

THE BIBLICAL ILLUSTRATOR.

THE SONG OF SOLOMON.

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OR,

ANECDOTES, SIMILES, EMBLEMS, ILLUSTRATIONS, EXPOSITORY,
SCIENTIFIC, GEOGRAPHICAL, HISTORICAL, AND HOMILETIC,
GATHERED FROM A WIDE RANGE OF HOME AND
FOREIGN LITERATURE, ON THE VERSES
OF THE BIBLE.

BY

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THE SONG OF SOLOMON.

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INTRODUCTION TO THE SONG OF SOLOMON.

THE TITLE OF THE BOOK.—It is generally believed that the title "Song of Songs" is a superlative expression (like "heaven of heavens") to indicate the best of songs; though some explain it in the sense of a song made up of different songs, or canticles, all having one subject—love. (*James Robertson, D.D.*) The opening words, "The Song of Songs which is Solomon's," are of the nature of a title added in later times—an author would hardly call his poem the Song of Songs—and therefore are not conclusive evidence as to the writer. (*A. M. Mackay, B.A.*)

THE AUTHORSHIP OF THE BOOK.—Solomon is expressly mentioned in the superscription as the author. Positive arguments for the genuineness of the superscription are—(a) Its enigmatical and pregnant character, and that mingling of description of the subject and of the author which is very probable and appropriate as emanating from the sacred poet himself, but not as emanating from a later glossarist; (b) The circumstance, that at the beginning of the poem there would be no mention of its subject if the present superscription be pronounced inaccurate. The evidence in relation to the author, furnished by the superscription, is confirmed by the marked connection of the historical relations and allusions of the book with the age of Solomon. This is most decided and plain in such passages as chap. iv. 8; vii. 5. The age of Solomon is farther suggested by the whole style and character of the work. "The whole feeling, the whole tone of the book, and its manner, which is in part splendid, and in part beautiful and natural, lead us at once to think of the writer as belonging to the most flourishing period of the Hebrew constitution and history." (*Kleuker.*) The account given of itself by the Song of Songs receives further confirmation from the fact that the mental and other peculiar characteristics of Solomon reappear in it. It breathes the high and lofty spirit attributed to Solomon in 1 Kings v. 9 ff; and it could only have been written by a man whose experiences in connection with earthly love had been such as Solomon's. History testifies to Solomon's pleasure in gardens (*Eccles. ii. 4-6*). Here we have the natural groundwork of the allegorical description of nature contained in the Song. According to 1 Kings iv. 33, Solomon "discoursed concerning trees . . . cattle and birds," etc. Now there is not a book in the whole of the Scriptures which contains in so brief a space so many allusions to natural objects. Again, Solomon "built houses" (*Eccles. ii. 4*; cp. 1 Kings vi., vii.); and his taste for art shows itself in various ways in the Song (chap. i. 5, 10, 11, 17; iii. 10, 11; v. 14, 15; vii. 2, 5; viii. 9). The testimony of the superscription to Solomon as the author is also confirmed by the reference to the Song found in the oldest prophets, especially in *Hosca*; see also *Joel iii. 3*; *Isa. v. 1*. A further confirmation is, that *Psalm xlv.*, which belongs to an early period, presupposes the existence of the Song, and is evidently a compendium thereof. (*E. W. Hengstenberg, D.D.*) If Solomon was indeed the author, he must have written in the dialect used in the northern part of his country; and not in that with which he was most familiar. That he should have written so strongly in favour of an ideal of love the reverse of that which he adopted in practice is certainly improbable, but not, as *Driver* says, "out of the question." Did not *Burns*, in "The Cotter's Saturday Night," eloquently denounce the cruelty of that licentiousness which was his own besetting sin, and is not all literature full of such inconsistencies? (*A. M. Mackay, B.A.*) The view most generally accepted at present is that the Song was the work of a poet in the northern kingdom, composed not long after the separation of the two kingdoms, probably about the middle of the tenth century before Christ. In evidence of its northern birthplace, are the frequent and almost exclusive mention

of localities in the north; the author's strongly expressed dislike of the luxury and expense of Solomon's court, which necessitated the exactions that so contributed to the schisms between the two kingdoms (1 Kings xii. 4, *seq.*; 2 Chron. x. 1, *seq.*); the entire absence of all allusions to the temple and its worship; the exaltation of Tirzah to an equal place with Jerusalem as a type of beauty (vi. 4); dialectical peculiarities, which can only be accounted for on this hypothesis, or on the untenable one of an extremely late composition; the comparison of Hosea, undoubtedly a northern writer, which shows that the two authors "lived in the same circle of images, and that the same expressions were familiar to them." (Renan.) This fact of a northern origin established, it follows almost inevitably that the date of the poem must be placed somewhere in the middle of the tenth century, for it was only during the period from 975 to 924 B.C. that Tirzah occupied the position of northern capital; and the whole tone and spirit of the book, together with its treatment of Solomon, is what we should expect at a time not far removed from the rupture of the two kingdoms. As yet tradition had not exaggerated the splendour of the Solomonic era: in the references to Solomon's guard, his harem, and his arsenal, the figures are not extravagant, as in the comparatively late accounts in Kings and Chronicles. A crowd of smaller indications point the same way, *e. g.* the mention of Heshbon, which had ceased to be an Israelitish town by Isaiah's time (Isa. xv. 8). The mention of the Tower of David, as still possessing a garrison (vii. 4, and iv. 4), the allusion to Pharaoh's equipages have a similar tendency; while it is almost inconceivable that Solomon himself or any author, while that monarch was alive, and his rule all-powerful, could have represented him and his court in such an unfavourable light as they appear in the Song. But it is exactly the representation we should look for in a poet of the northern kingdom in the early years after it revolted against the tyranny of the Davidic dynasty. (*Archæacon Aglen, D.D.*)

THE PURPOSE AND PLAN OF THE BOOK.—There is no doubt that different speakers are introduced, so as to give a dramatic appearance to the book; but they appear so abruptly that it is exceedingly difficult to say who or how many they are; and hence the determination of the purpose and plan of the whole book remains one of the most perplexing problems of Old Testament study. 1. In the original, the distinction of male and female speakers is indicated by the genders of the words. We can thus, so to speak, discriminate the *voices*, though we cannot clearly discern the *features* of the characters. In the R.V. a space between the verses denotes a change of speaker. 2. Of the characters of the piece, one can be traced throughout, viz. the "Shulammitte," so named in vi. 13 (R.V.) and generally understood to be a maiden of Shunem (compare 2 Kings iv. 12). The "daughters of Jerusalem," who somewhat resemble the chorus in a Greek play, though subsidiary, are easily recognizable. The main question is whether the Shulammitte has two suitors or only one; for according as this question is answered, the division of dialogue must be made and the interpretation of the whole carried out. (a) On the view that there is only one male speaker, it is the king who falls in love with a rustic maiden, and at length raises her to the position of his bride in the palace. The most of the dialogue on this view consists of the exchange of endearments between the lovers. (b) The other opinion, which many now hold, is that the Shulammitte has been betrothed to a shepherd lover; but she has been noticed by Solomon and his retinue on some royal journey (vi. 10-13), brought to Jerusalem, and there, surrounded by the women of the palace, is plied with entreaties by the king in the hope of winning her affections. On this view it is explained that those speeches of a rustic suitor, which do not befit the character of Solomon (see ii. 8-14), are the words of her absent lover, recalled by the maiden herself to confirm her in her devotion. Towards the close the parted lovers are united (viii. 5-7), and the conclusion of the whole seems to be that true love is unquenchable, and cannot be bought by wealth and position. 3. The conclusion to be drawn as to the purpose of the book depends upon the opinion we form of the characters introduced. On the view that has just been mentioned (*b* above), the book would have an ethical aim—to exhibit the triumph of pure, spontaneous love, over all worldly and unworthy enticements; and, the scene being laid in the time of Solomon (though the book could not thus have come from his hand), the protest would be all the more striking against the loose view of marriage which is associated with his reign. The lesson would be one on the sacredness of human love, which our Lord Himself emphasized (Matt. xix. 4-8, etc.). On the other view mentioned (*a* above), while some would regard the book as nothing more than a collection of

love-songs, or a composite poem made up of songs such as are found in other Eastern literature, others think that the marriage of Solomon to Pharaoh's daughter, or to a Galilean maiden whom he raised to the throne, is made typical of a higher and spiritual love. On this ground they suppose the book was taken into the Canon, and has a counterpart in Psalm xlv. This may be called a modification of the earliest known mode of interpreting the book, which was allegorical. This view, found among the Jews as early as the Fourth Book of Esdras (end of the first century A.D.) and among Christian writers first in Origen (died A.D. 254), regarded the book as teaching symbolically the love of God to the nation of Israel, or to the Church, or to the individual soul; and the literature connected with the Song on this line of interpretation has been most extensive down to modern times. (*James Robertson, D.D.*) The mystical sense is false philosophically, but it is true religiously. It corresponds to the great sanctification of love inaugurated by Christianity. (*E. Renan.*)

THE CANONICITY OF THE BOOK.—This was a subject of dispute down to the assembly of Jewish doctors held at Jamnia about 90 A.D., when it was settled, on the authority of Rabbi Akiba, that "no day in the history of the world is worth the day when the Song of Solomon was given to Israel," and that "the Song of Solomon is a holy of the holies,"—though, indeed, its sanctity was still sometimes questioned in the second century after Christ. (*Chambers's Encyclopædia.*) Castellio was forced to leave Geneva in 1544 for having demanded its exclusion from the Canon as a mere amatory poem. (*Ibid.*) The story could only seem out of place in Holy Scripture to one who assigns to religion a very narrow sphere indeed, and leaves outside its pale the largest and most important tracts of human life. Consider how large a part love plays in the literature of every nation, how vividly it colours the experience of almost every life, how powerfully for evil or for good it influences character and conduct, and few will fail to appreciate and approve the words of Niebuhr: "I should think there was something wanting in the Bible if we could not find in it any expression for the deepest and strongest sentiment of humanity." To the ancient Jew it must have been a witness for monogamy against polygamy, for true and honest love as against the organized lust which then prevailed in king's courts. And by the modern Englishman its lessons are not less needed. How much misery and sin is occasioned by marriages made for money, for position, for mere convenience, without that strong affection which can fuse two personalities into one; how often is a legal marriage made a cover for prostitution of the soul! So far from the poem, taken in its primary sense, being unworthy of the Bible, it is to be wished that the Church would take to heart the lessons it teaches, and inculcate them upon its children with growing insistence and earnestness. (*A. M. Mackay, B.A.*)

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CHAPTER I.

VER. 1. The Song of Songs, which is Solomon's.—*The Song of Solomon*.—The Song of Songs is Solomon's, as composed by the wisest of men, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, and Solomon's also as composed concerning the true Solomon the Prince of Peace, of whom the son of David was an eminent type. It belongs to the earthly Solomon, as the skilful work of his hands; to the heavenly Solomon, as the utterance of his heart to the Church, and of the heart of the Church towards him. (*A. Moody Stuart.*)

Ver. 2. Let Him kiss me with the kisses of His mouth: for Thy love is better than wine.—*Communion with Christ*.—1. Such as have the least taste of Christ's love, are impatient and restless in their desires after the nearest fellowship and communion with Him. The Church here desires Christ's manifestation in the flesh, that she might enjoy him in a Gospel-dispensation, and have sweeter discoveries of His favour: so in like manner the Church of the New Testament, who did enjoy all the privileges of the Gospel; yet she goes higher in her affections, and desires Christ's last coming, that so she might enjoy Him in that heavenly and everlasting communion, which the saints shall enjoy hereafter. 2. Christ hath given more sweet and comfortable pledges of love and reconciliation to His people under the Gospel, than He did under the Law (Luke x. 24; Heb. xii. 18–20, 22; Eph. iv. 8). 3. The doctrine of the Gospel is very sweet and desirable (Heb. vi. 5; 1 Tim. iv. 6; 2 Cor. v. 19; Eph. i. 13; ii. 17). 4. Those strong desires and earnest longings of the faithful after Christ, flow from a principle of love (2 Cor. v. 15; Jer. xxxi. 3; Hosea xi. 4). Christ is the ocean of spiritual love, from whence we derive, and into which we return our love: so that our love proceeds from Christ's love; His love is as a loadstone, attractive, drawing our affections to Him; our love is as the reflecting back to Him again the beams of His own love. 5. The love of God in Christ is an infinite and a manifold love. (1) His electing love (Eph. i. 4–6, 11). (2) His redeeming love, whereby He hath brought His from the bondage of sin into glorious liberty and freedom (Gal. iv. 4; Acts xx. 28; 1 Tim. ii. 6). (3) God's love of calling; the outward is a bare propounding of the Gospel; but the inward call is a spiritual enlightening, "to know the hope of His calling" (Eph. i. 17). And that whereby the soul is made able to apprehend Him, of whom it is apprehended (Phil. iii. 12). (4) God's justifying love, whereby He doth free and discharge His people from sin and death, and accounts them righteous in Christ. (5) His adopting love, whereby He accepts the faithful, unto the dignity of sons (John i. 12; Rom. viii. 17). (6) His sanctifying love, whereby He doth free believers from the filthiness of sin, and restore in them again the image of God, which consisteth of righteousness and holiness (Eph. iv. 24). (7) His glorifying love, whereby He lifts up His people unto that state of life and glory, and gives them an immortal inheritance, where all comfort, peace, and joy shall abound, and where they shall have the communion of the chiefest good, the love of God shining forth immediately upon their hearts. (*John Robotham.*) **Thy love is better than wine.**—*Better than wine*.—1. CHRIST'S LOVE IS BETTER THAN WINE BECAUSE OF WHAT IT IS NOT. 1. It may be taken without question. Many delightful things, many of the pleasures of this world, are very questionable enjoyments. Christians had better keep away from everything about which their consciences are not perfectly clear; but all our consciences are clear concerning the Lord Jesus, and our heart's love to Him; so that, in this respect, His love is better than wine. 2. It is to be had without money. Many a man has beggared himself, and squandered his estate, through his love of worldly pleasure, and especially through his fondness for wine; but the love of

Christ is to be had without money. The love of Christ is unpurchased ; and I may add that it is unpurchasable. Christ's love is the freest thing in the world,—free as the sunbeam, free as the mountain torrent, free as the air. 3. It is to be enjoyed without cloying. If ever there was a man on earth who had Christ's love in him to the full, it was holy Samuel Rutherford ; yet you can see in his letters how he laboured for suitable expressions while trying to set forth his hungering and thirsting after the love of Christ. He says he floated upon Christ's love like a ship upon a river, and then he quaintly asks that his vessel may founder, and go to the bottom, till that blessed stream shall flow right over the masthead of his ship. He wanted to be baptized into the love of Christ, to be flung into the ocean of his Saviour's love ; and this is what the true Christian ever longs for. 4. It is without lees. There is nothing in the Lord Jesus Christ that we could wish to have taken away from Him ; there is nothing in His love that is impure, nothing that is unsatisfactory. Our precious Lord is comparable to the most fine gold ; there is no alloy in Him ; nay, there is nothing that can be compared with Him, for "He is altogether lovely," all perfections melted into one perfection, and all beauties combined into one inconceivable beauty. 5. It will never, as wine will, turn sour. He is the same loving Saviour now as ever He was, and such He always will be, and He will bring us to the rest which remaineth for the people of God. 6. It produces no ill effects. Many are the mighty men who have fallen down slain by wine. But who was ever slain by the love of Christ ? Who was ever made wretched by this love ?

II. CHRIST'S LOVE IS BETTER THAN WINE BECAUSE OF WHAT IT IS. Let me remind you of some of the uses of wine in the East. 1. Often, it was employed as a medicine, for it had certain healing properties. The good Samaritan, when he found the wounded man, poured into his wounds "oil and wine." But the love of Christ is better than wine ; it may not heal the wounds of the flesh, but it does heal the wounds of the spirit. 2. Wine, again, was often associated by men with the giving of strength. Now, whatever strength wine may give or may not give, certainly the love of Jesus gives strength mightier than the mightiest earthly force, for when the love of Jesus Christ is shed abroad in a man's heart, he can bear a heavy burden of sorrow. 3. Wine was also frequently used as the symbol of joy ; and certainly, in this respect, Christ's love is better than wine. Whatever joy there may be in the world (and it would be folly to deny that there is some sort of joy which even the basest of men know), yet the love of Christ is far superior to it. 4. It is better than wine, once more, for the sacred exhilaration which it gives. The love of Christ is the grandest stimulant of the renewed nature that can be known. It enables the fainting man to revive from his swooning ; it causes the feeble man to leap up from his bed of languishing ; and it makes the weary man strong again. III. The marginal reading of our text is in the plural : "Thy loves are better than wine," and this teaches us that CHRIST'S LOVE MAY BE SPOKEN OF IN THE PLURAL, because it manifests itself in so many ways. 1. Think of Christ's covenant love, the love He had to us before the world was. 2. Think next of Christ's forbearing love. 3. Aye ! but the sweetness to us was when we realized Christ's personal love, when at last we were brought to the foot of His cross, humbly confessing our sins. 4. When you first felt Christ's forgiving love, I will not insult you by asking whether it was not better than wine. That was a love that was inconceivably precious ; at the very recollection, our heart leaps within us, and our soul doth magnify the Lord. 5. Since that glad hour, we have been the subjects of Christ's accepting love, for we have been "accepted in the Beloved." 6. We have also had Christ's guiding love, and providing love, and instructing love. His love in all manner of ways has come to us, and benefited and enriched us. 7. And we have had sanctifying love ; we have been helped to fight this sin and that, and to overcome them by the blood of the Lamb. 8. The Lord has also given us sustaining love under very sharp troubles. Some of us could tell many a story about the sweet upholding love of Christ,—in poverty, or in bodily pain, or in deep depression of spirits, or under cruel slander, or reproach. His left hand has been under our head while His right hand has embraced us. 9. Then let us reflect with shame upon Christ's enduring love to us. Why, even since we have been converted, we have grieved Him times without number ! Yet He uses the most kind and endearing terms towards us to show that His love will never die away. Glory be to His holy name for this ! Is not His love better than wine ? 10. There is one word I must not leave out, and that is, Christ's chastening love. I know that many of you who belong to Him have often smarted under His chastening hand, but Christ never smote you in anger yet. Whenever He has laid the cross on your back, it has been because He loved you so much that He could not keep it off.

11. There are other forms of Christ's love yet to be manifested to you. Do you not sometimes tremble at the thought of dying? Oh, you shall have—and you ought to think of it now,—you shall have special revelations of Christ's love in your dying moments. Then shall you say, like the governor of the marriage feast at Cana, "Thou hast kept the good wine until now." 12. And then—but perhaps I had better be silent upon such a theme,—when the veil is drawn, and the spirit has left the body, what will be the bliss of Christ's love to the spirits gathered with Him in glory? 13. Then think of the love of the day of our resurrection, for Christ loves our bodies as well as our souls; and, arrayed in glory, these mortal bodies shall rise from the tomb. With a life coeval with the life of God, and an immortality divinely given, we shall outlast the sun; and when the moon grows pale, and wanes for ever, and this old earth and all that is therein shall be burned up, yet still shall we be for ever with Him. Truly, His love is better than wine, it is the very essence of Heaven, it is better than anything that we can conceive. IV. CHRIST'S LOVE IN THE SINGULAR.—Look at the text as it stands: "Thy love is better than wine." 1. Think first, of the love of Christ in the cluster. That is where the wine is first. We talk of the grapes of Eschcol; but these are not worthy to be mentioned in comparison with the love of Jesus Christ as it is seen, in old eternity, in the purpose of God, in the covenant of grace, and afterwards, in the promises of the Word, and in the various revelations of Christ in the types and symbols of the ceremonial law. There I see the love of Christ in the cluster. 2. Next, look at the love of Christ in the basket, for the grapes must be gathered, and cast into the basket, before the wine can be made. Oh, the love of Jesus Christ in the manger of Bethlehem, the love of Jesus in the workshop of Nazareth, the love of Jesus in His holy ministry, the love of Jesus in the temptation in the wilderness, the love of Jesus in His miracles, the love of Jesus in His communion with His disciples, the love of Jesus in bearing shame and reproach for our sakes, the love of Jesus in being so poor that He had not where to lay His head, the love of Jesus in enduring such contradiction of sinners against Himself! 3. But oh! if your hearts have any tenderness towards Him, think of the love of Christ in the wine-press. What a crushing was that under the foot of the treader of grapes when Christ sweat as it were great drops of blood, and how terribly did the great press come down again and again when He gave His back to the smiters, and His cheeks to them that plucked off the hair, and hid not His face from shame and spitting! But oh! how the red wine flowed from the wine-press, what fountains there were of this precious sweetness, when Jesus was nailed to the cross, suffering in body, depressed in spirit, and forsaken of His God! "Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?" These are the sounds that issue from the wine-press, and how terrible and yet how sweet they are! 4. Now I want you to think of the love of Christ in the flagon, where His precious love is stored up for His people;—the love of His promises, given to you; the love of His providence, for He rules for you; the love of His intercession, for He pleads for you; the love of His representation, for He stands at the right hand of the Father as the Representative of His people; the love of His union with His people, for you are one with Him, He is the Head, and you are the members of His Body; the love of all that He is, and all that He was, and all that He ever shall be, for in every capacity and under all circumstances He loves you, and will love you without end. 5. And then not only think of, but enjoy the love of Christ in the cup, by which I mean His love to you. For this we have the declaration of inspiration; nay, we have more even than that to confirm it beyond all question, for we have His own death upon the cross. He signed this document with His own blood, in order that no believer might ever doubt its authenticity. "Herein is love." "Behold what manner of love" there is in the cross! What wondrous love is there! (C. H. Spurgeon.) *Christ's love is better than wine*:—I. FOR ITS ANTIQUITY. Good old wine is accounted the best (Luke v. 39). Now no wine is comparable to this of Christ's love, for its antiquity; for it is a love which commences from everlasting; it does not bear date with time, but was before time was. II. FOR ITS PURITY. It is wine on the lees well refined, free from all dregs of deceit, hypocrisy, and dissimulation; it is a love unfeigned, a pure river of water of life. III. FOR ITS FREEDOM AND CHEAPNESS. IV. FOR THE PLENTY OF IT. In the marriage at Cana of Galilee, there was want of wine; but there is no want thereof in this feast of love: this is a river, nay, an ocean of love, which flows forth in plentiful streams to poor sinners. V. IN THE EFFECTS OF IT. 1. Wine will revive and cheer a man that is of a heavy heart (Prov. xxxi. 6). 2. Wine may remove a worldly heaviness, or a sorrow on the account of worldly things, the things of time; but not a spiritual

heaviness, or a sorrow on the account of the things of another world, the things of eternity; but the manifestation of Christ's love to the soul, can remove this sorrow and heaviness, and fill it with a joy unspeakable and full of glory, and give him that ease, and comfort, and satisfaction of mind, he is wishing for. 3. If a man drinks never such large draughts of the wine of Christ's love, it will never hurt him; when other wine, with excessive drinking of it, not only wastes the estates, but consumes the bodies, and destroys the health of men; but of this a man may drink freely and plentifully, without doing himself any hurt; nay, it will be of considerable advantage to him, and therefore says Christ (chap. v. 1). (*John Gill, D.D.*)

Ver. 3. **Because of the savour of Thy good ointments, Thy name is as ointment poured forth, therefore do the virgins love Thee.**—*The preciousness of Christ.*—In Christ are contained all those attractive beauties—those excellencies, which are adapted to win souls to Himself, and to God in Him. The rose and the lily, every flower of the garden, and every tree of the forest, are brought together at once, to illustrate to us the rich and varied excellence of Him who is “altogether lovely.” The rays of the sun are sometimes collected together by a burning-glass, and made to rest on a certain point, and there to burn with great fervour. Oh! the rays of the Sun of Righteousness seem to be gathered together here. I. **THE ANOINTING OF THE LORD JESUS CHRIST, WITH THE HOLY GHOST.**—“Because of the savour of Thy good ointment.” Now, this anointing of Christ implies two things, His *call* and *qualification*.—His call to, and qualification for, all the offices entrusted to Him by His Father. Christ, being set forth to us, as anointed by the Holy Ghost to all His offices, invites and claims all our confidence that we should come to God, through Him, and repose unlimited trust in Him as our Prophet, Priest, and King. II. **Because of this anointing, “HIS NAME IS AS OINTMENT POURED FORTH”;** because of His covenant offices, His name is sweet and fragrant to the perception of all those who believe in His name. The name of the Lord implies everything whereby God is made known to us, even all the attributes of God. Before Christ became incarnate, the ointment, as it were, was shut up in a box, it was not poured forth; the only begotten Son was in the bosom of the Father, so that there was not that full development of the gracious purposes of God to sinners which afterwards took place in His incarnation. Even after His incarnation, and during the days of His flesh in this world, the fragrance of His name was little perceived, the ointment was not fully discovered, some little perfume rejoiced the hearts of the few disciples who had grace to wait upon Him. It was when Christ was lifted up on the cross, when the vial which held the precious ointment was broken, that the dying thief was quickened to newness of life by the fragrance of it, and acknowledged his anointed King in his expiring agonies. But there was a still further manifestation after the resurrection, and the outpouring of the Spirit. That was the day indeed when the name of Jesus was as ointment poured forth. The apostles are now filled with its sweetness, and ravished with its fragrance, and now, their own souls being possessed with the unspeakable preciousness of the Lord Jesus as the Saviour of sinners, they show forth that knowledge to others, they proclaim the name of Jesus. III. **“THEREFORE DO THE VIRGINS LOVE THEE.”** Virgin souls are attracted to Christ by the fragrance of Christ's sweet name, so that they love Christ. Now what is signified by the expression, *virgins*? You have the same word in Psalm xlv. 14, where the Church as a bride is brought to the bridegroom. Individual believers are called by that name of virgins which indicates purity, holiness, “Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.” And how shall their hearts be purified? You have it in Acts xv. that God purifies their hearts by faith; they believed in the Son of God, and their hearts were purified; their hearts, which before were like “a sepulchre full of dead men's bones, and all uncleanness,” are cleansed. Now, where the heart is purified by faith in Christ, that heart will embrace Christ and love Him. (*H. Verschoyle, M.A.*) *As ointment poured forth.*—1. First, it may be taken to intimate the greater discoveries of the riches of His grace which have been made to us under the Gospel. Adam had a savour of the ointment in the promise made to him of “the seed of the woman”; Abraham had, as it were, drops of the precious unguent granted to him when, rejoicing in the day of Christ, he saw it and was glad. But now, in these Gospel times, the box containing the ointment is broken. As bees to a garden of spices, all nations flow to this Divine compound of myrrh, aloes, and cassia. 2. Again, the expression seems to intimate that a right apprehension of Christ in His work, character, and offices,

will conduce to religious cheerfulness and joy. The use of ointments in the East, on account of their cooling and refreshing properties, often furnishes the sacred writers with an expressive image for all that is bright, and beautiful, and happy. To know Christ, then—what He is, what He says, what He has done for us, what He is doing now; to know Him as our Shepherd to guide, our Staff to uphold, our Rock to flee to, “from storms a Shelter, and from heat a Shade”;—to know Christ in all these beneficent and happy relations, should make the heart glad, and the hands strong, and the tread firm. 3. Another reflection arising out of this passage is the obligation which lies upon us to make Christ known to others. “The savour of Thy name is as ointment;” but then not ointment as it is pent up, hoarded, not suffered to escape from its case of alabaster, but ointment as it is “poured forth,” diffused far and wide, reviving all who come near to it with the odour of its perfumes, and having life and healing on its wings. (*D. Loore, M.A.*)

Ver. 4. **Draw me, we will run after Thee.**—*Divine drawings*:—I. MAN NEEDS TO BE DIVINELY DRAWN TO GOD. 1. He is far away from God in heart, life, and purpose. 2. Has no inclination to return. 3. Is every moment wandering farther. 4. His understanding needs to be enlightened, his affections to be won, his will changed, and his whole life and being drawn God-ward. II. GOD IS EVER SEEKING TO DRAW MEN TO HIMSELF. 1. By loving words. 2. By merciful deeds. 3. By gracious revelations of Himself and of His purposes, as in Christ His Son. 4. By the influences of His Holy Spirit. III. MAN'S PROPER ATTITUDE IN RELATION TO THE DIVINE DRAWINGS. Here is—1. A sense of need. 2. Candid acknowledgment of it. 3. Earnest prayer—“Draw me.” 4. A spirit of obedience—“and we will run after Thee.” 5. Eager desire to come to God with all possible diligence—“we will run after Thee.” (*Thomas Haynes.*) *Divine drawings*:—I. A HUMBLE ADMISSION. 1. Of ourselves we cannot come to God. Need to be drawn (*John vi. 44*). Disposition to procrastinate (*Acts xxiv. 25*). 2. What holds us back? (1) Natural bias of will. (2) Strength of temptation. (3) Spell of the world. 3. Yet, over against this reluctance to come, see God's gracious promise (*John xii. 32*; *Jer. xxxi. 3*; *Hosea xi. 4*). II. AN EARNEST REQUEST. Appeal to God to “draw” the soul. 1. Christ draws by silence—woman of Canaan. 2. By a look—Peter. 3. By a word—Mary of Magdalen at sepulchre. 4. By afflictions—the two sisters at Bethany. III. AN EAGER PROMISE. If drawn, “we will run after Thee.” What does this promise imply? 1. We will lead a new life. Instead of after sin, now “after Thee.” 2. We will lead an active life—“run.” 3. We will lead a useful life. Not “I,” but “we,” will run, etc. Drawn myself, I will induce others to run with me in the way of Thy commandments. Conclusion: Two drawing powers are plying us. Satan is drawing. Christ is drawing. How different the two drawings! Satan's downward. Christ's upward. Which of the two prevails in your case? (*Preacher's Assistant.*) *The Church's prayer for nearer communion and fellowship with Christ*:—1. Let us note, first, what it is the Church desires—what every pious soul must desire who would make a prayer to Christ at all: “Draw me, allure me, bring my soul under the power of a holy and Divine captivity.” It is a prayer of the believer that he may feel all the oppositions of the unregenerate nature giving way; that, by the spell of some holy fascination resting upon him, he may feel his will drawn into absolute and entire concurrence with the Divine will. “Draw me,” says the Church, “with lovingkindness, and compassions, and mercies. Allure me to Thee by Thy Word—its promises drawing me after them, like the sweet strains of distant music; or by Thy Spirit, His holy and gentle compulsions leading me onwards, by an influence the methods of which I know not, save that thereby I am brought nearer to Christ, by having Christ brought nearer to me. Many are the things I have need to be drawn from. Draw me from the bondage of sin, which holds me; from the allurements of the world, which entangle me; from the infirmities of a fleshly nature, which still cleave to me. Draw me from my enemies, which are too many for me; from my temptations, which are too strong for me; from my fears of being forsaken, and overmastered, and finally falling away.” 2. “And we will run after Thee.” “Run;” being so drawn we could not be content with a slower pace, and the speed of the running is proportioned to the intensity of the drawing. “I made haste,” said the psalmist, “and delayed not to keep Thy commandments.” Hence the expression may be taken to denote the alacrity with which, after an experimental acquaintance with Christ and the power of His grace, we shall persevere in our Christian course. None run so fast as those whom Christ draws. Thus the believer “follows on to know the Lord”; he becomes

more vehemently and intensely earnest the nearer he gets to the heart of Christ. Led and lured as by some secret magnetism—by “a sweet omnipotence, and an omnipotent sweetness,” as one of old describes it—he feels as if he could follow the Lamb whithersoever He goeth. “Draw me, and we will run after Thee.” The change of person should not be passed over, for it illustrates the germinating property of Divine influences. One convert makes many. He who runs well does much to quicken others’ speed. Grace is communicative, it cannot but speak. “Come, see a Man that told me all that ever I did.” 3. But mark, next, the grounds on which the Church presumes to hope for these near manifestations of Christ’s love to her. “The King hath brought me into His chambers”—that is, He has recognized the lawfulness of my espousals; He has initiated for me this covenant relation of protection, and peace, and mercy. It is on the authority of the King Himself that we and the whole Church “have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand.” We may take the words “bringing into the chambers” in two senses; that is, either as implying an admission to the ordinances of religion, or a more privileged insight into the truth of its doctrines. Either interpretation would fall in with the national custom which is supposed to be the source of the allusion—that of a bride being conducted to her lord’s home, both to inspect all his household treasures, and to have her future part and possession in them formally made over and acknowledged. Thus, assuming ordinances to be the chief point of the reference, how truly may we, as Christians, say, “The King hath brought me into His chambers.” Or adopting the other supposition, that by “chambers” here are meant the inner recesses of God’s truth—the deep things of the Spirit, hidden mysteries, kept secret from the foundation of the world, and which even “angels have desired to look into”—this privilege is ours also. Ours, the more we love Christ and the nearer we keep to Him. A knowledge of the things of the kingdom is reserved for the children of the kingdom. As the bridegroom would lead his affianced bride from chamber to chamber, to show his wealth, to display his treasures, to unlock his cabinet of choicest gifts, so does Christ, by His Spirit, delight to lead His people into all truth, to conduct them from knowledge to knowledge, and from promise to promise, and from glory to glory. (*D. Moore, M.A.*) *The believer’s prayer*.—I. THE EARNEST PETITION. “Draw me.” 1. This is a petition which the very best of us need continually to offer. We have these three enemies ever plotting, ever drawing us—drawing us from salvation towards destruction—the world, the flesh, and the devil. We need, therefore, the magnet of God’s love to overcome these adverse “drawings,” and to guide us at last to a happy and holy heaven. 2. To whom is your petition addressed? The three Persons of the ever-blessed Trinity are employed in drawing you from earth to heaven. (1) God the Father draws you (John vi. 44). (2) God the Son draws you (John xii. 32). (3) God the Holy Ghost draws you. He takes of the things of Jesus, and shows them to you, making you willing converts in the day of Christ’s power. 3. But in the passage before us, the prayer, I conceive, is rather addressed to God the Son. (1) We pray Christ to draw us from those things which will do us harm. From self, that we may not trust in our own strength. (2) We pray Christ to draw us to those things which will do us good. We pray Him to draw us “to a throne of grace”—to His Word—to His people—to His house—and to His table. And oh, the blessed end of this “drawing”! Deborah the prophetess “drew” Sisera, with his chariots and his multitude, to Mount Tabor; but she “drew” them thither, only to give them into the hands of Barak for their destruction. But, the Lord Jesus Christ is drawing you, not to Mount Tabor, but to Mount Zion, and He is drawing you thither, not for your destruction, but for your salvation; that you may stand there with all the redeemed for the endless ages of eternity. O blessed drawing! 4. But the Lord Jesus uses means. (1) He draws you by His Spirit; for without the Holy Spirit we can do nothing. (2) He draws you by dark providences, and makes you say with David, “It is good for me that I have been afflicted.” (3) He draws you by the sunshine of prosperity (Jer. xxxi. 3). (4) He draws you by the remonstrances of conscience, as He drew the woman of Samaria at Jacob’s well. (5) He also draws you by the preaching of His Gospel, opening your hearts, as He opened the heart of Lydia, and bringing the Word home to your souls, as He did to the Thessalonians, “in power, and in demonstration of the Spirit, and in much assurance.” II. THE DECIDED PROMISE. “We will run after Thee.” 1. This is not the voice of nature, but of grace. Nature, unconverted nature, says, “I will run from Thee.” “I will hide myself, as did Adam, in the trees of the garden,” I will forsake the fountain of living waters, and I will hew me out

other cisterns. I will say to the Lord, "Depart from me; for I desire not the knowledge of Thy ways." But grace, grace in your heart, says, "Lord, when wilt Thou come unto me? Lord, I will run after Thee. I will follow Thee whithersoever Thou goest." It is the large-hearted obedience of one who feels that all he has belongs to Christ; who confesses that he is not his own, but that he has been bought with a price. 2. You are not content to "run" alone. You wish your fellow-men to enjoy what you are looking for; and, therefore, you promise your Divine Lord, that if He will only draw you by His grace and free Spirit, you will bring others with you. "Draw me, and we will run after Thee." (*C. Clayton, M.A.*)

Predestination:—We have to investigate what is taught us herein of the Church and her Lord. He is to draw her; she is to hasten after His steps. This is the statement in its simplest form; but it will lead us across deep mysteries, and doctrines which have ministered food for much controversy. I. THE TEXT BRINGS US ACROSS THE GREAT MYSTERY OF GOD'S PREDESTINATION. The cry of man to God is, "Draw me, and I will follow Thee." In the New Testament we have our Blessed Lord declaring, "No man cometh unto Me, except the Father draw him." It is asserted that God must call, before there can be any access of the creature to Him. St. Paul has accurately traced the order of Divine providence in this respect; "those whom He did predestinate, them He also called; and whom He called, them He also justified; and whom He justified, them He also glorified." The act by which the Almighty draws, or calls, His people, is a consequent of His predestination. Now, wherever predestination is spoken of, it is a predestination which concerns not our final salvation or condemnation, but simply our call to the knowledge of Christ Jesus. "Whom He did foreknow," says St. Paul, "He did predestinate"—to what? why—"to be conformed to the likeness of His Son, that He might be the first-born among many brethren." And again in the Epistle to the Ephesians we read, "God predestinated us unto the adoption of the children, by Jesus Christ." These are the only two places in which the apostle speaks of predestination; and it is, you observe, a predestination to the knowledge of the Gospel, to incorporation into the Christian Church, to which he alludes. He to whom the future is as the present, fixed by His high decree that some kingdoms should immediately be instructed in the truth as it is in Jesus; that others should only after the lapse of years be enlightened; that others should not be summoned to enter the fold until the thunder-clouds of the last tempest should be seen gathering in the sky. The whole history of the propagation of the Gospel, in short, the relation of the fulfilment by man's agency of the determinate counsel of God, which in the morning of creation, whilst the first dew was yet upon the hills, traced out across them the path of evangelists and teachers, and decreed who should be called and who passed by, while yet all the generations of human kind were in the loins of Adam. And this is the predestination of the Bible; and it has, you see, nothing whatever to do with the salvation of individuals. A predestination to eternal ruin would be hopelessly irreconcilable to the Divine attributes of justice and mercy; but there is nothing so hard in accepting the doctrine of a predestination to the knowledge of Christ and His Gospel here upon the earth. We would not have you then recoil from the doctrine of God's predestination, as from something too hard for flesh and blood. It is the alone doctrine which will explain why one is taken and another left; one people adopted into the Church, and another passed by. I cannot tell what moves the Eternal King in His dispensation of the Word of Life; but I am prepared to believe that He has a reason for all He does, and believing this, I take the doctrine of His absolute predestination as a most marvellous proof of His infinite nature. Who but God could thus comprehend in His counsels thousands of years, and myriads of living things? Even now there are millions of our race to whom the name of Christ is an unknown thing. But not according to man's eagerness, but His own ancient counsel, does the Lord reveal Himself to those that sit in darkness: their day and their hour was predestined long since. But this predestination touches not their free-will to live soberly, righteously, and godly; and therefore do I hear but a tribute to His greatness and omniscience in the cry that floats upward from the dim waters to Him who arranges the times and seasons for every islet that sleeps upon the wave, "Draw me, we will run after Thee." II. Let us now consider the words AS THE UTTERANCE OF THE BRIDE AFTER HER UNION WITH CHRIST. Let us examine in what way they may be used by us, who have already been grafted into the family of Christ. Now with respect to ourselves, the Divine acts of predestination, justification, and sanctification, are past and gone. We are of those who were predestined to be early adopted into God's household. So far,

then. He has drawn us to Him, and we have hastened after Him; we have believed in Christ, we have taken up the sign of the Cross to be our banner; we have, in a word, accepted the Gospel, and are members of the Church, the mystical bride of the Lamb. Is there, then, no further application of the language of the text? no further drawing by the Lord God? Indeed the entire life of man is a period during which there is perpetually being exerted upon the soul a gentle violence, alluring, tempting it to follow the footsteps of Christ. The life of every man is, we believe, arranged by God in such a manner as will best conduce to his salvation. The details of our existence are so planned as to lead us unto heaven. Do you ask why any of us fall short of the promised reward? Oh! is it not because, though God draws, we hasten not after Him? We thwart God's purposes; we resist His impulses; we counteract His designs. If we would surrender ourselves into His hands unreservedly, He would bring us safe to the eternal city. And there is yet a further truth involved in the text. It implies, that the course of the servant of God is one of constant progress and active advance. Christ is ever, as it were, moving onward; He leads us from one height of moral excellence to another. There is no rest in store for us on this side the grave. We dare not look for ease; we dare not fancy that the time shall ever come on earth when our discipline for eternity shall be over, or the lessons of our schoolhouse be learnt. He that looketh back is not fit for the kingdom of God. Whatever ye are, ye may be better; whatever ye have done, ye may do more. (*Bp. Woodford.*) *The soul's delight in God.*—When the fields are clothed with fruitfulness, and the flowers bloom in beauty, we know that the rains and the dews have descended, and the sun has sent forth his rays of light and heat; so, when in the soul of man the fruits of holiness abound, when aspirations of faith and prayer bind him to the throne of the Eternal, it is because there has been unveiled to that soul, as existing in the heart of God, a gentleness which makes us great; the gracious and omnipotent love, which sought us when we were lost, welcomes us when we return, and leads us into the King's own banqueting-house, where, in His presence, we make merry and are glad. Of the salvation of the Church, and of every man in it, Christ is the Alpha and Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end. I. THE ATTRACTIONS OF THE DIVINE LOVE BY WHICH WE ARE BROUGHT NIGH TO GOD. "Draw me, and we will run after Thee." It is the language of devout aspiration, the expression of the soul's desire for closer, holier fellowship with its Saviour King; and, by the very fact that it takes the form of prayer, we are reminded of the inborn helplessness of the soul either to enter upon or to continue in the life wherunto we are called. The best of men are open to powerful temptations; the strongest are often weary and dispirited; and if any of us are to be kept safe unto the heavenly kingdom, we must indeed pray, "Draw me, draw me unto Thyself." And if the prayer be sincerely offered, it will assuredly be answered. God will draw you as with the cords of a man and the bands of love. By the power of His Spirit, He will illuminate your mind, and whisper to your hearts the mysteries of His love. By sweet and gentle persuasives will He win for Himself your deepest trust. The image of Christ will be so imprinted on your memory, that no succeeding waves of worldly thought or sensuous impression shall be able to erase it. The joy of living unto Him shall be so true and keen, that all lower choice shall be as poison to your soul. Duty and pleasure, inclination and delight, sacrifice and reward, shall be transmuted into one; and, unseen by others, the Son of Man shall be ever at your side to counsel, to direct, to sustain you. II. THE EXALTED PRIVILEGES TO WHICH THAT LOVE INTRODUCES US. "The King hath brought me into His chambers," beyond the outer courts and entrance halls of His palace, and the rooms in which His servants abide, into the inner and more secluded apartments reserved for His own use; where He receives no casual visitors, but those only who possess His full confidence, who are entrusted with the most responsible tasks of His government, and are honoured with marks of His special regard. We are the Lord's free men; not servants merely, but friends, who have the continued right of access to His presence, receive direct communications of His will, and are entrusted with tasks of highest moment. We are brought into the King's chambers, and can there tell out to Him the sorrows of our heart, and seek His help in every form of need. The plea of the penitent and aspiring suppliant, the adoration of the reverent worshipper, and the song of the victor are alike welcome to His ear. It is the King's chamber into which we have been introduced, and there we have perfect freedom. (*Jas. Stuart.*) *The King hath brought me into His chambers.*—*The Kingship of Christ.*—Clear as a knell of pure silver, rang out the words of the strange man of Pethor, amid the goodly tents and tabernacles of

Israel (Num. xxiv. 17). With the most captivating frenzy, Israel's greatest bard gave grand, dramatic exhibitions of the coming Saviour—as the enthroned King (Ps. ii.); as the conquering King (Ps. xlv.); as the righteous King (Ps. lxxii.); as the Priest King, made after the order of Melchizedek (Ps. cxi.). The weeping Jeremiah wiped away his tears, as visions of a new hope broke upon him (xxiii. 5, 6). Gathering up the choice music of the centuries, Zechariah bursts forth into the loftiest of refrains (ix. 9). To the Virgin, the angel came ringing joy-bells, because of the Kingship of her expected Child (Luke i. 33). The Magians—those star-guided strangers—thought only of the sovereignty of the world's Redeemer (Matt. ii. 2). As soon as the guileless eyes of Nathaniel rested upon Jesus Christ, he exclaimed: "Thou art the King of Israel" (John i. 49). Coronation Day being passed and the newly crowned potentate having entered into glory, how the subsequent disclosures that Jesus made of Himself, in the visions of Patmos, were radiant with His own royal light: We read that He is "the Prince of the kings of the earth" (Rev. i. 5); "the King of saints" (xv. 3); "the King of kings (xvii. 14)!"

I. THE ELEMENTS OF THE DIVINE KINGSHIP. 1. Christ's Personality. A king is a man of high birth—noble ancestry—pure, good blood. Royalty is the blossom on the Tree of Humanity—the ripened fruit of the race. The Kingship of Christ calls attention, first of all, to His lofty personality—that is, to the exclusiveness of His ancestral line: the nobility of His immediate parentage, and the dignity and grandeur of His own inborn substance. 2. Christ's Authority over His people. This is the second idea involved in His Kingship. "Him hath God exalted with His right hand to be a Prince and a Saviour!" O, this is the new and startling lesson the Gospel brings to every man to learn: "Christ a Prince first—then a Saviour!" Submission of will, before redemption from sin! Make a whole-hearted self-surrender to Jesus, as your Lord and Master. Then will your sins be forgiven and you will be a child of God. But what is meant by a surrender of self to Jesus Christ? I reply, we must make Him the King of Life; the King of Truth; and the King of Money. 3. Christ's protection of His people. This is the third element involved in His Kingship. When things seem dark for the Church, for the ultimate success of the Gospel and the triumph of Christianity, bear in mind that this glorious work is in the hands of an infinite Potentate. Glorious King! He will conquer all our enemies. He will protect His people.

II. Behold, in view of the facts stated, THE HIGH SPIRITUAL TEACHING OF MY TEXT. Just read the second verse of this wonderful Song of Redeeming Love. There we find the awakened soul praying for reconciliation. In the third verse we find a burst of praise to the Saviour. Then comes the text, with its prayer of humility and submission: "Draw me; we will run after Thee." We are only saved when we "run" after Jesus Christ. It is His own sovereign command; "Follow thou Me!" In the next clause, behold this saved soul's protection—absolute safety, as to every foe: "The King hath brought me into His chambers," *i. e.* into the inner, private compartment of the palace, from which the world is excluded and where no enemy can enter. This is the sacred place of the Most High, where all dwellers abide under the shadow of the Almighty (Ps. xci. 1). This is the pavilion, where, in the time of trouble, Jesus Christ hides His people—the secret of His tabernacle, giving safety to all (Ps. xxvii. 5); "The strong tower into which the righteous run and are safe" (Prov. xviii. 10). But this part of my text is rich beyond all we have yet seen. Truly we see Protection standing before us in all the calm dignity and infinite power of Divine sovereignty. But you know that the "chambers" of an Eastern monarch were those secluded and gorgeously furnished apartments of his palace, into which no male friend ever entered; nor yet a concubine—only the King's most cherished wife. In these "chambers," therefore, behold the dwelling-place of Love. That is, Christ is King of Love! Who would not exclaim: "We will be glad and rejoice in Thee," seeing that Christ's work is love—first, last and evermore! Behold this truth and go forth, from this hour, to make your religion a grand chorus-song—a sweet harp of a thousand chords—an immortal flower, ever beautiful, ever fragrant—a life spent in willing, joyful service!

III. THE KINGSHIP OF CHRIST MUST BE CHERISHED IN SACRED MEMORY. "We will remember Thy love more than wine; the upright love Thee." "Wine," here, means the world's most desirable things: gold; learning; pleasure; power; fame; ease; human affection. But what are all those, as compared with Him who is the King of all wills, all hearts, all knowledge, all possessions, of righteousness, and of love—the Christ of God who has saved us with His own precious blood! (*A. H. Moment, D. D.*)

We will be glad and rejoice in Thee.—*Rejoicing and remembering*:—It is a very

blessed habit of saints who have grown in grace to enter into actual conversation with the Well-beloved. Our text is not so much speaking of Him as speaking to Him: "We will be glad and rejoice in Thee, we will remember Thy love more than wine." I. We have here a DOUBLE RESOLVE: "We will be glad and rejoice in Thee, we will remember Thy love more than wine."—1. It is, first, a necessary resolve, for it is not according to human nature to rejoice in Christ, it is not according to the tendency of our poor fallen state to remember His love. There must be an act of the will with regard to this resolve; let us will it now. 2. It is also a right and proper resolve. Should we not be glad and rejoice in Christ? Why should the children of the bride-chamber fast while the Bridegroom is with them? With such a Husband as we have in Christ should not the spouse rejoice in Him? 3. Do you not think also that this resolution, if we carry it out, will be very helpful to ourselves? There is no way of getting right out of the Stygian bog of the Slough of Despond like rejoicing in the Lord. 4. Certainly, it will also be for the good of others. If you can get right out of your sorrow, and can actually rejoice in the Lord, and if you can so remember Him as to be glad and rejoice in Him, you will allure many to the fair ways of Christ, which else will be evil spoken of if you go mourning all your days. 5. We cannot carry out that resolve without the help of the Holy Spirit. Therefore, let us breathe it unto the Lord in prayer; and, as we tell Him what we mean to do, let us each one add, "Draw me, O Lord; then I will run after Thee. Help me to come to Thee; manifest Thyself to me, and then I will be glad and rejoice in Thee." II. The resolve of the text is a SUITABLE RESOLVE FOR THIS OCCASION: "We will be glad and rejoice in Thee, we will remember Thy love more than wine." 1. We are most of us coming to the communion table, to eat of the bread and to drink of the cup in remembrance of our Master's dying love. Surely, now is the hour, if ever in our lives, to be glad and rejoice in Him, and to remember Him, for the object of this supper is to commemorate His dying love. It is idle, and worse than idle, to come to Christ's table if you do not remember Him; what good can it do you? 2. Recollect, next, that in coming to this communion table, we also commemorate the results of Christ's death. One result of our Lord's death is that He gives food to His people; His body broken has become bread for our souls, yea, it is meat indeed. His blood, which was shed for many for the remission of sins, has become drink indeed. So, dear friends, if we come to this table in a right spirit, we must rejoice in our Lord, and we must remember His love. 3. I think also that there is this further reason why we should rejoice in our Lord, and remember His love, because at this table the commemoration is made by our Lord to be a feast. What! will ye come to the King's table with sorrowful countenances? Will ye come sadly to see what He has brought you? 4. Let us also recollect that, when we come to the table of our Lord, we commemorate a very happy union. 5. It does not become us to gather at this communion table with a heavy heart when we recollect that it is not only a commemoration, but an anticipation. We are to do this "till He come." Let us leap up at the remembrance of this gladsome hope. III. I must dwell for a brief space upon what I meant to make my third point concerning this double resolve,—LET US CARRY IT OUT. "We will remember Thy love." Dear Saviour, what we have to remember is Thy love,—Thy love in old eternity, or ever the earth was, Thy prescient love. We remember the love of Thine espousals when Thou didst espouse Thy people unto Thyself, and didst resolve that, whatever might be the lot of Thine elect, Thou wouldst share it with them. "We will remember Thy love,"—that love which, having once begun, has never wavered, never diminished, never stopped. We remember the love which Jesus bore in His heart right up into the glory at the right hand of the Father; that love which is still as great as when He hung on Calvary to redeem us unto Himself. Next, let each one of us say to Christ, "I will remember Thy love to me." Still, even that is not all. The text does not merely speak about Christ's love, and Christ's love to me, but it talks about Christ Himself. "We will be glad and rejoice in Thee,"—not only in His love, but in Himself. Do try, dear friends, to let your thoughts dwell upon Christ, His complex person, God and man, and all the wonders which lie wrapped up in Immanuel, God with us. Thy work, Lord, is fair; but the hand that wrought the work is fairer still. Come, then, beloved, and let us be glad and rejoice in Him, and let us remember His love more than wine. (C. H. Spurgeon.) We will remember Thy love more than wine.—A refreshing canticle:—The Hebrew word for "love" here is in the plural: "We will remember Thy loves." Think not, however, that the love of Jesus is divided, but know that it hath different channels of manifestation. All the affections that Christ hath, He bestows upon His Church; and these are so varied that they may well be

called "loves" rather than "love." We will remember, O Jesus, that love of Thine which was displayed in the council chamber of eternity, when Thou didst, on our behalf, interpose as the Daysman and Mediator; when Thou didst strike hands with Thy Father, and become our Surety, and take us as Thy betrothed! We will remember that love which moved Thee to undertake a work so burdensome to accomplish, an enterprise which none but Thyself ever could have achieved. We will remember the love which suggested the sacrifice of Thyself; the love which, until the fulness of time, mused over that sacrifice, and longed for the hour of which, in the volume of the Book it was written of Thee, "Lo, I come." We will remember Thy love, O Jesus, as it was manifested to us in Thy holy life, from the manger of Bethlehem to the garden of Gethsemane! We will track Thee from the cradle to the grave, for every word and every deed of Thine was love. And especially, O Jesus, will we remember Thy love to us upon the cross! Nor is this all the love we have to remember. Though we ought to recollect what we have heard, and what we have been taught, I think the spouse means more than this. "We will remember Thy loves,—not only what we have been told, but what we have felt. Let each one of you speak for yourselves; or, rather, do you think of this for yourselves, and let me speak of it for you. I. Here, then, we have A RESOLUTION POSITIVELY EXPRESSED: "We will remember Thy love." Why does the spouse speak so positively? Because she is inspired; she is not like Simon Peter when he said, "Although all shall be offended, yet will not I." She is speaking the truth, for she will not forget the love of her Lord. Why is that? For one very good reason, because she cannot. The virtue was not in her own constancy, but in the tenacity of his affection, wherefore she could not help remembering it. What is there, in the love of Christ, that will compel us to remember it? The things that we recollect best are of certain kinds. Some that we remember best have been sublime things. When we have stood, for the first time, where we could see a lofty mountain, whose snowy summit pierced the thick ebony clouds, we have said, "We shall never forget this sight." The sublimity of what we have seen often causes us to remember it. So is it with the love of Christ. How it towers to heaven! And mark how brightness succeeds brightness, how flash follows after flash of love unspeakable and full of glory! There is no pause, no interval of darkness or blackness, no chasm of forgetfulness. Its sublimity compels us to remember its manifestation. Again, we are pretty sure to recollect unusual things. Many people do not notice the stars much, but who forgets the comet? So it is with the love of Christ. It is such an extraordinary thing, such a marvellous thing, that the like was never known. That constellation of the Cross is the most marvellous that is to be seen in the spiritual sky; the eye, once spellbound by its charms, must retain its undying admiration, because it is the greatest wonder of wonders and miracle of miracles which the universe ever saw. Sometimes, too, things which are not important in themselves are fixed on the memory because of certain circumstances which happen in association with them. If something particular in politics should happen on our birthday, or our wedding day, or on some other notable occasion, we should say, "Oh, yes! I recollect that; it happened the day I was married, or the day So-and-So was buried." Now, we can never forget the love of Christ, because the circumstances were so peculiar when, for the first time, we knew anything at all about it. We were plunged in sin and ruin; we were adrift on the great sea of sin, we had no hope, we were ready to sink, and no shore was near; but Jesus came and saved us. I think I might give you twenty reasons why it would be impossible for the children of God to forget the love of Christ to them; but above and beyond every other reason is this one, Christ will not let His people forget His love. If, at any time, He finds them forgetful, He will come to them, and refresh their memories. If all the love they have ever enjoyed should be forgotten by them, He will give them some fresh manifestations of love. II. Now let us look at THE COMPARATIVE RESOLUTION: "We will remember Thy love more than wine." Why is "wine" mentioned here? I take it to be used here as a figure. The fruit of the vine represents the chiefest of earthly luxuries. "I will remember Thy love more than the choicest or most exhilarating comforts which this world can give me." The fact is, the impression which the love of Christ makes on the true believer is far greater and deeper than the impression which is made by anything earthly. Mere mortal joys write their record on the sand, and their memory is soon effaced; but Christ's love is like an inscription cut deeply into marble, the remembrance of it is deeply engraven in our hearts. Earthly comforts, too, like wine, leave but a mingled impression. In the cup of joy there is a dash of sorrow. There is nothing we have here below which is

not somewhat tainted with grief. But in Christ's love there is nothing for you ever to regret; when you have enjoyed it to the full, you cannot say that there has been any bitterness in it. True, there is the remembrance of your sin, but that is so sweetly covered by your Lord's forgiveness and graciousness, that His love is indeed better than wine. It has had all the good effects of wine, and none of its ill results. Equally true is it that the remembrance of earth's comforts, of which wine is the type, must be but transient. If the sinner could live many days, and have much wealth, would he remember it when he entered the unseen world? Ah! he might remember it, but it would be with awful sighs and sobs. But we can say, of the love of Christ, that it is better than wine, for we shall rejoice to remember it in eternity.

III. THE PRACTICAL EFFECTS OF REMEMBERING CHRIST'S LOVE. 1. If we remember the love of Christ to us, the first practical effect will be that we shall love Him. 2. Another practical effect of remembering Christ's love will be, love to the brethren. Christ has many very unseemly children; yet if we can but see that they are Christ's, if they have only a little likeness to Him, we love them directly for His sake, and are willing to do what we can for them out of love to Him. 3. The next effect will be, holy practice. When we remember the love of Christ to us, we shall hate sin. 4. Another effect of remembering the love of Christ will be, repose of heart in time of trouble. A constant remembrance of Christ's love to us will make us always cheerful, dutiful, holy. Dear Lord, grant us this boon; for if Thou wilt enable us to remember Thy love more than wine, Thou wilt give us all good things in one. Let Thy good Spirit but keep us up to this good resolution, and we shall be both holy and happy, honouring Thee and rejoicing in Thee. IV. A FEW PRACTICAL SUGGESTIONS AS TO PRESERVING A DEEPER AND MORE SINCERE REMEMBRANCE OF CHRIST'S LOVE than you have hitherto done. 1. One of the first things I would recommend to you is, frequent meditation. See if you cannot more often get a quarter of an hour all alone, that you may sit down, and turn over and over again the love of Christ to you. Our old proverb says, "Prayer and provender hinder no man's journey"; and I believe that prayer and meditation hinder no man's work. Do try to get a little time to think about your soul. 2. Take care that you are not content with what you knew of Christ's love yesterday. You want to know a little more about it to-day, and you ought to know still more about it to-morrow. If you learn a little more about Christ every day, you will not be likely to forget what you already know of Him. 3. Then, again, as another way of keeping in your heart what you do know,—take care, when you have a sense of Christ's love, that you let it go down deeply. If there were a nail so placed that it would slacken its hold a little every day for six days, if I had the opportunity of driving it in the first day, I would try to drive it in right up to the head, and to clinch it. So, if you have not much time for fellowship and communion with Christ, if you have only a short season for meditation, try to drive the nail well home. Do not be content with merely thinking about Christ, seek to see Him before your eyes as manifestly crucified. Realize your fellowship with Him as He rises from the tomb, for this will help very much to keep you right. 4. When any of you meet together, it is always a good thing to make Christ the theme of your conversation. Whenever you have the opportunity, tell out the marvellous story of His great love to you; so will your own memory be refreshed, and others, listening to your testimony, will also get a large, and, it may be, an everlasting blessing. (C. H. Spurgeon.) *Remembrance of the love of Christ*.—I. INQUIRE INTO THE NATURE OF THE SAVIOUR'S SPECIAL LOVE. 1. This love is everlasting; that is to say, it did not commence in time, but existed from eternity; and it will not terminate while eternity endures: like its Divine source, it has neither "beginning of days nor end of years." 2. The love of Christ is most generous; since it was undeserved, unsolicited, and disinterested. 3. This is an efficient and powerful love. If conscience condemn us, His peace-speaking blood can assure us, and enable us to shout with the apostle, "Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect?" If our corruptions rage and struggle, His Spirit can subdue them, and render us more than conquerors over them. If the curses of the broken covenant hang over us, and hell gape to receive us, yet sheltered in His wounds, no curse can smite us, no flames kindle around us. If we be called to pass through the gloomy vale of death, this Sun of Righteousness can enlighten it, and cause us even there to "lift up our heads, knowing that our redemption draweth nigh." If we go into a strange and unknown world, He can there fill our souls with joys far above all our thoughts or desires. Then, and not till then, shall we be able to see the power of that love, which stormed and vanquished our obstinate hearts. 4. To crown all these properties, this love was painful and suffering. II. IT IS THE

DUTY OF BELIEVERS TO REMEMBER THE LOVE OF CHRIST. 1. All those circumstances which tend to produce permanent and firm impressions upon the memory, are to be found in this love. (1) We carefully observe and faithfully remember those things that are *wonderful* and beyond the ordinary course of nature. "Common events pass through the mind as common persons through the streets, without attracting particular notice;" whilst those events that are rare and astonishing, fasten upon the mind, and leave a durable impression. Now where can a greater complication of wonders be discerned, than in the love of your Redeemer? (2) We easily retain and frequently meditate on all those things which excite our love. Do we love any object? Memory constantly presents it to us; in our more retired moments, and even amidst the bustle of the world, the object of our attachment is the theme of our meditation. Now, what is more calculated to excite our love than the love of Christ? (3) We easily remember those things that are *beneficial* to us, and *necessary* for us. And what is there so beneficial, so necessary, as the love of Christ? 2. We are bound to remember the love of Christ, because the remembrance and sense of this love is the fountain whence all holy actions and good desires proceed. It is this love which animates the Christian to obedience; it is this love which, in the strong language of the apostle, "constraineth him" to labour for his Master. III. OUR REMEMBRANCE MUST BE ACCOMPANIED WITH GRATITUDE IN THE HEART. This duty is not painful; this duty is the source of the highest joy; dost thou fly from pleasure, my soul? Then let thy transports and thy rapture testify that thou feelest the value of a Saviour's love. 1. If this remembrance be thus accompanied by gratitude in the heart, it will manifest itself by the praises of the lips; it will shine in our discourse. 2. To these emotions of the heart, to these words of the mouth, must be added the actions of the life, if we would manifest a true remembrance of the love of the Saviour. (*H. Kollock, D.D.*) *The memory of Christ's love*:—This is a night for remembering Christ's love. The communion table spread before us, the sacred feast to which we are about to come, is meant to recall to our minds our Saviour's words, "This do in remembrance of Me. . . . This do ye, as oft as ye drink it, in remembrance of Me." I. First, I would remind you of THE PREPARATIONS FOR THIS HOLY MEMORY. Here they are. 1. The first word is, "Draw me." Lord, I would fain come at Thee; but, like Mephibosheth, I am lame in both my feet. I would fain fly to Thee; but my wings are broken; if, indeed, I ever had any. I cannot come to Thee. I lie inert, and dead, and powerless. So the first preparation is, "Draw me." It is a sweet, gracious, efficacious exercise of Divine power that I need and entreat. I pray this for myself, and I trust that you will pray with me, "Come, Sacred Spirit, and draw us nearer to Christ; enliven our hopes; incline our hearts; arouse our desires; and then help us to yield our whole being to Thy gracious influences!" 2. Notice, next, that this verse says, "Draw me, we will run after Thee." I like the change in the pronouns, as though I should pray to-night, "Lord, draw me; I am the most weighted, the heaviest of all Thy children in this congregation; but draw me, we will run after Thee. If Thou dost draw the most burdened one towards Thyself, all the rest will come to Thee at a rapid rate." Oh, that we might every one attain the running pace to-night! Oh, that we might speed along towards our Lord with that strong, impetuous desire which will not let us rest till we are close to Him: "Draw me, we will run after Thee." 3. Now, in the further preparation, if you read the verse through, you will find that an answer comes to the prayer directly it is uttered: "The King hath brought me into His chambers." I know, and some of you know, unhappily, what it is to feel very cold and lifeless; but I also know, and some of you know, what it is to become full of life, full of love, full of joy, full of heavenly rapture, in a single moment. 4. There is only one more preparation for remembering Christ, and that is to feel gladness and joy in Him: "We will be glad and rejoice in Thee." Come, take those ashes from thy head, thou that art sighing by reason of affliction! Come, unbind that sackcloth, and throw it aside, thou that hast lost fellowship with God, and art consequently in the dark! Christ is yours if you believe in Him. He has given Himself to you, and He loves you. Rejoice in that blessed fact. II. I would like to speak about THE DIVINE SUBJECT OF THIS HOLY MEMORY: "We will remember Thy love." 1. First, we will remember the fact of Christ's love. What it is for God to love, God only knows. We faintly guess, by the love that burns in our bosom towards the objects of our affection, what the love of God must be. The love of God must be a mighty passion. I use the word because I know no better; I am conscious that it is not the right one, for human language is too feeble to describe Divine love. 2. But we will remember, also, the character of Christ's love. What

a love it was! He loved us before the foundation of the world. With the telescope of His prescience, He foresaw our existence, and He loved us when we had no being. It was unmerited love, which had no reason in us for it to light upon. He loved us because He would love us. It was the sovereignty of His love that made Him love those whom He chose to love. He loved them freely, without anything in them, or that would ever be done by them, to deserve His love. But He loved fully as well as freely; He loved intensely, divinely, immeasurably. 3. We will also remember the deeds of Christ's love. 4. I would like you, to-night, to remember the proofs of Christ's love. You were far off, but He sought you, and brought you back. You were deaf, but He called you, and opened your ear to His loving call. III. THE DIVINE PRODUCT OF THIS HOLY MEMORY: "The upright love Thee." 1. So it seems, then, that if we remember Christ, we shall have a respect for His people. His people are the upright; and she, who speaks in the sacred Canticle, here looks round upon them, and says, "The upright love Thee." "That commends Thee to me; for if they who are of a chaste spirit love Thee, much more should I." 2. In remembering Christ's love as the upright do, we shall grow upright. I believe that God blesses trouble to our sanctification, and that He can bless joy to the same end; but I am sure of this, that the greatest instrument of sanctification is the love of Jesus. If you will remember Christ's love, you will be lifted up from your crookedness, and made straight, and put among the upright, who love the Lord. (*C. H. Spurgeon.*) *Love of Jesus*:—The spouse has been singing the praise of her Beloved. The Church has been chanting to the honour of the Church's Head. There is nothing gives the spouse so much delight as to be able to set forth the glory of her Husband and her King. She cannot find words sweet enough to express her admiration of Him. She loves Him better than all else, and her love is better than a banquet of wine. She is happy in the song, but just while she is at her happiest, there seems to float across her sky clouds, dark and heavy clouds. She remembers, for a moment at all events, that all do not love Him as she does. "Oh," she seems to say, "I love Thee, yet all do not share in my affection." But the cloud does not tarry long; it is gone when she remembers that the upright love Him, that all whose love is worth having love Him, so she cheers her heart again with this glad thought that there are some who hold Him at His true worth, some who count Him fairest of the fair, and dearest of the dear. Then is it that she speaks, not always in the first person, but sometimes in the third, for she loves to get them to join the strain and all rejoice to sing the self-same song. All ye who love Jesus, have you not all felt the same? I learn from this text, first, that Jesus well deserves His people's highest love. Take the revised version of the text, "Rightly do they love Thee." He well deserves His people's love, first, because of His great affection for His people. "We love Him because He first loved us." This is the charm of Christ's love, that it is ever the same, that it never changes, that it stands the strain of our unfaithfulness and lack of love, and He has proved it over and over again. Did He not leave His glorious throne to tabernacle with men? Did not He live? Did not He die? Did not He rise again, all for your sake and for mine? Lord Jesus, rightly do we love Thee! Lord, we love Thee, because Thou art so lovely and so lovable. "Thy very name is as ointment poured forth, therefore do the virgins love Thee." The purer we are the more we shall love all that is pure. I love to think of this, that the Lord Jesus delights to have His people happy in His love, to see them trusting Him and familiar with Him. Who can chide us for loving our dearest friends? Lastly, there is that other version in the margin of the Authorized Version which tells us that "they love Thee uprightly." I understand from this that those who love Jesus must love Him in the best possible style and greatest possible degree, love with utmost love. You love Christ, you are conscious of that; but that love of yours must count best. You must love uprightly. Now, I want you to search your hearts to see if you love Him as He deserves. Do you long for fresh tokens of His affection? Your love is not of the right sort unless you are constantly pressing forward to closer proximity to the Master. Here is another test. Have you great joy in His sacred Person? We will be glad and rejoice in Thee. I do believe that true love to Jesus means much joy to every one of us. My heart does leap at the sound of His name. There is something wrong in the heart if it does not thus respond to His affection. I would that you were happy Christians. The clouds that darken the sky are gilded with this love. I pray you revel in His love. It is better than wine. Be as those who feast. (*T. Spurgeon.*)

Vers. 5, 6. **I am black, but comely, O ye daughters of Jerusalem.**—*The Church's*

blackness:—I. THE CHURCH OF GOD AND CHRISTIANS, WHILST THEY ARE HERE, ARE IN AN IMPERFECT STATE. There is a mixture of some light and darkness together, and so it will be till we come to heaven, both for sin and sorrow, for sins and defects in soul. The causes why God will have it so are: 1. In regard of outward infirmities, that we might be made conformable to His Son (Rom. viii. 17), and so reign with Him, being first made suitable to the body. 2. In respect of outward and inward infirmities, both because God's glory is seen in our infirmities (2 Cor. xii. 7), His grace being sufficient to uphold us, and also in regard our weakness commends His strength, and our folly His wisdom. 3. Because He would draw us out of the earth, and have us hasten to accomplish the marriage and come away, therefore He sends us so many crosses, and so little rest in the flesh. 4. Because God would have us humble, patient and pitiful people, neither of which would be unless our state were imperfect; we would never know ourselves, our brethren and God, unless it were so, that on both sides we saw the prints of our imperfections. II. THOUGH OUR ESTATE BE HERE IMPERFECT, YET WE MUST NOT BE DISCOURAGED. 1. We have a great and mighty deliverer. He loves His children in the midst of all their deformities. 2. He is able to help them in all estates; His grace is still sufficient, He hath present help. What needs the child be dismayed for pain when the Father can remove it at His pleasure? 3. The saints of God in all ages have gone through imperfections; they have been sick, poor, doubtful, passionate, as well as we. God hath brought them to heaven, to happiness, through all storms. 4. Uprightness may stand with imperfection, some gold may be amongst earth; as the Church shows here, beauty and deformity may stand together, some light, some darkness. Now God bids the upright hope, rejoice, says he is blessed (Ps. xxiii. 6). 5. Because the effects of discouragement are too bad, as fretting (Ps. xlii. 11); yea, this doth not only keep out praises, but causes neglect of all ordinances, drives from God, makes one fierce, envious, uncomfortable, impotent, etc. III. THERE IS A GLORY AND EXCELLENCE IN THE SAINTS OF GOD IN THE MIDST OF ALL THEIR DEFORMITIES AND DEBASEMENTS. Indeed their glory is like Solomon's curtains, not obvious to every eye; like Kedar's tents, or a heap of wheat in the chaff, and outwardly base, but inwardly excellent. 1. Needs it must be so, for being converted, they obtain a new name (Rev. ii. 17); yea, they have this peculiar favour granted, as 1 John iii. 1, to be called the "sons of God." 2. They have a new nature, being made partakers of the image of God, and so of the Divine nature; as it is (2 Pet. i. 4). 3. They have a new estate; Christ Jesus makes them free, as John viii. 35, and He makes them also rich, supplying all their wants with the riches of His glory (Ps. iv. 3). 4. They have a new kindred and guide. God is their Father, they are members of Christ (1 Cor. xii. 13), they are "led by the Spirit of God." God dwelleth in them, and the Spirit of glory rests upon them even in affliction (1 Pet. iv. 14), and filleth them with glorious faith and precious graces. (1) This first discovers a wonderful blindness in us, who can see no such matter in the saints of God. (2) This is comfort to saints now and hereafter. Now they be glorious, but yet they are but in the way going to glory (Prov. iv. 18). If thus in their pilgrimage, what at home in their country? If thus, imperfect, what in perfection? If thus, in corruption, what when this corruption shall put on incorruption? And if thus, in mortality, what when mortality shall be swallowed up of life? IV. WE MUST NOT STILL BE PORING INTO THE DEFORMITIES OF GOD'S CHURCH AND PEOPLE, like flies on galled places, or dogs upon garbage and raw flesh. For—1. This is a practice which utterly crosseth God in His commandments, who chargeth us "not to despise the day of small things" (Zech. iv. 10). 2. This is quite against justice; for Christians have beauty as well as blackness, graces as well as corruptions. 3. This neither cometh from any good, nor worketh good. It ariseth from pride, ignorance, etc., and sheweth that a man neither knows his own estate, nor God's proceedings with His people, who brings them to honour through baseness, and confounds the glory of the world with base things. V. THEN GOD'S CHILDREN PAY FOR IT, WHEN THEY DO NOT THEIR OWN WORK, NOT KEEPING THEIR OWN STANDING. It is with them as soldiers and scholars, when they keep not their own places, and learn not their own lessons: they are met with on every side. 1. Because no man speeds well out of his own place, but Christians worst of all; as Prov. xxvii. 8, a thousand inconveniences befall to oneself, to his charge, when absent. God will be upon him, and leave him to himself, till he hath wound himself into woeful brakes. 2. Men will be upon his back, as Paul on Peter's, or else grow strange till he be humbled; but bad men they will curse him, all the hypocrites in the town will be at his heels. 3. The devil will be upon them, and having drawn them out of the

way, will either still mislead them, or else cut their throats and steal all, or hold them, if possible he may, from returning unto God; as in the prodigal son. 4. Their own consciences will be upon them, and it is with them as with a child that plays truant, his heart throbs, he hath no peace: so a Christian, whether he prosper or not prospers, he hath no peace, he eats not, he sleeps not in peace. (*R. Sibbes.*) *The Church's confession of infirmity*:—By the “daughters of Jerusalem,” Jewish expositors understand the Gentiles, Jerusalem being the spiritual metropolis and mother of us all. And, in substance, most Christian expositors agree with them—that is, they suppose the persons addressed to be some who are not yet openly joined to Christ; who are halting and undecided; seeing much of power and grace in Christ, but discouraged and driven back, either by the remaining infirmities of His followers, or by the persecutions to which they see them to be exposed. Hence the Church proceeds to vindicate herself against any suspicions arising out of these adverse appearances. “True, in one sense I am ‘black’; judged of externally, and seen only as man seeth, I am as dark and swarthy as the skins with which the wild Arab roofs his tent. But, in another sense, I am ‘comely’; my ‘clothing is of wrought gold,’ my raiment ‘is of finest needlework’; my soul, embroidered and enriched with the graces of the Eternal Spirit, makes me beautiful as the hangings in king’s palaces, gorgeous ‘as the curtains of Solomon.’” “Black, but comely.” The words may be taken, and by the Jews are taken, as anticipative of the glory of the Church in the latter days. In her present state she may be considered as dark as the Ethiop’s skin. Her heresies, her divisions, her heart-burnings, the spots in her feasts of charity, the scandals among men professing godliness, make the saying to be true of her which Jeremiah witnesses, that her “visage is blacker than a coal.” But how does Ezekiel speak of what her glory shall be (*Ezek. xvi. 9-14*)? Again, the expression, “I am black,” may be taken to refer to the many sins of the believer. In the eyes of no one is he so black as he is in his own. He is covered over with blemishes, and spots, and soils. There are stains upon his duties, stains upon his repentances, stains upon his prayers. But look we again. We have seen the picture but from one side. On looking at it from the other, this stained and darkened thing is beautiful as Tirzah, comely as Jerusalem, “terrible as an army with banners.” Thus, while the believer is both “black and comely,” he is neither all the one, nor all the other. There is a strife for mastery always going on between the elements of his inner life—the grace reigning, but the sin not expelled—the flesh disputing inch by inch the claims of the Spirit, and iniquity forcing its presence into the shrine of his holiest things. Still, comely he is, and that through Christ’s comeliness. The world sees only the “tents of Kedar,” but cannot discern the “curtains of Solomon.” (*D. Moore, M.A.*)

Ver. 6. Look not upon me, because I am black.—*Self-humbling and self-searching*.—I. THE FAIREST CHRISTIANS ARE THE MOST SHAMEFACED WITH REGARD TO THEMSELVES. The person who says, “Look not upon me, because I am black,” is described by some one else in the eighth verse as the “fairest among women.” Others, who thought her the fairest of the fair, spoke no less than the truth when they affirmed it; but in her own esteem she felt herself to be so little fair, and so much uncomely, that she besought them not even to look upon her. Why is it that the best Christians depreciate themselves the most? Is it not because they are most accustomed to look within? They keep their books in a better condition than those unsafe tradesmen, the counterpart of mere professors, who think themselves “rich and increased in goods,” when they are on the very verge of bankruptcy. In his anxiety to be pure from evil, the godly man will be eager to notice and quick to detect the least particle of defilement; and for this reason he discovers more of his blackness than any other man is likely to see. He is no blacker, but he looks more narrowly, and therefore he sees more distinctly the spots on his own character. The genuine Christian also tries himself by a higher standard. He knows the law to be spiritual, and therefore he judges many things to be sinful which others wink at; and he counts some things to be important duties which others regard as trifles. The genuine Christian sets up no lower standard than perfection. He does not judge himself by others, but by the exact measure of the Divine requirements, by the law of God, and especially by the example of his Lord and Master; and when he thus sets the brightness of the Saviour’s character side by side with his own, then it is that he cries out, “Look not upon me, for I am black.” Another reason why the fairest Christians are generally those that think themselves the blackest, is that they have more light. When the light of God comes into the soul, and we see what purity

really is, what holiness really is, then it is the contrast strikes us. Though we might have thought we were somewhat clean before, when we see God in His light we see light, and we abhor ourselves in dust and ashes. Our defects so appal our own heart, that we marvel they do not exhaust His patience. The better Christian a man is, the more abashed he always feels; because to him sin is so exceedingly hateful, that what sin he sees in himself he loathes himself for far more than others do. A very little sin, as the world calls it, is a very great sin to a truly awakened Christian. Now, I think our text seems to say just this: there were some that admired the Church. They said she was fair. She seemed to say, "Don't say it; you don't know what I am, or you would not praise me." Every Christian, in proportion as he lives near to God, will feel this self-abasement, this lowliness of heart; and if others talk of admiring or of imitating him, he will say, "Look not upon me, for I am black." And as he thus, in deep humility, begs that he be not exalted, he will often desire others that they would not despise him. It will come into his mind, "Such and such a man of God is a Christian indeed; as he sees my weakness, he will condemn me. Such and such a disciple of Christ is strong; he will never be able to bear with my weakness. Such and such a Christian woman does, indeed, adorn the doctrine of God her Saviour; but as for me, alas! I am not what I ought to be, nor what I would be. Children of God, do not look upon me with scorn. I will not say that you have motives in your own eyes. I have a beam in mine. Look not upon me too severely. Judge me not harshly. If you do look at me, look to Christ for me, and pray that I may be helped; 'for I am black, because the sun hath looked upon me.'" II. THE MOST DILIGENT CHRISTIAN WILL BE THE MAN MOST AFRAID OF THE EVILS CONNECTED WITH HIS WORK. "Evils connected with his work!" says one. "Does work for God have evils contingent upon it?" Yes; but for every evil connected with the work of God, there are ten evils connected with idleness. I speak now only to the workers. I have known some whom the sun has looked upon in this respect; their zeal has grown cold through non-success. You went out, first of all, as a Christian, full of fire and life. You intended to push the Church before you, and drag the world after you. But you have been mixed up with Christians for some years of a very cool sort. Use the thermometer to-night. Has not the spiritual temperature gone down in your own soul? Perhaps you have not seen many conversions under your ministry? or in the class which you conduct you have not seen many children brought to Jesus? Do you feel you are getting cool? Then wrap your face in your mantle to-night, and say: "Look not upon me, for in losing my zeal I am black, for the sun hath looked upon me." Perhaps it has affected you in another way, for the sun does not bring freckles out on all faces in the same place. Perhaps it is your temper that is grown sour? Sometimes this evil of sun-burning will come in the shape of joy taken away from the heart by weariness. I do not think any of us are weary of God's work. If so, we never were called to it. But we may get weary *in* it. The toil is more irksome when the spirits are less buoyant. Well, I would advise you to confess this before God, and ask for a medicine to heal you. You had need get your joy back, but first you must acknowledge that you have lost it. Say, "I am black, because the sun hath looked upon me." III. THE MOST WATCHFUL CHRISTIAN IS CONSCIOUS OF THE DANGER OF SELF-NEGLECT. "They made me the keeper of the vineyards; but mine own vineyard have I not kept." Solemnly, let me speak again to my brethren who are seeking to glorify Christ by their lives. I met some time ago with a sermon by that famous divine, Mr. Henry Melvill, which consists all through of one solitary thought, and one only image well worked out. He supposes a man to be a guide in Switzerland. It is his duty to conduct travellers in that country through the sublime passes, and to point out to them the glories of the scenery, and the beauties of the lakes, and streams, and glaciers, and hills. This man, as he continues in his office, almost inevitably gets to repeat his descriptions as a matter of course; and everybody knows how a guide at last comes to "talk book," and just iterate words which do not awaken any corresponding feeling in his own mind. Yet when he began, perhaps it was a sincere love of the sublime and the beautiful that led him to take up the avocation of a guide; and at first it really was to him a luxury to impart to others what he had felt amidst the glories of nature; but as, year after year, to hundreds of different parties, he had to repeat much the same descriptions, call attention to the same sublimities, and indicate the same beauties, it is almost impossible but that he should get to be at last a mere machine. Through the hardening tendency of custom, and the debasing influence of gain, his aptest descriptions and most exquisite eulogies come to be of no greater account than

the mere language of a hireling. Every worker for Christ is deeply concerned in the application of this parable; because the peril of self-complacency increases in precisely the same ratio as the zeal of proselytizing. When counselling others, you think yourself wise. When warning others, you feel yourself safe. When judging others, you suppose yourself above suspicion. You began the work with a flush of ardour; it may be with a fever of enthusiasm; a sacred instinct prompted, a glowing passion moved you. How will you continue it? Here is the danger—the fearful danger—lest you do it mechanically, fall into a monotony, continue in the same train, and use holy words to others with no corresponding feeling in your own soul.

