

# The Canticles.

J. G. Bellett.

## Section 8 of: **The Patriarchs: Being Meditations upon Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Job; The Canticles, Heaven and Earth.**

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"Will God in very deed dwell with men on the earth? Behold, heaven and the heaven of heavens cannot contain Thee."

This was the devout breathing of the king of Israel (the penman, too, of this little book to which we are now proposing, in the Lord's grace, to introduce ourselves), when the glory had come to fill the house which he had builded.

But so it was. The Son of God, Jehovah's Fellow, He that was with God and was God, was manifest in flesh, and conversed with us here. He dwelt with men on the earth. He tabernacled among us. He was Jesus. We knew Him as such. He was a *Man*, and a Friend, and a Master, and a Companion. He invited confidence. He sought sympathy and imparted it. And, as a *Man*, we know Him still — as truly a Man amid the brightest glories of heaven now, as once He was a Man amid the ruins and sorrows of earth — as able, through sympathy, to understand the sufferings of His saints still, as when He walked the streets and highways here, bearing our griefs and carrying our sicknesses.

And what will He be even for ever? Still *Jesus Christ*. Dominion of all things will be His as a *Man*. The scene may change the second time, from the present temple in heaven to the kingdom of glory, as at first it changed from the cities and villages here to the temple on high, but it is "the *Man Christ Jesus* " who passes from scene to scene. Precious mystery! Manhood having been once taken up, will never be given up. A temple has been found for the glory, a vessel for the blessing, a person for the manifestation, an instrument for the exercise of power and government, suited to the counsels of divine wisdom and to the purposes of divine goodness.

From the beginning of His ways, and throughout them, the Lord God has been evidencing His purpose to bring His creature *man* very near to Him. The expression of this has been different, but still constant.

In patriarchal days the intimacy was *personal*. He walked in the midst of the human family, personally appearing to His elect; not so much employing either prophets or angels, but having to do with the action Himself.

In the, times of Israel, He was not so much in "the human guise " as before. He was rather in mystic dress. But still He was *near* them. The Lord in the burning bush, the glory in the cloud, the armed captain by Jericho, speak this nearness. The God of Israel seen on the sapphire throne, the glory filling the temple courts, or seated between the cherubim, tell the same. And the promises, "I will set My tabernacle among you, and I will walk among you," and "Mine eyes and Mine heart shall be there perpetually," alike witness this desired and purposed fellowship.

Then, in the progress of the ages, the assumption of manhood is a witness, I may say, that speaks for itself; and the ways of God manifest in the flesh agree therewith. Jesus "came eating and drinking." And still the same, after He had become the *risen Man*. He had not then, it is true, one lodging and

repast with His disciples, as once He had. He did not then, as before, go in and out among them. They were not to know Him "after the flesh," as in earlier days. But still there was full intimacy. There was many a note of conscious authority about Him, it is most true. He speaks of all power in heaven and in earth being His. He opens their understandings. He pronounces peace upon them on new and authoritative grounds, He imparts the Holy Ghost, as the Head of the new creation. He blessed, as Priest of the temple, the only Priest. All this He does, as risen from the dead, with conscious power; but, with all this, He owns intimacy, loving, personal intimacy, as near and dear as ever, if not more so. He eats and drinks with them, as once He did. He calls them "brethren," as He had not done before His resurrection. He speaks of having one God and Father with them, as He had not done then. Though with all authority He sends them forth to work, yet does He still work with them Mark 16; Luke 24; John 20. And though He was at that time paying them only an occasional visit, a visit now and then, as He pleased, during forty days (Acts 1: 3), yet He intimates, by a little action, that, by-and-by, all such distance and separation will be over, and they should "follow" Him to His place, risen and glorified with Himself. John 21: 19-23.

Is not all this intimacy still? desired and enjoyed intimacy on the part of our "everlasting Lover"? And as to this present dispensation, the same is provided for and maintained, though in a different way. The Holy Ghost is come. The Spirit of truth is in us. Our bodies are nothing less than His living temples or dwelling-places, while the Son has, mystically, borne us to heaven in and with Himself. Eph. 2: 6. Surely no form of fellowship which we have contemplated is more deep and intimate than this. If, personally, the Lord God was with the patriarchs, and would take a calf and a cake in the love of hospitality — if, in the sight of the whole congregation, He would let the glory fill the temple courts in the joy of its new-found habitation — if, in "the Man Christ Jesus," the Lord God would walk with us, and share our seasons of rest and labour and refreshment, talking at a well with one elect sinner, or letting another press His bosom at supper, and ask Him about the secrets that were in that bosom in this present day He has us, in the thoughts and affections of His own heart, up in heaven with Himself, and the Holy Ghost is here with us, in the midst of the thoughts and affections of our hearts.

Is this, I ask, intimacy of a feebler nature? Is this a retracing of His way back into His own perfection's and sufficiency, or amid the glories and principalities of angels? Is this *reserve*, as men speak? Is this withdrawing Himself, or repenting of former intimacy with man, as though He had been disappointed and put off? "Adam, where art thou?" was His voice. But has Adam's retreat forced the Lord back? Let this one Witness, this Witness of our times this indwelling Spirit, leading us in company with Himself after this manner, tell us. All His present way is only a richer pursuit of that Purpose which broke forth, in infant form, in the days of Genesis.

And what shall we say of this intimacy in still future days? Redeemed men take the place of cherubic nearness to the throne. The living creatures and the crowned elders are there, and the angels do but surround them as well as the throne. The Lamb's wife, the holy Jerusalem, bears the glory in her bosom. The Tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them.

But if all this be so, as it surely is, a holy inquiry arises, How are we to entertain this? In what spirit, and after what manner, are we to act on the truth of this gracious purpose of God? *We are to admit and believe it in all the simplicity in which it is revealed.* This is our first duty. We are by no means to refuse the thought of this divine nearness. Did John, I ask, refuse to lie on His Lord's bosom, or excuse himself for doing so? No. Neither are we, through mistaken humility, to question whether we have rightly interpreted the many scriptures which declare this truth. We are to use the privileges it confers.

But with this use of its privileges we are to honour its claims. For this presence of God is a *pure* as well as a *cheerful* element. Of old, the shoes were to be taken from the feet, when that presence was entered, to express the sense of holiness which became it. But that was all. Neither Moses nor Joshua were required to withdraw; only to tread softly. They were welcomed and encouraged, while instructed in the holiness of such intimacy.

So in the Canticles. The soul makes its boast of its Lord's love. It does not refuse to listen to the tenderest expressions of it, nor to recite His well-known desire towards her; but withal, there is owned and felt unworthiness. There is the breathing of the purest though most intimate thoughts — an affection quickly sensitive of the putting slight on such wondrous condescensions of divine love, and diligence in nourishing in the soul the answer due to them. And thus, this little book gives very clear witness to the truth of God's intimacy with man, and to the manner in which it should be entertained by us. And in doing this it introduces us to a great divine mystery, which, in like manner, gets its early and constant illustration in the Book of God — a mystery which must now hold our thoughts for a little. I mean that of the Bride and the Bridegroom.

The Church is called "the Lamb's wife." But this title has its meaning. "The Lamb" is a figure or a description of the Son of God which tells us of the sorrows He endured for us. The soul well understands this; and therefore this title, "the Lamb's wife," tells us that it is by His *sufferings* the Lord has made her His own; that He valued her so as to give up all for her. And from the beginning He has been publishing this precious gospel truth.

Ere Adam received Eve he was cast into a deep sleep, and out of his side was taken a rib, of which was formed that one that was afterwards presented to him as his wife. This witnesses the mystery I have mentioned. Adam was humbled and Adam suffered (I mean, of course, only in the symbol or mystery), ere he received Eve; all this casting beforehand the shadow of the humiliation and suffering of the true Adam, in acquiring His Eve for Himself.

So Jacob afterwards. He had to sustain the burden and heat of a long and toilsome day, ere he could possess himself of Rachel. The law of her people, the law of her country, and the oppressive exactions of the covetous Laban, had put him on these terms. He had to endure the constant consuming of sun and moon, to toil night and day, and have his exile lengthened out, or go without his Rachel.

