Hence our affections may diminish, undergo complete change. This can never happen with God. He does not love us because we are lovable. He loves us in order to make us lovable and worthy of himself. His love chose us when we were aliens, rebels, depraved, dead in sin. As there was nothing in us to attract him at the first, so nothing in us will drive him away. He will correct, chastise, prune, purify us, but will not allow his love to change. Says he, "I have loved thee with an everlasting love." The flame of love which glows in his breast is a flame that cannot die out, so long as God is God.

III. THE RESPONSE TO THIS PRAYER. We may very properly regard this verse as the bridegroom's response. To the pathetic, yearning appeal of the bride, he promptly replies, "Thy argument is most valid; cogent in the extreme. Yea, verily, many waters cannot quench love, neither can the floods drown it." 1. *Love is all-victorious.* If it be imaged forth as a flame of fire, then in one respect the figure fails. You can extinguish flame with water, if only you can pour on a sufficient quantity; but on this

flame of love no amount of coldness or opposition will cool it in the least degree. Let Satan and his legions do their very utmost to lessen the intensity of this heavenly flame, their labour is vain. They only prepare for themselves a bitter disappointment. Or let the floods of human vice and human antagonism rise as they may, they can never rise as high as this heavenly flame. The finite can never o'ermaster the Infinite. The love of God to men is a sacred principle, an integral part of the Divine nature. There is nothing outside God to be compared in potency with what is within him. As the creature can never be a match for the Creator, so no kind of opposition can ever injure or diminish the eternal love of God. Just as nothing on earth nor in hell can diminish God's power or tarnish his righteousness, so also nothing can lessen or dim the fervent flame of his eternal pity. "Many waters cannot quench love;" yea, love turns all human hatred into fresh coals to feed the flame. 2. *Love has a priceless value.* The argument on the part of the Bridegroom seems to be, "Wherefore should my love abate? If it should, there must be some reason for it. What reason can there be? what advantage? what gain?" Even were there some advantage to be gained, this would not weigh in the scale. For love scorns all advantage. Love delights in sacrifice. Only let love discover how it can make some new surrender, in order to bless the fallen and the wretched, and straightway love makes the surrender. Jesus will give up his heaven, his joy, his crown, to-day; give all up without hesitation, if he can thereby lift some poor sinner into a righteous life. On his part nothing shall impede the activities of his ardent love. Will he ever listen to any proposal to allow his love to rest? Never! Will he at any time prefer ease, or rule, or fame, or worship, to the outgoings of practical love? Never! A thousand times, never! Do I feel myself now more unworthy of his love than ever in my past history? Then, my soul, be hopeful! Here is greater scope for Immanuel's love! Spirit of truth, show me more clearly yet my guilt, my ingratitude, my inward corruption! For then shall I see how much I need my Saviour's pity, my Saviour's help. Then I know that he will run to my deliverance. For "Christ died for the ungodly." He loves to save the needy. If I have had much sin forgiven, then shall I love much. "Therefore, Lord, write my name upon thy heart, for in me thy love shall have a glorious triumph!"—D.

Ver. 11.—*Stewardship.* This language is Oriental, yet the lesson is cosmopolitan. In every kingdom there must be a system of economics. For a prosperous condition there must be division of labour. The land must be cultivated. The people must have food. The king's household must be sustained. To this end scope should be given to personal skill and personal enterprise. So a wise king farms out his land to husbandmen, who are under obligation to render back a fair proportion of the produce. This system brings the greatest advantage to both parties. Now, all this has its counterpart in the kingdom of God. Every man is a steward entrusted with God's property. He cannot live for himself. A day of reckoning is appointed, when the account must be produced and examined. Life, with all its possessions and privileges, is a sacred responsibility. Independence of God is impossible.

L. OBSERVE THAT GOD IS THE GREAT PROPRIETOR. "The earth is the Lord's, and the fulness thereof; the world, and they that dwell therein." No part of this vast and illimitable universe is exempt from his lordship. 1. *His claim is founded on creation.* God alone is uncreated. The unfallen hosts of angels, all principalities and powers in heaven, no less than the tiniest insect on earth, are the workmanship of his skilful hands. Creation gives a prescriptive and an indisputable right. What I make I claim as my own, though probably the raw material belonged to another. But God created out of nothing, or rather out of himself; therefore his title is without a flaw. 2. *His claim is founded on preservation.* For preservation is simply a continuous act of creation. He sustains in existence every atom of material, every form of life, every dynamic force, and this through every successive hour. In this way he asserts perpetually his supreme rights of property. Every vineyard is his workmanship. The life of every tree is his gift. The nourishing qualities of the soil; the sunshine, dew, and rain; all influences of the revolving seasons—all are his contributions to the maintenance of the vineyard. This is simply a sample of God's sustaining activity. My life hangs upon him through every hour. "In him I live and move;" "By him all

things consist." 3. *His claim is founded on acknowledgment.* We admit that we are not our own. The enlightened conscience of every man testifies that God is the supreme Owner. We are not masters even of ourselves, nor of our own life. We did not choose in what year, or in what city, or in what family, we would be born. We have no control over our continuance in life. The voice from heaven says, "Return to the dust, ye children of men!" We have no control over the mode or the time of our departure. Nor have we unlimited control over our property. Sudden misfortune may scatter our wealth. "Riches make themselves wings and fly away." We feel that we are accountable to God; for to the bar of our own consciences are we frequently brought, to be prejudged of the use we have made of life, and the decision of this court will simply be ratified in the great assize. We are tenants at will. We have only a life-interest in our earthly possessions. We are stewards, not proprietors.

