The Song of Songs

William Kelly

Public domain. As published on plymouthbrethren.org.

Also online at https://plymouthbrethren.org/article/3279

KEE Ministry Library · Faithful Men
kee-ministry-library.netlify.app

The Song of Songs

Many have applied this wonderful book of scripture to the church, many more to the soul, in relation to the Lord Jesus. Nor is it denied for a moment that there is a principle common to all born of God, the love to Him Who died for all that enter by faith into the love of God in Christ, the love which His known love creates, itself passing knowledge.

But is there the smallest reason to question that the book really contemplates, what the O. T. does every where, that object which is so precious to Messiah on earth, confirmed as it is by so many proofs in the Psalms (especially 45) and the Prophets (Isa. 62.)?1 Solomon accordingly was no unsuited vessel for the Spirit to employ in this respect. The N.T. treats Christ and the church as a secret kept hid in God till the apostle Paul was employed to make it known; so that the bearing is naturally on the mutual love of Messiah and His earthly bride, the daughter of Zion, and other such figurative terms. It seems difficult to men who look only at the past to realise what divine mercy is yet to effect in Jerusalem; when, instead of her old rebellion and treachery, the city of the Great King shall be the object of Jehovah’s delight, called by a new name, a crown of beauty and a royal diadem in His hand, and shall stand at His right hand as the queen in gold of Ophir, a praise in the earth.

In fact a great deal of the perplexity among the commentators is owing to misapplication. Literalists are apt here, as elsewhere, to deprive the book of a worthy object and divine character. Thus, according to one of the latest and ablest, it is intended to display the victory

of humble and constant love over the temptations of wealth and royalty! Such an aim might suit the Idyls of Theocritus or the Eclogues of his Latin imitator, Vergil; but it betrays fatal ignorance of O. T. scripture, which rises habitually above the immediate historical occasions into a purpose of grace. It is the more easily overlooked, because its accomplishment awaits the grand future when Messiah shall have the object of His nearest affections here below answering to His love. As a whole it is typical or allegorical, however unbelief may miss the object.

The Song of songs accordingly fills a place in the O. T. which is as unique as the Book of Psalms, while both are without counterpart in the N. T. where neither was directly needed, and the Christian as well as the church could use both fittingly, mutatis mutandis, in keeping with our own distinctive relationship. For us redemption is accomplished, salvation come, and righteousness revealed. The accepted work of Christ glorified on high and the gift of the indwelling Holy Spirit place us in a position very different from that which is contemplated in Canticles. Hence the wonderful reality which the Christian and the church alike and already possess of union with Christ, where, by the Spirit, there is still the power of hope, because we await the consummation, the actual bridals in heaven, after being caught up to be with Christ (Rev. 19) For us the relationship is so established that the affections can flow, and the walk be expected, which suit her who is Christ’s body and bride (Eph. 5, Rev. 22). This is in contrast with the Jewish position here set forth, where the relationship is as yet only desired and has to be formed, or at most re-established. Hence we have the varied exercises of the

heart, through circumstances of trial that issue in profit, set on the profession of what is dearest, but not yet enjoying it in peace. And as we could not without the inspiring Spirit have had such a collection as the Psalms from a people under the law, a ministry of death and condemnation; so still less if possible such an anticipation of the mutual love of Messiah and Jerusalem that is to be; whereas the Christian and the church are morally capable of uttering our own psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, in the enjoyment of His love and our intimate relationship as one with Him. What, next to having eternal life and redemption and our proper relationship to Christ, can be more important than the enjoyment of His love and the kindling and strengthening and fixing of ours! We love Him because He first loved us.

Let us then look briefly into the details of Canticles.

Cant. 1:1 - 2:2.

“The Song of songs which [is] Solomon’s.

Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth;

For thy love [is] better than wine.

Thine ointments have sweet fragrance;

Thy name (is) ointment poured forth:

Therefore do the virgins love thee.

Draw me: we will run after thee (The king hath brought me into his chamber);

We will be glad and rejoice in thee;

We will make mention of thy love more than of wine.

Upright ones love thee.

I [am] black but comely, O daughter of Jerusalem,

As the tents of Kedar,

As the curtains of Solomon.

Look not upon me, because I [am] black,

Because the sun hath looked upon (scorched) me.

My mother's sons were angry with me;

They made me keeper of the vineyards: mine own vineyard have I not kept. Tell me, thou whom my soul loveth, Where thou feedest [thy flock], where thou makest [it] to rest at noon; For why should I be as one veiled (wandering) beside the flocks of thy companions? If thou know not, thou fairest among women, Go thy way forth by the footsteps of the flock, And feed thy kids beside the shepherds' tents.

I have compared thee, my love (friend),

To a steed in Pharaoh's chariots.

Thy cheeks (are) comely with plaits,

Thy neck with jewel chains.

We will make thee plaits of gold

With studs of silver.

While the king is at his table

My spikenard sendeth forth its fragrance.

My beloved [is] unto me a bundle of myrrh

That lieth between my breasts.

My beloved [is] unto me a cluster of henna-flowers

In the vineyards of Engedi.

Behold, thou [art] fair, my love;

Behold, thou [art] fair:

Thine eyes [are as] doves'.

Behold, thou [art] fair, my beloved, yea pleasant:

Also our couch [is] green.

The beams of our houses [are] cedars,

Our rafters firs.

I [am] a crocus of the Sharon,

A lily of the valley.

As a lily among thorns,

So is my love among the daughters" (vers. 1-17, 2:1, 2).

