

THOUGHTS  
ON PARTS OF  
THE SONG OF SOLOMON

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**RICHARD C. GILASPY**

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# THOUGHTS

ON PARTS OF

## THE SONG OF SOLOMON.

BY

BENJAMIN WILLS NEWTON.

*(Reprinted from "Occasional Papers on Scriptural Subjects.")*

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## ADVERTISEMENT.

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THE five papers contained in this volume were originally published in the four parts of "Occasional Papers on Scriptural Subjects" (1863-1866), one of which has been out of print for some time. Their author, the late Mr. B. W. Newton, began to revise them with a view to republication, but only finished the first. His alterations have been incorporated here, and it will be seen upon comparison that not a single statement of fact or of opinion was altered; only here and there a felicitous turn of the sentence or a more concise expression was given. In the remaining four papers only the obvious press errors have been corrected. The whole are now sent forth with the hope that the Lord may be pleased to bless them to the instruction and comfort of His own people.

*August, 1906.*

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# On the Song of Solomon.

## I.

FROM VERSE 5 TO II OF CHAPTER I.

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MANY parts of the word of God have for their object the direction of our minds to that first great act of His mercy in providing the redemption that is in Christ, whereby, whilst continuing just, and upholding the claims of His own holy government, He is able to receive sinners and to pardon them, and to impute to them the value of the blood of Jesus, and to know them as a covenant God, in love and in grace, for evermore. Nor is the fulness of this grace greater than the freedom of its proclamation. It is proclaimed to sinners *as sinners*. God “preaches peace by Jesus Christ.” The proclamation is not limited. It was a mingled multitude to whom the Apostle said, “Men and brethren, through this man is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins; and through him all who believe are justified from all things.”

Again, there are other parts of Scripture which

teach us of the exceeding greatness of the glory and heavenly blessing, into which all, who are of faith, are already brought, in virtue of their union with Him who is now their Representative in glory, as He was once their Representative in death. Even whilst personally in this earth and knowing many sorrows, we have a *representative* existence in the heavens; and there, all is glory. "Blessed," says the Apostle, "be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessing (εὐλογία πνευματικῆ) in heavenly places in Christ":\* and again, "seated in heavenly places in Christ Jesus." Thus that wondrous power of life and glory which is to be actually ours at our Lord's return, when, in the twinkling of an eye, we are to be changed into His risen likeness,

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\* The "spiritual blessing" spoken of in this verse does not mean blessing communicated to us through the Spirit *here*—for they are defined as being "in heavenly places in Christ." "Spiritual" refers to that character of glorified existence which Christ now hath above the heavens—His body and all the characteristics of His condition being spiritual or "according to the spirit" (κατὰ πνεῦμα)—we in Him being endowed with the same spiritual condition of glorious being. In the next dispensation, Israel, when converted, will be able to bless God, not only for having given them "all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ," but *also* for having granted them blessings in the earth beneath, for they shall be "blessed in basket and in store, blessed in their going out and in their coming in"—sorrow and sighing having fled away. The outward condition of God's people then will be sabbatical. Creation shall no longer groan in the bondage of corruption. Yet, however blessed on earth, the people of God will still wait expectantly for the higher blessings of the "eighth day," when they shall join their brethren that have gone before in glory above the heavens.



is only the *manifestation* of that which is already our heritage *in Him*. Already, as represented by our Substitute, we have judicially died: already, *in Him*, we are "seated in heavenly places": already to us, so regarded, "old things have passed away." Such is the present heritage of all the family of faith. Daily, therefore, we have to remember this, our *representative* existence above; daily to "arm ourselves" with this mind.

But this is not all. The Scripture having thus, as it were, taken us to heaven, descends with us into the earth again. For a season we are left in this earth to fight the fight of faith; to walk by faith and not by sight. Accordingly, many parts of Scripture pertain to the period of our present militancy, and of such parts, the Song of Solomon is one.

The Song of Solomon speaks of one, who, pardoned, accepted and loved, by her heavenly Bridegroom, with a "love that many waters cannot quench," is left during His absence, in the midst of the shadows and darkness of this present night of evil, surrounded by many adversaries and many dangers—to have as her characteristic dwelling-place, the valley or the lowly cottage, and to find her occupation either in the vineyard (chap. ii. 15), or in the garden (chap. iv. 13), or at the sheepfolds (chap. i. 8); far away from the streets and palaces of man's City: for what place for the vine, or for pleasant plants of fragrance, or for the sheepfold,

could be there? Neither the glory nor the rest of the City of man's greatness was to be hers. She was to be "without the gate"; to sojourn where His Truth sojourned. So, and so only, was she to receive the present sanction of her Lord and tokens from Him of practical fellowship with her in her ways. There were occasions on which she wandered disobediently into the City and rested, or tried to rest, in its palaces—and she lost Him. There were other occasions when she kept by the sheepfolds, or sought the valley where the lilies grew—and she found Him.

The Song of Solomon, therefore, is pre-eminently a *practical* part of Scripture. Its object is not to treat of our pardon or the certainty of our acceptance. *That* is throughout the Song *assumed*. How could it be doubted that one espoused to Christ, and loved with a love stronger than death was accepted? The object of this Song is neither to teach us respecting the way of acceptance in Christ, nor to teach us respecting the certainty of such acceptance. Its object is to mark the path of the accepted: to shew the way that it beseems *them* to follow, who are loved with a love from which nothing can separate. The object of this Song is not to show that the spouse of Christ is safe—that she is and must be. It is to show that whilst there is a path in which she may walk and find sorrow, dishonour and travail of spirit; there is also another path in which she may find joy, peace and present

practical communion with her Lord. She was right only as long as she eschewed the rest, and honour, and habits of man's City, and was content to be as one who had gone without the gate, bearing reproach.

There are, indeed, intimations in this Song of the coming of another and still future period, when this present season of sorrowing militancy is to give place to a far different hour. The night is not to be for ever: shadows and darkness are not always to prevail. The "City" is not always to be the symbol of ways, and thoughts, and manners, adverse to God and to His Truth. When the day of man shall have passed and the "morning without clouds" have come, "the City of the great King" having for her walls salvation, and for her gates praise, and for her name, "Jehovah is there," shall be established in the earth as the centre of truth and righteousness and peace to all nations. Then "the Lord of hosts shall reign in Mount Zion, and in Jerusalem, and before His ancients gloriously." In this Song there are not a few incidental allusions to that coming hour when the anti-typical Solomon shall come forth in the glory of His strength—"His chariot paved with love for the daughters of Jerusalem"—when Israel as "the Shulamite" (*i.e.* the bride of Solomon) shall succeed into the reciprocity, not indeed of the sorrows, but of the love at present known by that outcast stranger whom "the daughters of Jerusalem" recognise not

—whom they seldom notice except to despise. But such prophetic allusions to the future are incidental only. The Song of Songs (for “wine is for them who are of heavy heart”) is God’s gift to *us* in this present dispensation of sorrow. It ceases as soon as “the day breaks and the shadows flee away.” It is a song intended exclusively for that night of evil, during which the beloved of Christ is a wanderer and a stranger in a world that knows her not.

In the passage before us, she finds herself in the presence of the daughters of man’s City, exposed to their unkindly and contemptuous gaze. Sensitively conscious—too sensitively conscious, of their scorn, she thus endeavours to explain and justify her position. “I am black, but comely, O ye daughters 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 me: my mother’s children were angry with me; they made me the keeper of the vineyards; but mine own vineyard have I not kept.” Such was her appeal to the daughters of Jerusalem.

The words, “I am black,” have no reference (although by many so explained)\* to that blackness and deformity of evil that marks our natural

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\* Thus Augustine, “Nigra per naturam formosa per gratiam—Black by nature, beautiful by grace”—and Ambrose, followed by many others. To interpret the Song on this principle would be utterly to destroy its object.

condition as men. True indeed it is, that the Ethiopian's skin is but a feeble type of the moral blackness that marks inwardly and outwardly all that we naturally are; and true it is that unless the comeliness of the heavenly robe of Christ's righteousness were thrown around us, we should be left in defilement and "filthy rags," for ever. But this passage speaks not of that kind of blackness, which, in the case of believers, grace has for ever put away. She speaks not here of that blackness, but of another far different, which, however despised by those who (like the daughters of Jerusalem) view things only in the light of man's day, is comeliness and beauty in the estimation of her heavenly Lord. "I am black in your sight: but comely in His sight, O ye daughters of Jerusalem. Look not disdainfully on me because I am black, because the sun has looked on me and blackened me. If my lot had been as your lot; if, like you, sheltered and cherished in the City, I had known the rest and protection of its halls and palaces—if its ways and habits had been mine, I should then have been safe from the scorching of the sun and the beating of the storm, and this blackness would not have been found upon me. Yet despise me not because of it. In this I do but resemble the tents of Kedar and the curtains of Solomon. They too are set to meet the burning of the noontide heat, and the fury of the midnight storm, and they like me are blackened. But are they despised for that

blackness and counted as nothing worth? Is it not deemed an evidence rather that they have discharged the office they were appointed to fulfil? So is it with me. Early I became as a stranger unto my mother's children. They were angry with me. They said, she is not as one of us; we have no fellowship in her ways. Let us drive her from our father's mansion, and send her far away into distant vineyards. There let her dwell: there let her labour. So I was sent to the vineyards. But I have not laboured for myself; I have not kept any vineyard of my own. I have cherished no grapes to fill my own cup with wine. The vines on which I have laboured have not been my own vines: the sheepfolds which I have tended have not been my own sheepfolds. They have been the sheepfolds and vineyards of my Lord: for I have heard and followed His voice: and therefore I have been exposed to the beating of the storm; and therefore the sun has looked upon me; and therefore has come this blackness which ye despise. I am black\* in your sight, but comely in His sight, O ye daughters of Jerusalem."

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\* Some understand "curtains," in this passage, as the symbol of that which is costly and beautiful as the curtains of a palace: in which case the meaning would be "black as the tents of Kedar, but comely, in my Lord's sight, as the curtains of the palace of Solomon." But "curtains" in Jer. iv. 20 and x. 20, and Isa. liv. 2, evidently mean the covering of a tent. "There is none to stretch forth my tent any more and to set up my curtains," Jer. x. 20. I understand it, therefore, to mean that the preciousness of the blackened curtains of Solomon's tent is to be estimated by the

There was a time once when the Church of God had much of this honourable blackness. It marked in an especial manner the great Apostle of the Gentiles, and he counted it precious. "I," said he, "bear in my body the marks of the Lord Jesus"—marks, that is, of many a suffering that has come upon me for His name's sake. He found, in manifold ways, toil, danger, sorrow and reproach for Christ's sake. How strong the words of his own description: "we are made as the filth of the world; the offscouring of all things unto this day." The offence of the Cross and the reproach of the Truth, prepared for him many a cup of sorrow. And there were some, who, like Clement, and Timothy, and the Philippians, shared with him these sufferings, and partook of the reproach of this blackness. But it was far otherwise with many even of those who knew and who prized the Gospel of the grace of God. The Corinthians prized the

value of their service in protecting him who rests beneath them. The Sept. renders *ὡς δέρρεις Σολομών* "as the skins of Solomon"—and the Vulgate in the same way, *sicut pelles Solomonis*, showing that they understood the passage to refer to the external coverings of the tent.

On the words, "Look not upon me because I am black," Gill observes—"She had said this before, but here she uses the same word in another form, which some think is to diminish the signification of it, and that she was not so black as they thought her to be, and read it *blackish*, or *somewhat black*; though the doubling of the radicals seems rather to increase the signification, as in other places, as Ps. xlv. 5, and therefore should be read, 'I am *very black*, or *exceeding black*. Valde fusca. Bochart. Prorsus vel valde et tota nigra.' Marckius."

Gospel; but they loved not its separation nor its reproach. Whilst the Apostle was despised, they sought "before the time, to reign as kings." They had no desire to "go without the gate"; they wished rather to settle in the City of man, and, if possible, to control it. Their sympathies were not with her whose place, and whose service, and whose "blackness" the Lord approved. Their sympathies were well nigh with her persecutors. They were almost, as to their feelings, one, and, but for grace would actually have become one, with "the daughters of Jerusalem."

It should cost us little effort to apprehend who they are, whom "the daughters of Jerusalem" denote. The daughters of Jerusalem are they who are under the tutelage and control of those who are afterwards denominated in this Song, "keepers of the wall"—*i.e.*, the wall of man's City. From the time that the Apostles died, there have been in the professing Church, multitudes who have sought to elevate Truth, or that which they have called Truth, into the place of worldly dignity and honour. Without adopting *all* the principles of the halls of Caiaphas, or of Cæsar, they have coveted their dignity and loved their glory. Ecclesiastical and secular greatness have been the idols before which they have bowed down and worshipped. They have desired for their "Zion" as they have called it, that "Kings should be its nursing fathers, and their Queens its nursing mothers," forgetting that while



the vail rests on Israel's heart, the hour of Truth's triumph cannot come. Impatient of the garb of Nazareth, not willing to own that at present "the foundations of all things are out of course," they wish that Truth should be exalted *now*—that *now* "the glory of the nations should come to it as a flowing stream." Accordingly, they labour to maintain, and to strengthen, and to guard, the walls of the City of man. The prosperity of that City is their prosperity; its glory, their glory. Its melodies delight them: the rest of its dwelling-places is the rest which their souls covet. And if, perchance, they behold any *so* awakened to a sense of the coming doom of this City of man's strength, as to quit it, and to go without the gate led by the voice of Truth, they persecute—unless, indeed, it suit better their Gallio-like indifference to sit still and to deride. Bitterness is not confined to the active persecutor; it is often found even in greater intensity in those who sit in the seat of the scorner and mock. Are we then numbered among the keepers of the walls of this City? Are our energies and talents and powers devoted to upholding the strength of the City of man's present greatness? Or, have we, in a more quiet and less prominent sphere, become, like the daughters of Jerusalem, imprisoned within barriers which other hands have reared, so as to be made the unreflecting instruments of others' will? Responsibility is not destroyed by the listless docility of willing ignorance.

