

# **Union and Communion**

**or**

## **Thoughts on the Song of Solomon**

By  
J. Hudson Taylor

The text used, unless stated otherwise, is that of the Revised Authorised Version.

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## Introduction

The great purpose towards which all the dispensational dealings of God are tending is revealed to us in these words - that God may be all in all. (1 Corinthians 15:28) With this agrees the teaching of our Lord - And this is (the object of) life eternal, that they might know you the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent. (John 17: 3) This being so, should we not act wisely by keeping this object ever in view in our daily life and study of God's holy Word?

All Scripture is given by inspiration of God and is profitable; and hence no part is, or can be, neglected without loss. Few portions of the Word will help the devout student more in the pursuit of this all-important "knowledge of God" than the too-much-neglected Song of Solomon. Like other portions of the Word of God, this book has its difficulties. But so have all the works of God. Is not the fact that they surpass our unaided powers of comprehension and research a "sign-manual" of divinity? Can a feeble man expect to grasp divine power, or to understand and interpret the works or the providences of the All-wise? And if not, is it surprising that his Word also needs superhuman wisdom for its interpretation? Thanks be to God, the illumination of the Holy Spirit is promised to all who seek it! What more can we desire?

If you read without a key, this book is especially unintelligible, but that key is easily found in the express teachings of the New Testament. The Incarnate Word is the true key to the written Word; but even before the incarnation, the devout student of the Old Testament would find much help to the understanding of the sacred mysteries of this book in the prophetic writings; for there Israel was taught that her Maker was her Husband (Isaiah 54:5). John the Baptist, the last of the prophets, recognized the Bridegroom in the person of Christ, and said - He who has the bride is the bridegroom; but the friend of the bridegroom who stands and hears him, rejoices greatly because of the bridegroom's voice Therefore this my joy of mine is fulfilled. (John 3:29) Paul, in his Letter to the Ephesians, goes still further, and teaches that the union of Christ with his Church, and her subjection to him, underlies the very relationship of marriage, and affords the pattern for every godly union. (Ephesians 5:22-33)

In Solomon, the bridegroom-king, as well as being the author of this poem, is a type of our Lord, the true Prince of peace, in

his coming reign. Then will be found not merely his bride, the Church, but also a willing people, his subjects, over whom he will reign gloriously. Then, distant potentates will bring their wealth, and behold the glory of the enthroned King, proving him with hard questions, as once came the Queen of Sheba to King Solomon; and blessed will they be to whom this privilege is accorded. A brief glance will suffice them for a lifetime; but what shall be the royal dignity and blessedness of the risen and exalted bride! Forever with her Lord, forever like her Lord, forever conscious that his desire is toward her, she will share alike his heart and his throne. Can a study of the book which helps us to understand these mysteries of grace and love be other than most profitable?

It is interesting to notice the contrast between this book and the one preceding it. The Book of Ecclesiastes teaches emphatically that - Vanity of vanities, all is vanity: and is thus the necessary introduction to the Song of Solomon, which shows how true blessing and satisfaction are to be possessed. In like manner, our Saviour's teaching in the fourth chapter of John points out in a word the powerlessness of earthly things to give lasting satisfaction, in striking contrast with the flood of blessing that results from the presence of the Holy Spirit (whose work it is not to reveal himself, but Christ as the Bridegroom of the soul) - whoever drinks of this water will thirst again, but whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will never thirst. But the water that I shall give him will become in him a fountain of water springing up - overflowing, on and on - into everlasting life. (John 4:13-14)

We will find it helpful to consider the book in six sections: -

1. The unsatisfied life and its remedy (1:2 - 2:7)
2. Communion broken Restoration (2:8 - 3: 5)
3. Unbroken communion (3:6 - 5:1)
4. Communion again broken. Restoration (5:2 - 6:10)
5. Fruits of recognised union (6:11 - 8: 4)
6. Unrestrained communion (8:5-14)

In each of them, we find the speakers to be the bride, the Bridegroom, and the daughters of Jerusalem. It is not usually difficult to ascertain who the speakers are, though in some of the verses, different conclusions have been arrived at. The bride speaks of the Bridegroom as her beloved; the Bridegroom speaks of her as his love, while the address of the daughters of Jerusalem is more varied. In the first four

sections, they style her the fairest among women, but in the fifth, she is spoken of as the Shulamite, or the King's bride, and also as the Prince's daughter.

A student of this book will find great help in suitable Bible-marking. A horizontal line marking off the address of each speaker, with a double line to divide the sections, would be useful, as also perpendicular lines in the margin to indicate the speaker. We have ourselves ruled a single line to connect the verses which contain the utterances of the bride; a double line to indicate those of the Bridegroom, and a wavy line to indicate the addresses of the daughters of Jerusalem.

It will be observed that the bride is the chief speaker in Sections 1-2, and is much pre-occupied with herself; but in Section 3, where the communion is unbroken, she has little to say, and become a hearer. The daughters of Jerusalem give a long address, and the Bridegroom his longest. In that section for the first time he calls her his bride, and allures her to fellowship in service. In Section 4, the bride again is the chief speaker, but after her restoration the Bridegroom speaks at length, and does not reproach her. In Section 5, we notice that the bride is no longer called the fairest among women, but claims herself to be, and is recognised as, the royal bride. In Section 6, the Bridegroom claims her from her very birth, and not merely from her espousals, as God did when he claimed Israel (Ezekiel 16).

*In the secret of His presence,  
How my soul delights to hide!  
Oh, how precious are the lessons  
Which I learn at Jesus' side!  
Earthly cares can never vex me,  
Neither trials lay me low:  
For when Satan comes to tempt me,  
to the secret place I go!*  
(Ellen Lakshmi Goreh)

**The Title: "*The Song of Songs, which is Solomon's.*"**

Well may this book be called the Song of Songs! There is no song like it. If it is read aright, it brings a gladness to the heart far beyond the joy of earthly things, as heaven is higher than the earth. It has been well said that this is a song which grace alone can teach, and experience alone can learn. Our Saviour, speaking of the union of the branch with the vine, adds - These things I have I spoken unto you, that my joy may remain in you, and that your joy may be full. (John 15:11) And the beloved disciple, writing of him who was from the beginning, and who was with the Father, and was manifested unto us (that we might share the fellowship which he enjoyed, also said - And these things we write to you that your joy may be full (1 John 1:1-2,4).

Union with Christ and abiding in Christ, what do they secure? Peace, perfect peace; rest, constant rest; answers to all our prayers; victory over all our foes; pure, holy living; ever-increasing fruitfulness. All, all of these things are the glad outcome of abiding in Christ. To deepen this union, to make this abiding more constant, is the practical use of this precious book.

## **Section 1: The Unsatisfied Life and its Remedy (Song 1:2 - 2:7)**

There is no difficulty in recognising the bride as the speaker in 1:2-7. The words are not those of one dead in trespasses and sins, to whom the Lord is as a root out of a dry ground, without form and comeliness. The speaker has had her eyes opened to behold his beauty, and longs for a fuller enjoyment of his love.

Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth - for your love (better, loves = endearments, caresses) is better than wine. (2) It is well that it should be so; it marks a distinct stage in the development of the life of grace in the soul. And this recorded experience gives, as it were, a divine warrant for the desire for sensible manifestations of his presence and sensible communications of his love. It was not always thus with her. Once, she was content in his absence - other society and other occupations sufficed her; but now it can never be so again. The world can never be to her what it once was; the betrothed bride has learnt to love her Lord, and no other society than his can satisfy her. His visits may be occasional, and brief; but they are precious times of enjoyment. Their memory is cherished in the intervals, and their repetition longed for. There is no real satisfaction in his absence, and yet, alas! he is not always with her: he comes and goes.

Now her joy in him is a heaven below; but again she is longing, and longing in vain, for his presence. Like the ever-changing tide, her experience is an ebbing and flowing one. It may even be that unrest is the rule, and satisfaction the exception. Is there no help for this? Must it always continue so? Has he, can he have, created these unquenchable longings only to tantalise her? Strange indeed it would be if this were the case. Yet are there not many of the Lord's people whose habitual experience corresponds with hers? They do not know the rest, the joy of abiding in Christ; and they do not know how to attain to it, nor why it is not theirs. Are there not many who look back to the delightful times of their first espousals, who, so far from finding richer inheritance in Christ than they then had, are ever conscious that they have lost their first love, and might express their experience in the sad lament -

*Where is the blessedness I knew  
When first I saw the Lord?  
Where is the soul-refreshing view*

*Of Jesus and his word?*

(William Cowper, 1731-1800)

Again, others who may not have lost their first love still feel that the occasional interruptions to communion are becoming increasingly unbearable as the world becomes less and he becomes more. His absence is an ever-increasing distress - your love is better than wine (vs. 2).

“Would that his love were strong and constant like mine, and that he never withdrew the light of his countenance!” Poor mistaken one! There is a love far stronger than your waiting, longing for satisfaction. The Bridegroom is waiting for you all the time. The conditions that debar his approach are all of your own making. Take the right place before him, and he will be most ready, most glad, to satisfy your deepest longings, to meet and supply your every need. What should we think of a betrothed one whose conceit and self-will prevented not only the consummation of her own joy, but of his who had given her his heart?