Joseph, ere he got his Asenath, was separated from his brethren.

The same thing we see in Moses. He too was separated from his brethren. And still more, he *earned* Zipporah. He rescued her from oppression, then opened the well to her and her flock, and then her father owned his claim to her hand. So with his second wife. He had to take her at the expense of his good name with his own kindred; she was a black Ethiopian, and did not suit the thoughts of his brother and sister. But he bore the reproach, and married the Ethiopian.

In each of these marriages (typical as well as real) we see *the character* of the Bridegroom — we see the Lord Jesus Christ possessing Himself of His Bride *at some personal cost*. Whether it be humiliation and suffering, as in Adam, toil and weariness and conflict, as in Jacob, separation and dreary loneliness, as in Joseph, or mere reproach, as doing a thing unworthy of him, as in Moses, still it is, in principle, a *suffering* Bridegroom that we see.

And I might notice Boaz, another type of the same. He was a mighty man of wealth, but he pleads the cause of a poor gleaner in his fields; he allows her approaches and her suit, and takes her to him to wife. He is not ashamed to make a destitute stranger, who but a day before depended on the

bounty of his hand, the companion of his wealth and honour, and the builder of his house and name among the tribes of Israel. And thus the marriage of Boaz tells out the same mystery, that the Bridegroom of the Church is the One who had before been humbled to redeem her, and make her His own.

Not only, however, in types and illustrations is this great truth set forth, but in the plain teaching of Scripture also. It is said, that Christ loved the Church, then gave Himself for it, then sanctified it by the washing of the Word — and all this, that He might present it worthily to Himself as His Bride. Eph. 5. Here, doctrinally, or in the way of plain teaching, we have the *Lamb the Bridegroom*; for ere He takes the Church *He gives Himself for her*. He takes to wife the one whom He had afore purchased with blood.

In Old Testament Scriptures, the same thing is taught, as between the Lord and Jerusalem, which is, in *principle*, the same as Christ and the Church.

Thus, in Isaiah it is said, Thy Maker is thy Husband, thy Redeemer — the whole passage showing Jerusalem taken up by the Lord in simple loving-kindness, He owning one that, like the Ethiopian or like Ruth, might be a reproach to Him. Isa. 54.

So Jeremiah represents the Lord in the very same grace, taking Jerusalem even after she had proved herself unfaithful, and been legally and judicially put away. Jer. 3.

Hosea is made the representative of the same. Hosea 1 - 3. He buys his wife (Hosea 3: 2), he washes and cleanses her, as well as bears the reproach of espousing one in herself so worthless and lost.

So in the striking picture of Ezekiel. Jerusalem is looked at in her loathsome, offensive degradation; but when not one eye pitied, the Lord not only took compassion on, but quickened, washed, clothed, anointed, beautified, and endowed her, and did not stop till He had taken her to Himself. Ezek. 16.

Thus is it in the teachings or voices of the prophets, as in the early types and shadows; both and all telling out the mystery, that *the Lamb* is the *Bridegroom*, that the One who at the end seats her in the companionship of His glory, had before redeemed her by His blood, washed and purified her by His Word and Spirit, suffered reproach for her (Luke 19: 7), and gone down to her in her ruin, ere He could take her up to His estate and honour.

This is the mystery of the Divine Bridegroom. All human tales or fables fall short of this, let the imagination that wrought them up be as fervent as it may. This is the mystery of a love that passes knowledge between Christ and the Church. She must love Him for the service He has shown her; He must love her for the cost she has put Him to. She will find herself for ever by the side of One who so loved her as to die for her. He will see one by His side who so engaged Him that He was willing to go through with His affection, though the cost of loving her would take (to speak after the manner of men) all that He was worth. He cannot but prize her supremely, and so she Him. This only difference may be observed — that His love was proved ere she became His, for He had beforehand counted the cost of loving her — her love, later and more backward, and only in the second place, began on her knowing His love for her. For Christ, as the Bridegroom (as in everything else, whether of grace or glory, Col. 1), is to have "the pre-eminence." In the character of His love He entirely outshines the love of the bride, and leaves hers, as it were, no love at all, by reason of the love that excelleth.

But having thus looked at the Bridegroom, I would, in like manner, see the Bride for a moment or two. But I must limit myself, and will, therefore, only trace her as reflected in the Book of Genesis.

*Eve* is, of course, the earliest type. In her we see the personal characteristics of the bride: she is formed by the Lord for Adam. Adam's joy in a helpmeet was what the Lord proposed to Himself when He began to form Eve. He had respect to Adam's need and joy in this work. And when Adam receives Eve from the hand of the Lord, his words express his satisfaction in her, vindicating the Lord's workmanship, that His hand had accomplished the design which His love had undertaken. Eve was fitted to Adam. This was her full personal beauty. He owned her bone of his bone, and flesh of his flesh. *All in her was attractiveness*. She entirely answered the expectations, and satisfied the heart, of him for whom she had been formed. He took her and clave to her (Gen. 2); and this, we know, is a type of Christ and the Church. Eph. 5.

*Sarah* is the next distinguished female in that book; and she is a mystic person also. But it is not the Bride whom she expresses, but the Mother. So that I will not particularly notice her. For Abraham is "the father of all them that believe" — and Sarah is "the free woman" or, in an allegory, "the mother of us all" (Gal. 4), linked with the family of God in the place of the mother, rather than with the Lord as His Bride. So that I pass her by.

*Rebecca* comes next in this holy line, and in her we have the Bride again, as in Eve. But great and blessed truths connected with the Bride are told in Rebecca. She is separated from Isaac. He is far away, and has never seen her. But Rebecca is the father's choice, and Eliezer's care, till Isaac receives her. Isaac longed for her. That is shown by his going forth in solitariness to meditate at eventide. But beyond the sense of this loneliness, we do not see Isaac doing or suffering anything for her. The council about the wife is taken between Abraham and Eliezer. They settle the whole plan. And Eliezer, in beautiful, self-denying service, goes on toil and travel to secure this elect Bride for Isaac. And he does secure her. And he prepares her for him. He not only separates her from her kindred and her father's house, but conducts her across the desert; on the way, doubtless, telling her many a tale of him whose she was so soon to be — till at length he gives her safely into Isaac's hand, and Isaac, like Adam, is comforted in his Bride.

This is a beautiful light in which to look at the Bride; the one who is brought home to her lord from the distant land, having been the object of the father's choice, and of the servant's care. This is a mystery. And in it we get the Lord receiving His Bride at the hand of the Father and of the Holy Ghost, chosen for Him, and given to Him, He having nothing to do but to take her at their hand, and to find in her, as Isaac, found in Rebecca, the relief of his solitariness, the inmate of his tent, and the companion of all his joys.

*Rachel*, next in order, shows herself to us. And in her we get the Bride again, though in a different character. Here we find the one who was to own and enjoy her, travelling and toiling for her. And this is just as true, in the mystery, as the other. For, in one sense, Christ has only to receive His Bride at the hand of the Father and the Holy Ghost, the gift of the one and the workmanship of the other — but, in another sense, He has Himself gone into the distant land, and (as I have already been observing on the Bridegroom) laboured and been put to reproach and wrong for her. In all this, Jacob sets forth the true Bridegroom. The Lord Jesus personally has borne the heat of the day *all alone*. He had not where to lay His head, like Jacob — absent from His Father's house, and the place of His inheritance — wronged again and again in a world which, like Laban and his house, ever seeks its own; and yet, enduring all this, and willing to endure all this, for the love that He had to her whom His eye had rested on; as Jacob's seven years of service seemed to him but as a few days, because of his love for Rachel.

This is as striking a picture of the truth as we have yet seen; here the same mystery of the Bride

is still published to us, though still in a distinct part of it. In Eve, we had her full personal fitness for her Lord — in Rebecca, we had her as the object of the Father's election and the Spirit's care, in order to give her to Christ — in Rachel, we see her as the prize, whom the Lord sets before His own eye, for the sake of which He will give Himself to exile and toil and wrongs. As reflected in Isaac. He has nothing to do for her; as reflected in Jacob, He has everything to do for her.