Thus the bride expectant acknowledges the preciousness to her of Messiah's love, and delights to speak of the fragrance of His grace, His name, not only to herself, but to all that kept clear of idolatrous corruptions (the virgins). On this last danger and preservation from it, the early verses of Rev. 14 may be compared, to profit those that weigh both. It is certain that the future godly remnant of Jews, when the church is no longer here, will be tried by this evil again bursting forth, not merely among the nations, but in Jerusalem and the temple itself (compare Is. 57:4-9; Dan. 11:36-39, Dan. 12:11; Matt. 12:43-45, Matt. 24:15; 2 Thess. 2). Therefore the bride associates the faithful with herself in this purity of affection, but cleaves to her own special intimacy with the king, while confessing her love too. Then she rehearses the effect of fiery trial on herself (for indeed Jerusalem had suffered long and severely); so that His grace elsewhere declares she had received of

His hand double for all her sins. Jealousy and anger had been where it might have been least expected. Yet she who should have been a blessing to the nations around in fruit to God had failed even in her own responsibility. The less would she now trust herself but with Messiah's flock and those He gave to tend them (vers. 1-7), as indeed others testify (vers. 8).

Thereupon Messiah declares His pleasure in her, as grace delights to tell her (vers. 9-11); and she rejoins in confessing the effect on her heart; to which He answers briefly in ver. 15, and she replies in verses 16, 17 and 2:1; which all form the general view of their attitude respectively. Testimonies of mutual affection close this portion.

Cant. 2:3-17.

It will be noticed that the bride speaks a great deal of the Beloved to others, while He speaks rather of her to herself. This is thoroughly according to her need of re-assurance, and to the truth of things, when we know that Christ is the One really intended by the Spirit; for He is above all need of the creature and by His love creates love. That He loves her she needs to know; and on this He dwells most fully. Others may learn it from the fact that His love is set upon her: she relieves her heart by setting forth His beauty and excellence to others.

"As the citron among the trees of the wood,

So is my beloved among the sons.

In his shadow I delighted and sat down,

And his fruit [is] sweet to my taste.

He brought me to the house of wine,
And his banner over me [is] love.
Stay ye me with raisin-cakes,
Refresh me with citrons;
For I am sick of love.
His left hand [is] under my head,
And his right hand doth embrace me.
I charge you, daughters of Jerusalem,
By the gazelles and by the hinds of the field,
That ye stir not up, nor awake [my] love,
Until he please.
The voice of my beloved! behold he cometh,
Leaping upon the mountains, skipping upon the hills.
My beloved is like a gazelle or a young hart.
Behold, he standeth behind our wall,
He looketh in through the windows,
He glanceth through the lattice.
My beloved spake and said unto me,
Rise up, my fair one, and come away.
For, behold, the winter is past,
The rain is over, it is gone;
The flowers appear on the earth;
The time of singing is come,
And the voice of the thrush is heard in our land;

The fig tree melloweth her winter figs,

And the vines in bloom give forth fragrance.

Arise, my love, my fair one, and come away.

My dove, in the clefts of the rock,

In the covert of the precipice,

Let me see thy countenance, let me hear thy voice;

For sweet [is] thy voice, and thy countenance comely.

Take us the foxes, the little foxes that spoil the vineyards: For our vineyards are in bloom.

My beloved [is] mine, and I his;

He feedeth [his flock] among the lilies.

Until the day dawn, and the shadows flee away,

Turn, my beloved: be thou like a gazelle, or a young hart, Upon the mountains of Bether" (vers. 3-17).

Christ is described under the figure of the citron, the true bearer of fruit. Under His shadow she had rapture and sat down, and His fruit was sweet to her taste. Moses did not avail Israel, though faithful as a servant. Nor did the first covenant meet the need, but provoked transgressions, and brought forth death and ruin. Christ is the spring of all good. Yet even at this early point the bride feels that the bright time is coming. It is evident that in the Canticles is the revelation of the mutual affection between Messiah and the Israel of God, such as is found nowhere else. And this will be the sweeter to the people of God when brought by the Holy Spirit to judge their whilom truant affections; for Israel had gone after many lovers in the past: see Jer. 3, Ezek. 16, Hosea 1, 2, 3. But her restoration to Messiah in the discovery

of His faithful love, notwithstanding her shameless infidelity to such a lover, will be all the deeper; and this book supplies the needed expression of it all on both sides: so gracious is God, so complete His word, Who knew all from the beginning and reveals fully what will be realised only at the consummation of the age.

The psalms of David are rich indeed, but they reveal the rejection and the sufferings of the Messiah (no doubt in infinite grace), and the people's wickedness, sins, unbelief, and need generally, rather than the mutual love expressed in the Song of Songs. Still less do the Law and the Prophets show this forth as here. Yet Zeph. 3:17 is a beautiful word that illustrates, as far as it goes, the bearing of Canticles. Sympathy in sorrow predominates in the Psalms. Every thing in the scripture is perfect in people, place, and season. And those taught of God find Christ to their everlasting profit and joy everywhere, save in such an unfolding as Ecclesiastes (the remarkable writing by the same hand which indited Canticles), the nothingness and misery of all where Christ is not, spite of the utmost round of passing pleasures and pursuits with the largest means and power of enjoying them. That the style necessarily differs immensely goes without saying: none but a simpleton or a malignant would expect, or if able, execute, otherwise. Yet in all these inspired books, however profoundly instructive to the Christian, the Jewish people are those immediately and primarily in view, not the church of the firstborn ones, not the saints blessed with all spiritual blessing in heavenly places in Christ as we are now.