II. **OBSERVE THAT GOD HAS MADE US KEEPERS, OR STEWARDS.** "He let out the vineyard unto keepers." The interest of the Proprietor is to be kept in view. We are "keepers" of his property. *His good, not ours, must be sought.* 1. *This stewardship comprises everything.* My body is not my own; it is a temple of the living God. Every organ of body and of mind is simply entrusted to my care. My tongue is not my own; it is an instrument for praising God. My learning is not my own; it should be laid on God's altar. My will is not my own; it should be made submissive to God's will. Hourly my prayer should be, "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?" Even the skill for gaining money belongs to another. "Say not in thine heart, My power, and the might of my own hand, have gotten me this wealth. But thou shalt remember the Lord thy God, for it is he that giveth thee power to get wealth." If I live to please myself, I am usurping the place of my Lord, and I incur his displeasure. 2. *We are stewards who know the will of our Master.* He has not left us in ignorance respecting the business of our life, or in what way his property should be employed. The vineyard must be "kept," and must be made fruitful. His Word is full of instruction, which demands our careful study and our faithful observation. In these living oracles he clearly speaks, "Son, go work to-day in my vineyard." "As ye have opportunity, do good unto all men." "Follow me," says Jesus. In other words, he means, "Live as I live. Spend life in doing good." We cannot plead as an excuse for slothfulness that we know not the will of our Master. And if we desire to obtain fuller direction, the Master himself is at hand, and guides every submissive soul. "Ask, and ye shall receive." For the promise still runs, "I will guide thee with mine eye." 3. *We are stewards who have the ability to do our Master's will.* He is no hard Taskmaster, requiring the tale of bricks without providing raw material. On the contrary, "his yoke is easy." In every circumstance, his friendly voice whispers, "My grace is sufficient for thee." Often do we put up the prayer, "Thy kingdom come, thy will be done." But it behoves us to remember that the means for attaining this great end lie within our reach. Had all servants of God been faithful in their office, what a different world would this be to-day! How large a proportion of our fellow-men would be in the kingdom of God! It does not suffice that we serve Christ with one talent, while we allow other talents to lie idle. We cannot, with our money gifts, buy release from personal service. As no man can transfer to another his mental endowments, or his social influence, or his personal responsibility; so no man can transfer to another man his work. In these vineyards, service by proxy is not allowed. That person whom I presume to employ is already under the same obligation as myself, and cannot therefore serve as my substitute. Nor can we hope to see any great enlargement in the kingdom of Christ until each separate disciple feels and realizes that the burden of the world's salvation rests upon him. "As each one hath received the gift, let him minister the same, as a good steward of the manifold grace of God."

III. **NOTE THAT GOD APPOINTS A RECKONING-TIME.** In the annual vintage season, the husbandman was required to make a proper return to the owner. This return might be made either in kind or in some equivalent. 1. *There is a special season for this reckoning-time.* Speaking generally, the reckoning-time will be at the day of judgment. Yet, for all practical purposes, this tenure terminates at death. Then our Lord comes, and conveys his servant home. Then the authoritative voice says, "Give an account of thy stewardship, for thou mayest be no longer steward." Then the faithful servant gives in his account with joy. "He has boldness in the day of

judgment." It is the end for which he has toiled and waited. Just as the busy farmer rejoices greatly when his last harvest-sheaves are garnered, because his toil has reached a successful end; so the disembodied Christian presents himself before his Lord with rapturous joy. For, with the fruits of his toil surrounding him, he confidently says, "Here am I, Lord, and the children thou hast given me. It is only thy talent I have thus multiplied. Not unto me, not unto me, but unto thy Name be all the glory." 2. *Note the system of the reckoning.* In God's kingdom the system must be strictly equitable; on God's part generous. That system is that a fair proportion of the gain belongs to God. He that is entrusted with ten talents is required to bring more gains than the man with only five. In proportion to our faith, fidelity, and zeal will be the measure of our success. Divested of all imagery, the simple fact is that each Christian is required to increase righteousness, loyalty, and love in God's world. I am expected to leave this world better, i.e. holier, than I found it. My business in life is to bring men nearer to God. If I can increase in men repentance, faith, piety, mutual benevolence, I have fulfilled my stewardship in some measure. If I have persuaded men to abandon a life of sin and to follow Jesus, I have brought honour to my Master's Name. My life-work as a Christian is to enlarge the spiritual empire of Messiah. As in the fields of nature seed-corn will produce sixty, or eighty, or a hundredfold; so each servant of Jesus Christ should lead sixty, or eighty, or a hundred men out of a state of rebellion into the covenant grace of our Immanuel. Saved ourselves, it should be our main business in life to save others.

"What is my being but for thee,
Its sure support, its noblest end?
Thy ever-smiling face to see,
And serve the cause of such a Friend?"

D.

Vers. 13, 14.—*Sacred fellowship.* The love of Christ to men amazes us by its generosity; it amazes us also by its constancy and its condescension. He, who delighted in human companionship when on earth, delights in it still. In his irrepressible longing to do us good, he encourages us to speak freely, to tell out our desires, and to ask largely. Our requests for his gifts are never too large; they are invariably too small. If he can increase our faith in him and draw forth our love, he has done us greatest good. So, with exquisite tenderness, he says, "Cause me to hear" thy voice.