*Asenath* closes these wonders. She is the woman of the fourth generation of the Patriarchs. There is the Sarah of Abraham, the Rebecca of Isaac, the Rachel of Jacob, and the Asenath of Joseph. She now in her turn takes up the same mystic tale. She was a Gentile, and in nowise, like the rest, connected in the flesh with Joseph. The enmity of his brethren had cast Joseph among her people. And he is honoured there, and with these strange and Gentile honours gets a Gentile bride and family; and in the bosom of this unexpected joy he is willing to forget, for a season, his father's house, and to account himself fruitful or happy, though among strangers.

This, in its season, is as full of meaning as any of our previous pages in this tale of the Bride. For here we get the Bride in her Gentile, heavenly character. Here we are told a great secret; that this same personage, whose beauty and personal characteristics we saw in Eve, whose election by the Father and conduct under the hand of the Spirit we saw in Rebecca, and whose purchase for Himself by the personal toil and sorrow of Christ we saw in Rachel, is a *Gentile*, a *Stranger*, one brought into union with the Lord, after His own kindred in the flesh had refused Him.

All this speaks clearly in the ear of the scribe that is instructed unto the kingdom of heaven; he traces the mystery of the Bride in all this, and listens to Eve, to Rebecca, to Rachel, and to Asenath telling out separate parts of it. And how does all this witness to us *the delight which Christ takes in His saints!* It is not merely that He has saved them by His blood, but they are His crown and His joy, His glory and His delight. His own love and workmanship have been displayed in us, more highly than in any scene of His power. And this joy of Christ in His saints is strongly expressed in each of these cases. We love Him for the sorrows He has endured, and He loves us who thus prize His love. John 14: 21. And if these affections be not understood as passing between Christ and the saint, if we do not, without reserve, allow this satisfaction in each other, our souls will not enter into much of that communion which the Scripture provides for. The Canticles will not be understood, if we do not allow and entertain the thought of Christ's delight in the saints, with the same certainty that we allow the thought of His having purchased and sanctified them by His blood.

But this communion must spring from intelligence of the soul, or it will be mere natural fervour. When Ruth sought the feet of Boaz, and did not again go to the gleanings-field, it was because Naomi had been instructing her further about him. Her soul had passed through the light of Naomi's words, and, thus taught, she desires more intimate fellowship with him than she had yet enjoyed. She seeks *himself*. The gleanings-field, where she was less than his handmaids, is deserted, and the place of a suitor for himself is assumed. She cannot call herself less than one of his handmaids any longer. She seeks a kinsman's love, for she knows him to be a kinsman. And this is truly blessed.

Love, or desire towards another, takes different forms in the heart. There is the love of *pity*, the love of *gratitude*, and the love of *complacency*. The love of *pity* regards its object in some sort as *below* it, and is full of tenderness. The love of *gratitude*, on the contrary, regards its object as *above* it, and is full of humility. The love of *complacency* does not necessarily look either above or below, but simply at its object, and is full of admiration. But, in addition to this, there is the love of *kindred*. It has its foundation in nature, and hence it is called "natural affection." And this love of kindred has a glory which is peculiarly its own. *It warrants the deepest intimacies*. There is no settling of one's self

for the other's presence. There is full ease in going out and coming in. *Expressions* of love are not deemed intrusive — nay, they are sanctioned as being due and comely. The heart knows its right to indulge itself over its object, and that, too, without check or shame. This is the glory of this affection. The love of pity, of gratitude, or of complacency, must act decorously, and in proper form. But the love of kindred, the love of those who dwell in one house, and whom nature or the hand of God has bound together, feels its right to gratify itself, and is not fearful of being rebuked. See, for instance, Canticles 8: 1. This is its distinguishing boast. Nothing admits this but itself. This is, in a full and deep sense, "personal affection."

Parents and children, brothers and sisters, husbands and wives (and I might add, friends), know this. They know their title to indulge, without scorn or rebuke, in the warmest expressions of their mutual love. And it is the richest feast of the heart. The love of pity has its enjoyment, and so have the love of gratitude and the love of complacency; but they do not, in themselves and alone, warrant these *personal* fervours. Personally, their objects may be below, above, or at a distance, and should be approached with a due respect to all their rights. But not so with our kindred, because it is their *persons* and not *their qualities* or *conditions*, that form the around of our love. We may deal with them without apology or reserve. In such cases it is *himself* that the heart embraces. It is not his sorrows, his favours, or his excellencies, but it is himself, which this affection handles and converses with.

We may receive a benefit from a person, and be assured of a hearty welcome to it, and yet feel ourselves ill at ease in his presence. Nothing is more common than this. Gratitude is awakened in the heart very deeply, and yet reserve and uneasiness are felt. It calls for something beyond our assurance of his goodwill, and of our full welcome to his service, to make us at ease in the presence of a benefactor. And this something, I believe, is the discovery that we have an interest in *himself*, as well as in his *ability to serve us*.

This delineates, as I judge, the experience of the poor woman with the issue of blood. Mark 5. She knew the Lord's ability to relieve her sorrow, and her hearty welcome to avail herself of it. She, therefore, comes and takes the virtue out of Him without reserve. But she comes *behind Him*. This expresses her state of mind. She knows her welcome to His service, but nothing more. But the Lord trains her heart for more. He lets her know that she is interested in *Himself*, as well as in *His power to oblige her*. He calls her "daughter." He owns kindred or relationship with her. This was the communication which alone was equal to remove her fears and trembling. Her rich and mighty patron is her kinsman. This is what her heart needed to know. Without this, in the spirit of her mind, she would have been still "behind" Him. But this gives her ease. "Go in peace" may then be said, as well as "Be whole of thy plague." She need not be reserved. Christ does not deal with her as a patron or benefactor. Luke 22: 25. She has an interest in *Himself* as well as in *His power to bless her*. And so as to the Canticles. It is the love which warrants *personal intimacy* (after this manner of the nearest and dearest relationships) that breathes in this lovely book. The age of the union has not yet arrived. But it is the time of betrothal, and we are His delight. Nay, it was so ere worlds were. Prov. 8.

Do we believe this? Does it make us happy? We are, naturally, suspicious of any offer to make us happy in God. Because our moral sense, our natural conscience, tells us of our having lost all right even to His ordinary blessings. The mere moral sense will therefore be quick to stand to it, and question all overtures of peace from heaven, and be ready to challenge their reality. But here comes the vigour of the spiritual mind, or the energy of faith. Faith gainsays these conclusions of nature. It refuses at times to think according to the moral sense of nature, as it refuses at times to act according to the relative claims of nature. In their place, the dictates of the moral sense and the claims of nature are sacred — as we read, "Doth not even *nature* itself teach you, that if a man have long hair it is a

shame unto him?" But still they are not supreme. If God put in His claim, or make His revelation, the *relations* of nature and the *moral sense* of nature are to withdraw their authority. "He that loveth father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me." And in the revelation of God, faith reads our abundant title to be near to Him and happy with Him, though natural conscience and our sense of the fitness of things would have it otherwise. Faith feeds where the moral sensibilities of the natural mind would count it presuming even to tread.

I ask, then, Do we ponder, without reserve or suspicion, the thought of such love towards us in the heart of Jesus as this book suggests? Does it make us happy? We owe the love of children to God as our Father, the love of redeemed ones to God as our Saviour, the love of disciples to Jesus as our Master and Lord. But what is the love that we owe for this way of Christ's heart to us? How are we to meet it in a way worthy of it? This book, I believe, tells us. But this conducts the soul into the holiest. And what grief, and shame, and trouble of heart arise, when we reflect how little we are there, and how many tales against us all this is ever telling!

The Canticles do not give us the ways of filial affection, or of the affection due to a benefactor. But they give us, I believe, the actings of the love of espousals, in both Christ's heart and ours. The joy of hearing the Bridegroom's voice, I may say, is fulfilled here in the heart of the saint, as it was in the soul of the Baptist. And what, I would ask, are the attributes of a commanding affection like this? What do we find the power of it to be, when it seats itself in us?

