

**THE LOVE LIFE
OF THE LORD**

BY

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CHAPTER ONE

THE LOVE LIFE

From many standpoints, the Bible looks at our spiritual life. Sometimes it is as a life of faith, again as a life of holiness, evermore as a life of service, deepest of all as a life of patience and victorious suffering; but the highest and divinest view of it is a life of love. Nor is it love in any ordinary sense, but the tenderest and most intimate forms, and the most exquisite figures of human affection and friendship are used to describe the unspeakable bond which links the heart of God with the souls He calls to be His own. It is not the love of compassion, nor even the stronger love expressed by the relationship of fatherhood, brotherhood and even motherhood, but it is the tie, above all others, which links two hearts in the exclusive affection which no other can share - the love of the bridegroom and the bride, the love which touches all human love with its inexpressible charm, and transfigures and glorifies the humblest lot and the hardest circumstances into a heavenly paradise.

This is the meaning of the Song of Solomon. This is the Old Testament climax of the series of figures that runs all the way from Eden to the Millennial throne. The opening picture of the Bible is a love song - two hearts, the one born out of the other, and then given back to it in perfect unison, the central figures of earth's first Paradise. Next we have the story of Rebekah's wooing and Isaac's marriage, the great type of the heavenly Bridegroom sending to this far-off land for His chosen and exclusive bride. The beautiful idyll of Ruth and Boaz has the same figurative significance. The forty-fifth Psalm is David's song of heavenly love and the divine Lover, and its tender call has reached many a Christian heart and called it to a heavenly betrothal, "Hearken O daughter, and consider! Forget also thy kindred and thy father's house; so shall the King greatly desire thy beauty, for He is thy Lord and worship thou Him."

This beautiful book is Solomon's love song. Later prophets re-echo its heavenly strains. Isaiah tells of our Maker who is our Husband. Jeremiah repeats the plaintive appeal, "I remember thee, the kindness of thy youth, the love of thine espousals, when thou wentest after me in the wilderness, in a land that was not sown." Hosea tells of the higher experience, when the soul restored from its backslidings shall call Him Ishi, 'my husband,' no longer Baali, 'my Lord,' and He shall betroth us unto Him in righteousness, and we shall know the Lord." Ezekiel vividly portrays the picture of the calling of the bride, "I passed by thee and thy time was the time of love, and I spread my skirt over thee and covered thy nakedness; yea, I swore unto thee and entered into a covenant with thee, saith the Lord God, and thou becamest mine." John the Baptist introduces Christ as the Bridegroom, while he himself is only the friend of the bridegroom. Jesus takes up the figure Himself, and speaks of His days as the time when the bridegroom is with them, and of the days when He says that the bridegroom shall be taken away, and the waiting bride shall fast until His return; and, true to the figure, He commences His miracles at a marriage feast, turning the water into wine, as the type of the great purpose of His kingdom, to transform the earthly into the heavenly, and give to us not only the water of life but the wine of love.

His parables are as suggestive as His miracles. He tells of the Marriage Feast for the King's son, and the Ten Virgins who went forth to meet the Bridegroom. Above all other New Testament writers, the apostle Paul catches the spirit of this exquisite figure and interprets the meaning of earthly affection by the heavenly reality.

Speaking of the love of the husband and the wife he lifts our thoughts above the earthly type to our deeper union with the Lord, and with a depth and vividness of meaning that can scarcely be expressed in words and can only be understood by the heart that lies on the bosom of its Lord he says, "This is a great mystery, but I speak concerning Christ and the church. For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, and he is the Saviour of the body. For we are members of His body, of His flesh and of His bones. As is the love of the husband to the wife, even so Christ loved the church and gave Himself for it, that He might sanctify and cleanse it by the washing of water through the word; that He might present it unto Himself, a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle."

So again speaking of our personal purity, the very ground on which he urges it is our physical union with the Lord. "Now the Lord is for the body and the body for the Lord ... Know ye not that your bodies are the members of Christ?"

The climax of all this heavenly imagery is reached in the book of Revelation where the universe is summoned to gaze on the crowning spectacle of God's love and power, the paragon of creation, redemption and grace, the wonder of angels, the delight of God. "Come hither" they exclaim as all eyes are turned to yonder vision of ineffable glory descending from the skies, resplendent with the light of unearthly jewels and shining with the glory of God, "Come hither and I will show you the Bride, the Lamb's wife. And I heard as it were the voice of a great multitude, and as the voice of many waters, and as the voice of mighty thunderings saying, "Alleluia: for the Lord God omnipotent reigneth. Let us be glad and rejoice, and give honour to Him for the marriage of the Lamb is come, and His wife hath made herself ready. And to her was granted that she should be arrayed in fine linen clean and white: for the fine linen is the righteousness of saints. And he saith unto me, 'Write. Blessed are they which are called to the marriage supper of the Lamb.' And he saith unto me, 'These are the true sayings of God.'"

Surely, beloved, no man can say that a subject that occupies so prominent and sublime a place in God's holy Word and in the hopes of the future, is unworthy of our profoundest interest and our most reverent and earnest consideration!

In oriental countries the marriage pageant is the chief event and the story that lies back of it is of less importance, for often indeed the bridegroom and the bride never meet until for the first time he approaches her on her wedding day in all the splendour of her bridal robes, and, lifting the veil from her face, looks into her eyes. In our Christian civilization the marriage scene is the least important part of the entire proceedings. The love story of the heart and the tender and personal interest associated with the first acquaintance and ripening affection of wedded hearts after all the tests and triumphs of true love are over, this is of paramount importance. It is even so in the love story of the soul. Glorious, indeed, will be the hour when our love shall be crowned and the bride of the Lamb shall sit down by His side on His Millennial Throne. But far more important is the simple story of the call of the bride and the betrothal of the soul now to its everlasting Lord and lover.

It is of this we are chiefly to speak in the consideration of our fascinating theme, and may it indeed prove, through the power of the Holy Spirit, in the case of many who shall read these lines, the beginning of an everlasting love story that shall invest all time and all eternity with the infinite and heavenly charm.

First, let us endeavour to grasp the structure of this book and the form of this beautiful drama in its simple beauty. It is a love song of the gifted and glorious king of Israel in the days of his purity, when his heart was true to God and true to his single bride. The heroine of Canticles is known as Shulamith, or the daughter of Shulem which we know in Hebrew is the same as Shunem. I have never been able to resist the strong impression that she was the same maiden as we read of in connection with the closing days of David's life, the fairest daughter of Israel that could be found in all the land, who was especially brought to the aged king to be the companion of his closing days, to cheer and cherish by her sweetness and brightness the last moments of his feeble and sinking life. We know that she was a daughter of Shunem. We know that she was so beautiful that she was selected for her surpassing loveliness. We know also that she was beloved of Adonijah, Solomon's faithless brother, and because he asked that she might be his bride, Solomon became strangely indignant and ordered his execution, saying that he might as well have asked the kingdom. One can hardly understand this indignation, unless, back of it, lay a secret in Solomon's heart of love to the fair Shulamite. However this may be, it matters comparatively little. We are enabled, however, from the book itself, to weave a very complete thread of romantic and most suggestive incidents into one of the most charming of oriental poems. The plan of the story is very simple and will be best understood by dividing the book into six sections, which we may call respectively:

First, THE WAITING DAYS, from chapter 1:1 to 2:7, which represent the bride as waiting in the palace in Jerusalem with her maidens while preparing for her marriage. This is occupied with a number of little incidents comprising a song from her maidens, a chorus in which she joins, and then her interview and conversation with her lover as he suddenly appears and closes the song with mutual words of love, in one of the gardens of the palace.

Second, THE WOOING DAYS, from chapter 2:8 to 3:5, containing the story of her wooing, told by her own lips in a little song to her maidens, in which she describes most beautifully, the first visit of her lover to her rustic home under the shadows of Lebanon, and then closes with a sad dream which followed his visit, in which it seemed to her as if she had lost his love, but at length she found him, welcomed him and brought him to her mother's home with a love which determined never again to let him go. Each of these beautiful scenes close with the same simple refrain, "I charge you, O ye daughters of Jerusalem, by the roes, and by the hinds of the field, that ye stir not up, nor awake love till it please," which is a strong poetic expression denoting the intensity of her love and calling upon all to be careful how they thoughtlessly awaken the fires that burn with so intense a fervour.

Third. WEDDING DAYS, from chapter 3:6 to 5:1, the scene of the marriage procession, the words of love from the bridegroom to the bride and the wedding feast with the welcome to the guests.

Fourth. TESTING DAYS, chapter 5:2 to 8:10. This is the story of the trials which followed this happy union; trials which began with her first failure, in her languor, self-indulgence and slowness to respond to the bridegroom's call; followed by sorrow and bitter repentance, and many an indignity from the watchmen of the street as she sought in vain for her lost bridegroom. But all through the separation her heart is true to him and her testimony unflinching. She tells the daughters of Jerusalem of his beauty and loveliness, and still testifies without the shadow of a doubt, "I am my

beloved's and he is mine." At length her faithfulness is rewarded, her trials are ended, her beloved returns and meets her with words of unbounded affection, admiration and comfort, and her maidens look upon her with wondering delight as she appears before them with new beauty, "bright as the morning, fair as the moon, clear as the sun, and terrible as an army with banners," and the scene closes with a still closer union and a more complete expression of her utter surrender to his will in the simple words, deeper than any she had yet expressed, "I am my beloved's, and his desire is toward me" (7:10). It is not now, "My beloved is mine." The selfishness even of her love is gone, and her one thought is to be his and to meet his every wish for her.

Fifth. The thought of this section is best expressed by the words "HOME LONGINGS." It is the cry of her heart for her old home (8:2-4). This is not a selfish desire, nor merely a lonesome, homesick wish to be back in her mother's house once more, nor to be absent from her beloved, but rather a wish to have him more wholly to herself out of the excitement and confusion of the city, and the causes that so often separate him from her, in the simple unbroken communion of her own home, and the days when he used to be ever by her side among the Galilean hills. It is the cry of a loving heart for constant, unbroken fellowship and separation from others unto him alone.

Sixth. Chapter 8:5-14. This is the HOME COMING, the beautiful picture of the fulfilment of her longing, the return to Galilee, the renewal of their plighted vows under the old trees and amid the old trysting scenes. Then comes her artless yet half artful intercession for her sisters and her brother, and that all dear to her may share in the blessing which she enjoys. The beautiful scene closes with the request of her bridegroom for a favour from her, and that is, that she will sing for him one of the songs which doubtless she had often sung in the days of old; and the poem closes with her last song, a sweet out-breathing of the love that longs for his presence, and that asks only for him in inseparable union, pointing forward in its deep spiritual application to the everlasting song and the undivided fellowship of the home above.

Such is the structure of this love story, and it is easy to see how much may lie back of it in the higher world of spiritual realities. Of course there is boundless room for extravagant and visionary application, but there is also abundant cause for sober, scriptural interpretation, and for lessons that touch the whole field of personal experience and dispensational truth.

Jewish writers have been very fond of seeing in it the story of their race, and much that they have seen is doubtless true, perhaps all. Most truthfully and vividly does it recall the beginning of their history; waiting like her in the king's palace in the time of Solomon's magnificence and splendour, unequalled and apparently unlikely to be ever changed. The story of her wooing is the story of God's loving call to ancient Israel, as He summoned them to come with Him to another land and accept Him as their heavenly Husband. The first sad dream of chapter 2 is applied to the dark days of the Babylonian captivity; the second and more terrible dream, and the longer separation of chapter 5, with all the wrongs received at the watchmen's hands, has been more than fulfilled in the sad story of the Middle Ages and the sufferings of the Jewish nation for nearly eighteen hundred years. The reason of this is not hard to find in the confession of the bride. It was because he had knocked at Israel's door and been rejected when He came to them as their Bridegroom in the days of His flesh. But He will appear to them once more, as he did to her, and, as in her case, so for them also,

there will be the restoration to the old home once more, and amid the hills of Galilee and the scenes of Hebrew history will He renew with them His everlasting covenant and betroth them unto Himself forever, and Israel's last song will be "the song of Moses and the Lamb."

The application of this delightful allegory to the church of Christ is still more marked. She, too, had her waiting and her call to come out from the world and follow her Lord according to the beautiful imagery of chapter 2 verses 8-13, and with His call came a new springtime and an everlasting summer. She, too, had her first dark dream, perhaps during the sad days of His crucifixion and burial. She, too, had her spiritual betrothal and marriage to her Lord and went forth in Pentecostal power and apostolic purity in His name, and with all the fullness of His gifts and graces, and the fellowship of His love. But she, too, like Israel, has had her second and her longer sad dream of sorrow and separation, in the dark ages of error and corruption, which almost blotted out the church for a thousand years from existence. And she, too, has had her restoration and once more has begun to appear in the glory of His spiritual revealing, "fair as the moon, clear as the sun, and terrible as an army with banners"; and above all, like the fair bride, when restored to His spiritual fellowship her great longing and blessed hope is His personal coming and the restitution of all things which that coming is to bring, corresponding to the bride's return to her Galilean home. And her sweetest song and the song the Bridegroom loves the best is that which every true heart is singing today, and which is the closing echo of the Bible itself, "Make haste, my beloved," or, as the New Testament translates it, "Come, Lord Jesus, come quickly."