1V. THE MOST CONSCIENTIOUS CHRISTIAN WILL BE THE FIRST TO INQUIRE FOR THE ANTIDOTE, AND TO USE THE CURE. What is the cure? The cure is found in the verse next to my text. See, then, you workers, if you want to keep up your freshness, and not to get blackened by the sun under which you labour, go to your Lord again—go and talk to Him. Address Him again by that dear name, “Thou whom my soul loveth.” Ask to have your first love rekindled; strive after the love of your espousals. Oh, to be always full of love to Him! You will never get any hurt by working for Him then; your work will do you good. The sweat of labour will even make your face the fairer. The more you do for souls, the purer, and the holier, and the more Christlike will you be, if you do it with Him. Keep up the habit of sitting at His feet, like Mary, as well as serving Him with Martha. You can keep the two together; they will balance each other, and you shall not be barren or unfruitful, neither shall you fall into the blackness which the sun is apt to breed. (*C. H. Spurgeon.*) **My mother's children were angry with me.**—*The Church's enemies*:—

1. The greatest enemies of the Church are such as are the nearest in relation unto her. Where there is the greatest sympathy, when divided, turns to the greatest antipathy. Hereof David complaineth (Ps. lxxix. 9). Such was the enmity of Cain towards Abel, of Esau towards Jacob, of Absalom towards David. 2. The greatest pretenders to religion and holiness, prove many times the greatest enemies to the same (Phil. iii. 5, 6). Paul had a zeal, but not according to knowledge; and therefore none more forward to persecute the saints than Paul; none more greater enemies to Christ than the Scribes and Pharisees; none more opposite to the apostles than the devout Jew, one that was zealous for legal observances. 3. Those that are nearest in relation to the saints, and those that pretend most holiness, if such prove false brethren, they afflict and hurt the saints most of all. (1) Such are most apt to seduce them, and draw them from the truth (Acts xx. 30). Josephus, in his “Book of Antiquities,” reporteth that when Jerusalem was besieged by the Romans, the Jews received more damage by their several divisions within their city than from the Romans without, who were their besiegers: so a false brother doth more endanger the welfare of the saints than an open enemy. (2) Such as are false brethren do not only seduce the saints but grievously afflict them; they know how to strike where it will most smart; they know the conscience to be the most tender place, and therefore aim to oppress that most. Julian the Apostate did the saints more hurt than any persecutor beside: so none was more fit to betray Christ than Judas. (3) False brethren persecute with the greatest heat and indignation. Of this the Church complaineth here: “My mother's sons were angry with me,” they were incensed with indignation, and with burning heat and choler; with wrath and envy they were set against her. (*John Robotham.*) **They made me keeper of the vineyards; but my own vineyard have I not kept.**—*The vineyard-keeper at fault*:—If you consider the bride in the nuptial song to be the Jewish nation, then the text is a confession, that while witnessing for God against other nations—idolatrous nations—the children of Abraham had not considered their own ways. If you take the bride to be the Church of Christ, then the text is a confession that while she has attended to her mission in the world, she has forgotten her duty to herself. If the bride be the individual subject of Messiah's kingdom, then the text is an acknowledgment that benevolent work has supplanted personal spiritual cultivation. The heart of a Christian is redeemed by the Saviour for God, and redeemed unto God; and that heart is taken possession of by the Holy Ghost that it may bring forth fruit unto God. Now, the keeping of that heart by God Himself is essential to prosperity and well-being; but there is a something also which God requires us to do, and that something is to co-operate with His ministrations and with His care of us. The husbandman breaks up the clods of the field; he casts in the seed; he treats the soil as the soil demands; but when he has done his best and his utmost, Providence has to do very much. Unless rain fall and the sun shine, unless the Source of life give life, and sustain life, the husbandman will be a sower, but he will

never be a reaper. Just so is it with the heart of a Christian. There are certain things which God does for us, and then God saith to us, "Now work out your own salvation with fear and trembling." You see, therefore, the point to which I want your attention. I. WHAT IS THIS COMPLAINT? "Mine own vineyard have I not kept." The spiritual nature of a godly man is here supposed to be likened to a vineyard; and it is like to a vineyard in several respects. In the first place it is a soil in which things are planted and sown; in which things spring up and wither; in which things grow and are cut down; in which things bear fruit and are barren; in which things live and die. In the next place it is a sphere affording full scope for exertion, vigilance and skill. In the third place judicious labour secures profit and reward. And in the last place neglect makes evil fertile, and brings miserable barrenness of good. In a self-neglected spirit you will find such things as these—first there is culpable and mischievous ignorance; also, undigested information; words about things, without the ideas of things; or the ideas of things not connected or classified. You will also find injurious prejudices, false judgments, vain imaginations, irregular emotions, an evil conscience, corrupt motives supposed to be right motives, restlessness, self-deception, falsity of profession, and a constant going back from good and from true positions which the individual has gained. Such an one will not be like the man who said, "I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection." He will have no idea of self-crucifixion, or of self-mortification. You will not discover in such an one power in prayer. You will not observe in such a case judicious and successful work. You may find such an one busy; but you will not witness in this case judicious and successful labour. Neither will you find profit from Divine ordinances—rest of soul or peace of mind. The witness of the Spirit with such a man will not be distinct and clear; nor will you behold in this case the choicest fruits of righteousness. "Mine own vineyard have I not kept." II. THE CAUSE AND THE OCCASION OF THE EVIL COMPLAINED OF. You know the distinction between the cause and the occasion. It is possible to keep others' vineyards, and, at the same time, to take care of our own. The two things are compatible. We are quite sure they may be done together, because God requires us to do them both. The cause of self-neglect, therefore, is not in the vineyard-keeping for others; it must be in the character of the individual concerned. But where in the individual concerned? It may be in false views of a state of salvation, and of our personal obligations. Many persons who are exceedingly particular about doctrine, and who tithe their mint, and anise, and cummin, as respects doctrinal statements, are often horribly careless with reference to practice: and yet if there be not religious practice in those who embrace religious truths, tell me in what is the advantage of holding true doctrine! The cause of neglecting our own vineyards is to be found also in excess of zeal for the welfare of others. It is to be found in false amiability and accessibility to others. It is to be found in a strong taste for the excitement of caring for others; and in the vanity which prefers the position of keeper of the vineyard to the quiet condition of attending to one's own vineyard. These few remarks will show the cause—now for the occasion. "They made me." "They." A great deal of religious and benevolent work is done evidently as unto man, and not as unto God. You ask me for proof of this—I give it you instantly. The proof is here. If the leader or associate of some benevolent religious workers offend them, they will throw the work up directly. What does this prove? It proves that they have been working for man, and not for God. If men work simply for gratitude, if they are kind to each other simply expecting thankfulness, they will be invariably disappointed. And it is not the prospect of thankfulness from others that should ever bind you to doing good to men. Never look even for gratitude, but do good to another for the sake of the blessed God. And then it matters very little what the man you serve may be, how he may change, either towards you or towards others, you will be able to cleave to him, not for his own sake, but for his God's sake. We neglect our own vineyards because others call us away, and we obey. We become engrossed. We become too ardent. We are keeping the vineyards of others, just, perhaps, that it may be said that we are keeping their vineyards, and that we may have the praise of the fruit of the vineyard, or that we may please those who are connected with the vineyard. The occasion of self-neglect may be suggested in these words: "They made me keeper of the vineyards." (*S. Martin, M.A.*) *The unkept vineyard; or, personal work neglected*.—We are all pretty ready at complaining, especially of other people. Not much good comes of picking holes in other men's characters; and yet many spend hours in that unprofitable occupation. It will be well for us, at this time, to

let our complaint, like that of the text, deal with ourselves. I. First, then, let me begin with THE CHRISTIAN MAN WHO HAS FORGOTTEN HIS HIGH AND HEAVENLY CALLING. In the day when you and I were born again, we were born for God. In the day when we were quickened by the Holy Ghost into newness of life, that life was bound to be a consecrated one. This you will not deny. Christian, you admit that you have a high, holy and heavenly calling! Now let us look back. We have not spent our life idly: we have been forced to be keepers of the vineyards. Even in Paradise man was bidden to dress the garden. There is something to be done by each man, and specially by each Christian man. Ask yourself, "Am I an earnest labourer together with God, or am I, after all, only a laborious trifler, an industrious doer of nothing, working hard to accomplish no purpose of the sort for which I ought to work, since I ought to live unto my Lord alone?" To a very large degree we have not been true to our own professions: our highest work has been neglected, we have not kept our own vineyards. In looking back, how little time has been spent by us in communion with God! How little a part of our thoughts has been occupied with meditation, contemplation, adoration, and other acts of devotion! How little have we surveyed the beauties of Christ, His person, His work, His sufferings, His glory! Think of our neglect of our God, and see whether it is not true that we have treated Him very ill. We have been in the shop, we have been on the exchange, we have been at the markets, we have been in the fields, we have been in the public libraries, we have been in the lecture-room, we have been in the forum of debate; but our own closets and studies, our walk with God, and our fellowship with Jesus, we have far too much neglected. Moreover, the vineyard of holy service for God we have too much left to go to ruin. I would ask you—How about the work your God has called you to do? Men are dying; are you saving them? Might not many a man among you say to himself, "I have been a tailor," or "I have been a shopkeeper," or "I have been a mechanic," or "I have been a merchant," or "I have been a physician, and I have attended to these callings; but mine own vineyard, which was my Master's, which I was bound to look to first of all, I have not kept"? Well, now, what is the remedy for this? It is that you follow up the next verse to my text. Get to your Lord, and in Him you will find recovery from your neglects. Ask Him where He feeds His flock, and go with Him. They have warm hearts who commune with Christ. They are prompt in duty who enjoy His fellowship. Hasten to your Lord, and you will soon begin to keep your vineyard; for in the Song you will see a happy change effected. The spouse began to keep her vineyard directly, and to do it in the best fashion. Within a very short time you find her saying, "Take us the foxes, the little foxes, that spoil the vines." See, she is hunting out her sins and her follies. Farther on you find her with her Lord in the vineyard, crying, "Awake, O north wind; and come, thou south; blow upon my garden, that the spices thereof may flow out!" She is evidently keeping her garden, and asking for heavenly influences to make the spices and flowers yield their perfume. She went down to see whether the vines flourished, and the pomegranates budded. Anon, with her Beloved, she rises early to go to the vineyard, and watch the growth of the plants. Farther on you find her talking about all manner of fruits that she has laid up for her Beloved. Thus you see that to walk with Christ is the way to keep your vineyard, and serve your Lord.

II. Now I turn to THE MAN WHO IN ANY PLACE HAS TAKEN OTHER WORK AND NEGLECTED HIS OWN. He can use the words of the text—"They made me the keeper of the vineyards; but mine own vineyard have I not kept." There is a vineyard that a great many neglect, and that is their own heart. It is well to have talent; it is well to have influence; but it is better to be right within yourself. What is your character, and do you seek to cultivate it? Do you ever use the hoe upon those weeds which are so plentiful in us all? Do you water those tiny plants of goodness which have begun to grow? Do you watch them to keep away the little foxes which would destroy them? Now think of another vineyard. Are not some people neglecting their families? Next to our hearts, our households are the vineyards which we are most bound to cultivate. It is shocking to find men and women speaking fluently about religion, and yet their houses are a disgrace to Christianity. Besides that, every man who knows the Lord should feel that his vineyard lies also around about his own house. If God has saved your children, then try to do something for your neighbours, for your workpeople, for those with whom you associate in daily labour. (C. H. Spurgeon.)

Vers. 7, 8. Tell me, O Thou whom my soul loveth, where Thou feedest.—*The Good*

Shepherdess :—The bride was most unhappy and ashamed because her personal beauty had been sorely marred by the heat of the sun. The fairest among women had become swarthy as a sunburnt slave. Spiritually it is so full often with a chosen soul. The Lord's grace has made her fair to look upon, even as the lily; but she has been so busy about earthly things that the sun of worldliness has injured her beauty. The bride with holy shamefacedness exclaims, "Look not upon me, for I am black, because the sun hath looked upon me." This is one index of a gracious soul—that whereas the ungodly rush to and fro, and know not where to look for consolation, the believing heart naturally flies to its well-beloved Saviour, knowing that in Him is its only rest. It would appear from the preceding verse that the bride was also in trouble about a certain charge which had been given to her, which burdened her, and in the discharge of which she had become negligent of herself. "Mine own vineyard have I not kept." Under this sense of double unworthiness and failure, feeling her omissions and her commissions to be weighing her down, she turned round to her Beloved and asked instruction at His hands. This was well. Had she not loved her Lord she would have shunned Him when her comeliness was faded, but the instincts of her affectionate heart suggested to her that He would not discard her because of her imperfections. She was, moreover, wise thus to appeal to her Lord against herself. Never let sin part you from Jesus. Under a sense of sin do not fly from Him; that were foolishness. Sin may drive you from Sinai; it ought to draw you to Calvary. I. Here is A QUESTION ASKED. Every word of the inquiry is worthy of our careful meditation. You will observe, first, concerning it, that it is asked in love. She calls Him to whom she speaks by the endearing title, "O Thou whom my soul loveth." Whatever she may feel herself to be, she knows that she loves Him. The life of her existence is bound up with Him: if there be any force and power and vitality in her, it is but as fuel to the great flame of her love, which burns alone for Him. Mark well that it is not "O Thou whom my soul believes in." That would be true, but she has passed further. It is not "O Thou whom my soul honours." That is true too, but she has passed beyond that stage. Nor is it merely "O Thou whom my soul trusts and obeys." She is doing that, but she has reached something warmer, more tender, more full of fire and enthusiasm, and it is "O Thou whom my soul loveth." The question therefore becomes instructive to us, because it is addressed to Christ under a most endearing title; and I ask every worker here to take care that he always does his work in a spirit of love, and always regards the Lord Jesus not as a taskmaster, not as one who has given us work to do from which we would fain escape, but as our dear Lord, whom to serve is bliss, and for whom to die is gain. "O Thou whom my soul loveth," is the right name by which a worker for Jesus should address his Lord. Now note that the question, as it is asked in love, is also asked of Him. "Tell me, O Thou whom my soul loveth, where Thou feedest." She asked Him to tell her, as if she feared that none but Himself would give her the correct answer; others might be mistaken, but He could not be. She asked of Him because she was quite sure that He would give her the kindest answer. Perhaps she felt that nobody else could tell her as He could, for others speak to the ear, but He speaks to the heart: others speak with lower degrees of influence, we hear their speech but are not moved thereby; but Jesus speaks, and the Spirit goes with every word He utters, and therefore we hear to profit when He converses with us. Now, observe what the question is. She wishes to know how Jesus does His work, and where He does it. The question seems to be just this: "Lord, tell me what are the truths with which Thou dost feed Thy people's souls; tell me what are the doctrines which make the strong ones weak and the sad ones glad: tell me what is that precious meat which Thou art wont to give to hungry and fainting spirits, to revive them and keep them alive; for if Thou tell me, then I will give my flock the same food: tell me where the pasture is wherein Thou dost feed Thy sheep, and straightway I will lead mine to the self-same happy fields. Then tell me how Thou makest Thy people to rest. What are those promises which Thou dost apply to the consolation of their spirit, so that their cares and doubts and fears and agitations all subside? Thou hast sweet meadows where Thou makest Thy beloved flock to lie calmly down and slumber, tell me where those meadows are that I may go and fetch the flock committed to my charge, the mourners whom I ought to comfort, the distressed ones whom I am bound to relieve, the desponding whom I have endeavoured to encourage; tell me, Lord, where Thou makest Thy flock to lie down, for then, under Thy help, I will go and make my flock to lie down too. It is for myself, but yet far more for others, that I ask the question, 'Tell me where Thou feedest, where Thou makest them to

rest at noon.' " We would know the groves of promise and the cool streams of peace, that we may lead others into rest. If we can follow Jesus we can guide others, and so both we and they will find comfort and peace. That is the meaning of the request before us. II. Here is AN ARGUMENT USED. The bride says, "Why should I be as one that turneth aside by the flocks of Thy companions?" If she should lead her flock into distant meadows, far away from the place where Jesus is feeding His flock, it would not be well. She speaks of it as a thing most abhorrent to her mind, and well might it be. For, first, would it not look very unseemly that the bride should be associating with others than the Bridegroom? They have each a flock: there is He with His great flock, and here is she with her little one. Shall they seek pastures far off from one another? Will there not be talk about this? Will not onlookers say, "This is not seemly: there must be some lack of love here, or else these two would not be so divided"? Stress may be put, if you like, upon that little word "I." Why should I, Thy blood-bought spouse; I, betrothed unto Thee, or ever the earth was, I, whom Thou hast loved,—why should I turn after others and forget Thee? Our hearts may grow unchaste to Christ even while they are zealous in Christian work. I dread very much the tendency to do Christ's work in a cold, mechanical spirit; but above even that I tremble lest I should be able to have warmth for Christ's work and yet should be cold towards the Lord Himself. Beware of that! Love your work, but love your Master better; love your flock, but love the great Shepherd better still, and ever keep close to Him, for it will be a token of unfaithfulness if you do not. And mark again, "Why should I be as one that turneth aside by the flocks of Thy companions?" We may read this as meaning, "Why should I be so unhappy as to have to work for Thee, and yet be out of communion with Thee?" It is a very unhappy thing to lose fellowship with Jesus, and yet to have to go on with religious exercises. If the wheels are taken off your chariot it is no great matter if nobody wants to ride, but how if you are called upon to drive on? When a man's foot is lamed he may not so much regret it if he can sit still, but if he be bound to run a race he is greatly to be pitied. It made the spouse doubly unhappy even to suppose that she, with her flock to feed and herself needing feeding too, should have to turn aside by the flocks of others and miss the presence of her Lord. Above all, should we not try to live as a church, and individually, also, in abiding fellowship with Jesus; for if we turn aside from Him we shall rob the truth of its aroma, yea, of its essential fragrance. If we lose fellowship with Jesus we shall have the standard, but where will be the standard-bearer? We may retain the candlestick, but where shall be the light? We shall be shorn of our strength, of our joy, our comfort, our all, if we miss fellowship with Him. God grant, therefore, that we may never be as those who turn aside. III. We have here AN ANSWER GIVEN by the Bridegroom to His beloved. She asked Him where He fed, where He made His flock to rest, and He answered her. Observe carefully that this answer is given in tenderness to her infirmity; not ignoring her ignorance, but dealing very gently with it. "If thou know not"—a hint that she ought to have known, but such a hint as kind lovers give when they would fain forbear to chide. The Lord forgives our ignorance, and condescends to instruct it. Note next that the answer is given in great love. He says, "O thou fairest among women." That is a blessed cordial for her distress. She said, "I am black"; but He says, "O thou fairest among women." I would rather trust Christ's eyes than mine. If my eyes tell me I am black I will weep, but if He assures me I am fair I will believe Him and rejoice. As the artist, looking on the block of marble, sees in the stone the statue which he means to fetch out of it with matchless skill, so the Lord Jesus sees the perfect image of Himself in us, from which He means to chip away the imperfections and the sins until it stands out in all its splendour. But still it is gracious condescension which makes Him say, "Thou art fairest among women," to one who mourned her own sunburnt countenance. The answer contains much sacred wisdom. The bride is directed where to go that she may find her Beloved and lead her flock to Him. "Go thy way forth by the footprints of the flock." If thou wilt find Jesus, thou wilt find Him in the way the holy prophets went, in the way of the patriarchs and the way of the apostles. And if thou dost desire to find thy flock, and to make them lie down, very well, go thou and feed them as other shepherds have done—Christ's own shepherds whom He has sent in other days to feed His chosen. Make the Lord Jesus your model and example; and by treading where the footprints of the flock are to be seen, you will both save yourself and them that hear you; you shall find Jesus, and they shall find Jesus too. Then the spouse added, "Feed thy kids beside the shepherds' tents." Now, who are these shep-

herds? Let me take you to the twelve principal shepherds who came after the great Shepherd of all. You want to bless your children, to save their souls, and have fellowship with Christ in the doing of it; then teach them the truths which the apostles taught. And what were they? Take Paul as an example. "I determined not to know anything among you save Jesus Christ, and Him crucified." That is feeding the kids beside the shepherds' tents, when you teach your children Christ, much of Christ, all of Christ, and nothing else but Christ. Mind you stick to that blessed subject. And when you are teaching them Christ, teach them all about His life, His death, His resurrection; teach them His Godhead and His manhood. Preach regeneration. Let it be seen how thorough the change is, that we may glorify God's work. Preach the final perseverance of the saints. Teach that the Lord is not changeable—casting away His people, loving them to-day and hating them to-morrow. Preach in fact, the doctrines of grace as you find them in the Book. Feed them beside the shepherds' tents. Aye, and feed the kids there—the little children. (*C. H. Spurgeon.*) *A dialogue*:—It is the Church addressing her Lord: it is the condescending Saviour giving in reply the instruction required.

I. THE CHURCH ADDRESSES HER LORD. 1. A conscious love to her best friend. (1) The Church loves Him for His personal excellence. (2) The Church loves Him for His condescending gifts. (3) The Church loves Him for His precious promises. 2. A dread of swerving from her loyalty to Him. "Why should I be as one that turneth aside," etc. Christ has many rivals: and that, not only in hearts which "the god of this world hath blinded," but even in those of His faithful followers. The spiritual Christian is aware that there are such rivals. He knows how ensnaring they are—how feeble and treacherous his own heart is. 3. An anxious petition for His pastoral care. "Tell me where Thou feedest," etc. A true believer needs food for his soul; something to nourish and strengthen him in the exercise of that spiritual life. And it is to Christ that He looks for it—"Tell me where Thou feedest," that I may "go in and out, and find pasture." He needs rest to his soul—peace from the war in his members—victory over the world, whether it allure or terrify him. And because Jesus has invited "all them that labour and are heavy laden," he "comes"; "Tell me where Thou makest Thy flock to rest at noon."

II. THE CONDESCENDING SAVIOUR REPLIES. 1. A gentle reproof: "If thou know not." They who know so much of Christ, as the petition implies, already possess the means of knowing more. But they are apt to forget their past experience of His care, and of the way in which they sought and found it, and impatiently desire some new and unusual means to be employed for their consolation. Then He will gently reprove—"How! knowest thou not? if I be not a Saviour to others, yet doubtless I am to thee!" 2. An expression of endearment: "O thou fairest among women!" Has He, then, forgotten that we are "conceived in sin" and "shapen in iniquity"? He sees, moreover, the graces of the Spirit which He Himself bestows upon His children; imperfect, indeed, but genuine—variable, but progressive—resisted by the flesh, but gradually victorious over it. 3. A significant reference. Certain questions had been asked: the Saviour will not give a direct answer, but refers the questioner to those who could satisfy the inquiry. "Go thy way forth by the footsteps of the flock," etc. (1) Christ will have His people to be helpers of each other's faith, hope, and love. (2) Christ puts especial honour upon His own ordinance, the preaching of the Gospel; and upon His ministers in that excellent work. He is Himself "the Chief Shepherd"; yet the tents of His under-shepherds must also be frequented. (*J. Jowett, M.A.*) *The Church's love to her loving Lord*:—

I. We commence with THE TITLE: "O Thou whom my soul loveth." It is well to be able to call the Lord Jesus Christ by this name without an "if," or a "but." Learn to get that positive knowledge of your love to Jesus, and be not satisfied till you can talk about your interest in Him as a reality, which you have made infallibly sure by having received the witness of the Holy Spirit, and His seal upon your soul by faith, that you are born of God, and belong to Christ. Speaking, then, of this title which rings the great bell of love to Jesus, let us notice first the cause, and secondly the effect of that love. 1. If we can look into the face of Him who once sweat great drops of blood, and call Him, "O Thou whom my soul loveth," it is interesting to consider what is the cause of our love. And here our reply is very quick. The efficient cause of our love is the Holy Spirit of God. Why do we love Jesus? We have the best of answers—because He first loved us. Moreover, we have another reason. I trust many here can say that they love the Saviour because of His present dealings towards them. What has He not done for us this very day? He has made us glad; our spirits have leaped for very joy, for He hath turned again

the captivity of our soul. Nor is this all. We love the Saviour because of the excellency of His person. We are not blind to excellence anywhere, but still we can see no excellence like His. 2. I shall now for a short time speak on the effects of this love, as we have dwelt on the cause of it. When a man has true love to Christ, it is sure to lead him to dedication. There is a natural desire to give something to the person whom we love, and true love to Jesus compels us to give ourselves to Him. When the pupils of Socrates had nearly all of them given him a present, there was one of the best scholars who was extremely poor, and he said to Socrates, "I have none of these things which the others have presented to thee; but, O Socrates, I give thee myself"; whereupon Socrates said it was the best present he had had that day. "My son, give Me thy heart"—this is what Jesus asks for. True love next shows itself in obedience. If I love Jesus, I shall do as He bids me. He is my Husband, my Lord—I call Him "Master." "If ye love Me," saith He, "keep My commandments." True love, again, is always considerate and afraid lest it should give offence. It walks very daintily. If I love Jesus, I shall watch my eye, my heart, my tongue, my hand, being so fearful lest I should wake my beloved, or make Him stir until He please; and I shall be sure not to take in those bad guests, those ill-favoured guests of pride and sloth, and love of the world. Again, true love to Christ will make us very jealous of His honour. As Queen Eleanor went down upon her knees to suck the poison from her husband's wound, so we shall put our lips to the wound of Christ when He has been stabbed with the dagger of calumny, or inconsistency, being willing sooner to take the poison ourselves, and to be ourselves diseased and despised than that His name, His cross, should suffer ill. Oh, what matters it what becomes of us, if the King reigneth? If we love Christ, again, we shall be desiring to promote His cause, and we shall be desiring to promote it ourselves. We shall wish to see the strength of the mighty turned at the gate, that King Jesus may return triumphant; we shall not wish to sit still while our brethren go to war, but we shall want to take our portion in the fray, that like soldiers that love their monarch, we may prove by our wounds and by our sufferings that our love is real. The apostle says, "Let us not love in word only but in deed and in truth." Actions speak louder than words, and we shall always be anxious to tell our love in deeds as well as by our lips. And once again, if we love Jesus we shall be willing to suffer for Him. Darkness is light about us if we can serve Him there. II. The second point of consideration is THE DESIRE OF THE CHURCH AFTER CHRIST JESUS OUR LORD: having called Him by His title, she now expresses her longing to be with Him. "Tell me, O Thou whom my soul loveth, where Thou feedest." The desire of a renewed soul is to find out Christ and to be with Him. Stale meats left over from yesterday are very well when there is nothing else, but who does not like hot food fresh from the fire? And past communion with Christ is very well. "I remember Thee from the land of the Hermonites and the hill Mizar;" but these are only stale meats, and a loving soul wants fresh food every day from the table of Christ, and you that have once had the kisses of His mouth, though you remember the past kisses with delight, yet want daily fresh tokens of His love. A true loving soul, then, wants present communion with Christ; so the question is, "Tell me where Thou feedest? Where dost Thou get Thy comfort from, O Jesu? I will go there. Where do Thy thoughts go? To Thy cross? Dost Thou look back to that? Then I will go there. Where Thou feedest, there will I feed." Or does this mean actively, instead of being in the passive or the neuter? Where dost Thou feed Thy flock? In Thy house? I will go there, if I may find Thee there. In private prayer? Then I will not be slack in that. In the Word? Tell me where Thou feedest, for wherever Thou standest as the Shepherd, there will I be, for I want Thee. I cannot be satisfied to be apart from Thee. My soul hungers and thirsts to be with Thee. She puts it again, "Where dost Thou make Thy flock to rest at noon," for there is only rest in one place, where Thou causest Thy flock to rest at noon. She wants to get away to hold quiet communion with her Lord, for He is the brook where the weary may lave their wearied limbs; He is that sheltered nook, that shadow of the great rock in the weary land where His people may lie down and be at peace. III. THE ARGUMENT USED BY THE CHURCH. She says, "Why should I be as one that turneth aside by the flocks of Thy companions?" Thou hast plenty of companions—why should I be turned aside? Why should I not be one? Let us talk it over. Why should I lose my Lord's presence? But the devil tells me I am a great sinner. Ah! but it is all washed away, and gone for ever. That cannot separate me, for it does not exist. My sin is buried. The devil tells me I am unworthy, and that is a reason. But I

always was unworthy, and yet it was no reason why He should not love me at first, and therefore cannot be a reason why I should not have fellowship with Him now. Why should I be left out? Why should I be turned aside? I am equally bought with a price. I cost Him, in order to save me, as much as the noblest of the saints; He bought them with blood; He could not buy me with less. (*C. H. Spurgeon.*) *The love of the Redeemer and the redeemed*.—I. THE RELATION WHICH CHRIST SUSTAINS TO US AS THE SHEPHERD OF OUR SOULS. II. THE WARM AFFECTION WHICH CHRIST'S RELATION TO US INSPIRES. "Thou whom my soul loveth." III. THE SPECIAL MANIFESTATION OF HIS FAVOUR FOR WHICH OUR AFFECTION PLEADS. "Tell me where Thou feedest, where Thou makest Thy flock to rest at noon." It is a perfectly legitimate thing to desire a close, personal intimacy with our Saviour. There is no virtue in spiritual timidity. We ought not to be contented with a dwarfed and maimed Christianity, with an imperfect righteousness or a disturbed peace. In everything we should seek to attain the highest and do the best. And if Christ be a Saviour at all, we ought to desire His best and choicest blessings. If He welcomes us in our sin and sorrow, He will not spurn our endeavours to be always near Him. If, however, we are to reach this height, we must take the course indicated in our text. We rise by earnest and fervent prayer. "Tell me where Thou feedest." To receive we must ask; to find we must seek; to have the door opened to us we must knock. The receiving of this blessing must be made a direct and specific aim. IV. THE SATISFACTION AND DELIGHT SUCH A MANIFESTATION OF OUR LORD'S FAVOUR WILL BRING. "Why should I be as one that turneth aside by the flocks of Thy companions?" I need scarcely remind you how in actual life other lords than Christ claim to rule over us. (*J. Stuart.*) *Love to Jesus*.—I. First, then, the loving title of our text is to be considered as expressing RHETORIC OF THE LIP. The text calleth Christ, "Thou whom my soul loveth." Let us take this title and dissect it a little. One of the first things which will strike us when we come to look upon it, is the reality of the love which is here expressed. Reality, I say; understanding the term "real," not in contradistinction to that which is lying and fictitious, but in contrast to that which is shadowy and indistinct. Suppose an infant taken away from its mother, and you should seek to foster in it a love to the parent by constantly picturing before it the idea of a mother,—and attempting to give it the thought of a mother's relation to the child. Indeed, I think you would have a difficult task to fix in that child the true and real love which it ought to bear towards her who bore it. But give that child a mother; let it hang upon that mother's real breast; let it derive its nourishment from her very heart: let it see that mother; feel that mother; put its little arms about that mother's real neck and you have no hard task to make it love its mother. So is it with the Christian. We want Christ—not an abstract, doctrinal, pictured Christ—but a real Christ. It is not the idea of disinterestedness; it is not the idea of devotion; it is not the idea of self-consecration that will ever make the Church mighty: it must be that idea incarnate, consolidated, personified in the actual existence of a realized Christ in the camp of the Lord's host. I do pray for you, and pray you for me, that we may each one of us have a love which realizes Christ, and which can address Him as "Thou whom my soul loveth." But, again, look at the text and you will perceive another thing very clearly. The Church, in the expression which she uses concerning Christ, speaks not only with a realization of His presence, but with a firm assurance of her own love. Many of you, who do really love Christ, can seldom get further than to say, "O Thou whom my soul desires to love! O Thou whom I hope I love!" But this sentence saith not so at all. This title hath not the shadow of a doubt or a fear upon it: "O Thou whom my soul loveth!" Is it not a happy thing for a child of God when he knows that he loves Christ? when he can speak of it as a matter of consciousness?—a thing out of which he is not to be argued by all the reasonings of Satan?—a thing concerning which he can put his hand upon his heart, and appeal to Jesus and say, "Lord, Thou knowest all things, Thou knowest that I love thee"? Now, notice something else equally worthy of our attention. The Church, the spouse, in thus speaking of her Lord, thus directs our thoughts not merely to her confidence of love, but to the unity of her affections with regard to Christ. She hath not two lovers, she hath but one. She doth not say, "O ye on whom my heart is set!" but "O Thou!" She hath but one after whom her heart is panting. She has gathered her affections into one bundle, she hath made them but one affection, and then she hath cast that bundle of myrrh and spices upon the breast of Christ. He is to her the "Altogether Lovely," the gathering up of all the loves which once strayed abroad. She has put before the sun of her heart

a burning-glass, which has brought all her love to a focus, and it is all concentrated with all its heat and vehemence upon Christ Jesus Himself. Come, do we love Christ after this fashion? Do we love Him so that we can say, "Compared with our love to Jesus, all other loves are but as nothing"? If you will look at the title before us, you will have to learn not only its reality, its assurance, its unity; but you will have to notice its constancy, "O Thou whom my soul loveth." Not, "did love yesterday;" or, "may begin to love to-morrow;" but, "Thou whom my soul loveth,"—"Thou whom I have loved ever since I knew Thee, and to love whom has become as necessary to me as my vital breath or my native air." The true Christian is one who loves Christ for evermore. In our text you will clearly perceive a vehemence of affection. The spouse saith of Christ, "O Thou whom my soul loveth." She means not that she loves Him a little, that she loves Him with an ordinary passion, but that she loves Him in all the deep sense of that word. Oh! you should see Love when she hath her heart full of her Saviour's presence, when she cometh out of her chamber! Indeed, she is like a giant refreshed with new wine. I have seen her dash down difficulties, tread upon hot irons of affliction and her feet have not been scorched; I have seen her lift up her spear against ten thousand, and she has slain them at one time. I have known her give up all she had, even to the stripping of herself, for Christ; and yet she seemed to grow richer, and to be decked with ornaments as she unarrayed herself, that she might cast her all upon her Lord, and give up all to Him. Do you know this love, Christian brethren and sisters? II. Now let me come to THE LOGIC OF THE HEART, which lies at the bottom of the text. My heart, why shouldst thou love Christ? With what argument wilt thou justify thyself? Our hearts give for their reason why they love Him, first, this: We love Him for His infinite loveliness. When you see Christ you look up, but you do more, you feel drawn up; you do not admire so much as love; you do not adore so much as embrace; His character enchants, subdues, o'erwhelms, and with the irresistible impulse of its own sacred attraction—it draws your spirit right up to Him. But still, love hath another argument why she loveth Christ, namely, Christ's love to her. One more reason does love give us yet more powerful still. Love feels that she must give herself to Christ, because of Christ's suffering for her. This is love's logic. I may well stand here and defend the believer's love to his Lord. I wish I had more to defend than I have. I dare stand here and defend the utmost extravagancies of speech, and the wildest fanaticisms of action, when they have been done for love to Christ. I say again, I only wish I had more to defend in these degenerate times. Has a man given up all for Christ? I will prove him wise if he has given up for such an one as Christ is. Has a man died for Christ? I write over his epitaph that he surely was no fool who had but the wisdom to give up his heart for one who had His heart pierced for him. III. Rhetoric is good, logic is better, but a POSITIVE DEMONSTRATION is the best. Let the world see that this is not a mere label to you—a label for something that does not exist, but that Christ really is to you "Him whom your soul loves." (*C. H. Spurgeon.*) *Heavenly Food*:—First of all, we find in the words of the text the cry of the living, longing soul, "Tell me, O Thou whom I love, where Thou feedest, where Thou makest Thy flock to rest at noon." The soul that here speaks is the soul of the child of God speaking to Jesus. It is a test by which to try the true spiritual life of a soul. The heart can always speak to Jesus in words of love, for we are not God's true children, we are not true disciples of Jesus, unless each of us can speak to Him in words like these, "O Thou whom my soul loveth." It is not, remember, the warm excited feelings of affection of which God's Word here speaks, but of the deliberate choice, of the deliberate surrender of the will. But, again, the text is also the cry of a hungering soul, "Tell me, O Thou whom my soul loveth, where Thou feedest, where Thou makest Thy flock to rest at noon." It is, you see, the soul hungering from a sense of weakness, conscious of the need of heavenly food. So we may hear one saying, "I see others around me strong in the life and power of His might, though I suffer naught but defeat." It is the cry of a soul which has been stumbling on in weakness, fighting and backsliding, yet longing to get more near to Jesus, to cleave to Him, to follow after Him, yet deeply conscious of its utter helplessness and weakness and need of spiritual food. God Himself hath given us the answer. He feeds us with the Word of Life—gives us strength with which to fight on through the struggle after Jesus. Is this the spiritual food with which our souls are strengthened and refreshed from day to day? Again, God feeds us in the blessed sacrament of His body and blood. But, again, the soul asks, "Where makest Thou Thy flock to rest at noon?" The phrase "at

noon" carries us to another suggestion of our text. It may have been in the scorching sun of prosperity that we suffered our great trial—none so sharp as that, none under which one who had been really seeking God found it more difficult to follow Jesus, none under which he had more need to cry, "Tell me, O Thou whom I love, where Thou feedest, where Thou makest Thy flock to rest at noon." But, blessed be God, there are those on whom the sun of prosperity has shined in all its brightness, yet have never been moved from rest in their Holy Saviour. We long to know and enjoy that rest for ourselves. And where is our hope? Not in anything of man, but in God's Word. The Lord hath said, "Believe," and I take Him at His word and rest in that word. He tells me of One who loved me and gave Himself for me, and then I ask my soul, "Do I feel peace? Do I sufficiently care about this matter? Do I sufficiently love my Saviour?" There is no sweeter resting-place for weary souls than in God's own soul. But, once more, God gives us rest in His Church. Is this not the meaning of what we call the "Day of Rest"—our Lord's Day, the day given by our Lord to be a resting-place unto our souls in the midst of a weary world? Surely, above all things that we desire in this busy, toiling age, is that we may find rest. Yet one other question arises in our hearts as we speak to Him whom our soul loveth. Christ has two flocks—a travelling flock and a gathered flock. He tells us where the travelling flock finds rest—in the pastures of His Word, in the quiet of His Church, above all in His own heart of love. But that gathered flock—where does that rest? We shall know when we, like it, are gathered. God's Word tells us but little of that heavenly rest, but enough surely to spur us on to seek it earnestly each for ourselves. "There remaineth a rest for the people of God." Oh! let us then press on more earnestly after Jesus lest any of us fail to enter into the rest. But now let us turn to the answer to our text—"If thou know not, O thou fairest among women, go thy way forth by the footsteps of the flock, and feed thy kids beside the shepherds' tents." "Why should I be as one that turneth aside by the flocks of Thy companions?" is the question of the anxious soul. Let it be our question this morning, each one for himself, "Why should I be as one that turneth aside?" God calls me to read His Word, why should I reject the Heavenly knowledge? God calls me to rest on His Church, why should I turn my back upon that rest and seize after the things of the world? God calls me to His Holy Sacrament, "Why should I be as one that turneth aside from the flocks?" Yes, why indeed? Can we do without Christ? Can we risk disobedience to His Holy Word? Are we strong enough without His strength? Can we be satisfied without He shall feed us? (*Archbishop Maclagan.*)

Ver. 8. If thou know not, O thou fairest among women, go thy way forth by the footsteps of the flock.—*Christ's answer unto His spouse.*—I. **HIS SUPPOSITION.** 1. The faithful servants and saints of Christ walk in much blindness and ignorance. 2. Christ takes not advantage from the sins or from the ignorance of His people to upbraid them, but doth rather help them against their infirmities (Heb. ii. 17, 18). II. **HIS COMPELLATION.** 1. Christ doth win the affections of His saints by sweet insinuations. (1) To assume them of His goodwill, love, delight, and acceptance. (2) To cause them to take notice of His grace and love. 2. The Church is exceeding fair and beautiful in Christ's eyes (Eph. v. 25-27). (1) This beauty is not natural, nor do we receive it from nature (Ezek. xvi. 3-6). (2) It is supernatural (Ezek. xvi. 7-10, 13; Eph. iv. 24). 3. The saints are most fair in Christ's eyes, when they are most deformed in their own (2 Cor. xii. 9, 10). III. **HIS DIRECTIONS TO HER.** 1. Where she should go. (1) Out of former evils of blackness and ignorance unto purity and saving knowledge. (2) From one degree of grace to another. (3) From all kind of superstition and idolatry to pure worship and sanctity. 2. Where she should feed. (1) He doth tend and take care for young Christians. (2) Those that are strong should strengthen and feed those that are weak. (3) Young and tender Christians must be fed with wholesome food. (*John Robotham.*)

Vers. 9-11. I have compared thee, O My love, to a company of horses in Pharaoh's chariots.—*Christ's commendation of His Church.*—I. **THE SWEET EPITHET CHRIST GIVETH UNTO HIS CHURCH.** "O My love." 1. The greatest outgoings of love and friendship from Christ, are toward His Church. His love to His people is—(1) Infinite and immeasurable, beyond all imagination or comparison (John xv. 9). (2) Gracious (Hosca xiv. 3). (3) Liberal and bountiful (John xv. 13; Eph. v. 25). (4) Eternal (Jer. xxxi. 3). II. **THE COMPARISON BY WHICH HE SETS HER FORTH.** 1.

"I have compared thee." Christ esteems His servants and people, not as they are in themselves, but as they are in Himself. 2. "A company of horses," etc. Now by this comparison Christ setteth forth the glory and renown of His Church in respect of her victories and achievements; for He having directed His Church to follow the footsteps of the Flock, and to feed above the tents of false Shepherds, no question now but these false Shepherds, who before were called Christ's companions, will persecute and afflict her: now for the comforting and supporting of her, Christ tells her, she shall be strong and victorious, she shall be like *the horses of Egypt*, ready for the battle. 3. Christ having set forth the Church's strength and valour, now continueth His speech, showing also, how His Church is decked with His ordinances and graces (ver. 10). 4. Then He declareth what should be her future happiness; viz. a further increase of her graces, and some addition of rich ornaments (ver. 11). (*John Robotham.*)

Ver. 10. **Thy cheeks are comely with rows of jewels, thy neck with chains of gold.**—*The bride adorned with jewels.*—I. THE GRACES OF THE HOLY SPIRIT ARE THAT ADORNING OF THE CHURCH WHICH IS VISIBLE TO ALL SPIRITUAL DISCERNMENT. Faith itself is a very choice jewel, but we are to have rows of jewels—faith in exercise; faith, as a principle, honouring Christ; as a hand, laying hold of Christ; as an eye, beholding His beauty; as a warrior, conquering all that opposes Christ—faith victorious over the world—the grace of faith. The next jewel the apostle mentions is hope. We must take care we do not get it exchanged for a pebble, or some portion of mud, as formalists, and hypocrites, and profane persons do, hoping that they will be saved, hoping that God will forgive them, and that they will get to heaven and the like. Pass on to mark another brilliant jewel—love. Not only the love of God shed abroad in the heart, though that is very blessed, but love as a grace of the Holy Spirit. Then we go on to another jewel, a very lovely one, though frequently out of sight—humility. "God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace to the humble;" He giveth it first, and giveth grace to supply it. Another jewel in close connection with humility is meekness. "Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus." He was meek and lowly of heart, and enjoins His disciples to imitate Him, that they may find rest to their souls. Another very brilliant jewel is zeal. I do not want the meekness and humility of the Christian to dwindle down into Laodicean carelessness—that would tarnish his jewels; but I want the zeal of the Lord of Hosts, which is said to have eaten up my glorious Master, to eat me up also. I want, as He was, to be clothed with zeal, as with a cloak. I will mention another jewel, making seven on this side of the face. It is a quiet jewel, but a very important one. I mean patience. "In patience possess ye your souls." "Let patience have her perfect work." I might lengthen this row of jewels, but I leave you to do it in your retirement, for I want to turn to the other cheek, and notice those jewels which are visible to the world. And when I have exhibited both cheeks to you, you may follow the advice of our Lord, "If thine enemy smite thee on the one cheek, turn to him the other also." If they smite you on the cheek I have been naming, they will not hurt one of the jewels. Now let us look at the other. The first jewel I mention is decision. A very important one, for you must know that if you are like the Israelites, halting between two opinions, the world will laugh at you; if they find you one hour very devout in the house of God, or perhaps reading the Bible or some good book, or even holding conversation scripturally and profitably on spiritual things, and another at some silly amusement, some careless kill-time pursuit of the world, they will say your religion is all hypocrisy, and I should not wonder if they are very near the mark. Oh, for more decision! Then there is another jewel that the world will look at and admire—integrity. Oh, the disgracefulness of everything like duplicity among those who profess to belong to Christ! Oh, the dignity of a Christian being blessed with that integrity which says what it means, and means what it says—that will not, cannot, say and unsay, but is ever in the same mind as to the things which relate to God's glory, and to his own perseverance in the divine life! Mark, another prominent jewel before the world is self-denial, just the contrast of selfishness. Again, another of these visible jewels is fortitude, which bears up the soul with a holy confidence, and shows a firm front to every enemy, and causes the soul to put on the armour of God, and make its stand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand. Circumspection must be reckoned among the jewels that are visible to the world. Hence it is written, "See, then, that ye walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise." And again, "Walk in wisdom toward them that are without." But there are two more I must just mention.

Devotion. The spirit of devotion is invisible to the world, but its manifestation will be seen. Just the contrast of that levity, and carelessness, and trifling that characterize so many professors. Then there is one jewel more I must name—joy. “The God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing.” This, of course, will include gratitude, which, also, is a grace; but I put them together, and just remark that we are exhorted to “rejoice in the Lord always.” II. THE BRIDE’S NECK AND ITS ORNAMENTS. The first question that arises is, What are we to understand by the neck of the Church? The neck is the part that unites the body and the head. Then it must be the covenant of grace that is the neck; the living union between Christ and His Church. It is the strength, the support, and the medium of communication. Now let us come to the ornaments. You are to recollect they are in the plural—chains. “Thy neck with chains of gold.” The golden chain of doctrines. Observe, they are not detached links or rings, but they are closely linked together, and we cannot part with one link without breaking the chain. What shall I say about the chain of promises? If I take a short summary of it I would just say, that they are distinct, that they are not to be separated, and, as we before said, they are linked together. And hence we read that all the promises of God in Him (Christ) are yea, and in Him amen. Are they not well riveted? One more chain I must mention—the chain of privileges. The privilege of separation and distinction from the world—the privilege of high education, the Spirit of the Lord being the preceptor—the privilege of adoption, being at home at the Father’s house—the privilege of feasting on a feast of fat things, provided and prepared by the Master of the feast, who is the Bridegroom—the privilege of attendants, servants such as you cannot find on earth. Moreover, the privilege of advocacy within the veil. “If any man sin, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous.” Here are chains of gold, beloved, chains to hang about the neck. I tell you of these, as of the jewels, that Jesus has put them on, and they are invaluable; though I know the carnal mind will prefer the tinsel, the toys, the gilded ornaments, the empty, light, worthless things, that look a little gaudy in external religion, rather than these gold chains. (*J. Irons.*) *Chains of gold*:—By those *chains of gold*, with which the Church’s neck is beautified and adorned, may be meant, 1. The laws and ordinances of God; which the ministers of the Gospel, and members of Churches, should be careful to observe (Prov. i. 9). Or, 2. Those diversities of gifts which are bestowed on the ministers of Christ, by which they are made “able ministers of the New Testament”; and so become useful to many, and appear comely and beautiful, both in the eyes of Christ, and of such souls to whom they minister. Or, 3. The various graces of the Spirit, with which, not only ministers, but all believers are adorned; for sins and vices are so chained and linked together, that where there is one, there is all; so the graces of the Spirit are like chains of gold, which are so closely linked together, that they cannot be separated, but where there is one grace there is every grace, which very much beautify and adorn the believer. This chain consists of ten links: (1) Faith. (2) Hope. (3) Love. (4) Humility. (5) Patience. (6) Self-denial. (7) Contentment. (8) A saving knowledge of Jesus Christ. (9) Longsuffering and forbearance. (10) Sincerity. Or, 4. Those blessings of grace which are laid up in an everlasting covenant, come through the blood of Christ, and are communicated to all His people, may be meant by these chains; they go inseparably together; where a person is blessed with one, he is blessed with all: for though our interest in them may be gradually discovered to us, yet are we blessed at once, “with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ.” Not one of these links can be broken; this golden chain of grace and salvation is described (Rom. viii. 30). (*John Gill, D.D.*)

Vor. 12. While the King sitteth at His table, my spikenard sendeth forth the smell thereof.—*The Church’s testimony to Christ*:—These words are the Church’s testimony from experience of the blessed effects which Christ’s presence in His ordinances hath upon pious souls which wait upon Him under them. 1. The title THE CHURCH gives Christ, “The King”: as showing thereby the sense she had of His dignity and dominion, and also of her subjection to Him, and dependence upon Him. 2. What she says of Him from her own experience, as a witness to His condescension and grace, “the King sitteth at his table”: which may refer to all the ordinances of the Gospel, in which, as at a feast, He meets and entertains His people, supping with them, and they with Him, as His own expression is (Rev. iii. 20). 3. The happy fruit or effect of Christ’s sitting at His table upon the believer who is admitted to sit with Him. “My spikenard sendeth forth the smell thereof.” Grace is compared to spikenard for its preciousness and value; and the sending forth of its

smell denotes that grace as discovering itself in a lively, fresh and vigorous manner. It is as ointment poured forth, most pleasing to Christ, and to all that love Him, too; they rejoicing in the honour paid Him by themselves and others through a lively exercise of grace. 4. The connection of this effect with its cause, or the presence of Christ, and the dependence of this upon it. I. GRACE IN THE FRIENDS OF CHRIST IS HIGHLY VALUABLE AND PRECIOUS. 1. Grace in Scripture most usually denotes these two things, namely, God's goodwill to us, and His good work in us. (1) His goodwill to us lost sinners in and through His Son, and this as revealed and tendered to us in the Gospel (Tit. ii. 11; Eph. ii. 8). (2) God's good work in us, in all His people, which is the fruit or effect of that goodwill which He had in His heart concerning them (Eph. iv. 7; John i. 16). 2. From whence its worth and excellency may be collected. (1) Grace in the friends of Christ may be said to be valuable and precious, as having so much of heaven in it. (a) It comes from heaven; (b) It marks out for it; (c) It leads to it; (d) It will issue in it. (2) The necessity of grace is a further evidence of its value. Without grace we cannot please God upon earth, nor be admitted to the enjoyment of Him in heaven. It is grace that crowns all outward mercies, and speaks and makes them mercies indeed; and nothing but this can sweeten afflictions, and make our heaviest crosses light. (3) The excellency of grace may be argued from the happy distinction it makes in them, from fallen angels, from the rest of mankind, and from their former selves. (4) The value of grace may be gathered from the price that went to purchase it, which was no less than the blood of Christ. (5) It is precious in regard of its Author, the Spirit of God: hence He is called "the Spirit of Grace." Under this character He is promised where a saving change is designed (Zech. xii. 10). And it is wrought by His agency wherever it is wrought. The instrument He ordinarily makes use of is the Word; but all the influence it hath, and the saving impression it makes, is from Him. (6) It is precious in its nature. No two things can more widely differ than the old and the new; the corruption propagated with the common nature by the first birth, and the grace infused in regeneration. (7) The excellency of grace is proved by its effects: particularly as it ennobles, enriches, secures and comforts. APPLICATION: 1. Is grace so valuable? How blind are they that see not its worth! What enemies to their souls are they who labour not after it! 2. How much hath God done for them on whom He hath bestowed His grace, so excellent in itself, and leading to glory! 3. How greatly are the partakers of grace obliged to Christ, by whose blood it is purchased, and for whose sake it is bestowed! 4. How glad should they be of all the opportunities to meet Him, by His presence and influence, to have grace drawn into act! 5. How thankful should they be who can say with the Church, "While the King sat at His table, my spikenard sent forth the smell thereof!" 6. How willing should they be whose grace hath been drawn forth by the presence of Christ here, to behold Him in His glory, and dwell with Him for ever. (D. Wilcox.) *A Sacrament sermon*.—In acts of special communion with Christ, grace cannot lie hid, but will breathe out with great fragrantcy; or, at the table of the Lord our graces should be specially and in a most lively manner exercised. 1. There is a reverence common to all worship, for "God will be sanctified in all that draw nigh unto Him" (Lev. x. 3). 2. There is a special delight and affection which should accompany every act of communion with God (Ps. lxxiii. 28; Isa. lvi. 7). 3. Besides, in all acts of communion with God there is an interchange of donatives and duties. Where we expect to receive much grace, there it must be much exercised and acted (Mark iv. 24). 4. Christ may more sensibly manifest Himself in one duty than another, for He is not tied to means, or to time and season; and it is His presence that maketh an ordinance comfortable, and doth revive the exercise of grace. 5. One duty must not be set against another. They are all instituted by God, and accompanied with His blessing, and are means of our communion with Him, yet they all have their special use and tendency, and one is to be preferred in this respect, another in that, as the ends are for which they are appointed; as in the Word we come to Christ as our teacher, in prayer as our advocate, in baptism as our head and lord, into whose mystical body we are planted; in the Lord's Supper as the master of the feast, or our royal entertainer. 6. Though the Lord's Supper be a special means, yet it is the spirit of grace which doth stir up faith, hope and love in us. (1) The duty is a means accommodated and fitted to this end, or God would never have instituted it. (2) The Spirit is the author both of grace and the exercise of grace; He first infuseth and then quickeneth and stirreth up grace in us by this means: "It is the Spirit that quickeneth, the flesh profiteth nothing" (John vi. 63). (3) You must stir up your own hearts (Isa. lxiv. 7; 2 Tim. i. 6). 7. Allowing all this, yet it is a truth that at the Lord's table graces should be exercised

in a special lively manner, which will appear if we consider—I. WHAT A SACRAMENT HATH BEYOND OTHER DUTIES. It is the most mysterious instrument of our sanctification and preservation in a state of grace, and therefore requireth a special exercise of grace. 1. In a Sacrament there is a more sensible assurance. In other duties we see God's goodness, or readiness to do us good, in this His solicitous and anxious care for our good (Heb. vi. 17, 18). 2. A closer application. A general invitation is not so much as an express injunction. We have the universal proposal in the Word, the particular application in the Sacraments (Acts ii. 38). 3. A solemn investiture, or taking possession by certain instituted rites. As we are put in possession by certain formalities of law, as of a house by the delivery of a key, or of a field by the delivery of a turf, so we take possession of Christ and all His benefits, "This is my body." 4. A visible representation of the mysteries of godliness; and so it doth excite us to the more serious consideration of them when they are transmitted to the soul not by the ears only, but by the eyes (Gal. iii. 1). 5. An express means of union and communion with Christ. We draw nigh to God in prayer, and God draweth nigh to us in the Word; but here is not only an approximation, but a communion (1 Cor. x. 16). 6. It is God's feast, where we come to eat and drink at His table as those that are in friendship with Him. 7. This is the sum of all other duties and privileges, the abridgment of Christian religion, the land of promise in a map (Luke xxii. 20).

II. WHAT IS THE SPECIAL USE AND INTENT OF THIS DUTY? It was instituted for the remembrance of Christ (1 Cor. xi. 24, 25), and (ver. 26) it is an announcing or showing forth the Lord's death till He come. 1. The occasion and necessity of it, why Christ should be given for us, our guilt, and misery, which could only be expiated by the blood of the Son of God; so that one great work of the Sacrament is the representation of the evil of sin; for we are to remember the Son of God, "Who was made sin for us that knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him" (2 Cor. v. 21), and who was "made a curse for us" (Gal. iii. 13). 2. The cause of it; the great love of God, or His mercy to poor sinners (John iii. 16). 3. The act of redemption itself; His "obedience to the death of the cross" (Phil. ii. 7); or His "making His soul an offering for sin" (Isa. liii. 10). Therefore He is represented as "crucified before your eyes" (Gal. iii. 1). 4. The consequent benefits which thence result to us. You come not to receive the mercy of an hour, but here is pardon of sin given us without any infringing the honour of God's justice (Rom. iii. 25, 26); the favour of God (2 Cor. v. 19); the spirit of grace (Titus iii. 5, 6; Gal. iii. 14; and 1 Cor. x. 4, compared with John iv. 14, and vii. 37). So also eternal life, or hopes of glory (Titus iii. 7; Rom. v. 1, 2, and 1 John iv. 9). And indeed this whole duty is a figure of the eternal banquet.

III. WHAT GRACES ARE TO BE EXERCISED, WHICH IS, AS IT WERE, THE POURING OUT OF OUR BOX OF PRECIOUS SPIKENARD ON CHRIST'S HEAD OR FEET? 1. With respect to the necessity of our redemption, a humble sense of the odiousness of sin, represented to us in the bruises and sufferings of our Lord Jesus Christ when He came to be a sacrifice for sin, that we may loath it, condemn it, resolve no more to have to do with it (Rom. viii. 3). 2. The love of God in Christ, which was the cause, must beget a fervent love to Him again, that we may love Him who hath loved us at so dear a rate (2 Cor. v. 14, 15). 3. The act of redemption, or the death of Christ, must breed in us a lively faith in Christ, that we may accept Him as our Redeemer and Saviour upon His own terms, and trust ourselves into His hands, and devote ourselves to His service, crying out, as Thomas, "My Lord and my God" (John xx. 28), welcoming Him into our souls with the dearest embraces of thankfulness and hearty affection. 4. With respect to the consequent benefits, there must be (1) Earnest desire after communion with God in Christ, that you may be partakers both of His renewing and reconciling grace, and that you may get more sensible proof of His love to your souls; (2) Joy in the sense of the greatness, suitableness and firmness of the mercy represented, offered and applied to you (Cant. i. 4); (3) Hope, which is a desirous expectation of the promised glory, looking and longing for it with more earnestness and confidence. This antepast in the house of our pilgrimage is sweet, but what will be our communion with Him in heaven! 5. That love which is here commemorated must be imitated, and leave a suitable impression upon you. If Christ gave His life for those who are sometimes called His enemies, sometimes His people, such an impartial charity must you have to all men; to brethren and neighbours (1 John iv. 11), and to enemies (Eph. iv. 32). (*T. Manton, D.D.*)

Ver. 13. **A bundle of myrrh is my Well-beloved unto me.**—*A bundle of myrrh* :—
I. CHRIST JESUS IS UNUTTERABLY PRECIOUS TO BELIEVERS. Observe first, that

nothing gives the believer so much joy as fellowship with Christ. In our esteem, the joys of earth are little better than husks for swine compared with Jesus the heavenly manna. I would rather have one mouthful of Christ's love, and a sip of His fellowship, than a whole world full of carnal delights. What is the chaff to the wheat? What is the sparkling paste to the true diamond? What is a dream to the glorious reality? What is time's mirth in its best trim compared to our Lord Jesus in His most despised estate? We may plainly see that Christ is very precious to the believer, because to him there is nothing good without Christ. Oh, what a howling wilderness is this world without my Lord! If once He groweth angry, and doth, though it be for a moment, hide Himself from me, withered are the flowers of my garden; my pleasant fruits decay; the birds suspend their songs, and black night lowers over all my hopes. On the other hand, when all earthly comforts have failed you, have you not found quite enough in your Lord? Do you remember when you were poor? Oh! how near Christ was to you, and how rich He made you! You were despised and rejected of men, and no man gave you a good word! Ah! sweet was His fellowship then, and how delightful to hear Him say, "Fear thou not; for I am with thee: be not dismayed; for I am thy God!" As afflictions abound, even so do consolations abound by Christ Jesus. Nor should I be straining the truth if I say that the Christian would sooner give up anything than forsake his Master. If it came to this, that you must deny Christ, or give up the dearest thing you have, would you deliberate? I think we could go further, dear friends, and say, not only could we give up everything, but I think, when love is fervent, and the flesh is kept under, we could suffer anything with Christ. I met, in one of Samuel Rutherford's letters, an extraordinary expression, where he speaks of the coals of Divine wrath all falling upon the head of Christ, so that not one might fall upon His people. "And yet," saith he, "if one of those coals should drop from His head upon mine and did utterly consume me, yet if I felt it was a part of the coals that fell on Him, and I was bearing it for His sake, and in communion with Him, I would choose it for my heaven." One thing I know proveth, beloved, that you esteem Christ to be very precious, namely, that you want others to know Him too. The more your love grows, beloved, the more insatiable will be your desire that others should love Him, till it will come to this that you will be, like Paul, "in labours more abundant," spending and being spent that you may bring the rest of Christ's elect body into union with their glorious head.

II. THE SOUL CLINGETH TO CHRIST, AND SHE HATH GOOD REASON FOR SO DOING, for her own words are, "*A bundle of myrrh* is my Well-beloved unto me." 1. Jesus Christ is like myrrh. (1) Myrrh may be well the type of Christ for its *preciousness*. It was an exceedingly expensive drug. We know that Jacob sent some of it down into Egypt as being one of the choice products of the land. It is always spoken of in Scripture as being a rich, rare and costly substance. But no myrrh could ever compare with Him, for Jesus Christ is so precious, that if heaven and earth were put together they could not buy another Saviour. (2) Myrrh, again, was pleasant. It was a pleasant thing to be in a chamber perfumed with myrrh. Through the nostrils myrrh conveys delight to the human mind; but Christ gives delight to His people, not through one channel, but through every avenue. (3) Moreover, myrrh is perfuming. It is used to give a sweet smell to other things. And surely, beloved, Jesus Christ is very perfuming to His people. Does not He perfume their prayers, so that the Lord smelleth a sweet savour? Doth He not perfume their songs, so that they become like vials full of odour sweet? (4) Myrrh has preserving qualities. It was used to prevent corruption. What is there which can preserve the soul but Christ Jesus? What is the myrrh which keeps our works, which in themselves are dead, and corrupt, and rotten—what, I say, keeps them from becoming a foul stench in the nostrils of God, but that Christ is in them? (5) Myrrh, again, was used as a disinfectant. And there doubtless is some power in myrrh to preserve from infectious disease. Well, brethren, certain I am it is so with Christ. You have to go into the world, which is like a great lazaret-house; but if you carry Christ with you, you will never catch the world's disease. (6) But myrrh was believed by the ancient physicians to do more than this—it was a cure—it did not merely prevent, but it healed. Certain it is that your Christ is the best medicine for the soul. His name is Jehovah Rophi—"I am the Lord that healeth them." (7) Myrrh was used in the East as a beautifier. The belief of Oriental women was, that it removed wrinkles and stains from the face, and they used it constantly for the perfecting of their charms. I do not know how that may be, but I know that nothing makes the believer so beautiful as being with Christ. He is beautiful in the eyes of God, of holy angels, and of his fellow-men. (8) Myrrh might

well be used as an emblem of our Lord from its connection with sacrifice. It was one of the precious drugs used in making the holy oil with which the priests were anointed and the frankincense which burned perpetually before God. It is this, the sacrificial character of Christ, which is at the root and bottom of all that Christ is most precious to His people. O Lamb of God our sacrifice, we must remember Thee. 2. Christ is called a bundle of myrrh, or, as some translate it, a bag of myrrh, or a box of myrrh. There were three sorts of myrrh: there was the myrrh in sprigs, which being burnt made a sweet smell; then there was myrrh, a dried spice; and then, thirdly, there was myrrh a flowing oil. We do not know to which there is reference here. But why is it said "a bundle of myrrh"? (1) First, for the plenty of it. He is not a drop of it, He is a casketful. He is not a sprig or flower of it, but a whole bundleful. There is enough in Christ for my necessities. (2) A bundle again, for variety; for there is in Christ not only the one thing needful, but "ye are complete in Him"; there is everything needful. (3) He is a bundle of myrrh again, for preservation—not loose myrrh to be dropped on the floor or trodden on, but myrrh tied up, as though God bound up all virtues and excellences in His Son: not myrrh spilt on the ground, but myrrh in a box—myrrh kept in a casket. Such is Christ. "Able to save unto the uttermost them that come unto God through Him," is He still unto this hour. (4) A bundle of myrrh again, to show how diligently we should take care of it. We must treasure up His words, prize His ordinances, obey His precepts, tie Him up and keep Him ever with us as a precious bundle of myrrh. (5) And yet again, a bundle of myrrh for speciality, as if He were not common myrrh for everybody. No, no, no; there is distinguishing, discriminating grace—a bundle tied up for His people and labelled with their names from before the foundation of the world. Oh! blessed people whom the Lord hath admitted into His secrets! Oh! choice and happy people who are thus made to say, "A bottle of myrrh is my Well-beloved unto me." III. With a sense of Christ's preciousness is combined a CONSCIOUSNESS OF POSSESSION. It is "my Well-beloved." My dear hearer, is Christ your well-beloved? A Saviour—that is well; but my Saviour—that is the best of the best. What is the use of bread if it is not mine? I may die of hunger. Of what value is gold, if it be not mine? I may yet die in a workhouse. I want this preciousness to be mine. "My Well-beloved." Have you ever laid hold on Christ by the hand of faith? But that is not the only word. "A bundle of myrrh is my Well-beloved unto me." He is not so to many. Ah! my Lord is a root out of a dry ground to multitudes. They would sooner go to a play or a dance than they would have any fellowship with Him. They can see the beauties upon the cheeks of this Jezebel world, but they cannot see the perfections of my Lord and Master. Well! well! well! Let them say what they will, and let them think as they please, every creature hath its own joy, but "a bundle of myrrh is my Well-beloved unto me"—unto me—unto me, and if there is not another who finds Him so, yet "a bundle of myrrh is my Well-beloved unto me." IV. A SENSE OF POSSESSION AND A SENSE OF ENJOYMENT WILL ALWAYS LEAD THE CHRISTIAN TO DESIRE CONSTANT FELLOWSHIP. The Church does not say, "I will put this bundle of myrrh on my shoulders"—Christ is no burden to a Christian. She does not say, "I will put this bundle of myrrh on my back"—the Church does not want to have Christ concealed from her face. She desires to have Him where she can see Him, and near to her heart. 1. It is an expression of desire—her desire that she may have the consciousness of Christ's love continually. Do not you feel the same desire? 2. But then, it is not only her desire, but it is also her confidence. She seems to say, "He will be with me thus." You may have a suspension of visible fellowship with Christ, but Christ never will go away from His people really. He may close His eyes and hide His face from you, but His heart never can depart from you. 3. This is also a resolve. She desires, she believes, and she resolves it. Lord, Thou shalt be with me, Thou shalt be with me always. I appeal to you, brethren, will you not make this resolve in God's strength this morning to cling close to Christ? (C. II. *Spurgeon.*)

Ver. 14. **My Beloved is unto me as a cluster of camphire in the vineyards of Engedi.**—*A beautiful symbol*:—Terraced on the side of the mountains were the vineyards of Engedi. Oh, they were sweet places! From a shelving of the mountain four hundred feet high waters came down in beautiful baptism on the faces of the leaves; the grapes intoxicate with their own wine; pomegranates with juices bursting from the rind; all fruits, and flowers, and aromatic woods—among the sweetest of these the camphire plant of the text. Its flowers are in clusters like our lilac—graceful, fragrant, symbolical of Jesus. I. I will first show you that this camphire

plant of the text was a symbol of Christ, because of ITS FRAGRANCE. If I had a branch of it, and should wave it in your midst, it would fill all the house with the redolence. The camphor, as we have it, is offensive to some ; but the camphire plant of the text had a fragrance gracious to all. The name of Caesar means power ; the name of Herod means cruelty ; the name of Alexander means conquest ; the name of Demosthenes means eloquence ; the name of Milton means poetry ; the name of Benjamin West means painting ; the name of Phidias means sculpture ; the name of Beethoven means music ; the name of Howard means reform ; but the name of Christ means *love* ! It is the sweetest name that ever melted from lip to heart. Oh, rich and rare, exquisite and everlasting perfume ! Set it in every poor man's window ; plant it on every grave ; put its leaves under every dying head ; wreath its blossoms for every garland ; wave its branches in every home ; and when I am about to die, and my hand lies cold and stiff and white upon the pillow, let no superstitious priest come with mumbling fooleries to put a crucifix of wood or stone in my hand, but rather some plain and humble soul—let him come and put in my dying grasp this living branch, with “clusters of camphire from the vineyards of En-gedi.” II. This camphire plant of the text was a symbol of Christ in the fact that IT GIVES COLOURING. From the Mediterranean to the Ganges, the people of the East gathered it, dried the leaves, pulverized them, and then used them as a dye for beautifying garments or their own persons. It was that fact that gave the camphire plant of the text its commercial value in the time of King Solomon ; a type of my Lord Jesus, who beautifies and adorns, and colours everything He touches. I have no faith in that man's conversion whose religion does not colour his entire life. It was intended so to do. If a man has the grace of God in his heart, it ought to show itself in the life. There ought to be this “cluster of camphire” in the ledger, in the roll of government securities, in the medical prescription, in the law-book. I tell you, unless your religion goes with you everywhere, it goes nowhere. That religion was intended to colour all the heart and the life. But, mark you, it was a bright colour. For the most part, it was an orange dye made of this camphire plant, one of the most brilliant of all colours ; and so the religion of Jesus Christ casts no blackness or gloom upon the soul. It brightens up life, it brightens up everything. III. The camphire plant of the text was a symbol of Jesus Christ because IT IS A MIGHTY RESTORATIVE. You know that there is nothing that starts respiration so soon in one who has fainted as camphor, as we have it. Put upon a sponge or handkerchief, the effects are almost immediate. Well, this camphire plant of the text, though somewhat different from that which we have, was a pungent aromatic, and in that respect it becomes a type of our Lord Jesus Christ, who is the mightiest of all restoratives. I have carried this camphire plant into the sick-room, after the doctors had held their consultation and said there was no hope and nothing more could be done, and the soul brightened up under the spiritual restorative. There is no fever, no *marasmus*, no neuralgia, no consumption, no disease of the body, that the grace of God will not help. I wish that over every bed of pain and through every hospital of distress we might swing this “cluster of camphire from the vineyards of En-gedi.” Christ's hand is the softest pillow, Christ's pardon is the strongest stimulus, Christ's comfort is the mightiest anodyne, Christ's salvation is the grandest restorative. This grace is also a restorative for the backslider. For great sin, great pardon. For deep wounds, omnipotent surgery. For deaf ears, a Divine aurist. For blind eyes, a heavenly oculist. For the dead in sin, the upheaval of a great resurrection. But why should I particularize that class in this audience when we all need this restorative, for we have all wandered and gone away ! (*T. De Witt Talmage.*)

CHAPTER II.

VER. 1. *I am the rose of Sharon, and the lily of the valleys.*—*The best of the best* :—It is a marvellous stoop for Christ, who is “God over all, blessed for ever,” and the Light of the universe, to say, “I am a rose ; I am a lily.” O my blessed Lord, this is a sort of incarnation, as when the Eternal God did take upon Himself an infant's form ! So here, the Everlasting God says, “I am”—and what comes next ?—“a rose and a lily.” It is an amazing stoop, I know not how to set it forth

to you by human language ; it is a sort of verbal rehearsal of what He did afterwards when, though He counted it not robbery to be equal with God, "He took upon Himself the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of sinful flesh, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross." "I am God, yet," saith He, "I am the rose of Sharon, and the lily of the valleys." I. THE EXCEEDING DELIGHTFULNESS OF OUR LORD. He compares Himself here, not as in other places to needful bread and refreshing water, but to lovely flowers, to roses and lilies. What is the use of roses and lilies ? They are of no use at all except for joy and delight. With their sweet form, their charming colour, and their delicious fragrance, we are comforted and pleased and delighted ; but they are not necessities of life. You are to find in Christ roses and lilies, as well as bread and water ; you have not yet seen all His beauties, and you do not yet know all His excellence. 1. And first, He is in Himself the delight of men. He speaks not of offices, gifts, works, possessions ; but of Himself : "I am." Our Lord Jesus is the best of all beings ; the dearest, sweetest, fairest and most charming of all beings that we can think of is the Son of God, our Saviour. Eyes need to be trained to see beauty. No man seeth half or a thousandth part of the beauty even of this poor, natural world ; but the painter's eye—the eye of Turner, for instance—can see much more than you or I ever saw. "Oh !" said one, when he looked on one of Turner's landscapes, "I have seen that view every day, but I never saw as much as that in it." "No," replied Turner, "don't you wish you could ?" And, when the Spirit of God trains and tutors the eye, it sees in Christ what it never saw before. But, even then, as Turner's eye was not able to see all the mystery of God's beauty in nature, so neither is the most trained and educated Christian able to perceive all the matchless beauty that there is in Christ. 2. But next, our Lord is exceedingly delightful to the eye of faith. He not only tells us of what delight is in Himself—"I am the rose, and I am the lily"—but He thereby tells us that there is something to see in Him, for the rose is very pleasing to look upon. Is there a more beautiful sight than a rose that is in bud, or even one that is full-blown ? And the lily—what a charming thing it is ! It seems to be more a flower of heaven than of earth. Well now, Christ is delightful to the eye of faith. To you who look at Christ by faith, a sight of Him brings such peace, such rest, such hope, as no other sight can ever afford ; it so sweetens everything, so entirely takes away the bitterness of life, and brings us to anticipate the glory of the life that is to come, that I am sure you say, "Yes, yes ; the figure in the text is quite correct ; there is a beauty in Jesus to the eye of faith, He is indeed red as the rose and white as the lily." 3. And next, the Lord Jesus Christ is delightful in the savour which comes from Him to us. There is a spiritual way of perceiving the savour of Christ ; I cannot explain it to you, but there is an ineffable mysterious sweetness that proceeds from Him which touches the spiritual senses, and affords supreme delight ; and as the body has its nose, and its tender nerves that can appreciate sweet odours, so the soul has its spiritual nostril by which, though Christ be at a distance, it yet can perceive the fragrant emanations that come from Him, and is delighted therewith. 4. Once more, in all that He is, Christ is the choicest of the choice. You notice the Bridegroom says, "I am the rose." Yes, but there were some particularly beautiful roses that grew in the valley of Sharon ; "I am that rose," said He. And there were some delightful lilies in Palestine ; it is a land of lilies, there are so many of them that nobody knows which lily Christ meant, and it does not at all signify, for almost all lilies are wondrously beautiful. "But," said He, "I am the lily of the valleys," the choicest kind of lily that grew where the soil was fat and damp with the overflow of mountain streams. "I am the lily of the valleys:" that is to say, Christ is not only good, but He is the best ; and He is not only the best, but He is the best of the best. II. THE SWEET VARIETY OF CHRIST'S DELIGHTFULNESS. He is not only full of joy, and pleasure, and delight to our hearts, but He is full of all sorts of joy, and all sorts of pleasure, and all sorts of delights to us. The rose is not enough, you must have the lily also, and the two together fall far short of the glories of Christ, the true "Plant of renown." "I am the rose." That is the emblem of majesty. The rose is the very queen of flowers ; in the judgment of all who know what to admire it is enthroned above all the rest of the beauties of the garden. But the lily—what is that ? That is the emblem of love. The psalmist hints at this in the title of the forty-fifth psalm. "Upon Shoshannim, a Song of love." Shoshannim signifies lilies, so the lily-psalm is the love-song, for the lilies, with their beauty, their purity, their delicacy, are a very choice emblem of love. Are you not delighted when you put these two things together, majesty and love ? A King upon a throne of love, a

Prince, whose very eyes beam with love to those who put their trust in Him, a real Head, united by living bonds of love to all His members—such is our dear Lord and Saviour. The combination of these sweet flowers also suggests our Lord's suffering and purity. Jesus, when on earth, could say, "The prince of this world cometh, and hath nothing in Me." The devil himself could not see a spot or speck in that lovely lily. Jesus Christ is perfection itself, He is all purity; so you must put the two together, the rose and the lily, to show Christ's suffering and perfection, the infinitely pure and infinitely suffering. In which of the two do you take the greater delight? Surely, in neither, but in the combination of both; what would be the value of Christ's sufferings if He were not perfect? And of what avail would His perfections be if He had not died, the Just for the unjust, to bring us to God? But the two together, the rose and the lily, suffering and purity, fill us with delight. Of both of these there is a great variety. Jesus possesses every kind of beauty and fragrance. "He is all my salvation, and all my desire." All good things meet in Christ; in Him all the lines of beauty are focussed. Blessed are they who truly know Him. Further, Christ is the very essence of the sweetness both of the rose and of the lily. When He says, "I am the rose," He means, not only that He is like the rose, but that He made all the sweetness there is in the rose, and it is still in Him; and all the sweetness there is in any creature comes to us from Christ, or else it is not sweetness such as we ought to love. All good for our soul comes from Him, whether it be pardon of sin, or justification, or the sanctification that makes us fit for glory hereafter, Christ is the source of it all; and in the infinite variety of delights that we get from Him, He is Himself the essence of it all.

III. THE EXCEEDING FREEDOM OF OUR LORD'S DELIGHTFULNESS. I have been talking about my Master, and I want to show you that He is accessible, He is meant to be plucked and enjoyed as roses and lilies are. He says in the text, "I am the rose of Sharon." What was Sharon? It was an open plain where anybody might wander, and where even cattle roamed at their own sweet will. Jesus is not like a rose in Solomon's garden, shut up within high walls, with broken glass all along the top. Oh, no! He says, "I am the rose of Sharon," everybody's rose, the flower for the common people to come and gather. "I am the lily." What lily? The lily of the palace of Shushan, enclosed and guarded from all approach? No; but, "I am the lily of the valleys," found in this glen, or the other ravine, growing here, there and everywhere: "I am the lily of the valleys." Then Christ is as abundant as a common flower. Whatever kind of rose it was, it was a common rose; whatever kind of lily it was, it was a well-known lily that grew freely in the valleys of that land. Oh, blessed be my Master's name, He has brought us a common salvation, and He is the common people's Christ! And now, poor soul, if you would like an apronful of roses, come and have them. If you would like to carry away a big handful of the lilies of the valleys, come and take them, as many as you will. May the Lord give you the will! Even to those who do not pluck any, there is one strange thing that must not be forgotten. A man passes by a rose-bush, and says, "I cannot stop to think about roses," but as he goes along he exclaims, "Dear, dear, what a delicious perfume!" A man journeying in the East goes through a field that is full of lilies; he is in a great hurry, but, for all that, he cannot help seeing and smelling the lilies as he rushes through the field. And, do you know, the perfume of Christ has life in it! He is "a savour of life unto life." What does that mean but that the smell of Him will save? (C. H. Spurgeon.)

The best flower.—We find flowers of some kind or other growing everywhere. They spring up in the sandy desert. On the tops of bleak and snow-capped mountains, where even trees will not grow, the little flowers may be seen. Travellers who have gone near the North Pole, where ice and snow last all the year, have been surprised to find in some places red snow. And when they came to examine it with a microscope, they were still more surprised to find that the colour of it was owing to an exceedingly small kind of plant, bearing a flower too little for the naked eye to see. But among all the multitude of flowers which grow on the earth, there is none like this which Solomon speaks of in the verse before us. "I am the Rose of Sharon." This, we suppose, refers to Jesus. He is the "Rose of Sharon." Sharon was the name of a large plain, or level tract of country in Palestine, famous for the number of flowers which grew there. And if we consider this "Rose of Sharon" as referring to our blessed Saviour, then we may well say that this Rose is the best flower.

I. BECAUSE IT WILL GROW EVERYWHERE. This flower does not grow in the ground like other flowers. You must not look for it in the beds of the garden; nor in the fields, the valleys or the mountains. The soil in which it grows is the human heart. And when any person learns to love and

serve Jesus, and is made happy by Him, then we may say that the "Rose of Sharon" is growing in that person's heart. This flower is sometimes found growing in the hearts of very young people. And the old as well as the young—the poor as well as the rich, may have it if they will. It is growing now in the hearts of people in all the different nations of the earth. John Williams, the martyr-missionary of Erromanga, planted it in the sunny islands of the South Seas. Robert Moffat planted it far up into the southern part of Africa; and other missionaries are planting it all along the western coast. Dr. Livingstone carried it into the very centre of Africa, from the East. The great wall of separation, which kept the missionaries so long out of China, has been thrown down, and now all that vast country is waiting to receive the Gospel. The servants of Jesus are going about over the burning plains of India, and planting this best flower there. The heat is dreadful there sometimes, but still it is not too hot a climate for the "Rose of Sharon" to grow and flourish in. The Moravian missionaries have carried it to Greenland's ice-bound shores; and that climate, even, is not too cold for it. For above a hundred years it has been blooming sweetly there. And now, this very day, it is growing and flourishing equally well in all these different countries. Oh, what a wonderful flower this is! There is no other like it in all the earth.

II. BECAUSE OF ITS MANY USES. 1. It is beautiful to look at. When Jesus was on earth, most people saw no beauty in Him, that they should desire Him. But those who learn to know and love Him, find Him to be "the chief among ten thousand, and altogether lovely." The greatest happiness of heaven will be to "see His face." There is nothing in all the world half so beautiful as the sight of Jesus will be in heaven. 2. It is useful for its fragrance, as well as for its beauty. Every one knows how sweet it is to smell a beautiful rose. And we read in the Bible, that the name of Jesus is "as ointment poured forth." This means, that it is just as pleasant to the souls of those who love Jesus to think about Him, as it is to their bodily senses to smell the sweetest flower, or the most fragrant ointment. 3. The "Rose of Sharon" bears fruit as well as flowers, and its fruit is wholesome and pleasant. It is made to be eaten, as well as looked at, and its "fruit is sweet to the taste" of those who partake of it. 4. The "Rose of Sharon" yields pure water to drink, as well as food to eat. There is a singular plant in the East Indies called "the pitcher-plant." It has leaves, or flowers, in the form of small pitchers. Each pitcher has a lid to it, and at certain seasons these pitchers are filled with a sweet, pleasant liquid, which is very good to drink. The "Rose of Sharon" is a pitcher-plant. It is full of pitchers. These are not only always full, but they never can be emptied. The water of salvation flows into them as fast as it is taken out. And oh, it is delightful water! It is cool, clear and refreshing. 5. The "Rose of Sharon" is good for medicine, as well as for food and drink. When Jesus, who is this "Rose of Sharon," was on earth, He opened the eyes of the blind; He unstopped the ears of the deaf; He made the lame to walk, and went about "healing all manner of sickness and disease among the people." Then, He cured all kinds of *bodily* diseases. Now, He cures all kinds of *spiritual* diseases. 6. The "Rose of Sharon" is good for clothing. This is a very singular use to make of a flower. We often hear of people making wreaths of flowers to ornament or dress the head with. But no one ever heard of an earthly flower that was good to make clothing of. The "Rose of Sharon," however, is good for clothing. We read in the Bible about "garments of salvation"—about "robes washed and made white in the blood of the Lamb"—about "clothing of wrought gold—all-glorious within." These all refer to that righteousness of Jesus, which He puts upon all His people as the dress they are to wear in heaven. Oh, the clothing which is made out of the "Rose of Sharon" is very beautiful! It is so in God's sight. There never was any like it. 7. And then the "Rose of Sharon" is good to make people rich. Nobody ever thinks of feeling rich because he has a rose. Why, you may have a bunch of roses; yes, a whole garden of roses, and yet not be very rich. Sometimes we hear of a king making a present of a golden rose to one of his friends. Yet that would not make him rich. But every one who has the "Rose of Sharon" is rich. Nobody can tell how rich Christ makes His people. "They shall inherit all things." What more could they have? III. BECAUSE IT MAKES PEOPLE HAPPY WHEN NOTHING ELSE CAN. What a dreadful thing it must be on board a burning ship, far off on the ocean! We all heard about that dreadful calamity—the burning of the steamer "Austria." She was full of passengers. The fire spread almost like lightning. Could anything make persons calm and happy on board that burning vessel? Yes, there were some there who loved Jesus, who had the "Rose of Sharon" with them and that made them happy.

