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MEDITATIONS

ON

THE SONG OF SONGS.

By H. F.

NEW YORK :
LOIZEAUX BROTHERS, BIBLE TRUTH DEPOT,
63 Fourth Avenue.

LONDON W., ENGLAND,
WILLIAM BLATCHLEY, 27 LANCEFIELD STREET.

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PREFATORY REMARKS.

THE book, upon which the following papers bear, is, in some respects, unique. Allegorical in character, highly figurative in its language, it is essentially the book of love. By Hebrew scholars it has always been held in high esteem; and of the three books written by Solomon this has been regarded as the most highly spiritual. They have named Ecclesiastes the porch, Proverbs the holy place, and the Song of Songs the holiest of all—the holy of holies.

The true Solomon and His earthly spouse are therein portrayed. She passes through exercise of heart, manifests what she is, but draws out the infinite resources of His love and grace. True heart-education she receives, and it is this that makes the Song so exceedingly precious. Christ is the only One that can fill heart and mind, and here He is seen as the Object that fills the heart to overflowing. There is no "vexation of spirit" here. Oh, for more capacity for Christ!

The aim in the following papers has not been so much exposition as the simple desire to lead the heart into the full assurance, and fulness of the love of Christ. May this be in some measure accomplished for both reader and writer.

H. F.

THE SONG OF SONGS.

HOW varied are the compositions of Solomon, and small wonder, since to him was granted the spirit of wisdom and understanding, God giving him wisdom exceeding much. He was learned in the whole range of nature, "and he spake three thousand proverbs: and his songs are a thousand and five" (1 Kings iv. 29-32).

In the canon of Scripture we have three books attributed to Solomon; for in His unerring wisdom it pleased God to have the son of David as one of the inspired penmen, writing under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. We have the Proverbs, that wondrous compendium of wisdom, setting out the path for man in this scene. The voice of wisdom is loudly heard denouncing folly and commending prudence. Then, in Ecclesiastes, he expatiates upon the vanity of all things under the sun; and who more fitted to do so than the one who had more deeply drunk than any other of the streams of pleasure here? His soul had all that soul desired; in fact, was surfeited with the abundance of possessions, but remained unsatisfied. His cry was empty, empty, empty—"All is vanity and vexation of spirit." With all his glory, and with all his wisdom, he was yet unable to extract from these things the nectar of satisfaction.

Of his thousand and five songs one only finds an abiding place in the Scriptures of truth, known to us as the Canticles, or Song of Solomon. It is a love sonnet indeed, couched in the most beautiful Eastern imagery, containing the breathings of ardent affection conveyed to the heart in sublime poesy. It is the language of the heart, and hence some of it appears, to untutored minds,

extravagant. But love is extravagant, not cold and calculating like a scientist working out his problems, or a miser reckoning his stored-up hoard. Heart speaks to heart here; and He whose love alone is unfailing and perfect, the Messiah, the King, is, with His spouse, whose love could wax and wane, and who could play truant and be indifferent, allegorically set forth as speaking to her in His matchless way of her excellence and beauty, thus to establish her in grace, fitting her to be a fit companion for Himself in glory. Judah shall yet stand as queen by His side, arrayed in gold of Ophir, and morally like unto the King (Psa. xlv.); for He who greatly desires her beauty labors greatly to that end. He would have communion. He is seen desirous and ready; but she, though desirous, is found unready, and has to pass through exercise of heart again and again to learn at last thoroughly, what He has been endeavoring to teach her all through, that "His desire is toward her." What a consummation!

But though the primary interpretation of this love-song has reference to the Messiah and that Zion, His earthly bride, loved and chosen, in which He delights, and hence desires the re-establishment in grace of the relationship now broken, yet, since all turns on the pivot of His love, and one of the main features is the beauty of communion, the saint of God can draw sweetness from it now. Who has, or can have, a monopoly of Christ's love? Precious indeed is the truth that each one of His redeemed ones can think of His love as set upon him or her in all its immensity and wealth. It is not for one individual only to say, "He loved *me* and gave Himself for *me*," but each, with varied emotions, can utter that into the ears of others.

This much by way of introduction, that we might remember, that since the love of our Lord is unchangeable we may use this precious portion for ourselves, and here listen to the voice of the Beloved speaking, and fully enjoy it, without in any way setting aside the distinctive blessing that pertains to those who joy in redemption accomplished, and have perfect peace on the basis of that perfect work. An old writer has said, "If you would be holy, read the Psalms; if you would be wise, read the Proverbs," and to this we would add the further remark, "If you would learn love's language, and be instructed in the action of love to establish real, lasting communion, study the Canticles, and seek to breathe the fragrant air that surrounds the utterances of the unchanged heart of the King to the spouse. Love begets love, and that is the principle upon which the Beloved acts, though He has to wait long oftentimes ere He receives the answering love. But we turn now to the Song.

Chap. i.-ii. 7.*

It is the "Song of Songs;" for where shall another be found to compare with it? True, it is Solomon's, yet how little of Solomon, and how much of the One wiser, and greater, and more gracious than Solomon appears in it! Mention is first made of *love*, and the desire is expressed by the spouse that the most intimate and blessed manifestations of love might be given her; for what is a kiss but the expression of this? "Let Him kiss me with the kisses of His mouth," she entreats. Fresh from Himself, she would receive these assurances of His love.

Doubtless she had already received many tokens of

* [It is earnestly desired that the reader may have the "Song" open before him to refer to it continually. ED.]

love; for every blessing from Him would surely be a kiss from Him. Not in word only, but in action would His love find display; and numerous blessings strewed about her would fall like kisses from her Well-beloved, testifying to her of His love that was better than wine.

For that is her testimony about it, and her reason for desiring it and then wanting it multiplied: "For Thy love is better than wine," she declares. How, then, could she help craving to quaff from such a bowl? One taste of Christ's love serves to prove it to be superior to all others, and deepening acquaintance will only deepen the first impression that His love passes knowledge. All who know Him have proved this. Kisses have often seemed sweet when pressed upon the lips, but have turned into the bitterness of wormwood and gall when the person who imprinted them there has proved a traitor. But *His* love is sure and changeless, in the midst of all that is uncertain and unreal—

"In earth beneath and heaven above,
One thing is sure—the Saviour's love."

How well, then, we might desire to have signs of it given us again and again; and morning, noon, and night, when blessings in abundance, of whatsoever kind they might be, surround us, let us feel as it were His loving lips pressed hard upon ours, and receive them as the kisses of His mouth. He assures us of His love. May we crave more and more of it, and in craving receive.

"*Better than wine*" it was, for there was none to compare with it. Wine is the symbol of happiness, joy and prosperity; but His *loves*, for He has many ways of expressing it, are better than anything earth can provide. Better, because it can never fail; better, because it can never injure—only bless; better, because it is pure; bet-

ter, because it is the very sum and substance of all that is sweet and precious. It imparts strength to the arm and joy to the heart. It gives consolation to the down-cast and comfort to the tired, putting weariness to flight, and enabling sufferers to sing sonnets of praise. It intoxicates with joy and a holy exhilaration, but who can declare all that Christ's love is, and all that it does? Let us cry with the spouse, "Let Him kiss me with the kisses of His mouth."

She speaks of "kisses," and she speaks of "loves," and the former are the manifestations of the latter. But whether we reckon up the tokens singly, or combine them and have them as a cluster but yet one, the supremely precious fact still stands that the highest joy earth affords bears no comparison with the joy His love bestows.

It is no mean exercise to sit before our Lord and go over the various ways His loves have shown themselves—His undertaking on our behalf, His stooping from riches to poverty, His life of humiliation and suffering here; and then to see all these unite in that death on Calvary, that henceforth and forevermore His love might be better than wine to His chosen ones.

Delighting in the preciousness of His love, she tells of the savor of His graces and merits, comparing them to ointments, rich, fragrant, and rare; and then *His name*, fully expressing who and what He was, shed fragrance all around, being like unto ointment poured forth. "Because of the savor of Thy good ointments Thy name is as ointment poured forth." Every virtue, every grace, all things lovely, pure, and of good report, were without measure displayed in Jesus. He was verily "virtue incarnate." Think of His meekness, humility, gentleness, and say if the name of *Jesus* does not embrace them all? His name,

as in no other case, was the full expression of Himself. Does not the mention of that dear name bring before heart and mind the picture of One living a life divine amidst sinful men? Ointment in the box might be of great value, but the unguent gives forth its sweetest perfume only when emptied out. So the name of Jesus, combining all that Jesus was and did, is aptly likened to ointment poured forth. How well we can sing:—

"Jesus—it speaks a life of love,
 Of sorrows meekly borne;
 It tells of sympathy above,
 Whatever makes us mourn."

And others beside herself were attracted to Him. She knew Him; others discerned His worth and loved Him in consequence—"Therefore do the virgins love Thee." The pure ones, purchased indeed from amongst men (Rev. xiv. 4), found in Him all their hearts desired. Keeping themselves from the idolatrous practices of the apostate part of the nation, they are regarded as virgins, as undefiled ones; and upon Him, the savor of whose ointments they had smelt, their love was set. He was the object for them; for Jesus meets the need of every yearning heart, and only those who love Him can conceive His worth.

But "nearer, still nearer," she would be to Him, and the yearning of her heart gives vent to the cry, "Draw me." The virgins might follow in her train, running after her since she was after Christ, but that cry proceeded from her lips, they saying—for desire of heart was with them likewise—"We will run after Thee." As the pole attracts the magnet, and then the magnet the needle, so does Christ's attractive power first exert itself upon the soul, and then through His own upon others.

It was Christ they were after, for they would follow the Lamb whithersoever He went (Rev. xiv. 4); but when she cries, "Draw me," they say, for they loved Him, "We will run after Thee." The answer to her request is contained in the next clause of our verse, and the latter portion gives us the joyous occupation of her companions.

Does she express the wish to be drawn irresistibly along? then immediately she finds herself transported into the banqueting chamber of the King. "The King hath brought me into His chambers," and so in holy fellowship and communion with Him she would enjoy the feast His love provided. None could be nearer, and there, in the beauty of holiness, with the King of kings, she would be kissed afresh with the kisses of His mouth.

Do we, with holy energy, desire to be drawn by Christ? Then we may rest assured that this desire of our hearts *shall* be gratified. For the expressing the desire is immediately followed by the being bodily carried into His chambers. To no heart is Christ sweeter than to the desirous heart; and though little is revealed to us of heaven's joys, yet enough that we shall be there with Him—and that is heaven. The innermost chambers are for His spouse. Her companions run, and then rejoice, speaking of His love more than anything else, though not so near in relationship as she. "We will be glad and rejoice in Thee." Oh, blessed resolve! that should shut out every wandering tendency. How well they would be repaid, for each bit of gladness and every rejoicing would enhance the beauty of the King of Glory to their souls. Their joys were to be reduplicated. With a calm gladness and ecstatic rejoicing they would think of Him. His mercies they would prize; His blessings would distil as the dew; but in Himself, the Giver of all

blessings and mercies, they would joy, making mention of His love.

Himself and His love were the themes of their hearts, and shall not these themes be ours also? Good reason have we for remembering His love; that love which, though old as eternity, is new every day. His love no suffering could stay. It breasted the billows of ignominy and scorn; and that His love might be ours He endured the contradiction of sinners against Himself. Adorable Lord! until we see Thee *we* will remember Thy love as the most precious, constant, and enduring love there is! His love is worthy of remembrance surely, for it is love excelling, immeasurable; a love displayed in life, a love unfolded in death, and a love continued in resurrection. He who loved loveth still. All the blessed qualities of love like His pass comprehension, and cannot even be told; but if, with the spouse and these upright ones, we will but tell over to our souls the story, yea, the history of the love of Christ, our souls will be glowing and our lips a-praising ere it is half told. The remembrance of His love will go farther than anything else in increasing our growth in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ, and will help us with lip and life to commend One so exceedingly precious.

“In uprightness do they love Thee.” Where shall genuine love to the Beloved be found apart from uprightness? and how could the virgins be possessed of their blessed resolves save from the fact that they love uprightly?

And now, addressing the daughters of Jerusalem, she gives utterance to one of those blessed paradoxes found in Scripture, which grace has created, and which grace

likewise solves, "*I am black, but comely.*" Her lips gave expression to this double confession. By nature and by practice she was truly black, and yet, through His comeliness which He had now put upon her, she is "comely." And to show forth the intensity of the blackness, she uses the figure of the black tents of the herdmen of Kedar, which, we are informed by some travelers, glistened in the full blaze of the Eastern sun with an intense blackness. And what simile shall she use to shadow forth the perfection of beauty with which He had invested her but those curtains of Solomon, curiously wrought, and skilfully and richly ornamented?

How different the appearance as she thought of what she was in herself, or what she was in His sight—"black, but comely." 'Tis a strange mixture, and yet, O believer, how true it is of all that believe on Jesus. Meditate on what we have learnt of ourselves, and part at least of the confession of the spouse will flow from our lips. Black? Yes! By nature the children of wrath, and deeply dyed with the guilt of our many sins, the term *black* is certainly not an untrue expression of our former condition. But now complete in Him, and clothed with garments of salvation which He has put upon us, we can say:

"Like Thee, O Lord—how wondrous fair,
How like Thee, all Thy members are!"

Yes, black, yet comely now; but the moment comes when we shall be seen in glory with Him, reflecting the radiance of His blessed person; and then we shall be comely indeed, and no longer black.

She proceeds to mention another blackness; for she had passed through severe trial, and the sun had scorched her. She felt herself very unworthy; for if she had suffered at the hands of others, she also realized that she

had failed to fulfil her own responsibility. The burning sun had scorched her black; and that was the mark, the sign to her, of her own failure; and she makes the humbling confession, and shows that she would now trust herself less than ever.

She had been the object of derision and hatred even by those who stood in near relationship to her: "My mother's sons were angry with me," and they had imposed labors upon her. Burdens hard to be borne she had had to bear; and laboring thus, her fairness had withered away, and blackness had taken its place.

She adds, however, "Mine own vineyard have I not kept." That which was her immediate and proper responsibility she had grossly failed in. Set to care for the vineyards of others, she felt then that she had been neglectful of her first, her prime duty. Oh, sorrowful thought—sad retrospection! But the truth is out, and the lesson is writ large for others to profit by.

Can we read it? May we not regard the figure of the vineyard as standing for ourselves, and find in the regret of the spouse that which we might perhaps with equal truth utter as well? The spiritual needs of our own souls should first be attended to, surely; or, like the vineyard of the man void of understanding, thorns and nettles will cover the face thereof (Prov. xxiv. 31). It may be that we have neglected to cultivate the precious and tender plants that should be growing in our vineyard. Communion needs cultivating; prayer requires attention; and if these have not our care, then, depend upon it, we are not keeping our own vineyards, though, mayhap, we are bestowing a great deal of thought and labor upon others.

It is easy to set about putting other people right without one's self being right. It often happens that God's

word is read for others, not for ourselves; and the needs of the heart, the home, the family, are shamefully neglected whilst outside work is carried on zealously. "*Mine own vineyard have I not kept!*" Then let us set about finding the remedy; and if we but discover what the One we love best wants, we shall have found the strongest possible motive to help us to that end. We will take the path of the spouse.

Confession and humbling is followed by distrust of self and desire to be with her Well-beloved. "Tell me," she says, "O Thou whom my soul loveth, where Thou feedest, where Thou makest Thy flock to rest at noon; for why should I be as one wandering beside the flocks of Thy companions." Apart from Him she was in danger of falling into manifest and manifold corruptions, appearing to others indeed as a lewd woman. None but Himself would satisfy her; in no one else's presence would she be free from the drudgery of self; with no one else could she be happy. How could she be when He was the One her soul loved? Love can repose in love. It delights to sit at His feet. It is crowned when leaning on His bosom. Love finds its answer in the presence of its object. And how hers speaks in these words: "Thou whom my soul loveth." Be it that she had failed, that the sun had burnt her swarthy, yet she wanted to fail no more, and would find a security in the presence of the Beloved; for, spite of her neglect, she speaks to Him with certainty, sure that He who heard and understood her confession would not chide or upbraid her.

The love of her soul was set upon Him, and in His presence she would be and abide, happy and secure. No desire had she to wander beside other flocks; but to find out where He fed *His* flock, and where He made it to

rest, was the object of her inquiry. On love's wings would she speedily be there. Soon she would soar away from herself, to be in spirit with the King, the Shepherd, there to find repose in His love. How sweet and precious to be in such a place, the very abode of love and tenderness! She loved Him and would plead it; and if others derided and oppressed, He never. He was *such a Shepherd, feeding His flock, making it to rest during the heat of the day.*

“ From pole to pole let others roam,
And search in vain for bliss ;
My soul is satisfied at home ;
The Lord my portion is.”

She obtains the answer she seeks. Could *love* plead and be refused? She might have known, however, that her very question told of her indifference to abide ever with Him. The “*If thou know not*” may convey this; nevertheless the information is vouchsafed to her, “the fairest among women,” and to follow in the footsteps of the flock of the unfailing Shepherd would bring her where she desired to be.

There she is bidden to tend her flock. There, in fellowship with Jesus and with those shepherds raised up to perform His work, she would be able to do hers. Oh, blissful labor performed under such auspicious surroundings!

In thinking over this portion, do not our hearts recall that scene depicted in John i., when the Baptist's disciples, having been directed to Jesus as the Lamb of God, were desirous of knowing where He dwelt? “Master, where dwellest Thou?” and graciously they are invited to “Come and see;” and then in sweet intercourse with Him they abide there that day.

Another word does this portion also suggest to the heart. Where is the One who loves us found? He has not left us in doubt. "Where two or three are gathered together in My name, there am I in the midst" (Matt. xviii.): so, if we would find Him, if we crave fellowship and communion, and the bliss of His immediate presence, we must be amongst those gathered to His peerless name. There we can get the sweetest foretaste of glory. There we feel the strength of His love. Oh, why should we wander here and there, though it may be with those who love Him and labor for Him, and remain unsatisfied? Who, or what, can fill *His* place? "Where makest Thou Thy flock to rest at noon?" "Where two or three are gathered together in My name, there am I in the midst." Aimless soul, let thy wanderings cease. With Him thy soul's every longing may be satisfied in His love, and joy, and delight; and thy love too find its ease in the utterance of love's strains of praise.

In tones of unmistakable affection and delight the Well-beloved's voice is heard speaking directly to the heart of her who had but just then been saying, "I am black." In her ear He sounds her praises, ravishing and transporting her soul, and declaring the secrets of His wonderful love which discovers a multitude of graces and beauties in her. He lets out the fact that His heart had been occupied with her. He had been engaged in comparing her to what was world-renowned—the horses of Pharaoh's chariots. "I have compared thee, O My love, to a steed in Pharaoh's chariots" (ver. 9).