Are we numbered among either of these two classes ?  
Or are we "without the gate ?"

There may be occasions when they who have gone without the gate have opportunity to testify to "the daughters of Jerusalem," or even to the keepers of the walls of the City : but to testify is not to apologize. To speak in the power of Truth and of grace to men's consciences (for truth and grace are to be combined in our testimony), is very different from seeking to commend our ways to men's natural judgments with the view either of averting their contempt, or of disarming their enmity. Whenever the servant of Christ sinks into the place of a mere apologist, it shows that his faith has lost its proper energy and its right power of discernment. This was, in measure, the case with this faithful one of Christ, when she thus addressed the daughters of Jerusalem. Her words had far more the tone of apology than of testimony. She appears rather as one pleading at the bar of human judgment, than as one standing simply in the presence of her Lord. Her eye was fixed on them, rather than on Him. Accordingly, as soon as she had ceased, and before any reply could be returned by those to whom she had spoken, she suddenly remembers her Lord, and finds that while occupied in this appeal to the stranger, she had, in a measure, wandered from the footsteps of His flock. "Tell me," were her words, "tell me, O thou whom my soul loveth, where thou feedest, where thou makest thy flock to rest at noon : for why should I

be as one that turneth aside from the flocks of thy companions?" These words plainly intimate that she was not as near as she might have been, and as she had been wont to be, to the presence of her Lord. She had, for the moment, lost Him. Whilst she had been parleying with strangers and vindicating her ways to them, He had moved on with His companions and was feeding His flock, she knew not exactly where. Yet it was not that she had really wandered. She had merely tarried on the way, and that but for an instant; and the ready earnestness of her enquiry plainly showed, that desire after her Lord and the place which He practically occupied, had never ceased to be uppermost in her soul. She had no desire except to be found *with* Him. This He knew. Accordingly, He instantly replied to her appeal, and did not, as on some subsequent occasions, delay His answer—mingling, however, with that answer, a slight measure of reproof. "If thou knowest not, O thou fairest among women"—as if to say, "Is it indeed true that thou knowest not? How is it that thou knowest not?" His words conveyed reproof; and her conscience doubtless recognised that it was deserved. But the knowledge for which she asked was given. "If thou knowest not, O thou fairest among women, go thy way forth by the footsteps of the flock, and feed thy kids beside the shepherds' tents. *There* I abide. *There* thou wilt find thyself *with* me."

Thus then "the shepherds' tents" is the object

pointed out to us to guide our steps, and to fix the bounds of our habitation in the midst of the world's dark wilderness. We have to seek out where the meet ministration of Truth to the sheep of Christ is being carried on, and there we have to dwell or to sojourn—for if Truth merely sojourns, we have to sojourn likewise. We have to remember too, that there is a fulness and completeness and harmony in Truth as revealed in God's holy word, and that it may suffer as much from mutilation as from corruption. Truth, therefore, in its integrity, is to be sought: and wherever our consciences tell us that its streams (or it may be, its streamlets) flow; wherever true shepherds of Christ minister in faithfulness His word, that is the spot in the wide wilderness which we have to seek; and there we find Christ. The place of His Truth is, and ever will be, *His* place. Have we then this practical fellowship with the Truth—or do other interests, or friendships, or associations, bind us? It is possible that the palace of Saul, even though it be the centre and spring of the corruptions of Israel, may be dearer to us than the cave of Adullam—for the cave of Adullam has its sorrows, and we may shun them.

It was otherwise with this faithful one of Christ. She heard His voice, and she followed. And there she found not only quiet peaceful tents in which to rest: but she found employment too. “Go and feed thy kids beside the shepherds' tents.” There were

“ kids ” dependent on her care, part doubtless of the flock of her Lord—hers not in title of possession, but as being the subjects of her care. They who through God’s grace show faithfulness and energy in cleaving to the Truth, are ever made channels of blessing to others weaker or less instructed than themselves. To receive, and also to communicate, are the characteristic blessings of all who seek to abide near the footsteps of the great Shepherd of the sheep. Such was the place of her who is the subject of this Song. She stood, herself a shepherdess, among the shepherds’ tents; there finding herself the object not only of the love, but of the approval of her Lord, who communed with her, and spoke to her of another and far different scene, where the lowly garb of the shepherdess should be exchanged for the stateliness and majesty of royalty and glory.

“ I have compared thee, O my love, to a company of horses in Pharaoh’s chariots. Thy cheeks are comely with rows of jewels, thy neck with chains of gold. We will make thee borders of gold with studs of silver.” Such were the words with which this lowly shepherdess was suddenly addressed by her Lord. What could be more contrasted, than the royal pomp and pageantry of the proud King of Egypt, and the condition of this wanderer in the wilderness, surrounded by her kids, few and feeble? “ Every shepherd is an abomination to the Egyptians.” There scarcely can be a contrast more marked and more vivid, than that which subsists

between the service of the sheepfold, and all that Egypt honours. Yet which will be found the place of honour when the day of man ends, and the day of God comes? Already we have had many a typical intimation of the greatness of the change to be wrought in that coming day of visitation—as when Moses was summoned from tending his flock in the wilderness, and set in that place of wondrous power before which Egypt quailed and fell: or as when David was chosen and “taken from the sheepfolds. From following the ewes great with young, the Lord brought him to feed Jacob His people, and Israel His inheritance.” Yet not so sudden or so marvellous, in either of these cases, was the change, as will be that coming operation of God’s power, whereby they who have been hitherto outcasts from Egypt, and strangers often to their mother’s children, will suddenly be surrounded by a glory and a majesty which the pageantry of earth may symbolize, but cannot express. As truly as the proud ones of earth—the mighty monarchs of this Egyptian world, have lavished their riches in adorning the ministers and instruments of their triumphs, so truly, soon and suddenly, shall the King of kings and Lord of lords from the resources of His own heavenly glory, clothe with brightness and majesty greater than eye hath seen, or ear heard, those, who, at present, strangers in a world that knows them not, shall then be manifested as being what they are, “heirs of God, and joint-

heirs with Christ," and be known as ministers to His majesty, and fall into the train of His glory, and constitute the adornment of His triumph. When, at the hour of the earth's deepest darkness, the earthen pitchers shall be suddenly broken, and the light hidden within them shall shine forth, the true meaning of the words, "Christ in you, the hope of glory" will then (when it is too late) burst in upon the conscience of an affrighted and stricken world. The despised shepherdess was reminded of this her destined glory: reminded of it by her Lord, in order that she might be comforted and encouraged during the hour of her endurance and sorrow. But would she have been thus reminded if she had been as one that had turned aside from "the flocks of his companions"? There were afterwards occasions when we read of her in the City—apart from her Lord—her hands and her fingers dropping with sweet smelling myrrh, in the rest and shelter of a palace, whilst His unsheltered head was "filled with dew, and His locks with the drops of the night"; but we read of no remembrances of glory then. So much has right position to do, not indeed with the *possession* of the Lord's love (that is secured to us on the ground of His own sovereign grace), but with the present manifestations of that love—such manifestations, I mean, as show His sanction of our ways and His fellowship with us in them, a fellowship which, through His grace, is made dependent neither on

the degree of our strength nor on the extent of our progress ; for, where there is straight-forward honesty of purpose in the right way, He “ will not quench the smoking flax,” or “ despise the day of small things.”

Such, then, as I believe, is the general character of the instruction which this interesting passage is intended to convey. May we have grace to receive it in simplicity, and not seek to turn aside the edge of its truth for the sake of vindicating our own consistency. If a path *be* honourable, let us pronounce it honourable, whether we have grace to walk in it or not. On the other hand, we must beware of imaginative notions, and not deceive ourselves by ideal pictures of pilgrim life. Imagination, when uncontrolled by fact and by the clear testimonies of the revealed Truth, has often been a grievous snare to God’s people. A day of weakness like the present (one of which the Lord Himself said, that because of the abounding of iniquity “ the love of the greater part ” (*τῶν πολλῶν*) even of His own people would “ wax cold ”) is a period in which we find ourselves exposed to two opposite dangers. We are in danger either of becoming so deadened and apathetic in conscience as to be indifferent to and tolerant of evil ; or else, if aroused, to be so hasty and proudly impetuous in action, as to fail both in duly estimating the circumstances and in waiting upon God. True faith is not impetuous nor unduly censorious. It weighs well and considers (for others as



well as for itself) the difficulties; and is only confident because it waits upon God. So was it with David when he dwelt in the cave of Adullam: so was it with Gideon when he tried the fleece, wet and dry: whilst Peter, on the other hand, neither considering his own powerlessness, nor what walking on the waters meant, was ready enough to meet the difficulty, and as ready to cry out in confusion and dismay. To walk steadily in the path of faith requires, that the conscience, and the affections, and the understanding, should be alike in healthful exercise: but if the conscience or the affections be active, and the understanding feeble or undirected by the word of God, there must be failure. Yet I say not these things to discourage. It is well neither to be behind our conscience, nor beyond our faith: only we have to seek that our conscience be not morbid, but guided by the light of revealed Truth; and that our faith should be reflective, and not be marked in its developments by hastiness or presumption. When Israel once were commanded to go onward they refused, and said they would go back into Egypt. Afterwards, when they were commanded not to go forward, they would go forward—and they disastrously failed. Again I repeat, that I say not these things to discourage. God forbid. Only let us be duly conscious of our weakness, and then cast ourselves on the graciousness and strength of Him “who resisteth the proud, but giveth grace to the humble”:—“who

giveth liberally and upbraideth not." The love and graciousness of the character of God, as well as the grace of the everlasting covenant, is often a sweet and needed thought in the hour of weakness and depression.

## II.

### FROM VERSE 8 TO 17 OF CHAPTER II.

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NOTHING can be more marked than the contrast between the present condition of the Church of God, left for a season amidst the darkness and evil of earth, and the condition of its risen Head, in the rest and liberty and joy of His heavenly home. The dispensation in which we live is emphatically termed in Scripture, an "evil day." Not only does the whole creation groan, even as it began to groan when sin first entered, but the very blessings dispensed by God in the midst of the earth's ruin have been so used by man as to be turned against Him who gave them. The resources of the earth are great and various. It has its watered valleys and its fruitful plains; its gold and its silver; its brass and iron and marble—many things goodly and beautiful: and man's intellect and taste and skill have known how to avail themselves of these resources and to use them. But how have they been used? Have they fallen under the control of a hand meekly submissive to God and to Christ, or have they been grasped and wielded by the hand of unregeneracy and pride?

It is in the history of the family of Cain that we first read of the builded city, and of "the father of such as have cattle, and of such as handle the harp and organ, and of the instructor of every artificer in brass and iron." Hence the origin of the civilization of man. Civilization if ordered and guided by the Spirit of Christ, how blessed! The earth needs it and groans for it, and in due season shall have it. But the present is the day of the civilization of unregenerate man. Its sun indeed has not yet attained the height of its meridian brightness. It will shine wondrously for a moment. But it will be but for a moment; for it is "to set at noon"—it is "to go down whilst it is yet midday"—to be quenched in the blackness of darkness for ever. The eighteenth of the Revelation gives us the maturity of that greatness which germinated in the family of Cain. Cain at the commencement—Nebuchadnezzar and Pilate in the centre—Babylon and Antichrist at the close, are names which sufficiently indicate what the character of "human progress" has been, and will be, till the end. Yet "human progress" is that in which even Christians glory, prophesying of it smooth things, blessing that which the Lord has not blessed.

But however great and excellent the natural gifts of God's creative goodness, there are other blessings far more precious than they. TRUTH has been made known by direct revelation from heaven. Israel first, and then Christendom, became the

sphere of that light which came through Prophets and Apostles, and through the Son of God Himself. Israel first, and now Christendom, have received "the oracles of God."

But what was Israel, and what is Christendom? Has Truth found there its place of triumph and rest; or, its prison-house and grave? May it not be now said of Christendom what was once said of Israel, that the name of God is blasphemed among the heathen because of its iniquities? Governmental power also, without which order would have ceased to be, and evil would have run riot throughout the earth, is another gift that God has given. The Chaldæan and Persian, Greek and Roman Empires, have successively inherited a power which has made them during their respective periods, the centres of governmental influence in the earth. But their power has been systematically used against God, and the Ten Kingdoms into which the Roman World is soon to be divided, are they that will weave the last chaplet of human glory, and place it on the brow of Antichrist. The foundations, therefore, of all things are out of course. The very blessings given by God against darkness and against evil, have been so used by man as to increase darkness and to cherish evil. Well therefore may the present season of our militancy be termed an "evil day."

There are, from time to time, some in the Church of God whose hearts feel the truth of these things.

They cannot rest, and they do not desire to rest, in things in which the Spirit of their Lord rests not. They know that there are many scenes which, though they shine like the plains of Sodom with Eden-like beauty (see Gen. xiii. 10), are yet plains of Sodom still. They know that the cities of human greatness are but so many places in which secular or ecclesiastical evil has enshrined itself and concentrated its energies against God. They know that the fruitfulness of the day of man is in Scripture symbolized by that "vine of the earth" whose clusters are to be cast into the "winepress of the wrath of God." They cannot, therefore, rest in these things: they shrink and retire from them like Noah's dove retired from those tossing and death-covered waters, where the raven that fed on death rested, but where *she* could not rest. Of such, the distant and lowly valley—the valley of "the mountains of separation," becomes a refuge. There they find their "valley of vision" (Isa. xxii. 1). There they can meditate on One who once knew the sorrows of earth, but now knows them no more for ever. Whatever clouds may brood over the valley, the light of the everlasting morning—the light of the day of the new creation, rests upon the height of "the mountains of Bether."\* *There* there is severation from the circumstances of earth. *There* is that sphere of free and joyful liberty com-

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\* "Bether" means separation or severation.

parable to the liberty of "a roe, or a young hart that comes leaping on the mountains, skipping upon the hills." What liberty more complete! What freedom more joyous! Man and his ways are unknown on the high tops of the mountains of severation. They rise above the clouds; they are far away from the darkness, and turmoil, and sorrow of earth.

