

# THE SONG OF SOLOMON

BY THE

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## PREFACE

The aim of this volume is simple, yet sublime—lowly, yet rising above earth. Its desire is to promote and elevate and sanctify the communion of families with heaven; to give wings to piety, and warm utterance to prayer. This exercise requires watchful care—the often recurrence militates against impression. An object always present to the eyes scarcely arrests notice. The lull of one repeated note will wrap the senses in forgetfulness. Hence *fruitless formality* may creep in, and dull routine may slowly move where liveliness should burn. True worship is the heavenward elevation of the soul. To obtain this benefit is worth all efforts.

A family thus spiritually engaged is a blessed company. It basks in heaven's sunshine. It breathes celestial atmosphere. Its influence extends far beyond a narrow circle. It shines as a beacon on some eminence. Before the daily work begins, it seeks God's arm to protect, and His eye to guide; it puts on the armor of faith, it girds up the loins to climb the upward path, and when evening brings employments to a close, it gives floods of praises for overflowing mercies, and washes in the blood which cannot fail to cleanse.

Lessons from the Bible are an essential ingredient in such exercise. This book utters God's voice, proclaims His salvation, reveals His will, and issues His commands. Thus it prepares the heart for near approach, and tunes the instrument for harmonious sound. In this treasury the Song of Solomon is a bright jewel. From the day when first the Holy Spirit gave it to the world, it has rightfully received co-equal rank with kindred books. From its birth its sacred origin has been indubitably maintained. The pen which wrote the Proverbs and Ecclesiastes gave this likewise to the sacred Canon. Our Church, also, has without hesitation enrolled it in this heaven-born company.

Moreover, to outward authority internal evidence adds its assuring weight. Believers' hearts in every age and place have recognized in it the voice of God speaking in terms indubitably divine. Such streams of consolation, comfort, and instruction, could only flow from the throne of God and of the Lamb. Its channel is too deep—its waters are too full for human origin. Its tender whispers have cheered the disconsolate—upheld the tottering—revived the fainting—strengthened the weak—confirmed the wavering—wiped many a weeping eye—and soothed many a sighing breast. In hours of pain and weariness and solitude, its voice has sounded as the melody of heaven. When love has languished, its breath has fanned the sparks into a flame. Refreshed in this vestibule, how many have exclaimed, "This is none other than the House of God, and this is the gate of heaven!" The eye of faith has seen the Savior drawing near, "leaping upon the mountains, skipping upon the hills." If this blessed book had not been

given, many harps of delight might often have hung on the willows of disconsolation. But all praise to heavenly grace, it has been given, and we possess it. Let us then prize it, and devoutly use it.

There is, also, proof in passages not few that the same Spirit which composed other Scriptures is the writer here. The unity of expressive terms shows this truth in full clearness. Let a brief exemplification be adjoined. The Spirit is invoked in this book as the wind. The lips of Jesus adopt the same similitude. Here, and in other Scriptures, the attraction of the soul is described by the term "to draw." Similarly, "things new and things old" are words adopted to describe the comprehensive fullness of the heavenly treasure. The description of Bride and Bridegroom—of the Church as a vineyard—of Christ standing at the door—so conspicuous here, are as rays of light in other Scriptures. This book terminates by importunately calling upon Christ to come. The Revelation closes with the same petition. The conclusion cannot be gainsaid. Unity of thought and vocabulary establishes unity of authorship—and the Author is the Holy Spirit. Thus the Song of Solomon is the offspring of eternal wisdom.

Let it, also, be noted that in this Song we find the expansion of David's Hymn of Loves. The sweet singer of Israel in the forty-fifth Psalm draws the miniature—his son supplies the life-size portrait. We gain entrance into the palace which Solomon constructed, by a key thus previously provided by his inspired father. An acorn falls

to the ground, and here an oak of widespread branches is the produce. A little rill widens into a flood of waters. The keynote sounds, and a melodious hymn of many notes is sung.

The significance of this portion of the inspired volume stands on a pinnacle of clearness. It is conspicuous as a cloudless sun. It exhibits the mystery of mysteries—the Heavenly Bridegroom's love—and the response of the believer's heart. It may without irreverence be said, that the Holy Spirit could not find a worthier theme. Heaven alone can embrace its breadth and length, its depth and height. It baffles all power of human mind to conceive it. No tongue of eloquence can express it. Wondering angels desire to measure its boundless infinitudes. To grasp its history requires super-human mind.

But its consideration has a mighty power to elevate and transform. It changes the whole inner man. It transports to regions above earth. It causes old things to pass away; it makes all things new. To view it is heaven begun. In this Song this mutual love is exhibited in a series of diversified similitudes. A train in beauteous procession passes before the eye. Allegory follows on to allegory. Sometimes the portions are brought together as parts of a continued drama. Sometimes dissimilarity and disparity break every link of connection. But throughout the teaching is uniform. From the opening to the close, bridal love occupies the scene. It gives one relish to the overflowing goblet. The pictures may be generally rich in ornament, and choice embellishments may decorate the landscape. The forms

and figures may be richly clad. In this exposition, attempts to deduce dogmatic teaching from such drapery has been deliberately shunned. Such introduction would be wholly adverse to the plan. The main desire has been to put aside all dubious and earth-born thoughts, and to proclaim exclusively how Christ loves the Church, and gives Himself for it; and how the Church loves Christ, and gives herself to Him.

It is undoubted wisdom to keep the eye fixed on the main feature of heavenly love. Let it be repeated, it might be difficult, and would be inconsistent with the present design, to endeavor to establish clear connection between the varied parts. Thus they are here viewed as a series of detached representations. May they give refreshment like the exuberant flowers, which diffuse fragrance in a well-stocked garden!

As the sublime subject is one, some monotony might arise from continuous and unbroken perusal. The book is therefore divided into fifty-two portions.

The purpose is, that each should give contemplation to the assembled family as each Lord's-day of the year moves on. It is hoped that the hallowed hours may become more hallowed by realizing the eternal and unchangeable love of Christ. It should be happiness congenial with the day, to draw water with joy from this well of salvation. The contemplation of this holy and most blessed truth, should alike exhilarate and sanctify. May the Holy Spirit, who here reveals the glories of Christ Jesus, ride forth in a

chariot of light! May no earth-born mists obscure the grand intent! May devout hearts open their portals to receive pure truth! If any, heretofore, have paused with hesitation at its threshold, may they advance with confidence in the persuasion, that sanctifying grace will meet them here, as in other Scriptures! May they find that this Song is a chaste prelude to the chorus of the white-robed multitude!

# Chapter 1.

1:1. "The Song of songs, which is Solomon's."

The Holy Spirit gives the title to this sacred book. The name of the author and the message are not left to critical surmise. Solomon, famed for wisdom, rich in every gift, distinguished above men, is the inspired penman. We thus can date the period when this ray of light first gleamed. It follows in close succession to the spiritual songs of David, the sweet Psalmist of Israel. All thoughts of human composition are excluded.

Let us now approach it with the lowliest reverence, as a stream proceeding out of the throne of God, and of the Lamb. May it carry our thoughts high above earth, and raise them to the purest light!

*It is a Song.* It is not a historic narrative, relating in plain terms the annals of the past. It is not a prophetic portrait, foreshadowing in shrouded form the semblance of the coming future. It is no scientific treatise, developing God's plan in the arrangement of nature's multitudinous wonders. It is not a chain of moral precepts, directing to the beauties and bliss of holy life.

It is a Song. It mounts on the wings of metaphor and figure. It expatiates in the regions of imagination, and decorates spiritual thoughts with poetic images. Thus large scope is given for lively interpretation. But to this license strict limits are erected. No conclusion may be enforced but the obvious lessons of sound judgment and indisputable truth.

Moreover, it is *the Song of songs*. It rises incomparably above all similar expressions of words or feelings. May it be to us the joy of joys—the charm of charms—the delight of delights—a feast of melody! May our souls here find superabundance of heavenly transports! May we be enraptured by it to sing at the very gate of heaven! Doubtless, the Song reveals a great mystery, even the communion which exists between Christ and His Church. Happy are they who hear in the Bridegroom's words the love of Christ addressed to their own souls. Happy are they who can respond, that the words of the Church are the pure experience of their inmost feelings.

1:2. "Let Him kiss me with the kisses of His mouth; for Your love is better than wine."

These opening words are abrupt, and presuppose that the aspirations of the Church are not unknown. They evince fervent longing for closer manifestations of the love of Christ. Evidence of its nearness is sought. A familiar term gives reality to the desire. "Let Him kiss me with the kisses of His mouth." This act is the outbreak of the warm feeling of a loving parent— of an affectionate brother—of

a tender spouse—of a devoted friend. Where love is ardent it thus finds vent. The Church pants to be assured that she has a saving interest in Christ; that His feelings are real and strong, and seeks delight in manifested proofs. She desires to live in the abiding sense of this interest.

Many are the methods of this revelation. In the hours of *meditation* the Spirit withdraws the veil, and exhibits the Redeemer's heart. In the pages of *Scripture* He leads to persuasions of this love by the lessons of indisputable facts. Why does Christ assume our nature, put on the rags of mortality, condescend to represent us as bone of our bones, and flesh of our flesh? Why does He lay down His life to buy us from perdition? Why does He work out a perfect obedience to be our robe? Why does He reign at God's right hand, causing all things to work together for our good? Revelation gives the reply. Love prompts Him—love carries Him through the whole work. On every step is inscribed, "He loved me, and gave Himself for me." Clearly to see these blessed truths is to receive the kisses of His mouth.

More glowing evidence cannot be given. The enraptured believer replies, "Your love is better than wine." As wine cheers and exhilarates, so these truths, clearly seen and realized, raise the soul to joys unspeakable. No earthly objects can impart like pleasure. The love of Christ is a cup overflowing with delights. Wine cannot give like gladness to the heart.

1:3. "Because of the savor of Your good ointments, Your name is as ointment poured forth—therefore do the virgins love You."

Strains of rapture are continued. The Church commends her Lord as fragrant in delicious perfume.

It is the province of faith to view the blessed Jesus as fulfilling high offices in salvation's scheme. He is adored as Prophet, Priest, and King. Anointing oil inaugurated the personages admitted to these distinctions.

Jesus, called to execute these offices, is anointed by the Holy Spirit. Let us reverence Him as thus exalted. He ever lives, the PROPHET of the Church— He instructs in all wisdom—He reveals saving truth—He dispels the shades of ignorance—He enlightens with rays of heavenly knowledge—He teaches to profit. To know this is to delight in the savor of His good ointments. He is anointed also, to be the High PRIEST of His Church. On the Altar of His Cross He presents Himself as the all-atoning Victim, accomplishing in His person what sacrificial rites prefigured. He bears His people on His shoulders and on His breast, and from the throne of heaven pours down all blessings to enrich them. For this office He received the good ointment of the Spirit.

Mediatorial government is committed to His hands. The Father's decree proclaims, "Yet I have set My KING upon My holy hill of Zion." He rules for His people, ordering all things for their good. He rules in them, bringing every

feeling into subjection to His sway. And soon He will take to Himself His great power and reign, as King of kings, and Lord of lords. Faith views Him as regally anointed by the Holy Spirit. Charming indeed is the contemplation. It is the sweet savor of His good ointments.

Hence His name excites a thrill of joy. As fragrance, it cheers—it gladdens—it exhilarates—it quickens love. His pure and holy followers, espoused as chaste virgins, love Him with the fervor of intense affection.

1:4. "Draw me—we will run after You. The King has brought me into His chambers. We will be glad and rejoice in You; we will remember Your love more than wine—the upright love You."

The Church desires the closest communion with her Lord. She feels her inability to advance without His gentle drawing. He must invigorate her zeal; He must pour strength into her languishing powers. She earnestly solicits such constraining help, and vows, that drawn by cords of love, she will run with all alacrity. By 'plural language' (we), she intimates that she will draw others.

Can such prayer go forth in vain? Instant reply is delightedly proclaimed. Christ is recognized as her supreme Lord, and delight testifies that He has brought her into the intimacies of His favor.

The result is her overflowing delight. She avows that the exuberance of joy is centered in Him. Other gratifications

vanish as empty baubles. Sensual luxury, such as the goblets of the rich banquet, present no rival pleasure. To know Jesus is to love Him supremely. His true followers, upright and sincere, give Him their undivided hearts. No other object stands in competition. Love will embrace Him with inviolate attachment. One transport is all-pervading—"We love Him because He first loved us."

1:5. "O daughters of Jerusalem, I am black, but lovely—as the tents of Kedar, as the curtains of Solomon."

The Church here holds communion with her friends. Doubtless, it is the believer's high delight to maintain direct converse with the Lord. It is sweet joy to open out the heart to Him—to tell the inmost feeling, and to crave help for every hour of need. But it is pleasant, also, to unwind in the openness of Christian fellowship. Thus mutual strength is gained, and brotherly support administered. This communion of saints is ordained as a helpful staff in the heavenward course. It is well-pleasing to our Lord. They who fear Him speak often one to another. He hearkens, and a book of remembrance is written.

So the Church here turns to her associates. They are styled the daughters of Jerusalem. To them she pictures her state. It is a seeming paradox. The extremes of lowliness and greatness are combined. She presents two aspects.

Deformity and loveliness compose the portrait. "I am black, but lovely." Blackness is frightful and repulsive. No

eye can rest on it complacently. But blackness is the emblem of our state by nature. We are conceived and born in sin; and sin is most hideous wherever it appears. The Spirit has revealed this truth to each enlightened convert. He sees it—he feels it—he owns it—he bewails it. It is his constant misery. When he would do good, evil is present with him. He hates and loathes and abhors himself in dust and ashes. Surveying the innate corruption, which is his, he mournfully confesses, I am black—I am vile.

But he looks off to Christ. He sees the precious blood washing out every stain and obliterating the crimson dye. The blackness disappears. In Christ he is whiter than the whitest snow. He puts on Christ, and adores Him as made sin for us, that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him. He sees His pure and perfect obedience wrought out as a robe to hide his every defect, so bright, so lovely, and so glorious, that it exceeds all admiration. He feels that this righteousness is through grace imputed to him. He knows that he is lovely through divine loveliness. Thus clothed and decked, he triumphantly tells his friends, "I am black, but lovely."

To exemplify this truth, similitudes are introduced. The tents of Kedar represent nature's vile condition; the curtains of Solomon exhibit the beautiful contrast. Kedar was the progenitor of the wandering tribes which roamed throughout Arabia. They had no settled home. In search of pasture, they drove their flocks from field to field, with no fixed rest. They had their shelter under the covering of most rough and unsightly tents. These tents, exposed to

every change of weather, sometimes parched by heat, sometimes shriveled in the frost, and composed of the coarsest skins, presented an appearance on which no eye could happily repose. This image of *lowliness and deformity* showed nature in her low estate.

Look now to Solomon's magnificent abode. It sparkled with the riches of resplendent hues. Its tapestry was elaborate in the charms of art. Its hangings dazzled in the brilliancy of beauty. What could be more choice—more lovely—more attractive! No admiration could describe its luster. These curtains shine as an emblem of the beauty of the Church clad in celestial loveliness. Each believer beholding his dual state exclaims, "O daughters of Jerusalem, I am black, but lovely, as the tents of Kedar, as the curtains of Solomon."

1:6. "Look not upon me, because I am black—because the sun has looked upon me. My mother's children were angry with me. They made me the keeper of the vineyards—but my own vineyard I have not kept."

The Church appears low in *the valley of self-renunciation*. This spot is often visited by true faith, and most precious lessons are received. In this school we learn to view our natural estate with just abhorrence, and to exult more fervently in the righteousness of Christ. Thus we sink in humility, that we may soar in rejoicing love. We sternly hate ourselves, that we may more adore our Lord. The truth is realized, "He that humbles himself shall be exalted."

Thus the Church again presents herself in the garb of degradation. She appears as a peasant injured and despised by relatives—dishonored by those whose love was naturally her due—driven from domestic comfort—compelled to the drudgery of degraded work—exposed to the disfiguring effects of sultry weather, and thus conscious that her appearance could excite no feelings of attraction. As such she shuns man's observation, and piteously cries, "Look not upon me, because I am black." There was nothing in her on which the eye could rest complacently. She therefore shrinks from notice.

Obvious are the *lessons* of this picture. They teach us the vileness of our state by nature. Let us be wise, and open our eyes to the humiliating truth. What is our best righteousness? View it in the light of Scripture. It is full of faults and blemishes, hideousness pervades its every part. It is a filthy rag. Shall we present our own performances for acceptance before our omniscient God? At best they are the abominable thing which His holiness abhors. Let us rather cry, Away with such pleas, away with them. "Look not upon me, because I am black." "Enter not into judgment with Your servant, O Lord, for in Your sight shall no man living be justified."

If God should mark what is done amiss, who shall stand? The believer feels that in himself he is thus loathsome. From the sole of the foot to the crown of the head there is nothing in himself but wounds and bruises and putrefying sores. The sunburnt peasant, toiling in the vineyard

beneath the midday rays, is the image of his wretched state.

This view of self is most profitable when it drives us to abhor self-righteousness, and to wash our thoughts and words and works in the fountain of Christ's all-cleansing blood. Then with what delight is the precious truth clasped, "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." Each child of man who mournfully exclaims, "Look not upon me, because I am black," is led to the rapturous joy of adding, "But I am lovely. God's eye beholds me bright in the righteousness of Christ."

But self-complacency may not rest in an 'enlightened mind'. Consciousness of shortcomings and defects must ever keep us lowly in shame. The Church adds, "My own vineyard I have not kept." Where is the day which testifies not of indolence and careless walk? Our souls are a neglected vineyard. Briers and weeds are not diligently plucked up. Fences are not carefully repaired. Gaps are left, through which the wild beasts of the forest may enter and spread ruin. We sit with folded hands, while much work on all sides demands industrious toil. Who will not confess, "The good that I would, I do not." Hence the prayer is prompted, 'Do not remember my countless omissions.' Hence we are led to put all our trust in the finished work of Christ, and to confess, "By grace are we saved through faith; and that not of ourselves—it is the gift of God—not of works, lest any man should boast." Holy Spirit, bless this emblem to our souls' good!

1:7. "Tell me, O You whom my soul loves, where You feed, where You make Your flock to rest at noon—for why should I be as one that turns aside by the flocks of Your companions?"

The Church addresses Christ in the warmth of devoted love. She cries, "O You whom my soul loves." All motives, which can influence the heart, constrain to this affection. Consider His love. It burns from everlasting to everlasting. It knows no change. It is gloriously evidenced by His achievements in redemption, and by His continued work in heaven. Surely the soul, enraptured by these realities, will overflow with responding love. The profession will break forth, "Lord, You know all things; You know that I love You." Happy are they whose consecrated lives give testimony to this devotion!

The Church next avows her longing desire for intimate communion. His presence is her main delight. His absence renders life a dismal blank. She addresses Him as the Chief Shepherd. She knows that in tender solicitude He leads His flock into the richest pastures of nourishment and strength; that He will vigilantly protect them from all overburdening toil, and will cause them to lie down in sweet repose. She prays to be acquainted with the spot thus carefully selected. Her sigh is, 'O that I knew where I might find Him—with eager haste I would fly to this retreat—no hindrances would detain me.' It is indeed most blessed, when the soul ardently solicits this communion.

She expresses, also, apprehension of mistake. She fears lest some false guides should turn her astray. "Why should I be as one that turns aside by the flocks of Your companions?" Alas! that false teachers should harass congregations! But so it always has been, and so it still continues. There were false apostles in the earliest days; unenlightened guides still would lead in paths of error. Let earnest prayer be made for deliverance from their vain deceits. The pulpit is no blessing—no, it is a fearful peril, unless it stands as a signpost, ever pointing to the Lord, and calling poor sinners to rejoice in His uttermost salvation. "None but Jesus" should be the ministerial motto.

1:8. "If you do not know, most beautiful of women, follow the tracks of the sheep and graze your young goats by the tents of the shepherds."

The gracious Lord grants reply. How precious is the truth, that supplication quickly reaches His loving ear! It swiftly flies to heaven's gate, and while it knocks, replies descend.

A tender appellation tells the Church that she is truly loved. *She had owned her blackness. He only regards her loveliness.* He sees her, as arrayed in the garments of salvation—as decked in His pure righteousness—as filled with the graces of His Spirit. Thus cleansed and clothed and beautified, she is addressed as 'the beloved, on whom His eye rested with delight'.