Egypt was famous for its horses, and the king's chariots would have the very best—noble and graceful in appearance, the very embodiment, to admiring eyes, of excellent beauty. They reminded Him of His spouse, and

we can say from what He spoke then, that on the beholding of those sensitive, strong and beautiful creatures, instinctively His admiring, loving heart compared her to them. It is what He, the King, saw in her. He expressed it, not by or to a friend, but Himself to herself. She heard it, and was glad.

But He stops not there. Beholding her He joys, and says, "Thy cheeks are comely with plaits, thy neck with jewel chains." According to the Oriental custom, she was arrayed in this way. Often they were well-nigh laden with ornaments, as well as plaiting their hair about their cheeks. To Him she appeared comely with it all, and He would add other decorations, putting on her "plaits of gold and studs of silver." "*We* will make thee," He remarks, as though He would associate others with Himself in perfectly arraying her. She was the centre of His heart's affections, and too many could not be engaged in bedecking her to His satisfaction. Surveying her in her beauty, the Beloved would make her more beautiful still, supplying what she lacked, for she was precious to Him.

The spouse stands forth as an illustration of what the saint is to Christ. O, redeemed one, *thou* art precious to thy Lord! Jeweled with those virtues which His grace has put upon the ransomed, they are comely to Him. The excellencies of Christ, when manifested by His own, are like unto chains of jewels and precious stones which richly embellish the person of the wearer—ornaments and beauties unappreciated by most, spurned and regarded as touches of hypocrisy by some, but highly valued by the Lord. "We wait in His beauties to shine;" "the glory which Thou hast given Me, I have given them," He said; and He will yet deck each one with His glory as the result of His atoning death. With unfading

beauties He will clothe them. Let us hear, then, His words of love, and, standing in the light, may we discern what is suited to Himself, and act accordingly; each day more perfectly reflecting, though but feebly still, the all-varied graces of our blessed Lord and Master.

The King had brought her into His chambers, and as He sat at His table her spikenard emitted its fragrance. The sweet odor of grace flows freely in the presence of the Well-beloved; and surely it is for Him. Others may get a smell thereof, but that fragrance is for Him; it is the answer to His own love and goodness. What a season of joy it is to be in His presence! There the affections are moved as nowhere else; and in the abounding of her joy *His* soul is delighted with the sweet fragrance of her precious perfume. When *He is at His table her spikenard sendeth forth its fragrance.* Then it is that she, gazing on His face, rests in serving Him; and happy in that service, her love in its sweetness flows forth to Him. Oh, may Christ have our best thoughts, words, and deeds! Whatever grace effectuates is of Him, and therefore for Him. Such is like unto spikenard of great value, and in His presence the alabaster boxes are to be broken.*

And the heart of the spouse worthily responds to the

[* In John xii. 1-3 we have a precious example of all this. Lazarus is at the table with the Lord: associated with Christ in new life, he feeds with His Lord on the riches of His grace. Martha serves again, but in that sweet service which finds its rest and joy of heart in service to her Lord. Then Mary, in the spirit of the true worshiper, breaks over her Lord the most precious ointment she had "kept" for *Him*, who, she now saw, was surely going to death, from which He had delivered Lazarus:—this little household is presented to us there as on resurrection ground; the three together giving a complete picture of our place, service and joy in Christ.—*Ed.*]

appeals of love. Her words show why the precious perfume of her spikenard flows to her Beloved; "*My Beloved is unto me a bundle of myrrh,*" she says.

Myrrh was one of the costly drugs of the East, and was there used in many ways; for not only was it expensive, one of the choice products of that land, but it was useful likewise. So we see again that love alights on appropriate figures to express the heart-yearning; for without doubt the Beloved was both very dear and satisfying to her. "He shall lie between my breasts," she says. That is the place she gives Him; and there, in the very seat and centre of love, her King was enthroned.

What can we say of Christ? Not less than that He is inexpressibly precious to the believer; for there is, and can be, only one Christ of God. He is the Friend in our need—our own Saviour. In Him all wisdom is found. In Him dwells the fulness of the Godhead bodily (Col. ii.). He is Saviour, Shepherd, and Lord, and there is enough in Him "the heart and mind to fill." What joys do we lack when Christ is possessed? The bundle of myrrh might preserve from many an infectious disease, but Christ enthroned in the heart will keep out every obnoxious thing. He is the only preservative against the seekings of self and the attractions of the world. It is said that the followers of Mohammed usually wear a portion of their Koran round their necks as a charm. Christ is the charm for *us*; and if He lies betwixt *our* breasts, all others and all else shall be effectually excluded. He alone is excellent, and He alone, in His peerless person, combines all the preciousness and all the uses of the much-used myrrh.

"Jesus, in Thee our eyes behold
A thousand glories more
Than the rich gems and polished gold
The sons of Aaron wore."

Again she adds: "My Beloved is unto me a cluster of camphire (or henna flowers) in the vineyards of Engedi" (ver. 14). Engedi is said to be "a wild ravine on the western shore of the Dead Sea," where vineyards abounded, as her words intimate. There the henna flowers luxuriated, and were highly prized by the Orientals for their beautiful fragrance, as also for their connection with love and marriage. They grew in clusters, so to a *cluster* of these flowers does she liken her Beloved. Were they beautiful? So was He. Were they odoriferous? So was He indeed, for His fragrance surrounded her. Were they pleasant? He charmed her more than all else. Myrrh to preserve, and henna flowers to charm, were to her but reminders of the all-excelling powers of the Well-beloved to keep her and to please her.

Nature's treasures possess secrets; and though, when yielded up, they only imperfectly declare the perfections of Christ, yet, nevertheless, let natural beauties remind us of Divine excellencies; let nature's voice point us to spiritual truths; let us read sermons on Christ in what we find so near to us, and are so intimately acquainted with. How often would the weary heart be refreshed if sun, and star, and flower, and all nature were heard directing to Christ; if what they so loudly declare were only duly interpreted into spiritual language! Truly they are only faint emblems of Him; but in them the spouse saw the One her soul loved. In them let us see Christ, and may quickened affections more perfectly translate what they dimly foreshadow.

The King was precious to her. She was likewise precious to Him. And so love's response meets with the response of love again. "Behold, thou art fair, My love," He says to her; and that she may not fear to fully believe

it, He thrills her heart by repeating it: "Behold, thou art fair," adding, "thou hast dove's eyes" (ver. 15). He therein read her love, her simplicity, her chastity, her dependence. The gentle gaze of the dove, so pure and unassuming, speaks of undivided affection. It is said of that meek bird that "when she hath chosen a mate, she keepeth herself unto him only, to the end of life." Does not the King seem to say, I will satisfy your heart completely; upon Me you can rely; on Me you may trust fully.

And from the heart's recesses re-echo love's message, "Behold, *Thou* art fair, my Beloved." Her fairness was but the reflection of His own. She lacked beauty, and was black without Him. But *He* was fair—"yea, pleasant." She could doubtless sing,—

"Cheered with Thy converse, I can trace
The desert with delight;
Through all the gloom, *one smile of Thine*
Can dissipate the night."

Peace, happiness, satisfaction, were all found in Him. His love knew no coldness, no decay; and communion with Him was as fresh and sweet as ever. "Our bed is green" is her declaration. How many thoughts His words had awakened! He had spoken; she had replied; and now, as in fellowship together, she can say, "Our bed," "our house," "our galleries."

Nearer, then, she could not be brought, and of course His unending love would bring her into a right regal place, a house of cedar, with galleries of fir. All bore out the character of His love: whether in the secret place, in the larger sphere of the house, or in the galleries around, all would remind her of what was unfading and undecaying. *He* was pleasant. *His* love was everlast-

ing. Fellowship with Him was bliss indeed; and as the house supported by unrotting cedar beams and galleries formed of firs must last, so all that He was, and all that He had done, would endure—time could not spoil it.

Now, re-read all this. Is not our Lord's love as fresh, as undimmed, as undivided, as when first we knew Him? It knows no waning with age. Who shall separate us from it? Who shall hinder fellowship with Him? Communion with Him can be enjoyed in the private chamber, in the assembly of the saints, or in passing through the world, when the life lived is that lived by the faith of the Son of God. For us, all that He is, and all that He has done, rests upon a foundation that time cannot touch, and is supported by that which age cannot corrupt.

So, happy and secure, the spouse sings exultingly, "I am a rose of Sharon, a lily of the valleys." Would He chide her for such a bold statement? Nay, His word, "Thou art fair, my love," forbids the thought. What is sweeter than the rose? What more lovely than the lily? We know not with certainty what flowers are here referred to, but they were doubtless of unsurpassed brilliancy and beauty. Be the former the rose, or, as some suppose, the crocus, it was of *Sharon*, the richest and best of Palestine's meadows; and whilst many varieties of lilies flourished in that land, the most fragrant bloomed in the valleys: and what a blending of loveliness and humility there is in these emblems foreshadowed!

The language of grace is very bold, but not unjustified. It speaks not of what man sees, but as Christ judges. The exquisite fragrance and beauty of the fairest and sweetest flower is but a faint picture of the sweetness and excellency of a redeemed soul to Christ. That to Him is beyond comparison. He perceives the excellency. He

smells the sweet odor. Hers was a beauty and humility which is all the fruit of grace. And so this self-praise, as we may say, sung into His ear, was a recommendation, for she exulted in, and read aright, the breathings of His love and the work of His grace.

Fear not, then, O believer, to tell into the ear of the Lord Jesus what you assuredly know you are to Him. On the couch, in the house, or walking the open places, tell over with rejoicing of soul, ever and anon, what His grace has wrought. Recall the words found in Eph. v., where we learn what Christ is doing for His Church, "that He might present it to Himself a glorious Church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish" (ver. 27); and remember He now labors in each individual saint to this end. He has taken us from off the dunghill to set us upon the throne of glory; and in that day, when in the full setting of the glory of His grace, in the Father's house, He shall present us to Himself "without blame before Him in love."

At once another responsive note proceeds from the lips of the King; for without doubt it is the Beloved that speaks. "As a lily among thorns, so is My love among the daughters" (ii. 2). This forceful contrast requires little explanation to make its meaning apparent. The lily is a thing of beauty and delicacy, the more clearly discerned because of its hard surroundings. The thorns bespeak barrenness, harshness and worthlessness, fit only for the burning. The lily refreshes, delights, and soothes; the thorns repel, pierce, and lacerate. Well, "*so* is My love among the daughters." To Him she was incomparable.

"A lily among thorns—a life in death!" All others

were, in comparison with her, worthless. She was the only one for Him, the object to be loved and admired. This is love's judgment; for here we have again the testimony of His affection, and in the next verse her response. Grace has wrought a wondrous transformation; and looking upon her who once was black, but now beautiful, the communication of His heart is uttered: "As a lily among thorns, so is My love among the daughters."

And what will *she* say? Love is not dumb; but there was such a fulness in Him that she finds it difficult to express it all. "As the apple tree among the trees of the wood, so is my Beloved among the sons." It matters little what tree is intended if we perceive the meaning of the spouse. It has been variously rendered as the citron-apple, the orange, and by some the pomegranate; but the point is this, that it is not only a tree which yields a cool shade and protection from the heat, but also refreshing nourishment for her panting soul. To her, then,

"Jesus was the tree of trees
Among a thousand groves."

It is said of the citron-apple that it is always fruitful. You will find on one tree at the same time blossoms, unripe and ripe fruit; so that the fruitage is continual. How well this accords with her thought of Him is easily perceivable. There was but *one* for Him. There was but *One* for her. All the yearnings of her heart found their satisfaction in Him. "I sat down under His shadow with great delight," she says, and His fruit was sweet to my taste. She seems to rush, as it were, into that delightful shade. Such a refuge it was, and such rest did she find there, that

“No mortal tongue can speak the bliss
That in His shade is given.”

And is not this the testimony of the soul when in communion with Christ? The spouse fed on His fruit, and with comfort and joy sat under His shade. May we do likewise!

Beloved, we know that Christ is laden with fruit—full of grace and truth. Whether we think of His *doings* whilst He was here flourishing as the fruitful tree in the midst of this great barren desert, or whether we listen to His *words* when He spoke of life, of deliverance, of His shepherd-care and the Father's love, or of glory and judgment, all demands our soul's adoring attention. However viewed, the sight of Christ is glorious. As He stands in all His endearing characters and relations to believers the sight is soul-absorbing. We can view Him undertaking our cause; becoming like unto those He would call brethren; suffering, bleeding, dying in our stead. We can behold Him risen for our justifying; ascending into heaven, there to appear in the presence of God for us; and there ever living to intercede for us. Have you found Him? Then sit down and feed upon these precious truths, and they *will* be sweet to your taste.

But more. She finds herself transported into “the house of wine,” where His love would produce its most precious things, and joy would overflow. There, as she looks up, she sees the banner floating over her, with *love* written on it. In the very abode of love she proves to the full that

“With love He marched, with love He led,
With love He armed my breast;
With love He drew, with love He fed,
With love He crowned the feast.”

Such a sense of love was overwhelming, and so she calls for the restoring cordials that would sustain her. "Stay me with flagons, comfort me with apples; for I am sick of (or wounded with) love. She rests satisfied in an ecstasy of joy, feeling that "His left hand is under my head, and His right hand doth embrace me." Fulness of communion this blissful repose foreshadows. And she would not have it disturbed. She was fearful lest some one should break in and bring it to an end by an untimely intrusion. Consequently, she charges the daughters of Jerusalem, "by the roes or by the hinds of the field" that they do nothing to awaken her love until He consented.

The graceful gazelles were creatures of innocence and beauty, and of great sensitiveness. They were easily put to flight. They dreaded scrutiny, and loved the secret glades of the forests. How beautiful her charge then! Genuine love and fellowship is retiring and shy. It is enjoyed in secret; but a little unwatchfulness will mar its beauty. The spouse coveted its continuance, and utters her charge that none intrude and cause her joy to depart.

Do we covet intercourse with the Lord Jesus? Then let us imitate the spouse. Fellowship can be easily broken. Then let us be very watchful over ourselves, as well as careful not to allow others to deprive us of its continued enjoyment. We must aim at maintaining communion, and can well say,

"Begone sin, Satan, *earthly toys*;
Far be ye from my heart;
Approach not to disturb my joys,
Nor cause my Lord depart."

Here ends what we can call the first canticle. It begins with the desire to have the kisses of His mouth; it

ends with the charge to her friends not to disturb the unrivaled joy, the hallowed quiet, the sanctified bliss of communion.

Chap. ii. 8—iii. 5.

We now enter upon a brief examination of the second canticle. Just a cursory study will show that its first subject is that of deliverance; for the spouse anticipates the moment of freedom and liberty when Jehovah shall truly be her strength and her song; and in language begotten of warm desire it is here expressed. The day of Jacob's trouble is to be sanctified to the house of Judah. By trial she shall be purged. By grace she shall again be brought consciously into relationship with the One for whose praise she was formed, but from whom she has so shamefully wandered (Jer. iii. 1). Awakened affection knows the deep blessedness of being with the Well-beloved. His voice reaches the ear of her soul, and her eyes are opened to beholding Him approaching.

Awaking out of slumber, as it were, a sound is heard, and she exclaims, "*The voice of my Beloved!*" The heart leaps at the sound of the voice of a friend; the pulse quickens as the accents fall upon the ear; and though the person be not seen, yet there instantly arises a vision of the one to whom the voice belongs. The expectant heart of the spouse immediately perceives her Lord approaching, not reluctantly, but with alacrity, with the swiftness and sureness of a young roe or hart. Yea, with the speed that love imparts, He bounds over every intervening obstacle, hastening to reach her "leaping upon the mountains, skipping upon the hills." There are no obstacles that love like His cannot surmount;

every hindrance is behind Him, and His breathings of love are heard.

“The voice of *my Beloved*,” she says, recognizing it intuitively, though the Speaker was not then seen. No other voice would have so aroused her. The voice of the stranger would not have attracted. To His voice her heart responds. Expectation quickens the hearing; and when we are truly desirous towards Christ, how quickly the accents of His voice are caught! Alas that the spouse, and we also, can so quickly lapse into indifference!

“*My Beloved*” are her words. She claims Him as her own; and surely, if our hearts aspire to Him, and are not faithless, it will be one continued enjoyment of His boundless love and grace.

And now He stands without. Behind the wall she discerns Him; she beholds Him looking through the window as He showed Himself with the sparkle of love on His countenance; and through the lattice she discovers Him glancing. Imagery, do you say? True, but how sweetly effective to realize the nearness of Christ! And for what purpose had He appeared? To give her the sweet invitation of love. “*Rise up, My love, My fair one, and come away*,” He calls. Away from Egypt’s bondage, as it were; away from the servitude of the iron-house; away from the dark regions of winter’s reign, into the warmth and joy of a never-ending summer—away, but with Him.

Tribulation had run its course, and now He appears to invite, and so to emancipate and deliver. She must respond—“*rise up*.” Winter’s night of sorrow and dreariness was to be succeeded by the ushering in of the day of sunshine, joy, and gladness. And the Well-beloved

backs up His invite with cogent reasons; for if unbelief can find excuses to justify itself, love can provide reasons to drive home its argument. "For, behold, 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-dove is heard in our land. The fig tree putteth forth her green figs, and the vines in blossom give forth a good smell" (vers. 11-12). Everything was inviting! There could be no reason for hesitation or fear. Ought it not to have sufficed that her King invited? Yet He urges and pleads for her company.

We know that in the history of Jehovah's dealings with His people they are to be allured into the wilderness, and there He will speak to her heart; the valley of Achor (trouble) becoming a door of hope; and from thence she will receive her vineyards (Hos. ii.); and there she is to sing as in the day when she came up out of Egypt. Here we are taught of His incomparable way of making known His faithful love to her, with the assurance of what she is to Him. He calls her to have communion with Himself, and repeats His invite, "Arise, My love, My fair one, and come away."

Fellowship with Jesus! Is it not joy unspeakable? "Arise," He says, and

"Faith, joy and love begin to stir,
And spread their odors high,"

when His voice is heard; for by His love He creates answering love. Fellowship here is but the prelude to the full joy that must follow; for as winter gives place to summer, so shall partial joy give place to full bliss, and longing desire shall be superseded by complete satisfaction. Oh, let *our* souls heed His invitation, and in the

secret of His presence we can pour forth our sonnets of gratitude and offer that praise which glorifies Him.