In the passage before us we find her whose wanderings form the subject of this Song, seeking in the valley at the foot of these mountains of separation, the place of her rest. It was not an evil or unholy place of rest. It was not that kind of rest which on one occasion afterwards she was tempted to seek in the stately mansions of the City. But still it is very evident that the full energies of her faith and service were, to a certain extent, relaxed. The meditateness of retirement is not always favourable to the strengthening and development of faith. The separate dwelling-place in the lowly valley is not *necessarily* the place of energy and strength. There is a time for all things—a time to act, and a time to rest; a time to strive, and a time to be still. Desire after a life of seclusion and repose may be the result of timorousness, or of a natural love of quiet, or it may spring from inertness. Discouragement too or disappointment may unnerve our strength, and may cause the hand to hang down, and the knee to be feeble; and, in that case, our rest may

become the prolonged rest of exhaustion rather than the rest of the soldier, sought only that it may re-invigorate for toil.

It is well for us that He, the place of whose rest is the far distant heights of the mountains of separation, forgets not her who sojourns in the valley. In the passage before us He is described as descending from those mountains and drawing near to her lowly dwelling-place. She recognises His voice, and her words show how well she appreciates the joyful liberty that pertains to Him in His bright and distant dwelling-place. "The voice of my beloved: behold He cometh leaping upon the mountains, skipping upon the hills. My beloved is like a roe or a young hart." The vigour of His step, and the exuberance of His joy, stand in marked contrast with her plaintive quietude. She hears His voice, and she understands it, for she is able to recite His words, "My beloved spake and said unto me, Rise up my love, my fair one, and come away. For, lo, the winter is past, the rain is over and gone; the flowers appear on the earth; the time of the singing of birds is come, and the voice of the turtle is heard in our land; the fig-tree putteth forth her green figs, and the vines with the tender grape give a good smell. Arise, my love, my fair one, and come away." Here was the invitation to her *faith*. Would she, by faith accompany Him to those new scenes of joys and glories, as yet unmanifested, where His home, and therefore



virtually her home, is—for she and Himself are one. The land of which He speaks to her He calls “our land.” “The voice of the turtle is heard in *our* land.” Its rest, and joys, and melodies are thine. It is *my* land, but I have it not apart from thee. Come with me and view it. Come with me, and let us rejoice in it together.

But however sure the inheritance that grace has irrevocably given, it does not necessarily follow that we have present power of faith to appreciate and enjoy it. We are assured of many things which, nevertheless, we feebly realize. Long since, for example, to the anticipative ear of faith the millennial song has been sung. John, while yet the outcast of Patmos, was caught up into the heavens and heard it, and heard it for us. He heard it even whilst as yet all creation was groaning, as it still continues to groan in the bondage of corruption : he heard “every creature which is in heaven, and on the earth, and under the earth, and such as are in the sea and all that is in them, giving thanks”—as if the groan were past and the night of sorrow ended, and the morning without clouds come. How accordant with the words before us—“the winter is past, the rain is over and gone, the flowers appear on the earth, the time of the singing of birds is come, &c.” Yet do we realize these things? Does our faith “whilst toiling here below, catch up the joyful sound”? Do we carry the light of this joy into the dark

scenes around us, where no present joy is, but rather lamentation, and mourning, and woe?

The Ephesians were not weak in faith, yet even for the Ephesians the Apostle prayed that "their inward eyes might be opened to discern what was the hope of God's calling, and what the riches of his inheritance in the saints." How feebly we recognise that God in raising and glorifying Christ, virtually, though not actually, raised and glorified us. Yet it was this that enabled the Apostle to say, "If any man be in Christ" (and all believers are in Christ) "there is to him a new creation:"\* that is, he is himself new and all the circumstances of his condition (speaking of them as viewed in Christ) are new likewise. The glories of a new creation are his portion. "Old things are passed away, behold all things are become new." And again, "as Christ is, so are we;" that is, in the judicial estimate of God, and therefore in the estimate of faith, we are already as Christ is, for He is our Head and Representative in glory. Well therefore may our Heavenly Bridegroom in speaking of the Land of His glory, speak of it as *our* land. And although it is true that the emblems of earth can but imperfectly express its joys, yet the coming of the spring and the singing of the birds, and the voice of the turtle, are similitudes condescendingly

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\* ὥστε εἴ τις ἐν Χριστῷ, καινὴ κτίσις· τὰ ἀρχαῖα παρῆλθεν, ἰδοὺ γέγονεν καινά.

and graciously employed to shadow forth those joys unfading and eternal which eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, but which God has revealed, through Christ, to be our eternal portion in the power of a new creation.

But to be told that these things are ours, and even to believe that they are ours, is not the same thing as having present capacity to enjoy them. There are many things which tend to impair the energies of faith, and cause timidity and trembling to usurp the place of holy confidence and strength. How many times was it reiterated in the ear of Joshua—"only be strong and of a good courage." How earnestly did St. Paul press upon Timothy, "God hath not given us the spirit of timidity (*δειλίας*) but of love, and of power, and of soundness of mind . . . my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus." Many things were bearing heavily and depressingly on the heart of Timothy. Dark clouds had settled in upon the close of the day of St. Paul's labour—that labour in which Timothy had been so long associated with him as with a father and a friend. St. Paul was in bonds. At Rome no one had stood with him; all forsook him. Even in Asia where he had laboured so faithfully and so long, all had turned away from him. The spirit of unfaithfulness and cowardice had seized even on the saints; and others who were not saints, but who were evil men and seducers, had crept into the churches, and their

evil was to increase and wax worse and worse. Falsehood and iniquity were to progress. Truth was to be abandoned and betrayed. The Apostle was to die, and Timothy was to be left to meet the gathering storm. It was a dark prospect, and his heart quailed.

The heart when dejected, or timorous, or engrossed with the contemplation of surrounding dangers, is little able to rise above the circumstances. It has little power "to soar on faith's strong eagle pinion." It is more like the fluttered dove that flies from the rising storm, and seeks a hiding place "in the clefts of the rocks, or in the secret places of the stairs." Yet timidity or dejection are not necessarily accompanied by unfaithfulness. Timothy was not unfaithful; neither was she, whose history is the subject of the passage before us. She might unduly have hastened her escape from the stormy wind and tempest, and sought unwisely the quietude of the valley, but she was not unfaithful to her Lord. If unfaithful she would not so soon have recognised and welcomed His approach, nor would He have addressed her with words of cheering like these. Christ may and does love His own people, even when unfaithful. He loved the Laodiceans; but His words to them were not words of present comfort, but of rebuke. "As many as I love I rebuke and chasten." He cannot honour unfaithfulness, nor seek to comfort and gladden it

by present views of the glory of His heavenly home.

Yet though she was not unfaithful, her faith was not vigorous. She heard His words of gracious invitation, but she replied not. He waited, but there was no response. He paused, and then again addressed her, but in an altered tone. He saw that she was as a dove that had hidden itself in secret places, and He asked her to come forth from her hiding-place that He might see her countenance and hear her voice, "for sweet is thy voice, and thy countenance is comely." The development in His people of the activities of faith is a sight comely and precious in the eyes of Christ. Christ has still His interests in this earth: His interests are bound up with His Truth and with His people, and therefore when the words and habits of His saints show that they have a living interest in the things which interest Him, their ways have an attractiveness and beauty in His sight. He marks with joy every indication in any, of their hearts and energies being given to the things in which His soul delights. Sweet *then* is their voice and comely their countenance in His view. But the secret hiding-place which timidity or discouragement may seek, is not the place where energy of service is likely to flourish: on the contrary, it may there find its grave. Elijah, zealous though he was for the Lord God of Israel, could find no place for the display of his zeal in

the solitude of that desert where he had sought to bury himself, until arrested by the voice, "What doest thou here, Elijah?" The energies of faith cannot flourish in a self-chosen solitude, any more than plants buried in sunless gloom. She who was thus hiding herself in the clefts of the rock and in the secret places of the stairs, could not, whilst there abiding, give effect to her testimonies, or let her light shine before men. On other occasions we find her feeding her kids by the side of the shepherds' tents, or else caring for the vines, or walking amongst pleasant plants of fragrance which in her garden her hand had trained for her beloved. But she had left these spheres of her service and had withdrawn herself into a retirement whose quietude was likely to become the quietude of inertness and slumber.

When the Lord saw that she responded not to His appeal, He repeated it no more. He no longer spoke to her of the land far away—the land of His rest and glory; He no longer asked her to accompany Him there. It is in vain to expect high developments of grace when the energies of faith are enfeebled. The wise physician seeks not to extort strength out of weakness by forcing it into developments for which it has no power. He seeks rather by wise and kindly care to re-strengthen and to heal. Accordingly, in His new appeal to her who was as the dove hiding in secret places, the Lord no longer speaks of the bright glories of His

heavenly home. He no longer asks her fellowship with Him in scenes and joys to which, for the present, her faith was unable to rise. Yet she was not, therefore, to be banished from all fellowship—all present companionship in His interests and joys. How then could she have been strengthened—how then could her vigour and power of future fellowship have been renewed? For by what is spiritual strength more effectually destroyed than by a want of participation in the occupations and interests of Christ? If she was at that moment unable to have fellowship with Him in His heavenly joys, yet there were occupations in earth in which she could be still united with Him—occupations in which she had once found joy, but in which apparently she had wearied, and hence, in part at least, her weakness. His words were gentle. They were not words of rebuke; scarcely words of admonition though admonition was to a certain extent implied “Take us the foxes, the little foxes that spoil the vines, for our vines have tender grapes.” The recognition of unbroken fellowship is strongly marked in the word “our”—“*our* vines have tender grapes.” He speaks of “our vines,” just as He had before spoken of “our land.” Yet His words seem to imply that she had not been so careful as she might have been over the vines: that she had not watched as vigilantly as she might have watched against the little foxes that marred their growth and fruitfulness. It is not

only the greater and more open assaults of the enemy that are to be dreaded in the vineyards of Christ. There are, indeed, occasions when the wild boar of the wood may ravage, or the tempest uproot, or the blast wither. The storm of persecution may rage as when the Pentecostal saints were scattered: and the poisonous breath of heresy and corruption may wither, as at Corinth and Galatia. St. Paul was not without these greater conflicts with evil. At Corinth and at Galatia he found "travail," "anguish," and "many tears." But even when these greater dangers were not present, the Apostle well knew what it was to watch against lesser and more insidious workings of evil, very dangerous to growth and fruitfulness among the saints. There was much love and brotherly kindness at Thessalonica. Yet there it was that some were found ready to presume on that love; working not at all, but becoming busybodies. There had been a certain weakness exhibited in tolerating this evil, so that the Apostle had to say with apparent sternness, "If any man will not work, neither let him eat." How would the fruitfulness of the Thessalonians have been marred if these things had not been corrected. At Thessalonica, too, there had been much living appreciation of what the Apostle had taught them respecting the coming and kingdom of the Lord Jesus, but the effect of that truth on their souls and characters had become impaired by their



cherishing false expectancies which never could have had any existence if they had exercised their understandings duly, and remembered the cautions which the Apostle had given. "Remember ye not," said he, "that whilst I was yet with you I told you these things. Let no man deceive you by any means." The Apostle never treated the slightest deflexion from truth as unimportant: he knew that falsehood is falsehood, and must (whatever the subject) work the effects of falsehood, and therefore he earnestly set himself to withstand incipient error. The saints at Philippi were marked by the vigour and stedfastness of their service. From the first day of their acquaintance with the Apostle they had fellowship with him in his service and suffering for the Truth. When even the Thessalonians forgot to minister to the Apostle's need, and suffered him, even whilst dwelling with them, and labouring for them, to know "necessity," the more vigilant eye of the Philippians marked and seized the opportunity. They sent to Thessalonica and ministered once and again to his necessities. Yet the insidiousness of evil needed to be watched against even at Philippi. There was danger lest even their earnestness in service should give rise to rivalry, and cause that things right in themselves should be done in strife or vain-glory; lest they should each look upon their own things only, and not also on the things of others. There was a danger lest Euodias and Syntyche (women who had

both aided the Apostle in his labours) should mar their service and fruitfulness by not being like-minded in the Lord.

The history of the Church, both individually and collectively, supplies many an example of the disastrous effects of these lesser agencies of evil. What watchful Christian knows not the power of little circumstances in stealing away opportunities of service, or hindering in the use of them? An angry or impatient look may mar an act of grace. An unkindly word may spoil an act of liberality. A deed of devotedness may be marred by something that indicates an undue estimate of self. A little circumstance may cause fruit of the fairest promise to be despoiled of its bloom, or to be marred by some disfiguring blemish. One dead fly may cause the most fragrant "ointment of the apothecary to stink."

When faith has become enfeebled and our practical energies impaired, one result ever is, that the soul seeks to re-establish to itself, and as it were, to reconvince itself of, truths which ought to be assumed as unquestioned and unquestionable. The soul of a believer is not prospering in spiritual health when it is seeking to reassure itself of truths which the grace of God has supplied to it as the established basis and starting point of its action. St. Paul, after he knew the grace of the gospel, did not spend his hours in proving to himself that he was Christ's, or that Christ was his; he assumed

it as an established and unquestionable fact—it formed the basis of all his thoughts—it was the spring of all his actions.