After the introductory sketch of Cant. 1, the godly Jewish remnant are here shown as going through the

spiritual process to make Messiah's love appreciated and fruitful. And the charge in ver. 7 should be compared with a similar one in Cant. 3:5, and in Cant. 8:4. In each case the coming of Messiah follows suitably to the advancing action of the book. The bride anticipates it by faith; for He is not yet come, however warm the language that realises its blessedness. Jehovah shall arise and have mercy on Zion; for the time to favour her, yea, the set time, is come, though the Psalmist alone could suitably add that His servants take pleasure in her stones and favour the dust thereof. It is here His voice that is heard, as He comes leaping on the mountains, skipping on the hills. What He spoke and said reached the ear, the heart, of the bride (vers. 13, 14), where we next hear of "our" vineyards (ver. 15): compare Cant. 2:6-11. The first expression of conscious relationship follows (ver. 16). Progress is clear, when we compare what appears afterwards. It is rather Himself and His love to her that comes out on this mention of His coming. We shall see more on each fresh occasion; but here His fulness of power, the suitability of the time and circumstances, and the welcome sound of His love to her, have their due place.

Cant. 3.

We have seen how faithful is the Bridegroom's attention to that Zion whom He loved and chose, and will in the end reclaim from all her long folly and from the hand of all her foes; and that the making of her heart true and responsive to His love is the object of this book. That there is a principle common to every believing heart, and so to the church as a whole, is certain and important, so it is with scripture generally. But it is as

important to discern that Christ's special relationship here is with the Jewish bride for the earth, as in the Pauline Epistles and the Revelation with the church, the Lamb's wife for the heavens, though now rightly anticipated and enjoyed in the Spirit on earth. Truth has suffered through the same unbelieving ignorance, which has for ages since the apostles blotted out these immense differences, and merged O. and N. Testaments in the confusion of heaven and earth, Israel and the church, the present and the future, in one vague and undefined object of mercy from the beginning to the end of time, in collision with all scripture, to the enfeebling of truth, to the darkening of divine purposes and love, and to the sad marring of the affections, worship, and walk of faith, especially in Christians.

To us all is sovereign grace reigning through righteousness unto eternal life by Jesus Christ our Lord. The consequence is that believers, whether from Jews or Gentiles, are brought out of darkness into God's marvellous light by the gospel, and, resting on redemption in Christ through His blood, are sealed with the Holy Spirit; as by the same Spirit they are baptised into one body and made God's habitation (Eph. 1, 2). The Christian, the church, thus blessed with every spiritual blessing in heavenly places in Christ, is responsible to walk accordingly, together no less than as individuals. If souls go back, it is fatal, as we see in Hebrews 10, whatever the grace that restores the repentant faithful; if there is public corruption maintained in pride under the plea of unity, as in Babylon and her daughters, there is no restoration but divine judgment.

With Israel it is wholly different. Her backsliding and rebellion under the law, the Jewish rejection of the Messiah, inexcusable as all was, are wholly different from the apostacy after redemption and the presence of the Spirit sent down from heaven. The Lord will come to take His own who await Him to the Father's house, when apostate Christendom and the mass of the Jews will ripen for judgment, which the Lord will execute as the second and displayed act of His advent, after working by grace in both Israel and the Gentiles separately (not in one body as now), as we see in Rev. 7 and elsewhere, to prepare earthly witnesses of His saving mercy before the beginning of the millennial age. Thus both heaven and earth are to have appropriate denizens, the O. T. saints and the church on high in their glorified bodies, saved Jews and Gentiles in their natural bodies, the living demonstration of His blessed power as a King reigning in righteousness, when the Man of God's right hand receives the kingdom that all the peoples may serve Him. The God of peace will bruise Satan under the feet of His saints.

But as long as the church is being called and formed for heavenly glory, the veil lies on Israel's heart: whensoever it shall turn to the Lord, the veil is taken away (that is, in the interval during which the church is caught up, and before the Lord appears with His saints in glory). This interval has divine light cast dispensationally on it, largely in Daniel, and in the Revelation yet more. The Psalms richly express the working of conscience and heart in them, their hopes and their distress Godward, when converted but not brought into settled peace till they see the Lord and have the Spirit poured on them, as we have had since

Pentecost. But it is a great error to confound that first and real work of grace, in which souls to be fully blest are born of God, with the rest and deliverance which only come through learning our own powerlessness as well as guilt and need, and thereon finding all met in Christ and His redemption. The Song of Songs supplies another lack, the bringing of the Israel of God, the earthly bride, into the sense of Messiah's personal relation and love to the people of His choice.

It need not be said that we have what is analogous in that bridal affection, so feebly developed among us, the saints since apostolic days, though we are already one spirit with the Lord before He come and the marriage of the Lamb celebrated on high. Hence, as we have in the N. T. no special book of psalms and hymns provided for us but are capacitated to pour them forth from hearts filled with the Spirit, so we have not like Israel the need of a book analogous to Canticles for kindling and strengthen our affections, as they will find here supplied in the most direct way. The sad truth is that Israel was married to Jehovah, as the prophets remind the people (Isa. 54; Jer. 3), and their unfaithfulness is branded therefore, not like the N. T. Babylon as prostitution, but as adultery (so in Hosea 3 and elsewhere), however His grace may by-and-by deal with Israel not as a guilty widow but as a woman forsaken and a wife of youth.

Hence then the painstaking labour of the Holy Spirit both in the Psalms and the Canticles to lead the godly remnant into all exercises of heart, not only as saints, but in their proper relationship to Messiah. But hence too its necessary form for Zion, after so grievous a breach, for that renewal of blessedness, which was never truly known of old, and which will stand assuredly

as long as the earth lasts, the results of which pass not away but abide when the new heavens and new earth are come in the full and final sense.