Though never at rest in his absence, she cannot trust him fully; and she does not care to give up her own name, her own rights and possessions, her own will to him who has become necessary for her happiness. She would rather claim him fully without giving herself fully to him; but it can never be. While she retains her own name, she can never claim his. She may not promise to love and honour if she will not also promise to obey: and till her love reaches that point of surrender, she must remain an unsatisfied lover. She cannot, as a satisfied bride, find rest in the home of her husband. While she retains her own will, and the control of her own possessions, she must be content to live on her own resources; she cannot claim his.

Could there be a sadder proof of the extent and reality of the Fall than the deep-seated distrust of our loving Lord and Master, which makes us hesitate to give ourselves entirely up to him, and fears that he might require something beyond our powers, or call for something that we should find hard to give up or to do? The real reason for an unsatisfied life lies too often in an unsundered will. And yet how foolish, as well as how wrong, this is! Do we fancy that we are wiser than he? Or, that our love for ourselves is more tender and strong than his? Or, that we know ourselves better than he does? How our distrust must grieve and wound afresh the tender heart of him who was for us the Man of Sorrows! What

would be the feelings of an earthly bridegroom if he discovered that his chosen bride was dreading to marry him, lest, when he had the power, he should make her life miserable? Yet how many of the Lord's redeemed treat him like that! No wonder they are neither happy nor satisfied!

But true love cannot be stationary; it must either decline or grow. Despite all the unworthy fears of our poor hearts, divine love is destined to conquer. The bride exclaims - Because of the fragrance of your good ointments, your name is ointment poured forth: therefore the virgins love you. Lead me away! (1:3-4).

There was no such ointment like that with which the High Priest was anointed- our Bridegroom is a Priest as well as a King. The trembling bride cannot wholly dismiss her fears; but the unrest and the longing become unbearable, and she determines to surrender all, and, come what may, to follow fully. She will yield her very soul to him, heart and hand, influence and possessions. Nothing can be so insupportable as his absence! If he leads to another Moriah, or even to a Calvary, she will follow him. We will run after you (i.e. the Bridegroom - masculine singular), declare the daughters of Jerusalem (vs. 4).

But ah! what follows? A wonderful glad surprise! No Moriah, no Calvary; on the contrary, a King! When the heart submits, then Jesus reigns. And where Jesus reigns, there is rest. And where does he lead his bride? The king has brought me into his chambers. (4) Not at first to the banqueting house - that will come in due time; but first to be one with himself.

How perfect! Could we be satisfied to meet a loved one only in public? No; we want to take him to one side - to have him all to ourselves. So it is with our Master: he takes his now fully consecrated bride aside to taste and enjoy the sacred intimacy of his wonderful love. The Bridegroom of his Church longs for communion with his people more than they long for fellowship with him, who often need to cry - Let me see your countenance, let me hear your voice; for your voice is sweet, and your countenance is lovely (2:14).

Are we not all too apt to seek him rather for our need than for his joy and pleasure? This should not be. We do not admire selfish children who only think of what they can get out of their parents, and are unmindful of the pleasure that they may give,

or the service they may render. But are we not in danger of forgetting that pleasing God means giving him pleasure? Some of us look back to the time when the words "To please God" meant no more than not to sin against him, not to grieve him; but would the love of earthly parents be satisfied with the mere absence of disobedience? Or a bridegroom, if his bride only sought him for the supply of her own needs?

A word about the morning watch may not be out of place here. There is no time so profitably spent as the early hour given to Jesus only. Do we give sufficient attention to this time? If possible, it should be redeemed; nothing can make up for it. We must take time to be holy! One other thought: when we bring our questions to God, do we not sometimes either go on to offer some other petition, or leave the closet without waiting for the answer? Does not this seem to show little expectation of a reply, and little desire for one? Would we like to be treated like this? A quiet waiting before God would save us from many a mistake and from many a sorrow.

We have found the bride making a happy discovery of a King - her King - and not a cross, as she expected. This is the first-fruit of her consecration. The daughters of Jerusalem declare - We will be glad and rejoice in you. We will remember your love more than wine. The bride comments - Rightly do they love you (vs. 4).

Another discovery no less important awaits her. She has seen the face of the King, and as the rising sun reveals what is hidden in the darkness, so his light reveals her blackness to her. She cries - I am dark but lovely, O daughters of Jerusalem. Like the tents of Kedar, like the curtains of Solomon. (5) Nothing humbles the soul like sacred and intimate communion with the Lord; yet there is a sweet joy in feeling that he knows all, and, notwithstanding, loves us still. Things once called "little neglects" are seen with new eyes in "the secret of his presence." There we see the mistake, the sin, of not keeping our own vineyard.

This the bride confesses - Do not look upon me because I am dark, because the sun has tanned me. My mother's sons were angry with me; they made me keeper of the vineyards, but my own vineyard I have not kept. (6)

Our attention is here drawn to a danger which is pre-eminently one today: the intense activity of our times may lead to zeal in

service, but the neglect of personal communion; and such neglect will not only lessen the value of the service, but tend to incapacitate us for the highest service. If we are watchful over the souls of others, and neglect our own; if we are seeking to remove motes from our brother's eye, unmindful of the beam in our own; we will often be disappointed with our powerlessness to help our brethren, while our Master will be no less disappointed in us. Let us never forget that what we are is far more important than what we do; and that all fruit borne when not abiding in Christ must be fruit of the flesh, and not of the Spirit. The sin of neglected communion may be forgiven, and yet the effect remains permanently, as wounds, once healed, often leave a scar behind.

We come now to a very sweet evidence of the reality of the heart-union of the bride with her Lord. She is one with the Good Shepherd. Her heart at once goes out instinctively to the feeding of the flock; but she would tread in the footsteps of him whom her soul loves, and would not labour alone, nor in companionship other than his own - Tell me, O you whom I love, where you feed your flock, where you make it rest at noon. For why should I be as one who veils herself by the flocks of your companions? (vs. 7).

She will not mistake the society of his servants for that of their Master, who replies - If you do not know, O fairest among women, follow in the footsteps of the flock, and feed your little goats beside the shepherds' tents. (vs. 8) This is a correct reply to her questions. Let her show her love for her Lord by feeding his sheep and by caring for his lambs (see John 21: 15-17), and she need not fear to miss his presence. While sharing with other under-shepherds in caring for his flock, she will find the Chief Shepherd at her side and enjoy the tokens of his approval. It is service with Jesus as well as for Jesus.

But far sweeter than the reply of the daughters of Jerusalem is the voice of the Bridegroom, who now speaks again. It is the living fruit of her heart-oneness with him that makes his love break out into joyful utterances (vss. 9-11). For it is not only true that our love for our Lord will show itself in feeding his sheep, but will respond to what he said when on earth - inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me. (Matthew 25:40) His own heart-love is stirred, and he not infrequently particularly reveals himself to those who are ministering for him.

The commendation of the bride in verse 9 is one of striking appropriateness and beauty - I have compared you, my love, to my favourite foal among Pharaoh's chariots. You will remember that horses originally came from Egypt, and that the thoroughbred still found in Arabia was, during Solomon's reign, bought by his merchants for all the kings of the East. Those selected for Pharaoh's own chariot would not only be of the purest blood and be perfect in proportion and symmetry, but would also be perfect in training, docile and obedient. They knew no will but that of the charioteer, and the only object of their existence was to carry the king wherever he wanted to go. So should it be with the Church of Christ - one body with many members, indwelt and guided by one Spirit; responding to the Head, and knowing no will but his. Her rapid and united movement should cause his kingdom to progress throughout the world.

Many years ago, a great friend of mine, on returning from the East by the overland route, made the journey from Suez to Cairo in a heavy carriage then in use. On landing, the passengers took their places; about a dozen wild young horses were harnessed with ropes to the vehicle; the driver took his seat and cracked his whip, and the horses dashed off, some to the right, some to the left, and others forward, causing the coach to start with a bound, and just as suddenly to stop, with the effect of first throwing those sitting in the front seat into the laps of those sitting behind, and then of reversing the operation. With the aid of sufficient Arabs running on either side to keep these wild animals progressing in the right direction, the passengers were jerked and jolted, bruised and shaken, until, on reaching their destination, they were too weary and sore to take the rest they so much needed.

Is not the Church of God today more like these untrained steeds than a company of horses coupled to Pharaoh's chariot? And while self-will and disunion appear in the Church, can we wonder that the world still lies in the power of the wicked one, and that the nations are barely touched?

Changing his simile, the Bridegroom continues - Your cheeks are lovely with ornaments, your neck with chains of God. To which the daughters of Jerusalem reply, We will make you ornaments of gold with studs of silver. (11) The bride is not only beautiful and useful to her Lord, she is also adorned, and it is his delight to add to her adornments. Nor are his gifts perishable flowers, or trinkets devoid of great value.

The finest of the gold, the purest of the silver, and the most precious and lasting of the jewels are the gifts of the Royal Bridegroom to his spouse; and these, plaited into her own hair, increase the pleasure of the One who bestowed them.

In verses 12-14, the bride responds - While the King is at his table, my spikenard sent forth its fragrance (vs. 12). It is in his presence and through his grace that whatever of fragrance or beauty may be found in us comes forth. With him as its source, through him as its instrument, and to him as its end, is all that is gracious and divine. But he himself is far greater than all that his grace works in us.

A bundle of myrrh is my beloved to me, that lies all night between my breasts. My beloved is to me a cluster of henna blooms in the vineyards of En Gedi (vss. 13-14). Well is it, when our eyes are filled with his beauty, and our hearts are occupied with him. In the measure in which this is true of us, we shall recognise this related truth, that his great heart is occupied with us. Note the response of the Bridegroom - Behold, you are fair, my love! Behold, you are fair! You have doves' eyes (vs. 15).