In the case before us, she whose faith and whose energies had in a measure become enfeebled, and who was found hiding herself in secret places when first she was appealed to by her Lord, answered as we have seen, not at all. To His second appeal, however, she replied. Graciously adapting Himself to her weakness, He besought her to come forth that He might “see her countenance and hear her voice;” and the invitation was not in vain. She responded, and her voice was heard. But her first utterance showed what the meditation of her heart had been. She had evidently been pondering whether it was really true that her Beloved was hers and herself His. Without perhaps actually doubting it, she had occupied herself with reassuring herself of a truth which in her happier hours—her hours of energy, whilst occupied in feeding the kids or caring for the vines, she had never thought of questioning. “My beloved is mine, and I am His.” It was indeed a precious and most blessed truth. It was well that she should assure herself of it if she doubted it. But it was not the kind of response sought for by her Lord when He said to her, “come with me my love, my fair one, and let us view the goodness of our Land together.” In asking her to come and share His joys and glories, He did not ask that

she should debate within herself the question of the reality or the faithfulness of His love. Yet as I have already said, it was well that she should reassure herself of this if she doubted it. It was well too that she should remember that her Beloved was One that "feedeth among the lilies." Was she tempted to doubt whether her Beloved had any thing dear to Him in this earth? It was well then that she should remember that whatever joys He might have in His own proper dwelling-place on the bright and blessed heights of the mountains of separation, yet that He had also joys in earth; that there were still there, some in whom His heart rested—some of whom He could say, "my delight is in them." Though He had indeed turned away, as she too had turned away, from the violence, and strife, and pride, of man's city, which He loathed; though the earth as formed morally under the hand of man had no beauty in His sight, yet there were in earth other spheres—spheres retired and lowly, where flowers of true fragrance and hidden beauty grew. There He found His solace and His joy. The renewed conviction of this—the conviction that the earth was not altogether abandoned by Him, as if an utter void in which nothing lovely grew, was a great step towards a renewal of those joys of faith which she had often known in the activities of present service and testimony for her Lord. Nevertheless, to His invitation she responded *not*, save indeed to say, that her faith could not at

present rise into the appreciation of the joys and glories of His heavenly home. "Until the day break and the shadows flee away, turn my beloved, and be thou like a roe or a young hart on the mountains of severation." Such were her words. They seem to say, "A time will come when this night of sorrow shall end, and then I will accompany thee to thy heavenly land, and have full fellowship with thee in all its joys. Till then let the light and liberty and joy of the mountains of separation be thine. It is my delight to think of thee as above the darkness of this night of sorrow, in the joy and brightness of thy distant home. And although I tarry for a season here, yet when the morning of the new day comes, I will say to thee no longer as now, 'Turn my beloved,' for I will go with thee then, and enter into all thy joys, and tread with thee the heights of the mountains of separation, and follow thee whithersoever thou goest."

These words do not indeed show so strong an apprehension as might have been shown, of the fulness of her present lot of blessing. They fall short of the words of the Apostle when he said, "old things have passed away, behold new things have become to be." Nevertheless, they are blessed words. They could only be used by a heart that had learned well to estimate the character of this present night of evil, and to contrast its darkness with the light and holiness of Heaven. They

showed a full and joyful confidence in the love of her Lord, and a living anticipation of that coming hour when she too would know in no less perfectness than her beloved, the liberty and joy of the mountains of severation.

### III.

#### FROM VERSE 7 TO 16 OF CHAPTER IV.

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THERE are certain truths which may be always, under all circumstances, affirmed of the family of faith, because depending exclusively on that which Christ by His one finished sacrifice has accomplished for them. There is no one, for example, who has been once sprinkled with the blood of reconciliation (and every believer is sprinkled) of whom it may not be said, that "his iniquity is taken away, and his sin purged." Spotlessness pertaineth to him, not because he has no spots (they are as those of the leopard, countless), but because his spots are covered. Atoning blood hath covered them. Consequently, there is no one amongst Christ's people to whom it may not be said, "There is no spot in thee." In the judicial estimate of God this is as true *now* as it will be in that coming day when Christ shall present the Church unto Himself, "a glorious Church not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing."

But that which we may recognise as abstractedly true is not always livingly present to the apprehensions of the soul. It belongs to the Spirit of Christ

to give to the apprehensions of faith vividness and power: but that Spirit whereby God has sealed us as His own, may be grieved and hindered. The Corinthians were, what indeed all believers are, "spiritual," in that they were all quickened in Christ, and had within them "the new man," and the abiding presence of the Holy Spirit. Nevertheless the Apostle "could not speak unto them as unto spiritual, but as unto carnal, even as unto babes in Christ. I have fed you with milk, and not with meat: for hitherto ye were not able to bear it, neither yet now are ye able." The encouragement and comfort which his heart and his lips were ready to minister to them were, in great measure, stayed. "All fulness" was given to them in Christ, but its present communication was hindered. The fountain was full, and the channels were prepared, but they who should have been the recipients were not ready. When the heart is full of other interests and rests satisfied with its portion, the voice of Christ's love, even if it comes, comes to a closed or pre-occupied ear. It was not, however, so with her who is addressed in the verses before us. Her heart was not engrossed with wrong interests. She was standing holily separate, and (as the succeeding verses show) she had been occupied—earnestly and diligently occupied, in the things of her Lord. And to her, as thus standing, these words were addressed in living power of comfort. "Thou art all fair, my love; there is no spot in thee. Come with me from



Lebanon, my spouse, with me from Lebanon; look from the top of Amana, from the top of Shenir and Hermon, from the lions' dens, from the mountains of the leopards."

The mountains here mentioned are on the outskirts of the Land of Israel, constituting, virtually, its northern boundary. Thence we look down upon Immanuel's Land, and behold it left to its desolation. The power that regulates the earth is not found in Zion *now*. Zion is desolate, and other mountains are exalted—mountains in which the proud power of the Gentile dwells—"mountains of prey," as they are elsewhere called. "Thou art more glorious and excellent (Zion is addressed in the hour of her future glory) thou art more glorious and excellent than the mountains of prey. The stout-hearted are spoiled, they have slept their sleep: and none of the men of might have found their hands. At thy rebuke, O God of Jacob, both the chariot and horse are cast into a dead sleep." (Ps. lxxvi. 4-6.) Such is the doom of the proud stout-hearted Gentile power that now dominates in the earth. Lebanon, Amana, and the like, are its representatives in the passage before us. They are the strong-hold of the earth's glory, but they are not the home of peace, or love, or grace, or truth. The Lamb—He who shall by and by rule on Zion, standeth not there. The roar of the lion and the cry of the leopard is heard there. There are lions' dens and mountains of leopards—sights and sounds from which the heart, that has learned to

rest in the love and grace of Christ, instinctively shrinks, and ought to shrink; for they are things strange and abhorrent to Christ's spirit. Nevertheless, it is needful for the servant of Christ to contemplate these things. The lesson respecting them should be learned. Unless we learn it, we shall fail in estimating aright the place of our present service, and we shall lack the light that can alone enable us to determine rightly the course of our testimony.

There are few things about which Christ has been more careful to instruct His people, than respecting the character of the path trodden by those who exercise supreme governmental power in the earth during the time of the abasement of Israel. In the estimate of the Spirit of Christ, Herod is "the fox"; Cæsar "the lion"; and the last great head of Gentile power "a beast covered with names of blasphemy." In the Scripture, all the four Empires that have been appointed successively to rule the earth are all fierce monsters, the last of which, when the time of its dominion shall have ceased, is to be "given to the burning flame." Yet, notwithstanding all the evidence afforded both by Scripture and by facts, there is probably no subject on which the minds, even of real Christians, have more wandered from truth, than in their estimate of Gentile governmental power. They have, not unfrequently, confided in it, hoped in it, made it often their counsellor and their guide, and sometimes rendered to it an homage that is due to the Lord alone. The era of

Constantine, the time of the Reformation, and yet more modern times, afford sad evidence of the mistaken light in which the past and future course of governmental power has been viewed even by the true children of the Kingdom of God.\*

We can easily understand, therefore, why she who is here addressed, is invited in the passage before us to come WITH Him (observe the word "with"; it indicates that she was to walk by the side of, and in companionship with, her Lord) and so to pass from one mountain top to another, and to view them in all the various aspects of their glorious but savage strength. Thence, too, she was to look forth upon the nations, and judge of their condition as the subjects of this fierce unsanctified power.

Never before had she been invited to view scenes like these. On other occasions, she had either been called away from earth to view the brightness and joys of her heavenly home, or else had been directed

\* Let it, however, be observed that in speaking thus, we are speaking not of governmental power in itself, but of *its use*. All power is of God. It is one of His precious gifts to men; and they who hold it are to be officially revered, because they hold a power that God hath given. The archangel would not revile even Satan; how much more have we to beware of speaking evilly of those whom God has set to preserve order in the earth, and who are therefore ministers of God towards us for good. What would the world become if self-will and evil were allowed to run riot in it? Nothing can be more important than rule. Indeed it is so important, that righteousness and truth will never flourish in the earth until the sovereignty of the world has become "the sovereignty of our Lord and of His Christ." We may, therefore, honour and reverence governmental power, even while we recognise and weep over the course that it is treading.

to the sheepfolds, or to the vineyards, as the peaceful separate place of her present service in the earth, far away from the turmoil and strife of man's city and the mountains of his power. But there should be a certain comprehensiveness in the apprehensions of faith. Not all the knowledge that the Ephesians may have had of heavenly fellowship with Christ—not all the experience gained by the Philippians or Thessalonians in their long course of loving and faithful service, would be sufficient to furnish the man of God completely, and to fit him thoroughly for the conflict, unless there be also an appreciation of the circumstances and characteristics of that "evil day" in which the Church finds the scene of her present conflict. He who has the heart of a warrior on the battle-field, and stands having his armour on, must be conversant with other sights and sounds than those which meet him either at the sheepfolds or in the scenes of his heavenly rest. Who more than John understood the blessedness of fellowship with his Lord in heavenly places? He, if any one, was a father in Christ, knowing "Him that was from the beginning"—having communion with Him as returned into that sphere of life and glory which He had as the eternal Son in the bosom of the Father before all worlds. John had well learned to appreciate the Church's heritage in its risen Head. He had learned too, to prove and to appreciate the place of the Church's retired and humble service in the earth. He had not forgotten

the admonition, "Feed my sheep, feed my lambs." He had walked as a shepherd in the midst of the family of faith, exhorting them to abide in the truth and in the love of Christ. Yet it was John who was appointed in Patmos to behold other sights, and to become conversant with far different scenes. Glory was indeed revealed to him there—bright heavenly glory; but it was glory brought into contrast and antagonism with the darkness and corruption of earth. He was taught to behold the earth as filled with, and held down beneath, the power of evil ripening for judgment. He was caused to walk, as it were, from mountain to mountain of Gentile power,—to behold their evil greatness, to view the course and end of their blasphemies, and to record their doom. He left for a season "the bleating of the sheepfolds" to hear the roar of the lion and leopard amidst the mountains and dens of their savage greatness, where that greatness is, for the present, permitted to strengthen and establish itself, and to mar and "destroy" (Rev. xi. 18) the earth.

There are many worshippers of human progress, as it is called, who look to these seats of Gentile power, as if they were the appointed rectifiers of the earth. Their hope is in these lions' dens and mountains of leopards, as if they were the earth's appointed deliverers. They think not of the condition of Immanuel's Land; appreciating *not* the nature and cause of its present woe; and regarding *not* its destined glory in "the age to come." They

have no knowledge of the time when the true Solomon, the Prince of Peace, shall reign, and "the mountains" (*i.e.* the greater seats of authority in the earth) and "the little hills" (the lesser seats of authority) "shall all bring peace to the peoples, by means of righteousness." They have never contrasted that coming period with the present hour of the lordship of unregenerate man. They know nothing of that storm of judgment and fiery indignation that is to introduce the long-promised morning of blessing. Necessarily, they call evil good; put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter; say Peace, when there is no peace; and glory in the very things which are to bring down the righteous inflictions of Divine vengeance. Let the people of Christ beware of these apostles of human progress. Let them hear the invitation of their Lord, and view as by His side, these mountains of Gentile glory, and look forth from them on the troubled world over which they dominate; and they will be taught a holy fear. They will shrink from the scene around them, and their hope will be alone in the arm of Him who has promised in His own appointed time to work deliverance in the earth, by abasing these "mountains of prey," and establishing instead, the Zion of God—the mountain of holiness and Truth.

It is a vain hope to imagine that Truth will spread and attain its destined supremacy, whilst the high places of authority amongst men remain unsubject to its power. Until the sovereignty of the

world shall have become "the sovereignty of our Lord and of His Christ," it is impossible that righteousness should prosper. Next to God's revealed Truth, there is nothing in the earth that more nearly concerns the welfare and happiness of man, than the administration of governmental power; and until that power is taken from those to whom it is, at present, delegated, and given to Him who is to be brought before the Ancient of days (see Dan. vii.) that He may be invested with it, the dens of lions and mountains of leopards will not be either subverted, or changed as to their character. Satan will succeed in controlling the diadems of earth, and iniquity will continue to flourish till then.

It is a happy thing when the heart of a believer is ready and willing to receive this lesson respecting the present condition of human things. If we have drunk of the wine of earth and found solace in the world's joys, we shall be little prepared to walk amidst the mountains of its glory and judge truthfully. We shall be dazzled by their brightness, covet their influence, and bow down before their power. The Lord asks not such to come with Him to view these mountains of strength. She who in the passage before us is summoned to His side, had not been indulging herself in evil joys, or neglecting the service of her Lord. On the contrary, she had been keeping herself in holy separation. Nor had the monotony of her retirement, and the seclusion of her almost solitary path, undermined her vigour.

The allusion in the verses that follow, to the garden, in which she had laboured, and its pleasant plants of fragrance, sufficiently indicate the character of her service, and the earnestness of her toil. Wisdom had been given her to find the one green spot—the one place of true joy in the world's wide wilderness, where she found happiness for herself in doing those things which she knew to be pleasing in the sight of Him in whose faithful love she rested. Consequently, her heart was not dull nor her ear heavy, when she was suddenly called from these scenes of quietude and peace, to behold lions' dens and mountains of leopards. The holy sensitiveness found in her, fitted her the more to receive the appointed lesson—a lesson like the book which John in vision was commanded to eat—sweet in the mouth, but when incorporated into the apprehensions of the soul—bitter.