But the heart hears more. His address of endearing, importunate love continues pleading, as it were, for a sight of her countenance and a word from her lips—so wondrous is divine love. "O My dove," He entreats, thinking of her as a bird, shy, gentle and unassuming, hid away in the covert of cliff and rock, "let Me see thy countenance, let Me hear thy voice," assigning as the reason for this request that her voice was sweet, her countenance comely. Yes, sweet *to Him*. How immeasurably deep must that love be that gives expression to such an utterance! We could better understand such desires flowing from *her* heart; for, without controversy, *His* voice is sweet, *His* countenance is comely, radiant with loveliness. But more even than this shall yet be; for in the day of full restoration Jehovah will joy over her with singing, and will rest in His love (Zeph. iii.).

Dear saint of God, not less is His love towards us now; and already conscious of it,—the death of Christ the great convincing proof,—let us store our minds with His heartbreathings, that, through times of "winter" and of "rain," our souls may be responsive and true to Him whose love abides the same.

The coveting of undisturbed communion is but the natural desire, surely, of the heart that has heard such strains. But many are the hindrances that arise and check it. The spouse does covet, and utters, either as a prayer or a command, that the little foxes that spoil the vines might be taken away. The words, though spoken in a general way, imply a very particular desire. The little foxes, cunning and harmful, often devastated a vineyard; and how often have little sins, little failures, little

faults, been productive of robbing souls of the continuance of communion! Take away, we pray, every wayward thought, every worldly wish, every dangerous error, every untrue doctrine, that looks so broad and progressive; for these things hinder and destroy fruitfulness. Numerous are the little foxes; and remembering that the grapes are tender, let us join the spouse and ardently desire their removal. The fruits of grace and displays of worldliness do not flourish together. Far from us, then, may all that tends to rob us of the priceless boon of communion be put away!

Now, in an ecstasy of delight, she gives expression to that precious, that cheering word which has been reiterated by thousands of adoring hearts, "*My Beloved is mine, and I am His.*" More is to follow; but she has learnt, as it were, her first lesson. She will yet learn that it is her high privilege to reverse those words, and dwell upon the fact that *she* is fully His forever. Here we have the foundation of her peace and the source of her joy. Upon this foundation shall be erected an abiding edifice, and from this source shall flow a stream of unalloyed joy.

Nor is it a small thing she claims, though true. And the soul that by faith has appropriated Christ can also say so, and rejoice as it sings,

"Fade, fade, each earthly joy,
Jesus is mine."

"Christ in you the hope of glory" is the present portion of the believer; and do we not know from experience that our spiritual temperature is low *because our apprehension of Him is feeble*. Thoughts of self reign (little foxes these) where thoughts of Christ should be. "Abide in Me, and I in you" are our Lord's words; and truly "the Beloved is the head and front, the heart and soul,

of the Christian's delight when his heart is in its best state." Christ is indeed ours—our Saviour; and we are His—His ransomed, for He died to possess us.

"The gift unspeakable is given,
The grace of God has made Him mine;
And now, before both earth and heaven,
Lord, I will own that I am Thine."

The voice of her Beloved she had heard. Anticipatively she had seen Him coming, skipping upon the hills. His gracious invitation reached her heart. Responsively her heart expresses the fact that the Beloved was hers, and she was His, adding, "He feedeth among the lilies."

So she sees, and yearningly her heart desires Him to be actually present; and that earnest petition is breathed which tells of a blessed prospect and an early answer. The day would dawn, the shadows flee away, and at the first streak of twilight her Beloved would be there to welcome her. Over the mountains of division (Bether) she asks Him to come with the speed of a roe. The morning cometh, and deepening shadows remind of this; so look up. Many a hill seems oftentimes to be betwixt us and Christ, yet over them all He bounds to meet the yearnings of the heart, and Himself satisfy it.

But during the night, the season when the heart is educated in the ethics of His love, it is no uncommon experience to find a time of rest and bliss and satisfaction, when the heart rejoices in the conscious nearness of Christ, followed by depression and a deep sense of loss. And so with the Spouse. "By night on my bed I sought Him whom my soul loveth." The love remained; the joy had fled. There was no distance as to union with

her King. She retained the sense of what He was to her, but had lost what is so inconceivably precious—the abiding perception of His nearness. A kind of sloth often seems to overtake the heart that has been richly endowed with blessing. Many, very many of God's saints have been similarly afflicted.

But the loss is felt; and what a mercy that it is! To find Him whom she sought, practical energy combines with active love. Consequently she arises from off her bed and puts her resolve to "rise now and go about the city" into action. "I sought Him, but I found Him not," is her mournful refrain at first; for this treasure is more easily lost than recovered—lost through sloth, recovered through diligence. And it is well; for we more zealously guard what has cost some pains to obtain. She loved, but lost. She loved and sought. She loved, and sought, and found; for diligence shall be rewarded.

In the city, found by the watchmen, those appointed to care for its order and government, she inquires of them, "Saw ye Him whom my soul loveth?" Of their answer we have no intimation; and passing from them, her ardent longing is quieted. It may be that the broad ways and streets were not the places to find Him. Soon the Object of her quest is discovered. Oh, delighted heart! "I found *Him* whom my soul loveth;" and retaining Him, she brings Him into her mother's house (which mother is Israel) and there into the most secret chamber—her mother's chamber; for nothing but Christ consciously and fully enjoyed, we repeat, will satisfy the cravings of a heart set upon Him.

For, we must notice, it is not knowledge of Him she seeks; it is Himself she requires. The excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus our Lord sets the soul afire,

and then the energies are bent on winning Him who is already possessed.

Shall we grow cold and indifferent because assured of His acceptance, and slothfully rest in that? Jesus is the One whom our souls love. Let us aim at continuing in His love, for "the love of Jesus is another name for heaven." Nothing must displace Him in our hearts. He is the Object for our hearts, the Object of our hope, our all in all.

And once again, at the close of this little song, the spouse utters her charge, "O ye daughters of Jerusalem, by the roes or by the hinds of the field, stir not up nor awake my Love until He please." And until the day dawn, may our fervent desire be that nought occurs to break or mar our enjoyment of Christ.

Chap. iii. 6-v. 1.

Continuing our simple meditations, we now enter, as it were, the sanctuary, the abode of love, the place of intimacy and communion; for in this sweet canticle (chap. iii. 6-v. 1) we have an overflowing abundance of love's language, delight, and joy. We are first introduced to the glorious spectacle of the spouse emerging from out of the wilderness, suitably accompanied, carefully guarded; and on the other side the King is seen crowned. In the day of the gladness of His heart love must exceed; and meeting, He declares that she is indeed, in His eyes, beautiful, and precious to Him.

"*Who is this?*" is the exclamation. In the wilderness a procession appears. A palanquin is seen, surrounded with the marks of royalty and majesty. No king, however, is within it, for the word used is a feminine one;

but this is the King's provision for bringing His spouse safely across the barren sands of the wilderness. And as this gorgeous equipage wended its way along, the pillar of smoke that marked its course was redolent with the sweet savor of myrrh and frankincense, and every powdered perfume of the spice merchant—figures which are eloquent of all the virtues of death and life, whether in general or particular, of great David's greater Son.

The King made provision for bringing His own unto Himself; and He would, of course, do this in a way worthy of the love He bore her. Consequently our attention is directed to the litter upon which she is borne, and emphasis is laid upon the fact that it is "Solomon's own." There are charges committed to His servants, they have their duties to fulfil, responsibilities to perform; but there are things which the King commits to no one, for His love is jealous, and He only could adequately provide for her home-coming, so to speak, according to the dictates of that affection.

Some have seen in this litter, or palanquin, the ceremonies of the law; whilst others perceive that thereby is meant the gospel as the means employed to bring her to Himself. But we inquire not into these things now—they bear their own refutation. Fancy's flight leads to strange conclusions! Christ, in the excellency of His love,—and here we are on safe ground,—provides for the comfort and security of His earthly spouse, whilst she is being brought from the wilderness to stand by His side as queen arrayed in gold of Ophir (Psa. xlv.). And surely every provision would strike home to her heart, convincing of the certainty of the love of the Beloved, as the magnificence of them would loudly proclaim to her that His delight in her was full indeed.

“Behold His litter—Solomon’s own.” Forsaken had she been? No more should she be termed “Forsaken,” neither her land “Desolate.” And why? The answer is provided: “For the Lord delighteth in thee” (Isa. lxii. 4). His provisions here accord entirely with that.

All dangers are anticipated; so, not only is the couch provided, but the mighty of Israel are there: “Threescore valiant men are about it, of the mighty of Israel.” Amalek may appear with his hosts, but routed they shall be. The desert robbers, ever alert to find some unprotected traveler, shall find no opportunity here. The mighty ones are *about* this litter; they surround it; no part is unguarded. And these valiant defenders are veterans, expert in war. How keen-sighted is love! Not to the care of novices does He commit His dearest object. Experts in war are the guardians of the spouse. They feel their responsibility; they are watchful, for dangers are near: “Every man hath his sword upon his thigh, because of fear in the night.” A momentous charge was theirs! and so they are found always ready. One moment of unwatchfulness, a little of ease and indulgence, and much havoc might be wrought. “Because of fear in the night”—that is just the season of special difficulty. Dangers abound, so fear increases; not the fear of cowardice, but that fear that causes the sword to be drawn ready for use.

We turn aside and see this great sight, and for ourselves ponder that love which beseechingly says, “Feed My lambs;” that love that raises up chief men and guides—men who hazard their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ (Acts xv. 26)—men who are expert in the use of the sword, and who, conscious of the dangers of the way, hold it drawn, as it were, and are valiant for

the truth, earnestly contending for the faith. Let us think of the love that provided the threescore mighty men, and bless the Giver of gifts to His Church for the edification of its members. Paul in bonds rejoiced that the word of God was not bound (2 Tim. ii.); and would pray, though in bonds, for the power to speak boldly (Eph. vi. 20); for the truth of God is a priceless heritage. Sober and vigilant, then, must the servants of Christ be, that, holding fast the faithful Word, and being skillful in the use of it, they may both preserve others and be preserved (1 Tim. iv. 16). But we return.

Next we have a glowing description of the glorious chariot, or palanquin, made by Solomon, He only knowing what would meet His requirements. He comes forth crowned, the true Prince of Peace, not lowly now, but in glory and power, the true bridal day having nearly come. In the construction of this palanquin He uses the unrotting fragrant wood of Lebanon; silver for the pillars to hold up the canopy; gold for its base; purple for its seat; and the midst is paved with love from (not for) the daughters of Jerusalem. This last we can well understand as we remember that when Jerusalem is happy, then shall the land rejoice; for all shall be satisfied with the breasts of her consolations, and be delighted with the brightness of her glory (Isa. lxvi.). So they have an interest, a deep, abiding interest, in the King and His spouse. "Rejoice ye with Jerusalem," says Isaiah, "and be glad with her, all ye that love her" (lxvi. 10). "They love Thee uprightly" is the declaration of chapter i., and hence their hearts' affections find expression towards both King and spouse, and fill the interior with the sweet incense of love.

Many thoughts cluster round this royal carriage: we

might speak of the fragrant wood, reminding us of the incorruptibility of Christ's humanity; of those pillars of silver, suggesting that divine grace forms the props that uphold the canopy that shelters her; of that gold of which the floor is composed, foreshadowing that divine righteousness must be the base of all blessing; and of that seat of purple, a truly royal seat, which could only be obtained by the blood-shedding of the Holy Victim,—only on such a ground could she be found in association with Christ.

But in the midst of all, One forms the central figure, and commands attention. The daughters of Zion received the word to go forth and behold King Solomon crowned. The day of His espousals, of victory and triumph, having come, Christ, the One here prefigured, issues forth to meet His spouse. "*Behold King Solomon.*" The One once pierced, the One once rejected, is to be hailed with the glad "Hosanna, blessed is He that cometh in the name of the Lord." Already, then, the heart has given utterance to that confession, "He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities" (Isa. liii.) .Grace will have wrought gloriously in the soul of Israel. "Behold, I have refined thee, but not with silver; I have chosen thee in the furnace of affliction;" and thus prepared for Him, the King comes to receive her unto Himself.

"Come see, believe, admire, adore,
Heaven-glad'ning homage pay."

So the King goes forth; and meeting His spouse, He once again tells with delight of her worth to Him. Such is the character of divine love. He contemplates her, and finds there an object suited to His heart, seeing what

no one else could see; and then, to mark His full admiration, He describes minutely her features. True, she has much to learn of herself; but this is His inimitable way of teaching her.

“Behold, thou art fair, My love; behold, thou art fair,” are His words of tender affection; words which, uttered before (chap. i. 15) have now an added significance; for she knows Him better. It is not that she is yet seen arrayed in glory. That will assuredly follow (Isa. lxi. 10); and then, when openly the beauty of the Lord our God is upon her, shall it be that,

“Whole justified, in perfect dress,
Nor justice stern, nor fiery law,
Can in thy robe of righteousness
Discern the smallest spot or flaw.”

She was fair—*He* had made her so, and by His love operative in her heart would yet produce further conformity to Himself. Oh, think of the mighty affection that could speak to one who had been so unfaithful, going after many lovers (Jer. iii. 1); but, drawn back with the cords of love, she learns that she is precious in His sight. Wonders, indeed, love and grace can work! In this way was the fairness produced. Her confession, “I am black,” told of her condition by nature and practice apart from Him; but divine love perceives comeliness; for in that day no lie shall be in her mouth, she shall be blameless (Rev. xiv. 5).

“No artful curls, no pampered hair,
The sorry pride of mortal clay,
Can parallel the heavenly air
Of thy well-ordered walk and way.”

Divine love is unchangeable; and so it is no uncommon experience amongst the saints of God to have these

words of love pressed home upon the soul with irresistible might by the Spirit in times of depression and despondency. And what an uplifting is effected! Self-occupied, the ear grows heavy, and the heart weary; for what can be found there to cause rejoicing? Conscious of what is all too true,—sad failure and shortcoming,—yet when the voice of Jesus is heard in accents tender and soothing, “Behold, thou art fair,” we can but reply, “Thou sayest it, Lord!” and the soul o’erleaps itself in praise. Injurious it may be to receive praise after this fashion from man; but when it is the verdict of His all-seeing eye, of the One who knows all things, the effect must be to rejoice the heart, enlighten the eyes, and yet humble to the very dust; for are we not conscious at the same time that it is of His grace—not of what we are in ourselves? And yet another result must follow, for His love must be the living source of all that flows to Him. And here we quote the heart-breathing, illustrative of this, of one who underwent much for her Lord:

“And am I then to blame?
 He’s always in my sight;
 And having once inspired the flame,
 He always keeps it bright.
 For this they smite me and reprove—
Because I cannot cease to love.”

Yes, in His peerless way He keeps the flame bright, exercising the transforming power of His love. How prone are we with our “dout’s” to try to reach and educate the heart, and miserably fail! By the positive knowledge of His delight in her, the spouse is instructed. Despondent saint, listen for Christ’s voice, and in words of love that hath a most vehement flame you shall hear your Lord’s sweet verdict repeated, “Behold, thou art fair.”

And after the general declaration, He describes her minutely. From behind the veil that concealed her beauty, her eyes shone out radiant with purity, constancy, and love. "Thine eyes are doves' within thy veil," He says, adding emphasis to words expressed before (chap. i. 15). Her abundant tresses are "as a flock of goats that eat of mount Gilead." The Syrian goats are black, with long hair, and mount Gilead is "a wide tableland tossed about in wild confusion of undulating downs, clothed with rich grass throughout." Hence this figurative language, as portraying the beauty and luxuriance of what is a woman's glory (1 Cor. xi. 15). She possessed it in full measure.

No mark of beauty escapes love's eye. Her teeth pass in review, and are likened to a flock of shorn ewes coming up from the washing. Their whiteness, completeness, regularity, all making for perfect beauty, are conveyed by the terms used. He who had chosen her tells her of her beauty to Him.

"Thy lips are like a thread of scarlet, and thy speech comely." Lips and speech are connected, and, as sanctified, are both beautiful and pleasant. Far otherwise was it when "the poison of asps" was under them. Comely speech is a production of grace, a fruit of redemption, and flows through those lips consecrated to His service.

Her temples are next spoken about, and compared to a piece of pomegranate, delicately-hued, the beauty and freshness of which is partially hid by her veil. Love pierces that obscurity, and discerns the full perfection of what is only faintly adumbrated through it. To her, He addresses all this, not about her to others. The seemliness of her telling forth His glories to others, it is easy

to apprehend; but the love that so labors to acquaint the spouse with the full story of her beauty to Him, forming full assurance within, is beyond all knowing. It is the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge.

And more follows. Love desist? No, not until all is told. Avalanche-like, when once started it must go to the very bottom, gathering strength as it proceeds. Like a mountain torrent it gushes forth, and then rests in a placid lake as though satisfied, quieted. So He proceeds to make mention of her strength and her affection; the one under the figure of a tower, the other by reference to her breasts. The bowed-down neck is slavery and dejection; but, though once chained in slavery, the tower-like neck now bespeaks liberty and emancipation. The many trophies hung round the tower of David told of mighty victories won; but that upright neck tells of triumphs accomplished by mercy and truth being bound about it (Prov. iii. 3). Spiritual victories are gained and spiritual liberty maintained in this way. The bucklers are shields, "all shields of mighty men;" for that with which we fight is also our defensive weapon. When we walk as freed by the truth, we are a source of strength to others also; for strong is the one that is wrapped in truth—verily "a tower built for an armory." Such do mighty deeds, crucifying the flesh, casting away the attractions of the world, resisting the devil, bringing every thought into subjection to Christ.

How satisfied the King is with His spouse His minute prescription of her declares. "Thy two breasts are like two young roes that are twins," He says. Beauty and fruitfulness are here portrayed. "Like two young roes feeding among the lilies"—uniting the grace and charm of her person with the strength and fulness of her love.

In the delight of His heart, He seems to answer the request she uttered (ii. 17). There she urged, "Be Thou like a young hart or roe upon the mountains of division." Here He announces, "Until the day break and the shadows flee away I will get me to the mountains of myrrh and the hill of frankincense" (ver. 6). For we regard this as a poetical description of the spouse. In chap. iii. 6, she is spoken of as perfumed with myrrh and frankincense. All His virtues and excellences centre in and, in measure, are manifested by her. So His answer here assures her that during the long hours of the night He would be with her. It surely is a promise of comfort, in keeping with the incomprehensible story of what she is to Him. Christ loves to dwell with the humble, true, and devoted soul. Of each one that aspires after Him, and, having His commandments, keep them, Jesus says, "I will love him, and will manifest Myself unto him" (John xiv. 21). And for such the enjoyment of His love and care shall continue through the night, to the day of glory.