I. OBSERVE THE CHRISTIAN'S ABODE. "Thou that dwellest in the gardens." 1. *This description of the Christian's dwelling implies quiet retirement.* Formerly he loved bustle and excitement; now he loves a place for quiet meditation and prayer. He finds more pleasure in being among the works of God than among the works of men. As at the beginning God provided for Adam a garden, because most suited for healthfulness both of body and of soul; so the man who has the mind of Christ feels strongly the attractiveness of a garden. He loves to be shut out from the world, and to be shut in with God. He is a learner; and in deep quietude he best learns the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven. 2. *A garden implies privilege.* It is a privileged place. It is not open to all comers. The believer is no longer a rover, wandering up and down the earth in quest of some unpossessed good. He is not, like Cain, an outcast. He does not inhabit a wilderness, like the Edomites. The best situation this earth can furnish is for him. The place where God reveals himself is the place for him. Once it was a wilderness, now it is a garden. Among the lilies the good Shepherd feeds his flock; so there the Christian loves to abide. In the cool of the evening God walks among the trees; so there the Christian will walk also. It is Christ's garden, Christ's workmanship; a place of special privilege. This garden is, of course, the Church. Here the Christian sees what beauty and what fruitfulness adorn others; so he is emulated to be fragrant and fruitful also. 3. *A garden implies useful occupation.* For though God himself is the chief Husbandman, there is something for every Christian to do in the garden. He cannot give life to the plants, yet he can water them; he can shield them from peril; he can prune and train the branches. He is a worker along with God; a partner in service. Such occupation is contributive to his own life and health and joy. An idle Christian is an anomaly. So long as I am in the Church, my

influence is felt in moulding the Church. The Church will be either better or worse for my presence. My zeal for fruitfulness will be contagious. My devoutness will lift the Church to a loftier elevation. Or my unspirituality will chill the ardour of the Church's love. I cannot be an idle spectator. I must do good work in the Church or bad. I am called unto usefulness. 4. *A garden implies abundance of good.* Whatever can meet the hunger of the body, or gratify the nostrils, or please the eye, or bring delight to the whole man, is found in a perfect garden. The word suggests abundance. So, in the Church, Jesus Christ spreads a perpetual banquet. He well knows our every requirement, and he anticipates every need. Here is truth for the nourishment of the soul, wisdom for practical guidance, refreshing cordials for hours of weariness, strength for daily duty, deep wells of water for the soul's thirst, grace for every time of need. No earthly garden can fitly picture forth the lavish provision God makes for our souls. Not a blessing is withheld. "All things are ours; for we are Christ's, and Christ is God's." Much as I have already received, there's much more to follow.

II. **MARK THE CHRISTIAN'S SPEECH.** "The companions hearken to thy voice." 1. *This means that a Christian is social.* If he has withdrawn from the society of worldly men, he is the more drawn into the fellowship of the saints. A Christian cannot be a recluse. This is a mistaken idea of his position and his obligation. Christian love excludes selfishness. His new instinct impels him to help others. He yearns that all men may be saved. God has given him the talent of speech. It is a wondrous gift. He can convey his thoughts to others. He can express tender feeling and brotherly sympathy to others. He can reprove faults and encourage virtues by his speech. He can have intimate friendships, which shall be helpful to him and to others. He dare not leave neglected the social side of his nature, or he will be disloyal to his Master. 2. *His speech is attractive.* "The companions hearken to thy voice." They did not complain of the harshness or bitterness of his speech. The very reverse: "they hearkened." It was pleasant. There was a heavenly savour about it, that made it winsome. It was like a breath of spring that quickened and refreshed them. The Christian's converse sheds new light into others' minds. It stimulates gently all the better impulses of the soul. It strengthens faith and love and hope. He hears new revelations from God's lips, and communicates the message to his fellows. Each Christian can help and instruct other Christians. Each has his own peculiar experience of the new life, and the interchange of experience is comforting and stimulating. If we speak what "we have known, and tasted, and felt, and handled of the good word of life," if we speak under an impulse of love, our speech will be attractive, and will minister grace to the hearers. "As iron sharpeneth iron," so do wise and gracious words quicken friendship. 3. *This Christian speech was praiseworthy.* Had it not been so, the Divine Master would not have asked to hear it. May we not learn here how ready our Immanuel is to find occasion for commending us? Instead of being in a mood for censoriousness, he is always ready to put the best construction on our doings. If he can find in us a virtue to praise, he will do it. It well behoves us, then, to ask ourselves whether our converse with others is always edifying. Our speech greatly influences men; is that influence always on the right side? In the dark days of Israel's fall, there were a few "who spake often one to another: and the Lord hearkened, and heard, and a book of remembrance was written before him." During his earthly ministry, Jesus often reminded men of the power that resides in human speech, and of the tremendous issues that follow. "By thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned."

III. **THE CHRISTIAN'S FELLOWSHIP SOUGHT BY CHRIST.** "Cause me to hear it." 1. *A rare instance of Christ's meekness.* There is nothing more edifying or more delightful to the Christian than to listen to the voice of Jesus. "Never man spake like this Man." His words are like pearls of wisdom, and for sweetness are like the droppings of the honeycomb. But how comes it to pass that Jesus can find pleasure in listening to our imperfect speech? This is almost a crowning act of condescension. He delights to hear our voices. He asks us so to speak that he may hear. He loves to hear us speak as his witnesses among men. He is pleased to hear our testimony concerning himself. His ear is gratified with our songs of adoration and gratitude. Specially he rejoices to hear our voices in prayer. "Hitherto," he says, "you have asked nothing"—comparatively nothing—"in my Name. Ask, and ye shall receive, that your joy may