There is no doubt a peculiar sorrow connected with the apprehension of what the world governmentally and socially is. Unless counteracted, it may weigh on the heart so heavily as to break the spring of its energies, and cause despondency and languor. It was an apprehension of the prevalence and strength of evil—an apprehension most profitable *when duly qualified by other truth*—that caused Jeremiah to cry, “Cursed be the day wherein I was born: let not the day wherein my mother bare me be blessed. . . . Wherefore came I forth out of the womb to see labour and sorrow, that my days



should be consumed with shame?" (Jer. xx. 15, 18.) In Habakkuk too we find a scarcely less bitter cry. "O Lord, how long shall I cry, and thou wilt not hear! even cry out unto thee of violence, and thou wilt not save! Why dost thou show me iniquity, and cause me to behold grievance? for spoiling and violence are before me: and there are that raise up strife and contention. Therefore the law is slacked, and judgment doth never go forth; for the wicked doth compass about the righteous: therefore wrong judgment proceedeth." (Hab. i. 2-4.) The more the heart recognises the preciousness of Truth, the more must it weep over the triumph of falsehood and guile. And when we consider the gigantic and still increasing strength of the evil that now dominates in the earth, and trace the extent of its mighty influence, and view, as detailed in the word of God, its future course, and compare this present hour of the Truth's weakness with that of the world's abounding and increasing strength, we cannot wonder that the heart should be ready to question whether it be possible that any thing truly pleasing to Christ—any thing in which His heart can really rejoice, should any where be found amidst the scene of well-nigh universal darkness.

Wine, it is said, is for them who are of heavy heart. Whatever cause there may be for depression, there is always ability and willingness in the Lord to comfort His people with *present* comfort if only there be separateness and a leaning of heart upon

Him. Accordingly, she who is addressed in the passage before us, was speedily and abundantly comforted. Suddenly withdrawn from the sphere of her peaceful service to behold the triumphant and prospering reign of evil, it is no wonder that her heart should have sunk. As she contrasted the gigantic advance of evil with the hindered and restricted progress of Truth, and thought of her own narrow sphere of service, so hidden and so despised as scarcely to elicit the world's censure: and when she remembered too her own feebleness, and the imperfectness of her apprehensions and appreciations both of good and evil, and the want of vigour and comprehensiveness in her faith—when she reflected on these and other like things, it was natural that her heart should faint, and that she should question whether there was anything in her or around her that could really receive the approval and commendation of her Lord. Was there anything in her feelings, or demeanour, or character, or service, that was really acceptable in His sight? The answer was not long delayed. She was declared to be the subject not only of His approval, but of His joy and complacent delight. His delight was in her. The very glance of her eye was precious in His sight. The eye soon expresses the feelings of the soul. If the eye shrinks from those things from which the Spirit of Christ shrinks, and beholds loveliness in the things in which His heart delights; if it looks with holy trembling on the iniquity of

earth, and turns confidently and humbly to Him; if, as the eye of a servant towards the hand of his master, it wait upon the Lord alone, the glance of such an eye would in the estimate of Christ be blessed. And if there are the adornments of a meek and quiet spirit, and if there be lips of knowledge which are as "a precious jewel, more precious than a multitude of rubies," then there are things that are necklaces of beauty—chains of grace around the neck. So it was with her. In her retirement, where, in her garden, she had been nurturing plants of heavenly fragrance, she had learned many a lesson, and the results were manifest. Her look, her adornments, the proved truth and faithfulness of her love was precious in the sight of her heavenly Lord. "Thou hast ravished my heart, my sister, my spouse; thou hast ravished my heart with one of thine eyes, with one chain of thy neck. How fair is thy love, my sister, my spouse! how much better is thy love than wine! and the smell of thine ointments than all spices!" The wine and spices of earth are but shadows appointed to indicate the gratefulness and acceptableness before Christ of the character of those, who (in private, it may be, and almost hidden spheres) seek, like Philemon, or Gaius, or Dorcas, to show out of a good conversation their works with meekness of wisdom. No official or recognised ministerial place is necessary to fruitfulness in the Church of God. Pride may court such a place and rush unbidden into it, and

then true spiritual healthfulness will wane and depart. The mouth may be as a fountain "sending forth sweet waters" in a sphere as little prominent as that which was filled by "Philologus, and Julia, and Nereus." We know not who they were. But their names, as well as those of many others in like unobtrusive spheres, are by the Apostle recorded with honour—honour that will remain in the day of Christ.

There are, perhaps, few things which even an instructed believer more feebly recognises than the importance and potency of "*the tongue*," whether in serving evil or good. Naturally, it is set on fire of hell; it uses deceit; it is full of cursing and bitterness; it is instinct with the venom of asps; it walks proudly through the earth serving the lusts of those who say, "Our lips are our own, who is lord over us?" Yet how often is the eloquence of the unregenerate tongue delighted in, even by believers! How often are words of philanthropic kindness and amiability, as they drop from the lips of those who know not and prize not the Gospel of the grace of God, allowed to hide the certain truth, that the lips of such must be (whatever they may seem) an open sepulchre, breathing forth the taint of corruption and death, because nothing but death is there. There is one Christ; one Spirit; "one name given amongst men whereby we must be saved"; one Book sent into the world by God as the infallible record of Truth; and if men depart therefrom,

however much they may clothe their aberrations in garments of light, yet there is no light in them. They serve Satan, and not God. Yet nothing, perhaps, as I have already said, is more feebly appreciated than the influence of the tongue in the service of evil, except indeed it be, the value attached by the Lord to its service in the cause of good. We find it difficult to recognise that any among Christ's people here, can be capable of being addressed by Him in such words as these: "Thy lips, O my spouse, drop as the honeycomb: honey and milk are under thy tongue." What a contrast with the venom of asps! Yet so it is when the lips keep knowledge; when they are established in the *grace* of the sanctuary where redemption hath brought in everlasting peace: when they speak (it may be in a private and hidden sphere) words of truth and soberness drawn from the Scriptures of Truth; when they speak humbly in confession, or supplication, or thanksgiving unto God: or minister comfort to them to whom comfort is due; or speak to the world of righteousness and coming judgment and present grace as declared in the blood of the Lamb: in all such cases, that which distils from such lips is as the dew of heaven, and whether rejected or received, it has before God a preciousness unspeakable and eternal, that no circumstances can alter—a preciousness that may be despised or forgotten on earth, but which is remembered in the heavens.

Yet believers are not unfrequently ready to say,

“If it be so, why am I thus?” If the service of Christ’s people be thus pleasing and acceptable in His sight, why is their service not prospered? Why is the excellency and beauty of Truth hidden? Why do not our testimonies which, because of the truth that is in them, we know to be precious, attract, not indeed to ourselves (that we desire not) but to Him? Why are they so rejected and despised? Is it not because they have so failed in our hands through our weakness, that the Lord is displeased with us and will not prosper them? There may be, and no doubt often are, occasions when it is so. The remnant of Israel in the days of Haggai when they ceased to care for the Temple of the Lord and thought only of their own houses, were not blessed, but smitten. (See Haggai i.) But there are also occasions when it is otherwise. In the case before us there had been rightly directed energy,—holy and acceptable service, yet she who rendered it is described as “a garden inclosed; a spring shut up: a fountain sealed.” A garden inclosed may be well protected and preserved; its walls may be walls of strength and security; but an inclosed garden is not one whose beauties are made manifest: they are recognised and known only by its possessor. They are beauties that dwell, virtually, in a *secret* place. An inclosed garden is not the emblem of that which enlarges its limits, and advances upon the rude waste around, and spreads verdure and beauty over surrounding desolation.

Nor is a *shut up* spring, a *sealed* fountain, an emblem of diffusion. Waters "shut up" may be most precious—the fact of their being sealed shows that they are precious in the sight of their possessor. They may exist too in exhaustless plenitude, ready to flow forth like the cool streams from the snows of Lebanon on scorched and burning plains below. Yet such waters may be despised; no channels may be made ready to welcome and direct their flow: The arid waste may continue to wither, and that which is ready to be as "a fountain of gardens," causing fragrance and beauty to flourish and abound, remains shut up—its vivifying power existing seemingly in vain.

Facts and the Scripture abundantly testify that such is the Church's present relation to the moral waste around. Even in the days of its early strength, before weakness and decrepitude overtook its testimonies, its beauties were unrecognised by any save its heavenly Lord, or those whom He called His friends. None others cared to look upon the holy enclosure: or if they entered and looked on it, it was only to despise and to withdraw. The garden cultivated by the hand of Truth, blooms with plants of heavenly fragrance. "Spikenard and saffron; calamus and cinnamon, with all trees of frankincense; myrrh and aloes, with all the chief spices" are there—all plants of heavenly fragrance, but not delighted in by the Egyptian heart that dwells by the flesh-pots, and hungers after its garlic,

leeks, and onions—feeding nature's strength with nature's food.

But darkness shall not always reign. "The fountain of gardens" shall not always be as a fountain shut up and sealed. An hour is coming when its streams shall flow forth in living power, unchecked and prospered in their course. "Israel shall blossom and bud, and fill the face of the world with fruit." "Truth shall spring out of the earth, and righteousness shall look down from heaven." In the meanwhile, "The Church of the first-born ones" now militant in the midst of suffering and sorrow, has to wait in patience of hope. It has to remember that however restricted its sphere, it may be itself as a garden yielding plants of fragrance, precious in the sight of its Lord. And even if the Church unitedly ceased to be this, individual Christians may in their several spheres be as pleasant plants of fragrance. If only one solitary Christian were left in the world and he walked in grace, there would still be that in the earth which Christ would discern and recognise as a plant of heavenly fragrance.

There was no one of Christ's servants, perhaps, who had so strong an apprehension as the Apostle Paul, of the value and preciousness of the Church as a garden in the estimate of its heavenly Lord. Therefore he laboured to make it a garden abounding in plants of fragrance. The full energies of his heart were given to it. "Now," said he, "I live if ye stand fast in the Lord." And his efforts were not



in vain. He could speak of the Churches amongst whom he laboured and whom he nurtured (being gentle among them, even as a nurse cherisheth her children) he could speak of them as "epistles of Christ, known and read of all men." They livingly expressed the mind of Christ. Their doctrines and their manners were in conformity with the truth as revealed in God's holy word. The fragrance of Truth was found in the garden of the Lord. The Apostle recognised it, and he knew that the grace of his Lord would recognise it. He could, as it were, hear the voice of his Master saying, "Thy plants are an orchard of pomegranates, with pleasant fruits; camphire, with spikenard, spikenard and saffron; calamus and cinnamon, with all trees of frankincense; myrrh and aloes, with all the chief spices." The Apostle, and many others far weaker and more unworthy than the Apostle, regarded and were entitled to regard, words such as these as expressive of the Divine estimate of their humble and despised labour. Such was the place occupied by her who is addressed in the passage before us. She was thus comforted—she was thus encouraged. The plants about which she had laboured had their fragrance recognised by Him for whom she had trained them. He came to view them, and He called both on the north wind and the south wind to blow upon *His* garden—that garden whose plants He had before pronounced to be *hers*—in order that the spices thereof might flow out. "Awake, O

north wind ; and come, thou south ; blow upon my garden, that the spices thereof may flow out."

The north and south winds are evidently symbolic of two diverse and contrasted influences, to both of which the garden of the Lord is, from time to time, subjected here. The chill northern blast may so blow as to wither and destroy, or it may be so moderated as to revive and strengthen. It can invigorate by its cold, and develop qualities which more gentle influences fail to elicit. In the case before us it was called upon to awake, not that it might destroy, but that it might refresh and bring forth into development. "Endurance" is a grace that needs for its development the presence of the northern wind. Courage and soldiership can have little place where quietness and peace reign. "Thou therefore endure hardness, as a good soldier of Jesus Christ." On the other hand, there are graces that peculiarly flourish under the gentle influences of the south. Job felt it so, when, smitten by the northern blast, he looked back upon the time when other influences, gentle and peaceful, prevailed around him, and when in his prosperity he forgot not the Lord, but served Him with ready heart, and out of his abundance spread blessing over others, making the widow's heart sing for joy. "Oh that I were as in months past, as in the days when God preserved me : when his candle shined upon my head, and when by his light I walked through darkness : . . . When the ear heard me, then it blessed

me ; and when the eye saw me, it gave witness to me : because I delivered the poor that cried, and the fatherless, and him that had none to help him. The blessing of him that was ready to perish came upon me : and I caused the widow's heart to sing for joy. I put on righteousness, and it clothed me : my judgment was as a robe and a diadem. I was eyes to the blind, and feet was I to the lame. I was a father to the poor : and the cause which I knew not, I searched out. And I brake the jaws of the wicked, and plucked the spoil out of his teeth. Then I said, I shall die in my nest, and I shall multiply my days as the sand. My root was spread out by the waters, and the dew lay all night upon my branch. My glory was fresh in me, and my bow was renewed in my hand. Unto me men gave ear, and waited, and kept silence at my counsel. After my words they spake not again ; and my speech dropped upon them. And they waited for me as for rain ; and they opened their mouth wide as for the latter rain. If I laughed on them, they believed it not ; and the light of my countenance they cast not down. I chose out their way, and sat chief, and dwelt as a king in the army, as one that comforteth the mourners. But now they that are younger than I have me in derision, whose fathers I would have disdained to have set with the dogs of my flock." Job greatly prospered—spiritually prospered, under the gentle influences of the south ; but under the withering of the northern blast he quailed and spoke

unadvisedly with his lips, justifying himself rather than God. Yet to retain spiritual healthfulness as Job had done under the full sunshine of prosperity, argues no little grace. Stedfastness and faithfulness to God, and to His Truth, are perhaps never more proved than then. Asa, Jehoshaphat and Hezekiah, stood firm in days of adversity : but when prosperity came, they failed—Asa, grievously. The garment which we may prize in the hour that the north wind blows, we may cast from us in the day of the breathing of the gentle south ; and the garment so spurned may perhaps prove to be essentially a characteristic part of our pilgrim attire. Amongst all the servants of Christ there has been, probably, no one who has under *all* circumstances retained his stedfastness so fully as the Apostle Paul. “I know,” he said, “both how to be abased, and I know how to abound : every where and in all things I am instructed both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need. I am strong as to all things through Christ that strengtheneth me.” He found in his very employments an instrumental means of strength. He laboured not for himself ; nor simply for the interests of men as men ; nor for the Church apart from Truth (for the Church may have selfish interests of its own) but he laboured for the Church that it might be preserved, and established, and enlarged in the knowledge of the revealed Truth of God. And what was the result ? That in the midst of the fierce Gentile world, in

close contiguity to the mountains of their godless strength, there was found many a spot which was as a garden inclosed, full of plants of heavenly fragrance—plants which he had watched over and cherished as knowing that they were precious in the sight of his Lord. He had well learned to estimate the mountains of Gentile power: he recognised them as dens of lions and leopards; he knew the consequences of the abandonment and desolation of Immanuel's Land; but this knowledge, though it caused him anguish and many tears, yet weakened not his strength. He turned with the more thankfulness to his hidden and despised service in the garden of his Lord, finding there the sphere of his present joy. “*At present,*” said he to the Colossians, “I rejoice in my sufferings for you.” He did indeed anticipate other joys in the future, but his present joy was in suffering for Christ's people whilst labouring to present each one ripe in faith and of mature growth in Him. All the plants over which he watched were not of the same maturity; all had not the same vigour. Neither were any perfect. The Thessalonians had in a measure quailed under the northern blast: they were almost ready to faint under prolonged and bitter suffering. The Corinthians had become weary of the Nazareth garb of Truth, and were desiring to reign as kings before the time. Perfectness, therefore, was not found in God's people, either corporately or individually, even when an apostle watched over them. Never-

theless, there was fragrance in their ways—gifts and graces which God's own Spirit had given; and in this fragrance, as it was from time to time developed, the Apostle knew that his Lord rejoiced. He could speak of a gift given by the Philippians for Christ's sake, as being "an odour of a sweet smell, a sacrifice acceptable, well-pleasing to God."