As to *service*, it makes it welcome. To say that service for the object of this affection is "perfect freedom" is far too cold. It makes service infinitely grateful, even though it call for self-denial or weariness. And it can render its offering without caring for any eye or heart to approve it, but that of the one whom it has made its object. It cares not that others should be able to esteem its ways. It has all the desired fruit of its service, if its object approve it, and give but its presence at the end of it. As to *society*, this affection wants none but that of its object. If there be no weariness felt in service, as we have been saying, so is there no irksomeness known in solitude. All that is cared for is the presence of that one who commands the heart. There is no sense of solitude, if that one alone be present; there is no sense of satiety, though that one be *always* present. As to *authority in the soul*, it holds its place, I need not say, unrivalled. It is the man of the heart. It breaks the bands and cuts the cords of other desires. It makes us undervalue all things but the one. It may take other things up, but this is only by the way. It is ever glancing at its own thing, even if others be for a time in the foreground. It looks through the lattices at it. Other things are esteemed according to their connection with it. And it will control the wrong and cultivate the right tendencies of the heart; for occasions which might wound vanity or gratify pride are not valued or pursued, while we retain it; and yet to approve ourselves there, we will nerve the heart and the hand to great and generous ways.

What intensity is here! and what purity also! It refreshes the soul to think that we have been created susceptible of such affections. But the warning of another is in season. "Wherever a passion has these properties, or any of them, conspicuous in it, it cannot, but by being consecrated to God, avoid becoming injurious to Him and to itself. The very nobility of it entitles Him to it." But the same one tells us that we should seek, not to *annihilate*, but to *transfigure* it. He says, "I would not have it swallowed up by death, the common fate, but be ennobled by a destiny like that of Enoch and Elias, who, having ceased to converse with mortals, died not, but were translated to heaven."

It is good for us to listen to this. The heart has been made deeply susceptible of this affection, and Christ is the offered object of it. He proposes Himself to it. He claims the supreme place in our hearts. "He that loveth father or mother more than Me, is not worthy of Me." Whatever passion of the

soul be moved, it is God's right to have the highest exercise of it towards Himself. It has not treated Him as God if it have not rendered this to Him. If each of the passions of our souls do not give Him its richest and largest offerings, it is not a *worshipping* passion.

This we may readily grant, needing, however, increase of grace ourselves to be worshippers on such a score. In the language of another; "as, among the Jews, there were odoriferous unguents, which it was neither unusual nor unlawful to use themselves or bestow upon their friends, but also a peculiar composition of a precious ointment, which God having reserved for His own service, the perfuming of others with it was sacrilege, so there are regulated degrees of love which we may harbour for others, but there is too a certain peculiar strain of love which belongs unto God." Ex. 30: 34-38. It is, I may add, idolatry when bestowed on a creature, but it is worship when rendered to Him.

This may sound a solemn truth, but it is a happy one. Is it not blessed to know that our Lord claims our hearts and their affections? Have any of us, beloved, read "the first and great commandment" without, at least, sometimes rejoicing in the grace that would make such a demand upon us? Mark 12: 30. Is it nothing, to us that God Himself values our love, that He says to us, "My son, give Me thine heart"? The wise virgins delighted in such truth. Many had gone out with them, professing the common expectation. The foolish had lamps. They took their place in the common profession. But the wise counted the cost of the Bridegroom's absence, and the hope of His return. In the spirit of their minds they had said that, let His delay be long or short, they must still wait, for that nothing could satisfy them but His presence. The night of His absence might be long or short — they could not tell — they would not undertake to say. It might be, as to its length, a summer night, or a winter night. But their hearts deeply owned this — that nothing could close, nothing could turn that shadow of death into the morning, but the restored presence of the Bridegroom. On this their souls were fixed. And, therefore, they took vessels of oil, as well as lamps. They prepared for a night season, they counted on a dark-some time, till Jesus returned. The expectation of their heart so supremely pointed to Him. that nothing could chance hope to fruition but His presence; they must be expecting, expecting, and still expecting, till then. "Hope to the end" they purposed to do, for the grace that was to be brought to them at the revelation of Jesus Christ. It was a *worshipping* hope.

The early freshness faded, I doubt not. This may sustain us who are so conscious of the dulness and stupidity of our hearts. The brightness of that moment when the lamp was first lit is dimmed. "While the Bridegroom tarried, they all slumbered and slept." But the reality of supreme delight in Christ, and desire after Him, had not departed. The vessels were still at the side of the slumbering virgins. The oil had not to be *bought*, but only to be *wed* afresh.

How does all this, as in a parable, tell of the heart cleaving to Jesus! And our Canticles express the same. And our own poets have sung of this love, as well as these mystic songs of the King of Israel:

"Jesus has all my powers possess'd,  
My hopes, my fears, my joys,  
He, the dear Sovereign of my breast  
Shall still command my voice.  
Some of the fairest choirs above  
Shall flock around my song,  
With joy to hear the name they love

Sound from a mortal's tongue."

The Church receives such breathings as not beyond the measure or the melody of the soul. And we want these affections to make us happy, and to set us free. It is a divine method of delivering us from the tyranny of carnal or worldly desires. It is the Spirit's way of spoiling other attractions of their power to seduce and fill the heart, and of lifting the soul above the frettings of low anxieties. Look at the commanding power of such affection in the poor sinner in Luke 7. Working in her heart as it did, she was deaf to the reproaches and blind to the splendours of the Pharisee and his entertainment. She knew only her Object. The feast and the guests were all lost upon her. This was the *power* of affection in her. And what was the value of it to Christ? Nothing that it dictated or did passed His notice. He appeared to be silent, and but the passive Receiver of her offerings; but He had noted them all. The tears, and the kiss, and the ointment, and all, had been noted in the book of His remembrance, and they are read therefrom, when the time for the opening of that book had come.

And look at the same in Mary at the sepulchre. She sees the angels. And they were dazzling, beautiful in their generation, and wondrous to the eye of flesh and blood. But what was all splendour to her then? The dead body of her Lord was her object, the fond image of her heart, and even heavenly glories can be passed by in the pursuit of it. So with David of old. His soul was full of joy in the Lord. He will dance before the ark, he would "play before the Lord;" and if such were shame, he purposed to be viler still. As with Zacchaeus too, not a king like David, but a mere citizen of Jericho (for the Spirit links rich and poor, high and low, gentle and simple, as we speak, in one affection), he would press through the crowd, and without seeming to give the strangeness of the deed a thought, climb into a sycamore tree in pursuit of the desire which then commanded his heart.

Would that this, beloved, were more shed abroad in our hearts! How should we learn to entertain Christ, as this passion entertains or embalms its object! And what a heaven it will be, when He is ours in this way, feeding this fire in our souls, and giving us to know, in Himself and in His beauties, this seraph love without chill for ever and ever!

Would that our hearts were longing for Him! This is what we find breathed in the Canticles. It is not filial love or grateful love that would ever send this message, Tell him that "I am sick of love." It is more than that. Such is not the language of those affections, but such is the language of the Canticles. And, therefore, we cannot say less of this book, than that it is, after a mystic manner, the utterances of Christ and of a living, espoused soul — all springing from the faith which gives the soul the happy assurance of acceptance and favour with God through the Lord Jesus Christ.