be full." As an earthly father delights to hear the silvery prattle of his little child, and no request from an infant's lips goes unheeded; so our God finds peculiar pleasure in hearing our voice of childlike appeal. Before we finish our petition, the answer is on the way. 2. *This request is an outcome of Christ's relationship to us.* Since he has entered into intimate and affectionate union with us—ay, made with us a marriage covenant—it follows that communion with us is a thing to be desired. If he had not been willing to live with us on familiar and reciprocal terms, he would not have entered into this mystic and organic union. Having made the greater sacrifice, he will not refrain from the lesser. It is not his fault that his intercourse with us is not more frequent, more close, more sensibly enjoyed. He is ever asking us to treat him as our bosom-Friend, and to trust him for every kind of need. It is as if he said to us, "You tell your troubles unto others; why not tell them unto me? Cause me to hear thy voice!" Would a loyal wife tell her cares and her griefs to one and to another, while refraining from speaking of them to her husband? Would not this be a scandalous folly? Hence Jesus says to us, "Tell me everything. There is nothing that disturbs your peace which is not a care to me." We are charged to "cast all our care upon him." And our simple duty is, "in everything . . . to make known our wants unto God." 3. *This request of Christ will serve as a corrective.* To remember that Jesus wants to hear our voice, will this not often be a check upon our speech? Those hasty or unkind words of ours respecting another, did not Jesus hear them? Or, if we are forming in our minds an ungenerous estimate of a neighbour, does not Jesus whisper to us, "Cause me to hear thy voice"? Even thoughts are heard by him. The voice that Jesus hears is not always the voice that others hear. They hear the words which escape the lips. Jesus hears the intention uppermost in the mind. Jesus hears the "still small voice" of our motives. Our every feeling, our every ambition, has a voice, and Jesus says, "Let me hear it." It is for our good that he should hear it all. My best Beloved is ever listening. How soft and loving and true should my voice always be! I must "set a watch on the door of my lips, that I sin not with my tongue."

IV. THE CHRISTIAN'S RESPONSE TO HIS LORD'S REQUEST. "Make haste, my Beloved, and be thou like to a roe or to a young hart upon the mountains of spices." 1. *Note the promptness of true obedience.* Jesus had said, "Cause me to hear thy voice." Forthwith the loving soul responds, "Lord, thou shalt hear it. Come, Lord Jesus; come quickly!" No word could be more welcome to Jesus than that. It is as if the spouse had said, "Mayhap my voice may express feelings and inclinations which are very faulty; but do thou, beloved One, come, and thou wilt correct all faultiness. Thy presence will be food and medicine, rest and growth, in one. The 'one thing needful' is thyself. I pass by all the streams of help; I come to the Fountain-head. Thou art the Fount of life. 'All my springs are in thee.'" Love is swift to obey. 2. *Yet absence is for a time expedient.* The night is as needful to the plant as the day. Winter is as useful to agriculture as summer. It was expedient for the first apostles that Christ's visible presence should be withdrawn. They learnt to use the wisdom and the courage which he had given them. They gave themselves more to the study of Scripture and to prayer. They showed far more enthusiasm and zeal than when he was among them. We see, as a fact, that great advantage accrued to them from the departure of Jesus. So is it still. We have from him all the help we need. We have his mighty Spirit in our souls. To have the visible presence of Jesus would fill us with a new rapture. But enjoyment is not the main thing now. We want personal holiness and personal consecration; these are attained through faith. 3. *The Christian interprets this command of Christ as a fresh proof of his love.* Did he say, "Cause me to hear thy voice"? then this is a love-token. He would not desire to hear my voice unless he loved me. What delicate reminders of his love does our Immanuel give! How he devises to do us good, and plans to give us pleasure! And the more love grows, the stronger grows the desire to see him as he is. We long to have nearer access to Christ, without a veil between. 4. *Love is impatient of all delay.* We cannot climb to the heavenly heights, or sometimes we would. Hence, if there is to be a meeting between Christ and me, he must come down to me. Where he dwells must be a mountain—a mountain of fragrant spice. As mountains are the eminences of nature, the loftiest parts of this material globe, so they help us to ascend to those

empyrean heights, where true purity resides, where the Highest dwells. Love can conquer every hindrance. Love annihilates distance and time. Already Love dwells in the future. To her eye the final consummation is reached; and hence she sings, "Come, Lord Jesus; come quickly!"—D.

Vers. 1—3.—*The ardour of spiritual love.* There is no measure, no restraint, in this language. If it is possible for human love, when duly placed, to be too fervent and absorbing, this is when that is given to the creature which it behoves us to reserve for the Creator. Passion and poetry combine to express the deepest emotions, the most ardent wishes of the soul.

I. THE OBJECT OF SPIRITUAL LOVE. 1. In loving Christ the soul centres its purest and strongest affections upon One who is in himself infinitely excellent. Earthly love is often the creature of the imagination, conceiving beauty and excellence which do not exist, or which exist in a measure extravagantly exaggerated. There is no possibility of thinking too highly of the Saviour, of admiring him too absorbingly, of loving him too warmly. He is all, and more than all, that our imagination can picture. 2. In loving Christ the soul does but render to him what his services and his sufferings deserve from our hearts. "We love him, because he first loved us." He has done for us what none other could or would have done. "While we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." Is it possible to overstate our obligations—to offer him more than he has a right to expect and to claim from us?

II. THE YEARNING OF SPIRITUAL LOVE. Love would *receive* from the beloved. Two points are suggested by the passionate and glowing language of the text. 1. A desire for intimacy, for closest fellowship, for endearing friendship. 2. A desire for instruction, for lessons such as Christ only can convey to the soul of the disciple. It is well that we should look to our Lord for all things, for the wisdom that guides, the love that cheers, the grace that supports and sustains. The proper attitude of the Christian towards his Lord and Saviour is an attitude of dependence, of supplication, of expectation.