Yet although I have thus referred to the Apostle and his labours in illustration of the passage before us, we must beware of imagining that we can have no garden—that we can train no plants of pleasant fragrance unless we have an apostle's sphere of service. The apostles in their own peculiar office had no successors: and although God has in faithful mercy according to His promise (see Eph. iv.) continued to supply evangelists, pastors, teachers, and the like, yet even at the time of the Church's early history, when ministers of the Word were in greatest abundance given, they were even then, comparatively few. Shepherds are always few in comparison with the flocks they feed. It is not therefore necessary to "minister in the word and doctrine," or to occupy any ostensible or official place in the Church of God in order to have around us a garden that may be cultivated and become fragrant and fruitful in the sight of the Lord. Dorcas, and Epaphroditus, and Gaius, were individuals whose sphere of service was *comparatively* unnoticed and unknown. Yet, seeing that they loved and abided in the Truth which the apostles taught, they each of them found

in the discipline of their own hearts, and in the circumstances immediately contiguous to themselves, opportunities for cherishing and carrying out into development habits of thought and action which surrounded them with fruitfulness and fragrance. The devotedness of Dorcas (for it was a devotedness guided by God's revealed Truth) would, whatever the Church's collective condition, have made her and the sphere around her, a garden of pleasant plants into which she could invite her Lord, and into which He would come and gather His myrrh and His spices. Even as the field of the suburbs of the Levites' cities could not be alienated, so the people of Christ shall never be deprived of the opportunity of sowing, and nurturing, and training, that which is well-pleasing in the sight of God, who despiseth not the day of small things. The sphere may be circumscribed and lowly, yet it may be laboured in with zealous and energetic heart, and it is the heart that the Lord regardeth.

## IV.

FROM CHAPTER V. 2, TO CHAPTER VI. 3.

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IT has been already observed that the place assigned to her, whose varying experiences are the subject of this Song, was not the City. *There*, man had collocated *his* strength, and stamped the impress of his own name: *that*, therefore, was not the place designed for her, whose distinctive blessing was companionship with her rejected Lord. Like Him she was called "to go without the gate, bearing His reproach." She was to find the place of her rest and her occupation, far away from man's City; in the vineyards or at the sheep-folds; or in some "garden enclosed," where plants of heavenly fragrance could be trained by her for her Lord.

In the previous chapter, we find her in one of her highest positions of honour and blessing. We see her encompassed by plants of pleasant fragrance that had sprung up under the culture of her hand—herself rejoicing in the presence of her Lord, and acknowledged by Him as one that was ministering to His joy. She had asked Him to come into His garden, and He had come and tasted of its honey-



comb, and spices, and pleasant fruits. He had commended her, and they had rejoiced together.

But now, how changed the scene! She had forsaken the sheep-fold, and the vineyard, and the garden; she was no longer a sojourner "without the gate"; she had wandered into the City, and found her way into one of its palaces; she had encompassed herself with its delicacies (for she speaks of her fingers dropping with sweet smelling myrrh) and there she had lain down to rest. Her pilgrim-garb was laid aside. She was no longer the despised shepherdess, or the keeper of the vineyards, but rather a princess, treading delicately kings' courts. She no longer said, as once she had done, "Tell me, O thou whom my soul loveth, where thou feedest, where thou makest thy flock to rest at noon: for why should I be as one that turneth aside by the flocks of thy companions?" Her companionship with her Lord had ceased; and she sought not to renew it. He still remained unsheltered—"His head filled with dew, and his locks with the drops of the night"; whilst she was resting, or seeking to rest, in the midst of luxuries and refinements which could never have been hers unless she had abandoned the true place of her service and had ceased to be a sojourner "without the gate."

"I sleep, but my heart waketh." Such was her apology—such the plea by which she would fain have hidden from herself, as well as excused to

others, the truth of her condition. But why this difference between her outward circumstances and her inward feelings? Was it needful? Was it right? And could such discrepancy continue? Would the heart long remain wakeful, if the eye and the ear ceased to watch, and the hand to act? And even if the heart could so watch, what use would there be in such vigilance, if no outward development followed? Who would credit her tale respecting her heart's wakefulness, if all surrounding circumstances contradicted her saying, and proved that her activity had wholly given place to slumber? Yet, false as is the plea, it is one by which believers have, not unfrequently, deceived themselves; until their slumber has become so deep as to preclude the possibility of arousing them even to a sense of the delusion.

She, however, whose history we are here considering, was not to be allowed to sink into such depth of slumber. Her course was to be arrested. She was speedily to be summoned from her resting place, and brought back to the side of her Lord; for her heart had not yet so lapsed as to be altogether deaf to His voice, or indifferent to its call. Accordingly, when He drew nigh and knocked at the closed door—(the door which herself had closed against Him) as soon as she heard His call, as the call of one who was seeking for Himself shelter from the cold and darkness, and dew of night, she instantly recognised His well-known

voice—"It is the voice," said she, "of my beloved that knocketh." Yet she was slow, and even reluctant, to unlock the closed door. "I have put off my coat; how shall I put it on? I have washed my feet; how shall I defile them?" Such were the words with which, at first, she responded to His call. Was it that she was really unwilling to re-assume, for a brief moment, the garment she had put off? Did she really fear that her feet, which she had washed, would be defiled by crossing, for a moment, the chamber of her luxury? Or, did her heart tell her that if her Lord entered that chamber, He would refuse to share with her the shelter she had chosen and would surely summon her from it: and that thus, drawn from her resting place, she too would have to say, that her "head also was filled with dew, and her locks with the drops of the night?" Conscience is quick, under certain circumstances, in anticipating results; though its anticipations are not unfrequently wrong: because though discerning, perhaps, the path of duty and its difficulties, it fails with equal clearness to apprehend the grace and lovingkindness which sustains in that path, and removes or overcomes its difficulties.

Doubtless, she anticipated that she would be called away from her rest, and hence her reluctance. Yet, her folly was not permitted to turn aside the persistency of His grace. He had before knocked: He now sought to *open* the closed door. Her heart was touched; and she arose to unlock it—her

“hands dropping with myrrh, and her fingers with sweet smelling myrrh, upon the handles of the lock.” Here was the evidence of the luxuriousness of her rest. It was a condition very unlike that of the shepherdess whom the sun had looked upon and blackened; or that of the outcast in the vineyards, despised and spurned by her own mother’s children. She opened the door, however; but it was too late. He was gone. “I opened to my beloved; but my beloved had withdrawn himself, and was gone; my soul failed when he spake: I sought him, but I could not find him; I called him, but he gave me no answer.” Indeed, He had never designed to enter that chamber, nor to rest where she rested. He had only come there to arouse her. If she desired to find Him, she must thread her way back through the streets of that City into which she never ought to have wandered. She must again go without the gate, and seek Him *there*.

And she *did* seek Him; for her heart was really true to her Lord. She returned not to her forbidden rest; but forsaking that goodly chamber, she went forth even at that midnight hour into the dark City, helpless and alone. No voice of love greeted her; no kindly hand sustained, no friendly voice directed her. She was to be chastened, and to know many sorrows ere she again found herself by the side of Him from whom she had wandered. “The watchmen that went about the city found me; they smote me, they wounded me; the keepers

of the walls took away my veil from me." Such is her own narrative of her sorrows. The watchmen of man's City, and the keepers of its walls, can have no sympathy with any one who is unattracted by that City's glories, and refuses to labour for its interests—having an ear deaf to its melodies, an eye closed to its beauties. "Who is blind but my servant? Or deaf as my messenger that I sent? Who is blind as he that is perfect, and blind as the Lord's servant? Seeing many things, but thou observest not: opening the ears, but he heareth not." Such was the character of the One faithful and true Witness; and such, in measure, is the character of all who remember His example, and follow His steps; for they know that from the days of Cain and of Nimrod to the present hour, unregenerate man under Satan has been lord of the earth, and has stamped upon it the impress of his evil hand. They know too that in this there will be no change, except indeed for advance in rebellion, until the Lord shall be revealed in the brightness of His destroying glory. "Human progress," therefore, is to them, only another name for the advance of unregeneracy to its doom. "Antichrist," "Babylon," "Armageddon," "the wine-press of the wrath of God," "the lake that burneth with fire and brimstone," such are the names that indicate to the eye of faith the end and the goal of all present human progress. The more, therefore, the City of man strengthens itself—the more it illumines itself

with brightness, the more the instructed heart trembles ; for it knows what “ will be in the end thereof.” What place then more fearful than that held by those who are the watchmen of man’s City—the strengtheners of its greatness—the defenders of its walls.

If that place had been held only by the Nimrods, and Cæsars, and Caiaphases of earth, and their servants ; if the world’s religiousness had always worn its Pagan or its Jewish garb, and had never assumed the profession of the name of Jesus ; if none of Christ’s servants had been seduced into the belief that the City of man is being gradually transformed into the City of God, the danger would not be what it at present is. But nominal Christianity has undertaken to sanctify the world’s energies. It has encouraged those who give themselves, body and soul, to the advancement and glorification of man’s City, and has told them that in so doing they glorify God. It has put the name of Christ upon Christ’s enemies ; and has striven to identify before the thoughts of men, the City of God and the City of man. And it has wonderfully succeeded. Few recognise that the relation held by the Lord Jesus and His servants the apostles, towards Caiaphas and Cæsar, and all that morally characterised Jerusalem or Rome, is still the relation in which Truth and its servants stand toward every system, secular or religious, that is formed by the hand, or controlled by the will of unregenerate man. Doubtless,

the acknowledgment of this narrows greatly the path of Christ's servants : but is not the way narrow that leadeth unto life ? Is the exhortation to " go without the camp, bearing His reproach," limited to any especial time or place ? Is it not a commandment addressed to all who own the sanctifying blood of Jesus ? " Jesus that He might sanctify the people by His own blood, suffered without the gate. Let us go forth therefore unto Him without the camp, bearing His reproach. For here have we no continuing city, but we seek one to come." Can any words more plainly mark the everlasting difference between the City of God and the City of man ? And as the hour of Antichrist draws nigh, this difference becomes, not indeed more real, but more marked, every day.

We cannot wonder that they whose view is bounded by the horizon of earth should greatly glory in man's present progress. The leaders of the world's energies have not laboured in vain. The City of man grows and waxes stronger and stronger every day : and even professed servants of Christ consent to guard it and to become the watchmen of its walls. We can well conceive how, like Nebuchadnezzar of old, they walk about upon its battlements, and look forth upon its greatness and say, " Is not this the City which our hands have formed, and which our skill and wisdom preserve ? " Religiously and secularly they glory in it ; and woe to the pilgrim stranger that comes across their path

and tells them that her Lord whom she worships, is not only distant from, but AGAINST *them* and *it*. We might expect that their wrath would wax hot against her—that they would smite and wound her, for what more hateful in their sight than such thoughts, and ways, and testimonies as hers? But why did she draw nigh them? Did she indeed expect to find in them sympathy, or to obtain from them direction? Did she imagine that *they* could tell her where to find her Lord; or that *they* would be willing to seek Him with her? She may, perhaps, have thought so; for when the people of God with perplexed heart and uneasy conscience find themselves treading a wrong path, surrounded too by the results of their disobedience, it is not often that they view the circumstances around them with calm sobriety of mind. Impulse and excitement, for the most part, rule their steps; and they earn by their own foolishness, chastisement and sorrow. So was it with her. If, commissioned by her Lord, and coming as from His side, she had met these watchmen and keepers of the City she might have confronted them and triumphed. At any rate, she would have been sustained by His strength. But it was far otherwise now. She appeared before them not only as an alien (that she must ever have been) but as an alien, weak, sorrowful, deserted,—and needing, perhaps claiming, help. Were *they* to be the helpers of that which they abominated? They helped her not, but they smote her.