IV. BECAUSE IT NEVER FADES. Its beauty never decays. Its leaves never fall off.

Winter never comes in heaven. The flowers are blooming all the time there. And chief among them is this beautiful "Rose of Sharon." Ah! my dear children, if you want to love one who never dies and never changes, then love Jesus. He is the "Rose of Sharon," and this is the best flower, because *it never fades*. V. BECAUSE ITS BEAUTY IS ALWAYS INCREASING. There never was another flower known of which this could be said. You take a small rose-bud and look at it. How beautiful it is! As it grows larger its beauty increases. Every day it swells to a greater size. You see more and more of its lovely crimson colour. Presently the bud begins to open. You can almost see its leaves expanding as you stand and gaze upon it. How interesting it is to watch it! Gradually it unfolds itself, till all its many leaves have opened themselves, and now it stands before you a fragrant, blushing, beautiful, full-blown rose. How sweetly it looks! Can anything in the world be more delightful? But now it's all over! You have seen all there is about the rose worth seeing. Very soon it will wither away, and you won't care to look at it any more. But it is very different with the "Rose of Sharon." This will be always growing and always blooming. And its flowers will be always increasing in beauty. I do not mean that some of its flowers will die, and others, more beautiful, come out upon it. Not one of its flowers will ever die. But they will all go on increasing in beauty continually. Oh, wonderful plant! How glorious it will be, if we get to heaven to look on and to watch its increasing beauty to all eternity! (*R. Newton, D.D.*)

The rose and the lily:—It is our Lord who speaks: "I am the Rose of Sharon." How is it that He utters His own commendation, for it is an old and true adage, that "self-praise is no recommendation"? None but vain creatures ever praise themselves, and yet Jesus often praises Himself. How, then, shall we solve the riddle? Is not this the answer, that He is no creature at all, and therefore comes not beneath the rule? For the creature to praise itself is vanity, but for the Creator to praise Himself, for the Lord God to manifest and show forth His own glory is becoming and proper. Our Lord, when He thus praises Himself doubtless does so for an excellent reason, namely, that no one can possibly reveal Him to the sons of men but Himself. No lips can tell the love of Christ to the heart till Jesus Himself shall speak within. Christ must be His own mirror; as the diamond alone can cut the diamond, so He alone can display Himself.

I. First, I shall speak upon the MOTIVES OF OUR LORD IN THIS COMMENDING HIMSELF. I take it that He has designs of love in this speech. He would have all His people rich in high and happy thoughts concerning His blessed person.

1. Doubtless, He commends Himself because high thoughts of Christ will enable us to act consistently with our relations towards Him. The saved soul is espoused to Christ. Now, in the marriage estate, it is a great assistance to happiness if the wife has high ideas of her husband. In the marriage union between the soul and Christ, this is exceedingly necessary.

2. Moreover, our Master knows that high thoughts of Him increase our love. If we are to love Him at all, it must be with the love of admiration; and the higher that admiration shall rise, the more vehemently will our love flame forth.

3. A high esteem of Christ, moreover, as He well knoweth, is very necessary to our comfort. Beloved, when you esteem Christ very highly, the things of this world become of small account with you, and their loss is not so heavily felt. Get but delightful thoughts of Him, and you will feel like a man who has lost a pebble but has preserved his diamond; like the man who has seen a few cast clouts and rotten rags consumed in the flames, but has saved his children from the conflagration. You will rejoice in your deepest distress because Christ is yours if you have a high sense of the preciousness of your Master.

4. Our Lord would have us entertain great thoughts of Himself, because this will quicken all the powers of our soul. I spoke to you just now of love receiving force from an esteem of Jesus, I might say the like of faith, or patience, or humility.

5. High thoughts of Jesus will set us upon high attempts for His honour. When the grand thought of love to God has gained full possession of the soul, men have been able to actually accomplish what other men have not even thought of doing. Love has laughed at impossibilities, and proved that she is not to be quenched by many waters, nor drowned by floods.

II. Whatever may be the commendable motive for any statement, yet it must not be made if it be not accurate, and therefore, in the second place, I come to observe OUR LORD'S JUSTIFICATION FOR THIS COMMENDATION, which is abundantly satisfactory to all who know Him. What our Lord says of Himself is strictly true. It falls short of the mark, it is no exaggeration. Observe each one of the words. He begins, "I am." Those two little words I would not insist upon, but it is no straining of language to say that even here we have a great deep. "I am" hath revealed Himself unto thee in a more glorious manner than He did unto Moses at the

burning bush, the great "I AM" in human flesh has become thy Saviour and thy Lord. "I am the rose." We understand from this, that Christ is lovely. He selects one of the most charming of flowers to set forth Himself. All the beauties of all the creatures are to be found in Christ in greater perfection than in the creatures themselves. He is infinitely more beautiful in the garden of the soul and in the paradise of God than the rose can be in the gardens of earth, though it be the universally acknowledged queen of flowers. But the spouse adds, "I am the rose of Sharon." This was the best and rarest of roses. Jesus is not "the rose" alone, but "the rose of Sharon," just as He calls His righteousness "gold," and then adds, "the gold of Ophir"—the best of the best. Our Lord adds, "I am the lily," thus giving Himself a double commendation. Indeed, Jesus Christ deserves not to be praised doubly, but sevenfold, aye, and unto seven times seven. Earth's choicest charms commingled, feebly picture His abounding preciousness. He is the "lily of the valleys." Does He intend by that to hint to us that He is a lily in His lowliest estate, a lily of the valley? The carpenter's son, living in poverty, wearing the common garb of the poor, is He the lily of the valleys? Yes; He is a lily to you and to me, poor dwellers in the lowlands. Up yonder He is a lily on the hilltops, where all celestial eyes admire Him; down here, in these valleys of fears and cares, He is a lily still as fair as in heaven. The words, having been opened up one by one, teach us that Christ is lovely to all our spiritual senses. The rose is delightful to the eye, but it is also refreshing to the nostril, and the lily the same. So is Jesus. Go anywhere where Jesus is, and though you do not actually hear His name, yet the sweet influence which flows from His love will be plainly enough discernible. Our Lord is so lovely, that even the recollection of His love is sweet. Take the rose of Sharon, and pull it leaf from leaf, and lay by the leaves in the jar of memory, and you shall find each leaf most fragrant long afterwards, filling the house with perfume; and this very day we remember times of refreshing enjoyed at the Lord's table still delightful as we reflect upon them. Jesus is lovely in the bud as well as when full blown. You admire the rose quite as much when it is but a bud as when it bursts forth into perfect development: and methinks, Christ to you, my beloved, in the first blush of your piety, was not one whit less sweet than He is now. Jesus full blown, in our riper experience, has lost none of His excellence. When we shall see Him fully blown in the garden of paradise, shall we not count it to be our highest heaven to gaze upon Him for ever? Christ is so lovely that He needs no beautifying. Let the roughest tongue speak sincerely of Him in the most broken but honest accents, and Jesus Himself is such a radiant jewel that the setting will be of small consequence, He is so glorious that He is "Most adorned when unadorned the most." He is so lovely, again, that He satisfies the highest taste of the most educated spirit to the very full. The greatest amateur in perfumes is quite satisfied with the rose, and I should think that no man of taste will ever be able to criticize the lily, and cavil at its form. Now, when the soul has arrived at her highest pitch of true taste, she shall still be content with Christ, nay, she shall be the better able to appreciate Him. Dwelling for another minute on this subject, let me remark that our Lord Jesus Christ deserves all that He has said of Himself. First, in His Divine glory. The glory of Christ as God, who shall write upon it? Nothing is great, nothing is excellent but God, and Christ is God. O roses and lilies, where are ye now? Our Lord deserves these praises, again, in His perfection of manhood. He is like ourselves, but in Him was no sin. "The prince of this world cometh, but hath nothing in Me." Throughout the whole of His biography, there is not a faulty line. He deserves this commendation, too, in His mediatorial qualifications. Since His blood has washed us from all our sins, we talk no more of the red roses, for what can they do to purify the soul? Since His righteousness has made us accepted in the Beloved, we will speak no more of spotless lilies, for what are these? He deserves all this praise, too, in His reigning glory. He has a glory which His Father has given Him as a reward, in the power of which He sits down at the right hand of God for ever and ever, and shall soon come to judge the world in righteousness, and the people with equity. View the Lord Jesus in any way you please, all that He Himself can say concerning Himself He richly deserves, and therefore glory be unto His name for ever and ever, and let the whole earth say, Amen. III. I shall now conduct you to a third consideration, namely, THE INFLUENCE OF THIS COMMENDATION UPON US. Think of the ruin of this world till Christ came into it! Methinks I see in vision a howling wilderness, a great and terrible desert, like to the Sahara. Christ is the rose which has changed the scene. If you would have great thoughts of Christ think of your own ruin. Yonder I behold you cast out an infant, unwashed, unwashed,

defiled with your own blood, too foul to be looked upon except by beasts of prey. And what is this that has been cast into your bosom, and which lying there has suddenly made you fair and lovely? A rose has been thrown into your bosom by a Divine hand, and for its sake you have been pitied and cared for by Divine Providence, you are washed and cleaned from your defilement, you are adopted into Heaven's family, the fair seal of love is upon your forehead, and the ring of faithfulness is on your hand—a prince unto God—though just now you were an orphan, cast away. O prize the rose, the putting of which into your bosom has made you what you are! Consider your daily need of this rose. You live in the pestilential air of this earth: take Christ away, you die. Christ is the daily food of your spirit. Think of the estimation that Christ is had in beyond the skies, in the land where things are measured by the right standard, where men are no longer deceived by the delusions of earth. Think how God esteems the Only Begotten, His unspeakable gift to us. Consider what the angels think of Him, as they count it their highest honour to veil their faces at His feet. Consider what the blood-washed think of Him, as day without night they sing His well-deserved praises with gladdest voices. Remember how you yourself have sometimes esteemed Him. Have there not been moments when the chariots of Amminadib seemed but poor dragging things, compared with the wheels of your soul when Jesus ravished your heart with His celestial embrace? Estimate Him to-day as you did then, for He is the same, though you are not. IV. I shall close by asking you to make CONFESSIONS SUGGESTED BY MY TEXT. I am sure you have all had falls, and slips, and shortcomings, with regard to Him. Well, then, come humbly to Jesus at once. He will forgive you readily, for He does not soon take offence at His spouse. He may sometimes speak sharp words to her, because He loves her, but His heart is always true, and faithful, and tender. (C. H. Spurgeon.)

The Rose of Sharon, and the Lily of the Valleys.—Jesus calls Himself first, “the Rose of Sharon,” and then, “the Lily of the Valleys.” Let us consider what He means. I. THE ROSE OF SHARON. Of all the flowers that God has made, the rose, take it all in all, is the loveliest and the sweetest. It has three things in perfection—shape, colour, and fragrance. Indeed, we may call it the queen of flowers. Now, it is in its sweetness especially that the rose reminds me of the Lord Jesus Christ. His character was marked not only by manliness, but also with what we may call “sweetness,” for he had all the firmness of a man and all the tenderness of a woman. I will give you another reason for the comparison of Christ to a rose. The rose is the most common as well as the most beautiful of all the flowers. You find it wherever you go,—in all countries and in all places. In fact, it is the universal flower: it belongs to everybody. And in this respect it resembles Christ, for Christ is the common property of all—of the peasant as well as of the prince; of poor as well as of rich; of the child as well as of the full-grown man. He belongs to all nations, too—to the dwellers in north and south and east and west; and there is no one, whatever he may be, or wherever he lives, who cannot say, “The Lord Jesus Christ is my Saviour, and I claim Him as my own.” II. But the Saviour calls Himself in the text THE LILY OF THE VALLEYS, and we have now to consider what this second title is intended to teach us. Supposing that “the Lily of the Valleys” is the flower which we know by that name—you all remember how graceful it is, with pretty little white bells ranged in a row on a tapering stalk, and how it appears to hide itself modestly under the shade of its broad green leaves. Now, why is it thus chosen? Partly because the lily is of a beautiful white colour, and represents purity. And you know how pure the Lord Jesus Christ was. Never at any time did He think, or say, or do anything that was wrong. As a child, as a boy, as a man, He was absolutely free from fault. But the lily of the valley—because it has a drooping head, and retires behind the shade of its broad green leaves, instead of thrusting itself forward—may be taken as an emblem of lowliness or humility, and so will serve to remind us of the Lord Jesus Christ. III. We will try, in conclusion, to APPLY THE SUBJECT TO OURSELVES, so that we may be the better, by God's blessing, for having talked about it and thought about it. We have the example of the Lord Jesus Christ proposed to us. He is perfect, and we can never hope to be perfect. But we may become, by the kind help of His Holy Spirit, more and more like Him every day. (G. Calthrop, M.A.).

The rose and the lily.—I have taken a text, chiefly because it is generally supposed that a sermon cannot be preached without a Bible text. But I only want those two words—Rose, Lily; and I take those two because they may be regarded as the chief and the representative of the midsummer flowers. But how can we learn from the rose and the lily concerning God? In this way. Everything a man does or makes embodies

and expresses himself. The Bible tells us that is true even of children. "Even a child is known by his doings." Somehow children and men always stamp themselves on everything they make and everything they do. And this is one of the chief ways by which we come to know God. We look at the things He makes, and when we find out what character they bear we may say, God is like this, only infinitely better. If He made this, the possibility of making more and better than this must be in Him. If God made the rose and the lily, what must He be? 1. Now the first thing that comes to our thought, when we notice the exquisite form of the rose and the stately grace of the lily, is—How beautiful God must be. What beautiful thought He must have to have designed such forms, and what a beautiful touch to mould such forms, and so how beautiful He Himself must be. 2. Looking again at the rose and the lily we are reminded of their fragrance, we feel their fragrance—that sweet scent of the rose, that rich and almost overpowering odour of the lily. Then it strikes us that they are not merely beautiful to look at, they are scattering blessings continually—pouring forth their treasures to enrich the air, and to give us pleasure and health, filling the summer sky with balmy breath, spending themselves to do others good, to make others glad. And so they tell us what God is. For in God's thought they were filled with that fragrance, and in breathing it out they fain would tell us of Him of whose eternal sweetness they partake. What must the fragrance of God be who put such fragrance into His flowers? And this we can feel to be true of God manifested in Christ. The fragrance of Christ's life on earth is its greatest charm. It was a life of self-denials, generousities and charities; crowded with thoughtfulnesses and helpfulnesses, exemplifying His own words, "It is more blessed to give than receive." 3. Then, again, we are struck with the colour of the rose and the lily—that creamy whiteness of the lily, that tinted whiteness of the rose. We feel purity in colour, more especially in white flowers, but it is the characteristic of them all. God made these pure white flowers, then what must His purity be? We are often touched with God's wonderful and exhaustless power of making pure things—clear waters, white snows, woolly clouds, new leaves, blue sky, and the exquisite pale tinting all about the summer sunset. Moses had a vision of the surroundings of God, and under His feet was a paved work of a sapphire stone, and, as it were, the body of heaven in His clearness. This purity is characteristic of God "manifest in the flesh." Jesus was clothed in white all through His life, and on His beautiful garments one stain never came. 4. So the leaves and petals of rose and lily become leaves of a Bible to us, from which we may learn of God. The flowers say, "We come to tell you that God lives, that God loves, and that God wants your love." The roses say, "Love and serve the good and beautiful God, who may be served by everything that is kind and lovely." The lilies say, "Love and serve the pure and righteous God, who may be served by everything that is holy and true." And all the other midsummer flowers, gathering round their king and queen, seem to join in one great chorus, and to say, "We love and serve the One, the living God—the Wonderful, the Beautiful, the Pure, the Good—and you should love Him too." (*R. Tuck.*)

Ver. 2. As the lily among thorns, so is My love among the daughters.—*The lily among thorns* :—I. First, I think my text very beautifully sets forth THE RELATION OF THE CHURCH AND OF EVERY INDIVIDUAL TO CHRIST. He styles her, "My love." An exquisitely sweet name; as if His love had all gone forth of Him, and had become embodied in her. 1. The first point, then, of her relation to Christ is that she has His love. Think of it, and let the blessed truth dwell long and sweetly in your meditations. Each one of us may rejoice in the title under which our Lord addresses us—"My love." This love is distinguishing love, for in its light one special object shines as a lily, and the rest, "the daughters" are as thorns. Observe that this is a love which He openly avows. The Bridegroom speaks and says before all men, "As a lily among thorns, so is My love among the daughters." He puts it upon record in that Book which is more widely scattered than any other, for He is not ashamed to have it published on the housetops. He declares it that His adversaries may know it, that He hath a people in whom His heart delights, and these He will have and hold as His own when heaven and earth shall pass away. This love, wherever it has been revealed to its object, is reciprocated. If the Lord has really spoken home to your soul and said, "I have loved thee," your soul has gladly answered, "This is my Beloved, and this is my Friend; yea, He is altogether lovely." 2. Next, she bears His likeness. Notice the first verse of the chapter, wherein the Bridegroom speaks—

"I am the rose of Sharon, and the lily of the valleys." He is the lily, but His beloved is like Him; for He applies His own chosen emblem to her—"As the lily among thorns, so is My love among the daughters." Notice that He is the lily, she is as the lily, that is to say, He has the beauty and she reflects it; she is comely in His comeliness, which He puts upon her. Note, too, that He who gave the beauty is the first to see it. While they are unknown to the world Jesus knows His own. Love's eyes are quick, and her ears are open. Love covers a multitude of faults, but it discovers a multitude of beauties. Let His condescending discernment have all honour for this generous appreciation of us. Let us bless and love Him because He deigns to think so highly of us who owe everything to Him. "Thou art," saith He, "My love, as the lily." It is evident that the Lord Jesus takes delight in this beauty, which He has put upon His people. He values it at so great a rate that He counts all rival beauties to be but as thorns. 3. Bringing out still further the relationship between Christ and His Church, I want you to notice that her position has drawn out His love. "As the lily," saith He, "among thorns, so is My love." He spied her out among the thorns. She was at the first no better than a thorn herself; His grace alone made her to differ from the briars about her; but as soon as ever He had put His life and His grace into her, though she dwelt among the ungodly, she became as a lily, and He spied her out. The thorn-brake could not hide His beloved. "As the lily among thorns" wears also another meaning. Dr. Thompson writes of a certain lily, "It grows among thorns, and I have sadly lacerated my hand in extricating it from them. Nothing can be in higher contrast than the luxuriant, velvety softness of this lily and the withered, tangled hedge of thorns about it." Ah, beloved, you know who it was that in gathering your soul and mine, lacerated not His hand only, but His feet, and His head, and His side, and His heart, yea, and His inmost soul. 4. Yet once more, I think many a child of God may regard himself as still being a lily among thorns, because of his afflictions. Certainly the Church is so, and she is thereby kept for Christ's own. If thorns made it hard for Him to reach us for our salvation, there is another kind of thorn which makes it hard for any enemy to come at us for our hurt. Our trials and tribulations, which we would fain escape from, often act as a spiritual protection: they hedge us about and ward off many a devouring foe. Sharp as they are, they serve as a fence and a defence. II. Our text is full of instruction as to THE RELATIONSHIP OF THE CHURCH AND EACH INDIVIDUAL BELIEVER TO THE WORLD—"The lily among thorns." 1. First, then, *she has incomparable beauty*. As compared and contrasted with all else she is as the lily to the thorn-brake. The thorns are worthless, they flourish, and spread, and cumber the ground, but they yield no fruit, and only grow to be cut down for the oven. Alas, such is man by nature, at his best. As for the lily, it is a thing of beauty and a joy for ever; it lives shedding sweet perfume, and when it is gathered its loveliness adorns the chamber to which it is taken. So does the saint bless his generation while here, and when he is taken away he is regarded with pleasure even in heaven above as one of the flowers of God. He will ere long be transplanted from among the thorns to the garden enclosed beyond the river, where the King delights to dwell, for such a flower is far too fair to be left for ever amid tangled briars. 2. In the comparison of the saint to the lily we remark that he has, like the lily, a surpassing excellence. The thorn is a fruit of the curse: it springs up because of sin. Not so the lily: it is a fair type of the blessing which maketh rich without the sorrow of carking care. The thorn is the mark of wrath and the lily is the symbol of Divine Providence. A true believer is a blessing, a tree whose leaves heal and whose fruit feeds. A genuine Christian is a living gospel, and embodiment of goodwill towards men. 3. The last point with regard to our relationship to the world is that the Church and many individual Christians are called to endure singular trials, which make them feel "as the lily among thorns." That lovely flower seems out of place in such company, does it not? Christ said, "Behold, I send you forth as sheep among sheep"—no, no, that is my mistake, "as sheep among wolves." It is a very blessed thing to be as sheep among sheep: to lie down with them under the shadow of the great rock, and feed with them in green pastures under the Shepherd's eye. This is our privilege, and we ought to value it greatly, and unite with the Church and frequent its ordinances; but even then we shall, some of us, have to go home to an ungodly family, or to go out into the world to win our bread, and then we shall be as sheep among wolves. Grace struggling in loneliness is very choice in God's esteem. If man sees thee not, O lonely believer, thou mayest nevertheless sing. "Thou God seest me." The flower which blooms for God alone has a special honour put upon it, and so hath the saint whose quiet life is all for Jesus.

If you are unappreciated by those around you, do not therefore be distressed, for you are honourable in the sight of God. But why doth the Lord put his lilies among thorns? It is because He works transformations, singular transformations, by their means. He can make a lily grow among thorns till the thorns grow into lilies. He can set a Christian in a godless family till first one and then another shall feel the Divine power, and shall say, "We will go with you, for we perceive that God is with you." Be lilies, preach by your actions, preach by your kindness, and by your love; and I feel quite sure that your influence will be a power for good. If the Holy Spirit helps all of you to stand among your associates as lilies among the thorns, the day will come when thorns will die out, and lilies will spring up on every side: sin will be banished and grace will abound. (*C. H. Spurgeon.*) *Christ and the believer*:—I. INQUIRE WHAT CHRIST THINKS OF THE BELIEVER.—"As the lily among the thorns, so is My love among the daughters." 1. See what Christ thinks of the unconverted world. It is like a field full of briars and thorns in His eyes. (1) Because fruitless. (2) Because, when the Word is preached among them, it is like sowing among thorns. (3) Because their end will be like that of thorns—they are dry and fit only for the burning. 2. See what Christ thinks of the believer. "As the lily among thorns, so is My love among the daughters." The believer is like a lovely flower in the eyes of Christ. (1) Because justified in the eyes of Christ; washed in His blood, he is pure and white as a lily. (2) A believer's nature is changed. Once he was like the barren, prickly thorn, fit only for burning—now Christ has put a new spirit in him—the dew has been given to him, and he grows up like the lily. (3) Because so lonely in the world. Observe, there is but one lily, but many thorns. There is a great wilderness all full of thorns, and only one lonely flower. So there is a world lying in wickedness, and a little flock that believe in Jesus. II. INQUIRE WHAT THE BELIEVER THINKS OF CHRIST—"As the apple tree among the trees of the wood." 1. Christ is more precious than all other saviours in the eye of the believer. As a traveller prefers an apple tree to every other tree of the wood, because he finds both shelter and nourishing food under it, so the believer prefers Christ to all other saviours. Oh! there is no rest for the soul except under that branch which God has made strong. My heart's desire and prayer for you is, that you may all find rest there. 2. Why has the believer so high an esteem of Christ? (1) Because he has made trial of Christ. (2) Because he sat down with great delight. (*E. M. M'Cheyne.*)

Ver. 3. **As the apple tree among the trees of the wood, so is my Beloved among the sons.**—*The apple tree in the wood*:—The point of the metaphor is this. There are many trees of the forest, and they all have their uses, but when one is hungry, and faint, and thirsty, the forest trees yield no succour, and we must look elsewhere: they yield shelter, but not refreshing nutriment. If, however, in the midst of the wood one discovers an apple tree, he there finds the refreshment which he needs; his thirst is alleviated, and his hunger removed. Even so the Church here means to say that there are many things in the world which yield us a kind of satisfaction—many men, many truths, many institutions, many earthly comforts, but there are none which yield us the full solace which the soul requires; none which can give to the heart the spiritual food for which it hungers; Jesus Christ alone supplies the needs of the sons of men. I. First, then, our text speaks of THE TREE WHICH THE FAINTING SOUL MOST DESIRES. Suppose you appeal to yonder stately tree which is the greatest of them all, the king of the forest, unequalled in greatness or girth; admire its stupendous limbs, its gnarled roots, its bossy bark, the vast area beneath its boughs. You look up at it and think what a puny creature you are, and how brief has been your life compared with its duration. You try to contemplate the storms which have swept over it, and the suns which have shone upon it. Great, however, as it is, it cannot help you: if it were a thousand times higher, and its topmost boughs swept the stars, yet it could minister no aid to you. This is a fit picture of the attempt to find consolation in systems of religion which are recommended to you because they are greatly followed. Suppose that in your wanderings to and fro you come upon another tree which is said to be the oldest in the forest. We all of us have a veneration for age. Antiquity has many charms. I scarcely know, if antiquity and novelty should run a race for popular favour, which might win. There are some things which are so old as to be rotten, worm-eaten, and fit only to be put away. Many things called ancient are but clever counterfeits, or wherein they are true they are but the bones and the carcases of that which once was good when life filled it with energy and power. It may be

that in the midst of the forest, while you are hungry and thirsty, you come upon a strangely beautiful tree: its proportions are exact, and as you gaze upon it from a distance you exclaim, "How wonderful are the works of God!" and you begin to think of those trees of the Lord which are full of sap, the cedars of Lebanon which He hath planted. But beauty can never satisfy hunger, and when a man is dying of thirst it is vain to talk to him of symmetry and taste. He wants food. We will pursue our investigations in the forest, and while we are doing so we shall come upon some very wonderful trees. I have seen just lately instances in which branches are curiously interlaced with one another; the beech sends forth a long drooping bough, and lest it should not be able to support itself, another bough strikes up from below to buttress it, or descends from above and clasps it, and the boughs actually grow into one another. Strange things may be observed in the undisturbed woods, which are not to be seen in our hedgerow trees, or discerned in our gardens; trees have odd habits of their own, and grow marvellously if left to their own sweet wills. I have stood under them and said, "How can this be? This is singular indeed! How could they grow like this? What wondrous interlacings, and intertwinings, and gnarlings, and knottings!" Yes, but if a man were hungry and thirsty, he would not be satisfied with curiosities. You remember when you first came to that precious tree whereon the Saviour died, and found that your sin was blotted out, and that you were accepted in the Beloved, and were made to be henceforth an heir of heaven. Oh, the lusciousness of the fruit which you gathered then! Oh, the delightful quiet of the shadow under which you sat that day; blessed be His name! You had searched among the other trees, but you found no fruit there: you tried to rest in the shadow of other boughs, but you never rested till on that blood-stained tree of the cross you saw your sin put away and your salvation secured, and then you rested and were satisfied. But the Lord Jesus Christ has not only satisfied us as to the past, see what He has done for us as to the present! Why, I know sick people who are far more happy in their sickness than worldlings are in their health; and I know poor men who are infinitely more at peace, and more contented, than rich men who have not the Saviour. Jesus Christ alone satisfies us for the past and delights us for the present. And then as to the future. The man who has found Christ looks forward to it not merely with complacency, not simply without a dread, but with a joyous expectancy and hope. Those things which make others tremble make us glad. II. The spouse spoke of the tree which she most desired; **THE WONDER WAS THAT SHE FOUND IT.** It was an apple tree, but it was not in a garden; a fruit tree, but not in a vineyard; it was "among the trees of the wood." Who would know of so great a rarity as an apple tree in a wood if he were not first told of it? So Jesus Christ at this present day is not known to all mankind. Even in our own country you will not find it a difficult thing to meet with persons who are totally ignorant of Christ. Where the greatest light is, there the shadows are deepest. Men nearest to the church are often furthest from God. You cannot easily find an apple tree in a great forest. If you were put down in the middle of a forest and told there was an apple tree there, you might wander for many a day before you discovered it, and often go over your own footsteps, lost in endless mazes, but you would not find the object of your search; and so, though there be a Saviour, men have not found the Saviour, and there may even be souls here present who long for that which Jesus is able to give, and yet have not discovered Him. You know all about Him in the letter of His Word, but you cannot find Him spiritually, and I hear you cry, "Oh, that I knew where I might find Him." Now, is it not a strange place for an apple tree to be found in—a wood? We seldom hear of such a thing; an apple tree should grow in a garden. How should it be found in a forest? And is it not a strange thing that a Saviour should be found for us among men—not among angels? Ye shall search for a Saviour amongst "the helmed cherubim and sworded seraphim" as long as you will, but there is none there. The Saviour is found in a manger at Bethlehem, in a carpenter's shop at Nazareth; amongst the poor and needy is He seen while He sojourns amongst the sons of men. Not among you, O ye cedars, not among you, O mighty oaks, but amongst the bushes of the desert, amongst the trees accursed was Jesus found. "He made His grave with the wicked." Now, there is something very sweet about this, because a wood is the very place where we most love to find Christ growing. If I had come the other day upon an apple tree in the forest, and it had happened to be the time of ripe fruit, I should have felt no compunction of conscience in taking whatsoever I was able to reach, for a tree growing in the forest is free to all comers. Should there be a hungry one beneath

its bough, he need not say, "May I?" when his mouth waters at the golden fruit: he need not say, "It would be stealing; I am unfit to take it; I am unworthy of it." Man, if there be an apple tree in the forest, no man can keep it for himself or deny your right to it, for each wanderer has a right to what fruit he can gather. Christ has no barriers around Him to keep you from Him. If there be any they are of your own making. Whoever shall come shall be welcome to this priceless apple tree. There is some comfort, therefore, in thinking that He grows among the trees of the wood. III. It was little wonder that when the spouse, all hungry and faint, did come upon this apple tree in the forest SHE ACTED AS SHE DID. Straightway she sat down under its shadow, with great delight, and its fruit was sweet unto her taste. She looked up at it; that was the first thing she did, and she perceived that it met her double want. The sun was hot, there was the shadow: she was faint, there was the fruit. Now, see how Jesus meets all the wants of all who come to Him. Is it not delightful to sit down beneath the scarlet canopy of the Saviour's blood, and feel, "God cannot smite me: He has smitten His Son; payment He cannot demand the second time: if Jesus suffered in my stead, how can God make me suffer again for sin? Where were the justice of the Most High to punish an immaculate Substitute, and then punish men for whom that Substitute endured His wrath?" This is the cool, calm, holy shadow under which we abide. But then, the spouse also found that she herself was thirsty, and that the fruit of the tree exactly met her case. Our inner life wants sustenance and food; now, in the Lord Jesus is life, and the bread of life. One thing more is to be noted: the spouse, when she had begun to enjoy the provision and the shade, and had sat down under it as if she intended to say, "I never mean to leave this place; in this delicious shadow I mean to repose for ever," then she also began to tell of it to others. In the text she describes Christ as the apple tree, and gives her reason for so calling Him—"I sat down under His shadow with great delight, and His fruit was sweet to my taste." Experience must be the ground upon which we found our descriptions. Now, I beseech you who have found the Saviour to be telling others what you know about Him, and try to lead others to look at Him. You cannot make them feed upon Him, but God can, and if you can lead them to the tree, who knows but God will give them spiritual hunger, and will lead them to feed as you have fed. (*C. H. Spurgeon.*) **I sat down under His shadow with great delight, and His fruit was sweet to my taste.**—*The Church's experience:*—

I. WHAT IT IS TO SIT DOWN UNDER THE SHADOW OF CHRIST WITH GREAT DELIGHT. 1. A shadow is not prized by men, till some heat scorch them. The Church is here represented as faint and parched with heat. Our addresses to Christ always begin with a sense of our own want and misery. Ease is sweet to the burdened soul, and none seek rest in Christ to any purpose, but those that feel the load of their own sins (Matt. xi. 28). 2. That which scorseth poor distressed souls, is a sense of God's wrath: observe how fitly God's wrath is set forth by the scorching of the sun. God's goodness is exceeding great and large; yet this good God hath His wrath, which is set forth to us by the notions of a consuming fire (Heb. xii. 29), and a burning oven (Mal. iv. 1). The wrath of the living God is a dreadful thing, which consumeth and drieth up all, without recovery, unless we get a shelter from it. 3. Scorched souls can find no shelter nor refreshing shadow among the creatures; but only by coming to the spiritual apple tree, who is the Lord Jesus Christ. 4. Christ is a complete and comfortable shadow, the only screen between us and wrath. In Him alone we find refreshing, ease, and comfort. 5. Faith is necessary, that we may have the comfort of our shadow; for we make use of Christ by faith. There are three acts of faith: (1) They choose, consent, and own Christ as the only shadow. (2) They earnestly run to it. And (3) compose and quiet their hearts under it. 6. They meet not only with coolness, but fruit; as an apple under an apple tree to one that sits under its shadow in a great heat. II. WHAT THESE FRUITS ARE. They are the benefits and privileges which we have by Christ. 1. Here is fruit. Christ received of the Father the fulness of power and of the Spirit, for the benefit of the redeemed, that He might shower down the streams of grace on all that repair to Him for relief and succour. Now, what these fruits are; in the general, we may tell you, all that is worth the having, we have from Jesus Christ: all the blessings of this present life, and of the world to come. More particularly. There are many choice and excellent fruits which believers receive from Him. (1) The pardon of all our sins (Eph. i. 7). (2) Peace with God (Rom. v. 1). (3) Adoption into God's family (John i. 12; 1 John iii. 1). (4) The heirs of glory (Rom. viii. 17). (5) The Holy Ghost is given, not only to sanctify us at first, but to dwell in

our hearts, as a constant inhabitant, as in His own Temple (1 Cor. vi. 19). (6) Peace of conscience, and joy in the Holy Ghost: for this is a great privilege of Christ's kingdom (Rom. xii. 17). (7) Access to God, with assurance of welcome and audience (Ps. l. 15; Heb. iv. 15, 16; 1 John v. 14). 2. His fruits: for a threefold reason: Because purchased by Him: all these privileges were procured for us by His blood, death, and sufferings. 3. These are sweet unto a believer's taste. Believers have a taste of the goodness of Christ. They do experimentally find a great deal of comfort and sweetness in Him (1 Pet. ii. 2, 3). Christ's fruits are very sweet to their taste, because of the suitableness of the fruit to the prepared appetite: they have a hungry conscience, and so can sooner taste that sweetness. A Christian hath another spirit than the spirit of this world. A sanctified soul can taste the sweetness of spiritual things, word, sacraments, graces, hopes. Yea, the way of obedience is sweet to them (Prov. iii. 17). It is wonderful, comfortable, and filleth their hearts in a satisfying manner, when they can have any experience of God's love in Christ, in the Word, or meditation, or prayer, or sacraments (Ps. lxxiii. 6). Besides the attractive goodness of the object, there is inclination in their own souls to it. I. Here is an invitation to draw us to Christ. 1. As He is a shadow. This notion is like to prevail with none but those who are scorched with God's wrath, or laden with the burden of sin; with them that are either of a troubled, or of a tender conscience. They long to sit down under His shadow indeed, and to get a taste of His pleasant fruits. Yet I must speak to all to begin here. The fruits are neither eaten, nor the sweetness of them felt, till we come under His shadow, and delightfully sit under His righteousness. 2. With respect to pleasant fruit (Ps. xxxiv. 8). We entertain black thoughts of the ways of God, as if religion were a sour thing, and there were no pleasure and delight for those that submit to it. O taste and see! You will find enough in Christ to spoil the gust and relish of all other pleasures. II. Do we ever sit down under His shadow, so as to find His fruit sweet unto our taste? You may try your state, and discern it by your relish of spiritual things. III. Direction to us in our special addresses to God. The practice of the spouse is then in season. Come and sit down under His shadow, and eat of His fruits. (*T. Manton, D.D.*) *Suitable improvement of Christ the Apple Tree*.—I. THE WAY OF RELIEF FOR POOR SINNERS, UNDER ALL SCORCHINGS TO WHICH THEY ARE EXPOSED, IS TO SIT DOWN IN, AND BY FAITH TO REPOSE THEMSELVES UNDER CHRIST'S SHADOW. 1. Show what need sinners have of a shadow to cover them. The world is turned a hot country all over to the sons of fallen Adam, witness the spiritual blackness upon all faces (Amos ix. 7). Adam's fall has changed the temperature of the air which we breathe. God Himself, the sun of the world, whose influences were enlightening, cheering, comforting and warming to innocent men, is become a consuming fire to the workers of iniquity. 2. Show how Christ became a shadow for poor sinners in this case. (1) He was fitted to afford a shadow from that heat, by His assuming our nature, in that He being God was incarnate and became man. Good news to poor sinners in this weary land. There is a root sprung out of the dry ground, and it is become a tree of life; the name of it is the tree of life; and it casts a shadow, a defence, for guilty creatures under it, from the heat of wrath from Heaven. (2) He actually affords a shadow for needy sinners by virtue of His complete satisfaction to law and justice. (a) He received all the scorching beams of wrath on Himself, that so He might keep them from His people. (b) He exhausted them. He drank the cup of wrath from the brim to the bottom. (c) And now through Him, the comfortable influences of Heaven are bestowed and conveyed to those under His shadow, through Him as the channel of conveyance. (3) He is by Divine appointment made a public shadow for all the inhabitants of the weary land; so that it is lawful for them and every one of them to come in by faith and take shelter under it, whatever they are or have been. 3. Show what it is to sit down under Christ's shadow. It is the soul fleeing to Jesus Christ for a refuge, coming unto Him on the call of the Gospel, and receiving Him and uniting with Him by believing on His name. And this notion of faith bears, (1) The soul being sensibly scorched and uneasy in itself. Though all may, yet none will come under Christ's shadow but sensible sinners. (2) That the soul finds no shadow anywhere else. (3) A discovery of Christ's shadow to the poor outcast that can get lodging nowhere else. (4) It imports that the soul goes under Christ's shadow for shelter and rest. This is the renouncing of all other refuges, and betaking oneself to the covert of blood alone. (5) It imports the soul abiding under Christ's shadow. II. CHRIST'S FRUIT RELISHETH WELL WITH THOSE WHO, BY FAITH, SIT DOWN UNDER HIS SHADOW. 1. Show some things

imported in this doctrine. (1) It imports that there is in Christ Jesus a suitable fulness for the soul. (2) They must put themselves under the covert of His blood and righteousness, who would partake of His fruits. (3) Those to whom Christ is a shadow and defence from the wrath of God and curse of the law He also feeds. There is no separating of the justifying blood and sanctifying Spirit. (4) When we sit down under Christ's shadow by faith, it corrects the vitiated taste, cools the distempered heat of the soul, and brings it to a holy temperature; so as spiritual things which before were tasteless as the white of an egg, become sweet to their taste. (5) Faith, trust, and confidence, in the Lord Jesus Christ, produce sweet experiences at length of the Lord's goodness to the soul. This is the way the soul sucks the sweet and nourishment out of the precious promises, while unbelief as it expects nothing from Him, gets as little. 2. Show what are Christ's fruits which are so sweet to the taste of those that sit under His shadow. These are all the benefits, privileges, graces, comforts, and fulness of the covenant, making His people happy here and hereafter. (1) There is an inexhaustible fulness of them that will serve to feed all the saints, in time and through all the ages of eternity. Therefore they are called the unsearchable riches of Christ (Eph. iii. 8). (2) There is a variety of them, suited to all the possible cases of those that are under Christ's shadow. 3. Show why Christ's fruit relisheth so well with those who by faith do partake of it. (1) Because it is suitable to their case, which drove them under Christ's shadow. (2) Because this fruit is proper food for their new nature. (3) Because the real experience of Christ's fruits communicated to the soul, always leaves a sweet relish of them behind it. (*T. Boston, D.D.*) **His fruit was sweet to my taste.**—*The fruitfulness of Christ*:—The fruit borne by Christ, the Tree of Life, the Living Vine, "the Apple Tree among the trees of the wood," may be regarded under three aspects, relating to His character, work, influence. I. CHARACTER. The Lord Jesus possesses excellence in Himself, apart from the relation in which He stands to us. His own personal nature preceded and qualified Him for His entire mediatorial work. The manifestation of this excellence shone forth in His earthly life. Words, acts, miracles were but the outward exhibitions of what He was within. He was hidden, concealed from earthly gaze, visible only to His Father. As seen thus, however, He was spotless, and Divine Omniscience declared itself "well pleased" with Him. The soul of Christ, that human spirit, which, in its powers and faculties, was like ours, and which became "an offering for sin," was most holy. And His life! this was the embodiment of His pure spirit, its outward working, the channel through which its sympathies flowed out upon the world around. How perfect this; recollect it was life like ours; in the same world, subject to the same laws, physical and mental, as our own. It was far less favourably circumstanced than ours. It was the first of its kind; there was no previous example for Christ to imitate, no perfect model to copy. It was also surrounded by sin. It was without sympathy too. The "loneliness of Christ" in these respects was most painful, and itself a test of virtue. That virtue had no external support from custom, habit, friendly countenance. Not only Scribes and Pharisees sought to ensnare, entangle, and catch Him in His talk, the prince of the world came. And how He did resist! What conflict in doing this He had to pass through, how sorely He was tried, what strong "crying and tears" were wrung from His mighty spirit,—is what none of us can know; but He did resist all; and spite of all there shone forth a character the most radiant earth has ever exhibited, and one which now fills heaven with light and lustre superior to all else which it contains. II. WORK. One of the names by which prophecy foretold the Messiah was "Emmanuel, God with us." One of the expressions by which the apostle declares the purport of His work, is in the corresponding sentiment, "He was made sin for us." What tongue can express, what imagination conceive, the grandeur of this work! It spans eternity, past and to come. It rescues humanity, and makes it Godlike. Nothing nobler, grander, purer, has been devised, even by God Himself. It is His chief work, His masterpiece, His last and greatest conception; and of it all, Christ is "the Alpha and Omega, the beginning, the ending, the first and the last." It is His operation, His fruit, that which here we may find most delectable, which through eternity we shall feast upon and find sweet to our taste. III. INFLUENCE. By this I mean not so much what the Saviour is in Himself, nor what He is for us, though there is influence from both, as the power which He exerts upon us. How vast the influence the Saviour has been ever exerting in our world! Kings, emperors, dynasties, mighty forms of government, have risen and decayed, apparently subject only to natural laws of progress and dissolution. The Saviour

has been guiding all. They have been His servants; and although they thought not so, nor did their hearts mean so, He has by them been working out His purposes, and using them as His agents. While His general influence has thus been exerted on the world, its choicest modes of operation have been reserved for the Church. What streams of Divine influence, like waters from a fountain, or beams from the sun, have ever been flowing from Christ. As there is no diminution in the sun's power though it has been pouring forth its radiance for six thousand years; as the ocean is to-day as mighty as ever, though it has been ever diffusing freshness and health, so, and far more certainly, is there no diminution in Christ. (*J. Vinay, D.D.*)

Ver. 4. **He brought me to the banqueting house, and His banner over me was love.**—*The Christian's position of privilege.*—It is a great thing to be a Christian. It is a great thing in view of the personal change wrought in him who sustains this character. He was once lost, he now is found. It is a great thing, too, in view of the change which it brings over a man's relations to others, as well as that which it produces in his personal character. Once he lived for *time*, now he lives for eternity. Once he served Satan, now he serves God. Once, if his earthly possessions had been wrested from him he would have exclaimed, "Ye have taken away my gods, and what is there more?"—now, with St. Paul, he can endure the loss of all things, and account it a gain, that he may win Christ and be found in Him. Once the grave bounded all his prospects, and death was dreaded as the extinguisher of all his hopes; now he can look death calmly in the face, and go down to the grave with a hope full of immortality. I. THE ACTION, ON WHICH ALL THE CHRISTIAN'S EXPERIENCE OF HIS PRIVILEGE IS BASED. "He brought me." The agent referred to is God our Saviour. Salvation, in all its effectual influences, belongs to Him. Each truly converted soul, when telling how it was led to Christ, will feel constrained to look up to God with adoring gratitude and say, "*He brought me.*" "He brought me," by Divine foreknowledge and sovereign choice, before the foundations of the world were laid. "He brought me" through His Spirit, working with me in due season, to make His own call effectual. "He brought me" by ordering and controlling all the outward circumstances of my condition so as to favour this blessed result of His purpose. "He brought me" by His preventing grace so working in my soul, that I should have a desire to know and love Him, and then, co-operating with that desire, in such a way as to bring it to good effect. "He brought me" by sweetly subduing my stubborn will,—taking away all the natural enmity of my heart to Him, and sending the spirit of adoption into my soul whereby I cry Abba Father. II. THE POSITION IN WHICH THIS EXPERIENCE IS REALIZED. "He brought me into the banqueting house." There are two ideas which we seem naturally to associate with the thought of a monarch's banqueting house. 1. It is a place where choice delicacies may be expected. It is not common fare, which the guests admitted to such a place look for. The richest and the rarest things that wealth can purchase, or skill prepare, are provided for such a banqueting hall. The products of every clime, the luxuries of every land are put in requisition there. And these are but faint figures of those spiritual good things with which Jesus regales the souls of His people in the banquet house of salvation. 2. It is a place where special favours are dispensed, and confidential communications made; and, on this account too, the language of the text applies to the believer's condition of privilege in Christ. The treasury of heaven is put at the disposal of the believer in Jesus. He is fully assured that "God will supply all his need from the riches of His grace in Christ." III. THE CIRCUMSTANCES OF THE BELIEVER IN OCCUPYING THIS POSITION. "His banner over me was love." 1. When a prince, a governor, or monarch unfurls his banner over a fortress or citadel, he means thereby to declare his determination to protect that place. As that flag waves in the breeze, it proclaims significantly, that all the power and resources of him whom it represents are pledged for the defence and safeguard of that fortress. And this is what Jesus means when He unfurls His banner of love over the believing soul. All the resources of omnipotence—all the perfections of an infinite God are enlisted for the safety of that soul. 2. The material of a banner, and the mottoes, or emblems upon it, are expressive of the thoughts and intentions of Him whom the banner represents. A white banner bespeaks a desire for peace. A red flag shows a determination to shed blood; a black flag is the signal that no quarter is to be expected. And then the military nations of the earth, whose lust has been for war and conquest, have generally adopted emblems expressive of their character. Thus the

eagle was the emblem Imperial Rome bore on her conquering standards. But the Captain of our salvation has a banner woven out of the precious fabric of love, and the dove is the symbol which that banner bears. His thoughts towards His people are thoughts of peace; and love, unspeakable, everlasting, and past finding out, runs through all His purposes concerning them. 3. The banner of his country is to the true patriot an object of honourable regard, and of intense affection. And so, while the wise man glories in his wisdom, the rich man in his riches, and the mighty man in his might, the language of the Christian is: "God forbid that I should glory, save in the Cross of our Lord Jesus Christ." (*R. Newton, D.D.*) *Christ's banqueting-house for His spouse* :—

1. Jesus Christ hath from the beginning of the world entertained His Church with various dispensations of providence, and doth so entertain every true believing soul. 2. Though all these dispensations be proper means in relation to the great end of the soul's salvation, and profitable to the Church and the soul in reference to that end; yet some are more sweet and pleasant than others, and so more fitly compared to Christ's banquet. 3. The dispensation of the Gospel to the Church in general, and the enlightening, quickening, strengthening, consolatory influences of the Spirit of grace to patient souls, may be fitly compared to a banqueting house or to a house of wine. 4. As Christ did of old entertain some of His people's souls, under the darker dispensations of the covenant of grace, with these refreshing dispensations, which were like a banquet of wine to them; so under the latter and more full dispensation of the Gospel, He doth still entertain some of His people's souls with these gladdening dispensations. 5. It is Christ, and Christ alone, that can bring the soul into the house of wine. (*John Collinges, D.D.*) **His banner over me was love.**—*How Christ's banner over a believing soul is love* :—1. The love of Christ is that which distinguishes the soul of a believer from another soul, and the Church of God from other companies. (1) Let this be rooted in your hearts, that you may not glory in any other differences and distinctions. (2) Let Christ have all the praise, and let it be our business to labour to be thus distinguished from others. 2. The exalting of Christ's love directs and invites every soul whither to go (*John* iii. 14, 15; *xii.* 32). 3. The Church of God and the believing soul should move as the love of God doth guide them. All our actions are of no worth that flow not from this principle. 4. The love of Christ is that which unites the Churches of God and particular believers both unto Christ and unto one another. 5. The love of Christ is a sign of His protection to His people. 6. The love of Christ displayed to the world signifies His victory over His enemies, yea and the Church's, and every true believing soul's victory. 7. The love of Christ to His people is that which should make His Church and true believers terrible to all His and their enemies. (*John Collinges, D.D.*) *Christ's banner over His Church* :—1. The use of banners, standards, or ensigns, is to gather and keep persons together: thus Christ Himself was lifted up on the cross, and is now lifted up in the Gospel, as an ensign to gather souls unto Him: and so His love, being displayed in the preaching of the Gospel, has a power and efficacy in it to draw souls after Him; for as a fruit and effect of everlasting love, "with loving kindness" He draws them: and in the same way and manner Christ here drew the Church unto Himself, and held her fast; and constrained her to keep close to Him, and follow hard after Him; see *2 Cor.* v. 14. 2. A banner displayed, or a standard set up, is an indication of war; it is to prepare for it and to animate to it (*Jer.* li. 12, 27), the Church of Christ here on earth is militant, and therefore in chap. vi. 4, is represented as formidable and terrible as an army with banners: she has many enemies to engage with, as sin, Satan, and the world, and yet has the greatest encouragement to fight, for she is bannered under the Lord of hosts. 3. A banner displayed is also a sign of victory; sometimes when a town, city, or castle is taken, the flag is hung out as an indication of it; see *Jer.* i. 2. Christ has gotten the victory over all His and our enemies. 4. A banner is for protection and defence; hence Moses built an altar, and called it *Jehovah nissi*, that is, The Lord is my banner; because the Lord had been on the side of him and the people of Israel, and defended them from the Amalekites. 5. It is to direct soldiers where to stand, when to march, and whom to follow; see *Numb.* i. 52, ii. 2, which may teach us, who are enlisted in Christ's service, not to fly from our colours, but adhere closely to Christ and His Gospel, His cause and interest, His Church and people, and to follow Him, the Standard-bearer, wherever He goes; and nothing can more strongly engage us to do so than love, which is the motto of His banner; this first drew us to Him, this animates us in His service, and keeps us close to His person and

interest. 6. It is to distinguish one band from another (Numb. ii. 2). As one band has one motto upon its banner or ensign, by which it is distinguished from another, so the motto on Christ's banner is "*love*," by which His band or company is distinguished from all others. The allusion may be to the names of generals being inscribed on the banners of their armies; so Vespasian's name was inscribed on the banners throughout his armies. (*John Gill, D.D.*)

Vcr. 5. Comfort me with apples.—*An apple*.—The term "apple" is a conventional one. By the ancients it was applied indiscriminately to every round fleshy fruit. We require to take into account this extended application of the term, in order to understand the metaphorical allusions to the apple in ancient poetry, classical and oriental. The "apple" occurs several times in the Bible, but there is abundant reason to believe that it is in almost every case a mistranslation of a word which should have been rendered citron, orange, or quince. The East is not the true home of the apple. It is essentially a Western fruit, the product of the cooler air and moister skies of the north temperate zone. The wild crab-apple, from which all the cultivated varieties have sprung, is a native of most of the countries of Europe; and the development of the fruit has engaged the attention of their inhabitants as far back as we can trace. The tree does not grow wild in the East as it does in our hedges and woodlands, and the ancient Jews were altogether ignorant of apples such as we know them. The apple is appropriately associated by popular tradition with the paradisiacal condition of man, for it belongs to an order of plants that was introduced into the world about the human period. Nature in former epochs had run into rank, luxuriant foliage, but she blossomed and fruited when man came upon the scene. There is a profound relation between the efflorescence of the earth and that of the human soul. The fullest significance of flowers and fruits can only be seen in the life of man, for the illustration of which they furnish innumerable expressive images and analogies. The apple belongs not only to the latest, but also to the highest order of plants. This order is the *Rosaceæ*, which for beauty of colour, grace of form, perfection of structure, and great and manifold utility, takes precedence of all others. Looking at an apple from a morphological point of view, we find that it is an arrested branch. Instead of going on to develop more wood and foliage, a branch terminates in an apple; and in this apple the sap and substance that would have prolonged the branch are concentrated, and hence its enlarged size and capability of expansion. Looking upon an apple thus as an arrested branch, the branch giving up its own individual life in order that the species may be perpetuated by means of blossom, and fruit, and seed, we behold in it, as in a glass, a very striking natural example of the law of self-sacrifice; that law which pervades all nature, and upon which the welfare and stability of nature depend. And it is a most interesting circumstance, that it is in this self-sacrifice of the plant that all its beauty comes out and culminates. The blossom and fruit in which it gives its own life for another life that is to spring from it are the loveliest of all its parts. God crowns this self-denial and blessing of others with all the glory of colour, and grace of form, and sweetness of perfume, and richness of flavour. The flesh of the apple, it may be remarked, has no purpose to serve in the economy of the plant itself. It is merely an excretion of the plant, produced in large measure by cultivation. And surely this capability of developing flesh which certain fruits possess in relation to the wants of man is one of the most interesting subjects of thought. In this respect man is a fellow-worker with God, in dressing and keeping the great garden of nature so that there shall be trees in it good for food and pleasant to the taste. The nature bound fast in fate has been made fluent by the freedom of the human will; and all the hints and outlines suggested by her roots, and fruits, and flowers are worked out and filled in by man in the exercise of this wondrous Divine gift. Passing strange is it that through this same freedom of will, he should, in the higher moral region, instead of being a fellow-worker with God, be less true to his proper end and destiny than the beasts that perish to their several instincts. Why is an apple round? The circular shape is that in which forces and substances are most perfectly balanced—in which there is the greatest economy of material, and the greatest resistance to external circumstances. It is the most stable of all forms, and therefore, characteristic of bodies in repose. The whole heavens and the whole earth are continually aiming at the spherical form; and they fail to reach or retain it because of their want of repose, insisting upon a shortcoming or departure from the spherical. Thus the apple becomes to us a very significant object, when we see in its round form a striking illustration of the same law that is shaping the earth around us, and the heavens

above us, and the heart within us. The skin or rind which hems in the apple, and by limiting completes and individualizes it, is also a most significant feature. It varies in thickness, smoothness, quality of texture, and colour in different varieties of apple; but in all it may be said to pass through the different stages of leaf and flower like the plant that bears it. Wonderful is the ministry of the green skin of plants. It changes inorganic into organic matter, and thus furnishes the starting-point of all life. Nowhere else on the face of the earth does this most important process take place. Everything else consumes and destroys; the green skin of plants alone creates and conserves. It is the mediator between the world of death and the world of life. Hence the significance of the green colour which appears so vividly in all young growing plants. We thus see that the little globe of the apple is a microcosm, representing within its miniature sphere the changes and processes which go on in the great world. Life and death, growth and decay, fight their battle on its humble stage. Fermentation and putrefaction, the two great processes under whose familiarity are hid some of the greatest wonders of the physical world, take place within it. It exhibits the characteristics of the vegetable, animal, and mineral kingdoms; it creates organic matter, and it consumes it; and in its motion within its little orbit, from its formation on the bough in summer to its fall to the ground in autumn, it illustrates the action of the mighty laws which bind the universe together. Our greatest philosopher, by his sublime theory of gravitation, connected it with the stars of heaven; and to every thoughtful mind it suggests far-reaching ideas which shed light upon the mysteries of our own world. (*H. Macmillan, D.D.*)

Ver. 7. **By the roes, and by the hinds of the field.**—*The roes and the hinds*:—The spouse was in the full enjoyment of fellowship with her Beloved. Her joy was so great as almost to overpower her, and yet, so nearly does fear tread upon the heels of joy, she was filled with dread lest her bliss should come to an end. She feared lest others should disturb her Lord, for if He were grieved she would be grieved also, and if He departed the banquet of her delight would be over. She was afraid even of her friends, the daughters of Jerusalem; she knew that the best can interrupt fellowship as well as the worst, and therefore she adjured even Zion's daughters not to sin against Zion's King. The adjuration which she used is a choice specimen of oriental poetry: she charges them, not as we should prosaically do, by everything that is sacred and true, but "by the roes, and by the hinds of the field."

I. "The roes and the hinds of the field" are creatures of great BEAUTY. Who can gaze upon them as they wander among the bracken without an inward admiration? Now, since nothing can be more lovely than communion with Jesus, the spouse exhorts the daughters of Jerusalem by all the loveliest objects in nature to refrain from disturbing it. A soul in converse with its God is the admiration of angels. Was ever a lovelier sight seen than Jesus at the table with the beloved disciple leaning on His bosom? Is not Mary sitting at the Master's feet a picture worthy of the choicest art? Do nothing, then, O ye who joy in things of beauty, to mar the fellowship in which the rarest beauty dwells. Neither by worldly care, nor sin, nor trifling make even the slightest stir which might break the Beloved's repose.

II. The next thought suggested "by the roes, and by the hinds of the field" is that of TENDER INNOCENCE. These gentle creatures are so harmless, so defenceless, so timid, that he must have a soulless soul who would do them harm or cause them fright. By all, then, that is tender the spouse beseeches her friends not to disturb her Beloved. He is so good, so kind, so holy, harmless, and undefiled, that the most indifferent ought to be ashamed to molest His rest. In fellowship with Jesus there is a tenderness which ought to disarm all opposition, and even command respectful deference. A soul communing with the Son of God challenges no enmity. The world may rise against proselyting zeal, or defiant controversy, or ostentatious ceremonialism, for these have prominence and power, and are fair game for martial spirits: but fellowship is quiet, retiring, unobtrusive, harmless. The saints who most abound in it are of a tender spirit, fearful to offend, non-resistant, and patient—surely it would be a superfluity of cruelty to wish to deprive them of their unselfish happiness, which deprives no heart of a drop of pleasure, and costs no eye a tear.

III. A third thought most certainly had place in the mind of the anxious spouse; she meant to adjure and persuade her friends to silence by everything which sets forth LOVE. The lilies and the roes have always been sacred to love. If you love, or are loved, or wish to be loved, have a reverent regard for those who commune with Jesus, for their souls take their fill of love, and to drive them from their

bliss would be inexcusable barbarity. O ye who have any hearts to fool for others, do not cause the bitterest of sorrow by depriving a sanctified soul of the sweetest of delights. Draw not nigh hither with idle tale, or wanton speech, or empty mirth: the place whereon thou standest is holy ground, for surely God is in that place where a heart enamoured of the altogether Lovely One delights itself in the Lord. IV. Once more, upon the very surface of the figure lies the idea of DELICATE SENSITIVENESS. The roes and the hinds of the field are soon away if anything occurs to disturb them. In this respect they set forth to the life the speediness with which the Beloved departs when He is annoyed by sin. The Lord our God is a jealous God. In proportion to the fire of love is the heat of jealousy, and therefore our Lord Jesus will not brook a wandering affection in those greatly beloved ones to whom He manifests Himself. It needs constant watchfulness to maintain constant fellowship. If we would be favoured above others we must be more on our guard than others are. He who becomes "a man greatly beloved" must needs keep his heart with sevenfold diligence, for to whom much is given of him much will be required. (*C. H. Spurgeon.*)

Vers. 8-17. The voice of my Beloved.—*The voice of the Beloved*:—I. WHEN CHRIST IS AWAY FROM THE SOUL OF THE BELIEVER, HE SITS ALONE. Whatever be the mountains of Bethel that have come between his soul and Christ—whether he hath been seduced into his old sins, so that "his iniquities have separated again between him and his God, and his sins have hid his face from Him, that He will not hear"—or whether the Saviour hath withdrawn for a season the comfortable light of His presence for the mere trial of His servant's faith, to see if, when he "walketh in darkness and hath no light, he will still trust in the name of the Lord, and stay himself upon his God"—whatever the mountains of separation be, it is the sure mark of the believer that he sits desolate and alone. He cannot laugh away his heavy care, as worldly men can do. He cannot drown it in the bowl of intemperance, as poor blinded men can do. Even the innocent intercourse of human friendship brings no balm to his wound—nay, even fellowship with the children of God is now distasteful to his soul. II. CHRIST'S COMING TO THE DESOLATE BELIEVER IS OFTEN SUDDEN AND WONDERFUL. Some text of the Word, or some word from a Christian friend, or some part of a sermon, again reveals Jesus in all His fulness—the Saviour of sinners, even the chief. Or it may be that He makes Himself known to the disconsolate soul in the breaking of bread, and when He speaks the gentle words—"This is My body broken for you; this cup is the New Testament in My blood shed for the remission of the sins of many; drink ye all of it"—then he cannot but cry out, "The voice of my Beloved! behold, He cometh leaping upon the mountains, skipping upon the hills." III. CHRIST'S COMING CHANGES ALL THINGS TO THE BELIEVER, AND HIS LOVE IS MORE TENDER THAN EVER. The world of nature is all changed. Instead of the thorn comes up the fir tree, and instead of the brier comes up the myrtle tree. Every tree and field possesses a new beauty to the happy soul. The world of grace is all changed. The Bible was all dry and meaningless before; now, what a flood of light is poured over its pages! how full, how fresh, how rich in meaning, how its simplest phrases touch the heart! The house of prayer was all sad and dreary before—its services were dry and unsatisfactory; but now, when the believer sees the Saviour, as he hath seen Him heretofore within His holy place, his cry is,—*"How amiable are Thy tabernacles, O Lord of Hosts, etc."* The garden of the Lord was all sad and cheerless before; now tenderness towards the unconverted springs up afresh, and love to the people of God burns in the bosom—then they that fear the Lord speak often one to another. The time of singing the praises of Jesus is come, and the turtle voice of love to Jesus is once more heard in the land; the Lord's vine flourishes, and the pomegranate buds, and Christ's voice to the soul is, *"Arise, My love, My fair one, and come away."* IV. OBSERVE THE THREEFOLD DISPOSITION OF FEAR, LOVE, AND HOPE, which this visit of the Saviour stirs up in the believer's bosom. These three form, as it were, a cord in the restored believer's bosom, and a threefold cord is not easily broken. (*R. M. McChesney.*) **Behold, He cometh, leaping upon the mountains, skipping upon the hills.**—*The mountains of Judah*:—One of the most striking features of this book of Solomon's Song is that of liveliness. We find the Church here represented in the liveliness of her affections to Christ, to God; we here see the Saviour in the liveliness of His love, and of His activities towards the Church; and so He is represented as a roe, or as a young hart, expressive of freedom and activity. I. THE MOUNTAINS, THE HILLS OF IMPEDIMENT WHICH THE SAVIOUR OVERCOMES. I will here take the Saviour leaping upon the mountains, skipping

upon the hills, to denote with what triumph and with what certainty He enables all His people to overcome all their troubles. II. Take the mountains and the hills to denote THE ETERNAL TRUTHS OF THE GOSPEL, as spoken of in this book,—the mountains of eternity. "The voice of my Beloved! behold, He cometh leaping upon the mountains, skipping upon the hills," of division. There is God's everlasting love to Jacob in contradistinction to Esau; God's everlasting love to His own, in contradistinction to the others; and Christ glorified in that mountain of division. There is God's eternal election, and Christ gloried in the same, and commands His disciples to rejoice that their names are written in heaven. There is His eternal achievement by which He hath redeemed His people, and distinguished them from all others by that eternal redemption, for none but the redeemed can learn that song that the redeemed sing. "The mountains of division." Then comes regeneration; that brings His people up to Mount Zion—mountain of division. Then comes resurrection to life; then comes glorification. Here is a range of mountains ranging from eternity to eternity. (*J. Wells.*) *An absent Christ yet beloved*.—1. An absent Christ is yet a beloved Christ to His true Church, and to the truly believing soul. 2. The spouse of Christ will know her Beloved's voice, though He hath a while been absent. 3. The spouse of Christ will greatly rejoice to hear her Beloved's voice, especially after a time of absenting Himself. 4. Though Christ may withdraw, and absent Himself from His Church, and from the souls of His people, yet He will come. 5. When He comes, He will come skipping upon the mountains and leaping upon the hills, openly and hastily, and trampling all difficulties and impediments under His feet. 6. The Church, and the true members of it, will by the eye of faith discern Christ coming, skipping upon the mountains. (*John Collinges, D.D.*) *Christ's coming to His spouse to be beheld*.—Believing souls in the time of His withdrawing from them may and ought to behold Him again returning to them. I. Christ's return to His spouse after an absence may be beheld by a believer. (1) He came by His Incarnation. (2) He cometh to His people in the influences of His grace, to comfort, quicken, strengthen them. (3) He cometh in the influences of His providence, to protect, save, rescue and deliver His people. (4) He cometh to judgment, and His reward is with Him to render to every one according to his work. II. A believer may behold Christ's coming, in many sure and faithful promises. III. The believer sees Him coming in the sure words of prophecy. IV. His coming may be beheld in the steps of His providence. (1) To a particular soul in the influences of His grace. (2) To the public assemblies of His people in the influences of His common providences. (3) To the universal judgment. Signs of this are:—(a) Plenty of seducers (*Matt. xxiv. 4.*) (b) Great commotions in the world, and other judgments of God. (c) Abounding of iniquity and decay of religion. (d) Great security of sinners. (e) Alterations in the course of nature. (*Ibid.*) *Lessons of the Spring*.—Whatever these words may or may not mean in any deep, spiritual sense, they may at least be applied to the Spring-time and the Summer. I. AS WE FEEL THE INFLUENCES OF THE GROWING SPRING, THEY SUGGEST TO US THE IDEA OF ORDER. By the end of the Winter we are apt to feel as if we had the end of all inanimate nature. But the first buds of Spring bring to mind the order of nature more vividly than such frequent changes as the succession of day and night, which become so familiar that we fail to mark their lessons. II. SPRING IMPRESSES US WITH THE MANIFESTATION OF POWER. It returns with a great manifestation of force. Who can compute the aggregate weight now lifting in the vegetable creation all over this land, in ten thousand times ten thousand billions and billions of plants, from the tiny grass-blade to the giant oak? There is a moral aspect here also. The power which wields this force is on the side of righteousness. It is the same as that which rules the hearts of men, and makes their lives and actions to praise God, and bring about His will on earth. III. THE INCOMING SPRING DELIGHTS US WITH ITS EXHIBITION OF PROGRESSIVENESS. I watch a tree opposite my dwelling with ever-increasing interest. This tree in Winter seemed dead, until as Spring approached a single bud peeped forth. After neglecting to look for a few days I was yesterday surprised to see it clothed in every branch with leaves. Ah, what progressiveness! The kingdom of Spring "cometh not by observation." So with the "kingdom of God"—the kingdom of goodness in the earth. Has Christianity made no advance? Compare to-day with yesterday, and, as in a tree, we see but little change. But think of the treatment of the insane, or of prisoners, now, and even so lately as only fifty years ago! Is there no advance there? Compare the pictures drawn by writers of the former day with what we now take as a matter of course, and we seem to be living in almost a new world. The function of Christianity in the world is the

bettering of men in physical, moral, and spiritual progress ; and the work, though gradual, is sure. Therefore learn this lesson : Be patient ! You cannot take the bellows of the sky and blow the heat of heaven into greater intensity, to hasten God's work in nature or in grace. Be patient, as God is patient. His policy is broadly progressive. In means of Gospel privilege God's kingdom grows as under glass ; but in heathen lands the progress is more slow—yet none the less sure. God's will shall triumph in the end. He can afford to wait, and we should follow His example. IV. WE LEARN FROM THE SPRING THE HOPE OF RECOVERY. The Spring-time is a recovering. So with grace. Salvation is a recovering—not only a setting up of something new. There was once a golden age for the race, but we have descended to an iron age ; nay, even to an age of clay, and broken clay at that. But there is a good day coming, when the earth shall be filled with more than its original blessedness. This blessedness is through Christ, in whom alone trusting you may surely find eternal life. (*L. D. Bevan, D.D.*)

Vers. 10-13. **Rise up, my love, my fair one, and come away. For, lo, the winter is past, the rain is over and gone.**—*A Sermon for Spring*.—The works of creation are pictures to the children of God of the secret mysteries of grace. The very seasons of the year find their parallel in the little world of man within. Each particular season has its duty. The husbandman finds that there is a time to plough, a time to sow, a time to reap ; there is a season for vintage, and a period for the pruning of the vine ; there is a month for the planting of herbs, and for the ingathering of seeds. To everything there is a time and a purpose, and every season has its special labour. It seems from the text, that whenever it is springtime in our hearts, then Christ's voice may be heard saying, "Arise, my love, my fair one, and come away." Whenever we have been delivered from a dreary winter of temptation or affliction, or tribulation,—whenever the fair spring of hope cometh upon us, and our joys begin to multiply, then we should hear the Master bidding us seek after something higher and better, and we should go forth in His strength to love Him more, and serve Him more diligently than aforesaid. I. First, with regard to THE UNIVERSAL CHURCH OF CHRIST. The history of Christ's Church is a varied year of many seasons. She has had her high and noble processions of victory ; she has had her sorrowful congregations of mourners during times of disaster and apparent defeat. Commencing with the life of Christ, what a smiling spring it was for the world when the Holy Spirit was poured out in *Pentecost*. The bride arose, charmed by the heavenly voice of her spouse, she girt on her beautiful garments and for some hundred years or more, she did come away ; she came away from her narrowness of spirit, and she preached to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ : she came away from her attachment to the State, and she dared to confess that Christ's kingdom was not of this world : she came away from her earthly hopes and comforts, for "they counted not their lives dear unto them that they might win Christ and be found in Him : " she came away from all ease and rest of body, for they laboured more and more abundantly, making themselves sacrifices for Christ. Alas, alas, that season passed away, the Church grew dull and sleepy ; she left her Lord, she turned aside, she leaned upon an arm of flesh, courting the endowments of earthly kingdoms, then there came a long and dreary winter, the dark ages of the world, the darker ages of the Church. At last the time of love returned, when God again visited His people and raised up for them new apostles, new martyrs, new confessors. The time of Luther and Calvin, and Melancthon, and of Knox was come—heaven's sunny days when once again the frost should give way to approaching summer. Then it was that men could say once again, "The winter is passed," priestcraft has lost its power, the rain is over and gone ; false doctrines shall no more be as tempests to the Church ; the flowers appear on the earth—little Churches ; plants of God's right hand planting, are springing up everywhere. Oh ! would to God that the Church could then have heard her Master's voice, "Rise up my love, my fair one, and come away." And now, brethren, in these days we have had another season of refreshing. God has been pleased to pour out His Spirit upon men again. He speaks to each denomination according to its need, but to the same import, "Rise up and come away ; leave deadness and coldness and wrong-doing and hardness and harshness, and bitterness of spirit ; leave idleness and slothfulness and lukewarmness ; rise up and come away. Come away to preach the Gospel amongst the heathen ; come away to reform the masses of this wicked city ; come away from your little heartedness ; from your coldness of spirit, come away : the land is before you ; go up and possess it." II. Methinks the text has a very SPECIAL VOICE TO US AS A CHURCH. We must

use the Scripture widely, but yet personally. While we know its reference to the universal Church, we must not forget its special application to ourselves. We, too, have had a season of refreshing from the presence of the Lord. A glad period of abundant increase in which there has been as many converts as we could receive, till every officer of the Church has had his hands full in seeing enquirers, and we have only had time to stop now and then and take breath, and say, "What hath God wrought?" Well, what ought we to do? I hear the Master saying, "Rise up, my love, my fair one, and come away." I hear Jesus speaking to this Church, and saying, "Where much is given, there much shall be required." Serve not the Lord as other Churches, but yet more abundantly. III. WHEN THE TIME OF THE BRIDAL OF THE SOUL HAS ARRIVED TO EACH CONVINCED SINNER, THEN ALSO THERE ARE SPECIAL DUTIES. Young convert, young believer, in the dawn of thy piety, Jesus says, "Rise up, my love, my fair one, and come away." He asks thee to come out from the world and make a profession of thy faith in Him now: put it not off; it is the best time to profess thy faith whilst thou art young, while as yet to thee the days come not, nor the years draw nigh, when thou shalt say, "I have no pleasure in them." Make haste and delay not to keep His commandments. Arise, and be baptized. Come ye out from among the world, be ye separate, and touch not the unclean thing; follow Christ in this perverse generation, that you may hear Him say at the last, "Of you I am not ashamed, for you were not ashamed of Me in the day when I was despised and rejected of men." In this your early time, dedicate yourselves to God. IV. It may be that you and I have had winters of dark trouble, succeeded by soft SPRINGS OF DELIVERANCE. Now have we our assurance back again; and Christ is near to us, and we have fellowship with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ. Well, then, what are we to do? Why, the Master says to us, "Rise up, and come away." Now is the time when we should mount up to be nearer to Himself. Now that the day dawns and the shadows flee away, let us seek our beloved amid the bed of spices, and by the lilies where he feeds. (*C. H. Spurgeon.*) *Spring* should remind us of—I. THE INTRODUCTION OF THE GOSPEL DISPENSATION. 1. The Jewish dispensation may fitly be compared to winter. 2. The opening of the Gospel dispensation resembled the advent of spring. It was caused by the rising of the Sun of Righteousness. II. TIMES OF REFRESHING FROM THE PRESENCE OF THE LORD. 1. Seasons of awakening in the experience of individuals. 2. Seasons of reformation in the history of the Church. III. THE GLORIOUS RESURRECTION OF THE SAINTS, AND THE FULL REALIZATION OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD AND CHRIST. (*Evangelical Preacher.*) *A Spring Sermon*.—I. SOME OF THE NATURAL CHARACTERISTICS OF SPRING. 1. Life will be felt to be a predominant feature. The sap is rising, with its quickening energies, through every plant and tree. The buds are opening with the elasticity and glow of life. From the nests of birds are issuing the first quivering strains of the young feathered host whose liquid music shall soon be heard rippling through all the woods: "the time of the singing of birds is come." But amongst men death is still to be seen in dark contrast. There is bodily death; the passing bell is tolling through all these spring days. There is mental death, where ignorance, blind prejudice, and superstition prevail. And, worst of all, there is spiritual death. Men are "dead in trespasses and sins." To such the cry comes, "Awake, thou that sleepest." 2. Beauty shines forth in spring. We see it in unfallen blossoms and opening flowers, in the many hues of early foliage that soften and relieve each other, in the cloud-dappled sky and its moving shadows on the earth, and in the fresh clear landscape that looks as though the rain of winter and the sun of summer had combined to clothe it with rainbow radiance. 3. Beauty consists in due proportions being maintained between each part and the perfect harmonizing of them as a whole. Does your soul present this picture of spiritual beauty, or is it deformed and distorted by alienation from God? Spring proffers health and strength. The sick yearn for its balmy breath. It ministers additional vigour to the robust. But how does it find you—weakly yielding to besetting sins, victims of vices that will hurry you to the gates of hell, poor, hapless slaves of Satan, crying out, "Who will deliver me from this body of death?" Oh! to you thus groaning in impotence and sin comes a reviving strength in the beams of the Sun of Righteousness. 4. Joy and gladness distinguish the spring-time. The winds laugh as they play through the bowing trees. The leaves rustle as though the feet of fairy dancers were pattering on them. A chorus of joy rolls up to the clouds from "a thousand voices full and sweet." Is your heart glad too? Accept the offer of mercy that is made now by Christ, who cries, "Come unto Me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." 5. We are impressed at this season with the proofs of

riches and wealth that are manifest around. "Thou crownest the year with Thy goodness, and Thy paths drop fatness." But yet with all this external plenty there may be leanness in the soul. The spirit may be poverty-stricken, starving, because it refuses to be fed by the hand of God, preferring the husks of this world to the corn that may be eaten in the Father's house. 6. Lastly, we notice youth and promise as characteristics of spring. We look forward to a further development of what we see. The green blades of wheat shall become golden stalks of corn. The blushing blossoms shall give place to ripe mellow fruit. Nature is but young. It has yet to glow with maturity and to droop with age. The dew must glisten through many mornings and the sun must shine through many moons ere the moaning winds of autumn sweep the leaves to their graves. Some of you are in the spring of life. You are hopeful, and afford promise of great things. But are you beginning life "looking unto Jesus," as your Saviour and example—seeking to grow up into the perfect stature of man in Christ Jesus? If you are not yours will be an aimless, fruitless life. II. THE REVELATION CONCERNING THE DIVINE NATURE WHICH SPRING AFFORDS. 1. Spring testifies to the faithfulness of God. Never do the seasons cease to recur at the appointed times. The snows of winter do not forget to melt. The ice-bound rivers do not remain for ever held in silent rest. He that never slumbers nor sleeps rolls the earth on, without any exercise of care or thought on our part, until the sun's rays can warm and revive the forms that winter's cold has benumbed. Surely the frequent manifestations of His faithfulness in nature should inspire us with a nobler confidence, and cause us to cry with Job, "Though He slay me yet will I trust Him." 2. But not less plainly revealed is the goodness of God. With how many hands do we see God, in the spring time, promising to supply our coming wants! The lowliest fruit of the earth proclaims that God is love. And this regard is manifested to all alike. The sun shines on the evil and on the good. But how do you regard this goodness when it is revealed in the form of mercy towards you who have sinned so greatly against God? What think you of the statement—"God so loved the world"? 3. How many evidences of the wisdom of God we may gather up at this spring time! Take that leaf, and mark the wonderful system of veins by which nutriment is supplied to the remotest part; or that flower, and see what wonderful provision is made for the propagation of the species; or that bird's feather that lies on the ground, and see how its cylindrical pen gives it lightness and strength designing it for flight. In these minute objects that are scattered all around now we may trace Divine wisdom. But in general results we may see it equally. It is wisdom that arranges the gradual transition from winter to summer, thus adapting the change to the human constitution. It is wisdom that provides that man shall be tasked with ploughing and sowing before the reaping season comes, for were there not these healthful labours, idleness and sin would soon enervate and destroy the race. And this wisdom is that in which we invite you to confide rather than in your own erring judgments. May you learn to discern the wisdom of God in redemption, and be able with adoring faith to adopt the language of the apostle, and cry, "O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God!" 4. Lastly, we will advert to the resources of God that are made known to us in the spring. We see them in the provision made for the support of the myriad living creatures that awaken to life as the spring opens. We find them also in the arrangements made for maintaining the fertility of the soil. The leaves of last autumn as they decay render the earth more rich this year. Let us learn then to trust in Him who invites us by His love, and encourages us by His wisdom and infinite power, to rely upon Him. III. THE RELATION OF SPRING TO THE DOCTRINE OF RESURRECTION. Spring presents the most appropriate figures whereby to represent resurrection. The forms of animal and vegetable life that lived through the last summer, and which either died or passed into a torpid condition at the approach of winter, now arise again in all their wonted beauty and vigour. The insect breaks forth from its chrysalis state, and spreads its bright gauzy wings in the sunshine. The seed decays, and from it arises a stately stem to wave with joyous life in the breeze. It is not without interest that the period of the resurrection of our Lord is coincident, at least in our country, with the spring-time. Let us rejoice as we read the record of that wondrous event, which confirms our faith in the Divine character of the Saviour, which proclaims His sacrifice to have been accepted, and which celebrates His victory over death and hell. This spring-time points us also to a more general resurrection of which our Lord's was the first-fruit, when through earth's valleys, and in the caverns of the deep, the trumpet-call of the angel shall be heard winding, summoning buried millions to the judgment-seat of