And how suited was she to the heart of her King! He again shows that His estimate had not been lightly, meaninglessly spoken; for He confirms in the most deliberate manner what He had previously addressed to her. "Thou art fair," He had said. "Thou art all fair," He repeats, and adds, "there is no spot in thee." He saw what was effected by grace divine, and consequently so testifies. No other heart would have so read. He discerns the result of the activities of grace, and that is indeed fair and lovely in His sight.

And does not such a testimony go far beyond any human conception? for, consider who speaks, and to whom the words are spoken. *He* speaks upon whose word

worlds are dependent—He for whose glory all things were made—He who is in very deed the Lord of life and glory. And these were words spoken to one who was, in herself, conscious of much past failure (i. 6), and equally aware that she had no title from herself to any such testimony. Here is Balaam's prophecy again, uttered anew, and, as it were, fulfilled. "He hath not beheld iniquity in Jacob, neither hath He seen perverseness in Israel" (Num. xxiii. 21).

How the dross has been cleared away, the blackness, the wilfulness, the obstinacy! "Thou art all fair, My love; there is no spot in thee." A high encomium indeed is this. No spot, nor wrinkle, nor any such thing, seen in her, but the very embodiment of beauty and loveliness to Him! Every spot has been washed away, every wrinkle removed, every flaw righted. Self-culture may give a *pleasing exterior, but many a spot remains. Many a flaw may be outwardly righted, but hideous wrinkles are yet to be seen.* But His grace effectuates all, working by love; and He who has chosen her for Himself fits her to be the suited companion of His glory. As the moon reflects the glory of the sun, so shall she yet reflect the glory of the King. What depth lies in those words of His, "As the lily among thorns, so is my Love among the daughters"!

And, dear fellow-believer, we may surely drink in the spirit of these words; for what He will presently accomplish in His earthly spouse He is now working in us. Have you never heard Him say so much to you? Then an ecstasy of joy awaits you when those tender breathings thrill your soul. You may blush as you think of naughty, unchristlike ways: for who would feel like justifying such doings, or excusing them in the presence of

such love? Who would not feel like putting them far away, and earnestly desiring to deserve the testimony rendered, attributing all the glory to our great and patient Teacher? Truly Christ has a method all His own for drawing to Himself.

Her company is desired by Him; hence His loving invitation to her to come with Him from Lebanon: "With Me from Lebanon, spouse; with Me from Lebanon." *With Me* are the emphatic words to which love would impart emphasis; and answering affection would appreciate this. Lebanon was a border mountain between the outside world and the Promised Land; and we may regard this invitation as a desire for her to take possession of what, by title, already belonged to her. And much she would escape; for behind lay the arid wilderness, with its toil, its scarcity, its entanglements. But Lebanon was beautiful, and the scenery beheld from it grand. Porter says: "After Egypt's marshy plains, and Sinai's naked cliffs, and the parched desert of dreary Arabia, need we wonder that when Moses looked on Lebanon,—its snow-crowned peaks towering to heaven, its sides all waving with foliage,—he should have thus breathed forth to God the desire of his heart: "I pray Thee, let me go over, and see the good land that is beyond Jordan, that goodly mountain, and Lebanon" (Deut. iii. 25). And looking from Amana, Shenir, and Hermon, peaks in the Anti-Lebanus range, the land would lay spread out below, and with Him she was to enter it, leaving behind the haunts of the lions and the leopards. "*With Me*," He urges. What weight that should have with her! and those words are intensified by the acknowledgment that, though from such spots, she was nevertheless spotlessly fair.

But why should He be so anxious for her to accom-

pany Him? Why so solicitous for her presence? He proceeds to acquaint her: "Thou hast ravished My heart, My sister spouse." Omit the little word "my" in italics, and we have the two titles, expressive of a double relationship, brought together. Now, speaking reverently, we can say that He was deeply in love with her, enchained with bonds of beauty. In a tenderly endearing way He speaks, and by His words calls her attention to the relationships which *He* acknowledges. *She* makes no claim. By natural tie, she was His "sister;" by grace, she was His "spouse;" for she stood in that relationship by His own choice. How closely He seeks to bind her to Himself!

She had captured His heart, so to speak. "Thou hast unhearted Me" is His declaration. It is passing strange, such love! The force of the expression we can gather as we remember what He went through to obtain her; and by those means the truth was impressed indelibly upon her soul that many waters could not quench His love. He endured the cross, despising the shame, to possess her. It is the picture of the treasure hid in a field, to obtain which the discoverer sells all that he has; for, of course, his heart is bent upon having that. Is it true that the test of love is what it is willing to do for its object? Then, unfathomably deep was His indeed!

But here it is of her worth and beauty that He speaks. And this divine Encomiast gives utterance to words of truth, not flattery. It could not possibly be otherwise, though we may fail to comprehend their fulness. Notwithstanding, "drink abundantly;" for great refreshment is here for the soul. It is the telling out of the discoveries of grace. Of such praises it must be said that

"Love gave them energy—love gave them birth."

Do the words seem to express too much? Do they appear to you, cold heart, to savor of extravagance? If so, we are again taught that they do not overreach the mark; for their deliberate repetition confirms the first utterance; and the addition, "with *one* of thine eyes, with *one* chain of thy neck," shows that more could be added.

"One glance of thy believing eye,
One golden chain of thy fair neck,
Part of thy form has ravished me;
How must the whole my heart affect!"

We surely must learn from this how beautiful in His eyes are the effects of grace. The traits of the Christlike character are despised by man, but highly prized by Him who begets them; and it is *Him* we have to please. What earnestness and carefulness, then, these breathings should formulate in our hearts—earnestness, in seeking the grace that works such wondrous results; carefulness, lest we should, by the allowance of unseemly ways, hinder the transforming process, and mar the manifestations of Christ in our walk. All the forces of nature combine to bring forth fruit to perfection; sun, rain, wind—all help. So the forces of grace and love unite to produce that which is well-pleasing in His sight; and this is consummated for us when we are presented "holy and unblameable and unproveable in His sight" (Col. i. 22); and that our practical walk may conform with this hope, may we "be diligent that we be found of Him in peace, without spot, and blameless" (2 Peter iii. 14).

Continuing love's eulogy, the King commends the love of His sister spouse, esteeming it more pleasant and refreshing than wine; He praises her graces, which were laden with fragrance for Him more precious than all spices; her speech He fully appreciates, likening her lips

to the droppings of the honeycomb; to Him her thoughts were of value, for He says, "Honey and milk are under thy tongue;" and lastly, He commends all that surrounded her—her works, the adornment of a godly woman (1 Tim. ii. 10); and, as catching the perfume-laden air from Lebanon, He declares, "And the smell of thy garments is like the smell of Lebanon."

What volumes of love are here! She had spoken of His love, and yearned for deeper manifestations of it (chap. i. 2); but, think you, she ever expected such an expression as this? It is the truth that "a believer loves Christ above all, and all of Christ;" yet the merit lies, not in their love, but in His; for His love is the cause of theirs. "How fair is thy love!" He says, thus showing that when that is displayed of which He is the procuring cause, it is fair and lovely and precious to Him. Would she not own that she loved Him because He first loved her? And with her we can now in spirit unite and bless His name for the fact here recorded that our love, which seems so mean, so petty, so frail, that it will not bear any comparison with His, is yet sweet to Him.

And His words intimate even more; for, luxuriating in it, He emphasizes His former remark by this: "How much better is thy love than wine!" No earth-born pleasure could afford Him the joy of her heaven-begotten affection. The juice of Eschol's grapes would bear no comparison with the taste of this. Her love was better—how much better!—than wine. His love was that to her. Her love was that to Him. Cold-hearted, critical Simon, Pharisee that he was, was indeed surprised that Jesus should allow a woman who was a sinner to touch Him. He neither knew the forgiving love that was better than wine to that poor sin-laden woman, nor the responding

love that was so acceptable to the Forgiver. The Pharisee's feast provided no joy for Jesus; but the tears, the kiss, the ointment, the fruit of love, were intensely sweet to Him (Luke vii.).

Let us set no estimate of our own upon our love, but yet let us mark for our heart's delectation the way the Lord speaks. Estimated by its strength, our love may be as naught; but He reckons according to its character, its sincerity, its unfeignedness; and so, first love, that is wholly His, brooking no rival, is to Him incomparable. What cheering words are these, dear saints of God—who can tell all their sweetness?—that our Lord Jesus prizes the love that flows from redeemed hearts, and finds refreshment in that affection!

There is also His word of praise for her graces. The fragrant perfume that was wafted from her to Him told of the inward work that had been accomplished, of the purity and peace that reigned there; and not all the wealth of Arabia's spicery combined could contribute a sweetness comparable to it. That sweet savor is but the reproduction of Christ in the soul; and this, in all its fragrance, rises to the throne above. The love, joy, peace, meekness, long-suffering, and every fruit of the Spirit, are esteemed more in heaven than all the virtues upon which men lay a value. Then, upon what are we bent? What is the goal before us? Is Christ our goal? Is it to be altogether pleasing to Him that our energies are devoted? Just calmly think of the condescending love: He is gratified when faith is manifested, when love is displayed, when long-suffering is exercised, when tribulation is patiently endured. Of these graces the ointment is compounded that sends forth the rich odor so exquisitely according to His liking.

Her words, too, are extremely pleasant. This we learn from His reference to her lips dropping as the honeycomb—that is, perfection of sweetness. These are not the words of idle, worldly conversation. Ah, how many of such does this kind of commendation of His recall!—words that we are perfectly sure could not be to Him as the droppings of the honeycomb. The spouse would love to speak of the altogether lovely One; and assuredly the words addressed to Him and about Him would issue from the very depths of the heart. Such words are sweet beyond measure to the Well-beloved.

Again, let us apply this word. Here is an incentive to cultivate a conversation suited to the ear of Christ: and for this there must be the abundance of Christ in the heart. Then will it well up and delight Him; edifying, too, those who might hear..

Meditation should precede speech; and it is by dwelling in quiet contemplation on the one glorious theme that a goodly store of spiritual thoughts is laid up; and such are compared to honey and milk. The unspoken word is under the tongue. But the result of having them there is that the drop, drop, drop, of the honeycomb follows. The poverty of our speech often proves the lack of meditation, and reveals the barrenness of soul within. Honey for refreshment, and milk for food, must, when under the tongue, first sustain and bless the owner; and then, in issuing forth, effect the double purpose of gratifying the heart of Jesus and ministering grace to the hearers. It may be that we shall read afresh, in the light of those precious sayings of our Lord, that exhortation, "Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but that which is good to the use of edifying" (Eph. iv. 29).

"The smell of thy garments is like the smell of Leba-

non." Now if there be first the flowing forth of the perfume of inwrought sanctification, the outward life will accord. The garments are what outwardly characterize an individual—the every-day doings of life. What a testimony, then, is this! Odoriferous plants in abundance grew on Lebanon, and emitted a fragrant smell that was often carried a considerable distance on the breeze. To this the King likens the smell of the garments of His spouse. Her actions were perfumed with the breath of heaven. Remember, it is His estimation; and, beloved saint of God, how does it appeal to us? Are we satisfied with our doings? Even now there may be the remembrance of actions which sent forth a stinking smell, savoring of the flesh or of Egypt. But He loves confession. It is an action well-pleasing in His sight; and let this truth encourage us—Christ finds in the lives of His saints that which He can praise. Love's language is, when describing her every-day life, "The smell of thy garments is as the smell of Lebanon" (ver. 11). How comes this about? Christ was hers, and the doctrine tells us, "They that are Christ's have crucified the flesh, with the affections and the lusts" (Gal. v. 24).

But the King's commendation is not exhausted. Figure upon figure is used to express His knowledge and appreciation of and delight in His spouse. And how significant are the figures used! "A garden inclosed is my sister spouse, a spring shut up, a fountain sealed." Gardens in the East were often surrounded by walls, or hedges of thorns, effectually barring admission to them; thus making them places of repose and communion, where the owners could walk in secrecy, fearing no molestation from without. Shut off from the wilderness around, such a garden was wholly for the possessor. To such a gar-

den the King compares His spouse, as entirely His. Not only were her words and acts and graces precious to Him, but herself. Like an inclosed garden He views her, to which He alone has access; and she declares herself to be this for Him (ver. 16). Destructive beasts were barred from entering, and fruitfulness was found within: for, not only is the exclusion of evil necessary, but we want the activities of grace, the working of the Holy Spirit in the heart—shut off *from* the world, inclosed *for* Christ.

And she was “a spring shut up.” Springs were valuable possessions in those Eastern lands, often covered up, sometimes built over, and access to them was by some secret door or passage. The thought here set forth is that of hidden freshness in life, which He so much appreciates.

The spring was His, and hence the fountain must be; and as the former was shut up, so this is sealed. How incomprehensible is this to the untaught, who know not the secrets of communion, and judge of fruitfulness only by what is manward—alas, all too often but the energy of nature untempered by grace! The hidden comes first—what is public emanates from that. Oh, to have, according to the words of the Beloved here, a heart undivided for Him! then, indeed, like Mary of Bethany, there will first be the sitting at His feet (Luke x. 39), and then the anticipation of His heart’s yearning (John xii. 7). Truly, they serve best who commune most. The King lets her know His appreciation of her, as He speaks of “inclosed,” “shut up,” “sealed,” that He regarded her as truly separated to Himself.

What an enumeration of the beautiful and fragrant products of nature, as expressive of her fruitfulness (vers. 13–15)! She was a veritable garden of delights; for He

says, "Thy plants (or shoots) are a paradise of pomegranates, with pleasant fruits." The pomegranate, a luscious fruit filled with seeds, is the picture of fruitfulness (Ex. xxviii. 33). Grace was active indeed! And in the various plants and spices which follow we have set out the varied displays of grace.

Not indigenous to Palestine, some plants had been introduced from the East; and of the spices, some were obtained by using the knife to cause the fragrant, preserving balm within to exude. Frankincense is supposed to have been brought from Arabia; spikenard and aloes, from India; and myrrh was obtained by exudation.

And what lessons are here! The fruit of the Spirit is not natural to the human heart; its manifestations are like heavenly exotics; and how needed is the hand of the Gardener! "From Me is thy fruit found." It is common knowledge that the most fragrant virtues of the saints are not produced without the use of "the knife" (John xv.). It may wound and pain, but is nevertheless a necessity. Here adversity does indeed justify itself. The outer bark of worldly hopes and aspirations has to be pierced, and then flows forth the preserving myrrh, with other precious perfumes—"all the chief spices."

He likens her to "camphire (or henna), with spikenard plants." To a *cluster* of henna flowers the spouse had compared her Beloved (chap. i. 14). In this inclosed garden grew the henna, with the precious spikenard. In Oriental language, the henna was a love-flower; and suitably is it linked here with the plant that produces what is so costly. Love is not far separated from what is of great price. So much we gather from the woman that poured her love-offering over the head and feet of Jesus. Here is love and its fruit.

But she was also as spikenard and saffron. Of ointments, the costliest was the spikenard; and of perfumes, saffron was reputed one of the finest. This latter is said to be obtained from the crocus flower, which is by many believed to be the one meant by the "rose of Sharon," mentioned in chap. 1. What delighted Him came from her garden. Grace permitted her to say, "I am the rose (crocus) of Sharon;" and now He indorses her statement, enumerating it along with the products of her garden.

In the next phrase, we learn that "calamus and cinnamon, with all trees of frankincense," were there. From Ex. xxx. 23, 34, we learn that the first two were used in the composition of the holy anointing oil, and that frankincense was one of the ingredients of the incense which set forth the moral excellencies and perfections of Christ her King, manifested in the power of the Holy Spirit. What pertained to Him, in perfect love He applies to her. "*All trees of frankincense*" were there; and remembering the import of this sacred spice, we can the better understand His delight and pleasure in her. Thus, when what characterized Christ is displayed, we are a sweet savor of Him to God. The manifestation may be feeble, compared with the original, but He sees it fully developed, and gives the deepest significance to it. Only from those who are His can this sweet savor arise. Acts of kindness, moral living, etc., in which deluded men profess to see Christ manifested, however valuable in themselves, rise not to God as a sweet savor, coming, as they do, from unrenewed hearts, not as fruits of the faith that honors Him (Heb. xi. 6), and in whom the spirit of disobedience now works (Eph. ii. 2). "*All trees of frankincense*" were in the inclosed garden:—the virtues of Christ are seen in the saints' when walking in the Spirit.

The psalmist, in dilating upon the wondrous glory of the exalted Messiah the King, anointed with the oil of gladness above His fellows, says, "All Thy garments smell of myrrh and aloes and cassia out of the ivory palaces" (Psa. xlv. 8); and she who was to be queen, forgetting her own people and becoming "a garden inclosed" for Him, has the "myrrh and aloes, with all the chief spices," associated with herself by her Lord. Precious token of love was that when Nicodemus came with his hundred pounds' weight of myrrh and aloes to embalm the body of the One whom He had but timidly followed, but whose death now disclosed the depths of his affection. These grew in the garden of the spouse; they grew for Him, and at the fit moment would be the sweet token of her answering love, as "sweet-smelling myrrh."

And now we have the result that follows from being in such blessedly close association with the Beloved. For Him she is a fountain sealed, but becomes likewise "a fountain in gardens, a well of living waters, and streams from Lebanon." She is the means of watering and blessing others—the medium whereby His good things are diffused around.

Grace received cannot be locked away or shut in; and the words of the Lord come to us, as we meditate on this portion, that out of the belly of those who believe on Him shall flow rivers of living water, such having within a well of water—living water indeed, for it springs up unto everlasting life (John iv. 14; vii. 38). From whence did these living waters come? Who is the source of them? Jeremiah tells us, "the Lord is the fountain of living water" (chap. xvii. 13). There, Judah had forsaken her Lord; but, as we read of her in Canticles, how well is the word of Isaiah fulfilled, "Thou shalt be like a watered

garden, and like a spring of water, whose waters fail not" (lviii. 11)!

The spouse is compared to flowing streams, a well, and a fountain in gardens. Given in the reverse order, it is plain that the outward blessing is traced upwards to its source. Let us begin there. View that eternal snow on Lebanon's lofty summit, and behold the beginning of many a flowing stream—some open, some underground. How fittingly emblematic are these of the unseen streams of grace and refreshment that issue from the throne of the Eternal! And as the fresh flowing waters find a lodgment in some prepared recess, so do these waters from on high find an abiding place within the believer—a *well* of living waters. Not to remain there inactive, as it were, but rising, as water to its source, and, overflowing, become "rivers of living water." The believer is, then, verily a fountain in gardens, causing fruitfulness to abound. What beautiful accord is here! The never-failing snows on Lebanon provided supplies for many a fountain. Our God, the Jehovah of Israel, is the living source of the waters that fail not.

