

wilt thou not, my soul, learn from so notable a proof, how utterly insufficient all earthly things must be to give comfort? Shall Solomon complain at the head of a kingdom, that emptiness, vanity, and disappointment attended all; and wilt thou expect a different issue from earthly attainments? Say! Canst thou acquire possessions like his? or, even if acquired, couldst thou be sure to keep them? or if keeping, would a different close mark thine from Solomon's?

Turn, my soul, turn from all these things to Jesus. His grace, his love, his good-will, his favor, which is better than life itself, will give the finishing enjoyment to every other blessing, or make up the want of it, if denied thee. It is Jesus which must put a sweetness and a relish into all the comforts which are found in creatures of any kind. And if Jesus be not in it, there can be no sweetness in it at all. Come, then, thou dear Lord, come and bless the young man in his youth, and the old man in his grey years. And then, *when the grasshopper shall be a burden*, and even *desire* of all nature's enjoyments shall fail; thou wilt be the strength of the heart, and the portion to satisfy for ever. Oh! grant Lord, both to him that writes, and him that reads, that ere *the silver cord be loosed, or the golden bow be broken; the dust return to the earth as it was, and the spirit return unto God that gave it*; Jesus may be the all in all to our souls, the conclusion of the whole matter, and the sum and substance of all our joy. May we have the full interest of Jesus, and all that is his, by faith in this life, and in the life to come, then we shall be satisfied with the everlasting enjoyment of him by sight, *when we awake up after his likeness*. Amen.

THE

SONG OF SOLOMON.

GENERAL OBSERVATIONS.

I ENTER upon my Commentary in this part of the sacred writings with more than ordinary diffidence, from a consciousness how very sublime and mysterious this book of God is in itself, and with what veneration it ought to be approached. And both at the door, and before that I venture to step over the threshold of perusal, I would not only put off the shoe of preparation but bend the knee of prayer, that the divine light may go before me, and guide me through every apartment of the sacred inclosure.

Blessed Spirit of all truth, (I would say both for myself and reader) thou *who searchest all things, yea the deep things of God; vouchsafe to take of the things of Jesus here written, and shew unto us.*

And here, at the first opening of this precious book of God I detain the Reader to remark, both the authority of the author of it, and the proofs it brings with it of its divine authenticity.

As to the first of these in respect to the author of it, there can be no question but that *Solomon*, whose name it bears, wrote it under the immediate inspiration of God the Holy Ghost. And the period of the Church in which it was written, must of course carry with it a correspondence to the æra in which Solomon lived, namely, somewhat about a thousand years before the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. I stay not to enquire whether it was written in the early or later days of Solomon's life, because in a commentary of this kind it would be leading the Reader's mind unnecessarily away from the main object of concern. As it is placed last among the writings of Solomon very probably it was written last. But it may not be improper in this place to observe, as a guard against any unfavourable impressions to be formed in the mind of the Reader to the book itself, that the sad infirmities which marked the conduct of Solomon in his old age, have nothing to do by way of lessening the blessedness of those writings. It is no doubt a very painful consideration with every faithful heart, and in itself enough to humble to the dust the pride of our nature in its highest attainments, when we behold a man so *eminently blessed in grace and wisdom*, so sadly falling under the power of temptation. But when we have made the suitable improvements, which through the Spirit's teaching such an example is designed to induce, let it be considered that the frailty of the man ought not to have the smallest influence in lessening the importance of his ministry. It hath pleased the great head of his Church to make use of poor and sometimes unworthy instruments, for the accomplishing of the sacred purposes of his will. And the holiness of his grace is neither lessened nor polluted, though it flows to us through unholy channels. The fall of Solomon makes no more discord in the melody of this sweet song on the ear, than the fall of Peter lessens the blessed truths given to us in his divine epistles in the heart. Nay, as both carry such decisive marks with them of the *imprimatur* of God the Holy Ghost; while we read and recollect the unworthiness of the servant, doth not the thought minister yet more powerfully to bring home, and endear to us the infinite preciousness of the master.

As to the *second* consideration, of the proof the Song of Solomon brings with it of its divine authenticity; though there are several at hand which might be produced to establish the fact, yet *to the poor man*, (and I beg under whatever form this Commentary may hereafter appear it may never be forgotten that it was undertaken, and hath been uniformly carried on with an eye

to the poor man's special service), there is one evidence which this little volume eminently possesseth, and which in my humble judgment becomes so decisive and satisfactory as to supersede the necessity of every other; and that is, the inward testimony it carries with it to the heart of the believer, that these are the great truths of God. For surely it is impossible to conceive that the Lord should have blessed as he hath done this sacred part of the divine writings in every age of the Church, and made it the sweet savor of grace to thousands, if it had not been the work of his own holy inspiration. Nothing but the most inveterate prejudice could harbour such a thought! When, therefore, the soul of an enlightened believer, in the perusal of this precious book of God, is made to feel its divine power, finds his heart warmed and animated in the contemplation of its divine truths, and is led into a participation of the many gracious impressions which the Church enjoyed in the view of her beloved; such evidences become the fullest proof of its heavenly authority, and shew that it is what an Apostle calls, *The engrafted word which is able to save the soul.*

Reader! should it be your happy lot, while going over the Song of Solomon, to trace in your own experience similar effects to what the Church is here said to have experienced—should you discover that what she saith of Jesus, you can and do say; that what she acknowledgeth of her unworthiness you feel: her desires are your desires; her longings are the very same breathings as your soul is panting after; and the gracious answers of Jesus to her cries, are the very refreshments you covet above all that the world holds dear: will you not, from such inwrought effects upon your heart, in such a correspondence of the Church's experience to your own, accept this evidence as the strongest of all evidences, that the Song of Solomon's is, indeed, the word and work of God: and like the man, which the Apostle Paul speaks of upon another occasion, you will feel disposed to do as he did, when *from the secrets of your heart being thus made manifest, you will fall down upon your knees and worship God, and confess that God is in this word of a truth.*

But while I lay so much stress upon this evidence, and which becomes the more valuable to the humble believer, because it is always near at hand, and easy to be referred to; I do not mean to pass over in silence the other testimonies the Song of Solomon brings with it of its divine authenticity.

The Jews, to whom, it is well known, were committed *the Oracles of God*, and as such, must be supposed to have been competent judges upon this subject, have always been forward in acknowledging, that the Song of Solomon formed a part of the sacred canon of scripture: indeed, their testimony is, if possible, more convincing, in consequence of their high veneration for it, than Christians: for in their *Misnah*, they distinguish this book with a more exalted title than any other of the sacred writings, calling it *the holy of holies*. And as a further confirmation it is

remarkable, that they prohibited the reading of it to every one under *thirty years* of age; to intimate thereby also, that a ripeness of years and judgment, was needful for a proper apprehension of the glorious truths which were veiled under the mere letter of the word. I cannot help wishing that an equal veneration had been observed for this blessed book of Solomon, by some who called themselves Christians. For then, under grace, it would have tended to check the loose imagination of carnal readers, who from being led away by the want of chastity in their own thoughts, have put improper constructions upon what the Holy Ghost hath said in figure and metaphor, concerning some of the most precious things which belong to salvation.

To the testimony of God's ancient people, the Jews, in confirmation of the divine authenticity of Solomon's Song, might be added the very many proofs of a sacred nature, the book itself carries with it in its own bosom. For surely the subject of which it treats; the dignity, and no less simplicity of the stile in which it is written, and the correspondence it bears, in point of doctrine, with the whole of the bible, all tend to stamp its authority; and, indeed, it would be little less than blasphemy, the very title it bears, as *the Song of Songs*, intimating thereby a superiority to the other songs in the word of God, (and there are several, it is well known, of divine inspiration) if it could for a moment be supposed to have a doubt whether the work were of God or not.

Of the book itself, I shall not think it necessary to detain the Reader with any remarks, by way of recommending it to his perusal in these *general observations*. The beauties of the incomparable Song, the loveliness and sweetness of it, and the many blessed things contained in it through every part, will meet the Reader's eye as he passeth over the several chapters; and it would be only protracting his pleasure, to keep him for a moment from the work itself by any preliminary observations of mine on these things. The principal object which is held forth through the whole, (indeed it is the prominent feature,) is the love of Jesus to his church. This will meet the Reader more or less in every verse. And I hope as this love of Jesus is sweetly represented as awakening, and calling forth into exercise the love of the Church to Jesus, that the Reader, under the Spirit's influence, will enter into an heartfelt enjoyment of both these divine principles, and know in himself, and in his own feelings, the truth of what the Apostle saith, *We love him because he first loved us*. And while the fire is thus kindled from the live coal taken by the Holy Ghost from the sacred Altar, as the Reader passeth through the sacred part of the holy word, he will be constrained to cry out with David; *How sweet are thy words unto my taste; yea, sweeter than honey unto my mouth!*

It may be proper in this place to admonish the Reader of what he hath to meet with in this part of the sacred canon, as well as the plan the inspired writer hath adopted in the execution of it.

The love of Jesus to his Church is the subject more or less of the whole; and this discourse is set forth in the type of Solomon and his bride, under the similitude of the marriage state. It is too well known to need being much insisted upon, that parable and metaphor were the general mode of conveying instruction among the Eastern nations. In the sacred volume this is so very common, that the most ordinary Reader cannot but have noticed it. From the first moment of the Lord's forming his Church into a distinct people from the nations around, in gracious condescension he was pleased to assume the endearing character of their Husband. This tender appellation is the great outline observed through the whole of Solomon's Song. And the Reader will do well, while he keeps in view the Lord's love to his Church, under this title, to recollect also that the Holy Ghost closeth the scripture in the book of the Revelation, with holding forth the same token of Jesus's affection to his redeemed, in calling the Church the Bride, the Lamb's wife. But in deed, and in truth, in this point of view, the subject ceases to be figure or parable, for it is a blessed reality. The Church of Jesus is truly his body; and his people, in every individual, *are members of his flesh, and of his bones.*

I have but one thing more to add to these general observations, before that I take the Reader by the hand to lead him to the perusal of this divine Song; and that is, to beg that he will seek grace from on high, not only to qualify him for the right understanding of it, but also to preserve him from misapprehension and offence, at certain expressions here and there to be met with in the book; which, to a carnal mind, may seem to savor of indelicacy, but to a spiritual taste have no such tendency. If the Reader will himself make application of what is frequently spoken of the *Person*, to what is as frequently intended of the *dress*; great part of the objection will be done away. He may with great safety conclude, that it is the imperfection of language, and which always suffers by translation, which hath given rise, for the most part, to what in our English copies appears exceptionable. And if the translation could have conveyed precisely the images which the original meant, no such ideas would have been created. But while I say this, I beg that I may not be misunderstood. The translation of the bible, take it altogether in our mother tongue, though here and there we find defects, is in my poor esteem so great, so truly great and invaluable a blessing, that I class it among the first mercies which the Lord hath bestowed upon us as a nation. Never can it be too highly prized—never can we sufficiently bless the Lord for it: neither can the instruments, by which the Lord accomplished it, be too highly honoured.

Reader! may the Lord command *the north wind and the south wind to blow upon* this part of *his sacred garden, that the spices thereof may flow out*, while you and I go over it. And let us

implore our Beloved, to come into his garden, and eat of his own pleasant fruits. Amen.

CHAP. I.

CONTENTS.

The Chapter opens with giving the title of the book. The Church then takes up the subject with expressing her love to Christ, and desiring fresh manifestations of his affection to her. She compares his love to the fragrantcy of the richest ointment. She prays to be drawn by him, and professeth her readiness to run after him. She describes her blackness as in herself, and comeliness as in him: complains of the unkindness of her relations; and desires to know where Jesus feeds his flock, longing to be in his and his people's company. In return to these vehement desires of the church, Jesus now takes up the subject, and distinguishing her by the title of the fairest among women, directs her in her enquiry where to find him and his fold. Jesus then enlargeth upon her beauty, and gives her many sweet and precious promises. The church, in return, commends the loveliness of Jesus, and the chapter concludes in mutual congratulations.

THE song of songs, which is Solomon's.

The first object which calls our attention in opening this blessed book of God, is the title of it, namely, *A Song*. And as it is Solomon's Song, by which is evidently meant, as will hereafter more plainly appear, Jesus Christ, (for a greater than Solomon is here); we may, without violence to the expression, call it *a gospel song*; for its whole contents is of salvation by Jesus Christ. When a soul is taught by the Holy Ghost to sing this song, then is that scripture fulfilled, *In that day shall this song be sung in the land of Judah: We have a strong city; salvation will God appoint for walls and bulwarks.* Isaiah xxvi. 1. And Reader! when Christ is truly formed in the heart, the Lord hath put a new song in the mouth. Psm. xcvi. 1. But it is not only *a song*, but the *song of songs*; and if it treats wholly of Jesus and his great salvation, well may it merit this distinguished name. Well, indeed, may that be called the excellency of all excellencies, which hath Jesus for its object, and his love to his Church for the subject matter. How very sweet and precious to trace in it the several marks and testimonies of his love. And on the other hand, how delightful to behold the goings forth of the Church's love, awakened by the Holy Ghost on the person of Jesus. Surely such a person as the Lord Jesus is, and such subject-matter as the mutual love and union between Jesus and his people forms, may well be called *the song of songs*. Oh! for grace to bear a part in it with all the redeemed of the Lord! But we must not stop here. It is not only the song of songs, but it is *Solomon's*. I do not deny but that Solomon king of Israel was the penman of it; nay, I have no doubt but that Solomon, David's son, was the writer of it: but I hesitate not to believe, that in the writing of it he acted only as the

penman to the Holy Ghost, as his Father David had done before him in the Psalms : and in those scriptures, they, with all the other inspired writers, *wrote* as the Apostle tells us the prophets and holy men of old *spoke*, as they were moved by the Holy Ghost. 2 Pet. i. 21. I venture to believe, that there is not a line in it which hath the smallest reference to Solomon king of Israel. So far from being, as some impious men have said, the love-song of Solomon and Pharaoh's daughter, that it carries with it a contradiction in many places. Whoever consults the life and reign of Solomon, will discover that his marriage with Pharaoh's daughter was full twenty years before this book was written. *Seven* years was Solomon in building the temple, and *thirteen* years more in building his own house. Compare 1 Kings, vi. 38, with 1 Kings, vii. 1; after which we are told he built the house of the forest of Lebanon, which is noticed in Song vii. 4. compared with 1 Kings, vii. 2, and 1 Kings, iii. 1. And if it be proved, as I think this one view of the subject fully proves it, that it could have no reference to Solomon's marriage with Pharaoh's daughter, it will as fully prove also that it is not, as some have ventured to think, *typical*: for how can that be a representation by type concerning Solomon's marriage, when the subject itself could never arise out of it. Besides, Pharaoh's daughter was never what the Church is said to be, a *keeper of vineyards*: neither beaten by *watchmen*, nor *running about by night* in quest of her beloved. These accounts figuratively considered, have a sweet reference to the Church looking after Jesus; but would be ridiculous and false, if read with an eye to the daughter of Pharaoh. See Song, i. 6. v. 7. iii. 2. But if by Solomon's Song we accept the expression as it might have been rendered, the Song of Songs *concerning Solomon*; meaning the true Solomon, the Lord Jesus Christ, then we shall at once enter into the proper apprehension of what is meant by the expression, and be led to a right conclusion, that it is indeed the Song of Songs, as infinitely transcending all other songs, in treating of Him, who is *the altogether lovely, and the chiefest among ten thousand*.