As to the structure of it as a composition, I doubt not, for a moment, the correctness of those who treat it as "a collection of distinct idylls or little poems perfectly detached and separate from each other, with no other connection than what they derive from a common subject, the peculiarities of the style of a common author, and perhaps some unity of design in the mystic sense, which they are intended to bear." The spiritual senses of the saints are to be exercised in discerning the beginnings and endings of these different canticles or little songs, and in interpreting the holy mysteries they express. Different light, and different enjoyment in doing it, may surely be expected among us. But that these songs or little poems are allegories, we will none of us doubt. The intercourses of an espoused pair are the imagery; the love of Christ and the saint, the mystic sense. And warranted, I am sure, are the suggestions of another on this subject, "that there are those manifestations of His love, and those affections kindled in the heart towards the person of the Son of God, which may well borrow their allusions from the tenderest and most powerful affection which subsists among men." "As the bridegroom rejoices over the bride, so shall thy God rejoice over thee." "The Lord thy God in

the midst of thee is mighty; He will save, He will rejoice over thee with joy; He will rest in His love, He will joy over thee with singing." "So shall the king greatly desire thy beauty." "Thou shalt abide for me many days . . . thou shalt not be for another man: so will I also be for thee." "Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the Church." These and kindred passages, with many typical histories in Scripture, and some ordinances of the law, all warrant this thought, as well as the character of the Spirit's inworking at times in the souls of the saints.

The divine authority of this book has never been questioned in any way worthy of the least regard from those who walk simply in the light of God, refusing man and his thoughts and his wisdom. "Where is the wise? where is the scribe? where is the disputer of this world?" It was ever revered by the Jews as a part of the oracles of God, and in that character, we may assure ourselves, received the sanction of Christ, and of the Holy Ghost in the Apostles. No one should pause for a moment to admit its value to the soul of the saint. "We may," as has been well said, "form but a guess concerning some of its beauties, but, in the hands of a Christian, it is invested with a brighter lustre than they could have discerned, who read it in the days of Solomon. For though, in regard to the exterior imagery of the allegories, some of their beauties may be lost, the hidden mystic sense is brought more to light, and manifested with fuller assurance to the believer under the Gospel dispensation. 'For I tell you that many prophets and kings have desired to see those things which ye see, and have not seen them.'"

There is no inquiry into the fact or the ground or the nature of our acceptance with God, in this book. Such questions and inquiries are settled beforehand. The communion is *upon* the settlement of them all, as I have already noticed. Acceptance with God is known. It is delight in Christ, occupation with Himself, that we get here. It is not the finding of Him out, nor is it the confession of sins. The communion is a *sinner's* communion, most surely — but it is of a consciously pardoned, accepted, and loved sinner. And when any sorrow or repentance is felt or owned, it is not for any blot or open transgression, but for some spiritual backsliding, some momentary coldness, some infirmity in maintaining or cultivating the soul's due fervour. This is much to be observed. Nothing gross, or even open, in conduct — nothing established as a habit is detected here — nothing that a soul that had not been already in simple and earnest fellowship with Jesus would have been apprehensive of. It is only a *present, temporary slothfulness of heart*. The very repentance and confession is of such a nature as intimates the fine tone of the soul that could feel and make it. The contact or touch is so tender, that the very perception of it speaks the delicacy of the organ which met it and resented it.

But what an element is this! Oh, how coarse, beloved, are our sensibilities compared with all this. Our poor souls are rarely here; they are engaged oftentimes in doing first works again, in grieving over the advantages which our lusts have taken of us, the surprisals which the heat of wrong tempers has wrought, and such like things. But all such occupation of the soul keeps us below this pure and spiritual delight in Christ, this sickness of love, this breathing on the mountains of myrrh, and this dressing and keeping of the garden of spices, here so blessedly presented. Surely it is but little of this we know. Is God our exceeding joy? Is it in the chambers of the King, in thoughts of glory, we walk? Is our spikenard greeting our Lord, and are our souls able to call Him nothing less than our "Beloved"? It were well indeed if such affections as these were filling and commanding our hearts. Then should we have weapons of sure victory wherewith to meet our enemies, and to beat down the intrusive desires and thoughts that defile us so often. In the figurative style of another we may say: "As when, in a clear morning, the rising sun vouchsafes to visit us, the bright stars which did adorn our hemisphere, as well as those dark shades which did benight it, vanish." Lust could not with any power come against a soul thus occupied. This "joy of the Lord" would indeed be our "strength." For

what a dwelling-place opens here for faith to enter! What a banqueting-house for the soul! How far distant from fear and clouds of conscience such regions lie! The land of the turtle is this, the garden of all pleasant fruits.

But where is the precious faith to enter it and walk there? We need to cry for largeness of heart in the bowels of Christ Jesus. It is of influence on the whole soul to be occupied with such affections. It strengthens and sanctifies — for all questions of our *standing* are anticipated, and our energy in *meeting temptation* is increased, and thus the *liberty* and *purity* of the soul are secured. For how can the thought of *condemnation* or the temptation to *defilement* be entertained, when the believer is seeking to reach more into the light and joy of such communion as this? Does it not lead him into more than a mere escape from a spirit of bondage, or from practical evil? Is it not the divine method of making him more than conqueror?

As expressing such communion as this, this book of the Song of Songs may suit any saint. Not, however, that I mean, that we may necessarily follow one path of experience, and go from one stage therein to another. But according to the soul's enlarging knowledge of Jesus, so will, of course, be its enlarging experience. And there ought to be *progress* - as we read, "Grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ." And as the different relations in which the Lord stands to us are apprehended and embraced by the soul, corresponding experiences will arise, for experience is our entrance into the power of these relations. And the Canticles I judge to be the utterances of the soul at one point of this journey, from the first quickening to the full and final enjoyment. It is not the experience of Rebecca when first awakened to leave Mesopotamia, nor of Ruth, when first made ready, in Moab, to take the God of Naomi as her God, nor as afterwards a gleaner in the field — it is the exercise of Rebecca's heart, while on the way to Isaac, listening to the tales of her gracious and wise conductor, and of Ruth at the feet of Boaz, as the suitor of his hand and name.

This is the general moral of the book. But this being so, I can the more admire the perfectness of the Spirit in making this a short book. It is of too intimate a character to have been much spread out. It lies within. It is the recesses of the Temple. It was called by the Jews the "holy of holies." And that was the smallest place, as well as the most retired. It expressed the deepest character of communion with God. There was one communion at the Brazen Altar or the Brazen Laver in the courts — another in the holy place, at the Table, the Candlestick, and the Altar — and another in the presence of the Lord Himself, in the holiest. And of this character of communion is that which the Canticles express. It may be that the soul cannot at all times enter into it. Ruth would not have been prepared for laying herself at the feet of Boaz when she entered his field as a gleaner. The teaching she got from Naomi was needed to bring her into the threshing-floor.

And this little book seems to open with the soul expressing all this. It opens with strong and fervent desire toward *Himself*; reaching forth to apprehend Him in some more intimate manner than had been previously understood. It is as though the saint had been conscious of being in a lower condition than would now satisfy. For at times the soul rests itself simply on the firm ground of doctrines; such as "The blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanseth us from all sin." It is the simple and sure power of such truth that alone answers, at times, the need of the soul. But again, at times, the ground under our feet, as believers, is understood and rested on, and it is the Lord Himself that the soul desires. And such is its condition here. "Let Him kiss me with the kisses of His mouth." She had been keeping the vineyards — attending to things abroad, but now was learning that her own vineyard had been neglected; and the deeper things of personal fellowship are longed for. The saint is leaving Martha's and taking Mary's place, longing to feed under His own eye and from His own hand, and not

another's. And at the close, the soul appears to know that *it had become a keeper of its own vineyard*. At the beginning there had been the grief that the vineyards of others had been kept, but that her own had been neglected (Cant. 1: 6); but now, it is conscious of being more at home, more about its own vineyard; as though it had left the Martha place, busy about many things, and assumed the Mary place, at the feet of Jesus in personal communion. Cant. 8: 12.

This is the advance, the conscious, happy advance, which the soul makes through these exercises. It has reached a higher order of communion with the Lord, and it desires that this may continue till Jesus return.

The very style of the writing, too, is just that which suits the heart under the power of a commanding affection. "Let *Him* kiss me with the kisses of His mouth " — like Mary Magdalene to the supposed gardener — "If thou have borne *Him* hence " — both *meaning* Christ, but neither *naming* Him. For "the heart had been before taken up with the thoughts of Him, and to *this relative* these thoughts were the antecedent — that good matter which the heart was inditing. For they that are full of Christ themselves are ready to think that others should be so too." Or, it is as the language of the Apostle, who *means* the day of glory and of the kingdom without *naming* it, when he says, "I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that He is able to keep that which I have committed unto Him against *that day*;" and again, "Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at *that day*."