But He seems gently to upbraid her for lack of knowledge within her reach. A like voice chided an Apostle, "Have I been so long time with you, and yet have you not known Me, Philip?" Ignorance is a fearful fault—for God is always ready to give wisdom liberally without upbraiding. Clear direction is supplied—Mark the example of the holiest saints—see how they live and walk, and follow them. Paul exhorts, "Be followers of me." Let us follow them who through faith and patience inherit the promises. The Church is exhorted to tarry near her faithful Ministers. In all arrangements it should be a prominent desire to dwell under the shadow of gospel-truth. Thus we shall "grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ."

1:9. "I have compared you, O my love, to a company of horses in Pharaoh's chariots."

The Church is tenderly addressed. We marvel at this condescension of God's co-eternal and co-equal Son. But if He was willing to adopt our low estate, and to espouse us as His bride forever, loving expressions may be expected from His lips. "I have compared you, O my love, to a company of horses in Pharaoh's chariots." The words portray the beauty—the excellence—the superiority of the Church. The striking image introduces a company of horses in Pharaoh's chariots. Horses are among nature's grandest productions. They are worthy of admiration for exquisite symmetry, graceful movements, and surpassing strength. How pre-eminent, then, in every aspect, would

the horses be, which were selected for the chariots of the Egyptian monarch!

In their picture we are taught to see the Church. The Creator's hand endowed these creatures with their illustrious appearance. The hand of Christ enriches His bride with the glories of celestial beauty. What can surpass the brightness of the 'righteousness' which He wrought out! He clothes her with the garments of salvation. Every dark spot is completely and forever hidden. Her garb exhibits loveliness in perfection.

The horses for Pharaoh's use were doubtless the choicest which earth produced. Distant lands would send supplies to the royal stables. So, also, the members of the Church are gathered from all nations and kindreds and people and tongues. All countries from East—from West—from North—from South contribute to their number. When the great multitude shall stand around the throne, the noblest sons of the whole world shall be assembled as the Lamb's bride. Let the enquiry be diligently made, Shall *we* appear in this resplendent throng?

Doubtless, these horses were of surpassing value. They would be purchased at high cost. The treasures of Egypt would not be withheld to procure them. Thus the Church is bought with the most precious price—Christ presents His own blood as the purchase. But who can tell its value! The riches of this earth—the treasures which it contains—the elaborate productions of art and science—millions of suns in meridian brightness—gold and silver in countless heaps

are worthless in comparison. When Christ lays down His life, He gives so much that heaven can give no more.

1:10. "Your cheeks are lovely with rows of jewels, your neck with chains of gold."

Next, these horses are *richly decorated*. Behold them. How splendidly they are adorned! Their heads are brilliant in choice jewels—chains of gold sparkle on their necks. The Church, also, is adorned with precious gifts of grace. The Spirit employs His wondrous power to enrich her with charms of godliness. They who see her are constrained to acknowledge that she is raised high above the rank of fallen nature. To enumerate the excellences thus granted to her would be to enumerate out all the gifts of the Spirit. He is ever lavish in decking and beautifying her.

1:11. "We will make you borders of gold with studs of silver." The rich ornaments of these horses seem incapable of improvement. But more shall yet be added. Collars of gold, sparkling with studs of silver, shall be added to the rich adornments. It is a precious truth, "He gives more grace." Let us never be content with what we have already gained. Let us strive and toil and pray, until we are filled with all the fullness of God. We must be conscious that at the best we are most miserable short-comers. Let us give our God no rest, until grace more and more enriches our hearts.

1:12. "While the King sits at His table, my perfume spread its fragrance."

Another image here instructs us. May it shine brightly as a Gospel-ray! The King is seen seated in His banquet-hall. We may imagine the table rich in all the luxury of Eastern courts. The Queen, in royal robes and redolent with sweet perfumes, is enthroned by His side. We here are taught a lesson written emphatically in Scripture. The desire of Christ to hold free converse with the Church is vividly portrayed. He calls her to sit at His table. Such is the voice of the Revelation, "Behold, I stand at the door, and knock. If any man hears My voice, and opens the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with Me."

Amazing grace that we should be welcomed to such feast! His Spirit, His grace, the Scriptures, holy meditation, and Gospel-ordinances thus constantly invite us. It would exceed our space to tell the luxuriant bounties which enrich His banquet. Here we are regaled with realizing views of His eternal love. We may enter on refreshing knowledge of His incarnation. We may find that His flesh is food indeed, and His blood drink indeed. Here we may extract strength from most precious promises, and draw delight from their countless dainties. And while we feast, the tender voice may be heard, "Eat, O friends, drink, yes, drink abundantly, O beloved." Mighty is the effect on the delighted guest. "While the King sits at His table, my perfume spread its fragrance." *Marvelous is the power of Christ's presence to invigorate grace.* Walk in the garden in the chill days of winter. Shrubs and flowers, to appearance, are withered and dead, and no sweetness is presented. Revisit this spot when summer-rays are bright,

and genial breezes softly blow. Then countless flowers expand in lovely charms, and fragrance breathes around. *So when Christ is absent, the soul is a barren wasteland. But when He comes with His reviving power, all graces bloom, and spread deliciousness around.* The perfume of the heart sends forth its fragrance. When Jesus sat at the table, Mary broke her box of ointment, and the house was filled with the fragrance of it.

1:13, 14. "A bundle of myrrh is my well-beloved unto me; He shall lie all night between my breasts. My beloved is unto me as a cluster of henna blossoms from the vineyards of Engedi."

The Church well knows the source from which her graces flow, the tree on which her blossoms bud. If fragrance proceeds from her, His love has first infused it. If she shines as light, she only reflects the rays of heaven. If she diffuses delight, it is from the treasures which He so abundantly has imparted. In the deep consciousness that all her grace is the aroma of His indwelling, she avows that her beloved is unto her a bundle of myrrh and a cluster of the choicest henna blossoms. *As the rich perfume cheers and invigorates, so Jesus is the chief joy of every believing heart.*

It is indeed ecstasy to meditate on Him and on His work. Every feeling is charmed when contemplating His beauty—His glory—His achievements. Let us be wise, and entertain ourselves in the sweet garden of these countless flowers. Each is enchanting sweetness—each

exhilarates and strengthens. The Church resolves that nothing shall take this joy from her. The bundle of myrrh—the cluster of henna blossoms—shall lie all night between her breasts. She will clasp her beloved Lord to her heart of hearts. As throughout the day His presence had gladdened her walk, so when shades of night obscure all other objects, He still shall be near to her adoring love, and breathe His fragrance through her wakeful hours.

1:15. "How beautiful you are, my beloved, how beautiful! Your eyes are soft like doves."

Christ still most tenderly commends the Church. He views her with admiring gaze, and utters His deep feeling, "How beautiful you are, my beloved, how beautiful!" The repetition denotes the fervor of His heart.

The believer should never close his eyes to his low estate by nature. His birth is in a vile cradle. He is shaped in iniquity—in sin his mother conceives him. His walk through life is linked to uncleanness. Transgression is his frequent rule. His weak steps totter into mire. His best righteousness is but a filthy rag. The leper's miserable state, is nature's portrait.

This sense of deep depravity should not be banished from the mind. The believer should ever be smiting on his breast, and crying for mercy as a miserable sinner. But in close connection with these humbling thoughts, the knowledge of his Lord's gracious estimate excludes despair. In the depths of self-abhorrence he hears the

whisper, "How beautiful you are, my beloved, how beautiful!"

A seeming paradox here perplexes reason. But faith by Scripture-aid can reconcile the dual aspect. As viewed in Christ, what object can be more beautiful than the blood-washed soul! Over all its defects the robe of Christ's perfect obedience is spread. The requirements of the law, which demand love in every step—in every moment—in every movement of the mind—are perfectly and gloriously fulfilled by Him. This righteousness is "unto all and upon all those who believe." In it there is no spot or stain—no blemish, nor any such thing. Jesus views His bride thus adorned and cries, "How beautiful you are, my beloved, how beautiful!"

He marks, also, *the work of the Spirit in her heart*. There sovereign grace implants the seed of godly words and works. How beautiful is the holiness wrought by the Spirit! Jesus admires the blossoms and the fruit which thus flourish, and exclaims, "How beautiful you are, my beloved, how beautiful!"

Let us diligently ponder this truth. The dark clouds of our iniquity should not conceal the splendor of this light. The vile waters of our sad course should not extinguish the brightness of Christ's work. In Him, partakers of a divine nature, we should fully recognize His goodness, and lying low at the footstool of His grace, we should adoringly give thanks, and embrace the truth, "How beautiful you are, my beloved, how beautiful!"

An especial grace is next commended—"Your eyes are soft like doves." It is pleasing to see that gentle bird—how sweet the softness of its eye! It shows not the brilliant fire which sparkles in the majestic eagle—it exhibits not the wild ferocity of the cruel and unsparing hawk. It is sweet in the charms of softness. We here see the *humility* of the followers of the Lord. He was meek and lowly in heart. Let all pride and uplifted looks be cast away, and let our clothing be this lowly grace.

1:16, 17. "Behold, you are lovely, My beloved, yes, pleasant—also our bed is verdant. The beams of our house are cedar, and our rafters are firs."

To give strong consolation and good hope through grace, Christ multiplies His praise. Let not such tenderness be lost. He next reveals His intimacy by representing His people as inhabitants of the same dwelling. This abode is described as built of the most costly, fragrant and enduring materials, and furnished with every apparatus for rest. The beams are cedar; the rafters fir; the bed is of most lovely hue. Intimate are they who thus are united beneath one roof.

Such are the delights which Christ provides for His people here. What must those mansions be which He is now preparing for them! They were arranged from the foundation of the world. Christ is now employed in making them ready. How wondrous is His love!

## Chapter 2.

2:1. "I am the rose of Sharon, and the lily of the valleys."

It is a precious exercise to seek for Jesus in the pages of His Word. The same pursuit is also precious in the field of nature. His beckoning hand oftentimes directs our search. He, who in the days of His flesh, said, "I am the true vine," here by the Spirit depicts Himself as "the rose of Sharon, and the lily of the valleys."

He selects the *garden's* pride, and the lowly *valley's* charm, as emblems of Himself. While we behold them, may we receive refreshing lessons!

In the garden, no flower in loveliness can surpass the rose. In the tender bud, and in the expanded flower, rare beauty shines. Streams of fragrance float around. So, also, in the sequestered valley, the lily shows its modest head. Its graceful form attracts delighted gaze—its exquisite perfume enlivens the sense of smell. The union of these choice delights shows Jesus in all the perfections of His beauty, grace, and glorious worth. But no emblems can fully paint the perfections of Him, who is the brightness of His Father's glory, and the express image of His person—the chief among ten thousand, the altogether lovely One.

More than image can express the transcendent excellence that is combined in Him. His name is as perfume poured forth. Every thought of Him delights and cheers, invigorates and gladdens, the believing heart. The objects here selected are often in our view. May we never see them without delightedly ascending to their great Anti-type!

2:2. "As the lily among thorns, so is my darling among the maidens."

He who has just portrayed Himself as the tender lily, now gives the same designation to His Church. Thus His condescending grace shows the truth, that He and His redeemed are one. This assurance is not inferred only from this sweet passage. In Jeremiah, "the Lord our righteousness" is His name. Subsequently the same title is given to the Church. The Holy Spirit by the pen of Paul similarly honors the Church by the name of Christ.

Let this truth be no unmeaning revelation to our hearts. Let us strive and toil and pray that every grace in Christ may be reflected in our lives. Let all who see us testify, that we are conformed to the likeness of the Firstborn.

But we are here especially taught, that we must surpass all others in holiness of walk. The lily blooms attractively amid thorns. So our excellence and fragrance should be discerned as raising us high above the sons of men. We should be as preeminent now, as we shall be in glorious

inheritance. The thorns and briers shall be gathered together in bundles for the burning, when believers shall shine forth above the brightness of the skies.

2:3. "Like the apple tree among the trees of the forest, so is my Beloved among the young men. I sat down under His shadow with great delight, and His fruit was sweet to my taste."

Shall Jesus commend the Church, and no responsive admiration be excited? The Church in fervor of adoring love, selects as His portrait the apple tree, which in its beauty, and in its fruit, excels all the produce of the woods. She speaks of herself as attracted to it. Weary with toil—overcome by sultry rays, she finds rest beneath the shadow of the widespread branches. In this sweet repose, she plucks delicious fruit from the boughs descending to her reach, and there *shelter* and *refreshment* are combined.

Thus the soul, wearied with fruitless search for peace in forms and services, and lifeless works, beholds the refuge, which the sheltering shade of Christ presents. Here it feels that labors end, and peace is obtained. The fiery darts of Satan cannot pierce the covering protection. Thus what the needful soul requires is found in Christ.

But under His covering there is more than perfect peace. The Tree of Life bears all manner of *fruit*. Each craving is supplied. Rich abundance gives nourishment and delight. Happy they who thus sit down beneath this noble Tree!

2:4. "He brought me to the banqueting house, and His banner over me was love."

This portion unfolds a splendid scene. A royal banquet is opened. We discern a table spread with all luxurious delights. Like the ancient halls of earth's nobles, it is decorated with flags and ensigns, proclaiming ancestral exploits. To this grand guest-chamber Christ leads the Church. Over her seat a banner floats, emblazoned with emblems of love. The spectacle is resplendent with opulent magnificence. May the Holy Spirit teach us by these images of greatness!

We are often reminded, that *the life of the believer should be a perpetual feast*. How different are the provisions of the famished worldling! He seeks his refreshment in the vain pleasures of a fleeting scene. The world is indeed a mocking cheat. Its friendship is enmity with God. It brings no peace to the affrighted conscience. It affords no shelter from the law's tremendous curse. It presents no blood to cleanse from guilt—no righteousness to hide transgression—no key to open heaven's portals—no refuge from the wrath to come. It holds out indeed a goblet, dazzling to the deluded eye—but there is no reviving power from its poisoned contents. The worldling drinks, but is not satisfied. "He that drinks of this water shall thirst again."

Mark, also, the empty formalist. In rites and services, he strives to gratify the cravings of his heart—but they prove

husks and rubbish—their food is but the nauseousness of ashes.

The believer approaches the banquet which Christ enriches. He finds the truth, "He that comes to Me shall never hunger. He that believes on Me shall never thirst." While he thus feasts, his eye discerns the banner which overshadows him. It is a revelation of Christ's love. O marvelous—O transporting view! But it is as real as it is amazing. Who can doubt this love, who sees Christ lying in the manger—whose eye beholds Him hanging on the cross—whose faith looks to the extended hands, and the unceasing intercession! When these perceptions of Christ's love come like a flood into the raptured soul, the adoring spirit is verily overcome. It feels that it can bear no more. It verily faints in ecstasies of delight.

2:5. "Strengthen me with flagons, refresh me with apples, for I am faint with love." Song 2:5

Oh! that these feelings of transporting joy were more frequent! Such they would be, if faith were blazing in more ardent warmth. The Church is now like Sheba's Queen, of whom we read that when she saw all Solomon's wisdom and the house that he built, and all his greatness, and his ascent by which he went up to the house of the Lord, "there was no more breath in her."

The Church cries for help. She prays to be supported and sustained. She seems to feel, that if no aid be granted, her life must soon expire. The table spread before her, supplies

the images which her lips employ. Give me wine from those flagons—let your sweet fruit refresh me. No cries to Christ ever go forth in vain. Hear her quick acknowledgment of response.

2:6. "His left hand is under my head, and His right hand embraces me."

Jesus appears. He raises her fainting head in His arms. He upholds her sinking frame. He puts forth His strength to reanimate and cheer. It is an everlasting truth, "He gives power to the faint, and to those who have no might, He increases strength." His everlasting arms are underneath His feeble people. Blessed is the promise, "Fear not, for I am with You—be not dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you—yes, I will help you—yes, I will uphold you with the right hand of my righteousness." Thus, when discoveries of His love overpower, His arm of strength will render aid.

2:7. "I charge you, O you daughters of Jerusalem, by the gazelles, and by the deer of the field, that you stir not up, nor awake my love, until He please."

A solemn charge here warns us not to drive Jesus from our hearts. We are aided by a pastoral scene, which pleasantly conveys instruction. We are bid to consider the gazelles and deer of the field. Among animals they are remarkable for shyness and timidity. We view them reposing beneath the shelter of the forest trees, or stretched beside the flowing stream, or sporting in the spacious meadow. At

the least sound they raise their heads to catch the note. If a leaf rustles, they are startled. If an intruding step approaches—if the voice of a distant dog is heard, instantly they flee. In some near covert they hide themselves, when scared by any sound.

This instructive emblem is here a messenger of Gospel-truth. It is happiness to know that Christ delights to occupy the believer's heart. Scripture teaches us in graphic words, that He stands at the door, and knocks—that it is His desire to enter, and abide.

It is true, likewise, that His love is an eternal flame. No waters can ever quench it. From all eternity it has burned—to all eternity it will continue. *But still His presence, at times, may be withdrawn.* The seat which He occupied may be left vacant. The sun may be eclipsed. The stream may be congealed, and thus for a season checked.

Dark and sad are indeed the seasons, when we mourn His absence. But despair must not prevail. Blessed is the assurance, "For a brief moment I abandoned you, but with great compassion I will take you back. In a moment of anger I turned my face away for a little while. But with everlasting love I will have compassion on you," says the Lord, your Redeemer. "Just as I swore in the time of Noah that I would never again let a flood cover the earth and destroy its life, so now I swear that I will never again pour out my anger on you. For the mountains may depart and the hills disappear, but even then I will remain loyal to

you. My covenant of blessing will never be broken," says the Lord, who has mercy on you. Isaiah 54:7-10

But the departures of Christ, though not *final*, are very *grievous*. Why do they ever occur? The fault is wholly ours. We stir Him up, and we displease Him. Therefore He retires. With no desire to see His place made void, our indifference may produce the sad effect. Affections, seeming to be cold, may be as the multitude which besought Jesus to depart; and we read, "So Jesus returned to the boat and left."

Open and notorious sins are not here denounced. No *light* can tarry with such *darkness*. Warning is rather given against the stealthy approach of some enemy in attractive guise. For instance—the WORLD often comes with crafty step. It quietly strives to introduce its principles, and to win to its Christ-denying vanities. Unhallowed PLEASURES, also, may be permitted to entice. The godly voice of Scripture may be unheeded. Conscience may fail to be startled by ungodly sights and words—prayer may be restrained— communion with the Lord may be regarded as irksome and unwelcome.

As in a moment, the gazelles and the deer of the field startle and disappear— so Jesus leaves His chosen resting-place. Let us take heed, and guard well the portals of our hearts. Let not an unhallowed thought intrude. Let all diligence be used that we may never quench the Spirit, or resist His blessed sway. If we abide in Christ, we may be

well assured that He will abide in us, until heaven be entered, where separation cannot come.

2:8. "Listen! The voice of my Beloved! Behold, He comes, leaping across the mountains—bounding over the hills."

The Church appears in the attitude of charmed attention. She listens, and rapturously exclaims, "It is the voice of my Beloved!" She then lifts up her eyes, and she beholds Him drawing near in activity and haste. Mountains and hills may intervene, but over them He bounds. No hindrances retard His happy coming.

May these contemplations expand our spiritual perceptions!

The Church hears a voice, which instantly she recognizes. The believer's joy is to listen to the voice of Jesus. Frequent should be the prayer, "Speak, Lord, for Your servant hears." The assurance will be verified, "My Sheep hear My voice." It is in the pages of God's Word, that this voice sweetly sounds. How many are the calls—how tender are the promises—how sustaining are the assurances! In them the Savior speaks. The believer drinks them in with joy; and as in succession they are heard, he delightedly exclaims, "It is the voice of my Beloved!"

No music can be sweeter to the ear. It is the very melody of heaven. Let us ever listen and partake of the raptures, which bless the hearing ear. "Come to me with your ears wide open. Listen, for the life of your soul is at stake. I am

ready to make an everlasting covenant with you. I will give you all the mercies and unfailing love that I promised to David." Isaiah 55:3

The ear thus listens, and the eyes, also, are ravished with an enchanting sight. Jesus appears in all eager haste drawing near. Faith sees this fact in His coming to assume His people's nature. Obstacles and difficulties raise their head in formidable array. Satan and all his legion muster their forces to prevent. But zeal for His Father's glory, and love for His people's souls, triumphantly bear Him onward. Over every mountain and over every hill of intervening obstacle He bounds forward.