2 Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth;
for thy love is better than wine.

Thus the song opens: and there can be no hesitation to discover the singer, namely, the Church. It is she which begins it. But Reader! do not imagine, that because the Church opens this Song, that thereby is meant to intimate love begins first in the human breast. No! thou blessed Jesus! thy love is first in the field; and if we do love thee, it is *because thou hast first loved us*. 1 John, iv. 19. Hadst thou not loved us with an *everlasting love*; nay, hadst thou not found out some way of subduing the natural enmity of our hearts; hadst thou not sweetly constrained and drawn us with the bands of love to thyself; never should we have loved thee, or desired to love thee. But when that everlasting love of thine prompted thy sacred breast to manifest it to us, and by thy sweet Spirit to give us a sense and perception of it; then thy love to our souls became the source and fountain of our love to thee, and hath drawn us to thyself, and now will keep us near thy dear Person for ever!

There is a great beauty in the manner of the Church's expression when she saith, *Let him kiss me*. She doth not call Jesus by name, but

him: meaning, no doubt, that her whole soul and heart was so full of him, that it was needless to mention whom she meant. She could refer to no other. We have several beautiful examples of the same kind in scripture. The Psalmist; Psm. lxxiii. 25. Mary Magdalene; John xx. 15. Peter's account of the Church; 1 Pet. i. 8.

The object of the Church's request is interesting, that Jesus would *kiss her with the kisses of his mouth*; meaning the manifestation of his presence. This was what the *Old Testament*-saints longed for; the appearance of Christ in the flesh: and the same is what *New Testament* believers continually desire more of. The manifestation of the Lord Jesus, in substance of our flesh, might well be called *kisses*; because his incarnation was a sure pledge that he came to redeem our fallen nature; and the acceptance of redemption by us, is, in one part of scripture, summed up in this comprehensive way, as *kissing the Son*. Psm. ii. 12. Well might the Old Testament Church thus long for Christ's coming, that the salvation of Israel might come to Zion. Psm. liii. 16. For however God spake in sundry times, and in divers manners, to our fathers by the prophets; yet prophets, nor angels, nor wise men, nor scribes, none were like Jesus: *never man spake like him*. Thou, and thou only, dearest Jesus, hast the words of eternal life. But, my soul, was this the request of the Old Testament Church only? Dost not thou, doth not every real follower of the Lord Jesus in the New as earnestly long, and passionately cry out, for frequent, constant, uninterrupted manifestations of himself, and his love to our hearts? Yes! the language of all that know our Lord Jesus Christ, is, like the Church: *Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth*.

I hardly think it necessary to remind the Reader, that the request is for *kisses* in the plural number, and not for one kiss only, a single token of Jesus's love. The cause of this is very obvious. They who have tasted that the Lord is gracious, will desire to taste more and more of him. There must be repeated manifestations of his love, and repeated desires of the soul going forth after him. And though a believing soul may, and will say, when under a dark state of mind, and an absence, as to our view of things, of the light of God's countenance; oh! that Jesus would but grant me one token of his love, one kiss of his mouth, one sweet smile of his favour, which is better than life itself; yet, when the Lord Jesus comes with his hands full of grace, and his heart full of love, the soul finds such rapture in communion, that she will not be satisfied with a little; but, like the Patriarch, will wrestle for a blessing, and will lay hold of the skirt of his mantle, saying, *I will not let thee go, except thou bless me*. Gen. xxxii. 26. Pause, Reader, and admire with me the condescension of our Jesus! doth he, indeed, whom angels adore, kiss with the kisses of his mouth poor polluted sinners. Is it an honour to kiss the hand of an earthly prince? And will our heavenly King himself kiss with his mouth the beggars of the dunghill? Oh! precious Jesus! what a love is thine. But we must not stop here. The Church gives the reason for her request: *Thy love is better than wine*. Let the Reader remark with me, that the manner of expression in the song is now changed. She had before been speaking of him. And now she particularly speaks to him. But what an endless subject is opened here in the view of Jesus' love? Who shall describe it, as it is in itself; as it is in its effects; or as it manifests itself to the souls of his people,

Yes! thou dearest Jesus, none but thyself can tell what it is. It began before all worlds. It had its rise in thyself: nothing in us, no, not even our misery prompted thee to it, though our misery afforded occasion for its display. But it would rob thee, dearest Lord, of thy glory, in thy love to us, to say that any thing in us became the cause. No! it was spontaneous in thy holy breast. And as it was *from* everlasting; so it is *to* everlasting. And the duration of thy love is only equalled by the nature and quality of it, in its greatness, extensiveness, aboundings, unmeasurable by heights, and depths, and lengths, and breadths: a love indeed that passeth knowledge: and as infinitely surpassing all creature love as *the drop of the bucket, or the small dust of the balance*. Its blessed effects also are such as no language can describe. All that we have in time: all that we look forward to in eternity. All the mercies of redemption, all the works of grace, and all the hopes of glory: the whole hath its rise in this unparalleled love of Jesus. Neither are the manifestations of it less wonderful on the hearts of the Lord's people. For what can equal the astonishing powers of this love in converting such an heart as mine, (may I, Reader, add your's also) from an hatred to the Lord and his ways, to the love of him and his salvation. Can you be surprized, Reader, then, that the Church should cry out under such views of Jesus; *Thy love is better than wine*. Wine is an high cordial, and as such it is recommended in the book of the Proverbs, to be given *to the heavy in heart*. Prov. xxxi. 6. But then it can reach no further than to the refreshment of the body. But the love of our Jesus reacheth to the soul. If I give a poor, famishing, fainting creature a little wine, it may revive his spirits. But if Jesus gives his precious love to me, it will heal my soul. It hath done so, dearest Lord, for thou hast quickened my soul which before was dead in trespasses and sins. And now the renewed draughts of the same everlasting love keep my soul alive, and preserve it from day to day. Reader! do you know any thing of this love of Jesus? Can you say, as the Church did, *Thy love is better than wine*? If so, let us ask the dear Lord to shed abroad the sweet tokens of this love more and more in our hearts: here is no danger of intoxication. We would be *drunken, but not with wine*. Jesus hath said, *Drink, yea, drink abundantly, O beloved*.

3 Because of the savour of thy good ointments, thy name *is as* ointment poured forth, therefore do the virgins love thee.

It is the Church which is here addressing herself to Jesus. And the substance of what this verse contains seems to be, that there is in her esteem so much fragrancy and preciousness in the very name of her Lord, that, like the holy ointment of the sanctuary, which was both costly and odorous, her spiritual senses were gratified by it. And not only the Church, but the heart of the virgins were sweetly influenced by the same. It may be proper to remind the Reader, that the Lord himself gave Moses the prescription for making the holy ointment, to be used in the sanctuary, with which Aaron and his sons, and the tabernacle were to be anointed. See Exod. xxx. 22—30. And we find in after ages, that the consecration of kings, and priests, and prophets, as well as the vessels of the tabernacle was by this ointment. Hence, therefore,

the Lord Jesus Christ is said to be anointed, both as King in Zion, as Priest after the order of Melchisedek, and as Prophet, when he was anointed to preach the gospel to the poor. He as our great Head and Mediator, was anointed with the oil of gladness above his fellows, when, like another Aaron, (and whom Aaron typified), the holy oil of the Spirit was poured out without measure upon his sacred head, which ran down to the skirts of his garments, even to the humblest and poorest of the members of his mystical body, who are said thereby to have *an unction from the Holy One, and to know all things*. 1 John ii. 20. Psm. cx. 2—4. Psm. xlv. 7. Isaiah, lxi. 1. Psm. cxxxiii. 2. Reader! how sweet is it to observe, that our Lord Jesus Christ, whose name for his redemption-work to his Church and people becomes so precious and savoury, was thus anointed as the God-man Mediator from all eternity. Well may his name be as ointment poured forth, when we behold him as the anointed of the Father, *full of grace and truth*, and engaging before all worlds for our redemption, anointed by the Holy Ghost from the womb in his human nature, at his baptism, through his whole offices and ministry, and, when returning triumphant to glory, receiving all the gifts of the Holy Ghost for his people, and all power as Mediator both in heaven and in earth. Reader! is not his name as ointment poured forth to you?—But here is another sweet part in this verse to be noticed by us. The Church calls these ointments *thy* good ointments. Yes! they are peculiarly belonging to our Jesus. They are his, in common with the Father and the holy Ghost, as God. *All things were made by him, and without was not any thing made that was made*. John, i. 3.

But these are yet more peculiarly his as God-man Mediator, because by redemption-work he hath purchased all the gifts and graces of the Holy Spirit for his people: for all these are included in the covenant. See Isaiah, lix. 21. Isaiah, xlv. 2, 3, &c. And they are his, being himself the sum and substance of the whole of them, to bestow them on whom, and in what degree and extent he pleases; for *it pleased the Father that in him should all fulness dwell*; and it is of his fulness all his people receive, and grace for grace. John, i. 16. John, xvii. 2. Reader! is not Jesus' name most sweet and precious to you on these accounts? Doth it not give a lift to your soul, when you hear him say, I have all grace, and faith, and strength, and consolation, and every new covenant mercy; and I have it for my people. But we must not stop here in our review of this blessed verse. The Church saith, that it is the name of Jesus which is as ointment to her soul. Here, therefore, as no one particular name is mentioned, and he hath condescended to reveal himself under so very many, and all of them most precious, precious names, have we not authority to conclude, that every name of Jesus is, or ought to be, like the most fragrant ointment to our spiritual senses? And didst thou not, dearest Jesus, purposely in this verse cause thy Church to speak only of thy name in general, without particularizing which, that thy people might learn from hence, that all are equally dear, and all equally to be prized, as the most costly ointment of the sanctuary? Reader! where shall you and I begin, or where end, in the enumeration of the many precious names of the Lord Jesus. Oh! my adored Lord God, I would call thee Jehovah, Alehim, Adonai, Emmanuel, the Lord our righteousness, Wonderful, Counsellor, the mighty God, the everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace. The Shiloh, the Re-

deemer, the Holy One of Israel. The Christ of God, the sent of God, the anointed of God, the sealed of God. I would call thee Jesus, the Saviour of poor lost sinners, my Saviour, my King, my God. Oh! how shall I enumerate the thousandth part of thy loveliness, or of the sweet savor of thy name. Blessed be God, there is salvation in no other; my soul renounceth every other, most completely and fully satisfied as I am, that *there is no other name under heaven given among men whereby we must be saved.* Acts, iv. 12. There is yet remaining to be noticed, that part of this lovely verse which speaks of the virgins' affection to Jesus: *therefore do the virgins love thee.* By the virgins, it seems probable is meant true believers. And this title of virgins is not singular when applied to such, for the undefiled in heaven before the throne are called by the same name. Rev. xiv. 2. And there is a great propriety in it, if we consider that the followers of the Lamb are supposed to have a single eye to the Redeemer's glory: are chaste in life, in conversation, in doctrine, in fellowship, and above all in their attachment to Jesus. Paul beautifully speaks of believers to this effect in one of his epistles: *I am jealous over you (says he) with godly jealousy, for I have espoused to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ.* 2 Cor. xi. 2. Reader! do you and I love Jesus on the same account? Have we such regard to his person, that his name, his people, his word, his ordinances, and all that belong to him, are precious in our esteem? Every poor follower of Jesus may ascertain his real love and faith in the Lamb by this rule. Peter saith, *that unto them which believe he is precious.* 1 Pet. ii. 7. Then it will plainly follow, and I am a believer if Jesus be precious to me.

4 Draw me, we will run after thee: the king hath brought me into his chambers: we will be glad and rejoice in thee, we will remember thy love more than wine: the upright love thee.

The Church is still going on in her discourse in this verse: and her address is still to him, whose *name is as ointment poured forth.* The verse opens with a petition to the Lord, *draw me.* As if conscious, that without this precious act of sovereign grace, and which is literally the case, the church could not come to Jesus. It is a promise of Jehovah, arising from his everlasting love, to draw his people. *I have loved thee with an everlasting love; therefore with loving kindness have I drawn thee.* Jeremiah, xxxi. 3. And our Lord Jesus hath laid so much stress upon those drawings of the Father, that he expressly saith: *no man can come unto me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him.* John, vi. 44. and again repeated to shew its importance, verse 65. But, as if to shew at once that one-ness in the Godhead, which Jesus hath with the Father, and to encourage the poor sinner which like the Church here desires to be drawn to Christ, Jesus himself sweetly promised in his gospel, that *when he was lifted up upon his cross all his redeemed ones he would draw to himself.* John, xii. 32. Reader! do you know what those gracious drawings mean in your own experience? Have you felt your heart constrained to come to Jesus Christ for life and for salvation, convinced by the Holy Ghost that you need his salvation, and that without it you are lost for ever. If so, you will be able to describe, better than any form of words I can make

use of, what that sovereign and effectual grace is, which totally differs from all moral persuasion, and which sweetly constrains the soul to fly out of itself into the arms of Jesus, for pardon, mercy, and peace, in the blood of his cross. You will then be able to tell me, how the Lord wrought upon your heart, how divinely he taught you the evil of sin, and loveliness of Jesus: and led out your whole soul upon his person and righteousness. And since the first drawings of his love, how he now at times inclines your whole soul to desire nearer communion with him, and more frequent manifestations of himself; and to keep you from ever more being drawn away by the world, by the suggestions of Satan, or the remains of indwelling corruption in your own heart, from Jesus, the sole object of your love. See David's desire to this effect, Psalm, xxvii. 4.

But we should observe on this verse, that while the church prays to be drawn to Jesus, she promiseth for herself and companions (perhaps the virgins before spoken of) that they will run after him. Draw *me*, we will run after thee. When she says draw *me*, we will run after thee; the Church did not mean to say that the drawing of her would incline all to run, unless indeed we consider the Church in this place, as the collected body of believers, and then the doctrine is sweet and consolatory. For the Church as one made up of the whole body, of which Jesus is the head, is *his fulness*. Ephes. i. 23. But without reading the passage in this sense, it will follow that the drawings of the Lord are necessary for every individual member of his mystical body. There is a great beauty in the expression running *after* Christ. Not simply running to him once for protection, but always pursuing him: *following the Lamb whithersoever he goeth*. Rev. xiv. 4. *Cleaving to him*, as Moses expresseth it. Deut. x. 20; or as Isaiah hath it, *hanging upon him all the glory of his Father's house*. Isaiah, xxii. 24. It is in this sense David meant it no doubt, when he said; *I will run the way of thy commandments, when thou shalt enlarge my heart*. Psm. cxix. 32.

The next clause in the verse seems to carry with it an idea, that her request hath been heard and answered: for the Church saith, *the king hath brought me into his chambers*. And this proves the truth of that most blessed promise: *And it shall come to pass that before they call I will answer; and while they are yet speaking, I will hear*. Isaiah, lxxv. 24.