Christ. In that resurrection we must take part. To the judgment-seat of Christ we must come. If you should now begin to live a life of faith in the Son of God, it will be the brightest spring that has ever blossomed around you. It will be spring in your soul. All the latent powers you possess of knowing, of loving, and of having fellowship with God shall awake to life. The lost likeness of God shall be restored. Your soul shall feel the harmony with extended nature renewed. The thrill of holy joy, and the glow of Divine life, shall be felt, with new and spiritual meaning you shall sing, "The winter is past." (*R. S. Harrington.*) *Spring*.—I. **SPRING AN EMBLEM OF YOUTH.** Winter, of age. 1. Spring is the season of hope, the dawn of the year. Looking forward. So youth is the season of bright anticipations. 2. The season of preparation. Ploughing, sowing, etc. So youth. Laying foundations of character and success. 3. The season of activity. So youth. 4. Fleeting. Youth soon merges into manhood, care and trouble comes. II. **SPRING AN EMBLEM OF CONVERSION.** Winter, of the unconverted state. Cold, dark, dreary. 1. The season of renewal. "Thou renewest the face of the earth." Conversion is the renewal of the heart. "Renew a right spirit within me." 2. The season of joy and gladness. "Time of the singing of birds is come." Conversion produces joy. Eunuch "went on his way rejoicing." III. **SPRING AN EMBLEM OF REVIVAL.** Winter, of declension. Spiritual barrenness. A revival needed both in churches and individuals. "O Lord, revive Thy work." IV. **SPRING AN EMBLEM OF RESURRECTION.** Winter, of death. 1. Resurrection of Christ. Then the Winter of the world indeed. The race was filled with hope, joy, gladness. 2. Our resurrection at the last day. V. **SPRING SUGGESTS HEAVEN.** "There everlasting Spring abides." May the Winter of our spiritual apathy be past and the Springtide of a new life be ours. (*E. Ashton Jones.*) *Spring and Summer*.—We shall be following the example of Christ, and shall do well, when we take the words of the royal lover and apply them as the words of Divine invitation to human souls; making spring and summer, with their flowers and grass, trees and fruits, and the birds and beasts, speak on behalf of God and Christ, of Divine love and mercy, of perfect righteousness and justice, and of human activity and life. I. **RETURNED SPRING AND COMING SUMMER REPROVE AND CONDEMN OUR SINFUL SOULS.** Jesus Christ was sent into the world to live, and suffer, and die for human salvation; the Holy Spirit is given to quicken our spiritually dead souls into newness of life; the Church was established by Christ to preserve, and perpetuate, and extend the Gospel of salvation; the Sabbath-day and the ministry of the Word, and the public services of religion, are divinely appointed to bring the truth, and the power, and the love of God, with living energy from living hearts to cold and dead souls. This is the spiritual order of God for the regeneration of men. And this order is as powerful and effective on willing minds and obedient hearts, as returned spring and coming summer make the flowers to appear on the earth, the trees to enrobe themselves with foliage, the grain hid in the soil to grow, the birds of the air to sing, and all animate nature to join in the universal enjoyment of the world. II. **Returned spring and coming summer, with their silent processes continually and unchangeable at work, PROVE THE DIVINE POWER AND WISDOM OF GOD.** Divine power and wisdom were no more visible in Christ creating and multiplying food for the hungry thousands from a few loaves, than in those slow, silent processes by which the seed springs up and bears the full corn in the ear during the course of spring and summer and autumn, and is multiplied some thirty, some sixty, and some an hundredfold. The power and wisdom of God would no more be seen in a bare, leafless, flowerless dell or grove instantly clothed with foliage and blossom of every variety of form and colour, than in the same results gradually achieved by silent, hidden, but interesting processes extending over weeks or months. The processes are the same in the first case, though accelerated or made to act in a moment of time, instead of being spread over weeks. No power other than the infinite power and wisdom of the Divine Creator could combine the influences and forces and agencies necessary to produce in either case such a scene of beauty and sublimity. III. **Returned spring and coming summer DIFFUSE A SWEET, SOOTHING, AND SACRED INFLUENCE.** The fields and dells and hills, the air perfumed with the breath of flowers, the bursting of buds, the spreading of luxuriant foliage bearing every shade of green, the light of heaven shining down,—all speak of the perfect goodness and the sweet loveliness of God. Even the names by which flowers are commonly known have a language of their own, by which they give utterance to pure thoughts, kindly feelings, and generous words, and speak of sympathy and affection, truth and goodness, peace and love. How beautifully, yet how marvellously, has God revealed Himself in nature; how

sweet, how clear, and how lovingly does He stamp His presence and the attributes of His character upon all things, for He has made all things for beneficent ends. Even through Nature, the door of the future world is opened to our view. The forms and colours and substances of things are perfectly adapted to preserve and promote our earthly comfort and life; and may we not assume there will be in glory the same natural, pleasing, and perfect fitness of all things to preserve and promote our glorious life in the likeness of Jesus Christ? The same God who rules and reigns on earth also rules and reigns in heaven. IV. Returned spring and coming summer, IN AWAKENING THE ENERGIES AND ACTIVITIES OF NATURE FROM THEIR WINTER'S SLEEP, CALL US TO ARISE TO ACTIVE WORK. It is God that worketh in us both to will and to do of His good pleasure; and yet we must both will and do as He works in us by His Word and Spirit. The energies of our spiritual nature must have opportunities of exercise until they form gradually in us habits of grace and goodness. We must carefully form and actively maintain habits of piety, such as prayer, faith, love, self-restraint, reverence, and decision. We must sustain a conscience void of offence, and sensitive of evil. We must abhor selfishness, pride, and immorality. We must cultivate close attachment to Jesus Christ, and love Him as our Saviour for His love to us. We must live in sympathy with every good work, and with all good men; and we must give full play to our living activities in doing good. (*W. Simpson.*) *The Risen Christ the Church's spring*:—I. A SYRIAN SPRING-TIME. 1. Winter past, and rain over. In Syria, winter rains descend in torrents unknown to us, but at a certain time spring at once succeeds, and for months clouds are never seen (1 Sam. xii. 16-19; Prov. xxvi. 1). 2. Change marvellous. Tender grass springs out of earth (2 Sam. xxxiii. 4). Ground enamelled with lovely flowers. Fig-tree puts forth her green fruit, and vines their fragrant smell. 3. Singing and voice of the turtle heard. Its presence a sure sign of the return of spring (Jer. viii. 7). II. CHRIST'S RESURRECTION A SPIRITUAL SPRING-TIME. 1. History of early Church. Contrast apostles as seen in the Gospels and in the Acts—winter and spring. 2. History of religious revivals. Churches for a season in wintry state, Scripture pastures snow-covered, spiritual streams ice-bound. When, however, Christ is preached, not only as a pattern of life, not only as propitiation for sin, but as the risen Saviour pleading at God's right hand, then the Spirit works a wondrous change. Barren winter and dark days no more, the Sun of Righteousness shines, spring returns, pastures are green, waters flow softly, fruits of righteousness abound. Converts grow in grace, as willows by watercourses. 3. History of individual believer. May have felt dark and dead; but when the Spirit quickens this truth in him then day breaks, shadows flee away. Realizing in Christ's Resurrection God's acceptance of the finished work on his behalf, he henceforth walks in holy peace and liberty,—each day a Sabbath, a sacrament in every meal; he loves to break the costly spikenard in the ardour of spiritual love and joy. III. CHRIST'S RETURN WILL BE A NEVER-ENDING SPRING. At His coming all things will be made new. The winter of sin and sorrow will be past, and there will be no more sin and no more tears. Then the dew of herbs (Isa. xxvi. 19). When, at the voice of the Beloved, the Bride comes forth from her wintry grave, and enters with Him the garden of God, then creation itself will be delivered from the bondage of corruption (Rom. viii. 21); then mountains and hills will rejoice, and trees will clap their hands, whilst the Church serves its Lord with gladness, and comes into His presence with a song. (*Ep. Barstley.*) *Spring*:—The most obvious analogy which the spring suggests is—I. THE RESURRECTION OF MANY FORMS AND KINDS OF LIFE, WHICH FOR A PERIOD OF TIME WERE DEAD. 1. Spring represents us with a marvellous example of the sufficiency of means to produce, in a short time, a great change in the appearance of the earth. The existence of this power is calculated to remove all doubt from the mind regarding those agencies which shall be employed to awaken the buried inhabitants of Time from their wide-spread places of rest. 2. As spring brings back to us familiar objects, so the resurrection will re-unite us to those we loved and from whom we had parted on earth, with sorrow. As then, we visit the resting-places of those dear to us on "God's acre," as the Germans term the graveyard, and see the violets blooming above their tombs, and the buds appearing on the trees, the heart is comforted by those emblems of hope, and feels that those from whom it has parted are not lost, but gone before, and that they shall meet them on the resurrection morn. II. THE RENEWING OF THE FACE OF THE EARTH IS A TYPE OF A RENEWING OF THE SOUL. As the day comes out of night, or as the spring emerges from winter, so the soul passes from death into the fresh light of a new life by the

power of the Holy Spirit. "Old things pass away and all things become new." And as spring gives a tone to the sky, the cloud, the air and the fields, so the new life of the soul, being diffusive, gives a tone and colouring to the thoughts, the feelings, and the actions of the Christian. 1. This progress of the soul in the Divine life is, like the progress of the spring, gradual. Sin does not easily relax its grasp; old habits are not thrown off at will; so that the virgin joys of the new life of the soul are often chilled by the cold influences of sin, striving to renew their reign like the winter. 2. This progress of the soul in the Divine life is, like the progress of spring, irresistible. Winter must give place to spring. So faith, like a grain of mustard seed in the soul, will germinate and expand, and progress, and establish itself in holy desires, fervent affections, and correct thoughts, under the life-giving influence of the Sun of Righteousness. 3. This progress of the soul in the Divine life is, like the progress of spring, pleasing. As spring introduces us to new pleasures; the renewing of the soul leads us to fresh delights. III. SPRING IS ILLUSTRATIVE OF YOUTHFUL LIFE. Spring is a period of importance to the husbandman; so is youth. (*Homilist.*) "I will arise—I who have resisted so long—and go to my Father." It may be so with them there; but here there is but little chance for them. "The moth shall eat them up like a garment, and the worm shall devour them like wool." (*Stopford Brooke, M.A.*) Spring:—No wonder is so wonderful as the birth of spring. Music, painting, and poetry, all art and every artist has felt its power to quicken life and warm emotion, and has striven to express its charm and thrill of joy. Every year we are moved by its coming, morally and physically. No one who heard the warm west wind of this April flowing through the trees and felt the secret stirring that was made in blood and brain, but knew the influence of spring upon the body. As the sap ran upwards through the flowers, so the blood went swifter through the veins, and the physical emotion sent its message to that immaterial life of thought and feeling which we call the spirit. And the spirit receiving the impressions, took and moulded them into ideas by the imagination and sent the ideas forth to give motives to the will. The first thought that occurs is the abounding life of spring. Through all, there ran, as the first mark of life, the sense and power of love. All things that lived seemed to sacrifice their best in colour, beauty, and life for one another; I could not think of any one leaf or plant without thinking of the rest, so deep was the impression of the brotherhood of all, so strong was the feeling of ceaseless intercommunion that came to me from the universe of spring, and told me that love was its spirit. And not only love lived there, but joy that was intense. The face of every flower was like that of a radiant child. The air shook with the joyful thoughts of the birds, the dance of insect life had begun, and the airy ravishment of the butterfly born too soon, was the expression of the life that trembled with delight through every animal. Life, love, joy, what are these in their tale to the spirit, as spring sends them flowing into our hearts? They are a revelation of the Being of God. Its first attribute is infinite life. Decay, death, sorrow, dullness, the wearing out of feeling, they are only the accidents of our trial time, and in themselves part of life and not of death. Let them touch us as they will, they cannot last for ever; for they are weaker than life, when life is God. Again, this life is Love—love in God, the same as goodness. What else can it be but love, for it is creative? That there is such a thing as creation; that life and joy come out of death and pain; that the wonder of the spring is born out of the travail of the winter, is proof enough to those who feel how impossible creation is to evil, that it is goodness—goodness that stream forth as love, love that is life in all things, that is the spirit of the universe. And, again, if life and love be one in the being of God, that being must also be joy, infinite, self-exultant, varying through every phase of quiet and of rapture. Words would fail to paint one moment of its triumphant fulness; joy is the glory of God. True, it is dear to us who need sympathy in pain, who know so much of pain, to feel, through Christ, that God can be touched with sorrow for us, that it pitieth Him to see us in the dust, but that is not of the absolute in His Being. The essence of His Being is, on the contrary, joy, intense, overflowing, streaming in rapturous life through universes of life, material and immaterial. These, then, are the three thoughts of God's Being that we bind up with the woods and fields and streams of spring. We take the same thoughts now and bring them to touch on our own life. Spring is the image of our youth, and the lesson we learn from it is—that our youth should be Life, and Love, and Joy, and that these are its natural companions. Life lives with youth, and its first rush is wonderful. Thoughts break out into leaf, feelings into blossoms; a single

day in that time of sun and rain may make the whole heart like a woodland ; when the foliage of sweet thoughts first appears the grass is not seen for flowers. The first touch of love, the touch of a new aspiration, the winning of one new knowledge, may loosen the bonds of a thousand seeds of thought, and set them shooting upwards into growth and life. We are often born in a day ; life then begins, and I hold it our duty in youth to put our whole force into living. There is yet another lesson. Along with the leaves is born the cup of the flower, and with the flowers are involved the seeds. In all true life future life is hidden ; provision is made for that production which is the first mark of life, for continuance of life and for its flower. Think of that truth as the spring moves your blood. Is there the element of continuance in anything you do ? In your life are there seeds which, when decay comes, will insure a new outburst of life ? Have you some certainty that you have life enough to flower ? Is the true flower of a beautiful or useful life already formed in you ? Are you showing forth already the beauty and sweetness and charm which tell that the flower is coming ? If these things be so, then you are living the fullest and the quickest life, the life of which spring is the image, of which God is the reality. But you cannot have in youth the life of spring without also having its love. Make the brotherhood of the flowers, their intercommunion of good, their joyous sacrifice of all they have in order to give joy, the example and impulse of your youth ; make your springtide the reflection of the spring in love. Pour forth all the odour, colour, charm and happiness you have to all your friends, to your home, to your daily society, to the poor and sorrowful, the joyous and prosperous. Charm the world by love. Brighten darkened lives, soften the rude, make a sunshine of peace in stormy places, cover the faults and follies of men with the flowers of love. And, finally, this will be joy. Not the wild, self-exhausting joy of wild persons wildly wrought, but something which, though quieter, is even more intense, only it is not over tense. The strings of life are in tune, not stretched almost to breaking ; and music comes, not discord ; music in which others rejoice, in which we ourselves rejoice. Life led by love has as its child the radiancy of joy. It is a joy none can take away, because it has its roots in the joy which we make in others, because it has its deepest root in the joy which life and love make in the being of God. (*Ibid.*) *Spring-time in nature and in experience* :—Nature teaches that to every season of trouble and overthrow there comes resurrection. In the deepest January of the year there is a nerve that runs forward to June. Life is never extinguished. That which seems to be death reaches forward and touches that which is vital. I. NATIONS SEEM TO HAVE THEIR PERIODS LIKE THE YEAR. Neither in civilization nor in Christian elements do they seem to mount up with steady growth. They move, rather, as it were in spirals. They often return as if falling back, and yet their progress, on the whole, is onward. II. DEEP CONVULSIONS AND EMBARRASMENTS OF ALL INDUSTRIAL PURSUITS ARE WONT TO GO ALONG WITH NATIONAL TRIALS. So it has been with us. To all those whose wheels of enterprise are blocked ; to all those whose past growths are withering ; to all whose roots are locked in the icy soil ; to all whose leaves are touched by the frost of disappointment—to them I say, the winter is past ; the time of the singing of birds has come. Wait a little ; some more snows may fall, and there may be some more frosts ; but the time of the singing of birds has come, and the voice of the turtle is heard in our affairs. III. THERE ARE THE SAME EXPERIENCES IN FAMILIES AS IN NATIONS AND INDUSTRIAL COMMUNITIES. There are some families that seem compelled to go to the promised land, as the Israelites did, through a desert. There are many that, having experienced long years of toil and suffering, come out only at last. But there are many that, having been prospered and happy, lapse into a state of want and trouble. The streams that swelled with prosperity, swell no more ; the birds that sang of prosperity sing no more. They come from wealth and comfort into distress and poverty. But are there no spring-like days that come upon the winter of troubles in the household ? Is it all blast, all blight, all burying ? Is there nothing but pale, white, enwrapping snow ? Are there no birds that ever fly athwart the sky of the bereaved family ? Is there an utter absence of everything like comfort and cheer ? Blessed be God, even though trouble may abide, joy comes too. IV. THE SAME IS EMINENTLY TRUE OF INDIVIDUALS. They know not why things have gone against them. If you were to hear some men's experience, you would think that they grow as the white pine grows, with straight grain, and easily split—for I notice that all that grow easy split easy. But there are some that grow as the mahogany grows, with veneering knots, and all quirks and contortions of grain. That is the best timber of the forest which has the

most knots. Everybody seeks it, because, being hard to grow, it is hard to wear out. And when knots have been sawn and polished, how beautiful they are! There are those who have fought the fight of great trouble in sickness. Not all the soldiers of God are in the battle-field. There are those there who are strong-backed, whose muscles are like brawn, whose bones are like flint, and whose faces, for zeal, are like the face of January, and for enthusiasm are like the face of July. But these are not God's only soldiers, nor his strongest soldiers. Some of God's most heroic soldiers are the bedridden. If sickness be God's will, even so. His will be done, not mine. The time of the singing of birds has come to such a heart. To such a heart spring has come, and summer is not far off. V. THERE ARE APPLICATIONS INNUMERABLE TO SPIRITUAL CONDITIONS. Many of you have cast your leaves. You have seen November, and gone wading through the cold winter of backsliding. But March has come round to you. A little bird began to sing right in your family. Before you thought of such a thing, you heard the singing of birds. It was your daughter that sung; or, it was the little child of your next-door neighbour. There is beginning to be a warmth in your heart. You are beginning to think of your declining days. You are beginning to yearn for the old love. You are beginning to say, "Is it not time for the winter to be gone, and for the spring to have come in my heart?" The time, oh! backsliding Christians; oh, wandering professor of religion; oh! child of God, beloved of Him, and yet forgetful of your Father and your Saviour—the time of the singing of birds has come to you. Rise up and rejoice! VI. WE ARE ALL OF US GOING THROUGH LIFE AS A KIND OF WINTER. We are as we go towards age, dropping our hair, and losing, one by one, our senses. We are drifting towards autumn. Then come the vacuous days of the winter of seeming uselessness—declines which men dread. How many hate age! This is the winter of human life, to be sure: but just beyond is the rising of that bright immortal spring where the birds of heaven sing, and which, when it has once begun, shall never be followed by winter, and shall never be visited by storms. We are all of us drawing near to the sweet spring of resurrection. (*H. W. Beecher.*) *The joy of spring:*—Spring is the season of resurrection, the period of renewed hope and quickened sensibilities, when the gloom of winter is forgotten in the anticipation of growing brightness and life. The spring is a season that awakens hope, that revives deadened sensibilities, that gives a man a new sense of life, and makes him feel young again. Milton tells us that the muses always came back to him in spring. He could not sing very much as a rule, in winter, but when spring came back the muses came. He caught the youthfulness and hopefulness of spring: he looked round, and saw life springing triumphantly out of the grave of winter: he saw the feeblest growths rejoice in a new life and beauty. Then, too, his own intellect, under the blessing and inspiration of his God, just as the flower under the blessing and inspiration of a spring sky, began to blossom anew. Spring, therefore, is a season that comes to all sensitive men with special freshness and inspiration. It is something to feel that after all death is not the mightiest thing even in this physical world. When the spring comes, life in its tenderest, loveliest, and most delicate forms springs out of the cold and lately frozen earth. Look at the little bud as it opens. What so delicate as the flower? Take it up and carry it in your hand; you have to guard against withering it by the warmth of your hand. And yet there it is—it has sprung up, almost before you know it, out of the cold and bare earth. The sun came in the brightness of his rising, and, under the genial effects of his warmth that little flower sprang up out of the clammy soil. Is not that a message for us? Can a life so exquisitely tender and so beautiful spring out of the desolate earth? Then I have learnt once more that all along the line, even in the physical world, life is triumphant. That even in the revolving year death only reigns for a brief season, and even then to answer the higher purposes of life in its rich and varied developments and outgrowths; so that when the proper season comes, life asserts itself anew, in new forms of beauty, that surprise the eye, and delight the heart. 1. The spring delights the eye—"The flowers appear on the earth." What are the uses of flowers? Surely one is the joy they give to life. It is as if God said to Nature, "I am about to give thee reviving power: see to it that the first things thou bringest forth shall be things of beauty, a joy to the child's eye, a solace to the heart of the invalid in the sick room, and a delight to the bedimmed vision of the aged ere the realities of another world dawn upon them. See to it that thou puttest on thy loveliest garb—not the useful for the moment so much as the delightful, which, however, shall be the promise of the useful by and by." Nature responds and sends forth its lovely flowers—"flowers appear on

the earth." But God has also higher motives than that. It is His will that the flowers should take their humble and doubtless secondary part, but a very important one, in our and in our children's education. He has not merely intended that we should be hard at work from morning to night, and see the buildings which our hands and other hands have erected, without seeing a field or becoming rapturous over an opening flower. No, He bids us go forth to the fields, as opportunity offers, and see how happy God would have His children be, "for the flowers appear in the earth." 2. But not only is the eye appealed to by the beauty of Nature, but also the ear by its music—"The time of the singing of birds is come." Out of the fulness of the heart the bird pours out its harmonies. This is the safety valve, or the bird would die of compression. It sends out the music because it cannot keep it in. This is the instinct that God has put in the heart of the bird, bidding him "tell out the joy that is in him." This is a blessed privilege. And as it is true of the bird, it ought to be true of the Christian. The Christian must sing out his joy like the bird, not for the sake of effect, but for the joy and relief that the very act gives. Wendell Holmes tells us that there are some men and women who "die with all their music in them." This is spoken of as one of the saddest possibilities of life. There are circumstances in life which have so oppressed them that they grow sullen, hopeless, and despairing. There is nothing more sad than such a sight. The Christian surely should be beyond that. O man, touch the strings of thy lyre, and out of those finger tips shall go forth harmonies into every string thou touchest. Do not sit down in the dust; lift up thy voice withal, to and for God. Speak for Christ, and sing of His love; and out of thy soul, even in trial and in affliction, shall inspiring harmonies go forth. 3. Not only does the spring gratify the eye and the ear, but also the smell. This is the third gate of which Bunyan speaks. Here we have a perfect picture of a peaceful home in the East. We have already read of the eye being gratified, and the ear charmed, and now we read of the tender grape giving a sweet smell. And so God speaks to us through the avenues of even our physical senses. It is His wish that we should all be happy on this bright spring day, and that, like the flowers and the birds, and sweet smelling blossoms, we should be full of praise to His name. (*D. Davies.*) *The spring and its voice*.—Spring has a great deal to say to us that may be worthy of our attention. She speaks to various characters. 1. We will, in the first place, listen to what spring has to say to the aged Christian. It is pregnant with hope, joy, and immortality, because God has put these precious things into his heart. 2. The spring has also something to say to the young Christian. The spring to you is pregnant with promise, full of hope. And when you look around on this wide-spread picture of Divine benevolence, and remember that all these things have come into existence at the voice of God, and reflect upon the fact that the God, who has again covered Nature with beauty and glory, is the God you serve and the Saviour that redeemed your spirit, spring may well teach you the importance of a strong and vigorous hope. What cannot He do for your spirit who can thus adorn Nature? But spring also teaches you that in connection with your religion there should be toil. How concerned the husbandman is to get in the seed on which their hopes of a crop depend. So it must be with you. Now is the time to grow in the knowledge of your Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. These bright and fair opportunities may never return. Remember, moreover, that you are bound, as Christians, to "contend earnestly for the faith once delivered to the saints"; but, in order that you may do so, you must understand what that faith is. You must love the Word of God, and ponder often and deeply over the precious Gospels, and study, also, the writings of good men. Get into your minds a goodly store of precious truth—a kind of bread-house to which you shall repair in other days, and get that spiritual nutriment which you will need. 3. The spring also speaks to the afflicted Christian. There may be some one here greatly tempted in soul. It may be there is winter within. Thou art ready to come to the conclusion that God hath forsaken thee; that there is death and destruction in this winter. But it is not so. Winter precedes the harvest-home; and so this spiritual winter is not intended to destroy, but to do a necessary work, as in Nature. God frequently brings winter into the hearts of His people that He may teach them His will. This winter may have come upon thee in love. It may be that roots of spiritual pride and presumption require to be rooted up, which have stifled the meekness and tenderness of thy love towards Christ. It may be that He has brought this winter upon thee to teach thee the vanity of the creature, and that without Christ there is no enjoyment, but that with the presence of Christ, even winter can be a joy to thee; while summer itself without Him, without Christ, would be a miserable

desert—a winter of desolation. 4. Spring also speaks to the slothful Christian. And what is the voice of spring to him? Awake, thou sluggard. Every green leaf which surrounds thee, all the various forms of life which encompass thy path, the very birds of the air reprove thee; all Nature speaks, and calls upon thee to arise from the dust, and shake thyself. Has not thy soil been waste long enough? 5. Spring also speaks to the backslider. All Nature is coming back to her original beauty and glory—coming out of the womb of winter. Does it not speak to thee, backslider? Thou hast wandered from the Lord, and it is now winter with thee. Thy soul is miserable. The smile of God is not upon thy spirit. But does not spring speak to thee, and say, come back again? By the remembrance of the past, by the patience of thy Lord whom thou hast pierced and wounded, return again. He says to thee, “Return, oh, backsliding children!” 6. Spring also speaks to the sinner—to the man who has been altogether unconcerned about the state of his soul. Dream not of heaven you who treat the Gospel as a fable and bring forth no fruits of contrition, of faith, hope, love, and meekness. Unless men have their Springtide here, they will not have it in the paradise above. (*W. P. Balfour.*) *The Spring-time call*:—Each succeeding season comes to the world with a new and peculiar influence. Spring has a different language from winter. She stirs different forces within the human frame. She evokes different feelings within the human heart. She hath a gladsome voice, and her step is altogether light and joyous. And men change under her influence; then they will come to bear the impress of summer’s hand, and then again grow sad and contemplative with autumn. And the Christian lives in this world and under these varying influences; and they, like all the multifarious forces which he feels, should prove religious,—favouring breezes to swell the sails of his Christian life; drawing powers to draw towards happiness and peace, and purity and God. Hence Christ’s exhortation to His Church in the text. I. He calls unto her through the **BEAUTY OF THE SPRING-TIME**. His exhortation hath for its emphasis, or one of its most beautiful settings, the blossoming flowers. “Arise, come away, for the flowers appear on the earth.” Scattered throughout the earth; blooming now upon mountain top, and now in deepest gorge; now lifting up its tiny form from out the crevasses of the ice-fields, and now painting itself in gorgeous hues beneath a tropical sun; now blooming in lonely desert, where no eye save that of God may note its beauty, and now upon the beaten thoroughfare lifting up its spiritual face beneath the rude gaze of the passers-by; now, in rich profusion, heaped upon the casket of death until its ghastliness is well-nigh abolished, and, now, in wreaths of orange and snow, lending the last charm and grace to animated beauty,—the flower, wherever it blooms, is a smile of God lingering upon the earth; the most delicate earthly blossoming of that spirit of beauty which God has breathed into all the works of His hand. And spring is full of flowers. She stretches forth her wand over the earth, and forthwith they start up in innumerable ranks of loveliness. She calls with her voice, and they come trooping in beautiful array to her side. She cries out that the winter is gone, and assured of safety, as an angel ambuscade, they lift up their smiling faces over all the earth. She breathes with the breath of the south wind over field and garden, and at once they rise up from their wintry graves, their spirits of life laden with ten thousand odours. And so God calls unto men through the voice of the spring; for this is the voice of flowers and of beauty. With the beauty which is external He would call unto that which belongs to the soul, and which is the beauty of holiness. As, then, during the coming days, and amid the opening glories of the spring-time, your Nature shall feel the softening influence, and flow out in warmer and swifter currents towards the lovely, the beautiful, and the good, know that all this is the voice of your Saviour speaking unto you, and saying, “Arise, come away.” Open your heart to the gentle and purifying influences which, at this season of the year, fill the air; for they will do you good and not evil. They will have for you a voice from God speaking of the beauty which is unfading,—the beauty of holiness, which blossoms perennially in the world above. II. The call of the Saviour is through the **JOY OF THE SPRING-TIME**. There is joy in the vernal season as well as beauty; and this joy is made the organ of the Saviour’s call: “The time of the singing of birds is come. Arise, my love, and come away.” As the Creator of all things, He is the Author of all the joy which fills the world, and which meets in a royal crown upon the head of spring. Birds sing because He, the Good One, has created them so full of joy that they cannot help but sing. The waters laugh in the sunshine, and join in merry music as they flow, because He has made the sun so bright and water so clear. Children disport themselves in the streets, and fill the air with their merry voices, because

children are fresh from God,—freshly filled with joy at an infinite fountain. God is the joy of this world. Forget not the joy-fountain, while you bathe yourself in the joy-streams! While gladness streams into your heart, let grateful love flow out from it and upward. And, oh! if perchance you are a dissonant, jarring being within this world of joy and gladness; if the waves of the spring-time joy, as they roll over this world, reach not your dry and thirsty and unhappy heart,—still is the voice of the Saviour unto you through all this unshared flood, which, Tantalus like, you reach after, but may not drink. Listen to His words, “Arise, come away.” God has the joy which you need also,—enough for all your cravings, and to fill you too. Pray Him that by His renewing Spirit He would create spring-time within your soul, and fill you with this joy of His which rolls and flows throughout His Being and throughout His realm. III. The call of the text is unto men through THE FRUITFUL LIFE OF THE SPRING. The winter has been the night of Nature, and with spring comes the morning, in which, as in a gradually awakening city, begins the hum of life, swelling louder and louder into the full activity of mid-day. Spring is life from the dead; resurrection, reanimation, restoration. And God speaks through it as such, proclaiming Himself as the Life-giver, and through it He also calls for life within His followers. Some of you, it may be, have been hibernating in the Church: you have not been dead, but torpid; hoping little, feeling little, doing little. Come away; leave your winter-quarters; throw off their imprisonment, their constraint, their dull routine. Forth into the field where your Saviour calls; go, to ramble with Him through the flowery fields and beside the still waters. Drink of the fulness of a spiritual spring-time. Dare to hope more, to attempt more, to enjoy more. Let all the fulness of your being flow out towards the Saviour, who loves you with an everlasting love. (*S. S. Mitchell, D.D.*)

The flowers appear on the earth.—*Flowers*.—What object do flowers serve in the economy of Nature and in the purposes of God? Every one admits that the flowers are beautiful—strikingly and prominently beautiful, even among the choicest beauties of God’s most perfect works. Now, philosophers tell us that the useful is the beautiful—that things are beautiful in proportion to their usefulness in supplying the material wants of men. According to this theory, an ear of corn ought to be more beautiful than a rose or a lily, and yet there is probably not a sound-minded man in the whole world who would not consider the useless rose more beautiful than the useful ear of corn. In fact, the flowers that men have always agreed to regard as the most beautiful are in most cases absolutely useless for man, from a utilitarian point of view. This proves, then, that beauty is something very different from mere usefulness. In reality the great characteristic of beauty is to lift up our minds from mere worldly usefulness to the contemplation of the perfect and the Divine: to lift our hearts and minds to God. For example, we might speak of beautiful conduct, and what is it that constitutes beauty of conduct? Conduct is beautiful in proportion as it approaches the conduct of Christ. Again, what is it that constitutes beauty in literature? Literature is beautiful in proportion as it reveals by means of suitable language the soul of man in its Godward aspirations. In everything, then, which we call beautiful, we find that this principle holds good, and the more powerful to lift up our hearts unto God, the more beautiful. Beauty is the manifestation of God in His works. Why, then, do we regard the flowers as beautiful? We regard the flowers as beautiful because they direct our thoughts to God. God is the natural destiny of man. God is the one thing that every man either consciously or unconsciously longs for. Whatever helps to satisfy your longing is pleasurable, and when the longing is of an elevating nature—when it is Godward—the pleasurable is also the beautiful. Art is elevating and ennobling only when its votary has learned to cultivate the beautiful as a means of approach to God. This was the spirit in which the greatest architects, the greatest sculptors, the greatest painters and the greatest poets did their work, and so no atheist, however great his natural talent, has ever yet produced a master work, either in art or in literature. The first condition of true art is to recognize the beautiful as an expression of the Divine. To the sound and healthy and pure mind everything beautiful in man or in the world around him points towards God. And so the flowers are beautiful, not because they are useful, but because they lift up our hearts to God. There are many ways in which they do this, many lessons which they teach us in their silent eloquence with more force and more clearness than the words of our greatest and our wisest teachers. Our Lord Himself taught some of His most important lessons from such ordinary things as the lilies of the field, and the grass, and each one of those lessons had for its aim the lifting up of our hearts to God. Christ made use of

the humble beauty of the flowers to attain that end. One of the first conditions of realizing the presence of God is to learn the lesson of humility. This is taught by the flowers. Most men are vain of something—appearance, attainments, position, and so on—but Jesus rebukes such vanity by telling us to “consider the lilies of the field.” “I say unto you that even Solomon, in all his glory, was not arrayed like one of these.” Christ makes use of the flowers to teach us the lesson of faith—also one of the conditions of any real knowledge of God or communion with Him. The flowers prove that God is just as careful of small things as He is of large things. Again, the flowers teach us the shortness and the uncertainty of human life. Out of the dull-looking stem springs forth mysteriously and silently, the fragrant blossom of loveliest hue. It spreads itself out in smiling gladness, to the light and warmth of the sun. It gladdens the eye of the beholder with its beauteous presence, but no sooner does it attain its highest perfection than it fades away in a breath of wind and vanishes quite as mysteriously as it came. And so the earthly life of man passeth away as mysteriously as it came, and the place that knew him shall know him no more. And once more, do not the flowers teach the great and comforting lesson of the resurrection from the dead and the immortality of the soul? Complete indeed is the withering of a flower. The beauty, the colour, the fragrance, the delight of it vanish away, leaving no trace or vestige behind, even as the life of man does. But, in spite of the cold and frost of winter, the dead stump will awake to life after many days. The summer sun will shine upon it. The bud will appear, the flower will bloom once more in its pristine beauty, a perfect and a never-failing emblem of the resurrection and the life. (*A. Macrae, B. A.*) *The teaching of the flowers*:—“The flowers appear on the earth” not accidentally, but for gracious ends and purposes. I. TO TESTIFY OF THEIR MAKER’S WISDOM AND SKILL. Take the best human imitation, and how far short it falls of the Divine original! Different shades, and delicate blendings of colour, the perfect structure and reviving scent defy reproduction by man. No two blades of grass are exactly alike, nor two flowers, even of the same species. Why? A profound mystery, enough to awe and humble us. II. TO PROCLAIM THE GOODNESS OF GOD. We may see His compassion for His children in every flower that bends to the breeze. A believer on the verge of starvation, or in temptation, or oppressed by spiritual chill and lethargy might argue *a fortiori*: “If God so clothe the grass of the field . . . ?” “If God provides even flowers with means of protection and recovery . . . ?” “If the flowers praise the Lord, shall I be silent?” III. AS A PROTEST AGAINST HUMAN DISCONTENT. Flowers are content to bloom where they are planted. “Godliness with contentment is great gain.” Still, we must not be the slaves of our environment. Submission may be servile and ruinous to our manhood; *e. g.* to continue in a business that compels dishonesty or injury to others. But where we are earning an honest livelihood, and Providence does not point the way to some other sphere, it is our duty, and certainly our interest, to be quiet, cheerful, and contented. IV. AS A SYMBOL OF OUR MORTALITY. Mazzini preferred the pale blossoms of the syringa to the rose because their acrid perfume suggested hidden stings in all pleasures, and so were a better type of life. And it is not a morbid religiousness that sees in every frail flower an emblem of our fragile and fleeting life. Let us face the fact bravely. As we see the flower of our existence fading let us dispense fragrance while we may. And let those whose earthly leaf is withered anticipate the completer life beyond. (*John Wright.*) 1. Note the infinite variety of flowers, and how they thrive in all sorts of places. High up on the mountains, at the very edge of the snow, is found the purple soldanella, the white crocus, and the blue hepatica. Down in the sultry plain blooms the red poppy, the white dog-daisy, and the blue corn-flower; in the cold, raw winds of March, the dearly-loved snowdrop shakes its pure bell. Everywhere, in all sorts of situations, in all sorts of climates, out of all sorts of soils, spring up the flowers God has made. Everywhere, in all sorts of situations, in all ranks of life, in all conditions of life, out of every social deposit, the saints of God arise. Everywhere the grace of God shines and matures the seed of eternal life, and causes the flowers of a Christian life to unfold. And as each flower is specially suited to the soil in which it grows, and to the climate which surrounds it, so it is with the Christian graces. There are special graces, special virtues, according to class, and place, and circumstances. 2. At certain times you may be discouraged, and think that you cannot serve God in the place where you are, you have so many difficulties to contend against, those around you are so wicked. But do not fear. God’s flowers will grow everywhere. What can be fouler than the filth in which the water-lily has her roots, the slime in which the newt and the worm wriggle, and yet,

what more stainless or sunlike than the flower? I have known lads in mechanical workshops, surrounded by men blaspheming, cursing, doing all in their power to degrade and brutalize the boys associated with them. And yet some of these lads have maintained a really heroic Christian faith and walk before God. 3. The first growth of the seed or root is hidden. The process is unsoen. I dare say you know the rule to be observed with hyacinth bulbs grown in glasses. They have to be put away in the dark till they are rooted. So must it be with the spiritual growth of the soul, its first processes must be hidden. There must be no display of religion, no talking about it, no demonstrative piety; all that sort of show leads to poor flowering. The rooting and germinating must be hidden deep down in the soft soil of the inner heart. It is afterwards that the flower of a Christian life expands. Now for another lesson. Have you ever observed a flower in its growth from a seed? The seed leaves unfurl,—two little leaves, quite unlike those the plant will eventually bear. These open, and are extended like little hands towards heaven. They are very sensitive. On them depends the life of the plant. If those little appealing hands be destroyed, the plant will cast up no more. It will rot away underground, and die. Like the seed leaves of the plant are children's prayers. These are the first manifestations of the soul's life. The little hands are lifted up to God appealingly, often ignorantly, but trustfully and lovingly. Most essential to the spiritual life are children's spiritual beginnings. They must be carefully guarded. Beware, children, how you suffer your early prayers to cease, to die. On them depends the life and health of your soul in after life. (*S. Baring Gould, M.A.*)

For a flower service:—Nothing that we can conceive of is prettier than flowers. People who teach or learn drawing speak sometimes of "the line of beauty," and they bestow vast pains in order to be able to draw it. Did you ever observe a flower which was without a line of beauty? No;—flowers are always, when their growth is not interfered with, as perfect in form as can be, and all the lines of beauty which ever were drawn or designed by man must, I think, have been copied, in the first instance, from leaves and flowers. Of this you may have plenty of proofs by noticing beautiful pillars in buildings, beautiful patterns on vases, beautiful pictures, beautiful forms of man's devising anywhere; in most, or many, of them you will find that the beauty consists in curves copied from flowers and leaves. Ah! there is a lesson for you here, to be learned from the beauty and perfect form of flowers; it is this:—If you wish your lives to be as beautiful and perfect as they can be, you must fashion them after a God-given example. Nobody can make a plant or flower. It must grow in God's appointed way and no other. Having grown, it lends itself to the architect, the painter, the poet, the potter, to anybody having need thereof, to make the copy he desires. So also there is one perfect life, one perfect character, of God's appointment, given to mankind, from which to copy. In so far as you make Christ's life your pattern and example, your life and character shall be full of grace, beauty, and sweetness. Linnæus, the great Swedish botanist, used to observe the beautiful order which reigns among certain flowers, and so was led to suggest the telling of time by what he called "a floral clock." It was to be composed of plants which open and close their blossoms at particular hours; as, for instance, the dandelion, which opens its petals at six in the morning, the hawkweed at seven, the succory at eight, the celandine at nine, and so on; the closing of the flowers being marked with equal regularity, so as to indicate the progress of afternoon and evening. What a lovely thing it would be thus to bedeck every passing hour of life with grace and obedience, as the flowers do. Shall they be punctual in all that concerns the purpose for which they are made, and boys and girls, who have reason and intelligence to guide them, be unpunctual? Nay,—but let the flowers which open early in the morning remind you of the call to prayer; those which open later, of the call to work and duty; those that close in afternoon or evening may lead you to reflect on the way in which you have spent your day, and teach you to commit yourselves to God's care and keeping during the darkness of the coming night. In this way you will, with undeviating regularity, learn to obey the influence of the Sun of Righteousness, and give each following hour its proper due, just as the flowers accommodate themselves to the influence of the natural sun. Has it ever occurred to you that the common names of flowers often tell us of the way in which they were regarded by the people who first named them? Pansy was originally a French word, meaning thought. The pansy, then, was the thought-flower. It is very fitting, therefore, that it should be found everywhere. The whole world is governed by thought. But, we must remember that thought may be either evil or good. Now the pansy ought never to suggest evil thought.

How should it? It is, in itself, so beautiful and perfect that only an ill-disposed and perverted mind could be persuaded to evil by it. People bent on evil deeds do not seek for inspiration how to accomplish them by thinking of pretty flowers. They are not led by the beauty of pansies or other blossoms to be ill-tempered, or spiteful, or disobedient, or untruthful, or to commit thefts, or fall into other crimes. The thought suggested by the pansy, then, is good thought, thought beautiful like its emblem. "The best thoughts are those which a man conceives when on his knees before his God." Thus we should think what God is: a loving, merciful Father; what the Lord Jesus Christ is: a tender, atoning Saviour; what God the Holy Spirit is: a Sanctifier who will dwell in us and make us holy. Again, we should think what we ourselves are: weak and sinful by nature, who need God's help to make us better. Thirdly, we should think of others, and of what we can do to benefit them. Thus our thoughts should really be concerned with what is set before us in the Church Catechism as, "Our duty to God and our duty to our neighbour." I may tell you that the pansy, the thought-flower, has another common name which bears strangely on this subject: It is heart's-ease. A good deal of our duty to our neighbour consists in giving, where we can, heart's-ease, peace of mind. An old ordained minister of the Church, who lived many years ago, used to say: "I see in this world two heaps, one of human misery, and the other of human happiness. Now if I take but the smallest bit from one heap and add it to the other, I carry a point; I feel I have done something." And is this all I am to say? Oh! no. By and by, when you are blessed with means such as are not expected in the case of children, you will dedicate something more than flowers to God's service. In former days there lived a princess Eugénie, sister of the king of Sweden. She set her mind on finishing a hospital which had been begun, and, to do so, sold her diamonds. When visiting this hospital, after its completion, a suffering inmate wept tears of gratitude as she stood by his side: "Ah!" exclaimed the princess, "now I see my diamonds again." Do you understand her meaning? She meant that in those grateful tears she beheld what was to her more beautiful and valuable than the diamonds with which they had been purchased. One thing more: you will dedicate something else to God besides your means, namely, yourselves, your lives, your thoughts, your words, your acts. (*George Lilling, M.A.*)

The world's need of flowers:—We are not told why God causes the flowers to appear on the earth. Nothing is said of His purpose in calling this hidden world of beauty into the light. The silence is explained by the fact that the end is obvious and patent to every observer. The soil needs the work of their roots, and the chemicals of their tiny structures. The atmosphere needs the fragrance and the gases they exude. The world of mixed life which hums all day in their petals needs the food they provide. The man needs the sight of them to train his eye and culture the love of the beautiful. And dimpled childhood needs them, and many a sick home. God's end in their creation is not only adornment, but ministry, the serving and the satisfying of the needs of other created things. That is why God seeks to call the beauties out of man, because they are needed. Man wants the sight of a splendid faith to make it possible for him to believe. Man wants self-sacrifice, for he will die of his wounds if there is no self-forgetful soul to help him. Man wants love, for his lot is hard, and he will perish of heartbreak and loneliness without its gentle ministry. Man wants purity, that, amid the sensuality and immoralities of the age, he may see it is possible to master the flesh. Man wants hope, for his sky is often starless, and he needs the beacon of another's hope to guide him through the storm. The world needs these flowers of the soul; needs their fragrance, their colours, their help, their hints, their inspiration. (*C. E. Stone.*)

The time of the singing of birds is come.—*The vernal concert*.—I. Learn first THE GOODNESS OF GOD. Do you realize the mercy of the Lord in the dominant colour of the spring-time—the green in which is so kindly and lovingly mingled the mercy and the goodness of God? Is our voice silent? II. This season suggests THE WISDOM OF GOD. Oh, the wisdom of God in the structure of a bird's wing and voice! Where is the harp that gave the warble to the lark, the sweet call to the robin, the carol to the canary, the chirp to the grasshopper? He who pairs the birds in the spring-time gave us our companions. He who shows the chaffinch how to take care of her brood will protect our children. He who gathers the down for the pheasant's breast will give us apparel. III. The season of the year suggests THE WISDOM OF RIGHT BUILDING OF THE HOME NESTS. Birds build always in reference to safety. Sometimes the nest is built in rocks, eaves, trees, but always in reference to safety. The only safe place for man to build a nest is the tree of

the cross, and the only safe rock is the Rock of Ages. IV. This season of the year suggests THE INFINITE GLORIES OF HEAVEN. If this world, blasted with sin and swept with storms, is still so beautiful, what must be the attraction of the sinless world toward which we travel! V. This season of the bird-anthem suggests to me THE IMPORTANCE OF LEARNING HOW TO SING. In a little while there will be no pause in the melody of the song. Whether it be a warble, or a chant, or a carol, or a chirp, or a croak, God will be praised by it. Shall not we, more intelligent appreciators, sing! Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your heart unto the Lord. (*T. De Will Talmage.*)

Ver. 13. **The vines with the tender grape give a good smell.**—*The tender grapes*.—The vine is of all trees the most useless unless it bears fruit. You cannot make hardly anything of it; you would scarcely be able to cut enough wood out of a vine to hang a pot upon; you cannot turn it into furniture, and barely could you use it in the least degree for building purposes. It must either bear fruit, or else it must be consumed in the fire. You all know that there is no possibility of bringing forth any fruit except we are in Christ, and except we abide in Christ. We must bear fruit, or we shall certainly perish; and we cannot have fruit unless we be knit to Christ, vitally one with him, just as a branch is really, after a living fashion, one with the stem. It would be no use to tie a branch to the stem of the vine; that would not cause it to bring forth fruit. It must be joined to it in a living union, so must you and I be living joined to Christ. I think I hear some one say, "I hope I have begun to bring forth some fruit, but it is very little in quantity, and it is of very poor quality; and I do not suppose that the Lord Jesus will hardly stoop to notice it." Well, now, listen to what the text says; it is the heavenly Bridegroom, it is Christ Himself, who, in this Song, speaks to His spouse, and bids her come into the vineyard, and look about her. For, saith He, "The vines with the tender grape give a good smell." So, you see, there was some fruit, though it could only be spoken of as "the tender grape." Some read the passage, "The vines in blossom give forth fragrance"; others think it refers to the grape just as it begins to form. It was a poor little thing, but the Lord of the vineyard was the first to spy it out; and if there is any little fruit unto God upon any one, our Lord Jesus Christ can see it. Though the berry be scarcely formed, though it be only like a flower which has just begun to knit, He can see the fruit, and He delights in that fruit. I. First, then, **WHAT ARE THESE TENDER GRAPES?** What are these first-fruits of the Spirit of God? 1. One of the first tender grapes that we spy out on living branches of the true Vine is, a secret mourning for sin, and very often, an open mourning, too. The man is no longer the jovial, light-headed, dare-devil sort of fellow that he was. He has found out that his life has not been right in the sight of God; he has become conscious that he has done much that is altogether wrong, and that he has left undone a thousand things which he ought to have done, and he feels heavy of heart, and sad in spirit. Whenever he sees his sin, it grieves him; and he is grieved because he does not grieve more than he does. This is a crop that will ripen and sweeten before long. Surely, never was there a truly gracious soul who did not put forth this as one of the firstfruits of the Spirit, a secret mourning for sin. 2. Another tender grape is, a humble faith in Jesus Christ. That little trembling faith is one of the tender grapes. It will grow, it will come to perfection in due time, for the least true faith has everlasting life in it. 3. Then there comes another tender grape, and that is, a genuine change of life. The man has evidently turned right about; he is not looking the way he used to look, and he is not living as he used to live. At first he fails, and perhaps fails a good many times, like a child who is learning to walk, and has many a tumble; but it will never walk if it does not tumble a bit. So, when men begin to live the new life, they have many slips. They thought that ugly temper of theirs would never rise again, but it does, and it grieves them very much; and some old habit, from which they thought they had clean escaped, entangles them unawares, and they say, "Surely I cannot be a child of God if I do these things again"; and there is great brokenness of spirit, and soul-humbling. Well, that very soul-humbling is a tender grape. That effort to do better—not in your own strength, because you have none, and you are sure to fail utterly if you attempt such a task alone; but the effort to do better in the strength of God, yet with the full consciousness of your own weakness,—all that indicates a real change. 4. Another very blessed fruit of spiritual life in the soul is, secret devotion. The man never prayed before; he went sometimes to a place of

worship, but he did not care much about it. Now, you see that he tries to get alone for private prayer as often as he can. "Behold, he prayeth," is an indication that God has renewed his heart. 5. Another of these tender grapes is an eager desire for more grace, a longing for more of the good things of the covenant. 6. There is also, in such persons, another very precious sign of grace, and that is, a simple love to Jesus. The heart knows little, but it loves much; the understanding is not yet fully enlightened, but the affections are all on fire. II. WHAT IS THE LORD'S ESTIMATE OF THESE TENDER GRAPES? 1. Well, first, He thinks so much of it that He calls His Church to come and look at it (vers. 10-13). We do not usually call our friends to look at things which we do not ourselves admire; so here the Bridegroom calls His spouse to share in His joy in these tokens of the heavenly life of the Church of God. Be always on the look-out for the tender grapes. "Ah!" says one, "that young man does not know much." Does he know that one thing, whereas he was blind, now he can see? Then, be thankful that he knows as much as that. "Oh!" you exclaim, "but he has not much prudence." No; do you suppose that this young man is to have as much prudence as you have at your age, and you are perhaps sixty or seventy? I might possibly say with truth that you have not quite so much zeal as you might have to go with your prudence. "Oh, but!" you say, "we want the young man to be more mature." Give him time, and he will get as mature as you are; but while the grapes are still tender, your Master and his calls you to look at them, and to thank Him for them, for there is something very cheering in the sight of the first weak, faint tokens of the working of the Holy Spirit in the soul of a young believer. 2. What is Christ's estimate of these tender grapes? Why, next, He calls them tender. He might have called them sour, but He does not; He calls them "tender." He likes to use a sweet word, you see, the softest and best word that He can use; so when you describe a young convert, my dear brother, do not at once point out his immaturity, but call him "tender." 3. Then He says something more: "The vines with the tender grape give a good smell." Of what do they smell? (1) Well, first, they smell of sincerity. (2) Next, there is about these young believers a sweet smell of heartiness. (3) There is sure to be also about these young Christians the sweet smell of zeal; and, whatever may be said against zeal, I will take up the cudgels for it as long as I live. In the work of God, we cannot do without fire. (4) These young believers have another sweet smell: they are teachable, ready to learn, willing to be taught from the Scriptures and from those whose instructions God blesses to their souls. (5) There is also another delicious smell about them, and that is, they are generally very joyful. I wish that we could catch the sweet contagion of the early joy of those who have just found the Saviour. There is something delightful in all joy when it is joy in the Lord, but there is a special brightness about the delight of those who are newly converted. III. WHAT IS THE DANGER TO THESE TENDER GRAPES? (see ver. 15). In the spiritual vineyard there are "foxes" of many kinds. 1. There is, first, the hard censurer. He will spoil the vines, if he can, and especially the vines that have the tender grapes. He finds fault with everything that he can see in you who are but young believers. May God deliver you from these cruel foxes! He will often do so by enabling you not to mind them. After all, this is only the way in which all Christians have been tried, there is nothing strange in your experience from these censurers; and they are not your judges, you will not be condemned because they condemn you. Go and do your best in the service of your Lord; trust in Christ, and do not mind what they say; and you will be delivered from that kind of fox. 2. A worse fox even than that one, however, is the flatterer. He comes to you smiling and smirking, and he begins to express his approval of your religion, and very likely tells you what a fine fellow you are. Indeed, you are so good that he thinks you are rather too precise, you have gone a little over the line! Get away from that fox at once. The man who tells you that you are too precise ought to be precisely told that you do not want his company. There never lived a man yet who was too holy, and there never will live a man who will imitate Christ too closely, or avoid sin too rigidly. 3. Then there comes another foul fox, Mr. Worldly-wiseman. He says, "You are a Christian, but do not be a fool. Carry your religion as far as you can make it pay; but if it comes to losing anything by it, well then, don't you do it. You see, this practice is the custom of the trade; it is not right, I know, but still, other people do it, and you ought to do it. If you do not, you will never get on in business." I know that there are many young people who, unless they are watchful

and careful at the very beginning of their spiritual life, will get lamed, and never walk as they ought to do, because this fox has bitten them. 4. There is another ugly fox about, and that is, a doubting fox. He comes and says, "You seem very happy, and very joyful; but is it true? You appear to have become quite a different person from what you used to be; but is there, after all, such a thing as conversion?" 5. There are some foxes of evil doctrine, and they generally try to spoil our young people. Do not any of you young people be carried away with the notion that all the learned men are heretics; it is very largely the reverse, and it is your sham, shallow philosopher who goes running after heresy. Get out of the way of that fox, or else he will do much mischief to the tender grapes. (*C. H. Spurgeon.*)

Ver. 14. **O my dove, that art in the clefts of the rock, in the secret places of the stairs, let me see thy countenance, let me hear thy voice.**—*A sermon for Lent*:—My text contains a parable. The parable is one easy for us to realize. There rises somewhere in the Jewish land a mountain of rock, and it rises precipitously. Looked at from beneath it would seem as if its peak were inaccessible. Yet to the cragsmen of the district it is an oft-trodden path. They rise from ledge to ledge of the rock as by a natural staircase, and they pause and rest in its grottoes and caverns, and find refreshment in the ascent. To one at least this is a well-known spot. Again and again he climbs its height, and he has entered into familiar intercourse with one of those making their homes in the cleft of the rock. There dwells a dove that he has tamed, one who knows his voice, one who in his sight is unequalled in comeliness, one the sound of whose note is as the sweetest music to his ear. And as he climbs the mountain ascending to where the dove dwells, he cries, "O my dove, that art in the clefts of the rock, in the secret places of the stairs, let me see thy countenance, let me hear thy voice: for sweet is thy voice, and thy countenance is comely." Such is the parable. What is its interpretation?—at least to Christian men? To us the Song of Solomon comes as a beautiful poem, revealing to us the conditions of Christian life as lived in the love of Jesus Christ our Lord. He is the cragsman typified of old! He draws nigh to His Church, as at this Lenten season; He speaks to His dove, His undefiled one, in the words we are considering now. And this is His cry—God grant that it may be answered by you, my brothers, at this Lenten season, "Let me see thy countenance, let me hear thy voice: for sweet is thy voice, and thy countenance is comely." A dove is a type of innocence, I know, but not a type of sinless innocence. It is a type of innocence recovered by contrition. Ezekiel is our teacher here. He sees Israel escaped from bondage and restored to her fatherland, and thus describes her dwelling there. He shall be like the dove on the mountains, all of them mourning, every one for his iniquity. There is no sound so peaceful and so plaintive as the note of the dove. Peaceful, for contrition is a state of peace. Yet, after all, mournful is his plaintive note, because in the contrite, true sorrow co-exists with peace and joy. And this is the call of Jesus Christ at this time—that we will lift to Him the countenance that is marked with tears of penitence; that we will lay at His feet in the consecrated songs of the Church our *misereres* for forgiven sin. Always in the Church's worship, in the worship of the individual creature, blended with the voice of loud thanksgiving must be the wailing note of the dove. It is this truth, I am sure, that we need to recognize—that contrition is of necessity a feature of Christian life, because that Christian life is lived by those who are not wholly free from sin. As we go on our way day by day we are conscious of shortcomings. Nay, nay, happy is he who is not conscious from time to time of deliberate deviation from the law of righteousness. And even beyond that, whatever is wrought out in us by the great crisis of conversion, it does not break that link of personality which links us to our sin-stained past. We who live in the Divine peace and love and obedience now are they who sinned in the sin-stained past. We cannot, if we are wise or true, act as though there were no link linking us to that past. Our life, therefore, of necessity, must be a life of contrition for sin, and all the more intense just because that sin is forgiven. How, then, is this contrition to be ours? God gives the answer in this season of Lent. Lent is one of the seasons of our Divine education. Christ has created by His Spirit this season of Lent in the Catholic Church, in order that He may teach us how to live a contrite life. Well, how? In varied ways. Sometimes this contrition is awakened or deepened within us by a revelation of the reality of God, as it was to Isaiah. Sometimes by strange Divine interpositions in the ordinary course of life, as it was to Simon Peter by the lake. Sometimes in the course of deep, engrossing study, as it was with the Magi. Sometimes by a Divine

call meeting us in the path of our duty, as it was when Matthew was called from the receipt of custom. Yet, mainly, Jesus educates us into contrition by the revelation of Himself as the crucified Lord. It was thus when the 3,000 were brought to contrition. And so it has been all down through the ages, as the testimony of the history of the Church bears witness. And so it is to-day, as every evangelist will bear testimony. Generally men are brought to contrition, generally men are maintained in contrition, generally men advance in contrition through the revelation of Jesus to the sinner as the crucified, by the power of the Holy Ghost. Nor is it difficult to see why this is. Contrition depends upon conviction of sin. It begins in our conviction of sin; it grows with the deepening of conviction of sin; and this conviction of sin is ours through the revelation of the Cross of Christ. As we recognize the connection between man's sins and the Redeemer's sorrows, and see what sin is in its exceeding sinfulness; our eyes are opened to judge of sin aright, and our judgment expresses itself in self-condemnation. Again, contrition implies not only conviction of sin, but the knowledge of God's love. A knowledge of sin's exceeding sinfulness, unless it is followed by a revelation of Divine love, would result in despair and death. But God, who sees our position of danger when we are convicted of sin, reveals unto us Jesus Christ crucified, as being the unveiling of Himself as the God of Love. He bids us see in the eyes of love which look down upon the world from the cross, eyes that are lit up with the very love of God Himself. And yet once more. If in the vision of the cross there is given to us a revelation of the greatness of sin, and then of the greatness of the love of God speaking to the sinner in his sorrow, and giving to him the kiss of reconciliation, there comes to us a revelation of what a sinner's life should be as lived under this conviction of sin and in this vision of the love of God. It is to be a life of humility as the sinner kneels at the loving Father's feet and breathes out in acts of devotion his own sorrow for sin. It is to be a life of zeal, as he rises to show this sorrow for a wasted past by devotion to the service of God in the living present. It is to be a life of patient conformity to the Divine discipline, as he recognizes in the sorrows of life God's blessed living purgatory in which His own children are purified and educated according to His will. So, then, if you would go forth and really live with God during this season of Lent; if you would have your Lent life a reality and not a mere ecclesiastical sham, let it be a Lent spent at the feet of Jesus Christ, your crucified, your enthroned Redeemer; give yourselves up to Him in whole abandonment, and in the spirit of prayer. Call upon Him in the power of His Spirit, to give you deeper conviction of sin, a grasp of Divine love, a stronger purpose to live a life of firmer humility, of zeal, and patience. Above all, remember this—there is no living the life of contrition unless it is lived in the Divine peace. How wisely we learn this from the order of the Church's seasons. Shrove Tuesday is not in Holy Week, nor is its teaching assigned to Easter Eve. It is not first Lent, and then forgiveness; it is first forgiveness and then Lent. Through Shrove Tuesday we pass by the door of Ash Wednesday into the Lent of contrition. And so it is, believe me, in our Christian life. If we would really mourn before God for sin with a generous and unselfish mourning; if we would sing the song that he longs to hear, we must sing it in the clefts of rock. It is only as we surrender ourselves to Christ for forgiveness of the past; only as we cling to Him in love and faith and hope for acceptance in the living present; only as we entrust ourselves to Him for the future that awaits us; in a word, it is only as we live in realized union with Him as our Redeemer, that we can ever offer Him the contrition that He craves. (*Canon Body.*)

Ver. 15. **Take us the foxes, the little foxes, that spoil the vines : for our vines have tender grapes.**—*The little foxes:*—The fox in the vineyard is exceedingly destructive. The food of that animal is not merely flesh, but honey and fruits, particularly grapes; and the young foxes not merely devour the fruit, but by their sportiveness, and by the action of their teeth on the bark of the vine, destroy as much as they devour. The habits of the fox increase the mischief. Instead of roaming, as some animals, without any certain place of rest, he fixes the bounds of his habitation, choosing a cave or den at a convenient distance from those places which will furnish most substance for plunder; and from this hiding-place and watch-tower united, he exercises his acuteness, ingenuity, prudence, and circumspection, in the capture of whatever is fitted to be his prey. The well-known voraciousness of the fox gives breadth to the mischief, and his cunning renders the application of means of defence almost impossible. So that the husbandman of the vineyard regards the fox as one of his greatest enemies. We will consider the text—

I. AS ADDRESSED TO THE INDIVIDUAL. 1. The evils, the capture of which is here urged, are such as the following:—Ostentation—the spirit that leads men to give alms that may be seen of men; to pray, that it may be said, “Behold, he prays;” and to be very particular that their circumspection may become the talk of a street or of a town. Concealment—the temper that prompts men to try to prevent their light shining by placing it under a bushel. The easily-offended and unforgiving spirit—by which allied hearts are moved to a distance from each other, and kept separate. Fear of man and men-pleasing—by which the soul is snared into neglect of duty, and into the occupation of wrong positions. Anxiety—by which the mind is distracted and the heart robbed of peace. A longing for treasure upon earth—by which the religious sight is confused and the spirit darkened. That judging of others—by which our beams are made notes and others’ notes made beams. That finding our life and burying our dead, and bidding them farewell who are at our house—which involves a looking back and an unfitness for the kingdom of God. All such plausible errors in doctrine and specious deviations from truth as affect principle and conduct; injustice in the things that are least; trifling omissions of duty; all pleasures and indulgences producing moral uneasiness, and especially all doubtful actions and courses, those deeds and paths about which the conscience is uneasy and the spirit timid, about which the mind is not made up, and in the performance or pursuit of which there is, at least, a suspicion of the divine displeasure and frown. 2. The good which may be marred is of this kind:—The subjects of Christ’s kingdom are born from above: we may expect in them heavenly-mindedness. They are born of God: and we may look to them for godliness. They are created anew by Christ Jesus: and we may expect to see Christ-likeness. 3. This good may be thus marred:—The pursuit of religious information may be checked. The attainment of divine knowledge by experience may be hindered. The judgment may be perverted or corrupted. The memory may be burdened with remembrance of sin. The conscience may be blunted or defiled. The affections may be corrupted or divided. Godly action may be impeded. The energy of holy principle may be impaired. The bloom of spiritual peace and rest may be removed. The enamel of character may be broken. The lustre of reputation may be dimmed. 4. Such mischief ought to be prevented or cured. Take the foxes. Pray in secret, and give in secret. Let your light shine. Forgive a brother his trespasses. Fear not them that kill the body. Cast all your care on Him who careth for you. Lay not up for yourselves treasure upon earth. Judge not. Let the dead bury their dead. Hold the faith and a good conscience. Do nothing by which others are offended and made weak. Defy the persecutor. Withdraw from the backslider. Take the foxes. Make impending evil captive, and, if possible, destroy it. II. AS ADDRESSED TO THE CHURCHES OF CHRIST. 1. The foxes in any congregation of believing men are such evils as these:—Ill-humour, whether arising from the body, or from circumstances, or from any dominant evil passion—that mood which makes a jaundiced eye and an itching ear, and which will not see good, but is determined to discover evil. Suspicion—the opposite temper to the charity that thinketh no evil, the spirit that sees nothing but whited sepulchres, and platters clean but on the outside. Distrust—the spirit that has no friend or counsellor, but saith deliberately, “All men are liars.” Self-importance—the thinking too highly of oneself, and too meanly of others, instead of estimating others and oneself soberly. Carelessness and disorder—by which the sweetest ointment is spoiled, dead flies being allowed to abide in it, and by which the most magnificent music is marred, through the performance being slovenly in the execution. 2. So far as these evils have influence, they check the life of God in the soul of the man, and thereby damage the fellowship. As a congregation consists of individuals, so the character of a church is created by the moral and spiritual attributes of persons. Whatever injures the individual, mars the communion. 3. To prevent this spoliation, take the foxes. This is one with Christ’s precept (Matt. v. 29, 30), “cast it from thee.” (Rom. xvi. 17, 20; 2 Thess. iii. 14; 1 Tim. iv. 7; 1 Tim. vi. 20; 2 Tim. ii. 16; 2 Tim. ii. 23; Titus iii. 9; 2 John 9, 10; 1 Cor. v. 11.) Paul’s directions and John’s are in harmony with the text. We remark, (1) That individual life and church life are not maintainable apart from carefulness and exertion. Real religion has nothing mechanical in it. It is all life. It does not proceed on a principle of perpetual motion. It meets resistance and must resist in turn, or it will stop. It is in incessant friction, and must be protected or it will wear out. (2) To such carefulness and effect we have the strongest inducement. Your labour is not in vain; God cares for you. If you

look to Him, He will satisfy thy soul in drought and make thee as a watered garden. Abide in Christ, and you will bring forth much fruit. (*St. Martin, M.A.*) *Little Foxes*:—The St. Gothard Alp is a great mountain pass dividing Switzerland from Italy. On the Swiss side the country is bleak and sombre, with great mountains like white-coated sentinels keeping watch over the valleys. On the Italian side the sky is bluer and nature is clad in gentler hues. The sloping hillsides are covered with lovely vineyards. The sun is so warm that grapes will grow in the open air, and the green vines are trained over frames and posts, making the uplands look like a vast garden. The vine-dressers have to use great care in order to preserve the fruit-bearing branches. The grapes have many enemies. Tiny parasites abound which are very destructive. When the grapes are young and tender the little foxes steal into the vineyards, and snatching the bunches pull the branches down and spoil the grapes. Hence arose this vineyard-keepers' song. There are little foxes that spoil the character of boys and girls. I. SELFISHNESS. Jesus teaches us to think more of others than we do of ourselves. He pleased not Himself. His life was one long act of service. Unselfishness is one of the tender fruits of a Christ-like character. A little fox steals in and prowls around trying to spoil the grapes. His name is Self. He tries to make a boy think of none but himself. II. TEMPER. This fox is nearly always found in company with Self. When Self finds his way into the vineyard, Temper generally follows, and eats what few grapes are left. This little fox of Temper has a variable face. 1. Sometimes it is passionate. In the last summer months you have seen the sun sailing in a clear blue sky and flooding the earth with life and beauty. Suddenly thick black clouds gather and blot out the sun and smiling sky till the earth is covered with a dark canopy. Great drops of rain splash on the pavement, the lightning flashes and the thunder roars. The storm comes near, passes over our head, dies away as quickly as it came. Then the sun shines out till the raindrops glisten like diamonds, and the birds sing sweetly, and the perfume of the flowers fills the air. So suddenly came these bursts of dark, passionate temper. 2. Sometimes this fox is not passionate, but sulky. Then his victims are like a dull, depressing day, when the mists are unrelieved by a solitary ray of sunlight. The boy pouts and sulks. His anger is sullen, and if he is not very watchful that fox will eat every bit of fruit clustering on the vine. III. DECEIT. None of you, I hope, would ever stoop to wilful falsehoods. Rather die than be false to truth. Deceit is an acted lie. When a girl breaks a jug and hides the pieces in the cellar without saying anything to mother, that is deceit. I knew a boy who was not very quick at sums, but was good at grammar. So he helped a boy at grammar, and that boy did his sums in return. The boy took his sums on the slate to school next day, and they were all correct. The master thought he was improving, and expressed his pleasure to the boy. Tom knew he did not deserve the praise, and felt very guilty. He thought he would tell the master; but just then this little fox called Deceit came along and said: "You are a silly boy if you do. The master will never know unless you tell him." But Tom was straightforward, and told the truth, and kept out the little fox. We must be like the vine-dressers, ever upon the watch. Little foxes grow big, and bad habits grow strong. Passion grows in force and intensity. The boy who deceives at school will do so at his work. Deceiving others ends in deceiving self. Keep out the little foxes, and when the Master of the vineyard comes at the time of vintage, He will find the rich and perfect fruit of the Spirit growing in our lives to the glory of God. (*E. Clowes Chorley.*) *Little foxes*:—I. WHAT THE LITTLE FOXES ARE—what we are to understand as represented by them. 1. A little lie. Not a great, black, ugly lie, enough to make conscience cry out, and to startle yourself and everybody that knows of it, but a little untruth that does not hurt and need not frighten anybody. 2. A little theft. It was only a penny or halfpenny or farthing—only a bit of pencil or a bit of ribbon—only a sweetmeat or a pin. It was only some little unfairness in the class or in the game, that got you a place or credit that did not belong to you. 3. A little outburst of temper. You were provoked, and flew into a passion, and you looked or spoke or acted your anger. 4. A little act of disobedience, refusing to do, or putting off doing, or not doing pleasantly and cheerfully, what a parent asked you to do. You say you must do something else first. 5. A little oath, or slang expression, or low bad word. 6. A little act of selfishness. 7. A little yielding to indolence, laziness. 8. A little breaking of the Sabbath. 9. A little omission of prayer. 10. A little yielding to envy or jealousy. II. THE HARM THE LITTLE FOXES DO. 1. Little sins are real sins. A little fox is a real fox. A little tiger is a real tiger. A little serpent is

a real serpent. The smallness of it does not alter its nature. 2. Little sins are apt to be little thought of. That is one great part of their danger. You say "it is only a little fault. Who would think anything of that? It is only a little fox, what harm can it do?" The little sin does not ruffle your conscience, or make you unhappy, or make other people think much the worse of you for it. That is the worst of the whole case. That is one of the strongest reasons why you should be afraid of it. 3. Little sins prepare the way for big ones, and form habits of sin. I never heard of a boy becoming a drunkard, or a thief, or a swearer, or a liar, or a profligate, or a criminal, all at once. It was gradually—by little and little, that he became such. III. HOW TO CATCH THEM AND KILL THEM. "Take us the foxes, the little foxes." Have you ever seen a party setting out for a day's fox-hunting? How eager all are—men, horses, and dogs. They are prepared to run any distance, to cross rivers, to leap over walls and hedges, each more in earnest than the other to catch the fox. Their first concern is to discover where he is, and then they set out after him with a will. And so your first concern should be to discover what and where the little foxes are, that are spoiling your vines. And having learned that, your next business is to catch them and kill them. There are two hands with which you must seek to catch them. Neither will do alone. Both must go together. These hands are prayer and pains. The most important is prayer, for that calls in Divine help. But then it is said, "God helps them that help themselves," and it is in helping yourselves—watching, striving, resisting—that He helps you. You must keep your eye ever open. You must never be off your guard. (*J. H. Wilson, D.D.*) *Words to the little ones:*—We read in the New Testament of Christ being the Vine, and so our hearts joined to him are the vines, or, as they are called, branches. Now, we know that grapes grow upon vines, so the tender grapes that grow upon our vines are all the good thoughts, and words, and deeds that come forth from your young hearts. We are told that little foxes spoil the vines which have tender grapes. Why do you suppose that it is the little foxes against which we are warned? Because the little foxes are often far more dangerous than the big ones. I remember one day passing through one of our London squares. I saw two cruel dogs chasing a cat—indeed, it was only a kitten. The poor little thing ran for its life, and the two dogs after it, a big fellow foremost, and a smaller one coming on as fast as it could behind. The kitten got safe to the railings of the square, and it jumped in through them; and when the big dog, almost touching it as it went through, tried to follow, he couldn't get in after it—the railings were too close together, and so the little kitten thought itself safe. But up came the little dog, and he was able to get through when the big fellow couldn't; but I'm glad to say a gardener, who was working inside, drove it back again, and so the little kitten was rescued. Do you see what I mean by that story? It shows us how small things are often more dangerous than big things, for they can get in through small openings. Now that is just the way it is with your young hearts. There are tender grapes growing in them, and while you couldn't let a big fox in, perhaps many a little one creeps in and destroys them, and takes all the sweetness out of them. You often could not let a great big sin come into your heart, but a little one creeps in almost without your knowing it. And the worst of it is these little fellows come into the vineyard of your heart, and stay there, and grow big there. A little untruth, so innocent-looking that we don't think it can do harm, gets in first, and it grows and grows so gradually that we don't notice it, and at last it is a big lie! Ah! be on your guard against the small things—the small unkindness, the first bad word, the first untruth, the first disobedience. Take care of the little foxes, or they'll get in and destroy the tender grapes. Don't be taken in by their looks. One time, when our soldiers were fighting against Indians in America, a sentry at a very important point was found one morning dead at his post. The guard had heard no sound, and they could not imagine how any one could have come so close to the sentry as to kill him. They thought he must have fallen asleep at his post. Another man was put in his place, and next morning he, too, was found dead there. They were greatly surprised, for he was a very steady man, and had been warned to be on the look-out. So the officer selected another soldier, and said to him, "Now, let nothing escape you; if it's only a dog tries to get near you, shoot him." The man promised his officer to obey him. Well, an hour passed, and not a sound reached the sentry. He thought then that he heard a very little noise, as of something walking on the dead leaves. He called out, "Who goes there?" and there was no answer. So he looked, and listened;

and he saw a slight movement of a branch some few yards off. "If you don't answer, I'll fire," said he, and raised his rifle to his shoulder. He was just going to pull the trigger, when he saw a small bear passing away from him beside a bush. So he lowered his gun, saying to himself, "What a fool I should have looked to have startled all the camp by shooting that poor animal!" Still, he remembered his promise to his officer that he'd shoot even a dog; so saying to himself, "I know they'll all laugh at me, but I'll keep my word like a good soldier," he fired. The bear fell, and out rushed the guard at the sound of the shot. They ran over to where the bear lay dead, and they found it was only a bear's skin and an Indian dead inside it! The Indian had night after night approached the sentry, walking on hands and feet, and concealed in the skin of a bear, and when he got close to the soldier he had killed him. So, boys and girls, be on your guard. No matter how innocent, no matter how small the untruth, the unkindness, the deceit, the dishonesty may look, don't let them pass in that way. They are enemies, after all: they'll kill you, if you don't kill them. Beware of the foxes that spoil the tender grapes. (*T. T. Shore, M.A.*) *Little sins*:—A famous ruby was once offered for sale in England, and the crown jeweller reported that it was the finest he had ever seen, with a single slight defect in one of the cuttings of the face. This almost invisible flaw reduced its value by thousands of pounds, and the ruby was not purchased for the regalia of the kingdom. It is only man's littleness which discovers no importance in trifles. Trifles make perfection, and perfection is no trifle. The most deplorable failures in Christian consistency and uprightness may, generally, be traced back to a very small departure from duty. Give the "little foxes" an opportunity to break through the enclosure which surrounds the vineyard, and the prospect of grapes will be small. What, then, are some of these little sins, which mar our happiness or hinder our usefulness? I. At the head of the list may be placed A SOUR AND CRABBED TEMPER. II. Another little sin to be watched against is THE GIVING WAY TO EASE AND SELF-INDULGENCE. There is too much of what may be called "summer religion"; a readiness to enjoy the agreeable parts of it, without its restraints and sacrifices. III. DISHONESTY IN OUR ORDINARY DEALINGS may be named as another example of little sins. IV. Another little sin, as the world looks at it, is JEALOUSY. (*J. N. Norton, D.D.*)

Ver. 16. **My Beloved is mine, and I am His.**—*The interest of Christ and His people in each other*:—The Church says concerning her Lord, "My beloved is mine and I am His." No "ifs," no "buts." The two sentences are solemn assertions. Not "I hope, I trust, I think;" but, my Beloved is mine, and I am His. "Yes," but you will say, "the Church must then have been gazing upon her Husband's face; it must have been a season of peculiar enjoyment with Him, when she could speak thus." Nay, nay; the Church, when she thus spake, was in darkness; for in the very next verse she cries—"Until the day break, and the shadows flee away, turn, my beloved, and be thou like a roe or a young hart upon the mountains of Bethel." I. I AM MY BELOVED'S, AND MY BELOVED IS THEREFORE MINE. 1. "I am my Beloved's." Glorious assertion! I am His by the Father's gift. But I am my Beloved's, if I be a believer, because of Jesus Christ's purchase of me. But more than this, "I am my Beloved's," for I am His by conquest. He fought for me, and He won me, let Him possess me. Besides this, every true believer can add, "I am my Beloved's" by a gracious surrender. "With full consent I give myself to Thee." We have seen how we came to be our Beloved's, let us inquire in what sense we are so now. We are his, first of all, by a near affinity that never can be sundered. Christ is the head; we are His members. Further than this; we are our Beloved's by a most affectionate relationship. He is the husband, believers are the spouse. "I am my Beloved's" by an indissoluble connection, just as a child is the property of his father. 2. The second sentence in order of time is, "My Beloved is mine." Ah! you very poor men and women, you who could not call one foot of land your own! If you can say, "My Beloved is mine," you have greater wealth than Cressus ever knew, or than a miser ever dreamed. But how is my Beloved mine? He is mine, because He gave Himself to me of old. But besides that, our Beloved is not only ours by His own gift, which is the bottom of all, but He is ours by a graciously completed union. "I in them, and Thou in Me;" for thus the union stands. Again: Christ is ours personally. We sometimes speak of severally and jointly. Well, then, Christ is ours jointly; but He is ours severally too. Christ is as much yours, however mean you may be, as though He did not belong to another man living. He is all mine, all yours; personally mine, personally yours. Oh that we

could realize this fact ! And, then again, Christ is always ours. He is never more ours at one time, and less ours at another. The moment we believe in Him we may know our perfect and invariable right to Christ—a right which depends not upon the changes of the hour, or upon the temperature of our frames and feelings, but upon those two immutable things wherein it is impossible for God to lie. II. I shall now take the text in the ORDER in WHICH it is GIVEN to US, WHICH IS THE ORDER OF OUR EXPERIENCE. Do you not see, that to a man's experience God's order is reversed ? We begin thus : "My Beloved is mine." I go to Him, take Him up in the arms of my faith, as Simeon took up the little Child in the temple, and pressing Him to my heart, I say : "Jesus, Thou art mine. All unholy and unclean, I nevertheless obey Thy command ; I believe Thee ; I take Thee at Thy word ; I trust my soul wholly with Thee ; Thou art mine, and my soul can never part with Thee." What next ? Why, then the soul afterwards says : "Now I am Thine, tell me what Thou wouldst have me do. Jesus, let me abide with Thee. Lord, I would follow Thee whithersoever Thou goest ; put me on any service ; dictate to me any commandment ; tell me what Thou wouldst have me to do to glorify Thee !" Christ is mine—this is faith. I am His—this is good works. Christ is mine : that is the simple way in which the soul is saved. I am Christ's : that is the equally simple method by which salvation displays itself in its practical fruits. God's commands require obedience, and it is essential that every servant be found faithful. Whatever Jesus bids us do, if it save us not from anything else, at any rate the fulfilment of it will save us from the sin of being disobedient to Him. (*C. H. Spurgeon.*) *The reciprocal interest of Christ and His people* :—I. EVERY-REAL CHRISTIAN MAY SAY, "CHRIST IS MINE." 1. There are five different ways in which anything may become ours. (1) By formation, or production. In this way the articles which we construct, and the fruits of the earth which our labour produces, become ours. (2) By purchase, or exchange. In this way we obtain many things which were previously the property of others. (3) By inheritance. In this manner we become possessed of the property of deceased relatives. (4) By conquest. In this manner many things are acquired, especially by sovereign princes. (5) By gift. In this manner whatever is bestowed on us by the generosity of others, becomes our property. 2. Among all these ways, there is only one in which Christ can become ours. (1) He is given to them by His Father. (2) Christ gives Himself to His people. II. CHRIST IS THE PROPERTY OF ALL TRUE CHRISTIANS, SO, ALL CHRISTIANS ARE HIS. 1. They are His by creation ; for by Him and for Him they were created. 2. They are His by inheritance ; for we are told that the Father hath appointed Him heir of all things. 3. They are His by purchase ; for He has bought them, bought them with His own blood. 4. Christians are the property of Christ by right of conquest. 5. They become His by gift. (1) They are given to Him by His Father (John xvii. 6). (2) All true Christians have voluntarily given themselves to Christ. Conclusion : 1. From this subject you may learn something of the worth and interest of the Christian's portion. 2. We may learn from our subject to whom this incomparable gift belongs ; who it is that without presumption may say, "Christ is mine." Every man may say this who can with truth repeat the other part of our text, who can truly say, "Christ is my beloved, and I am His property." 3. From this subject you may learn the extent of your duty. "I am Christ's" are words easily said, but the engagements which they imply are not so easily fulfilled. If we are His, we are no longer our own. If we are His, then everything that we possess is His—our time, our possessions, our strength, our influence, our powers of body and faculties of mind, all are His, and must be consecrated to His service and glory ; and if we love Him supremely, they will be so, for the whole man ever follows the heart. 4. How great are the privileges which result from an ability to say, "Christ is mine." If Christ is yours, then all that He possesses is yours. His power is yours to defend you, His wisdom and knowledge are yours to guide you, His righteousness is yours to justify you, His Spirit and grace are yours to sanctify you, His heaven is yours to receive you. 5. From this subject you may learn what is the nature of the ordinance which you are about to celebrate, and what you are about to do at the Lord's table. In this ordinance we give ourselves to Christ, and He gives Himself to us. (*E. Payson, D.D.*) *My Beloved is mine* :—What I have to do is to mention a few things which may help some timid one to say, "My Beloved is mine," and then to do the same with regard to the second sentence in the text, "I am his." Thou askest, perhaps, "May I say, 'My Beloved is mine' ?" You know who that Beloved is ; I have no need to tell you that. He is the chief among ten thousand, and the altogether lovely.

First, hast thou taken hold of Christ by faith? Faith is the hand with which we grasp the Lord Jesus Christ. Hast thou believed that Jesus is the Christ, and that God hath raised Him from the dead? Dost thou trust thyself wholly to Him? Let me ask thee another helpful question. Is He truly thy Beloved, the Beloved of thy soul? I remember well a dear Christian woman, who frequently said to me, "I do love Jesus, I know I do; but does He love me?" Her question used to make me smile. "Well," I said, "that is a question that I never did put to myself,—'If I love Him, does He love me?' No, the question that used to puzzle me was, 'Do I love Him?'" When I could once settle that point, I was never again the victim of your form of doubt." If thou lovest Christ, Christ loves thee for certain, for thy love to Christ is nothing more nor less than a beam out of the great sun of His love; and the grace that has created that love in thy heart towards Him, if thou dost indeed love Him, proves that He loves thee. Next, I would help thee with a third question. Is Jesus dear to thee above all thy possessions? I hope that many of you can say, "O sir, we would give all that we have, we would suffer all that might be suffered, we would part with the very light and our eyes, too, if we could but be sure that we might each one truly say, 'My Beloved is mine.'" Well, if thou lovest Christ beyond all earthly things, rest assured that He is thine. Further, dost thou love Him beyond all earthly companions? Couldst thou part with your dearest ones for His sake? Say, art thou sure of this? Oh, then, He is assuredly thine! Dost thou love Him beyond all earthly objects? Aye, beyond the desire of learning, or honour, or position, or comfort,—wouldst thou let all go for His dear sake? Canst thou go that length? If thou canst, then surely He is thine. Let me further help thee by another question. Is Jesus so fully thy hope and thy trust that thou hast no other? O poor heart, if thou art clean divorced from every confidence but Christ, then I believe that thou art married unto Christ, notwithstanding that thou tremblest sometimes, and askest whether it be so or not. Let that thought also help thee. I would further help you in this way. If Christ is yours, your thoughts go after Him. You cannot say that you love a person if you never think of him. He to whom Christ belongs often thinks of Him. Again, do you do more than this? Do you long for Christ's company? If "my Beloved" is indeed mine, I shall want to see Him; I shall want to speak with Him; I shall want Him to abide with me. How is it with you? And, once more, if thy Beloved is thine, thou wilt own it to be so. Holy Bernard was wont to say, and I believe that he could say it truly, "O my Jesus, I never went from Thee without Thee!" He meant that he never left his knees, and left Christ behind him; he never went out of the house of God, and left Christ behind him; but he went through the outward act of devotion with a consciousness of the presence of Christ. Now, if this be your habit to keep up or to labour to keep up continued communion with Christ, and if you are longing for more and more of that communion, then, dear friends, you are His, and He is yours. Further, let me help you with a still closer question. Have you ever enjoyed that communion with Christ? Didst thou ever speak with Him? Hast thou ever heard His voice? If thou knowest anything experimentally about this matter, then thou mayest conclude that thy Beloved is indeed thine. But supposing that thou art not enjoying Christ's presence, I am going to put another question to thee. Art thou cast down when He is away? If thou hast grieved His Spirit, art thou grieved? If Christ be gone, dost thou feel as if the sun itself had ceased to shine, and the candle of thy existence had been snuffed out in utter darkness? Oh, then, He is thine! If thou canst not bear His absence, He is thine. Stretch out the hand of faith, and take Him, and then say without hesitation, "My Beloved is mine." "Yes, weighing everything the preacher has said, and judging myself as severely as I can, yet I dare take Christ to be mine, and to say, 'My Beloved is mine.'" If that is your case, dear friend, then you shall get confirmatory evidence of this fact by the witness of the Spirit within your soul, which will very likely come to you in the form of perfect contentment of spirit, perfect rest of heart. (C. H. Spurgeon.) **He feedeth among the lilies.**—*A song among the lilies*:—This passage describes a high state of grace, and it is worthy of note that the description is full of Christ. This is instructive, for this is not an exceptional case, it is only one fulfilment of a general rule. Our estimate of Christ is the best gauge of our spiritual condition; as the thermometer rises in proportion to the increased warmth of the air, so does our estimate of Jesus rise as our spiritual life increases in vigour and fervency. Tell me what you think of Jesus and I will tell you what to think of yourself. Christ is all to us, yea, more than all when we are thoroughly sanctified and filled with the Holy Ghost. I. First, here is a DELIGHTING TO HAVE CHRIST.