“On my bed, by night

I sought him whom my soul loveth;

I sought him, but I found him not.

I will rise now and go about the city;

In the streets and in the broad ways

I will seek him whom my soul loveth;

I sought him, but I found him not.

The watchmen that go about the city found me-

Have ye seen him whom my soul loveth ?-

Scarcely had I passed from them,

When I found him whom my soul loveth;

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.

I charge you, daughters of Jerusalem,

By the gazelles or by the hinds of the field,

That ye stir not up nor awake [my] love,

Until he please.

Who is this, that [fem.] cometh up out of the wilderness Like pillars of smoke, Perfumed with myrrh and frankincense, With all powders of the merchant?

Behold his litter, Solomon’s own:

Threescore mighty men are about it,

Of the mighty of Israel.

They all handle the sword, experts in war.

Each hath his sword on his thigh

Because of fear in the night.

King Solomon made himself a palanquin

Of the wood of Lebanon.

Its pillars he made of silver,

The base of gold, its seat of purple,

The midst of it being paved [with] love

By the daughters of Jerusalem.

Go forth, daughters of Zion,

And behold king Solomon

With the crown wherewith his mother crowned him

In the day of his espousals,

And in the day of the gladness of his heart" (vers. 1-11).

It was not the day, but in hours of darkness the Beloved was sought. The heart truly turned to Him. So the Lord had warned, Ye shall not see me henceforth till ye shall say, Blessed is He that cometh in the name of Jehovah. And she must know herself better to value Him aright. It is not the lesson of heart which the church, the Christian, knows in Him come and fully revealed through accomplished redemption. Yet souls now often pass through similar vicissitudes, because they put themselves under law instead of knowing that we, having died with Christ, are justified from sin (as well as our sins), our old man crucified with Him that the body of sin might be annulled that we should no longer serve

sin. Whence we, Christians, are to reckon ourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus. But the godly Jews here in view are in no such peace. Even when, after passing from the watchmen to whom she appeals she does find the Beloved, we are not to conceive it more than anticipatively in the Spirit of prophecy, as with others of old. It is not to the church but to Israel that the Son is born (see Rev. 12)

But there is progress after the second charge; and the vision is seen of the earthly bride coming out of the wilderness on one side, and on the other a greater than the Solomon of old in the delight of His heart for the day of His espousals.

Israel, however, is the mother whether of the Bridegroom or of the bride: not the church, which is never set forth in that relation, but solely as the Lamb's bride. We do hear of Sarah as the free mother of the heirs of promise in contrast with the bondmaid Hagar gendering to bondage. But this is another order of thought, where the church as such does not enter. It was the catholic system which confounded the two and spoke of "our holy mother" the church; as the Roman Catholic went farther astray and made her not mother only but "mistress" in human vanity and pride.

Cant. 4.

Here it is the voice of the Bridegroom to His earthly bride, and so a wholly different strain from the rehearsal of experience just before. He lets her know fully what she was in His eyes, her beauty, and this in detail (vers. 1-8). Then in vers 7-15 he tells her that she was all fair and no spot in her, though from the haunts of danger and death. With this, though of course in another style

of grace suited to the case, we may compare what Jehovah compelled the heathen prophet to declare of Israel in Num. 23, 24. Here it is the expression, not of separation to Himself and justification and goodly power and glory, but of tender affection and all read in this light.

“Behold, thou [art] fair, my love; behold, thou [art] fair;
Thine eyes [are] doves behind thy veil;

Thy hair [is] as a flock of goats

That appears on the side of mount Gilead.

Thy teeth [are] like a flock of shorn [ewes]

Which go up from the washing,

Which have all borne twins,

And none bereaved among them.

Thy lips [are] like a thread of scarlet,

And thy speech comely.

As a piece of a pomegranate [are] thy temples

Behind thy veil.

Thy neck [is] like the tower of David

Built for an armoury:

A thousand bucklers hang thereon,

All shields of mighty men.

Thy two breasts [are] like two fawns, twins of a gazelle,
Which feed among the lilies.

Until the day dawn (or, be cool) and the shadows flee away, I will get me to the mountain of myrrh, And to the hill of frankincense.

Thou [art] all fair, my love and [there is] no spot in thee. With me from Lebanon, spouse, with me from Lebanon;

Look from the top of Amana, from the top of Senir and Hermon, From the lions' dens, from the mountains of the leopards. Thou hast ravished my heart, my sister spouse;

Thou hast ravished my heart with one of thine eyes,

With one chain of thy neck.

How fair is thy love, my sister spouse!

How much better is thy love than wine,

And the fragrance of thine ointment than all spices!

Thy lips, spouse, drop honeycomb;

Honey and milk [are] under thy tongue;

And the smell of thy garments is like the smell of Lebanon. A garden shut up is my sister spouse, A spring shut up, a fountain sealed.

Thy shoots [are] an orchard of pomegranates with precious fruits Henna with spikenard plants; spikenard and saffron;

Calamus and cinnamon with all trees of frankincense;

Myrrh and aloes, with all the chief spices:

A fountain of gardens, a well of living waters

Which stream from Lebanon.

Awake, north wind, and come, south;

Blow upon my garden [that] the spices thereof may flow forth. Let my beloved come into his garden And eat his [or, its] precious fruits" (vers. 1-16).