But the Song of Solomon has a very special application to the individual Christian.

We see in it the story of our call, conversion and justification. "Draw me and we will run after thee; the king has brought me into his chambers." This is where we all began. "I am black but comely, O ye daughters of Jerusalem, black as the tents of Kedar, comely as the curtains of Solomon." This is the striking picture of the soul's justification. Sinful and unworthy, in ourselves, we yet are clothed in our Saviour's spotless righteousness, and "beautiful through His comeliness." Our righteousness is not our own; but clothed in His merits and united to His person we are "even as He."

We see the soul's desire for a deeper intimacy with Jesus. "Tell me, 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 that wandereth by the flocks of thy companions." It is the cry of the hungry heart for the living bread, and of the tired spirit for the secret place of His presence and His rest. And He answers it by the revelation of His love, so that the happy heart can say, "I sat down under His shadow with great delight, and His fruit was sweet to my taste, He brought me into His banqueting house and His banner over me was love."

The call to leave all and follow Him. This is more. The relation of Jesus to the disciples on the banks of Jordan brought them to His house to abide with Him that whole day. But there came another call, a little later, to leave all and follow Him forever. This is the call of the second scene in the Song of Solomon. "Rise up my love, my fair one and come away." Happy they who promptly answered, "I will go."

We see the soul a little reluctant to respond to so abrupt a call, and putting Him off a little while “until the day breathe” that is until the evening. But also it is followed by a bitter disappointment, and a sad and gloomy night, when she seeks her Lord long in vain, and at last is only too glad to find Him even on the streets, and bring Him to her home to be parted no more.

Next we see the soul’s marriage to the Lord, in the imagery of the third and fourth chapters.

This is the great spiritual mystery of grace, the union of the heart with Christ in the happy hour, when all has been yielded and the Holy Spirit comes to say “Thou shall call thy name Hephzibah and thy land Beulah, for the Lord delighteth in thee and thy land shall be married.”

Then come the testing days of the heart when faith and love are tried and even failures come to teach us deeper lessons and establish us in a place of strength that we never knew before. First He leaves His bride for a little, but it is only till the evening, and soon He returns with tenderest love. Next He comes at night to her door, but she is asleep and waits so long to open the door that He goes away again. Then comes the darkest of her trials. She seeks Him but she finds Him not. The watchmen of the street insult and mock her. But she is steadfastly faithful to her Lord. She declares to all His glory and His grace. She declares her own love to Him. At last he appears to her, and with words of tenderest affection rewards her constancy and love. And then she appears in a loveliness and glory she had never known before. Her trials have only deepened her life, and now she “looketh forth as the morning, fair as the moon, clear as the sun, and terrible as an army with banners.” And so wholly His has she become that her one testimony is, “I am by beloved’s, and His desire is toward me.” Such is the soul’s experience often even after it has come into full union with its Lord. A very slight unfaithfulness will often bring a long, sad separation and many a sorrow. It is a much more serious thing to disobey Christ after we have come into full union with Him than before. But even this sad failure is not irremediable. Out of these testings we come with an experience worth all it cost, and a consecration that can say without reserve, “I am my beloved’s, and want to meet His desire and satisfy His love to me.”

The later experiences of Shulamith have their counterpart in every true spiritual life. The longing to dwell apart with Him, the cry for His closer presence, the longing for home, especially for His blessed coming again, all these things are the ripening of the love-life of the heart and the preparation for His coming. The more we know Him spiritually, the more will we long to see Him face to face, and to be with Him where distance divides not, and temptation, sin and sorrow come no more.

CHAPTER TWO

WAITING DAYS

“The King hath brought me into His chambers. He brought me into His banqueting house, and His banner over me was love.”

As we have already seen, the book of Canticles opens with the picture of the bride waiting in the palace of the king for her wedding day. She has come from her Galilean home, and is surrounded by her attendants, the daughters of Jerusalem. The poem opens with a song by her, and a chorus in which her maidens join, occupying the first eight verses. This is followed by another solo, in which she calls upon her lover to tell her where she may find him, followed by a response by her maidens, who bid her go forth and search by the footsteps of the flocks. Then her Beloved himself appears, and the rest of the scene is a conversation between them in one of the arbours of the king’s gardens, followed by a repast in the banqueting house of the palace. The whole scene is full of spiritual parallels, reminding every one of us of our own most precious experience.

We have her heavenly call. “Draw me and we will run after thee. The King hath brought me into His chambers.” She recognizes even her love as the response of her heart to another love that first drew her. How true of us! “We love Him because He first loved us.” “By the grace of God I am what I am.” With loving kindness hath He drawn us because He hath loved us with an everlasting love. Our highest longings after God were first inspired in us by God Himself, and we never can more than apprehend that for which we are apprehended of Christ Jesus. Well may we say of that great love that has anticipated long ago all that it has brought us, and much more that is to follow, “How precious are thy thoughts to me, O God! They are more in number than the sands of the sea.” “God, who is rich in mercy, for His great love wherewith He loved us, even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, and hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus.”

Her heavenly robes. “I am black but comely, as the tents of Kedar, as the curtains of Solomon.” That is, “I am black as the tents of Kedar, comely as the curtains of Solomon.”

We have here a beautiful blending of perfect humility and perfect confidence. This is the spirit which should run through our entire Christian life. True first of the sinner’s justification, it will ever be as true of the saint’s holiness. It is practically Paul’s own confession, “the chief of sinners, but I obtained mercy.” “I am not sufficient even to think anything as of myself, but my sufficiency is of God.” It is the lowliness that prostrates itself in the dust, evermore conscious even after the longest experience of Christ’s grace, that we still are nothing but worthless empty vessels, and that all our righteousness is not self-constituted but constantly dependent on Christ alone. It is just because our righteousness is not our own that we can speak of it in such high terms, and dare to say, I am comely; I am clothed with the righteousness of Jesus; I am kept by the power of God; I can do all things through Christ who strengtheneth me. He hath clothed me with the garments of salvation, He hath covered me with the robes of His righteousness. I am sanctified by Christ Jesus and filled with the Holy Spirit, and enabled to walk with Him in Holy obedience unto all pleasing, and yet I

am nothing by myself, but “by the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace towards me was exceeding abundant with faith and love which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.” There is no modesty in sitting down in the kitchen if we are the sons of God and the beloved of our Father’s family. He expects us, with becoming dignity, to take the place His love has given us, and to feel at home in the heavenly robes in which His grace has arrayed us, daring to say, as He says of us, “The blood of Jesus Christ cleanses from all sin.”

Her higher longings for her Lord Himself. It was not enough for her to be in His palace and arrayed in His robes of loveliness and honour, but she wanted her Lover Himself. “Tell me,” she cries, “Thou whom my soul loveth, where thou feedest, where thou makest thy flock to rest at noon; for why should I be as one that turneth aside by the flocks of thy companions?” She cannot be content with the society of others, nor can any of them be her shepherd. Three things she wants in Him. She wants Him to feed her; she wants Him to rest her; and she wants Him to be her companion and give her His sweet society.

This expresses the soul’s deep longing for a closer fellowship with Jesus. Its first cry is for His love to minister to its deep need, “Tell me where thou feedest.” The spirit has its own peculiar capacities and needs, and Christ alone can satisfy them. He is our living bread. “He that eateth me shall live by me.” “My flesh is meat indeed, and my blood is drink indeed. He that eateth my flesh and drinketh my blood dwelleth in me and I in him. Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood ye have no life in you.” This is the source of spiritual freshness, gladness and growth. This is the spring of physical healing and victorious life in every sense. Without this, Christian work will soon exhaust us. We are as dependent upon Him as the babe upon its mother’s breast. The restlessnesses, frets and failures of most Christians arise from the lack of spiritual nourishment and not knowing “where He feeds His flock.” But nobody can tell you the secret but Him. The daughters of Jerusalem could not answer the question any more than John the Baptist could tell Andrew and Simon where the Master dwelt. He Himself had to take them home to His own abode and welcome them to His inner fellowship. If you want to know the secret of abiding in Jesus and feeding upon His life, go to Him and tell Him, like Shulamith, your desire, and, although you may not see Him at the time nor feel His presence, although He may be absent from your consciousness as He was from hers, still you can stretch out your hands in the darkness and breathe out your cry in His ear, as she did, “Tell me where thou makest thy flock to rest at noon,” and lo! He will be by your side, as He was by hers, answering Himself the longing of her heart. The only way to Jesus is Jesus Himself. The answerer of your hard questions, the light of the blind as well as the life from the dead is He, who is the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last.

The next cry is for rest. This is the deep need of the heart in this world of change, and in the midst of constant irritation, opposition, toil and sorrow. The human spirit finds no rest in earthly things, and has an instinctive longing for the deep repose which only God can give. This is the sweet blessing Christ has purchased for us. It was the legacy which He especially mentioned when leaving His beloved ones. “Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you”; and this peace must ever come to us on His bosom. Our only resting place is His heart. It is He “who causeth His flock to rest at noon.” It is beautiful that the rest comes at the hottest, hardest hour of the day. It is when the sun is beating most fiercely from the tropical sky and all life is languishing under its

fiery breath that He holds His own upon His breast at noon as under the “shadow of a great rock in a weary land.” Oh, the peace Jesus gives! It passeth all understanding. They who come to Him indeed find rest unto their souls.

Beloved, do you not long for God’s quiet, the inner chambers, the shadow of the Almighty, the secret of His presence? Your life perhaps has been all driving and doing, or perhaps straining, struggling, longing and not obtaining. Oh, for rest! to lie down upon His bosom and know that you have all in Him, that every question is answered, every doubt settled, every interest safe, every prayer answered, every desire satisfied. It is God’s everlasting rest. You may have it. Lift up the cry, “Tell me, O thou whom my soul loveth, where Thou feedest, where Thou makest Thy flock to rest at noon!”

And the last longing of the heart is for His companionship and His love. The cry is addressed to Him whom her soul loved, and her appeal is for the love that will make her His exclusive object, and separate her from His companions. It is not their society she wants but His. Oh, how we need to be separated from people, even the best, and have such direct contact with Him that they will be dear to us only through Him, and in His blessed society we shall not even need any other, should He so order it, but Himself; and if He does link us, as He so sweetly does, with His own, they shall be reckoned as part of Him, and shall minister to us not in their human love, but the love and life of Jesus.

Blessed be His name! He has this for us, His exclusive love, a love which each individual somehow feels is all for himself, in which he can lie alone upon His breast and have a place which none other can dispute; and yet His heart is so great that He can hold a thousand million just as near, and each heart seem to possess Him as exclusively for its own; even as the thousand little pools of water upon the beach can reflect the sun, and each little pool seem to have a whole sun embosomed in its beautiful depths. And Christ only can teach us this secret of His inmost love. It is an old story that nobody else can make love for you but yourself. Marriages are made in China by middlemen but true hearts are not thus wedded, nor can you learn it out of a book; it has to be the spontaneous prompting of a loving heart. So Christ alone can unlock the secret door of love and wholly possess the heart as His shrine.

Her happy experience and the satisfaction of all her heart’s desire.

Her cry is not in vain. The echoes have scarcely died away when lo! her beloved is by her side with words of affection and admiration and the unbroken fellowship of His love, and her own glad testimony tells the story of the completeness of the answer which He brings to all her heart’s desire. Had she longed for rest? “I sat down,” she says, “under his shadow with great delight.” For His heavenly feeding, “His fruit was sweet to my taste; He took me into His banqueting house.” For His more precious love, “His banner over me was love.”

So He wants to give us rest, to cover us with His shadow, to make us no sit down under it with great delight. But we must sit down if we would know His rest. We must cease from our own activity and we must be willing to go into the shadow, lost to the sight of ourselves, lost to the sight of others, overshadowed by what they might call gloom, or even shadow. But it is the shadow of the Almighty, and oh! the delight of those who there sit down and trust where they cannot see! The most that we need to

do to get rest is simply to rest, to cease from what we are thinking, questioning, planning, fearing, to suppress ourselves, to stop thinking, to stop trying, to stop listening, to stop answering the tempter, to hide our heads on the bosom of Jesus and let Him think and love and keep, seeing nothing but the shadow of our Beloved which hides everything else, even the light of our way, from our view.

And He has for us the heavenly fruit and the house of wine. "His fruit was sweet unto my taste." Not the fruit He gives but the fruit He bears; He is the apple-tree and we feed on Him. The banqueting house literally means the house of wine, and wine is the scriptural symbol of life, of blood, of the richest form of life. He feeds us upon His very life. He gives us, not only the sacramental cup but every other, and says of it, "Drink ye all of it."