"My Beloved is mine." The spouse makes this the first of her joy notes, the corner-stone of her peace, the fountain of her bliss, the crown of her glory. Observe here that where such an expression is truthfully used the existence of the Beloved is matter of fact. Scepticism and questioning have no place with those who thus sing. Love cannot, will not doubt; it casts away the crutches of argument and flies on the wings of conscious enjoyment, singing her nuptial hymn, "My Beloved is mine, and I am His." In the case before us the love of the heavenly-minded one is perceived and acknowledged by herself. "My Beloved," saith she; it is no latent affection, she knows that she loves Him, and solemnly avows it. She does not whisper, "I hope I love the peerless One," but she sings, "My Beloved." There is no doubt in her soul about her passion for the altogether lovely One. But the pith of the text lies here, our possession of Him is proven, we know it, and we know it on good evidence—"My Beloved is mine." Jesus is ours by the promise, the covenant, and oath of God; a thousand assurances and pledges, bonds and seals, secure Him to us as our portion and everlasting heritage. This precious possession becomes to the believer his sole treasure. "My Beloved is mine," saith he, and in that sentence he has summed up all his wealth. Oh, what would all the treasures of the covenant be to us if it were possible to have them without Christ? Their very sap and sweetness would be gone. Having our Beloved to be ours, we have all things in Him, and therefore our main treasure, yea, our sole treasure, is our Beloved. O ye saints of God, was there ever possession like this? II. The second portion of the text deals with DELIGHTING TO BELONG TO CHRIST. "*I am His.*" This is as sweet as the former sentence. Christ is mine, but if I were not His it would be a sorry case, and if I were His and He were not mine it would be a wretched business. These two things are joined together with diamond rivets—"My Beloved is mine, and I am His." Put the two together, and you have reached the summit of delight. That we are His is a fact that may be proven—yea, it should need no proving, but be manifest to all that "*I am His.*" Certainly we are His by creation: He who made us should have us. We are His because His Father gave us to Him, and we are His because He chose us. Creation, donation, election are His triple hold upon us. Now this puts very great honour upon us. I have known the time when I could say "My Beloved is mine" in a very humble trembling manner, but I did not dare to add "*I am His*" because I did not think I was worth His having. I dared not hope that "*I am His*" would ever be written in the same book side by side with "My Beloved is mine." Poor sinner, first lay hold on Jesus, and then you will discover that Jesus values you. This second part of the text is true as absolutely as the first. "*I am His*"—not my goods only, nor my time, nor my talents, nor what I can spare, but "*I am His.*" The believer feels that he belongs to Jesus absolutely; let the Lord employ him as he may, or try him as he pleases; let him take away all earthly friends from him or surround him with comforts. Blessed be God, this is true evermore—"I am His"; His to-day, in the house of worship, and His to-morrow in the house of business. This belonging to the Well-beloved is a matter of fact and practice, not a thing to be talked about only, but really to be acted on. If you are His He will provide for you. A good husband careth for his spouse, and even thus the Lord Jesus Christ cares for those who are betrothed unto Him. You will be perfected too, for whatever Christ has He will make worthy of Himself and bring it to glory. III. To conclude: the saint feels DELIGHT IN THE VERY THOUGHT OF CHRIST. "He feedeth among the lilies." When we love any persons, and we are away from home, we delight to think of them, and to remember what they are doing. Now, where is Jesus? What are these lilies? Do not these lilies represent the pure in heart, with whom Jesus dwells? Where, then, is my Lord to-day? He is up and away, among the lilies of Paradise. In imagination I see those stately rows of milk-white lilies growing no longer among thorns: lilies which are never soiled with the dust of earth, which for ever glisten with the eternal dews of fellowship, while their roots drink in unfading life from the river of the water of life which waters the garden of the Lord. There is Jesus! But what is He doing among the lilies? It is said, "He feedeth among the lilies." He is feeding Himself, not on the lilies, but among them. Our Lord finds solace among His people. His delights are with the sons of men; He joys to see the graces of His people, to receive their love, and to discern His own image in their faces. Then what shall I do? Well, I will abide among the lilies. His saints shall be my companions. Where they flourish I will try to grow. I will be often in their assemblies. Aye, and I will be a lily too. By faith I will neither toil nor spin in a legal fashion, but I will live by faith upon the Son of God, rooted in Him. (C. H. Spurgeon.)

Vor. 17. Until the day break, and the shadows flee away.—*Darkness before the dawn*.—The spouse sings, “Until the day break, and the shadows flee away,” so that the beloved of the Lord may be in the dark. A child of God, who is a child of light, may be for a while in darkness; first, darkness comparatively, as compared with the light he has sometimes enjoyed, for days are not always equally bright. Yes, and he may be in positive darkness. It may be very black with him, and he may be obliged to cry, “I see no signs of returning day.” Sometimes, neither sun nor moon appears for a long season to cheer the believer in the dark. This may arise partly through sickness of body. But yet it can be only temporary darkness. The same text which suggests night promises dawn: “Until the day break,” etc.

I. First of all, let us consider OUR PROSPECT. Our prospect is, that the day will break, and that the shadows will flee away. We may read this passage in many ways, and apply it to different cases. Think, first, of the child of God who is full of doubt. He is afraid that, after all, his supposed conversion was not a true one, and that he has proved it to be false by his own misbehaviour. He is afraid, I scarcely know of what, for so many fears crowd in upon him. His eyes are looking toward the cross, and somehow he has a hope, if not quite a persuasion, that he will find light in Christ, where so many others have found it. I would encourage that hope till it becomes a firm conviction and a full expectation. The day will break for you, dear mourner, the shadows will yet flee away. This expression is equally applicable when we come into some personal sorrow not exactly of a spiritual kind. I know that God’s children are not long without tribulation. As long as the wheat is on the threshing-floor, it must expect to feel the flail. Perhaps you have had a bereavement, or you may have had losses in business, or crosses in your family, or you have been sorely afflicted in your own body, and now you are crying to God for deliverance out of your temporal trouble. That deliverance will surely come. Yes, in the darkest of all human sorrows there is the glad prospect that the day will break, and the shadows will flee away. This is the case again, I believe, on a grander scale, with reference to the depression of religion at the present time. We want—I cannot say how much we want—a revival of pure and undefiled religion in this our day. Will it come? Why should it not come? If we long for it, if we pray for it, if we believe for it, if we work for it, and prepare for it, it will certainly come. The day will break, and the shadows will flee away. I believe that this is to be the case also in this whole world. It is still the time of darkness, it is still the hour of shadows. I am no prophet, nor the son of a prophet, and I cannot foretell what is yet to happen in the earth; it may be that the darkness will deepen still more, and that the shadows will multiply and increase; but the Lord will come. That glorious advent shall end our weary waiting days, it shall end our conflicts with infidelity and priestcraft, it shall put an end to all our futile endeavours; and when the great Shepherd shall appear in His glory, then shall every faithful under-shepherd and all his flock appear with him, and then shall the day break, and the shadows flee away.

II. Now consider OUR POSTURE, “until the day break, and the shadows flee away.” We are here, like soldiers on guard, waiting for the dawn. It is night, and the night is deepening; how shall we occupy ourselves until the day break, and the shadows flee away? Well, first, we will wait in the darkness with patient endurance as long as God appoints it. Whatever of shadow is yet to come, whatever of cold damp air and dews of the night is yet to fall upon us, we will bear it. What next are we to do until the day break? Why, let there be hopeful watching. Keep your eyes towards the East, and look for the first grey sign of the coming morning. Then, further, while we maintain patient endurance and hopeful watching, let us give each other mutual encouragement. What further should we do in the dark? Well, one of the best things to do in the dark is to stand still and keep our place. We are not going to plunge on in a reckless manner, we mean to look before we leap; and as it is too dark to look, we will not leap, but will just abide here hard by the cross, battling with every adversary of the truth as long as we have a right hand to move in the name of the Almighty God, “until the day break, and the shadows flee away.” What else ought we to do? Keep up a careful separateness from the works of darkness that are going on all around us. If it seems dark to you, gather up your skirts, and gird up your loins. The more sin abounds in the world, the more ought the Church of God to seek after the strictest holiness.

III. Now notice OUR PETITION: “Until the day break, and the shadows flee away, turn, my Beloved,” etc. I am not going to preach about that part of our text, but only just to urge you to turn it into prayer. “Turn to me, O my Beloved, for Thou hast turned away from me, or from Thy Church. Turn again, I beseech Thee.

Pardon my lukewarmness, forgive my indifference. Turn to me again, my Beloved. O Thou Husband of my soul, if I have grieved Thee, and Thou hast hid Thy face from me, turn again unto me! Smile Thou, for then shall the day break, and the shadows flee away. Come to me, my Lord, visit me once again." Put up that prayer, beloved. The prayer of the spouse is in this poetic form: "Come over the mountains of division." As we look out into the darkness, what little light there is appears to reveal to us Alp upon Alp, mountain upon mountain, and our Beloved seems divided from us by all these hills. Now our prayer is, that He would come over the top of them; we cannot go over the top of them to Him, but He can come over the top of them to us, if He think fit to do so. Like the hind's feet, this blessed Hind of the morning can come skipping over the hills with utmost speed to visit and to deliver us. (*C. H. Spurgeon.*) *Things to be awaited*:—We can speak confidently of such things only as we now know in part, beginnings that here have no completion, germs that come to leaf and bud, but not to fruit, in the soil of this world; processes that have promise of great results but are cut short of them, desires and aspirations that now have no full satisfaction. I. WE WAIT FOR REST. If the question were raised: Is man made for toil or for rest? the answer would be a mixed and qualified one. He is appointed to toil, he is destined to rest; one is his condition, the other is his end. If man is made in God's image, he is made to share in God's condition; and both Christian revelation and heathen conjecture unite in conceiving of Deity as in repose, eternally acting yet in eternal rest. If it be said that man can never attain this repose because he can never reach the eternal perfection and power, it may be answered that it does not depend upon the proportions of the being, but upon the harmony of his powers and upon his adjustment to his external condition. One whose nature has been reduced to perfect harmony may have perfect peace within, and also without, if also he is in a world entirely adapted to him. But we have not this rest at present except in some foretaste of it in our spirit. Unceasing toil is the largest feature of human life. It is divinely appointed, but it is painful; it is a blessing, but also a suffering; an evil thing, but with a soul of goodness in it. It is wise, for, if remitted, vice creeps in, but it is no less a bond that chafes, a burden that weighs down, a trial that wears the spirit. Some morning, this shadow will flee away. In the church of St. Nazaro in Florence is an epitaph upon the tomb of a soldier, as fit for the whole toiling race as for his own restless life: "Johannes Divultius, who never rested, rests,—hush!" We say of our dead, "they rest from their labours." Whatever the future world may be to us or require of us, it is not clothed in the guise of toil, but offers seats of eternal rest; it is the contrast of earth, the other side of mortal existence as spirit is the other side of matter. II. WE WAIT FOR THE RENEWAL OF LOST POWERS. However we answer the question, if life is a process of loss or gain, it cannot be denied that real or apparent loss is one of its largest features, even when life is at its best. Is this loss absolute, or do we regain that which seems to pass? Shall I never,—so we are forced to ask ourselves,—shall I never have again the buoyancy of youth, the zest, the innocence, the unquestioning faith, the ardent desire and unconquerable will, the bounding vigour of body and mind, with which I began life? We do not get half-way through our allotted years before these riches are gone from us. If they are gone for ever, one half of life, at least, is spent under an ever-deepening shadow. It is difficult to believe that existence is so ordered; that God's increased gifts are annihilated; that the impress of His hands, the similitudes of Himself, are blotted out for ever. St. Paul speaks of the redemption of the body as something that is waited for. He means no narrow doctrine of a physical resurrection, but a renewal of existence,—a restoration of lost powers. It changes the whole colour of life, and its character also, if we take the one view or the other,—if we regard existence as a dying-out process, or as passing into temporary eclipse, to emerge with all its past glories when the shadows of death flee away. III. WE WAIT FOR THE FULL PERFECTING OF CHARACTER. I do not mean, of course, that we are to wait in the sense of relaxing effort after perfection—such waiting may end in an eternal failure of character, but rather that the effort that now only partially succeeds will finally reach success. There is nothing that weighs more heavily upon a right-minded man than the slow progress he makes in overcoming his faults. There is nothing a right-minded man desires so much as entire right-mindedness. Will it never come? Yes—but it must be awaited. Entireness is nowhere a feature of present existence, else it could not be a world of hope and promise. On no thing can we lay our hand and say, Here is finality and perfection. The adamant is crumbling to dust; the orderly heavens oscillate towards final dissolution, and foretell "new heavens"; in every

soul is weakness and fault. We are keyed not to attainment, but to the hope of it by struggle towards it. And it is this struggle, and not the attainment, that measures character and foreshadows destiny. Character is not determined by faults and weaknesses, and periodic phases of life, nor by the limitations and accidents of present existence, but by the central purpose, the inmost desire of the heart. If that be turned towards God and His righteousness, it must at last bring us thither.

IV. WE AWAIT THE RENEWAL OF SUNDERED LOVE. When love loses its object its charm is interrupted, for love is oneness and cannot brook separation. It is impossible to believe that God has organized into life an incurable sorrow; that He has made love, which is the best conceivable thing—being the substance of Himself,—the necessary condition of the greatest misery. Love may suffer an eclipse, but it is not sent walling into eternal shadows. It is as sure as God Himself that human love shall again claim its own. But this eternal union must be awaited. It begins here, springing out of mysterious oneness; it grows up amidst unspeakable tenderness, rising from an instinctive thing to an intellectual and moral union, losing nothing, and weaving into itself every strand of human sympathy till it stands for the whole substance of life, and so vanishes from the scene. If this prime reality is an illusion, then all else is. If it does not outlast death, then all may go. But love is not a vain thing, and God does not mock Himself and us when He makes us partakers of His nature.

V. WE WAIT FOR THE MYSTERY TO BE TAKEN OFF FROM LIFE. The crucial test of a thoughtful mind is a sense of the mystery of life in this world. This highest order of mind is not antagonistic to faith; it is simply conscious of the incomprehensible range of truth. None but an inferior mind has a plan of the universe; it is to the thoughtless that all things are plain. What is life? What is matter? What is the relation between them? What is creation? Granting evolution, what started the evolving process? Assuming God, what is the relation of creation to Him? What the relation of man? What is this that thinks and wills and loves—this I? And then, what is it all for? Is there a final purpose and an order tending to it, or is it but the whirl of molecules, the dust of the universe circling for a moment in space, of which we are but some atoms? Is there a bridge between consciousness and the external world, or a gulf that cannot be spanned or fathomed? Is life a reality, or is it a dream from which we may awake in some world of reality to find that this world was but the vision of a night? It is useless to deny that this mystery carries with it a sense of pain. It is alien to mind, a condition foreign to our nature. And the more thoroughly mind is true to itself, the more painfully does it feel the darkness. When Goethe, dying, said, "Let the light enter," he uttered, not the highest and best hope of the heart, but the dearest satisfaction of the intellect. He felt that he was going where the shadows that hang over this world would flee away, and he could find some answer to the questions that had vexed him here. So, too, those commoner questions, Why does evil exist? Why do the innocent suffer? Why does one suffer on account of another? Why does life end untimely? Why is man so subject to nature? Why is the experience of life so long in ripening the fruit of wisdom? Why are the chances so against man that he spends his days in sorrow and evil? Why is there not more help from God? Why does life gradually assume the appearance of a doom, spent in vanity and ending in death? We get no full answer to these questions in this life. Shall these questions never be answered? It is not easy to believe that mind will for ever be harassed by an alien element; it may always require something other than itself to stand upon, or as a foil like that which the jewel-merchant puts under precious stones to reflect their colour, but it will not for ever wear this *other* as a clog and burden. The mystery of the present life is due to the fact that it is so heavily conditioned by its material environment; matter contends against spirit. But as existence goes on, if it is normal, it throws off these conditions and presses towards absolute action and full freedom. This is the eternal state, and this action is eternal life, and the world where it is achieved is the eternal world.

VI. WE WAIT FOR FULL RESTORATION TO THE PRESENCE OF GOD. There are hours when the whole world, and all it contains, shrivels to nothingness, and God alone fills the mind; hours of human desolation, seasons of strange, mysterious exaltation, times of earthly despair, or of joy; the height and excess of any emotion bears us away into a region where God Himself dwells. But even if we have taught ourselves to make the impression of these hours constant, there is still an unsatisfied element in the knowledge. We long for more, for nearness, for sight or something that stands for sight, for the Father at hand, and the home of the soul. I know that in many and many of God's children there is a longing for God that is not satisfied, because they are

children and are away from the Father's house. And I know still better that the unrest of this weary world is its unvoiced cry after God. This full, satisfying presence of God, must be awaited. It is contended against by sense, by the world of things, by the limits that shut out the infinite, and by our own slow and hesitating departure from the evil and the sensual—a muddy vesture of decay doth grossly close us in; but when this falls off, and these earthly shadows flee away, we shall see face to face, and know as we are known. (*T. T. Munger, D.D.*) *The saint's night and day*:—

I. A SOUL ONCE TRULY MARRIED TO CHRIST, WILL FROM THENCEFORTH LOOK ON THE LIFETIME IN THIS WORLD AS A NIGHT-TIME, A SHADOWY ONE, AS INDEED IT IS. II. TO THOSE THAT ARE TRULY MARRIED TO CHRIST, THE DAY WILL BREAK IN THE OTHER WORLD, AND THE SHADOWS FLEE AWAY; AND THEY SHOULD LIVE IN THE COMFORTABLE EXPECTATION OF IT. Consider the day's breaking, and the shadows fleeing away thereupon. I am to speak of the day's breaking in the other world to those that are married to Christ. And here I shall show what a day will break to them there. A clear and bright day (Isa. lx. 1, 2). A fair day and calm. There are no storms nor tempests, no blustering winds nor rains in Immanuel's land (Rev. xxi. 4). A glad and joyful day (Ps. cxxvi. 5). An eternal day. Let us next see how this day will break there to those who are married to Christ. As coming near their night-journey's end, they enter the passage betwixt the two worlds, the darkness and shadowiness of the night will come to a pitch. For as the darkest hour ordinarily goes before daybreak, so is it here, the hour of death is so in a signal manner, "the valley of the shadow of death" (Ps. xliii. 4). As soon as they are got over to the other side, immediately the day breaks, and it is fair daylight to them. I proceed to consider the shadows, upon this breaking of the day, fleeing away. What is that fleeing away of the shadows? The utter removal of everything interposing betwixt God and them, and intercepting the light of His countenance (Rev. xxi. 3). The removal of all dark, gloomy, and melancholy things out of their condition (Matt. xxv. 23). The removal of all imperfection of light, and whatsoever gives but a faint and shadowy representation of Christ and the glories of the other world (1 Cor. xiii. 12; Rev. xxii. 4). What are the shadows that will flee away when that day breaks? The shadow of this world will then flee away (1 Cor. vii. 31). The shadow of sin (Heb. xii. 23). The shadow of temptations (Rom. xvi. 20). The shadow of outward troubles will flee away, of troubles on your bodies, relations, names, affairs, etc. (Job iii. 17). The shadow of inward spiritual troubles, through deserts, and hidings of the Lord's face. The shadow of ordinances will flee away (Rev. xxi. 23). The shadow of all manner of imperfections (1 Cor. xiii. 12). I shall now confirm this point, That the day will break, and the shadows flee away, as to those who are married to Christ. It was so with their Head and Husband, and the procedure with them must be conformable to that with Him (Heb. xii. 2). The nature of God's work of grace in them; it cannot be left unperfected (Ps. cxxxviii). The bounty and goodness of God to His people. God is essentially good, and He is good to them in Christ His Son. It is inconsistent with the goodness of His nature to keep them always in the darkness of the night, and horror of shadows. The nature of the covenant, which is everlasting, and cannot be broken. Consider believers living in the comfortable expectation of the day's breaking to them in the other world and the shadows fleeing away. It implies these following things: (1) Their looking on themselves as travellers only through this world, who are not to stay in it (Heb. xi. 13). (2) Their laying their account with the continuance of the night and gloomy shades, while they are here. (3) A contentedness to leave this world, and go to the other (Luke ii. 29). (4) A faith of the day, the clear and bright day that is in the other world (Heb. ix. 13). (5) A desire to be there in the other world, where the day breaks and the shadows flee away (Phil. i. 23). (6) A hope and expectation of the day's breaking to them there, and the shadows fleeing away (Rom. viii. 23, 24). (7) A comforting themselves in this world with the prospect of the other world (2 Cor. iv. 17, 18).

III. IT WILL BE THE GREAT CONCERN OF THOSE MARRIED TO CHRIST DURING THEIR NIGHT-JOURNEY IN THIS WORLD, THAT HE MAY TURN AND COME TO THEM, TILL THE DAY BREAKING AND THE SHADOWS FLEEING AWAY, THEY GET TO HIM IN THE OTHER WORLD. 1. I am to show what is Christ's turning and coming to those married to Him, that will be their great concern to have. (1) His affording them His presence. That will be their great concern to enjoy during their night-journey; that if they must have a dark and shadowy night-journey of it through the world, He would not leave them, but be with them in it (Exod. xxxiii. 15). (a) His seen or sensible presence with them, of the want of which Job complains (Job xxiii. 8, 9), and in the enjoyment

of which the Psalmist triumphs (Ps. xxiii. 4). (b) His operative or efficacious presence in them (Phil. iii. 8, 10). (2) His affording them His countenance, the shining of His face, and the manifestation of His favour (Ps. vi. 6). 2. The import of this concern of those married to Christ, that He may turn and come to them, till the day's breaking and the shadows' fleeing away, they get to Him in the other world. (1) That during the night-journey in this world, Christ sometimes turns away and withdraws from His people; so that seeking Him they cannot find Him (Cant. iii. 1). (2) The travellers to Zion, when Christ is away, though it be night, they readily miss Him (Cant. iii. 3). (3) A holy dissatisfaction with all things while He is away. (4) A holy resolution to give Him a welcome reception, if He will turn and come again; then the doors should be cast wide open to receive Him (Cant. viii. 1, 2). (5) Earnest outgoings of the heart after Him in desires for His return (Isa. lxix. 1). (6) A holy restlessness in the soul, till He turn and come again (Cant. iii. 1). 3. The reasons of this concern in those married to Christ, that He may turn and come to them. (1) Their superlative love to Christ (Cant. i. 3, 4). (2) Their comfort in their night-journey depends on it; without it they must go drooping, for nothing will make up the want thereof. (3) Their experience of the desirableness of His presence and countenance in their night-journey (Ps. lxxiii. 1-3). (4) Their felt need of it; they know not how they will ever make out the night-journey without it (Ex. xxxiii. 15). (a) The sense of their liableness to mistake their way, that they need Him for their direction and guidance (Jer. x. 23). (b) The sense of their weakness for the journey, that they need to go leaning on Him, as a weak woman on her husband (Cant. viii. 5). (c) The sense of the great opposition and difficulty to be met with in the way (Eph. vi. 12, 13). 4. We shall now confirm this point, That it will be the great concern of those married to Christ, during their night-journey in this world, that He may turn and come to them till the day breaking and the shadows fleeing away, they get to Him in the other world. (1) Christ their Lord and Husband has got their heart above all other, and it rests in Him. (2) They are partakers of the Divine nature (2 Pet. i. 4), partakers of Christ, of His Spirit, His grace, His image; and like draws to like; the carnal worldling to the world, and the Christian to Christ. (3) All believers may be observed to be great miscounters of time, when Christ is turned away from them in their night-journey (Isa. liv. 7). (4) When they are themselves, they are resolute for His presence and countenance (Eph. vi. 15.) (*T. Boston, D.D.*)

In the shadow:—To all the light is very dear, and more so perhaps because this life is a *twilight season* to all of us, we are all in the shadow. It is not all dark, neither is it all light, but it is full of shadows, shadows of sin, shadows of sorrow, shadows of sickness, of want, of disappointment, of death. The brightest life cannot be all sunshine, over rich and poor alike the shadows fall. The brightest eyes must be dim with tears sometimes, the gayest voices must turn to mourning sometimes, the merriest Church bell must toll sometimes. 1. The Church on earth has ever been in the shadow of trouble, its holiest members have had to suffer many things. In the Jewish Church there was the shadow of idolatry and unbelief, the shadow of self-will and bad government, ending in the darker shadow of captivity and exile. In the Christian Church there have been shadows of persecution, of division, of false doctrine, of lukewarmness, of tyranny. 2. So with ourselves, the individual members of the Church, we are all more or less in the shadow. (1) Some of us perhaps are under the shadow of a great sin, repented of, and so pardoned, but not forgotten. (2) Some of us perhaps are under the shadow of worldly loss. (3) It may be the shadow of a great bereavement which has fallen upon us. (4) Over some of us again the shadow of a great illness may have fallen. 3. We cannot make the darkness light, or scatter the shadows, or hasten the daybreak, Jesus alone can do that. He who once said "Let there be light," will say so again in answer to our prayers. (*H. J. Wilmot-Buxton, M.A.*)

CHAPTER III.

VERS. 1-3. I sought Him, but I found Him not.—Hidings of God:—Prophetically those verses may be taken as delineating the sorrow of the first disciples at the departure of Christ from the earth. Between Easter Day and Pentecost the infant Church was very much as here described. We would not, however, limit the

application of this passage to the apostolic age. It has its fulfilment, we believe, again and again. The leading idea is that of a temporary estrangement, real or imaginary, between Christ and His people, during which they seek Him but cannot find Him. I. There would be nothing remarkable in the Redeemer denying the consolations of His Presence to those who were careless about Him. The remarkable point suggested by the text is that there is such a thing as desiring God and being disappointed. Now it would seem to be an ordinary feature in God's providence to withdraw occasionally from the saints, in order to increase that very craving after Him which He declines to gratify. He suspends His operations in their behalf until what we call the last moment (John ii. 4, vi. 5, 6). Again and again have dangers and distresses thickened round about the Church. The heathen have furiously raged together. The kings of the earth have stood up, and the rulers taken counsel together. The tyranny of despotic monarchs has well-nigh crushed the Church at some periods: at others, heresies have prevailed so widely that the whole community has appeared tainted. This was the case with Arianism in the fourth century. They who maintained sound doctrine cried unto the Lord, and apparently in vain. They sought Him, but they found Him not. And this is no solitary instance. How often has it happened with those who have gone to bear the cross into heathen lands! They have laboured and toiled, and caught nothing. For months and years they have preached, and made no converts. Nor is it difficult to perceive that all this is a discipline to the souls of the faithful; nay, not only a discipline, but a test of the reality of their faith. How could the fervour of a man's heart be proved, if he was heard at the first petition? How could the depth of the soul's yearning after the Divine Being be manifested, if He was to be found as soon as sought for? Again, it is not unusual to find persons complaining that they are at times quite unable to experience pleasure or consolation in religious exercises. They go through the service of the Church without once being able to realize the presence of God, or the solemnity of what they are about. Their hearts respond not to the words of thanksgiving or of prayer. Everything seems heavy, wearisome, and cold. People are frequently discouraged when they find their souls thus chilled and lifeless—utterly unable to rise to the level of their work; but if you get possessed of the principle which we are illustrating, there will be no need for this discouragement. We are not always to blame when we are listless and cold in Church. If we do not try or desire to be otherwise, of course the fault is our own; but if we try to be devout and cannot, it may be only that God is dealing with us—that He is subjecting us to a discipline which He sees necessary. For example, He may be teaching us not to rely upon warm emotions—not to build overmuch upon feelings, however good. II. Now from the foregoing considerations there flows a very solemn thought. We have said that, as well to individuals as to the Christian Church at large, the Redeemer applies a sort of discipline in modifying at times or altogether withholding the consolations of His Presence. What follows? Why, that He must personally engage Himself about every soul. The spirit of each man and woman is a separate planet in the spiritual system whose summer and winter, whose storms and sunshine are regulated by Deity alone. Hence the full meaning of that passage in which Christ Jesus is called the Shepherd and Bishop of our souls. It intimates that the human soul is so fine and subtle a thing that none but He can supervise and tend it. From the moment of our new birth He takes us in hand. Every trial and temptation has been appointed by Him; every annoyance and disaster has been weighed out by Him. His seat is in heaven, yet is His hand upon each one of us. He shrouds Himself from the gaze of the seraphim, but He is about the path and bed of every child in this assembly. And this is what we would have you learn secondarily from the text, "I sought Him, but I found Him not." His withdrawing Himself is a proof of His individual care. When anything happens out of the common course, it speaks to us of God. When with all our exertions we fail to find Christ, it is evidence that He is working in and about us. We recur to the main lesson involved in what has been said, which we desire especially to enforce. It is this. We are not to expect to find always great delight in the path of duty; we are not to be anxious about our feelings, if our actions are right. Daily service and weekly communion will often be attended coldly, and as we fear without heart. It must be so. It is the tendency of repetition to diminish ecstatic emotions; still we are to go on steadfastly on our road. The spiritual life is very like the natural, it has its bright days and its gloomy, its calm and its storm, its hours of exultation and depression. Let us take each as it comes, doing our work in each with care and sobriety and per-

severance. Yet a little while and these variations shall be no more. We are travelling onward to a land where the sun never goes down, and the noise of the waterfloods is never heard. (*Bp. Woodford.*)

Ver. 3. The Watchmen that go about the city.—*Gospel Watchmen*: The ministers of the Gospel are called watchmen, either in allusion to shepherds, who watch over their flock by night (Luke ii. 8); or else, to watchmen in cities as here; and their work may be considered: 1. With regard to themselves; they are to watch over themselves as well as others; they are to watch over their conversations, that they be as become the Gospel they preach, and so that they may give no ill examples to others, nor cause the ways and doctrines of Christ to be evil spoken of, and render their ministry useless; they are to watch over their doctrines, and take heed that they be agreeable to the oracles of God; and they deliver nothing but the “wholesome words of Christ Jesus,” and such as may be for the edifying of their hearers, and suitable to the cases of souls; they are to watch all opportunities to preach this gospel, as the apostle says (2 Tim. iv. 2), to “be instant in season and out of season;” and then they are to watch and observe the success of it, and how it is blessed and made useful to souls: moreover they ought to have a very great guard upon themselves; for if the enemy can but surprise, decoy, or corrupt them, it turns much to his advantage. 2. With regard to others, their work is, (1) To give the time of night, as in (Isa. xxi. 11, 12). (2) To give notice of approaching dangers. They are to give notice of the danger that sinners are in, who are walking in the broad road to destruction; and also the dangers that churches may be in through errors and heresies springing up among them, as well as by indulging themselves in any vicious practices, which they are severely to check and reprehend. Now, this work requires vigilance, prudence, courage, and faithfulness; and also shows the necessity and usefulness of the public ministry, which can no more be dispensed with than watchmen in a city; and likewise what care the Lord has of His churches, in placing such officers in them, as well as the awfulness of the work they are concerned in; for if the watchman does not discharge his duty, the blood of those he has to do with will be required of him. (*John Gill, D.D.*) **Saw ye Him whom my soul loveth?**—*Objects of a Christian's love*.—I. THE OBJECT OF A CHRISTIAN'S LOVE MAY EASILY BE IDENTIFIED. Who should be the object of a Christian's love but Christ? We wear His name, profess His religion, believe His Bible. II. THE EXISTENCE OF A CHRISTIAN'S LOVE SHOULD BE PERSONALLY KNOWN TO OURSELVES. It must not be a theory, but a realization. Do we love Him more than the world or the creature? III. THE OBJECT OF A CHRISTIAN'S LOVE SHOULD BE OPENLY AND PUBLICLY AVOWED. It is not to be a secret thing, for he who is ashamed of his Master's livery is unworthy of Him. IV. THE FLAME OF A CHRISTIAN'S LOVE TO CHRIST SHOULD BE STRONG AND VIGOROUS. “My soul loveth Him.” “Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart,” etc. It will prompt to inquiry and earnestness. V. THE CHRISTIAN'S LOVE TO CHRIST IS NOT ALWAYS SATISFIED. The Master sometimes hides His face. There may be some cause of the Saviour's withdrawing—wandering in sinful paths, sinful company, etc. VI. THE CHRISTIAN'S UNSATISFIED LOVE WILL PRODUCE IN HIS SOUL GREATER ACTIVITY AND ZEAL. (*Homilist.*)

Vers. 4, 5. It was but a little that I passed from them, but I found Him whom my soul loveth: I held Him and would not let Him go.—*The real presence, the great want of the Church*.—As God, Jesus is everywhere; as man, He is only in heaven; as God and man in one person, Mediator and Head of the Church, He is present with us by the Holy Ghost, the Comforter, whom the Father has sent in His Name. This presence, not a bodily but a spiritual presence, is the glory of the Church of God. When she is without it she is shorn of her strength; when she possesses it all good things ensue. I. Before ever we can bring the Well-Beloved into our mother's house, the Church, we MUST FIND HIM PERSONALLY FOR OURSELVES. “It was but a little that I passed from them, but I found Him whom my soul loveth.” How can we bring into the chamber of the Church Him whom we have not yet met with ourselves? How can we communicate grace to others instrumentally unless, first of all, we have received it into our own hearts? If thou wouldst bring Christ into the Church which thou lovest, then, first of all, thine inmost soul must so love Christ that thou canst not live without His company. This must be thy cry: “Saw ye Him whom my soul loveth?” and this must be the goal of thine aspirations: “I have found Him whom my soul loveth.” It must not be talk, it must be soul-love; it

must not be a profession of affection for Jesus, but the inmost bowels of our being must be moved by His Name. These ardent lovers of Jesus must diligently seek Him. The spouse sought Him, sought Him on her bed, sought Him in the streets, sought Him in the broadways, sought Him at last at the lips of the watchmen, sought Him everywhere where He was likely to be found. In seeking our Lord we must use all ministries. The spouse inquired of the watchmen. We are not to despise God's servants, for He is usually pleased to bless us through them, and it would be ungrateful both to Him and to them to pass them by as useless. But, while we use the ministries, we must go beyond them. Do not imagine that hearing the truth preached simply and earnestly will of itself be a blessing to your souls. Far, far beyond the servant, pass to the Master. Be this the longing of each heart, each Sabbath day, "Lord, give me fellowship with Thyself." Note that we must search to the very utmost till we find our Beloved. The Christian must leave no stone unturned till he gets back his fellowship with Christ. If any sin obstructs the way, it must be rigorously given up; if there be any neglected duty, it must be earnestly discharged; if there be any higher walk of grace, which is necessary to continuous fellowship, we must ascend it, fearing no hill of difficulty. Oh, for more Enochs, men who walk with God, whose habitual spirit is that of close communion with Jesus, meditating upon Him, yea, more than that, sympathizing with Him, drinking in His spirit, changed into His likeness, living over again His life, because He is in them, the monarch of their souls.

II. If we would be a blessing to the Church, and have already found Christ, WE MUST TAKE CARE TO RETAIN HIM. "I have found Him whom my soul loveth; I held Him, and I would not let Him go." How comparatively easy it is to climb to the top of Pisgah! It needs but a little effort; many bold and gracious spirits are fully equal to it. But to keep there, to abide in that mountain, this is the difficulty. Mark that, according to the text, it is very apparent that Jesus will go away if He be not held. "I held Him and I would not let Him go"; as if He would have gone if He had not been firmly retained. When He met with Jacob that night at the Jabbok, He said, "Let me go." He would not go without Jacob's letting Him, but He would have gone if Jacob had loosed his hold. He will go unless you hold Him. But note, next, He is very willing to be held. Who could hold Him if He were not? He is the Omnipotent Saviour, and if He willed to withdraw He could do so: let us hold Him as we might. But mark His condescension. Jesus is willing enough to be retained by hearts which are full of His love. And whenever you have Christ remember that you are able to hold Him. She who held Him in the Song was no stronger than you are; she was but a feeble woman, poorly fed under the Old Testament dispensation; you have drunk the new wine of the new covenant, and you are stronger than she. You can hold Him, and He will not be able to go from you. Embrace Him with the arms of mighty affection, enchain Him with ardent admiration. Lay hold upon Him by faith, and clasp Him with love. Be also much in prayer. Prayer casts a chain about Him. He never leaves the heart that prays. Hold Him, too, by your obedience to Him. Never quarrel with Him. Let Him have His way. Watch His words; be careful to obey them all. Be very tender in your conduct, so that nothing grieves Him. Show to Him that you are ready to suffer for His sake.

III. It appears from the text that, after the spouse had thus found Christ for herself and held Him, SHE BROUGHT HIM INTO THE CHURCH—"I brought Him to my mother's house." We ought lovingly to remember the Church of God. By the Holy Spirit we were begotten unto newness of life, but it was in the Church, and through the preaching of the Word there, that we were brought into the light of life. Did I hear a harsh but honest voice exclaim, "But I find much fault with the Church"? If thou lovest her, thou wilt go backward and cast a mantle over all. But suppose thy candour is compelled to see faults in her; then there is so much the more need of her Lord's presence in her to cure those faults. The more sickly she is, the more she wants Him to be her strength and her physician. I say, therefore, to thee, dear friend, above all things, seek to bring Christ into an imperfect Church, and a weak Church, and an erring Church, that she may become strong in the Lord and in the power of His might. The saints can bring Him in by their testimony. I hope that often Christ is here when I have borne testimony to you of His power to save, of His atoning blood, of His exaltation in Heaven, of the perfection of His character, and of His willingness to save. But others can do it by their prayers. There is a mysterious efficacy in the prayers of men who dwell near to God. Even if they were compelled to keep their beds, and do nothing but pray, they would pour benedictions upon the Church. Wrestling prayers bring Christ into the innermost chambers of the Church of God. And there is no doubt that Christ is

often brought into the Church by the example of those eminent saints who abide in Christ. You know what I mean. There is a very manner and air about some Christian men which honours Christ, and benefits His people. They may not be gifted in speech, but their very spirit speaks, they are so gentle, loving, tender, earnest, truthful, upright, gracious. Their paths, like the paths of God Himself, drop fatness. IV. This leads me to the last point, which is this, to CHARGE THE CHURCH THAT SHE BE CAREFUL NOT TO DISTURB THE LORD'S REPOSE, if we have been enabled by Divine Grace to bring the Lord into the chambers of our mother's house (ver. 5). Observe, then, that the Lord Jesus in His Church is not indifferent to the conduct of His people. The Lord Jesus Christ, looking around His Church, if He sees anything evil in it, will do one of two things; either He will go right away from His Church because the evil is tolerated there, and He will leave that Church to be like Laodicea, to go on from bad to worse, till it becomes no Church at all; or else He will come and He will trim the lamp, or, to use the figure of the fifteenth of John, He will prune the vine-branch, and with His knife will cut off this member, and the other, and cast them into the fire; while, as for the rest, He will cut them till they bleed again, because they are fruit-bearing members, but they have too much wood, and He wants them to bring forth more fruit. It is not a trifling matter to be in the Church of God. God's fire is in Zion and His furnace in Jerusalem. (*C. H. Spurgeon.*) *Love's vigilance rewarded*:—I. Before we actually come to our text, we may notice THREE PRELIMINARY STEPS IN THE SPOUSE'S PROGRESS. 1. The first one is implied in the words, "I love Him." She refers to her Beloved under the title of "Him whom my soul loveth." Can you give the Lord Jesus that title? 2. Then, in the spouse's progress, there came another step, "I sought Him." Can you put your finger on that sentence and say, "That is true, too"? Have you been seeking Him this Sabbath day? Are you coming to His table to-night seeking Him? 3. Then comes in a little minor or mournful music, for the next clause is, "I sought Him, but I found Him not." The spouse is so sad about it that she tells out her woe twice, "I sought Him, but I found Him not." Do you know that experience? I hope you are not realizing it at this time; but many of us have known what it is. Our Lord Jesus Christ would not have us think little of His company; and, sometimes, it is only as we miss it that we begin to appreciate the sweetness of it. If we always had high days and holidays, we might not be so thankful when our gala days come round. II. Inside the text, there are THREE FURTHER STEPS: "I found Him," "I held Him," "I brought Him into my mother's house, and into the chamber of her that conceived me." 1. This is the first of the second series of steps, "I found Him." I do not wish to stand here and speak for myself alone; but I want, beloved, that you should each one of you also say, "I love Him," "I sought Him," and now, "I have found Him." What is meant by the words, "I found Him"? Well, I think a soul may say, "I found Him," in the sense employed in the text, when first of all it has a clear view of His Person. My Beloved is Divine and human, the Son of God, and yet the Son of man. Let your soul picture Him so plainly that you can seem to see Him, for this will be a part of your finding Him. But that will not be enough; you must then get to know that He is present with you. We cannot see Him, but yet He that walketh amidst the golden candlesticks is, in spirit, in this house of prayer at this moment. If you can get that thought fully into your minds, that Christ is really here in our midst, you can then each one begin to say, "I have found Him." But you want more than that, namely, to feel that He loves you, loves you as if there were nobody else for Him to love, loves you even as the Father loves Him. That is a daring thing to say, and I should never have said it if He had not first uttered it; but He says, "As the Father hath loved Me, so have I loved you." 2. Now we come to the second step. The spouse says, "I held Him." This is a deeper experience than the former one; "I held Him" means more than "I found Him." How are we to hold Christ? Well, first, let us hold Him by our heart's resolve. Get you to Jacob's boldness when he said to the Angel of the Covenant, "I will not let thee go except thou bless me"; but go even beyond that, do not put in any "except" at all, but say, "I will not let Thee go, for I cannot be blessed if Thou art gone from me." Further, brethren, hold Him by making Him your all in all. Yield up everything to Him, be obedient to Him, be willing to suffer for Him, grieve not His Holy Spirit, crown Him, extol Him, magnify Him, keep on singing His praises, for so will you hold Him. Hold Him, too, by a simple faith. That is a wonderful hold-fast. One word more before we leave this point. The only way to hold Christ is to hold Him by His own power. Think of poor Jacob, who, when the angel did but touch him, felt his sinews shrink directly, yet he said, "I will not let thee go." And I, a poor

trembling creature, may hold the Omnipotent Himself, and say to Him, "I will not let Thee go." How is that wonder to be accomplished? I will tell you. If Omnipotence helps you to hold Omnipotence, why, then, the deed is done! If Christ, and not you alone, holds Christ, then Christ is held indeed, for shall He vanquish His own Self? 3. The next step is described in the words, "I brought Him." With this we finish: "I brought Him into my mother's house, and into the chamber of her that conceived me." And where, I pray you, is our mother's house? I do not believe in any reverence for mere material buildings; but I have great reverence for the true Church of the Living God. The Church is the House of God, and the mother of our souls. How can you bring Christ to His Church? Partly, you can bring Him by your spirit. If you have really found Christ, and bring Him with you into the assembly, you will not be the man who will criticize, and find fault, and quarrel with your neighbour because he does not give you enough room in the pew. You will not be the person to pick holes in other people's coats; but you will be very considerate of others. As for yourself, anything will do for you, and anywhere will do for you, for you have seen the Beloved. You want other people to get as much good as they can; you are no longer selfish; how can you be, when you have found Him whom your soul loveth? And now your poor brother need not be very choicer in the selection of his words: if he will only talk about Jesus, you will be quite satisfied; if his accents should be a little broken, you will not mind that. So long as you feel that he wishes to extol your Lord, that will be enough for you. So, in this manner, you will in spirit bring the Beloved to your mother's house, to the chamber of her that conceived you. But, dear friend, it will also be a happy thing if you are able to talk about your Lord, for then you can bring Him to the Church with your words. But if, alas! you feel that you cannot speak for Christ, then, beloved, bring Him by your prayers. (C. H. Spurgeon.)

Vers. 6-11. **Who is this that cometh out of the wilderness?**—*The royal pair in their glorious chariot*:—Great princes in the East are in the habit of travelling in splendid palanquins, which are at the same time chariots and beds. The person reclines within, screened by curtains from public view; a bodyguard protects the equipage from robbers, and blazing torches light up the path along which the travellers proceed. King Solomon, in this Song, describes the Church of Christ, and Christ Himself, as travelling through the world in such a palanquin. The day is coming when both our Divine Lord and His chosen bride shall be revealed in glory before the eyes of all men. I. THE MAGNIFICENT PROGRESS, THE GLORIOUS ON-GOING OF THE CHURCH AND HER LORD THROUGH THE WORLD (ver. 6). The equipage excites the attention of the onlooker; his curiosity is raised, and he asks, "Who is this?" The true Church of God is a stranger and pilgrim still; an alien and a foreigner in every land; a speckled bird; a dove in the midst of ravens; a lily among thorns. The ignorance of men concerning spiritual things is not, however, caused by the darkness of the things themselves, for Christ and His Church are the great lights of the world. When great personages travelled in their palanquins, and more especially in marriage processions, they were attended by a number of persons who, at night, carried high up in the air burning cressets which gave forth a blaze of light. Sometimes these lights were simply torches carried in the hands of running footmen; at other times they were a sort of iron basket lifted high into the air, upon poles, from which went up a pillar of smoke and flame. Our text says, "Who is this that cometh out of the wilderness like pillars of smoke?" a beautiful illustration of the fact that wherever Christ and His cause are carried, light is a sure accompaniment. High lift your lamps, ye servants of our Lord. High lift up the Cross of the Redeemer; for in Him is light, and the light is the life of men. But you will tell me that our text rather speaks of "pillars of smoke" than of sparkling lamps. The smoke is but the effect of the flame, and even the pillar of smoke is luminous. What is the smoke that has attended the Church? What but the deaths of her martyrs, the sufferings of her confessors, the patient endurance of her valiant sons? Wherever she goes, the thick smoke of her suffering goeth up to Heaven. It often happens that Oriental monarchs of immense possessions are not content with burning common coals in these cressets, but frequently consume sandal-wood and other woods which give forth a delightful smell; or else, if they use ordinary coals, they sprinkle upon them frankincense and myrrh, so that a delicious perfume is spread on all sides. In the olden times, they also went to great expense in obtaining drugs, which the merchants collected from all parts of the earth, and these were carefully compounded into the renowned "powders of the merchants,"

which yielded a delicious variety of delicate perfumes, not to be produced by any one aromatic essence. Our inspired poet describes the travelling procession of the royal pair, and fails not to dwell upon the delightful perfume of myrrh and frankincense, with all the powders of the merchant, "which make the wilderness smell as a garden of roses." Wherever the Church of Christ proceeds, though her pathway is a desert, though she marches through a howling wilderness, she scatters the richest perfume. Among the ten wonders which Jewish tradition ascribes to the temple, we find that the rain never extinguished the fire of the wood which was laid in order upon the altar, nor did the wind ever conquer the pillar of smoke so as to disperse or bend it. Verily it is so with the Church of God, as she cometh out of the wilderness: who shall quench her flaming lamp, or stay the incense of her golden censers? Ride on, Great Prince, and bear Thy spouse with Thee in Thy majestic chariot, till Thou hast lit the world with Thy Divine light, and hast made it a temple filled with a cloud of incense of sweet smell to the nostrils of Jehovah!

II. THE SECURITY OF CHRIST'S CHURCH AT ALL TIMES. Of course when travelling through a wilderness, a royal procession was always in danger of attack. Arabs prowled around; wandering Bedouins were always prepared to fall upon the caravan; and more especially was this the case with a marriage procession, because then the robbers might expect to obtain many jewels, or, if not, a heavy ransom for the redemption of the bride or bridegroom by their friends. What shall I say of the attacks which have been made upon the Church of Christ, and upon Christ Himself? They have been incessant. We know that Christ's cause in the world is always safe because of Divine protection, and because the legions of God's angels keep watch and ward over the saints. But we have something more tangible than this. Our gracious God has been pleased to commit unto *men* the ministry of Christ. "Unto the angels hath He not put in subjection the world to come, whereof we speak." The Lord ordaineth that chosen men should be the protectors of His Church; not that they have any power as of themselves to do anything, but He girdeth the weak with strength and maketh the feeble mighty; so then, men, even the sons of men stand in array around the travelling palanquin of Christ, to guard both the bridegroom and the bride. Read the 7th and 8th verses carefully, and you will notice that there are enough swordsmen. "Threescore valiant men are about it." There are always enough men chosen of God to guard the Church. Observe that these warriors are men of the right mettle. "Yes," says poor trembling Little-Faith, "we have hosts of men, but they are not like the great-hearts of old; they have not the qualifications which the age requires." Ah! but remember, about the bed of Solomon there are "threescore valiant men"; and glory be unto my Master, while I may not flatter the ministry, I must not dishonour Him by believing that He has left His Church without valiant defenders. "Ah!" I think I hear you say, "but though there may be so many men, and men of the right sort, I am afraid they are not in the right place." Look again at the text. It is written, "Threescore valiant men are ABOUT IT"; that is, there are some on that side, and some on this, some before, and some behind; they are all round the travelling chariot of Christ. "I wish there might be one in our parish," says one. Pray for Him, and He who has promised to send you all good things may yet send him to you. Notice that these men are all well armed. "They all hold swords." What swords are these? Every valiant man in Christ's Israel holds the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God. Besides this, and here is an opportunity for you all to carry swords—every valiant man in God's Israel carries the sword of prayer, which is comparable to those huge two-handed swords of the olden time, which the soldier lifted up and brought down with such tremendous force as to cleave a man in halves: prayer is a weapon which no man can effectually resist. Further, these men are not only well armed, but they are well trained. They are all expert in war; men who have endured temptations themselves; men whose souls have been exercised; men who have slain both the lion and the bear, and are men of war from their youth. Further, these men were not only well trained, but you will see that they were always ready. Each man has his sword upon his thigh, ready to be drawn forth. Observe also that these men were watchful, for "they had their sword on their thigh because of fear in the night." They never sleep, but watch always for the Church's interest. Pray ye that the Lord may raise up many such, who night and day with tears shall watch for the souls of men, and against the enemies of our Israel.

III. THE EXCELLENCY OF THIS CHARIOT IN WHICH JESUS RIDES. It is not difficult to convey to persons the most unacquainted with Eastern manners and customs, an idea of what this palanquin is. It is a sort

of large sedan in which one or two persons may recline with ease. Of course, this palanquin could not be made of gold or silver, because then it would be too heavy for carriage; it must be made of wood; hence King Solomon made a bed, or chariot, or palanquin, of the wood of Lebanon. Then there needs to be four pillars supporting the covering and the curtains; the pillars thereof are of silver. The bottom of it should be something massive, in order to sustain the weight of the person; the bottom thereof is of gold. The canopy on the top is a covering of purple. Since to lie on gold would be very unpleasant, it is covered with delicate, daintily wrought carpets; and so we have the bottom thereof paved, or rather carpeted with love for the daughters of Jerusalem. Some delicate devices of needlework adorn the bottom of this bed-chariot in which the king and his spouse recline during their journey. The doctrines of the Gospel are comparable, for their antiquity, for their sweet fragrance, for their incorruptibility, to the wood of Lebanon. The Gospel of Christ never decays; Jesus Christ the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever. Not one single truth bears any sign of rot. And to those souls that are enlightened from above, the Gospel gives forth a fragrance far richer than the wood of Lebanon. As for the silver pillars which bear up the canopy, to what should I liken them but to the attributes of God which support and guarantee the efficiency of the great atonement of Christ beneath which we are sheltered. There is the silver pillar of God's justice. He cannot, He will not smite the soul that hides beneath the Cross of Christ. Then stands the next, the solid pillar of His power. "They shall never perish, neither shall any pluck them out of My hand; My Father which gave them Me is greater than all, and none is able to pluck them out of My Father's hand." Then on the other side is the pillar of His *love*, a silver pillar, indeed, bright and sparkling to the eye; love unchanging and eternal, strong as the power and fast as the justice which bear up the canopy on the other side. And here on this side stands immutability, another column upon which the atonement rests. If God could change, then might He cast away His blood-bought; but "because I am God and change not, therefore, ye sons of Jacob, rejoice." As for the covering of the chariot, it is of purple. I need not tell you where it was dyed. No Tyrian hues are mingled here. As for the bottom of this palanquin, which is of gold—may not this represent the eternal purpose and counsel of God, that purpose which He formed in Himself or ever the earth was? Then, to make this all soft and pleasant to recline upon, here is pavement of needlework. Soft cushions of love on which to rest. There is a double meaning here, for both the bride and bridegroom find rest in love. Our Lord finds rest in the love of His people. "Here will I dwell for ever." They do, as it were, make these carpets of needlework in their love and affection for Him, and in their trust and confidence in Him; and here He rests. On the other hand, our Beloved spent His life to work for us our bed of rest, so that we must translate it "love of," as well as love for the daughters of Jerusalem." We rest in Christ's love; He rests in our love.

IV. THE DUTY OF EVERY BELIEVING HEART in connection with the subject. Let every believer, while he recognizes himself as part of the Church inside the palanquin, yet look upon himself personally as one of the daughters of Zion, and let us each go forth this morning to meet King Solomon. He is the Wonderful, the Counsellor, the Mighty God, the Everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace, and therefore is He King Solomon going forth. Get up from your beds of sloth; rise from your chambers of ease; go forth, go forth to pray, to labour, to suffer; go forth to live in purity, leaving Babylon behind; go forth to walk with Him alone, leaving even your kinsfolk and acquaintance if they will not follow with you. Wherefore tarriest thou at home when the King is abroad? "Behold the Bridegroom cometh, come ye forth to meet Him," and behold King Solomon. To-day let your eye rest upon Him. Let your eye behold the head that to-day is crowned with glory, wearing many crowns. (C. H. Spurgeon.) *Christ's ascension*:—The simile is a most striking one. When Christ was on earth, He came, as it were, to a wilderness. He lived in the wilderness while here, in the desert, on the mountain-top. It was at His ascension that He appeared as pillars of smoke rising out of the earthly wilderness. "When He had spoken these things, while they beheld, He was taken up, and a cloud received Him out of their sight." And when we consider who it was that ascended—the well-beloved Son of God, in whom the Father was well pleased, in whom His soul delighted, who finished His work on earth—we see still further the propriety of the figure. The smoke was not the smoke of offensiveness, but the fragrance of perfume, the smoke of the sweet-smelling incense, filling both earth and heaven with fragrance.

I. CHRIST'S ASCENSION IS THE CONSUMMATION OF HIS WORK. 1. It was not complete until

this had taken place. Before His crucifixion He was working out our salvation and accomplishing the purposes of His Father. When in the grave He was under the dominion of death. After His resurrection He was still in this world of sin and sorrow. But when He ascended into heaven the whole work He had undertaken to perform was carried to a fitting conclusion. 2. We must bear in mind that when Christ ascended into heaven it was not merely a return to the place He came from. He came from heaven a spirit, an essence. He returned, the same spirit indeed, but bearing with Him a human body. His ascension, then, was rather the entrance of renewed manhood into the presence of God, the admission of justified humanity into the kingdom of heaven. II. CHRIST'S ASCENSION WAS THE EARNEST OF OUR PERSONAL BLESSINGS. Two important objects were to be especially assured to us. 1. The preparing a place—"I go that I may prepare a place for you." What this preparation involved we cannot exactly say. 2. The giving His Spirit—in other words, preparing us for the place. 3. The officiating as High-Priest. III. CHRIST'S ASCENSION WAS A SUITABLE REWARD TO HIS WORK. (*Homilist.*) **Like pillars of smoke.**—*Pillars of smoke.*—The architecture of the smoke is wondrous, whether God with His finger curls it into a cloud or rounds it into a dome, or points it in a spire, or spreads it in a wing, or, as in the text, hoists it in a pillar. In the first place, these pillars of smoke indicate the suffering the Church of God has endured. The smoke of martyrs' homes and martyrs' bodies if rolling up all at once would have eclipsed the noonday sun, and turned the brightest day the world ever saw into a midnight. Has persecution ceased? Ask that young man who is trying to be a Christian in a store or factory, where from morning to night he is the butt of all the mean witticisms of unbelieving employes. Ask that wife whose husband makes her fondness for the house of God, and even her kneeling prayer by the bedside, a derision, and is no more fit for her holy companionship than a filthy crow would be fit companion for a robin or a golden oriole. For the body, thanks to God, there are now no swords or fiery stakes, but for the souls of thousands of the good, in a figurative sense, rack and gibbet and Torquemada. The symbol of the domestic and social and private and public suffering of a great multitude of God's dear children, pillars of smoke. But nothing can be more beautiful than the figures of smoke on a clear sky. You can see what you will in the contour of this volatile vapour, now enchanted castles, now troops of horsemen, now bannered procession, now winged couriers, now a black angel of wrath under a spear of the sunshine turned to an angel of light, and now from horizon to horizon the air is a picture-gallery filled with masterpieces of which God is the artist, morning clouds of smoke born in the sunrise, and evening clouds of smoke laid in the burnished sepulchres of the sunset. The beauty of the transfigured smoke is a Divine symbol of the beauty of the Church. The fairest of all the fair is she. Her mission is to cover the earth with a supernatural gladness, to open all the prison-doors, to balsam all the wounds, to moss all the graves, to burn up the night in the fireplace of a great morning, to change handcuffs into diamonded wristlets, to turn the whole race around, and whereas it faced death, commanding it, "Right about face for heaven!" According to the number of the spires of the churches in all our cities, towns and neighbourhoods, are the good homes, the worldly prosperities, and the pure morals, and the happy souls. According as the churches are numerous are the crimes few. According as the churches are few the crimes are numerous. The most beautiful organization the world ever saw or ever will see is the much-maligned Church, the friend of all good, the foe of all evil, "fair as the moon and clear as the sun." Beautiful in her Author, beautiful in her mission, the heroine of the centuries, the bride of Christ, the queen of the nations! Through her gates will march all the influences for good that shall ever reach our world. Take its membership as a mass, not speaking of the acknowledged exceptions, they are the noblest, grandest, kindest, best men and women of the ages. But for them the earth would long ago have been a burned-out volcano. They have been the salt that has kept the human race from putrefaction insufferable either to human or angelic olfactories. (*T. De Witt Talmage.*)

Vers. 9, 10. **King Solomon made himself a chariot of the wood of Lebanon.**—*Solomon's chariot.*—I. SOLOMON WAS A TYPE OF JESUS CHRIST. 1. In his offices he represented Jesus. (1) He was, as you know full well, a king, and a very notable king, richer and wiser and more glorious than any of the kings of the earth. And what shall we say of Jesus, who, even when He was here in flesh and humiliation, was still a King? Now that He is exalted at the right hand of God, He seems to be yet more kingly; but He is destined to sit upon a still nobler throne, and to wield

a still wider influence. (2) But Solomon, in this passage, and, indeed, throughout this wonderful book, is seen as a bridegroom. Herein also he represents Jesus Christ. Christ, as the Head of the Church, calls us His precious and beloved bride. All He has we have. "All that is Mine is thine," says Jesus, and the bonds that bind us to Him neither life, nor death, nor earth, nor hell, can ever break, or even stretch. Blessed be the name of Him who, while He is not ashamed to call us brethren, admits His people into still closer relationship, and calls them collectively, "My sister, My spouse"! (3) Moreover, Solomon was distinguished as a great temple builder. Jesus Christ is the architect and builder of the Temple that shall never fade away. Solomon's temple has long ago crumbled into dust, and its successors have passed away, but Jesus Christ has been engaged from all eternity erecting a Temple which abides, which will outlive the wreck of matter and the crash of worlds, which will shine in greater splendour as the everlasting ages come and go. He is at once the architect and the builder of it; He is also the foundation-stone, and the chief corner-stone of it. 2. But there are certain qualities that distinguished the king that shine resplendent in the King of kings. (1) Solomon was the wisest of men; he was wise enough originally to ask for wisdom. Then God gave him not only wisdom, but riches and honour and power. But oh, how wise is Jesus! In Him are hid all the treasures of wisdom and of knowledge, and He is made unto us wisdom. (2) If Solomon was wealthy, what shall we say of the Christ of God? The treasures of Solomon's house, and the abundance of his table amazed all who visited his court, but think of the abundance of the wealth and fulness of Jesus Christ. He is the possessor of all things, He is God's own Son and Heir. (3) How glorious Solomon was, though indeed Christ said of the lilies that Solomon, in all his glory, was not arrayed like one of these. Yet it must be admitted that Solomon's court was magnificent. Oriental splendour was at its grandest in his case, but oh, how Jesus outshines him, not with the same sort of glory, but with the glory that excelleth, the glory of His grace, the beauty of His holiness, the grandeur of His goodness! If the lilies outvied and excelled Solomon in all his glory, what shall be said of Jesus, who is at once the rose of Sharon and the lily of the valleys, the chiefest among ten thousand and the altogether lovely? II. THE KING'S CHARIOT IS A TYPE OF CHRIST'S COVENANT, AND OF THE GOSPEL OF THE GRACE OF GOD. It was not a chariot really, but rather a travelling couch or palanquin, in which the king himself and his spouse were seated. It was the place of rest, in which these twain reclined at ease, while they came up from the wilderness towards the great and glorious city. Now such is the covenant to us. 1. Now notice concerning this so-called chariot that Solomon himself made it. "King Solomon made himself a chariot." I do not mean that the royal hands were actually engaged in its construction—we can hardly suppose that—but he gave instructions for its construction, perhaps personally superintended the making of it. I do say, however, of the covenant of the Lord our God, that He Himself prepared it. As Noah built the ark, so God Himself has arranged the terms of the covenant. He Himself has signed it; Jesus Himself has sealed it with His own precious blood. Christ has built this chariot for Himself to ride in. You may be sure it is well and truly built, then; I have not the slightest fear in trusting myself on board that travelling couch, for I shall share it with Jesus. 2. Notice the materials of its construction. This royal litter is said to have been of cedar—"the wood of Lebanon." That is the finest of all the woods, the most lasting and the most fragrant. It is as if to say that the covenant which God has made with Jesus Christ on behalf of all who love Him and trust Him, is a covenant that lasts, and which, while it lasts, is full of joy and fragrance. "He made pillars thereof of silver." This represented Divine holiness and infinite purity. I notice that the floor or basis was of gold. It was constructed of this imperishable and unchangeable metal, because it was intended to set forth the immutable purpose and the unchanging decree of the infallible God. Over all was a purple canopy, with equally royal curtains hanging by the sides, screening from the too-hot sun. Ah, here is sovereign grace, here is atoning blood, here is the doctrine of the substitution, for we can look through these purple curtains, even towards the sun of God's holiness, and find the exceeding brightness bearable because Jesus Christ, the Day's-Man, has come between us and Him. It was paved with love for the daughters of Jerusalem, or, as some think, the chariot was lined and upholstered with embroidered work, so that the daughters of Jerusalem should be glad at sight of it, and the bride herself be filled with joy. 3. What is the purpose of this covenant, and of this Gospel of His grace? A parallel purpose to that of Solomon's chariot. "Whereby believers are carried to heaven," says Cruden.

The spouse shares the triumph to Zion as well as in it, while the daughters of Jerusalem go out to meet the cavalcade, and to share the joy. (*T. Spurgeon.*) *The saint's palanquin*.—It seems no part of the mind of the Spirit that we should take this description to pieces, and try to allegorize the several parts. The intention is to represent to us the fact that the believer is carried onward to heaven in a conveyance as costly and glorious as that here described; that the materials are of the richest, choicest, most durable character; that the midst is paved or tessellated with love. The provision made, the means provided for bringing us to glory, are of a rare and splendid nature. After exhausting the things most valuable among men, making the pillars silver, the railing gold, the seat or couch purple, he adopts a feature in the description entirely new, and says the midst is curiously wrought with something more precious than silver or gold, even with love itself—showing that the saint, while thus passing through the wilderness between this world and heaven, between our state of guilt and our state of glory, is in a palanquin of the most costly make, borne up in the hands of angels, surrounded by an armed angelic guard, and reclining on a soft couch beautiful as purple, the most costly colour, with the midst of the litter formed of love—the many acts of Divine love from Father, Son and Holy Spirit, there combining underneath us like the different pieces in a beautiful mosaic, tessellated pavement. In the spirit of this passage, those who wait on the Lord are said to renew their strength; and He will give His angels charge concerning such, to bear them up in their hands, lest at any time they dash their foot against a stone (*Isa. xl. 31; Ps. xci. 12.*) (*G. Burrowes.*)

Ver. 10. The midst thereof being paved with love, for the daughters of Jerusalem.—*Paved with love*.—This palanquin or travelling chariot in which the king is carried, represents the covenant of grace, the plan of salvation, and, in fact, the whole system by which the Lord Jesus comes down in mercy among men, and by which He bears His people along with Himself through the wilderness of this world, onward to the rest which He hath prepared for them. It is, in a word, the mediatorial work of Jesus. **I. NOTICE THE GROWTH WHICH IS INDICATED HERE AS TO OUR VIEWS OF THE COVENANT OF GRACE.** The description advances step by step, each sentence mentioning an additional and far-enhanced preciousness. At the first glance the sweet singer who speaks in this Song perceived that the chariot was made of cedar, a costly wood; a closer view revealed “the silver pillars, beauteous to behold”: further observation showed “the basis all of burnished gold.” From cedar to silver, and from silver to gold, we have a clear advance as to precious material. On looking again, the observer remarks “the top of princely purple,” which is yet more precious as the type of imperial dignity, and the token of that effectual atonement which was wrought out by the ensanguined stream of Calvary. The blood which dyed that purple canopy is much more precious than gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire. And then, though one would think there could be no advance beyond the precious blood, the Song proceeds yet one step further, for we find that “the midst thereof was paved with love, for the daughters of Jerusalem.” The covenant is love in its secret places, all love, unalloyed love, invisible love, nothing else but love. When one comes to know most of the covenant, and admires the wisdom, the power, the purity, the eternity of all that God has done, yet the most striking characteristic of it to the advanced Christian is the love, the mighty love of God, by which he is brought by Jesus Christ into eternal salvation. Thou hast crowned me with lovingkindness; Thou hast loved my soul out of the pit; Thou hast loved me, and given Thyself for me. Thy love has redeemed me with a price most precious; Thy love has made me what I am; Thy love carries on the work, and Thy love will complete it, and present me to Thee in its own perfect image; for “the midst of it is paved with love, for the daughters of Jerusalem.” **II. NOTE THE POSITION FROM WHICH THE LOVE MENTIONED IN OUR TEXT IS BEST SEEN.** “The midst thereof is paved with love.” It is not, therefore, to be seen from the outside. The mere outsider understands nothing of the love of God to His people as displayed in the covenant of grace. “The secret of the Lord is with them that fear Him, and He will show them His covenant.” And so note next, when the Christian himself stands apart from his Lord, and judges by outward appearances, he cannot perceive, as once he did, the lovingkindness of the Lord. Providence grows dark as a winter’s day. The tried believer cries, “My wife has been taken from me; my property is melting away, my business fades; I am sick in body and weary in soul; I cannot see a trace of the love of God to me in all this.” Brother, the description in the Song does not say that the chariot is plated with love on the outside, but it is paved

with love *within*, "in the midst of it." Oh, that you had faith to believe that the heart and real core of every providence is love. The exterior of it may be as a thorn hedge, but sweet fruit ripens within. Look at the tessellated pavement of love beneath your feet for a moment. See you not the Father's love—that golden mass of uncreated love, for the Father Himself loveth you: look at Jesus' love, another diamond pavement beneath your foot: Jesus loved you to the death with a love that many waters could not quench, nor floods drown: look at the love of the Spirit, too: equally precious is the tender affection of the loving Comforter. Think how the Holy Ghost has borne with you, has striven with you, and endured your ill manners in the wilderness, and blessed you still. Look at those delightful embroideries from the Divine needle—the precious promises. A thousand promises there are, but they are all love. Look down and see how all the attributes of God are engaged for you, but they are all in league with love. Look, then, at all the providences of God towards you, at all the exercises of His grace in your heart, and you will see many and strange colours of varied beauty, all blending in one wondrous pattern of deep, unsearchable love. III. NOTICE THE PECULIAR POSITION OF THE PAVEMENT OF LOVE DESCRIBED IN THE TEXT. It is "in the midst" of the chariot, and only from the midst is it to be seen. It is in the midst of it; and therefore Jesus rides upon it, and His espoused ones ride upon it. It is a very simple thought, but it richly deserves to be beaten out a little. Jesus is represented here as the King in the chariot, and as the chariot is lined with love, we are taught that Jesus dwells in love. Where is He now? Among the thrones and principalities above, but He abides still in love. Love brought Him down from heaven to earth, love conducted Him in all His weary journeys over the acres of Palestine: love led Him to the garden, the death-sweat, and the cross; and equally at this hour does love attend Him: He loves in heaven as He loved below. Whatever He is doing, whatever He is feeling, whatever He is saying, we know this one thing about Him, He dwells in love to us. He is in His chariot, and all around Him in that chariot is love. IV. DWELL ON THAT LOVE itself for a moment. Remember it is special love. There is an electing, discriminating, distinguishing love, which is settled upon a chosen people—a love which goes forth to none beside, but only to them; and it is this love which is the true resting-place of the saint. It is love undeserved, for what daughter of Jerusalem ever deserved that our glorious King should fall in love with her? It is a love, therefore, which is a theme for eternal wonder. Why didst Thou love me, Redeemer? Why didst Thou make a covenant of grace with me, and line that covenant with immutable love? This love is everlasting and eternal. It never had a beginning, it never will have an end. Simply as I have stated the truth, it is a nut with heaven for its kernel. Thou wast always loved, O believer, and thou always shalt be, come what may. It is love unrivalled, for never was there such affection as that which Christ has for His chosen; love unexampled, to which none of us shall ever reach. (*C. H. Spurgeon.*)

Ver. 11. Go forth, O ye daughters of Zion, and behold King Solomon with the crown wherewith his mother crowned him, in the day of his espousals.—*The coronation of Jesus*:—Here we have, by the voice of the Holy Ghost, the account of the coronation of human nature in the person of the Incarnate Word. As "the day of our Lord's Resurrection is the day wherein the dignity of the everlasting priesthood was actually collated upon Him," so "the day of His ascension, or placing at the right hand of God, is the day of His solemn enthronization, when the Lord 'sent forth the rod of His strength out of Zion.'" But the coronation of our Lord is not the quiet accession of the heir of a desired and long-descended line to the peaceful seat of his fathers: it is rather the final triumph of a mighty warrior who through blood hath waded to the throne. It is rather the eventual vindication of the true heir, who, as in many an Oriental land, has been debarred from His succession by the intrigues of His enemies, and has to obtain His own by the might of His holy arm. And who are they whom the triumphant Lord hath thus routed? I will not speak of those temporal enemies who now, or in times past, oppose and resist His will. Rather will I speak of the spiritual enemies of this Monarch, whom He hath overthrown—Satan, sin and death: each a mighty potentate—Satan, "the prince of this world"; sin, that "reigned unto death" "in our mortal bodies"; death, that by one offence reigned "from Adam till Moses." Now the royal work of our ascended Lord is to subdue and to destroy these; and because, though scotched and crippled, they still exist, so the royalty of our Lord is a present and potential act of conquering dominion. The "demonstration of the eternal justice of

God," and the probation of holy souls, require that still the powers of evil should be allowed; and therefore is the Eternal Son "set down on the right hand of God, from henceforth expecting till His enemies be made His footstool." And yet the conquest is complete, so far as our condition of trial will allow. Satan subdued is now the unwilling servant of Divine justice in the case of the reprobate, while he has no power to hurt the elect of God. Sin still remains, in all its hideous mystery, as the measure of the love of the Cross, but has no power over the children of the kingdom; and even death itself, though still allowed to fill its place in the physical world, has now changed its conditions, and altered its position in the kingdom of grace, its realm being the ante-chamber of the New Jerusalem, and itself the harbinger of a joyous resurrection. But we must not confine our ideas of the royalty of Christ to a mighty warrior going forth conquering and to conquer. Our Heavenly Monarch is to His own no "minister of God, a revenger to execute wrath upon him that doeth evil"; but yielding to the deep necessities of the benevolence of His attributes, "He doeth according to His will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth: and none can stay His hand, or say unto Him, What doest Thou?" First, His reign is established in the kingdom of the physical world. This bursting springtime, when nature is at its freshest and loveliest, when the hidden powers of vegetable life, so lately dead and inert, have again put forth their might to the glory of God, and the green carpet of the earth, and the rich foliage of the trees and the flowers reflecting every hue of paradise on the earth below, all speak to the eye of faith, as the sweet bird's song speaks to the ear, tells us not merely of a King, but of a King whose law shall not be broken, and who shows us, by the beauty of that inviolate law, how bright would be His other kingdoms, did not the free will of man mar what He had made good, and defile what He had pronounced pure. And next, His reign is established in the kingdom of grace. Our blessed Saviour is King and Lord of His Mystical Body. That mighty organization is no mere fortuitous congeries of holy souls, unknown to men, known only to God, without discipline or order; but it is a well-grounded polity, of which by far the greater part is in heaven, obeying, loving, serving, adoring, and where here on earth the heart of man finds its truest happiness in perfect and unreserved submission. How it comforts one in the midst of the mysterious providences and spiritual trials, and strange dispensations which mark the course of the fortunes of the Church here below, to dwell upon that unswerving obedience which is paid Him by the glorious hierarchies above. The Lord is king, be the people never so impatient. He sitteth between the cherubim, be the nations never so unquiet. And more than this, He is the very King and Lord of holy souls. When we say, "Thy kingdom come," what mighty thoughts are stirred up within us! May Thy reign be established within our hearts!—Thy kingdom which Thou hast said is "within" us. May every power and faculty be subdued to Thy gracious commandments! Be Thou the Master of our intellects, the Lord of our affections. Rule Thou, and so constrain our wills already subject to Thee, that even in this world we may anticipate the perfect conformity of heaven. Is the thought of our Lord's ascension as connected with His royalty exhausted? I trow not. The ascension of our Lord hath not terminated in Himself. It is our ascension also. The coronation of our Lord is not merely the assumption of royal state by our ascended Head, it is also the coronation of His body mystical. The nature of man in the Person of the Divine Word hath been seated upon the throne of God. Who shall now use unworthy words of the worthlessness of that which is thus united to God? Who shall now undervalue the exalted position of the true Christian? Who shall now dare to profane, either in body, soul or spirit, that which has attained to so high a destiny? (*Bishop A. P. Forbes.*)

CHAPTER IV.

VER. 8. Come with Me from Lebanon, My spouse, with Me from Lebanon.—*The invitations of Christ*:—The whole idea is that the Shulamite Virgin who is sought as a bride lives in high, craggy, cavernous regions—amid inhospitable scenes—and close to the mountain haunts of beasts of prey. Such words as *Amara*, *Shenir*, *Hermou*, and *Lebanon* are used to typify a region of mountain, rock, fastness, forest, and jungle. There the fair Shulamite has her native home. That is one side of the

picture. On the other side is the King, who lives in Jerusalem, the royal city, the city of peace, far away from the haunts of leopards; and He goes forth to invite the bride to leave the crag and the den, the forest and the danger, saying, "Come to Jerusalem, to the centre of civilization, to the home of beauty, to the King's palace, to the splendid and inviolable home,—no lion shall be there, nor any ravenous beast go up thereon,—come, O My dove, that art in the clefts of the rock, whose lips drop as the honeycomb, and the smell of whose garments is as the smell of Lebanon,—come!" How is all this sustained by collateral Scripture, and made to apply to the Son of God? Christ calls men away from what may be regarded as the nativities of the present scene. There must be no division, no holding on with both hands: the attitude must not be that of one who has the right foot in the caverns and the left foot in the metropolis: there must be a complete detachment from all that is native and original, and a clear coming away with all trust and love and hope to the new abode. Christ is calling us away from our animalism—the first condition of our birth. He will not have it that the body is the man, that the flesh is the immortal part of humanity. So Christ calls the Church, which is His Bride, the Lamb's Wife,—He calls her away from stony places, and from low associations, and from connections with lions' dens and mountain haunts of leopards,—calls humanity away from flesh, and earth, and time, and sense, and prison, into all the upper spaces, where the blue sky is unclouded, and where the infinite liberty never degenerates into licence. What does Christ call us from? Precisely what the Shulamite was called from—from stony places and desert lands and mountain fastnesses—from "desolation desolate." When does Christ ever call men from knowledge to ignorance? from abundance of spiritual realization to poverty and leanness of soul? When does Jesus Christ ever offer men an inhospitable welcome? The great offers of the Gospel are in such terms as these: Eat and drink abundantly, O beloved! Ho, every one that thirsteth, come! We are called not only from desolateness, but from danger. If we have not entered into the spirit-life, the faith-life, that higher life which sees the invisible and realizes the eternal, then we are simply walking through perils without number, and as for seductiveness or subtlety or power of involving us in mischief and in suffering, no language can express the reality of the situation. We are called not only from desolateness and from danger, but from incongruity. What a background was the mountain region to the fair and lovely Shulamite! Surely that fair dove was made for Jerusalem, and not for some region of caverns or mountain haunts of leopards. Save her! This sense of incongruity afflicts men who profess to be under the spell of refined and elevating taste. What shocks do men receive who profess to be refined and large in their culture! A musician feels as if he were staggering under a blow of insult when he hears a false note. Is there no law of incongruity in morals, in spiritual relation? "What doest thou here, Elijah?"—why wanderest thou in these desert places, O thou child of the king, meant to adorn a palace? Why estranged and ragged and humiliated and debased, thou child of fortune? Explain the ghastly incongruity! Christ ever calls men to home, to security, to honour. Herein he is like the man who seeks the Shulamite for his bride: he calls her to the palace, to Jerusalem, to all beauty and comfort and security. Jesus Christ says, "I go to prepare a place for you." When Jesus Christ prepares a place, who can describe its largeness, its beauty, its completeness? "Where I am, there ye shall be also;" and where He is, heaven is. But, there is on the road a cross? We cannot enter into the city unless we understand the cross, and die upon it. The cross is not an intellectual puzzle; it is a cross on which every man must be himself crucified with the Son of God. After the cross the crown—the pure river of the water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb. After the cross, the city in the midst of whose street, and on either side of the river, is the Tree of Life. (*J. Parker, D.D.*) *Christ's invitation to His bride*:—This world was never designed to be the fixed abode of the children of men, and therefore there was a restraint laid upon our first parents in paradise, as to the forbidden tree, showing that they behoved to look to another world for their happiness. Man was once set fair on the way to the land where glory dwells, but he lost his way, and now poor sinners are found wandering on the mountains of vanity. The first Adam managed ill, and brought us into this condition. But behold, the second Adam came to gather the dispersed of Israel, and to lead them on their way to the better country. Hear His voice in the text, calling His people to leave the weary world and go homeward with Himself. **I. TAKE NOTICE OF SOME THINGS SUPPOSED IN THIS KIND CALL AND INVITATION.** 1. It supposeth that Christ's bride is yet in the world. Though brought out of Egypt, yet not come to Canaan, but still in the wilderness. 2.

Though she be there, and perhaps has been there many years since she was united to Christ, yet He has not forgot her, but kindly remembers her still, whatever she may think otherwise. 3. The world is not a place for Christ's spouse to rest in, she is in great danger there. 4. Yet sometimes the foolish creature lies down even among the lions' dens, and being charmed with the deceitful mountains is averse to come away. 5. Our Lord takes notice of and is concerned for the soul's danger from the deceitful world. And therefore He cries with earnestness to come away. II. EXPLAIN THIS COMING FROM THE WORLD, OR SHOW WHAT IS IMPLIED IN IT. There is a twofold coming away from the world, 1. There is a natural coming out of it. By the course of nature, we are all on our way out of it. 2. There is a spiritual coming out of it, namely, in heart and affection. This is what Christ is calling you to this day. (1) Take your last look, the parting look of the world by faith even as Moses did of the profits and pleasures of Egypt. (2) Turn your backs, then, upon the things of the world. Be mortified to them. (3) Give up this day with the men of the world, never more to mix with the natives of the weary land; who labour for nothing but the entertainment of Lebanon, and who have taken up their home among the lions' dens. III. SHOW THE IMPORT OF COMING AWAY WITH CHRIST FROM THE WORLD. 1. Our Lord has a better place for your reception, than the world can be in its best dress. This is the new Jerusalem. There His Father's house stands. And in that house are many mansions. The society of saints, angels, and to be ever with the Lord constitute the felicity of the place. 2. Our Lord can assuredly bring you into this glorious and happy place. But oh! will I obtain admission? Why, come with Me, says Christ, there will be no hindrance if you enter along with Me. 3. That place is His own choice. 4. Christ is in His way thither, out of the world to His Father's house, the better country. What, is not Christ there already? True, Christ personal is there, but Christ mystical is not there yet. 5. Our Lord is very desirous of your company by the way, yes, and to have you away with Him for altogether. 6. Our Lord displays His glory to you in the Gospel, to win your hearts and get you away with Him. 7. Our Lord offers you, not only better in hope, but better in hand than the world can give you. 8. If you will come away, you shall go as He goes, you shall go together. Go as He goes in point of duty. Esteem all things as He does. Let His choice be your choice. Rejoice in those things in which He rejoices; and be grieved for what grieves His Spirit. Love what He loves, and hate what He hates. 9. He will lead you and support you through the whole of the way. You are now in the fields of the world, and there will be difficult steps in your way to the city; these will not be easily discerned, but come with Him, He will keep you from stumbling on the dark mountains. 10. He will be all to you in all. Leave all the world and "come with Me," for all, as the espoused bride goes with her husband. Whatever comfort, pleasure and delight you drew out of the muddy streams, you may now draw in a far superior manner from the fountain. Thus it shall be your duty and privilege too, to live as people of another world. "For our conversation is in heaven; from whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ." (*T. Boston, D.D.*)

Vers. 10, 11. **How fair is thy love, My sister, My spouse! how much better is thy love than wine! and the smell of thine ointments than all spices!**—*Christ's estimate of His people:*—I. Christ first PRAISES HIS PEOPLE'S LOVE. Dost thou love God, my hearer? Dost thou love Jesus? Harken, then, to what the Lord Jesus says to thee, by His Holy Spirit, from this Song! Thy love, poor, feeble, and cold though it be, is very precious unto the Lord Jesus, in fact it is so precious, that He Himself cannot tell how precious it is. He does not say how precious, but He says, "how fair." Pause here, my soul, to contemplate a moment, and let thy joy wait a while. Jesus Christ has banquets in heaven, such as we have never yet tasted, and yet He does not feed there. He has wines in heaven richer far than all the grapes of Eschol could produce, but where does he seek His wines? In our hearts. Not all the love of angels, nor all the joys of Paradise, are so dear to Him as the love of His poor people compassed with infirmity. The love of the believer is sweet to Christ. II. Do not imagine, however, that Christ despises our faith, or our hope, or our patience, or our humility. All these GRACES are precious to Him, and they are described in the next sentence under the title of ointment, and the working of these graces, their exercise and development, are compared with the smell of ointment. Now both wine and ointment were used in the sacrifice of the Jews; sweet-smelling myrrh and spices were used in meat-offerings and drink-offerings before the Lord. "But," saith Jesus Christ to His Church, "all these offerings of wine, and

all that burning of incense, is nothing to Me compared to your graces. Your love is My wine, your virtues are My sweet-smelling ointments." Yes, believer, when you are on your sick-bed and are suffering with patience; when you go about your humble way to do good by stealth; when you distribute of your alms to the poor; when you lift up your thankful eye to Heaven; when you draw near to God with humble prayer; when you make confession of your sin to Him; all these acts are like the smell of ointment to Him, the smell of a sweet savour, and He is gratified and pleased. O Jesus, this is condescension indeed, to be pleased with such poor things as we have. Oh, this is love; it proves Thy love to us, that Thou canst make so much out of little, and esteem so highly that which is of such little worth!