By the King, as hath before been observed, can be meant no other than the Lord Jesus. And by the Church distinguishing him, peculiarly by this title in the very opening of her song is meant, no doubt, to shew the sovereignty of Jehovah in redemption. It is beautiful if we consider the title given, in the very commencement of the communion and fellowship between Christ and his Church, on this account, as referring the whole into the Lord's supremacy. When a poor sinner in the after-stages of his warfare is enabled to look back and trace sovereign power in the founding of salvation; whatever difficulties then occur, he feels a proportioned confidence in the issue of every event. Is it not Jehovah that hath founded Zion, and shall not the poor of his people trust in it? Isaiah, xiv. 32. Can any thing undo his purposes, or make him alter the plan of his counsel? *Hath he said, and shall he not do it: or hath he spoken, and shall he not make it good?* Numb. xxiii. 19. Oh! Reader it is very sweet in times of trial to rest upon the sovereignty of God, and his faithfulness in the promise: for then, like the prophet, the soul

can sing; *The Lord thy God in the midst of thee is mighty, he will save, he will rejoice over thee with joy, he will rest in his love, he will joy over thee with singing.* Zeph. iii. 17. Reader! what are your views of this glorious, this sovereign, this almighty king Jesus? Do you know him in his Godhead, as *one with the Father over all, God blessed for ever?* Do you know him as the God-man Mediator, to whom as the constituted head of his Church an universal empire is his, in heaven and in earth; the sovereign of angels, of all worlds, of heaven, hell, death, and the grave? He saith himself, *all power is mine in heaven and in earth.* And he hath not only received a kingdom which cannot be moved, from the gift of his Father; but by his blood and the conquests of his grace he hath purchased to himself universal and everlasting dominion. Doth my Reader's heart, with holy joy, bend to the sceptre of his kingly throne? And doth his tongue as gladly confess *that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father?* This is made one striking mark of his people, and confirmed by the solemnity of Jehovah's own asseveration. Isaiah, xlv. 23.

By the king's having *brought the Church into his chambers*, we may understand that the marriage between Christ and his Church is consummated. The union is formed. The poor sinner is one in Christ Jesus. The Son of God hath accomplished the long planned object of redemption. From the gift of his Father, the purchase of his blood, and the conquests of his Spirit, he hath now brought home his bride the Church, hath led her into his chambers, made her savingly acquainted with the treasures of his grace, and put her in possession of all his promises, which neither death, nor hell, no, nor the unbelief of her own heart shall finally deprive her of. Well might the prophet in the contemplation cry out; *Sing, O ye heavens, for the Lord hath done it; shout ye lower parts of the earth: break forth into singing ye mountains, O forest, and every tree therein: for the Lord hath redeemed Jacob, and glorified himself in Israel.* Isaiah, xlv. 23. I beg the Reader particularly to remark with me the delightful expression in this part of the verse, the king hath brought the Church into his chambers. Not that the Church found her way there, neither of herself *came* there; but the king *brought* her there. Yes! thou dearest Jesus! thou must bring thy people in, or they will never come. It is thou that hast opened a new and living way for us through thy blood. And the way thou hast once opened by thy blood, thou ever livest to keep open by thy power, and the all prevailing efficacy of thy merits, death, and intercession; but unless thou bring us in, and by the sovereignty of thy holy Spirit lead our souls by the hand into thy presence, and the presence of God our Father; never would any of thy people draw nigh in their own strength and merit. Reader! I trust the Lord hath taught you this precious truth; that *having the sentence of death in ourselves we may not trust in ourselves, but in him that raiseth the dead.* 2 Cor. i. 9.

But what are those chambers into which the king brings his Church and people? Not those mansions above I apprehend, which Jesus is gone before to take possession of in his Church's name, and whence he will come again by and by to take his people to himself. Though believers now, may truly be said by faith to rest in Jesus; for he is *the rest wherewith he causeth the weary to rest, and he is their refreshing.* Isaiah, xxviii. 12. But concerning our everlasting home it may be said

of this, as *Moses* told Israel in the wilderness: *ye are not as yet come to the rest, and to the inheritance which the Lord your God giveth you.* Deut. xii. 9. Those chambers of the king therefore seem to mean, acquaintance, and knowledge, and communion, into which the Lord brings poor sinners when *he shews them his covenant*: when he reveals to them his love, and brings them more intimately acquainted with their own corruptions, and their need of him: when he opens to them the scriptures of truth: pours out upon them the gracious manifestations of himself: gives them ravishing views of his glory, and in short, reveals himself to them otherwise than he doeth to the world. John xiv. 22. Reader! hath our king Jesus in any of those ways brought you into his chambers?

The joy of those spoken of in this verse, is the next point to be regarded. *We will be glad and rejoice in thee*: that is, in Christ. But who the persons are that are said here to be glad and rejoice in Christ, is not said; though it should seem from what was related before, that it means the virgins, or believers in Jesus. And there is indeed enough cause to be glad, and to rejoice in him. His person, his salvation, his love to his people; his great undertaking for them, and his accomplishment of it: every thing indeed relating to Jesus furnisheth subject for joy. When we consider what he is in himself, what he is to his Church, what he *hath* wrought, what he *will* perform, and what will be the everlasting source of happiness in him; these thoughts furnish endless matter of rejoicing, so that well might the virgins be said to express themselves in the words of this verse: *we will be glad and rejoice in thee.* Reader! what saith your heart to the same? Have you ever contemplated the Lamb of God in his own spotless purity? Have you ever beheld him taking away sin, by the sacrifice of himself? Have you looked at our Jesus and contemplated him under all his endearing characters, bringing in his Church as the king into his chambers: acting as the High Priest in making atonement for his people by his blood, and pleading their cause by his compleat righteousness and intercession? And as the great prophet of his Church teaching by his holy Spirit all things, and guiding and leading into all truth? Do you behold him who is thus set forth in his blessed word, and do you not find your heart going forth in the same earnestness as the virgins: *We will be glad and rejoice in thee.*

But this is not all. It is added: *we will remember thy love more than wine.* Hath not this an allusion to the ordinance of the supper? The Lord hath made in this mountain *a feast to all people, of wine on the lees well refined.* Isaiah xxv. 6. But saith the believing soul, the remembrance of Jesus' love shall more exhilarate my soul, than the strongest, richest, wine. Reader! it is one thing to have communion with the cup at the table, and another to have fellowship with Jesus in his blood. In that sacred service are your eyes singly to him, and his person, *whom God hath set forth a propitiation through faith in his blood?* Rom. iii. 25.

The last clause of this verse is, *The upright love thee.* By the upright we may suppose are meant, sincere followers of Jesus. David calls them *the undefiled in the way, and that walk in the law of the Lord.* Psalm, cxix. 1. Precious souls who have given in their names to Jesus, and will not go back. The book of Ruth furnisheth a beautiful example of

the kind in the person of that converted Moabite. The language of every true believer in Christ corresponds to what she said to *Naomi*. *Intreat me not (she said) to leave thee, or to return from following after thee: for whither thou goest I will go, and where thou lodgest I will lodge: thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God. Where thou diest I will die, and there will I be buried. The Lord do so to me, and more also, if ought but death part thee and me.* Ruth i. 16, 17.

5 ¶ I am black, but comely, O ye daughters of Jerusalem, as the tents of Kedar, as the curtains of Solomon.

There is a very great beauty in this verse, considered as to the view the Church had of herself as she really was in herself, and as she really was in Christ, and as beheld in him. And I think, if the Reader connects these expressions (as no doubt he ought) with what went before, he will discover a still greater beauty. She had desired the Lord to draw her that she might run after him—this was done. The king had brought her into his very chambers. Overpowered with such condescending grace the Church looks into herself, and sees so much vileness and iniquity that her soul swoons in the view, and cries out “I am black, O ye daughters of Jerusalem:” full of spots, and in myself covered over with the leprosy of sin. But behold, by the clothing of Jesus’s righteousness, and the washing in his blood, how comely I am in the comeliness which he hath put upon me?

By the daughters of Jerusalem I should conceive is meant the same as the *virgins* before noticed: only as a beautiful variety to heighten the representation they are here called *daughters*. For considering *Jerusalem which is above*, as the Apostle calls her, *the Mother of us all*, who belong to the gospel church, and of *the general assembly whose names are written in heaven*; they are all one in Christ Jesus. See Gal. iv. 26. Heb. xii. 22, 23. Gal. iii. 27, 28. The comparison the Church makes of her corruption by nature to the tents of *Kedar*, and of her loveliness in Jesus to the curtains of *Solomon*, is uncommonly beautiful. *Kedar* was one of the children of *Ishmael*, whose posterity dwelt in tents, being shepherds. And no doubt those tents being exposed to the weather acquired blackness from variety of seasons, of sun, and storms, and rain. The blackness of those tents became no unapt representation of the dark state of the mind by nature, and the habit of mourning in the soul by reason thereof. And moreover, it might be meant to shew also the black estate in which the Church of Jesus appears in the eyes of the world. See Genesis, xxiv. 13. Isaiah, xlii. 11. The contrast to all this in the curtains of *Solomon*, which, no doubt, from the riches of *Solomon*, and the splendour in which he lived, must have been very superb and elegant, is equally striking to represent the loveliness of the Church, who as *the king’s daughter is all glorious within*, when beheld in the garment of Christ’s salvation, and made as *Zion* is said to be, *a perfection of beauty, from the comeliness Jesus hath put upon her*. See Lament. ii. 15. Psalm. xlv. 13. Ezek. xvi. 14. Reader! what say you to this account the Church gives of herself? Can you adopt the same language? Do you behold yourself as in yourself, vile and worthless: but in the righteousness of Jesus, without spot or wrinkle, or any such thing? Can you join issue with the Church; *I will greatly rejoice in*

the Lord, my soul shall be joyful in my God, for he hath clothed me with the garments of salvation: he hath covered me with the robe of righteousness as a bridegroom decketh himself with ornaments, and as a bride adorneth herself with her jewels. Isaiah, lxi. 10.

Before I dismiss this verse, I would call upon the Reader to remark with me what a precious view this state of the Church gives, both of our Lord's unparalleled grace and condescension, and the happy state into which the sinner is brought by his great salvation. I stand amazed, dearest Jesus, notwithstanding all I have heard, and all I have known of thy love to our fallen nature, in the contemplation of such grace as is here displayed. Was it not enough that thou shouldst come down from the realms of light and glory, to seek and save that which was lost; but dost thou go on to such unequalled condescension as to receive sinners, and eat with them? to make those that are by nature black as the tents of *Kedar*, fair and lovely as the curtains of *Solomon*? Nay, more, to unite them to thyself, and to make them one with thyself in the human nature, as thou art one with the Father in the Godhead. Reader, if happily the Lord thy God hath wrought this work of grace on thee, learn why it is the King hath brought thee into his chambers, namely, from his love and mercy; not thy desert. And in the consciousness of this, however despised and looked upon as black by the world, rejoice in the hidden glory put upon thee by the Lord thy righteousness. This is enough to support thee under all thy afflictions.

6 Look not upon me, because I *am* black, because the sun hath looked upon me: my mother's children were angry with me; they made me keeper of the vineyards; *but* mine own vineyard have I not kept.

If, as some have thought, the Gentile Church is here particularly referred to, who being converted from heathenism and idolatry, to the knowledge and enjoyment of the covenant God in Christ, may be said to have been gathered from a dark estate, there will be an uncommon degree of beauty in the expressions. Look not upon me with an eye of disdain by reason of my former situation, nor of envy, because Jesus hath regarded me in my low estate, *for his mercy endureth for ever*. Reader! it is always precious to keep in view *the rock whence we were hewn; and the hole of the pit from whence we were digged*. Isaiah, li. 1. But, indeed, in a more general point of view, the converted soul, conscious of its own worthlessness and unsuitableness to bear inspection, begs favour in the eyes of all lookers on, not to estimate the state in which the soul stands in Jesus's love, by what they recollect of her former condition by nature, or the many infirmities since grace hath been vouchsafed her. The ungodly, unawakened, and carnal world, delight in the frailties of God's children. *Aha!* is their language, if at any time they fall, *so would we have it.*

By the *sun looking upon her*, some have thought is meant *the Son of righteousness*. But this blessed aspect would not contribute to make black, but fair, for so is the promise. Mal. iv. 2. I rather think that the expression is similar, in allusion to hot countries, to what our Lord saith in his gospel, concerning the scorching sun on the seed, inducing

heat like the fire of persecution. And then the sense will be, look not upon me with a jealous or suspicious eye, questioning the reality of the work of grace in my heart, because I have so much blackness of infirmities upon me; for I have been so scorched with the sun of persecution, that I am not in myself what I am in Christ Jesus.

My mother's children were angry with me. This phrase is very plain in its meaning, after what our Lord Jesus Christ hath taught us of the displeasure of carnal relations, as soon as ever a work of grace is wrought upon the heart. *A man's foes are they of his own household.* How strikingly is this manifested in every age of the Church. Reader! put it down as a maxim of everlasting truth and certainty. As in the case of Jacob and Esau; *as he that was born after the flesh persecuted him that was born after the spirit, even so it is now.* Gal. iv. 29.

They made me the keeper of the vineyards. Keeper of the vineyards was the most servile office; and, from the extreme heat and sultry exposure out of doors in the execution of it, became an irksome employment. In a spiritual sense, perhaps, it means that the Church was long exposed to false teachers when in the unconverted state of heathenism. And in the Jewish Church our Lord told the scribes and pharisees, that they had made the commandments of God of none effect by their traditions. Nothing can be more opposite to the true spirit of the gospel than forms of godliness without the power. In a figurative language this may be called *the vine of Sodom, and the fields of Gomorrah; the grapes of which are grapes of gall, and their clusters are bitter.* Deut. xxxii. 32.

But mine own vineyard have I not kept. How beautiful is grace which thus induceth humility. We find a little further on in this Song the Lord Jesus calleth his spouse the fairest among women; yet in the view she had of herself, she sees nothing but blackness as the tents of Kedar; and the neglect of her own soul, while engaged in the service of others. Such, Reader, depend upon it, will ever be the teaching of the Holy Ghost. The soul who lives nearest to Jesus in sweet fellowship and communion, will be led most to discover his own poverty and negligence. We see most dust in a room where the sun shines most clear; and the believer never lies lower before the Lord in humbleness of spirit, than when the Lord Jesus exalts that soul with brighter views of his glory.

7 ¶ Tell me, O thou whom my soul loveth, where thou feedest, where thou makest *thy flock* to rest at noon: for why should I be as one that turneth aside by the flocks of thy companions?

There is a great beauty in this verse. The Church had been speaking in the preceding to the daughters of Jerusalem. She now turns from them to speak to Jesus. The communion of saints is sweet; but, oh! how infinitely sweeter is *fellowship and communion with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ.* 1 John, i. 3. But what doth the Church say to Jesus? She considers him under one of his precious characters, as the great Shepherd of his fold, the Church; and viewing herself as his property, both by the Father's gift, his own purchase, and the conquests of his grace by his Holy Spirit, she earnestly desires that he

would tell her where it was that he fed his flock, and where he caused it to rest at noon. Every word in this sweet verse is most highly interesting; but it would swell the Commentary to a length not admissible in a work of this kind, to enlarge upon the several portions of it. A few of the more striking particulars must be sufficient.