And finally, He is for us the satisfaction of our love. "His banner over me was love." This means, of course, that His love for us is the pledge and guarantee of our safety and protection. What can harm us if God be for us? His love defies every foe and secures every resource. But the words have a deeper meaning.

They suggest that our banner, too, is love; the power that will guard us, the defence that will save us from all evils and keep us in perfect victory is that which is the spirit and theme of all this song, the love-life of the Lord. Therefore we have given to the theme of this book this name. Its design is to teach us that love-life which is above every other life. It is when we are baptized into its perfect love, when our beings are penetrated and filled with this heavenly principle that we are bannered against all our foes and armed for perfect victory. Love is the weapon, even more than faith, that will disarm all our enemies and melt their fiery darts into harmless weakness as they strike our glowing breastplate of love. Archimedes, it was, who proposed to destroy the ships of the enemy by a simple burning glass, through which he converged upon them the rays of the sun and set them on fire. The love of the Lord, burning in our hearts, will consume everything that harms us. Satan cannot live against it a moment. It consumes all our enemies and turns their hatred into love. It is the antidote to every temptation that can come to us in disobedience and unfaithfulness. It is the charm which inspires and sustains every sacrifice and service for the Lord, and makes every burden light. It is the balm which brings even healing to our flesh and mortal frame. It is the joy of the earth and light of heaven.

CHAPTER THREE

WOOING DAYS

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

This is the story of the calling of the Bride. It is recited as a sort of song or soliloquy. Perhaps it was told to the attendant maiden as she waited in the palace for her wedding day. Her home had been amid the beautiful scenes of Northern Galilee, somewhere among the foothills of Lebanon. There in her simple rustic home, with her mother and her brothers, for her father is not mentioned and she was probably an orphan girl, she had lived in seclusion, having even to labour with her hands in taking care of her brothers' vineyards. Her beauty, however, had attracted the notice of Solomon, and he had found her out in her quiet home and the story of his coming is here described with great vividness and beauty.

Appearing at her lattice-window one day in the spring time, doubtless after his first acquaintance had given him the right to make such a visit, he whispered the starling call to her to leave her lowly home and come away with him into a sweeter spring-time of love.

“For, lo, the winter is past, the rain is over, and gone. “The flowers appear on the earth; the time of the singing of birds is come, and the voice of the turtle is heard in our land. “The fig tree putteth forth her green figs, and the vines with the tender grape give a good smell. Arise, my love, my fair one, and come away.”

And as she coyly hid away he pleaded, “O my dove that art in the clefts of the rock, in the secret places of the stairs, let me see thy countenance.”

The words that follow seem to be a request to her to sing for him one of her simple country songs, which she does in the playful strains of the fifteenth verse.

“Take us the little foxes that spoil the vines, for our vines have tender grapes.”

Perhaps she meant in her little song to put him off in half playful mood or invite him to come and help her in the care of the garden, as her duties were more practical than he seemed to imagine, and instead of going with him it would be more fitting for him to come and help her in the care of her vineyard and catch for her the little foxes that eluded her ability; but at the same time she sings softly to herself in an undertone, perhaps not meant altogether for him,

“My Beloved is mine and I am his.”

And then she resumes her little song again in the seventeenth verse, gently hinting to him to withdraw for a little until the day cool and the shadows flee away, that is, until the eventide, and then to swiftly come from the mountains of division which are to separate them for a little while. In a word it is a quiet hint to him to come back at another time when perhaps they shall be less exposed to curious eyes and she less busy with her practical duties.

Then follows the sad dream of the third chapter. That night was a very lonely and gloomy one and in her sleep she thought she had lost her beloved whom she had thus

foolishly sent away. "By night I sought him whom my soul loveth, I sought him but I found him not."

And then she tells how she went forth into the city and sought him in the streets in vain and how she went to the watchmen for direction and at last after a painful search, she found him and she gladly welcomed him and brought him to her mother's home, and feared not to have the world know her love because she would thus atone for the folly which before had let him go. This is the beautiful story of the call of this ancient bride, and back of it lie the deeper teachings of our spiritual life and the experiences of many of us.

The coming of the Beloved. This is a picture of the Saviour's coming to the heart which He calls to the fullness of His love. It looks back to His first coming to save a ruined world. He is represented as coming upon the mountains and leaping over the hills. What mountains of sin, hills of provocation, obstacles that nothing but infinite power and love could ever have surmounted. Oh the hindrances which our depravity, which our prejudices, which our wilfulness have placed between His love and our wicked hearts, but how swiftly and victoriously He came!

"Down from the shining hosts above With joyful haste He sped."

And to each of us has He come. With His whole heart has He sought us. How touching the picture of His standing behind the wall looking forth at the windows, showing Himself at the lattice. It tells of Him who has waited long to gain our attention, to win our confidence, to reach our hearts, and He is still crying to many of us, "Behold! I stand at the door and knock. If any man hear my voice and open the door, I will come in unto him and sup with him and he with me."

His call. Verse 10, "My Beloved spake and said unto me, Rise up my love, my fair one, and come away."

This is the Master's call to do something and to leave something. We shall never get anywhere in the life of consecration until we take a positive step and positive stand. We must rise up sometimes. The act of rising up in the congregation and committing one's self to a consecrated life is often the first real step in a life of holiness, but whatever be the step, there is something that must be done before we can make any headway, and there is something that must be left. We must "come away." There are associations from which we must break away, worldly entanglements that we must separate from, forbidden occupations that we must abandon, doubtful relationships that we must dissolve, pleasures that we must forsake, friends that we must surrender. "Come ye out from among them and be ye separate, and touch not the unclean thing," is the peremptory condition of the promise, "I will receive you and be a father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters," saith the Lord Almighty.

And therefore we must go somewhere. At least we must go with Him wherever He may go.

"I will follow Jesus, Anywhere, everywhere, I will follow on."

Enough to know that He leads; enough to be with Him. Beloved, have we answered this call, "Rise up and come away?" This is speaking to some of us today, as it finds

us in some forbidden place, and bidding us decide like Rebecca when the servant of Abraham brought her the proposal to be the wife of Isaac and pressed the solemn question for her immediate decision, "Wilt thou go with this man?" And she answered, "I will go." He was a stranger to her. The land to which he led her was a strange land. She knew not the way. She had not even seen her bridegroom, but her trusting heart accepted it all without reserve, and her prompt decision was, "I will go." When the soul thus answers to the call of Jesus it has begun an everlasting progression of blessing and glory. So He is calling thee today, "Rise up and come away." Come from this perishing world, come from the low claims of your selfish life, come out from the fellowship of the worldly, come out from the hopes that end with earth, put your hand in His, commit your future to His will, invest all your hopes in His kingdom and coming, and you shall find how true it is, "He that loseth his life for my sake shall keep it unto life eternal."

His pleading. He urges her to come by all the beauty and gladness of the world around, which, no doubt, He means as a type of the brighter spring-time and summer of happiness and love into which He is to introduce her. Much more true is this of our heavenly Bridegroom's call. The summer land of love into which He brings us is one whose beauty no springtide glory can express and no sunlit sky adequately set forth.

Oh! that we may hear His pleading and that we too may have cause to sing,

"I've reached the land of Beulah, the summer land of love, Land of the Heavenly Bridegroom, land of the Holy dove. My winter has departed, my summer time has come. The air is full of singing, the earth is bright with bloom. Oh! blessed land of Beulah, sweet summer land of love. Oh! blessed Heavenly Bridegroom, oh! gentle Holy dove. Oh! Saviour keep us ever, all earth-born things above, In the blessed land of Beulah, the summer land of love."

The winter is past. It stands for the coldness, the barrenness and the wretchedness of our old selfish life, the first-bound misery and the selfishness in which we dwell until the warm Sun of Righteousness lights up our life with heavenly radiance and melts our frigid hearts to love and sweetness. The coming of Christ to the heart is like a great thaw. Not so great is the difference between December and May, as between the earth-bound heart and the soul into which Christ has come to reign.

The rain is over and gone. This is the figure of clouds, mists, spiritual darkness and gloom. Many Christians live in an atmosphere where they never see the sun. It is all mists and tears, doubts and fears, clouds and cares, but when we follow Him the rain is over and gone, the sky is ever clear, the sun is ever bright, the face of our Lord is ever unclouded and unveiled. Our sun shall no more go down nor our moon withdraw her shining, for the Lord shall be our everlasting light and the days of our mourning shall be ended.

The flowers appear on the earth. Blossoms are the beautiful earthly types of faith; the flower is just the promise of the fruit. It is nature anticipating the coming seed and running over with the joy of the anticipation. The flower is just a fruit in embryo, and so faith is just the bud and blossom which foretells the coming blessing. How full of luxuriant beauty and blossom God has made the summer time of the world. Blossoms are everywhere; wild flowers are running to waste on every mountainside and wayside and in the wilderness where no eye ever sees them but the insects and the

birds. God's prodigal hand scatters them everywhere, for the delight of His own heart and the joy of the meanest creatures that gaze upon their beauty. So God wants our lives to effloresce in the overflowing beauty and luxuriance which will not only fill up the actual routine of duty, but which will run over in such fullness that we shall be a blessing to every creature we touch, and that even the insects that buzz around us, the sparrows that play on the sidewalk or at the door, the birds that sing in our branches, our very horse and our dog will be the better and the happier for our religion and shall almost know that something has happened to us. An engineer remarked the other day that since he had become a consecrated Christian his old engine seemed to know it and went better. When it didn't work rightly he used to swear at it, but now he only lifted his heart and voice in a word of prayer or a note of song, and the old engine tried to keep time, as the piston moved apace with his song and seemed to say Amen! When we follow Christ in all His fullness, then our heart will be a land of flowers; our life a garden of bloom.

The time of the singing of the birds is come - rather, the time of singing is come. The spirit of praise is one of the signs of a consecrated life. We pray less and sing more. Certainly we groan less, or rather we turn all our murmurs and moans into Hallelujahs and life is one sweet everlasting song. Sorrow cannot quench it, but we count it all joy even when we cannot see or feel the joy. Beloved! God is calling some of you to a life of song. You do not praise enough, and you never will until you know the love-life of the Lord, and then the song will be like a nightingale in the house. It will sing at midnight because it cannot help it. It will sing when there seems no rational cause for singing. It will sing just because the song is there and it must sing even amid the darkness, the raging tempest, or with the dirges of death and despair on every side.

The voice of the turtle is heard in our land; that is, the turtle dove, the sweet emblem of the Holy Spirit. How beautiful the notes of the wood-dove as some of us remember them in our childhood, sometimes on some distant mountain-side. How much more beautiful as they ring,

“Through all Judea's echoing land,” sweet symbol of the gentle and peaceful voice of the Holy Spirit, as it is revealed to the listening ear of love. Oh! how delightful the first whisper of a Comforter in our hearts, sorrowing perhaps or lonely and afraid. Oh! shall we ever forget the blissful moment when first the voice of the turtle was heard in our land, and all heaven seemed to whisper, Peace! Peace! and the heart nestled under the wings of the heavenly Dove, and the soul grew still as it hearkened to the still, small voice that said, “Peace be unto you. Not as the world giveth give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid.” Beloved, follow Jesus and you shall know the voice of the dove, the peace that passeth all understanding, the heavenly presence that folds you under the wings of everlasting love and stills you in the eternal calm of the bosom of God.

Let us not fail to notice the words “IN OUR LAND.” The voice of the turtle is not heard in the old land of self-love and sin, but only in the land to which our Bridegroom calls us; the land of love and fellowship with God. How sweetly He calls it “OUR LAND.” He does not say “My land.” Already He recognizes the partnership to which He has called us, and shares with us even the better country into which we have not yet entered. Beloved, let us make it our land too.

There is one way of living in everlasting spring, even on this little globe; that is, like the birds of passage, to fly away when the winter comes and leave the land of winter for Southern climes where frosts are not and cold blasts never blow. How sweetly Cowper sings to one of these happy birds that live in continual sunshine.

“Sweet bird, thy heart is ever young, Thy voice is ever clear; Thou hast no sorrow in thy song, No winter in thy year.”

This may be true of the heart that will migrate from the winter-land of the old life to the everlasting summer of His presence. There is such a land of love and peace for every weary, homesick heart. Beloved, let us rise and come away. The voice of the turtle-dove is calling us to do it.

The fig-tree putteth forth her green figs, or rather ripeneth her green figs. They have been hanging all the winter on the tree, and they are green and sour, but with the spring-time they ripen and become aromatic and mellow. As the beautiful Hebrew phrase expresses it,

“She spiceth forth her green figs.”

How true of the Christian life. The ordinary Christian has figs, but they are winter figs. They are green and sour. He does something for God and has many a good feeling, but there is no perfume about it. It is raw and harsh; but when love comes, and the love-life of the Lord possesses all the being, oh, how mellow the spirit becomes, how tender the unction, how gentle the meekness and patience, how fervid the zeal and the love; how full of fragrance, how spiced with heavenly sweetness the whole being and bearing become!