So, also, He comes to enter hearts—to invigorate grace—to fill with joys unspeakable. Indifference may strive to close the door. Unbelief may present a gigantic barrier. But in vain. "He comes, leaping across the mountains—bounding over the hills!"

2:9. "My beloved is like a gazelle or a young deer—behold, He stands behind our wall—He looks forth at the windows, showing Himself through the lattice."

Manifestations of Christ's presence do not always shine in unclouded luster. Sometimes He partially retires, and is for a while obscured. Like the timid creatures of the chase, He seems to seek a temporary concealment. "He hides Himself behind our wall." We know to whom the blame is due. Evil passions have been indulged—faith has dwindled—the earnestness of prayer has been relaxed—

the rich pastures of Gospel-ordinances have been neglected. The sad effect is sure.

But the *hidings* of His face are not *desertion*. "He hates divorce." "I am the Lord, and I do not change. That is why you descendants of Jacob are not completely destroyed."

We instantly perceive that His withdrawal has ceased, and He has entered the dwelling. "He looks forth at the windows, showing Himself through the lattice." Jesus will make it apparent, that absence is not congenial to Him; that His delight is to dwell with His people. Let our cries ever invite Him to rest in His love. Let us plead His Word, "Abide in Me, and I in you." Let us listen to the grand teaching, "He that has My commandments, and keeps them, he it is that loves Me; and he that loves Me shall be loved of My Father; and We will come unto him, and make Our abode with him."

2:10 "My Beloved spoke, and said unto me, Rise up, my love, my beautiful one, and come away."

Who can listen to the voice of Christ without a thrill of joy! The Church here states that His address now reached her ear. He calls to her. He bids her arise and break from delay, and come with Him in holy fellowship to refreshing scenes. The beauties of reviving nature are introduced as alluring to this sweet communion. Let these lovely scenes now pass before our view.

2:11. "See! the winter is past, the rain is over and gone."

Winter is the season of external dreariness. Nature is locked in the cold arms of gloom. Hardness sits supreme on the surface of the soil. The trees present a leafless aspect. The streams are often bound in congealing fetters. The eye surveys, and no verdure gladdens. Pitiless storms affright with frequent visits. They dash with fury along the meadows and through the groves. They drive the flocks and herds to sheltering retreats.

But this winter season is not perpetual. In due course the sun breaks forth in vernal power. The scene is changed. Gladness again assumes its sway, and the happiness is felt that "the winter is past, the rain is over and gone."

2:12. "The flowers appear on the earth; the time of the singing of birds has come, and the voice of the dove is heard in our land."

The entire prospect is changed. The garden—the fields—the meadows and the valleys, smile in renewed beauty. In rich profusion sweet flowers show their lovely heads. In varied hue they charm the eye—with delightful fragrance they regale the sense. Earth seems again to bloom in Eden's loveliness—and melody is heard throughout the air. The happy songsters warble in the branches. From trees and shrubs around sweet harmony resounds. One note fixes rapt attention. The plaintive dove utters her melting song. Thus universal joy prevails.

2:13. "The fig tree forms its early fruit; the blossoming vines spread their fragrance. Arise, come, my darling; my beautiful one, come with me."

At the recurrence of this season, some trees attract especial notice. The fig tree pleases with its luxuriant growth. Promises of rich fruit abound. The tender grape appears in clusters on the wide-spreading branches of the fertile vine. Exquisite is the fragrance, which the young fruit emits. Realizing these charms, we hear with melting effect the call, "Arise, come, my darling; my beautiful one, come with me."

Let us now turn to the anti-type—the believer's heart. There are times when dark and dreary winter freezes the inward feeling. Pitiless storms, also, frequently assail. Temptations come in cruel fury. Shelter from the merciless attacks seems far away. Where is the soul, which has not had experience of such dark and stormy days!

But the Sun of righteousness sends forth reviving rays! The season of gloom is past—the torrents of temptation are over and gone. Sweet grace again revives, and the heart smiles as the well-watered garden—the wilderness rejoices and blossoms like the rose. In the place of dreary desolation, signs of lovely vitality reappear. The heart so dull—so silent, now breaks forth in praise. Songs of adoration mount up to heaven. The fig tree, no longer barren, is laden with luxuriant fruit. Delicious aromas, as from the infant berries of the vine, pervade. It is the resurrection-time of the Spirit's graces!

Jesus now invites to closer fellowship with Himself. He bids the soul to arise—to leave its couch of sloth and indolence, and disconsolation. He calls it to put forth strength and to break from all entangling fetters to join itself to Him in closer fellowship, and to enjoy with Him the beauties of this newborn state.

If such the sweetness of His present call, what will it be when His voice shall bid our bodies arise from the grave's cell, and come away to His eternal presence, and to exult in fullness of joy, and to partake of the pleasures, which are at His right hand forever more! Lord, may we be ever listening for the last trumpet's clang!

2:14. "O my dove, who is in the clefts of the rock, in the hiding places on the mountainside, let Me see your face, let Me hear your voice; for sweet is your voice, and your face is lovely."

No words can exceed the tenderness of this address. The most endearing name is given to the Church, "My dove." In the feathered tribe the dove attracts especial admiration. The form—the note—the habits—the faithfulness—awaken just praise. Beauty and sweetness are its peculiar properties. In every aspect the bird is lovely. Thus the Church is beautiful in the Redeemer's eyes. This truth almost baffles our belief. It requires faith in strong exercise to realize that the eyes of Christ can rest satisfied on us. If we are conscious of our deep corruption—of our vile transgressions—of our inconstancy and

waywardness—much more must the omniscience of Christ discern this sad deformity. But in His superabundant grace He views us as mantled in His own righteousness, and adorned with the excellences, which His Spirit imparts. This view is loveliness. Christ sees, and says, "O my dove."

The dove, also, is distinguished for its *gentleness*. This grace was pre-eminent in Christ. Believers are entreated "by the meekness and gentleness of Christ." It is, also, their constant study to follow these footsteps. Thus proud and haughty looks are studiously shunned—and in lowliness of mind each strives to esteem others as better than himself. Thus the injunction is obeyed, "Put on the Lord Jesus Christ." Thus the title is obtained, "O my dove."

The dove, moreover, is noted for *conjugal fidelity*. Here we see the image of the believer espoused as a chaste virgin to the Lord. The whole heart is given, and every affection clings to her beloved. May we reflect this loving character!

This dove is here described as seeking refuge in the clefts of the rock, and in the hiding places on the mountainside. Here is a sign of timidity. It strives to hide itself from observation. It seeks concealment in rocks above man's access; or in the most secret recesses of the mountains. Of Jesus it is said, "He shall not strive nor cry, nor cause His voice to be heard in the streets." His kingdom comes not with observation. So the believer shuns all needless

ostentation. It is not his desire to attract the gaze of man; or call for public applause. He meekly pursues an unnoticed path; and with his heart fixed on heaven, he disregards the notice of inferiors. To the retiring believer the voice is addressed, "Let me see your face, let me hear your voice—for sweet is your voice, and your face is lovely." Amazing grace! Can Christ desire this close communion with us? Can He call us thus to present ourselves to Him? We see in this cry the *reality* and the *immensity* of His love.

He asks to hear our voice. Let us humbly and delightedly obey, besieging His throne with constant and importunate petitions. By prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let all our requests be made known to Him. And the peace of God, which passes all understanding, shall keep our hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

Let praise, also, be our constant exercise. Let it ever ascend as grateful incense to His courts. Let it sound forth in unwearied admiration. Let it depict our sense of His goodness and His grace. Let us tell Him of our delight in the glory of His person and His work. Christ stoops to mark our approach, and to listen to our voice. "Sweet is your voice, and your face is lovely." Faith is thus assured that such communion is welcomed!

2:15. "Catch the foxes, the little foxes that spoil the vines—for our vines have tender grapes."

A solemn lesson warns that *grace is a tender plant*. As such, it needs to be guarded with incessant care. A similitude gives the instruction. Believers are represented as a vineyard of luxuriant fruit. But it is infested with wily and injurious foes. Destructive broods abound. Stealthily they watch to inflict vital harm. Thus the tender shoots are constantly imperiled.

The picture leads us to mark the subtleties which lurk to spoil the Spirit's work. We are here called to mark the INNATE CORRUPTION of our nature. When sin entered, terrible was the ruin which ensued! Every imagination of the thoughts became evil, and that continually. A noxious fountain was opened to send forth poisonous streams. Briers and thorns sprang up in the blighted soil. These corruptions are as the foxes in the vineyard. They are perpetually assailing the sweet fruits of grace. Let us be wise, and ever on our guard. Corruption undetected—unopposed—will kill the buddings of sanctity within, and soon render the soul a desolate and barren wilderness. SATAN, also, ever hates, and ever plots, and ever watches to check the holy work. He is termed the old serpent. Is he not, also, a wily fox? How stealthily he crept into Eden's fair garden—with what deceitful words he enticed our first parent! With a lie he tempted and prevailed, and with daily lies he still continues to succeed. But let us meet this fox with resolute determination. When boldly encountered he will instantly depart. We know, that if we resist the Devil, he will flee from us. We know, also, that if our strength is weak against this ensnaring foe, we may call Jesus to our aid. Satan may be strong—but Jesus is stronger. The arch-

enemy may have power—but Jesus wields omnipotence. Thus let us catch the fox and all his brood. The victory will be ours. We shall tread Satan under our feet shortly.

Let our eyes be open, also, to the crafty temptations of the WORLD. No fox can surpass it in treachery and deceit. It calls to an attractive walk. It makes a show of pleasing prospects; and a path fragrant with flowers. But the path is beset with every peril. It leads from God, and goes down straight to hell. It presents a goblet mantling with enticing draughts, which, sweet for a moment to the taste, prove to be deadly poison. The world checks the budding of all grace. It renders the soul an expanse of dreariness and disappointments. Let us catch this wily fox. Never let him be spared.

In this evil world, also, TEACHERS OF ERROR craftily beguile. At first they show not their true front. A pleasing mask conceals their features. They can transform themselves into angels of light. But they are murderers in disguise. They check the growth of grace—they mislead into the region of ignorance and death—to receive their teaching is to abandon Christ.

Thus numerous is the offspring of the old fox. Let all be attacked with vigilance and unsparing effort to destroy. Let each like Dagon fall to the ground. Let each like Agag be hewed to pieces. Let us, also, be on our guard against the infant brood. Their appearance may be innocent. Their power to do harm may not be obvious. But such is not the truth. They can mangle the stem of the vine—they can

suck the precious juice. It is awfully true that temptations, however weak when once admitted, grow with terrible rapidity. Oh! let us watch—and resolutely crush. Let us spare not the little foxes, they will destroy the vines, which have such tender grapes.

2:16. "My Beloved is mine, and I am His—He feeds among the lilies."

The Church appears in raptures of delight. The heart overflows with love. The lips abound with heavenly assurances. The believer realizes, that he has acquired an inestimable treasure; that he has found the pearl of great price; that he has plucked the plant of renown. Gracious invitations have subdued him. On the wings of ecstasy he has flown directly to his Lord. He has grasped Him with indomitable might. He avows, "My beloved is mine." Who can count these inestimable riches! To gain Christ is to have all that heaven itself can give. It is to possess His blood to wash out every sin—His death to redeem from all iniquity—His sufferings to cancel the law's inexorable curse—His robe of pure obedience to adorn for the courts of heaven—His throne of glory to be a seat forever—His intercession to ward off evil and to enrich with blessings—His providences to direct events to promote real good—His angels to encamp around and to shelter with their protecting wings—His Holy Spirit ever ready to teach, to sanctify, to comfort—His God to be a God forever. Happy the soul, which can in truth exclaim, "My Beloved is mine."

Another profession is added. There is reciprocity. "I am His." The Lord prefers all claims to the possession of our hearts. The believer is His by *sovereign creation*. Christ willed his being, and he lived. Christ breathed into him the breath of life, and he shall never die. The thing formed is the property of Him that formed it.

But Christ is more than the author of being. The believer is naturally born a prisoner in the cells of Satan. He, stronger than the strong man armed, assails the prison-house—demolishes the empire of the powers of darkness—breaks all chains from the enfeathered hands, and bids the prisoners go forth. The liberated company are His by right of conquest. But they are deeply in bondage through their countless debts. They owe much to the wronged attributes of God. Great is the price required to liberate them from such demands. But Christ presents His blood. The scales of justice are more than filled. Every debt is paid. Thus believers are Christ's by *superabundant purchase*.

Moreover they are His by their *voluntary surrender*. Other lords have had dominion over them. Now they reject the vile servitude. They come forth like Israel's sons from Egypt's bondage. They present themselves and all they are, and all they have—their every faculty of mind and body, and every moment of their time, to be unreservedly a free-will offering to Him. So in every sense the believer exclaims, "My Beloved is mine, and I am His."

"He feeds among the lilies." A sweet description here follows. Christ is described as finding refreshment among

His people. The Church has been portrayed as the "lily among thorns." Here He is set forth as delighting in communion with the flowers, which His hand has planted, and His grace has matured. Wondrous condescension! It requires strong faith to grasp it. But it is an everlasting truth. It is His joy to have communion with His people. His delights are with the sons of men.

2:17. "Until the day breaks, and the shadows flee away, turn, my Beloved, and be like a gazelle or a young deer upon the mountains of Bether."

The truth is confessed, that earthly days are not without their gloom. The shadows of night are their frequent emblem. At these times how ardently the presence of Christ is sought! The cry is heard, "Turn, my Beloved, and be like a gazelle or a young deer upon the mountains of Bether." Turn and come near. Come quickly with the speed and activity of the gazelle and deer skipping and leaping upon the mountains, which form Israel's boundary. Bless Your loved ones with Your visits until the brightness of the heavenly day shall come. Then clouds and darkness shall no more obscure. Then they shall see You face to face, and ever bask in the sunshine of Your smile!

## Chapter 3

3:1. "By night on my bed I sought Him whom my soul loves—I sought Him, but I found Him not."

The Church lies low in deep distress. It is a season of darkness and despondency. She seeks her Beloved, but the search is fruitless.

The time of this scene is *night*. Life is not uninterrupted sunshine. The bright rays sink into shade. Gloom spreads its mantle, and night recurs. So, also, Jesus is not always present. For a season His smile may cease to cheer. The light of His countenance may be withdrawn.

Various causes tend to produce this lack of comfort. Faith remits active exercise. Unbelief comes in with deadening power. This hiding of Christ's face is midnight to the soul.

But this night has not forever blotted out the day. That cannot be. In the darkest time the sun is not more distant than when it brightly shines. The love of Christ is never quenched. It is enduring as His own being. *Communion* may be interrupted, but vital *union* is eternal.

Of this we have proof in the Church's present trial. If Christ's love had ceased, all grace would utterly have fled. The soul would have been bound in fetters of spiritual death. But such is not the case. In its desertion it still shows signs of life. In this her night, the Church puts forth some effort. She seeks Him whom her soul loves.

The appellation of her Lord is evidence that grace still lived within. She professes that her search is in pursuit of Him to whom her soul was warmly joined. Where this love is once implanted by the Spirit's gracious hand, it may languish, and flicker like a feeble flame. But the power which first caused its birth will still cherish. The originating motives are too strong to allow it to vanish with apparent absence. Its liveliness may wither, but its life endures. In the darkest night of desertion the believer will seek Him whom his soul still loves.

It is stated that the Church sought Him on her bed. She is lying lazily in indolence. She seems unwilling to be roused. Energies and activities are drooping. She yields to languid torpor. She puts not forth any power. She girds not up the loins of her mind. Drowsily inactive, she would like to continue in repose.

It is no marvel that such search is ineffectual. Disappointment might be anticipated. "I sought Him, but I found Him not."

Solemn is this warning. If we would soon regain the presence of the Lord, we must resolutely break from the

enfettering enticements of ease and indolence. We must not be slothful, but followers. "We ask and have not, because we ask amiss." We seek and find not, because our seeking is half-hearted.

But let us be assured, that the Lord though absent is not really departed. It is a tender word and should be cherished in the heart, "Having loved His own who were in the world, He loved them unto the end." Yet there are times when He "is a God who hides Himself." But these withdrawals really spring from the deep fountains of His love. They tend to invigorate faith. They cherish patience. They cause hope to look out with more ardent longing, and when His presence is restored, the soul is filled with redoubled raptures of delight.

3:2. "I will rise now, and go about the city in the streets, and in the broad ways I will seek Him whom my soul loves—I sought Him, but I found Him not."

The Church continues in distress. She is disconsolate. Her Lord is absent and her joy is gone. In vain she seeks Him on a bed of indolence. She resolves to exert her energies, and to make some efforts; "I will rise now." It is wise to break from indolence; but efforts will not prosper except they are put forth in right direction and in resolute determination. Many are the *good resolves*, which have borne no lasting fruit. Abortive desires end in disappointed blank. In early morning streaks of light promise a brilliant day; but clouds may arise, and gloom overcast the skies. Early blossoms may show lovely flowers; but frost may

touch them with a withering hand, and they may fall blighted to the ground. The bud expands not always into a full-blown flower. The steps which commence in right path may often pause, or be diverted into ways of woe. If we could listen to the wails of many a lost spirit in the realms of everlasting night, we would hear much of *blighted vows*. The resolve was formed to leave the paths of peril, and to walk in the narrow way. But Satan came; the world enticed; the flesh seduced; the hopes were frustrated; and the end was misery.

Lot's wife resolved that she would flee to Zoar. She paused—she cast a backward look, and moved no more. Let us take heed, that no good desire in our hearts may find an early wreck. The Church resolves "I will rise now." We find her not slow in compliance. Though it be night, and the season might tempt her to remain at rest, yet she goes forth—she traverses the city, in the streets and in the broad ways she seeks Him whom her soul loved. *Love is a mighty passion*. It urges to strong efforts. But efforts may err in the line taken by them. He has not promised His presence in public and crowded places. Such search can plead no word to ensure success. The warm desire may not fly on the wings of victory. It is no surprise then, that the Church repeats the wail of disappointment, "I sought Him, but I found Him not."

Let us be wise. Let faith enquire, "Tell me where You feed." We are not left without distinct direction. We are told, that Christ is a treasure hidden in the field of God's WORD. "Search the Scriptures; for in them you think you

have eternal life—and these are they which testify of Me." As the sun abounds in light; as the ocean is full of drops; as the summer grove resounds with melody; as brightest gems reflect sparkling rays, so is the Bible full of Christ. It testifies in terms most precious and most clear of the glories of His person and of His completed work. It records His grace—His tenderness—His love. It abounds in inviting calls. It overflows with precious promises. At every page it seems to say, 'Behold Me! Behold Me!' No veil conceals His beauty. He shines throughout in heavenly luster. They who dig in this quarry will never dig in vain.

He has promised, also, to meet us if we seek Him in His holy ORDINANCES. Where two or three assemble in His name, in the midst He will appear; and He will show them His hands and His side. In the communion of His saints He will manifest Himself. He joined the two disciples as they talked of Him in their sorrowful steps towards Emmaus. They returned to testify what things were done in the way; and how He was known by them in breaking of bread.

Let us thus seek Him. We may plead the promises that His presence shall be given. Precious discoveries will gladden the heart. He never says to Israel's house, "Seek My face in vain."

3:3, 4. "The watchmen that go about the city found me—to whom I said, Did you see Him whom my soul loves? It was but a little that I passed from them, when I found Him

whom my soul loves—I held Him, and would not let Him go, until I had brought Him into my mother's house, and into the chamber of her that conceived me."

The disconsolate Church appears still wandering in the streets. Her Lord is not found and she cannot rest. The guardians of the city in their night circuit meet her. She eagerly addresses them. Her full heart gives not the name of her beloved Lord; but she rapidly enquires whether they had seen Him. Impatient of reply she hurries forward, and to her excessive joy she now discovers Him.

Great is the transport of her delight. She clings to Him. She refuses to release Him from her embrace. She leads Him to some tranquil retreat, where without interruption she may hold delighted converse with Him. May the Spirit who delineates this touching scene write on our hearts its holy lessons!

