

HEART BREATHINGS.

(SONG OF SOL. 4 AND 5.)

I WANT to give vent to a few heart breathings that shall touch the affections of the saints. I want to speak to the heart. There is very little for the head in the Song of Songs, which is Solomon's—there is much for the heart. There are seven things in the song that are declared to be Solomon's. He wrote a thousand and five songs, but this is the only one that the Spirit of truth has deemed worthy of preservation. Hence its title is a true one, it is indeed the song of songs.

We do not suppose that Solomon understood the spiritual meaning of that which he wrote. The song has surely an historical basis. It was probably composed by Solomon and devoted to Pharaoh's daughter—his Gentile bride—as a simple love song. But the Spirit of truth guided his pen, and when we bring the light of Christianity to bear upon it, it becomes divinely luminous.

You know that Pharaoh's daughter is the last of the seven brides of scripture that represent the church; and that is what makes me think that the bride here may be viewed as the church. Doubtless it will be used by Israel, that is, by the Jewish remnant, the nucleus of the true Israel,

by-and-by, as other scriptures will. But during the present period Israel is quiescent. "Praise waiteth for thee in Zion"—that is the condition of things among the Jews now. But bridal affections are found in the church, as the heavenly bride, whilst Israel is unresponsive. Of course Israel is spoken of in the song, as are other characters. She is spoken of as the mother of Solomon, who crowned him in the day of his espousals, in the day of the gladness of his heart, as Israel will yet do. She is spoken of also as a little sister "who has no breasts"—no affections. Whereas, when the heavenly bride speaks of herself she declares that her affections are full. Then we have seven times in the song the daughters of Jerusalem spoken about, who are often sceptical and unsympathetic. Perhaps they may represent the unbelieving Jews to-day.

Now in the first part of chapter 4 we find the bridegroom describing the bride; and in the last part of the next chapter we find the bride describing the bridegroom. When he describes her he speaks *to* her. When she describes him, she speaks *of* him. She speaks of him because it is a matter of testimony. As soon as the daughters of Jerusalem somewhat sarcastically ask, "What is thy beloved more than another beloved?" her affections are stirred, and she bursts out in a glowing description of what her beloved is. She starts with his head and she goes all over his person, coming down to his feet, and then goes back to his countenance and lingers upon his lips. Then she reaches finality—"He is altogether lovely." Thus she

is able to introduce him to others, she is able to say, "This is my beloved, and this is my friend, O daughters of Jerusalem." How is it that we are oftentimes backward in introducing Him to others? Because our affections are not right. If He is filling these hearts of ours, our lips must speak. How is it that sometimes in a railway carriage, and elsewhere when opportunity occurs, it means a great effort to offer a book or to speak a word for Him to whom we owe everything? It is no use making an effort. That will not do. It only brings us into legal bondage.

But you may be sure of this, if the affections are true and warm to Christ, we shall bear personal testimony to Him. When did you last introduce your Beloved and your Friend to any one? Come now, look the question in the face. I do not want you to answer it to me. I want you to answer it to Him. We need more personal testimony—do you not think so? Well, it can only be brought about as the heart is filled with love to Christ. How are we to get the love? Only by contemplating Him. As soon as the bride contemplates him she describes him. As soon as ever she sees and feels how lovely he is, her heart is full; she must introduce him to others.

Now when he describes her, he begins with her eyes and he goes all over her person. Why does he begin with her eyes? Because the eyes tell more than the lips tell. The eyes invariably speak true, do they not? The lips may lie; the eyes seldom do. We can generally read the

truth in another's eyes. He sees in her eyes affection, true and warm, towards himself. That is what attracts him. He starts with her eyes and then he describes her minutely, and presently he can say no more. He closes with, "Thou art all fair, my love ; there is no spot in thee."

But then, if he appreciates her so much, he must needs have her company. That is what he wants. So he starts to woo her on to the path that is his. "Come with me from Lebanon, my spouse, with me from Lebanon." Twice he says, "with me" ; twice he utters that preposition "from." He would assure her that whatever she may have to come from, his presence will more than make up for any loss that she may suffer. Notice it is not "come to" ; it is "come with." How many stop short of the latter ! "Come to me"—that is all right. "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." But that is "Come *to* me." But He adds, "Take my yoke upon you and learn of me, for I am meek and lowly in heart, and ye shall find rest unto your souls." That means "Come *with* me." Are we ready for that ? Are we ready to tread the path that He is treading ?