The vines with the tender grape give a good smell. This is higher than fruit; it is fragrance, the very smell of the plant, and that which, as we shall see later in this beautiful song, is the highest expression of spiritual qualities, and the flavour of the Christian spirit. Many Christians have fruit, but they have no fragrance. There is much value in their lives, but there is no attractiveness. This is not as God would have it. He wants the vines with the tender grapes to give a good smell, and this never can be until our whole being is saturated with love. This love, then, must first come from the love of the Lord, revealed to us, accepted by us, and reflected from our happy, heavenly lives.

His repeated call. Once again He calls His beloved one. Verse 14, “Oh, my dove, that are in the clefts of the rock, in the secret places of the stairs, let me see thy countenance, let me hear thy voice.” She had been turning away, and he pleads with her to turn back and let Him look upon her face and hear her voice. Christ wants us to turn our faces directly to Him. Is not this the attitude of prayer, and the prayer that looks up into the face of God with unveiled countenance and loving, whole-hearted confidence. God wants our faces turned heavenward, and shining with the reflected glory of the skies. Too often we go with faces turned downward and earthward, but He says, “Let me see thy countenance.” Lift up your face toward the heavens, for He wants to hear your voice in holy testimony and praise. Not until you give him your voice and fully confess Him with your lips shall you know all the fullness of His deeper abiding. He wants your lips to answer His question and to testify to His love, and the reason that many of you have never had the full witness of His Spirit is

because your face has never fully witnessed unto Him. Beloved, let Him hear your voice.

Her response. Her answer was not worthy of His love. There was a little trifling in it, a little procrastination, and yet a good deal of sincere love, but enough hesitation and compromise to lose her full blessing. Her playful hint to him to come and catch the foxes that spoiled the vines was a little like the excuse that some of us make when Christ calls us to be all His own, that we are too busy with our earthly duties for what we sometimes consider sentimental religion, and that when we get a little more leisure from our secular cares and occupations we will give our attention to a life of devotion. That is the very time and place that we need our Lord the most.

He is indeed willing to come into our common life, and help us with our vines and little foxes, but not until we have first surrendered them to Him so fully that we are at leisure from them for His other calls, and are willing to turn aside from the most engrossing occupation to commune with Him or to follow Him wherever He may lead. Her great mistake, however, was the procrastination and delay which put Him off until the evening. Perhaps it was the shame of being seen with Him which prompted her proposal; perhaps it was the pressing cares of the day; but whatever it was, it was wholly wrong, and cost her a very sorrowful night. How often many of us are tempted to say, "Go thy way for this time." The children of Israel, when called by God to enter the promised land, hesitated only for a night, and were quite willing the next morning to follow the pillar of cloud from Kadesh Barneah had it led that way, but it was too late. God refused to go with them. Now it was their time, but it was not His. The time of His visitation was passed. Love brooks no delay. Oh, that each of us might be able to say of every call of the heavenly voice, "When thou saidst 'Seek ye my face,' then my heart replied, 'Thy face, Lord, will I seek.'" A hint is enough to repel a sensitive heart. Love is peculiarly sensitive, and the Holy Ghost is easily offended and grieved from our door. Let us take heed how we chill His overtures and appeals by even a qualified refusal, but let our whole heart ever meet Him as generously and uncompromisingly as He has given all to us.

The sad sequel of her reluctant response. The sorrowful dream which follows in the sad story of Shulamith, is also the story of many a Christian heart. "By night I sought him whom my soul loveth, I sought him, but I found him not." The grieved friend withdraws, and the heart is conscious of desertion and loneliness, and awakes to realize its terrible mistake. But still there is something we can do. We can seek Him as she did, and when we find Him not, we can, as she did, go to the watchmen and ask the way. They can tell us the way, but they cannot take us to Him. We must go beyond them. It was not until she passed the watchmen that she found her beloved, and it is not until we pass beyond the presence and the consciousness of even the best of men, and even those who have helped us most to find our Lord, that we really find Him. The lover always meets his loved one alone. No friend can be witness of the trysting hour. Heart to heart, and with no other heart between, the betrothal must be made. And so she passed from the watchmen's presence and followed their directions, and soon she was clasping the feet of her beloved. There was no reserve now, no desire to have Him withdraw to the mountains of Bethor, or separation, but the clinging embrace that would never again let him go, and the uncompromising welcome that brought him to her mother and to the most sacred chambers of her house, where the fondest place was given to him, and his dearness and nearness were

recognized without reservation. Yes, even the mother's place to which, perhaps, she had clung hitherto, is now abandoned to a dearer and nearer. Beloved, thus you can seek the Lord, and they that seek shall find, and to him that knocketh it shall be opened. Very blessed it is to open immediately when He knocketh, but blessed is it also to knock until He opens. So, seeking one,

“Come thy way to Zion's gate, There till mercy lets thee in, Knock and seek and watch and wait.

Knock. He knows the sinner's cry, Weep. He loves the sinner's tear. Watch, for heavenly love is nigh. Wait till heavenly light appear.”

And when we find him we must give him the inmost chamber, the fondest love, the place that the dearest has held. It is when the sacrifice of the tenderest of earthly ties has been fully made that Christ becomes our All in All, and every earthly tie becomes more sacred and more true. The spirit of self-sacrifice is the secret of the truest happiness.

Once in India a company of soldiers were in extreme poverty and distress. The general entered a heathen temple. The natives besought him to spare their idols, and warned him that if he touched a certain chief deity that every calamity would fall upon him and his troops; but he boldly marched up to the proud idol and striking it from its pedestal, he dashed it to pieces on the temple floor, when lo! to his astonishment and the surprise of the witnessing multitudes, countless treasures of silver and gold poured from its shattered bosom. It had been the storehouse for centuries of the treasuries of kings, and all that it needed was to be shattered in order to enrich the needy whose hand had dared to strike the blow. Beloved, many of our idols stand between us and the wealth of God's infinite love and grace. Let us not fear to strike the fatal blow, and lo! from the bosom of that which we perhaps spare as an Agag or cherish with an unholy clinging, will come forth the wealth of infinite blessing and everlasting love.

CHAPTER FOUR

WEDDING DAYS

“In that day they shall call me Ishi, and no longer Baali.” (Hosea 2:16)

This beautiful section of the Song of Solomon describes the wedding scene in the old Oriental poem. It begins with a picture of the marriage procession coming up from the wilderness, the former home of the bride, amid clouds of fragrance, which look like pillars of smoke in the distance. She is borne in the litter or palanquin of King Solomon, and is guarded by the band of three-score valiant men who march before and behind the royal bride to protect her from danger and “fear in the night.” She is met by the king in a chariot of silver and gold, lined with costly tapestries presented by the daughters of Jerusalem as a gift of love, and the royal bridegroom is crowned with a diadem of beauty and glory presented by his mother’s loving hands.

The marriage procession fades into the meeting of the bridegroom and the bride, and we next listen to his greeting of Shulamith and his words of admiration as he welcomes her with love and praise (Chapter 4, verses 1-16), and then leaves her for the remainder of the day and until the evening shadows flee away, when he will come again, after all the marriage preparations are complete, to claim her as his bride, and to take part in the wedding ceremonies and the wedding feast. Returning in the evening he greets her with words of still stronger admiration and love (verse 7), “Thou art all fair, my love. There is no spot in thee.” And then he pleads with her to turn her thoughts away from Lebanon, her old home, and turn her eye with single purpose and thought to him alone. He now calls her for the first time his spouse. The remaining verses of chapter 4 are the outpourings of his full heart, as he loves to dwell on the sweetness of her who has satisfied his soul’s deepest love. All the most exquisite imagery of an Oriental land is laid under tribute to praise the beauty and sweetness of the bride - the sweetness of the honeycomb, the exhilarance of wine, the smell of costly ointments, the rich fragrance of Lebanon, the beauty of the garden, the freshness of the fountains, the fruitfulness of the pomegranate, the manifold variety and delicacy of the perfumes of camphor, saffron, calamus, cinnamon, frankincense, myrrh, aloes, and all the chief spices - all these pale before the sweetness of her love.

At length we hear her response (in verse 16), as she turns all her being to his love and calls upon the north wind and the south wind to blow upon her garden that its spices may flow out, and then invites her beloved to come into her garden and accept it as his own.

The scene closes with the bridegroom’s response to her as he accepts her offered gift of herself, and then, turning to the invited guests and friends, bids them welcome to the marriage feast, “Eat, oh friends, yea, drink abundantly, oh beloved.”

The great spiritual truth which all this Oriental imagery covers in our union with the Lord Jesus Christ, the true Bridegroom of the church and of the heart. First we see the coming of the bride to meet the bridegroom. She comes up from the wilderness. It is there that Christ always calls His Bride. “I will allure her and bring her into the wilderness,” he says to her, “and there will I speak to her heart, and in that day she shall call me Husband, and I will give her vineyards from thence and the valley of Achor for a door of hope, and she shall sing there as in the days of her youth.” It is

usually out of the deep, dark, lonely place of trial that we come into our deepest intimacy with Jesus and know the fullness of His love.

The pillars of smoke amid which she came are figures of the sweet fragrance of the heart, the incense of love, the one offering which makes the most unworthy and insignificant acceptable to the remembrance of love. This is all the bride has to bring, her love, but it is so deep, and rich, and sweet, that it fills all the air with clouds of fragrance and pillars of smoke.

Once in the desert a wandering Arab found a spring. The water was so delicious that he could not keep it to himself, but filling a leathern flask he bore it across the desert a hundred miles in the hot sun and sand, and presented it to his chief as an offering of his love. The water was all corrupted before it reached the prince, and when he tasted it, it had no sweetness, but he betrayed no sign of its unpleasantness and thanked the kind bestower and sent him back laden with honours. His princes afterwards tasted the water, curious to know what strange charm it possessed, but to them it was loathsome, and they looked with astonishment and disgust at their chief. "Oh," said he, "it had for me a taste which you could not discern. It was the taste of love. The kindness of heart that brought it was all that I could see, and I would not for the world have let him know that his gift itself was so worthless, because the love that brought it made it of infinite value." Beloved, we may be poor and unworthy, but if we bring to Jesus a heart of love, it will be to Him a priceless treasure, of surpassing intrinsic values. In the wedded life there can be no substitute for love. Without it marriage is a hideous mockery, and in Christian life and our relationship with Jesus Christ, without love we are but sounding brass and tinkling cymbals, and all our theories, ceremonies and religious forms are an offensive sham, and, notwithstanding all that we may do, or think, or say, His sentence can only be, "Thou hast left thy first love. Because thou art lukewarm I will spew thee out of my mouth."

Next we see the chariot of the bride. It was furnished by her husband and defended by his own body guard. And so, as we come into our place of chosen intimacy with Jesus Christ, it is He Himself who bears us into this higher plane. The very love that brings us to His bosom is His own heavenly gift. The very power to rise to meet Him in this wondrous union is from Him. He bears us to His palace and to His heart in His own chariot. The Holy Spirit will teach us the wondrous secret of heavenly love, and often we will say, like the bride a little later, "Or ever I was aware my soul made me like the chariot of Amminadib." The guards around the chariot that bore her to her beloved suggest to us the perils that surround us as we walk in the closer places of Christian experience. There is no place so full of peril as that which lies nearest to the gates of heaven and to the arms of Jesus. The fallen spirits of the air, the emissaries of Lucifer, son of the morning, are not only spirits of light but spirits of love, and there is a false love that would lower us to the depths of ruin as well as a true love that would lift us to the heights of heaven. Many a heart has been beguiled and seduced by lying spirits to a kind of love that is not the love-life of the Lord; and, yielding to some delusive charm that claimed to be from heaven, the soul has lost its purity, and instead of becoming the bride of the Lamb has become an unholy partner of Satanic power. Thus, alas, the once pure church of apostolic days became the harlot of the great apostasy, and that which was so terribly fulfilled in the church has often been made as real in the individual life. This is the day, especially, when spiritualism, spiritism, theosophy, science falsely so called, and morbid sentimentalism, under the guise of

leadings of the Spirit, are betraying many hearts into the sad and sinful counterfeit of the love-life of the Lord. But through God the heart that is wholly His will be guarded by His almighty hand, and the chariot of heavenly love will be defended by the armed hosts of His power and holiness. Let us keep our eye singly upon Him, our heart wholly true to Him, and let us not fear to draw nigh, for His guardian presence and heavenly panoply will protect us even from the wiles of the devil, and we shall walk in the narrow paths of the heavenly life safe from all danger and fear even in the night, and His jealous and mighty love will guard us like a chaste virgin from even the breath of defilement.

We see in this picture the coming of the Bridegroom to meet his bride. He, too, has a chariot of silver, and gold, and royal purple, the gift of the daughters of Jerusalem, and, as he meets his bride, his head is crowned with the crown of love, and his heart is full of gladness in the day of his espousals.