In the *first* place, the cry of a truly awakened soul, for personal enjoyment of Jesus and all his benefits, is here strongly expressed: *Tell me, O thou, whom my soul loveth!* Reader! it is the truest sign of interest in Jesus, when the soul is going out after him in longing desires. And do observe further, that the soul may be going out in the most earnest desire after Jesus, when, as in the instance of the Church here, the soul may be at a loss where to find her Beloved. There may be, and there sometimes is, in the best of Christ's disciples, darkness upon the mind from the persecution of the world, the temptations of Satan, and from the body of sin and death they carry about with them: but when Jesus, by his Holy Spirit, awakens anew this desire in the soul, these desires plainly prove that the grace of the Lord Jesus remains unextinguished.

In the *next* place, we may observe the unanswerable strength of the arguments the Church makes use of to prevail with Jesus. He is her Beloved; and she is in extreme need. Reader! it is a precious testimony in the soul, when, like Peter, amidst the numberless circumstances of unworthiness which are in me, I can still say, *Lord! thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I love thee.* And shall one that loves Jesus, be as one that loves him not? Shall I be in doubt like others, that know thee not; whether I am thine, or no? Shall I, whom thou hast betrothed to thyself as thy spouse, be regarded as if I was an harlot? Shall it be thought by others that are turned aside, and who are not of thy fold, that I am like one of them? Oh! shew me where thou feedest, where thy flock is; that, like a lamb of it, I may be found among thy fold, and fed from thine own hand, and brought under thine own eye and care.

There is a very great beauty in this character of the Lord Jesus, considered in his pastoral office, in which the Church here beholds him. And if the Reader hath not been much accustomed to consider Jesus under this character and office, I shall rejoice, if the reference to him, which the Church makes in this most interesting point of view, should call up his attention. Through the whole of the eventful history of the Church, from the very first forming of it, to the ministry of Jesus at his incarnation, the Lord seems to have been pleased that his people should consider him under this character: hence one of the sacred writers cries out, *Give ear, O Shepherd of Israel, thou that leadest Joseph like a flock: thou that dwellest between the cherubims, shine forth.* Psalm, lxxx. 1. And as if God our Father meant to hold him forth to his people in a yet more endearing point of view, it is remarkable that he is called God's Shepherd. See Zech. xiii. 7. And that his people might know him as such, as suited to all their wants and circumstances, he is expressly distinguished under the various names of the *great Shepherd*, Heb. xiii. 20; the *good Shepherd*, John, x. 11; the *chief Shepherd*, 1 Pet. v. 4, and the like; intimating that he is exactly suited to every case of his flock. His *greatness* becomes their security for all things: his *goodness*, never to let them want: his sovereignty, and being the only One, implies that every other is unnecessary. And as the Father's Shepherd, coning in his name, appointed by his authority, all his

acts are valid, and his sheep cannot but be eternally secure. *They shall never perish, nor any pluck them out of his hand; because his Father gave them, who is greater than all, and none can pluck them out of his Father's hand.* I, saith Jesus, and my Father are One. 1 John, x. 28—30.

I stay not to particularize the many precious things folded up in this one character of Jesus: I only refer the Reader to the several passages in his sacred word, which confirm the glorious truth: and I beg of him to read the same with attention; and form, under the teaching of the Holy Ghost, his opinion of their importance. John, x. 16—18. Psm. xxiii. Ezek. xxxiv. throughout. Heb. xiii. 20.

But beside the character of Jesus as a Shepherd, we must notice the office also belonging to our dear Lord, of feeding. *Tell me* (saith the Church) *where thou feedest.* Now this is a most delightful feature in the portrait of Jesus. It was prophesied of him before his coming, that *he should feed his flock like a Shepherd.* Isaiah, xl. 11. And it is affirmed of him after his return to glory, that *he is the Lamb in the midst of the throne to feed his Church.* Rev. vii. 17. So that this act of Christ is perpetual. And if we take into our consideration what is evidently implied in feeding, we shall discover that it intends every thing necessary to be done for the welfare of his flock. It is the office of the Shepherd, not only to provide pasture, but to protect from rapine; not only to guard the weak, but to restore wanderers, to heal the diseased, to search and seek out those that are scattered in the dark and cloudy day; or as Jesus most graciously expresses it himself: *To seek that which was lost, and bring back again that which was driven away; to bind up that which was broken, and strengthen that which was sick.* Ezek. xxxiv. 16. Reader! have you ever considered your Almighty Shepherd under this sweet character? Have you yourself experienced the tenderness of your Shepherd? Do you know him, of going in and out before you in the pastures of his holy word, in the ordinances of worship, and in the gracious services of his house or prayer? Do you know him in his voice, in seasons of wandering, in his watchings over you like the Shepherd of *Bethlehem* in right seasons; in his deliverance of you from the lion's dens, and the mountains of the leopards. Oh! the preciousness of knowing the Redeemer under this endearing character! The sheep of Christ, who are the objects of his care, can best describe what is implied in this one feature of their Lord's love towards them. The office of a Shepherd is distinguished in the freeness and graciousness of his love. Though the sheep fail in their obedience, Jesus never fails in his love. It is his own grace, not our desert, which becomes the rule of his conduct. Frequently the poor silly sheep is unconscious of his wants and weaknesses; but doth the Shepherd wait to be informed? Is it needful that they should cry before he relieves? Oh! no. Their need affords the opportunity for the display of his grace; and his own love is the sole motive of all his mercy and tenderness towards them. Precious Shepherd of thy blood-bought sheep! the flock of slaughter! how delightful is it to my soul, that the needy as well as the full, the distressed as well as the strong, the wandering as well as the restored, are the peculiar objects of thy care. *I have gone astray, dear Lord, like a sheep that is lost: O seek thy servant, for I do not forget thy commandments.* Psm. cxix. 176.

But we must not stop here. The Lord Jesus not only feeds his flock like a shepherd; but in the act of feeding, the food with which he feeds them, infinitely surpasseth all other sustenance: for he not only feeds them in his ordinances, by the ministry of his word, with the discoveries of his grace, the precious nourishment of the gospel; but he himself gives them to eat of the hidden manna, the bread of life, even his own body and blood, *which is meat and drink indeed*. And his language is, *Eat, O friends, drink, yea, drink abundantly, O beloved*. Reader! doth not your very soul cry out, in the contemplation of this unequalled love of the Lord Jesus, *Lord! evermore give me this bread*. John, vi. 27—58. Oh! dearest, merciful, gracious Redeemer! feed my soul with the manifestations of thy glory—give me to see what thou art in thyself, what thou art to thy people, what thou hast done for thy Church, and what relation thou standest in to them! Feed my soul with the communications of thy love—let my soul live upon thee in thy pardoning, refreshing, renewing, strengthening, confirming grace. And let the consolation of thy Holy Spirit become the perpetual nourishment of my soul, when, in all his blessed offices, he is taking of thine, and shewing unto me.

There is another point to be considered in this delightful verse; and that is the question of the Church: Where Jesus feeds, and where he causeth his flock to rest at noon? by which we may observe, that it is not enough for the seeking soul to know *how*, and with *what* sweet and suitable food the Great Shepherd supplies the necessities of his flock, but *where* the seeking soul is to come. To this the answer is direct: wherever the pure and unadulterated gospel is preached, and gospel ordinances are faithfully administered, there the Redeemer hath promised his presence, wherever *two or three are met in his name*. Matt. xviii. 20. There he will be found of them that seek him. And also under the noon of persecution, the noon of temptation, the noon of affliction, or any other season of trial, like the scorching heat of a sultry day, in a dry and barren land, where no water is; there Jesus hath his resting places, and deeply exercised souls may find a sweet resting place in him, through the everlasting covenant love, and faithfulness of the Father; the justifying blood and righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ; and the powerful efficacy, strength, and aid of God the Holy Ghost. *This is the rest* (saith the Prophet, in allusion to all these grand things) *wherewith ye may cause the weary to rest, and this is the refreshing*; Isaiah, xxviii. 12. Reader! do you seek with the Church to the Great Shepherd for this resting place? Here set up thy rest in the faithfulness of Jehovah, against all the accusations of conscience, the charges of Satan, the arrest of justice, and the curse of God's broken law. This is what my soul would plead, in the double plea, of the sovereign grace of God the Father's covenant love, and God the Redeemer's justifying blood and righteousness: and sure I am, as Job justly argued; *God will not plead against me with his great power*, when he hath put the strength of his own salvation in me. There, in Jesus's finished work, the righteous might dispute with him; *so should I be delivered for ever from my Judge*. There can be no ground for fear of a condemnation from God the Father, while my soul stands clothed and justified before him in the

appointed and approved righteousness of God the Son. See Job xxiii. 6.

8 ¶ If thou know not, O thou fairest among women, go thy way forth by the footsteps of the flock, and feed thy kids beside the shepherd's tents.

Some have thought, that this answer is given by the virgins or daughters of Jerusalem: but, not to remark that it is a little unlikely, that young converts should better know where Christ is to be found, than elder believers: it should seem to be much more probable to be the answer of the Lord Jesus himself: for the promise is, *Before my people call I will answer, and while they are yet speaking I will hear.* Isa. lxxv. 24. And, Reader! do not fail to observe, how sweetly and affectionately Jesus speaks to his Church, and by what endearing names he calls her. Remark, then, that however black, in their own eyes, believers appear; yet, in Jesus's view, they are fair. But do not forget to connect with this view the sole cause, namely, because they are beheld by him in his robe of righteousness, and made comely from the comeliness he hath put upon them. Oh! precious Jesus! is this thy love, thy matchless, unparalleled love, to make souls that are in themselves black, fair in thy loveliness, and then to admire them for thy own graces!

But, Reader, observe further in this verse, how very gentle the rebukes of Christ are, for the ignorance of his people. It is as if he had said, After so many evidences as I have given thee of my love in my communion with thee, and manifestations towards thee, art thou ignorant where to find me? As he said to Philip, *Have I been so long time with thee, and yet hast thou not known me, Philip?* John, xiv. 9. Reader! call to mind that scripture in all thy moments of doubts, and fears, and ignorance. *He will not break the bruised reed, nor quench the smouldering flax.* Isaiah, xlii. 3. Matt. xii. 20.

The latter part of this verse, in the direction of Jesus, is as plain as it is precious, and as refreshing as it is important. The *flock*, to which the spouse is directed, can mean no other than the whole body of Christ, his Church, which the Father hath given him, and which is the purchase of his blood. The *Shepherds* here spoken of, are the ministers, the under pastors of the fold, such as are faithful in the work and doctrine, and correspond to such as the Lord promised he would give *Pastors after his own heart, which should feed them with understanding and knowledge.* Jerem. iii. 15. And by the *footsteps of the flock*, evidently are intended the several ordinances and means of grace. And perhaps the *kids* refer to the case of young believers; so that our Lord Jesus directs his people in this verse to search out a pure ministry of his Holy Word, that their souls may be fed, and nourished, and built up in their most holy faith; that whether they are babes in Christ, or young men, or fathers in God; the soul-reviving, soul-refreshing truths of his holy gospel may be their daily food.

9 ¶ I have compared thee, O my love, to a company of horses in Pharaoh's chariots.

I beg the Reader to be particularly careful in his observations on the very tender appellations which pass between Jesus and his Church. It is, indeed, one of the most distinguishing features of this delightful book; and as, more or less, he will meet with such in every chapter, and many times in the same Chapter, I do desire once for all, that he will mark it down as an object of great note. Indeed the Church and her spouse seem, at times, to labour for expressions, as if to excel the commendations of one another: nor is this to be wondered at.—How dear soever to a truly awakened believer the Lord Jesus is; yet we must conclude, that in love, as well as in all other things, Jesus hath the pre-eminence. *If we love him, it is because he first loved us.* I hope, Reader, that we both love Him, on account of his Person, his love to us, his suitableness to us, the manifestations he hath made of Himself to us, our union with him, and our communion from him. But when I call to mind the source of his love, the commencement of his love, the nature of his love, the quality of his love; the extent, the power, the degree, the unchangeableness of it; and, if possible more than all, the unmerited freeness, fulness, and sovereignty of it, bestowed upon such objects as we all are by nature; I fall down under the conviction, that His love is a love that passeth knowledge. *Epes. iii. 14—19.* This verse affords a beautiful example of it, in the rich similitude the Lord makes of his spouse, the Church, (made up of the whole body of believers), to that of a company of horses in Pharaoh's chariots. To a mere English reader, it might seem but a coarse kind of compliment, the comparison of men to horses; but when it is considered, that the manners of the East were very different from ours; that no animals were so highly prized as their horses, which were always on gaudy days adorned with trappings of gold and the costly jewels: and yet, more particularly to our present purpose, when it be recollected, that the dressings of the horses were exactly as is said in this place of Christ concerning his Church; *The neck with chains of gold, and the cheeks made comely with rows of jewels;* the objection is lost in the elegance and beauty of the similitude.

And if the Reader considers for a moment, how many striking qualities may be supposed in the character of Pharaoh's horses, which, by way of illustration, point out the loveliness and value of the Church in the eyes of her husband, the figure will appear very striking and instructive.

We read in the first book of the Kings, chap. iv. 26. that Solomon had forty thousand stalls of horses for his chariots. Will not the abundance be considered as no unapt representation of Jesus's army, which *no man could number.* *Rev. vii. 9.* And if we calculate the price of each, which, in another part of that same scripture we are told cost 150 *shekels* of silver (2 Kings, x. 29), which, supposing the shekel at the lowest value to be but equal to *three shillings* of our coin, makes the whole stud of horses to be somewhat more than *eight hundred and eighty thousand pounds* of our money; although the figure falls infinitely short, because the purchase of our redemption cannot be calculated with corruptible things, such as silver and gold; yet it may serve to shew the justness of the application that souls purchased with a ransom so inestimable as the blood of Christ, are more valuable in Jesus's eye than Solomon's costly horses were in his. But these are not all.

No doubt the horses in Pharaoh's chariots were picked out and selected; paired, if one may so say, in size, colour, form, shape, and strength. And is not this a beautiful allusion to the people of God, who are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people, the objects of Almighty grace? Moreover, the qualities of horses in their order, discipline, training, management, and the like, bear no unapt resemblance to the regularity of Christ's household. And the distinguished place the horses in Pharaoh's chariots held beyond the common labouring horses of the field, may illustrate the peculiarity of that exalted situation believers in Christ enjoy, who wait chiefly upon the service of the Lord, and live in the presence of the King of kings. And lastly, to mention no more, when we consider what care, what attention the horses in the chariots of Pharaoh had shewn them, above the ordinary run of others; we may, without violence to the figure, say, that here is represented somewhat very striking of the superintendence shewn the Lord's people in the service of angels, and ministers, and providences, and grace; and above all, the care over them by the Lord himself, *who watches over them night and day, lest any hurt them.* Isa. xxvii. 3. Precious Redeemer! am I a part in this gracious view to which thou hast compared thy Church? Didst thou indeed purchase my poor soul with so great a price? 'Didst thou set thy love upon me at the first. Hast thou adorned me with thy coverings, and now dost thou set me apart for thyself and thy glory? Oh! for grace, not to recompense such unequalled bounty, for that is impossible; but to love and adore such matchless mercy, that being bought with a price so dear, I may *glorify thee, my God, in my body and in my spirit which are thine.* 1 Cor. vi. 20.