In human life, however, they who have power and energy to *act upon* others, are far fewer than those who *are acted on*. Men, for the most part, are the ready subjects of others' influence. Multitudes dwell in man's City who are neither its "watchmen," nor "the keepers of its walls," but its "daughters." Trained under its influences, and unresistingly imbibing from their earliest years its principles, they readily receive from the institutions of society around them an abiding impress. Society prepares the mould, and their characters, like plastic clay, are formed therein. Having little ability, and less desire, to test the principles and practices that prevail around them, they find it far more easy to favour what others favour, than to incur the labour and painfulness of examination. Prosperity, success, numerical increase, popular approbation, and the like, are their tests; and anything that answers thereunto is readily accepted by them as good and true. "Securus judicat orbis terrarum." The universal verdict of society is in their judgment a sufficient warrant for Truth. How can that be wrong which the whole world judges to be right? They know that it is more easy to float with the current than to struggle against it: more pleasant to consort with that which is honoured and dignified, than with that which is outcast and despised. To look too searchingly into any thing is in their estimate the part of folly, rather than of wisdom. They know that, as the foot moves most pleasantly when it

lightly skims over the ground's surface, so does the heart know least of sorrow when it thinks and feels *superficially*. Carelessly, therefore, they bow down before anything that educationally they have learned to reverence. When not swayed by habit, they are guided by expediency. Where the multitude leads, they follow. Such is the character of the "daughters of Jerusalem." They are the children of the City of man. It is their parent and their home. They love it—cleave to it—rejoice in it. Nothing is more abhorrent to their hearts than the thought of going without the gate, bearing reproach. If not sensitive to the appeals of Truth, they are very sensitive to ignominy, and dread the scorn of men even more than they covet their approbation. Truth, or such portions of it as admit of being established in a place of dignity and honour they are not unwilling to accept: but *the reproach* of Truth they fear. Is not this the condition of myriads in Christendom now? Floating carelessly on the surface of the stream, they are the sport of every casual influence, and are thus being prepared as a ready prey for that coming hour of delusion, before whose potency none but those who have really the spirit of Christ will stand. In proportion as the bonds which have hitherto bound human society together are dissolved, and as men become more "like unto fishes of the sea that have no ruler over them," so will they become a more ready prey to the influence of those who will shape the world's

moral course at its closing hour, and be swept into that mighty drag-net which will enclose unto perdition.

Yet, even among the daughters of "man's City," grace can, and does, find a remnant. Not unfrequently before, had this pilgrim stranger whom the sun had looked on and blackened, who could speak of the roes and hinds of the field, or of vineyards, or sheep-folds, or of lilies, but knew not the manners of the City, being a stranger to its palaces and its priestly courts—not unfrequently before had this wanderer found herself in the presence of the daughters of Jerusalem. Yet never before had she stood before them as now, in reproach and dishonour, smitten and wounded, and that by the guardians of their City—at a time too when she could no longer say that she was with her Lord, or closely following His footsteps. On the contrary, she had to confess that she had wandered from and lost Him; and she even appealed in the excitement of her harassed heart to *them*, as if *they* could tell her where to find Him whom her soul loved—a vain and foolish appeal, for how could *they* direct her who knew nothing of her Lord or of His ways. Yet such often is the manner of the servants of Christ when they have wandered from the practical place into which He seeks to separate His people. Impulsiveness and excitement give birth to great activities; but there is a want of reflectiveness—a want of sobriety of mind. There is an absence of the calm

guidance of Truth; and if this condition of soul continues, if Christ do not quickly bring back to the place where He feeds His separated flock with His own pure Truth, the results are unspeakably sorrowful. What more disastrous than unguided or misguided energy! It is as when soldiers, abandoning their banners and their lawful leaders, rush wildly into the battle-field: or as when a torrent having no channels prepared for its course, spreads desolation where its waters rightly guided would have brought fertility and fruitfulness.

It was, however, otherwise with her whose history we are here considering. Her wandering was not to be prolonged. Her Lord had come and effectually roused her from her evil slumber, and her heart was incapable of rest until she again found herself practically by His side. If she had been content with anything short of this, she would probably have linked herself in some way to the daughters of Jerusalem, and abjectly submitted to their control, and made the keepers of their walls her masters. When the people of Christ are content to remain in practical distance from their Lord, this commonly becomes their condition—a condition of degradation and debasement. With her, however, it was far otherwise. A secret hand was quickly guiding her back to her place of holy rest, and she was truly willing to follow as it led. Soon, therefore, she ceased from seeking counsel of the daughters of the City, and became to *them* a testifier and a guide.

The praises of Him whom her heart loved were in her lips, and that not feignedly. There was fervour in her recital of His excellencies—vigour in her description. It was the utterance of the heart: and although her position was not yet rectified, yet it was *being* rectified. She was not settling down into a place of practical distance from her Lord. Every thought, every expression indicated that her soul was bent on recovering the place which she had lost. Her testimony therefore was blessed. It took effect upon the souls of those that heard. And they said at last, “Whither is thy beloved gone, O thou fairest among women? whither is thy beloved turned aside? that we may seek Him with thee.”

These words are indeed notable. If the daughters of Jerusalem had merely said, We will join thee, or help thee in seeking thy beloved, it might have been nothing more than the expression of a transient feeling which sudden emotion may produce on unstable fickle hearts. But in that case they would not have used the words, “O thou fairest among women.” These were indeed strange words to be found in the lips of those who, when they had once before looked on this stranger, had despised her because she had known toil and travail in the vineyard, or at the folds where she had laboured for her Lord, where the sun had scorched her and the storm beaten on her. But now, although she was not only still blackened and worn, but smitten also and wounded, and her heart restless and unhappy, she nevertheless

was suddenly addressed by those who had hitherto contemned her, as the "fairest among women." Her blackness had now become comeliness in their sight: her bruises were honourable: her sufferings blessed. The eye of faith was given them. Their estimate of her was changed. They viewed her as she was viewed by Him who had now become their Lord as well as hers; for none but those who have communion of heart with Him can see honour and beauty in those whom man looks on "as the filth of the world and the off-scouring of all things." Wherever the heart's estimate is so altered as to judge *that* to be honour and beauty which before it accounted ignominy and vileness, there must have been a change wrought by the Spirit of the living God. And now grace had accomplished its object. She had been aroused, chastened, taught, and made in sorrow to learn the appointed lesson; yet even in the midst of that sorrow had been so favoured, so blessed, that when she returned to her Lord, she returned to Him with increase. Others had been won to discern His excellencies, and to seek the place in which He loved to dwell. That place she now descried: that place she again found. "My beloved," she said, "is gone down into His garden, to the beds of spices, to feed in the gardens, and to gather lilies." These spices and these lilies were not found in the City. They were *without* the gate. There she had before rejoiced in the presence and favour of Him whom her soul loved, and there she

rejoiced in Him again : with increased apprehension of the contrast between the rest of the City, and the joys of the garden : with increased consciousness of her need of the mercy and grace of His faithful hand. Once more we find her able to say, “ My beloved is mine, and I am His. He feedeth among the lilies.”

May we learn the lesson. May we fear even to rest in man’s City : much more may we dread to be numbered among its “ watchmen.” Let us go without the gate, acting *on* man’s City, if we can, so as to gather out of it ; but showing ourselves to be not *of* it. If the servants of Christ give themselves over to the world to subserve its purposes and forward its designs, they will find themselves at last like Samson in the hand of the Philistines—his eyes put out—his Nazarite separation lost—his distinctive strength departed, whilst that which yet remained to him was forced into the service of the stranger—the service of the enemies of the God of Israel.

## V.

### CHAPTER VI. 10 TO END.

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THE great object of this Song is, as I have before observed, to mark the place (or rather that which *should* be the place) of the Church, in the midst of the earth's present darkness, whilst her Lord is absent, and herself a pilgrim. The proud City of man and the guardians thereof had no knowledge of her who ventured without the gate, trusting to the guidance of a voice that they knew not. If they thought of her at all, they thought of her only to despise. They understood neither her sorrows nor her joys. Her comeliness, that is to say, her comeliness in the eyes of her heavenly Lord, was in their sight "blackness." What honour in the estimate of the keepers of man's City could attach to one whose blackened visage was scorched by the sun and beaten by the storm; whose home and occupation was at the sheepfold, or in the vineyards, or in the distant valley where flowers and fruits of heavenly preciousness might bloom or ripen, but where nothing was found that was great, or elevated, or ennobling in the estimate of those who desired



rather to reign as kings than to go without the camp bearing the reproach of Truth. Yet *that* was the only place in which she whose joys and sorrows are the subjects of this "Song" could find communion with her Lord. *There* she could rejoice in Him and He in her: but if from that place she wandered, she found not peace, not happiness, but chastisement and sorrow.

But although this "Song" belongs to this present night of suffering, and not to that future hour when Truth shall prosper and be exalted, yet there are in it, interspersed here and there, many allusions to that coming morning of brightness when "the day shall break, and the shadows flee away." Of this the passage before us is an example.

The words, "Who is she that LOOKETH FORTH as the morning, fair as the moon, clear as the sun, and terrible as an army with banners?" are words incapable of being applied to the Church during the present period of its humiliation. The words, "LOOKETH FORTH" imply manifestation, and to the Church in the present dispensation no *such* manifestation pertains. Whatever the Church, or any in it, may be in the eyes of Christ, or in the estimate of faith, the time for the declaration of their excellency and preciousness is not yet come. "The world knoweth us not, because it knew Him not." But the moment the day of the coming dispensation dawns, and converted Israel becomes God's witness in the earth, the scene changes. The

day of Truth's honour will have come, and Israel as being Truth's witness will of necessity share its exaltation and triumph. "For Zion's sake will I not hold my peace, and for Jerusalem's sake I will not rest, until the righteousness thereof go forth as brightness, and the salvation thereof as a lamp that burneth. And the Gentiles shall see thy righteousness, and all kings thy glory: and thou shalt be called by a new name, which the mouth of the Lord shall name. Thou shalt also be a crown of glory in the hand of the Lord, and a royal diadem in the hand of thy God." (Isa. lxii.) Blessed words, which shall be fulfilled in their season. But they belong not to the present condition of the servants of Truth. To them a far different path has been appointed. It was never intended that *they* should reign as kings. On the contrary, they were set forth by God as persons appointed to death, who were to be, for Christ's sake, "despised," "reviled," "persecuted," "defamed," "made as the filth of the world and the off-scouring of all things." (I Cor. iv. 9, &c.) Such was the path trodden by the apostles. It was no self-chosen course. Their sufferings were not earned by haughtiness, or self-will, or fanatical peculiarities. They resulted from simple, straightforward humble adherence to Christ and to His Truth: and therefore their sufferings were blessed. But with the apostles, we may almost say that *such* sufferings ceased. St. Paul intimated that it would be so, when he said, "I think that God hath set

forth us the apostles *last*, as persons appointed to death." St. Paul marked with sorrow the disposition that prevailed in those around him, to reign rather than to suffer; to be *within* rather than *without* the camp. Throughout the last eighteen hundred years, few have even desired the place which the pilgrim-stranger in this Song is described as holding. They have sought after the throne far more than "the valley": influence has been purchased by the sacrifice of Truth: and the practical power of Christianity has in proportion waned.

Yet, however Christ would have rejoiced in seeing His people treading patiently the path of holy separation, it is not, and cannot be, pleasing in His sight that falsehood and iniquity should prevail, or that His people should be despised and His Truth rejected. His wisdom and grace may cause Him for a season to acquiesce in this, but it is His purpose finally that Righteousness and Truth and the servants thereof should flourish in the earth and triumph. Even then, if His Church throughout this dispensation had kept her proper place of faithful separateness, He still would have looked forward to and welcomed the approach of that hour when the place of suffering will be exchanged for one of honour, and when she who is appointed to be His new witness in the earth shall "look forth in brightness, fair as the moon, clear as the sun, and terrible as an army with banners."

But, seeing that the people of God have greatly

failed in keeping their proper place of separateness, and have become weak in the day of conflict, we find in this an added reason why the coming day of Israel's return unto the Lord should be looked forward to, as a relief against the oppressive sense of the earth's present fruitlessness. Fruitfulness, if found anywhere, would be found in "the valley"; the place, that is, of retired humble separateness, where alone fruits ripen meet for the Lord—where alone "the vines flourish and the pomegranates bud." Such "valleys" cannot be found everywhere; nor can we create them for ourselves when and where we please. Many indeed have sought to do this. We love to choose for ourselves the spots we cultivate, and to determine for ourselves the character and limits of our separation. But "the valley" of true fruitfulness cannot thus be gained. It is a place unto which the wisdom, and Truth, and Spirit of Christ can alone guide. In seeking it the understanding and conscience must be exercised as well as the heart. There must be ability to discern Truth, and grace to follow it when discerned; otherwise, the true "valley" of blessing at the foot of the mountains of Bether (separation) will not be reached. It would be too much to say that it has been reached by *none*; for it is spoken of as a place not unknown to her whose history is set before us in this "Song." Yet her companions were few. She is evidently spoken of as one singularly isolated and alone. Few accompanied her to "the valley"; few

joined her in watching over the vines and pomegranates that were there; and the consequence was paucity of fruit. I do not indeed say that this paucity was caused solely by the fewness of those that shared her labours. There might also have been languor in her own discouraged hand; or the blighting noxious influences of earth might have been permitted to destroy. All these causes may have concurrently operated to produce the result plainly indicated in the words that follow: "I went down into the garden of nuts to see the fruits of the valley, and to see whether the vine flourished, and the pomegranates budded. Or ever I was aware (*i.e.* suddenly) my soul set me on the chariots of my willing people." The Lord visited the valley. He does not indeed say that He found *no* fruit; but evidently He found not that which satisfied His desires, and therefore His heart turned to the future. "Suddenly my soul set me on the chariots of my willing people." His soul looked onward to the day of Israel's strength when they shall be willing in the day of His power, in the beauties of holiness from the womb of the morning—the first birth, that is, of the millennial day, when they "shall blossom and bud, and fill the face of the world with fruit."