III. Now we come to the third, "Thy lips, O My spouse, drop as the honeycomb." Christ's people are not a dumb people, they were once, but they TALK now. I do not believe a Christian can keep the secret that God gives him if he were to try; it would burst his lips open to get out. Now it is but poor, poor matter that any of us can speak. When we are most eloquent in our Master's praise, how far our praises fall beneath His worth! When we are most earnest in prayer, how powerless is our wrestling compared with the great blessing that we seek to obtain! But Jesus Christ does not find any fault in what the Church speaks. He says, "No, 'Thy lips, O My spouse, drop as the honeycomb.'" You know the honey that drops out of the honeycomb is the best—it is called the life-honey. So the words that drop from the Christian's lips are the very words of his life, his life-honey, and they ought to be sweet to every one. They are as sweet to the taste of the Lord Jesus as the drops of the honeycomb. And now, Christians, will you not talk much about Jesus? Will you not speak often of Him? Will you not give your tongue more continually to prayer and praise, and speech that ministers to edifying, when you have such a listener as this, such an auditor who stoops from heaven to hear you, and who values every word you speak for Him? "But," says one, "if I were to try to talk about Jesus Christ, I do not know what I should say." If you wanted any honey, and nobody would bring it to you, I suppose the best way, if you were in the country, would be to keep some bees, would it not? It would be very well for you Christian people if you kept bees. "Well," says one, "I suppose our thoughts are to be the bees. We are always to be looking about for good thoughts, and flying on to the flowers where they are to be found; by reading, by meditation, and by prayer, we are to send bees out of the hive." Certainly, if you do not read your Bibles, you will have no honey, because you have no bees. But when you read your Bibles, and study those precious texts, it is like bees settling on flowers, and sucking the sweetness out of them.

IV. This brings us to the next topic—"Honey and milk are under thy tongue." I find it necessary when I preach to keep a good stock of words under my tongue as well as those that are on it. Very often I have got a simile just ready to come out, and I have thought, "Ah, that is one of your laughable similes, take that back." I am obliged to change it for something else. If I did that a little oftener perhaps it would be better, but I cannot do it. I have sometimes a whole host of them under my tongue, and I am obliged to keep them back. "Honey and milk are under thy tongue." That is not the only meaning. The Christian is to have words ready to come out by and by. You know the hypocrite has words upon his tongue. We speak about solemn sounds upon a thoughtless tongue; but the Christian has his words first under the tongue. There they lie. They come from his heart; they do not come from the top of his tongue,—they are not superficial surface-work, but they come from under the tongue—down deep,—things that he feels, and matters that he knows. Nor is this the only meaning. The things that are under the tongue are thoughts that have never yet been expressed; they do not get to the top of the tongue, but lie there half formed and are ready to come out; but either because they cannot come out, or we have not time to let them out, there they remain, and never come into actual words. Now Jesus Christ thinks very much even of these; He says, "Honey and milk are under thy tongue"; and Christian meditation and Christian contemplation are to Christ like honey for sweetness and like milk for nourishment.

V. And, then, last of all, "the smell of thy garments is like the smell of Lebanon." The odoriferous herbs that grew on the side of Lebanon delighted the traveller, and, perhaps, here is an allusion to the peculiarly sweet smell of the cedar wood. Now, the garments of a Christian are twofold—the garment of imputed righteousness, and the garment of inwrought sanctification. I think the allusion here is to the second. The garments of a Christian are his EVERY-DAY ACTIONS—the things that he wears upon him wherever he goes. Now these smell very sweet to the Lord

Jesus. What should you think if Jesus should meet you at the close of the day, and say to you, "I am pleased with the works of to-day"? I know you would reply, "Lord, I have done nothing for Thee." You would say like those at the last day, "Lord, when saw we Thee hungry and fed Thee? when saw we Thee thirsty and gave Thee drink?" You would begin to deny that you had done any good thing. He would say, "Ah, when thou wast under the fig tree I saw thee; when thou wast at thy bedside in prayer I heard thee; I saw thee when the tempter came, and thou saidst, 'Get thee hence, Satan'; I saw thee give thine alms to one of My poor sick children; I heard thee speak a good word to the little child and teach him the name of Jesus; I heard the groan when swearing polluted thine ears: I heard thy sigh when thou sawest the iniquity of this great city; I saw thee when thine hands were busy; I saw that thou wast not an eye-servant or a man-pleaser, but that in singleness of purpose thou didst serve God in doing thy daily business; I saw thee, when the day was ended, give thyself to God again; I have marked thee mourning over the sins thou hast committed, and I tell thee I am pleased with thee." "The smell of thy garments is like the smell of Lebanon." (*C. H. Spurgeon.*)

Ver. 12. **A garden inclosed is My sister, My spouse; a spring shut up, a fountain sealed.**—*The Lord's own view of His Church and people.*—I. THE NEARNESS OF KIN OF THE CHURCH TO CHRIST, AND CHRIST TO THE CHURCH. He calls her in the text, "My sister, My spouse." As if He could not express His near and dear relationship to her by any one term, He employs the two. "My sister"—that is, one by birth, partaker of the same nature. "My spouse"—that is, one in love, joined by sacred ties of affection that never can be snapped. "My sister" by birth, "My spouse" by choice. "My sister" in communion, "My spouse" in absolute union with Myself. Oh, how near akin is Christ to all His people! But first, do try to realize the person of Christ. Believe that He truly is, and that He truly is here—as much here and as really here as He was at Jerusalem, when He sat at the head of the table, and entertained the twelve at the last supper. Jesus is a real Man, a real Christ—recollect that. Then let this further truth be equally well realized, that He has so taken upon Himself our human nature that He may correctly call His Church His sister. He has become so truly man in His incarnation, that He is not ashamed to call us brethren. He calls us so because we are so. Change of place has made no change of heart in Him. He in His glory is the same Jesus as in His humiliation. No man is so fully a man as Jesus Christ. If you speak of any other man, something or other narrows his manhood. You think of Milton as of a poet and an Englishman, rather than as a man. You think of Cromwell rather as of a warrior, than as a man. The second Adam is, *par excellence*, man. We may not think of Him as one amongst a vast number who may be distantly akin to us, as all men are akin to one another by descent; but the Lord comes near to each individual. He takes each one of His believing people by the hand, and says, "My brother." In our text He salutes the whole Church as "My sister." He says this with tender emphasis. As we have already observed, the first term, "sister," implies kinship of nature; but the second term, "My spouse," indicates another kinship, dearer, and, in some respects, nearer; a kinship undertaken of choice, but, once undertaken, is everlasting. This kinship amounts to unity, inasmuch that the spouse loses her name, loses her identity, and, to a high degree, is merged in the greater personality to which she is united. Such is our union to Christ, if indeed we be His, that nothing can so well set it forth as marriage union. He loves us so much that He taken us up into Himself by the absorption of love. If you are true believers, if you have been born again, if you are really looking to Christ alone for salvation, He has brought you into a condition of the utmost conceivable nearness with Himself: He has participated in your nature, and He has made you a partaker of His nature, and in so many words He says, "I will betroth thee unto Me for ever; yea, I will betroth thee unto Me in righteousness, and in judgment, and in lovingkindness, and in mercies. I will even betroth thee unto Me in faithfulness: and thou shalt know the Lord." II. THE SECURITY OF THE PEOPLE OF GOD IN CONSEQUENCE OF BEING WHAT THEY ARE. "A garden inclosed is My sister, My spouse; a spring shut up, a fountain sealed." We are not only like a garden, but a garden "inclosed." If the garden were not inclosed, the wild boar out of the wood would bark the vines, and uproot the flowers; but infinite mercy has made the Church of God an inclosure, into which no invader may dare to come. "For I, saith the Lord, will be unto her a wall of fire round about, and will be the glory in the midst of her." Is she a spring? Are her secret thoughts,

and loves, and desires like cool streams of water? Then the Bridegroom calls her "a spring shut up." Otherwise, every beast that passed by might foul her waters, and every stranger might quaff her streams. She is a spring shut up, a fountain sealed, like some choice cool spring in Solomon's private garden around the house of the forest of Lebanon—a fountain which he reserved for his own drinking, by placing the royal seal upon it, and locking it up by secret means, known only to himself. The legend hath it that there were fountains which none knew of but Solomon, and he had so shut them up that, with his ring he touched a secret spring, a door opened, and living waters leaped out to fill his jewelled cup. No one knew but Solomon the secret charm by which he set flowing the pent-up stream, of which no lip drank but his own. Now, God's people are as much shut up, and preserved, and kept from danger by the care of Christ, as the springs in Solomon's garden were reserved expressly for himself. Are you really in Christ? If so, who is to pluck you thence? Are you really trusting Him? How can He fail you? Have you been begotten again into the Divine family? How can that new life be quenched? III. THE MOST STRIKING IDEA OF THE TEXT IS THAT OF SEPARATION: "A garden inclosed is My sister, My spouse; a spring shut up, a fountain sealed." A garden is a plot of ground separated from the common waste for a special purpose: such is the Church. The Church is a separate and distinct thing from the world. Let us, however, take heed that our separateness from the world is of the same kind as our Lord's. We are not to adopt a peculiar dress, or a singular mode of speech, or shut ourselves out of society. He did not so; but He was a man of the people, mixing with them for their good. He was seen at a wedding-feast, aiding the festivities: He even ate bread in a Pharisee's house, among captious enemies. He neither wore phylacteries, nor enlarged the borders of his garments, nor sought a secluded cell, nor exhibited any eccentricity of manner. He was separate from sinners only because He was holy and harmless, and they were not. The Church is to be a garden, walled, taken out of the common, and made a separate and select plot of ground. She is to be a spring shut up, and a fountain sealed, no longer open to the fowl of the air, and the beasts of the field. Saints are to be separate from the rest of men, even as Abraham was when he said to the sons of Seth, "I am a stranger and a sojourner with you." IV. THE TEXT BEARS EVEN MORE FORCIBLY ANOTHER IDEA, NAMELY, THAT OF RESERVATION. The Church of God is "a garden inclosed." What for? Why, that nobody may come into that garden, to eat the fruit thereof, but the Lord Himself. It is "a spring shut up," that no one may drink of the stream but the Lord Jesus. "But," cries one, "are we not to seek the good of our fellow-men?" Assuredly we are to do so for Christ's sake. "Are we not to seek to help on sanitary, educational, and purifying processes, and the like?" Yes, so far as all can be done for His sake. We are to be the Lord's servants for the blessing of the world, and we may do anything which He would have done. In such a garden as the text speaks of, every plant bears flowers for its owner, every tree yields fruit for him. "All for Jesus," is to be our motto. No one among us may dare to live unto himself, even in the refined way in which many are doing it, who even try to win souls that they may have the credit of being zealous and successful. We may so far degenerate as even to attempt to glorify Christ that we may have the credit of glorifying Him. It will not do. We must be truly, thoroughly, really living for Jesus: we must be a garden inclosed, reserved, shut up for Him. The wall must wholly inclose the garden, for a gap anywhere will admit an intruder everywhere. If one part of our being be left under the dominion of sin, it will show its power everywhere. The spring must be sealed at the very source, that every drop may be for Jesus throughout the whole of its course. Our first thoughts, desires, and wishes must be His, and then all our words and deeds. We must be "wholly reserved for Christ that died, surrendered to the Crucified." (*C. H. Spurgeon.*) *The garden of the soul*.—Your soul is, or should be, the Beloved's vineyard, God's fruitful field, God's garden and your own. The history of this garden of gardens falls into four chapters—I. THE COMMON GROUND. That beautiful garden was once a bit of heath or moorland, over which the beasts ranged. In its natural state it was worthless. About one hundred years ago the finest garden in the world was the palace-garden of Versailles. But when the French king chose the spot it was a marshy moor. It cost twenty-five years of toil and forty millions of money to change it into the royal garden. And every garden was a waste till the busy hand of cultivation clothed it with various beauties. And are not greater wonders wrought in the soul reclaimed from the outfield of the world? II. THE GROUND CULTIVATED, OR THE GARDEN. 1. It

must first be inclosed. "A garden inclosed is my spouse," says Solomon. Of every Christian soul we may say, as Satan said of Job, "Thou hast made a hedge about him." 2. The soil must next be broken up. What hard and rough work is the digging, the trenching, and the uprooting! But as the confusion in our gardens in spring does not discourage us, so we should not be discouraged by those sorrows that belong to the cultivation of the soul. 3. Then without wise sowing all the gardener's pains would be lost. Fill mind and memory with the delightful truths of the Bible, and let them sink deep, that, seed-like, they may swell, and sprout, and bring forth fruits and flowers of choicest perfume and colour. And you must be ever tending them, for to let your garden alone is to spoil all. 4. The gardener's utmost art would be in vain without the sunshine, the shower, and the quickening breath of spring. That philosopher, famed for his contentment, was right, who, when asked by a friend to show him the splendid garden of which he was always boasting, led him into a bare, rocky space behind his house. "Where is your garden?" the friend asked. "Look up," said the philosopher, "heaven is a part of my garden." Every good gift in the garden really comes from above; for should God command the clouds to rain no rain, the earth would soon be as iron. Heaven shields, broods over, and enriches every fruitful sod. It is a great truth that Paul planteth and Apollos watereth, but God giveth the increase. Turn, then, your whole being fairly towards the sunshine of God's grace, and pray that the garden of your soul may always be as ready to receive heavenly blessing as is the garden around your dwelling.

III. THE GARDEN NEGLECTED. A neglected garden is one of the completest pictures of desolation in the world: it is desolation's throne in the deserted village.

IV. THE GARDEN WELL KEPT. Solomon gives a picture of what your soul should be, and Isaiah of what it should not be. Everything had been done for the Beloved's vineyard, and in return He received only wild grapes (Isa. v.). But the garden in the Song was stocked with all rich and beautiful things. It gave pleasure to every sense: its fine forms and colours gladdened the eye, its ripe fruits gratified the palate, its exquisite perfumes gave delight, and its leaves yielded an additional joy by their agreeable shade. A holy soul is compared to such a garden. It is the most beautiful thing in the world, a paradise of heaven on earth. "How can my soul be a fruitful garden of God?" do you ask. The answer is, by good cultivation; and that is the work of God and man. For "we are labourers together with God: ye are God's husbandry" (1 Cor. iii. 9). All your powers should be gladly devoted to this God-like work of keeping your own vineyard. I remember visiting in spring a poor widow residing in a miserable corner of the city. Her soul was a garden of God. On the window-sill she had some flowers in jelly-dishes and spoutless teapots—a touching proof of that love of the country which city life wakens in all but the broken-hearted. I took notice of the flowers. "Yes," she said, "I take many a bit lesson from them; if I neglect them for a day or two, they hang their bit heads and wither. And my soul does the very same if it is not always watered with the grace of God." God help you so to cultivate the garden of your soul as that you shall bring much fruit to His praise! (*James Wells.*)

A secret and yet no secret (with ver. 15):—Observe the contrast which the two verses present to us. There are two works of the Holy Spirit within us. The first is when He puts into us the living waters; the next is when He enables us to pour forth streams of the same living waters in our daily life. The Spirit of God first implants in us the new nature. This is His work—to regenerate us, to put into us the new principle, the life of God in Christ. Then next, He gives us power to send forth that life in gracious emanations of holiness of life, of devoutness of communion with God, of likeness to Christ, of conformity to His image. The streams are as much of the Holy Spirit as the fountain itself. He digs the well, and He afterwards with heavenly rain fills the pools. He first of all makes the stream in the desert to flow from the flinty rock, and afterwards out of His infinite supplies He feeds the stream and bids it follow us all our days. Now, we think the first verse, to a great extent, sets forth the secret and mysterious work of the Holy Spirit in the creation of the new man in the soul. Into this secret no eye of man can look. The inner life in the Christian may well be compared to an inclosed garden—to a spring shut up—to a fountain sealed. But the second verse sets forth the manifest effects of grace, for no sooner is that life given than it begins to show itself. No sooner is the mystery of righteousness in the heart, than, like the mystery of iniquity, it "doth already work." It cannot lie still; it cannot be idle; it must not rest; but, as God is ever active, so this God-like principle is active too; thus you have a picture of the outer life proceeding from the inner. "A fountain of gardens, a well of living waters, and

streams from Lebanon." The first is what the Christian is before God; the next is what the Christian will become before men. The first is the blessedness which he receives in himself; the next is the blessedness which he diffuses to others. I. With regard to the first text, you will clearly perceive that in each of the three metaphors you have very plainly the idea of secrecy. There is a garden. A garden is a place where trees have been planted by a skillful hand; where they are nurtured with care, and where fruit is expected by its owner. Such is the Church; such is each renewed soul. But it is a garden inclosed, and so inclosed that one cannot see over its walls—so shut out from the world's wilderness, that the passer-by must not enter it—so protected from all intrusion that it is a guarded paradise—as secret as was that inner place, the holy of holies, within the tabernacle of old. The Church—and mark, when I say the Church, the same is true of each individual Christian—is set forth next as a spring. "A spring"—the mother of sweet draughts of refreshing water, reaching down into some impenetrable caverns, and bubbling up with perennial supplies from the great deeps. Not a mere cistern, which contains only, but a fresh spring, which through an inward principle within, begets, continues, overflows. But then, it is a spring shut up: just as there were springs in the East, over which an edifice was built, so that none could reach the springs save those who knew the secret entrance. So is the heart of a believer when it is renewed by grace; there is a mysterious life within which no human skill can touch. And then, it is said to be a fountain; but it is a fountain sealed. The outward stones may be discovered, but the door is sealed, so that no man can get into the hidden springs; they are altogether hidden, and hidden too by a royal will and decree of which the seal is the emblem. I say the idea is very much that of secrecy. Now, such is the inner life of the Christian. It is a secret which no other man knoweth, nay, which the very man who is the possessor of it cannot tell to his neighbour. A second thought is written upon the surface of the text. Here you see not only secrecy, but separation. That also runs through the three figures. It is a garden, but it is a garden inclosed—altogether shut out from the surrounding heaths and commons, inclosed with briars and hedged with thorns, which are impassable by the wild beasts. There is a gate through which the Great Husbandman Himself can come; but there is also a gate which shuts out all those who would only rob the keeper of the vineyard of His rightful fruit. There is separation in the spring also. It is not the common spring, of which every passer-by may drink; it is one so kept and preserved distinct from men, that no lip may touch, no eye may even see its secret. It is a something which the stranger intermeddleth not with; it is a life which the world cannot give and cannot take away. All through, you see, there is a separateness, a distinctness. If it be ranged with springs, still it is a spring specially shut up; if it be put with fountains, still it is a fountain bearing a particular mark—a king's royal seal, so that all can perceive that this is not a general fountain, but a fountain that has a proprietor, and stands specially by itself alone. So is it with the spiritual life. It is a separate thing. I would not give a farthing for that man's spiritual life who can live altogether with others; if you do not sometimes feel that you must be a garden inclosed, that you must enter into your closet, and shut to the door; if you do not feel seasons when the society of your dearest friend is an impediment, and when the face of your sweetest relation would but be a cloud between you and Christ, I cannot understand you. Be ye, O ye children of Christ, as chaste virgins kept alone for Christ. In the third place, you have in the text the idea of sacredness. The garden inclosed is walled up that it may be sacred to its owner; the spring shut up is preserved for the use of some special person; and the fountain sealed more eminently still bears the mark of being sacred to some distinguished personage. Now such is the Christian's heart. It is a spring kept for Christ. Oh, I would that it were always so. Every Christian should feel that he is God's man—that he has God's stamp on him—and he should be able to say with Paul, "From henceforth let no man trouble me, for I bear in my body the marks of the Lord Jesus." But I think there is another idea prominent, and it is that of security—security to the inner life. "A garden inclosed." "The wild boar out of the wood shall not break in there, neither shall the little foxes spoil the vines." "A fountain shut up." The bulls of Bashan shall not mud her streams with their furious feet; neither shall the wild beast of Lebanon come there to drink. "A fountain sealed." No putrid streams shall foul her springs; her water shall be kept clear and living; her fountains shall never be filled up with stones. Oh, how sure and safe is the inner life of the believer. Satan does not know where it is, for "our life is hid with Christ." The world cannot touch it; it seeks to overthrow it with troubles and trials and

persecutions, but we are covered with the Eternal wings, and are safe from fear of evil. How can earthly trials reach the spirit? As well might a man try to strike a soul with a stone, as to destroy a spirit with afflictions. We are one with Christ, even as Christ is one with the Father; therefore as imperishable through Christ's life as Christ Himself. Truly may we rejoice in the fact that "because He lives we shall live also." Once more only. I think in looking at the text you receive the thought of unity. You notice, it is but one garden—"a garden inclosed." "A garden." It is but one spring, and that is shut up; it is but one fountain. So the inner life of the Christian is but one. If you could imagine two bodies quickened by the very same mind, what a close connection would that be! But here are hundreds of bodies, hundreds of souls, quickened by the self-same Spirit. Brethren, indeed not only ought we to love one another, but the love of Christ constraineth us, so that we cannot resist the impulse; we do love each other in Christ Jesus.

II. I shall now try to open the second text, which presents a decided contrast, because it deals not so much with the inner life as with the active life which goes abroad into all the deeds of the Christian in the world, and is the natural outgoing of the life within. First, notice that in contradistinction to our first thought of secrecy you have in the text manifestation. "A fountain of gardens." Everybody can see a fountain which runs streaming through many gardens, making deserts fertile. "A well of living waters." Whatever the traveller does not see, when he is riding along on a thirsty day, he is sure to see the fountain; if there be one anywhere he is certain to observe that. "And streams from Lebanon." So that any passer-by in the valley, looking up the side of the mountain, will see by the clusters of trees which skirt the stream where the stream is; or, if it be a smaller brook, just as sometimes in Cumberland and Westmoreland, on a rainy day you see the mountain suddenly marked with streaks of silver all adown its brown sides, where the brooks are rippling, so the Christian becomes like the streams leaping adown Lebanon's steep sides, clearly perceived even from a distance, manifest to the most casual observer. Now, brethren, this is what you and I ought to be. No man ought to court publicity for his virtue, or notoriety for his zeal; but, at the same time, it is a sin to be always seeking to hide that which God has bestowed upon us for the good of others. The inner life is secret—mind that you have this inner mystery; but out of the secret emanates the manifest; the darkness becomes the mother of light; from the dark mines comes the blazing coal. Oh! see to it, that from all that is hidden and secret and mysterious there comes out the plain and the manifest that men may see the holiness, truthfulness and zeal of God in thy life. But clearly enough, again, we have in the second text, in opposition to the separation of the first, diffusiveness. The garden was inclosed before, now it is "a fountain of gardens"; the well was shut up, now it is a well of living waters; before we had the fountain sealed, now we have streams dashing adown the sides of Lebanon. So a Christian is to be separate in his inner life; but in the outer manifestations of that inner life, he is to mingle for good among his fellow-men. We must let the streams flow abroad; we must seek to give to others what Christ has given to us. Briefly we are obliged to speak on each of these points; but notice, thirdly, that in opposition to the sacredness of the first text we have in the second verse an unlimited freeness, especially in that last expression—"streams from Lebanon." What can be freer than the brook, which leaps along the mountain-side? There the bird wets its wings; there the red deer comes to drink; and even that wild beast of Lebanon, of which we read in the Book of the Kings, comes there, and without let or hindrance slakes its thirst. What can be freer than the rivulet singing with liquid notes adown the glen? It belongs to no one; it is free to all. Whosoever passeth by, be he peer or peasant, may stoop there and refresh himself from the mountain-stream. So be it with you, Christian. Carry about with you a piety which you do not wish to keep for yourself. A light loses none of its own lustre when others are lit at its flame. We must be hidden springs within, but let us be sweetly flowing rivulets without, giving drink to every passer-by. And notice that, while we had in the other text the idea of security, in connection with that we have here in this text the idea of approach. The garden was shut up—that was to keep it. There are no walls here, so that all may come to it. The streams were shut up before; here it is an open well. The fountain was sealed in the first verse; here it is a flowing stream, which is to teach us this—that the way God keeps His people in security is not by shutting out their enemies from attacking them, but while laying them open to temptation and attack, He yet sustains them. And last of all, in opposition to the unity of which I spake, we have in our second text great diversity. You have "a fountain,"

not of a garden, but "of gardens"; you have a well, but it is a well of living waters; you have not a stream, but streams—streams from Lebanon. So a Christian is to do good in all sorts of ways, and his fruits are to be of many kinds; he is to be like the trees of Paradise, which bear twelve manner of fruits. The Christian is to have all sorts of graces. Oh! if the fountain, the secret fountain, were better seen to, I think there would be more of these outward streams; and if the sealed well were better guarded, we should see more of these rapid streams from Lebanon, which would make glad the people of God, and the world at large. (*C. H. Spurgeon.*) *Christ's Church*:—I. IT IS A SACRED INCLOSURE. Inclosed: 1. For protection—against the many foes that would injure it. 2. For enjoyment—Christ has a right to witness its beauties and enjoy its fruits. II. THE MEANS BY WHICH IT IS INCLOSED. 1. By sovereign electing grace—this sweeps round His Church as a boundary line—grand, comprehensive, invisible. 2. By the ministrations of angels—these are its guardians, servants, etc. 3. By restraining grace—this is needed by every plant in this garden and every member in Christ's Church. 4. By Christian ordinances—baptism, the seal of separation. 5. By Christian doctrine—no man can be a Christian without believing some fundamental doctrines. (*J. F. Elder, D.D.*)

Vers. 13, 14. **Thy plants are an orchard of pomegranates, with pleasant fruits; camphire, with spikenard, spikenard and saffron; calamus and cinnamon, with all trees of frankincense; myrrh and aloes, with all the chief spices.**—*Fragrance*:—Of all man's sources of enjoyment, none display more clearly the bountifulness of God than the fragrant odours of nature. Fragrance seems so wholly superfluous and accidental, that we cannot but infer that it was imparted to the objects which possess it, not for their own sakes, but for our gratification. We regard it as a peculiar blessing, sent to us directly from the hand of our Heavenly Father; and we are the more confirmed in this idea by the fact that the human period is the principal epoch of fragrant plants. Geologists inform us that all the eras of the earth's history previous to the Upper Miocene were destitute of perfumes. Forests of club-mosses and ferns hid in their sombre bosom no bright-eyed floweret, and shed from their verdant boughs no scented richness on the passing breeze. Palms and cypresses, though ushering in the dawn of a brighter floral day, produced no perfume-breathing blossoms. It is only when we come to the periods immediately antecedent to the human that we meet with an odoriferous flora. God placed man in a sweet-scented garden as his home. No sense is more closely connected with the sphere of soul than the sense of smell. Its agency is most subtle and extensive—going down to the very depths of our nature, and back to the earliest dawn of life. Memory especially is keenly susceptible to its influence. The acceptance of man's offerings by God is usually represented in the anthropomorphism of the Bible, as finding its expression in the sense of smell. When Noah offered the first sacrifice after the flood, "the Lord," we are told, "smelled a sweet savour." The drink-offerings and the various burnt-offerings prescribed by Levitical law were regarded as a sweet savour unto the Lord. Christ, the antitype of these institutions, is spoken of as having given Himself for us an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling savour. And the Apostle Paul, employing the same typical language, speaks of himself and the other apostles as "unto God a sweet savour of Christ," etc. The Psalms and the prophetic writings are full of the most beautiful and expressive metaphors, applied to the most solemn persons and things, borrowed from perfumes; while the whole of the Song of Solomon is like an oriental garden stocked with delicious flowers, as grateful to the sense of smell as to the sense of sight. In the gorgeous ceremonial worship of the Hebrews, none of the senses were excluded from taking part in the service. The eye was appealed to by the rich vestments and the splendid furniture of the holy place; the ear was exercised by the solemn sound of the trumpet, and the voice of praise and prayer; and the nostril was gratified by the clouds of fragrant smoke that rose from the golden altar of incense and filled all the place. Doubtless the Jews felt, when they saw the soft white clouds of fragrant smoke rising slowly from the altar of incense, as if the voice of the priest were silently but eloquently pleading in that expressive emblem in their behalf. The association of sound was lost in that of smell, and the two senses were blended in one. And this symbolical mode of supplication, as Dr. George Wilson has remarked, had this one advantage over spoken or written prayer, that it appealed to those who were both blind and deaf, a class that are usually shut out from social worship by their affliction. Those who could not hear the prayers of the priest could join in devotional exercises symbolized by incense, through the medium of

their sense of smell; and the hallowed impressions shut out by one avenue were admitted to the mind and heart by another. But not in the incense of prayer alone were perfumes employed in the Old Testament economy. The oil with which the altars and the sacred furniture of the tabernacle and temple were anointed—with which priests were consecrated for their holy service, and kings set apart for their lofty dignity—was richly perfumed. One of the sweetest names of Jesus is the Christ, the Anointed One, because He was anointed with the fragrant oil of consecration for His great work of obedience and atonement. As our King and Great High Priest, He received the outward symbolical chrism, when the wise men of the East laid at His feet their gifts of gold, myrrh and frankincense in token of His royal authority, and Mary and Nicodemus anointed Him with precious spikenard and costly spices for His priestly work of sacrifice. His name is as ointment poured forth; and He is a bundle of myrrh to the heart that loves Him. The ingredients of the Hebrew perfumes were principally obtained in traffic from the Phœnicians. A few of them were products of native plants, but the great majority of them came from Arabia, India and the spice islands of the Indian Archipelago. So great was the skill required in the mixing of these ingredients, in order to form their most valued perfumes, that the art was a recognized profession among the Jews: and the *rokechim*, translated “apothecary” in our version, was not a seller of medicines as with us, but simply a maker of perfumes. Perfumes were at one time extensively employed as remedial agents, particularly in cases of nervous disease. They are still used freely in the sick-room, but more for the purpose of refreshment and overpowering the noxious odours of disease than as medicines. How important they are in the economy of nature we learn from the fact that when the Dutch cut down the spice trees of Ternate, that island was immediately visited with epidemics before unknown; and it has been ascertained that none of the persons employed in the perfume manufactories of London and Paris were attacked by cholera during the last visitation. From the recent experimental researches of Professor Mantegazza, we learn the important fact that the essences of flowers such as lavender, mint, thyme, bergamot, in contact with atmospheric oxygen in sunlight, develop a very large quantity of ozone, the purifying and health-inspiring element in the air. And as a corollary from this fact, he recommends the inhabitants of marshy districts, and of places infected with animal exhalations, to surround their houses with beds of the most odorous flowers, as the powerful oxidizing influence of the ozone may destroy those noxious influences. Many of the most delicious perfumes, however, are dangerous in large quantities. Taken in moderation they act as stimulants, exhilarating the mental functions, and increasing bodily vigour. But in larger and more concentrated doses they act as poisons. If we pursue them as pleasures for their own sake, they will soon pall upon us, however delicious; and if we concentrate them so as to produce a stronger sensation, they become actually repulsive and sickening. God has given them to us to cheer us in the path of duty, not to minister to our love of pleasure and self-indulgence; and in this respect the laws of the unwritten revelation of nature give their sanction to the laws of the written revelation of the Bible, indicating a common source and pointing to a common issue. (*H. Macmillan, D.D.*)

Ver. 15. **A fountain of gardens, a well of living waters, and streams from Lebanon.**—*The Church a garden*.—Again and again the Church is represented as a garden, all up and down the Word of God, and it is a figure specially suggestive at this season of the year, when the parks and the orchards have put forth their blossom and the air is filled with bird-voices. 1. It is a garden because of the rare plants in it. Sometimes you will find the violet, inconspicuous, but sweet as heaven—Christian souls, with no pretence, but of much usefulness, comparatively unknown on earth, but to be glorious in celestial spheres. In this garden of the Lord I find the Mexican cactus, loveliness within, thorns without, men with great sharpness of behaviour and manner, but within them the peace of God, the love of God, the grace of God. They are hard men to handle, ugly men to touch, very apt to strike back when you strike them, yet within them all loveliness and attraction, while outside so completely unfortunate. But I remember in boyhood that we had in our father's garden what we called the Giant of Battle—a peculiar rose, very red and very fiery. Suggestive flower, it was called the Giant of Battle. And so in the garden of the Lord we find that kind of flower—the Pauls and Martin Luthers, the Wycliffes, the John Knoxes—Giants of Battle. What in other men is a spark, in them is a conflagration; when they pray, their prayers take fire. When they suffer, they sweat

great drops of blood ; when they preach, it is a pentecost ; when they fight, it is a Thermopylæ ; when they die, it is martyrdom—Giants of Battle. But I find also in the Church of God a plant that I shall call the snowdrop. Very beautiful but cold ; it is very pure, pure as the snowdrop, beautiful as the snowdrop, and cold as the snowdrop. I would rather have one Giant of Battle than 5000 snowdrops. You have seen in some places, perhaps, a century-plant. You look at it and say, "This flower has been gathering up its beauty for a whole century, and it will not bloom again for another hundred years." Well, I have to tell you that in this garden of the Church, spoken of in my text, there is a century-plant. It has gathered up its bloom from all the ages of eternity, and nineteen centuries ago it put forth its glory. It is not only a century-plant but a passion-flower—the passion-flower of Christ ; a crimson flower, blood at the root, and blood on the leaves, the passion-flower of Jesus, the century-plant of eternity. Come, O winds from the north, and winds from the south, and winds from the east, and winds from the west, and scatter the perfume of this flower through all nations. Thou, the Christ of all the ages, hast garments smelling of myrrh and aloe and cassia, out of the ivory palaces. 2. The Church of Christ is appropriately compared to a garden because of its thorough irrigation. There can be no luxuriant garden without plenty of water. I saw a garden in the midst of the desert, amid the Rocky Mountains. I said, How is it possible you have so many flowers, so much rich fruit, in a desert for miles around ? I suppose some of you have seen those gardens. Well, they told me they had aqueducts and pipes reaching up to the hills, and the snows melted on the Sierra Nevada and the Rocky Mountains, and then poured down in water to those aqueducts, and it kept the fields in great luxuriance. And I thought to myself—how like the garden of Christ ! All around it the barrenness of sin and the barrenness of the world, but our eyes are unto the hills, from whence cometh our help. There is a river the streams whereof shall make glad the city of our God, the fountain of gardens and streams from Lebanon. Water to slake the thirst, water to refresh the fainting, water to wash the unclean, water to toss up in fountains under the sun of righteousness, until you can see the rainbow around the throne. I wandered in a royal garden of choicest plants, and I saw the luxuriance of those gardens were helped by the abundant supply of water. I came to it on a day when strangers were not admitted, but, by a strange coincidence, at the moment I got in the king's chariot passed, and the gardener went up on the hill and turned on the water, and it came flashing down the broad stairs of stone until sunlight and wave in gleesome wrestle tumbled at my feet. And so it is with this garden of Christ. Everything comes from above—pardon from above, peace from above, comfort from above, sanctification from above. Streams from Lebanon—oh ! the consolation in this thought. How many have tried all the fountains of this world's pleasure, but never tasted of the stream from Lebanon ! How many have revelled in other gardens, to their soul's ruin, but never plucked one flower from the garden of our God ! I swing open all the gates of the garden and invite you in, whatever your history, whatever your sins, whatever your temptations, whatever your trouble. The invitation comes no more to one than to all : "Whosoever will, let him come." (*T. De Witt Talmage.*)

Ver. 16. Awake, O north wind ; and come, thou south ; blow upon my garden, that the spices thereof may flow out.—*Grace for communion.*—The loved one in the text desired the company of her Lord, and felt that an inactive condition was not altogether suitable for His coming. Her prayer is first about her garden, that it may be made ready for her Beloved ; and then to the Bridegroom Himself, that He would come into His garden, and eat its pleasant fruits. She pleads for the breath of heaven, and for the Lord of heaven. 1. First she cries for THE BREATH OF HEAVEN to break the dead calm which broods over her heart. In this prayer there is an evident sense of inward sleep. She does not mean that the north wind is asleep : it is her poetical way of confessing that she herself needs to be awakened. She has a sense of absentmindedness, too, for she cries, "Come, thou south." If the south wind would come, the forgetful perfumes would come to themselves, and sweeten all the air. The fault, whatever it is, cannot lie in the winds ; it lies in ourselves. Notice that the spouse does not mind what form the Divine visitation takes so long as she feels its power. "Awake, O north wind ;" though the blast be cold and cutting, it may be that it will effectually fetch forth the perfume of the soul in the form of repentance and self-humiliation. The rough north wind has done much for some of us in the way of arousing our best graces. Yet it may be that the Lord will send

something more tender and cheering ; and if so, we would cry, "Come, thou south." Divine love warming the heart has a wonderful power to develop the best part of a man's nature. Many of our precious things are brought forth by the sun of holy joy. Either movement of the Spirit will sufficiently bestir our inner life ; but the spouse desires both. Although in nature you cannot have the north wind and the south blowing at the same time ; yet in grace you can. The prayer is "blow," and the result is "flow." Lord, if thou blowest, my heart floweth out to Thee ! "Draw me, we will run after Thee." II. The second half of the prayer expresses our central desire : we long for THE LORD OF HEAVEN to visit us. The bride does not seek that the spices of her garden may become perceptible for her own enjoyment, nor for the delectation of strangers, nor even for the pleasure of the daughters of Jerusalem, but for her Beloved's sake. He is to come into His garden, and eat His pleasant fruits. Note well the address of the spouse to her Beloved in the words before us. She calls Him hers—"my Beloved." When we are sure that He is ours we desire Him to come to us as ours, and to reveal Himself as ours. While He is hers she owns that she is wholly His, and all that she has belongs to Him. In the first clause she says, "Awake, O north wind ; and come, thou south ; blow upon my garden" ; but now she prays, "Let my Beloved come into His garden." She had spoken just before of her fruits, but now they are His fruits. She was not wrong when she first spoke ; but she is more accurate now. We are not our own. We do not bring forth fruit of ourselves. The Lord saith, "From Me is thy fruit found." The garden is of our Lord's purchasing, enclosing, planting, and watering ; and all its fruit belongs to Him. This is a powerful reason for His visiting us. Should not a man come into his own garden, and eat his own fruits ? Oh, that the Holy Spirit may put us into a fit condition to entertain our Lord ! The spouse further cries, "Let Him eat His pleasant fruits." I have often felt myself overcome with the bare idea that anything I have ever done should give my Lord pleasure. Can He perceive any perfume in my spices, or taste any flavour in my fruits ? This is a joy worth worlds. It is one of the highest tokens of His condescension. O Lord Jesus, come into our hearts now ! O Holy Spirit, blow upon our hearts at this moment ! Let faith, and love, and hope, and joy, and patience, and every grace be now like violets which betray themselves by their perfume, or like roses which load the air with their fragrance ! (C. H. Spurgeon.) *The Church's prayer* :—Let us consider the prayer of those who are planted in this garden, and who are represented in the text, as imploring the Holy Spirit to descend upon them. I. IN HIS CONVINCING AND HUMBLING POWER, AS THE PIERCING NORTH WIND. As the cold north wind prepares the soil, and fits it for vegetation, so are the sharper operations of the Spirit needful for the believer, when, as too often happens, he is under a decay in grace ; when the things that are in him are ready to die. When He thus comes, He uses various means of awakening. 1. His grand instrument is "the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God," "sharper than any two-edged sword," etc. When a believer grows cold and careless in his walk, God directs to him some text, some threatening, or warning, or promise. 2. He often comes with awakening power in the shape of afflictions. II. IN HIS COMFORTING AND ENLIVENING POWER, AS THE GENTLE SOUTH WIND. When He has pierced the backsliding heart with sorrow for sin. He binds up the wound ; shines upon the heart, like the cheering sun ; and breathes, like the mild and gentle south. (E. Blencowe, M.A.) *The graces of the Holy Spirit implored* :—"The wind bloweth where it listeth." The Spirit of God is an unshackled agent, acting freely in the first application of grace to the sinner's soul, and in all its future operations. 1. Pray that your faith in Christ Jesus may be greatly strengthened. If faith be the element of a Divine life, will not that life, in its exercise and development, be more vigorous, according as God shall give us a stronger and a larger measure of faith ? 2. Again, a believer will plead with Christ, that the Spirit may give him a more lively hope. 3. And should not a believer say, "Awake, O north wind, and come, thou south"—let my love abound ? But is not this love ? Doth the love of Christ, producing a corresponding affection within us, constrain us as it ought ? 4. And is it not fitting that a child of God should say, Let my humility be deepened ? It is the great business of the Gospel to hinder the poor guilty worm of the earth from saying, "I am rich, and increased in goods, and have need of nothing." 5. Should not, moreover, a believer pray, "Come, thou south wind, breathe upon my garden, that the spices thereof may flow out," that my joy may be increased ? (R. P. Buddicom, M.A.) *North and south winds* :—There is a law of classification and contrasts in all life. Things are paired off. They present themselves in sets or classes. We have stars in

galaxies, and the rolling worlds arranged into systems. Vegetable and animal life are known by their genus and species. The principle of order characterizes the conditions of man in the complexity of his nature and the diversity of his life. Our main purpose is to trace the Divine plan of working in the developing and perfecting of God's image in a human soul. In the text we are taught that it is by contrary and conflicting forces that perfection of character is attained. I. THE TEXT IS TRUE OF NATURAL LIFE. "North and south" are the two extremes of this sphere. Between these two extremes exist all the fluctuating variations of the earth's condition. The day's weather depends very largely upon the point from which the wind will blow. We divine the meteorological conditions of the day by the prophecy of the morning. North winds bring cold, hail and snow; south winds are balmy and warm. These facts find their analogue in our higher experiences. What contrasts there are in the conditions of our everyday life! This is true socially. When all things are going smoothly in the home, when health and plenty abound—when children are dutiful and diligent, parents revel in the gentle breezes as they waft down from the southern sky. But, alas! the wind sometimes veers round to the opposite point with a surprising suddenness, and the chilly blasts beat upon us with pitiless fury and pierce our spirits to the quick. How true is the text to business life. Prosperity is verily a congenial south wind. We all aim at and desire success. But the winds of commercial enterprises do not always blow from the south; and for aught we know to the contrary, there may be more perfect developments of character under the latter than by the agency of the former. The two winds are useful and necessary. The south for the comfort and nourishing of young elements and principles in their more incipient stages, and the north wind for giving setness and endurance to these essential qualities. II. THE TEXT IS ALSO TRUE OF SPIRITUAL LIFE. The life of the soul is promoted by principles similar to those which rule in our physical nature. There are opposing elements even in our food. Some are alimentary, building up the body, repairing waste tissue; while others are poisonous, rendering innocuous, or eliminating elements that are deleterious, and that would, if permitted to operate unchecked, kill the body. The value of foods depends upon their adaptation to the peculiar and varying states and requirements of the physical system. In the childhood of our divine life we need the tender and sympathetic. Either through sin or neglect of duty, or strange providences, or the wearing power of temptation and persecution, or the ordinary and inevitable friction of life, we become attenuated in our spiritual proportions and correspondingly feeble. The "north wind" is too strong for us, and so we need the southern breezes to soothe back into strength the weakened energies of the soul. But then spiritual athletes are not braced into might by south winds only. We need to cry, "Awake, O north wind." Too many of the avowed followers of Him "who was rich yet for our sakes became poor," "who pleased not Himself," who "had not where to lay His head," are resting in the warmth of the southern sphere, thus taking no part in the great activities of the Christian Church. If all were as they are what would be the future of Christianity, aye! and of the world, too? It is a good thing to get out into the refreshing breezes which come even from the northern regions. Many a Christian will have to thank God for pain and trial and losses. As the north and south winds are essential, we do well to keep ourselves in the line of both. True greatness is attained by a combination of opposite qualities. It is the strong man tender, the great man lowly, the rich man humble, the wise man with condescending simplicity we most admire. Do not arraign the Divine government if north winds blow, but keep well in mind the great fact that He is designing and evolving your good in all things so that you may attain the stature of a perfect man; and in the last day you shall be presented perfect, wanting nothing. (*M. Brokenshire.*) **Let my Beloved come into His garden, and eat His pleasant fruits.**—"My garden"—"His garden":—What a difference there is between what the believer was by nature and what the grace of God has made him! Naturally we were like the waste howling wilderness, like the desert which yields no healthy plant or verdure. But now, as many of us as have known the Lord are transformed into gardens; our wilderness is made like Eden, our desert is changed into the garden of the Lord. In a garden there are flowers and fruits, and in every Christian's heart you will find the same evidences of culture and care; not in all alike, for even gardens and fields vary in productiveness. Still, there are the fruits and there are the flowers, in a measure; there is a good beginning made wherever the grace of God has undertaken the culture of our nature. I. Now coming to our text, and thinking of Christians as the Lord's garden, I want you to observe, first,

that THERE ARE SWEET SPICES IN BELIEVERS. For instance, there is faith ; is there anything out of heaven sweeter than faith—the faith which trusts and clings, which believes and hopes, and declares that, though God shall slay it, yet will it trust in Him ? Then comes love ; and again I must ask, Is there to be found anywhere a sweeter spice than this—the love which loves God because He first loved us, the love which flows out to all the brotherhood, the love which knows no circle within which it can be bounded, but which loves the whole race of mankind, and seeks to do them good ? And there is also hope, which is indeed an excellent grace, a far-seeing grace by which we behold heaven and eternal bliss. You do not need that I should go over all the list of Christian graces, and mention meekness, brotherly kindness, courage, uprightness or the patience which endures so much from the hand of God : but whatsoever grace I might mention, it would not be difficult at once to convince you that there is a sweetness and a perfume about all grace in the esteem of Him who created it, and it delights Him that it should flourish where once its opposite alone was found growing in the heart of man. These, then, are some of the saints' sweet spices. Next notice that these sweet spices are delightful to God. He has joy over one sinner that repenteth, though repentance is but an initial grace ; and when we go on from that to other graces, and take yet higher steps in the Divine life, we may be sure that His joy is in us, and therefore our joy may well be full. These spices of ours are not only delightful to God, but they are healthful to man. A man of faith and love in a Church sweetens all his brethren. Give us but a few such in our midst, and there shall be no broken spiritual unity, there shall be no coldness and spiritual death ; but all shall go well where these men of God are among us as a mighty influence for good. And, as to the ungodly around us, the continued existence in the earth of the Church of Christ is the hope of the world. It sometimes happens that these sweet odours within God's people lie quiet and still. You cannot stir your own graces, you cannot make them move, you cannot cause their fragrance to flow forth. At such times, a Christian is very apt to ask, "Am I indeed planted in God's garden ? Am I really a child of God ?" Now, I will say what some of you may think a strong thing ; but I do not believe that he is a child of God who never raised that question. II. What is wanted is that THOSE SWEET ODOURS SHOULD BE DIFFUSED. Observe, first, that until our graces are diffused, it is the same as if they were not there. We may not know that we have any faith till there comes a trial, and then our faith starts boldly up. We can hardly know how much we love our Lord till there comes a test of our love, and then we so behave ourselves that we know that we do love Him. Notice next, that it is very painful to a Christian to be in such a condition that his graces are not stirring. He cannot endure it. We who love the Lord were not born again to waste our time in sinful slumber ; our watchword is, "Let us not sleep, as do others." "Quicken Thou me, O Lord, according to Thy word"—whichever word Thou shalt choose to apply, only do quicken Thy servant, and let not the graces within me be as if they were dead ! Remember, however, that the best quickener is always the Holy Spirit ; and that blessed Spirit can come as the north wind, convincing us of sin, and tearing away every rag of our self-confidence, or He may come as the soft south wind, all full of love, revealing Christ, and the covenant of grace, and all the blessings treasured for us therein. You see, also, from this text, that when a child of God sees that his graces are not diffused abroad, then is the time that he should take to prayer. Let no one of us ever think of saying, "I do not feel as if I could pray, and therefore I will not pray." On the contrary, then is the time when you ought to pray more earnestly than ever. Say, "O my Father, I cannot endure this miserable existence ! Thou hast made me to be a flower, to slied abroad my perfume, yet I am not doing it. Oh, by some means, stir my flagging spirit, till I shall be full of earnest industry, full of holy anxiety to promote Thy glory, O my Lord and Master !" III. "Let my Beloved come into His garden, and eat His pleasant fruits." These words speak of THE COMPANY OF CHRIST AND THE ACCEPTANCE OF OUR FRUIT BY CHRIST. I want you specially to notice one expression which is used here. While the spouse was, as it were, shut up and frozen, and the spices of the Lord's garden were not flowing out, she cried to the winds, "Blow upon my garden." She hardly dared to call it her Lord's garden ; but now, notice the alteration in the phraseology : "Let my Beloved come into His garden, and eat His pleasant fruits." The wind has blown through the garden, and made the sweet odours to flow forth ; now it is no longer "my garden," but "His garden." It is wonderful how an increase of grace transfers our properties ; while we have but little grace, we cry, "my," but when we get great grace, we cry,

"His." He planted every flower, and gave to each its fragrance; let Him come into His garden, and see what wonders His grace has wrought. Do you not feel, beloved, that the one thing you want to stir your whole soul is that Christ shall come into it? The best condition a heart can be in, if it has lost fellowship with Christ, is to resolve that it will give God no rest till it gets back to communion with Him, and to give itself no rest till once more it finds the Well-beloved. Next observe that, when the Beloved comes into His garden, the heart's humble but earnest entreaty is, "Let Him eat His pleasant fruits." The greatest joy of a Christian is to give joy to Christ; I do not know whether heaven itself can overmatch this pearl of giving joy to the heart of Jesus Christ on earth. It can match it, but not overmatch it, for it is a superlative joy to give joy to Him—the Man of sorrows, who was emptied of joy for our sakes, and who now is filled up again with joy as each one shall come and bring his share, and cause to the heart of Christ a new and fresh delight. (C. H. Spurgeon.)

CHAPTER V.

VER. 1. I am come into My garden, My sister, My spouse.—*The King feasting in His garden*.—I. The voice of the Master Himself calls us to consider HIS PRESENCE: "I am come." He tells us He is come. What! Could He come without our perceiving it? Is it possible? May we be like those whose eyes were holden so that they knew Him not? Is it possible for us to be like Magdalen, seeking Christ, while He is standing very near us? Yes, and we may even be like the disciples who, when they saw Him walking on the water, were afraid, and thought it was a spirit, and cried out, and had need for Him to say, "It is I, be not afraid," before they knew who it was! Here is our ignorance, but here is His tenderness. Observe, first, this coming was in answer to prayer. How quickly the spouse was heard! Scarce had the words died away, "Let my Beloved come," before she heard Him say, "I am come!" "Before they call, I will answer; and while they are yet speaking, I will hear." Now, observe what an unspeakable blessing this is! If the voice had said, "I have sent My angel," that would have been a precious boon; but it is not so spoken; the word is, "I am come." If you take each word of this remarkable sentence, you will find a meaning. "I am come." There is the personal presence of Christ, "I am come." There is the certainty that it is so. It is no delusion, no dream, no supposition. "I am truly come." This is a solemn as well as a pleasant fact. You who are members of this church, recollect that Jesus is come into the church, that He is now going his rounds among you, and marking your feelings towards Him; He knows to-day who is in fellowship with Him, and who is not; He discerneth between the precious and the vile. "I am come into My garden," saith He. Note here the possession which Christ claims in the Church. If it were not His garden, He would not come into it. A church that is not Christ's church shall have none of His presence, and a soul that is not Christ's has no fellowship with Him. The next word denotes cultivation. "I am come into My garden." The Church is a cultivated spot; it did not spring up by chance, it was arranged by Himself, it has been tended by Himself, and the fruits belong to Himself. And then there are the two choice words at the close, by which He speaks of His Church herself rather than of her work. As if He would draw the attention of His people to themselves and to Himself, rather than to their work; He says, "My sister, My spouse." There is one name for the garden, but there are two names for herself. The work is His work, the garden is His garden, but see, He wants communion not so much with the work as with the worker, He speaks to the Church herself. He calls her, "My sister, My spouse." "Spouse" has something in it of dearness that is not in the first word, for what can be dearer to the husband than the bride? But then there was a time when the spouse was not dear to the Bridegroom, there was a period perhaps when He did not know her, when there was no relationship between them twain; though they are made of one flesh by marriage, yet they were of different families; and for this cause He adds the dear name of "sister," to show an ancient relationship to her, a closeness and nearness by blood, by birth, as well as by betrothal and wedlock. The two words put together make up a confession of inexpressible sweetness. II. OUR LORD'S SATISFACTION IN HIS CHURCH. Observe,

first, that Christ is delighted with the offerings of His people. He says, "I have gathered My myrrh with My spice." We may consider myrrh and spice—sweet perfumes—offered by way of incense to God, as being indicative of the offerings which His people bring to Him. What if I say that prayer is like sweet-smelling myrrh, and that the Beloved has been gathering the myrrh of holy prayer, the bitter myrrh of repenting sighs and cries, in the midst of this church, lo, these many months! No faithful prayer is lost. The groanings of His people are not forgotten, He gathers them as men gather precious products from a garden which they have tilled with much labour and expense. And then, may not spice represent our praises? for these, as well as prayer, come up as incense before His throne. Praise is pleasant and comely, and most of all so because Jesus accepts it, and says, "Whosoever offereth praise glorifieth Me." The Saviour's satisfaction is found, next, in His people's love—"I have eaten My honeycomb with My honey." He takes an intense satisfaction in the sweet fruits which He Himself has caused us to produce; notwithstanding every imperfection, He accepts our love, and says, "I have eaten My honeycomb with My honey." Turning again to our precious text, we observe that our Lord's satisfaction is compared to drinking as well as eating, and that drinking is of a twofold character. "I have drunk My wine." Does he intend by this His joy which is fulfilled in us when our joy is full? Does He mean that, as men go to feasts to make glad their hearts with wine, so He comes to His people to see their joy, and is filled with exultation? Meaneth He not so? Surely He doth. And the milk, may not that mean the Christian's common, ordinary life? As milk contains all the constituents of nourishment, may He not mean by this the general life of the Christian? Our Lord takes delight in the graces of our lives. Permit me now to call your attention to those many great little words, which are yet but one—I refer to the word "My." Observe, that eight or nine times it is repeated. Here is the reason for the solace which the Bridegroom finds in His Church. If He has gotten anything out of us, He must first have put it in us: if He sees of the travail of His soul, it is because the travail came first. Note well, ye lovers of Jesus, that our Lord in this heavenly verse is fed first. "I have eaten," says He, and then He turns to us and says, "Eat, O friends." If any of you seek friendship with the Well-beloved, you must commence by preparing Him a feast. Be assured that after you have so done, your barrel of meal shall not waste, neither shall the cruse of oil fail. The way for believers to be fed by Christ is to seek to feed Him; look to His being satisfied, and He will assuredly look to you.

III. We must now remember, that the text contains an INVITATION. The Beloved says, "Eat, O friends; drink, yea, drink abundantly, O beloved." In the invitation we see the character of the invited guests; they are spoken of as "friends." We were once aliens, we are now brought nigh; we were once enemies, we are made servants, but we have advanced from the grade of service (though servants still) into that of friends, henceforth He calls us not servants, but friends, for the servant knoweth not what his Lord doeth, but all things that He has seen of His Father He has made known unto us. He next calls His people beloved as well as friends. He multiplieth titles, but all His words do not express the full love of His heart. "Beloved." Oh, to have this word addressed to us by Christ! It is music! Here, then, you have the character of those who are invited to commune with Christ; He calls His friends and His beloved. The provisions presented to them are of two kinds; they are bidden to eat and to drink. You, who are spiritual, know what the food is, and what the drink is, for you eat His flesh and drink His blood. The incarnation of the Son of God, and the death of Jesus the Saviour, these are the two sacred viands whereon faith is sustained. Note that delightful word, "abundantly." Some dainties satiate, and even nauseate when we have too much of them, but no soul ever had too much of the dear love of Christ, no heart did ever complain that His sweetness cloyed. That can never be. Your eating and your drinking may be without stint. Ye cannot impoverish the Most High God, possessor of heaven and earth. When ye are satiated with His love, His table shall still be loaded. Your cups may run over, but His flagons will still be brimmed. If you are straitened at all you are not straitened in Him, you are straitened in yourselves. (*C. H. Spurgeon.*) *The Sunday-school garden*:—By the garden, here, Jesus means His Church. But the Sunday-school is one of the most important parts of the Church of Christ.

I. WHY IS THE SUNDAY-SCHOOL LIKE A GARDEN?

1. The Sunday-school is like a garden because of what is done for it. (1) The first thing done for a garden is to fence it. These fences are made out of the commandments He has given us in the Bible. (2) When we have fenced our garden, the next

thing to do is to weed it. But you may ask, what are the weeds that grow in God's garden? Pride is one of these weeds. It is a tall, strong weed, with a glaring, disagreeable flower. Anger is another of these weeds; impatience is another; selfishness is another; idleness is another. (3) The next thing to be done for it is to improve the soil. Some soil is so very poor that nothing will grow in it. When this is the case, the gardener has many ways of curing it. I will only speak of one. He will have the poor soil taken away, and some good, rich soil put in its place. And this is just what Jesus does to His people. He improves the soil of their hearts by changing it and making it new. Everything that Jesus loves will grow in the soil of the new heart. (4) Now we are ready to sow the seed, and put in the plants we want to have growing there. (5) Now it must be watered and cared for. Suppose no rain comes down and no dew distills upon it, will the seed sown there ever spring up and grow? And just in this way Jesus waters and cares for His garden. His grace is the rain and dew that soften the soil of our hearts. His Holy Spirit is like the sun that shines on and warms them. Jesus has pipes in His garden to carry the water of His grace wherever it is needed. The Bible that we read and have explained to us is one of these pipes. And then our blessed Saviour watches carefully over His garden all the time to keep anything from hurting the plants, or from hindering their growth. 2. But then there is another reason why the Sunday-school may be compared to a garden, because of what grows in it. In a garden we expect to find beautiful flowers and delicious fruit. And so in the Sunday-school, which is the garden of Christ, many sweet flowers and fruits are found growing. Every good feeling that we cherish in our hearts is a spiritual flower, and every good deed that we perform in our lives is a spiritual fruit, which Jesus loves to see blooming and ripening in His garden. II. WHAT DOES JESUS COME INTO IT FOR? 1. He comes to watch the growth of the plants. 2. He comes to enjoy the beauty of the flowers. No gardener ever took half as much delight in the flowers he is raising as Jesus takes in His. Every Christian child, and every one who is trying to become a Christian, is a flower in the Saviour's garden, and nobody can tell how much pleasure Jesus takes in watching them. Oh, who would not wish to be one of the flowers of Jesus? 3. He comes to gather the flowers. You know how many dear children die while they are quite young. But what should we think if we could see them now, as they are blooming and flourishing in the Saviour's garden above? (*R. Newton, D.D.*) **I have gathered My myrrh with My spice.—Love joying in love:**—1. It is evident that the Lord Jesus is made happy by us. These poetical sentences must mean that He values the graces and works of His people. He gathers their myrrh and spice because He values them; He eats and drinks the honey and the milk because they are pleasant to Him. It is a wonderful thought that the Lord Jesus Christ has joy of us. We cost Him anguish, even unto death, and now He finds a reward in us. This may seem a small thing to an unloving mind, but it may well ravish the heart which adores the Well-beloved. 2. The Lord Jesus will not and cannot be happy by Himself: He will have us share with Him. Note how the words run—"I have eaten;" "Eat, O friends!" "I have drunk;" "Drink, yea, drink abundantly, O beloved!" His union with His people is so close that His joy is in them, that their joy may be full. He cannot be alone in His joy. He will not be happy anywhere without us. He will not eat without our eating, and He will not drink without our drinking. Does He not say this in other words in the Revelation—"If any man hear My voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with Me"? The inter-communion is complete: the enjoyment is for both. To make our Lord Jesus happy we must be happy also. 3. If we have already enjoyed happy fellowship with Him, the Lord Jesus calls upon us to be still more happy. Though we may say that we have eaten, He will again say, "Eat, O friends!" He presses you to renew, repeat, and increase your participation with Him. It is true we have drunk out of the chalice of His love; but He again invites us, saying, "Drink, yea, drink abundantly, O beloved!" Must it not mean that, though we know the Lord Jesus, we should try to know more of Him, yea, to know all that can be known of that love which passeth knowledge? Oh for grace to appropriate a whole Christ, and all the love, the grace, the glory that is laid up in Him! Does it not also mean—have greater enjoyment of divine things? Partake of them without stint. Do not restrict yourself as though you could go too far in feeding upon the Lord Jesus. Do not be afraid of being too happy in the Lord, or of being too sure of His salvation, or too much devoted emotion. Dread not the excitements which come from fellowship with Christ. Do not believe that the love of Jesus can be too powerfully felt in the soul. Permit the full sweep

and current of holy joy in the Lord to carry you away : it will be safe to yield to it. (*C. H. Spurgeon.*)

Ver. 2. **I sleep, but my heart waketh: it is the voice of my Beloved that knocketh.**—*Asleep and yet awake—A Riddle*:—We are glad to perceive in this Song the varied experience of the bride. She was the well-beloved of the heavenly Bridegroom, but she was not without her faults. Let us bless God that in the Book of revealed truth He has not merely given us the ideal standard after which we are to seek, but He has also preserved for us the humbler patterns of those who have striven to reach to the utmost height, and who have climbed a good way towards it, but who, nevertheless, have proved that, though they were the best of men, they were men at the best. Thus our Lord has saved us from despair by making us to know that we may be sincere, and true, and accepted, though we, too, fall short as yet of the holiness which we pant after with our whole hearts. I. First, then, here is **SLUMBER CONFESED.** The spouse laments her state, and sighs out, "I sleep." It strikes us at once that her sleep is a state recognized. We are astonished that she should say, "I sleep," and we conclude that it is not so profound a sleep as it might be; for when a man can say, "I sleep," he is not altogether steeped in slumber. I would not give you encouragement, if you are asleep at all to continue it; but yet I would say this, that if you mourn over your sluggishness you are not altogether a sluggard, if you feel uneasy in your dulness you are not altogether given over to spiritual stupidity, if you are anxious to be aroused out of your slumber it is certain that you are not given over to sleep yourself into the sepulchre of insensibility. Cultivate a quick perception, and when you are aware of the slightest defalcation or decline, confess at once to God that you begin to sleep. Further, as this sleep is a matter recognized, so it is a matter complained of. The spouse is not pleased with her condition. It is well for saints, when they perceive that they are in the least degree backsliding, that they should mourn before God, and accuse themselves before Him. Act tenderly to others, but severely towards yourselves. So all prudent men will do if God keep them prudent. This sleepiness is not a thing to be indulged in, but to be abhorred. To say the least of it, it is a low state of enjoyment. Sleep is peaceful and quiet, but it cannot enjoy the sweets of the senses, and the delights which the mind can receive thereby. If we fail to enjoy the banquets of our Bridegroom's love it must be because a deadness is stealing over us, and we are not so thoroughly alive and awake as we were in days gone by; and this is a condition to be deplored as soon as it is perceived. We ought to complain of ourselves if we sleep, because it is a state of danger. While men slept the enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat. It is bad, then, to have a drowsy minister and drowsy church officers, for these will not watch the fields for God. Sleep is a state of inaction. A man cannot do his daily business while his eyes are closed in slumber. Yet again; this slumber should be not only a matter of complaint as an ill to be dreaded, but it should be regarded as a fault to be ashamed of. Make excuses for others, and let your Lord make excuses for you, but do not frame apologies on your own account. Furthermore, it is an evil to be fought against. When a man is obliged to say, "I sleep," let him not content himself with sleeping on. Now is the time for much prayer: let him wrestle with this deadly foe till he is fully aroused. Falling into indifference on the road to heaven is something like sleeping on the vast plains of snow, where, if a man give way to the natural inclination to slumber which comes on through the intense cold, he may lie down and never rise again. II. We reach the point of the paradox; here is **WATCHFULNESS CLAIMED** by one who confessed to sleep. "My heart waketh," says the bride, "I sleep, but my heart waketh." Somewhat of heaven is about the man of God when the earth encompasses him most: "Sin shall not have dominion over you": God has the throne still, even when Satan rages most. This inward life shows itself usually in the uneasiness of the declining heart. When a believer feels that he is not what he ought to be, nor what he wants to be, he cannot be happy. He cannot rest and be content. He sleeps, but his heart beats, sighs, and palpitates with dire unrest. The inner life shows itself, too, in desire, for the heart is the seat of desire, and it leads the man to say "I am not what I would be. I live at a poor dying rate: Christ's love is so great to me, and mine to Him so chill. Lord, lift me out of this frozen state. I cannot bear this grave of lethargy. Lord, bring my soul out of prison! Give me more grace; give me to love Jesus better, and to be more like Him. Poor as I am, I long to be enriched by Thy love and mercy; O visit me with Thy salvation!" Such a pleading heart is still awake, though the mind may be dull. The spouse

gave another proof of her wakefulness by her discernment. She says, "It is the voice of my Beloved that knocketh." Even when half asleep she knew her Lord's voice. You may catch a true believer at his worst, but he still knows the Gospel from anything else, and can detect another gospel in a moment. This wakefulness of heart shows itself often in the soul chiding itself. "I sleep," saith she. She would not have blamed herself as I have tried to describe her doing if she had not been in some measure awake. This blessed living wakefulness within the heart will by and by display itself in action. The heart will wake up all that is within us, and we shall hasten to our Beloved. **III. MYSTERY SOLVED.** "I sleep, but my heart waketh." How doth her heart wake? It is because the voice and knock of her Beloved are heard. Every child of God has a wondrous union with Christ. "Because I live," saith Christ, "ye shall live also." Ask you why you are alive in such a body of death and grave of sin as your poor nature is? You live because Christ lives; and you cannot die till He does. This is why you cannot sleep as do others, because He does not so sleep. What a blessing is this vital union with the ever-blessed Head, immortal and unslumbering! **IV. NOW FOR THE LESSON LEARNED.** It is this, be very careful when you possess great joys, for in this instance the spouse had been with the Beloved in choice fellowship, and yet was soon drowsy. High joys may produce slumber; the chosen three upon the mount Tabor were soon overcome with heaviness. Mind what you do when on the mount; be careful to carry a full cup with a steady hand. Next, when you are blaming yourselves for your own work, do not forget the work of the Spirit in you. "I sleep:" smite your heart for that, but do not forget to add if it be true, "My heart waketh." Bless God for any grace you have, even if it be but little. Lastly, make sure above all things that you have that true faith which knows the voice of Jesus. He saith, "Incline your ear, and come unto Me: hear, and your soul shall live. My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me, and I give unto them eternal life." (*C. H. Spurgeon.*) *Nearer and dearer:*—Spiritual sickness is very common in the Church of God, and the root of the mischief lies in distance from Jesus, following Christ afar off, and yielding to a drowsy temperament. Away from Jesus, away from joy. Without the sun the flowers pine; without Jesus our hearts faint. **I. The spouse confesses A VERY COMMON SIN:** she cries, "*I sleep.*" She had no right to be asleep, for her Beloved knew no rest. He was standing without in the cold street, with His head wet with dew, and His locks with the drops of the night, why should she be at ease? He was anxiously seeking her, how was it that she could be so cruel as to yield to slumber! Do you not find, that almost unconsciously to yourselves, a spirit of indifference steals over you? You do not give up private prayer, but, alas! it becomes a mere mechanical operation. Shall such a King be served by lie-a-bed soldiers? Shall His midnight pleadings be repaid by our daylight sleepiness? Shall an agony of bloody sweat be recompensed by heavy eyelids and yawning mouths? **II. The song before us reminds us of A HOPEFUL SIGN.** "My heart waketh." What a riddle the believer is! He is asleep, and yet he is awake. His true self, the I, the veritable *Ego* of the man is asleep; but yet his heart, his truest self, his affections, are awake. It is a hopeful sign when a man can conscientiously say as much as the spouse in this case, but remember it is not much to say. Do not pride yourself upon it. Be ashamed that you should be asleep at all. Do not congratulate yourself that your heart is awake. Be thankful that infinite love affords you grace enough to keep your heart alive, but be ashamed that you have no more when more may be had and should be had. **III. The third thing is A LOVING CALL.** Asleep as the spouse was, she knew her Husband's voice, for this is an abiding mark of God's people. "My sheep hear My voice." A half-sleeping saint still has spiritual discernment enough to know when Jesus speaks. At first the Beloved One simply knocked. His object was to enter into fellowship with His Church, to reveal Himself to her, to unveil His beauties, to solace her with His presence. Such is the object of our blessed Lord, this morning, in bringing us to this house. Then the Bridegroom tried His voice. If knocking would not do, he would speak in plain and plaintive words, "Open to Me, My sister, My love, My dove, My undefiled." The Lord Jesus Christ has a sweet way of making the word come home to the conscience; I mean, not now, that effectual and irresistible power of which we shall speak by and by, but that lesser force which the heart may resist, but which renders it very guilty for so doing. Now, observe the appeals which the Beloved here makes. He says, "Open to Me," and His plea is the love the spouse has to Him, or professed to have, the love He has to her, and the relationship which exists between them. Did you notice that power-

ful argument with which the heavenly Lover closed His cry? He said, "My head is filled with dew, and My locks with the drops of the night." Ah, sorrowful remembrances, for those drops were not the ordinary dew that fall upon the houseless traveller's unprotected head, His head was wet with scarlet dew, and His locks with crimson drops of a tenfold night of God's desertion, when He "sweat as it were great drops of blood falling down to the ground." My heart, how vile art thou, for thou shuttest out the Crucified. Behold the Man thorn-crowned and scourged, with traces of the spittle of the soldiery, canst thou close the door on Him? Wilt thou despise the "despised and rejected of men"? Wilt thou grieve the "Man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief"? IV. Yet the spouse hastened not to open the door, and I am afraid the like delay may be charged upon some of us. Our shame deepens as we pursue our theme, and think how well our own character is photographed here by the wise man; for notice, that after the knocking and the pleading, the spouse made a MOST UNGENEROUS EXCUSE. She sat like a queen, and knew no sorrow. She had put off her garments and washed her feet as travellers do in the East before they go to rest. Shall I English the excuse she made? It is this: "O Lord, I know that if I am to enter into much fellowship with Thee, I must pray very differently from what I have done of late, but it is too much trouble; I cannot stir myself to energy so great. My time is so taken up with my business, I am so constantly engaged that I could not afford even a quarter of an hour for retirement. I have to cut my prayers so short." Is this the miserable excuse in part? Shall I tell out more of this dishonourable apology? It is this: I do not want to begin an examination of myself: it may reveal so many unpleasant truths. I sleep, and it is very comfortable to sleep; I do not want to be driven out of my comforts. Perhaps if I were to live nearer to Christ, I should have to give up some of the things which I so much enjoy. I have become conformed to the world of late; I am very fond of having Mr. So-and-so to spend an hour with me in the evening, and his talk is anything but that which my Master would approve of, but I cannot give him up. I have taken to read religious novels. I could not expect to have the Lord Jesus Christ's company when I am poring over such trash as that, but still I prefer it to my Bible; I would sooner read a fool's tale than I would read of Jesus' love. V. Still, as a wonder of wonders, although shamefully and cruelly treated, the beloved Husband did not go away. We are told that He "put in His hand by the hole of the door," and then the bowels of His spouse were moved for Him. Does not this picture THE WORK OF EFFECTUAL GRACE, when the truth does not appeal to the ear alone, but comes to the heart, when it is no longer a thing thought on, and discussed and forgotten, but an arrow which has penetrated into the reins, and sticks fast in the loins to our wounding, and ultimately to our spiritual healing? No hand is like Christ's hand. When He puts his hand to the work it is well done. He "put in His hand": not His hand on me to smite me, but His hand in me to comfort me; to sanctify me. He put in His hand, and straightway His beloved began to pity Him, and to lament her unkindness. VI. But now, observe THE DESERVED CHASTISEMENT which the Bridegroom inflicted. When her Spouse was willing to commune, she was not; and now that she is willing, and even anxious, what happens? "I opened to my Beloved, but," says the Hebrew, "He had gone, He had gone." The voice of lamentation the reduplicated cry of one that is in bitter distress. There must have been a sad relief about it to her sinful heart, for she must have felt afraid to look her dear One in the face after such heartless conduct; but sad as it would have been to face Him, it was infinitely sadder to say, "He is gone, He is gone." Now she begins to use the means of grace in order to find Him. "I sought Him," said she, "and I found Him not. I went up to the house of God; the sermon was sweet, but it was not sweet to me, for He was not there. I went to the communion table, and the ordinance was a feast of fat things to others, but not to me, for He was not there. I sought Him, but I could not find Him." Then she betook herself to prayer. She had neglected that before, but now she supplicated in real earnest, "I called Him; I said to Him, Come, my Beloved, my heart wakes for Thee. Jesus, reveal Thyself to me as Thou dost not to the world." Her prayers were many; she kept them up by day and by night. "I called Him, but He gave me no answer." She was not a lost soul, do not mistake that. Christ loved her just as much then as before, nay, loved her a great deal more. If there can be any change in Christ's love, He must have much more approved of her when she was seeking Him in sorrow, than when she was reclining upon the couch and neglecting Him. But He was gone, and all her calling could not bring Him back. What did she then? Why, she went to His ministers, she went to those who were the watch-

men of the night, and what said they to her? Did they cheer her? Perhaps they had never passed through her experience; perhaps they were mere hirelings. However it might be, they smote her. VII. As the poor spouse did not then find Christ, but was repulsed in all ways, she adopted A LAST EXPEDIENT. She knew that there were some who had daily fellowship with the King, daughters of Jerusalem who often saw Him, and therefore she sent a message by them, "If ye see my Beloved, tell Him that I am sick of love." Enlist your brother saints to pray for you. Go with them to their gatherings for prayer. Their company will not satisfy you without Jesus, but their company may help you to find Jesus. Follow the footsteps of the flock, and you may by and by discover the Shepherd. (C. H. Spurgeon.)

Ver. 3. **I have put off my coat; how shall I put it on!**—*Profession tested by the unusual*:—It is when we are asked to do unusual things that we find out the scope and the value of our Christian profession. How difficult it is to be equally strong at every point! How hard, how impossible, to have a day-and-night religion; a religion that is in the light and in the darkness the same, as watchful at midnight as at midday; as ready to serve in the snows of winter as amid the flowers of the summer-time! So the Shulamite breaks down. She has been rhapsodizing, calling to her Love that He would return to her; and now that He has come she says: "I have put off my coat; how shall I put it on?" What a refrain to all the wild rhapsody! When the Shulamite cries that her loving and loved one may return, always add, I have put off my coat; how shall I put it on? I have laid myself down; how can I rise again to undo the door?—Oh that he would come at regular times, in the ordinary course of things, that he would not put my love to these unusual and exceptional tests: for twelve hours in the day I should be ready, but having curtained myself round, and lain down to sleep, how can I rise again? Thus all mere sentiment perishes in the using; it is undergoing a continual process of evaporation. Nothing stands seven days a week and four seasons in the year but reasoned love, intelligent apprehension of great principles, distinct inwrought conviction that without Christ life is impossible, or were it possible it would be vain, painful, and useless. Have we any such excuses, or are these complaints historical noises, unknown to us in their practical realization? Let the question find its way into the very middle of the heart. There is an ingenuity of self-excusing, a department in which genius can find ample scope for all its resources. The ailment that would not keep a man from business will confine him all day when it is the Church that requires his attendance, or Christ that asks him to deliver a testimony or render a sacrifice. Who can escape from that suggestion? Who does not so far take Providence into his own hand as to arrange occasionally that his ailments shall come and go by the clock? Who has not found in the weather an excuse to keep him from spiritual exercises that he never would have found there on the business days of the week? How comes it that men look towards the weather quarter on the day of the Son of Man? Where do we begin to economize? Do we begin in the region of luxury? Where is there a man who can truthfully say that when he begins to economize he begins in the wine-cellar? How often have we risen at midnight to help the poor, the helpless, the lost? Of how many meals have we denied our hunger that we might help a hunger greater than our own? How often have we put ourselves out of the way to do that which is good, benevolent, and helpful? (J. Parker, D.D.)

Ver. 8. **I charge you, O daughters of Jerusalem, if ye find my Beloved, that ye tell Him, that I am sick of love.**—*Heavenly love-sickness*:—Sick! that is a sad thing; it moves your pity. Sick of love—love-sick! that stirs up other emotions which we shall presently attempt to explain. There is a twofold love-sickness. Of the one kind is that love-sickness which comes upon the Christian when he is transported with the full enjoyment of Jesus, even as the bride, elated by the favour, melted by the tenderness of her Lord, says in the fifth verse of the second chapter of the Song, "Stay me with flagons, comfort me with apples: for I am sick of love." Another kind of love-sickness, widely different from the first, is that in which the soul is sick, not because it has too much of Christ's love, but because it has not enough present consciousness of it; sick, not of the enjoyment, but of the longing for it; sick, not because of the excess of delight, but because of sorrow for an absent lover. I. First, consider our text as the language of a soul LONGING FOR THE VIEW OF JESUS CHRIST IN GRACE. 1. Do ye ask me concerning the sickness

itself: what is it? It is the sickness of a soul panting after communion with Christ. Gracious souls are never perfectly at ease except they are in a state of nearness to Christ; for, mark you, when they are not near to Christ, they lose their peace. The nearer to Jesus, the nearer to the perfect calm of heaven; and the further from Jesus, the nearer to that troubled sea which images the continual unrest of the wicked. The heart when near to Jesus has strong pulsations, for, since Jesus is in that heart, it is full of life, of vigour, and of strength. Peace, liveliness, vigour—all depend upon the constant enjoyment of communion with Christ Jesus. The soul of a Christian never knows what joy means in its true solidity, except when she sits like Mary at Jesus' feet. What the sun is to the day, what the moon is to the night, what the dew is to the flower, such is Jesus Christ to us. What the turtle is to her mate, what the husband is to his spouse, what the head is to the body, such is Jesus Christ to us; and therefore, if we have Him not, nay, if we are not conscious of having Him; if we are not one with Him, nay, if we are not consciously one with Him, little marvel if our spirit cries in the words of the Song, "I charge you, O daughters of Jerusalem, if ye find my Beloved, tell Him, that I am sick of love." Such is the character of this love-sickness. We may say of it, however, that it is a sickness which has a blessing attending it: "Blessed are they that do hunger and thirst after righteousness;" and therefore, supremely blessed are they who thirst after the Righteous One—after Him who in the highest perfection embodies pure, immaculate, spotless righteousness. Blessed is that hunger, for it comes from God. Yet it is a sickness which, despite the blessing, causes much pain. The man who is sick after Jesus will be dissatisfied with everything else; he will find that dainties have lost their sweetness, and music its melody, and light its brightness, and life itself will be darkened with the shadow of death to him, till he finds his Lord, and can rejoice in Him. Ye shall find that this thirsting, this sickness, if it ever gets hold upon you, is attended with great vehemence. As lovers sometimes talk of doing impossibilities for their fair ones, so certainly a spirit that is set on Christ will laugh at impossibility, and say, "It shall be done." It will venture upon the hardest task, go cheerfully to prison and joyfully to death, if it may but find its beloved, and have its love-sickness satisfied with His presence. 2. What maketh a man's soul so sick after Christ? Understand that it is the absence of Christ which makes this sickness in a mind that really understands the preciousness of His presence. The spouse had been very wilful and wayward; she had taken off her garments, had gone to her rest, her sluggish, slothful rest, when her Beloved knocked at the door. Mingled with the sense of absence is a consciousness of wrong-doing. Something in her seemed to say, "How couldst thou drive Him away? That heavenly Bridegroom who knocked and pleaded hard, how couldst thou keep Him longer there amidst the cold dews of night? O unkind heart! what if thy feet had been made to bleed by thy rising? What if all thy body had been chilled by the cold wind, when thou wast treading the floor? What had it been compared with His love to thee?" So, too, mixed with this, was great wretchedness because He was gone. She had been for a little time easy in His absence. That downy bed, that warm coverlet, had given her a peace—a false, cruel, and a wicked peace—but she has risen now, the watchmen have smitten her, her veil is gone, and, without a friend, the princess, deserted in the midst of Jerusalem's streets, has her soul melted for heaviness, and she pours out her heart within her as she pineth after her Lord. To gather up the causes of this love-sickness in a few words, does not the whole matter spring from relationship? She is His spouse; can the spouse be happy without her beloved Lord? It springs from union; she is part of Himself. Can the hand be happy and healthy if the life-floods stream not from the heart and from the head? Fondly realizing her dependence, she feels that she owes all to Him, and gets her all from Him. If, then, the fountain be cut off, if the streams be dried, if the great source of all be taken from her, how can she but be sick? And there is besides this a life and a nature in her which makes her sick. There is a life like the life of Christ, nay, her life is in Christ, it is hid with Christ in God; her nature is a part of the Divine nature; she is a partaker of the Divine nature. Moreover she is in union with Jesus, and this piece, divided, as it were, from the body, wriggles, like a worm out asunder, and pants to get back to where it came from. 3. What endeavours such love-sick souls will put forth. Those who are sick for Christ will first send their desires to Him. Go, go, sweet doves, with swift and clipping wings, and tell Him, I am sick of love. Then she would send her prayers. She is afraid they will never reach Him, for her bow is slack, and she knoweth not how to draw it with her feeble hands which hang down. So what does she? She has traversed the streets; she has used the means; she has done every

thing; she has sighed her heart out, and emptied her soul out in prayers. She is all wounds till He heals her; she is all a hungry mouth till He fills her; she is all an empty brook till He replenishes her once again, and so now she goeth to her companions, and she saith, "If ye find my Beloved, tell Him, I am sick of love." This is using the intercession of the saints. But after all, how much better it would have been for her to tell Him herself. "But," you say, "she could not find Him." Nay, but if she had faith she would have known that her prayers could; for our prayers know where Christ is when we do not know, or rather, Christ knows where our prayers are, and when we cannot see Him they reach Him nevertheless. 4. Blessed love-sickness! we have seen its character and its cause, and the endeavours of the soul under it; let us just notice the comforts which belong to such a state as this. Briefly they are these—you shall be filled. It is impossible for Christ to set you longing after Him without intending to give Himself to you. He makes you long: He will certainly satisfy your longings. Remember, again, that He will give you Himself all the sooner for the bitterness of your longings. The more pained your heart is at His absence the shorter will the absence be. Then, again, when He does come, as come He will, oh, how sweet it will be! II. This love-sickness may be seen in a soul LONGING FOR A VIEW OF JESUS IN HIS GLORY. 1. And here we will consider the complaint itself for a moment. This ailment is not merely a longing after communion with Christ on earth—that has been enjoyed, and generally this sickness follows that. It is the enjoyment of Eschcol's first-fruits which makes us desire to sit under our own vine and our own fig tree before the throne of God in the blessed land. This sickness is characterized by certain marked symptoms; I will tell you what they are. There is a loving and a longing, a loathing and a languishing. As the needle once magnetized will never be easy until it finds the pole, so the heart once Christianized never will be satisfied until it rests on Christ—rests on Him, too, in the fulness of the beatific vision before the throne. 2. As to its object—what is that? "Tell Him, that I am sick of love;" but what is the sickness for? When you and I want to go to heaven I hope it is the true love-sickness. The soul may be as sick as it will, without rebuke, when it is sick to be with Jesus. You may indulge this, carry it to its utmost extent without either sin or folly. What am I sick with love for? For the pearly gates?—No; but for the pearls that are in His wounds. What am I sick for? For the streets of gold?—No; but for His head, which is as much fine gold. For the melody of the harps and angelic songs?—No; but for the melodious notes that come from His dear mouth. What am I sick for? For the nectar that angels drink?—No; but for the kisses of His lips. For the manna on which heavenly souls do feed?—No; but for Himself, who is the meat and drink of His saints; Himself, Himself—my soul pines to see Him. 3. Ask ye, yet again, what are the excitements of this sickness. What is it makes the Christian long to be at home with Jesus? I do believe that all the bitters and all the sweets make a Christian, when he is in a healthy state, sick after Christ: the sweets make his mouth water for more sweets, and the bitters make him pant for the time when the last dregs of bitterness shall be over. Wearing temptations, as well as rapt enjoyments, all set the spirit on the wing after Jesus. 4. Well now, what is the cure of this love-sickness? Is it a sickness for which there is any specific remedy? There are some palliatives, and I will recommend them to you. Such, for example, is a strong faith that realizes the day of the Lord and the presence of Christ, as Moses beheld the promised land and the goodly heritage, when he stood on the top of Pisgah. If you do not get heaven when you want it, you may attain to that which is next door to heaven, and this may bear you up for a little season. If you cannot get to behold Christ face to face, it is a blessed make-shift for the time to see Him in the Scriptures, and to look at Him through the glass of the Word. These are palliatives, but I warn ye, I warn ye of them. I do not mean to keep you from them, use them as much as ever you can, but I warn you from expecting that it will cure that love-sickness. It will give you ease, but it will make you more sick still, for he that lives on Christ gets more hungry after Christ. But there is a cure, there is a cure, and you shall have it soon—a black draught, and in it a pearl: a black draught called Death. Ye shall drink it, but ye shall not know it is bitter, for ye shall swallow it up in victory. (C. H. Spurgeon.)