How can the Bridegroom truthfully use such words of one who recognises herself as dark...as the tents of Kedar? (5) And still more strongly are these words from the Bridegroom - You are all fair, my love, and there is no spot in you. (4:7) We find the solution to this difficulty in 2 Corinthians 3:17-18. In contemplating the divine glory, Moses became so transformed that the Israelites were not able to look upon the glory reflected in his face. The apostle comments - But we all, with unveiled face, beholding [reflecting] as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, [i.e. the brightness caught from his glory transforms us to glory], just as by the Spirit of the Lord. Every mirror has two surfaces; the back is dull and unreflecting, and is all spots, but, when the reflecting surface is turned fully towards us, we see no spot, but our own image. So, while the bride is delighting in the beauty of the Bridegroom, he sees his own image in her. There is no spot there: it is all fair. May we ever present this reflection to his gaze, and to the world in which we live!

Note again his words - You have dove's eyes (vs. 15). The hawk is a beautiful bird, and has keen eyes, quick and penetrating; but the Bridegroom did not want hawk's eyes in his bride. The

tender eyes of the innocent dove are those that he admires. It was as a dove that the Holy Spirit came upon him at his baptism, and a dove-like character is that which he seeks in all his people.

The reason why David was not permitted to build the Temple was a very significant one. His life was far from perfect; and his mistakes and sins have been faithfully recorded by the Holy Spirit. They brought upon him God's chastening; yet it was not any of these that disqualified him from building the Temple, but rather his warlike spirit. Though many of his battles - if not all - were for the establishment of God's Kingdom, and the fulfilment of his promises to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, only Solomon, the Prince of Peace, could build the Temple. If we would be soul-winners and build up the Church which is his Temple, let us note this: not by discussion nor by argument, but by lifting up Christ will we draw others to him.

We now come to the reply of the bride. He has called her fair; wisely and well does she reply - Behold, you are fair, my love! Yes, pleasant! Also, our bed is green. The beams of our houses are cedar, and our rafters of fir. I am (but) the rose of Sharon, and the lily of the valleys (1:16 - 2:1).

The last words are often quoted as though they were the utterance of the Bridegroom, but we believe this is wrong. The bride says in effect, "You call me fair and pleasant, but the fairness and pleasantness are yours. I am only a wild flower, a lowly, scentless rose of Sharon (i.e. the autumn crocus), or a lily of the valley." To this, the Bridegroom responds - Like a lily among thorns, so is my love among the daughters (2:2).

Again, the bride replies - Like an apple tree among the trees of the woods, so is my beloved among the sons. I sat down in his shade with great delight, and his fruit was sweet to my taste. (3) The citron was a beautiful evergreen, affording delightful shade as well as refreshing fruit. As a humble wild flower herself, she recognises her Bridegroom as a noble tree, both ornamental and fruitful. Shade from the burning sun, refreshment and rest, she finds in him. What a contrast there is between her present position and feelings and those with which this section began! He knew full well the cause of all her fears; her distrust sprang from her ignorance of him, so he took her aside, and in the sweet intimacies of mutual love, her fears and distrust vanished like the morning mist before the rising sun.

Now that she has learned to know him, she has a further experience of his love. He is not ashamed to acknowledge her publicly - He brought me to the banqueting house, and his banner over me was love (vs. 4). The house of wine is now as appropriate as the King's chambers. Fearlessly, and without shame, she can sit at his side as his acknowledged spouse, the bride of his choice. Overwhelmed with his love, she exclaims - Sustain me with cakes of raisins, refresh me with apples, for I am lovesick. His left hand is under my head, and his right hand embraces me (vss. 5-6).

Now she discovers the blessedness of being possessed. No longer her own, heart-ease is both her right and her enjoyment; and so the Bridegroom would have it - I charge you, O daughters of Jerusalem, by the gazelles or by the does of the field, do not stir up nor awaken love until it [she] pleases (vs. 7). The pronoun here, and in chapters 3: 5 and 8: 4, should not be "he" as the Authorised Version, nor "it" as in other versions, but "she." It is never by his will that our rest in him is disturbed.

*When my soul is faint and thirsty,  
'Neath the shadow of his wing,  
There is cool and pleasant shelter,  
And a fresh and crystal spring;  
And my Saviour rests beside me,  
As we hold communion sweet:  
If it tried, I could not utter  
What he says when thus we meet.*

(Ellen Lakshmi Gorkh)

There is never any change in his love; he is the same yesterday, today, and forever (Hebrews 13:8). To us he promises - I will never leave you nor forsake you (Hebrews 13:5; Deuteronomy 31:6, 8; Joshua 1:5); and his earnest exhortation and command is - Abide in me, and I in you (John 15:4).

## **Section 2: Communion Broken - Restoration (Song 2:8 - 3:5)**

*"Therefore we must give the more earnest heed to the things we have heard, lest we should drift away" (Hebrews 2: 1).*

At the close of the first section, we left the bride satisfied and at rest in the arms of her Beloved, who charged the daughters of Jerusalem not to stir up or awaken his love until it pleased her. We might well suppose that a union so complete, a satisfaction so full, would never be interrupted by failure on the part of the happy bride. But, alas, the experience of most of us shows how easily communion with Christ may be broken, and how needful are the exhortations of our Lord to those who are indeed branches of the true Vine, and cleansed by the Word which he has spoken, to abide in him. Failure is never on his side - Lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age, Amen (Matthew 28:20).

But, alas, the bride often forgot the exhortation addressed to her as found in Psalm 45:10-11 - Listen, O daughter, consider and incline your ear; forget your own people also, and your father's house; so the King will greatly desire your beauty; because he is your Lord, worship him.

In this second section, the bride has drifted back from her position of blessing into a state of worldliness. Perhaps the very restfulness of her newfound joy made her feel too secure; perhaps she thought that, so far as she was concerned, there was no need for the exhortation - Little children, keep yourselves from idols (1 John 5:21). Or she may have thought that love for the world was so thoroughly taken away that she might safely return, and, by a little compromise on her part, she might win her friends to follow her Lord too. Perhaps she scarcely thought at all: glad that she was saved and free, she forgot that the current of this world was against her; and she unconsciously drifted back to that position out of which she was called, unaware all the time of backsliding. It is not necessary, when the current is against us, to turn the boat's head down the stream in order to drift; or for a runner in a race to turn back in order to miss the prize.

Ah, how often the enemy succeeds, by one device or another, in tempting the believer away from that position of entire consecration to Christ in which alone the fullness of his power and of his love can be experienced! We say the fullness of his

power and of his love, for he may not have ceased to love his Lord. In the passage before us, the bride still loved him truly, though not wholly. There is still a power in his word, felt though she no longer renders instant obedience. She little realises how she is wronging her Lord, and how real is the wall of separation between them. To her, worldliness seems as but a little thing. She does not realise the solemn truth of many passages in the Word of God that speak in strong terms of the folly, the danger, the sin, of friendship with the world.

Do not love the world or the things that are in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him (1 John 2:15). Adulterers and adulteresses! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Whoever, therefore, wants to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God (James 4:4).

Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers. For what fellowship has righteousness and lawlessness? And what communion has light with darkness? And what accord has Christ with Belial? Or what part has a believer with an unbeliever?... Therefore come out from among them and be separate, saith the Lord. Do not touch what is unclean, and I will receive you. I will be a Father to you. And you shall be my sons and daughters, says the Lord Almighty (2 Corinthians 6:14-15, 17-18; Isaiah 52:11; Ezekiel 20:34, 41).

We have to make our choice: we cannot enjoy both the world and Christ. The bride has not learned this: she would enjoy both, with no thought of their incompatibility.

She observes with joy the approach of the Bridegroom - The voice of my beloved! Behold, he comes leaping upon the mountains, skipping upon the hills. My beloved is like a gazelle or a young stag. Behold, he stands behind our wall; he is looking through the windows, gazing through the lattice (2:8-9).

The heart of the bride leaps on hearing the voice of her Beloved as he comes in search of her. He has crossed the hills; he draws near to her; he stands behind the wall; he even looks in at the windows. With tender and touching words he woos her to come out to him. He utters no reproach, and his loving entreaties sink deep into her memory - My beloved spoke, and said to 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 singing has come, and the voice of the turtle-dove is heard in our land. The fig tree puts forth her green figs, and the vines with the tender grapes give a good smell. Rise up, my love, my fair one, and come away! (vss. 10-13).

All nature is responsive to the return of summer. "Will you, my Beloved, be unresponsive to my love?" Could such pleading be in vain? Alas, it can, and it was! In yet more touching words, the bride continues - O my dove, in the clefts of the rock, in the secret places of the cliff, let me see your countenance, let me hear thy voice; for your voice is sweet, and your countenance is lovely (vs. 14)

Here is a wonderful thought: that God should desire fellowship with us; and that he whose love once made him the Man of Sorrows may now be made the Man of Joys by the loving devotion of human hearts! But strong as is his love and his desire for his bride, he comes no further. Where she is now, he will not come. But surely she will go out to him. Does he not have a claim on her? She feels and enjoys his love; will she let his desire count for nothing? Alas that she should seek in vain!