And shall there be no response to this? That were impossible. Let but the love of Jesus be grasped, let His voice be heard in the soul, and then, whatever hastens the consummation of our hope, whatever will help towards pleasing Him, is welcomed. Yes, "sweet are the uses of adversity" even; but it is only as there is divine intelligence that the soul can, in any measure, glory in tribulation—*knowing* that tribulation worketh patience—a "spice" quite according to His heart.

What is the response of the spouse? The King has said in His love-breathings that she was a garden, and that in it were plants rare and precious. Then let the

spices flow forth. What will help to that end? Not a dormant atmosphere—then the air might be scentless; but blow, contrary winds! “Awake, O north wind; and come, thou south; and blow upon my garden!” Thus she calls, ere inviting her Beloved to come into His garden. “*My garden,*” she says, as she calls upon the winds to blow upon it. Could she appeal to the winds to blow upon His garden? When, however, the plants of her garden yield their fruit, then the invitation is given, and “my” becomes “His;” for she was the garden, and He was the possessor, and consequently the pleasant fruits were His.

We have cold and rain connected with the north wind (Prov. xxv. 23; Job xxxvii. 9), and warmth attributed to the south (Job xxxvii. 17). Contrary winds producing good; how emblematic of the trials and afflictions of the pathway sanctified by the Holy Spirit! The winds do not produce the spices; they aid in their outflow. In nature, the winds, by motion, hasten the circulation of the sap, and so are helpful to the tree in this as well as in bringing rain and heat. In the spiritual world, trials, difficulties, and persecution, beget patience, and help to strengthen and develop faith, hope, and love—perfumes very acceptable to the heavenly Gardener.

Travelers have recorded some remarkable instances of trees—vines especially—showing a wondrous growth during storms; and that symbolizes well the energy of faith put forth to meet the blasts. Lebanon’s cedars more firmly cling to the rocks when the shaking is over. Trials call forth faith, and trust, and prayer; then, “Awake, O north wind; and come, thou south; blow upon my garden, that the spices thereof may flow forth!”

Thus the spouse desires the diffusion of the spices,

and that stands for the open, manifest display of the fruit of the Spirit. Then the invitation is given, "Let my Beloved come into His garden and eat His pleasant fruits." They were His; for apart from Him no fruit could be borne.

No sooner does she invite than the answer comes, "I am come into My garden, My sister spouse," owning the truth of what she had said, and sealing all as His with "*My*." And what an occupation had been His! for the words intimate that all this time He had been getting delight and refreshment from His garden:

"I have gathered My myrrh with My spice;
I have eaten My honeycomb with My honey;
I have drunk My wine with My milk."

Precious, sweet, nourishing things He found there. He gathered for His own delectation of her graces, and ate and drank of the sweets of love's providing. What condescension for Him to speak in this way!

It is a wondrous and surprising thought that Christ is delighted with what is produced in us. But the actings of grace are very surprising. Do we not wonder how He can have any delight in us at all? Would not the harlot of Samaria wonder with a greater surprise than that caused by the fact that a Jew should ask a drink of a Samaritan, when she learnt *who* it was that spake to her, and knew Him as the one who could tell her all things that ever she did? And how delighted was Christ with the result of that interview! Tired, He reached the well; refreshed, He went up to the city. "I have drunk My wine with My milk."

The first results of grace must be His. The spouse invites Him to partake. The King invites others to

share His joy. "Eat, O friends; drink, yea, drink abundantly, of love" (chap. vi., R. V., margin). Those are called blessed who have a part in the marriage supper of the Lamb (Rev. xix.), and it is the same spirit here. His friends He would have share His joy. Those are His friends who rejoice with Him; and in words before quoted He says, "Rejoice . . . that ye may suck and be satisfied with the breasts of her consolations; that ye may milk out, and be delighted with the abundance of her glory" (Isa. lxv. 19; lxvi. 11). He rejoices, and they rejoice with Him.

May the Lord help us to enter into the wonders of His transforming love, that, animated by one desire, we may know how to suffer joyfully until we see His face in glory, and there learn perfectly the story of all His love and grace.

Chaps. v. 2-viii. 4.

We were noticing, in our contemplation of the third canticle, the matchless way in which the King assured His spouse of her preciousness to Him—of His full delight in her; and she learnt from His own lips that He much desired her presence. In this, the fourth song, we learn indeed that she could change, but that He was unchangeable; that His love was equal to every test—neither coldness nor indifference could quench it. How wonderful His affection! How remarkable her slowness and sloth!

For our opening verse is a confession of slothfulness. "I sleep, but my heart waketh." Assured of His love, she allowed that to induce carelessness; and sleep ensued when there should have been vigilance and real enjoyment of the Beloved. The assurance of being loved

is much; the enjoyment of it is much more: and with nothing short of this would He be contented. But this is not, alas, an unique experience; for how often spiritual ecstasy seems to be succeeded by spiritual torpor, the soul seeming content to rest upon what has been imparted.* It turns in upon itself, and consequently, first missing the exquisite joy of communion, has to learn in a painful way not to rest in happy experiences, but just to have Christ as the Object of the life.

But sensibility had not entirely gone. "I sleep, *but my heart waketh.*" A voice was heard, that voice that was once so quickly caught inviting away to regions of blissful enjoyment after the long winter season. "Rise up, My love, My fair one, and come away," is again heard issuing an invitation. "I sleep,"—alas that it was all too true, as seen from her behaviour to her Beloved (ver. 3),—"but my heart waketh." Blessed fact! presently to be fully awake when dull sloth shall have been thrown aside, and by her loss she is roused to action! And where Christ is prized, the loss of intimacy with Him is keenly felt. Could it be otherwise? The heart that misses Him not, is one that has never heard His voice, never felt Him to be indispensable, never said, "*This is my Beloved, and this is my Friend.*"

"It is the voice of my Beloved that knocketh." In tones unmistakable He knocked at her heart's door, and in the fulness of His love pleaded for admission. His accents of love were heard, and, using every term of endearment, He invites her to communion with Himself. "Open to Me, My sister, My love, My dove, My undefiled." Surely here is an irresistible appeal. All these

[* The manna laid by, unused, stank the next day, Exod. xvi. 17-20. ED.]

terms, except the last, He had addressed to her before; and now, in combination with the others, He mentions her perfection—"My undefiled," or "perfect one," putting into a title the outpourings of His love in chap. iv. Had He not said, "Thou art all fair, My love; there is no spot in thee" (ver. 7)?

Oh, moment of supreme heart-joy when Jesus invites to communion! And note the many relationships He puts forth: "My sister," the natural relationship; "My love," the object of His choice; "My dove," the constant one; "My undefiled," the very embodiment of all purity and loveliness—Mine altogether. What more could He say? How desirous He was to be with her His tenderly-moving language plainly indicates, and it would seem that, surely, He would get an *immediate* response. But no; not even when He tells her of what He had undergone to get to her: "For My head is filled with dew, My locks with the drops of the night."

He had waited long; He had suffered much; and now what answer from within awaits Him? Could she refuse His appeal? Could she slight such love? Must not indifference give way before love and grace like this? From within comes the excuse, "I have put off my coat: how shall I put it on? I have washed my feet: how shall I defile them?" Thus the most trivial things are allowed to hinder what she, when in her proper condition, most highly prized. The slight exertion of robing herself was too much for her to undertake just then; and think of the sloth that could speak of defiling the feet by walking across the chamber to open to Him! Not for His sake would she defile her feet; it was too much trouble for her to array herself for Him. Oh, base ingratitude! but truly she was her own enemy, robbing her

heart of the inestimable joy of Christ's presence, and for which she must presently justly suffer.

But individual experience testifies to the truth of this. How like the spouse we each are!—so prone to go asleep, becoming indifferent to all the claims the love of the Beloved imposes upon us! How often do we find that bodily indulgence, carnal ease, take the place of spiritual communion! How often do we seem to remind the Lord that His invitations are premature, unseasonable! and the wondrous story of His wonderful love fails for the moment to arouse us out of our lethargy. Excuses come easy to us. Not that love is absent, nor yet want of desire; but, seeking our own things, we are negligent of His voice, and in our way say:

“My clothes are off, my nap is sweet,
How shall I rise undressed?
How shall I stain my new-washed feet?
Excuse me,—let me rest.”

When Jesus speaks, it is out of the very depths of His heart, and He seeks to acquaint us with what we are in His sight. Oh, let us with all our renewed energies seek to respond to His word, “Abide in Me”! Remember the path of suffering Christ trod, culminating in the dark hours of Calvary with inconceivable sufferings when our judgment fell upon Him. May alienation from Christ be painful to us! If we trust to self, we too shall have to learn experimentally that it is not to be trusted. We want, as already remarked, not to rest in the assurance of His love, but in the enjoyment of it.

Indifference brings suffering; and now love, so slighted, is to be withdrawn; but not before further tokens of its enduring character, its superiority to every affront, are given. What love is like the love of Jesus! “Earthly

lessons teach us the limits of earthly love—the trifles which may snap affection's cords; the unkind word, the thoughtless letter, which may sunder a lifelong friendship. Not so our Saviour's love. How the apostles' conduct to Jesus when on earth illustrates this!—their ignorance, their apathy, their want of sympathy, all borne with so lovingly, forgiven, and corrected! And just the same history is repeated over again in our inner life." And Jesus remains the same.

Other tokens of love He gives—acts follow His words: "My Beloved put in His hand by the hole of the door; and my bowels yearned for Him." Utter insensibility there was not, and the sight of that hand accomplished more than His words. "The hole of the door" refers to the opening made for the hand to be thrust in to undo the lock, which was placed on the inside of the door. One traveler writes: "I once spent a summer in an old castle whose great outer door had a lock and a key which were almost a load to carry. This kind of lock no doubt is very ancient. They are placed on the *inside* of the doors of gardens and other courts, and even on those of inner rooms in some places. To enable the owner to unlock them, a *hole* is cut in the door, through which he thrusts his arm and inserts the key. All the garden doors about Sidon are thus arranged; and such must have been the custom at Jerusalem in the days of Solomon."

The sight of that hand quickened her senses, and her soul was moved. There was grace in her heart; and grace "once implanted can never be lost; though it is not always in exercise, yet it is always in being." "My bowels yearned for Him." His boundless love was again before her.

And her discoveries are once more twofold—(1) about

herself, her indifference, her ingratitude; and (2) about her Well-beloved. He had not withdrawn Himself without leaving some evidence of His mighty affection behind; and on going to open the door, she finds her "hands dropped with myrrh" and her fingers "with sweet-smelling myrrh upon the handles of the lock." What indications of abiding affection! There was the myrrh—it is "overflowing" rather than sweet-smelling—telling of love and grace, and the over-abounding of it. Myrrh is a preservative, and so is figurative of that preserving love of His. "A bundle of myrrh is my Well-beloved unto me; He shall lie betwixt my breasts," she had said (chap. i.). Well for her would it have been, her experience would have been less painful had she kept Him there, and not have allowed false confidences to rob her of His joy.

She rose from her couch of repose to open, but—He was gone. In love He came; in love He withdrew Himself. And now, when her loss is apparent, she is nigh overwhelmed with sorrow. But truant hearts have to pass through a painful schooling to rid them of lukewarmness and indolence which cling so tightly to them. But, dear saints, we can rejoice also that if, through yielding to circumstances, we cause Christ to withdraw Himself, yet He leaves us not without witness of His love. A sight of His pierced hand will bring with it the remembrance of blessings we enjoy, the fruit of His atoning death; and if we have, on account of slothfulness, to pass through the bitterness of not having the sensible enjoyment of His blissful presence, let us remember the "overflowing myrrh," and turn to Him to prove that He is willing to be found of us.

"*My Beloved had withdrawn Himself—was gone,*" is her

mournful lament. He had spoken; her soul failed to respond,—or rather, perhaps we should say, that hearing, self hindered the response,—and now she must be made sensible of her coldness. It was His purpose to bless her, and consequently there was the necessity for her to further learn herself. Christ does not break with His own on account of their ingratitude and coldness. Having loved, He loves forever. None of the little things that separate “chief friends” can diminish that love of His or make Him change His mind about them; yea, He must bless them. So chastening becomes blessing, for it enlarges their capacity for the enjoyment of Himself. “Had withdrawn Himself—was gone.” How that would test her desire for Him, and prove the reality of her love!

She sought Him: “I sought Him, but I found Him not.” A great void had arisen in her life. Her remissness had brought her pain, and she who might have been in the most blissful communion was found searching the city in quest of her Beloved; and, brought in contact with “the watchmen,”—those responsible for the order of the city, the guardians of its peace,—they smite her and insult her by taking away her veil. It was right for them so to act. The reason of her being there did not concern them. What cognizance of her love could they take? She was but suffering the due reward of her neglect of the Well-beloved. In chap. iii. the watchmen are silent. Here they exercise violence towards her; for it was not a first offence. Bitter experiences followed on her refusal to have communion with Him.

Nor, we must learn for ourselves, should the joy of communion be an occasional thing. True it is that there are seasons when we seem to apprehend, appreciate and respond to the breathings of our Lord in a fuller way

than at others; but yet, called, as we are, to have fellowship with the Father and with the Son, the joy of this is to be our general and not exceptional experience. But, like the spouse, *we* can be neglectful and forgetful, and therefore need also to pray that the little foxes that spoil the vines with tender shoots be taken away. We can assuredly bless Him for the knowledge that, though so poorly responsive now, yet to each one it is

“Sweet to know that, by and by,
My heart shall love Thee *perfectly*;
 Shall yield at length a full response
 To all Thy love, that never once
 Has failed, in grace, to bear with me,
 Whose ways so oft are grieving Thee.”

To the daughters of Jerusalem a charge is given: “I charge you, O daughters of Jerusalem, if ye find my Beloved, that ye tell Him that I am sick of love.” He was gone, but her soul was after Him; though slothful, yet unsatisfied without her Object. The daughters of Jerusalem might be sympathetic, but sympathy would not quench her desire, nor give the ease she sought. Christ alone would satisfy.

“I want my soul’s beloved One;
 None else can give me ease:
 I’m sick of love; oh, is there none
 To tell Him my disease?”

Do we so feel, after behaving, practically, in the same way as the spouse? Happy are we if we feel the loss—which should never be felt—as keenly as she. With nothing short of full satisfaction and rapturous enjoyment of Jesus and His love unfathomable ought the heart to rest satisfied. If the *must* of the heart is that it *must have Christ*, then such longing shall be speedily quieted.

With yearning heart, desirous of regaining her Beloved's company, she has pressed into her service the daughters of Jerusalem, and given them a charge that, finding Him, they were to acquaint Him with the fact that she was "sick of love."

But they instantly challenge her about Him. Why such earnestness? Why such haste? Who was her Beloved, that she should so brood over her loss? Could not another take His place? Was she not "the fairest among women"?—a title addressed to her in chap. i. 8, and here again ungrudgingly given. She evidently had deeply impressed them by her words and manner. But her heart was equal to the demand, and a glowing description, eloquently uttered, until language fails and He is the "altogether lovely" One, pours out of her heart. In detail she describes her Well-beloved. Of her beauty He has spoken to her. Upon His beauty she now dilates to others. Her heart was stirred to its deepest depths; and though she had been faithless, yet out of the abundance of her heart she now speaks, and her full and accurate description proves that she *knew* Him, had studied Him. Intimate with the perfection of every feature of His sacred person, she goes into detail, and triumphantly closes with "This is my Beloved; yea, this is my Friend" (ver. 16). No exaggerated account have we; for the excellencies of Christ cannot be exaggerated. The more carefully minute our examination of Him, the more profound our astonishment, the deeper our delight. Well, then, does the spouse answer the challenge of the daughters of Jerusalem.

Wanted they to know what He was? "My beloved is white and ruddy, the chiefest among ten thousand"—a statement, this, that declares Him to be both pure and

beautiful, and in His excellency standing alone. With whom shall He be compared? When looked at through eyes of unbelief, it might be that there was no form nor comeliness, no beauty to attract; but how very different the verdict when He is by faith gazed upon, through the eyes of love! Come forward, ye sons of men, the brightest and the best! Are there no spots seen on these? Is there here inward purity combined with outward loveliness, providing rest for both eye and heart? Ah no! perfect purity and matchless beauty belong to *One alone*, the Christ of God. And so the heart's language is,

“Fairer than all, Thou art!
 None can compare with Thee!
 The chiefest of ten thousand *now*,
 So shalt Thou ever be.

“Eternity shall show
 Thy beauties clearer, Lord;
 Now known by faith, but then by sight,
 Thyself alone adored.”

What think ye of Christ? is the question to test the heart. Put it to your own heart, and what is the response? Does not every answer betray the deep need of growing in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ? To study Christ is to be our first employ; and this study brings no weariness, but increases in delight and pleasure the more it is pursued.

In chap. iv. the Beloved was heard giving to His love a word-portraiture of herself. Minutely He there describes her; and now not less minute is the description she gives of Him. Fittingly she begins with His head, which, she says, “is as finest gold” (ver. 11); and in this way marks His supremacy, and superiority over all others. He must take precedence. In every way the first

place belongs to Him. Pre-eminence is rightly His; and who so fitted to give expression to this as those in whose hearts He is enthroned? Mark the figure, and lay the greatest stress upon the truth that Christ is and must be pre-eminent.

And beauty is there, associated with the signs of strength and vigor, unaccompanied by the least sign of decay. Here is the fairness of youth, as it were, in company with the vigor of full manhood. "His locks are flowing," sets out the former; "black as the raven," reminds of the latter; for gray hairs denote decay, either premature or otherwise. Christ is the only perennial stream of joy. What He is now He will ever be. That fountain never fails to yield more than heart can hold.