III. THE TRIBUTE OF SPIRITUAL LOVE. Love would *give* to the beloved. And the saved, rejoicing soul would fain offer of its best to Christ. The kisses, the spiced wine, and the pomegranate juice which the bride would offer to her spouse may suggest to us that Christ looks for the affection, the holy service, the consecrated devotion, of those for whom he died. What can we give him? If we cannot bathe his feet with tears or anoint his head with precious and fragrant unguents, we can at all events offer to him the sincere affection of the heart, a constant place in our thoughts, the tribute of our praise, and, to crown all, the service which, being rendered to his people, he will accept as given to himself.—T.

Ver. 5.—*"Leaning upon her beloved."* As a skilled artist by two or three strokes brings some incident vividly and picturesquely before the eye, so does the poet here by a few words picture before us a scene harmonious with the whole composition, and depict the mutual relation of the two personages of this exquisite dramatic idyll. We see the bride returning to the home of her youth, quitting the familiar pastures, and approaching the dear abode; she is "leaning upon her beloved." If true love is suggestive of true religion, as is not to be doubted, then we may regard this attitude as having its analogue in the Christian's wonted experience as related to his Lord.

I. THE CHURCH'S INNATE WEAKNESS. Men sometimes use extravagant language regarding the Church, as though in itself it were great and powerful. But the juster view to take is that suggested by the posture of the beloved coming up out of the wilderness. All the Church has is derived; she can neither stand nor walk alone; her steps would falter if unsupported, would stray and err if unguided.

II. THE CHURCH'S DIVINE FRIEND AND HELPER. Christ, who has called his Church into fellowship with himself, is alone able and willing to take her under his protection and control. He knows the way in which she is to walk, the enemies she will encounter, the dangers by which she will be assailed. And he has all resources of spiritual strength and wisdom, encouragement and love. Every earthly counsellor and friend has limited powers, which sooner or later will surely fail. There is no measure to Christ's capacity to save and bless.

III. THE CHURCH'S WILLING, GRATEFUL, AND CLINGING DEPENDENCE. They who would

be full." As an earthly father delights to hear the silvery prattle of his little child, and no request from an infant's lips goes unheeded; so our God finds peculiar pleasure in hearing our voice of childlike appeal. Before we finish our petition, the answer is on the way. 2. *This request is an outcome of Christ's relationship to us.* Since he has entered into intimate and affectionate union with us—ay, made with us a marriage covenant—it follows that communion with us is a thing to be desired. If he had not been willing to live with us on familiar and reciprocal terms, he would not have entered into this mystic and organic union. Having made the greater sacrifice, he will not refrain from the lesser. It is not his fault that his intercourse with us is not more frequent, more close, more sensibly enjoyed. He is ever asking us to treat him as our bosom-Friend, and to trust him for every kind of need. It is as if he said to us, "You tell your troubles unto others; why not tell them unto me? Cause me to hear thy voice!" Would a loyal wife tell her cares and her griefs to one and to another, while refraining from speaking of them to her husband? Would not this be a scandalous folly? Hence Jesus says to us, "Tell me everything." There is nothing that disturbs your peace which is not a care to me." We are charged to "cast all our care upon him." And our simple duty is, "in everything . . . to make known our wants unto God." 3. *This request of Christ will serve as a corrective.* To remember that Jesus wants to hear our voice, will this not often be a check upon our speech? Those hasty or unkind words of ours respecting another, did not Jesus hear them? Or, if we are forming in our minds an ungenerous estimate of a neighbour, does not Jesus whisper to us, "Cause me to hear thy voice"? Even thoughts are heard by him. The voice that Jesus hears is not always the voice that others hear. They hear the words which escape the lips. Jesus hears the intention uppermost in the mind. Jesus hears the "still small voice" of our motives. Our every feeling, our every ambition, has a voice, and Jesus says, "Let me hear it." It is for our good that he should hear it all. My best Beloved is ever listening. How soft and loving and true should my voice always be! I must "set a watch on the door of my lips, that I sin not with my tongue."

IV. THE CHRISTIAN'S RESPONSE TO HIS LORD'S REQUEST. "Make haste, my Beloved, and be thou like to a roe or to a young hart upon the mountains of spices." 1. *Note the promptness of true obedience.* Jesus had said, "Cause me to hear thy voice." Forthwith the loving soul responds, "Lord, thou shalt hear it. Come, Lord Jesus; come quickly!" No word could be more welcome to Jesus than that. It is as if the spouse had said, "Mayhap my voice may express feelings and inclinations which are very faulty; but do thou, beloved One, come, and thou wilt correct all faultiness. Thy presence will be food and medicine, rest and growth, in one. The 'one thing needful' is thyself. I pass by all the streams of help; I come to the Fountain-head. Thou art the Fount of life. 'All my springs are in thee.' Love is swift to obey." 2. *Yet absence is for a time expedient.* The night is as needful to the plant as the day. Winter is as useful to agriculture as summer. It was expedient for the first apostles that Christ's visible presence should be withdrawn. They learnt to use the wisdom and the courage which he had given them. They gave themselves more to the study of Scripture and to prayer. They showed far more enthusiasm and zeal than when he was among them. We see, as a fact, that great advantage accrued to them from the departure of Jesus. So is it still. We have from him all the help we need. We have his mighty Spirit in our souls. To have the visible presence of Jesus would fill us with a new rapture. But enjoyment is not the main thing now. We want personal holiness and personal consecration; these are attained through faith. 3. *The Christian interprets this command of Christ as a fresh proof of his love.* Did he say, "Cause me to hear thy voice"? then this is a love-token. He would not desire to hear my voice unless he loved me. What delicate reminders of his love does our Immanuel give! How he devises to do us good, and plans to give us pleasure! And the more love grows, the stronger grows the desire to see him as he is. We long to have nearer access to Christ, without a veil between. 4. *Love is impatient of all delay.* We cannot climb to the heavenly heights, or sometimes we would. Hence, if there is to be a meeting between Christ and me, he must come down to me. Where he dwells must be a mountain—a mountain of fragrant spice. As mountains are the eminences of nature, the loftiest parts of this material globe, so they help us to ascend to those

empyrean heights, where true purity resides, where the Highest dwells. Love can conquer every hindrance. Love annihilates distance and time. Already Love dwells in the future. To her eye the final consummation is reached; and hence she sings, "Come, Lord Jesus; come quickly!"—D.