Catch us the foxes, the little foxes that spoil the vines, for our vineyards are in blossom (vs. 15), replies the Bridegroom. The enemies may be small, but the mischief they do is great. A little spray of blossom, so tiny as to be scarcely noticed, is easily spoiled, and because of it, the fruitfulness of a whole branch may forever be destroyed. How numerous are the little foxes! Little compromises with the world; disobedience to the still small voice in little things; little indulgences of the flesh leading to the neglect of duty; doing evil in little things that good may come - and the whole beauty and fruitfulness of the vine are sacrificed!

We have a sad illustration of the deceitfulness of sin in the response of the bride. Instead of bouncing out to meet him, she first comforts her own heart by thinking of his faithfulness, and of her union with him - My beloved is mine, and I am his. He feeds his flock among the lilies (vs. 16).

My position is one of security. I have no need to be concerned about it. He is mine, and I am his; and nothing can change that relationship. I can find him at any time, for he feeds his flock among the lilies. While the sun of prosperity shines on me, I may safely enjoy myself here without him.

Should trial and darkness come, he will surely not fail me - Until the day breaks and the shadows flee away, turn, my beloved, and be like a gazelle or a young stag upon the mountains of Bether (vs. 17). Careless of his desire, she thus lightly dismisses him with the thought, "A little later, I may enjoy his love." And the grieved Bridegroom goes away!

Poor, foolish bride! She will soon find that the things that once satisfied her will no longer satisfy, and that it is easier to turn a deaf ear to his tender call than to recall or find her absent Lord. The day grew cool, and the shadows fled away; but he did not return. Then, in the solemn night hours, she discovered her mistake. It was dark, and she was alone. Retiring to rest, she still hoped for his return, the lesson that worldliness is an absolute bar to full communion still unlearned - By night on my bed I sought the one I love; I sought him, but I did not find him! (3:1) She waits and wearies: his absence becomes insupportable - I will rise now, I said, and go about the city; in the streets and in the squares I will seek the one I love. I sought him, but I did not find him (vs. 2).

How different her position from what it might have been! Instead of seeking him when alone, desolate, and in the dark, she might have gone out with him into the sunshine, leaning on his arm. She might have exchanged the partial view of her Beloved through the lattice, when she wanted to say "nothing between", for the joy of his embrace, and his public confession of her as his chosen bride! Instead, - The watchmen who go about the city found me, to whom I said, "Have you seen the one I love? Scarcely had I passed them by, when I found the one I love (vss. 3-4).

She had, at last, obeyed his command - Rise up, my love, my fair one, and come away. (2:10) Fearless of reproach, she was seeking him in the dark. And when she began to confess her Lord, she soon found him, and was restored to his favour - I held him and would not let him go, until I had brought him to the house of my mother, and into the chamber of her who conceived me. (4) Jerusalem above is the mother of us all. (Galatians 4:26) It is there that communion is enjoyed, not in worldly ways or self-willed indulgence.

With communion fully restored, the second section closes, as did the first, with the loving charge of the Bridegroom that none should disturb his bride - I charge you, O daughters of

Jerusalem, by the gazelles or by the does of the field [i.e. by all that is loving and beautiful and constant], do not stir up nor awaken [my] love, until it [she] pleases (vss. 3:5).

May we all, while living here in the world but not of it, find our home in the heavenly places to which we have been raised, and in which we are seated together with Christ! (See Ephesians 1:1:3) Sent into the world to witness for our Master, may we ever be strangers here, but ready to confess him the true object of our soul's devotion!

*How lovely is your tabernacle, O Lord of hosts!  
My soul longs, yes, even faints for the courts of the Lord; My  
heart and my flesh cry for the living God. Blessed are those  
who dwell in your house; They will be still praising Thee.*

*For a day in your courts is better than a thousand of my own  
choosing. I would rather be a door-keeper in the house of my  
God than dwell in the tents of wickedness. For the Lord God is  
a sun and shield; The Lord will give grace and glory; no good  
thing will he withhold from those who walk uprightly. O Lord  
of hosts, blessed is the man who trusts in you!  
(Psalm 84:1-2, 4, 10-12)*

### **Section 3: The Joy of Unbroken Communion (Song 3:6 - 5:1)**

*O Jesus, King most wonderful,  
Thou conqueror renowned,  
Thou sweetness most ineffable,  
In whom all joys are found!  
Thee, may our tongues forever bless;  
Thee may we love alone;  
And ever in our lives express  
The image of thine own.*

Translated from a 12<sup>th</sup>-century Latin hymn by Edward Caswall,  
1814-1878

We have been mainly occupied in Sections 1-2 with the words and the experiences of the bride. In marked contrast with this, in this third section, our attention is first called to the Bridegroom, and then it is from him that we hear of the bride as the object of his love and the delight of his heart. The daughters of Jerusalem are the first to speak - Who is this coming out of the wilderness like pillars of smoke, perfumed with myrrh and frankincense, with all the merchant's fragrant powders? (3:6).

They themselves answer their question - Behold, it is Solomon couch with sixty valiant men around it, of the valiant of Israel. They all hold swords, being expert in war. Every man has his sword on his thigh because of fear in the night. Of the wood of Lebanon Solomon the King made himself a palanquin: he made its pillars of silver, its support of gold, its seat of purple, its interior paved with love [love-gifts] by the daughters of Jerusalem (vss. 6-10).

The bride is not mentioned in these verses; she is eclipsed in the grandeur and state of her royal Bridegroom. Nevertheless, she is both enjoying and sharing it. The very air is perfumed by the smoke of the incense that ascends pillar-like to the clouds; and all that safeguards the position of the Bridegroom himself, and shows forth his dignity, safeguards also the accompanying bride, the sharer of his glory. The car of state in which they sit is built of fragrant cedar from Lebanon, and the finest of the gold and silver is lavished on its construction. The fragrant wood is a type of the beauty of sanctified humanity, while the gold reminds us of the divine glory of our Lord, and the silver of the purity and preciousness of his redeemed and peerless Church. The imperial purple with which it is lined tells

us of the Gentile world. The daughter of Tyre was there with her gift; and the love-gifts of the daughters of Jerusalem accorded with the prophecy - And the daughter of Tyre will be there with a gift; the rich among the people will seek your favour (Psalm 45:12).

These are the things that attract the attention of the daughters of Jerusalem, but the bride is pre-occupied with the King himself, and exclaims - Go forth, O daughters of Zion, and see King Solomon with the crown with which his mother hath crowned him on the day of his espousals, the day of the gladness of his heart (vs. 11).

The crowned King is everything to her, and she desires him to be so to the daughters of Zion as well. She dwells with delight on the gladness of his heart in the day of his espousals, for now she is not occupied with him for her own sake, but rejoices in his joy in finding in her his satisfaction. Do we sufficiently cultivate this unselfish desire to be all for Jesus, and to do all for his pleasure? Or are we conscious that we principally go to him for our own sakes, or at best for the sake of other?

How much of prayer begins and ends with the creature, forgetful of the privilege of giving joy to the Creator! Yet it is only when he sees in our unselfish love and devotion to him the reflection of his own that his heart feels fully satisfied, pouring itself out to his bride in precious utterances of love such as in the following words - Behold, you are fair, my love! Behold, you are fair! You have dove's eyes behind your veil. Your hair is like a flock of goats, going down from Mount Gilead. Your teeth are like a flock of shorn sheep which have come up from the washing, every one of which bears twins, and none is barren among them. Your lips are like a strand of scarlet, and your mouth is lovely, etc. (Read 4:1-5)

We have already found the explanation of the beauty of the bride in her reflecting like a mirror the beauty of the Bridegroom. Well may he describe with satisfaction her beauty while she is thus occupied with himself! The lips that speak only of him are like a thread of scarlet; the mouth or speech which includes no word of self, or for self, is lovely in his sight.

How sweet his words of appreciation and commendation were to the bride we can well imagine! But her joy was too deep for expression, and she was silent in her love. She would

not now think of sending him away until the day break and the shadows flee away. (2:6; 4:6) Still less does the Bridegroom think of finding his joy apart from his bride. He declares - Until the day breaks, and the shadows flee away, I will go my way to the mountain of myrrh, and to the hill of frankincense (vs. 6).

Separation never arises from his side. He is always ready for communion with a prepared heart; and in this happy communion the bride becomes ever fairer, and more like her Lord. She is being progressively changed into his image from one degree of glory to another through the wonderful working of the Holy Spirit, until the Bridegroom can declare - Thou art all fair, my love, and there is no spot in you (vs. 7).

And now she is fit for service; and to it the Bridegroom woos her. She will not now misrepresent him. He commands - Come with me from Lebanon, my spouse, with me from Lebanon. Look from the top of Amanah, from the top of Senir and Hermon, from the lions' dens, from the mountains of the leopards (vs. 8).

Come with Me - it is always so. When our Saviour says - Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, he precedes it with - All authority has been given to me in heaven and on earth, followed up with - lo, I am with you always (Matthew 28:18-20). Or, if, as here, he calls his bride to come, it is still with me, and it is in connection with this loving invitation that, for the first time, he changes the title my love for the more endearing one of my spouse [bride]. What are lions' dens when the Lion of the tribe of Judah is with us? Or mountains of leopards, when he is at our side? Yes, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; for you are with me (Psalm 23:4) On the other hand, it is while facing dangers, and toiling with him in service, that he says - You have ravished my heart, my sister, my spouse; you have ravished my heart with one look of your eyes, with one link of your necklace (vs. 9).