It is the expression of Christ's love which by the Spirit forms divine affections in the saints. We may see it in all the Gospels, but especially in that of John, and nowhere there so strikingly as in John 13-17. This "Song" is the divine word, which the Spirit (as He has used the principle for all who have pondered these communications to profit) will afresh apply in a still more exact and instinctive way to the godly remnant that is to succeed us in the dealings of God's grace. The love which so feels and speaks to its object, whatever this may be, has transforming power on all that have faith in Him, and enables those who are so loved to witness in their measure a good confession of Him. The right faith is that we worship; and none ought to know and feel this so deeply as the Christian and the church; to whom the love of Christ is now revealed in a form and power altogether exceptional; as indeed we need it to suffer unflinchingly with Him, while we wait for His coming.

Cant. 5.

The last chapter gave the bride inviting her beloved to come into His garden and eat His pleasant fruits. But she must learn more of herself yet: whatever she was in His eyes, He was (sad to say) not everything to her. And if we are apt to think too well of our state, grace deigns to teach us it experimentally. So it will be with the godly Jewish remnant by-and-by, as we are here shown.

"I am come into my garden, my sister spouse;

I have gathered my myrrh with my spice;

I have eaten my honeycomb with my honey;

I have drunk my wine with my milk.

Eat, O friends; drink, yea drink abundantly, beloved one." "I was asleep, but my heart waked.

The voice of my beloved that knocketh [saying],

Open to me, my sister, my love, my dove, mine undefiled; For my head is filled with dew, My locks with the drops of the night.

I have put off my coat: how shall I put it on?

I have washed my feet: how shall I defile them?

My beloved put in his hand by the hole [of the door];

And my bowels yearned for him.

I rose to open for my beloved,

And my hands dropped with myrrh,

And my fingers with liquid myrrh.

I opened to my beloved;

But my beloved had turned away-was gone.

My soul went forth when he spoke:

I sought him, but I found him not;

I called him, but he gave me no answer.

The watchmen that go about the city found me,

They smote me, they wounded me;

The keepers of the walls took away my veil from me.

I charge you, daughters of Jerusalem,

If ye find my beloved,

That ye tell him, that I am sick of love" (vers. 1-8).

Alas! how readily we understand such experience. The very, and the fullest, assurance of the Saviour's love is

apt to induce carelessness in our hearts. When we are assured that we are precious to Him, if we know Him at all, we are earnest and importunate; but when all is fully out in His incomparable grace to us, how readily the flesh creeps in and takes advantage of it as if it were a matter of course! When faith is in lively exercise and the flesh consequently judged by the Spirit that dwells in us, His wondrous words of love act powerfully in drawing out the soul's delight and praise and worship. But there is always for us the danger of that which the bride here is brought to feel and own. She yielded to sloth and circumstances, and truly though she loved Him, she made difficulties, slighted His love, and found to her shame and sorrow that He had withdrawn Himself-was gone!

This painful experience is turned to further profit. The bride is now so moved that she roams the streets of the city in quest of Him, unconscious of the strangeness of her acts in the eyes of those responsible for its order, who know little or nothing of her affection or her sorrow. For this is her secret. They see one abroad at a time when she should be at home. So the love she has, and grief over her folly, expose her to a blame in the eyes of those whose office it is to guard outward propriety, of which she never thought at such a moment. But when she awoke to it, could she deny that all was her own faultiness? She turns in her distress to others from whom she expects a sympathy not to be looked for in the watch or the keepers of the walls; and, not without fruit from that rough dealing, she pours out her heart to her enquiring companions.

"What is thy beloved more than [another] beloved,

Thou fairest among women?

What is thy beloved more than [another] beloved,

That thou dost so charge us?”

“My beloved [is] white and ruddy,

The chiefest among ten thousand.

His head [is] finest gold;

His locks [are] flowing, black as the raven;

His eyes [are] like doves by the water brooks,

Washed with milk, fitly set;

His cheeks [are] as a bed of spices, banks of sweet herbs; His lips, lilies dropping liquid myrrh;

His hands, gold rings set with beryl;

His body [is] ivory work overlaid (with) sapphires;

His legs, pillars of marble, set on sockets of fine gold; His aspect, as Lebanon, excellent as the cedars;

His mouth [is] most sweet;

Yea he [is] altogether lovely.

This [is] my beloved, yea this [is] my friend,

O daughters of Jerusalem” (vers. 9-16).

The bride can speak freely of the Bridegroom’s beauty to others: it is ever her happiness and suited place. And this is not only suitable in itself; but we can see how her own negligence with its bitter consequence made her feel and speak more fully than ever in His praise.

Cant. 6.

The enquiry of the daughters of Jerusalem serves but to draw out the progress of the bride in her appreciation of the Bridegroom’s worth and love, as well as of her value for the relationship.

“Whither is thy beloved gone,

Thou fairest among women?

Whither hath thy beloved turned,

And we will seek him with thee?

My beloved is gone down to his garden, to the beds of spice, To feed in the gardens and to gather lilies.

I [am] my beloved’s, and my beloved [is] mine:

He feedeth [his] flock among the lilies.

Thou [art] fair, my love, as Tirzah,

Comely as Jerusalem,

Terrible as bannered [hosts].

Turn away thine eyes from me,

For they overcome me.

Thy hair [is] as a flock of goats

On the slopes of Gilead.

Thy teeth [are] like a flock of ewes

Which go up from the washing,

Which have all borne twins,

And none [is] bereaved among them.

As a piece of a pomegranate [are] thy temples

Behind thy veil.

There are threescore queens and fourscore concubines,

And virgins without number.

My love, mine undefiled, is one;

She [is] the only one of her mother,

She [is] the choice one of her that bare her.