And coming to His eyes, she describes them "as of doves by the rivers of waters, washed with milk, and fitly set." Like a precious gem in a proper setting, so were the eyes of her Beloved in that head of gold. Here the fixedness of His love, and His constant gentleness, are shown out. Doves are pictured as loving to sit by placid streams, to gaze into the limpid waters. Thus she sees Him, with all His tender, constant affection, gazing upon her with beaming eyes. No marks of dimness, and no signs of "the flame of fire," gleam in His eyes for her; for "washed with milk" is to add both brilliancy and gentleness. Love's flame, not the flare of judgment, shines there for her. And as the clear water would reflect the gentle gaze of the doves, so love's beams attract, and there is the reflection back of answering love. Would not the beloved John, leaning on Jesus' bosom, understand without explanation the force of this part of the spouse's description of her King? And so, dear saints, the more we are acquainted with our Lord, and all that

He is to us, the better shall we understand these figures. The Songs are sealed to how many for this very reason, that they know but little of the reality of what is therein set forth in figure! Know the reality, and you enjoy the truth as set forth. It becomes a repetition of a former joyful experience, and the soul fully appreciates the force of the imagery love uses. For what is communion? It is the answer of heart to heart. Think not that because you are zealous in service, that therefore you are pleasing to your Lord. There are many exercised in that, to whom He will have to say, "I never knew you." Ah, soul, pause! Can you say, having discovered it for yourself, "His eyes are as doves' by the rivers of waters"? If not, then cease to wonder that your soul seems sapless. Where did you learn your lessons? How got you your instructions? Clearly not as set forth in the first golden-teaching psalm (xxxii. 8), "I will guide thee with Mine eye." Look up, for He is looking down upon you. Oh, the gentleness, the graciousness of the beams that issue from those eyes of His! To know the force, then, of the language, we must know the reality. The one who uttered the figure had before this "*sat down under His shadow with great delight.*" Where have you been? Out in the heat and toil of the day, without so much as a sit-down at all? Then sit down just here, under His shadow, and in that blissful spot seek to fathom the depths of love reposing in His eyes, and rest and renewed strength shall be yours. Occupation with the Son of God is our rightful employ. Have we been negligent? Perhaps so; yet look up, for with all the benignancy of unalterable and unending love He is looking down—"His eyes are as doves' beside the rivers of waters."

But Christ is all delights, and so every feature must

provide its meed of joy. He is to be gazed upon and admired; and now His cheeks pass in review. What does she see there? "His cheeks are as a bed of spices, as banks of perfume" (ver. 13). The lips speak, the eyes watch, the hands tend—all ministering in some way to our necessities; but the thought we attach to the cheeks is that of communion. The activity of other members is lacking, yet upon them the kiss is implanted. They are radiant with loveliness, and provide her with numerous heart's eases; for she sees not only the rising banks laden with the beauties of nature, and the air redolent with their fragrance, but "His cheeks are as a bed of spices"—useful and precious.

And the sight of that blessed face captivates the soul with its charms, and is the most effective antidote against the inroads of worldliness. In two ways can we think of His cheeks: as they are now, radiant in glory; as they were, beautiful in humiliation. For think of the inexpressible grace that permitted *Judas* to kiss Him! Why did not the divine glory shine forth then, and end that career of infamy and shame? He came to save. He gave His cheeks to them that plucked off the hair, and hid not His face from shame and spitting. Oh, mystery of love! Here, we are compelled to keep company with those that were astonished at Him. His visage was so marred more than any man; for He only could take the place He did. Are not His cheeks as beds of spices—refreshing, preserving, and gladdening? Are you angry because others seem not to accord you your place? Gaze upon *His cheeks*, and think of the place man gave Him! Does pride urge you to assert yourself and to come forward? Think of Him who took the place of suffering for thee, giving His cheeks to the pluckers off of hair!

Look, and see there the expression of grace upon grace, gentleness upon gentleness, meekness over-abounding! He was not hasty in His own cause. Marks of dishonor were heaped upon Him to whom all honor was due. And now to glory exalted, we can gaze upon His face still, and by faith discern the glory of God centred there. Yes, the face upon which wicked men spat, reflects the glory of God.

Passing on, in her survey, the lips are next mentioned: "His lips like lilies, dropping sweet-smelling myrrh" (ver. 13). Myrrh is not a product of lilies; but the spouse, by her figure, combines two thoughts—gentleness and beauty, with preserving virtue. Ever full of *grace and truth* was Christ Jesus. His speech was "alway with grace seasoned with salt." In these figures of His lips, we see in the lilies the grace that ever characterized Him; and in the liquid myrrh the truth, ever the accompaniment of grace. Go, for an illustration of this, to the scene depicted in Luke iv. 16-30. He entered the synagogue of Nazareth, and on that eventful occasion read of Himself from Isaiah; and, expounding that word, all there "wondered at the gracious words which proceeded out of His mouth." Who of that company would not have then said that "*His lips were like lilies*"? But proceeding, the other side must come out. The liquid myrrh must drop. And so, in His matchless way, the truth flows, acquainting the hearers with their true condition; writing, one can say, the sentence of death upon that guilty nation. The reception of this would have been their salvation; but they loved Him not, and so did not value His words. They hurried Him to the brow of the hill, to cast Him down headlong. Who of the assemblage *then* looked upon His lips as lilies?

And what are those lips to us? The testimony of His enemies was, "Never man spake like this Man." The utterance of the heart in love with Him is that they are "as lilies dropping liquid myrrh." Surely, having experienced the sweet, mysterious influence of the word of Christ, having proved its keeping power in the midst of evil, we can combine both. May we love the truth, that we may enjoy the grace!

"His hands as gold rings set with the beryl." The hand reminds of practical service; and not only did Christ speak, but He ministered also. "He went about doing good," we read; and that ministry of His towards needy men was ever a sweet savor to God. In all things He glorified God. Those once-pierced hands she beholds adorned with beryl,—or rather, the spouse speaks of the gold rings set with beryl as the hands,—suggestive of the fact that true service flows from love. Christ's service to man and God's glory cannot be separated; and the double color of the stone mentioned (the beryl is bluish-green) may suggest the double character of Christ's service, that being both earthly and heavenly.

"His body," as we should here read, "is ivory-work overlaid with sapphires." This sets forth the glory of His person in all its effulgence; for the ivory and the sapphires both refer to the throne; the ivory setting forth its firm purity, and the sapphire indicating the glory of God's throne (1 Kings x. 18; Ex. xxiv. 10; Ezek. i. 26). And did not, and will not, Christ uphold the glory of that throne in His own blessed person? The deep mysteries of His being, the Father alone comprehendeth; yet can we behold Him resplendent with majesty and glory.

Continuing, we read, "His legs are as pillars of mar-

ble, set upon sockets of fine gold." Here is strength and stability. Oh, most excellent foundation! indicative indeed of the truth that He stands in His own divine rights. His head of finest gold asserts that pre-eminence is His: the sockets of fine gold repeat this truth, and shadow forth that it is rightly His. Props of silver support the canopy that shelters the spouse (iii. 10); for divine grace put her within. No rights apart from that had she; but the gold reiterates a different fact. Well, well may her heart and ours adore Him who has made the fulness of grace our blessed portion.

Having taken her survey from the head downwards, how natural to take in at a glance the whole figure! and exultingly she exclaims, "His aspect (not countenance) is as Lebanon, excellent as the cedars. The dignity, the majesty, the surpassing excellency of His person rises before her heart and mind; and what would delineate this as well as the imposing grandeur and beauty of Lebanon and its cedars? Of these latter a traveler has written, when describing a visit to them, "Nor could I wonder that Hebrew poets selected such graceful foliage, and stately forms, and colossal trunks, as emblems of pride and majesty and power." For greatness and glory, who could match her Well-beloved?

"*His mouth is most sweet.*" The ring of His voice was, as it were, still in her ears; His words of love re-echoed in her heart, and hence her dwelling upon this most precious feature. The hearts of cold, unbelieving disciples burned within them as Jesus talked with them by the way. And the more we hear His voice, the more shall we repeat, with added force, "His voice is most sweet."

Now, what point has the spouse reached? The point

where language fails, as she realizes that no words can fully describe Him, no language set forth all His worth :

“ I wrong His name with words so faint,
 Nor half His worth declare :
 Can finite pencil ever paint
 The infinitely fair ? ”

Consequently she combines them all, and declares, “ *Yea, He is altogether lovely.* ” Gaze at Him as you will, view Him from any standpoint, and only the most perfect harmony is discernible. He is to be desired, then, above all others. Of all others it is truly said, “ in many things we all offend. ” Some defect mars the virtues of every creature. John, with his loving spirit, would call down fire from heaven. Peter, with his energy, proves coward in trial's hour. Paul, with his ardent devotion, yet goes forward spite of the Spirit's warning. And so we might extend the list ; but none can claim any right to the “ *altogether* ” of the spouse's praise. But of Jesus it has been well said, “ Under all aspects, and in all offices and all relations, at all times, and under all circumstances and conditions, anywhere, everywhere, ‘ He is altogether lovely. ’ ”

Space will not permit our dwelling more upon this ; but, dear fellow-believer, is not the heart at home in meditating upon a theme so glorious, so enthralling ? Sit you down and spread the Gospels before you, and let your heart, as you view Him laying hands upon sick folk, raising the dead, weeping with those that weep, weeping over callous rebels, unfolding His Father's counsels, let your heart confirm her opinion of Him that “ He is altogether lovely. ”

And with what emphasis the seeking one would declare to the daughters of Jerusalem, “ This is my Beloved ; yea,

this is my Friend"! Oh, precious combination where love is concerned! Espoused to Christ as chaste virgins, can we say, "Yea, this is my Friend"? He is the Friend that sticketh closer than a brother. Christ is the Friend that has "not only heart, but capacity"—capacity to meet and satisfy the yearning of the hungry soul. Want you an object? "This is my Beloved"! Do you feel lonely? "This is my Friend"! I commend Him to you, and pray that our contemplation of Him, as portrayed by the spouse, may lead to deeper appreciation of Him, and result in our being kept from treating Him as she did. Here is an enigma. She knew Him, loved Him well, and yet was slothful. What does that say? Rest not in your love or your knowledge, but maintain a constant communion, that your heart may be kept ever awake.

The earnestness of the spouse, and the urgency with which she pressed her desire upon the daughters of Jerusalem, led them to issue the challenge, "What is thy Beloved more than another beloved, that thou dost so charge us?" Right well did she respond; and the description of One so lovely, uttered so fully, freely and eloquently from the depths of a deeply-stirred heart, brought forth from them the question, "Whither hath thy Beloved turned, . . . and we will seek Him with thee?" (vi. 1.) Her rapturous strains took them captive, and made them seekers too: not the only occasion, either, when the testimony of Jesus has won hearts for Him. In company with her they would search for Him who had no equal.

But was that necessary? Would He be far from one who so perfectly set Him forth? Ah no! He was more than willing to be found of her. But a little while previously she was conscious of a great loss through indolence—conscious of having treated her Friend in any but a

comely manner; and her heart smote her. Then His worth rose before her soul. Again she is aware of His presence now, and informs the daughters of Jerusalem of His whereabouts. Whither had He turned aside? He had gone "to His garden, to the beds of spices, to feed in His gardens, and to gather lilies." The scales had dropped from her eyes. Her experience, though painful, had brought her blessing. Could One so faithful be far from her? Impossible. And at once she realizes where He would be. Was it not communion with her He sought? In *His* garden He would have that.

When unresponsive to the heart of Jesus, dulness creeps over the soul, and a feeling of estrangement arises—the bitter consequence of our negligence. But let the heart tell out all it knows of Him, and at once He who was thought to be so distant is found quite near; the heart learning that all the time He has been thinking of it. Many a soul has found an ecstatic joy in giving utterance to the gloriousness of the person of Jesus, the son of God. Coldness flees before that warming flame. Enthusiasm reigns when Christ is the theme of the heart upon which the tongue dilates. When Christ is all, and in all, everything else falls into its proper place. An overflowing heart never lacks fervor. But our hearts are strange vessels, and the experience of the spouse, and our experience too, so in accord with hers, justifies the poet's riddle—

"My heart's a mirror dim and bright,
A compound strange of day and night,
Of dung and diamonds, dross and gold,
Of summer's heat and winter's cold."

Near indeed was her Beloved whilst yet she sought Him; and this she now realizes. For He had gone down

to His garden, to the beds of spices, "to feed in the gardens." Once, at her invitation, He had come into His garden (iv. 16). Under that figure she was portrayed, and there He had eaten of His pleasant fruits—those precious virtues which grace produced in her. Upon these He fed. "And to gather lilies," the emblems of loveliness and purity—the reminder to Him of her exquisite beauty, a beauty *not* produced by toiling or spinning, but yet incomparable. Fruits and flowers grew in His garden for His delight and for His refreshment.

Her soul must have remembered His tender breathings of love; and accounting herself precious to Him (His occupation thus proving it) spite of her recent waywardness, spite of her slothfulness, her heart bubbles over, and joyfully she exclaims in her fervor, "*I am my Beloved's, and my Beloved is mine; He feedeth among the lilies;*" thus showing His appreciation of her. How near she seems to nestle to His heart! This savors of resting in *His love*.

And here we mark progress. Before, she laid stress on the blessed assurance that Jesus was hers—"My Beloved is mine" (chap. ii. 16). There we have assured safety; but here—"I am my Beloved's"—is definite certainty. And this is right and appropriate, and as His grace would have it. She had passed through many exercises, and had learnt in an experimental way the untrustworthiness of her own heart, but the reality of His love—a love too sensitive to permit failure to pass uncorrected. True, His perfection shines out in the way He leads to self-judgment. Our ways of correction often drive from us those whom we strive to win. He gave her through it all a deeper sense of the relationship existing, and drew her to Himself. "*I am my Beloved's,*"

she exclaims, without losing the blessedness of her former utterance, for she adds, "And my Beloved is mine."

Like true love-sonnets, these rise from the bottom of her heart. There is not a dubious sound about them—"am" and "is" are emphatic the other way. They provide themes for meditation. May our souls draw forth sweetness from them!

His voice is once more heard. He speaks to her. Will He upbraid? Does He demand an explanation, asking her what she can say in extenuation of her indifference? Nay; the voice that praised her before praises her still. And He speaks, as we may say, in the same voice, thus to reassure her that He had not changed. For many of the figures used here are repeated from chapter iv.; yet here He dwells more upon the outward appearance, telling of beauty, dignity, and glory.

"Thou art fair, my love, as Tirzah, comely as Jerusalem." Unchanged was He towards her. Tirzah was the residence of the kings of Israel before Samaria was built (1 Kings xvi.). Little is now known of it, but evidently, from the allusion to it, it was noted for its beauty. And so Jerusalem likewise. Says an Eastern traveler: "But when I stood that morning on the brow of Olivet, and looked down on the city, crowning those battlemented heights, encircled by those deep and dark ravines, I involuntarily exclaimed, "Beautiful for situation, the joy of the whole earth, is mount Zion, the city of the great King!" (Psa. xlviii. 2).

But He also associates the majesty of a bannered host with her. Awe-inspiring is the sight of an army with flags fluttering on the breeze. How very suggestive of triumph is such an array! A threefold combination of grace, beauty and glory we have here, then.

And she was verily victorious; for though it be marvelous, yet it is true, that His heart was captivated. She was His chosen one; and why? *Because* the Lord loved her (Deut. vii.). "Turn away thine eyes from Me, for they overcome Me," He says. Evidently, then, she had been looking upon Him, intently searching the depths of love in His. In chapter v. we behold her gazing upon Him until enthralled, and the words burst from her lips, "He is altogether lovely!" The victory was won. No furtive glance had hers been. Grace had wrought effectively; and strong in faith, she conquers and appears as a bannered army, and sets herself in His heart—"I am my Beloved's."

The declaration that with *one* of her eyes she had ravished His heart, we have seen in chapter iv. There the question was put:

"Part of thy form has ravished me;
How must the whole my heart affect!"

"They overcome Me" is the answer we might give from this portion. It is an expression of His appreciative love, as though He were held captive by her. How much had been wrought by His precious tenderness! Where was indifference now?

How oft neglectful are we! prone, indeed, to be forgetful. And yet, what do we find on seeking Him? We give our response in the words of the hymn:

"And yet to find Thee still the same—
'Tis this that humbles us with shame."

And right well may we declare:

"Thy love exceeds our highest thought,
Henceforth be Thou our all in all,
THOU who our souls with blood hast bought."

Proceeding to describe her, He uses again the figures

that relate to her personal appearance. And without dwelling on them, we would just briefly recapitulate what has been already stated in our musings on chapter iv. (page 42). He notes her hair, a woman's glory; her teeth, perfect in every way—in whiteness, regularity, completeness; her temples, like the richly-hued pomegranate, a type of delicate beauty. There were many upon whom love could be set. "There are threescore queens, and fourscore concubines, and virgins without number;" and though through her they shall be blessed (Isa. lx. 3), yet she was *the* object of His heart. The choice one of her mother was His dove, His undefiled or perfect one. The perfection of beauty shone in her, for His glory was seen upon her. And surely the day of manifestation was drawing nigh. "The daughters saw her, and called her blessed; the queens and the concubines, and they praised her." The day of rivalry will then be over, and she will be made "an eternal excellency, a joy of many generations;" for she occupies, of all on earth, the supreme place in His heart's affection, and is destined to possess glory with Him.

And in that unique place He views her; first asking a question, and then stating what He had done, and its results. "Who is she," He demands, "that looketh forth as the dawn, fair as the moon, clear as the sun, terrible as an army with banners?" His queen, surely, in association with Himself. She appears triumphant, exquisitely beautiful and fair, covered with glory's radiance, and accompanied with the outward signs of victory. So much His words convey. Awe-inspiring was she in her grandeur—irresistible as though just returning from a victorious march.

And she was ready for Him. After many wanderings,

He finds her willing in the day of His power. Many lessons she had had to learn, but her education is now well-nigh finished. Her heart is just bursting to declare, "Blessed is He that cometh in the name of the Lord" (Psa. cxviii.). His grace proves triumphant at the last.

"He plants, He waters every tree ;
His blessing makes them spring ;
Then gladly comes He down to see
What rich increase they bring."

He had proved her readiness ; for going down into the garden of nuts—a figure expressive of the place where the hidden riches of grace could be found—He finds the fruits of the valley ripening indeed. There were signs of development apparent on every side. The vine budded ; the pomegranate blossomed. It was what He had waited for, and immediately His soul is kindled within Him. If she was ready for Him, He must expend the fulness of love upon her ; "and before I was aware, My soul set Me on the chariots of Ammi-nadib" (or, My willing people) (ver. 12, margin). Desire of heart was there for Him, and He responds. He finds her willing, and the day of His power at once arrives.

Here, then, in anticipation, we have the day of glory for which the rejected Messiah waits, the day "when Judah shall be saved, and Jerusalem shall dwell safely" (Jer. xxxiii.). In that day shall be seen the precious consummation of long-suffering grace and mercy ; and, repentant, with every sin blotted out, the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord, and Jesus, the Messiah, the King, shall appear according to the Word (Acts iii. 19, 20). This is the historical aspect. In the Song we have the heart exercise through which

she passes ere completely assured that His love towards her was perfect.

There are many ways in which this can be applied now for our own profit, but we must pass on with just this remark, that it is evident He wants a people morally prepared to enjoy His own love. May we be diligent to allow His grace free, full scope! The bearing much fruit not only glorifies the Father, but brings deep joy in the enjoyment of the presence of Jesus (John xiv. 23).