Vers. 1—3.—*The ardour of spiritual love.* There is no measure, no restraint, in this language. If it is possible for human love, when duly placed, to be too fervent and absorbing, this is when that is given to the creature which it behoves us to reserve for the Creator. Passion and poetry combine to express the deepest emotions, the most ardent wishes of the soul.

I. THE OBJECT OF SPIRITUAL LOVE. 1. In loving Christ the soul centres its purest and strongest affections upon One who is in himself infinitely excellent. Earthly love is often the creature of the imagination, conceiving beauty and excellence which do not exist, or which exist in a measure extravagantly exaggerated. There is no possibility of thinking too highly of the Saviour, of admiring him too absorbingly, of loving him too warmly. He is all, and more than all, that our imagination can picture. 2. In loving Christ the soul does but render to him what his services and his sufferings deserve from our hearts. "We love him, because he first loved us." He has done for us what none other could or would have done. "While we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." Is it possible to overstate our obligations—to offer him more than he has a right to expect and to claim from us?

II. THE YEARNING OF SPIRITUAL LOVE. Love would *receive* from the beloved. Two points are suggested by the passionate and glowing language of the text. 1. A desire for intimacy, for closest fellowship, for endearing friendship. 2. A desire for instruction, for lessons such as Christ only can convey to the soul of the disciple. It is well that we should look to our Lord for all things, for the wisdom that guides, the love that cheers, the grace that supports and sustains. The proper attitude of the Christian towards his Lord and Saviour is an attitude of dependence, of supplication, of expectation.

III. THE TRIBUTE OF SPIRITUAL LOVE. Love would *give* to the beloved. And the saved, rejoicing soul would fain offer of its best to Christ. The kisses, the spiced wine, and the pomegranate juice which the bride would offer to her spouse may suggest to us that Christ looks for the affection, the holy service, the consecrated devotion, of those for whom he died. What can we give him? If we cannot bathe his feet with tears or anoint his head with precious and fragrant unguents, we can at all events offer to him the sincere affection of the heart, a constant place in our thoughts, the tribute of our praise, and, to crown all, the service which, being rendered to his people, he will accept as given to himself.—T.

Ver. 5.—*"Leaning upon her beloved."* As a skilled artist by two or three strokes brings some incident vividly and picturesquely before the eye, so does the poet here by a few words picture before us a scene harmonious with the whole composition, and depict the mutual relation of the two personages of this exquisite dramatic idyll. We see the bride returning to the home of her youth, quitting the familiar pastures, and approaching the dear abode; she is "leaning upon her beloved." If true love is suggestive of true religion, as is not to be doubted, then we may regard this attitude as having its analogue in the Christian's wonted experience as related to his Lord.

I. THE CHURCH'S INNATE WEAKNESS. Men sometimes use extravagant language regarding the Church, as though in itself it were great and powerful. But the juster view to take is that suggested by the posture of the beloved coming up out of the wilderness. All the Church has is derived; she can neither stand nor walk alone; her steps would falter if unsupported, would stray and err if unguided.

II. THE CHURCH'S DIVINE FRIEND AND HELPER. Christ, who has called his Church into fellowship with himself, is alone able and willing to take her under his protection and control. He knows the way in which she is to walk, the enemies she will encounter, the dangers by which she will be assailed. And he has all resources of spiritual strength and wisdom, encouragement and love. Every earthly counsellor and friend has limited powers, which sooner or later will surely fail. There is no measure to Christ's capacity to save and bless.

III. THE CHURCH'S WILLING, GRATEFUL, AND CLINGING DEPENDENCE. They who would

fain go alone are not Christ's. So surely as he chooses his own, so surely does he put within them a spirit of subjection and attachment to himself. A cry for leading and for support comes up from the depths of the spiritual nature—a cry to which Christ is never indifferent, to which Christ always responds. He bids her “lean hard” upon him.

IV. THE CHURCH'S HAPPY SECURITY. Having given herself into his keeping, she knows that she is safe; that he will lead her aright, that he will never leave and never forsake her; that if she stumbles, she will not be allowed to fall; that if she is faint and weary, he will uphold her tottering steps; that if she is fearful, his words and his smile will banish her apprehensions and restore her peace.—T.

Vers. 6, 7.—*The power and praise of love.* Literature furnishes no eulogy of the passion which most profoundly stirs the heart of man more splendid than this. Some of the clauses have passed into proverbs, and are often upon the lips. Here is a human scintillation from the Divine fire, glowing with something of the brilliancy of the celestial original. Such language as this has been adopted as their own by those ardent souls with whom piety is a passion, and for whom the love of God consumes all earthly emotion and desire. To analyze such poetry seems almost a profanation. Yet we may trace herein some of the characteristics by which the love of the saints of God has ever been in some measure distinguished. Of that love, especially as enkindled by the sacrifice of the Divine Redeemer, we are reminded that it is—

I. ARDENT. “A very flame of the Lord;” “the flashes thereof like flashes of fire.” The story of the Church tells us of many whose affection and devotion to their Lord cannot be justly described in less fervent terms. There have been consecrated apostles, zealous missionaries, seraphic saints, who have been consumed with this sacred passion. And lowly Christians have lived, and yet live, unnoticed by the world, and little recognized even by the Church, in whose breasts this pure fire has burned with fervour so glowing as to verify this glowing language.