Vers. 9-16. What is thy Beloved more than another beloved, O thou fairest among women?—*The incomparable Bridegroom and His bride*:—I want to address some earnest words to the people of God upon certain practical truths that arise out of our text; and the first thing I have to say is this, that the daughters of Jeru-

Jerusalem recognized in the spouse an exceeding beauty, which dazzled and charmed them, so that they could not help calling her the "fairest among women." This was not her estimate of herself; for she had said, "I am black, but comely." Nor was it the estimate of her enemies; for they had smitten her, and wounded her. But it was the estimate of fair, candid, and impartial onlookers. I. OUR CHARACTER SHOULD GIVE WEIGHT TO OUR PROFESSION OF RELIGION. I suppose it is the earnest wish of every Christian to win for Christ some new converts, to bring some fresh province under the dominion of the King of kings. I will tell you how this may be accomplished. Your power to achieve this noble purpose must largely depend upon your own personal consistency. It little availeth what I say if I do the reverse. The world will not care about my testimony with the lip, unless there be also a testimony in my daily life for God, for truth, for holiness, for everything that is honest, lovely, pure, and of good report. If your life be not all of a piece, the world will soon learn how to estimate your testimony, and will count you to be either a fool or a knave, and perhaps both. But it is not enough to be barely consistent; what the world expects in Christians is real holiness as well as consistency. Holiness is something more than virtue. Virtue is like goodness frozen into ice, hard and cold; but holiness is that same goodness when it is thawed into a clear, running, sparkling stream. If you are just barely honest and no more, if you are barely moral, and no more, it is of no service that you should try to speak of Christ; the world will not reckon you as the fairest among women, and it will not inquire anything about your Well-beloved. II. WE SHOULD CHARGE OTHERS CONCERNING CHRIST. "What is thy Beloved more than another beloved, that thou dost so charge us?" The "fairest among women" was asked why she had so spoken: "I charge you, O daughters of Jerusalem, if ye find my Beloved, that ye tell Him, that I am sick of love." By this "charge" is meant, I suppose, that the spouse adjured them, and spoke solemnly to them about her Beloved. Christians, be troublesome to the world! O house of Israel, be like a burdensome stone to the world! While your conduct should be courteous, and everything that could be desired as between man and man, yet let your testimony for Christ be given without any flinching and without any mincing of the matter. We must speak up for Christ, and so speak up for Him that men will be moved to ask us the question, "What is thy Beloved more than another beloved, that thou dost so charge us?" III. It is important for us to MAKE ALL WHO COME IN CONTACT WITH US FEEL THAT CHRIST JESUS IS FIRST AND FOREMOST WITH US. It is clear that Christ is not first in every nominal Christian's heart. No, alas! He is not first, and He is not even second, He is very far down in the scale. Look at them,—good honest tradespeople, perhaps, but from the first dawn of Monday morning to the putting up of the shutters on Saturday night, what is the main business of their life? It is only, "What shall we eat? or what shall we drink? or wherewithal shall we be clothed?" Now, where is Christ in such a case as that? This is not the case with the truly Christ-like man. With him, Christ is first, Christ is last, Christ is midst, Christ is all in all; and when he speaks about anything connected with Christ, his words come with such a solemn earnestness, that men are impressed with what he says, and they turn round to him, and ask, as the daughters of Jerusalem inquired of the spouse, "What is thy Beloved?" etc. IV. If ever, through the grace of God, we should possess such a character, and bear such a testimony as we have been talking about, so that men shall ask us the question of the text, IT WILL BE WELL FOR US TO BE PREPARED TO ANSWER IT. See how the spouse does; she does not pause a minute before she gives her reply. She is asked, "What is thy Beloved more than another beloved?" and she has the answer, as we say, at her fingers' ends, and why was this? Why, because she had it in her heart. So she says, "My Beloved is white and ruddy, the chiefest among ten thousand." She does not say, "Stop a bit, I must read up on that question; I must get myself well instructed upon it," but it is such a vital point, and one so dear to her, as it touches the person of her Lord, that she answers at once, "Is my Beloved better than any other beloved? Certainly He is, and here are the reasons." She puts them together one after another without a pause, so that the daughters of Jerusalem must have been convinced; and I commend her example to you also, my beloved in Christ Jesus. Do study the Word, that your faith may not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God. (C. H. Spurgeon.) *The best Beloved*.—I. ALL HAVE SOME BELOVED. By a beloved I mean any person or anything that more than any other occupies the thoughts—entwines about itself the affections and constitutes the mainspring of the person's actions. The beloved of many is money. Their thoughts can only run on

golden rails. But there are others of lighter, gayer dispositions who laugh to scorn the miser's treasure and cast their offerings at the feet of pleasure. For it they live, in it they revel. The world and the things of the world constitute their beloved, and they woo it with a blind devotion. No, my desire is to show and feel, and make you feel, that Jesus is infinitely more than any other, and that no other beloved can possibly be compared to Him. II. CHRIST SURPASSES ALL BELOVEDS. 1. He does so first in beauty. How magnificent is the description that flows from the lips of the spouse, when she is challenged to show the superiority of her Beloved. "My Beloved," she exclaims, "is white and ruddy, the chiefest among ten thousand." Here you have the perfection of loveliness—not merely ruddy, nor only pale, though there may be beauty in both, but white and ruddy, the rose and the lily united, the fairest contrasts meeting in the same person. Oh, is it not so with our Beloved? Your Beloved is white and ruddy now. 2. Our Beloved is more than others in that He reciprocates my love. For every drop of love I have towards Him, there is in His heart an ocean full for me. 3. He is more than any other beloved also, because He is never a cause of sorrow. Can you point me to any other love that never gives a pang or brings a tear? Earthly honey is always mixed with gall, and this world's fairest rose is ever accompanied with thorns. But Jesus is a beloved who is all joy. His friendship is sweeter than honey, and the rose of Sharon has no thorns. 4. Other beloveds may be loved too well, but Jesus never. Love to Him can never become a snare—love to Him need not and should never have any restraint. Love Him to a passion, and you will not love Him half enough. 5. Our Beloved is more than others in that death robs us not of Him. 6. No other beloved died for me, but Jesus did. Great and wonderful are the sacrifices that have been made through love. Remember our Beloved loved us unto the death, not because we loved Him, but because He would love us. So you will perceive that we here have love beyond that ever shown by friend to friend displayed to enemies. 7. Our Beloved is more than any other beloved in our estimation. Whatever others may think of Him, to me He is the chiefest among ten thousand. (*A. G. Brown.*) *The Christian's Beloved*:—I. WHAT ARE THE CHIEF OBJECTS OF MAN'S LOVE? 1. Money.—What is there men will not do or suffer for the sake of wealth? 2. Fashion.—There is a Baal as well as a Moloch in the Pantheon—a god of splendour as well as a god of fire! And Baal has his sacrifices too. To enter a circle a little above their own, to stand out prominently before the world—what unworthy artifices! what mean flatteries! How low men will stoop to raise themselves a little higher! 3. Science.—Here we feel that we are getting to a loftier elevation, and breathing purer air. Heaven and earth—sea and shore—the mineral, vegetable, and animal kingdoms, are full of treasures for the lover of science. And here he revels. Day is as night, and night as day—"the hours uncounted, meals untasted pass;" whilst his whole soul is in communion with his beloved. 4. Literature.—And surely such a study is not without its fascinations. And cultivated minds there are that make an idol of this object—Literature is the beloved of their souls. II. WHY DOES CHRIST DESERVE A WARMER LOVE? 1. Because He can love us in return. Money, Fashion, Science, Literature, are dead things; and the dead have no power to sympathize—they give not "smile for smile, or sigh for sigh." But Christ is a living one! "He was dead, but is alive again." There glows a heart in His bosom that can hear and answer the yearnings of ours. And seeking sympathy anywhere beside is "seeking the living among the dead"! Seek it in Christ! He lives and loves! 2. Because He is so exceeding lovely. See Him encompassed with a body like our own—going about doing good. Can you imagine a character more attractive? Is He not "altogether lovely"? 3. He has shown us so much love already. 4. We may depend upon His love for all time to come. The future—untried, unknown! it is this which weighs on us. What evils, trials, sufferings may there not be in store! The only thing to bring us peace is—the assurance that our future is in the hands of all-wise, unwearied, almighty Love! And is not this the assurance that Christ gives to His people? "Lo, I am with you alway." "My grace is sufficient for you." "All things work together for good to them that love Me." Is not this comforting? (*F. Tucker, B.A.*)

Ver. 10. **My Beloved is white and ruddy, the chiefest among ten thousand.**—*Christ's perfection and precedence*.—The spouse in this verse styles her Lord, "my Beloved," from which it is easy for us to gather that it is of the utmost importance that our heart's affection should be really and truly set upon Christ Jesus, our Lord. We must trust Him, and we must love Him. Christ on the cross saves us when He

becomes to us Christ in the heart. If we have reached that stage in our journey heavenwards, it will be well if we go on a step further. Loving our Lord and Saviour in our heart, and being assured of that love in our inmost conscience after earnest heart-searching, it will be well if we have the courage never to hesitate in the avowal of that love. We must not cast our pearls before swine; but, on the other hand, it is so ennobling a passion that we need never blush to own it in any company. If we ever are ashamed of loving Christ, we have good reason to be ashamed of such shameful shame. Loving Jesus, knowing that we love Him, and boldly confessing our love to Him, let us, next, so study His person and His character that we shall be able to give a reason for the love that is in us to any who make the inquiry, "What is thy Beloved more than another beloved?" I. First, then, the spouse saith, "my Beloved is white and ruddy," and so she sets forth HIS CHARMING COMPLEXION. 1. Our Lord is, first of all, in Himself white; that is, He has immaculate perfection of character. In His Godhead, Jesus Christ is perfection itself. As to His manhood, the term whiteness well describes Him who was born without natural corruption, or taint of hereditary depravity—"that holy thing," the Christ of God, who became incarnate, yet without sin. Doth not this word "white" describe Him also in His actual life? There was never any sin in Christ. As to Christ's actions, they are matchless and perfect in every respect; the two great objects of His life were the glory of God and the good of man. There is no spot in Him; He is the Lamb of God without blemish, the perfect Christ, and hence it is that we love Him. 2. But, next, we come to the blood-shedding, the sacrificial character of Christ. This is the chief reason, after all, why Christ's people love Him, because, in His precious blood, they see the pardon of all their sins, they see the lifting of themselves up into the life of God, they see the open way of access unto the Father, they see the gates of heaven opened to all believers. II. Now notice that the spouse saith of her Beloved that He is "the chiefest among ten thousand." These words set forth HIS PERSONAL PRECEDENCE. He is the chiefest among ten thousand, and it so happens that this word "chiefest" may mean any one of three or four things. 1. First, take it as it stands—"Chiefest," that is to say, Christ is higher, better, lovelier, more excellent than any who are round about Him. If you shall bring ten thousand angels, He is the chiefest Angel, the Messenger of the covenant. If you shall bring ten thousand friends, He is the chiefest Friend, the "Friend that sticketh closer than a brother." Christ is the chiefest, the best, the highest of all beings; whatever excellences there may be in others, they are all eclipsed by the surpassing excellences that are found in Him. 2. Christ is the chiefest among ten thousand; that is to say, He is the Head, the Ruler, the Prince, the King, the Lord over all. Let Christ, and Christ alone, wear the crown He bought with His own blood; He alone is King, and let Him ever be so proclaimed and acknowledged. 3. According to the Septuagint, the text has another meaning. Our Lord in Scripture is called the chosen One, the elect of God. As the psalmist puts it, speaking by prophecy, "I have exalted One chosen out of the people." Christ is chosen out of ten thousand, as the Mediator to stand between God and men. Whoever else might have been employed by God for this service—and we are not able to think of any other—yet first of all was Christ chosen of God; and to-day we may call Him the chosen One because He is the chosen of His Church. 4. Lastly, according to the margin of our Bible, the text should be thus read, "He is the Standard-bearer among ten thousand." Now, our Lord Jesus Christ has come into this world, and set up a standard because of the truth, and well does He handle it, firmly doth He grasp it. When on the cross, the battle thickened round Him; all the hosts of hell and all the bands of cruel ones on earth sought to smite Him, and to seize the standard, too, but He bore it still aloft through all the dreadful fray! and this day, though He is now in heaven, yet by His blessed Spirit that standard is still unfurled to the breeze. (*C. H. Spurgeon.*)

Ver. 13. **His cheeks are as a bed of spices, as sweet flowers: His lips like lilies, dropping sweet-smelling myrrh.**—*Spices, flowers, lilies, and myrrh:*—It is of Christ, the heavenly Bridegroom, that we perceive the spouse to be speaking, and mentioning in detail at least ten particulars, dwelling with delight upon the beauties of His head and His locks, His eyes and His cheeks, His lips and His hands, and every part of Him; and, beloved friends, I think it shows true love to Christ when we want to speak at length upon everything that concerns Him. True love to Christ seeks to get to Him, to live with Him, to live upon Him, and thus

to know Him so intimately that things which were unobserved and passed over at the first, stand out in clear light to the increased joy and delight of the contemplative mind. I. CHRIST LOOKED UPON IS VERY LOVELY. "His cheeks are as a bed of spices, as sweet flowers." 1. But why do they mention His cheeks? (1) I suppose, first, because every part of Christ is inexpressibly delightful. Take any portion of His countenance that you may, and it has surpassing beauty about it. Think for a moment what is meant by a sight of "His cheeks." Though you may not yet see the majesty of His brow as King of kings and Lord of lords,—though you may not perceive the brightness of the lightning flashes of His eyes, which are as a flame of fire,—though you may scarcely be able to imagine at present what will be the glory of His second advent,—yet, if you can but see the cheeks that He gave to the smiters, if you do but know something of Him as the suffering Saviour, you shall find that there is inexpressible delight in Him, and with the spouse you will say, "His cheeks are as a bed of spices." (2) But, methinks, the saints see great loveliness in those parts of Christ which have been most despised. Oh! if we could but see Him now, if we could but gaze upon His face as it is in glory, what a subject of meditation it would be to think that even the spittle of cruel mockers did run a-down those blessed cheeks,—that infinite loveliness was insulted with inconceivable contempt,—the holy face of the Incarnate Son of God distained with the accursed spittle of brutal men. "It was I, with my vain and idle talk, with my false and proud speech, that did spit into that dear face." How sad that He should ever have been made to suffer so! O glorious love, that He should be willing even to stoop to this terrible depth of ignominy that He might lift us up to dwell with Him on high! (3) And next, those parts of Christ in which we do not immediately see any special office or use are, nevertheless, peculiarly lovely to the saints. Do you care only for the lips that speak to you? Have you no love for the cheeks that are silent? Do you care for nothing but for the eyes that are watching over you? If there come to you nothing from those cheeks of your Lord, yet shall they not be to you "as a bed of spices, as sweet flowers"? The fact is, we are not to judge concerning Christ in any such fashion as this; on the contrary, if there is any duty which Christ has commanded, but which, instead of seeming to be easy and profitable to us, is hard, and requireth that we should give so much that Judas will cry out, "To what purpose is this waste?" let us never mind him, but break our alabaster boxes, and pour out the sweet perfume upon our dear Master. (4) But further, the followers of Christ have an intense admiration, an almost infinite love for that part of Christ by which they are able to commune with Him, and perhaps that is one reason why His cheeks are here specially mentioned. The cheek is the place of fellowship where we exchange tokens of love. What a blessing it is that Christ should have had a cheek for the lips of love to approach, and to kiss! 2. The spouse, however, in our text tries to speak of the loveliness of Christ by comparisons. She cannot do it with one emblem, she must have two even concerning His cheeks; they are "as a bed of spices," "as sweet flowers." (1) Notice, in the metaphors used by the spouse, that there is a blending of sweetness and beauty; "as a bed of spices,"—there is sweetness: and then, "as sweet flowers,"—there is beauty. There is sweetness to the nostrils and beauty to the eye, spice for its fragrance and flowers for their loveliness. In Christ, there is something for every spiritual sense, and for every spiritual sense there is a complete satisfaction and delight in Him. (2) Notice that, when the spouse is speaking even of the cheeks of her Beloved, she brings in the idea of abundance;—spices, aye, "a bed of spices"; flowers,—not one or two, but, according to the Hebrew, "towers of perfume," which I understand to mean those raised beds which we delight to have in our gardens, where there are many flowers set in order, forming charming banks of beauty. No doubt Solomon had some of those in his garden, for "there is nothing new under the sun"; and those raised beds of dainty flowers are fit emblems of the beauteous cheek of Christ, with its delicate tints of white and red. So in Christ there is infinite abundance. (3) There is also in Christ infinite variety; there is in Him all you can want of any one thing, and there is more than all you can want of everything. (4) The spouse's metaphors seem to me also to suggest use and delight. She speaks of spices, for which there is practical use in surgery and in medicine, for preservation and for perfume; and she also mentions sweet flowers, for which there may not be any particular use, but which are charming for ornament, and for the delectation of taste. So, dear friends, in Christ Jesus there is all that we want, but there is a great deal more. There is something beside and beyond our actual necessities, there are many spiritual luxuries. II. Now let us turn to the other part of our text:

"His lips like lilies, dropping sweet-smelling myrrh." These words teach us that CHRIST LISTENED TO IS VERY PRECIOUS. When He is silent, and we only look at Him, He is lovely to our eyes; but when He speaks, we can see "His lips like lilies, dropping sweet-smelling myrrh." 1. Notice, first, that it is well, whenever we hear the voice of Jesus Christ, to try to see the blessed Person who is speaking. The spouse does not say in our text, "His words are sweet," but she speaks of "His lips like lilies, dropping sweet-smelling myrrh." Why should we not believe more in a personal Christ, and why should we not always see the connection between the mercy and the hand that gives it, and between the promise and the lips that speak it? 2. Notice the comparison in the text,—lilies; not white lilies, of course, but red lilies, crimson lilies, lilies of such a colour as are frequently to be seen, which would be a suitable emblem of the Beloved's lips. Christ's lips are peculiarly delightful to us, for it is with them that He speaks to us, and intercedes with the Father for us. When He pleads as the Intercessor on behalf of a poor soul like me, His lips are indeed in God's sight like lovely lilies. The Father looks at His dear Son's lips, and He is charmed with them, and blesseth us because of Christ's intercession. And whenever Christ turns round, and speaks to us, shall we not listen at once, with eyes and ears wide open, as we say, "I like to watch His lips as He is speaking, for His lips are to me as lilies"? I suppose this comparison means that Christ's lips are very pure, as the lily is the purest of flowers; and that they are very gentle, for we always associate the lily with everything that is tender and soft and kind. 3. But the spouse's comparison fails, for she said, "His lips like lilies, dropping sweet-smelling myrrh." This lilies do not do, but Christ does. He is more than a lily, or He is a lily of such a sort as never bloomed on earth except once. He was the only lily that ever dropped sweet-smelling myrrh. The spouse says that His lips do that; what means this? Does it not mean that His Word is often full of a very sweet, mysterious, blessed influence? (C. H. Spurgeon.)

Ver. 16. **Yea, He is altogether lovely.**—*Altogether lovely* :—When the old Puritan minister had delivered his discourse, and dwelt upon firstly and secondly and thirdly, before he sat down he usually gave a comprehensive summary of all that he had spoken. In these five words, the spouse here gives you her summary. Remember these words, and know their meaning, and you possess the quintessence of the spouse's portion of the Song of Songs. This verse has been translated in another way: "He is all desires"; and so indeed Jesus is. He was the desire of the ancients, He is the desire of all nations still. To His own people He is their all in all; they are complete in Him; they are filled out of His fulness. But we will not dispute about translations, for, after all, with such a text, so full of unutterable spiritual sweetness, every man must be his own translator, and into his own soul must the power of the message come, by the enforcement of the Holy Ghost. I. We shall consider THREE POINTS OF CHARACTER which are very noticeable in these words. 1. The first which suggests itself is this: the words are evidently uttered by one who is under the influence of overwhelming emotion. The words are rather a veil to the heart than a glass through which we see its emotions. The sentence labours to express the inexpressible; it pants to utter the unutterable. Lost in adoring wonder, the gracious mind desists from description, and cries with rapture, "Yea, He is altogether lovely." It has often been thus with true saints; they have felt the love of Jesus to be overpowering and inebriating. I believe those are the happiest saints who are most overwhelmed with a sense of the greatness, goodness and preciousness of Christ. Oh! to be carried right away with the Divine manifestation of the chief among ten thousand, so that our souls shall cry out in rapture, "Yea, He is altogether lovely." This is one characteristic of the text: may it be transferred to us. 2. A second is this, and very manifest it is upon the surface of the verse—here is undivided affection. "He is altogether lovely." Note that these words have a world of meaning in them, but chiefly they tell us this, that Jesus is to the true saint the only lovely one in the world. Our text means, again, that in Jesus loveliness of all kinds is to be found. If there be anything that is worthy of the love of an immortal spirit, it is to be seen in abundance in the Lord Jesus. He is not this flower or that, but He is the Paradise of perfection. He is not a star here or a constellation there, He is the whole heaven of stars, nay, He is the heaven of heavens; He is all that is fair and lovely condensed in one. When the text says, again, that Jesus "is altogether lovely," it declares that He is lovely in all views of Him. It generally happens that to the noblest building there is an unhappy point of view from which the architecture appears at a disadvantage; the choicest piece of workmanship may not be equally

complete in all directions ; the best human character is deformed by one flaw, if not with more ; but with our Lord all is lovely, regard Him as you will. Under all aspects, and in all offices and in relations, at all times and all seasons, under all circumstances and conditions, anywhere, everywhere, "He is altogether lovely." I will close this point by saying, every child of God acknowledges that Christ Jesus is lovely altogether to the whole of Himself. He is lovely to my judgment ; but many things are so, and yet are not lovely to my affections ; I know them to be right, and yet they are not pleasant : but Jesus is as lovely to my heart as to my head, as dear as He is good. He is lovely to my hopes ; are they not all in Him ? Is not this my expectation—to see Him as He is ? But He is lovely to my memory too : did He not pluck me out of the net ? Lovely to all my powers and all my passions, my faculties and feelings. 3. The third characteristic of the text is ardent devotion. It is the language of one who feels that no service would be too great to render to the Lord. I wish we felt as the apostles and martyrs and holy men of old did, that Jesus Christ ought to be served at the highest and richest rate. We do little, very little : what if I had said we do next to nothing for our dear Lord and Master nowadays ? The love of Christ doth not constrain us as it should. Is Christ less lovely, or is His Church less loyal ? Would God she estimated Him at His right rate, for then she would return to her former mode of service. Oh, for a flash of the celestial fire ! Oh, when shall the Spirit's energy visit us again ! When shall men put down their selfishness and seek only Christ ? When shall they leave their strifes about trifles to rally round His Cross ? When shall we end the glorification of ourselves, and begin to make Him glorious, even to the world's end ? II. Thus I have shown you the characteristics of the text, and now I desire to USE IT IN THREE WAYS FOR PRACTICAL PURPOSES. 1. The first word is to you, Christians. Here is very sweet instruction. The Lord Jesus "is altogether lovely." Then if I want to be lovely, I must be like Him, and the model for me as a Christian is Christ. We want to have Christ's zeal, but we must balance it with His prudence and discretion ; we must seek to have Christ's love to God, and we must feel His love to men, His forgiveness of injury, His gentleness of speech, His incorruptible truthfulness, His meekness and lowliness, His utter unselfishness, His entire consecration to His Father's business. 2. The second use to which we would put the verse is this, here is a very gentle rebuke to some of you. You do not see the lowliness of Christ, yet "He is altogether lovely." Now, you who have never heard music in the name of Jesus, you are to be greatly pitied, for your loss is heavy. You who never saw beauty in Jesus, and who never will for ever, you need all our tears. The Lord open those blind eyes of yours, and unstop those deaf ears, and give you the new and spiritual life, and then will you join in saying, "Yea, He is altogether lovely." 3. The last use of the text is, that of tender attractiveness. "Yea, He is altogether lovely." Where are you this morning, you who are convinced of sin and want a Saviour, where have you crept to ? You need not be afraid to come to Jesus, for "He is altogether lovely." It does not say He is altogether terrible—that is your misconception of Him ; it does not say He is somewhat lovely, and sometimes willing to receive a certain sort of sinner ; but "He is altogether lovely," and therefore He is always ready to welcome to Himself the vilest of the vile. Think of His name. It is Jesus, the Saviour. Is not that lovely ? Think of His work. He is come to seek and to save that which was lost. This is His occupation. Is not that lovely ? Think of what He has done. He hath redeemed our souls with blood. Is not that lovely ? Think of what He is doing. He is pleading before the throne of God for sinners. Think of what He is giving at this moment—He is exalted on high to give repentance and remission of sins. Is not this lovely ? Under every aspect Christ Jesus is attractive to sinners who need Him. Come, then, come and welcome, there is nothing to keep you away, there is everything to bid you come. (C. H. Spurgeon.) *The loveliness of Christ*.—I. IN THE SPOTLESS PURITY OF HIS NATURE. II. IN HIS UNRIVALLED PERFECTIONS. III. IN HIS VARIED OFFICES OF PROPHET, PRIEST, AND KING. IV. IN HIS TEMPER AND SPIRIT. Love, meekness, tenderness and benignity marked His whole earthly career. (J. N. Norton, D.D.) *The best beloved*.—I am not about to speak of Christ's loveliness after the flesh, for now after the flesh know we Him no more. It is His moral and spiritual beauty, of which the spouse in the Song most sweetly says, "Yea, He is altogether lovely." The loveliness which the eye dotes on is mere varnish when compared with that which dwells in virtue and holiness ; the worm will devour the loveliness of skin and flesh, but a lovely character will endure for ever. I. THIS IS RARE PRAISE. What if I say it is unique ? For no other being could it be said, "Yea, He is altogether lovely." It means, first, that all that is in Him is lovely, perfectly lovely. There is no point in

our Lord Jesus that you could improve. To paint the rose were to spoil its ruddy hue. To tint the lily, for He is lily as well as rose, were to mar its whiteness. Each virtue in our Lord is there in a state of absolute perfection: it could not be more fully developed. He is altogether lovely at every separate point, so that the spouse, when she began with His head, descended to His feet, and then lifting her eyes upward again upon a return voyage of delight, she looked into His countenance and summed up all that she had seen in this one sentence, "He is altogether lovely." This is rare praise. And He is all that is lovely. In each one of His people you will find something that is lovely,—in one there is faith, in another abounding love; in one tenderness, in another courage, but you do not find all good things in any one saint—at least not all of them in full perfection; but you find all virtues in Jesus, and each one of them at its best. In Jesus Christ—this, moreover, is rare praise again—there is nothing that is unlovely. You never need put the finger over the scar in His case, as Apelles did when he painted his hero. Nothing about our Lord needs to be concealed; even His cross, at which his enemies stumble, is to be daily proclaimed, and it will be seen to be one of His choicest beauties. II. As this is rare praise, so likewise it is PERPETUAL PRAISE. You may say of Christ whenever you look at Him, "Yea, He is altogether lovely." He also was so. As God over all, He is blessed for ever, Amen. When in addition to His Godhead, He assumed our mortal clay, was He not imitatively lovely then? He is lovely in all His offices. What an entrancing sight to see the King in His beauty, with His diadem upon His head, as He now sits in yonder world of brightness! How charming to view Him as a Priest, with the Urim and Thummim, wearing the names of His people bejewelled on His breastplate! And what a vision of simple beauty, to see Him as a Prophet teaching His people in touching parables of homely interest, of whom they said, "Never man spake like this Man"! Let Him be what He may—Lamb or Shepherd, Brother or King, Saviour or Master, Foot-washer or Lord—in every relation, He is altogether lovely. III. Though this praise is rare praise and perpetual praise, yet also it is TOTALLY INSUFFICIENT PRAISE. Say ye that He is altogether lovely? It is not enough. It is not a thousandth part enough. No tongue of man, no tongue of angel, can ever set forth His unutterable beauties. "Oh," say you, "but it is a great word, though short; very full of meaning though soon spoken—altogether lovely." I tell you it is a poor word. It is a word of despair. The praise of the text is insufficient praise, I know, because it is praise given by one who had never seen Him in His glory. It is Old Testament praise this, that He is altogether lovely: praise uttered upon report rather than upon actual view of Him. Truly I know not how to bring better, but I shall know one day. Till then I will speak His praise as best I can, though it fall far short of His infinite excellence. IV. This praise is VERY SUGGESTIVE. If Christ be altogether lovely it suggests a question. Suppose I never saw His loveliness. This world appreciates the man who makes money, however reckless he may be of the welfare of others while scheming to heap up riches for himself. As for this Jesus, He only gave His life for men, He was only pure and perfect, the mirror of disinterested love. The vain world cannot see in Him a virtue to admire. It is a blind world, a fool world, a world that lieth in the wicked one. Not to discern the beauties of Jesus is an evidence of terrible depravity. (C. H. Spurgeon.) **This is my Beloved, and this is my Friend, O daughters of Jerusalem. Christ the Beloved, and the Friend of His people:—**I. CHRIST THE BELOVED OF HIS PEOPLE. 1. They love Him for His own great and glorious perfection. In Him all beauty centres. In Him, whatever qualities excite admiration, or engage esteem, whatever excellence adorns, dignifies, or endears the character, unite without diminution or alloy. 2. They love Him for His suitableness to their necessities. Are they in a lost and perishing condition? Christ is a Saviour and a great one. Are they blind and ignorant? In Christ are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. Are they tied and bound with the chain of their sins? Christ proclaims liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prisons to them that are bound. Are they weak and helpless? Christ will give strength to His people. He is a strength to the poor, a strength to the needy in distress. In a word, Christ is a remedy exactly suited to every want. 3. They love Him for the special benefits which He hath conferred upon them. (1) They have experienced the freeness of His love. (2) They have experienced the efficacy of His pardoning mercy. (3) They have experienced the power of His sanctifying grace. (4) They have experienced the faithfulness of His Word. They have trusted in Him and have been helped. They have called upon Him and have been delivered. II. CHRIST IS THE FRIEND OF HIS PEOPLE. 1. Christ is a Friend, who tenderly loves His people, and is cordially

attached to their interests. 2. Christ is an all-powerful Friend. The kingdoms of nature, of providence, of grace, are under His control. 3. Christ is an unchangeable Friend. 4. Christ is a seasonable Friend. The friend who ministers to our support, when other friends forsake us, and when we stand most in need of his support, pre-eminently shows himself to be a friend. Such a friend is Christ to His people.

III. SOME MARKS, BY WHICH YOU MAY JUDGE WHETHER YOU LOVE CHRIST OR NOT. 1. If you love Christ, you love His cause. That His kingdom may come, is your prayer. That His kingdom will come, is your joy. 2. If you love Christ, you love His people. The faithful in Christ Jesus you will account the truly honourable on earth; the excellent, in whom is all your delight. 3. If you love Christ, you love His ordinances. 4. If you love Christ you love to do His will. (*E. Cooper, M.A.*)

Christ the Friend of His people:—I. BECAUSE OF WHAT HE UNDERTOOK AND WHAT HE HAS ACCOMPLISHED FOR THEM. 1. When their cause was desperate with God, He engaged to remedy it—to answer every charge to which they were liable, and He did it. 2. He purchased their persons, that He might be free to bless them as He saw meet. (1) Having them as His own, it is His delight to enrich and honour them to the utmost. (2) Having them as His own, He strips them of their filthy garments—He washes them from their sins. (3) Having them as His own, He reveals Himself to them. He cures the blindness with which the God of this world had afflicted them. (4) Having them as His own, He puts His law in their hearts and writes it in their minds. With their whole soul they consent unto it as “holy, just, good.” 3. He has gone before to the place of final rest, there to appear for them, thence to hold communication with them, and thither to take them at last.

II. THE CHARACTER OF HIS FRIENDSHIP. 1. It is an indissoluble friendship. It is not a friendship which, having viewed its object at first, through the false and delusive medium of an absorbing passion, has been deceived in it, and, on discovery of the deception, cools, fades, falls away, until it ceases altogether, or sinks into indifference, bearing proportion in its extent to the blind ardour that once raged. But it is a friendship based on intelligent, holy, as well as affectionate choice; He that led to it, that formed it, being the Father who so loved us that “He gave His only begotten Son, that we might live by Him.” It never wearies of its object, for it is never disappointed, never deceived. It grows, it increases continually. On Christ’s side it is perfect from the beginning, as existing in His heart; but the manifestations of it to us multiply every day. 2. It is marked by uniform constancy. Christ is a Friend that “loves at all times.” 3. It is distinguished by unswerving faithfulness. (*A. Beith.*) *This is my Friend*:—I. THE NEED OF THIS FRIEND. This will be evident if you reflect upon the sad state and condition in which all mankind are involved by sin. II. SOME PROOFS AND INSTANCES OF CHRIST’S FRIENDSHIP TOWARDS US. 1. His engaging in our cause as our Surety in the everlasting covenant, which is ordered in all things and sure, and entered into between the Persons of the Trinity, is a manifest proof and indication of His friendship towards us. 2. He has not only undertaken to do all this, but He has done what He undertook to do. He has paid the very last farthing for us. 3. He has proved Himself to be our Friend by having wrought out a righteousness for us, a righteousness which ensures us against all the demands both of law and of justice; a righteousness which shall be for ever, a salvation which shall not be abolished. 4. He has proved Himself to be our Friend by His dying in our stead, the Just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God. 5. He has proved Himself to be our Friend by His having purchased our persons, and procured all things needful for us. Look at the price which He has paid, His own blood. 6. He has proved Himself to be our Friend by His having risen again in our behalf; by His having ascended to His Father and to our Father, to His God, and our God; by His taking possession of heaven for us. 7. He has proved Himself to be our Friend by interceding for us. III. SOME OF THE PROPERTIES OF THIS FRIEND.

Christ is a nonsuch; there is none like Him; none to be compared to Him. He is the chiefest among ten thousand, He is altogether lovely. He is all desires, and the Desire of all nations, “Whom have I in heaven but Thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire besides Thee.” 1. He is a rich Friend. Such an one is often useful and needful. A man may have a friend that has the heart to help him, but who has not got the means; but Christ as He is willing, so also He is able. 2. He is a faithful Friend. You may safely trust Him with your all. He is faithful to the Father, having perfectly fulfilled His covenant engagements with Him, in fulfilling the law and suffering the penalty. And He is faithful to His people in giving them eternal life. 3. He is a tender-hearted Friend. He sympa-

thizes with His people in all their afflictions, their trials, their difficulties, their disappointments, their sicknesses. 4. He is an unchangeable and unchanging Friend. We may grow cold to Him. He grows not cold towards us. He is ever the same. 5. He is an everlasting Friend. A man may have a friend and he may die, and then all his dependence upon him is gone; but Christ ever lives to be the Friend of His people. Death separates friends, but over Christ it hath no power. IV. WHO THAT INDIVIDUAL IS THAT CAN CLAIM CHRIST AS HIS OR HER FRIEND. And here we observe, that no person in a state of nature can make this claim, since Christ is neither beloved by such, nor are they acquainted with that friendship which dwells in His breast towards all those whom He has redeemed with His most precious blood. And as they are unacquainted with His friendship, they cannot claim Him as their Friend. Neither is it the privilege of every one who is called by grace to claim Christ as his Friend. Although every regenerate person has faith, yet every regenerate person may not have the full assurance of faith. When faith does rise to this full assurance, the possessor thereof can say as Paul did, "He loved me and gave Himself for me." Such can say with holy Job, "I know that my Redeemer liveth:" not the Redeemer, but my Redeemer; "and that He shall stand, etc. Such can say as Thomas did, "My Lord and my God." Such can say as the Church does, "This is my Beloved, and this is my Friend." (*W. D. Long, M.A.*). *Our Friend*.—To have a true friend is a blessing beyond all price. I wish to show that there is a loving Friend for all mankind. 1. Who is our Friend? Men have always been asking, Who is God? In reply, the Lord our God appeared in a human body, called Jesus, and showed that He is the Friend of Man. 2. Our Friend sees all our trouble. O friendless one, tossed about on the sea of life, our Friend sees you, and is at hand to comfort you. 3. Our Friend is always present with us. 4. Our Friend can help us all times. 5. Our Friend is our Mediator, who saves us from the result of our sins. 6. Brothers, love our Friend! And, like Him, love the friendless! 7. Let us also show friendship to all creatures which God has made. (*W. Birch.*)

CHAPTER VI.

VERS. 2, 3. My Beloved has gone down into His garden, to the beds of spices.—Communion.—The exquisite pastoral from which our text is taken is peculiarly fitted for Sacramental meditation—because its design is to set forth the mutual love of Christ and His disciples; and because His disciples, in approaching the Sacrament, should be in frames of mind fitted to appreciate its exquisite imagery. I. **CHRISTIAN DUTY.** The Church is here represented as Christ's garden, into which He then descends to delight Himself with the gracious fruits of the believer's spiritual life. And our lesson of duty is, that the Sacrament we should experience and exhibit such spiritual affections as seem unto Christ precious—fruits to be eaten—lilies to be gathered! Consider these graces:—1. **Faith.** This is the foundation of all religious life. Now this grace Christ delights in, for it greatly honours and glorifies Him. In its ascription of salvation to Him alone it virtually places the mediatorial crown upon His head. 2. **Love**,—the soul's crowning grace, or a grand composite of all graces. For, in strict speech, they are all modifications of love. Penitence is love grieving—faith is love resting—obedience is love working—hope is love waiting. So that love toward man and toward God is at once the law fulfilled, and holiness perfected. And in this Christ delights. II. **THE CHRISTIAN'S PRIVILEGE.** Regarding the believer as the subject it represents his soul as greatly rejoicing in the Sacrament, gathering in Christ's garden the heavenly fruit. These fruits are the gracious gifts imparted by the Saviour. Consider a few of them. Take them as they are presented in Christ's discourse in that guest-chamber. 1. **Peace.** Quiet, tranquillity, spiritual and immortal rest! And for this we come to Christ in the Sacrament. Behold a garden walled up to heaven. And through its open portal the soul passes leaning on the Beloved, to bathe heart and spirit in the everlasting fulness of God's glorious peace! 2. **Joy.** "These things have I spoken unto you, that My joy might remain with you, and that your joy might be full." And what glorious, joy-imparting words they were! And this is better than peace; for that is but a passive rest, this is a reigning rapture. (*C. Wadsworth.*)

Ver. 3. **He feedeth among the lilies.**—*Feeding among the lilies*:—The literal reference is simple and obvious. The bride represents her husband as going down to the garden where the fruits grew among the flowers—where what was good for food was associated with what was fair to the eyes and pleasant to all the senses. The plain of Sharon, the lower slopes of Lebanon, the shores of Galilee, and even the bare craggy terraces of the hill country of Judea are illumined with gorgeous gleams of white, and scarlet, and golden lilies, whose glory is the most peculiar of all the common aspects of the country. The bulbous roots of many of them, containing a reserve of nourishment for unfavourable times, and guarding as in a secure citadel the principle of life, specially adapt these lilies for growing in the most unpromising looking places. And not only are they enabled themselves to extract nourishment from the driest soil and atmosphere, but they also create around them, by the shadow of their leaves and blossoms, and by the moisture which they attract, conditions suitable for the growth of other plants less richly endowed; take species under their protection whose forms are tougher and whose constitution is hardier, but which have no reserved stores like them for times and spots of scarcity. Nowhere is the herbage so luxuriant as under the shadow of these beautiful and graceful flowers. Such spots are therefore the favourite feeding-places of flocks and herds. They seek them out as the traveller in the desert seeks out the oasis; and they are as sure to find sweet and tender grass where the lilies are growing, as the traveller is to find a well where the palm-grove flourishes. The idea the text conveys is that as the roe deer or the gazelle feeds on the grass which grows among the lilies on the mountains, so is the bridegroom satisfied with the sterling useful qualities that are betokened by the beauties of mind and heart of the bride. Her fair exterior, her beautiful face indicate the possession of solid and substantial endowments beneath. In the shadow of the lily-like charms of her person, he finds not only what pleases his eye, but also what satisfies his mind and heart. The believer says of Jesus, “I am my Beloved’s, and my Beloved is mine: He feedeth among the lilies,”—eats of the fruits that grow among the flowers of the garden of my heart. I am filled with His fulness, and He sees in me of the travail of His soul and is satisfied. But separating the passage from its literal and symbolical reference in the text, it is susceptible of a wide signification. The Creator may be said to feed among the lilies, in the enjoyment which He receives from the beauties of creation. We can see no end in the existence of all this inaccessible beauty except to gratify the love of beauty in the heart of God Himself. And to this Divine feeling, He who was the express image of the Father’s person gave frequent expression on earth. The whole life of Jesus was a feeding among the lilies, which illumined His thoughts of God and His lessons for man. They helped to develop the nature which grew in wisdom as in stature by the aid of the same influences which develop ours. His soul fed upon those visions of the beauty of holiness, and those high impulses and deep emotions which the beauty of nature produced. He saw the spiritual in them behind the physical; and their perishing beauty was to Him but the veil which concealed the holy of holies of a nobler and more enduring beauty, a shadow glassed in the unstable element of time, of the steadfast light of God in heaven. The Jews of old fed among the lilies, for their land was pre-eminently the Flowery Land. Dr. Tristram calls it “the garden of Eden run wild.” Every traveller is struck with the immense profusion, variety, and brilliancy of the flowers. And as with the Land, so with the Book. The Bible is the book of flowers: its language is the language of flowers: it is full of the highest poetry and truest philosophy of these fair creations. The sweetest and most satisfying promises of God come to us in the midst of the most beautiful poetry; the plainest and simplest precepts are set forth in glowing images; the highest revelations reach us in lessons of the lowly lilies that grow beside our door. The whole of human life is a feeding among lilies. All our food and clothing and fuel come to us through beautiful forms and colours. In this respect how different are the manufactories of nature from those of man! In human works beauty is often eliminated and only what is useful is preserved; but in nature the useful and the beautiful always keep pace with one another. In the most carefully weeded field the eye, wearied with the monotony of the green stalks and the shimmering of the freckled glumes in the sunshine, is refreshed here and there with the blaze of scarlet poppy, and the azure gleam of the corn-bluebottle, and the mimic sunshine of the yellow corn-marigold. The wild mint perfumes its roots, and the white corn-spurry and scarlet pimpernel lend to it all the tender grace of their hue and shape. The corn itself feeds among the lilies; it draws its nourishment from soil and atmosphere in the company of a bright sisterhood of flowers which crown its sober

usefulness with a garland of beauty. And is not this feature common to all of nature that is associated with man? The green grass of the meadows and pastures is never allowed to grow in dull uniformity: nature spreads her golden buttercups and snow-white daisies and purple primellas over it, so that the beasts of the field feed among the lilies. How beautiful are the white and crimson blossoms of the clover, and the slender scented spikes of the vernal grass, which feed the bee with honey and load the air with a delicious fragrance, ere they yield their succulent herbage to the browsing cattle, or fill the barns of the farmer with their tedded hay! God has ordained that in everything man should feed among the lilies; that the useful should be produced by or among the beautiful. The arms of our orchard trees are clasped with bracelets of emerald moss, and their trunks are adorned with brooches of golden lichens; and thus bedecked, they, Hebe-like, offer to us, year after year, the fruit they have produced,—the rich harvest of their life. And these mosses and lichens are to our fruit trees what the poppies and marigolds are to our corn,—the lilies among which we gather our food. This association of beauty with man's food is designed for a wise and gracious purpose. As flowers on a dinner-table cast the shadow of their own loveliness upon all the viands around them, and change what is the mere gratification of a physical appetite into the fulfilment of a heaven-born longing, so the lilies among which we feed redeem that feeding from its grossness and link the man that feeds upon bread with the angels that feed upon every word of God. They show that eating is not an end, but a means to a higher, nobler end, and connect the means by which our lower nature is supported with the means by which our higher, spiritual nature is trained and educated. And what a purifying and refining influence have these lilies upon us! Their purity shames our impurity, their grace our ungraciousness, their meekness our pride, their lavish fragrance our thanklessness. How greatly, too, is our feeling of confidence in God increased as we feed among the lilies! If He has provided these superfluous things for us, it is a pledge and a guarantee that He will provide the things that are necessary. As the blossom on the individual plant is a prophecy that fruit will be produced, so the appearance of the lilies among the corn is an assurance that bread will be given to us, and we shall not want any good thing. If God so clothe the grass of the field, which to-day shines in the glow of the sun, and to-morrow shrivels in the flame of the oven, how much more will He clothe the creatures whom He has made in His own image! But more than all, the lilies among which we feed speak to us of our immortality. The corn is the meat that perisheth; but the beauty of the lilies and the lessons of Divine wisdom which they teach is the meat that endureth unto everlasting life. By the food of garden and field our decaying bodies are sustained; by the lilies our never-dying souls are nourished. While feeding among the lilies there is thus provision made for our twofold nature: we have in every feast a reminder that man does not live by bread alone, but by every word that cometh out of the mouth of God, and that is expressed on earth in every bright hue and beautiful form around us. Rightly viewed the corn exists for the sake of the lilies. They stand among the corn like the priests of old among the people, clothed in priestly garments of glory and beauty. They are the ministers of God serving at His altar, appealing to the higher faculties of man, and bearing their witness to the Divine love that formed them; and thus, though they themselves die in succession, like the sons of Aaron, their priesthood abideth for ever. The grass withereth, and the flower thereof fadeth; but the Word of the Lord, that speaks in and through them, endureth for ever. The lilies fade and pass away; but the truth which they teach and the character which they help to form are enduring as the soul itself, and shall be wrought into its very texture, and bloom in its beauty in the paradise above. (*H. Macmillan, D.D.*)

Ver. 4. Thou art beautiful, O my love, as Tirzah, comely as Jerusalem, terrible as an army with banners.—*The Church as she should be*:—Though the words before us are allegorical, and the whole Song is crowded with metaphor and parable, yet the teaching is plain enough in this instance; it is evident that the Divine Bridegroom gives His bride a high place in His heart, and to Him, whatever she may be to others, she is fair, lovely, comely, beautiful, and in the eyes of His love without a spot. Moreover, even to Him there is not only a beauty of a soft and gentle kind in her, but a majesty, a dignity in her holiness, in her earnestness, in her consecration, which makes even Him say of her that she is "terrible as an army with banners," "awful as a bannered army." She is every inch a queen: her aspect in the sight of her Beloved is majestic. **I. WHY IT IS THAT THE CHURCH OF GOD IS SAID TO BE**

AN ARMY WITH BANNERS. That she is "an army" is true enough, for the Church is one, but many; and consists of men who march in order under a common leader, with one design in view, and that design a conflict and a victory. But why an army "with banners"? Is not this, first of all, for distinction? How shall we know to which king an army belongs unless we can see the royal standard? The Church unfolds her ensign to the breeze that all may know whose she is and whom she serves. Unfurl the old primitive standard, the all-victorious standard of the Cross of Christ. In very deed and truth—in *hoc signo vinces*—the atonement is the conquering truth. Let others believe as they may, or deny as they will, for you the truth as it is in Jesus is the one thing that has won your heart and made you a soldier of the Cross. Banners were carried, not merely for distinctiveness, but also to serve the purposes of discipline. Hence an army with banners had one banner as a central standard, and then each regiment or battalion displayed its own particular flag. An army with banners may be also taken to represent activity. When an army folds up its colours the fight is over. It is to be feared that some Churches have hung up their flags to rot in state, or have encased them in dull propriety. It is high time that each Church should feel that if it does not work, the sole reason for its existence is gone. May we all in our Church fellowship be active in the energy of the Spirit of God. Does not the description, "an army with banners," imply a degree of confidence? Banners uplifted are the sign of a fearlessness which rather courts than declines the conflict. Ho! warriors of the Cross, unfold the Gospel's ancient standard to the breeze; we will teach the foeman what strength there is in hands and hearts that rally to the Church of God. Once more, an army with banners may signify the constancy and perseverance in holding the truth. If we give up the things which are verily believed among us we shall lose our power, and the enemy alone will be pleased: but if we maintain them, the maintenance of the old faith, by the Spirit of God, shall make us strong in the Lord and in the power of His might. II. The Church is said to be TERRIBLE. To whom is she terrible? I answer, first, in a certain sense she is terrible to all ungodly men. Even in the most ribald company, when a Christian of known consistency of character has wisely spoken the word of reproof, a solemn abashment comes over the majority of those present; their consciences have borne witness against them, and they have felt how awful goodness is. Not that we are ever to try and impress others with any dread of us; such an attempt would be ridiculed, and end in deserved failure; but the influence which we would describe flows naturally out of a godly life. If there be real goodness in us—if we really, fervently, zealously love the right, and hate the evil—the outflow of our life almost without a word will judge the ungodly—and condemn them in their heart of hearts. Holy living is the weightiest condemnation of sin. There will be always in proportion to the real holiness, earnestness, and Christ-likeness of a Church something terrible in it to the perverse generation in which it is placed; it will dread it as it does the all-revealing day of judgment. So is there something terrible in a living Church to all errorists. They do not dread those platform speeches in which they are so furiously denounced at public meetings, nor those philosophical discussions in which they are overthrown by argument: but they hate, but they fear, and therefore abuse and pretend to despise, the prayerful, zealous, plain, simple preaching of the truth as it is in Jesus. Even to Satan himself the Church of God is terrible. He might, he thinks, deal with individuals, but when these individuals strengthen each other by mutual converse and prayer, when they are bound to each other in holy love, and make a temple in which Christ dwells, then is Satan hard put to it. It is not every Church that is terrible thus, but it is a Church of God in which there is the life of God, and the love of God; a Church in which there is the uplifted banner, the banner of the Cross, high-held amid those various bannerets of truthful doctrine and spiritual grace, of which I have just now spoken. III. WHY IS THE CHURCH OF CHRIST TERRIBLE AS AN ARMY WITH BANNERS? First, because it consists of elect people. The elect shall overcome through the blood of the Lamb, and none shall say them nay. Ye are a royal priesthood, a peculiar people, a chosen generation; and in you the living God will gloriously declare His sovereign grace. The Church, again, consists of a praying people. Now prayer is that which links weakness with infinite strength. We cry unto the Lord, and He heareth us; He breaketh through the ranks of the foe; He giveth us triumph in the day of battle: therefore, terrible as an army with banners are those who wield the weapon of all-prayer. Again, a true Church is based upon eternal truth. Men who love the truth are building gold and silver, and precious stones; and though their architecture may progress but slowly, it is built for eternity. Ramparts of truth may often be assailed,

but they will never be carried by the foe. We are now to observe, that the chief glory and majesty of the Church lies mainly in the banner which she carries. What cause for terror is there in the banner? We reply, the enemies of Christ dread the Cross, because they know what the Cross has done. Wherever the crucified Jesus has been preached, false systems have tottered to their fall. Dagon has always fallen before the ark of the Lord. Rage the most violent is excited by the doctrine of the atonement, a rage in which the first cause for wrath is fear. The terribleness of the Church lies in her banners, because those banners put strength into her. Drawing near to the standard of the Cross the weakest soldier becomes strong: he who might have played the coward becomes a hero when the precious blood of Jesus is felt with power in his soul. Martyrs are born and nurtured at the Cross. Moreover, the powers of evil tremble at the old standard, because they have a presentiment of its future complete triumph. Jesus must reign; the crucified One must conquer. Will each one here say to himself: "An army, a company of warriors, am I one of them? Am I a soldier? I have entered the Church; I make a profession; but am I really a soldier? Do I fight? Do I endure hardness? Am I a mere carpet-knight, a mere lie-a-bed soldier, one of those who are pleased to put on regimentals in order to adorn myself with a profession without ever going to the war?" And then "terrible." Am I in any way terrible through being a Christian? Is there any power in my life that would condemn a sinner? Any holiness about me that would make a wicked man feel ill at ease in my company? If I am not a soldier, if I am not a servant of Christ in very truth, and yet I come to the place of worship where Christians meet, and where Christ is preached, the day will be when the church of God will be very terrible to me. (C. H. Spurgeon.)

Ver. 5. Turn away thine eyes from Me, for they have overcome Me.—*Overcoming Christ*.—This is the language of the heavenly Bridegroom to His spouse. In great condescension He speaks to her, and bids her take note that her eyes have overcome Him. Now, it must not be supposed, because of the language of the text, that there is any opposition between Christ and His people which has to be overcome. He loves His bride far too well to allow any division of feeling to separate them in heart from one another. Nor is it to be imagined that the spouse had to gain some blessing from an unwilling hand, and therefore pleaded with her eyes as well as with her lips. Oh, no! There is a holy discipline in Christ's house that sometimes withholds the coveted blessing till we have learned to pray in downright earnest; but the power that wins the victory in prayer has its real basis in the love of Christ Himself. I. First, notice that **LOOKING ON HIS CHURCH HAS ALREADY OVERCOME THE HEART OF OUR HEAVENLY BRIDEGROOM.** It was so in the far-distant past, not when she looked at Him, but when He looked at her, that she overcame Him. You know, too, when He lived down here among men, how often His inmost heart was stirred as He looked upon the people whom He loved. And, now that our Lord is risen from the dead, He still feels the power of the sight of His redeemed. He looks down to the saints on earth, and sees the myriads who are all trusting in Him, all conquering sin by His might, and all spared from going down to the pit by the merit of His precious blood; and He seems again to say, "Turn away thine eyes from Me, for they have overcome Me"; as if Christ felt that a glance at His people brought almost too much joy for Him. What a day will that be when He shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God; when all His people, raised from the dead, or changed in the twinkling of an eye, shall admire Him, and He shall be admired in them! I can well conceive of Him saying in that day, "Turn away thine eyes from Me, for they have overcome Me." The joy that Christ will feel in His own sight of His people, and in the glances of the multitudes that He has saved, must be a delight beyond anything we can even imagine. II. **THE EYES OF CHRIST'S CHOSEN ONES STILL OVERCOME HIM.** And, first, the eyes of His chosen overcome Him, when they look up in deep repentance, glancing at Him hopefully through their tears. There is a wondrous power in the penitent eye, in the full confession that makes a clean breast of every sin before the face of the Lord Jesus Christ. Remember that when we have once repented, we do not leave off repenting, for penitence is a grace that is as long-lived as faith; and as long as we are capable of believing, we shall also necessarily need to repent, for we shall be always sinning. So, whenever the child of God feels that he has gone astray in any way, that, though he did live near to God, he has gone back, and grown cold in heart, he has only to come to Christ again, and cry after Him, and confess his folly in having left Him, and his ingratitude in having been so indifferent to Him,

and Christ will receive him back again. Another kind of glance that has great power with the Lord Jesus is when the soul looks to Christ for salvation. Then it is that the eyes vanquish the Saviour. Many times since then, you and I have looked to Jesus Christ when a sense of sin has been very heavy upon us. While the eyes of faith are thus resting upon Jesus, He is overcome by them, and He darts inexpressible joy into our hearts as He says to us, "Turn away thine eyes from Me, for they have overcome Me." His heart is carried by storm by the faith-looks of His children. We also give another overcoming glance when we look to the Lord Jesus Christ for all things. When thine eyes are full of submission, full of hope, full of trust, it cannot be long before the Lord will, somehow or other, deliver thee, for He will say, "I cannot hold out against thee any longer. 'Turn away thine eyes from Me, for they have overcome Me.' 'I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify Me.'" Again, there are the eyes of prayer which often overcome the Lord Jesus Christ, and this victory comes, sometimes, when we are praying for ourselves. You cannot look steadily to God and say, "Lord, I am sure about Thy faithfulness, I am sure about Thy promise, and I cannot and will not doubt it," but before long you shall see the hand of the Lord made bare for your deliverance, and you also shall be among the happy number who have to bear witness that, verily, there is a God in Israel. Thus does prayer prevail with God when we present it for ourselves. So does it also overcome Him when we pray on behalf of others. Once again, there is another time when the eyes of the believer seem to overcome the heart of Christ, and that is, when we have turned right away from the world, and looked to Him alone. I have known it so again and again; have not you? At such seasons my soul has felt ready to swoon away in His presence. You remember how John in Patmos, when Jesus appeared to him, said, "When I saw Him, I fell at His feet as dead;" and well he might, for he had a brighter vision of his Lord than you and I can have at present. But even faith's view of Him is enough to transport us straight away into heaven itself. Well, whenever we are thus happily engaged in contemplation of our Lord, not only is He very near to us, but He is greatly moved by our love, and He says to us, "Turn away thine eyes from Me, for they have overcome Me." And, meanwhile, to prove how overcome He is, He begins to reveal Himself more fully to us. Last of all, sometimes the eyes of Christians have great power in overcoming Christ when they long for His appearing. Have you never seen the saints lie dying with such language as this on their lips, "Why are His chariots so long in coming? Why tarrieth He?" I have heard them say, with evident regret, "I thought to have been in heaven long ere now. Why not let me go?" And they have been like a poor thrush which I have sometimes seen a boy try to keep upon a little bit of turf; it longed for the broad fields, and beat itself against the wires of its cage. So is it with our dear suffering friends, at times; yet they have learned patiently to wait till their change came; but often, their eyes have been so fixed upon their Lord that they have said to Him, "Wilt Thou never come?" And, at last, Christ has looked out of heaven so sweetly on those sick ones, and He has said, "Your eyes have overcome Me, come up higher;" and they have leaped out of their body into His bosom, and the pierced hands have received their blood-washed spirits, and they have been "for ever with the Lord." (*C. H. Spurgeon.*)

Ver. 8. There are threescore queens.—*Woman's rights*:—So Solomon, by one stroke, sets forth the imperial character of a true Christian woman. She is not a slave, not a hireling, not a subordinate; but a queen: and in my text Solomon sees sixty of these helping to make up the royal pageant of Jesus. I. WOMAN HAS THE SPECIAL AND SUPERLATIVE RIGHT OF BLESSING AND COMFORTING THE SICK. The Lord God who sent Miss Dix into the Virginia hospitals, and Florence Nightingale into the Crimea, and the Maid of Saragossa to appease the wounds of the battlefield, has equipped wife, mother, and daughter, for this delicate but tremendous mission. II. WOMAN HAS A SUPERLATIVE RIGHT TO TAKE CARE OF THE POOR. III. IT IS WOMAN'S SPECIFIC RIGHT TO COMFORT UNDER THE STRESS OF DIRE DISASTER. IV. IT IS WOMAN'S RIGHT TO BRING TO US THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN. V. ONE OF THE SPECIFIC RIGHTS OF WOMEN IS, THROUGH THE GRACE OF CHRIST, FINALLY TO REACH HEAVEN. O, what a multitude of women in heaven! Mary, Christ's mother, in heaven; Elizabeth Fry in heaven; Charlotte Elizabeth in heaven; the mother of Augustine in heaven; the Countess of Huntingdon—who sold her splendid jewels to build chapels—in heaven; while a great many others who have never been heard of on earth, or known but little, have gone into the rest and peace of heaven. What a rest! (*T. De Witt Talmage.*)

Ver. 9. **My dove, My undefiled is but one.**—*The Church—a dove.*—I. COMPARING THE CHURCH TO A DOVE. 1. The dove is a beautiful bird, especially in Eastern countries, where their plumage is so dazzling, and in this particular typifies the Church (Ezek. xvi. 14). 2. The believer's righteous beauty is from Christ alone (Ps. xc. 17). 3. The dove is remarkable for her cleanliness; so the Church is both clean and cleanly (Heb. x. 22). 4. Doves will feed only on pure grain; so true believers can only live on Christ (Ps. cxix. 140; Tit. i. 15; John vi. 35). 5. The dove delights to be fed by her own mate; so does the Church by Christ (Song i. 7). 6. The dove is remarkable for its love to its mate; so is the Church to Christ (Ps. lxxiii. 23–28). 7. The dove is remarkable for its deep grief when separated from its mate (Ezek. vii. 16). 8. Doves are sociable creatures, and delight in each other's company (1 John iv. 7). 9. Doves are fearful and timid birds (Matt. viii. 96). 10. Doves are swift on the wing; so David wished for the wings of a dove (Ps. lv. 6). II. THE ONENESS OF THE CHURCH. 1. The Church is but one in respect of the world (John xv. 19). 2. One in respect of unity and communion with herself (Eph. iv. 13; Col. ii. 2). 3. She has but one faith (Eph. iv. 4, 5). 4. One in her conduct and practice (Heb. xii. 14). 5. One in the spirit and object of love (1 Cor. vi. 17). 6. And one in Christ their living Head, by whom they are saved (1 Cor. xii. 12). 7. And because Christ has no other spouse than the Church (Lev. xx. 24). III. WHY SHE IS CALLED HIS. She belongs unto Him by right of creation, donation, redemption, predestination, regeneration, or baptism, sanctification, and salvation. And as such—1. She will never be lost while residing in the wilderness, for the Spirit is her guide. 2. No creatures of prey shall ever rob her of life, because Christ is her Protector. 3. Nothing shall keep her from glory, for Christ is in heaven to secure her entrance there. (*T. B. Baker.*)

Ver. 10. **Who is she that looketh forth as the morning, fair as the moon, clear as the sun, and terrible as an army with banners?**—*The dawn of a better day, celebrated in sacred song.*—There is a beautiful upward gradation indicated, a progression towards a glorious climax; there is the dawn of a better day seen by the wise man's prophetic eye, and we will prayerfully consider the prophetic inquiry as foreshadowing the mission of Christ, and the nature of His glorious kingdom. "Who is she that looketh," etc. Apply these words: I. TO THE HISTORY OF CHRIST. Christ looked "forth as the morning" in the first promise made to our first parents in Eden. The Mosaic dispensation may be considered as daybreak, dim and hazy, the prophetic age may be regarded as "fair as the moon," it was brighter than the former, and it shone, as the moon shines with light borrowed from the unseen Sun. When the fulness of time came, and Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, then the Sun of Righteousness arose with healing in His wings, and throughout the whole of our Lord's public ministry He marched forth "clear as the sun." Christ went forth "terrible as an army with banners." He vanquished Satan in the Temptation of the wilderness. He was a terror to evil-doers, and planted His standard in the centre of the kingdom of darkness. Especially was He "terrible as an army with banners" when He entered upon His Passion. And He shall be "terrible as an army with banners" when He shall come in His glory, and all His holy angels with Him, to gather all nations together, and separate the righteous from the wicked. II. TO THE HISTORY OF THE CHURCH. The Jewish Church was only the dawn of Gospel times, it looked "forth as the morning"—it was "fair as the moon," but not clear as the sun. The day broke when the day of Pentecost came, and the Spirit rested upon the Apostles' heads as tongues of flame. In that sunlight the Evangelists wrote their Gospels, and the Apostles their Epistles; and in the warmth and blessed life-giving influence of the rays of the Sun of Righteousness, the early preachers of the Cross went forth preaching Jesus and the Resurrection; they went forth "terrible as an army with banners," and the world was won by them, for by the end of the third century the Gospel had been preached, and converts had been won in every part of the then known world. The Church is still going on from victory unto victory. III. TO THE HISTORY OF EVERY CHRISTIAN BELIEVER. The rise and progress of the soul in religion are gradual and progressive. Religious impression and conviction may be regarded as the looking "forth as the morning." In the dawn of religious life there is much cloud, and the shadows of the night move but slowly away. We cannot tell just when the night ends and the morning breaks—and daybreak differs in different climes, so is it in the history of the regenerate: many rejoicing in the light of the Sun of Righteousness can only say, "One thing I know, whereas I was in the dark, now I am in the light—the day has dawned, and the shadows have fled away." Light

shines upon the soul "fair as the moon," and, at first, often as cold. But soon the light shines brighter and warmer, the soul is filled with life and joy and glory, for, "clear as the sun," Jesus sheds His love abroad there. (*F. W. Brown.*) *The glory of the Church* :—God, who has determined that everything shall be beautiful in its season, has not left the night without a charm. The moon rules the night. The stars are only set as gems in her tiara. Now, says my text, "Who is she, fair as the moon?" Our answer is, the Church. Like the moon, she is a borrowed light. She gathers up the glory of a Saviour's sufferings, a Saviour's death, a Saviour's resurrection, a Saviour's ascension, and pours that light on palace and dungeon, on squalid heathenism and elaborate scepticism, on widow's tears and martyr's robe of flame, on weeping penitence and loud-mouthed scorn. She is the only institution to-day that gives any light to our world. After a season of storm or fog how you are thrilled when the sun comes out at noonday! The same sun which in the morning kindled conflagrations among the castles of cloud, stoops down to paint the lily white and the buttercup yellow and the forget-me-not blue. What can resist the sun? Light for voyager on the deep. Light for shepherds guarding the flocks afield. Light for the poor who have no lights to burn. Light for the downcast and the weary. Now, says my text, "Who is she that looketh forth, clear as the sun?" Our answer is, the Church. You have been going along a road before daybreak, and on one side you thought you saw a lion, on the other side you thought you saw a goblin of the darkness; but when the sun came out you found these were harmless apparitions. And it is the great mission of the Church of Jesus Christ to come forth "clear as the sun," to illuminate all earthly darkness, to explain as far as possible all mystery, and to make the world radiant in its brightness. O Sun of the Church, shine on until there is no sorrow to soothe, no tears to wipe away, no shackles to break, no more souls to be redeemed! I take one more step in this subject and say that if you were placed for the defence of a feeble town, and a great army were seen coming over the hills with flying ensigns, then you would be able to get some idea of the terror that will strike the hearts of the enemies of God when the Church at last marches on like "an army with banners." You know there is nothing that excites a soldier's enthusiasm so much as an old flag. Many a man almost dead, catching a glimpse of the national ensign, has sprung to his feet and started again into the battle. Now I don't want you to think of the Church of Christ as a defeated institution—as the victim of infidel sarcasm, something to be kicked and trampled on through all the ages of the world. It is "an army with banners." It has an inscription and colours such as never stirred the hearts of any earthly soldiery. We have our banner of recruit, and on it is inscribed, "Who is on the Lord's side?" our banner of defiance, and on it is inscribed, "The gates of hell shall not prevail against it"; our banner of triumph, and on it is inscribed, "Victory through our Lord Jesus Christ!" and we mean to plant that banner on every hill-top and wave it at the gate of heaven. Oh, what a shout of triumph when all the armies of earth and all the armies of heaven shall celebrate the victory of our King, all at once and all together: "Hallelujah, for the Lord God Omnipotent reigneth! Hallelujah, for the kingdoms of this world have become the kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ!" (*T. De Witt Talmage.*)

Ver. 11. **I went down into the garden of nuts to see the fruits of the valley.**—*The Church, the garden of the Lord*.—I. THE CHURCH IS A GARDEN. There are four gardens which may furnish us with ample materials for meditation. 1. The garden of Eden, where man was formed, and where man fell. 2. The garden of Gethsemane, where the Saviour often resorted with His disciples. 3. The garden of Calvary, belonging to Joseph of Arimathea. 4. The Church. Now the three former gardens were real gardens; the latter is a garden metaphorically considered only; a spiritual garden, a garden for the soul, and for eternity. A garden requires much careful attention. A garden is a place of pleasure and delight. In a word, it is also a place of profit too. It yields not only flowers, but fruits. The Church is always "filled with all the fruits of righteousness, which are by Jesus Christ, unto the glory and praise of God." Some gardens yield the owner his chief income. God derives His principal revenue of honour from His Church. II. IN THIS GARDEN THERE IS A VARIETY OF TREES. There are three kinds of trees spoken of here. Now I am not going to make a comparison between Christians, comparing some of them to nut trees, and some to vines, and some to pomegranates. But as you find all these, however they differ, in the same garden, so it is with the subjects of Divine grace. They are all, however they differ from each other, "trees of righteousness, the planting of the Lord, that He may be glorified." And however distinguished from

each other, they stand in the very same state, and are in the same relation to Him and to each other. What do we learn from hence? Why, that you should never oppose Christians to each other, crying up one, and crying down another, because they are not the same, but valuing them all, loving them all, praying for them all—"Grace be with all them that love our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity." What do we learn from hence? Why, that you should not look for everything from the same individual. Do not go to the nut-bush for the grapes, and do not go to the vine for the pomegranate. You cannot expect all these fruits upon the same tree. III. HE ENTERS THIS GARDEN FOR THE PURPOSE OF INSPECTING IT. He enters His garden indeed for other purposes, too. He enters it to walk there; He enters it to enjoy His pleasant fruits there, and He loves to hold intercourse and communion with His saints. But here He speaks of entering it, you see, for another purpose; for as the garden is His own, it is so valuable that He will not treat it with neglect or overlook it. No; "I went down," says He, "to see the fruits of the valley": for the garden is low, and the Church is lowly: "I went down to see the fruits of the valley." He is continually inspecting His Church; and how qualified is He for this! "His eyes are as a flame of fire:" distance is nothing to Him; darkness is nothing to Him. And what is His aim when He comes to examine? Not to ascertain whether you are learned, but whether you are "wise unto salvation"; not whether you are rich, but whether you are "rich towards God"; not whether your bodies are in health, but whether "your souls prosper"; and so of the rest. IV. WHEN HE COMES TO EXAMINE HIS GARDEN, HE LOOKS AFTER EVEN THE FIRST BEGINNINGS OF GRACE. "I went down to see whether the vines flourished, and the pomegranates budded." Observe, not only to look after the flourishing of the vine, but the budding of the pomegranates. Oh! that is a fine bud when a man no longer restrains prayer before God, but cries, "God be merciful to me a sinner!" When his tear drops upon his Bible, and he says, "Lord, save, or I perish." One of the earliest buddings of religion, I am persuaded, is love to the Lord's people, and tenderness towards them, and delight in them. But why does the Saviour look after the very buddings of grace, and value these? We answer, because they are His own producing, the work of His own Spirit in the heart. And because they are necessary: for though there may be buds without fruit, there can be no fruit without buds; though there may be a beginning without advancing or finishing, there can be no advancing or finishing without a beginning. These things, therefore, are essentially necessary. And because also they are sure pledges of something more. He sees in them the peace of God—sees in them pardon—sees in them the comforts of the Holy Ghost. Oh! there is heaven in that bud! Oh! there is an immensity, an eternity of glory and blessedness in that bud! It will bring forth fruit unto life eternal. (*W. Jay.*) *Fruits of the valley*:—What do we mean by the valley? There are two things to which I think the figure is fairly applicable, viz. outward estate and inward condition, both yielding fruit. 1. The former is often experienced, and is requisite for us all. (1) I speak to some who are young. You, in reference to age, are in the valley, not yet ascended to the higher levels of mature life, of paternity and seniority. There are fruits to be borne in this valley, "fruits in their season," and in this condition—obedience, diligence, docility, consecration to Christ. (2) I speak to some who are poor; you are in the valley in reference to social position. There are fruits in this condition; and beautiful it is to see how by many patience, submission, contentment, thankfulness, practical generosity, are borne here. (3) I speak to some who are in affliction. This is a valley through which all pass, young, old, rich and poor alike. Need I say it has fruit? "Tribulation worketh patience, patience experience, experience hope." (4) There is yet a valley before us all, and through which all must pass—"the valley of the shadow of death." There will be fruit to be borne there. Grace will not cease its exercise with the activities of life. 2. But I would more especially urge the thought that there is a valley in inward experience, and that this is especially fruitful. Humility. I need not attempt to define this grace, nor yet to extol it. Both will best be done, perhaps, in exhibiting some of its fruits. (1) There are many that relate to God. True humility is a grace of God's Spirit. It thus comes from God, and it has many bearings towards God. It best qualifies us for knowing God. Nothing, however, so hides God from us as pride, which is like a vapour concealing the sun. The humble spirit, low in its own estimation, looking up to God, sees excellences, beauties in Him, which to others are concealed. As knowledge of God, so repentance towards God springs from humility. Nor less is it the source of faith. To trust wholly in the merits of another, to forego all claim to personal merit or righteousness, is a plan of salvation which staggers and offends many. The same

spirit is equally valuable in producing submission, contentment under affliction. And so in many ways bearing on the nature and government of God, humility is most fruitful. Thus we humble ourselves under the mighty hand of God. And thus it secures God's favour. As the springs flow down from the mountain, leaving it bare, but into the valleys, making them fertile, so do God's choicest influences avoid the proud spirit, but descend on the humble and the meek. "Unto that man will I look, and with him will I dwell," says the High and Lofty One, "who is humble, and of a contrite spirit." (2) Nor are the fruits borne by this lowly grace less important in relation to man. We are bound together in life by indissoluble ties, domestic, social and civil. Christianity claims to regulate all these, and it does so by regulating and rectifying the spirit which underlies them all. And it will be found that of all the dispositions most likely to remedy whatever is wrong in social life, and to confirm all that is good, is this spirit of humility. The more you look into yourself and observe others, the more I think you will find that the cause of nearly all that affects our social life, injuriously taints it, casts a shadow over it, makes it a jarring, distasteful, unattractive thing, when it ought to be only transparent, noble and pure, is the spirit of pride. It is this, unconsciously often, but really, which gives censoriousness to judgment, asperity to feeling, bitterness to expression, unkindness to act. We think so much of ourselves, that we despise and offend others. The Lord help us all, for the sake of each other, to walk more in this valley. (3) While this spirit, this valley-like grace, bears such blessed fruit towards God and towards man, it does so equally to its possessor. We cannot have a "conscience void of offence" in these two ways without having the comfort of it ourselves. It often secures material advantages. Seest thou a proud man, a boaster, or "one wise in his own conceit, there is more hope of a fool than of him." Seest thou a truly humble man, one willing to stoop to do anything, go anywhere, serve any one, that man is on the road to preferment. Far more important than any material benefit is the spiritual blessing it secures. What peace it brings! While the proud spirit, like the lofty mountain-top, is exposed to constant storms, the humble spirit, like the valley, escapes them, and its peace flows like the river, of which it is the bed. What leisure it gives, too! While pride is ever busy on the watch for the appropriate tokens of respect, and like the swelling Haman, has all else embittered if these are withheld, humility cares little for these things, and, like Mordecai, has leisure to think about others, to care for a loved Esther, and to save a nation besides. What influence, too! When Moses descended from the mountain, subdued, overwhelmed by a sense of God's greatness and his own littleness, he "wist not that the skin of his face shone," but it did so, and his power over the people was never greater than then. These, however, are only moral results, though as such they indicate God's approval of the spirit He thus causes to be honoured. There are more directly spiritual ones. "God giveth grace to the humble," and that in a most signal manner. He does not give it except to the humble. Only the empty vessel is receptive, and only in proportion as it is so. Faith is the glance of humility, prayer its sigh; this sweet grace underlies all graces, and is the soil in which all grow; and it secures more, "grace for grace." As by the law of nature, water, with all the virtue it holds in solution, seeks the lowest level, fertilizing the valley and making it "bring forth and bud"; so grace from Christ in all its various forms descends to the humblest spirit, causing it to bear "much fruit." If we would learn of Christ, receive from Christ, be filled with the fulness of Christ, be qualified for the service of Christ, receive commission from Christ, be imbued with the spirit of Christ, we must be humble; like Mary, must sit at the Master's feet; like the beloved disciple, must fall down before Him; like Isaiah, must be awed by a sense of His glory, and say, "Woe is me"; like Paul, must in a sense, suffer the loss of all things, be weak in order to be strong. There are laws in the spiritual universe as in the natural, a Christian philosophy as well as a secular; and one of the principles of the former, as of the latter, is that the lowest level is the most receptive, and that which seeks and obtains most of all that is fertilizing and good. "Though the Lord be high, He hath respect unto the lowly." (*J. Viney, D.D.*)

Ver. 12. **Or ever I was aware, my soul made me like the chariots of Amminadib.**—*The influence of the unseen:*—The world passeth away and the lusts thereof. The spiritual alone is permanent. Some men acquire notoriety in their day, their name passes into a proverb, and yet, singular to say, in after times, we find their names recorded, but we are at a loss to know what their deeds were which made them so famous. I have read out a text in which a man's name occurs about whom

we know nothing. As a proverbial saying, it may be regarded as an illustration of the spontaneity and intuition of the heart. The affections under the guidance of the will becoming a chariot, in which the man is borne away. I. SPIRITUAL SPONTANEITY. Spontaneity signifies that which is voluntary and unconstrained, free and instantaneous action. Without spontaneity our lives would sink to the dull, dead level of things, we should be mere links in the great chain of cause and effect. Without spontaneity we should be things, not men. This power, this pure activity is necessary to our personality. We are about to speak of the spontaneity of life—that is, spiritual life. By the spontaneity of this life, we mean that its impulses, sensibilities, and affections are not the result of a painful and protracted effort, but spring from life as its natural manifestation and development. There is *naturalness* in all the forms of life. We are often struck with the unnatural character of some men's religion. It seems like something that belongs to the man, a mere accident or appendage; he can put it on as a garment, but he can divest himself of it at any moment. What naturalness there is in life, in the modest, quiet beauty of the flower, that opens itself to drink in the dew and the sunlight, and gives its perfume to every breath that passes by, and does this spontaneously, for it is the law of its life. Some few illustrations of the spontaneity of life may make our meaning more apparent. When the physical organization is perfect, when there is health as well as life, the body performs many of its functions without effort and unconsciously. The man runs without weariness, and walks without fainting. Life is like a stream sparkling in the sunshine, making its own music as it flows on, sustained and nourished by the fountain that gave it birth. It is the sick man who frequently places his finger on the pulse. It is the man out of health who has the study of his own nature forced upon him, and who is constantly seeking to reproduce and restore harmony. A man who lives near to God and has constant communion with Him, will have Divine beauty put upon him. He may, like Moses, put a veil over his face, but at any moment he can put off the veil, and go in and speak with God. There is no necessity for the soul to see that the strings of the instrument are tuned concert pitch, at any instant she can awaken music and call on all spiritual faculties like so many choristers to blend their voices in one song. A man need not, like Saul, the first king of Israel, "force himself to offer sacrifice." There are spiritual instincts: "My heart and my flesh cry out for God." There is no fixedness of heart: "O God, my heart is fixed." There is spontaneity: "Or ever I was aware, my soul made me like the chariots of Ammi-nadib." The highest acts of the spiritual life are for the most part acts of pure spontaneity. Life is in its incipient and undeveloped forms, when we must learn to see, to speak, to walk; and so in the beginning of the spiritual life, there must be effort, and painful consciousness, till we grow up into Him who is the Head, even Christ. How may we attain this high spiritual state? We must seek the constant actings of the Spirit, and yield ourselves to the felt influence of the Holy Ghost. The Spirit is to help our infirmities,—that is, the Spirit is to lift us up, to raise, to elevate us; the Spirit gives wings to the soul, so that we may be borne up into a spiritual region, and commune with spiritual things. We must get the unity of our whole nature. You must live in constant communion with God. Let me say, there is real happiness and great peace resulting from this spontaneity of life. There is the Sabbath of the soul; the work of the new creation being over, God still comes to man, and walks in the garden in the cool of the day. Love manifests itself to love; a living God to a living soul. In this state you will be prepared to use all things; you will be ready to receive Divine communications; you will be fitted for all seasons of fellowship. Worldly men instinctively go after the world. They come to the sanctuary, but they go where their heart goes: "Or ever I was aware, my soul made me like the chariots of Ammi-nadib." There is spontaneity in sin. It becomes natural—it awakens no astonishment—man seeks his gratification in it. II. THE INTUITIONS OF THE HEART. The circumstances in the chapter are these: The bridegroom is without the bride, but he goes into scenes where she has been, which seem to him filled with her presence; everything reminds him of her—his heart goes after her, he instinctively feels that she is near, though he does not see her. We are influenced by the unseen. The true centre of our life—of all its thoughts, feelings, and energies—is the unseen. There is an attractive force, of even higher power than the force which draws bodies to the earth. Our life is in God; our holiness is the shadow of His light; our love the birth of His love. The regenerated soul goes to God to find satisfaction in Him; it goes instinctively, by the law of its new life, to have communion with God. The spiritual man finds, "or ever he is aware," his heart has lifted him up to heaven.