What an experience it is to have His yoke upon our necks, feeling that the other end of the yoke is upon His blessed neck—the yoke of implicit subjection to the will of the One who sent Him. That is our true path. "Come with me from Lebanon, my spouse, with me from Lebanon." Lebanon is a very beautiful country, but it is fraught with dangers. Lebanon is situated at

the extreme north of Palestine ; it is the *border-land*—its outlook is the world. Lebanon is a very dangerous place—a very dangerous place indeed. Let us beware of world-bordering. We read about the mountains of the leopards. Lebanon is not, of course, the world, but it suggests the world, or world-bordering. Then the mountains of the leopards would suggest the flesh. “Can the Ethiopian change his skin or the leopard his spots ? ” The leopard represents what man is in the flesh. Then we have the lions’ dens. That is suggestive of the devil—that great roaring lion. He has plenty of dens in the borderland. Lebanon—whatever may be its natural beauty—is a dangerous sphere. It is suggestive of the world, the flesh and the devil. Well, he would woo us from Lebanon. “Look,” he whispers, “from the top of Amana and Shenir and Hermon”—three mountain peaks, each peak, perhaps, higher than the other. If we are getting on in our souls then we are going up.

“Higher and higher yet !

Pleading that same life blood :

We taste the love that knows no let,
Of Abba, as of God.”

It is a wonderful thing to get on the top of Hermon. There is a marvellous vista of heavenly realities stretching forth from thence before the eye of the soul.

It is not Sinai. No one ever yet got to its top except the great lawgiver, and even he said, “I do exceedingly fear and quake.” Sinai is fraught with terrors, thunderings, and lightnings ;

"The sound of a trumpet and the voice of words" was heard there and the earth quaked to and fro and the mountain was covered with gloom. Who ever reached the summit of Sinai? Is any one here trying to climb it? You are attempting a vain task. Saul of Tarsus, the chief of legalists, tried, and maybe got higher than any other legalist has got—"If any think he hath whereof to trust in the flesh, I more." However high you may get on that mountain, you will hear a voice coming down from above, saying, "I more; I more." (Phil. 3.)

Hermon is not Pisgah. From Pisgah a beautiful panorama is seen. It is delightful to get to the summit of it, but then Pisgah is in the wilderness. The longing eyes of Moses gazed forth from Pisgah and he viewed the inheritance, but the inheritance he did not enter. In Romans we have Pisgah. We never get out of the wilderness in Romans. But we get to Pisgah's summit and cry: "He who spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?" "All things." Yes, but they are still in perspective.

Then, again, the mountain here is not Tabor. Tabor is the traditional site, right or wrong, of the transfiguration. When we get there we are in Colossians—the greatness of the Person fills our vision. Tabor is in the land of promise. We come under the influence of the new covenant on Tabor—"We all, with unveiled face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image." The man in the Epistle to the Philippians who had been trying to climb

Sinai comes down and climbs Tabor, and Christ is transfigured before him. But, beloved friends, there is something more. There is Zion. Zion speaks of universality. When we get on to the top of Zion we are on the summit of universal and sovereign mercy, and we have everything before us. We have blessing as regards the church, blessing as regards the Jews, blessing as regards the world, and blessing as regards every created intelligence.

But Hermon is a present reality. It towers about ten thousand feet above the level of the sea with its head, as it were, in heaven. We are in our inheritance on Hermon and we look around. We do not strain the vision and look from afar. We look around and we feel that we are in the land and all that we gaze upon is indeed ours.

But now mark how he appreciates any response, however slight it may be, that the bride gives to him. He says, "Thou hast ravished [or delighted] my heart, my sister" (indicating the purity of his love), "my spouse" (indicating the fervency of his love); "thou hast ravished my heart with *one* of thine eyes, with *one* chain of thy neck." "One of her eyes"; why does he speak of only one? Because when he accosted her, her back was towards him. Her face was towards the things of the world, but when she hears him, when that well-known and much-loved voice falls upon her ears, then she *half* turns. She does not wholly turn. The response is very slight indeed, but still it is enough for him to see one of her eyes, and he is delighted because he sees affec-

tion there. Is it not wonderful to think of the appreciation of the heart of Christ as to the slightest response we may give to Him? "One chain of thy neck." What does that not mean? Everything that was upon her, that was adorning her person, he had put there. Every grace adorning the believer is Christ-given. "One chain"—just one moral ornament, a single grace that His own grace has bestowed—only one—but that delights His heart. If we were more like Him, surely we should be in touch with His own appreciation of His people, and any response, however slight, from those whose backs may be on Him. If one has got astray, if there has been a turning of the back upon Him, the slightest response or movement toward Himself should make us glad.