The believer who mourns the absence of the Lord ceases not from diligent pursuit. 'Where may I find Him?' is the thought, which rolls like a full tide throughout his heart. He eagerly will seek direction from those who cross his path. Without giving name to his Beloved, he concludes that all who see Him must know the object of his fervent affection. He only describes Him as occupying the center of his heart. Thus Mary, in the garden, divulging no name, without preface, enquires, "If you have taken Him hence, tell me where you have laid Him, and I will take Him away."

It is well in times of desertion to seek directions from pious friends and godly ministers. Their holy guidance may give help—their wise counsel may relieve. Sorrows locked up may overburden. If they have vent, ease will come. But the believer rests not in ministers or friends. "None but Jesus—none but Jesus" can supply the aching void. The believer may profit much from godly counsels; but they are no substitute for Him whom the soul thus loves.

The heart of Jesus forbids protracted absence. When grace has had sufficient trial—when the set time has come, discoveries of Himself are quickly made. Who can describe the ecstasy of joy, which then overflows! The believer gazes with renewed delight, and enfolds his Beloved in his warm embrace. He clings to Him. He uses all holy boldness, and cannot relax his tokens of delight.

In the wrestling Jacob we have portrait of this overflowing feeling. The Lord desires release. The holy Patriarch exclaims, "I will not consent. I will not let You go."

Can it be that the believer, who is but feeble flesh and blood, can overmaster Him, who is omnipotent! Doubtless, in himself he is more feeble than a broken reed. But faith, the gift of God, is strengthened until omnipotence succumbs. He who kindled the flame keeps it burning with the oil of grace.

The believer longs for calm and tranquil communion, and thus retires from the giddy haunts of men to some

sequestered scene of repose, where, without interruption, he may tell the Lord all the feelings of his enraptured heart, and enjoy the charms of reciprocal tenderness.

3:5. "I charge you, O daughters of Jerusalem, by the gazelles, and by the deer of the field, that you stir not up, nor wake my Love, until He please."

The Church in this sweet fellowship dreads all interruption which may cause the Lord to disappear. How blessed will that day be, when sin shall no more enter, and Jesus no more retire! Swiftly may the hours fly, until the morning dawns, which shall usher in such blessedness!

3:6. "Who is this that comes out of the wilderness like a pillar of smoke, perfumed with myrrh and frankincense, with all the spices of the merchant?"

The teaching of the Spirit is boundless in variety. Nature in its endless beauties—art in its elaborate accomplishments—marvels of science—events of long-flowing history—annals of the past, are employed in the sacred page to give pictures of Jesus. A similitude of novel features is here introduced. The Church from her watch-tower looks abroad. She casts her gaze along the widespread wilderness. She beholds the advance of pillars of smoke redolent with every precious perfume. May He, who in unfailling love supplies this image, bless it to the instruction and comfort of our hearts!

The Church in wonder exclaims, "Who is this?" This question is not infrequent in the Word. We hear, "Who is this that comes from Edom—with dyed garments from Bozrah? I that speak in righteousness, mighty to save." Crowds at Jerusalem are moved by the approach of One to whom unwonted homage is given. The question breaks forth, "Who is this?" The reply is ready, "This is Jesus, the Prophet of Nazareth of Galilee."

It is wise in every object on which the eye is fixed, or to which the mind is turned, to seek for some manifestations of the blessed Jesus. He who thus tries to add to his stores of saving knowledge, will oftentimes be delighted with new views of Him whose excellence is inexhaustible. We may find much; but more remains unfound. The question, "Who is this?" opens the door for wondrous replies.

The Church here sees an object new to her admiration. But can this be Christ coming up out of a *wilderness*? Is He not God's co-eternal and co-equal Son? Are not the heaven of heavens His own home? Is He not God over all, blessed for evermore? Can such condition appertain to Him? Marvel of marvels—love surpassing all our powers of thought! He empties Himself of His glory. He descends to this degraded earth. He enters on a wilderness state. He assumes the rags of poor humanity, that in man's nature He may endure our curse—sustain our penalties—pay all our debt—shed blood to wash out our every sin—and to work out a righteousness with which to cover the iniquities and deformities of His people. Though He was so great, He becomes utter lowness—though He was so mighty, He

puts on extreme feebleness—though He was so rich, yet He is clothed in abject poverty—though He was heaven's Lord, He appears as earth's lowly child, and treads this wilderness, having no place in which to lay His head. We see, then, the aptness of the similitude, which shows Him in a wilderness state.

But an especial form is here exhibited. He advances as a *pillar of smoke*. Our thoughts at once are turned to the Tabernacle in the wilderness. By day a pillar of smoke rested on it. Clouds of smoke ascended from the Altar of burnt-offering—smoke, also, rose from the Golden Altar of Incense. Thus we see Christ corresponding to the grand teaching of the Tabernacle. These pillars of smoke are fragrant, also, with enchanting perfume. Thus to gaze on Christ refreshes—revives—cheers—exhilarates—gladdens. Myrrh and frankincense, and the costly spices of merchants, are employed to show the sweet delights which faith inhales from Him.

3:7, 8. "Behold his couch, which is Solomon's; sixty valiant men are about it, of the valiant of Israel. They all hold swords, being expert in war—every man has his sword upon his thigh because of fear in the night."

Our thoughts are here conveyed to the chamber of an Eastern Monarch. Solomon's couch is placed before our view. It is strictly guarded. Valiant men in numbers stand around. They are selected from the chief warriors. They bear arms, which they are expert to use. They are

watchful, lest in the darkness of the night some sudden surprise should imperil.

Here we are led to see how securely protection surrounds the Church. The bed of Solomon is named. This monarch is a conspicuous type of Christ. It is needless to exhibit the many features which depict the similarity. His couch represents the place of sweet repose. Thus we see the Church as the resting-place of Jesus. It is written, "He shall rest in His love." We hear the call, "Abide in Me, and I in you."

The couch surrounded by such valiant warriors, shows the Church guarded by secure defense. In this wilderness of woe God's people are exposed to countless perils. They are as the little lamb surrounded by a troop of wolves—as the dove pursued by devouring hawks—as a tender plant exposed to wintry blasts—as a vessel tossed by the billows, and threatened by treacherous rocks. But the Church lives, even amid her perils. No foes prevail—no dangers bring her to destruction. How can this be? It results not from any innate strength. No power—no vigilance resulting from *herself* could rescue her from sure ruin. She survives and safely reaches her eternal home, because her Lord extends His shield around her. The garrison of omnipotence is her defense.

How precious are the many assurances of unfailing support, which cheer our spirits! Of the vineyard of the Lord it is delightfully recorded, "I the Lord do keep it. I will water it every moment. Lest any hurt it, I will keep it

night and day." We hear the sustaining voice "The Lord is your keeper. He will preserve you from all evil. He will preserve your soul. He will preserve your going out, and your coming in from this time forth and even for evermore." We rejoice, also, in the knowledge, that He is as a wall of fire round about His people, and the glory in their midst. In tender terms we hear that "he that touches you touches the apple of His eye."

It is an eternal truth, that His people are kept by the power of God through faith unto eternal life. Their life is hidden with Christ in God. His sheep shall never perish, and none shall pluck them out of His hand. The Father, who gave them Him, is greater than all, and none is able to pluck them out of His Father's hand.

Solomon's couch is defended by Israel's *valiant men*, all armed and on the watch. An invincible garrison defends the saints.

Jesus gives His *angels* charge over them. "The angel of the Lord encamps round about those who fear Him and delivers them." Invisible are our mightiest foes. Invisible are our mightiest friends. Elisha prays that the eyes of his servant might be opened, and behold, the surrounding hills were filled with chariots of fire and horses of fire. If similarly our sight could be quickened, we should behold a multitude of the angelic host driving back the legion of the prince of darkness, and keeping us in sweet security.

The Lord, also, by His mighty Spirit, girds up the loins of our minds, and gives us strength to resist the assaulting Devil until he flees. He puts, also, in our hand the sword of the Spirit before which Satan quails. The armies of heaven, like Israel's valiant men, protect us from all sudden assaults. We are kept unto eternal life, by Him who never slumbers nor sleeps.

3:9, 10. "King Solomon made himself a chariot of the wood of Lebanon. He made the pillars thereof of silver, the bottom thereof of gold, the covering of it of purple, the midst thereof being paved with love, for the daughters of Jerusalem."

A splendid object dazzles our admiring eyes. The Eastern Monarch plans and constructs a chariot for his bridal procession. It reflects the treasures of his vast empire. Skill and the resources of wealth are employed for its embellishment. Lebanon contributes its choicest cedar—the mines supply their dazzling wealth. The pillars shine with silver. The bottom is resplendent with gold. The curtains are rich in materials of splendid hue. For the flooring which sustain the feet no suitable substance can be named. Therefore it is sublimely said, *Love is its pavement*.

In this instructive picture, we may vividly discern the plan and arrangement of the Gospel-scheme, and the provisions of the covenant of grace. To form this structure, heaven bestows its choicest possessions. But the *pavement* for the feet claims first attention. It is Jehovah's love. The thought

baffles all power to express—but faith delights to contemplate the reality.

The FATHER loves and designs a scheme to rescue His beloved ones from their misery, and to bring them in triumph, thoroughly fitted for His heavenly home. JESUS loves, and accepts them, as His bride—His jewels—His choice treasure—the sheep of His pasture—the delight of His heart. He comes to save, flying on the wings of love. He strides in love over every opposing barrier. In love He vanquishes their every foe—bursts the prison, which immured them—pays their every debt—works out for them vestments fit for His bride. In love He woos them—takes possession of their hearts, and rests not until He presents them pure and blameless in the presence of His Father.

The HOLY SPIRIT loves. In the plentitude of His grace He condescends to seek them in their low estate. By His sanctifying power He cleanses them from inward filth. He opens their eyes, that they may see Christ's finished work. He unlocks their ears, that they may listen to His inviting calls. He wins their hearts, that Jesus may be welcomed to occupy the throne. Such is the love, which constitutes the basis of this bridal chariot.

Let us gaze on it until our every faculty be melted into responding love, and until we can in truth exclaim, "Lord, You know all things; You know that we love You."

Every portion of the Gospel-scheme shows all heaven employed in using its riches to carry out the plan. It is the exhibition of unbounded wisdom. All the intelligence of angels and of men—all the resources of intellect and of mind could never have contrived a scheme, in which God and His every attribute should be infinitely glorified, and man eternally redeemed. God's highest WISDOM arranges this glorious plan.

What His wisdom designs His POWER executes. The pillars of the chariot are of the choicest metal—beautiful and durable. So God's power in its perfection consolidates the scheme. In vain is the might and malice of hell. In vain is the resistance of infatuated man. Every loved one by Him, is rescued from opposing foes—not one is lost. Divine power makes them more than conquerors. The chariot is for the 'daughters of Jerusalem'.

His PROVIDENCES, also, are employed to secure their heavenward course. Often is their path perplexed and perils seem to threaten ruin. But all harmonize at last, to give them safety and deliverance. Thus heaven constructs this glorious chariot. Happy they who through the riches of God's grace have been raised to a seat in this chariot! How can they utter praise sufficient! Once they were groveling in the mire of earth. Now they move onward with the heavenly Bridegroom to heaven.

3:11. "Come out, you daughters of Zion, and look at King Solomon wearing the crown, the crown with which his

mother crowned him on the day of his wedding, the day his heart rejoiced."

King Solomon strides forth before us, arrayed in wedding vesture. His mother places the marriage-crown upon his head. It is the day of his wedding—joy and gladness glitter on his brow. Festivity pervades the scene. To the contemplation of this happiness may we in humble piety draw near.

A far greater than the Eastern Monarch claims our first view. We think of Jesus, the Bridegroom of His Church. Of Him it is grandly said, "On His head were many CROWNS." Let us just glance at some of them, before we concentrate our view on the crown of crowns—the bridal diadem.

The crown of *essential Deity* is His. He and the Father sit on one throne of Godhead. He is God over all, blessed for evermore.

The crown of the *mediatorial kingdom* is His by Jehovah's gift. "Yet have I set My King upon My holy hill of Zion." In the book of Revelation He rides forth receiving all homage as the King of kings, and Lord of lords. This crown He shall wear until He gives up the kingdom to the Father, when God shall be all in all.

Warriors are crowned when they return in *triumph* from conquered lands. Jesus ascends with clothing dyed in

blood from slaughtered foes, and receives His merited reward.

But the crown, which we are here invited to contemplate, is that of MARITAL UNION. The Bridegroom's garb is the apparel which He condescends to bear. The name of Bride is tenderly given to the Church. We read, "He who has the Bride is the Bridegroom!" And again, "The Spirit and the Bride say come." Sweet is the assurance, "As the Bridegroom rejoices over the Bride, so shall your God rejoice over you." Precious is the promise, "I will betroth you unto Me forever." And again, "In that day," declares the Lord, "you will call me 'my husband'; you will no longer call me 'my master.'"

Here we enter on a wide expanse of Gospel-joy. We read with raptures of delight, that He takes poor sinners to be the objects of His tenderest love. Yes verily, He flies to earth, and becomes one of our family, that no dissimilarity of nature might intervene, and thus He is qualified to be our Bridegroom. He strives to win our love by every endearing effort. He knocks at the door of our hearts, and beseeches us to open unto Him. He cries, "Look unto Me." "Come unto Me." "Abide in Me." "See how I have loved you; behold My wounded hands and My pierced side." He sends His Holy Spirit to remove reluctance, and to win consent. Then the union is complete—the Bride clasps Him to her heart—it is the day of His marriage, and He receives the *wedding crown*. Angels rejoice when sinners turn to God—and shall not Jesus be glad when one

immersed in guilt surrenders to Him every affection of a conquered heart?

But at present, this union reaches not its perfect joy. Yet a little while, and the enraptured shout will be heard, "Behold, the Bridegroom comes—go out to meet Him." "Let us be glad and rejoice, and give honor to Him, for the marriage of the Lamb is come, and His wife has made herself ready." Then shall be the consummation of joy. The day dawns which shall never find end. It shall be the day of the rejoicing of His heart.

## Chapter 4

4:1. "How beautiful you are, my beloved. Oh, how beautiful! Your eyes behind your locks are like doves. Your hair falls in waves, like flocks of goats frisking across the slopes of Gilead."

Here is the admiring address of Christ to His beloved Church. He gives her the name which proves her to be a dear inhabitant of His heart. He styles her His beloved. He then proceeds to express His delight in her beauty. He strives by variety of image to commend her charms. He says in general and repeated terms, "How beautiful you are, my beloved! Oh, how beautiful!" He then diverges, and in seven distinct instances enumerates her attractions. These particulars are opened out in apt similitudes.

It is the marvel of marvels, that the Church should appear thus lovely in the eyes of Christ. We read—we believe—we adore. While we proceed to contemplate these diverse features, may the Holy Spirit increase our faith and thus give profit by this emblematic teaching.

Natural beauties here lend their aid. Their significance gives much food for faith's expanse. Conscience tells us how dark and deformed we are by nature. As descendants

of fallen parents, corruption is our inheritance and breaks forth incessantly in our thoughts, and words, and works. When we look at our daily course, shame and confusion sink us into dust. We blush to lift up our eyes to the all-holy One. We feel that rejection and abhorrence are our due.

But we hear Him say, "How beautiful you are, my beloved! Oh, how beautiful!"

*This estimation is wholly the result of grace.* Jesus, in the full tide of His mercy, comes down to earth, and in our nature walks before God in fullest obedience to every requirement of the law. Thus a lovely robe is woven, in which to array each member of the Church. Not one deviation from the perfect rule can be found. The acknowledgment then is deserved, "How beautiful you are, my beloved! Oh, how beautiful!"

By His SPIRIT, also, He works a gracious work within, and sows the seeds of grace to spring up, and blossom, and bear fruit. Hence He proceeds to specify, "You have doves' eyes behind your locks." Among the feathered tribes, none is more lovely than the dove. It is the emblem of humility, constancy, and purity, and thus sets forth precious elements in the believer's character. But its chief charm is the *softness and gentleness of the eye*. No pride, no haughtiness, no fierceness can consort with faith.

Hair is a lovely ornament. The goats of Gilead exhibit this truth. Flowing locks, also, are the distinguishing mark of

Nazarites, and proclaim believers as wholly consecrated to their God.

4:2. "Your *teeth* are as white as sheep, newly shorn and washed. They are perfectly matched; not one is missing."

Teeth are an especial feature of the countenance. Their charm is their regularity and their pure color. They find similitude in the shorn flock, white from the washing stream, and accompanied by sporting lambs. These teeth are more than ornament. Let them remind believers to *feed* upon the Word.

4:3. "Your lips are like a ribbon of scarlet. Oh, how beautiful your mouth! Your cheeks behind your veil are like pomegranate halves—lovely and delicious."

A ribbon of glowing hue is next named. It is an emblem of the lips. Lovely indeed is the believer's mouth, giving utterance to prayer and praise. The pomegranate, laid open to the view, exhibits splendid colors. The cheeks of the believer, radiant in open boldness, illustrates the similitude.

4, 5. "Your neck is as stately as the tower of David, jeweled with the shields of a thousand heroes. Your breasts are like twin fawns of a gazelle, feeding among the lilies."

Graces of the *form* are added. The tall and stately neck is as the lofty tower of David. Symmetry of body finds

image in twin gazelles feeding among the lilies. Thus nature furnishes her stores to show the beauty of the Church as viewed by Christ. Again we cry, 'What grace, what wondrous grace!' Again we add, 'Good Lord, increase our faith!'

4:6. "Until the day breaks, and the shadows flee away, I will go to the mountain of myrrh, and to the hill of frankincense."

We cannot sufficiently bless God for the profuse outshinings of His holy Word! It never wearies to tell in glowing terms of *Christ's loving heart towards His happy flock*. It portrays them in a diversity of images, tending to show how they attract His gracious favor. In this passage they are set before us as a mountain of myrrh, and a hill of frankincense, to which He delights to hasten, and in which He rejoices to tarry. May the Holy Spirit, from this new similitude, enlighten our minds and give fresh vigor to our faith!

*Mountains* and *hills* are grand features in nature's landscape. They uplift noble and conspicuous fronts, and afford *security from peril*. As such, they are instructive emblems of the Church. We read, "It shall come to pass in the last days, that the mountain of the Lord's house shall be established in the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills."

Of believers it is graphically said, that they shall be as a city set upon a hill. As these lofty eminences admit of *no*

*concealment*, so believers are called to be conspicuous among the children of men. Their holy walk, their heavenward path, should brightly shine, and command admiring notice. All should take knowledge of them, that they are much with Jesus, that their citizenship is in heaven, that they have taken a station above the debasing pursuits of this poor world, that they have mounted on the wings of faith, far above the plains of groveling pleasures, as the mountains uplift their heads from the humble valleys. Thus this image shows the Church in exalted grandeur.

But it rests not here. It further shows the mountain and the hill as preeminent for *delightful fragrance*. Here myrrh and frankincense flourish and abound. Here is luxuriant growth of all that cheers and charms the senses. We thus are taught that sterility and sinful pleasures are not their portion. The sweetest aromas float around them.

This view leads to the truth, that *Christ finds delightful solace in His people*. In this fragrance we are led to see that prayer and praise are as sweet beds of spices. It is joy and gladness to the Lord, when believers thus pour forth the incense of their hearts. He delights to listen to their supplicating voice, and to bow attentive ears when they open out their need, and in sweet communion, beseech Him to render help. Their praises, also, are as fragrant as the myrrh, and as satisfying as the scent of frankincense. It is indeed a mighty mystery, but faith clings to the truth, that in prayer and praise we glorify and gratify our Lord. Shall we ever, then, be silent? Let it be our constant effort,

and our ceaseless wish to besiege the mercy-seat with prayer, and to encircle the throne with praise. May we thus stand prominently out as mountains of myrrh, and hills of frankincense!

As we thus draw near to Christ, we have His promise that He will draw near to us—that He will come and take up His abode within us. His presence now is but a faint shadow of the brightness of the glory which shall speedily be revealed. In comparison with the light of heaven, these days are days of mists, and gloom, and darkness. *Ignorance* often is a concealing veil. We see but in part—we know but in part. *Unbelief*, also, intervenes, and utterly prevents open and clear sight. *Sins* rise as an obscuring cloud, and cast a shadow over the beauties and the smiles of Christ.