The unseen influences us. There are influences which do not act on the senses, but on the spirit, which do not proceed from anything that may be seen or that is handled, but from the spiritual. Men are influenced by fellowship, by example, by mind acting on mind, by the literature of the day, by the daily papers. We are influenced by the past, by the writings of men who have entered the unseen world. And are not our minds open to the direct influences of the Spirit of God? Cannot the Father of our spirits draw near to us, and illuminate, sanctify, and commune with our hearts? A man must be spiritual to recognize and appropriate spiritual things. What is meant by a man being spiritual? That he is born of the Spirit, that he lives in the Spirit, that his own spiritual nature has the mastery over the outward and the physical—that there is a state of real spiritual unity. With his well-balanced mind he can respond to spiritual impressions, and make use of spiritual opportunities. This ready response is indispensable; the “vision will not tarry.” A right state of heart is necessary that we may be able to take advantage of all opportunities, that we may be prepared, not only for the Sabbath, but for all times, so as to respond to all spiritual impressions and impulses. A right state of heart is necessary that we may be fitted for manifestations. We must be prepared, like the disciples in the upper room, waiting for the promise of the Father, for suddenly there may come “a sound from heaven.” We must be prepared, like mariners who have long been becalmed, but who see indications of a breeze springing up, and so make all ready to take every possible advantage of the wind which presently will sweep over the waters. We must be prepared to ascend the mount, so that at any moment we hear the Divine voice saying,—Come up, and “I will make all My goodness pass before you,” we may go up and see the glory. We must walk in the light, as He is in the light, that we may have fellowship one with another. (*H. J. Bevis.*) *The chariots of Ammi-nadib* :—It appears to me that without in the slightest degree wresting the passage, or deviating from an honest interpretation, we may understand that this is the language of the Church concerning Christ. If so, Christ’s words conclude at the end of the tenth verse, and it is the Church that speaks at the eleventh. There is not an instance in the whole Song, so far as I can remember, of the Prince Himself speaking in the first person singular; either, therefore, this would be a solitary exception, or else, following the current plan, where the same pronoun is used, the Church is speaking to Christ, and telling him of herself. I. What is the most wanted in all religious exercises is **THE MOTION, THE EXERCISE OF THE SOUL**. “Or ever I was aware, my soul made me”—or my soul became—“like the chariots of Ammi-nadib.” Soul-worship is the soul of worship, and if you take away the soul from the worship, you have killed the worship; it becomes dead and barren henceforth. There are professors in this world who are perfectly content if they have gone through the mechanical part of public devotion. If they have occupied their seats, joined in the hymns and the prayers, and listened to the preaching, they go away quite content and easy. Only that prayer which comes from our heart can get to God’s heart. Oh, that we may be more and more scrupulous and watchful in these things! In the diary of Oliver Heywood, one of the ejected ministers, he often says, “God helped me in prayer in my chamber and in the family.” And once he writes thus—“In my chamber this morning I met with more than ordinary incomings of grace and outgoings of heart to God.” Be it always recollected that we do not pray at all, unless the soul is drawn out in pleading and beseeching the Lord. II. **SOMETIMES IT HAPPENS THAT THE HEART IS NOT IN THE BEST STATE FOR DEVOTION**. If religion be a matter of soul, it cannot always be attended to with equal pleasure and advantage. You can always grind a barrel-organ; it will invariably give you the same discordant noise, which people call music, but the human voice will not admit of being wound up in the same fashion, nor will it for the most part discharge the same monotonous functions. The great singer finds that his voice changes, and that he cannot always use it with the same freedom. If the voice is a delicate organ, how much more delicate is the soul! The soul is continually the subject of changes. Ah, how often it changes because of its contact with the body! If we could be disembodied, oh, how we would praise God and pray to Him! “The spirit truly is willing, but the flesh is weak.” And then, alas, our sins are a much more serious hindrance to our devotion. Perhaps we have been angry. How can we come before the Lord calmly when our spirit has been just now tossed with tempest? Probably we have been seeking the world, and going after it with all our might. How can we suddenly pull up, and put all our strength into a vigorous seeking of the kingdom of God and His righteousness in a moment? Now God’s grace can help us to overcome all these things, and can even make our souls like the chariots of Ammi-nadib. We do not

want grace for such emergencies. The soul, in its different phases and states, has need of help from the sanctuary to which it repairs. III. THERE ARE SEASONS WHEN OUR HEART IS SWEETLY MOVED TOWARDS GOD. "Or ever I was aware, my soul made me like the chariots of Ammi-nadib." Have ye not proved welcome opportunities when all your thoughts have been quickened, enlivened, and stimulated to activity in the highest degree about your highest interests? All within us was awake; there was not a slumbering faculty. Our memory told us of the goodness of the Lord in days gone by; and our hopes were regaled by the mercy which we had not tasted yet, but which was made sure to us by promise, and brought near to us by faith. Our faith was active and bright of eye. Our love especially shed a clear light over our prospects. Oh, we have had our blessed times, when our soul has been light and rapid as the chariots of Ammi-nadib! And at such times we were conscious of great elevation. The chariots of Ammi-nadib were those of a prince. And oh, we were no more mean, and low, and beggarly, and grovelling, but we saw Christ, and were made kings and princes and priests with Him. Then we could have performed martyr's deeds. Then we were no cowards, we were afraid of no foes. We had princely thoughts then, large, liberal, generous, capacious thoughts concerning Christ and His people, His cause, and His conquests: our souls were like the chariots of Ammi-nadib. At the same time they were full of power; for, when the chariots of Ammi-nadib went forth, who could stop them? Such was our spirit. We laughed at thoughts of death, and poured contempt upon the trials of life. We were "strong in the Lord and in the power of His might." Oh, what splendid times we have had when God has been with us. Oh, yes! in God's house you have known the days of heaven upon earth. Not unfrequently too have I known that the Lord has appeared to His people and warmed their hearts when they have been working for Him. IV. SOMETIMES THE SWEET SEASONS COME TO US WHEN WE DO NOT EXPECT THEM. "Or ever I was aware, my soul made me like the chariots of Ammi-nadib." Some poor hearts do not reckon ever to have these joys again. They say, "No, no, they are all gone; the last leaf has blown from the tree; the last flower has faded in the garden. My summer is past. It is all over with me!" That is the bitter complaint and the hollow murmuring of unbelief. But the Lord for whom ye wait can suddenly appear, and while you are saying hard things of yourself He can refute them with the beams of His countenance. Even at this very moment you may stand like Hannah, a woman of sorrowful spirit, feeling as if you would be sent away empty; yea, and God's servant himself may address you with rough words as Eli did her, and may even tell you that you are drunken, when it is deep grief that enfeebles your steps and chokes your voice; and all the while the Lord may have in store for you such a blessing as you have never dreamed of; and He may say to thee, "Go thy way, My daughter; I have heard thy petition, thy soul shall have its desire." Or ever I was aware, while my unbelief led me to think such a thing impossible, Thou hast made me like the chariots of Ammi-nadib. (*C. II. Spurgeon.*)

Vor. 13. Return, return, O Shulamite; return, return, that we may look upon thee.—*Return, return, O Shulanite; return, return!*—The translation "Shulamite" is unhappy; it is unmusical, and misses the meaning. The Hebrew word is a feminine of "Solomon." "Solomon" may stand for the bridegroom's name, and then the well-beloved bride takes her husband's name in a feminine form of it, which is Shulamith, Salome, or perhaps better "Solyma." The King has named his name upon her, and as Caius has his Caiia, so Solomon has his Solyma. He is the Prince of Peace, and she is the Daughter of Peace. Aforetime she was called "the fairest among women," but now she is espoused unto her Lord, and has a fulness of peace. Therefore is she called the Peace-laden, or the Peace-crowned. You know how truly it is so with the justified in Christ Jesus. It appears that the Church in her beauty had gone down to attend to her work. "I went down into the garden of nuts to see the fruits of the valley, and to see whether the vine flourished, and the pomegranates budded." She did not sit down in the house to admire herself, nor go into the street to show herself: she went down into her Lord's garden to attend to her proper work, and then it was that they cried, "Return, return." Neither the world nor Christ Himself will call much after us if we go forth to make display of our own excellences. "Come, see my zeal for the Lord of Hosts," is a wretched piece of self-consciousness, which disgusts more than it attracts. A diligent life is an attractive life. Do thou, like an ant, work in thy season, carrying thy due burden upon the ant-hill, and if thou doest this for love of Jesus thou doest nobly. Plod on without courting approbation, and rest content to do thine utmost for the common weal. Ask not to rule

in the court, but be willing to work in the field; seek not to recline on the couch, but take thy pruning-knife, and go forth among the vines, to fulfil thine office, and in that self-forgetting service thy beauty shall be manifested, and voices shall salute thee, crying, "Return, return." It appears, too, that while she was thus engaged, she was the subject of a great stir and emotion of heart. Perhaps she had felt dull and dreary till she entered on her work, but while she was busy with her pomegranates and her nuts, she cries, "Or ever I was aware, my soul made me like the chariots of Ammi-nadib." She felt that she could hasten like the chariots of a willing people, who rush to the fight from love of their prince. She felt as if she could run after her Beloved; she could leap, she could fly. Thus vigorous and active, she was watched by many eyes, and soon she heard voices coming from the four quarters of the universe, crying, "Return, return, O Shulamith; return, return." I. Let us listen, but only with our ears, not with our hearts, to THE LOWER VOICES. Whence come these voices? There are voices from the vasty deep of sin and hell, voices from the tombs which we have quitted, voices from the Egypt from which we have fled. They are crying evermore, like unquiet ghosts, "Return, return." The devil is not altogether a fool, although he is great in that direction; and therefore he does not continue for ever to use nets which have failed to entangle the birds. If he finds that cajolery will not ensnare us, he leaves his old tactics and tries other methods. When "Return, return" will not woo us, he puts on his lion form, and roars till the mountains shake. By old companions he does this. They say, "You have left us all, we do not know why. You have turned a fanatic; you have joined with gloomy Christian people, and you are not half the good fellow you used to be. Are you not getting a little tired of those dreary ways? Are not the rules of Christ too precise and Puritanic?" Thus do her former comrades cry, "Return, return, O Solyma." The old joys sometimes, in moments of weakness which will come upon us, revive upon the memory, and attempt to mislead us. When do these voices come? Their sound is heard full often. "Return, return, return, return"—four times over the text hath it. They come so often that the word in the Epistle to the Hebrews is more than justified, "And truly, if they had been mindful of that country from whence they came out, they might have had opportunity to have returned." These opportunities come in our way everywhere, and at all times. If you wish to leave off being a Christian, if you wish to follow the world in its pleasures or in its labours, the doors are always open. It is a fight to reach to heaven, and few there be to help us in it; but the path to hell is downward, and multitudes thrust out their hands to urge us to the infernal deeps. These cries are borne to us by every gale, in tones both loud and gentle, "Return, return." And we shall find that they solicit us in our best moments. I cannot fully account for the fact, but so it is, that I am most liable to speak unadvisedly with my lips when I have just enjoyed the raptures of high fellowship with God. Yonder shines the Mountain of Transfiguration in its unrivalled splendour; but lo, at the very foot of it the devil rages in the lunatic child! Our highest graces are not to be trusted, for, as the most venomous serpents lurk among the brightest flowers, so are temptations most abundant hard by our most spiritual and heavenly joys. Notice that our text goes on to say why they wish us to return. "Return, return, that we may look upon thee." And is that all? Am I to be a traitor to my Lord, and quit His holy ways, and forfeit heaven, to be made a show of by thee, O Satan? or by thee, O world? Is this a full reward for treachery—"that we may look upon thee"? Why, their looks are daggers. As the eyes of basilisks are the eyes of the ungodly world; as malignant stars that blast the soul. When the world loves the holy man it is the love of the vulture for the sick lamb. Fear you the worldling, even when he bears you gifts. Now hear Solyma's wise answer to her tempters. She says, "What will ye see in Solyma?" Dost thou ask me, O world, to come back and show myself to be thy friend? Dost thou promise me approbation? Dost thou vow to look upon me, and admire me, and take me for an example? What is there in me that thou canst approve of? What wilt thou see in Solyma? What can the world see in a believer? The world knoweth us not, because it knew Christ not.

II. Now we turn to listen, not with our ears only, but with our hearts too, to the call of THE HIGHER VOICES which cry, "Return, return." Brethren, to go to heaven, to go to Christ, to go towards holiness, is a return to God's people: for God's people are originally His children. Though they are prodigals, and have gone into a far country, they always were His children; even when they spent their substance in riotous living they were still His sons, and each of them could speak of "My Father's house." To come to Christ, and holiness, and heaven, is to return.

Notice that in the text that word "return" is put four times over. Is it not because it is of the highest importance that every child of God should keep returning, and coming nearer to the Father's house? Is it not because it is our highest joy, our strongest security, our best enrichment, to be always coming to Christ as unto a living stone, and getting into closer fellowship with Him? As He calls four times, is it not a hint that we are slow to come? We ought to come to Jesus not only at His first call, but even at the glances of His eyes, when He looks as though He longed for our love: it ought to be our rapture to think only of Him, and live wholly to Him; but as we fail to answer to first pleas, He cries four times, "Return, return, O Solyma; return, return. Come to thine own Husband, thine own loving Lord." He ceases not to entreat until we do return. Do not the reduplications of this call hint at His strong desire after us, His condescending love for us? I beg you to observe what the spouse has to say to this when she is thus called upon to return to the Lord. The Lord saith to her, "Return, return, that we may look upon thee." Is not that a reason for coming back? The Lord says, "That I may look upon thee." He desires your society, and seems gently to hint that you have kept aloof from Him. He seems to say, "You have not been much with Me alone lately, you have neglected the reading of the Word, and the hearing of it; I have scarcely seen thy face; therefore return, that I may look upon thee." Cover your face and say, "Lord, why shouldst Thou look on me? I am full of sin;" but then draw near to Him, that His look of love may bring thee to repentance, and cause thy sin to pass away. Remember He hath power in His eyes to look thee into purity and beauty. Come and say, "Look upon me, Lord; search me, try me, and know my ways." Return, that with infinite pity thy Beloved may see what aileth thee, and then with His dear pierced hand may perform a Divine surgery upon thee, and make thee well again. (C. H. Spurgeon.)

CHAPTER VII.

VER. 1. How beautiful are thy feet with shoes, O Prince's daughter!—*Beautiful with sandals*.—The Great Redeemer, the Heavenly Bridegroom, is now represented under the leading emblem of the Book, as surveying the beauties and excellences of His betrothed bride. The whole chapter is an apostrophe to her. She is in herself full of conscious unworthiness. But He sees her clothed in the bridal attire of His own righteousness, and instead of upbraiding her for avowed imperfections, He begins with the words, "How beautiful are thy sandalled feet, O Prince's daughter!" I. The Church's or the Believer's NAME—"Daughter" and "Prince's daughter." 1. She is called "daughter." This points to the tender relation subsisting between Christ and His people. When Jehovah in the Old Testament speaks most endearingly of His ancient Church, He calls it "The Daughter of Zion." He employs, indeed, manifold figures, all indicative of strong and ardent attachment. "As one whom his mother comforteth." "Can a woman forget her sucking child?" "Like as a father pitieth his children." "I will be a Father unto you." 2. But again, she is a "Prince's daughter." He reminds her of her pedigree. It is no ordinary birth. She is one of the adopted children of the "King of kings." Their glory is His glory. II. THE SUBJECT OF COMMENDATION: "How beautiful are thy feet with shoes." 1. The shoe, or sandal, in ancient times, and in Oriental countries, was the badge of freedom and honour. The crouching slave never wore a sandal. The unsandalled feet was the badge and mark of subjection, if not of degradation. When the Lord, therefore, in the text speaks of His betrothed bride's feet being "beautiful with shoes," what is this but to proclaim that she—type of every believer—is translated from the bondage of corruption into "the glorious liberty of the children of God"? 2. Shoes or sandals were emblems of joy: while the want of these was equally recognized and regarded as a symbol of grief and sorrow. And is not the Christian called to be joyful? Yes, God's children are indeed, really, and in truth, alone of all, in this sin-stricken world, entitled to the epithet of "happy." 3. The sandals on the feet speak of activity and duty, and preparedness for Christ's service. They point to the nature of the journey the believer is pursuing. Though a pleasant road, and a safe road, and a road with a glorious termination, it is at times rough; a path of temptation and trial. Unshod feet would be cut

and lacerated with the stones and thorns and briars which beset it. The figure, moreover, suggests, that there can be no loitering or lingering on the way. (*J. R. Macduff, D.D.*)

Ver. 5. The King is held in the galleries.—*The King is held in the galleries*:—Christ, the blessed King of Zion, condescends sometimes to be held and detained by His people in the galleries of Gospel-ordinances. I. I WILL GIVE SOME ACCOUNT OF THIS ROYAL KING. I. That he is a King appears from these particulars. (1) From the Father's designation and ordination. (2) From the prophecies that went of Him before His actual manifestation in our nature (*Gen. xlix. 10*; *Luke i. 32, 33*; *Ps. cxxii. 11*; *Isa. ix. 6*). (3) From the types and shadows that prefigured Him. He was typified by Melchizedek, who is called "the King of righteousness and the King of peace"; by David; and by Solomon. (4) From the princely titles that are given Him in Scripture. He is called "the Prince of peace, the King of righteousness, and the King of kings and Lord of lords"; and it is God the Father's will that "every one should confess that Jesus Christ is the Lord." (5) From the princely prerogatives and royalties that are assigned Him by His Father (*Psa. lxxxix. 20*). 2. As He is a King, so He is the King by way of eminency and excellency. (1) He is the King eternal (*1 Tim. i. 17*; *Isa. ix. 6*). (2) He is called the King immortal (*1 Tim. i. 17*). (3) He is the King invisible (*1 Tim. vi. 16*). (4) He is the only blessed and happy King (*1 Tim. vi. 15*). (5) He is the absolute and universal King. His kingdom is universal in respect of all persons, places, times. II. THE GALLERIES WHEREIN THIS ROYAL KING TRYSTS AND KEEPS COMPANY WITH HIS PEOPLE. 1. I will only mention these few galleries. (1) There is the secret gallery of meditation, wherein David found God's "lovingkindness to be better than life," and had his "soul satisfied as with marrow and fatness." (2) There is the gallery of prayer, wherein Jacob wrestled with the angel of the Covenant, and, like a prince, prevailed for the blessing. (3) There is a gallery of reading of the Scriptures, wherein the Ethiopian eunuch got such a discovery of the promised Messiah as made him "go on his way rejoicing." (4) There is a gallery of Christian converse anent soul-matters; wherein the disciples going to Emmaus had such a meeting with Christ as made "their hearts burn within them." (5) There is the gallery of preaching, or of hearing of the Word preached; "by the foolishness of which God saveth them that believed." Here it was that Lydia's heart was opened. (6) The Sacraments of the New Testament, baptism and the Lord's Supper, are galleries wherein Zion's King displays His glory before His people. 2. Why are these ordinances compared to galleries? (1) Galleries are magnificent apartments of royal and stately buildings. So there is a Divine magnificence in the ordinances of the Gospel when countenanced with the presence of the great Master of assemblies. (2) Galleries are lightsome and pleasant apartments. O how pleasant and lightsome are ordinances to a gracious soul! (3) Galleries are places of walk and converse, as is plain from *Ezek. xli. 15*. So it is in Gospel-ordinances that Christ doth walk and converse with His people. (4) Galleries are places of public feasting and entertainment of friends. So it is in the mount of Gospel-ordinances that the Lord has provided for His people "a feast of fat things," etc. III. THE HOLDING OF THE KING IN THE GALLERIES. 1. What does it suppose and imply on the believer's part? (1) It necessarily supposes a meeting with Christ in the galleries; for no person can hold that which they never had. (2) It supposes a high esteem of Christ, a love to, and liking of, His company. (3) On the believer's part, this holding of Christ supposes a fear of losing Him or of being deprived of His company. (4) It supposes a seeming willingness in Christ to withdraw from His people after their sweetest enjoyments. (5) It implies a holy solicitude, and earnest desire of soul, to have His presence continued. (6) It implies an ardent breathing of soul after more and more nearness to Christ, and further discoveries of Him. (7) It implies a firm resolution not to part with His company. (8) It implies a cleaving or adhering to Christ with the whole strength and vigour of the soul. How, or wherein does the soul put forth its strength in cleaving to Christ? I answer, it does it by these three especially. (i.) By the lively exercise of faith. Hence faith is called an apprehending of Christ, and a cleaving to Him. (ii.) The soul binds or holds Christ in the galleries by sincere and ardent love. (iii.) The soul cleaves to Christ by fervent and ardent prayer. 2. What does it imply on Christ's part? (1) It implies amazing grace and condescendency toward the work of His own hands. (2) It implies Christ's great delight in the society of His people. (3) It implies that there are certain cords which have a constraining power to stay Him in His people's company: and sure

they must be strong cords indeed wherewith Omnipotency is bound. (i.) He is bound by the cord of His own faithfulness, which He has laid in pawn in the promise. (ii.) He is bound in the galleries by the cord of His own love. (iii.) He is bound to them by the bond of marriage. IV. THE APPLICATION OF THE DOCTRINE. 1. The first use is of information. Is it so that Zion's King is sometimes held in the galleries of Gospel-ordinances? Then, (1) See hence the happiness and dignity of the saints of God beyond the rest of the world. (2) See hence why the saints put such a value and estimate on Gospel-ordinances. 2. By way of trial and examination. You have been in the galleries of the King of Zion; but that is not enough: and therefore let me ask, Have you been in the galleries with the King? and have you been holding the King in the galleries? (1) What did you hear in the galleries? what said the King unto you? (2) What did you see in the galleries? Many sights are to be seen in the galleries of ordinances, and particularly in that of the Lord's Supper. Here the Lamb of God is to be seen, "which taketh away the sin of the world," and in a crucified Christ, who is evidently set forth in that ordinance, all the Divine attributes and perfections shine with a greater lustre than in the large volume of the creation. (3) What have you tasted in the galleries? for galleries are for feasting and entertainment of friends. Now, did the King say to you, or is He yet saying it, "Eat, O friends, drink, yea, drink abundantly, O beloved"? Did He make you to eat of the fatness of His house, and to drink of the rivers of His pleasures? 3. Use third may be in a short word directed to two or three sorts of persons. (1) To you who know nothing of this doctrine, never met with the King in the galleries. (2) To you who have had a comfortable meeting with Him. (3) To those who perhaps are complaining, "I sought Him, but I found Him not." (*E. Erskine.*)

Vers. 11-13. Come, my Beloved, let us go forth into the field; let us lodge in the villages.—*Good works in good company*:—The daughters of Jerusalem had been praising the Church as the fairest among women. They spoke of her with admiring appreciation, extolling her from head to foot. She wisely perceived that it was not easy to bear praise; and therefore she turned aside from the virgins to her Lord, making her boast not of her own comeliness, but of her being affianced to her Beloved: "I am my Beloved's, and His desire is towards me." The spouse seems abruptly to break off from listening to the song of the virgins, and turns to her own husband-Lord, communion with whom is ever blessed and ever profitable, and she says to him, "Come, my Beloved, let us go forth into the field; let us lodge in the villages." Communion with Christ is a certain cure for every ill. Whether it be the bitterness of woe, or the cloying surfeit of earthly delight, close fellowship with the Lord Jesus will take the gall from the one and the satiety from the other. I. First, then, IN THE MATTER OF SELF-EXAMINATION. This is a most desirable and important business, but every believer should desire to have communion with Christ while he is attending to it. Self-examination is of the utmost importance. Well does the spouse suggest that she should see whether the vine flourished, whether the tender grape appeared and the pomegranates budded forth; for our spiritual vineyard needs perpetual watchfulness. While you are attending to this important business, see to it at the same time that you keep up your communion with Christ, for you will never know so well the importance of self-examination as when you see Him. Know His love for you, and all His griefs on your behalf, and you will charge your own heart after this fashion—"See to it, that thou make sure work as to thine interest in Jesus, that thou be really one with Him, that thy faith in Him be genuine, and that thou shalt be found in Him in peace at the day of His appearing." Self-examination, however, is very laborious work: the text hints at it. It does not say, "Let us go," but "Let us get up." Self-examination is ever up-hill work. We need to school ourselves to perform a duty so irksome. But, beloved, if we attempt to examine this, feeling that Christ is with us, and that we are having communion with Him, we shall forget all the labour of the deed. Keep close to the Saviour and the difficulties of self-examination will vanish, and the labour will become light. Self-examination should always be very earnest work. The text says, "Let us get up early." It has been well observed that all men in Scripture who have done earnest work rose up early to do it. The dew of the morning, before the smoke and dust of the world's business have tainted the atmosphere, is a choice and special season for all holy work. And yet again, self-examination, it seems to me, is not the simple work that some people think, but is beset with difficulties. I do believe that the most of self-examinations go on a

wrong principle. You take Moses with you when you examine yourself, and consequently you fall into despair. I do not want you to look at Christ so as to think less of your sin, but to think more of it; for you can never see sin to be so black as when you see the suffering which Christ endured on its behalf; but I do desire you, dear friends, never to look at sin apart from the Saviour. Examine yourselves, but let it be in the light of Calvary; not by the blazing fires of Sinai's lightnings, but by the milder radiance of the Saviour's griefs. It appears, from the words of the spouse, that the work of self-examination should be carried on in detail, if it is to be of real service. It is written, "Let us see if the vine flourish, the tender grape appear, and the pomegranates bud forth." We must not take a general view of the garden, but particularize, and give special attention to each point. Oh! to have our great pattern ever before our eye! Jesus should not be a friend who calls upon us now and then, but one with whom we walk evermore. Thou hast a difficult road to travel; see, O traveller to heaven, that thou go not without thy Guide. In every case, in every condition, thou needest Jesus; but most of all, when thou comest to deal with thine own heart's eternal interests. O, keep thou close to Him, lean thy head upon His bosom, ask to be refreshed with the spiced wine of His pomegranate, and then there shall be no fear but that thou shalt be found of Him at the last, without spot, wrinkle, or any such thing. II. THE CHURCH WAS ABOUT TO ENGAGE IN EARNEST LABOUR, and desires her Lord's company. It is the business of God's people to be trimmers of God's vines. Like our first parents, we are put into the garden of the Lord for usefulness. Observe that the Church, when she is in her right mind, in all her many labours desires to retain and cheerfully to enjoy communion with Christ. Taking a survey of Christ's Church, you will find that those who have most fellowship with Christ are not the persons who are recluses or hermits, who have much time to spend with themselves, but they are the useful indefatigable labourers who are toiling for Jesus, and who in their toil have Him side by side with them, so that they are workers together with God. Let me, then, try and press this lesson upon you, that when we as a Church, and each of us as individuals, have anything to do for Christ, we must do it in communion with Him. Let me hold up for your imitation some in modern times who by works of faith and labours of love have made us feel that the old spirit of Christianity is not dead. Our beloved friend Mr. George Müller, of Bristol, for instance. There burns a holy devotedness, an intensity of faith, a fervour of perseverance which I would to God we all possessed. May we have more of this, and so by keeping close to Jesus, we shall produce better fruits, richer clusters and more luscious grapes than are commonly produced upon those vines which are in a less happy part of the vineyard. III. THE CHURCH DESIRES TO GIVE TO CHRIST ALL THAT SHE PRODUCES. She has "all manner of pleasant fruits," both "new and old," and they are laid up for her Beloved. We have some new fruits. I hope we feel new life, new joy, new gratitude: we wish to make new resolves and carry them out by new labours. Our heart goes up in new prayers, and our soul is pledging herself to new efforts. But we have some old things too. There is our first love: a choice fruit that! and Christ delights in it. There is our first faith: that simple faith by which, having nothing, we become possessors of all things. There is our joy when first we knew the Lord; let us revive it. Old things! why we have the old remembrance of the promises. How faithful has God been! Old sins we must regret, but then we have had repentances which He has given us, by which we have wept our way to the Cross, and learned the merit of His blood. We have fruits, both new and old; but here is the point—they are all to be for Christ. (*C. H. Spurgeon.*)

A call for revival.—I. The fact which is implied in the text, that LOVE IS THE GREAT MOTIVE FOR ACTION IN THE CAUSE OF CHRIST. This love has about it certain marked peculiarities. 1. It is first a love which realizes the person of the Beloved. Jesus must be to us no historical personage who was once on earth, but is now dead and powerless; he must be an actual person living still in our midst. 2. The love here spoken of was well assured of the affection of its Beloved. Note the verse which precedes our text, "I am my Beloved's, and His desire is towards me." A Christian is never strong for service when he does not know whether Christ loves him or not. Strive then for a well-assured sense of the Saviour's love. Be not content till you possess it, for it will be health to your spirit and marrow to your bones: it will be a girdle of strength to your loins and a chain of honour about your neck. 3. The love of the spouse lived in fellowship with the Well-beloved. "Come, my Beloved, let us go, let us lodge, let us get up, let us see. There will I give Thee my loves." True love to Jesus grows stronger and stronger in proportion as it abides

in Him. If we have abounding love to Jesus we can prosper under disadvantages, but if we have it not we have lost the great secret of success. It yokes us with the strong Son of God, and so makes our infirmities to be but opportunities for the display of His power. 4. This love leads the Church to hold all things in joint possession with Christ. Observe that word, "at our gates are all manner of pleasant fruits." Love to Jesus constrains us to make over all that we hold to Him, while faith appropriates all that Jesus has to itself. 5. The love which is the great motive to Christian action is a love which looks to Jesus for united operation. It is, "Come, my Beloved, let us go forth into the field, let us get up early to the vineyard." All is well when the Redeemer leads the way. Be not afraid, for you go in good company. Who among us will be afraid to do anything or go anywhere if Jesus saith, "I will go with you"? II. LOVE LEADS US TO GO AFIELD IN THE SERVICE OF JESUS. "Come, my Beloved, let us go forth into the field." 1. A loving Church spontaneously puts herself upon widened service. She has a large heart towards her Lord, and longs to see Him reign over all mankind. She does not wait to hear again and again the Macedonian's cry, "Come over and help us," but she is prompt in mission enterprise. 2. The spouse, when she said, "Let us go forth into the field," knew that the proposal would please her Lord; for the nature of Christ is a large and loving one, and, therefore, He would bless the far-off ones. His is no narrow heart; His thoughts of love are far-reaching, and when the Church says, "Let us go forth into the field," truly her Lord is not backward to accept the invitation. 3. The spouse is evidently prepared for any discomfort that may come as the result of her labour. She must needs leave the fair palaces of her royal husband and lodge in rustic cottages. Poor lodgings there for Solomon's fair spouse; but what cares she? 4. The spouse is quite ready to continue in this uncomfortable service. She says, "I will lodge in the villages," there will she abide a while, not paying a flying visit, but stopping until the good work is done, for which her Lord and she went forth. Oh, get ye out, ye Christians, into the distant fields of labour. For our Master's sake, and in His strength and company, we must compass sea and land for His redeemed ones. Only, if any of you go, do not try to go alone. Stop until you breathe the prayer, "My Beloved, let us go." You go in vain when you go not with the Master, but when you have secured His company, then go and welcome, for you "shall doubtless come again rejoicing, bringing your sheaves with you." III. LOVE LABOURS ALSO AT HOME. Nearer the palace there were vineyards, and the spouse said, "Let us get up early to the vineyards." 1. Note, then, that the Church does her work at home as well as abroad. "When she loves her Lord she works with zeal, she gets up early. All men in Holy Scripture who loved God much rose early to worship Him. We never read of one saint engaged upon sacred service who rose late. Abraham rose early, David rose early, Job rose early, and so did they all. It is put here as the very type and symbol of an earnest, vigorous service of Christ. 2. Notice that God's people, when they are awake, first look well to the Church. "Let us see if the vine flourish." The Church is Christ's vine. Let us take stock of it. 3. Then the Church looks after the little ones. "Let us see if the vine flourish, whether the tender grape appear." No earnest Church forgets the children of her Sabbath school, and every other agency for the young will be sure to be well minded. 4. Then the Church also takes notice of all inquiries. "Let us see whether the pomegranates bud forth." If a Church be alive, there will be always many to observe where the first tear of repentance is glistening. IV. LOVE IN A CHURCH BRINGS FORTH ALL ITS STORES FOR THE BELOVED. The Church of God has in herself, through the rich love of her Husband, all manner of pleasant fruits. Some of these fruits are new, and oh, how full of savour they are. Our new converts, thank God for them, what a freshness and power there is about their love! Then there are old fruits, the experience of believers who are ripening for heaven, the well-developed confidence which has been tried in a thousand battles, and the faith which has braved a lifetime of difficulties. These old fruits—the deep love of the matron to Christ, the firm assurance of the veteran believer—there is a mellowness about them which the Lord delights in. All these choice things ought to be laid up. Every good thing in a Church is meant to be stored up, not to be despised and forgotten; and the point of all is that all in the Church ought to be laid up for our Beloved. (*Ibid.*) *Standing corn.*—I want you to go with me in thought and spirit while I try to reproduce the lessons taught me in the rustling language of the standing corn. "Let us go forth into the field." I. HERE ARE REVELATIONS FROM GOD. I feel myself to be in the presence of my Creator; and all the questionings of doubt, and all the vain philosophies of the sceptic, vanish like the morning

mist. My intellect, my conscience, my heart, my instinct if you will, prompts with remembrance of a present God. In this bright field of waving corn I see His power. What mighty forces are here at work ! I see His wisdom. What harmony in the whole operations, with never a collision, accident, or blunder ! What exact adaptation of means to an end ! I am led to say with Cowper, "There lives and works a soul in all things, and that soul is God." I see His goodness. Not only has its wise Contriver had in view its useful service, but He has clothed it with rare, refreshing beauty. I see His faithfulness. After the desolating flood, God declared that hence on for ever "summer and seedtime, autumn and harvest should not cease." Since then thousands of years have passed, stars have fallen, mountains have been engulfed, nations have perished, mighty changes have been wrought, but this rich, ripe field of standing corn in every waving stem declares the steadfast faithfulness of God.

II. LIFE COMES OUT OF DEATH. Out of death and decay come life and beauty ! Behold, I show you a mystery ! A few months ago this bright field of teeming life was a graveyard, and every individual grain died, and was buried here, in sure and certain hope of a glorious resurrection. In due time the trumpet of the spring winds announced the grand arising day, and here the dead-alive are standing arrayed in bright raiment and clad in a glory that excelleth. Standing here, the mystery of the resurrection, it is true, remains, but the impossibility dies out for ever ! The cemetery is the field of God. I hear the winds of heaven making music through the standing corn ; and this is the burden of their song, "Sown in dishonour and raised in glory !" **III. LIKE COMES FORTH FROM LIKE.** This heavy crop of wheat is all the outcome of scattered wheat, and no other kind of plant could possibly arise. As the tall corn rustles beneath the light autumnal wind I hear it say, "What a man soweth, that shall he also reap." **IV. MUCH COMES FROM LITTLE.** In a small compass of bag and basket was the seed-corn contained ! What spacious yard, capacious barn, and extensive granary will be required to hold the vast result ! Mark you, it would have been much the same had cockle, tares, or darnel been scattered on the soil. Little seeds bring great harvests, in some thirty-, in some sixty-, and in some a hundred-fold. "Despise not the day of small things." **V. FRUIT COMES FROM LABOUR.** This field of waving wheat is the farmer's fee for hard and willing work. You will find the truth hold good in your own daily labour, your handicraft, your profession, or your trade. You will find, too, that diligent effort will bring into your bosom rich sheaves of saving grace ; that hard labour in the Church or the school, Christ's great field of toil, will bring harvests of spiritual success. **VI. WITH PROGRESS COMES MATURITY.** As you look at this field now, remember what it was. From the day the life-germs broke through their decaying shells, advancement has been the order of the day, first the blade, then the ear, then the full corn in the ear, then the ripe and mellow grain ready for the garner. Little by little, higher and greener, stronger and riper, ever maturing, ever progressing, until the stage of perfection is reached at last. It is so in the moral world. Constant progression in evil fits the sinner at last for the hopeless destiny of the oven and the fire. Growth in grace brings maturity of Christian character. Faith and hope and love grow stronger, brighter as the years go by. The life grows purer and more like the great Exemplar as the harvest-time draws near, until the "shock of corn" is garnered, being made meet for the paradise of God. **VII. ADVANTAGE COMES FROM TRIAL.** As you look upon this sea of waving glory you remember that once it was as naked as the highway. Think of the bitter winds that swept it, the biting frosts, the drenching rains, the cutting ploughshare, the tearing harrow, the crushing roller, and all the severity of discipline required. Then came the hard fortunes of the tender plant, scorched and tossed, and battered by wind and sun, until it lay limp, flaccid, and yellow on the ungenial ground ; and yet all these adverse seemings had a part in producing the golden glory that waves in triumph now. It is just so in the Lord's spiritual and human field ; crosses, trials, reverses, and disappointments are all necessary preliminaries and preparatories to the joy of harvest. **VIII. DESTINY COMES FROM CHARACTER.** By and by the reapers will put in the sickle. What for ? In order that the prostrate crop may be trodden under foot or bundled for the fire ? No, no. It is wheat, precious and good, therefore its destiny is the barn, and even the gleanings shall be gathered and housed with care. The weeds, the thistles, these are noxious and must feel the fire. Their character is bad, and that decides their destiny. O men and women ! your character shall decide yours. **IX. FRUITION COMES FROM FAITH.** Many months ago, the farmer set to work here, but he could exercise but small control ; for aught he knew the land might have lost its fertility, or the seed might have lost its germinating power. Perhaps the sun might forbear

to shine, or the rain to fall. There might be no return for all his anxious care. But he had faith : faith in the soil, faith in the seed, faith in the sun, faith in the sure processes that he could neither control nor understand. He had faith and patience, too, and all this sterling gold is his reward. Learn the lesson : God's promise cannot fail. No good deed is lost. Incorruptible seed cannot die. X. **THE SEEN COMES FROM THE UNSEEN.** The buried corn was hidden. What was going on beneath the surface was hidden from human ear and eye. What is going on ? You do not know. What kind of seed is it ? You cannot tell. How much will there be from it ? You cannot possibly predict. It is all secret, hidden—as secret, my friend, as the thoughts of your heart, as the secret sins of your life, as the germ or bias of evil in your nature. It is as secret, Christian, as the depth of your loyalty and love, the private deeds of godly sacrifice, brave endurance, pious beneficence, closet prayers. But wait a while ; the secret of the soil is revealed ; the day hath declared it : and this fair field is the answer for all the world to read. “ There is nothing hidden that shall not be known.” XI. **GAIN COMES FROM OPPORTUNITY.** If the farmer had let the ploughing season pass, if he had permitted the sowing season to slip by, no such glorious sight as this golden treasure would have gladdened his eye. No ; he caught the season while it lasted, he seized the opportunity while he had it. Last winter was the parent of this success ; last spring was the foster-mother of this field of corn. He turned to use the precious present ; he put out to usury the golden now ; and this is the usury that has come of it, this golden guerdon, this wealth of grain. Don't you hear every bended head, as the bright field shimmers in the wind, saying “ What thine hand findeth to do, do it with thy might, etc.” ? XII. **ALL COMES FROM GOD.** That's the crowning lesson. His the soil, the seed, the sower, the sun, the success. All are the absolute gift of His gracious providence and tender love. (*J. J. Wray.*)

CHAPTER VIII.

VER. 5. Who is this that cometh up from the wilderness, leaning upon her Beloved ?—*The state and attitude of a believer* :—I. **THE BELIEVER'S SPIRITUAL STATE.** “ Who is this that cometh up from the wilderness ? ” From this desolate wilderness, the Church, and by consequence every believer, is represented as departing. The deliverance is not complete, the departure is not entire, while the follower of Christ is in the present state of being. II. **THE ATTITUDE OF A BELIEVER'S SOUL.** 1. Dependence on Christ. By faith, believers lean upon the person of their glorious Redeemer for acceptance with God ; upon His power for help ; upon His love for joy ; upon His faithfulness for hope. 2. Delighted affection. 3. Entire devotedness. (*R. P. Buddicom, M.A.*) *The Christian renouncing the world* :—I. **THE REPRESENTATION HERE GIVEN OF THE WORLD** ; it is called a wilderness. By the world, I mean the things of the world, regarded as sources of happiness and satisfaction. It is totally insufficient for the supply of true and lasting happiness. II. **THE CONDUCT OF EVERY TRUE CHRISTIAN WITH RESPECT TO THE WORLD.** 1. The true Christian no longer seeks his chief happiness from worldly things. 2. The real Christian uses great moderation, in his enjoyment even of lawful things. He does not venture to the edge of forbidden ground, but keeps at a cautious distance. He allows himself no gratification which is of a doubtful character. And even when he has reduced his cares and his pleasures to a much smaller compass than his worldly neighbours would think needful, he still sets a guard over his heart, lest it should be betrayed into too great an attachment to the things which remain. 3. The real Christian longs for his final translation to a better world. III. **THE SECRET SOURCE AND SPRING OF THE CHRISTIAN'S CONDUCT.** 1. He is influenced to do this by the Love of Christ. 2. He is encouraged by the promises of Christ. 3. He is strengthened by the grace of Christ. (*J. Jowett, M.A.*) *True believers, espoused to Christ, turning their back on the world, and walking heavenward with Him, are a mystery, a strange sight in the world* :—I. I SHALL PREMISE SOME THINGS FOR RIGHT UNDERSTANDING THE DOCTRINE. Sin turned this world into an enemy's country in respect of heaven, and so into a wilderness. This her going away up from the wilderness with her espoused Husband, is a going away in heart and affections ; it is the soul's motion heavenwards in this life, the last step of which is made at death. Christ's bride

at her waygoing, and ongoing with Him thus, is a mystery, a strange sight in the world. II. I SHALL SHOW IN WHAT RESPECTS BELIEVERS ARE A MYSTERY, A STRANGE SIGHT IN THE WORLD; the power of godliness appearing in their walk at this rate, so that it is said of them, "Who is this?" There is something very amiable about them, as we are told of the primitive Christians (Acts ii. 46, 47), that "they continuing daily with one accord in the temple," etc. They are like foreigners in a country, apt to become a gazing-stock, a wonder, about which the natives cannot satisfy themselves. III. I SHALL GIVE THE REASONS OF THE POINT, THAT TRUE BELIEVERS ARE A MYSTERY, A STRANGE SIGHT IN THE WORLD.

1. Because they are so unlike the world, they are like speckled birds among the rest (1 Pet. iv. 4).
2. Because they are so unlike themselves in former times.
3. Because they are very rare in the world; they are but here and there one for a marvel (Jer. iii. 14).

USE I. Of information. 1. Serious souls need not think it strange, if they become a wonder to many (Ps. lxxi. 7). 2. The world is no idle spectator of those who have given themselves to Christ, and profess to follow Him. 3. Those who shall still walk after the course of the world, continue sons of earth, not making away heavenward in the tenor of their life and conversation, are not espoused to Christ; though they have given Him the hand, they have not given Him the heart.

USE II. Of exhortation. O Christians, communicants, walk so as the world may bear witness, that ye are going up out of the wilderness, leaning on your Beloved; that your faces and hearts are heavenward; that ye have set off from them, and are no more theirs. And further, if ye be clothed with humility and with humanity, meek, ruling your own spirit, doing good to all, even to those that wrong you; and are patient under trouble, and living by faith. (*T. Boston, D.D.*) *The life of believers as espoused to Christ, is a going up from the wilderness of this world, with Him, to His Father's house in the heavenly Canaan.*—I. I SHALL TAKE NOTICE OF SOME THINGS SUPPOSED IN THIS DOCTRINE.

1. As soon as a soul is espoused to Christ, it is loosed from the world.
2. The soul espoused to Christ, being loosed from the world, is set in motion heavenwards, away from the world (Ps. lxxxiv. 5-7).
3. The believer's journeying heavenwards is attended with many difficulties. It is an up-going, and that through a wilderness.
4. The believer's passage to heaven is also a work of time. It is not a leaping out of the wilderness into Canaan, but a going up out of it by degrees. It cost Israel long forty years in the wilderness.
5. Christ is with the believer in the journey. It is a weary land they have to go through, but they are not alone in it (Cant. iv. 8).
6. The end of this journey is a most comfortable one (John xiv. 2).

II. I SHALL UNFOLD THE BELIEVER'S LIFE, AS A GOING UP FROM THE WILDERNESS OF THIS WORLD, TYPIFIED BY THE ISRAELITES GOING UP FROM THE WILDERNESS TO CANAAN.

1. I shall show you how believers are brought unto the wilderness. The world is not a wilderness to them and in their esteem, till they be brought out of the Egyptian bondage of their natural state. Then, and not till then, they enter into their wilderness-state.
2. I shall show how the believer is set into the wilderness. When once converting grace has made a fair separation betwixt the sinner and the world, presently he enters into a wilderness-state.

- (1) He cares not for the world as he was wont (Gal. vi. 14).
- (2) The world cares not for him as before (Gal. vi. 14).
- (3) Then it becomes, by God's appointment, the place of trial for him, as the wilderness was to the Israelites (Deut. viii. 2).
- (4) It is no more his home or his rest; but the place of his pilgrimage, the place he must travel through in his way home to his eternal rest (Heb. xi. 13).

3. I shall show how the believer is going up from the wilderness.

- (1) By the course of nature, which is swift as a post, a ship, and as an eagle's flight.
- (2) In the habitual bent of his heart and affections. Believers' hearts are turned off the world, and set on things above.
- (3) In progressive sanctification (Prov. iv. 18).
- (4) In obtaining victory over the world (1 John v. 4).
4. The hardships and inconveniencies of the wilderness-road, which the believer must lay his account with, while he goes up from the wilderness. It is a difficult way through the wilderness. The road the travellers must go will try their patience, their strength, etc.
5. I now come to show the advantages and conveniencies of the wilderness-road. The people of God, while in the wilderness-world, have as much allowed them from heaven as may balance the hardships of the wilderness.

- (1) The pillar of cloud to go before them in the wilderness.
- (2) They have provision allowed them from heaven in the waste wilderness. The King's country affords them provision for their journey.
- (3) Sometimes they are allowed a song in the weary land, for their comfort and recreation by the way (Ps. cxix. 54).
- (4) The Lord is their banner in the wilderness, and so they may be sure of victory, they shall be conquerors in the war

(Exod. xvii. 15). (5) There is healing in the wilderness for them, for the wounds got there. (6) We must not forget the tabernacle in the wilderness, which was the comfort of the godly Israelites there. The tabernacle of Gospel-ordinances is the great comfort of the travellers towards Zion. USE I. Of information. 1. The people of God need not be surprised, that they meet with many hardships and trials in the world, and that it is a strange world to them. While they are in it, they are in a wilderness. How, then, can they expect other than a wilderness-life? 2. They have good reason to bear all the hardships of their wilderness-lot patiently, and with Christian fortitude and cheerfulness. And that (1) Because they will not last, they will be over ere long; they are going up from the wilderness. (2) Because the heavenly Canaan which the wilderness-road leads to, will make amends for all. (3) Their lot is a wise mixture, take it at the worst. 3. They are not Israelites indeed, nor espoused to Christ, who are not going up from this world as a wilderness, in heart and affection, in life and conversation. USE II. Of caution. While ye are in the wilderness, beware of wilderness sins and snares. 1. Unbelief (Ps. lxxviii. 22). 2. Murmuring (1 Cor. x. 10). 3. Lusting (1 Cor. x. 6). 4. Looking back to Egypt (Num. xiv. 4). 5. Fawning and flattering enemies (Num. xxv. 17, 18). 6. The mixed multitude (Exod. xii. 38). USE III. Of exhortation. 1. Ye who profess to be espoused to Christ, evidence the reality of it by your going up from the wilderness-world with Him in heart and affection, in the progress of sanctification, and contempt of the world, holding off from the ways of it. 2. Strangers to Christ, be espoused to Him, that ye may go up with Him from this wilderness-world, to His Father's house in the heavenly Canaan; believe that Christ is offered in an everlasting marriage-covenant to you. Embrace ye and accept, and so close with Him as your Head and Husband, for time and eternity. (*Ibid.*) *The believer's journey from the wilderness of this world to the heavenly Canaan:—*

I. THE CHARACTER OF A SOUL TRULY ESPOUSED TO CHRIST. He is one that is aye breathing to more and more nearness to the Lord, and a more intimate fellowship and acquaintance with Him. The soul espoused to Christ is one who is bending his course heavenwards, and has his back turned upon this world as a howling wilderness. He is one whose life in this world is a life of faith and dependence on Christ.

II. THE PLACE OF THE PRESENT RESIDENCE OF THE SPOUSE OF CHRIST; it is a wilderness, a very unheartsome lodging. III. THE COURSE THAT THE SPOUSE IS TAKING, OR THE EARTH TOWARD WHICH SHE IS BENDING WHILE IN THE WILDERNESS; she is not going down, but coming up from the wilderness. And this, I conceive, may imply these things following. 1. That believers, or those who have really taken Christ by the hand, have turned their back on the ways of sin, which "lead down to the chambers of death." 2. That believers are pilgrims on the earth, and that this world is not their home. 3. A dissatisfaction with, and a disesteem of, this world, and all things in it; and therefore she has her back turned upon it, and her face toward a better earth. 4. That though she could find no rest nor quiet here-away, yet she expected a quiet rest on the other side, or beyond the wilderness. 5. This coming up from the wilderness implies motion, and progress in her motion heavenwards. 6. This phrase of coming up from the wilderness implies, that religion is an up-the-hill work and way; for the spouse's way here is represented under the notion of an ascent. IV. THE SPOUSE'S POSTURE; she comes up leaning on her Beloved. It is the life of faith upon the Son of God that is here intended. And this expression of faith implies these particulars following. 1. The spouse's weakness and inability in herself to grapple with the difficulties of her way through the wilderness; that she could never surmount them by the strength of natural, or yet of any created grace in her. 2. That however weak and insulcient she was in herself, yet there was almighty strength in her Husband and Head, on whom she leaned. 3. A blessed knowledge or acquaintance with the Lord Jesus. 4. The expression implies, not only knowledge, but intimacy and familiarity; for we use to lean upon them with whom we are intimately acquainted. 5. This leaning posture implies Christ's nearness to the spouse; for we cannot well lean upon a person that is at a distance. 6. It implies a trusting, resting, or recumbency of her soul upon him, under all her weights and burdens, which she rolls over on Christ (Ps. lv. 22: Matt. xi. 28; Ps. xxxvii. 7). 7. It implies, that there is something in Christ that the hand or arm of faith stays and leans upon, as we come up from the wilderness. Sometimes faith stays itself on the person of Christ, as He is "Emmanuel, God with us"; sometimes upon His love, which passeth knowledge (Ps. xxxvi. 7). Sometimes it stays itself upon His name; for "they that know His name will put their trust in Him": sometimes on His mission, as the Sent of God, "the great Apostle of our

profession"; it takes Him up as God's legate, His ambassador-extraordinary, sent to seek and to save that which was lost. It leans upon His general office as Mediator, for peace and reconciliation with God; upon His prophetic office, for instruction and illumination in the knowledge of the mysteries of the kingdom; upon His priestly office, for reconciliation and acceptance; upon His regal or kingly office, for sanctification and deliverance from the power of sin and Satan. (*E. Erskine.*)

Leaning upon her Beloved.—*Leaning on our Beloved.*—In the verses which precede my text, the spouse had been particularly anxious that her communion with her Lord might not be disturbed. Her language is intensely earnest, "I charge you, O daughters of Jerusalem, that ye stir not up, nor awake my Love, until He please." She valued much the fellowship with which her Beloved solaced her; she was jealously alarmed lest she should endanger the continuance of it; lest any sin on her part or on the part of her companions should cause the Beloved to withdraw Himself in anger. Now it is a very striking fact that immediately after we read a verse so full of solicitous care concerning the maintenance of communion, we immediately fall upon another verse in which the upward progress of that selfsame spouse is the theme of admiration; she who would not have her Beloved disturbed is the selfsame bride who cometh up from the wilderness, leaning herself upon Him; from which it is clear that there is a most intimate connection between communion with Christ and progress in grace, and therefore the more careful we are to maintain fellowship with our Lord, the more successful shall we be in going from strength to strength in all those holy graces which are landmarks on the road to glory.

I. We notice THE HEAVENLY PILGRIM AND HER DEAR COMPANION. "Who is that cometh up from the wilderness, leaning upon her Beloved?" Every soul that journeys towards heaven has Christ for its associate. Jesus suffers no pilgrim to the New Jerusalem to travel unattended. He is with us in sympathy. He has trodden every step of the way before us; whatever our temptations, He has been so tempted; whatever our afflictions, He has been so afflicted. He is touched with the feeling of our infirmities, having been tempted in all points like as we are. Nor is Jesus near us in sympathy alone, He is with us to render practical assistance. When we least perceive Him, He is often closest to us. When the howling tempest drowns His voice, and the darkness of the night hides His person, still He is there, and we need not be afraid. Courage, then, ye wayfarers who traverse the vale of tears; you come up from the wilderness in dear company, for One like unto the Son of God is at your side. Note the title that is given to the Companion of the spouse. "Her Beloved." Indeed, He of whom the Song here speaks is beloved above all others. He was the Beloved of His Father or ever the earth was; He was declared to be the Lord's Beloved, in the waters of Jordan, and at other times, when out of the excellent glory there came the voice, "This is My beloved Son in whom I am well pleased." Beloved of His Father now, our Jesus sits for ever glorious at God's right hand. Jesus is the Beloved of every angel, and of all the bright seraphic spirits that crowd around the throne of His august majesty, casting their crowns before His feet, and lifting up their ceaseless hymns. He is the Beloved of every being of pure heart and holy mind.

II. We have said that the pilgrim has a dear Companion, but that much of the blessedness of the text lies in HER POSTURE TOWARDS HIM. "Who is this that cometh up from the wilderness leaning upon her Beloved?" Her posture, then, is that of "leaning." His relation to her is that of a Divine supporter. What does this leaning mean? Why, first of all, there can be no leaning on another unless we believe in that other's presence and nearness. A man does not lean on a staff which is not in his hand, nor on a friend of whose presence he is not aware. Christ Jesus is with thee; though thou hearest not His voice, and seest not His face, He is with thee. Try to grasp that truth, and to realize it clearly, for thou wilt never lean until thou dost. Leaning also implies nearness. We cannot lean on that which is far off and unapproachable. Now, it is a delightful help to us in believing repose if we cannot understand that Christ is not only with us, but to an intense degree near us. A sacred unity exists between thee and Him, so that thou dost drink of His cup, and art baptized with His baptism, and in all thy sorrows and thine afflictions He Himself doth take His share. These two things being attended unto, leaning now becomes easy. To lean implies the throwing of one's weight from oneself on to another, and this is the Christian's life. The leaning place of a Christian is, first of all, Christ's person. We depend upon the Lord Jesus as God and as man. As God, He must be able to perform every promise, and to achieve every covenant engagement. We lean upon that Divinity which bears up the pillows of the universe. Our dependence is upon the Almighty God,

incarnate in human form, by whom all things were created, and by whom all things consist. We lean also upon Christ as man; we depend upon His generous human sympathies. Of a woman born, He is partaker of our flesh; He enters into our sicknesses and infirmities with a pitiful compassion, which He could not have felt if He had not been the Son of man. We depend upon the love of His humanity as well as upon the potency of His deity. We lean upon our Beloved as God and man. We lean upon Christ Himself in all His offices. We lean upon Him as Priest; we expect our offerings, and our praises, and our prayers to be received, because they are presented through Him. Our leaning for acceptance is on Him. We lean upon Him as our Prophet. We do not profess to know or to be able to discover truth of ourselves, but we sit at His feet, and what He teaches that we receive as certainty. We lean upon Him as our King. He shall fight our battles for us, and manage all the affairs of our heavenly citizenship. We have no hope of victory but in the strength of Him who is the Son of David and the King of kings. We lean upon Christ in all His attributes. Sometimes it is His wisdom—in our dilemmas He directs us; at other times it is His faithfulness—in our strong temptations He abides the same. At one time His power gleams out like a golden pillar, and we rest on it, and at another moment his tenderness becomes conspicuous, and we lean on that. There is not a trait of His character, there is not a mark of His person, whether human or divine, but what we feel it safe to lean upon, because He is as a whole Christ, perfection's own self, lovely and excellent beyond all description. We lean our entire weight upon HIM, not on His arm; not on any part of His person, but upon Himself do we depend. III. HER REASONS FOR THUS LEANING. She leaned on her Beloved because she was weak. Strength will not lean, conscious strength scorns dependence. My soul, dost thou know anything of thy weakness? It is a sorrowful lesson to learn; but oh! it is a blessed and profitable lesson, which not only must be learned, but which it were well for thee to pray to learn more and more, for there is no leaning upon Christ except in proportion as you feel you must. She leaned, again, on her Beloved, because the way was long. She had been going through the wilderness. It was a long journey, and she began to flag, and therefore she leaned; and the way is long with us, we have been converted to God now some of us these twenty years, others these forty, and there are some who have known the Lord more than sixty years, and this is a long time in which to be tempted and tried, for sin is mighty and flesh is weak. She leaned, again, because the road was perilous. Did you notice, she came up from the wilderness? The wilderness is not at all a safe place for a pilgrim. Here it is that the lion prowls, and the howl of the wolf is heard, but she leaned on her Beloved, and she was safe. If the sheep fears the wolf, he had better keep close to the shepherd, for then the shepherd's rod and staff will drive the wolf away. There is no safety for us except in close communion with Christ. Again, she leaned on the Beloved because her route was ascending. Did you notice it? "Coming up." The Christian's way is up—never content with past attainments, but up; not satisfied with graces to which he has reached, but up. If we are to go up, we must lean. Christ is higher than we are; if we lean, we shall rise the more readily to His elevation. He comes down to us that we, leaning upon Him, may go up to Him. He is made of God unto you sanctification as well as redemption. Again the spouse leaned on her Beloved because her walk was daily separating her more and more from the whole host of her other companions. The Church is in the wilderness, but this traveller was coming up from the wilderness. She was getting away from the band marching through the desert, getting more and more alone. It is so, and you will find it so; the nearer you get to Christ, the more lonely you must necessarily be in certain respects. The spouse leaned upon her Beloved because she felt sure that He was strong enough to bear her weight. He upon whom she leaned was no other than God over all blessed for ever, who cannot fail, nor be discouraged. She leaned yet again, because He was her Beloved. She would have felt it unwise to lean if He were not mighty; she would have been afraid to lean if He had not been dear to her. So it is, the more you love the more you trust, and the more you trust the more you love. IV. THE PERSON AND THE PEDIGREE of her who leaned upon her Beloved. The text says, "Who is this?" What made them inquire, "Who is this?" It was because they were so astonished to see her looking so happy and so little wearied. Nothing amazes worldlings more than genuine Christian joy. Who, then, is this that leans on her Beloved? Her name was once called "outcast," whom no man seeketh after, but according to this old book her name is now Hephzibah, for the Lord delighteth in her. The name of the soul that trusts in God, and finds peace in so doing, was by nature a name of

shame and sin. We were afar off from God even as others; and if any soul is brought to trust in Christ, it is not from any natural goodness in it, or any innate propensity towards such trusting; it is because grace has wrought a wondrous transformation, and God the Holy Ghost has made those who were not a people to be called the people of God. Good news this for any of you who feel your guilt this morning. (C. H. Spurgeon.)

Vers. 6, 7. **Set me as a seal upon Thine heart, as a seal upon Thine arm.**—*The Shulamite's choice prayer*:—This is the prayer of one who hath the present enjoyment of fellowship with Christ, but being apprehensive lest this communion should be interrupted, she avails herself of the opportunity now afforded her to plead for a something which shall be as the abiding token of a covenant between her and her Beloved, when His visible presence shall be withdrawn. I. THE PRAYER, you will notice, is twofold, although it is so really and essentially one—"Set me as a seal upon Thine heart, as a seal upon Thine arm." Oh! Lord, let me know that my name is engraven on Thy heart; not only let it be there, but let me know it. Write my name not only in Thy heart, but may it be as a signet on the heart that I may see it. II. The spouse argues with her Lord thus. It is my advantage that Thou shouldst thus write my name upon Thine hand and heart, for I know this concerning Thy love, that it is strong; that it is firm; that it has a wondrous intensity; and that it has a sure and unquenchable eternity. With these FOUR PLEAS she backeth up her suit. 1. She pleadeth that He would show her His love, because of the strength of it. "For love is strong as death." Death is but weakness itself when compared with the love of Christ. What a sweet reason why I should have a share in it! What a blessed argument for me to use before the throne of God! Lord, if Thy love be so strong, and my heart be so hard, and myself so powerless to break it, oh! let me know Thy love, that it may overcome me, that it may enchain me with its sure but soft fetters, and that I may be Thy willing captive evermore. 2. Let us now turn to the second plea—"Jealousy is cruel as the grave." The idea is just this, that the love of Christ in the form of jealousy is as hard and as sternly relentless as is the grave and hell. Now hell never looses one of its bond-slaves. Once let the iron gate be shut upon the soul and there is no escape. Well, but such is the love of Christ. If just now we had to speak of its strength, we have now to speak of its tenacity, its hardness, its attachment to those whom it has chosen. You may sooner unlock Hades and let loose the spirits that are in prison there than ye could ever snatch one from the right hand of Christ. Ye may sooner rob death of its prey than Jesus of His purchased ones. 3. If the love of Christ is strong as death; if it be such that it can never be moved from its object, yet the question arises, may not the love itself die out? Even should it abide the same in its purpose, yet may not its intensity be diminished? "No," says the Shulamite, "it is an attribute of Christ's love that 'the coals thereof are coals of fire which hath a most vehement flame.'" More forcible is the language of the original—"The coals thereof are the coals of God,"—a Hebrew idiom to express the most glowing of all flames—"the coals of God!" as though it were no earthly flame, but something far superior to the most vehement affection among men. It is not like fire merely, but like coals of fire, always having that within itself which supports it. Why did Christ love the spouse? What lit the fire at first? He kindled it Himself. There was no reason whatever why Christ should love any of us, except the love of His own bowels. And what is the fuel that feeds the fire? Your works and mine? No, brethren, no, no, a thousand times no; all the fuel comes from the same place; it is all from His bowels. Well, then, may we understand that it never shall grow less, but always be as a vehement flame. 4. We shall now turn to the last argument of this choice prayer, which is equally precious. It is the unquenchable eternity of this love. There is that in its very essence which defies any opposite quality to extinguish it. The argument seems to me to run thus—"Yes, but if Christ's love do not die out of itself—if it has such intensity that it never would of itself fail, yet may not you and I put it out?" No, says the text, "Many waters cannot quench love, neither can the floods drown it." (C. H. Spurgeon.)

Ver. 7. **If a man would give all the substance of his house for love, it would utterly be condemned.**—*Unpurchasable love*:—That is a general truth, applying to all forms of real love; you cannot purchase love. Who, for instance, could purchase a mother's love? Take, again, even the love of friends; I only instance that just

to show how true our text is in relation to all forms of love. Damon loved Pythias ; the two friends were so bound together that their names became household words, and their conduct towards one another grew into a proverb. Yet Damon never purchased the heart of Pythias, neither did Pythias think to pay a yearly stipend for the love of Damon. No ; if a man should give all the substance of his house even for human love, for the common love that exists between man and man, it would utterly be contemned. Rest assured that this is pre-eminently true when we get into higher regions, when we come to think of the love of Jesus, and when we think of that love which springs up in the human breast towards Jesus when the Spirit of God has renewed the heart and shed abroad the love of God within the soul. If a man should offer to give all the substance of his house for either of these forms of love, it would utterly be contemned. I. We will begin at the highest manifestation of love, and commune together upon it. So let me say, first, that **THE LOVE OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST IS ALTOGETHER UNPURCHASABLE.** This fact will be clear to us if we give it a moment's careful thought. It must be quite impossible to purchase the love of Christ, because it is inconceivable that He ever could be mercenary. The pure stream of His love leaps like the crystal rill, and there is no sediment that can be found in it ; it is altogether unmixed love to us. Besides, there is another point that renders this idea of purchasing Christ's love as impossible as the first thought shows it to be incredible ; for all things are already Christ's. Therefore, what can be given to Him wherewith His love could be purchased ? Let us also note that, if Christ's love could be won by us by something we could bring to Him or do for Him, it would suppose that there was something of ours that was of equal merit and of equal value with His love, or, at any rate, something which He was willing to accept as bearing some proportion to His love. But, indeed, there is nothing of the sort. But what a blessing it is that we have the love of Christ, though we could not purchase it ! The Son of God hath loved us ; He has bestowed upon us what He never would have sold us ; and He has given to us freely, "without money and without price." The greatest wonder to me is that this unpurchasable love, this unending love is mine ; and you can always say, each one of you, if you have been regenerated, "This love is mine ; the Lord Jesus Christ loves me with a love I never could have purchased." Peradventure, some one is saying just now, "I wish I could say that." Do you really wish it ? Then, let the text serve to guide you as to the way by which you may yet know Christ's love to you. Do not try to purchase it, abandon that idea at once. "But surely, surely we may do something. We will give up this vice, we will renounce that bad habit, we will be strict in our religiousness, we will be attentive to all moral duties." So you should ; but when you have done all that, do you think you have done enough to win His love ? Is the servant who has only done what he ought to have done entitled to the love of his master's heart because of that ? Thou shalt not win Christ's love so ; if thou hast His love shed abroad in thy heart, thou hast infinitely more than thou hast ever earned. II. **IN OUR CASE, NOTHING CAN EVER SERVE AS A SUBSTITUTE FOR LOVE.** If Christ has loved us, or if we are desirous of realizing that He has done so, the one thing needful and essential is that we have true love to Him. God's demand of each one who professes to be His child is, "My son, give me thine heart." Love He must have ; this is His lawful demand. His people delight to render it ; if thou dost not, then thou art none of His. III. **THE SAINTS' LOVE IS NOT PURCHASED BY CHRIST'S GIFTS.** The love of saints to their Lord is not given to Christ because of His gifts to them. We love our Lord, and we love Him all the more because of the many gifts He bestows upon us ; but His gifts do not win our love. Oh, it is "Jesus Christ Himself" who wins the love of our hearts ! If He had not given us Himself, we should never have given to Him ourselves. All else that may be supposed to be of the substance of His house would not have won His people's hearts, until at last they learnt this truth, and the Spirit of God made them feel the force of it, "He loved me, and gave Himself for me." "My beloved is mine, and I am His," is now one of the sweetest stanzas in love's canticle. The spouse does not say, "His crown is mine, His throne is mine, His breastplate is mine, His crook is mine" ; she delights in everything that Christ has as a King, and a Priest, and a Shepherd ; but, above all else, that which wins and charms her heart is this, "He Himself is mine, and I am His." But I meant mainly to say, under this head, that there are some of Christ's gifts that do not win our hearts, that is to say, our hearts do not depend upon them. And they are, first, His temporal gifts. I am very thankful, and I trust that all God's people are also, for health and strength. I have lost

these sometimes, but I did not love my Lord any the less then ; neither do I love Christ this day because I am free from pain. If I were not free from pain, I would still love Him. I meant also to say that we do not love Christ because of His temporary indulgence of us in spiritual things. You know our Saviour very frequently favours us with manifestations of His presence. We are overjoyed when He comes very near to us, and permits us to put our fingers into the prints of the nails. He takes all the clouds out of our sky, and gives us the bright shining of the sun ; or He opens the lattices, and shows us Himself in a way only second to that in which we shall see Him when we behold Him face to face. And oh, how we love Him then ! But, thank God, when He draws the lattice back again, and hides His face, we do not leave off loving Him because of that. Our love to our Lord does not depend upon the weather. Even if we should be called to pass through terrible trials and adversities, and should have to walk a long time in clouds and darkness, yet still would we love Him and rejoice in Him. IV. THE LOVE OF SAINTS CANNOT BE BOUGHT OFF FROM CHRIST AT ANY PRICE. The saints sell Christ ? No, they are too much like their Master to do that. You recollect how Satan took their Master to the top of a high mountain, and showed Him all the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them, and said, "All these things will I give Thee, if Thou wilt fall down and worship me." Wicked thief ! It was not his to give ; yet he tempted Christ in that way, but Jesus answered, "Get thee hence, Satan : for it is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and Him only shalt thou serve." If any of Christ's followers are tempted in the same fashion, let them give the same reply. All the substance of the devil's house could not win the love of that man who has set his affection on Jesus. (*Ibid.*)

Ver. 12. **My vineyard, which is Mine, is before Me: thou, O Solomon, must have a thousand, and those that keep the fruit thereof two hundred.**—*Christ's love for His vineyard* :—You are aware that these Canticles are responsive songs,—that one sentence is uttered by Solomon, and the next by Solyma, his spouse. We believe that, in this "Song of Songs, which is Solomon's," we also hear Christ speaking to His Church, His bride, and the Church responding to His words of love in tones which His love has suggested to her. The fact that it is a responsive song sometimes renders it the more difficult to understand, because it is not easy, in every case, to discover whether it is Solomon or Solyma—Christ or His Church—that is speaking. The first sentence in our text is just of that character ; it may be Christ who says, "My vineyard, which is Mine, is before Me ;" or it may be His Church which is saying, "My vineyard, which is mine, is before me." With regard to the latter part of the verse, we have no difficulty, for we can see, upon the very face of it, that it is addressed by the spouse, the bride, to her Divine Bridegroom, to whom she says, "Thou, O Solomon, must have a thousand." I. Let us look at the first sentence : "My vineyard, which is Mine, is before Me." We have no difficulty in understanding that this vineyard is Christ's Church. The Master here, then, claims a special property in His Church. Twice does He mention that claim : "My vineyard, which is Mine," as if He meant to assert His rights, and to maintain them against all comers ; being ready to defend them in Heaven's High Court of Chancery, or before all the hosts of His enemies who might seek to snatch His inheritance from Him. "Whatever is not Mine," saith the Divine Lover, "My Church is. She is so mine that, if I gave up Lebanon, if I should renounce Bashan, and give up all the rest of My possessions, I must retain Zion, My vineyard, My best-beloved." First, He claims the Church as His own by His Father's gift. You know that the Church is the property of all the three Persons of the holy and blessed Trinity. She is the Father's property by election ; she is the Son's property by donation, passing from the hand of the Father to that of the Mediator ; and, then, the Church is the Spirit's by His indwelling and inhabitation ; so that all three of the Divine Persons have a right to the Church for some special office which they exercise towards her. So Christ claims His Church as His Father's gift, a love-token, a reward, a sign of the Father's favour and regard towards Him. Next, Christ's Church is His by purchase. More than this, the Church is Christ's by one other tie, which, perhaps, makes it dearer still to Him. She is His bride, His spouse. But we must pass on to notice that, in the first sentence of our text, we are not only told about Christ's special right to His Church, but also about His special care and observation of her : "My vineyard, which is Mine, is before Me." The Church is "before" Christ in the sense that He so loves her that He never has

her out of His presence. The vineyard is so dear to the Husbandman that He never leaves it. His Church may be willing to endure His absence for a while, but He loves her so much that He cannot bear to be away from her. He will always pour upon her the beams of His love, and ever fix upon her the affection of His whole heart. The expression, "My vineyard, which is Mine, is before Me," may also mean that Jesus is always caring for it, as well as always loving it. There is also, in this expression, not only the sense of love and care, but also of knowledge: "My vineyard, which is Mine, is before Me." Christ knows every vine in the vineyard, and He knows all the fruit that is on each vine, and how much there was last year, and how much there will be in years to come. II. Now, regard this first sentence of our text as **THE LANGUAGE OF THE CHURCH ITSELF**. According to the eleventh verse, "Solomon had a vineyard at Baal-hamon; he let out the vineyard unto keepers; every one for the fruit thereof was to bring a thousand pieces of silver." So, dear brethren, every one of us whom the Lord has brought to Himself has a part of His vineyard to keep for Him. We leave the work of saving our souls in higher Hands than our own; but after our souls are saved, then we have a charge to keep, and that charge is, to publish the name and fame of Jesus to the utmost of our power, to seek to bring others under the sound of the Gospel, and to tell them what they must do to be saved. III. I will now turn to the second part of our text, which is **THE LANGUAGE OF THE CHURCH TO HER GREAT PROPRIETOR AND LORD**: "Thou, O Solomon, must have a thousand"—"must have a thousand." Whatever others have, our Lord must have Solomon's portion; "and those that keep the fruit thereof two hundred." So, then, in the first place, the fruit of the vineyard belongs to Christ; but, in the second place, both Christ and His Church agree to reward the keepers of the vineyard, and to let them have their two hundred. First, then, all the fruit of the vineyard belongs to Christ, and He must have it. Dwell on that word "must," and let each one of you feel the blessed necessity. The ministry must still be powerful, the prayer-meetings must continue to be full of faith and fervour, the members must keep on striving together in love for the extension of Christ's kingdom, His kingdom must come, and His will must be done on earth as it is heaven. We will not put in an "if" or a "perhaps"; it *must* be so and we will not be satisfied unless it is. "Thou, O Solomon, must have a thousand." Now I will conclude with a few remarks upon the last words of the text: "and those that keep the fruit thereof two hundred," which means that the keepers of the vineyard are to receive a reward. Christ's ministers are to receive the love, and regard, and esteem of His people for His sake. Our Master is a blessed Paymaster, for He pays us while we are doing His work, in the work itself; He pays us when the work is done, and then He says that He has only begun to pay us; for, when the whole of our work here is over, we shall enter into His joy, and receive the fulness of our reward. (*Ibid.*)

Ver. 13. Thou that dwellest in the gardens, the companions hearken to thy voice: cause Me to hear it.—*The Bridegroom's parting word.*—The Song is almost ended: the bride and Bridegroom have come to their last stanzas, and they are about to part for a while. They utter their adieux, and the Bridegroom says to his beloved, "Thou that dwellest in the gardens, the companions hearken to thy voice: cause Me to hear it." In other words—when I am far away from thee, fill thou this garden with My Name, and let thy heart commune with Me. She promptly replies, and it is her last word till He cometh, "Make haste, my Beloved, and be Thou like to a roe or to a young hart upon the mountains of spices." These farewell words of the Well-beloved are very precious to His chosen bride. Last words are always noticed: the last words of those who loved us dearly are much valued; the last words of one who loved us to the death are worthy of a deathless memory. I. We notice, first of all, **AN APPOINTED RESIDENCE**. The Bridegroom, speaking of His bride, says, "Thou that dwellest in the gardens." This title is given to believers here on earth, first, by way of distinction—distinction from the Lord Himself. He whom we love dwelleth in the ivory palaces, wherein they make Him glad: He has gone up into His Father's throne, and has left these gardens down below. He Himself is an inhabitant of the palaces, for there He best accomplishes the eternal purposes of love; but His Church is the inhabitress of the gardens, for there she best fulfils the decrees of the Most High. Here she must abide a while until all the will of the Lord shall be accomplished in her and by her, and then she also shall be taken up, and shall dwell with her Lord above. The title is given by way of distinction, and marks the difference between her condition and that of her Lord. Next, it is given by way of enjoyment. She dwells in the gardens, which are places of delight.

Your portion is with the Lord's saints, yea, with Himself; and what can be a better portion? Is it not as the garden of the Lord? You dwell where the great Husbandman spends His care upon you and takes a pleasure in you. You dwell where the infinite skill and tenderness and wisdom of God manifest themselves in the training of the plants which His own right hand has planted; you dwell in the Church of God, which is laid out in due order, and hedged about and guarded by heavenly power; and you are, therefore, most fitly said to dwell in the gardens. Be thankful: it is a place of enjoyment for you: awake and sing, for the lines have fallen unto you in pleasant places. The title is also used by way of employment as well as enjoyment. If we had not our daily tasks to fulfil, rest would corrode into rust, and recreation would soon gender corruption. You and I are set in the garden of the Church because there is work for us to do which will be beneficial to others and to ourselves also. Some have to take the broad axe and hew down mighty trees of error; others of a feebler sort can with a child's hand train the tendril of a climbing plant, or drop into its place a tiny seed. One may plant and another may water: one may sow and another gather fruit. One may cut up weeds and another prune vines. God hath work in His Church for us all to do, and He has left us here that we may do it. "O thou that dwellest in the gardens!" The title sets forth employment constant and engrossing. It means also eminence. It speaks with emphasis to those who dwell where sweet spiritual fruits are plentiful, where odours and perfumes load the air, where the land floweth with milk and honey. If any of you happen to dwell where Christ is set forth evidently crucified among you, and where your hearts do leap for very joy because the King Himself comes near to feast His saints and make them glad in His presence, then it is to you that my text hath a voice and a call: "Thou that dwellest in the gardens, in the choicest places of all Immanuel's land, let Me hear thy voice." Yet one more word. The title here employed is not only for eminence but for permanence. "O thou that dwellest in the gardens." If you are only permitted to enjoy sound gospel teaching now and again, and then are forced to cry, "It may be another twelve months before I shall be again fed on royal dainties." Then you are in a trying case, and you need to cry to God for help: but blessed are those who dwell in the good land, and daily fill their homers with heavenly manna. "Blessed are they that dwell in Thy house: they will be still praising Thee." No spot on earth is so dear to the Christian as that whereon he meets his Lord. Beloved, if you dwell in the gardens you have a double privilege, not only being found in a fat and fertile place, but in living there continually. You might well forego a thousand comforts for the sake of this one delight, for under the Gospel your soul is made to drink of wines on the lees well refined. II. Secondly, let us note the RECORDED CONVERSE: "Thou that dwellest in the gardens, the companions hearken to thy voice." She was in the gardens, but she was not quiet there, and why should she be? God gives us tongues on purpose that they should be used. Now, observe that evidently the spouse held with her companions frequent intercourse,—*"The companions hearken to thy voice."* There should be among those who are children of the common Father a mutual love, and they should show this by frequent commerce in their precious things, making a sacred barter with one another. Such converse ought to be as usual as the talk of children of one family. And next, it should be willing and influential; for if you notice, it is put here: *"Thou that dwellest in the gardens, the companions hearken to thy voice."* They do not merely hear it, and say to themselves, "I wish she would be quiet," but they hearken, they lend an ear, they listen gladly. The converse of the bride in the gardens was constant, and it was greatly esteemed by those who enjoyed it. I gather from the text, rather by implication than otherwise, that the converse was commendable; for the Bridegroom does not say to the spouse, *"Thou that dwellest in the gardens, thy companions hear too much of thy voice."* No; He evidently mentions the fact with approval, because He draws an argument from it why He also should hear that selfsame voice. Brothers, I leave it to yourselves to judge whether your communications with one another are always such as they should be. Are they always worthy of you? Brethren, make your conversation such that it may be commended by Christ Himself. These communications were, no doubt, very beneficial. As iron sharpeneth iron, so does a man's countenance his friend. In fact, our communications with one another ought to be preparatory to higher communications still. The converse of saints on earth should be a rehearsal of their everlasting communion in heaven. III. Now comes the pith of the text: *INVITED FELLOWSHIP*—*"The companions hear thy voice: cause Me to hear it."* Now, I note concerning this invitation, first of all, that it is very loving and condescending to us that the

Lord should wish to hear our voice. Is it not marvellous that He, the infinitely blessed, should want to hear our voices when all that He hath heard from us has been begging, sighing, and a few poor broken hymns? It is condescending and gracious, and yet how natural it is! How like to Christ! Love ever seeks the company of that which it loves. We may truly add, that this invitation to fellowship is a blessed and profitable request. We shall find it so if we carry it out, especially those of us who are called by God to use our voices for Him among the crowds of our companions. We shall never fitly handle the word of God without prayer. When we pray we are taught how to speak the words to others. Salvation and supplication are a blessed pair. Put the two together, so that, when you speak to others about salvation, you do it after having baptized your own soul into supplication. "The companions hear thy voice: cause Me to hear it: before thou speakest with them speak to Me: whilst thou art still speaking with them still speak with Me; and when thy speaking to men is done, return unto thy rest and again speak with Me." This invitation is a many-sided one; for when the Bridegroom says, "Cause Me to hear it," He means that she should talk to Him in all sorts of ways. Frequently we should be heard in praise. Oh, let the Lord hear your voice! Get up early to be alone with Him. So let it be with all your complaints and petitions; let them be for Jesus only. Speak with Jesus Christ, in little broken accents, by way of frequent ejaculation. The best of Christian fellowship may be carried on in single syllables. When in the middle of business you can whisper, "My Lord and my God!" You can dart a glance upward, heave a sigh, or let fall a tear, and so will Jesus hear your voice! IV. I find according to the Hebrew that the text has in it a REQUESTED TESTIMONY. According to learned interpreters the Hebrew runs thus: "Cause to hear Me." Now, that may mean what I have said, "Cause Me to hear"; but it may also mean, "Cause them to hear Me." Now hearken; you that are in Christ's garden: make those who dwell in that garden with you to hear from you much about Him. In the Church every one has a right to talk about the Head of the Church. In the garden, at any rate, if not in the wild wilderness, let the Rose of Sharon be sweetly spoken of. Let His name be as ointment poured forth in all the Church of God. Again, you, according to the text, are one that can make people hear, so that "the companions hearken to thy voice;" then make them to hear of Jesus. If you do not speak about Christ to strangers, do speak to your companions. They will hearken to you; therefore let them hearken to the word of the Lord. Oh, cause Christ to be heard. Hammer on that anvil always: if you make no music but that of the harmonious blacksmith it will suffice. Ring it out with sturdy blows—"Jesus, Jesus, Jesus crucified." Hammer away at that. "Now you are on the right string, man," said the Duke of Argyle, when the preacher came to speak upon the Lord Jesus. It needed no duke to certify that. Harp on that string. Make Jesus to be as commonly known as now He is commonly unknown. So may God bless you as long as you dwell in these gardens, till the day break and the shadows flee away. (*Ibid.*)

Ver. 14. **Make haste, my Beloved, and be Thou like to a roe or to a young hart upon the mountains of spices.—Come, my Beloved:**—The Song of Songs describes the love of Jesus Christ to His people, and it ends with an intense desire on the part of the Church that the Lord Jesus should come back to her. The last word of the lover to the beloved one is, "Speed thy return; make haste and come back." I. Notice, first, WHAT THE CHURCH HERE CALLS HER LORD. Observe, the spouse first calls her Lord, "Beloved," and secondly, "My Beloved." Christ is our "Beloved." This is a word of affection; and our Lord Jesus Christ is the object of affection to us. Brethren, true religion has many sides to it; true religion is practical, it is also contemplative; but it is not true religion at all if it is not full of love and affection. Jesus must reign in your heart, or else, though you may give Him what place you like in your head, you have not truly received Him. To Jesus, beyond all others, is applicable this title of the Beloved, for they who know Him love Him. "My Beloved." If nobody else loves Him, I do. This is a distinguishing affection; and I love Him because He belongs to me; He is mine, He has given Himself to me; and I have chosen Him because He first chose me; He is "my Beloved." I am not ashamed to put Him in front of all others; and when men say, "What is thy Beloved more than another beloved?" I can tell them that "My Beloved" is more than all the earthly beloveds put together. II. Now I will lead you on to the second division of my subject. I have shown you what the Church calls her Lord; now, in the second place, I will tell you WHENCE SHE CALLS HIM:

"Make haste, my Beloved, and be Thou like to a roe or to a young hart upon the mountains of spices." What does that mean? She cries to Him to come from the place where He now is, which she calls the "mountains of spices." What are these spices? Are they not Christ's infinite merits, which perfume heaven and earth? The foul corruption of our sins is not perceptible, because of the mountains of spices. Behold this wondrous sanitary power of Divine grace; these mountains of spices more than nullify the foulness of our sins. Christ's merit is perpetually before the eye of His Father, so that no longer does He perceive our sins. What shall I say next of these mountains of spices? Are they not our Lord's perpetual and prevailing prayers? He intercedes for His people before the throne of God. Now, this is where Jesus is now; not here, in this foul, polluted world, but up yonder He rests in the mountains of spices; and the prayer of His Church continually is, "Come, my Beloved! Make haste, my Beloved! Be Thou like to a roe or a young hart upon the mountains of spices." III. We have noticed what the Church calls her Lord, and whence she calls Him; now, thirdly, note how SHE CALLS HIM. She says, "Make haste, my Beloved, make haste." Why is it that all the Church of God, and each individual Christian in particular, should be found anxious for the speedy coming of our Lord Jesus Christ? I think, surely, that this is the result of true love. If we love our Lord, we shall long for His appearing; be you sure of that, it is the natural result of ardent affection. But, notwithstanding this, beloved, we sometimes need certain incentives to stir up our souls to cry for our Lord's return. One reason that ought to make the believer long for Christ's coming is that it will end this conflict. Our lot is cast in a wretched time, when many things are said and done that grieve and vex God's Holy Spirit, and all who are in sympathy with Him. "Come, Lord! Make haste, my Beloved! Come to the rescue of Thy weak and feeble servants; come, come, come, we beseech Thee!" Put yourself into this great fight for the faith; and if you have to bear the brunt of the battle, you will soon be as eager as I am that Jesus should make haste, and come to your relief. You also will cry, "Make haste, my Beloved," when you think what wonders He will work at His coming. What will Christ do at His coming? He will raise the dead. Mine eyes shall see Him in that day. "I know that my Redeemer liveth," etc. And when He comes, beloved, remember that then shall be the time of the glory of His people: "Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father." Slander will be rolled away in the day when Christ cometh. The wicked shall awake to everlasting contempt, but the righteous to an everlasting justification. Still, there is another reason why we say, "Make haste, my Beloved." It is this. We desire to share in Christ's glory; but our chief desire is that our Lord may be glorified. To every loyal soldier of King Jesus, this is the best thought in connection with His Second Advent, that when He comes, it will be to be admired in His saints, and to be glorified in all them that believe. Then shall there be universal acclamations to Him, and His enemies shall hide their heads in shame and dismay. (C. H. Spurgeon.)