The daughters saw her and called her blessed;

The queens and the concubines, and they praised her.

Who [is] she [that] looketh forth as the dawn,

Fair as the moon,

Clear as the sun,

Terrible as bannered [hosts]?

I went down into the garden of nuts,

To see the verdure of the valley,

To see whether the vine budded-

The pomegranates blossomed.

Before I was aware,

My soul set me [in] the chariots of my willing people.

Return, return, O Shulamite;

Return, return, that we may look upon thee?

What look ye upon in the Shulamite?

As upon the dance of two camps (Mahanaim).” (vers. 1-13).

How wonderful is the grace of God always and in every relationship! On His side, on the part of Him Who alone is His perfect image, the accomplisher of His counsels and the expression of His ways, love abiding though

never insensitive to the failure of the object of His love, and ever turning the failure to the correction of faults and a deepening sense of relationship. So it is here. In the earlier stage (Cant. 2:16) said the bride, My beloved [is] mine, and I His. And this is the right order of apprehension. She thinks of Him as the object before her heart and rejoices that He is here though even then she can say that she belongs to Him. But the exercises of soul through which she passes, in consequence of her failure in answering to His love and of her review and self-judgment, lead her now as appropriately to say, "I [am] my beloved's and my beloved mine" (ver. 3). This is no less true, and learnt experimentally more than at first; but such is now the deep feeling of her heart, and out of the abundance of it she speaks. How overwhelming that such as we should be so near to Him! and how re-assuring that the only Worthy One is ours! So Jerusalem will say in truth of heart ere long.

Then follows the Bridegroom's renewed declaration of the bride's charms in His eyes. The nations are to be blessed in that day, some of them peculiarly in that prolonged and future hour of earth's blessing to the praise of Jesus. Isa. 19:23-25 is plain enough, if the ears were not dull of hearing. The blessing succeeds the judgment of Jehovah which that day opens. Instead of mutual hostility, and each seeking mastery over Israel, Egypt shall serve with Assyria: both subject to the God of Israel. In that day shall Israel be the third with Egypt and Assyria, certainly not to enfeeble Isa. 11, 12, 14, 24-27. (to refer to nothing beyond the same prophet), but to assure each of the divine mercy to all as yet in unbelief when all Israel shall be saved and He will have mercy upon all (Rom. 11). Jehovah of hosts shall reign

on mount Zion and in Jerusalem, and before His ancients in glory. The name of the city from that day is Jehovah-Shammah. How great the favour of Israel, Abraham's sons and not seed only in that day, when they shall be a blessing in the midst of the earth, not a reproach and a curse as now because of their infidelity! But when Jehovah of hosts has blessed them, it will be in large mercy, saying, Blessed be my people Egypt, and the work of my hands Assyria, and mine inheritance Israel. So near is Israel to Him, that it is in no way demeaned by being named third. The bride of the beloved is one, His undefiled, the only one of her mother, the choice one of her that bare her; so she will sing. As Jehovah counts when writing up the peoples, This Man was born there. His blood has washed away the reproach of the blood-shedding for Jerusalem believing and blessed and a blessing. The daughters saw her and called her blessed; the queens and the concubines, and they praised her. No more rivalry, nor treacherous dealing of the vile called noble; for a king shall reign in righteousness, and the Spirit be poured from on high to bless man on the earth, instead of men severed from it in sin save those now united to Christ on high for the heavens.

When the Bridegroom looks on the bride according to her unique place and destined glory on the earth (ver. 10), as He had expressed afresh what she is for Him, He goes down to see how all flourishes by His grace, and before He is aware, His soul set Him on the chariots of His willing people in glory. It is no longer "Who is this coming up out of the wilderness"? as in Cant. 3:6, where He had found her again and recalled her to Himself. Here He anticipates her triumphant glory when He leads Israel in the day of His manifested power; and they, His

people no longer unwilling, have said with believing hearts, Blessed He that cometh in the name of Jehovah. Then indeed the Shulamite shall have returned from long and fruitless and sad wandering, and Israel, no more weak, nor longer needing a staff, shall become two camps, God's host.

Cant. 7.

Thus will be accomplished the confident and bright anticipation of "the Israel of God," expressed vividly in Ps. 73:24, but travestied in most versions through unbelief of their just hopes, and the consequent substitution for them of Christian feeling, quite beside the mark in the psalm of Asaph or of any other in the book. "Thou wilt guide me by [or in] thy counsel, and after glory thou wilt receive me." So it will be with the earthly bride, but not with the heavenly; which last being assumed probably led to the singular departure from all legitimate construction, and tends to keep the unwary English reader in the continual misinterpretation of the Psalms. Christ, as made known to the church, was received up in glory on the accomplishment of redemption, and will receive us to Himself changed at His coming, before He displays us as the sharers of His heavenly glory in His kingdom. The reception of Zion, guided in a way little known and through desolating sorrow, will be after glory appears. Compare Ps. 85:9, Ps. 102:13-22, and Zech. 2:8.

Like the last chapter from ver. 4, this again is the utterance of the Bridegroom save from the latter part of ver. 9 to the end.

"How beautiful are thy steps in sandals, O prince's daughter! The joints of thy thighs like jewels, work of

the hands of a skilful artist. Thy navel [is] a round goblet, wanting not mixture;

Thy belly, a heap of wheat set about with lilies;

Thy two breasts are two fawns, twins of a gazelle;

Thy neck as a tower of ivory;

Thine eyes, the pool in Heshbon by the gate of Bath-rabbim; Thy nose as the tower of Lebanon looking toward Damascus; Thy head upon thee as Carmel, and the locks of thy head as purple- The king held captive in the tresses.