Is it not wonderful how the heart of the Beloved can be ravished with the love of her who is prepared to accept his invitation, and go out with him, seeking to rescue the perishing! The marginal reading of the Revised Version for You have ravished my heart is very significant - You have given me courage. If the Bridegroom's heart is encouraged by the fidelity and loving companionship of his bride, it is not surprising that we cheer and encourage one another in our

mutual service. The apostle Paul had a steep mountain of difficulty to climb when he was led captive to Rome, not knowing what awaited him there. But when the brethren met him at the *Appii Forum*, he thanked God and took courage (Acts 28:15). May we ever thus strengthen one another's hands in God!

But to resume, the Bridegroom brings cheer in the difficult ascents and the steep pathways of danger, with a sweet communication of his love. How fair is your love, my sister, my spouse! How much better than wine is your love, and the scent of your perfumes than all spices! Your lips, O my spouse, drip as the honeycomb; honey and milk are under your tongue; and the fragrance of your garments is like the fragrance of Lebanon (vss. 10-11).

A garden enclosed is my sister, my spouse, a spring shut up, a fountain sealed. Your plants are an orchard of pomegranates, with pleasant fruits, fragrant henna with spikenard and saffron, calamus and cinnamon, with all trees of frankincense, myrrh and aloes, with all the chief spices - a fountain of gardens, a well of living waters, and streams from Lebanon (vss. 12-15).

Working with the Bridegroom in seeking to rescue the perishing, the utterances of her lips are to him as honey, and the honeycomb; and figure is piled upon figure to express his satisfaction and joy. She is a garden full of precious fruits and delightful perfumes, but a garden enclosed. The fruit she bears may bring blessing to many, but the garden is for him alone. She is a fountain, but a spring shut up, a fountain sealed. And yet again, she is a fountain of gardens, a well of living waters, and flowing streams from Lebanon. She carries fertility and imparts refreshment wherever she goes; and yet it is all of him, and for him.

The bride now speaks for the second time in this section. As her first utterance was of him, so now her second is for him. Self is found in neither - Awake, O north wind, and come, O south! Blow upon my garden, that its spices may flow out. Let my beloved come to his garden and eat its precious fruits (vs. 16).

She is ready for any experience. The north wind and the south may blow upon her garden, if only its spices flow out so that her Lord might feast in their fragrance. He calls her a garden, an orchard of pomegranates and precious fruits. Let him come to it and eat his precious fruits. To this, the Bridegroom replies

- I have come to my garden, my sister, my spouse; I have gathered my myrrh with my spice; I have eaten my honeycomb with my honey; I have drunk my wine with my milk (5:1).

Now, when she calls, he answers at once. When she is for her Lord alone, he assures her that he finds all his satisfaction in her. The section closes with the Bridegroom's invitation to his friends, and hers - Eat, O friends! Drink, yes, drink deeply, O beloved ones! (vs. 1). The consecration of all to our Master, far from lessening our power to share, increases both our power and our joy in service. The five loaves and two fish of the disciples, first given up to the Lord, then blessed by him, were more than enough for the needs of the crowds, and grew, in the distribution, into a store when twelve baskets were filled with fragments after they had all been fully satisfied.

We have seen, then, in this beautiful section, a picture of unbroken communion, with its delightful results. May our lives correspond! First, one with the King, then, speaking of the King, then the joy of communion leading to fellowship in service, being all for Jesus, ready for any experience that will further our service, surrendering all to him, and being willing to minister all for him. There is no room for love of the world here, for union with Christ has filled the heart. There is nothing for the gratification of the world, for all is sealed up and kept for the Master's use.

*Jesus, my life is Thine!  
And evermore shall be Hidden in thee.  
For nothing can untwine  
Thy life from mine.*

#### **Section 4: Communion Again Broken - Restoration (Song 5:2 - 6:10)**

The fourth section begins with the bride addressing the daughters of Jerusalem, when she narrates her recent sad experience, and begs their help in her time of trouble. The presence and comfort of her Bridegroom is again lost to her; not this time by relapse into worldliness, but by idle self-indulgence.

We are not told of the steps that led to her failure, or how self found a place again in her heart. Perhaps spiritual pride in the achievements which grace enabled her to accomplish was the cause; or, not improbably, a cherished satisfaction in the blessing she had received, instead of in the Blessor himself, may have led to the separation. She seems to have been largely unconscious of her decline; preoccupied and self-content, she scarcely noticed his absence. She was resting, resting alone, never asking where he had gone or what he was doing. And worse, the door of her chamber was not only closed, but barred; an evidence that his return was neither eagerly desired nor expected.

Yet her heart was not far from him: there was music in his voice that would awaken echoes in her soul such as no other voice could do. As far as the world was concerned, she was still a garden enclosed, a spring shut up, a fountain sealed (4:12). The snare this time was all the more dangerous and subtle because it was quite unsuspected. Let us consider her words - I sleep, but my heart is awake; it is the voice of my beloved! He knocks, saying, Open for me, my sister, my love, my dove, my perfect one (5:2).

How often the position of the Bridegroom becomes that of a knocking Suitor outside, as in the letter to the Laodicean Church ("the church of Popular Opinion", according to the Rev. Charles Fox in an address at Keswick, in sharp contrast with the church of Philadelphia, which was the church of Brotherly Love) - Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with me (Revelation 3:20).

It is sad that he should be outside a closed door - that he should need to knock; but still more sad, that he should knock, and knock in vain, at the door of any heart which claims to be his own. In this case, it is not the position of the bride that is

wrong; if it were, his word as before would be - Rise up, my love, my fair one, and come away (2:10); whereas now his word is - Open for me, my sister, my love, my dove, my perfect one (5:2). It was her condition of self-satisfaction and love of ease that kept the door closed.

Very touching are the titles he uses for her - Open for me, my sister (he is the first-born among many brethren), my love (the object of my heart's devotion), my dove (one who has been endued with many of the gifts and graces of the Holy Spirit), my perfect one (washed, renewed, and cleansed for me); and he urges her to open up with a reference to his own condition - For my head is covered with dew, my locks with the drops of the night (vs. 2).

Why is his head covered with the dew? Because he has a shepherd's heart. There are those whom the Father has given to him who are wandering on the dark mountains of sin. Many, oh so many! have never heard the Shepherd's voice. Many, too, who were once in the fold, have wandered away - far away from its safe shelter. His is a heart that can never forget, a love that never can fail, for he must seek the wandering sheep until the lost have been found (Luke 15:3-7). My Father has been working until now, and I have been working (John 5:17). And will she, who so recently was at his side, who joyfully braved the dens of lions and the mountains of leopards, will she leave him to seek alone the wandering and the lost? He commands - Open for me, my sister, my love, my dove, my perfect one; for my head is covered with dew, my locks with the drops of the night. (2) We know of no more touching plea in the Word of God, and sad indeed is the reply of the bride - I have taken of my robe; how can I put it on again? I have washed my feet; how can I defile them? (vs. 3).

How sadly it is to delight in conferences and conventions, to feast on all the good things that are set before us, and yet be unprepared to go out to self-denying labour in rescuing the perishing; to delight in the rest of faith while forgetting to fight the good fight of faith; to dwell upon the cleansing and the purity effected by faith, and to think nothing of those poor souls struggling in the morass of sin. If we can take off our coats when he wants us to keep them on, if we can wash our feet while he wanders alone on the mountains, is there not a sad lack of fellowship with our Lord?

Meeting with no response from the reluctant bride, her

Beloved put his hand by the latch of the door, and her heart yearned for him (vs. 4). But, alas, the door was not only latched, but locked; and his effort to secure an entrance was in vain. Then, she says - I arose to open for my beloved, and my hands dripped with myrrh, my fingers with liquid myrrh, on the handles of the lock. I opened for my beloved, but my beloved had turned away and was gone. My heart went out to him when he spoke (vss. 5-6).

When, all too late, the bride did get up, she seems to have been more concerned to anoint herself with the liquid myrrh than to speedily welcome her waiting Lord; more occupied with her own graces than with his desires. No word of welcome was spoken, though her heart failed her; and the aggrieved One withdrew before she was ready to receive him. Again (as in the third section), she had to go out alone to seek her Lord; and this time her experiences were much more painful than on the first occasion - I sought him, but I could not find him; I called him, but He gave me no answer. The watchmen who went about the city found me. They struck me, they wounded me; the keepers of the walls took my veil from me (vss. 6-7).

Her first relapse was due to inexperience; if a second relapse came about through carelessness, she should at least have been ready and prompt when summoned to obey. It is no little thing to fall into the habit of being slow to obey, even in the case of a believer. In the case of the unbeliever, the final issue of disobedience is inexpressibly awful - Turn at my reproof; surely I will pour out my spirit on you; I will make my words known to you. Because I have called and you refused, I have stretched out my hand and no one regarded. Because you disdained all my counsel, and would have none of my reproof, I also will laugh at your calamity. I will mock when your terror comes. When your terror comes like a storm, and your destruction comes like a whirlwind and anguish come upon you, then they will call on me, but I will not answer; they will seek me diligently, but they will not find me (Proverbs 1:23-28).

The backsliding of the bride, though painful, was not final, for it was followed by true repentance. She went out into the dark night to seek him. She called, but he did not reply. The watchmen finding her, both struck and wounded her. They appear to have appreciated the seriousness of her decline more accurately than she had done. Believers are often blind

to their own inconsistencies; others, however, take note of them; and the greater the profession of the Lord, the more surely will any lapse be noted with disapproval.