10 Thy cheeks are comely with rows of jewels,
thy neck with chains of gold.

The Bridegroom is still going on with commending the beauty and loveliness of his bride as she appeared in his eyes. For, notwithstanding the consciousness she had of her own blackness and deformity, yet to him she appeared most lovely, from the comeliness he had put upon her: Ezek. xvi. 14. The Reader cannot need much recollection here to see the justness of the expressions in reference to every redeemed and truly regenerated believer. For when a soul is washed in Jesus's blood, and clothed in Jesus's righteousness, the imagination is not able to conceive how surpassingly beautiful that soul must be found! But concerning the particular parts of the believer which are here spoken of as adorned, the *cheeks* and the *neck*; perhaps it is not so easy to determine the exact reference. Some have thought, that as the neck is immediately joined to the head, it is intended by the expression to shew the nearness to Jesus, the head of his body the Church. And others have thought, that it hath respect to the special grace of faith, since by faith we apprehend and lay hold of Christ. And by the adornings with *jewels* and *gold*; (though I beg the Reader to observe that these words are not in the original, but are supplied by the translator): it hath been supposed also, that the ordinances and means of grace, which certainly are highly ornamental in the Christian walk of faith, Jesus intended to convey his approbation of the Church's diligent use of them. But whether these things are intended or not, nothing can be more evident,

from the whole construction of the verse, than that Jesus was looking upon his spouse with complacency and delight. As if the Lord had said, How lovely art thou in my sight! I behold thee as the purchase of my blood, and the gift of my Father. Every thing about thee, which is mine, I am pleased with. The gifts and graces of my Spirit, which I have imparted to thee, give a comeliness to thy countenance, which is graceful like rows of jewels; and I have united thee to myself as with chains of gold:—such and so fair art thou in my eye. Reader! oh! how blessed is it to be thus seen by Christ, and to be loved by him from our interest *in* him, and our union *with* him!

11 ¶ We will make thee borders of gold with studs of silver.

I desire the Reader to remark with me the alteration that is here made in the language of the Speaker. All that went before is delivered by one person, and is in the singular number. But here, it is as if by more than one, and is in the plural. And what can this mean, but that Jesus, as the Speaker, promiseth in his own name, and jointly in the name of the Father, and the Holy Ghost with himself, to give his Church the blessings here spoken of. Let the Reader recollect a similar form made use of at the creation: *Let us make man in our image, after our likeness.* Gen. i. 26. And so again at that glorious vision the Prophet saw; *Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?* Isa. vi. 1—8. Let the Reader further recollect the commission Christ gave to his Apostles in the moment of his departure, when committing his blessed gospel into their hands, that they should go forth and baptize in the joint name of the *Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.* Matt. xxviii. 19. And let the Reader call to mind at the same time the Holy Ghost's words by Paul the Apostle, when blessing the Church; *in the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God the Father, and the communion of the Holy Ghost.* 2 Cor. xiii. 14. Let the Reader bring all these scriptures into one point of view together; and then let him determine for himself, whether we are not to consider what is said in this verse; *We will make thee borders of gold with studs of silver*, as the covenant engagements of all the Persons of the Godhead to the Church in Jesus, that she shall be blessed with all spiritual blessings of God in Christ Jesus the Lord. Ephes. i. 3. I need not enlarge on that part of the verse, in inquiring what those blessings are. No doubt the borders of gold and studs of silver mean to include all blessings, temporal, spiritual, eternal. Every thing, and every state, shall be sanctified and blessed: for God having chosen the Church in Christ, and Jesus having married the Church to himself, and washed her from all the filthiness, and from all her idols; the Holy Ghost hath made her, and will make her *a glorious church not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing, but that she might be holy and without blemish.* Eph. v. 27.

12 ¶ While the king sitteth at his table, my spikenard sendeth forth the smell thereof.

At this verse the Church takes up the conversation. And as her Husband had spoken so graciously of her, she now breaks out in commendation of him, and his loveliness, and condescension. By the King, there can be no question who is meant; it could be none but

Jesus. By the table, may be understood, either the covenant of grace, the scriptures of truth, the several ordinances of the gospel, or his providences, dispensations, or the like:—and as it is said to be his *table*, no doubt it is intended to express that all are his, and of his own do his people give him. The spikenard is a beautiful figure to represent the state and exercise of a true believing soul. Naturalists tell us, that it is a poor, little, contemptible shrub in itself: but yet by a process when made into an ointment, it is most costly and highly esteemed, both for its fragrantcy and virtues. And is not this strongly expressive of the soul? When sunk by sin, how low, how despised, and even offensive in the sight of holy angels. But when washed in the blood of Christ, and made comely in his comeliness, how beautiful and graceful to every beholder! By the Church's expression of *her* spikenard sending forth a fragrantcy while Jesus is sitting at his table, and she with him, is meant to imply what a blessed frame the soul is in, when the graces, which the Holy Spirit hath planted in the heart, are called forth into exercise by the presence of her Lord. Similar to the effects wrought on some sweet flower of the garden or field, which, while the sun shines upon it, and melts by its beams the fine oil of its foliage, the air becomes impregnated with the odour; so the Lord Jesus, shining in upon the graces he hath given to the believer, brings forth the sweets thereof in the life and conversation all around. Thus Mary's spikenard is recorded with peculiar honour, as a token of her love which she poured on Jesus's feet. And it was at supper at the table when this was done; which should seem to refer to this very scripture; John, xii. 3. What a beautiful view doth this verse afford, both of the graciousness of the Redeemer, and the happiness of the soul when living under the immediate enjoyment of his presence. He saith himself, that he stands at the door, and doth knock; and that if admitted there shall be a mutual feast. He will sup with his people, and they shall sup with him. Rev. iii. 20. And so it is, indeed, for while his grace flows out to them, their exercises of faith, and love, and hope, and desire, are all going forth to him, and upon him; and while blessings come down, praises go up; and all his goodness and his glory is made to pass before them. I must not quit the verse before that I have first observed that some have thought that the Church meant by her *spikenard* her Beloved, her Jesus: and if so, the expression is still more interesting: for then it is as if the Church had said, While my Lord and King sitteth at his table, my Redeemer who is to me all that is blessed and costly, sendeth forth all his fragrantcy. He is the whole of my enjoyment. He is the Altar, the Sacrifice, and the Sacrificer in the sanctuary. And he is the glorious Head and Provider of the whole feast at his table. Every thing here is of Jesus. 1 Every thing is in Jesus. 3 Every thing is from Jesus. And every thing to Jesus. He is the Lord my Righteousness. And he is made of God to me wisdom, and righteousness, sanctification, and redemption; that according as it is written, he that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord. 1 Cor. i. 30, 31.

13 A bundle of myrrh is my well-beloved unto me; he shall lie all night betwixt my breasts.

14 My beloved *is* unto me *as* a cluster of camphire in the vineyards of En-gedi.

I bring both these verses into one view, for the sake of making one observation answer for both. A bundle of myrrh, and a cluster of camphire, are intended to convey the same thing, namely, the infinite riches of the Person and work of Jesus; and that every thing in him is abundant and as the richest clusters. *Myrrh* is well known as a rich spice. It formed a principal ingredient in the holy ointment. Exodus, xxx. 23. And perhaps in allusion to this, in the anointings of the Holy Ghost, the Church is said to be perfumed with it, when *coming up out of the wilderness*. Song, iii. 6. And no doubt the Person and sacrifice of Christ is precious to the soul as myrrh, while we consider that Jesus in his oblation of himself to God, for the salvation of his people, offered himself *for a sweet smelling savor*. Ephes. v. 2. But though, no doubt, by the church's comparing Christ to a bundle of myrrh, might well be understood those and numberless other things in reference to the loveliness of Jesus; yet I rather think in this place is intended by the expression, an allusion to Christ in his sufferings. Myrrh was given to Jesus in the offered vinegar; and the bitter taste that there is in Myrrh, might be well suited to convey this idea. Hence, under this view, there will be a double meaning as suited to the representation of Christ; for both in his sufferings and all-sufficiency, Christ is altogether precious to his people: and the church might very properly call him *a bundle of myrrh*, for a fulness of every blessing, both in doing, and dying; both in himself, and in all his offices, characters, and relations is in him; and she might well say, that he should lie all night between her breasts; intimating the closest communion as an object of all others most desirable, during the whole night of her pilgrimage state, until the light of that everlasting day-break in upon the soul which shall have no night. And perhaps the church might allude in this expression of Christ's *laying all night betwixt her breasts*, to the two Testaments, the old and the new, where indeed Christ may be said to lie, and where he is discovered by his people; for these are strictly and properly the breasts of the Church: so, in like manner, *the cluster of camphire*, though the figure is different, yet the subject is the same. The copher (which some have thought means the Cyprus pine, and others the Cyprus tree, and others the grapes of Cyprus, and some the dates or fruit of the Palm-tree), hath a beautiful allusion to Christ: for the sweet savour and medicinal qualities intended to be denoted by the expression, are all applicable to Jesus. Our Lord himself takes himself the same figure, John, xv. 1. And indeed, when we add to these several considerations, that the word *Copher* hath another meaning distinct from all, and literally might be translated atonement; in this sense there is an uncommon beauty in the thought, and the Church's view of Christ under this character, is very striking. *Engedi*, it is said, was a remarkable spot for the production of Palm-trees. But we must not dismiss those verses until that we have particularly remarked that special right of appropriation which the Church makes in both, of Jesus as her own. In the *former*, she calls him her well-beloved; and in the *latter*, she repeats the same as her beloved. Reader! in every way, and in all points of

view, Christ is lovely. What he is in himself, and what he is to his people; all is lovely. But faith finds a great sweetness when she can say, *My beloved is mine, and I am his.* Oh! for grace to know this, and to enjoy it; that while Christ is the only begotten Son, and well-beloved Son of the Father, he may be our truly beloved also, *the altogether lovely, and the chiefest among ten thousand.*

15 Behold, thou *art* fair, my love; behold, thou *art* fair; thou *hast* doves' eyes.

16 Behold, thou *art* fair, my beloved, yea, pleasant: also our bed *is* green.

I include in one reading these verses, because the beauty of them is in my apprehension, heightened in being read together. The *former*, I conceive to be the words of Christ: the *latter*, those of his Church. Both are introduced with a *behold*, as if to intimate their importance. Jesus speaks of the fairness of his love; and he repeats it for her comfort: and he ascribes to her the eyes of the dove.

There is a vast comprehension in those few words to shew the complacency and delight which Jesus hath in the person of his people, Christ himself is fairer than the children of men, for grace is poured into his lips: Psalm xlv. 2. And as Christ and his Church are one, through his comeliness, which he hath put upon her, she is lovely also. But what is particularly intended to be set forth by the ascribing to the Church *doves' eyes*, is not perhaps so easy to determine. It hath been supposed by some that the ministers of the gospel are thus represented; for their office is to be eyes to the blind, and feet to the lame: to go in and out before the people, and to act as stewards, watchmen, and guides, to the Lord's Zion. But whether there be a peculiar reference to them, or a general reference to all the redeemed of the Lord, the representation is alike beautiful; for the eye of the dove is supposed to be chaste, and meek, and gentle; not beholding so much the blemishes of others, as earnest in humbleness to discover her own. The weeping eye of a penitent is suited also to the dove; for the Prophet describes holy mourners as the sorrowful dove of the valley. Ezek. vii. 16. And in another part of this Song the Church describes the eyes of her Lord, as by the rivers, washed with milk and fitly set. Song v. 12. But if Jesus commends her love under these characters as a perfection of beauty, the Church, with all suited humbleness, takes his own gracious words and makes application of all that is truly lovely to him in the verse that follows; and to her view Jesus is all in all: as God and as man, and as both God and man in one person. She beholds him as the disciples beheld him, when he manifested forth his glory and they believed in him. John, ii. 11. She adds, as a further commendation, that he was *pleasant*; meaning, no doubt, that every thing in him, and on him, was blessed to her soul: his cross, as well as his crown; his Person, blood, righteousness; all his promises, his providences, doctrines, ordinances, people, interest, communion, fellowship, exercises; yea, all belonging to Christ, and in Christ. The *bed* here spoken of, and which is said to be the mutual property, both of Christ and his Church, may probably mean the human nature; but some have supposed it refers to Zion herself. Certain it is, that it must

have respect to what both parties are equally interested in. In this the Church is equally so with Christ, by virtue of her connection with him; for he is the Head of her body the Church, the fulness of Him that filleth all in all. Ephes. i. 23. The *greenness* of it may be designed to set forth the everlasting verdure and fruitfulness of the Church in Christ. The seed of Christ are promised by Jehovah to spring up in the gospel Church *as among the grass, as willows by the water courses.* Isaiah, xlv. 4.

17 The beams of our house *are* cedar and our rafters of fir.

The same thought is pursued in this verse, as in the former. The house is said to be their joint-property; and the parts of it are described under images suited to the Eastern manner, of the best and most durable materials. And whether we consider the house here spoken of, to mean the Church above, *not made with hands, eternal in the heavens*; or the house Christ himself hath builded, which is his Church; and *which house* (as the Apostle saith) *are we*—the sense is the same. Every thing in Christ, and of Christ, is firm, sure, and everlasting: and from the union and oneness between Christ and his Church, all that belongs to Him as Mediator is the property of his Church. Believers have communion with his Person, his name, his righteousness:—all he is, he is for his people; all he hath wrought, is for them; all he is now engaged in is for them; all he is gone to take possession of, is for them, and in their name. Oh! the preciousness of Jesus. *All are your's*, (saith an Apostle), *and ye are Christ's, and Christ is God's.* 1 Cor. ii. 22, 23.

REFLECTIONS.

READER! what sayest thou now thou hast gone over the first chapter of this incomparable hymn? Is it to thee what the title terms it, The Song of Songs? And is it of thy Solomon, thy Jesus? If so, shall we not join in singing it here upon earth, until we come to the everlasting hallelujahs of heaven? Yes! surely I would say for you, and for myself, Let Jesus kiss us with the kisses of his mouth, for grace is poured into his lips, and he will communicate life, and grace, and pardon, and salvation unto our souls. And oh! that you and I may kiss the Son, for his love is indeed better than wine. Never was it known, that the highest cordial of wine recovered the dead; but thy love, blessed Jesus, can, and will recover sinners, that are dead in trespasses and sins: and surely thou, dearest Lord, as the virgins found, so have we known, that thy name surpasseth in fragrancy and in odour, the richest ointment. Every name of thine is dear to a poor sinner: neither can a poor exercised soul of thine be so sadly circumstanced, but that thou hast a name suited for his case; and thy name, through faith in thy name, is the universal relief for all the maladies of thy people. Draw me then, thou dear Redeemer, with the cords of a man, with the bands of love, and every heart will run after thee. Surely the Lord the King hath drawn me into the chambers of his love, of his grace, his everlasting covenant. Oh! Lord, I will remember thee; I will be glad in thee; I will hail

thee under all thine endearing characters, offices, and relations for thou art the Lord our righteousness.

And now let me tell the daughters of Jerusalem, and all that love our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity and truth, of the grace, and mercy, and loveliness of my Lord. I am, indeed, in myself a poor, black, fallen son of Adam, but Jesus hath made me comely in his comeliness, and adopted me into his family; so that I, that in myself merited hell, am made in him an heir of heaven. Oh! do not look upon me, then, as I once was, but as I now am. Behold me in Christ, and be not angry with me.