Our beloved Lord would have us understand that His heart is as glad as ours in the consummation of His union with us. He has chosen us as the object of His peculiar and eternal love, and He needs our love as we need His. We may not be able to understand why one so much above us can be satisfied with the affection of those so unworthy of Him, but there is always something in love that is inexplicable. It has no reason but itself, and He has loved us just because He has loved us and in a measure altogether out of proportion to any claim or fitness in the objects of that love. We contribute to His joy as well as to our own when we yield our hearts to our best Friend. Surely He has a right to claim from us the return which His love deserves. He has given up all else; this is His only portion. Let us not rob Him of any part of it.

The Bridegroom's welcome to his bride. His first words are a tribute to her loveliness, ending with the unqualified words of praise, "Thou art all fair, my love. There is no spot in thee." This is high praise to give, but it is the praise He longs to give to every one of His sanctified ones. It is not too high for the blood of Christ to cover. The soul that is washed in that fountain and robed in His spotless garments is whiter than the snow and spotless as Christ Himself. It is not that our personal character is perfect, but passing out of ourselves into Him and filled with Him, we are indeed able to claim even His own mighty assurance, "Now ye are clean through the word that I have spoken unto you."

Let us dare to believe it on the authority of His Word, and we shall please Him far better than when we are continually holding up the spots of our own unworthiness and betraying before His gaze the wretched corpses that He would have us bury forever out of sight.

A call to detach her thoughts and her affections altogether from former objects of attraction and fix her single eye on Him alone. "Come with me from Lebanon, my sister spouse." That is, withdraw thy thoughts from Lebanon thy old home, from the fair scenes of thy childhood, from the tender associations of the past, from the beautiful Amana and Shenir. Forget thy kindred and thy father's house, and let thy thoughts be all mine. This is His call to us to let every other interest and affection be concentrated in His great love, and when we do this then alone shall we satisfy His heart. God's love is jealous for our own good as well as for His own glory, and He cannot accept a divided heart in a bond so dear as that of marriage.

His delight in her singleness of eye and heart. Thou hast ravished my heart with one of thine eyes. She has responded to his appeal; she has given him all her heart. She has dropped the far-off look from her longing gaze, and every thought and affection is centred in Him alone, and the beautiful words which He uses in the parallel picture in Hosea are true of her. "Thou shalt abide for me, and I for thee." This is the secret of a consecrated and happy life, and the only life that can satisfy our Lord. Beloved, has He got all our eye and all our heart?

His higher tribute to her sweetness and love. He compares her in the closing verse of the chapter to the fountains, fruits and fragrance of an Oriental garden. "A garden enclosed is my sister spouse." It is the enclosure of the garden which constitutes the secret of its value. It is not open to the trampling feet of all the wild creatures of the woods, but it is enclosed for Him alone and guarded from the desecrating tread of others. This is the reason why our blessings so often fade away or leak out as from open vessels. We are not enclosed, but like a garden open to the wild beasts of the field and the destroying, desecrating tramp of every unclean thing. We receive a blessing in the house or at the altar of prayer, and lo! before an hour we have lost it and wonder why. The reason is very plain. Some idle talker has talked it all away, some vain and volatile flood of thoughts and imaginations has taken possession of our heart, and lo! the Holy Dove, disgusted, has taken His flight. Some wretched, miserable, idle conversation or unholy gossip has been permitted to occupy our attention, the garden gate has been opened and lo! the flowers and fruits are trodden down by unholy feet or devoured by rapacious mouths. Our God will not abide in company with Belial. If we would know the joy of the Lord and have our Beloved dwell with us, we must enclose our garden in the walls of holy separation, and coming out from among them and touching no unclean thing, He will receive us and we shall be His sons and His daughters, yea, the Bride of His exclusive affection. The same thought is expressed by the fountain sealed, the spring shut up. It is the picture of a heart separated unto God. It is the compression of the spring that gives it its impelling power and sends the waters high up sometimes in their heavenward flow, and keeps them ever fresh and pure. The narrower the torrent's channel, the mightier its rush of waters. The broad stream becomes a stagnant swamp, and the heart that has room for all promiscuous things ceases to have any deep love for anything, and Christ will not accept its mixtures and compromises. "Because he hath set his love upon me," He says of the single heart, "therefore will I deliver him." "Delight thyself also in the Lord and He shall give thee the desires of thine heart."

Next we have the fruitfulness of the garden, "An orchard of pomegranates and of pleasant fruits." It is singular that the pomegranate should be the only fruit specified. If you ever examined one you may see the reason. Cut this singular-looking fruit through the centre and look at a section of it as it is exposed by the knife, and your attention will be at once attracted, not to the rich colour of the fruit, or even to its delicious perfume or taste, but, above everything else, to its countless seeds. It is one mass of little germs, there being enough in a single pomegranate to multiply it a thousand-fold. The fruit which God wants from His children is fruit that reproduces itself in other souls. The grace that has saved us can just as well save the world. The blessing that we have received can be multiplied by all the people that are willing to accept it, and God wants each of us to be a seed which will spring forth and bear fruit, if not as much as the pomegranate, at least some thirty, some sixty and some an hundred-fold. Our salvation is not a selfish luxury, but a sacred trust; our every new

experience is given us for some other more than for ourselves. All that God does for us is intended by Him to be reflected and transmitted through our lives, so that on account of us the wilderness and the solitary place shall rejoice, and the desert shall blossom as the rose. Beloved, is our Master able to delight in us as in His Bride because of our fruitfulness? Is our life repeating itself, not by hard effort but by spontaneous and springing life?

But there is something far higher than fruit, and so the next characteristic of the Lord's garden, and the one that is emphasized in sevenfold variety and fullness, is fragrance. No less than seven different kinds of spices are mentioned in the verses that follow. Some of them are familiar to us, others are less known, but all express the idea of sweetness, of the devotion of love, of the inexpressible atmosphere of heavenliness. The perfume is the soul of the plant. It expresses the finer, the more delicate essence of its life. It stands for that in our Christian experience and in the outgoing of our heart, which is divinest, most sensitive, spiritual and devout. It is the very aroma of the heart, and it is in this that our beloved Lord most delights, and by this that the hearts of men are to be most deeply touched. Some of the spices mentioned here are quite suggestive. The aloe was a bitter spice, and it tells of the sweetness of bitter things, the bitter-sweet, which has its own fine application that only those can understand who have felt it. The myrrh was used to embalm the dead, and it tells of death to something. It is the sweetness which comes to the heart after it has died to its self-will, and pride, and sin. Oh, the inexpressible charm that hovers about some lives simply because they bear upon their chastened countenance and mellow spirit the impress of the cross, the holy evidence of having died to something that was once proud and strong but is now forever at the feet of Jesus, nay, in His bottomless tomb. They are far sweeter for having had it and died to it than if they never had possessed the proud will and died to the strong desire. It is the heavenly charm of a broken spirit and a contrite heart, the music that springs from the minor key, the sweetness that comes from the touch of the frost upon the ripened fruit.

And then the frankincense was a fragrance that came from the touch of the fire. It was the burning powder that rose in clouds of sweetness from the bosom of the flames. It tells of the heart whose sweetness has been called forth, perhaps by the flames of affliction, perhaps by the baptism of the Holy Ghost, the heavenly fire that kindles all the heart until the holy place of the soul is filled with clouds of praise and prayer. Beloved, are we giving out the spices, the perfumes, the sweet odours of the heart so that even as the traveller is conscious the moment he enters the waters of the Orient that he is near the land of the sun, and even as Milton sings,

“Far off at sea the soft winds blow Sabaeon odours from the spicy shores of Araby the blest.”

The bride's response. “Awake O north wind, and come thou south wind; blow upon my garden, that the spices thereof may flow out. Let my beloved come into his garden and eat his pleasant fruits.”

This is the surrender of the bride to her beloved with all the treasures of her affection and her life, and, at the same time, the acknowledgement of her dependence upon a higher power to evoke the sweetness that was slumbering in her being. Not even all the spices that he had named could send out their perfume until his own breath first blew upon them. It is the cry of dependence upon the Holy Spirit for every new breath

of love or praise. We have not in our hearts a crystallized and stereotyped sweetness which is at our command, but we are simply the strings of an aeolian harp, dead and silent unless breathed upon from above, and every motion or aspiration of piety, or prayer, or praise must be awakened afresh by the breath of God Himself. It is blessed to know that He does not expect us to even think a thought of ourselves. He is ready if we are but surrendered to Him, to blow upon our yielded hearts and awaken all the chords of melody; or, to change the figure, call forth all the breathings of heavenly love. He is both the north wind and the south wind, the wind that sharpens, braces, reproves, withers even, if need be, frosts sometimes with its cutting breath, and sweeps away the chaff, the rubbish and the withered leaves; and He is the south wind that comes with healing, with consolation, with sweet encouragement, with tender sympathy, with heavenly hope, with all the tenderness of brooding love. He knows how to adapt Himself to each of our changing moods and needs and the heart that is fully yielded to Him will accept either as He sends them and praise Him alike for both. Thus we see in her response the beautiful spirit of devotion to Him in all the rich fruition of her being. Her garden was for her Beloved and for none but Him. She did not wish to be sweet that others might see her sweetness, but that He might be satisfied. Oh! it is blessed and beautiful to shine for Christ alone, to be lovely that He may be glad, to pour rich ointment on His head and feet, to serve not the church or the people, but the Lord, and to have Him say of everything we do, even for others, "Ye did it unto me." Beloved! is our garden all for Him? Is our love for Him, our prayer for Him, our sacrifice for Him, our recompense enough if He is pleased and if He approves, our motto this, "For me to live is Christ," "that Christ may be magnified in my body whether it be by life or by death."

The Bridegroom's acceptance of her love and His generous invitation to the wedding guests. "I am come into my garden my sister, my spouse: I have gathered my myrrh with my spice; I have eaten my honey-comb with my honey; I have drunk my wine with my milk: eat, O friends; drink, yea, drink abundantly, O beloved."

Not enough do we realize how much of our service is due to Christ Himself and how truly He appreciates and enjoys the riches of our affection. He accepts the surrender we make; He feeds upon the banquet we spread. He sups with us and enjoys as the recompense of the travail of His soul the little that we bring to Him, and then He gives it all to others, and nothing is so blessed to them as that which was first given to Christ. It is the heart that is wholly dedicated to Jesus that becomes the greatest blessing to mankind. It is the ointment which was poured on Jesus' head which fills all the house with its odour. None can be such blessings to the world as those who, beyond all they do for the world, love and serve the Lord alone. It is when we come into the bosom of His love that we are able to stand, as the bride of the heavenly host at the gates of His palace, and invite His wandering children to the feast that His love has provided. "The Spirit and the Bride say come." It is not until we become the Bride, and are thus filled with the Spirit, and able to represent the Bridegroom that we can say, "Come" in all the fullness of effectual power, and so say it that he that is athirst, shall come, and whosoever will, shall take the water of life freely. Oh! beloved, if we could be a perfect blessing to a sad and lost world, let us come and enter into the love-life of the Lord.

CHAPTER FIVE

TESTING DAYS

“Who is she that looketh forth as the morning, fair as the moon, clear as the sun, and terrible as an army with banners.” (Song of Solomon 6:10)

The structure of this section of the Song of Solomon is very clear and simple. The marriage is over and the bride's first trial comes. It is a very serious trial and the cause of it is chiefly her own folly. Lying asleep at night in her chamber, her bridegroom comes to the door, knocks upon it and speaks to her, requesting her to open and admit him. Half asleep and self-indulgent she reluctantly answers, “I have put off my coat, how shall I put it on? I have washed my feet, how shall I defile them?” but as he still lingers, she rises and with fingers dropping with myrrh, freshly anointing herself to receive him, she opens the door. But she is too late. Chilled by the delay, he has gone. She searches for him up and down the streets in the darkness, but in vain. She wanders, anxious and half-crazed, through the town in the darkness, but she finds him not. She meets the watchmen on her way and they treat her with rudeness and harshness, and the keepers of the walls insult her, until heartbroken and disappointed, she cries to her maidens, “If ye find my beloved, tell him that I am sick of love.” Then her maidens tempt her by asking her what is her beloved more than any other beloved, and perhaps insinuate that there are plenty others just as good if she will only consent to let him go. It is then that her true nobility and fidelity shine out in spite of her mistake. Faithfully she answers, with words of love and devotion, that her beloved is the chief among ten thousand and the altogether lovely, and not only lovely, but true to her, and though she cannot find him, she persists in telling of her beloved and her devotion to him, summing it all up in the testimony, “I am my beloved's and my beloved is mine.” Then it is that he rewards her faithful heart by suddenly appearing and greeting her with words of warmest admiration and boundless praise, calling her beautiful as Tirzah, comely as Jerusalem, majestic as an army with banners. Then her maidens join in the chorus of admiration and utter perhaps a little later in the drama, probably as she goes from her chamber in the morning, fresh with her loveliness, “Who is she that looketh forth as the morning, fair as the moon, clear as the sun, and terrible as an army with banners?” They beg her to dance for them the simple dance of Mahanaim, and, as she grants their request, they break out again with their ascriptions of praise. “How beautiful are thy feet with shoes, oh prince's daughter,” etc., until their chorus is interrupted by the appearance of the bridegroom once more, and the scene closes with his fresh tribute of affection and admiration (Chapter 7:6-9), closing with her response of complete devotion, “I am my beloved's and his desire is toward me.”