But he says more: "How fair is thy love, my sister, my spouse! how much better is thy love than wine!" When she speaks of his love she says, "Thy love is better than wine"; but when he speaks of her love he is more extreme—"How *much better* is thy love than wine!" Christ appreciates our love to Him more than we appreciate His love to us. He speaks, too, of "the smell of thine ointments," saying, "Its fragrance is better to me than all spices." Think of the "all spices"—think of all He has lavished upon Him in the glory above! Think of the fragrance of the wealth of the universe which will soon be poured at His feet. Yet He values something more than that. It is what the saints give to Him now. "Thy lips," he says, "O my spouse, drop as the honeycomb." Note the spontaneity of it—it *drops*. There is no effort

about it at all. The honeycomb drops. If the heart is full of Christ, there is no effort in worship. But then again, sometimes the heart is so full that it is too full for utterance. What then? He knows what is under the tongue. He says to her, "Honey and milk are under thy tongue." We have here what is suggestive of "the land which floweth with milk and honey."

The one who has honey and milk under the lips is the one who is in the good and gain of the inheritance. Then he speaks of her garments, saying, "The smell of thy garments is like the smell of Lebanon." Garments mean *associations*. The old English word for garment was "habit." Our garments represent the moral guise in which we live and move. What about our associations? Are they fragrant? In Eastern lands it was the custom (and maybe it is so still) to make the garments fragrant with various sweet-smelling spices. We read concerning Jacob's garments that they were fragrant. (Gen. 27.) Our associations ought to be fragrant. Christ looks for that—that our circumstances might be acceptable to Him. "Every man wherein he is called so let him abide *with God*." That is it, our garments must be fragrant. They must be redolent with the fragrance of heaven. We ought to be heavenly in our circumstances as well as heavenly in speech and song.

Now we come, perhaps, to what is collective. He says, "A garden inclosed is my sister, my spouse; a spring shut up, a fountain sealed." A garden—I think that indicates a company, suggesting the assembly. We start on individual

lines. But what about what is collective? We should reach the garden. There must be the touching of the assembly. The enemy entered Eden's garden and our first parents were driven out. But Christ still has His garden. His garden is the saints, and all is for Himself. It is for no one else but Him. "A garden inclosed is my sister, my spouse; a spring shut up, a fountain sealed." It is all for Himself. Does it not remind us of that company in the upper room with the risen Lord in the midst. Did He not come into His garden then, as it were? Then we have the other side of the assembly—the other side of the supper—"Ye do announce the Lord's death." We have it in its public character. That is what is suggestive of the Beloved's words—"A fountain *in* gardens, a well of living waters, and streams from Lebanon." There is, first of all, what is inside and then the flowing out of what is inside to those who are outside.

In the garden we read of three things—plants, fruits and spices, three things in some way answering to John's babes and young men and fathers. Plants are tender; they are young; they need to be cared for just like the young and the weak. Then the "young men" suggest what is more mature—"the fruits of righteousness which are by Jesus Christ." Then in the spices we come to the fathers. We come to those who are fragrant with nothing but Christ. "I have written unto you, fathers," says John, "because ye have known him that is from the beginning." The fragrance of the spices flow out.