Wounded, dishonoured, unsuccessful in her search, and at the point of despair, the bride turns to the daughters of Jerusalem. Relating the story of her sorrows, she pleads with them to tell her Beloved that she is not unfaithful or forgetful of him - I charge you, O daughters of Jerusalem, if you find my beloved, that ye tell him that I am lovesick (vs. 8).

The reply of the daughters of Jerusalem reveals very clearly that the sorrow-stricken bride, wandering in the dark, has not been recognised as the bride of the King, though her personal beauty does not escape notice - What is your beloved more than another beloved, O fairest among women? What is your beloved more than another beloved, that you so charge us? (vs. 9).

This question, implying that her Beloved was no more than any other, stirs her soul to its greatest depths; and, forgetful of herself, she pours out from the fullness of her heart a soul-ravishing description of the glory and beauty of her Lord - My beloved is white and ruddy, chief among ten thousand. (10) Read the following verses up to verse 15, a passage which concludes with these words - His mouth is most sweet, yes, he is altogether lovely. This is my beloved, and this is my friend, O daughters of Jerusalem! (vs. 16).

It is interesting to compare the bride's description of the Bridegroom with the descriptions of the Ancient of Days in Daniel 7:9-10 and of our risen Lord in Revelation 1:13-16. The differences are very striking. In Daniel 7, we see the Ancient of Days seated on his throne of judgement. His garment is as white as snow, and the hair of his head like pure wool. His throne and his wheels are as burning fire, and a fiery stream issues from before him. The Son of Man is presented to him to receive from him dominion, and glory, and an everlasting kingdom that will not be destroyed. In Revelation, we see the Son of Man himself clothed with a garment down to his feet, and his head and his hair white as wool, white as snow. The bride in our Song sees her Bridegroom in all the vigour of youth, with locks wavy, and black as a raven. (11) The eyes of the risen Saviour are described in Revelation as a flame of fire, but the bride sees them like doves by the rivers of waters (12) In Revelation, his voice is as the sound of many waters; he had

in his right hand seven stars, out of his mouth went a sharp two-edged sword. (1:15-16) To the bride, his lips are lilies, dripping liquid myrrh. (13) His mouth is most sweet (16). The face of the risen Saviour was like the sun shining in its strength (16), and the effect of the vision on John was devastating - And when I saw him, I fell at his feet as dead (17), not unlike the effect of the vision on Saul as he neared Damascus (Acts 9:4-9).

But to his bride, his countenance is like Lebanon, excellent as the cedars (vs. 15). The Lion of the tribe of Judah is, to his own bride, the King of love; and, with full heart and beaming face, she recounts his beauties so well, that the daughters of Jerusalem are seized with a strong desire to seek him with her, that they should also look upon his beauty - Where has your beloved gone, O fairest among women? Where has your beloved turned aside, that we may seek him with you? (6:1).

The bride replies - My beloved has gone to his garden, to the beds of spices, to feed his flock in the gardens, and to gather lilies. I am my beloved's, and my beloved is mine. He feeds his flock among the lilies (vss. 2-3). Forlorn and desolate she might appear, but she still knows herself to be the object of his affections, and claims him as her own. The expression - I am my beloved's, and my beloved is mine is similar to that found in 2:16 - My beloved is mine, and I am his; and yet with noteworthy differences. Earlier, her first thought of Christ was of her claim upon him: his claim upon her was secondary. Now, she thinks first of his claim; and only afterwards does she mention her own. We see a still further development of grace in 7:10, where the bride, losing sight of her claim altogether, says - I am my beloved's, and his desire is towards me.

No sooner had she uttered these words, and acknowledged herself as his rightful possession - a claim she had practically repudiated when she locked him out - than the Bridegroom himself appears. And with no word of reproach, but with tenderest love, he tells her how beautiful she is in his eyes, and speaks her praise to the daughters of Jerusalem. To her he says - O my love, you are beautiful, as Tirzah [the beautiful city of Samaria], lovely as Jerusalem [the glorious city of the great King], awesome [or rather, brilliant] as an army with banners! Turn your eyes away from me, for they have overcome me (vss. 4-5). Continue reading till the end of verse 7.

Then, turning to the daughters of Jerusalem, he exclaims -

There are sixty queens, and eighty concubines, and virgins without number. My dove, my perfect one, is the only one, the only one of her mother, the favourite of the one who bore her. The daughters saw her and called her blessed, the queens and the concubines, and they praised her (vss. 8-9). Their praise is recorded thus - Who is she who looks forth as the morning, fair as the moon, clear as the sun, brilliant as an army with banners? (vs. 10).

Thus, the section closes with communion fully restored; the bride is fully reinstated and openly acknowledged by the Bridegroom as his own matchless companion and friend. The painful experience through which the bride has passed has been of lasting good, and we have no further indication of interrupted communion, for in the remaining sections we find only joy and fruitfulness.

## **Section 5: Fruits of Recognised Union (Song 6:11 - 8:4)**

In the second and fourth sections of this book we found the communion of the bride broken; in the former by backsliding into worldliness, and in the latter through slothful ease and self-satisfaction. The present section, like the third, is one of unbroken communion. It opens with the words of the bride - I went down to the garden of nuts, to see the verdure of the valley, to see whether the vine has budded and the pomegranates had bloomed. Before I was even aware, my soul had made me as the chariots of my noble people (6:11-12).

As at the beginning of Section 3, when the bride, in unbroken communion with her Lord, was present though unmentioned until she made her presence known when she addressed the daughters of Zion, so in this section the presence of the King goes unnoticed until he himself addresses his bride. But she is one with her Lord as she engages in his service! His promise - Lo, I am with you always is now true for her; and he no longer has to woo her to make her rise and come away, or to tell her that his head is covered with dew, his locks with the drops of the night; or to urge her, if she loves him, to feed his sheep and care for his lambs. She herself is his garden, which she does not forget to tend, nor keep the vineyards of others while neglecting her own.

With him as well as for him, she goes to the garden of nuts. So thorough is the union between them that many commentators experience difficulty in deciding whether the bride or the Bridegroom is the speaker here. Really, it is a point of little moment ; for, as we have said, both were there, and of one mind. Yet we believe we are right in attributing these words to the bride as she is the one addressed by the daughters of Jerusalem, and the one who replies to them.

The bride and Bridegroom appear to have been discovered by their willing people while engaged in the happy fellowship of fruitful service, and the bride, whether aware of it or not, finds herself seated among the chariots of her people - her people as well as his. The daughters of Jerusalem want to call her back - Return, return, O Shulamite; return, return, that we may look upon you! (vs. 13). There is no question now as to who she is, or why her Beloved is more than another beloved. He is recognised as King Solomon, and to her is given the same name, only in the feminine form (Shulamite).

Some have seen in the words Return, return a reference to the rapture of the Church (1 Thessalonians 4:16-17), and explain some parts of the subsequent context which appear inconsistent with this view, as resumptive rather than progressive. Interesting as this thought is, and it may well explain the absence of any reference to the King in the preceding verses, yet we are disinclined to accept it. Look at the whole song as progressive, and its last words as being equivalent to the closing words of the last book in the Bible - Surely I am coming quickly. Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus (Revelation 22:20). We do not therefore look upon the departure of the bride from her garden as being other than temporary. The bride replies to the daughters of Jerusalem - What do you see in the Shulamite? (vs. 13) Or, as in the Authorised Version - What will you see in the Shulamite?

In the presence of the King, she cannot understand why any attention should be paid to her. As Moses, coming down from the mount, was unconscious that his face shone with the divine glory, so is it here with the bride. But we may learn this very important lesson that many who do not see the beauty of the Lord will not fail to admire his reflected beauty in his bride. The eager looks of the daughters of Jerusalem surprise the bride, and she says that they might be looking at the dance of double camp (Mahanaim) - the dance of two companies of Israel's fairest daughters - instead of one who had no claim to their attention save that she is the chosen, though unworthy, bride of the glorious King. (vs. 13).

The daughters of Jerusalem have no difficulty in replying to her question, and recognising her as of royal birth - How beautiful are your feet in sandals, O prince's daughter! (7:1). As well as her queenly dignity, they describe in true and oriental language the tenfold beauties of her person. From her feet to her head, they see only beauty and perfection. What of her former natural state? Once - from the sole of the foot even to the head, there is no soundness in it, but wounds and bruises and putrefying sores (Isaiah 1:6); but now her feet are shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace (Ephesians 6:15), and the very hairs of her head proclaim her a dedicated Nazarite indeed - Your head crowns you like Mount Carmel, and the hair of your head is like purple; the King himself is held captive by its tresses (vs. 5).

But Someone, more to her than the daughters of Jerusalem,

replies to the unaffected question - What would you see in the Shulamite? (6:13). The Bridegroom himself says - How fair and how pleasant you are, O love, with your delights! (7:6).

He sees in her the beauties and the fruitfulness of the tall and upright palm, of the graceful and clinging vine, of the fragrant and evergreen citron. Grace has made her like the palm-tree, a symbol of uprightness and fruitfulness. The fruit of the date-palm was more valuable than bread to the oriental traveller: so great was its sustaining power. And the fruit-bearing powers of the tree do not pass away; as age increases, the fruit becomes more perfect as well as more abundant - The righteous shall flourish like a palm tree, he shall grow like a cedar in Lebanon. Those who are planted in the house of the Lord shall flourish in the courts of our God. They shall still bear fruit in old age; they shall be fresh and flourishing (Psalm 92:12-14). But why are the righteous made so fresh and flourishing? In order to declare that the Lord is upright; he is my rock, and there is no unrighteousness in him (vs. 15).