But soon shall the day break, and the shadows flee away! Soon, very soon, shall the Sun of Righteousness arise. Soon, very soon, shall we see Him as He is, face to face, in the brightness of His unclouded luster! The Lord shall be an everlasting light, and our God our glory. Shall we not cry, O Lord, we love Your appearing. Come, Lord Jesus, come quickly!

4:7. "You are all beautiful, my love; there is no spot in you."

Grand and precious are the *assurances* which hang in clusters from the Word! They spring from the heart of Christ, to cheer—to elevate—to gladden—to sanctify.

May we have faith to clasp them to our souls, and to hold them with unwavering grasp. Sweet is their meditation. They are the seed of holiness and peace. Their study is the very gate of heaven.

Christ had enumerated diversified particulars, which showed the charms of His spouse. Here they are comprised in one focus of concentration. "You are all beautiful, my love; there is no spot in you." The Church is thus seen as entirely wrapped up in Him. She is beautiful only in His beauty, and lovely only in His loveliness. "He was made sin for us who knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him."

There is *no spot* in the Church, because the blood of Jesus entirely obliterates each stain. Omniscience may look for sins, but no more can they be found. The absence of defect is the result of her being adorned with His perfect righteousness. In this no blemish can exist. Thus she appears righteous, even as God is righteous.

This blessed truth must be held fast without obliterating the knowledge of our own constant and innumerable transgressions. It cannot be too often repeated, that in ourselves we are deformed and loathsome. "If we say that we have no sin we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us." The most saintly of saints will ever breathe the prayer, "God be merciful to me a sinner."

4:8. "Come with me from Lebanon, my bride. Come down from the top of Mount Amana, from Mount Senir and

Mount Hermon, where lions have their dens and panthers prowl."

An earnest invitation follows, couched in tenderest terms. The call seems to be addressed to one, who pauses and lingers on the bleak and barren peaks of the lofty range which parted Israel from the Gentile world. In the recesses of these cliffs, ravenous beasts formed their retreats, and rioted in vicious work. In this call we hear the voice of Christ summoning us to separate from a world, which lies beyond His peaceful kingdom.

This range is infested by beasts delighting in savagely torturing the prey. The emblem is dark in warning. The summits of this range are bleak and barren. Such is this cold world. It is warmed by no gentle and genuine and generous feelings. It looks with chilling indifference on the need and misery of others. It has no heart to sympathize. It extends no hand to help. Selfishness congeals the flow of tender emotion. It cares little what the poor and needy suffer. It seeks mainly its own contracted interests. The mountain-top is thus the portrait of this wintry world.

The world, also, is a *barren* spot. No pleasing verdure clothes this scene. No flowers shed their fragrance. No goodly fruits are ripened to refresh. Briers and thorns are its poor produce. Here we look in vain for the fertility of holy words and works. Christ calls His people to come apart, and to unite themselves to Him.

But these summits are not only scenes of frost and unproductiveness. They have inhabitants, who delight in cruelty and craftiness. See the lion tearing the prey—see the panther crouching to take the fatal spring. Here again are the children of this world. Cruelly they ruin souls. With subtlety they lay wait to ensnare.

Christ bids us to abstain from such destructive fellowships. Let us hear His gracious voice, "Listen to me, O royal daughter; take to heart what I say. Forget your people and your homeland far away. For your royal husband delights in your beauty; honor him, for he is your Lord." Psalm 45:10-11

4:9. "You have ravished My heart, My sister, My spouse; you have ravished My heart with one glance of your eyes, with one jewel of your necklace."

Conspicuous parts of the human form are here presented to our view. Beauty in them attracts His admiring gaze. They are selected to exemplify *the charms in the Church which rivet the heart of Jesus*. He states the influence of the power which thus wins His love. We are hence taught the constant lesson of *the wonders of His grace*. The beauty, which He thus commends is *His own work*. It is His gift to the graceless and deformed. He first decks and adorns, and then expresses satisfaction in His own performance. He loves what His own love has framed. He is ravished by what His free bounty has conferred. From first to last, salvation flows in the stream of grace. It gives the blessing

and then adds more to the recipient. It is the first line and the last line in redemption's volume.

Here, also, we have the most endearing titles given to the Church. Jesus addresses her, "My sister, My spouse." We thus are reminded, that He by condescending grace has become one of our kindred. The sister and the brother are members of the same family. The bride and the bridegroom are one flesh. Jesus becomes flesh and blood that He might possess closest relationship.

What joy—what strength spring from meditation on these names! Where is the noble brother, who loves not the sister, and devotes not his best efforts for her protection and support! Where is the pledged bridegroom, who refuses to endure all sufferings even unto death, in the cause of his bride!

In these names then, we are distinctly taught how Jesus will withhold no power to advocate our cause—to screen us from foes—to deliver us from perils—to ennoble us with rank—to enrich us with gifts—to bless us with all blessings. Let us adore Him, for so graciously assuring us that we are unto Him, "sister and spouse."

4:10, 11. "How delightful is your love, my sister, my bride! How much more pleasing is your love than wine, and the fragrance of your perfume than any spice! Your lips drop sweetness as the honeycomb, my bride; milk and honey are under your tongue. The fragrance of your garments is like that of Lebanon."

The love of Christ, by the Spirit's gracious work, kindles *reciprocal love* in the believer's heart. "We love Him because He first loved us." This love is a mighty passion. It blazes as a strong flame. It displays itself in adoration and praise, and in unwearied effort to commend the Lord and to advance His glory.

The eye of the Lord delights in these loving manifestations. He exclaims, "How delightful is your love, my sister, my bride!" The perception of it seems to bring refreshment to His heart. He commends it, as more cheering—more invigorating—more strengthening than the properties of wine. As the weary and the weak partake of wine and are recruited in their strength, so Jesus marks this glowing love in His people, and avows that earthly refreshments are as nothing to it.

He delights, also, in listening to the *utterances of the believer's lips*. No cry of prayer—no song of praise—no commendation of His grace and work, fail to touch His heart. Is honey sweet to the taste? Is milk a soft and delicious nutriment? These emblems show the delight with which He marks each utterance of His people.

It is added, "the fragrance of your perfume is better than any spice! The fragrance of your garments is like that of Lebanon." The holy walk and conversation of the believer is as the sweetest fragrance. It is rich mercy to give assurance of this truth! The thought has power to quicken our diligence, that we may rise far above base and

sublunary pursuits, and diffuse the delightful fragrance of celestial life. What the Lord commends He is willing and able to accomplish. Let our prayer frequently be, "Sanctify us wholly, body, soul, and spirit." So shall the truths of this passage find their antitype in us.

4:12. "You are a garden locked up, my sister, my bride; you are a spring enclosed, a sealed fountain."

Nature here is employed to bring choice objects to our view. It is invoked to illustrate the beauties of the sister and the bride. It is used to help us to contemplate her excellences, as they may be deduced from the garden, the fountain, and the springs of water. These natural objects are rich in charms. May their delights now add instruction to our souls!

A GARDEN is unrivaled as a sweet spot. It is inclosed from the wilderness of the world. It is tilled with care and toil. Weeds and briers are diligently removed. The soil is enriched with all that can give it fructifying power. Flowers luxuriant in fragrance and brilliant in hue are set within it. It is abundant, also, in the choicest fruits. Thus every view of it is exquisite.

Here walks are prepared for refreshment. Here the owner finds tranquil enjoyments. A garden was man's abode in his days of innocence. The heavenly Father who designed his perfect bliss, planned this delightful residence. Thus the garden ranks high in nature's choicest spots. To preserve its fruitfulness and rarities, it requires to be well

watered. Hence in its enclosure the fountain claims a place—and springs, also, lend their aid to irrigate. Thus fruitfulness and luxuriance are secured. The garden, also, is carefully fenced. Strong barriers separate it from the surrounding waste. No destructive beasts can invade its privacy. They may prowl around, but they cannot reach the lovely plenty which smiles within.

The fountain and the spring, also, are well guarded. In eastern climates where the sun's rays are fierce, and water flows in few and scanty streams, these treasures were carefully guarded! We are told that huge stones were placed as safeguards at their mouths. Their possession often provoked fierce contention.

*As the vineyard carefully planted, prepared and preserved, has been selected as the Church's emblem, so here the beautiful garden and its refreshing supplies repeat the like lesson. Let us here view the people of the Lord as the antitype. They are chosen out of the waste howling wilderness. They are parted from the barren and the cheerless world. They are selected to show forth the glories of the Lord. In them fragrant and rich graces are planted. The Spirit sows the seed, and nurtures the growth of holiness.*

How carefully, also, are they preserved! A garden locked up, is their emblem. Many are the foes which hate and strive to lay them waste—but such rage and enmity are impotent as a broken reed. They are kept by the power of God through faith unto eternal life. Jesus their Lord is ever

watchful to defend. As the mountains stand round about Jerusalem, so His watchful eye and His almighty arm bestow security.

Providences are arranged to minister to their defense. The angelic hosts are employed to spread protecting wings around. Thus they are a garden locked up. May we strive to realize this emblem, exhibiting fragrance and fruitfulness and rejoicing in secure defense.

Let us live, also, as the fountain and the spring. They cheer—they invigorate—they refresh. Without them the soil of earth would be dry barrenness. Remove believers and you remove fertility and loveliness from the world. If they were not present the earth would be a wilderness noxious with thorns. As the fountain and the spring refresh, so holy words and works are a blessing to this earth!

4:13, 14. "Your plants are an orchard of pomegranates with choice fruits, with henna and nard, nard and saffron, calamus and cinnamon, with every kind of incense tree, with myrrh and aloes and all the finest spices."

Our attention is still fixed on the *fertility* of the garden. It is portrayed as abounding in all plants and shrubs which can delight the eye, or gratify the sense. They are multitudinous in number, and odoriferous in fragrance.

Imagination takes wing and flies back to the garden of Eden, in which God made every plant pleasant to the eye,

and good for food. This *garden* is chosen to represent the *Church*. The plants are very many. At any given time or place, believers may seem to be a little flock. But when all are collected, they shall be found to be a great multitude, which no man can number, of every nation and people and kindred and tongue. May we have happy place among them!

In this garden every tree and shrub is planted by the heavenly Father's hand. Doubtless in the world there are many counterfeits; but a searching day shall discover their unreality, and they shall be rooted up. There is a solemn warning, "Every branch in Me that bears not fruit, He takes away."

But every plant in this garden is a branch broken from the olive-tree, wild by nature, and is grafted into the good olive-tree, and partakes of the riches of the heavenly root. They are chosen out of the wild desert of the world. They are renewed by the Spirit's invigorating power. They bear fruits of righteousness to the praise and glory of God. They are the planting of the Lord that He may be glorified.

Mark the *fragrance* which flows from them, and the luscious *fruits*, which hang in clusters from their boughs. These are the graces, of which the Holy Spirit is the author. Pre-eminently FAITH is conspicuous. This is the eye which sees Christ Jesus—the ear which hears His inviting call—the feet which run after Him—the hand that grasps Him, and strongly holds the title-deeds of pardon,

righteousness and heaven. In this garden this flowering ornament emits transcendent fragrance.

In close contact HOPE blooms. It looks forward and discerns the coming glory of the heavenly inheritance. It traverses the spacious fields of promise, and deduces from each promise, most luscious flavor. Rich is the perfume of this heaven-set plant.

LOVE, also, sweetly blossoms. It is the counterpart of "the plant of renown." It is profuse in exhibiting the features which shall pervade the heavenly home. It is not obscure among the odoriferous plants of this garden.

Countless are the shrubs, which surround these most conspicuous plants. There is MEEKNESS with its lowly head—HUMILITY casting fragrance in the sequestered shade—PATIENCE, which endures, without withering, the adverse blasts, which threaten its destruction. There are JOY and PEACE showing their beauteous heads, and their refreshing forms. Indeed no grace is absent, which can contribute to enrich this paradise of God.

4:15. "You are a garden fountain, a well of living water, as refreshing as the streams from the Lebanon mountains."

Enumeration has now reached its close. The view has been concentrated on the collected treasure of beauty and perfume. It is however added, the Church is "a garden fountain, a well of living water, as refreshing as the streams from the Lebanon mountains." We know that

Lebanon supplied the rivulets which spread fertility through the chosen land. Thus from the Church the waters flow, which diffuse beauty and plenty through this fallen world. This truth is expressed in the words of Jesus, "He who believes in Me, from within him shall flow rivers of living water. This He spoke of the Spirit." May our bodies always be the temples of the Holy Spirit!

4:16. "Awake, north wind! Come, south wind! Blow on my garden and waft its lovely perfume to my lover. Let him come into his garden and eat its choicest fruits."

There are times when the garden is dreary, cold, and dull. The flowers droop, and charming fragrance ceases to float around. The invigorating and the congenial breezes have withheld their influence. The sigh is then heard, Oh! that the north wind would awake, and the south wind breathe again!

Similar is the case not infrequently with the believer's heart. The flow of grace seems to be impeded. The Spirit's work is intermitted. Faith is not in lively exercise. Hope looks not gladly from its high watchtower; and love exerts not its delightful sway. Other graces, also, are dull and languid. This is the time when the believer should put forth his energies in wrestling prayer. He should call for the Holy Spirit to return in His reviving and life-giving power.

The wind is the apt emblem of the Holy Spirit. It blows where it wills, and you hear the sound thereof, but cannot

tell whence it comes, or where it goes, so is every one that is born of the Spirit. Thus the Spirit's operations are brought to our notice. His absence is blight and deadness. His return is life and energy and brightness. Let His removal, then, be deeply mourned.

Sometimes He returns in *chilling dispensations as a northern blast*. These visits restore life and strength. Tribulation works patience, and patience opens the door, that other graces may revive. Before we are afflicted our feet wander from God's ways. By affliction the Spirit recalls us to the upward path, and gives us power to climb with vigor. Painful discipline prunes the too luxuriant vine, and causes more abundant fruit to fill the branches.

So, also, when mercy smiles and sweet prosperity diffuses joy, then gratitude swells in the heart—fresh discoveries of God's love cheer, and praise redoubles its adoring songs. Thus congenial breezes from the south call forth new life and fragrance. Hence we are taught that the Spirit's varied operations in turn invigorate the heart, and give new life to grace.

The fruit of these blessed visits is mainly evidenced in desire for closer communion with the Lord. The cry is fervent and incessant, "Let my Beloved come into His garden, and eat His pleasant fruits." Thus to partake is gladness to the Savior's heart. It is the marvel of marvels that anything in us should give God joy—but it is tenderly revealed that He takes pleasure when our hearts are faithful. Shall we not, then, strive and toil that every grace

should raise in us a fragrant head? Shall it not be our effort in all our powers and at every moment to respond to His desires! He thought it not too much to empty Himself for us. For the joy set before Him in our redemption He endured the Cross—despising the shame. Shall we be dull and languid in striving that our hearts should be as the garden abounding in pleasant fruits for His refreshment! It should indeed be to us the delight of delights to give delight to Him.

When then each morning dawns, let the earliest thought be strong, O that we this day may serve the Lord and glorify His holy name! As day proceeds, let the same earnest feeling be dominant within us! Let the cry be ever sounding, Lord, what will You have us to do! When the lips open, let no word issue forth, which is not redolent of grace. When the feet move, let every step be in the path marked out by His Spirit. At home—abroad, let us thoroughly live Christ. And when evening's shadows call us to retire, let our hearts bless Him for mercies so undeservedly bestowed, and let us cleanse the hours which have passed, by sprinkling them all with His atoning blood! Thus may we always present ourselves as full ripe fruits in the garden of His grace, and show that in response to earnest cry, the north wind and the south have breathed most healthfully upon us.

## Chapter 5

5:1. "I am come into My garden, My sister, My spouse—I have gathered My myrrh with My spice; I have eaten My honeycomb with My honey; I have drunk My wine and My milk. Eat, O friends; drink, yes, drink abundantly, O beloved."

Scarcely is the invitation uttered, when acceptance sweetly comes. The echo of "Let my Beloved come into His garden" has not died away, when the glad voice is heard, "I am come into My garden, My sister, My spouse."

Many and precious are the assurances that prayer excites heaven's smiles. It flies directly to the mercy-seat, and it triumphantly prevails. It is the Spirit's breath, and therefore success is sure. It touches the heart of love, and moves the right hand of omnipotence. No delay checks the outpouring of sympathy and help.

Let us especially treasure up the instance now before us. Let it dispel all doubts and fears. Let it excite to more earnestness in its exercise. How grand is the privilege of the believer! It cannot be over-estimated. He feels that he may present the entire volume of his need, and that supplies of grace will copiously respond. The answer may

not be in exact compliance with unenlightened words, but it will be in super-abounding wisdom.

Our blessed Lord invites our importunities. Why do we ever give Him rest? Let us revel in the assurance, "Before they call, I will answer; and while they are yet speaking, I will hear." To the supplicating Daniel the angel was bidden to fly very swiftly. It is recorded, that we might be followers of the example, and partakers of the success.

Let us now proceed to view Jesus hastening into His garden, and let us regale ourselves in the instructive scene which follows. He assures the Church that He is not indifferent to the graces, which He Himself has planted. He looked for fragrance, and fragrance fills the air. "I have gathered My myrrh with My spice." What an evidence of superhuman goodness is found in His being thus gratified by the produce of our poor hearts! He looked for redolence, and He expresses that He finds more. He testifies that there is food most luscious and abundant, to increase strength and invigorate power. "I have eaten My honeycomb with My honey. I have drunk My wine with My milk." Let it be repeated that it requires strong faith to realize that Christ can find any charms in the believing heart.

But let us never rise from deep humility—for He rejoices not in what springs from poor nature, but in what His love and power has cultivated. Let us learn, also, that He gives more grace. Never let us sit down content. Through His help we may have climbed high in the heavenward path;

but there are summits above summits yet to be reached. We may have drawn water from the wells of salvation; but there are depths below depths of surpassing excellence, which our lines have not yet fathomed. We may have gathered fruit from branches hanging low. But the topmost boughs are not yet touched. Let us never rest until we are filled with all the fullness of God. Let us cultivate our gardens with faith—with diligence—with prayer, that they may contain what our Lord seeks to find.

Marvelous is the invitation which ensues. We invite Him. Instantly He invites us. We see another exemplification of the often-repeated words—"Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If any man hear My voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with Me." Rich is the banquet which His grace provides. The Spirit describes it as "a feast of fat things, of wines on the lees well refined." On this table there is the rich abundance of the Holy Word—the refreshment of exuberant promises. There is the Bread of Life—His body and His blood, and all the discoveries of redeeming love manifested in His deep humiliation, that He might represent, redeem, and save. Who will refuse the invitation, "Eat, O friends; drink, yes, drink abundantly, O beloved."

5:2. "I sleep, but my heart wakes."

These words express the Church's frequent state. We see the workings of a twofold nature. The 'old man' obeys not the dictates of 'grace', but grace has existence, immortal and divine. Corruption spreads dullness and drowsiness

almost approaching unto death; but true grace lives in spite of opposition.

Sad indeed are the days when this somnolence prevails. Wretched is the time when the dull eyes are closed in sleepiness. All good desires languish as a faded flower. *Faith* no more strides forth in giant-power and grasps the Savior and exults in the glories of His finished work. *Hope* no more opens exulting eyes, and views the prospect of the glorious kingdom. *Love* drops its head and fails to sing the antiphon of heaven's songs. These graces, so precious in their active state, seem now depressed by the dull touch of dreary lifelessness. Torpor depresses where bright life should be in bold activity. Languor pervades the inner man.

The precious *Book* is not the constant study. Its pages are read with dull indifference. The beauties and the glories of redeeming love cease to be traced in every word of every line. Discoveries of the saving work shine not as the beauty of the inspired volume. It may be read; but it is a weary task, and not the rapture of raptures. Grace sleeps, and then the holy pages are obscure.

*Zeal* for the Lord's glory puts not forth unfailing energies. Efforts to spread abroad the knowledge of Christ's name languish. *Joy* becomes joyless—the song of praise loses its melody. Such and much worse is the state when the soul yields to sleep.