But, Lord, I turn to thee. Tell me where thou feedest thy sheep here in this wilderness. I know, Lord, that thou art the Lamb in the midst of the throne, feeding the church above: but I know also that thou art not less attentive to the humblest and poorest of thy family here below. Feed me, Lord, a poor weather-beaten lamb of thy flock, and bring me home at length to thine everlasting fold.

Reader! mark what Jesus hath directed the church in this place: If we are at a loss any time to know where Jesus feeds his flock like a shepherd, let us seek out for a faithful, pure, and gospel ministry. Here let us sit under the word, and be very diligent in the use of means and ordinances. Here let the kids, that is, our little ones also, the children of our houses and families, be brought beside the Great Shepherd's tents in the congregations of the faithful, and the Lord will bless and own his word to his people.

And Reader! let us, with humble reverence, look up, and implore the fulfilment of this blessed promise of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost; that, from their joint love, and joint agency, we may have indeed borders of gold, with studs of silver. Hail! holy, undivided, Three in One, the LORD JEHOVAH! do thou regenerate our souls, and form them anew in Christ Jesus. Creating work, and renewing work, and refreshing work; all, all is thine. Lord! carry on and compleat thy work, unto the day of thy coming.

Be thou then, thou blessed Jesus, all and every thing our souls can possibly need or require: and while thou sittest at thy table, and art handing to my soul thy bread in secret, my soul will go out in desires after thee, as the fragrant smell of the spikenard; for surely thou art to me more refreshing than myrrh—more healing than camphire. Thou art more fair than the morning, more lovely than the sun rising, even in a morning without clouds. May my soul live to thee, walk with thee, rejoice in thee; and be thou my portion, and mine everlasting rest, in time, and to all eternity. Amen.

CHAP. II.

CONTENTS.

The subject which the first chapter contained is the same as is continued through this; indeed there is none other through the whole book of the Song, the mutual love of Christ and his church. Jesus commends his spouse, and the spouse commends her Beloved.

VOL. V.

B B

I AM the rose of Sharon, *and* the lily of the vallies.

There is a lovely obscurity which runs through the whole of this Song, more or less, which prevents us from determining, upon many occasions, who is the Speaker, Christ or his church. I call it a *lovely* obscurity, because, as the point is undetermined, the awakened soul may consider the several expressions wheresoever this 'obscurity prevails, as in the person of both, and thereby derive a double sweetness from them: and I hope that I do not err when I say, that perhaps the Holy Ghost might be graciously pleased so to leave the words, on purpose that the soul of the faithful might occasionally apply them to both; and, under his teaching, find a blessedness as referring to both. Thus in the verse now before us, in the first reading, it should seem that the words are the words of the church; for how can we expect to find the Son of God comparing himself to similitudes so very low and familiar as *the rose of Sharon, and the lily of the vallies*. But yet, when we consider to what a wonderful degree of humiliation the Lord of life and glory came down, we may suppose, without violence to the figure, that Christ thus expressed himself as this verse sets forth. Jewish writers for the most part, have accepted them as the language of the church; and many among christians have been of the same opinion. Reader! let you and I see whether they are not very delightful if applied to both. And first of Christ; the rose of Sharon, as a figure of Christ, may be supposed to refer to his human nature. Adam, the first man, is so called from red earth; and the rose, in its beauty and redness, can be no unapt representation of him who is *fairer than the children of man, into whose lips grace is poured, and whom Jehovah hath blessed for ever*. And from the fruitfulness of Sharon, it is probable that the roses grew there in the greatest beauty and loveliness, and were of a superior quality: neither do I think it an improbable circumstance, that Christ, in this view of himself, had an eye both to the sweet savor of his merits, and the incense of his righteousness, with which all heaven is perfumed; and thereby efficacy and acceptance is given to the poor polluted prayers and offerings of his people; the offering of his precious blood corresponding to the redness of the rose, and his righteousness set forth under the image of the whiteness of the lily. Let the Reader, if he be a real lover of Jesus, and enamoured with his Person, blood, and righteousness; let him determine whether the sweetest rose hath a fragrancy equal to the order of Christ's oblation; or the loveliness of the lily, comparable to the purity of Jesus's holiness? I must not overlook what some have thought, when accepting these words as the words of Jesus, that they intimate by the rose of Sharon, that Christ declared himself to be *the flower of the field*: for some translate the passage. And they conceive this not only because it is planted, watered, and brought forth without human art or human labour, as Christ was in his human nature wholly by God; but also because a flower of the field, like his gospel is open to all: *Whosoever will*, that is, whomsoever the Holy Ghost makes willing in the day of Christ's power, *Let him come, and take of the water of life freely; without money and without price*. Certainly these things open to our meditation sweet views of Jesus; but if the words of the rose of

Sharon are thus beautifully considered as referring to the person of Christ, and spoken by him, we shall find an equally sweet allusion in the latter part of the verse, in which he compares himself to *the lily of the vallies*: for here, the unequalled whiteness of the lily may well be supposed to resemble the purity of Christ's human nature; and the valley where this humble modest flower delights to grow, sets forth the gracious humiliation of our Jesus, in the assumption of our nature. Of him indeed it may be, and must be truly said, that *Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these*. And hence in both, the rose of Sharon, and the lily of the vallies, we may find these, and perhaps many other very pleasing similitudes concerning the Person and character of our dear Lord to lead to him. But if the obscurity I just now remarked, hath rendered it difficult to ascertain with certainty, whether the words belong to Christ or the church, let us now consider them with reference to the latter:—and here it is certain we cannot err, if it be supposed the church used such language from her union and interest in Christ. She may truly call herself all that is beautiful, and fragrant like the sweetest flowers, from *the comeliness that Christ hath put on her*. In his eye, he saith himself, *she hath no spot*. Song iv. 7. Ephes. v. 27. And from the many qualities of his grace in her heart, she may consider herself compleat in him. But though by way of setting forth the glories of her Lord, and as she had before said, *I am black, but comely*; Song i. 5. she still felt her own original worthlessness, while taking delight in what she was in Jesus; yet, I confess, I am inclined rather to accept this first verse as the words of the Lord Jesus, thus recommending himself to the notice, love, and acceptance of his people. Isaiah lxxv. 1.

2 As the lily among thorns, so is my love among the daughters.

But whatever obscurity is found in the former verse to whom the words belong, there can be none here. Evidently Jesus is here speaking of his church, and by a comparison with all others to point out her superiority; and in his grace, and love, he hath done it in a most gracious and blessed manner. And observe how the Lord expresseth himself: He calleth his church what he calleth himself, a *lily*: as if to express the oneness between them: and not only the oneness and union, but interest; for it is this which gives all the beauty and loveliness to the church, her conformity and likeness to Jesus: and by this she is distinguished among all others; for as the loveliness of the lily is made to appear more striking, when beheld in the midst of thorns; so the church of Christ and every individual believer, is found most graceful *in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom they shine as lights in the world*. Pause, Reader, before this verse be dismissed, and remark with me, the love and tenderness of Jesus for his church. Though she dwelleth among briars and thorns, yet is she in his eye the lily still. She bears his name—she is owned as his love, and Jesus regards her with an eye of delight, and will never leave her, until he comes to remove her from the thorns and briars of this world's wilderness to the garner of his paradise which is above.

2 As the apple tree among the trees of the

wood, so is my beloved among the sons. I sat down under his shadow with great delight, and his fruit was sweet to my taste.

These are the words of the church, and very expressive they are, of her affection to her Lord. It should seem, as if conscious of her own undeservings, when hearing herself so spoken of and praised by Jesus, that she interrupts him to tell of his excellency and loveliness, as the sole cause of every grace which induced loveliness in her. Probably the apple tree in those warm countries, was vastly superior to these in our colder climates; and this, indeed, historians tell us it was: for in loftiness, fruitfulness, and beauty, this tree surpassed all others. Now Jesus is all this and infinitely more, in the eyes of his people. Jesus, in our nature, is far above all angels, and principalities, and powers; probably these are the sons the church speaks of, and we know, that when Jesus as God-man Mediator is brought into our world under this exalted character, as the first begotten, Jehovah said, *Let all the angels of God worship him.* And though in his human nature he is said to have been made a little lower than the angels: yet in that nature, united to the Godhead, he is crowned with glory and honour. And how preferable, then, must Jesus be in the eye of the church, compared to that of the highest angels, or the best of men? None of them could redeem the church. *None of them make agreement with God for her.* I stay not to enter into a larger view of the beauty of the comparison between the graces of Christ, and the qualities of the apple-tree. It is sufficient to our purpose to observe, that for beauty, usefulness, grace in its appearance, and the fruitfulness of the apple-tree beyond all the trees of the wood, Jesus in his person, offices, and character, may be supposed to be by this similitude strikingly represented. Jesus is indeed himself the *Tree of life* in the midst of the garden; and so lovely, and so prolific in all blessings, temporal, spiritual, and eternal, that he is unceasingly blessed. *He beareth twelve manner of fruits every month, and the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations.* Rev. xxii. 2. But the church doth not stop with commending Christ's Person; she goeth on in the same verse to tell of her enjoyment of him. Reader, mark with me, that in those two grand points the whole of a believer's joy in the present life, yea, and in a future, is made up. To know Christ, and to enjoy him; to accept him as the Father's gift, and to make use of him according to the Father's will. And the church in this verse tells us how she did it. *I sat down* (says she) *under his shadow with great delight, and his fruit was sweet to my taste.* This opens a beautiful view of Christ, and of the believer also; when, under the blessed influences of grace, a full use and enjoyment of Christ is made by him. The Lord Jesus is not only a refuge to protect, but the whole of sustenance and food. Like a rich, luxuriant, and prolific tree, which affords not only shelter to the traveller from the heat, but fruit to live upon; so Christ is made of God to his people, both life, and light, and strength, and supply; *Wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption.* The prophet gives a blessed account of the Lord in similar representations; Isaiah, xxv. 4, 5. and so again, Isaiah, xxxii. 2. And when the souls of his people have found Christ, and known Christ under these characters,

then they can, and do set to their seal, that God is true; for they then dwell under his shadow, and *revive as the corn, and grow as the vine.* Hosea, xiv. 7. And when then is it that the church, or any individual of the church, find Christ all these, and may be said to sit down under him, and live upon him? No doubt, when from a sense of a want of Christ, the soul betakes herself to Him; and having discovered him to be a full, present, suitable, and all-sufficient Saviour, she sits down as one determined to rise up no more. There is such a fulness, such a blessedness, and such an immediate grace and kindness in him to bestow of his mercy, that the poor soul finds a complacency and delight, and will neither go further in quest of any other Saviour, or accept of any other. That precious child of God that hath so seen Christ as fully to trust in him, and delight in him, hath adopted, and entered into the enjoyment of that sweet scripture, *Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth I desire beside thee. My flesh and my heart fail, but thou art the strength of my heart and my portion for ever.* Psalm lxxiii. 25, 26.

4 He brought me to the banqueting house, and his banner over me *was* love.

Various have been the opinions of pious men, what is meant by this banqueting house of Jesus. *Some* have supposed it to mean the scriptures, which are indeed full of wine on the lees, and of marrow, for the perpetual feast of God's people. *Others* have conjectured, that it is meant to convey by the expression, the gospel of Christ, which is much the same amount. And *others* have formed an opinion that it refers to the several ordinances of Christ's church, which also open stores of rich banqueting. And *others* have conceived, that it implies the covenant of grace, which, of consequence, includes all the rest. And perhaps, as this is most comprehensive of blessings, we may very safely accept this sense of the passage. But, what I particularly beg the Reader to remark with me, that under which sense soever the banqueting house of Jesus be accepted, it is Christ, and Christ himself alone, that it is here said to bring the church into it. Sweet and blessed thought this to the believer! *No man, says Jesus, can come to me, except my Father who hath sent me draw him.* John vi. 44. *No man says Jesus, cometh unto the Father, but by me.* John xiv. 6. *It is the spirit which quickeneth, the flesh profiteth nothing.* John vi. 63. Oh! how thrice blessed is it to behold all the Persons of the Godhead engaged in one and the same act, to bring souls unto Christ! And how truly delightful is it to the souls of the faithful, when, from the quickening, enlightening, leading, and strengthening influences of the Holy Ghost, a soul finds himself savingly brought to and acquainted with Jesus? *The banner of love*, was perhaps meant to intimate the warfare and conflict in a life of grace. Jesus's name and love, are unfurled over the believing soul; but though in him we have peace, in the world we must have tribulation. John xvi. 33. Isaiah xi. 12. And yet perhaps in an higher sense than this of the battles of his people, the banner over the church in her Lord's banqueting house, might be meant to set forth the victory which he hath obtained over death, hell, and the grave, in the blessings of which conquests the church hath her part: and hence in the after part of this song, the church is

described to all her foes *as terrible as an army with banners*. Song vi. 4. 10. Reader! let us each ask his own heart, Hath Jesus indeed brought us into his banqueting house? Can we at this moment look up and behold his banner over us! If so, we may and must indeed read his love in letters of blood; for so hath Jesus marked his love to all his redeemed.

5 Stay me with flaggons, comfort me with apples: for I *am* sick of love.

There is a great degree of earnestness in these expressions, which evidently shews the mind of the church to be going forth upon the Person of her Lord with much warmth of regard. Whenever we meet with such vehemency of language, it certainly is intended to convey, that faith, and grace, and love, are in most devout exercise. See Psm. lxxiii. 1—8. Reader! I fear that we, who live in these cold languishing days of Zion, can hardly have a conception what is meant by these passionate cries of the church. It is to be deeply regretted that we do not: but yet it is possible, and the instance here set forth as fully proves, that, when devout souls get to Christ's banqueting house, such rich discoveries of his love in the glories of his Person, and such amazing grace displayed in all his redemption-offices, there may be such an overwhelming power of love coming over the soul, as to induce that kind of sickness as requires the arms of Jesus to keep from fainting. If the queen of the south swooned, and had no more spirit in her at the display of Solomon's wisdom; (1 Kings x. 5.) what may be supposed to take place on the soul of the redeemed, when at any time Jesus breaks forth in the blessed manifestations of his grace, and love, and favor! The flaggons and the apple the church requests to be stayed with, are, no doubt, figurative of spiritual comforts; as if she had said, Lord, while thou art thus gracious, oh! give me every suited grace for support that I may go forth in love and praise, while thou art coming forth in such rich displays of goodness and favor.

6 His left hand is under my head, and his right hand doth embrace me.

I do not apprehend by those different expressions of left hand supports, and right hand embraces, that it is meant to convey any thing of one being inferior to the other: but rather from both the hands and arms of Jesus to imply that all that Christ is, he is for his people. *In him it hath pleased the Father that all fulness should dwell*, and this fulness is for his redeemed, in such degrees and proportions as his glory and their necessities render needful. Hence he hath comfort for the afflicted, and strength for the weak. He is the bread of life, and the water of life to all. The babes in Christ shall have the sincere milk of the word, that they may grow thereby: and the young men and fathers shall have their spiritual senses both exercised and supported with the stronger food of the same bountiful Lord. All shall be taken care of, and all supplied, for Christ is all in all to his people.

7 I charge you, O ye daughters of Jerusalem,

by the roes, and by the hinds of the field, that ye stir not up, nor awake *my* love, till he please.