How fair and how pleasant [art] thou, love, in delights! This thy stature [is] as a palm-tree, and thy breasts [grape-] clusters. I said, I will go up the palm-tree, I will take hold of the branches thereof; And thy breasts shall be as clusters of the vine, and the smell of thy nose as apples; And the roof of thy mouth as the best wine-

Goeth down aright for my beloved,

Gliding over the lips of those asleep.

I am my beloved's, and his desire [is] toward me.

Come, my beloved, let us go forth into the field, let us lodge in the villages; Let us get up early to the vineyards, let us see if the vine hath budded, The blossoms appear, the pomegranates bloom: there will I give thee my loves. The mandrakes yield fragrance; and at our doors [are] all choice fruits: New and old I have laid them up for thee, my beloved" (vers. 1-13).

It is the expression of His complacency in the bride. What a change for the Christ-despising Jew does grace effect! We know it, for ourselves too well, too little for Him. All that He accounts goodly and fragrant is of Him

whether now or in that day. And the fruit of the godly remnant's progress in the knowledge of Messiah's love appears in verse 10, as compared with Cant. 2:16, and Cant. 6:3. They, as ourselves, as all that are genuine, must begin with "My Beloved is mine, and I am His." It is the true order of grace. He looked on the bride and deigned Himself to become hers, as she is His. Now at length she wakes up to the infinite love that she once blindly and proudly refused to her ruin. Now she knows that He is the King, and that He loves her spite of all and is hers, and that she is His. Even then how much had she to learn! But she does gradually learn more and more of His love to her, and what she was in His eyes. Hence, in Cant. 6:3, she can say, even after feeling her folly and the self-judgment it wrought in her, "I am my Beloved's, and my Beloved is mine.'' This is a great step in its season, and the mark of confidence in His love. And here, in Cant. 7:10, it again takes the first place with language which seals her sense of His affection. ''I am my Beloved's, and His desire is toward me." Surely it is most holy and sovereign in its grace, but love that answers, by the Holy Spirit's power, to Him Who, as the prophet says, will not only save but rejoice over His bride with joy-will rest in His love and exult over her with singing.

Then will follow in due time the mission of Israel, renewed and humble, and the going out of heart for the blessing of others. What joy for all families of the earth when the ancient promise to the fathers of the faithful is literally in all its extent fulfilled! What a morrow after the long night of sin and shame and tears! But this cannot be till the faithless one owns her sins and receives the beloved, saying in truth of heart, Blessed is

He that cometh in the name of Jehovah. Then too, when men are blessed under the Blesser, shall the earth itself yield its long pent increase. But none the less shall Zion have her own peculiar place of love and honour here below. It is ours to enjoy and testify the grace that gathers to the glorified One in heaven, whence we look for Him and are assured He will come and take us there, even to the Father's house. But in that day Zion will be glad and the daughters of Judah rejoice, because of His judgments which inaugurate earth's peace and blessedness under His righteous rule.

Cant. 8.

The closing chapter appears to present summarily the object and principle of the Song, after a pouring forth of her affection, which the speaker desires might be gratified without reproof and in all purity, as will assuredly be when she becomes the bride of Messiah. No wonder if, after a review of her painful past misconduct and of His glory once despised, her heart needed re-assurance.

"Oh that thou wert as my brother,

That sucked the breasts of my mother !

Should I find thee without, I would kiss thee;

And they would not despise me.

I would lead thee-bring thee into my mother's house:

Thou wouldest instruct me;

I would cause thee to drink of spiced wine,

Of the juice of my pomegranate.

His left hand [would be] under my head,

And his right hand embrace me.

I charge you, daughters of Jerusalem,

Why should you stir up, why awake [my] love, till he please. Who is this that cometh up from the wilderness, Leaning upon her beloved?

I awoke thee under the apple-tree:

There thy mother brought thee forth,

There she travailed that bore thee.

Set me as a seal upon thy heart,

As a seal upon shine arm;

For love is strong as death,

Jealousy is cruel as the grave:

The flashes thereof are flashes of fire,

Flames of Jah.

Many waters cannot quench love,

Nor can the floods drown it:

If a man gave all the substance of his house for love,

It would utterly be contemned.

We have a little sister,

And she hath no breasts:

What shall we do for our sister

In the day when she shall be spoken for?

If she be a wall,

We will build upon her a turret of silver;

And if she be a door,

We will inclose her with boards of cedar.

I [was] a wall, and my breasts like towers;

Then was I in his eyes as one that findeth peace.

Solomon had a vineyard at Baal-hamon,

He let out the vineyard to keepers:

Every one for its fruit was to bring a thousand pieces of silver. My vineyard, which is mine, is before me:

Thou, Solomon, shalt have the thousand,

And the keepers of its fruit two hundred.

Thou that dwellest in the gardens,

The companions hearken to thy voice:

Let me hear it.

Haste, my beloved,

And be thou like a gazelle or a young hart

Upon the mountains of spices" (vers. 1-14).

It is throughout the Spirit of prophecy, as in all the O.T. and again in the Revelation, after the present action of grace is over and the glorified saints are seen in heaven, respecting whom God foresaw some better thing. The testimony of Jesus, as we are told, reverts once more to that prophetic character which could not but be of old, before He came and suffered rejection at the hands of His own people, but therein also accomplished redemption, and as the firstborn from the dead became on high Head of the body, the church. But it has consequently the Holy Spirit sent forth and dwelling in it as the power of actual relationship and communion in a way beyond example, save His own when here below:

only that He had it as the seal of personal acceptance, we solely through grace by His work and accepted in Him as the beloved. But Judah renewed, the godly remnant will look onward prophetically and through many a needed lesson of experience to the place in Messiah's love which is predestined. And what follows sketches how it will be effectuated.