Thus is it, in the very style and manner of the renewed mind, eyeing, as it does, both the Lord Himself and the glory. And blessed are these affections. The truth or the doctrine of the Gospel is no cold, rigid system. Surely our souls must know this. It is at times laid down in propositions, taking the form of an argument, deducing conclusions from adequate and proved premises. But still the Gospel calls for the warmest affections, and abundantly provides for them. — *Even the Canticles themselves never pass beyond the strict bounds of the Gospel — they never exceed that measure which the strictest rules of evangelic truth would prescribe*. So that we should interpret these little songs or idylls in the light of the didactic Scriptures, as we may profitably read those Scriptures in the warmth of these Canticles. The Apostle says, "I have espoused you to one Husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ." This assumes all that is in the Canticles. And in this way, the Gospel, in its strictest meaning, will account for all that is in Solomon's Song. The latter delineates those affections which well suit such truths and revelations as the former teaches or delivers. But this being so important, as I judge, I desire to instance it in a few particulars.

In these idylls, the Lord looks on the saint as altogether lovely. And so in His eyes is the believer. A sinner in himself, he has, by faith, taken on him the beauty of Christ. He is "in Him." He has "the righteousness of God" upon him. He is "accepted in the Beloved." Faith alone gives him all this comeliness. He has been baptized into Christ, and put on Christ. This is the beauty of the believer; and he is lovely in Christ's eye, as the Canticles again and again express.

Indeed in this form of beauty there can be no spot. For it is Christ Himself that the believer is arrayed with. The very "best robe" in the Father's house is on him. It is a spotless beauty he shines in. The doctrine of the Gospel teaches us this, and here Christ utters His delight in it; such harmonies are there between the Gospels and the Canticles.

But further. In the mystery of Christ and the believer, Christ has a mountain of myrrh to which He here invites the believer to turn his steps — and St. Paul exhorts us, "If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth." The believer mounts those hills with Jesus as here invited, and as in the Gospel exhorted. His conversation is in heaven. In Christ he sits in

heavenly places. And he savours of the myrrh and the frankincense which are there.

Again, the Lord delights in the graces of His saint. He rests, with the love of complacency, in the believer who walks in the Spirit before Him. John 15: 10. She is an enclosed garden under His eye, a spring shut up, a fountain sealed. As we read, the Spirit is in him, a well of water springing up into everlasting life. He has the savour of the spices, and the flowings of the living water, *in himself*, and the fragranciness and freshness of these gladden his Lord anew. This is the teaching of the Gospel, and this is the language of Christ in the Canticles. He delights in what is *in us* through the Spirit, as well as in what is *on us* through faith. He has His joy in the places of communion with His elect here, as in the heaven to which He has ascended.

This is largely told us in Scripture. "Hearken, O daughter, and consider, and incline thine ear; forget also thine own people and thy father's house, so shall the King greatly desire thy beauty; for He is thy Lord, and worship thou Him." Psalm 45. Here is something beyond *imputed* beauty. For here we learn the grace in her which kindles His desire. She has forgotten her own people and her father's house, so the King desires her. And she owns Him as Lord, and worships Him. She will render Him affection and homage. And all of this suited and attractive grace was shown in Rebecca. *She left all for Isaac*. She forgot her own people and her father's house, and came across an unknown desert in company with a stranger, in the singleness and devotedness of an undivided heart. And on reaching him for whom she had consented to all this, *she lights from her beast, and veils herself*. She puts on the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit. She arrays herself in shamefacedness and sobriety. She loves, and yet bows. And so Isaac desires her. And so is the Church to be *subject* to Christ, and yet *love* Him with virgin love. Eph. 5; 2 Cor. 11: 2.\*

\*Affection begets confidence. Rebecca committed herself to Eliezer, *never asking her father or brother for an escort*. So the more singly we love Jesus, the more confidently will our souls trust Him and His supplies for us alone, without confidence in the flesh or anything else.

And in the Canticles we find the Spirit of Christ inviting His saint into the liberty of this present time, into the atmosphere of a house where the cry of adoption is heard. All the darker and colder age is passed. All that dispensation which kept the soul in bondage and fear is over. The voice of the turtle is heard; the voice of that perfect love which casts out fear. "The darkness is past, and the true light now shineth," says St. John, as though he had the Canticles in mind. The saint should now arise, taking his place as the *loved* and the *fair* one, being in the full consciousness of personal unspottedness and beauty, through grace, and of his Lord's perfect favour and delight. He should come away from "the spirit of fear," and pass over into the spirit of love and of power "and of a sound mind." For all in the dispensation is gladdening. The flowers appear on the earth, and the singing of birds is heard. All is promise, all pledge, and earnest, and seal, and unction.

And again, if the betrothed one of the Canticles say, While the King sitteth at His table, my spikenard sendeth forth the smell thereof," the disciple in the gospel *does* this. John 12: 3.

And, according to all this, we may observe how some of the tenderest utterances of this book are warranted by the simple narratives of the Gospel. If the beloved watch over the restored soul with the fondest jealousy, not allowing the busy foot of others to disturb the silent, hidden rest of the loved one, what does Jesus do in the favoured house at Bethany less than this? How does He check the motions of Martha? Cant. 2: 7; Luke 10: 41.\*

\*"Till *she* please," it ought to be, as the "love" is the female in this book. Cant. 2: 7; Cant. 3: 5; Cant. 7: 4.

The great moral principles of truth are also strictly and fully understood here, though under very delicate and spiritual illustrations. St. James says, "Ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss, that ye may consume it upon your lusts." In this book we read, "By night upon my bed I sought Him whom my soul loveth; I sought Him, but I found Him not." The great moral principle, *that there is a seeking which does not find*, is equally owned in each of these scriptures; but the one has a much more delicate exhibition of it than the other. Jesus is here sought on *the bed*, that is, in some listlessness of mind. The bed may be the place of *meditation* (Psalm 63; Isa. 26), but not of *seeking*, which demands action. And thus the seeker *on the bed*, the listless, drowsy inquirer after the Lord, will not, till he pass through discipline, as here (Cant. 3: 1-5), find Him.

If Christ again and again express His deep satisfaction in her, through this book, what have we less than this in the strict teaching of Scripture? Did He not find, at the beginning, that His "delights were with the sons of men"? and at the end, when He sees of the travail of His soul for us, will He not be "satisfied"? Prov. 8; Isa. 53. If the sinner be content with Him, so is He equally with the sinner. The woman at the well, it is true, forgot her waterpot for Him; but He forgot His *thirst* for her, and that was greater. And then, in like enjoyment of spirit, He said, on the very same occasion, "I have meat to eat that ye know not of." John 4.

From the first to the latest moment of our Christian history, our power to refresh the mind of our Lord is deeply and fully owned in Scripture. Our earliest confidence in Him as sinners sets Him at once at a feast (as we have just seen, John 4: 32), there to make merry with his friends (Luke 15: 9); for angels rejoice. The recovery of a wanderer has like joy for Him. Read the utterance of the divine affection over repentant Ephraim, in Jer. 31: 20. And what under the eye, and to the heart of our Lord, are the comely walk of the saints, and their goings in the sanctuary? Is not "a meek and quiet spirit" in God's sight "of great price"? Does not the pure behaviour of the believer *please* Him, convey complacency or delight to the divine mind? 1 Thess. 4: 1. And how is such complacency in us witnessed again and again by the promise that He will manifest Himself to us, and make His abode with us! John 14.

Does not all this make good the suggestions of this book? And so, in the Gospels as well as in the Canticles, is not Christ borne away in the chariots of Amminadib, the chariots of His willing people? Where, I ask, did the report of the seventy bear Him? Luke 10: 17, 18. Where did the desire of the Greeks translate Him? John 12: 21-23. And the faith of the Gentile soldier could, for a moment, hold His spirit in delight and admiration, and then bear Him onward to the glory, when the East and the West shall send home the children of the kingdom with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob. Matt. 8: 8-11.