It appears from what is said in this verse, that the church was so delighted with being stayed with flaggons and apples in the arms of Christ, that she was jealous of being disturbed from a situation so very blessed and desirable; and therefore, she here gives a charge, even to the nearest and dearest connections, even believers with herself, not to interrupt her communion with Jesus, by even their spiritual communion with her. This is a beautiful and most interesting view of the church, and opens to a truly regenerated soul large scope for meditation. However blessed it is for the saints of God to be often talking one to another of the great things of salvation; and, no doubt, upon such occasions, Jesus himself is with them, (Malachi iii. 16. Matt. xviii. 20. Luke xxiv. 15.) yet it is still infinitely more blessed to have sweet communion with Jesus alone. Matt. xiv. 23. Gen. xlv. 1. Reader, I hope you know somewhat of this blessed life. It is sweet; it is gracious and delightful to take communion with the faithful, and to tell any one and every one what the Lord hath done for our souls. But, what an infinitely more blessed enjoyment is it to turn aside from the whole earth, and tell Jesus himself what passeth in our souls concerning him. And moreover, by this secret and private fellowship with Jesus, we find more real solid and substantial testimony in our own minds in one short hour's conversation, than much longer meetings in the society even of the faithful. There may be, and perhaps there often is, much talking of Jesus, where there is but little walking with Jesus: but no soul can retire alone to seek enjoyment with Christ, unless the heart be drawn to Christ. *Two cannot walk together except they be agreed.* Amos iii. 3. Reader! pause over this and satisfy your own heart on this grand point, before you dismiss it.

8 ¶ The voice of my beloved! behold he cometh leaping upon the mountains, skipping upon the hills.

I conceive that at this verse is the beginning of a new subject. Probably some short space might take place between this and the former. The Church appears to be in great delight in hearing the voice of Jesus. And indeed, when Christ speaks in the word, and by the word, there is such a sweetness, power, efficacy, and grace accompanying it, that it cannot but delight the soul of a believer. It is observable, that the church knew whose voice it was. She could and did distinguish it from all others. So Jesus hath marked his people. *His sheep know his voice and follow him, a stranger will they not follow.* John x. 3—14. And it is further observable, that the church heard Christ's voice, before she said she beheld his person. A sweet thought ariseth from hence. Jesus may be out of the believer's sight; but yet the believer can discern him in his word, from its power and gracious influences. Reader! it is a privilege which none but God the Holy Ghost bestows, to know how to discern the voice of Jesus, from the errors of the present day. David hath left upon record a blessed testimony to this great truth. *I shall never forget thy precepts, for with*

them thou hast quickened me. Psalm, cxix. 93. The church calls upon others to behold him with her. He cometh leaping upon the mountains, skipping upon the hills. Old Testament saints were always by faith upon the look out for his promised advent. *He that should come*, was the well-known character by which the Lord was in all ages expected. So that the church is here speaking of his approach in the general acceptance of it, in respect to his first coming in substance of our flesh. But over and above this general view of Jesus, no doubt the church had an eye also to his private and personal manifestation. *Mountains and hills*; yea, even the mountains of sin, and the hills of unbelief in our nature, shall not obstruct his sweet visits to his people; for his love and grace will cause him to leap over all. Reader! think for your encouragement, and let the thought bear both your mind and mine up in the blessedness of it, that as no discouragements kept Jesus back from coming for the salvation of his redeemed, so nothing shall arise to keep him back from fully accomplishing their deliverance. All the mountains of divine wrath against sin, and all the terrors of a broken law falling like hills upon the mind and conscience; yea, and all the hidings of his Father's countenance for a season, could not restrain the Lord from coming to satisfy God's justice, and to ransom his captives. So neither now shall any thing separate his people from his love, though their rebellion and slights of him are so very strong in testimony of their unworthiness. Jesus doth come, and will come speedily; as in his first appearance in our flesh, so in all the after visits of his grace and holy Spirit; and, ere long, finally, and fully *to be glorified in his saints, and to be admired in all them that believe.* 2 Thess. i. 10.

9 My beloved is like a roe, or a young hart: behold, he standeth behind our wall, he looketh forth at the windows, shewing himself through the lattice.

The former part of this verse is but a continuance of the former; in which the coming of Christ, as the church's beloved, is compared to the swiftness and loveliness of a roe or young hart. By which, no doubt, is intended, to convey the promptness with which Jesus flies to the relief and joy of all his redeemed. *It shall come to pass before they call I will answer, and while they are yet speaking, I will hear.* Isaiah, lxxv. 24. But it seems a very sweet addition to these features of Christ, what is said in the latter part of this verse, that Jesus *standeth behind the wall, looketh forth at the windows, shewing himself through the lattice.* Our nature, that is our corrupt part of it, the body of flesh, of sin, and death, becomes, no doubt, a thick wall of separation. In ordinances and the several means of grace, believers get sweet glimpses of Jesus. And he, when those ordinances are refreshing by the Holy Ghost, may be said to look in upon his people. But, after all, every view of Jesus is but partial and imperfect; and he that seeth most of Christ seeth but *as through a glass darkly.* Yea, Jesus himself having enshrined the Godhead in a veil of flesh, is seen but behind the wall of our nature. Reader, the slightest views of Jesus are blessed, the smallest manifestations he is pleased to make of himself are gracious to

the soul. Shall I venture to ask, Have you seen the king in his beauty? Hath he looked in upon you through the windows and lattices of his love, and mercy, and favour?

10 ¶ My beloved spake, and said unto me,
Rise up, my love, my fair one, and come away.

11 For, lo, the winter is past, the rain is over
and gone;

12 The flowers appear on the earth; the time
of the singing of *birds* is come, and the voice of the
turtle is heard in our land;

13 The fig tree putteth forth her green figs,
and the vines *with* the tender grape give a *good*
smell. Arise, my love, my fair one, and come
away.

These verses hold forth so endearing a view of the grace and condescension of the Lord Jesus, as must argue a very cold heart, not to feel a warmth of affection in them. Jesus is represented as calling upon his church to arise and come forth with him, and he calls her *beloved*, his love, his fair one; intimating the tenderest and most affectionate regard for her, and to shew her at the same time what confidence she might put in him. Never, surely, was there any love like the love of Jesus. He so loved his church, as to give himself for it, to die for it, and now to be everlastingly interceding for it. Behold the love of God which passeth knowledge. The persuasions Christ adopts to prevail upon the church to arise up and follow him, are very endearing also. *The winter past and the rain gone, the singing of birds being come, and the flowers appearing on the earth, with the voice of the turtle being heard in the land*; these are all highly beautiful in point of figure. It was a long dark winter indeed, in which our nature lay before the coming of Christ; *darkness had covered the earth, and gross darkness the people*. Both Jew and Gentile lay under it before the Son of righteousness arose with healing in his wings. And what it was to the nations of the earth at large, so is it to every son and daughter of Adam, before that Christ by the manifestation of his grace makes day-light in the soul. And Reader, as it was, and is, in the first awakenings of grace; so in the many wintry seasons in the after-stages of the believer, Who but Christ causes the spring to bud forth, and the flowers to appear? Who giveth the green figs, or the tender grape? Precious Lord! in every state, and in every stage, thou, and thou alone art the life and light of thy people. The voice of the turtle, the dove, the well known emblem of the Holy Ghost, is indeed heard in the land, when the soul is led to Christ: and then all those sweet effects follow, to induce the church to come away to Jesus, who alone makes a dispensation from nature to grace; converts sinners, comforts saints, and becomes a sure pledge of the compleat renovation of all things, when the earth shall give up her dead, and the winter of all desolated circumstances

shall be folded up and lost, in an eternal spring; *where Jesus hath wiped away all tears from off all faces, and taken away for ever the rebuke of his people.* Isaiah xxv. 6—8.

14 ¶ O my dove, *that art* in the clefts of the rock, in the secret *places* of the stairs, let me see thy countenance, let me hear thy voice; for sweet *is* thy voice, and thy countenance *is* comely.

Here are several very grand parts in this verse. Jesus here calls his beloved by a new name, that of the dove, perhaps from several causes. The dove is considered the most harmless of creatures. Hence Jesus enjoined his disciples to be harmless as doves. Matt. x. 16. And as the dove is harmless, so is it a beautiful creature in its plumage, exceedingly social also and attached in its affection, but timid to an excess. Now on all these accounts there should seem a great aptness in the Lord's comparison of his church to the dove. For what so weak as a poor believer, so fearful, so apprehensive, and full of doubting? What so lovely or beautiful as a soul washed in the blood of Christ, and made comely in his righteousness? And who so attached as the believer when brought into the privilege of an union with Christ? *The clefts of the rock* have been thought by some the enclosed and eternally secured purposes of God in Christ, the rock of ages. And if so, the *secretness* of it may be well understood in allusion to the other expression, *of the stairs*. It must be confessed, that as Jehovah hath from everlasting ordered all things according to the counsel of his own will; there seems a great propriety in this view. And Jesus calling to his dove in this sense seems to be as if he had said, O thou beautiful, but timid and fearful creature, thou art in the clefts of the rock, eternally secured in me, as in my side pierced by the soldier's spear; there I have placed thee, and there from everlasting thou art secret. I do not presume to decide upon a point of such sublimity; but I conceive that there is no impropriety in the thought. And under this idea was not Moses the man of God, somewhat typical of this, when the Lord God in passing by and making his glory to appear before him in the mount put him in the cleft of the rock? Exod. xxxiii. 22. The next thing to be considered in this verse is, what Christ said to the church. Jesus had called her his dove; and had said where she was; he now bids her to let him see her countenance, and hear her voice, and adds as a reason that the former was sweet, and the latter comely. If it be supposed that the church was mourning like a dove, when Jesus thus calls her, it should seem to imply, that the cries and mournings of his people for sin are noticed, and come up with acceptance before him. And the blushing countenance of the penitent is what the Lord regards. A beautiful view we have of it in Ezra, Chap. ix. 5—15. And in the prophet's account of Ephraim, Jerem. xxxi. 18—20. Reader! it is truly comfortable and encouraging to God's people, to consider, that however vile and refuse they may be esteemed by the world, yet, in the eyes of Jesus they are lovely. Oh! Lord Jesus! to be countenanced by thee, to be noticed by my Lord, how preferable to all the honours and distinctions of men!

15 Take us the foxes, the little foxes, that spoil the vines: for our vines have tender grapes.

It should seem that Christ is in this verse giving direction to his servants, perhaps the pastors in his church, to be on the look out for the enemy, who, like a fox is insidious, sly, and crafty, deceiving Christ's church. And to shew the subtleness of the foe, even the little foxes are to be taken. The smallest heresy in the church, the least sin if allowed to have hold in the heart, will prove of fatal consequence. They spoil the tender vine, that is, they wound the peace and comfort of young believers. And Jesus hath an especial eye to the lambs of his fold. Dear Lord! give grace to all thy faithful servants in thy church, to have a constant regard to this precept. Oh! for the Lord's constant grace to be imparted to all that minister in holy things, and for his strength to be perfected in their weakness. Give them, Lord, more of thy tender mind and will, that they may lay themselves out for greater usefulness, and take the foxes, the little ones of craft, and subtilty, and design; those foes which from their apparent smallness too often escape unnoticed, and yet commit greater evil. And oh! may they in imitation of their divine Lord, not only feed the flock of Christ in the whole body of believers, but carry the lambs of the fold in their arms, and gently lead those that are with young.

16 ¶ My beloved is mine, and I am his: he feedeth among the lilies.

Here is a short verse, but as comprehensive a one as almost any in the Bible. I need not observe that these are the words of the church, in which she asserts and seems to enjoy the blessedness of it, the mutual property which Christ and herself hath in each other. Perhaps the words might be read, and which would rather make them stronger: *My beloved is to me, and I am to him.* For then it might be asked, what is Christ to you, and what are you to him? The answer is, Every thing: more in it than words can express. Christ is mine, saith the church, for God my Father hath given him to me. Jesus himself hath so loved me as to give himself for me: and the Holy Ghost hath confirmed it by quickening me and uniting me to him for ever. *For he that is joined to the Lord is one Spirit.* And I am his from the same causes. For Jesus hath purchased me by his blood. And God the Father gave the church to Jesus that he should give eternal life to it from everlasting. And God the Spirit hath made me his, by the conquests of his grace upon my heart. Hence, Christ is mine, and I am his. And this my beloved *feedeth among the lilies.* Jesus had before declared that his beloved was in his view as a lily among thorns; and here he is said to feed among them. By which we may suppose is meant that his eye is always upon them, and he is perpetually manifesting himself to them by his grace. He feeds or takes delight in those exercises of theirs in grace, which he himself hath first given to them. Thus Jesus testifies his complacency and delight in them.

17 Until the day break, and the shadows flee

away, turn, my beloved, and be thou like a roe or a young hart upon the mountains of Bether.

The church in this verse is looking to her beloved with great confidence and joy, that he will be to her all she needs, for the support of her faith in him, and dependance upon him; until the gospel-day shall fully break in upon the church at large, and Jesus will appear in the open display of himself both to Jew and Gentile. This was the long-*ing expectation of the Old Testament Saints, when the law of ceremonies, and types, and shadows of good things to come should be done away and lost in the substance. Hence, we read in the opening of the Evangelists of those who departed not night and day from the temple, waiting for the consolation of Israel. Luke, ii. 37. And what is the cry of the soul now Christ is come, and all the Jewish ordinances as the shades of night are done away, but for Jesus to be like the roe or the hart for swiftness, in flying to his people's need in seasons of darkness and temptation, upon the mountains of Bether? And is not the holy expectation of the soul going out also, for the last coming of Jesus, when he will finally appear to gather his people to himself in glory? Surely the cry of each believing heart is, Come, Lord Jesus, come quickly. Amen.*

REFLECTIONS.

BLESSED Lord Jesus, while reading this chapter of thy love, do thou, I beseech thee, gracious Lord, lead out my heart, and the heart of every Reader of it on whom thy grace hath shined, to behold thy loveliness in all the several parts of it, which so beautifully holds thee forth to thy church. Methinks I hear my beloved say as to the church of old; I am the rose of Sharon, and the lily of the vallies. To which my soul replies, Yes! thou dear Lord! thou art indeed in thy bloody vesture, and thy spotless humanity, red as the rose, and whiter than the lily. And oh! how infinitely precious in both, beholding thee as I do through these similitudes in thy blood and righteousness, as the sure tokens of thy great redemption. And if thy church, Lord, is as the lily among thorns, is it not from thee that she derives all her beauty while living in the midst of a sinful world, the children of whom by nature in their best performances, *are but as a briar, and the most upright as a thorn hedge.* But thou, Lord, art the chiefest among ten thousand sons, as the apple-tree transcends the trees of the forest. And oh! for grace, dear Lord, like the church, to sit down under thy shadow with increasing rapture and delight, and to eat freely and fully of all the precious fruits of thy great salvation. Do thou, blessed Spirit, by thy sweet influences both provide the food and give the appetite, and cause me to enjoy all the good things in the everlasting covenant of God my Father, purchased by the blood of Jesus, and brought home to my soul by thy divine power. And, as for thy banqueting house, my rich bountiful Lord, I know that thou wilt bring me there, and spread thy banner of love over me there. I *do* know it, Lord, that thou wilt do this for me, and a thousand other blessed things of

thy love; for never should I have known thee or thy house, much less delighted in it, or desired to have been brought into it, unless thou hadst first shewn it to me, and opened for me a new and living way in thy blood. Reader! I break off for a moment from addressing my Lord, to ask you whether such views, and such desires of Christ are in *your* heart also?