II. STRONG AND TENACIOUS. There is a frequent belief that as a keen bright flame soon burns itself out, so it is not to be expected that piety should long retain its utmost fervour. It is presumed that the exalted mood must pass away, that the spiritual passion must give place to the cold ashes of indifference. But this is not so with the love which consciously responds to the love which passeth knowledge. This is persistent, and is “strong as death.”

III. UNQUENCHABLE. “Many waters” roll over it in vain, “neither can the floods drown it.” Opposition and persecution try their power upon this spiritual passion, only to find that it is more than able to resist them. The oil which is poured upon the fire by the hand that is unseen is mightier than the water which is dashed upon it by the carnal, cold, and unbelieving world. Nay, the worldliness and indifference too often distinctive of professing Christian society, more dangerous than open hostility, is powerless to extinguish the flame which God himself has kindled.

IV. UNPURCHASEABLE. How true is this language even of human love, which, if it be sincere, is surely spontaneous and unbought! If love is to be purchased, it is love and not money which must be paid for it; “the substance of a man's house” is no equivalent for the priceless treasure. Gratitude and service may be bought, but love is beyond the value of jewels and of gold. We are taken into another region than that of market value and of merchandise. It is the love of the Saviour, that love which shone through the lurid darkness of Calvary, which wins the love of human hearts.

“I give my heart to thee,
O Jesus most desired;
And heart for heart the gift shall be,
With grateful ardour fired.”

V. IMMORTAL. It is *sealed*, i.e. for an everlasting possession. An ancient writer said, “Christ seals us in the heart, that we may love him; in the forehead, that we may confess him; in the hand, that we may profess him, and that we may practise what we profess.” Over this love time and death have no power. It burns brighter when the lamp of life burns low; it breaks forth in perfect lustre when, beyond this murky atmosphere of earth, it reaches the clear air of heaven.—T.

Vers. 11, 12.—*The reward of the faithful.* The vine was cultivated very generally in some parts of Palestine, and afforded the Hebrew poets and prophets many similitudes, especially of the life of the nation and the Church. The incident related in these verses is apart from the main interest and plot of the work, but to whomsoever it refers—and it is conjectured to refer to certain rustic brothers of the bride—it suggests valuable spiritual lessons concerning the moral government of God and the responsibility of men.

I. A TRUST GRACIOUSLY COMMITTED. As Solomon let out his vineyard at Baal-hamon to certain tenants, so the Divine Lord and Ruler of all has appointed for each one of us a certain province of opportunity for improvement and for service. This is more strikingly the case with regard to those who occupy positions of eminence, but in reality such is the position of every intelligent and reasonable creature of God. We are tenants to whom his goodness has assigned a sphere of action in which we may be negligent or diligent, responsive to his behests or indifferent to his claims.

II. A TRUST FAITHFULLY FULFILLED. In the parable the keepers or tenants are represented as having cultivated the vineyards entrusted to them with skill and success, so that they were able to pay the king the rent which was agreed upon or the tribute which he required. In this they are representatives of all those who, having received privileges and enjoyed opportunities, turn them to good account. The scholar who cultivates his mind, enlarges his knowledge, and fits himself to influence aright the opinion and convictions of his less-favoured fellow-men; the man of wealth who employs his riches in a spirit of wise and expansive knowledge; the Christian minister who cultivates the corner of the spiritual vineyard committed to his care; every faithful child of God who diligently and prayerfully endeavours to do the will of the heavenly Husbandman, may be said to be faithful in his discharge of the obligations of his trust.

III. FIDELITY TO THE TRUST AMPLY RECOGNIZED AND REMUNERATED. Whilst the king received his thousand pieces of silver, the cultivators of the vineyard were rewarded with two hundred pieces as the recompense of their toil. And God suffers no faithful labourer to be the loser by his service. True, the recompense may not be material or temporal. Many a diligent servant of God is allowed to live a life of privation and to die in poverty. But there is a rich reward reaped by such a faithful trustee and steward of God's grace. He has the recompense of a good conscience; he may have the affectionate gratitude of some whose best interests he has promoted; and he certainly has the approval of him who can appoint to a higher ministry, who can confer lasting honours and true blessedness.—T.

Ver. 13.—*The longed-for voice.* “The companions hearken for thy voice: cause me to hear it.” Such is the closing utterance of the royal spouse, who thus invites the bride to give expression to the feelings that animate her breast. May we not believe that the King of kings, who is yet the Lover and the Friend of his Church, in similar language asks for the free communication of the Church's purest thoughts and best desires? Welcome to the Saviour is the outpouring of his people's hearts. Never can they speak to meet with inattention and disregard from him upon whom their all depends.

I. CHRIST DELIGHTS IN THE VOICE OF HIS PEOPLE'S LOVE. He has not refrained from assurances of his love towards us, and he expects that we shall not repress the utterance of our affection towards him. His kindness evokes our affection, and that affection cannot be speechless; it must needs find a voice, whilst its expression will ever be welcome and grateful to his tender heart.

II. CHRIST DELIGHTS IN THE VOICE OF HIS PEOPLE'S SINCERE SUPPLICATIONS. The relation being such as it is, our addresses to our Lord must be constantly taking the form of prayer. There is no reason why we should withhold our petitions. We are altogether dependent upon him, and in our dependence he takes pleasure, because 'it affords him the opportunity of constantly displaying his kindness. When we come into his presence as suppliants, we do not come unbidden. “Cause me,” says Christ, “to hear thy voice.”