But whence the cause? It springs from restraint of prayer, and listening to the vile temptations of a deceitful world. We cease to watch. We cease to pray. We check outbursting praise. We listen to the tempter's voice. We do not come apart from the seductive company of the profane. Can we be surprised that spiritual liveliness departs! How dreary is this state! Let us be wise. Let us resist its every approach. Let our prayer cease not, "Quicken me according to Your Word."

But grace, though it is grievously *obscured*, is not *extinguished*. The eclipse *hides*, but does not *destroy* the Church's rays. We are "born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the Word of God, which lives and abides forever." Liveliness declines. Life still abides. The flame may not ascend; but there is oil in the lamp. The seed, though deeply buried, retains the germ of life. Our life is hidden with Christ in God. "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? shall tribulation or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us." Doubtless, if Satan could prevail, the work of Christ would come to miserable end. But His sheep shall never perish, and none shall ever pluck them out of His hand. "I sleep, but my heart wakes."

The flesh may lust against the Spirit, but the Spirit raises the standard against it. The strong man armed may do destructive work; but the Stronger in the might of omnipotence will surely triumph. We may despond, but we may not despair. We may be cast down, but we shall

not be destroyed. *We may sleep, but the heavenly principle still lives inextinguishable within.* "He who has begun a good work will perform it unto the day of Jesus Christ." "We are not of them who draw back unto perdition; but of those who believe to the saving of the soul."

5:2. "Listen! My lover is knocking: "Open to me, my sister, my darling, my dove, my flawless one. My head is drenched with dew, my hair with the dampness of the night."

Tender and melting is this picture of the Savior's love. We see the Church drowsy, indolent, indifferent, yielding to the seductions of a sleepy frame.

In contrast, the Lord appears unchecked by every deterring circumstance— knocking with persevering effort at the door—addressing her in terms of warm affection, and giving evidence that no coldness could obliterate His zeal. He prays for admission. He requests attention to the hardship of His exposed condition. May we contemplate the lessons of this picture, until our hearts overflow with affectionate emotion, and uplift their portals to admit the loving Savior! Obdurate indeed is he who can resist such persevering love.

We perceive here again the essential truth, that the believer, when yielding to overpowering seductions, still retains his spiritual vitality. His state is lethargy, but his ears are open. He cares not to reply, but still he hears. He will not arouse his powers; but still he cannot be

completely deaf. An inward feeling in the drowsy heart can recognize the voice of the Beloved. There is the knowledge that He is near. There is the recognition that He is anxious for admission. "It is the voice of my Beloved that knocks."

Much as we deplore this miserable state, it is pleasing to allow, that grace still lives, and is perceptive of the Lord's nearness. The address is identical with that, to which her ears had often listened, when she was rejoicing in her liveliest frames. The happy truth is impressed upon us, that having loved His own which were in the world, He loves them unto the end. The precious lesson is repeated, that *our indifference gives not a fatal blow to His everlasting love*. He owns her still as one united to Him by the tenderest ties. He has assumed her nature. He is her elder Brother. He owns her as the offspring of His family. He professes that His love is unabated. Its birth was in the everlasting day, and no time shall ever write its epitaph.

He delights in her still, as endowed with all the beauties of the tender and the faithful dove, and in His zeal to multiply awakening terms, He adds, "My undefiled."

In these appearances of present lukewarmness and unimpassioned indifference, she still retained her fidelity of heart. She gave not her affection to another. But still there is upbraiding in this voice. She is charged with lack of feeling—"See how I persevere. The chill of night is patiently endured. My locks exhibit the signs of my indomitable endurance. Though wintry inclemency in its

dreariest form bids Me to seek shelter, I cannot leave this inhospitable door. In spite of cold and suffering, I knock—I wait. Open, open unto Me.'

Where is the conscience which will not testify, "Here is a true picture of the indifference and sloth, which too frequently show such odious and repelling front! To many a startling providence—to many a friendly admonition—to awakening calls—to tender utterances of the Word, I have often closed my heavy ears. I cared only for my present ease. I desired to be left in the lap of lethargy, of torpor, and of sleep. But all praise—all glory to my Savior's love. He turned not in anger from me. He knocked until, overcome by such displays of goodness, my relenting heart responded, I am yours. Return. Come in and occupy Your throne."

5:3. "I have taken off my robe. Should I get dressed again? I have washed my feet. Should I get them soiled?"

Sad is this spectacle of the drowsy Church. But it is sadder far to hear excuses uttered by her lips. She will not arise when her Beloved calls, and then she pleads that no blame belongs to her. We see the downward course of evil. *Corruption ever strives to assume a self-justifying mask.* Oh! resist it—resist it in the bud, or it will soon bear wretched fruit. Resist it firmly, for it has much strength. Resist it resolutely—it cannot be easily subdued. The rolling stone at first moves slowly. But fearful rapidity comes on apace. A leak, small at its early opening, soon widens to admit a flood of waters.

Eve pauses and *looks*; and then the *hand* is stretched to pluck the fruit. Shuddering horror cries, "Am I a dog, that I should do such a thing!" How soon is the very deed accomplished! The Church springs not from her couch when first the voice is heard, and soon she thinks it well that she should still repose. She says in extenuation, that the call is unseasonable—for now is the time allotted to repose. She thinks it a hard requirement, that the garments lately taken off should so speedily be resumed; and that the feet just washed should again touch the soil. Is it proper that I should rise? It is rather fit that I should now take rest. But ah! the folly of such slothful reasoning. How poor the gain—how great the loss! *What is there in all earthly ease, which can justify an exclusion of the Lord!* The exchange is to take earth for heaven—to prefer a transient bauble to inestimable bliss.

Dreadful it is to see such madness in those who have had experience of communion with Him. What blindness to close the eyes which might behold His beauty! What infatuation to shut the ears, which might have the privilege of His sweet converse! What delusion to prefer the bed of indolence, to the walk by His side—to slumber and sleep, rather than actively to be engaged! How great, also, is the peril! What, if when He is thus rejected, His condemning voice should say, "Sleep on now and take your rest." Then the sleep of indolence would merge into the sleep of death, and the drowsy eyes would never see the light of life.

In this picture we see the frequent actings of the heart, when the first call of grace knocks at the portals. Many excuses plead for delay. We see the conduct of the man in the parable, who cried, "Trouble me not—the door is now shut; and my children are with me in bed. I cannot rise and give to you." The young are startled by some providence—some friendly warning—some solemn text. But they object—"there is time yet before me. The indulgences of youth invite—the world presents a fascinating cup—pleasures allure in most bewitching garb. Not yet—not yet. When the convenient time shall arrive, I will shake off these detaining fetters, and will arise to seek salvation."

How many worldlings, also, hear a voice calling them to come apart, and not to persist in ruinous pursuits. They hear; but they postpone compliance. No thought have they of *final* rejection. They only yield to the seduction, that *the present moment is inopportune*. They retain a hope that at more suitable period, they will leave all and follow Christ. Their conduct finds examples in unhappy slumberers of every class of life. They are sufficiently awake to hear the voice which calls them to arise—to shake off indifference—to give themselves resolutely to the service of the Lord. But they invent and cherish excuses for delay. Alas! *delay* is the near kinsman to *ruin*. Happy they who instantly obey. It is a grand word, "Awake, you that sleep, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give you light."

5:4. "My lover thrust his hand through the latch-opening; my heart began to pound for him."

The graphic scene continues and is replete with spiritual teaching. The suitor, knocking and craving admittance with most tender voice, is not provoked to cease his earnest endeavor. He turns not away in anger and vexation. He rather waxes more importunate, and redoubles His efforts to prevail.

He put in His hand through the latch-opening. This action, evidencing persistence, rejects refusal. He now partially succeeds. Feelings of remorse for indifference begin to stir. Here we see Christ unchecked in His endeavors. No sloth—no indolence convert His love into cold withdrawal. We see at once that He is God and not man. Where is the man, in whose heart proud exasperation would not have arisen? Who would not have withdrawn, never again to renew solicitation! But the love which burned from everlasting to everlasting will endure. *He who loved during all the deadness of the unregenerate state, will love through all the drowsiness of spiritual decline,* although His knocks and His loving voice have been unheeded. Efforts shall be redoubled.

Can we sufficiently adore such unconquerable grace! Where is the believer who is not constrained to confess, "If sin could have defeated grace, my sins would often have driven Christ from me. If I still live, it is because my Savior lives and reigns; it is because the billows of super-abounding love have risen high above the billows of my abiding corruption."

It would be long to enumerate the many instances which exemplify the words, "My Beloved put in His hand through the latch-opening." The effort conquers. The heart is softened and subdued. The feeling rushes in; "Shame on my base ingratitude! Shame on my cold indifference! Shame on my slothful frame! Shame on my pitiful excuses!" Thus the Church exclaims, "my heart began to pound for Him."

5:5. "I rose up to open to my Beloved; and my hands dripped with myrrh, and my fingers with sweet-smelling myrrh, upon the handles of the lock."

Activity is now roused. Haste is made to open the door. The hand is extended to remove the bolts and locks; and the hand thus employed is fragrant with the perfume which the suitor's hand had left. This *perfume* is the known emblem of *celestial grace*. In the riches of His grace, Christ used all means to remove the obstacle. Touched by divine grace, the Church, also, strives to draw back the resisting bolts. Thus grace in Christ produces grace in the believer's heart. Thus He gives more grace. Salvation from first to last flows in the deep channel of God's sovereign will.

5:6. "I opened to my Beloved; but my Beloved had withdrawn Himself, and was gone—my soul failed when He spoke—I sought Him, but I could not find Him; I called Him, but He gave me no answer."

Christ's gracious efforts had succeeded. The couch of sloth is left. Liveliness returns. The door is opened. Expectant love is ardent to give welcome. But sadly would the spirit sink, when no appearance gladdened! Grievous surprise would depress when no form gave rapture to the sight prepared to welcome. The spirit had failed when the voice of love was heard. How much more would it fail when to her calling no answer came! How many thoughts would crowd the bewildered mind! Can it be that my loitering spirit has caused departure, and that I am now left in merited desertion!

Far different is the real case! In grace Christ had called. In grace He now appears to leave. His merciful design has entirely succeeded. Love in the Church is ardently rekindled. Active desires after Him are thoroughly restored. The torpid action has yielded to intense liveliness. The Church returns not to seek repose. She can no more rest until the presence of her Lord is gained. But let warning here be heeded. Triflers may trifle too long. Loiterers may linger until patience can suffer no more. It is an dreadful word—may it never sound in vain! "Ephraim is joined to idols. Let him alone."

5:7. "The watchmen that went about the city found me, they smote me, they wounded me; the watchmen of the walls took away my veil from me."

The believer's course is not unruffled calm. Change succeeds to change in spiritual frame. The morning brightness often sets in evening storm. The voyage

commences in tranquil waters—but billows may swell before the haven is attained. If Christ, however, sits at the helm, the raging waves will not engulf—the promised rest will be surely reached.

The picture now before us exhibits such case. The Church was lately indolent and secure. She asked that no interruption might disturb her ease. Sleepy existence was her main desire. She asked to be allowed to rest. Such state, however, was not health. Safety is not in repose, but in activity of zeal. Christ in His grace will send *sharp dispensations* to dispel such indolence, and to gird up the loins for wholesome toil.

The time is *night*. The Church had pleaded, that rest was therefore due. The time continues to be night—but now in distress she leaves her home. Her Lord is absent. How can she remain in quiet? Into the street she rushes. She moves about in earnest search. She makes enquiries of all who cross her path. Nothing can satisfy until the Lord again be found.

How far more healthy is this state than her previous unconcern! Then she cared for nothing but her ease. She cares for nothing now but to recover her Lord's presence. Such is the state of the awakened soul. *There can be no substitute for Christ. He, and He alone, can fill the craving void. He, and He alone, can give solace and speak peace.*

What is the Church's reception from the outer world? Does she find sympathy? Is she cheered by wise directions? Is

she guided to the path of peace? Is she told where Christ may surely be recovered? Far otherwise. She is regarded with contempt. Cruel mockings meet her anxious cries. Such injurious treatment is not the worst. Harshness and persecution add to her deep distress. We catch here a glimpse of *the world's conduct towards Christ's followers*. We are warned, that we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of heaven. The Church's history presents sad pages of persecuting enmity. It would be sad to tell of the groans and agonies, which the walls of the inquisition have witnessed. It would be harrowing to relate how martyrs have been hurried to the stake. But *how much better is it thus to die for Christ than to revel in the world's luxuries!*

5:8, 9. "I charge you, O daughters of Jerusalem, if you find my Beloved, that you tell Him that I am sick with love. How is your beloved better than others, most beautiful of women? How is your beloved better than others, that you charge us so?"

Sometimes sympathy is found. Some friendly ears will listen to the Church's wail. To such she earnestly appeals. She seeks their counsels and their prayers. She beseeches them to make intercession for her—to spread out her case before the Lord—to tell Him that her sickness is extreme—that she faints—she languishes—she dies from her intense longings for His presence.

But still her case may not be fully understood. Such vehement desire may excite surprise. It may seem strange

that the Lord should so engross each feeling, and that all things should be counted loss when placed in comparison. Hence the reply is heard, "How is your beloved better than others?" The question opens the door for a rapturous description of the Lord's beauty, grace, and goodness. As we proceed to ponder, may our souls reply, "Such is my Beloved, and such is my Friend, O daughters of Jerusalem."

5:10-16. "My beloved is dark and dazzling, better than ten thousand others! His head is the finest gold, and his hair is wavy and black. His eyes are like doves beside brooks of water; they are set like jewels. His cheeks are like sweetly scented beds of spices. His lips are like perfumed lilies. His breath is like myrrh. His arms are like round bars of gold, set with chrysolite. His body is like bright ivory, aglow with sapphires. His legs are like pillars of marble set in sockets of the finest gold, strong as the cedars of Lebanon. None can rival him. His mouth is altogether sweet; he is altogether lovely. Such, O women of Jerusalem, is my beloved, my friend."

The Church is invited to give a portrait of her beloved Lord, and to depict the charms which have engaged the warm affections of her heart. Rapture instantly transports her on swift wing to ascend to the highest heights of praise. But the task surpasses all her powers. She brings to view a human form, perfect—exquisite in every proportion—beauteous in every feature.

She selects ten bodily members as showing forth all that constitutes His excessive beauty. She strives to give them reality, by comparison with the most lovely images in nature and in art. But how inadequate is this elaborate

portraiture! Let the rarest things that nature can boast, of unrivaled excellence, be collected in one picture—let art bring her most surpassing works—they dwindle into nothingness, when called to represent the Lord.

The sun in mid-day brightness hides its dwindled face, and nature verily sinks into nothing, when called to exemplify the truth. No voice of angel—no thrilling eloquence of man—no brilliant colors from the painter's hand, can offer any just similitude. All efforts hang down ineffectual hands. Nothing can be added to the simple tribute, "He is chief among ten thousand, and altogether lovely." We see—we praise—and we adore.

But the picture before us is written with most blessed intent. It calls us to *perpetual admiration*. It bids us rouse our languid powers to contemplate and commend. Let then, the eye of faith be quickened by these choice similitudes, and without attempt accurately to discriminate, let us learn from these ten particulars, that *beauty, majesty, and glory are all concentrated in Him, whom our hearts love*—in Him who is our Savior and our God.

Let us contemplate Him arrayed in the glories of essential *Deity*. He is God over all blessed for evermore. He is as

high and great and glorious, as God can be. He sits supreme above all that thought can conceive. He reigns forever the great 'I am that I am'. His power is complete omnipotence. His wisdom is perfect omniscience. Creation's wonders are the formation of His will. No earthborn words can adequately portray Him.

Our sight, also, is dazzled when we contemplate His love and condescension in taking the *manhood* into God, that He might be qualified to be the Bridegroom of His Church—the surety of His people—the Representative of His chosen ones. Thus we learn that all eloquence is utter feebleness, which strives to represent Him. If we attempt to draw His picture, the canvas fails to give the slightest image of His beauty and His glory. It has been deemed superfluous to dwell upon the several particulars here named. They might rather tend to distract the thought, than to enhance the truth of His pre-eminence.

But when we forbear to open out the portrait, let adoring faith remember that yet a little while, "He will change our vile body, that it may be like unto His glorious body, according to the working whereby He is able to subdue all things unto Himself." Lord, hasten the time when we shall be like You, and see You as You are!

## Chapter 6

6:1. "Where is your Beloved gone, O most beautiful of women? where is your Beloved turned aside? that we may seek Him with you."

We have heard the Church pouring forth the fervent feelings of her heart in admiration of her beloved Lord. The sluice was opened, the waters rushed in torrents; verily the cup was full, even to overflowing. Terms of praise had been exhausted, and eloquence had spread its wings in loftiest flight. Similitudes of beauty had been collected. Her love had blazed in ardent words of praise.

We now are called to mark the result. Earnest commendations of the precious Savior cannot go forth in vain. The Spirit, who prompts the utterance, will clothe it with effectual power. It is so in the case before us. They who listened to these sweet praises were not unimpressed. *Earnestness always commands attention.* Those who heard, instantly enquire, "Where is your Beloved gone, O most beautiful of women? Where is your Beloved turned aside? that we may seek Him with you."

It is a precious truth, that no one is called by grace for himself alone. Faith is not an unfruitful seed—it feasts not

at a solitary banquet—it hides not its pearl of great price—it delightedly exhibits it—it swells with longings that others should rejoice in its joys. Thus it freely communicates what it has freely received.

Great is indeed the shame when faithful lips are silent, and when no calls invite to the redeeming cross. If we had not heard the preacher's commendations of the Lord—if friendly lips had not told us of His grace, we might have been left in darkness, ignorance, and death. We heard, we paused, we listened, we felt interest, we were convinced. We enquired, "Where shall we find this Savior, of whom we hear these glowing tidings?" We were filled with desire to draw near and taste the sweetness thus proclaimed.

Here by example we are taught to work with diligence for Christ. They toil with joy, who have rich expectation, that sure blessings will be the end. The husbandman breaks the fallow ground, and scatters widely the seed, in full hope that in due time the tender blade will show itself, and ripen into fruitful harvest. Thus the believer warmly magnifies His Lord in happy confidence, that no word will return void.

6:2, 3. "My Beloved has gone down into His garden, to the beds of spices, to feed in the gardens, and to gather lilies. I am my Beloved's, and my Beloved is mine—He feeds among the lilies."

Faithful lips are not slow to give instruction. It is delight to direct others to the heavenly path. The counsel is ready,

that Christ will be found in the company of His devoted followers. It has already been shown that believers are His garden. Here He has planted His precious seeds, and here He seeks His refreshing fruits.

Hence enquirers are exhorted to come forth from the barren wilderness, in which thorns and briars only grow; and leave the company of worldlings, whose principles and ways are enmity to God—to break from such entangling chains—to cast away these bewitching goblets—to renounce all polluted fellowships. In this desert Christ dwells not. They who would find Him must hasten to His garden—they must join the happy flock who walk in the narrow way—they must frequent the holy ordinances, in which His truth is faithfully proclaimed.

Believers profess that here they enjoy communion with the Lord. Dwelling in this garden, each one can say, "I am my Beloved's, and my Beloved is mine— He feeds among the lilies." May we have grace thus to call others to be one with Christ! Happy the minister who will have many saved souls as his joy and crown of rejoicing in the day of the Lord Jesus!

6:4. "You are beautiful, O my love, as Tirzah, lovely as Jerusalem, majestic as an army with banners."

It is the main delight of faith to read the meltings of Christ's loving heart. This exercise uplifts from earth. It brings the riches of strong consolation. It strengthens the legs to march with activity along the heavenward path.

God's Word abounds with these invigorating assurances. The story of Christ's coming in the flesh—His taking our nature that He might become our surety—His weaving the robe of perfect righteousness—His dying on the accursed tree, are facts resplendent with the luster of His love. Abundant declarations corroborate. Such is the present passage. It speaks of the delight with which He views His Church.

It multiplies terms of admiration. Images are used, displaying her beauty in His sight. The loveliest spots on earth are chosen as apt emblems. *Tirzah* was a city in which Canaan's princes dwelt. It was distinguished by every charm, which could elicit admiration. Thus it is a fit exhibition. "You are beautiful, O My love, as Tirzah."