But the affection which can be thus *gratified* may be *wounded*. These are among the properties of love. You may grieve as well as refresh the loving heart. And so it is with our Lord, both in the Canticles and in the Gospels; as we read also in the Epistles, "Grieve not the Holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption."

And again. The betrothed one here knows that the heavens (symbolized by hills and mountains) have received her Beloved. But she knows also that though He be *at home* there, like a roe or a young hart upon its *native* hills, yet that He delights in communion with her, and visits her, desirously looking through the lattices. And further still; she knows that her duty it is to watch against intrusion and disturbance, as the keepers of a vineyard would watch against the young foxes. And I ask, Is not all this the truth, the enjoyment, and the practical energy, again and again recognized and enforced in the teaching of the Gospel? We know that the heavens have received Jesus until "the times of

refreshing." We know that He makes His present abode with the saint, and manifests Himself to him, as He does not unto the world. And we know that there is to be energy and watchfulness that we "walk in the spirit," and not "in the flesh," if we would taste and enjoy these manifestations of His name to our souls.

So, still further, there is a garden, in this book, under the tillage of the north wind and the south wind, that it may yield its fruits and its spices to the Lord. And does not the severer style of the New Testament abundantly admit the idea? The Father Himself is the Husbandman of a vine which He digs about and dungs; and the saint is as a field that drinketh in the rain from heaven, to yield herbs meet for Him by whom it is dressed. John 15; Heb. 6.

In the imagery here we have Christ as a Suitor at the door, asking of the one He loves admission from "the drops of the night;" and in the New Testament we have Him standing and knocking at the reluctant heart, desiring that entertainment which revived and zealous affection would surely provide Him. Rev. 3: 20. And well for us, beloved, if our lukewarm Laodiceanism do but depart, like the drowsiness of this dear one in this lovely mystic song. Cant. 5: 2-16.

And I know not that the constant self-congratulation of the espoused one in this book is a whit beyond that of Paul. She can always talk of her Beloved being hers, and say moreover, "I am my Beloved's, and His desire is towards me." But he can also always, in spirit, sing (let the toil and wear of life be what they may), "The life that I live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, *Who loved me, and gave Himself* for me." And that is the language of Paul, happy in the assurance of Christ's devoted love to him.\*

\*It is commonly interpreted as though Paul, in Gal. 2: 20, were expressing his *devotedness* to his Master. But this is not so. This robs the verse of its exquisite glory. He is rather speaking of the joy of his soul in the knowledge of what a devoted and glorious Lover he had.

If, I may also say, in the imagery of this book, the loved saint can say, "I sat down under His shadow with great delight, and His fruit was sweet to my taste," the plainer style of an epistle is not less fervent. "Whom having not seen, ye love; in Whom, though now ye see Him not, yet believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory." Surely the heart is equally in possession of an Object which it knows is fitted to answer all its desires.

And further still. We have, in the actions of this book, souls in different elevations, the betrothed one, and "the daughters of Jerusalem." How much is that known among themselves, and contemplated in the illustrations and teachings of the New Testament! All are not fully formed — not fully in the measure of the stature, so to express it. "We have a little sister, and she hath no breasts." All are not alike in the liberty of the dispensation. Such draw out the sympathy of the saint established in the grace of God, and solicitous care, and prayer, and inquiry of the Lord, are made about such, as here. See Cant. 8: 8.

Indeed, I know not that anything can be more in the harmonies of the Spirit, in the combined and glowing lights of the Gospel, than the utterance of the betrothed one in this short passage. Cant. 8: 8-10. The actings of her soul, both towards others and towards the Lord, are the Spirit's sweetest and choicest workmanship. She has respect to "the infirmity of the weak," desiring for them strength and edifying in the fuller measure of Christ, and yet all the time owning full oneness and relationship with them in Him, while she rejoices in her own certain, happy assurance, and the fulness of her growth, even to an ecstasy, that her breasts were like towers! and because of that, knowing her Lord's favour towards her, and delight in her. And sure we may be, that all this is purely and richly the way of a believing, renewed soul. Full adoption of the weak, with desires for their larger liberty and assurance,

and yet certainty of personal standing in the most undimmed joy of entire assurance, with perfect persuasion that all this liberty and confidence were thoroughly to the heart and mind of Jesus.

Nothing can be more perfect, I believe, than all this in the harmonies and lights of a spiritual mind, according to the strictest sense of evangelic truth.

So again and again, in the gospel history, we find Jesus led to forget His sorrows when beholding faith in a sinner. He found there, as I have already stated, the refreshment of His spirit. He found a transient forgetting of His sorrows among the Samaritans, from the Centurion, from Zacchaeus, and from the spikenard and fellowship of Mary. He seeks the same here. He comes to His espoused one, that He might find, in fellowship with her, some other and far different thing than that rejection and refusal which He was ever meeting in the world. And is it not also so, that if the saint be sluggish and careless, the faithful kindred in Christ will help the discipline? If Jesus say, "Could ye not watch with Me one hour?" Paul will say, "Quit you like men, be strong." So in the action of this book. Jesus leaves a memorial of the soul's drowsiness on "the hole of the door," that the conscience may take alarm; and the watchman of the city smite her, and the keepers of the walls draw the veil from her face. Cant. 5.

The harmonies of the "one Spirit " are heard in all this. And so, in the course of these little songs, I discern the way of the Lord toward a repentant, recovered soul. See Cant. 6: 4-13. She had just refused to open her door to Him, but, through discipline, had been brought to fervent communion with Him again. Cant. 5: 2 - 6: 3. And now His eye and His heart are full of her again. He looks on her as beautiful as ever. She is His "undefiled," and nothing less; no upbraidings pass His lips. Her motion towards Him is comely and graceful in His esteem. And He lets her know that her repentance had given Him pleasant and wondrous refreshment. As soon as she was made willing (Psalm 110: 2), He got into a chariot to bear Him away speedily and joyously to her. Cant. 6: 12, margin. She may be a wonder to herself, she may take a place unworthy of any notice (v. 13); but the Lord and angels rejoice over her. As we know in the Gospels, the ninety and nine just ones can be left for the one prodigal; the angels in heaven rejoice; the house makes merry; the friends of the beloved triumph over the returned Shulamite. She is like the returned Jacob: the Mahanaim, the hosts of God, salute them both, wait at the threshold of the land or of the house, to do their Lord's pleasure toward them, and express His welcome and concern for them. Gen. 32: 1; Cant. 6: 13.\*

\*Another once observed to me, that in the Canticles, the Beloved expresses *directly to herself* the beauties He discerns in her; the betrothed one never does this, but recites His beauties in *the ears of others*; and further observed, that there was great moral propriety in this, something quite according to the dictate of a delicate affection.

And what is the longing here but that the day should break? And what is the longing of the same soul in the words of the Gospel? "Come, Lord Jesus, come quickly," — so largely and so exactly do the teachings and the breathings of the New Testament, in these and kindred ways, measure the affections of the heart in this book? Christ dwells in the heart by faith. Christ lies all night between the breasts. Eph. 3: 17; Cant. 1: 13. And has not the saint attuned his heart over Jesus in language of like fervour, such as we all use without shame?

"How tedious and tasteless the hours  
When Jesus no longer I see,  
Sweet prospects, sweet birds, and sweet flowers,  
Have lost all their sweetness for me

The midsummer sun shines but dim,  
 The fields strive in vain to look gay,  
     But when I am happy in Him,  
     December's as pleasant as May.  
 His name yields the richest perfume,  
 And sweeter than music His voice,  
 His presence disperses my gloom,  
 And makes all within me rejoice  
 I should, were He always so nigh,  
 Have nothing to wish or to fear,  
     No mortal so happy as I,  
 My summer would last the whole year."