After a final charge to the daughters of Jerusalem, there is a fresh vision of the bride coming up out of the wilderness leaning upon her beloved. Once of old the people had come up out of it, not without wonders of divine goodness and power; but all was vain, for they leaned not on Jehovah or His Christ, but on self and law, which for sinful man, and such they were, can only be death and condemnation. Far different will it be when the generation to come emerges from it leaning upon the beloved. What brings about so great a change? "I awoke thee under the apple tree; there thy mother brought thee forth; there she travailed that bore thee." As was noticed in Cant. 2:3, Christ is meant by that tree; and it is His to awaken her from her long slumber and give her that life which alone lives to God. Compare Micah 5:3. Not till then will the residue of His brethren return unto the children of Israel. The rejection of the Ruler, the smitten Judge of Israel, was fatal for the time: they were given up therefore, and God brings out His heavenly counsels in Christ and the church, until the day when Israel gives birth to the destined bride for Messiah here below, and the Jewish link will be re- formed, not under law that works wrath, but by faith that it may be according to grace and stand in God's power, not ruin out of human weakness.

Then indeed will the prayer be answered, and Zion be set as seal on Messiah's heart and arm: how strong and jealous His love! and there is the answer to it in that day. Death and Sheol only proved His love; flames of Jah tested it, waters and floods could not quench it, unbought and above all price, so that all man could give is utterly despicable in presence of it.

But who is the "little sister" (vers. 8-10), when Jerusalem is thus renewed? The house of Israel, it would seem; for they will come forward later for blessing. They suffered for their idolatry, as Judah did afterward; but they did not return from captivity as Judah did to refuse the Christ, nor are they to receive the Antichrist. Consequently the dealings of grace with Israel by-and-by do not assume the deep and retributory character which will be the portion of Judah. Compare the type of Gen. 42-45. when Joseph makes himself known to his brethren, and especially Reuben on the one hand and Judah on the other.

The allusion to Solomon and his vineyard at Baal-hamon thus becomes clear. As Lord of multitudes, the King of Peace in that day will have His widely extended sphere of fruit let out to His servants, the keepers, and the kings of Tarshish and of the isles shall render tribute; the kings of Sheba and Seba shall offer gifts; yea, all kings shall fall down before Him, all nations shall serve Him. No doubt, the bride will have her especial vineyard, which will be kept (compare Cant. 1:6); but the revenue she will lay at Messiah's feet, whatever may be the gain of others thereby. The bride no longer begrudges the Bridegroom's voice to others; she will be too restful in His love to doubt; but she desires to hear it

for herself in that day. The closing verses reiterate the call for the coming of the beloved.

P.S. It may interest the reader to know that the Codex Sinaiticus, one of the most ancient witnesses extant of the Septuagint, itself the oldest version of the Hebrew original, divides the Song into four sections, each sub-divided into lesser parts, which briefly indicate the speakers and circumstances throughout.

The four sections are: (1,) Cant. 1:1-14; (2,) Cant. 1:15-3:5; (3,) Cant. 3:6-6:3; and (4,) Cant. 6:3-8:13.

The reader that is curious about the copyist's view may see it all in the No. of the Journal of Sacred Lit. for April, 1865. It may suffice here to give as a sample the headings of the lesser part under § 1. (Cant. 1:1-14): ver. 2, the bride; ver. 4, the bride to the damsels; ver. 4, the damsels speak, and again proclaim to the Bridegroom the name of the bride; ver. 5, the bride; ver. 7, the bride to Christ the Bridegroom; ver. 8, the Bridegroom to the bride; ver. 10, the damsels to the bride; ver. 12, the bride to herself and to the Bridegroom.

It is clear therefore that this weighty document bears testimony in the first half of the fourth century era to the application of the Bridegroom to Christ, rather than to Solomon, still less to a shepherd of the northern kingdom (Hitzig), or any one else. The Song was then by some at least read without hesitation reverentially and believingly.

But there is another inference, which if sound is even more remarkable, from the heading of Cant. 4:16: "the bride asketh the Father that her Bridegroom may come down"; which is understood to point to the Jewish election as the bride in the copyist's judgment. Now the

idea prevalent, among the Fathers so called in that age and since, identified her with the church, though individuals, as Theodoret lets us know, were not even then wanting who denied its spiritual reference. Origen, learned but precarious and even wild, had taught that the Bridegroom is the Word of God, and the bride either the soul or the church. The ancient Jews held to its allegorical character, God being the bridegroom and Israel the bride. Had they believed in the Messiah (Who is God), and seen the godly Jewish remnant of the future, the object of His restoring love in the latter day, it would have been more accurate. But this would have been the truth, known in the rejected but glorified Christ, and incompatible with Judaism as it has been and is.

Only the Christian can have the truth, because he has Christ and life in Him and the Holy Spirit guiding into all the truth. Alas! how many that bear the name abandon its privileges and lapse into a scepticism more guilty than heathenism or Judaism. It is the spirit of the apostasy that is at hand.

W. K.

1 Of the few rationalists Rosenmüller and Eichhorn urged Chaldaisms to unsettle the authorship and lower the date. But Gesenius, a better judge of Hebrew than most, and in no way bound by tradition, had no doubt that it is of the golden age, and its few anomalies otherwise explicable.