But Tirzah will not suffice. There was a city yet more renowned. Behold *Jerusalem* in all its glory! For situation, it was the joy of the whole earth. Go round about her—mark her towers, and her stately walls—pass her portals, and behold her streets built in compact regularity. Her palaces are unrivaled for magnificence. Her temple uplifts its front, a type of Him who is the brightness of His Father's glory, and the express image of His person. No spot, no building, could surpass in splendor. Such is the Church's beauty in the eyes of Christ.

Moreover, she appears before Him "majestic as an army with banners." Believers are not called to inactive life. The fight—the good fight of faith must be encountered. For it

they are equipped—in it they strive as *warriors*. Terrible foes assail them—hell, with all its legions, is arrayed in opposition; but they take to themselves the whole armor of God. Having done all, they stand. Their sword resists the Devil, and he flees. Jesus is the Captain of their Salvation. He is their banner, leading them to victory. Dreadful is this army to the hosts of evil. No battle ever yet was lost—no soldier ever yet was slain.

6:5. "Turn away your eyes from Me, for they have overcome Me."

We next hear of the power of faith, even over Christ. It wrestles with omnipotence. It will not forbear until it overcomes. We see its actings in the case of Jacob. Its divine Author gives it strength. Thus it takes heaven by storm. Sweet is the testimony of Jesus, "O woman, great is your faith; be it done unto you even as you will." How earnest should be our constant cry, 'Lord, increase our faith!' This grace strengthens in the use.

6:5-7. "Your hair, as it falls across your face, is like a flock of goats frisking down the slopes of Gilead. Your teeth are white like freshly washed ewes, perfectly matched and not one missing. Your cheeks behind your veil are like pomegranate halves—lovely and delicious."

From a general description of the Church's beauty and power, particular features are now selected for commendation.

Here Christ repeats His previous description of her charms. The repetition shows His unabated love. Let it call forth our unabated praise. We marvel indeed, that He who is all holy and pure, should find delight in beings such as we are. We often are disposed to ask, "How can He thus love what we must feel to be so unlovely!" The paradox is solved by the grand truth, that by *grace* we are saved. The scheme in all its parts is the bright manifestation of free grace. May the Lord hasten the time when the topstone of the fabric shall be brought forth with shoutings of grace to it—grace to it!

6:8, 9. "There are sixty queens, and eighty concubines, and virgins without number. My dove, My undefiled is but one; she is the only one of her mother, she is the choice one of her that bore her. The maidens saw her, and blessed her; yes, the queens and the concubines, and they praised her."

The commendation of the Church continues. A *contrast* shows her marked pre-eminence. We are led to the palace of some Eastern Monarch. It is a scene of pomp and luxury and voluptuousness. Crowds meet our eye of royal personages, and others of inferior rank, attired in every attraction to charm the gaze. We gladly turn away to contemplate the Bride of Christ.

One chaste and lovely image shines throughout the pages of God's Word. We always read, that the Church is one—not many. Doubtless it is composed of an innumerable company of souls gathered from every nation, kindred,

climate, living in every age—a stream flowing on through all revolving years. But the collected multitude is only one. There is no diversity—the individual members, who make up the blessed unity, have all been called by the one Spirit. They have all washed their robes and made them white in the one blood. They have all put on the one glorious robe of righteousness. They all utter the same confession of miserable sinfulness. They all walk in the same narrow way of life. They all profess the one faith. They all seek the one home.

Soon they will all sing the one song of "Salvation to our God, who sits upon the throne; and to the Lamb forever and ever."

The unity of the Church is a strong argument to enforce Christian love. Let us ever strive to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. Believers who injure one another, should know that the real injury is inflicted on themselves. "Now there are different kinds of spiritual gifts, but it is the same Holy Spirit who is the source of them all. There are different kinds of service in the church, but it is the same Lord we are serving. There are different ways God works in our lives, but it is the same God who does the work through all of us."

As there are not two laws and two Gospels, and two heavens, and two sacrifices for sin so there are not two Brides.

The Church is here commended for faithfulness to her Lord. She is the undefiled one. Her heart and her affections are wholly given to Him. There was a time when other lords had dominion over her; but the Spirit by His power has now entirely subdued her heart. There one object reigns supreme. She holds no more dalliance with the seducing world. She is espoused as a chaste virgin. By this mark she is distinguished from the countless voluptuaries of this polluted earth. In heartfelt sincerity she professes, "I am my Beloved's, and my Beloved is mine."

Doubtless the enmity of the world is her portion. Forever true is the word, "If you were of the world, the world would love its own—but because you are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hates you."

But still homage and reverence is awarded to her. As Christ could not be hidden; so neither can the Church. The guilty Herod felt the power of the Baptist's preaching. Felix trembled before the captive Paul. So the Church still possesses influence, which cannot be questioned. The man of God is a power wherever He abides. "The maidens saw her, and blessed her; yes, the queens and the concubines, and they praised her."

Observation attests the truth, that faith never glows without imparting warmth around. A believer may dwell in some lowly hut—no influence of rank, of station, of wealth, of talent may be his portion; but it is always found

that his humble life is not in vain. Some eye will rest upon his peace, and obvious blessedness, and will receive a lesson which takes deep root. The impression will go forth, that godliness has the promise of the life that now is, as well as of the life that is to come. It will be seen that while lordly owners have trouble and sadness in their vast possessions, the meek have real enjoyment of this earth.

6:10. "Who is she that looks forth as the morning, fair as the moon, clear as the sun, and majestic as an army with banners?"

The praises of the Church are as boundless as the Bridegroom's love. Varied images have been employed in commendation of her beauty. The theme is not exhausted. Varied images still enlarge the picture. The grandest cities of the earth, pre-eminent in situation and in construction, have contributed illustration. We are now led to expand our vision, and to contemplate the glories of the skies over our heads. It proclaims a lesson to the ears of faith. In it we read how beauteous is the Church! "She looks forth as the morning."

What can be more lovely than the first streaks of light along the eastern sky! The eye beholds and admires with joy. Slender at first, the rays gradually increase. As they wax stronger their beauty amplifies. Mists and vapors disappear before them. A glowing prospect springs to light. The plains, the mountains, and the sea cast off the garb of darkness, and exhibit an illumined face. Inhabitants of earth awaken to their daily toil, and with

gratitude go forth. Let us see in the opening of returning day the beauty of the Church. Where it appears strong in the Lord, and bright in His grace, ignorance no more spreads its gloom. Discoveries of God, of His character, and of His work are gradually unveiled. The light shines more and more unto the perfect day. Thus *morning light* is a similitude of the Lamb's Bride.

Again lift up the eye, and mark the skies. Evening shadows prevail. Darkness has spread around its obscuring mantle. But a bright orb is seen on high. The MOON appears in sweet and silvery light. It pursues its beauteous course, delighting the gladdened earth. What object can be more enchanting! What eye can weary in gazing on the lamp of night! By its soft rays the wakeful shepherd tends his flock—the weary traveler pursues his way—the sleepless mariner directs his course. Thus the lesser light rules the night.

Let our admiring eyes read spiritual improvements. Adorned in grace the Church thus shines, and scattering benefits thus moves. Lovely is the moon in heaven; and lovely, also, Christ's Church on earth.

But the similitudes of the skies are not exhausted. Behold the glorious SUN. In majesty and glory it strides across the skies. Its rays dispel all darkness, and give life to the dormant powers of earth. Marvelous is, indeed, the grace, that this emblem of the blessed Lord should be employed to give figure to the Church. We learn the wondrous truth, that God who gives Himself for her, enrobes her in His

perfect beauty. It is a marvelous thought, that yet a little while we shall be like Him—for we shall see Him as He is. Our bodies of humiliation shall be transformed to the likeness of the body of His glory. His favored servants shall shine forth as the sun in his strength.

Again the Church is exhibited as a bannered army marching forth to victory. Let us clasp to our hearts the invigorating truth, that Christ's followers are arrayed in the armor of omnipotence—that no enemy can finally impede their heavenward course; and that they shall tread Satan under their feet shortly. All praise to Him who has loved us, and given Himself for us!

6:11. "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."

A garden is again presented as an emblem of the Church. The similitude is apt, significant, and teaching. It is often therefore introduced, and cannot be too often studied. It is a spot *enclosed* from the wilderness of the world, *prepared* by careful culture, and *enriched* with the choicest flowers and fruits. It abounds with recreations and delights. Its cultivation gives especial pleasure. Frequent are the visits of the owner; and with anxiety He watches the budding fruits—the opening blossoms—the ripening clusters.

Thus Christ's ever-watchful eye surveys His people. He has prepared their hearts as the good ground. He has filled it with good seed; and He looks to see that good fruit is the

result. May it be so with us! Shame indeed will be justly ours, if His selecting care, and His enriching grace should end in barrenness and disappointment. Shame if when He comes and looks for sweet grapes, He finds sour grapes. How sad when in this garden, barren fig-trees show nothing but the leaves of profession, without reality of precious fruit! There should be no limits to our longings after fruitfulness. "Herein is My Father glorified, that you bear *much fruit*. So shall you be My disciples." May we be fragrant flowers, as those blooming in Eden's garden! May we be trees of righteousness richly laden with the choicest produce! Means for this end are largely within our reach. Let us seek the enriching seed of the heavenly Word. May we capture heaven with the force of prayer! May our dwellings be under the ripening rays of the Sun of righteousness!

12. "Before I realized it, my desire set me among the royal chariots of Amminadab."

We are suddenly met with a rapturous exclamation. Without too curiously seeking to connect it with the context, we see in it the experience, which sometimes overpowers the soul with joy. Who has not known such blissful moments! Light suddenly breaks in. Extraordinary energy invigorates the heart. The wings are expanded for rapid flight. Earth is left. The soul seems wafted to the heaven of heavens. Jesus appears with fresh discoveries of His redeeming love. Our names are seen written in bright colors on His heart and on His hands. The celestial portals seem to open wide; a glimpse is obtained of the

blessedness within, and a taste is given of the joys which are at God's right hand for evermore. The consummation is apparently realized. Earth vanishes to immeasurable distance. Celestial heights are reached. Deliverance from sin and Satan are joyfully grasped. The feeling rushes in. This is heaven. Eternity is secure. If such anticipations have been occasionally granted, may they quicken the longings for the never-ending attainment!

Such joyous flight is in rapidity like the motion of some well-known charioteer. This rapture was given in wondrous measure to the enchanted Paul. Behold the record, "I knew a man in Christ above fourteen years ago (whether in the body I cannot tell, or whether out of the body I cannot tell— God knows) such an one caught up to the third heaven. And I knew such a man (whether in the body, or out of the body I cannot tell—God knows) how that He was caught up into Paradise, and heard unspeakable words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter." Let it be noted that such wondrous revelations are only given as a mark of most especial grace, and let us, also, perceive what amazing fruits the hand of faith may sometimes pluck.

6:13. "Return, return, O Shulamite; return, return, that we may look upon you. What will you see in the Shulamite? As it were the company of two armies."

The Church receives a new name. It is a pleasing thought, that this title seems to intimate that she is a citizen of *Salem*, the capital of the Prince of peace. It thus transports

us to the happy time when the Bride shall appear, as the "new Jerusalem coming down from God out of heaven prepared as a bride adorned for her husband." Oh! blissful day. Oh! happy company. On that morn may we appear as true Shulamites! The address, also, is couched in terms of importunity. The cry is redoubled, "Return, return." We marvel at this condescending love.

The believer often has to traverse dark days on earth. Restraint of prayer— neglect of appointed means— dallying with the distracting pleasures of the world— indifference and sloth betray departure from the Lord. Such sad strayings quench refreshing joy and peace. May the Spirit at such periods prompt the cry, "Return, return. Without You life is a dreary wilderness."

This, however, is not the truth of the passage now before us. We rather hear the blessed Jesus deploring the absence of the straying soul, and tenderly calling her to come back. How gracious—how encouraging is this evidence, that Jesus desires His people never to wander from Him! Sweet is the exhortation, "Abide in Me, and I in you." The Savior should be the Church's home. Believers dwell in God, and God in them. Hence in the multitude of tender mercies, the call to return is an assurance of His desire for the closest union. "Return, O backsliding Israel, says the Lord, and I will not cause my anger to fall upon you for I am merciful, says the Lord, and I will not keep anger forever."

Let the thought of the gracious welcome quicken the returning steps of each backsliding child. Let not the voice

be heard in vain, "O Israel, return unto the Lord your God—for you have fallen by your iniquity."

Steps may have wandered far in the downward path. But still we are not beyond the limits of return. Wide may be the barrier, but it is not impassable. We are thus taught that *we cannot fathom the oceans of His love.*

Marvelous, also, is the reason here adjoined—"Return, return, that we may look upon you." We are bid to look to Jesus; and to see Him is Salvation. We are exhorted to pursue our heavenward path, laying aside every weight—looking off to Jesus the author and finisher of faith. Happy are the eyes which never weary in this blissful gaze! But here we are told of *the heavenly Bridegroom's desire to look upon the Church.*

If the sight of believers on earth, so full of imperfection, can be regarded with complacency, what must the sight be in heaven, where all are transformed into the glorious likeness of the Son of God! "Beloved, now are we the sons of God—but it does not yet appear what we shall be. But we know that when He shall appear, we shall be like Him—for we shall see Him as He is."

Now the believer's heart is as a battle-field, in which contending armies engage. The 'old man' wounded and dying still shows much power to maintain a conflict. The 'new man' wrestles for the victory. The flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary, the one to the other. The Shulamite is a company

of two armies. She fights the good fight of faith. The victory, the triumph, and the crown will soon be won. Then all struggle—all conflict shall be forever ended.

## Chapter 7

7:1-5. "How beautiful are your sandaled feet, O queenly maiden. Your rounded thighs are like jewels, the work of a skilled craftsman. Your navel is as delicious as a goblet filled with wine. Your belly is lovely, like a heap of wheat set about with lilies. Your breasts are like twin fawns of a gazelle. Your neck is as stately as an ivory tower. Your eyes are like the sparkling pools in Heshbon by the gate of Bath-rabbim. Your nose is as fine as the tower of Lebanon overlooking Damascus. Your head is as majestic as Mount Carmel, and the sheen of your hair radiates royalty. The king is held captive in your queenly tresses."

Another title is here given to the Church. It proclaims her *royal* descent, and her relationship to the King of kings. By nature she is the offspring of lowest degradation—the child of wrath—the heir of never-ending woe. But through abundant grace—through the overflowing plenitude of divine love, she is born again. A new nature is infused. She is translated from the powers of darkness into the family of God; and is taught in filial truth to cry, 'Abba, Father'.

What wondrous love! It surpasses the power of human thought. It exceeds the highest terms of praise. But let the

truth be not ignored, because it is so wondrous. That we may duly regard it, and deduce from it comfort and strength, it is repeatedly enforced.

In this new creation the Eternal Spirit is the glorious agent. No lesser power could suffice—no mightier power could heaven supply. The same agency is employed which raised the lifeless Jesus from the tomb. The new creation is accomplished by the working of that arm of omnipotence, which set Him at His own right hand in the heavenly places, "far above all principality and power and might and dominion, and every name that is named; not only in this world, but also in that which is to come." Believers thus born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the Word of God, which lives and abides for ever, are regarded as even now sitting together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus. They live as heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ. They may at all times realize their high exaltation. They have heard the cry, "Come out from the world and be separate." They have received the assurance, "I will receive you, and you shall be My sons and daughters, says the Lord Almighty."

As such the Church is invested with heavenly beauty. The objects which are pre-eminent for loveliness are selected to exhibit her charms. The passage before us is replete with allegorical similitudes. They give rich feast to contemplation. They invite the mind to indulge in thoughts of the exquisite beauty of the human form.

It would be long exercise to deduce minute instruction, and to reap the abundant harvest which every part might easily present. Let it here suffice, generally to say, that the Church is portrayed as lovely with all loveliness—as beauteous in all beauty—as graceful in all graces—as charming in each charm—as attractive in every attraction—as arrayed with apparel befitting her royal state—as worthy of her Father's house—as exciting by perfect formation the Bridegroom's admiring love.

"The king is held captive in your queenly tresses." He admires, and stands enchained in contemplation of His beloved. Let this passage fill us with grateful joy. We should indeed be thankful for such transporting revelations. Let us be ever studious of the sacred page. Its gracious design is to win us to more constant gaze on Jesus. Blessed effects always follow. As we behold, we are transformed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord. As the rays of the sun ripen earth's fruits, so *warmth from His contemplation will cause our graces to expand*. Let us live, looking unto Jesus, until we shall see Him face to face.

7:6-9. "Oh, how delightful you are, my beloved; how pleasant for utter delight! You are tall and slim like a palm tree, and your breasts are like its clusters of dates. I said, 'I will climb up into the palm tree and take hold of its branches.' Now may your breasts be like grape clusters, and the scent of your breath like apples. May your kisses be as exciting as the best wine, smooth and sweet, flowing gently over lips and teeth."

In general terms the Church's loveliness is again set forth. High gratitude is due, that faith is thus strengthened, and encouragement to repose on Christ's love is quickened. Doubts and fears can retain no place before the bright beams of these assurances. Let us treasure them up in our hearts, and draw refreshment from their repeated exhibitions. Firm will he stand—joyful will he march onward, who cherishes the blessed thought, "I am dear to the heart of Jesus"—and whose happy mind can revel in the truth, "Oh, how delightful you are, my beloved; how pleasant for utter delight!"

From this general assurance Christ in His super-abounding grace proceeds to specify particular features of beauty and distinction. We are bid to go forth and mark the objects, which in the gardens and the orchards and the plantations, most captivate our eyes. The beauty here seen is specified as *depicting the Church's grace*. Behold the stately palm-tree. Its waving boughs are laden with abundant dates. Enter the vineyard. The vine presents its wide-spreading branches. They are enriched with clusters of luscious fruit. Approach, also, the orchard. What objects can be more enchanting to the sight, than apples of various form and hue and fragrance! As we behold—as we admire, we are taught in them the wondrous lesson—thus precious is the Church in the Redeemer's sight.

But let us not forget the truth, that *all this beauty is derived from His love, and is the work of His adorning hand*. In themselves, Christ's people are all deformity and

loathsomeness. By nature they have no loveliness or grace. But vile appearance has disappeared—beauty in exchange has been most largely given. Their native look was the result of sin—that hideous monster, which defaced creation's fair form, and turned man's heart into the abode of vileness and filth.

But *where are the believer's sins?* Far as the east is from the west Christ has removed them. Deep in the ocean of His redeeming merits He has buried them. Behind God's back they are forever cast. Christ's blood has been sprinkled over them, and they are whiter than the whitest snow. Omniscience may search—but it must search in vain. No more can they be brought to sight. No spot—no wrinkle—no defect—no blemish—no fault—no shortcoming can be discovered. "God is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." If the absence of everything ungraceful constitutes grace, how lovely is the Church in Christ's esteem!

But there is not only the absence of everything which can displease—there is the presence of all that can enrapture. Not only is the 'old man' destroyed—the 'new man' is raised up, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness. Likeness to the Elder Brother is inwrought. Is Christ lovely? So, also, is the Church. The righteousness of Christ is spread around her, as the garment of salvation, and the robe fit for heaven's court. With rapturous gratitude we hear the assurance, "Oh, how delightful you are, my beloved; how pleasant for utter delight!"

7:10. "I am my Beloved's, and His desire is towards me."

Faith sings aloud on the highest pinnacles of joy, when it sets forth Christ's love. It is delight thus to trace the various claims which He presents to the possession of His Church. May we approach the view with eyes uplifted for enlightening grace; and may every discovery give strength and peace!

What can He *not* do, or bear, who in undoubting confidence can say, "I am my Beloved's." Is the creature the property of the Creator? Does the Maker claim His work as His undisputed possession? Thus Christ, as the eternal Creator, has right to every faculty and power of our minds and bodies. Of His own sovereign will He called us from nothing into present being—from the dust of the earth He gave us living bodies, and into these bodies, by His Spirit, He breathed the breath of life. No right have we to regard ourselves in any sense as our own property. At every moment the enquiry should be, "Lord, what will You have me to do?"

It is sad robbery to use in others' service the bodies, the minds, the powers, which are Christ's. Happy the soul that says, 'I am Christ's by creation'. It is happier to add, 'I am His by redemption'. We had sold ourselves into an enemy's hand. Another Lord had obtained dominion over us. Fetters enchained our every faculty. We lived as slaves in a tyrant's foul cell. But Christ appears omnipotent to rescue. In vain the powers of darkness strain their utmost.