These are among the seals set upon this beautiful portion of God's Word by the spiritual mind of the believer, and also by kindred truths and principles found in other scriptures. And it has been happily said, that "if there be no express allusion to this book in the New Testament, the same allegory, as portraying the same truth, evidently appears to have been familiar to the minds of the writers of it, and to the minds also of the people whom they addressed. Not more abruptly does John the Baptist, for instance, refer to our Lord as 'the Lamb of God who taketh away the sin of the world,' as being the character of the Messiah which all would know and understand, than he does to the same blessed Person in the character of the Bridegroom of the Church — 'he that hath the Bride is the Bridegroom.'"

And is it not seasonable, in these days of growing irreligiousness and worldliness, to warn one another, beloved, to keep our minds incorrupt in the simplicity that is in Christ? In the preparation-season, which the present age is, and which the Canticles contemplate, Eve was getting ready, under the forming hand of God, for Adam, and for Adam only. Adam slept for Eve, and Eve was made for Adam. So with Christ and the Church. He slept in death for us, and we are preparing, under the Holy Ghost, for Him. "I have espoused you to *one* husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ." As he says also in another place, "My little children, of whom I travail in birth again till Christ be formed in you," Christ, and Christ only, Christ in His precious sufficiency for a sinner, in answer to the Hagar or Galatian thought of "days, and months, and times, and years," that other gospel which yet is not another.

But this is assailed. The Gospel, in its claim on the sinner to give his undivided confidence to Christ, has been abroad on the lips of a thousand witnesses, to the gladdening of thousands of souls. The enemy has watched and hated this. — Working in the scene in which he goes "to and fro" and "up and down" (Job 1: 7), he is busy to seduce the heart from this Gospel. And is not his success far beyond the measure of the fears of any of us? The religion of fleshly confidences or of ordinances is to this hour among us. It admits of worldliness; and worldliness is, at this same hour, flourishing in company with it. There is the erection of temples for worship, and of palaces for the worshippers; stricter care to observe, in its season, due attendance in the sanctuary, together with unparalleled skill and energy and enterprise in advancing the indulgence and elegance of human life, so as to make the world a *desirable* and *safe* place to live in — a place where religion may now be seen to be observed

and honoured.

This is all seductive from the principle of faith — this is corruption of the mind from the simplicity that is in Christ. The Gospel addresses itself to man, not only as a guilty but as a *religious* creature. It finds him under the power of *superstition* or *religiousness*, as well as of *sin*. It is as natural for man to refuse to go into the judgment-hall lest he should be defiled, as it is, in very enmity to God, to cry out, "Crucify Him, crucify Him." And the Gospel gets as stern a refusal from the *religious* man as from the lustful man. As the Divine Teacher tells us, the harlot goes into the kingdom before the Pharisee.

Religious vanities are deeply playing their part in our day, and fascinating many souls. What answer, beloved, do you and I give them? Is Jesus so precious that no allurements has power? Is the virgin purity of the mind still kept? and as chaste ones are we still betrothed to Christ only? Like the newly-formed Eve, are we in our place of earliest, freshest presentation to our Lord? or have we, apart from His side, opened our ear to the serpent?

The kingdom of heaven is as a supper, a royal, joyous feast got ready for sinners, that they might taste and see that the Lord is good, and that blessed is the man that trusteth in Him. It does not put God in the place of a *receiver*, for man *to bring Him His due*; but it puts Him in the place of a *giver*, and man is called *to value His blessing*. But the question is, Who listens, with desirous heart, to the bidding? Who wears "the wedding garment"? Who prizes Christ? Who triumphs in His salvation? Who longs for the day of His espousals? John had this garment on him, knowing, as he did, the joy of being the Bridegroom's friend. It was flowing at liberty on Mary's shoulders, as she sat at her Lord's feet and heard His words. Paul tucked it tight about him when he said, "God forbid that I should glory save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ." The eunuch had just put it on as "he went his way rejoicing" in the faith of the name of Jesus. Every sinner adorns himself with it the moment his heart values Christ. And what joy is it thus to know that when we put on Christ it is not "sackcloth" we put on, nor is it "the spirit of heaviness" we enter into, but "a wedding garment" has clothed us, and with "the garment of praise" we array our spirits!

Have we thus learned "the kingdom of heaven"? Have we, in spirit, entered it as a banqueting-hall where both magnificence and joy welcome us? Are we, consciously, guests at the marriage of a King's Son? Have we learnt the mysteries of the faith? Have we gazed at them? Has the musing over them kindled a fire in the heart to burn up the chaff of worldly rudiments? Paul had this element in his soul as he travelled through Greece. And how did the glow of these mysteries address itself to "the princes of the world" there? It consumed them all. "Where is the wise? where is the scribe? where is the disputer of this world?" Precious ardour of the Spirit! What a pile was thus fired in the famed cities of the learned and the wise! and how were all the thoughts of men thrown as rubbish into it!

And how did he treat the rudiments of the *religious* world? He bore the same fervent sense of Christ with him into their regions, to test what chaff and dross were there. In Galatia he found much of it; but he spared none of it. Though an angel from heaven gather such rubbish; though Peter himself help in the work; though the Galatians, who once would have plucked out their eyes for him, be enticed, nothing should stand before the heat of the Spirit that bore him onward. "O foolish Galatians, who hath bewitched you? . . . Ye observe days, and months, and times, and years. I am afraid of you."

Could he do less? Could he carry Jesus in his heart, and calmly stand and measure his light with the lights of Greece, or God's great ordinance with man's traditions?

It is to make much of Christ we want, beloved — much of Himself, and His glorious achievements for sinners. We want simplicity in that sense of the word — the breathings of a soul

content with Him, and the peace of a conscience for ever at rest in His sufficiency. "What think ye of Christ?" is the test, as a dear hymn well known among us has it

Some call Him a Saviour, in word,  
But mix their own works with His plan,  
And hope He His help will afford,  
When they have done all that they can.  
If doing prove rather too light  
(A little they own they may fail),  
They purpose to make up full weight  
By casting His name in the scale.  
Some style Him the pearl of great price,  
And say He's the fountain of joys,  
Yet feed upon folly and vice,  
And cleave to the world and its toys —  
Like Judas, the Saviour they kiss,  
And, while they salute Him, betray -  
Ah, what will profession like this  
Avail in His terrible day!  
If asked what of Jesus I think,  
Though all my best thoughts are but poor,  
I say, He's my meat and my drink,  
My life, and my strength, and my store;  
My Shepherd, my Husband, my Friend,  
My Saviour from sin and from thrall,  
My hope from beginning to end,  
My portion, my Lord, and my all."

May these thoughts and affections be ours. They are the sweet witness of the one faith, the one Lord, the one Spirit (Eph. 4), for they express the leading, ruling mind of the Canticles. There the soul in kindred affection has but one object, but that one is enough. It is satisfied, and never for a moment looks for a second. It has the "Beloved," and cares for nothing else. If it grieve, it is over the want of capacity to enjoy Him. It seeks for nothing but Jesus, lamenting only that it is not more fully and altogether with Him. And this is the experience we have to desire — to find in the Lord a satisfying object, a cure for the wanderings of the poor heart, which, till it fix on Him, will go about and still say, "Who will show us any good?" "The labour of the foolish wearieth every one of them, because he knoweth not how to go to the city."

"That unsatisfiedness with transitory fruitions which men deplore as the *unhappiness* of their nature is indeed the *privilege* of it." Just indeed, and truly to be prized, is such a sentiment. For this thirsting gain, this spending of "labour for that which satisfieth not," casts the heart on Jesus. As this has ever been, so is it now. The building of palaces, the planting of vineyards, the getting of singing-men and singing-women, the multiplying of the delights of the children of men, all these efforts and travails of the heart take their course and have their way still. Ecclesiastes 2. But Jesus revealed to the heart, as in this book, commands these thoughts and purposes away. It speaks the language of the blessed Lord Himself; and the experience in it is the experience of the poor woman who was able to leave her pitcher at the well — "Whosoever drinketh of this water shall thirst again: but whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst.. but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life."

"I am the Root and the Offspring of David, and the Bright and Morning Star. Even so, come, Lord Jesus."