One with our Lord, it is ours to show forth his graces and virtues, to reflect his beauty, and to be his faithful witnesses. The palm tree (7:8) is also the symbol of victory. It raises its beautiful crown towards the heavens, fearless of the heat of the sweltering sun or of the burning hot wind from the desert. Because of its beauty, it became one of the ornaments of Solomon's, as it was to be of Ezekiel's temple. When our Saviour was received at Jerusalem as the King of Israel, the people took branches of palm trees and went out to meet him. In the glorious day of his espousals, we shall see a great multitude, which no one could number, of all nations, tribes, peoples, and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, with palm branches in their hands, and crying out with a loud voice, saying, Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb! (Revelation 7:9-10).

If she resembles the palm, she also resembles the vine. (Read verses 8-10) How much she needs the culture of the Husbandman, and how well she repays him! Abiding in Christ, the true source of fruitfulness, she brings forth clusters of grapes, luscious and refreshing and sustaining, just like the fruit of the palm - refreshing to himself, the owner of the vineyard, as well as to a weary, thirsty world in which he has placed it.

The vine has its own special lessons: it needs and seeks support; the sharp knife of the pruner cuts away unsparingly its tender vines, and marks its appearance, but the while increasing its fruitfulness. It has been beautifully written -

*The living Vine, Christ chose it for Himself:-  
God gave to man for use and sustenance  
Corn, wine, and oil, and each of these is good:  
And Christ is Bread of life and Light of life.  
But yet, he did not choose the summer corn,  
That shoots up straight and free in one quick growth,  
And has its day, is done, and springs no more;  
Nor yet the olive, all whose boughs are spread  
In the soft air, and never lose a leaf,  
Flowering and fruitful in perpetual peace;  
But only this, for him and his is one,-  
That everlasting, ever-quickening Vine,  
That gives the heat and passion of the world,  
Through its own life-blood, still renewed and shed.*

*The Vine from every living limb bleeds wine;  
Is it the poorer for that spirit shed?  
The drunkard and the wanton drink thereof;  
Are they the richer for that gift's excess?  
Measure your life by loss instead of gain;  
Not by the wine drunk, but the wine poured forth;  
For love's strength stands fast in love's sacrifice;  
And who then suffers most, has most to give.*

Yet one figure more is used by the Bridegroom - The fragrance of your breath [is] like apples (vs. 8), or, rather, citrons. In the first section, the bride exclaims - Like an apple tree among the trees of the woods, so is my beloved among the sons. I sat down in his shade with great delight, and his fruit was sweet to my taste (2:3).

Here we have the outcome of that communion. The citrons on which she had fed perfumed her breath and imparted to her a delicious fragrance. The Bridegroom now concludes his description - The roof of your mouth [is] like the best wine. (9) The wine goes down smoothly for my beloved, interrupts the bride, moving the lips of sleepers gently (vs. 9). How wonderful is the grace that made this bride of Christ to be all-in-all to her Beloved! Upright as a palm tree; victorious, and ever fruitful as she grows heavenward; gentle and tender as the Vine, self-forgetful and self-sacrificing, not merely bearing fruit in

spite of the adversity of pruning, but bearing her richest fruits through it. She feasts on her Beloved, as she rests beneath his shade, thereby partaking of his fragrance. What has grace not done for her! And how great is her joy in finding ever more fully the satisfaction of the glorious Bridegroom in a lowly wild flower he has taken as his bride, and made beautiful with his own graces and virtues!

I am my Beloved's, and his desire is towards me, she gladly exclaims (vs. 10). Now it is none of self or for self, but all of him and for him. And if such is the sweet fruit of going down to the garden of nuts and caring for his garden with him, she needs no prompting to continue in this blessed service. Come, my beloved, let us go forth to the field; let us lodge in the villages (vs. 11).

She is not ashamed of her lowly origin, for she fears no shame: perfect love has cast out fear. The royal court of the King, with its pomp and pageant, will be enjoyed by and by: but now, it is more sweet to make the garden fruitful with him at her side; to give him all manner of precious fruits, new and old, which she has laid up in store for him; and best of all to satisfy him with her own love. Not only is she content in this fellowship of service, but she wishes that there were no honours and duties to claim his attention, and for the moment to lessen the joy of His presence.

Oh that Thou were like my brother, who nursed at my mother's breasts! If I should find you outside, I would kiss you; I would not be despised (8:1). Would that she could take care of him, and claim his whole attention, as a sister might care for a brother! She is deeply conscious that he has richly endowed her when she is nothing next to him. But instead of proudly dwelling upon what she has done through him, she wishes that it were possible for her to be the giver and him the receiver. How far removed is this from the grudging thought that must so grate upon the heart of our Lord, "I do not believe that God requires this of me", or, "Must I give this up if I become a Christian?" True devotion asks to be allowed to give, and counts as loss all that is not given up for the Lord's sake - "I also count all things loss, for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord" (Philippians 3:8).

This longing to be more to him does not, however, blind her to the fact that she needs his guidance, and that he is her true, her only Instructor - I would lead you and bring you into the

house of my mother, she who used to instruct me. I would cause you to drink of spiced wine, of the juice of my pomegranate. (2) "I would give you my best, and yet would seek all my rest and satisfaction in you" - His left hand is under my head, and his right hand embraces me. (3) And thus the section closes. There is nothing sweeter to the Bridegroom or to the bride than this hallowed and unhindered communion. Again, he commands the daughters of Jerusalem in a slightly different form - I charge you, O daughters of Jerusalem, Do not stir up nor awaken [my] love until it [she] pleases (vs. 4).

A sacred communion indeed! May we ever enjoy it; and abiding in Christ, we will sing the familiar words of this hymn:

*Both your arms are clasped around me,  
And my head is on your breast;  
And my weary soul has found you  
Such a perfect, perfect rest!  
Blessed Jesus,  
Now I know that I am blest.*

## **Section 6: Unrestrained Communion (Song 8: 5-14)**

Now we reach the closing section of this book, which, as we have seen, is a poem describing the life of the believer on earth. Beginning in Section 1 (Song 1:2 - 2:7), with the unsatisfied longings of the espoused one - longings which could only be met by her unreserved surrender to the Bridegroom of her soul - we found that when the surrender is made, instead of the cross which she had so much dreaded, she found a King, the King of love, who both satisfied her deepest longings, and found his own satisfaction in her.

The second section (Song 2:8 - 3:5) showed her failure; she was lured back into the world, and soon found that her Beloved would not follow her there. Then, with full purpose of heart, going out to seek him and confessing his name, her search was successful, and her communion was restored.

The third section (Song 3:6 - 5:1) tells of unbroken communion. Abiding in Christ, she is the sharer of his security and his glory. However, she draws the daughters of Jerusalem away from these external things to her King himself. And, while she is thus occupied with Him, and would have others so occupied, she finds that her royal Bridegroom is delighting in her, and inviting her to a fellowship of service, fearless of dens of lions and mountains of leopards.

The fourth section (Song 5:2 - 6:10), however, again showed failure; not, as before, through worldliness, but rather through spiritual pride and idleness. Restoration is now much more difficult; but again, when she went out diligently to seek her Lord, and confessed him so as to bring others to long to find him with her, he revealed himself, and communion was restored, and he was interrupted no more.

The fifth section (Song 6:11 - 8:4), as we have seen, described not only the mutual satisfaction and delight of the bride and the Bridegroom in each other, but the recognition of her position and her beauty by the daughters of Jerusalem.

Now, in the sixth section (Song 8:5-14), we come to the closing scene of the book. In it, the bride is seen leaning upon her Beloved, asking him to bind her yet more firmly to him, and occupying herself in his vineyard, until he calls her away from earthly service. To this last section, we give our undivided attention.

It opens, as did the third, with an inquiry or exclamation from the daughters of Jerusalem. They ask - Who is this coming up from the wilderness, leaning upon her beloved? (vs. 5). But then, their attention is drawn to the pomp and pageant of the King, not by his person, nor by that of his bride. Here, they are attracted by the happy position of the bride in relation to her Beloved, and not by their surroundings.

Leaning upon her Beloved - It is through the bride that attention is drawn to the Bridegroom. Their union and communion is now open for all to see. For the last time, the wilderness is mentioned; but in the sweet company of the Bridegroom, it is no wilderness to the bride. In all the trust of confiding love, she is seen leaning upon her Beloved. He is her strength, her joy, her pride, and her prize, while she is his special treasure, and the object of his tenderest care. All his resources of wisdom and power are hers. Though journeying, she is at rest, and in the desert she is satisfied to lean on her Beloved (vs. 5).

However wonderful are the revelations of grace and love to a heart taught by the Holy Spirit through the relationship of bride and Bridegroom, the Christ of God is more than Bridegroom to his people. He who, when on earth, said - Before Abraham was, I AM (John 8:58) - here, claims his bride from her very birth, and not just from her wedding day. Before she knew him, he knew her; and he reminds her of this in the words - I awakened you under the apple tree. There your mother brought you forth; she who bore you brought you forth (vs. 5). He takes delight in her beauty; but that is not so much the cause as the effect of his love, for he took her up when she had no beauty. The love that made her what she was, and now delight in her, is not an inconstant love, nor need she ever fear that it will change.

Gladly does the bride recognise the truth that she is truly his, and she exclaims - Set me as a seal upon your heart, as a seal upon your arm; for love is as strong as death, jealousy (ardent love) as cruel (retentive) as the grave; its flames are flames of fire, a most vehement flame (vs. 6).