The spiritual lessons of all this part of the drama may be summed up as follows:

Her failure. It was a lack of prompt obedience to his call and this is ever sure to bring us sorrow, separation and loss. The first counsel given by the apostles to those who had received the Holy Spirit, is, “that they who are of the Spirit do mind the things of the Spirit.” The closer we come to Christ, the more must we be subject to His call. Love is jealous and divine love wants us ever at its summons and quickly responsive to its faintest whisper. There is no greater word in the Christian's experience than the word OBEY. “God hath given His Spirit to them that obey him.” Christ has made the manifestation of His peculiar love dependent upon this very thing. “If any man love

me, he will keep my commandments - and I will love him and manifest myself unto him." The intimate and abiding communion of Jesus is wholly dependent upon our obedience and responsiveness to His vice. The causes of her failure were indolence and self-indulgence. This was the great slight to her lord. She had preferred her comfort to his. She could lie in luxurious ease while he was standing outside the door, his head wet with the dews and his locks with the drops of the night. What a sad picture of a bridegroom and a bride! What a sad, sad symbol of the attitude of the Lord Jesus Christ with respect to the very church that He has redeemed and wedded to Himself. She in luxury and selfishness, and He out into the cold and the darkness. The spirit of indolence, languor, and slothfulness are largely responsible for our frequent despondence, and therefore our Master has said, "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me." It is true she responded at length and opened the door, but she did not do it promptly, and her obedience was too late. The same thing is not the same thing at different times. That which is done at once is twice done. The children of Israel were quite willing to enter the land of promise the day after the Lord summoned, but He would not go with them. In matters of mutual confidence, hesitation implies distrust or at least indifference, and it is fatal to the fine, delicate complexion of sensitive love. It is true she brought her hands full of myrrh and the door-handle dropped with sweetness as she touched it, but that was a poor substitute for the sweetness of the heart. Her myrrh was all lost for lack of prompt, obedient love. We may bring much to Christ as a substitute for love but it is all lost. "Whatsoever He saith unto thee, do it, and do it at once." Beloved, learn in the life of abiding to be quick and to recognize and respond to the Master's voice. Whether it be the call to prayer, or to stillness, or to service, or to sacrifice, let the heart quickly answer, "Yes."

I will say, Yes, to Jesus, Whatever He commands, I will run to do His bidding, With loving heart and hands.

I will listen to hear His whispers, And learn His will each day. And always gladly answer, yes, Whatever He may say.

The humiliation and suffering which follows her failure. The first sad consequence of her mistake was the loss of her bridegroom's presence and the slight and offence which he so deeply felt. He withdrew from her door and left her alone. There is no trial more deep and keen to a devout spirit than the loss of the Lord's presence. That which once we did not value is now become the very essence of our life and happiness, and the moment that prevailing presence is gone we are conscious of a void that nothing else can fill and an anguish than which none is more keen. There is a deep sense of Christ's wounded love and the Holy Spirit's withdrawal in grief and displeasure, and sometimes there is a deep and terrible dread upon the soul lest He may have taken His everlasting flight. "My God! My God! why hast thou forsaken me?" is its bitter cry. "O! that I knew where I might find Him, that I might come to His seat," is its perplexed, distracted question. This is something quite different from the withdrawal of the Lord's manifestations which He may be often pleased to take from the soul with which He has no controversy, simply to try the faith and teach to trust Himself in the dark, but this is something deeper and keener. It is the Lord saying, "I will go and return unto my own place, until they acknowledge their inequality." There is a judicial severity in it which is meant to reprove the heart for its neglect and disobedience and it is a very keen and dreadful thing for a child of God to

fall under the hand of its Father's chastening; but the reason is very plain, and it is necessary that we shall learn it thoroughly and never forget it, and that henceforth whenever He speaks to us we shall instantly answer, "Yes."

The next sad consequence of her failure was the long and painful seeking, and the cruel harshness of the watchmen whom she met on the street as she vainly sought her Lord. It is strange how hard it is to find our way back again when we get far from God. That which once seemed so simple is now as dark as night. The promise that once seemed to glow with light is all full of darkness and gloom. The throne of grace at which we knelt, where heaven came down our souls to greet, is surrounded with clouds and thick darkness. The very conception of Christ seems dim, and God Himself distant and strange. The delightful sense of nearness is gone, and we know not how to pray. We seem like one perplexed and distracted in the night, fluttering, bewildered, heart-broken. Poor soul away from thy Lord, thou art not the first one that cried in the night, "Oh, that I knew where I might find Him." Let the recollection of thy misery be an everlasting restraint upon thy heart to abide henceforth ever near Him and quickly hearken to His voice and obey His slightest call. At such times others do not understand us; even the very watchmen on Zion's walls seem lacking in tenderness and sympathy. They do not enter into our distress. They treat us with harshness. How often the very ministers of the gospel will say to some perplexed, troubled soul that has lost its consecration, or is seeking for a deeper life, as the writer himself has said in the earlier years of his ministry, "Oh, you are just a little melancholy, and sentimental, and nervous. All you want is a little fresh air, or good company, or medicine, to get out of the blues, and cheer up, and give up dreaming." Often the unwise teacher will tempt the soul to abandon its notion of sanctification, to give the whole thing up as a delusion and come down to the ordinary plane of Christian life, and treat its former experience as a mistake. Sometimes the watchmen go further than this, and the erring one is treated with severity, rebuke and humiliation, rather than with tenderness, gentleness and helpfulness, and the soul at length turns away from all men, crying, like poor Job, "Miserable comforters are ye all." "I will seek unto God; unto Him will I commit my cause."

Still further, she is not only harshly treated by the watchmen, but actually tempted by her own companions. "What is thy beloved any more than any other beloved?" they tauntingly say. It is thus that the world comes to the lonely and aching heart, and tries to make it think that earthly love and pleasure can heal its wound and satisfy the aching void. "You have lost your new joy, but there are joys just as sweet that you may have with us. Return to your old friendships and accept the world's smile." Oh, how alluring is that which she sometimes holds out to the aching heart, and, alas, sometimes but too successfully does she apply her flattering appeals and fascinating charms, and many, for a time at least, have sunk back into the arms of the world and lost their first love. There is no time that Satan and the world tempt the heart so persuasively as when it has lost the joy of the Lord. It is a very perilous thing to allow disobedience or despondency to betray us into the hands of our enemy, who is only too ready to take advantage of his opportunity; but thank God if at such an hour we can, like her, stand fully armed in the panoply of love and repel all the world's alluring appeals with the testimony of our faithfulness.

There is yet one more subtle temptation which the adversary applies in the hour of the soul's desertion. "Where is thy beloved gone, thou fairest among women?" This is the

taunt of our scornful foe, who would insinuate a doubt of our Bridegroom's fidelity. "Has He left you? Is this the lover of whom you boasted so bravely? Has He deserted you so soon and left you to wander upon the streets in loneliness and humiliation? Is He after all not such a faithful lover as you thought? Perhaps you had better let Him go. Perhaps He has gone forever, and you had better stop searching for Him." This was David's experience when he cried out, "My tears have been my meat day and night, while they continually say unto me, 'Where is thy God?' Why go I mourning because of the oppression of the enemy? As with a sword in my bones mine enemies reproach me; while they say daily unto me, 'Where is thy God?'" Oh, beloved, keep out of the path of the backslider. It is beset with snares and thorns, and if thou dost venture into it, "Thine own backslidings shall reprove thee, and thou shalt know that it is an evil thing and bitter that thou hast forsaken the Lord thy God." But if you have wandered be not discouraged, stand firm amid all the temptation, like the bride, as we shall see, and when you are restored you shall remember the experience as an everlasting warning, and shall walk softly all your days closer to the side of your Beloved.

Her fidelity through all the trials of her faith and love. First, she continued seeking; she did not go back to bed again and fall asleep in languid indifference, but the moment she found out her mistake she endeavoured to correct it, and continued to search for her lord until she found him. So, beloved, there is always this resource left you, "Ask, and it shall be given unto you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you." It is as true for the backslider as it is for the sinner. "Then shall ye find me when ye search for me with all your heart." Next, she not only searched but she continued steadfast in her love. Her one continual testimony, when they asked her what was her beloved more than any other beloved, was that he was the chief among ten thousand and the altogether lovely. Not for a moment would she depreciate his charms or yield to a disparagement of his worth, but she boldly testified to his grace and beauty in the midst of all her trials; and, in the face of all her temptresses, her true and loving heart was immovable as a rock from its steadfast affection, and all the world could not tempt her to even a thought of disloyalty or compromise. So, beloved, even if you have lost the joy of your Lord, you can still retain the singleness of your purpose, the loyalty of your love, and cry, "Though I see Him not, yet I love Him; though I have sinned against Him, yet He knoweth that I love Him; though I have been foolish and forgetful, yet my heart is true; and, though all the world should tempt me, He and He alone shall be my Beloved; though I never see His face again, or hear His voice, yet I shall be true to Him in life and death forevermore." Therefore she was not only steadfast in her devotion, but she retained her faith in his love to her with unfaltering confidence, and when they seemed to imply that he had deserted her, she still declared, "I am my beloved's, and my beloved is mine. He is as true to me as I am to him, and, although he hides his face for a little, his heart, I know, has never changed. Although he forsake me, I will cling to him; though he slay me, I will trust him." Dear friends, is this your attitude even in the darkness? "Who is there among you that followeth the Lord and obeyeth the voice of His servant, and hath no light? Let him trust in the name of the Lord."

The appearing of her beloved. Suddenly he stands before her. He has heard her loving testimony, his heart has been moved with tenderness for all her trials, and she is dearer to him than ever as he sees her steadfast purpose, amid all the testing ordeal, to be his and his alone, and so he rewards her faithfulness. "Thou art beautiful, O my

love, as Tirzah, comely as Jerusalem, and terrible as an army with banners. My dove, my undefiled is one.” It is Christ’s admiring testimony to the heart that stands true to Him through all the fiery trial. The old promise was ever fulfilled. “Hope thou in God, for I shall yet praise Him who is the health of my countenance and my God.”

Brighter than His first appearing, dearer than even the soul’s first love, is the hour when He comes again to the desolate and wandering heart. “For this is as the waters of Noah unto me,” He cries, as He renews His covenant, “for, as I have sworn that the waters of Noah shall no more go over the earth, so have I sworn that I will not be wroth with thee nor rebuke thee; for a small moment have I forsaken thee, but with great mercies will I gather thee; in a little wrath I have hidden my face for a moment, but with everlasting kindness will I have mercy upon thee,” said the Lord thy Redeemer. Oh, the joy of the restored heart when the Lord arises with healing in His wings, and the long night of waiting ends in a morning of joy.

Her new loveliness after her trials are over. “Who is this that looketh forth as the morning, fair as the moon, clear as the sun, and terrible as an army with banners?” her maidens ask, as they behold her happiness the morning after her bridegroom has returned. The last shadow of her sorrow has passed away, her face is bright as the morning and fresh as the morning dew. Her beauty is fair as the moon, and its lustre has remained all through the night of sorrow. Her faith and love are glorious as the sun, and the strength of her character has come forth from the testing armed for all coming conflicts even as an army with banners.

The morning is especially the type of freshness. It speaks of a Christian life that is ever new, a buoyant spirit that ever springs with spontaneous life and fullness, like the springing dawn and the fresh zest which starts forth upon a new day with the complete oblivion of yesterday’s toil and care.

The moon is the beautiful figure of the light that shines in the darkness. It tells of the faith and love that live on in unclouded clearness even through the dark shades of the night. The sun tells of the stronger light for the service of the day, for endurance and trial is not the main business of life. It is a precious discipline to fit us for more strong and positive service. But the strong, clear light of the day is higher, even as the sunlight is better than moonlight, and after we have stood the test of the night and shone with the pure radiance of the moon, God sends us forth into the daylight and sunlight of service, and expects us to shed this strong light upon all around us and go forth in it ourselves to the work to which He calls us.

The last figure, an army with banners, tells of the strength that comes from the discipline of trial, the courage of faith, the precious, priceless lessons which fit us for the conflicts that lie before us. God wants us to be not only sweet, but strong; not only to be the joy of His heart, but a terror to the enemy of our souls and of His kingdom. It is not until we have fought that enemy in our own hearts that we are prepared to go forth in aggressive conflict and stand against him in the souls of others and the work of the gospel. It was after Christ had stayed forty days in the wilderness that He went forth in the power of the Spirit into Galilee and came out guiltless and triumphant over all the powers of darkness. This is the divine purpose of our testings. The trial of our faith is much more precious than gold that perisheth, even though it be tried with fire, that it might be found unto His praise and glory at the appearance of our Lord Jesus Christ. “No affliction for the present seemeth to be joyous but grievous,

nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness to them that are exercised thereby; but the God of all grace who hath called us unto His eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after all ye have suffered, will make you perfect, establish, strengthen and settle you, to whom be glory forever and ever, amen.” Beloved, is this the effect of your testings? Are they bringing into your life the freshness of the morning, the quiet light of the moon which shines on through the dark night, the clear light of day that fits you for the service and duties of your life, the settled strength and established purpose which enables you to withstand in the evil day, and to go forth in the strength of God in aggressive warfare against the devil and all his legions?