And the cry is raised, "Return, return, O Shulamite." The spouse has gone, led by the King in glory and triumph. The desire is to look upon her. But what could be there seen? "As it were, the company of two armies." In the margin we have "Mahanaim" for "two armies," or "camps." Thus we are referred to Gen. xxxii. 2, when Jacob, returning from his sojourn in the far country, has the assurance, if he could but receive it, that God was still for him. God's host met him. Jacob himself had gone out empty, but returned strong—*two bands*. What will ye look upon in the Shulamite? "As upon the dance of two camps." Oh, wondrous transformation! It is a change from wandering to home—to His heart; from humiliation and shame to glory—His glory; from weakness to strength—His host. "As upon the dance of two camps" is expressive of victorious joy and exultation; and in this is shadowed forth the full blessing of Israel. Truly they then shall enter into the joy of the Lord Jehovah. They come with singing unto Zion, and with everlasting joy upon their heads (Isa. li. 11).

The answer evoked by the cry for Solyma to return provides the occasion for the King to proceed with His eulogy in her praise. "As upon the dance of two camps," the answer came. "How beautiful are thy feet

with sandals, O prince's daughter!" is His response. The bare feet indicate shame (Isa. xx. 4), affliction (2 Sam. xv. 30), and unpreparedness for travel (Ex. xii. 11). Shame was gone; affliction had given place to victory and joy; and she was prepared to come up out of the wilderness, leaning upon her Beloved (viii. 5).

From the head downwards the spouse had traced the features of her King. Upwards, from her feet, He speaks of her members, each of which must yield its mead of pleasure, or refreshment, for Him. In ver. 2 we seem to have indications that she would be fruitful, the mother of many (Isa. liv. 1), of a generation not yet born.

Her two breasts are again referred to, and set forth the pure and undivided affection that was entirely set upon Him. It was of the character of her first love, "the love of thine espousals when thou wentest after Me in the wilderness, in a land that was not sown" (Jer. ii. 2). Then it was truly *Himself* that attracted, and not the scene around—not the blessing. And now she must emerge out of the wilderness in His company. True, other objects had come in, and her heart had played truant, but He speaks of the character of her love as He reads it. In origin it was from Him; and now, in communion, it was lavished upon Him. And how appropriate the figure—two young roes—to set forth the sensitive love that delights alone in its object.

And what of our love—is that undivided? Are we striving to bestow a portion upon Him, and a portion upon the things of the world? "Love not the world" we are exhorted. Unfeigned love, first love, suits the heart of our Lord. May we permit nothing to come in to divert the even flow of our hearts—the true answer to His constancy.

And, dwelling upon the glory of her person, her neck is likened to a tower of ivory, her eyes to pools, and her nose as the tower of Lebanon. In the previous reference to her neck the prominent thought was strength, but here the added thought of strength purified—glory. Grace confers strength, and then adds glory. The “eyes like pools in Heshbon” seems indicative of inward purity, the clear eyes reflecting back, like a pool the sunshine, the glory gazed upon. The clear eye is also suggestive of spiritual discernment. And in another way, the nose too; for whilst adding majesty to the countenance, it is also as a defense. By it dangers are discovered and averted. Ill odors as well as sweet savors are by it detected. A part of her punishment when Jehovah set His jealousy against her was to be the removal of her nose (Ezek. xxiii. 25). Power to discriminate gone—what a distressful condition! But all shall be restored in the day of her blessing; and in comparing it to “the tower of Lebanon which looketh towards Damascus,” we have it as a tower on an enemy’s border, as a sentinel at his post, a guard against the entrance of evil. It may be that there is a reference here to a tower of the house of the forest of Lebanon (1 Kings vii. 2), built by Solomon. The neck of ivory portrays the purity of her strength; the pure eyes, inward discernment; the nose, outward discrimination. In the day of departure, strength had been sought from a corrupt source (Isa. xxxi. 1); and in departing from God the eye had dimmed, and the nose had been removed, and they erred in vision, and they stumbled in judgment. But now the day when “they also that erred in spirit shall come to understanding” had arrived, and the King comments truly on the work of His hands.

And do the spiritual verities shadowed forth by these natural features pertain to us? How real is the necessity for the exercise of judgment and discretion, approving things that are excellent, or trying things that differ (Phil. i. 10). Decline in soul is shown by the absence of this ability.

“Thy head upon thee like Carmel.” Carmel, with its beautiful clothing of evergreen oak, beneath which are found flowers of various hues and glories, may well stand for the emblem of stateliness and feminine beauty. “The excellency (or beauty) of Carmel” is given to her (Isa. xxxv. 2). “To the rich foliage clothing the sides and summit of Carmel are compared the abundant tresses on the head of the spouse: its softer beauty is contrasted with the sterner majesty of Lebanon with its cedars, to which the King is compared.” Supremacy was properly His; queenly glory and beauty her Well-beloved associated with her, saying, “Thy head upon thee is like Carmel, and the hair of thy head like purple.”

Satisfied with her beauty, we read of Him as “held captive in the tresses.” And what can this mean? In Zeph. iii. 17 we read, “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.” It is as though another voice gives expression to this—“The King is held captive in the tresses.”

We would again remark that the figures are natural ones: the truths expressed by them are spiritual. Now, when Divine love is set upon an object, who shall turn it aside? The blessed One who is here the speaker knows what it is to receive hatred for love (Psa. lxxix.), to have the stream of that love bayed back until it flowed

forth with irresistible might in His baptism of sufferings and the new covenant was sealed with His precious blood. He views her now invested with the glory conferred by grace, and is "*held captive*" by it.

We are now prepared, then, for the next utterance, which shows how deep and real His appreciation was.

"How fair and how pleasant art thou, O love, in delights!" These are Divine estimations after grace has accomplished its good purposes. "Fair and pleasant"—pleasing and delightful. Fairness of form, grace of speech, charm of manner, all these appeal to men; yet they are as the eventide to the dawn when put beside the spiritual realities.

"How fair and how pleasant art thou, O love, in delights!" Be hushed every earth-born sound, that the heart may clearly hear this precious declaration ringing through its recesses! Overburdened soul, lay aside for a moment thine anxiety, and ponder this astounding truth, that in *you* Jesus your Lord finds satisfaction! Troubled heart, weary with brooding over evil and repeated failure, and tempted to renounce the path in which you find so much exercise, just cry halt, and, renouncing all this brooding, listen to what your Saviour says—they are the words of your Lord; then walk in His company, and as His voice attracts, so will your eyes turn from self to Him: as surely as light dispels darkness, so will occupation with Christ disperse the frettings that continually arise from self-occupation.

"This thy stature is as a palm tree," He exclaims, combining His summaries of her features. The palm is the striking Scriptural similitude of the believer—the righteous. We say striking, for so it is. Upwards, heavenwards it aspires, seemingly indifferent to every

other purpose but that. It hastens, as it were, to rear its crown sufficiently high to display its fruit. In appearance it is the very embodiment of order and calmness. Given a degree of moisture, the palm will flourish in any soil; and so, in this way also, the figure is very fitting; for that stature was produced, not by the character of the soil,—a wilderness is barren enough, surely,—but by the supply of living water and the abundance of grace continually vouchsafed.

“Thy breasts like grape-clusters.” Her love, then, was like His in this, that it had many ways of expressing itself. “Better than wine” was His (i. 2). “Much better than wine” her love was, He asserts (iv. 10). The *grape-clusters* speak of the numerous manifestations of it. Love, always in connection with obedience, He counts as the open display of fruitfulness. Uprightness, as the palm figures, is the first characteristic. The upright stem bears up the crown of fruit; and as it preceded the latter, so does fruitfulness for Him follow on the reception of the truth.

“I said, I will go up to the palm tree, I will take hold of the boughs thereof;” and thus taking possession, the King, in the earnestness of His love, exclaims, “Now also thy breasts shall be as clusters of the vine.” The grape-clusters borne on poles by the spies returning from Canaan were the silent but eloquent witnesses of the fruitfulness of the land to which Israel was going; and so grace finds in them the figure to set forth her love, which, though in itself perhaps as a drop in the bucket, was precious to Him.

“The smell of thy nose like apples.” Instead of the odor of death emitted by a fallen nature and its works, the new inward life manifesting itself in precious spiri-

tual activities, how pleasant to Him! As into the nostrils the breath of life was breathed, so in figure we have the effect of life breathed out again. Christ was the apple tree whose fruit was sweet to her taste (chap. ii.), and consequently the out-breathings that He perceives are the result of her having been brought into communion with Him. What is received from Christ in the blessings of grace returns to Him in love and service from grateful hearts.

“And the roof of thy mouth like the best wine,” He continues. “*The best wine*”—such is its character to Him. And immediately the spouse breaks in with “*For my Beloved.*” All is for Him—the clusters of grapes, smell of apples, and the best wine. And these stand for the outward signs of the hidden activities of grace, revealing the life beneath, and the object of that life. They are not so open as the lips dropping honeycomb, or the smell of the garments, but none the less perceived and commended by Him. Whatever flowed from her, pleasing to her Lord, was for Him; and after many wanderings, many forgetfulnesses, it was now “Him first, Him last, Him midst and without end.”

And if this be for us also, we must of necessity arrive at the point when with truth we can say:

“Thee will I love, my Joy, my Crown!

Thee will I love, my Lord, my God!

Thee will I love beneath Thy frown

Or smile, Thy sceptre or Thy rod:

What though my flesh and heart decay!

Thee shall I love in endless day.”

In the exuberance of her joy she exclaims, “For my Beloved!” “That goeth down smoothly” tells the character of the joy suggested by the “best wine,” awakening

responsiveness, even where there was the semblance of indifference. She thus imparts to it all the worth her King puts upon it, anticipatively stating what He would have uttered.

Now His whole heart is out, and she reaches her zenith in that direction, as fully realizing that the out-breathings of that heart were towards her. "*I am my Beloved's, and His desire is towards me,*" is the expression of the heart fully at rest and satisfied. This manifests true growth in grace and in the knowledge of the Lord Jesus. Safety is followed by certainty, and certainty by enjoyment.

"His desire is towards me!" What deep satisfaction can be marked here! "His desire"—the deep, tender yearnings of a perfect heart. "Towards me"—an unworthy object. The truth expressed was a matter of revelation, but she had learnt it through experience. "A peculiar treasure" she certainly was to Him, and His painstaking love proved it.

And can not each one of His beloved saints take up these words and say, "His desire is towards *me*"? He deigns in love to wash the feet of His own, that they might have *part with Him*. "If I wash thee not, thou hast no part with Me." He makes us meet, and keeps us clean, for that eternity of bliss awaiting us. Though in the glory now, He carries on a present service for us, and hence we can each assuredly declare, "His desire is towards me."

Perfectly assured, then, of His heart's love, the spouse invites the Beloved to accompany her to the fields, the villages, the vineyards, to receive from her the many manifestations of her loves. Truly, "perfect love casts out fear;" and now that His love with her is made per-

fect,—that is, she is convinced of it and able to rest satisfied in it,—things that would before have been shunned are faced, and together they are to enjoy the fruits of grace in the bliss of communion. Such is grace.

Where there is failure known, and the heart of Christ very imperfectly apprehended, there must be a measure of reserve, and companionship with Him not sought. But when all is out, the heart rests completely in One who knows all things. What gentle yet deep probings by love, of that heart that had strayed, (after the question of the conscience had been privately settled) by the words, “Lovest thou Me?” Love beamed in the eyes of the One who spoke, and love pervaded every word in the question. But no qualms of conscience were there: the opening out of that heart had dispelled them, and the answer comes, “Thou knowest all things; Thou knowest that I love Thee.” Blessed Master! so Thou dost. But sure I am of this, Thou lovest me. Not else couldst Thy care be so ceaseless, nor the ministry of Thy Word so abundant. Grant, Lord, the grace that, being obedient, we each might have the full joy of Thy presence!

“Let *us*,” says the spouse. She is no longer alone, nor desires to be. Her King is her companion. It is not now Moses, but One immeasurably greater. “Let us go forth into the field,” for communion; “lodge in the villages,” for rest; and “get up early to the vineyards,” for service; for “there,” says she, “will I give Thee my loves.”

The flourishing vine, the opening grapes, and the budding pomegranates, would all testify to the blessed effect of sunshine and shower, as the exercises and bitter experiences tended to bring forth the products of grace hidden within. Fully knowing Him, the long pent-up heart

finds free outlet, as the earth in that day shall yield its full increase, the wilderness even blossoming as the rose. Deep, deep shall be the gratitude manifested by Judah then. He loves much to whom much is forgiven—and, conscious of the depths of failure, “what fruits of gratitude, what peculiar feelings, will be those which the people of Israel have kept for the Lord alone, which they could never have for any other, and which, after all, none but themselves could have towards the Lord, viewed as come on earth.”

“There will I give Thee my loves.” The place of fruitfulness is the place of service and worship; for it is not mere saying or doing that is pleasing and acceptable to Him, but the production of fruit. True service is fruitbearing, and consequently it is in the vineyard that she bestows her loves upon her Beloved. Ah, what is doing, if the vine flourish not! Many are busy and bustling while the heart is sterile—the truth is refused, the object is to gain a name, not to glorify the Lord: so no “blossoms appear” showing the truth active within; and no “pomegranates bloom,” for grace has not been effectual in their souls. Self is the beginning and end of their works, and hence they have no loves to give to Him. They are at home in their doing, but ill at ease where Christ alone is exalted.

“The mandrakes (or love apples) yield fragrance,” she declares. These fruits have an unpleasant smell to most, except the people of the East. By them they are prized very highly. Thus divine love has no attraction to those who have it not. The joys of that love are by them unappreciated. But love in the believer answers to His love, and the fragrance is for Him.

“All manner of choice fruits are at our gates,” she

continues, both "new and old." Past gatherings have yielded abundantly, and the well-kept vines still produce more fruit. In the renewed heart, truth is ever active; all thus produced has Him in view; and the time when her loves should be given to Him she anticipates. How well she knows what suits Him!

Do we? What are we laying up *for Him*? The love, simplicity, dependence, of the child are sweet to Him. The strength of the young man, wherewith he overcomes the wicked one, is pleasant, and displaces not the characteristics of the little one. In spirit meek and lowly, in action strong and obedient—such marks true progress. And likewise the knowledge and patience of the fathers are choice to Him. The love that trusts and the love that labors, the faith that appropriates and the faith that increases, the hope that looks up and the hope that looks on, *never wavering, are alike precious to the heart of the Lord.* Youthful zeal and mellowed experience are both delightful to Him.

"Choice fruits, new and old, I have laid them up for Thee, O my Beloved!" Transposing that into the language of Paul, we hear him saying, "For me, to live is Christ." This means that life is life for service of which Christ is the centre and the sum; for it certainly is very true that "those are the best and most acceptable services in which Christ is the solitary aim of the soul, and His glory, without any admixture whatever, the end of all our efforts." Let our business be, then, the laying up of fruits for Him; our earnest desire, to be acceptable to Him, both here and up there.

"Thou art our triumph and our joy;
 We find our all in Thee;
 Thy glories will our tongues employ
 Through all eternity."

And now the yearning of her heart comes out. How could she with propriety bestow upon Him openly and without shame the sign of the love she bore Him? With the kisses of her mouth she would kiss Him then, and not be despised as a shameless, abandoned one. Hence her heart desires, "O that Thou wert as my brother!" Did she then find Him *without*, she would kiss Him. If He only stood to her in the known, recognized relationship of brother, then could she openly and in the most precious way avow her love and be above all criticism.

That He recognized such a relationship His tender breathings of love clearly show. "My sister spouse" He has more than once called her, and her heart, too, in its imperfect measure, has responded; but here, and this reveals true progress, it is the desire for the public avowal of love whilst maintaining her true place. "Should I find Thee without, I would kiss Thee; and they would not despise me." Her failure had before this led her into collision with the watchmen, and they had by removing her veil certainly despised her. Her affection drew her there in quest of her Beloved, but it was an impropriety, and from the consequences of that even her love did not save her. We must remember that it is exercise of heart, not conscience, that we have brought before us; she is learning the fulness of His heart, the perfect love and grace that is there, and the littleness of her own—though He gives us His own estimate of the value of that.

It is surely well when the heart bubbles up with strong desires towards Christ; and it is well when we have learned the untrustworthiness of them. Past failures may teach us some lessons, but they are not to quench affection. Nor is love to be hid any more than light, and,

continues, both "new and old." Past gatherings have yielded abundantly, and the well-kept vines still produce more fruit. In the renewed heart, truth is ever active; all thus produced has Him in view; and the time when her loves should be given to Him she anticipates. How well she knows what suits Him!

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spite of cold critics, the costly box of spikenard is broken and poured out on *Him*, and His approbation is so marked that a lasting memorial, a memorial that time cannot efface, is erected to her memory (Matt. xxvi. 6-13). Still, discretion is a virtue that has His approval too; not the discretion of fear and the flesh, but that which faith and grace impart.

And further, "I would lead Thee—bring Thee into my mother's house." In that day, no longer refused, but joyously welcomed, Judah's Messiah shall receive a glad introduction; and, actuated by love, she will adoringly sit at His feet and hear His words, "Thou wouldest instruct me." Always ready, always willing, how wondrous will be His impartations of divine things when the ear is both open and receptive! Notice the contrast: "*I* would lead Thee," "*Thou* wouldest instruct me." Such shall be her dual blessing. And what joy after confusion of face! what fellowship after long distrust and refusal! The ear, long closed, will then be widely open to drink in the unfoldings of divine fulness. "Thou wouldst instruct me." He is the gracious Instructor (for we should read "Thou" instead of "who"). The mother's house is the place of communion, and, there at home with her Beloved, He is the Teacher and she is the taught.

Oh, blessed portion! To be instructed thus is the "good part which shall not be taken away." It is the one thing needful; and never, never, will He allow a careworn Martha to snatch it away; nor will He by any word force any from it who elect to be there. It is granted in the blessing of grace: "They sat down at Thy feet; every one shall receive of Thy words" (Deut. xxxiii 3). May we truly receive Him home to our hearts, and prove in very truth that to hear Him is indeed "*the good part*"!

But has she nothing to impart? Nay, there must be the suited return. In its very nature communion must be mutual, and love must outflow towards the object upon which it is set, even as the Mary who sat at the feet of Jesus is the same Mary who has no scruple about "wasting" the precious ointment already referred to upon Him. And so, here too His heart was to receive its refreshment, for she would provide "spiced wine of the juice of my pomegranate." And this would be to Him delectable, the very essence of a fruitful walk. How He loves that! Grace produces this "spiced wine," and devoted love presents it to Him.

And after another word bespeaking settled joy and bliss, our canticle ends with the charge to the daughters of Jerusalem, "Why should you stir up, why awake my Love till He please?" Why, indeed! The opening words are, "I sleep, but my heart waketh" (chap. v. 2); but now divine love has wrought, has conquered, and what was once lost through her own lethargy, she would not now be robbed of by the activity of others.