But there is something more. "Awake, O

north wind ; and come, thou south ; blow upon my garden." Here we have the activities of the Spirit—the work of the Spirit in the assembly. Every local assembly needs to be operated upon in this way, otherwise things would get into a state of spiritual stagnation, and that Christ will not allow. Sometimes one has been in a local meeting where everything seems dormant. But the north wind blows harsh and cruel, blows down and blows away what is superfluous. It may be a lot of head doctrine and theology. The north wind of adversity is often needful. Every assembly is made up of individuals, and as the individuals are dealt with so the assembly is dealt with. So we find that an assembly, like an individual, may pass through a season of adversity—may be subject to the biting blast of the north wind. Then comes the south wind with its gentle breezes. That brings forth fruit and fragrance—the spices flow out. Beloved friends, let us not be afraid of the north wind. We would like things to go on quietly, but you may be quite sure that exercise, often painful exercise, is necessary. The north wind is most needful, but the north wind never comes without the south wind coming afterwards. It is bound to come, and then the saints are thankful for all the exercises through which they have passed.

And now we have the invitation of the bride, "Let my beloved come into his garden, and eat his pleasant fruits." Do we ever say that? I think we do when we eat the supper. What do we say in the supper? "Let my beloved come into his garden, and eat his pleasant fruits."

And He does come—He responds. He says, “I am come into my garden.” He claims every thing as His own. Notice the possessive pronoun “my” nine times uttered. “I am come into my garden, my sister, my spouse: I have gathered my myrrh with my spice; I have eaten my honeycomb with my honey; I have drunk my wine with my milk.” That is it. Then He invites others to share with Him that which is for the joy and satisfaction of His own heart. He can say—He *does* say it—“Eat, O friends; drink, yea, drink abundantly, beloved ones.” (New Trans.) Oh! what rapture that He should call us His beloved ones! He is *the* beloved One, is He not? He has His own unique and distinct place in the affections of God the Father. He is the beloved One, but we are the beloved ones.

And He says, “As the Father hath loved me, even so have I loved you.” He, so to speak, passes on the love. What a thought, is it not? that we are the beloved ones; that He puts upon us the same character that He Himself bears? How is it that we know so little of the joy of being the beloved ones? It is because we know so little of what it is to lean upon the breast of the beloved One. Five times in 1 John does he address those to whom he writes as beloved ones. John knew himself what it was to be among the number of beloved ones. Only John’s head leaned upon the bosom of Jesus at the last supper. Peter might have had his head there, but Peter’s head was not there. Samuel Rutherford said, “There are many heads upon Christ’s

breast, but there is room for yours." And so there is. *His* head, the head of the beloved One, rests upon the bosom of the Father. That is His own place. No one shares that place with Him. Yet He invites us to rest our heads upon His breast, and when our heads are there they are *very near* to the bosom of the Father. Peter at a distance did not know what John knew. He asked John to ask Jesus, and John whispered, "Who is it?" You find that when a saint is perplexed and in pressure, if that saint has not the head upon the bosom of Jesus, in order to get light and help he often turns to another saint who has his head there. How are we to get our heads there? The way to His bosom is by *His feet*. "As the apple tree among the trees of the wood," says the bride, "so is my beloved among the sons." Then she adds, "I sat down under his shadow with great delight, and his fruit was sweet to my taste." There we are at His feet, but it is still the *outside* place. It is, so to speak, in the orchard. It is under the apple tree—a very blessed place to be in, the place that Mary took when she sat at His feet and heard His word.

It was no passing word that Mary caught. She sat; she was quiescent. She took in all the fruit that fell from His lips. Then we get a little nearer. "He brought me to the banqueting house, and his banner over me was love." We are by *His side*; that is something nearer. He stoops and lifts us up by His side. His feet is the *near* place, His side is the *nearer* place. Then comes the superlative, the *nearest* place. What a place

it is! The bride needs to be strengthened for it—"Stay me with flagons, comfort me with apples: for I am sick of love." The soul must be fortified in order to rest in the nearest place. "His left hand is under my head, and his right hand doth embrace me"—not the arm notice but the *hand*—the pierced hand of our Beloved. That is the nearest place. At His feet, the nearest place, it is what He *gives*—"His fruit is sweet to my taste." By His side, the nearer place, it is what He *does*—"He *brought* me to the banqueting house, and his banner over me was love." On His breast, the nearest place, it is what He *is*. And when we get there, oh! what can we say? I will tell you what we can say, "Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth: for thy love is better than wine." We do not want more *only more of the love!*

"It passeth knowledge! that dear love of Thine,
O Jesus! Saviour! yet this soul of mine
Would of Thy love, in all its breadth and length,
Its height and depth and everlasting strength,
Know more and more."

S. J. B. CARTER.