The deeper love into which her trials have brought her. There is a very beautiful order running through her testimonies regarding her love. Her first testimony is, “My beloved is mine and I am His.” This gives no prominence to his love for her, and there is, if possible, a little touch of selfishness in the thought of him as her first glad consciousness. A little later her testimony is, “I am my beloved’s and my beloved is mine.” This speaks of a change in her attitude and thought. Her love to him and her entire surrender is the more prominent thought; but there is a third expression, a little later, after the return of his presence. It is simply this, “I am my beloved’s.” Every trace of selfishness in her love is gone, and her whole being is absorbed with the simple consciousness of being all his own. This is the crowning blessing of her trial. It brings her into a complete surrender and wholehearted devotion to him with her one concern to please him, to satisfy him, to glorify him, and even the enjoyment of him is lost in the thought of his enjoyment of her and delight in her. Surely sorrow has been crowned with infinite and eternal glory, and trial has been found unto praise, and honour, and glory in her happy experience. So may each of us stand in the hour of testing and find through our fiery trials a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.

CHAPTER SIX

HOME LONGING

“Make haste, by beloved, be thou like a roe or a young hart upon the mountains of Besamim.” (Song of Solomon 8:14)

“Even so, come, Lord Jesus, come quickly.” (Revelation 22:20)

This last text is the interpreter of the first. Both express, one in figure and the other in simple prose, the longing of every true Christian heart for the coming of our Lord. How different the closing cry of the Song of Solomon from the bride’s earlier song in the second chapter! There it is, “Turn, by beloved, and be thou like a roe or a young hart upon the mountains of Bether,” or “Division,” but here it is, “Make haste, my beloved, and be thou like a roe or a young hart upon the mountains of Besamim,” or the mountains of love, for the spices suggested by the Hebrew word just mean the “fragrance of love.”

We have already seen that the bride became weary of the constant distractions of the life that she was living in the great city, and longed to return to her early home, where she could have her beloved all to herself, and, in the simplicity of their home life, could meet him without restraint or thought of the keen eyes of a conventional world. This is expressive of the longing of the church for the Lord’s second coming, and the instinctive cry of every holy heart, “Come, Lord Jesus, come quickly.” Let us endeavour to understand the true spirit and limitations of this desire. What is a true Scriptural home-longing?

We do not mean by this a morbid discontent with life, either from the ennui of satiety with pleasure or business, or the deeper despair that comes from trouble, and which so often hurls the discouraged heart into reckless or cowardly suicide. There may be a deep weariness with life which is entirely wrong and even utterly cowardly and mean. The spectacle of Elijah lying under the juniper tree and crying, “Lord, let me die, because I am not better than my fathers,” or of Jonah sitting under his withered gourd and asking Jehovah to take away his life because Nineveh had been spared and his reputation as a prophet had suffered loss, are but samples of many kinds of discontent and morbidness that may always be found among the generations of earth; but this is far from the spirit to which our subject applies. Disappointed affection, unsuccessful business, the bitter consequences of our own mistakes and misdeeds, the reaction of wild and reckless passion, the terrors of a guilty conscience, or the hard and oppressive circumstances of life, all these may lead one to cry out like poor Job, “I am weary of life, I would not live away.” But it is often the most selfish and unmanly thing that a man can do, to run away from his difficulties and leave his helpless family and friends to stem the tide that he was not brave enough to meet. There may be a milder desire for death, which does not lead to reckless suicide, but which is at the best only a longing to get free from suffering, and which has in it no real devotion or spirituality. Let us not be deceived by the counterfeit and palm off mere jaded languor as heavenly-mindedness.

There is a true longing to be with Christ, which we find expressed all through the pages of the Scriptures and the utterances of all true Christian biography. There is a ripening of the grain which makes the heads hang low and the fruit mellow and ready

to fall. There is a true and beautiful sense in which the apostle can say, "To depart and be with Christ is far better; nevertheless to remain in the flesh is more needful for you." Here we find a sound and wholesome readiness and even gladness to be with the Lord in a better world, yet with not a tinge of morbidness about it, but rather on the contrary, a bright and radiant heartiness and hopefulness, and a real preference to remain amid the toil and conflict of life for the sake of others and for the Master's work. But under all this there is a heart springing heavenward, a spirit that often longs for the rest and communion of the life beyond, and like a caged bird, poises its wings for a higher and everlasting flight. Such heavenly aspirations breathe through God's holy Word and the hymnology of the ages as well as the highest experiences of the best of saints, and yet even this does not express the meaning of our text, and the most Scriptural form of the saints' "longing for home."

It is not so much a desire for even heaven as a definite longing for the personal coming of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the setting up of the kingdom which His advent is to bring. This is very definitely expressed by the apostle in the fifth chapter of Second Corinthians, where he distinguishes the expectation of death very clearly from the expectation of the Lord's coming and the resurrection. "Not that we may be unclothed," he says, referring to death, "but clothed upon," meaning the resurrection, "that mortality might be swallowed up of life." This is the Christian's true hope - the Lord's personal return, and the life immortal which this will bring to the body as it shall rise in His glorious likeness, and death shall be swallowed up of life immortal. This is a very different thing from the expectation of death. There is a most erroneous impression abroad among many Christians with respect to the Lord's coming. When He bids us to always be ready, ever ready, He certainly does not mean that we are to be continually looking for death, but we are to be looking and hastening for the coming of our Lord, and prepare to meet Him when He descends from the skies to claim His bride and to reward His servants. This is a very different thing from the expectation of death. That is a looking down into the tomb: this is a looking up into the air. That is a depressing thought; this is a living and comforting one. Nowhere do we find our Master bidding us keep our eyes upon the tomb, but often does He admonish us to watch for His return and to stand with loins girt and lights burning, like men that wait for their Lord when He will return from the wedding. Such a desire and expectation is not only Scriptural, but most sanctifying and quickening. It will lead to personal holiness and faithfulness in the discharge of our ministry and duties. It is an incentive to separation from the world such as nothing else can afford, and it will give a nobility to life and shed the halo of its glory over all its work and all our way, and inspire us like a pole star to lofty aspirations, and to the highest and noblest sacrifices and service. There are abundant reasons why our heart should feel this heavenly desire.

The world is not fitted to be our rest. It is too small for a heart that has felt the enlarging of God's indwelling presence, and it is too sad for the development of our heaven-born joy. There is no longing in the human heart so pure and sweet as the longing for home. No song has even touched a wider circle of responsive echoes than "Home, Sweet Home," and no writer has ever achieved by so small a work a greater reputation than the author of that sweet and simple song, just because it is so true to the deepest instincts of human nature. And yet, when we come to the real picture, how disappointing to the great mass of humanity it is! How few homes there are on earth that reach the highest ideal of even man's thought, and none of these are exempt from

the touch of that hand which falls most heavily of all on the sweetest and happiest shrines. It is where love has been most sweet and heavenly, and happiness most divine, that the parting which death at last brings is most keenly felt. The very depth of our joy only intensifies the measure of our pain, so that the heart cries amid the wreck of earth's sweetest home circles,

“Friend after friend departs, Who hath not lost a friend? There is no union here of hearts That finds not here an end. Were this trial world our only rest, Living or dying, none were best.”

The heart that is born from above instinctively reaches upward and rises heavenward, even as the river flows to the ocean and fire ascending seeks the sun.

The coming of the blessed Lord may well be an object of desire because of the unspeakable blessings which it is going to bring us. Not only will it take away from us a thousand sources of sorrow and pain, but it will bring to us the perfection of our own being. All that we know of holiness here will reach its maturity there and rise to a manhood to which all our present experiences are but as the play toys of an infant. Our physical life will reach its completeness there in the resurrection power and glory which will exalt us above the limitations of space and matter, and thrill our being with a fullness of life like His own.

It will bring still greater blessing to the world. It will be the time of the restitution of all things of which the prophets have spoken since the beginning of the world. It will bring to this sad and sin-cursed earth more than paradise restored, and for a thousand happy years the world will become the theatre of the highest and divinest possibilities of God's power and grace. Then will the philanthropist see his dreams of human happiness fulfilled; then will our wretched political systems give place to a reign of beneficence and happiness, and generation after generation rejoice in finding at last all that freedom and righteousness really mean. David Livingstone will look upon the continent for which he died, smiling in the loveliness of millennial righteousness. John Williams will wander through the lovely islands of Polynesia, where he shed his blood, and see every drop transformed into rubies of eternal glory and recompense in scenes as holy as they are fair. John Howard will seek in vain for a prison beneath the sun, and recall with rapture the prayers and tears that he spent amid these gloomy scenes of human misery. William Wilberforce will gaze with wonder and delight upon a globe where it will be impossible to find a fetter or a slave. Frances Willard will search for a thousand years before she will find a drunkard in the streets of the New Jerusalem. It is doubtful if even the fairest of our earthly scenes, our cemeteries, will be found. At least even death, if it comes at all during that age, will be robbed of its sting, and will probably be but a transformation from the lower to the higher plane, from the natural to the resurrection life. Oh, for the sake of a groaning world, may we not well cry,

“Oh, long-expected day, begin, Dawn on this scene of pain and sin.”

But the best of all reasons for desiring this blessed home coming, is that it is to bring us our Saviour in visible, continual and perfect fellowship forevermore. The joy of the bride is the bridegroom; the hope of His coming is centred in Himself. In this beautiful poem the reason the bride longs to be back at her home is not so much to see her mother or her garden as to be able to be ever with her beloved.

“O that thou wert as by brother,” she cries, “when I should find thee without I would kiss thee; yea, I would not be despised. I would lead thee and bring thee into my mother’s house, who would instruct me. His left hand should be under my head and his right hand should embrace me.” This is also the secret of the Christian’s longing. It is to be with Christ which makes it far better to depart. The Lamb is the light of the city above, and the Lord is its glory. It will bring Christ Himself. It is true we have Him now, but not as we shall then. We shall see His face. We shall dwell continually in His glorious presence. We shall behold His beauty. We shall commune with Him without restraint. We shall see the grandeur of His kingdom and be partners with Him in the government of the millennial world. We shall be glad in His joy, as we shall see forever the glorious fruition of all His sorrow, and the eternal results of redemption in the ages to come.

In this beautiful song the bride speaks not only of the joys that wait for her at home, but the joys she has laid up for him. “At our gates await all manner of fruits which I have laid up for thee, O my beloved.” We think of what that day will mean for us, but do we think of what it will mean for Him, as He gazes upon the innumerable souls that have been saved and glorified through His sufferings and love, and as each of them shall bring their crowns and their rewards and lay them at His blessed feet, oh, the joy that shall swell His noble heart as He gazes upon that spectacle of happiness and eternal transformation, and feels that one of those shining ones would be worth all the cost of Calvary. Have we something laid up for that day? Are we converting our treasures, our friendships, our affections into eternal memorials that some day we can bring to Him as the wedding gift of that glorious day?

It will bring us our loved ones. When He comes again, they also that sleep in Jesus will God bring with Him. It will give us back our dead. As the years go, how the friends of the past diminish. How the friends of the future increase. The other day I was talking with a dear old saint who desired to commit to some one the administration of an important trust after he had passed away, but he could think of no one to whom he would commit it. They were all gone, and he stood alone. This is not his home, but oh, how thickly they are clustering at yonder gates. What troops will meet us as we enter there - brothers, sisters, children, husbands, wives. Oh, how memory teems with them, and hope lights up that looked-for day with all that makes home “Sweet Home.” Happy they whose friendships all take hold upon that coming day! Happy they who have no strong ties that are not anchored within the veil! God has to awaken this homesickness often by breaking up our earthly nest, that we may transfer our hopes to the better home, and some day we shall thank Him for the flowers that He has transplanted to a climate where they shall wither no more, and where God is keeping them for our arms forever. Beloved, do you know this home longing? If not, why not? Is it perhaps because your life is all invested in this earth, your interests are all committed to the present world, and it is not possible for you to have two hopes and two aims? The Christian is a man of one idea. He is living for the kingdom of the future. His hopes are all passing onward, and where his treasure is, there will his heart be also. When the gardener wants his little bedding plant to form new roots and be prepared to be transplanted to the garden, he cuts the little branch off from the stalk, and then it throws out its roots and grows into the new soil, but if he did not detach it, it would never have formed its new connection, or draw its new sources of life from the soil. And so He calls upon us to separate ourselves from the hopes of earth and invest our being in the world to come. Then all the strength of our

spirit shall fasten around the throne and our heart will long for the consummation of its blessed hope. But there is nothing that so claims our longing for Christ's coming as Christ Himself in the heart, the Hope of glory. He is the Morning Star and as He is formed within us, so we reach out more and more for His appearing. Beloved, do you know anything of this home-longing? "Blessed are the home-sick," the Germans say, "for they shall get home." This is indeed true. Those that choose their portion on earth shall have their reward, and those that choose it on high shall in no wise lose their reward. Oh, that we may be able to sing with true hearts,

I am waiting for the coming of the Bridegroom in the air, I am longing for the gathering of the ransomed over there I am putting on the garments which the heavenly Bride shall wear For the glad home-coming draweth nigh.