And can *we* (feeble and limited as our apprehensions are) can even *we* contemplate the present condition of Christianity and not feel a certain comfort and relief in turning from it to that future hour when Truth shall no longer be successfully resisted

by its enemies, or find its interests betrayed by the weakness and unfaithfulness of its friends? The history of Christendom throughout, from the day the apostles died on to the present hour, has been a sorrowful and evil history. The professing Gentile Church has not continued in God's goodness, and therefore, like a diseased and cankered branch, it is to be cut off from the olive tree of blessing. The reaction against the ritualistic abominations of Christendom that took place at the time of the Reformation, was an intervention of God's goodness, for which His true people praise Him and will praise Him for ever and ever: yet Protestantism, even in the days of its early vigour, was content to spare not a few of the fetters which ritualism and superstition had forged, and was tempted to forge other bonds which have fatally bound those who wear them to the thrones and potentates of earth, and not unfrequently made the true saints of God like so many Jehoshaphats following in the train of Ahab. There is indeed still some true Protestantism, and we thank God for it; but for the most part the Protestantism of the present hour is nominal merely. Some so-called Protestants, deceiving and deceived, are rushing back to the vile idolatries and superstitions of Rome; others are plunging into the black darkness of Neologian infidelity; whilst another part look calmly on with Gallio-like indifference, careless about everything save that which bears upon their interests in earth—being worship-

pers of "human progress," and not unfrequently of Mammon.

At various periods in the history of Protestantism attempts have been made by many to emancipate themselves from restraints that have borne injuriously on their consciences; nor have such efforts been unprospered when the word of God has been really adhered to as the guide. Liberty is precious; but true holy liberty can only be gained by close subjection to the *revealed* will of God as declared in Holy Scripture.

None but the servants of Truth are really free. If not cleaving to the Truth, we are sure to be in servitude to some form of delusive error that human selfishness under Satan has constructed for the advancement of its own ends: and thus man—not God, will be our master. The present is a moment of great activity among many Christians who have set themselves free, as they say, from the restraint of human systems, that they may serve the Lord with unfettered hand. But what is more dangerous than a hand that has struck off former fetters, but refuses to submit itself to the restraining guidance of Truth? Nor is subjection to Truth the work of a moment. It is not easy for such as we, with all our ignorance and all our prejudices, to read and interpret the word of God with calm sobriety of mind. Nor is it easy in such a day as this to cleave to the faith once delivered to the saints. It is far easier to talk smooth things about love, "large-heartedness"

and the like, and to join in the prevailing cry against creeds and confessions and "old orthodox theology," and all "stereotyped" form of doctrine; as if the Holy Spirit disowned precision, and clearness, and fixedness, and delighted in vagueness, mystification and change. The Apostle thought otherwise when he said, "We use great plainness of speech"; and when he exhorted Timothy to remember "the form of sound words," and to keep through the Holy Ghost that precious deposit of Truth which had been committed to him. Order, surely, and not confusion, should characterise the assemblies and arrangements of God's people; but this cannot be unless the word of God be rigorously applied as the test of all doctrine and all practice, and unless teachers qualified by God's own Spirit be recognised as the appointed means by which His people are to be fed with the food that is needful to their growth. If such teachers sent of God be not sought after and owned; if all the Lord's people are supposed to be occasionally, if not abidingly, "prophets"; if circumstances connected with wealth, birth, or worldly standing, are deemed to give fitness for control, or presidency, or prominence in the Church of God—what then can be expected except confusion, error, and finally, heretical departure from the faith? In Cromwell's camp it was said that there were none to be taught, because all were teachers. "It was said of Athens that you might walk through her streets, and more



readily find gods than men : it might be said of the latter years of the Commonwealth that there were almost as many sects as worshippers." This description is true, and we well know the terribleness of the reaction that followed. An hour of liberty after bondage is the very time when the closest guidance of God's Truth is needed : and *that* cannot be received by His people collectively except through His word, unfolded by persons whom He has, by His Spirit, qualified. If the saints of God individually were instructed in Holy Scripture and loved it, they would soon be able to discern who were, and who were not, fitted to be guides. They would be able to discern the ruin of the walls of Truth, and might be perhaps privileged to aid in their restoration. But in default of such knowledge, their condition must be as that of the blind or the deaf, whose wisdom, while they so continue, is to be quiet and sit still. Nehemiah welcomed the co-operation of all who were *able* to labour with him for the restoration of the walls of Jerusalem. But a necessary qualification in those who so laboured was, that they should be capable of distinguishing between "rubbish" and "stones" ; or at any rate, that they should be willing to submit to the guidance of those who were able to make the needed distinction. Of this we may be very sure, that Truth alone can guide to the true "valley" of separation, or give vigour and fruitfulness to that which is planted there.

The relations, past, present, and to come of the earth, and all things in it, whether of men individually, or of nations corporately, or of rulers, or of Israel, or of the Church, both professing and true—the relations in which all these stand to God and God to them, is abundantly revealed in Scripture: and the right knowledge of these relations is the knowledge of Truth. Yet how little is the apprehension of these things either possessed or sought after! The various lessons taught by the different dispensations that have been or are yet to be, are not learned. Even the difference between a paradisiacal earth that did *not* groan, and a fallen earth that *does* groan, is feebly recognised: and Christians (even true Christians) marvel when they are told that they are as branches or twigs, few and little, that grow on a cankered bough—a bough destined to be broken off in judgment, although in them (the twigs) God's grace has preserved life, and sap, and fruitfulness which He will not fail to acknowledge both now and in the day of glory. Few, however, understand the lesson. They know not what the branch is, nor the canker, nor the coming excision, nor that which is to follow thereon. "Ah, Lord God! they say of me, Doth he not speak parables?" were the words of the Prophet of old. The prophets and apostles would still say so if they could visit earth and witness the manner in which their testimonies respecting the future are received.

But how altered the scene when the veil shall at

last be rent from the heart of Israel. Not only shall the light of Truth break upon their souls with a fulness and power which we Gentiles have not known, but their hearts shall be prepared not only to welcome the light, but to retain and to use it with a faithfulness and vigour that will not languish, but be maintained continuously. “The Redeemer shall come to Zion, and unto them that turn from transgression in Jacob, saith the Lord. As for me, this is my covenant with them, saith the Lord; my Spirit that is upon thee, and my words which I have put in thy mouth, shall not depart out of thy mouth, nor out of the mouth of thy seed, nor out of the mouth of thy seed’s seed, saith the Lord, from henceforth and for ever.” Is. lix. 20. “I will betroth thee unto me for ever; yea, I will betroth thee unto me in righteousness, and in judgment, and in lovingkindness, and in mercies. I will even betroth thee unto me in faithfulness; and thou shalt know the Lord.” Hosea ii. 19. “The remnant of Israel shall not do iniquity, nor speak lies; neither shall a deceitful tongue be found in their mouth: for they shall feed and lie down, and none shall make them afraid.” Zeph. iii. 13. Their soul shall be as the soul of a weaned child. Ps. cxxxii. They shall lean wholly on the Lord their God, and therefore shall be as Mount Zion which cannot be removed, but abideth for ever. Ps. cxxv. It shall be said of them, “Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together

in unity." Ps. cxxxiii. Thus shall they be indeed a prepared people, fitted to have communion with the thoughts and intentions of the Lord—fitted under Him as priests to instruct, and as kings to govern all nations. They shall be "a kingdom of priests." "Men shall call them priests of the Lord, and ministers of our God. All that see them shall acknowledge them, that they are the seed that the Lord has blessed." (Isa. lxi.)

Well therefore can we understand the reason of the call to the Shulamite (*i.e.* to the bride of Solomon) to return. "Return, return, O Shulamite: return, return, that we may look upon thee." Not till the true Solomon shall appear and establish His glory in the earth, and call the daughter of Zion back to His love, and teach her to call Him Ishi (my husband) and betroth her unto Him for ever in faithfulness, and lovingkindness, and in mercy—not till then, shall the darkness that now broods over the nations depart, nor Truth have in the earth any better witness to its power than such as is supplied by the checked and hindered fruitfulness of that valley, which, even if it were rightly fruitful, would still find its fruitfulness despised. However faithfully and successfully the pilgrim-stranger might have laboured, she and her labours would still have been by men contemned.

But it shall be otherwise with the Shulamite. In her shall be seen grace and glory. The standing that she will take in the earth will be one of mani-

fested strength and glorious power. In her shall be seen Mahanaim—*two* hosts.

“Mahanaim” was a word used by Jacob when on his return with his little band from the land of his exile, the angels of God met him. “And when Jacob saw them, he said, This is God’s host: and he called the name of that place Mahanaim”—*i.e.* “two hosts.” Jacob, as I have elsewhere observed,\* was ever wont to magnify his own strength, and to exalt it into virtual co-equality with the strength of God. We might indeed have supposed that in beholding the might and majesty of the Host of God, Jacob would have forgotten his own little company: but he did not; for it was not the habit of Jacob to forget himself, nor anything connected with himself. He could not forget the band which he for so many years had laboured to gather; nor consent that it should stand in any other place than one of acknowledged association with the Host of heaven. Hence the word, “Mahanaim.”

Yet expressions which God may permit or cause His servants to use, may conceal beneath them a meaning which they who use them apprehend not. So was it with the word “Mahanaim.” It embodies a truth for which heaven and earth, in ages yet to come, will praise and magnify the God of Jacob for ever. For an hour is coming when Israel, after having been “brought very low,” shall suddenly be

\* See “Occasional Papers,” part iv. pp. 25, 26, and “Narratives from the Old Testament,” pp. 70-73, as advertised at end.

strengthened by the Lord of hosts their God, "when I have bent Judah for me, filled the bow with Ephraim, and raised up thy sons, O Zion, against thy sons, O Greece, and made thee as the sword of a mighty man. And the Lord shall be seen over them, and his arrow shall go forth as the lightning; and the Lord God shall blow the trumpet, and shall go with whirlwinds of the south." Zech. ix. 13. "And thou, O tower of the flock, the stronghold of the daughter of Zion, unto thee shall it come, even the first dominion; the kingdom shall come to the daughter of Jerusalem . . . for I will make thine horn iron and thy hoofs brass: and thou shalt beat in pieces many people: and I will consecrate their gain unto the Lord, and their substance unto the Lord of the whole earth." Micah iv. 8, 13. See also Micah vii. 16. These, and many other like passages, supply abundant evidence as to Israel being made the host of the Lord *in the earth*. Yet not in dissociation from the hosts that are above. "Thither cause thy mighty ones to come down, O Lord," are words used in relation to the time of Israel's deliverance. "The Lord my God shall come, and all the saints with thee." "The house of David shall be as God, as the angel of the Lord before them." "The Lord shall be seen over them." The strength and glory of the host of heaven shall thus be connected with the strength of Israel in the earth; so that duplication of might, heavenly and earthly, shall mark the condition of

the Bride of Solomon in the day of her espousals—a condition well answering to the expression which Jacob ignorantly, yet prophetically used, when he uttered the word, “Mahanaim.”

From the prominence given in this passage to the Shulamite and her glory, it might almost seem as if the pilgrim-stranger, who up to that moment had been the peculiar object of the Lord’s solicitude and love, were forgotten: but it was far otherwise. A glory was to be hers greater and more perfect than that which the Shulamite was *then* to inherit: I speak not now of her final destiny. She who had so long sojourned in the earth as an outcast-wanderer, was now to share her Lord’s unearthly glory above the heavens. Many times during the course of her pilgrimage she had been addressed as one to whom honour and glory pertained. Although never said to “*look forth*” as the morning (for that would have implied manifestation) yet she is described as being in her Lord’s estimate comparable to one who moved in solemn state and majesty in the train of a triumphant monarch: (see chap. i.) and again: “Thou art beautiful, O my love, as Tirzah, comely as Jerusalem, terrible as an army with banners”—anticipative words descriptive of a glory that she deserved, and which in due time she would receive. And now that time had come. She was to be numbered with that heavenly host, whose presence was to give to the Shulamite, one of the chief and most distinctive characteristics of her

glory. She was to constitute part of that heavenly host that was appointed to watch over the Shulamite from above, and to minister to her from that heavenly City into which flesh and blood cannot enter. She was now to join her Lord on those mountains of Bether (separation) to which on former occasions she had bid Him return until the morning should break, and the shadows flee away, and the time be come for her to share His heavenly separation. And now that time had drawn nigh. She was soon to join her Lord on the mountains of His separation, and to become His associate in that distant glory.

But what was her practical condition when thus called away unto her heavenly home? Was it one of weakness, or of strength? In another part of this "Song" we find the answer. She is described as coming up out of the wilderness as one faint and weary, leaning on the arm of her Beloved. The leaning was indeed a token of weakness: but the arm on which she leaned was almighty, and therein she had everlasting strength.

She leaned, evidently, as one very conscious that she was weak: very conscious that she was cast as a burden on the sufficiency of His faithful arm. There was no disposition to feed on the sinew of her own strength. No mention is made by her of past experiences either of sorrow, or of joy. There had been times when she had spoken of her "gardens" and her "pomegranates," her "milk"



and her “spices,” and when she had asked her Lord to come and view *with* her the scene of her labour and of their common joy. There had been times when, filled with the comfort of His love, she had besought the daughters of Jerusalem not to arouse Him as He rested with her in her lowly habitation. But it was otherwise now. Now that the termination of her wilderness sojourn had really come, and new scenes were opening before her, her soul turned not to the thought of that which she had ministered unto the Lord: she thought only of that which she needed to be ministered to her. She made no mention of *her* ministrations. The sheepfolds, the vineyards, the garden, the valley, all her labours, all her joys, and all her sorrows connected therewith, were as things of the past. To *them* she looked not for the sustainment and comfort that she needed then. She knew that her need could be met by one thing only, even by love, full, faithful, free, almighty: and she knew where to look for that love. “Set me as a seal upon thine heart, as a seal upon thine arm,” was her language; for thy heart is faithful, and thine arm almighty. If I were to mistrust thy love—if I were to question its faithfulness, how then would the love I bear to thee become to me the source of anguish unspeakable, for “jealousy is cruel as the grave: the coals thereof are coals of fire, which hath a most vehement flame.” But I mistrust not thy love: wholly I lean on it. I know that it is love faithful and

true—love that “many waters cannot quench, neither can the floods drown it.” It is love, too, that is free as well as faithful, flowing spontaneously from the depths of its own fulness; for how can love be purchased? “If a man would give all the substance of his house for love, it would utterly be contemned.” On such love she leaned: by such love she was sustained. *So* she left the wilderness: *so* she entered into her rest.

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