He hurls the potentate of evil from his wrongful throne. He shatters to atoms his tyrannic scepter. He tramples beneath all-conquering feet his vaunted legion. He says to each of His own beloved children, 'Come forth to holy liberty'. Happy the soul which thus feels, "I am my Beloved's. He has delivered me from the tyrant's yoke." Shame—shame on those, who would return to do service to that tyrant from whom they have been so marvelously rescued.

But believers, moreover, by their evil ways were deeply in God's debt. They had robbed Him whom they were bound to serve. They had defrauded Him of all due allegiance. Justice demanded, that they should pay to the uttermost their every debt. Christ appears. He asks, 'What is the demand'. The answer is most clear. The transgressor is doomed to everlasting death; but substitutionary endurance and payment is allowed. Christ replies, "Behold Me. My Deity gives infinitude to My every act. On the Cross I make complete satisfaction." Justice requires no more. Happy the soul that feels, I am my Beloved's. He has bought me by an all-sufficient and infinite price. Shall the redeemed by Christ's blood return to renewed robbery of God. Forbid it every grateful heart. Forbid it every pious resolve. Forbid it every holy feeling.

The believer realizes, also, that he is Christ's by his own *voluntary surrender*. He has listened in the pages of the Word to His inviting calls. He has heard His loving voice. He has been made willing in the day of Christ's power. Heavenly love has melted the obduracy of the rocky heart. It has turned the enmity into abounding love. It has

prompted the cry, 'Now to be Yours, and only Yours, I come, dear Lord, I come'. Happy the soul which thus can realize, 'I am my Beloved's by my own free choice, by my willing surrender'. Let not the vows thus pledged to the Lord ever wax weak! Can it be, that Christ will be indifferent to the property thus given Him by His Father's love, and won by His own efforts! Who will not desire to hold possession of His own? Thus faith advances to the transporting thought, "His desire is towards me." This desire cannot be frustrated. It secures possession for time and for eternity.

7:11-13. "Come, my beloved, let us go out into the fields and spend the night in the villages. Let us get up early and go out to the vineyards. Let us see whether the vines have budded, whether the blossoms have opened, and whether the pomegranates are in flower. And there I will give you my love. There the mandrakes give forth their fragrance, and the rarest fruits are at our doors, the new as well as old, for I have stored them up for you, my beloved."

Rural scenes excite pure joys. It is sweet in spiritual frame to traverse the meadows and the groves. Objects on all sides present similitudes of Christ. To cultivate this taste is to make walks on earth assimilate to walks in heaven. An invitation here meets us to go forth into the country. There is some doubt from whose lips this call proceeds. Is Christ the speaker, or the Church? We cannot go far astray, if we join together both voices. Thus mutual communion will be obtained. In Scripture, reciprocal expressions are frequently interwoven.

The first word here gives proof. "Come" is a tender call from JESUS to His people. He would not have them stand apart. He desires them to clasp Him to their very heart. "Come unto Me all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." Blessed is it to reply, 'I come, dear Lord, I come'.

Frequently, also, is this call uttered from the BELIEVER'S heart. The absence of his Beloved is a miserable existence. He follows Him with invitations to come in and occupy each portion of his heart, and never more to leave him for a moment. And longing for the heavenly home, and for the eternal joys, he cries, "Come, Lord Jesus, come quickly." The believer desires His Lord's presence in all places—not only in the haunts of crowded cities, but in the comparative loneliness of fields and villages. Without Him every place is an empty wilderness. With Him every place is as Eden's fair garden. There is toil for the believer in the crowded streets—there is work, also, for him in the quiet villages—there is work at home—there is work abroad—but that work may prosper, Jesus must grant His presence. "If Your presence does not go with me, take me not up hence."

There must be no delay in thus seeking mutual work. "Let us get up *early* and go out to the vineyards." Christ shines as an example. A great while before day He went forth to commune with His God.

But to what place should these early visits be especially directed? To the spots where *fruits* of righteousness abound. Christ's desire is to mark the progress which believers make in the work of holiness. He sows good seed. His delight is to see how this good seed responds in abundant crops. Oh! let Him never find us as fruitless gardens, or as barren trees. May the sad doom be far from us, "Cut it down, why cumberest thou the ground."

There is a sweet promise here to the fruitful vineyard. "There will I give you My love." There will I make all My goodness pass before you. There will I reveal your name inscribed upon My heart. There will I enliven you with fresh discoveries, and renewed assurances. Abundant promises are given of rich supplies. There is much fragrance in the flowers—there is a rich meal in the abundant fruits. The produce of preceding days is stored for time of need, and fresh blooms give promise that fruitfulness shall continue. Thus we have the Scripture's invitation, "Is anyone thirsty? Come and drink—even if you have no money! Come, take your choice of wine or milk— it's all free! Why spend your money on food that does not give you strength? Why pay for food that does you no good? Listen, and I will tell you where to get food that is good for the soul!" In this Word are fruits new and old in store for all who joy in their relish.

## Chapter 8

8:1-4. "Oh, if only you were my brother, who nursed at my mother's breast. Then I could kiss you no matter who was watching, and no one would criticize me. I would bring you to my childhood home, and there you would teach me. I would give you spiced wine to drink, my sweet pomegranate wine. Your left hand would be under my head and your right hand would embrace me. I charge you, O daughters of Jerusalem, that you stir not up, nor awake my love, until He please."

The Church is inflamed with intense desire for closest communion with her beloved Lord. Sisterly affection in glowing exercise presents a fitting model. The tender sister makes appearance. It may be supposed that she has been mourning for the absence of a dear brother. Suddenly she sees him in the streets. She cannot be restrained. Her close relationship justifies familiar exhibition of her feeling. With no fear of censorious blame she imprints kisses on his cheeks. She resists all further separation. Clinging to his side she conducts him to her mother's abode. There they receive words of welcome from maternal lips. She seeks to cheer and solace her recovered brother. She brings the goblet of her choicest wine. She shows every token of endearment and affection. Such the picture of the intensity

of domestic love. Such the close intimacy between the loving brother, and the rejoicing sister.

In this picture we may read volumes of holiest truth. Is not the blessed Jesus, indeed, the believer's brother! In the plenitude of His heavenly grace, He who was God of God, and very God of very God, condescends to assume our nature—to be born one of human family—to be bone of our bones, and flesh of our flesh. The blessed truth is announced, "He is not ashamed to call us brethren." Not only is He thus qualified as one with man's family to be our representative—to undertake the office of our surety—to bear the penalties of the broken law—to fulfill the righteousness required by justice. As such He can hang accursed on the accursed tree, and shed the blood of atonement to obliterate human guilt.

But, moreover, by being made in all things like unto us—sin only excepted— He has *a heart to sympathize with us in our trials and in our conflicts*. He has tasted the cup of human woe. He can feel for those who are called to drink the same. Thus He can stick close, yes, closer than a mother's son.

As such He invites us to familiar converse. We may draw near, and pour into His heart the tale of all our need. He will not be slow to listen. He will be quick to bring relief. We may assure Him of the warmth and reality of our devoted love. We may clasp Him to our heart of hearts. We may embrace Him with tokens of rapturous delight.

It will be pain to think of any interruption to these pure raptures. We should be watchful against the approach of any intrusive passions threatening separation! Earnestly we should seek that no interruption should mar this happiness! The portals should be barred against the entrance of antagonistic feeling and desire. The world should be utterly avoided and shunned. The cry should be, 'Away, away, all that might cause the beloved Lord to take departure'. The voice will be heard, "I charge you, O daughters of Jerusalem, that you stir not up, nor awake my love, until He please."

8:5. "Who is this that comes up from the wilderness, leaning upon her Beloved?"

The scene is changed. Our eyes are fixed upon a novel sight. The Gospel spreads a feast of things new and old. This appearance meets us for the first time. It is a cluster of fresh budding fruit. A form is seen coming up from the wilderness; but not alone, not unsupported. There is another near, and on Him all weight is laid. The truth is clear. We see the Church deriving support from her Lord. They proceed together along a path leading up from the wilderness.

The believer is called to leave all for Christ—to come out, and to be separate from a fallen and polluted world—to shun its pleasures—to turn from its smiles—to disregard its frowns—to close the ear to its enticing voice—to reject its fascinating cup—to trample on its principles and maxims—beneath the mask to see the features of the

enemy of God—to feel that the world in its every pulse is opposed to Christ and heaven. Such views are the true teachings of the Spirit. The believer, a pupil in this school, arises and departs.

But there is no profit in what he abandons. The world, when truly seen, is a waste wilderness. It is no fair garden of Eden, fragrant with delicious flowers. It is no vineyard, in which grapes hang down in luxuriant clusters. It is no peaceful meadow, free from incursions of devouring beasts, where every step is happiness, security, and peace. It is no lovely grove, in which the melody of cheerful birds delights the ear. It is no path, in which surrounding prospects give enchanting views. It is a desert—wild, dismal, and unsatisfying. It is an enemy's land, beset with perils and encompassed with malignant foes. Here no manna falls, and no refreshing streams trickle by the side. Its food is poison. To taste is to imbibe death. What is its produce? Thorns—thistles—briers. It yields no nurture, but disappointment, misery, and woe. The believer is called to come up from this cheating and deluding scene.

But how can he obey? He is weak and powerless in himself. But a mighty arm is near. Jesus says, "I will strengthen you; yes, I will help you; yes, I will uphold you with the right hand of My righteousness." He extends the arm of His omnipotence and cries, Come, lean on Me. As without Jesus the first step cannot be taken, so without Him *advance* cannot be made. But He is ever near—willing—able. The heavenward path is a *steep* ascent. It requires strong limbs to climb. But leaning on Jesus, the

upward race may be run without loitering. The path, also, through life's course is *slippery*. Our feet are liable to stumble. Snares also, and pitfalls are before us—but leaning on Him we are upheld, and safely guided.

*Afflictions* also come in incessant storms. How often is the heart weighed down—how often are tears and sighs the food of our sorrowing board! But trials, troubles, and distresses will not overwhelm. Leaning on Jesus, we stand on an unshaken rock. *Temptations* may assail with subtle art. At each moment we are on the brink of downfalls. But clinging to Him we rise superior.

Let us be wise. Let us use the offered aid. Let us cast on Him the burden of our every care, anxiety, and fear. Let us place on Him the weight of our salvation. Self-righteousness is a broken reed. His blood—His righteousness is a giant-staff. Let us lean on Him as we pass through the valley of the shadow of death. His rod and staff will surely comfort. Thus let us pass through life leaning on our Beloved. Let us enter heaven leaning on the same arm.

8:5. "I raised you up under the apple tree—there your mother brought you forth—there she brought you forth who bore you."

Another portrait of Christ's tender love comes in succession. We see a helpless infant drawing the first breath of life. It has no home to shelter it, and no fond hands to nurse it. It is brought forth in the open air,

exposed to all the inclemencies of changing seasons. It finds its cradle in the leaves of some orchard-tree. We have not to go far to reach the signification of this allegory. The Holy Spirit, which thus indites it, adds a lucid explication by the pen of Ezekiel. There the miserable state of Judah is described, and the Lord appears in tender love to provide for her—to array her in all lovely clothing, and to adorn her as a bride fit for His palace. Let the Spirit's words, then, open out the wondrous meaning.

We read, that at the time of her birth—"When you were born, no one cared about you. Your umbilical cord was left uncut, and you were never washed, rubbed with salt, and dressed in warm clothing. No one had the slightest interest in you; no one pitied you or cared for you. On the day you were born, you were dumped in a field and left to die, unwanted. But I came by and saw you there, helplessly kicking about in your own blood. As you lay there, I said, 'Live!'" It follows, after naming various particulars, "Then I bathed you and washed off your blood, and I rubbed fragrant oils into your skin. I gave you expensive clothing of linen and silk, beautifully embroidered, and sandals made of fine leather. I gave you lovely jewelry, bracelets, and beautiful necklaces, a ring for your nose and earrings for your ears, and a lovely crown for your head. And so you were made beautiful with gold and silver. Your clothes were made of fine linen and were beautifully embroidered. You ate the finest foods—fine flour, honey, and olive oil—and became more beautiful than ever. You looked like a queen, and so you were!" It is, moreover, added, "Your fame soon spread

throughout the world on account of your beauty, because the splendor I bestowed on you perfected your beauty, says the Sovereign Lord."

Thus the Spirit teaches us to see how Jesus looked upon His Church, in her exposed and despised condition, and in His tender love raised her up to be the Bride of heaven.

8:6, 7. "Set me as a seal upon your heart; as a seal upon your arm—for love is strong as death; jealousy is cruel as the grave—the coals thereof are coals of fire, which has a most vehement flame. Many waters cannot quench love, neither can the floods drown it. If a man would give all the substance of his house for love, it would utterly be scorned."

Realizing such marvelous dealings, the Church prays for manifestations of the love of Christ. "Set me as a seal upon Your heart." May my image be deeply engraved in the seat of Your affections! "Set me as a seal upon Your arm." May I be as the signet ring on which Your eye continually shall rest! May the grand words be fulfilled in me, "I have engraved you upon the palms of My hands. Your walls are continually before Me."

But who can describe the might of Christ's all-conquering love! It is strong as DEATH. This enemy is indeed a mighty potentate. It strides forth victorious over all who enter upon mortal life. No rank can rise above its touch. No poverty is too lowly for its assault. It hurls the monarch from his throne—it bears the peasant from his

hut. Old age and youth are equally its prey. Talent and learning—ignorance and the unlettered mind alike succumb. Its jealousy is as cruel as the grave. It has no heart to relent from morn to eve. It drives crowds to its abode, always filling and never full.

Such is the power of love. It is devouring, as coals vehemently burning, and turning into ashes all that meets its touch. Let floods of water be poured on it; they are vain. It quenches all, and rages still.

Will love take anything in exchange for its beloved? All offerings would be instantly disdained. It is entirely centered on one object, and no intruding rival will receive notice. There is no rest until possession of the loved one is obtained.

We thus are taught the boundless essence of Christ's love. It is omnipotent and all victorious. It ever burns with warmth most ardent and unquenchable. It rejects all things when compared to the Church to which His heart is given. Faith meekly bows and prays, "Good Lord, may Your great love enkindle mine!"

8:8. "We have a little sister, and she has no breasts—what shall we do for our sister in the day when she shall be spoken for?"

The Holy Spirit here presents an allegory to unfold Gospel-truth. His tender mercy gives it. May His enlightening grace shine sweetly on it! Faith here looks off

from self. It is an aggressive and an active power. It concentrates not its thoughts on its own enjoyments. Its horizon embraces the whole need of man. Wherever members of our race abide, its compassions penetrate.

The blessed Jesus said, "Other sheep I have, which are not of this fold—they also I must bring, and they shall hear My voice, and there shall be one fold and one Shepherd." We have the Church's echo, "We have a little sister." Faith regards the multitudinous inhabitants of earth as allied to us by closest ties. They are partakers of the same flesh and blood. They breathe the same breath of life. They are inhabitants of the same wide earth. They tread the same soil—are enlivened by the same sun; and are journeying alike through the portals of death to an undying scene.

But they are unspeakably unlike in spiritual condition. Some are enlightened by the light of life—have been taught by the Spirit their lost estate by nature—have fled for refuge to Christ the only hope; and are looking to heaven as their everlasting abode. From their high pinnacle of blessedness, they look with pity on a multitude, who share not their grace. They see them bound fast in Satan's fetters—ignorant of God—His love—His character. They know nothing of Christ and His full—His rich salvation.

This sight melts the believing heart. Some of these forlorn masses dwell at their very door. They throng each city. They are scattered in every village. They are utterly unprepared to meet their God. Faith sees what will be their

doom, when Christ shall appear to gather up His jewels—when He shall come to be glorified in His Saints, and to be admired in all those who believe! These yearnings are aptly portrayed in the words, "We have a little sister, and she has no breasts—what shall we do for our sister in the day when she shall be spoken for?"

8:9. "If she is a wall, we will build upon her a palace of silver; and if she is a door, we will enclose her with panels of cedar."

Here we learn our two-fold duty towards the destitute of our race. We should labor diligently—in faith—in love—in prayer for their conversion. We should use every effort to win them to the knowledge of the Lord. We should proclaim Jesus to them in all His willingness and power to save. We should sound aloud in their hearing the precious calls of the Gospel. "Look unto Me, and be saved." "The Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost." We should confidently expect an answer of blessings.

But we must not give up there. When it shall appear, that the little sister has been brought home to the household of faith, and has been received as a living part of the true fabric of the redeemed, and is resting as a wall on the good foundation, and has become a portion of the noble structure, we should do all in our power to lead onward in the course of faith. We should strive, that converted souls should *grow* in grace—that they should daily shine more and more in the splendor of truth and holiness—that they

should be conspicuous as palaces of silver founded on this wall—and as fragrant cedar enclosing this door.

8:10. "I am a wall, and my breasts are like towers—then was I in His eyes as one that found favor."

Here we have the glad response of true converts. They realize that they are built together as a habitation of God through the Spirit. They attribute the work wholly to grace. "We have found favor." Let it never be forgotten, that *salvation from first to last is all of free and sovereign grace*. Grace began— grace carries on—and grace will consummate the whole. "By grace are you saved through faith; and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God."

8:11. "Solomon had a vineyard in Baal-Hamon; he let out his vineyard to tenants. Each was to bring for its fruit a thousand shekels of silver."

Allegoric pictures have pervaded this precious Song. In varied form they have presented Gospel-truth. Each view has been replete with teaching, and with charms. The character which commenced, now concludes the book. King Solomon appears as possessor of a vineyard at Baal-hamon. But a far greater than Solomon is here. We learn that Jesus has a chosen people. These people were given to Him by His Father in the councils of eternity. They were loved by Him with an everlasting love. They have been redeemed from all sin by the shedding of His precious blood; and rescued from every foe by His almighty power.

They have been guarded with ever watchful care, as His treasure—His delight—His sister—His spouse.

This Church shall never perish. All the ransomed shall be gathered in, and presented a glorious company without spot or wrinkle, or any such thing. To give seeming reality to the picture, it is stated that this vineyard is at Baalhamon. No special truth is here conveyed. In parables, embellishments are added to fill up the portrait; but not to teach dogmatic truth. This vineyard is entrusted to keepers. Christ employs His ministering servants to dress and cultivate it. They are expected to use all diligence in planting, watering, pruning, and guarding. Christ looks to them to bring much fruit to the heavenly storehouse.

12. "My vineyard, which is mine, is before me. You, O Solomon, must have a thousand, and those that keep the fruit thereof two hundred."

By rapid change the Church now speaks of herself as possessor of a vineyard. There are times when believers are negligent of their own hearts. It is a common lamentation, "Mine own vineyard have I not kept." But here the Church speaks of her anxious care. My eye is fixed upon my vineyard. How watchful should we ever be of our treacherous hearts, lest grace should decline, and weeds and briars should grow up—lest little foxes should creep in and spoil the tender grapes.

But to Christ and His glory all the produce should be devoted. The will—the power to strive in His cause come

from Him alone. To Him let boundless praise be given. But friends and ministering servants render much help. Let grateful hearts give them much love, and tokens of devoted gratitude.

8:13. "You who dwell in the gardens, the companions hearken to Your voice—cause me to hear it."

Believers are here exhorted. They are represented as having their abode in the garden of the Lord. Happy companions surround them, with whom they hold delightful converse. But Jesus cries, Let not this converse be restricted unto them. Come and hold loving communion with Me. It is well that believers should often talk, one with another. What grand—what sublime themes prompt their discourse! But the soul's main converse should be with the Chief among ten thousand, the altogether lovely One. In prayer we should be ever drawing near to Him. In praise we should be ever uplifting melodious notes. His gracious ear delights to hear. May it be our delight to wax stronger in this exercise!

14. "Make haste, my Beloved, and be like a gazelle or a young deer upon the spice-laden mountains."

Earnest cry concludes the Song. It calls upon the Lord to come with all speed and fill the heart. Behold the agile gazelles and deer skipping and bounding on the spice-laden hills. With such alacrity may Jesus come and take up His abode in hearts wide open to give welcome! But especially let our cry be, that He would hasten His

kingdom, and establish His gracious reign of righteousness. "Make haste, my Beloved." "Come, Lord Jesus, come quickly."

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