The High Priest bore the names of the twelve tribes upon his heart, each name being engraved as a seal in a costly and imperishable stone chosen by God, each seal or stone set in the purest gold. He, likewise, bore the same names on his

shoulders, indicating that both the love and the strength of the High Priest were pledged on behalf of the tribes of Israel. The bride is thus borne up by the One who is alike her Prophet, Priest, and King, for love is as strong as death; and jealousy, or ardent love, retentive as the grave. Not that she doubts the constancy of her Beloved, but she has learned, alas! the inconstancy of her own heart. She would be bound to the heart and arm of her Beloved as with chains and settings of gold, each a symbol of divinity. Thus, the Psalmist prayed - Bind the sacrifice with cords to the horns of the altar. You are my God, and I will praise you; you are my God, I will exalt you. (Psalm 118:27-28).

It was comparatively easy to lay the sacrifice on the altar to sanctify the gift, but it required divine compulsion - the cords of love - to keep it there. So here, the bride was bound to the heart and arm of him who would henceforth be her all-in-all, that she may evermore trust only in his love, and be sustained by his power.

Do we not all need to learn a lesson from this, and pray to be kept from turning to Egypt for help, from trusting in horses and chariots, and from putting our confidence in princes or the sons of men rather than in the living God? How the Kings of Israel, who won great victories of faith, used to turn to heathen nations in their latter years! May the Lord keep His people from this snare!

The bride continues - Its flames are flames of fire (vs. 6) - "it" referring to the love of the Lord, for love is of God, for God is love (1 John 4:8). To her request, the Bridegroom replies with reassuring words - Many waters cannot quench love, nor can the floods drown it. If a man would give for love all the wealth of his house, it would be utterly despised (vs. 7).

The love which grace begot in the heart of the bride is itself divine and persistent. Many waters cannot quench it, nor the floods drown it. Suffering and pain, bereavement and loss, may test its constancy, but they will not quench it. Its source is not human or natural; like our life, it is hidden with Christ in God. (Colossians 3:3) What shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? ... Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to

come, nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord (Romans 8:35-39). Our love for God is secured by God's love for us. To the soul really rescued by grace, no bribe to forsake God's love can be successful - If a man would give for love all the wealth of his house, it would be utterly despised (vs. 7).

Freed from anxiety on her own account, the happy bride next asks for guidance and fellowship in the service of her Lord on behalf of those who have not yet reached her favoured position - We have a little sister, and she has no breasts. What shall we do for our sister in the day when she is spoken for? (vs. 8).

How beautifully her conscious union with the Bridegroom appears in her expressions. We have a little sister, not I have a sister. What shall we do for our sister? She has no private relationships or interests; in all things, she is one with him. And we see a further development of grace in the very question. Towards the close of the last section, she recognised the Bridegroom as her Instructor. She will not now make her own plans about her little sister and ask his acquiescence in them until she has learned what his thoughts are and then act together with him in his plans.

How much anxiety and care the children of God would be spared if they learned to act in this way! Is it not all too common to make the best plans that we can, and to carry them out as best we may, feeling all the while a great burden of responsibility, and then earnestly ask the Lord to help us? Whereas if we always recognise him as our Instructor in service, and left the responsibility with him, our strength would not be worn out with worry, but would all be at his disposal to further his ends.

In the little sister, as yet immature, we see the elect of God, given to Christ in God's purpose, but not yet brought into a saving relationship with him? Perhaps also, it refers to those babes in Christ who, as yet, need feeding with milk and not with meat, but who, with care, will, in due time, become experienced believers, fitted for the service of the Lord? Now, they are spoken for, and they will be called into that type of service for which he has prepared them.

The Bridegroom replies - If she is a wall, we will build upon her

a battlement of silver; and if she is a door, we will enclose her with boards of cedar (vs. 9). In this reply, the Bridegroom sweetly recognises his oneness with his bride in the same way as she has shown her conscious oneness with him. As she asks, "What shall we do for our sister?", he replies, "We will build . . . we will enclose." He will not carry out his purposes of grace irrespective of his bride, but will work with and through her.

What is done for this sister, however, will depend upon what she becomes. If she is a wall, built upon the true foundation, strong and stable, she will be adorned and made beautiful with battlements of silver; but if unstable and easily moved to and fro like a door, such treatment will be as impossible as unsuitable. She will need to be enclosed with boards of cedar, hedged in with restraints, for her own protection.

The bride responds joyfully - I am a wall (vs. 10); she knows the foundation on which she is built, so there is no if in her case. She is conscious of having found favour in the eyes of her Beloved. Naphtali's blessing is hers as well: she is satisfied with favour, and is full of the blessings of the Lord. But what do we learn from the connection of this happy consciousness with the lines which follow?

Solomon had a vineyard at Baal-hamon. He let it out to tenants. Everyone, for the fruit gathered, was to bring a thousand pieces of silver. My own vineyard is before me. You, O Solomon, may have a thousand, and those who keep its fruit two hundred (vs. 12).

The connection is, we believe, one of great importance, teaching us that what she was (by grace) was more important than what she did; and that she did not work in order to earn favour; but being assured of favour, she gave her love free scope in service. The bride knew her relationship with her Lord, and his love for her; and in her determination that he should have the thousand pieces of silver, she was determined that her vineyard should not produce less for her Solomon than his vineyard at Baal-hamon. Her vineyard was herself, and she desired for her Lord much fruit. She would see, too, that the tenants of the vineyard who were her companions in its culture, and who ministered in word and doctrine, were well rewarded. She would not muzzle the ox that trod out the corn; a full tithe - no, a double tithe - will be the portion of those who produce the fruit and labour with her in the vineyard.

How long this happy service continued, and how soon it was terminated, we cannot tell. He who calls his servants to dwell in the gardens, and cultivate them for Him - as Adam of old was placed in the paradise of God - alone knows the limit of their service. Sooner or later, the rest will come, the burden and heat of the last day will be over, and the last conflict will take place, and the voice of the Bridegroom will be heard addressing his loved one - You who dwell in the gardens, the companions listen to your voice - let me hear it! (vs. 13) "Your service among the companions is finished; you have fought the good fight, you have kept the faith, you have finished your course. Henceforth there is laid up for you the crown of righteousness (2 Timothy 4:7-8), when the Bridegroom himself will be your very great reward!"

Well may the bride let him hear her voice, and, springing up in heart to meet him, she cries - Make haste, my beloved, and be like a gazelle or a young stag on the mountains of spices! (vs. 14). She no longer asks him, as she did in the second section - Turn, my beloved, and be like a gazelle or a young stag upon the mountains of Bether [separation] (2:17). She never again wants him to turn away from her, for the mountains of Bether do not exist for those who abide in Christ; now there are only mountains of spices. He who inhabits the praises of Israel, which rise like the incense of spices from his people's hearts, is invited by his bride to make haste, to come quickly, and be like a gazelle or young stag on the mountains of spices.

Very sweet is the presence of our Lord, as by his Spirit he dwells among his people serving him below. But here, there are many thorns on every path, which calls for watchfulness. It is now that we suffer with our Lord in order that we may later be glorified with him. The day, however, is soon coming when he will bring us up out of earthly gardens and associations to the palace of the great King. There, his people will not hunger any more, nor thirst any more; neither will the sun light on them, nor any heat. For the Lamb, who is in the midst of the throne, will feed them, and lead them to living fountains of waters; and God will wipe away all tears from their eyes (Read Revelation 21:4; 22:5).

*And the Spirit and the bride say, Come! ... Surely I am coming quickly. Amen.*

*Even so, come, Lord Jesus!*

(Revelation 22:17, 20)

## Appendix: The Daughters of Jerusalem

THE question is frequently asked - Who are the daughters of Jerusalem? They are obviously not the bride, yet they are not far removed from her. They know where the Bridegroom rests his flock at noon; they are charged by the Bridegroom not to stir up or awaken his love when she is at rest and abiding in him. They draw attention to the Bridegroom as he comes up from the wilderness with dignity and pomp; their love-gifts adorn his chariot of state; they are appealed to by the bride to help her find her Beloved; and, stirred by her impassioned description of his beauty, they desire to seek him with her. They describe the beauty of the bride; but, but on the other hand, we never find them occupied with the person of the Bridegroom; he is not their all-in-all, for they set their minds on external and earthly things.

Do they represent those who, if not actually saved, are very near it; or, if saved, barely? Are they not at present more concerned with the things of this world than the things of God? Do they not advance their own interests, and look to their own comfort, which concerns them more than being pleasing to the Lord in all things. They could form part of that great company spoken of in Revelation 7:9-17 who come out of the great tribulation, but do not form part of the 144,000 - the first-fruits to God and to the Lamb" (Revelation 14:1-5). They have forgotten the warning of our Lord in Luke 21:34-36 and, hence, are not counted worthy to escape all these things that will come to pass, and to stand before the Son of Man. (36) They have not, with Paul, counted all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus the Lord (Philippians 3:8), and hence do not attain to the resurrection from the dead (11), which Paul felt he might miss, but aimed to achieve.

We wish to go on record as saying that our solemn conviction is that not all who act as Christians, or think of themselves as Christians, will attain to that resurrection of which Paul speaks, or will meet the Lord in the air. To those who, by lives of consecration, show that they are not of this world, but eagerly wait for him, he will appear a second time apart from sin, for salvation. (Hebrews 9:28)