Oh, the glad home-coming, it is swiftly drawing nigh, Oh, the sad home longing will be over by-and-by Lo, the Bridegroom cometh, holy watchers soon will cry, For the glad home-coming draweth nigh.

CHAPTER SEVEN

HOME COMING

“Who is this that cometh up out of the wilderness leaning on her beloved?” (Song of Solomon 8:5)

This is the picture of the bride’s returning to her early home on the arm of her beloved. Soon it merges into the sweeter picture of the two at the old home, and recognizing the scenes associated with tender memories of their first meeting. They come to the old apple tree under which they first exchanged their vows of love, and in tender, passionate devotion, she clings closer to his side and cries, “Set me as a seal upon thy heart, as a seal upon thine arm, for love is strong as death; jealousy is cruel as Sheol; as a vehement flame of the Almighty it burneth. Many waters cannot quench it. If a man should give all his treasures he cannot buy it.” Then a little later she is represented as making intercession for her little sister who has not yet grown to maturity, and who seems to be, indeed, unnaturally dwarfed and undeveloped, full aged, but still in form a child; and her Lord answers her, “If she be a wall we will build upon her a palace of silver, but if she be a door we will enclose her with boards of cedar.” That is to say, if she be a virtuous woman, closed as a wall of adamant against all the approaches of evil, we will honour and reward her; but if she be open to all comers, and loose and lax in her purity and separation as an open door, we will place around her the restraints that will perforce protect her, if need be by the severest discipline. This was followed by an intercession for her brothers that Solomon will give them as their inheritance his vineyard at Baalhamon. All this is accompanied with a high-spirited protest of her own lofty virtue and devotion to her bridegroom as the grounds of his delight in her. The whole scene closes by a request from him that she will sing to him once more as in the days of old, and she responds by the sweet refrain that closes the Song of Solomon; a refrain that carries with it enough of the notes of the old song of their early love to be recognized, but enough also that is new to raise it to a higher key and a sweeter chord. The old song was, “Turn, my beloved, and be like a roe or a young hart on the mountains of separation,” but the new one is, “Make haste, my beloved, and be like a roe or a young hart on the mountains of love.” This beautiful closing scene of the old drama is a picture of the two stages in the Christian’s journey. The first we might call going home, and the second getting home.

Going Home. The apostle expresses the meaning of this in the two words, “looking for” and “hastening to” the coming of our Lord. It is one thing to be passively drifting toward the coming of the Lord, and it is another to be going out to meet Him. This denotes an ardent expectation and an active cooperation in bringing about His advent.

We may press forward to His coming first by desiring it and looking for it. It was when the people were in expectation that Jesus came of old. There is a strange power in love to draw the loved one, and when the heart of the church is really yearning for Jesus, He will speedily come.

Be praying for it. This is one of the things that God has promised always to meet. Believing prayer for the Lord’s return will surely not be in vain, and will mightily hasten the wheels of His chariot. The Holy Spirit has Himself inspired such a prayer. It is the last breath of inspiration in these sacred pages, “Even so, come, Lord Jesus, come quickly,” even as it is the last note of the Song of Solomon, “Make haste, my

beloved.” Prayer shall be made for Him continually it is said. He comes to the heart when invited, and He shall come to His own when the unanimous cry of His Bride goes up to His waiting heart.

We can go out to Him by preparing for His coming, by getting ready ourselves, by putting on the wedding robe, and keeping our vessels filled with the heavenly oil. Beloved, are we ready? Surely if the bride were dressed for the wedding, the Bridegroom would not expose her to ridicule by leaving her to wait in suspense. We believe that the moment the church of God is prepared for the coming of the Saviour He will come.

By preparing the world for His coming. This gospel of the kingdom “must first be preached unto all nations, and then shall the end come,” and they who truly long for His advent will be the most alive in sending forth the gospel in all lands.

By anticipating already in some measure the millennial life. Even here and now we may receive the foretaste of the coming kingdom. Our bodies may know a thrill of the life of the resurrection even here, and this is the meaning of divine healing. Our spirits may know a little of the rapture of His love and the marriage joy of that glad day. “We that have the first fruits of the Spirit, do groan within ourselves for the full redemption of the body.” Christ is coming very near today in the life of His people. There are many sober Christians who can honestly testify in these last times to a communion with the Lord which almost reaches within the veil, and brings the light that is inaccessible and full of glory; and certainly the wonderful manifestation of Christ’s life in the bodies of His people in the last quarter of a century is a stupendous foreshadowing of the coming glory, and the resurrection itself will only be a fuller manifestation of that which already has thrilled the mortal flesh of many of God’s beloved ones. In this respect, therefore, we can go forth to meet the Lord and feel already the glad foretaste of His millennial presence. It is through a wilderness that she goes up to meet her Lord and surely as His coming draws nearer it will become dark and lonely, and the clouds of the great tribulation will begin to gather, and the violence of the latter days will give premonition of the coming crisis. But the wilderness will only press her closer to his side as she leans upon her beloved with an intimacy which well describes the deep spiritual life which is one of the characteristics of this day on the part of the few who are looking for the Lord’s return. Above all others they are separated unto Him, and, having let go their hold of earthly hopes and confidences, they are compelled to lean their whole weight on Him alone. Beloved, do we know aught of this separation unto Him? Do we know aught of this expectation of Him? Sometimes on the battlefield, when pressed by the foe, the general has been known to get upon his knees to listen for the tramp of coming reinforcements; and once it is said that, at a very great crisis in one of the decisive battles of the world, one who had thus been listening sprang to his feet and shouted, “They are coming! They are coming! I hear the tramp of their feet miles away!” And the shout went along the line, “They are coming! They are coming! Reinforcements are coming!” and a cheer went up, and the flag was lifted high and the lost ground recovered, and the brave men held their own with new enthusiasm, for they knew that the armies of help and deliverance were at hand. Are we listening for the tread of the coming feet, and do we sometimes almost hear the tramp of the armies of the sky as the procession already begins to move earthward in the advent train of the Son of Man?

But this picture tells us still more of the getting home. The first incident in the home-coming is the recollection of the old apple tree which had been the scene of their earlier meetings. It tells of the memories and associations that will form part of the future life and will add such exquisite sweetness to the felicities of the millennial life. It suggests to us the memories that will come back to us from the eternal shore; nay more, the actual revisiting of the scenes of earth that have been associated with our tenderest spiritual experiences. An apple tree is not much in itself, but just such things are the pivots on which turn all that is sweetest in memory and affection in many of our lives. David speaks of his recollection of God's love in one of the Psalms in such words as these, "I will remember thee from the land of Jordan, from the hill Mizar," or the little hill. It was this little hill which, perhaps, had no earthly name that he associated in his mind with his tenderest recollections. It was the spot where God in some way met him, delivered him, comforted him. There are spots on earth for each of us that will be eternally dear, and that some day we shall visit with our precious Lord, and, remembering all the way He has led since our covenant was recorded there, we shall doubtless weep for love and gratitude as we thank Him for His faithfulness. Beloved, we are coming back again over this green earth and the path we are treading now. Let us leave no foot-prints which we would not care to retrace in company with our Lord.

The next deep record in the story of the home coming is the love which it is to perfect. Then, indeed, shall He set us as a seal upon His heart and upon His arm, to be separated no more forever, and to be used, even as the monarch uses his signet ring, for the highest and noblest ministries and with the very authority and majesty of the Lord Himself. And then we shall love with a love as strong as death and as vehement as the love of God Himself; for this is just what love means, the flame of the Almighty, the very love of God Himself, for when we reach His presence we shall love Him even as we are loved.

Next we have a picture of service and unselfish consideration for others. Immediately the bride begins to think of those who are dear to her, and to remember them to her lord in loving intercession. First she prays for her little sister. Who is meant by this little sister that hath no breasts, or, in other words, who with the years of a woman is still in form a child? Of course it is a type of some class of persons who shall be on earth at the time of the Lord's coming, and who shall be related to the real bride of the Lamb by a bond of sisterhood, but yet shall be different from her in perfection and spiritual maturity, and one who shall be of doubtful purity in the judgment of the Lord, for it must be remembered it was He who asked the question whether she be a wall or a door; that is, a separated one or a loose and lax woman open to every evil influence. What is more natural than to suppose that she represents that portion of the church of Christ which shall not be prepared for the Lord's coming, and which through the fault of its members willingly remains unsanctified. It is obvious to every careful reader of the Scriptures that there will be two classes of Christians at the time of the Lord's coming, the sanctified ones and the worldly and unholy followers of the Lord; His children, but His immature children who have never pressed forward to the fullness of their high calling and the true meaning of their sonship. It is of these that the apostle says, "when for the time ye ought to be teachers, ye have need that one should teach you again which be the first principles of the oracles of God, and are become such as have need of milk and not of strong meat; for every one that useth milk is unskilful in the word of righteousness, for he is a babe; but strong meat

belongeth to them that are of full age.” We see in the parables of the pounds and the talents two classes of servants who shall come before the judgment seat of Christ, one the faithful whose works shall be rewarded as the ruler of the millennial kingdom, the other the faithless ones who have kept what they have had committed to them, but have made no use of it for Him. We see the same solemn truth also in the parable of the ten virgins, where the foolish ones are virgins, but unprepared for the Lord’s coming. We see also in the First Epistle of John the distinction of two classes, one who shall be ashamed before Him at His coming. In the book of Revelation we find the first fruits unto God and the Lamb who are without spot before the throne of God, and their solemn warning to be ready for His coming and keep their garments lest they walk naked and we see their shame. We are told in the Epistle to the Hebrews that “without holiness no man shall see the Lord.” This little sister must, therefore, represent that element which in the day of His coming will be found unready to take the place of the bride, but for whom the bride lovingly intercedes, perhaps in the first rapture and translation of the saints, while many are still left on the earth that are dear to the translated ones. It is for this that she prays, and the Master answers that if her little sister will separate herself from the world and sin, and be a wall of virtue and purity, she shall have a palace of silver. This is not surely the same as a palace of gold. It is, perhaps, an inferior reward, but certainly a glorious one. But if she be a door, that is unholy or even unseparated from the world, she shall be fenced with boards of cedar, and thus shall be held back by the rigid restraints of God’s chastening hand from her own evil inclinations; referring, no doubt, to the tribulations of these last days through which the remnant of God’s people upon the earth will be at length separated from the world and prepared for some part indeed in the millennial kingdom.

We find her next interceding for her brothers; these same brothers who had harshly treated her before, but for whom she now asks from Solomon the least of one of his vineyards, and his royal and generous consideration. The application of this to the Jews as God’s earthly people seems very clear. They, too, shall have a part in the coming age. The vineyard which God’s right hand had planted shall be theirs again. The Queen of nations, Israel, shall return to her own land and possess once more her old estates throughout the millennial years.

The general idea, however, conveyed by this picture is that of unselfishness and loving regard for the good of others. It surely implies that in the age to come, God’s glorified church will be engaged in high and holy ministries. We believe that our best work for God is yet to come, and all we do in this day of toil and trial is to prepare for the higher occupations of that glorious time when in cooperation with Him we shall rule the nations, and shall see the earth under His administration, and ourselves rise to the beauty of more than paradise restored. Surely this is the meaning of such expressions as, “Be thou ruler over ten cities,” or again, “Who then is a faithful servant and wise steward, whom His Lord when He cometh shall find so doing? Verily I say unto you, He shall make him ruler over all that He hath”, and again, “I appoint unto you a kingdom as my Father has appointed unto me, and ye shall sit on thrones judging the ten tribes of Israel.”

The last song of the bride is a note of the heavenly anthem. It reminds us that the spirit of that happy age will be the spirit of praise, and that our songs will be for Him. We are going to a home where we shall spend eternity in the celebration of our

Redeemer's praise. The songs of heaven are but repetitions of the earth's songs with an added refrain. There are two songs in the book of Canticles, the earth song and the home song of the bride. The first song has for its refrain a minor chord, and the sad thought of the mountains of Bether, or separation; but the last song is about the mountain of Besamim, or the mountain of spices, that is love. Oh, what a difference there will be! All the songs of earth have a touch of sorrow. It is said that the song of every bird that warbles in the air is on a minor key. All earth is tainted with the sadness of the Fall, but there is a day coming when the key will be changed and the everlasting song will be without a chorus of sorrow.

There shall be no more crying,
There shall be no more pain,
There shall be no more dying,
There shall be no more stain.

Saviour, our watch we are keeping,
Longing for thee to come;
Then shall be ended our night of weeping,
Then shall we reach our home.