III. CHRIST DELIGHTS IN THE VOICE OF HIS PEOPLE'S GRATITUDE AND PRAISE. For such acknowledgments there is incessant occasion. He does not cease to give, nor should we cease to bless the Giver. If supplication is the special exercise of the Church on earth, praise is the undying exercise of the Church in heaven. Gratitude and adoration are as immortal as is love itself.—T.

HOMILETICAL INDEX

TO

THE SONG OF SOLOMON.



CHAPTER I.

THEME	PAGE
The Prologue	8
Dialogue between the Bride and the Chorus	10
The Communion of the Bridegroom and the Bride	12
"The Song of Songs, which is Solomon's"	14
Desire after God	15
Christ's Name	16
The Christian Soul, its Trials and Triumphs	17
The Soul's Joy in the Love of God	17
The Pastor's Peril	18
Not Faithless, yet not Faithful	20
How to find God	21
Love Assailed, but Steadfast	22
Characteristics of those whom Christ loves	23
Holy Communion	24
What Christ is to his People	25
The House of the Lord	26
The Bridegroom and the Bride	27
Low Estimate of Self	28
Seeking and Finding	29
Reciprocal Esteem	31
Holy Lyrics	33
Love Better than Wine	33

THEME	PAGE
The Fragrant Name	34
Divine Attraction	35
The Joyful Celebration of Divine Love	35
The Keeper of the Vineyards	36
The Shepherd's Care	37
Love and Admiration	37

CHAPTER II.

Converse of the Bridegroom and the Bride continued	42
The Visit of the Beloved	46
The Rose and the Lily	49
The Lord's Response to the Lily	50
"His Shadow"	51
Faint for Love	52
The Soul wooed and won	54
Spring	55
"The Little Foxes"	57, 71
He mine; I his	60
Eminent Piety seen in Contrast	61
The Pre-eminence of Immanuel	62
Royal Generosity	63
Christ's Coming makes a New Epoch in our History	65
Marriage Jointure	67
Wild-flower Beauty	69

THEME	PAGE
Shadow and Fruit ...	69
The Banquet of Love ...	70
The Approach of the Beloved ...	70
Spring-time ...	71
Mutual Possession ...	72

CHAPTER III.

The Dream of the Bride ...	76
The Espousals ...	79
Love's Dream ...	82
The Watchmen ...	83
"Solomon in All his Glory" ...	83
The Search for the True King ...	84
The King coming to his Capital ...	87
The Soul's Love ...	89
The Soul's Quest rewarded ...	90
The Bridal Entry ...	90

CHAPTER IV

The Bridegroom with the Bride ...	95
Further Conversation ...	98
What Christ sees in those who love him ...	101
Where Christ is now ...	103
The Immaculate Soul ...	104
The Beautiful but Dangerous World ...	104
"Cur Deus Homo?" ...	105
"Even so, come, Lord Jesus!" ...	106
Night and Morning ...	107
Christ's Appraisalment of Believers ...	109
The King's Garden ...	111
Prayer and its Quick Response ...	113
The Charm of True Beauty ...	116
"Without Spot" ...	116
Heart calls to Heart ...	117
The Garden and the Fountain ...	118
The Response of Love ...	119

CHAPTER V.

Response to ch. iv. 16: the Bridegroom accepts the Bride's Invitation ...	123
The Second Dream of the Bride ...	124
The Bride's Praise of the Bridegroom ...	128
Christ's Response ...	129
The Flesh and Spirit ...	130
The Dream of Gethsemane ...	131

THEME	PAGE
The Supremacy of Christ ...	132
"Altogether Lovely" ...	133, 143
Languid Life ...	134
The Personal Excellences of Jesus ...	136
Hospitality and Festivity ...	139
The Heart that waketh ...	140
Open to the Beloved who knocketh ...	140
The Dream of Distress ...	141
"Chiefest among Ten Thousand" ...	142

CHAPTER VI.

Dialogue between the Bride and the Daughters of Jerusalem ...	147
The Bridegroom's Praise of the Bride ...	148
Conversation between the Chorus and the Bride ...	151
Earnest Inquirers after Christ ...	153
The Friendship of the World ...	154
How Souls come into Perilous Places ...	155
Successful Quest after the Chief Good ...	155
Christ's Picture of his Church ...	157
True Love is True Knowledge ...	159
The Spiritual Beauty of the Church of Christ ...	160
The Terribleness of the Church of Christ ...	161
Spiritual Promotion ...	161

CHAPTER VII.

The Chorus of Maidens praise the Beauty of the Bride ...	165
Dialogue between the King and the Bride ...	167
Christian Missions ...	171
"I am my Beloved's" ...	171
Useful Service ...	171
The Fairness of Love ...	176
The Sweetness of Speech ...	176
The Desire of the Beloved ...	177
Divine Companionship ...	178
Garnered Fruits ...	178

CHAPTER VIII.

Wishes of the Bride ...	186
Entire Union of Wedded Love ...	188
"Oh that Men would understand!" ...	198
The Home-coming ...	194

THEME	PAGE	THEME	PAGE
Love's Prayer ...	195	Stewardship ...	202
Love's Characteristics ...	195	Sacred Fellowship ...	204
The Little Sister ...	196	The Ardour of Spiritual Love ...	207
"Gaudeamus igitur" ...	196	"Leaning upon her Beloved" ...	207
The Last Appeal ...	197	The Power and the Praise of Love ...	208
The Christian Pilgrim ...	198	The Reward of the Faithful ...	209
Prayer for Full Assurance ...	200	The Longed-for Voice ...	209