Chap. viii. 5-14.

We now enter upon the closing portion of this heart-study, and find somewhat of a retracing of thoughts already laid down. We have not now the exercises,—their work has already been accomplished,—but rather the foundation upon which all rests, and the after-results when Ephraim too shall have been gathered and purged, and, earth's peace having been inaugurated by the judgments of the Lord, all nations shall serve Him (Psa. lxxii.).

A fresh vision bursts upon the sight, and the question is again asked, "Who is this?" In chap. iii. 6 the same

query is put, but there the way in which she is brought across the desert sands is dilated upon; there it is the wondrous character of the provision made for her safe-conduct. But here, how much more blessed! There, Solomon's chariot; here, the Beloved Himself—"leaning upon her Beloved." Hide yourselves, all ye attendants, and let the gaze be riveted upon this glorious spectacle! Here, there is no mention of chariot to support her, no mighty men to guard her, but never had she been so secure, so supremely happy. She, entirely dependent, *leaned* upon her Beloved, and so emerges from the wilderness.

How sweetly simple is the description! When the King is there, all surrounding objects are in the background. He is at once her joy, support, and security. Our thoughts are by this carried back to the time when the people of old came up out of the wilderness, but *not* leaning upon the Beloved. Then, linked to self, they knew Him but distantly. Then it was law, now it is absolute grace; then it was self, now it is Christ. They essayed to come up leaning on that which could only condemn. Divine power brought them into the land, but all was lost again, that presently they might come up leaning upon the Beloved.

"*Leaning*"—how much there is in that word for ourselves! The very act betokens no confidence in self. How we do try to get on without leaning, and fail and stumble, bringing reproach upon His name, and sorrow upon ourselves! This leaning is a realized weakness that makes for strength. "When I am weak,"—and leaning sets this out,—*"then am I strong."* Oh, then, may our weakness be great, that we may *"lean hard,"* and be great in our weakness!

The spouse leans upon her Beloved. Well she knew His heart. What confidence, what heart-fellowship is here implied! And since it is "the Beloved," we may in all trials, under all circumstances, lean upon Him. He will not fail us. We traverse the vale of tears in the "*to-day*" of that ever-comforting word, "Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, and to-day, and for ever" (Heb. xiii.), and realize, in fellowship with Him, that *He* has been through it before. Better off than the angels are:

"The angels know His blessedness,
His wayworn saints His love."

"Lean hard," but upon—not human props, which snap like brittle reeds in the hour of severest trial—but upon the Beloved. Self-sufficiency and leaning do not keep company, but the Beloved is the *All-sufficient*, and it is upon Him—heart and arm, and all that He is—that we lean. "Who is this?" The one who once, trusting in her strength, refused Him, but now, knowing her strength to be alone in Him, comes up out of the wilderness triumphantly, because leaning upon Him.

A mighty change had been wrought; and how had it been accomplished? The way is implied in the words that follow: "I raised thee up under the apple tree." He does, in love and power combined, interpose, and brings life where only death was. Christ is set forth under the figure of the apple tree (chap. ii. 3), and life is derived from Him alone. Set aside, consequent on the refusal of the Messiah, He it is who awakens her out of her long slumber. After deepest exercise and sorrow have been passed through, He is accepted, travail is o'er, and the remnant becomes the spouse of the King.

"There she travailed that bore thee." Christ refused

must become Christ accepted, and trust in self be superseded by trust in Christ alone. Aroused from deep sleep, they open their eyes to find that the One esteemed as smitten of God, is the One by whose stripes they are healed; that the One in whom they found no beauty is radiant with glory. Blessed discovery!

Well, then, may the spouse pray the prayer that she does—a petition that we have really seen answered in other chapters of this book. What more could she need to know to reassure her that His desire was towards her?

Her prayer is twofold: "Set me as a seal upon Thy heart, as a seal upon Thine arm" (ver. 6); and she can set out her reasons for desiring this. It may be that there is here an allusion to the breastplate of the high priest, upon which were engraved the names of the children of Israel, and by means of which Aaron bore them upon his heart before the Lord continually; and also to the onyx stones which were borne upon the shoulders, "for a memorial *unto the children of Israel*" (Ex. xxviii. 12, 30). Then there were two seals—one upon the heart, an inward one as it were, and for the Lord; the other an outward one, upon the shoulders, and for the people. Those who have the heart of God towards them can count upon His power. "He that hath God's heart shall not want His arm."

The spouse appropriates the figures, and intensifies them. She would possess and be possessed by both His heart and His arm; for then His love would be hers—a love that had been tested to the utmost, and proved the characteristics of love to be those which she now mentions.

The *strength* of love is first set forth. "Love is strong as death," she avers. A well-chosen emblem this! Love

and death are set in contrast. What a mighty conqueror death seems! It makes itself felt in hamlet and in city, in cottage and in palace. It lays its dread hand upon rich and poor alike. Youth and old age both fall victims to it, and sovereign and peasant are alike laid low by it. From pole to pole, from one extremity of the earth to the other, death marches, leaving its trail behind.

But there is a match for it in power. "Love is strong as death," and death but proved the irresistible might of the love of Christ. The power of darkness pressed with its utmost force upon His heart, only to bring out, however, this characteristic of *love*. Not all the terrors of death could dissuade Him from His mission. It could not quell the activity of love within Him; and "hereby perceive we love, because He laid down His life for us." The sting of death—where is it? and soon death shall be swallowed up in victory. Love, mighty to save, has conquered, proving conclusively the truth of the saying that *love is strong as death*. "Set me as a seal upon Thy heart"—

"For Thy love remains that entered
Into death to make me Thine."

And equally forceful is the second figure used, setting out the unyielding character of love. It says, "Jealousy is cruel as the grave:" for love and jealousy are really synonymous. The intensity of one is the intensity of the other; and jealousy is love claiming an object as its very own. So think of the figure. The thought embodied in it is hardness, firmness—"jealousy is firm as Sheol," and love never relinquishes its grasp when once its hand has been laid upon an object. How unrelenting appears the grave! The tenacity of the hold of the tomb has passed

into a proverb. It certainly looks as though, when once in its icy grasp, it defies all to rob it of its victims.

And so with Christ's love. It is *strong*, and thus can obtain whatever it sets itself to get. It is unconquerable, it is firm; so that, having obtained, it can hold with an eternal grasp every redeemed one. Far, far easier would it be to rob the grave of its prey than to snatch one of His purchased ones from Him. There is power in her petition, "Set me as a seal upon Thine arm." Who can stop death in its onward course? Who can say to the grave, "Unlock, and give up thy victims?" Neither could, nor can, any power stay Christ in His course of love,—“He endured the cross, despising the shame,”—nor yet induce Him to spurn or cast away one for whom He died. Oh, blessed consolation! It is not what we are, but what He is. It is not love's offspring (our love to Him), but His own eternal love, in which we read our security. The spouse knew that once set upon His heart and arm meant being set there for all eternity. And so do we.

Passing to the next figure, we have the *intensity*, the fierceness, if we may so speak, of love. Love must out; it must make itself felt, like the piercing sunbeams; and here we have it flashing forth with a most vehement flame. "The flashes thereof are flashes of fire." Like a devouring flame, so does it manifest itself. Tested by the very "flames of Jah," it proved equal to it:—

"His love to the utmost was tried,
But firmly endured as a rock"—

and is now clothed with those very attributes. Who but Christ could prove the kindlings of divine wrath? The intensity of those flames must have consumed all others.

But Christ's love was triumphant. He bore our sins in His own body on the tree, and has verily shown that His love is as intense as the "flames of Jah."

And that love of His will yet again flash forth when, in delivering might, He shows Himself strong on behalf of His redeemed ones. "Violent fires soon burn themselves out," the poet says; but not so the fire of His love. It is fed from within, and so is self-existent, entirely independent of any creature action to kindle it.

In days of yore love's flashing was seen in Jehovah's compassionate dealing with His people, and it is set forth in an exquisitely tender and touching passage: "In all their affliction He was afflicted, and the angel of His presence saved them: in His love and in His pity He redeemed them: and He bare them, and carried them, all the days of old" (Isa. lxiii. 9). And how it will flash when He appears on their behalf, to deliver from oppressors! What sublimity there is in these words: "Who is this that cometh from Edom, with dyed garments from Bozrah? this that is glorious in His apparel, traveling in the greatness of His strength? I that speak in righteousness, mighty to save." Now why this display, this wondrous flashing? Mark the association—"For the day of vengeance is in My heart, and the year of My redeemed is come (Isa. lxiii. 1, 4). His love makes Him their deliverer, and it hath a most vehement flame.

Another characteristic of love remains. If it will not burn itself out, can it be quenched? "Many waters cannot quench love, nor can the floods drown it." Such is the answer here provided. And with it agree all the records of Jehovah's dealings with His people. Waters of murmuring and discontent and backsliding were poured

upon it. Floods of unbelief sought to drown it. But, above it all, it rose triumphant. He declares, "I drew them with cords of a man, with bands of love;" and when constrained, by reason of their ways and doings, to contemplate giving them up, His heart speaks, His love is victorious, and He argues, "*I am God, and not man*" (Hos. xi.); "I am the Lord; I change not;" therefore His love is unquenchable.

And how the truth of this statement is likewise verified by both the life and death of our Lord Jesus Christ! In love and with love He came, but waters of hatred and billows of ungodliness were let loose against Him. Encompassed by foes and betrayed by a friend was His portion. Misunderstood, hated, scorned—many waters could not quench that love of His. The deeper the waters, the stronger the billows, the higher rose that love. He says, "I have a baptism to be baptized with; and how am I straitened till it be accomplished!" The fiercer the water-floods, the more perfect the manifestation of love; and only at the cross could the depth and perfection of love be adequately set forth. There it was proved beyond question that "many waters cannot quench love, neither can the floods drown it." Ah, may we prize this being set upon His heart and upon His arm more than ever, as we remember this! If it were otherwise, would not *our* coldness, *our* indifference, unappreciative and unresponsive often, have effected it?

But how to obtain this love?—that is an important question. Can it be bought? It cannot. Love is unpurchasable. Unbought it came to us, and as a gift we must receive it. Let the wealthiest of the wealthy strip themselves of all, and love contemns it, regards riches as despicable in comparison with itself. It is above all

price. What joy is here for those who are poor, but rich in faith! If a price were on it, never could it be mine; but now the fulness of divine love is *given* to me (so each redeemed one exclaims), and spontaneously love flows in return. "He loved us, and gave Himself for us," and now "We love Him because He first loved us."

Oh, precious characteristics of love! It is *strong* as death; *firm* as the grave; intense as flames of Jah; *unquenchable*, and so eternal; unpurchasable, despising every price. We have, then, but to receive it and enjoy it. May the assurance asked for by the spouse be deepened in us; and as further realizing that by unfathomable grace He has engraven us on His heart and arm, may love's fruit be more freely borne for Him!

Now there is liberty to think of others; so it is when we are ourselves in possession of full assurance. It is so with the spouse here. After the death of Solomon, Israel divided into Ephraim,—the ten tribes, and Judah,—the two tribes; and eventually both were sent into captivity for their idolatries. Both are to be again brought back into full blessing, having, according to the terms of the New Covenant, the knowledge of God and the forgiveness of sins (Jer. xxxi.; Heb. viii.). This, however, is not effectuated for them in the *same* way, nor at the same time. Judah, guilty of the rejection of the Messiah, suffers for that sin *in* the land; but Ephraim is by trial purged *outside* the land, and then brought in and there accepted (Ezek. xx. 35-40).

So the "little sister" here is not the Gentiles brought in to form the Church with the Jews, as is so strangely taught by some; nor yet the Gentiles blessed with re-gathered Israel,—they come in further down,—but the

ten tribes, Ephraim, here made mention of by Judah, whose affections, already formed and developed and set upon Christ, go out in desire toward her still captive relation. Ephraim, as we have already intimated, is to share in the results of Christ's death. These facts provide us with the key to this section of the Song.

The plural term "*we*" here used (ver. 8), as well as the reference to "*My willing people—Ammi-nadib*" (chap. vi. 12), show that in the spouse of the Canticles we have a corporate body. But, fitted for the Lord and happy in His love, envy and jealousy are forever banished, and, each heart in accord, they individually speak and say, "*We* have a little sister."

"And she hath no breasts;" that is, her affections are undeveloped, not having been called into activity. But the day of inquiry for her should come; she is to be taken up and owned, and the query is put, "What shall we do for our sister in that day?" The answer also is given: "If she be a wall, we will build upon her a palace (or turret) of silver; and if she be a door, we will inclose her with boards of cedar." The "if" here is not the hypothetical "if," but has rather the force of "since," or "seeing." A wall is the outward sign of divine acceptance and security. Thus, Ezra speaks of God's mercy in giving a reviving—"to give us a wall in Judah and Jerusalem" (Ezra ix. 9). Hence, "seeing she is a wall," electing mercy having been extended to her, divine favor bestowed upon her, "we will build upon her a turret of silver," and thus signify their willing acquiescence in Jehovah's doings. Judah's joy and surprise at the return of Ephraim is markedly shown in Isa. xlix. 18, 23, as well as at the way the Lord takes to bring them back.

That turret of silver is the figure of open testimony that

grace alone is the source of strength, privilege, and true ornament. And how true is this testimony! For ourselves we say, and for all saved ones,

“Not to ourselves we owe
That we, O Lord, are Thine;”

and thus build upon the wall of divine favor and choice a turret of silver.

Then, by the door, we have signified that the activity of divine love had begotten an openness for Christ—Jehovah’s King. And that was but the prelude to glory. So those boards of cedar, fragrant and unrotting, may well set out the glory and delights, satisfying and eternal, by which she shall be surrounded; her heart, too, in entire accord with Messiah’s. Grace precedes glory, for “grace is glory begun, glory is grace made perfect; grace is the first degree of glory; glory is the highest degree of grace.”

And the words of the spouse bear out what has been said: for, looking back, she can say of herself, “I was a wall, and my breasts like towers”—telling of divine choice, and the answer to it in the development of her affections, thus becoming a door. And she was then accepted, receiving the seal of His approval: “I was in His eyes as one that findeth peace.” The light of His countenance He lifted upon her, and sealed His approbation thereby.

Then when His people are in the enjoyment of His love and glory, “many nations shall be joined to the Lord” (Zech. ii. 11). So, fittingly now follows the allusion to the vineyard at Baal-hamon. The Prince of Peace, the true Solomon, is alone the “Lord of multitudes,” for “all nations shall serve Him” (Psa. lxxii. 11). To them His

vineyard is let out, and tribute is rendered to Him in season. He is recognized and owned as King and Lord; "The kings of Tarshish and the isles render tribute," and so fulfil their responsibility.

And the spouse, too, will show how she values Him. "My vineyard, which is mine, is before me;" and now it is kept, in direct contrast to what is stated in chap. i. 6, and the revenue is laid at His feet. Should others render to Him a thousand pieces, and she not do the same? That could not be. "*Thou shalt have the thousand,*" whilst at the same time there accrues blessing to others through her, for the keepers of its fruits should receive two hundred. In this way she becomes the medium of blessing to others.

But will this rendering of a present satisfy His heart? From what He has already said, from the ardent breathings of His heart towards her, we can unhesitatingly answer, No! "*Let Me hear thy voice,*" He implored her, when inviting her away to regions with Himself, giving as the reason, "For thy voice is sweet." And His opinion was unaltered, for in Him there could be no change; and here He reiterates that desire, "*Let Me hear it.*"

It is His closing desire. She spoke to the companions, and doubtless of the One so very dear to her, and about whom she could say such excellent things (chap. v.); but that, though pleasant, did not just meet the craving of His heart. "Thou that dwellest in the gardens, the companions harken to thy voice: cause Me to hear it." Willing listeners she had to what was beneficial conversation, we may well assume. A willing listener He would be.

To speak *of* Him is one thing; to speak *to* Him, far more blessed. Oh, what a condescending and precious

invitation to fellowship with Him is here! Evidently this is of more worth than the thousand pieces of silver. Let that be rendered, but let not this be forgotten. Here again we have communion and service, privilege and responsibility, in contrast. Obligations must be met; privilege shall, through grace, be responded to.

And our souls can surely appreciate the sweetness of this desire. Are we not exhorted to make melody to the Lord? and, blessed be His name, this holy, precious, profitable intercourse is not limited to one day, nor to any place, but it is for every day and all places. In the wilderness of Judah, with barrenness around, David exultingly exclaims, "O God, Thou art my God!" and his soul was lifted up.

Let us notice here that the spouse is addressed as "thou that dwellest in the gardens." She was in the midst of fruitfulness and blessing, even the presence of the Lord. And David was a dweller there too, as that psalm (lxiii.) so plainly intimates. His soul bubbles over—"Thus will I bless Thee while I live," "My mouth shall praise Thee with joyful lips."

No symphonies are so pleasing to His ears as the heart utterances of His saints; and consequently, dear believer, we can respond to this gracious invitation, and our communications to others will be the more profitable and edifying. In the house or the wayside, in prayer and in praise, in sorrow and in joy, cause Him to hear thy voice. It is He that invites. Let thy heart give Him a loyal response!

And what is her response? One desire would be uppermost in her heart, and that would be to *see Him* actually. That must first receive utterance. He hears her voice saying, "Make haste, my Beloved." His words draw out the yearning of her heart. How is it possible

to know Him and not long for Him! The new-born soul begins to *wait* for Him, and with others raise the ever-seasonable cry, "Even so come, Lord Jesus." He is now on "the mountains of spices," in heaven, with all the infinite merits of His person and work. But quickly, quickly He will come. Such is His last message, His final affirmation to His own (Rev. xxii. 20). "Yea, I come quickly." Oh, be it so!

Make haste, O Lord;
 Our hearts for Thee do yearn;
 Haste, haste, blest Lord,
 We wait Thy sure return.

Let this be our *patient*, constant cry. From the throne of His glory He will arise. From the mountains of spices, the regions of bliss, He will come. Patience shall soon be over, the Spirit-raised desire receive its satisfaction; and then, oh precious fact! forever *with* Him, forever *like* Him; joy only we shall know, "and only live to praise."

His desire is expressed, her response is given, and the Song closes. It is the Song of songs—a love-song indeed, a word for the heart; and we are left with the yearning of the spouse upon our lips. An increased knowledge of Christ, and the reception of His communications, can but lead to a more intense desire after Him; and who can perceive the unfathomable depths of His grace, the unalterable character of His love, as shown in this book, without being moved to desire to see Him as He is?

"Ob, tarry not, but Come!"

F. H.

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