But, Lord, I turn to thee again, and in the language of the church, I would beg of thee to stay me with flaggons, and comfort me with apples, even the enjoyment of all thy rich covenant-promises, manifestations, and the unceasing communion of thyself to my soul; for without thee I am sick and sorrowful. And, Lord, the more thou givest, the more I need; the more of thee I know, the more I desire to know; for in thee alone I find comfort. Embrace my soul, O Lord, and let **all** my stay and support be in thee!

Ye daughters of Jerusalem! I mean all ye that love my Lord, (for one church is my beloved's and his Jerusalem, which is, above, is the mother of us all); I charge you as I charge myself, let nothing be said or done to wound or disturb our Lord. Let us seek together his grace, his Spirit, his manifestations; and by every thing that is interesting, as the roes or hinds of the field, let us be very cautious of grieving his Holy Spirit. Hark! do you not hear Jesus speak? Yes! it is his well-known voice; and he cometh to us notwithstanding all our sins, like mountains and hills, which might obstruct, for he is, and he will be Jesus. He looketh in upon us through the windows of ordinances, and, ere long, when this wall of our mortality is taken down, we shall see him as he is, and dwell with him for ever!

But I leave the church to listen to my Lord, inviting me to come forth to him in this spring-season of grace. Yea, Lord, I will rise, for the voice of the Holy Ghost, like the voice of the turtle after the winter of life, is heard in mine heart. Yea, I would follow thee whithersoever thou goest; and, as like the dove, thou hast sheltered me, and hidden me in the clefts of thy pierced side, and desirest to hear my voice and behold my countenance, thou shalt hear, Lord, my voice betimes in the morning; early will I direct my prayer unto thee, and I will look up: and do thou, Lord, take away the foxes of the desert; yea, even both the greater and the lesser hindrances to my soul, which, in the tender buddings of grace by thy bringing forth in me, my sins and corruptions joined with the temptations of sin, too often nip, and would destroy. Haste, Lord, to me, and to my rescue, for I am thine, and thou art mine. Make all intervening shadows flee away, and be thou to my poor soul *as the light of the morning when the sun riseth, even a morning without clouds.*

CHAP. III.

CONTENTS.

The church is here in a season of sharp exercises: seeking, but not immediately finding her Lord. She relates the conflicts she sustained in her pursuit and enquiry after Jesus. Having at length found him, she rejoices in the discovery. The chapter closeth with an account of the King's glory.

BY night on my bed I sought him whom my soul loveth: I sought him, but I found him not.

We left the spouse of Christ in the close of the preceding chapter, in a very comfortable, and even rejoicing state; for she was sitting down under the confidence that she was her beloved's, and her beloved was her's. But we have a great change of circumstances in the opening of this chapter. Evidently Christ had withdrawn himself, and the church was sensible of it. A great instruction ariseth from hence, which all the followers of the Lord should be earnest to learn. When the Lord, at any time hides his face from the house of Jacob, it is specially with a view to make his people know his value, and more earnestly to prize his presence: and, though he seemeth to withdraw and hide himself, yet, it is but to excite their greater desires after him. And I beg the Reader particularly to remark with me, that the church being made sensible of her Lord's departure, and determining to seek him, becomes at once a plain proof that there was no change in Jesus's love; for, by his grace, he was still working upon her heart to seek him. And I beg the Reader also to remark, that the church's going forth to seek Christ, was as plain a proof that dark seasons and dull frames do not altogether make dead the life of God in the soul. Jesus was still *Him, whom her soul loved*; though, if needs be, the soul is in heaviness through manifold temptations. Reader! though it be night often, when our souls are wanting fresh communion with Jesus, and we return from seeking after him without success, yet, it should support our minds during the trying hour, that Jesus's love, and our covenant interest in Christ, do not depend upon what we feel, but upon what Christ is. Read that precious scripture, for it is a sweet one; John xiii. 1. *Jesus having loved his own which are in the world, he loveth them unto the end.*

2 I will rise now, and go about the city in the streets, and in the broad ways I will seek him whom my soul loveth: I sought him, but I found him not.

The streets and broad ways here spoken of, into which the church resolves to go in quest of Jesus, I should apprehend mean the public ordinances of worship in the Lord's house of prayer. She had sought him in private prayer by night on her bed; but this mode being unsuccessful, she hastens with greater diligence to seek him, whom her soul loved, among the assemblies of the faithful. Reader! every thing is beautiful in due order. When we follow up the employments of the closet with public worship, and again close the duties of the church with retirement and prayer, these are sweet successions. Our Lord was eminent in both. He graced the synagogue with his presence by day, and the stars witnessed the privacy of his devotions, when in their circuit passing by, they beheld him spending whole nights in prayer to his Father. Matt. xiv. 23. But we find the church, in this account given of her, alike unsuccessful in finding Jesus, in seeking him both in public and in private; for she found him not. Thus the Lord sometimes will exercise the faith of his people, and, no doubt, sometimes it is to shew

us, that however blessed the means of grace are, still they are but means. Nothing but Jesus himself can satisfy a seeking soul.

3 The watchmen that go about the city found me: *to whom I said, Saw ye him whom my soul loveth?*

Very probably the watchmen here described, are meant for the ministers of the gospel of Christ; for so the Lord describes them as watchmen upon the walls of Zion. Isaiah, lxii. 6. And by their being said here to have found her, I apprehend is meant, that in their ministry, or preaching, they spoke to her case and circumstances. Perhaps there is nothing more common than this, in every church and congregation where the pure gospel is preached; for here the Holy Ghost will lead precious souls: and He, by his almighty power, makes his own blessed word effectual in the hearts of the people. The church seems to have been encouraged and comforted by the watchmen, so that she communicated her case to them, and put the earnest question; *Saw ye him, whom my soul loveth?* I might pause here, if, peradventure this Commentary were likely to fall under the eye of a minister of Jesus, just to remark how blessed the office, and how distinguished the honor of one of this description, to act in Christ's name, and to resemble his tenderness in guiding souls to Jesus. Oh! how needful to know Christ ourselves, that when poor burdened sinners would long to know him, we may, from our heart-felt acquaintance with him, be able to hold him forth; and like the star, which ministered to the wise men from the East, not only light souls to Jesus, but go *before* them, and go *with* them to Jesus. Matt. ii. 9, 10.

4 *It was* but a little that I passed from them, but I found him whom my soul loveth: I held him, and would not let him go, until I had brought him into my mother's house, and into the chamber of her that conceived me.

* It is not said what answer the watchmen gave the church, or whether any; but this verse brings with it the relation of Jesus's love in manifesting himself to her. The Lord was hastening his own gracious purpose concerning her; and now having by the sweet, but secret inclinations, wrought by his Holy Spirit in her heart, to seek him privately, both by night on her bed, and by day on the public ordinances of his word; she tells us in this verse, that it was but a little space from leaving the church, before that she found Him whom her soul loved; and now she determined never more to be separated from him. Thus the Ethiopian which came to Jerusalem for to worship, was returning from the temple as ignorant and uninformed as he came, but yet he found Christ in the desert. Acts, viii. 28—29. Reader! do not fail to mark the many precious instructions which arise from hence, Jesus hath promised his presence with his people always, even to the end of the world. Matt. xxviii. 20. But he will teach his people at times the infinitely precious privilege of this: by shewing that ordinances, though means, are not the end of religion: neither ministers, nor ordinances, nor means of grace, are in themselves any thing—Jesus alone is the sole object to satisfy the

soul; and, unless we have him, we have nothing. And when he hath hereby taught his people his preciousness; then, like the church, we shall greatly prize the invaluable mercy, and hold him fast by lively actings of faith upon his blood and righteousness, following him into his retirings, and wrestling with him in prayer, and praise, and love, and affection, until we have brought him into the chambers of the church, that blessed Jerusalem, which is the Mother of us all, which is above; to tell every one of *him, whom our soul loveth*, and whose we are, and from whom we would never more part; but live upon him by faith here, and in glory hereafter. Reader, it will be one blessed testimony that Christ is dear to us, if we endeavour to recommend him to others. When Jesus called Matthew he made a great feast, and invited other publicans and sinners to sit down with Jesus. Luke, v. 29.

5 I charge you, O ye daughters of Jerusalem, by the roes, and by the hinds of the field, that ye stir not up, nor awake *my* love, till he please.

Here is the same charge repeated by the church, as Chapter ii. 7. to which I refer.

6 ¶ Who is this that cometh out of the wilderness like pillars of smoke, perfumed with myrrh and frankincense, with all powders of the merchant?

Various are the opinions of believers by whom these words are spoken. Some suppose that they are the answer of the daughters of Jerusalem, to whom the church, in the preceding verse, gave such a charge, like persons astonished at the change wrought upon the church, compared to what they saw of her, when, as she described herself, she was black. Chap. i. 6. Some have supposed that they are the words of Christ, beholding his church with complacency, as comely in his comeliness. And some have thought that the words are from the Gentile world, wondering at the Jewish church in coming up out of Egypt. But let the words themselves be spoken by whom they may, there can be but little question but that the church is the object spoken of, as coming from the wilderness of the world in the strength and righteousness of Christ, the goodly merchantman. And there can be no difficulty in explaining the several expressions here made use of, with an eye to the church, and of every individual believer of the church in the present wilderness state: for as a wilderness is a barren, inhospitable, intricate; and dangerous place; so all these characters, and many more to the same effect, strikingly set off the situation of the Lord's people in their pilgrimage. And when a child of God is regenerated, hath felt the evil of sin, and is in pursuit of Christ, or having found him, is following him; such an one may truly be said to be coming up out of the wilderness. *The pillars of smoke*, like which the church is said to come, form no unapt representation of the bent of the heart being towards Christ, but yet having more smoke than flame. And *the myrrh and frankincense* with which she was *perfumed*, and the *powders of the merchant*, we may readily suppose, meant to refer to the graces and blessedness in Jesus. The influences of the Holy Ghost are more fragrant than all the spices of the

East; and when kindled into an holy flame, communicating from Jesus, must send forth a blessed perfume. Reader, we shall do well, before we dismiss this verse, to enquire how far our experience bears a correspondence to it. Are there any lookers-on upon us, who from our coming up from the wilderness thus adorned with Jesus and his righteousness, are led to say, Who is this that appears so rich a monument of sovereign grace and mercy?

7 Behold his bed which *is* Solomon's; threescore valiant men *are* about it, of the valiant of Israel.

Perhaps the church is the speaker here, who calls upon every one to behold her Solomon, her Beloved, her *Jedidiah*; and to mark some striking circumstances concerning him. That by Solomon is meant the Lord Jesus Christ, I have already endeavoured to explain both in the Preface, and in the first chapter, to which therefore I refer. And as Solomon was eminently, on many accounts, a lively type of Christ, it is not to be wondered at that the name is so generally adopted. Solomon, in his kingly office, in his wisdom, riches, peaceable reign, and the extensiveness of his territory, figured some very strong features of Jesus. The 72d Psalm which is entitled, *A Psalm for Solomon*, hath been universally accepted, as well by Jewish writers, as by Christians, as altogether prophetic of Christ. *By the bed of Solomon*, some have supposed is meant the church of Christ, or the scriptures of Christ; and some have taken it for Christ himself. And the valiant men about it, perhaps mean either the watchmen on the walls of Zion, the ministers of the gospel, or angels which are ministering spirits, sent forth to minister unto them, who are heirs of salvation. Their number, though particularly mentioned, may not be intended precisely to intimate threescore and no more, agreeably to the general plan of scripture on these points. The five wise virgins, and the five foolish virgins, in the parable, were not intended to say that there will be an equality of souls saved, and souls lost, at the last day. Neither can the one person, who had not on a wedding garment, in that other parable, be supposed to imply that there shall be but only one soul cast out at the great day of account. See Matt. xxv. 2. xxii. 11. Perhaps the threescore valiant men of Israel, in point of number, are to be considered much in the same way; a certain number is put for an uncertain.

8 They all hold swords, *being* expert in war: every man *hath* his sword upon his thigh, because of fear in the night.

It is most probable that the sword here spoken of, and which they are said *all to hold*, means the sword of the spirit, which the apostle calls *the word of God*, Eph. vi. 17. and which the ministers of Christ are expert, or ought to be expert in handling. The church calls upon Christ to *gird his sword upon his thigh, as the most mighty*! Psalm, xlv. 3. And the night guard of Solomon's worthies very beautifully represents the Lord's servants, who are supposed to be more earnest and alive at their posts in seasons of danger, and during the nights of error among the people.

9 King Solomon made himself a chariot of the wood of lebanon.

10 He made the pillars thereof of silver, the bottom thereof of gold, the covering of it of purple, the midst thereof being paved *with* love, for the daughters of Jerusalem.

I would not strain the figures we meet with in this Song, beyond what they may fairly be supposed to bear; but, both the bed and the chariot of Solomon may be supposed to have reference to Christ's church and people. He rests in his love; and his chariot of salvation, in which he goeth forth for the salvation of his people, is all of the choicest materials. Its being paved with love, gives us full authority to consider the whole an highly finished representation of the infinite preciousness of all that is here meant to be conveyed. Some have thought by the wood of Lebanon, an allusion is made to the cross of Christ, to shew the everlasting durability of the sacrifice Christ offered upon it. The chariot is supposed to mean the covenant of grace, and the blessed gospel in which the Lord Jesus is brought home to the hearts of his people. But whatever be the precise meaning of the whole, evidently it is of Christ's making, and this plainly proves that all the work of redemption, from beginning to end, is the Lord's. He is the Alpha and the Omega. He is the Author and Finisher of Faith.

11 Go forth, O ye daughters of Zion, and behold king Solomon with the crown wherewith his mother crowned him in the day of his espousals, and in the day of the gladness of his heart.

Here is a gracious call to the church at large to go forth and behold Jesus as King, and crowned. Jesus came forth at the hall of Pilate crowned with thorns, to testify that He, and He only, was made perfect through suffering. And when Jesus, after his ascension, returned to glory, then was he crowned in heaven to testify his kingly power over all. And there is another coronation which takes place on the day when any, and every poor sinner bends the knee of the heart to the sceptre of his grace, and crowns him for his Lord and his God. Then is the day of Christ's espousals, and the gladness of his heart; for then Satan is cast out, and the Lord Jesus rejoiceth in Spirit, when Satan as lightning falleth from heaven. Reader, what do you know of this coronation of our Lord Jesus in *your* heart? Is Christ formed there the hope of glory?

REFLECTIONS.

MY soul! frequently in silent meditation run over the several blessed and gracious instructions which arise out of this delightful chapter, and enquire what correspondence thou canst find between Christ's church and thy experience in the love she manifested here to her Lord. Hast thou known what it is by night on thy bed to seek Jesus? Canst thou not say, *With my soul have I desired thee in the night; yea with my spirit within me have I sought thee early.* It is blessed sometimes to

be exercised with disappointments in order to endear the mercy, and to increase the value of it. The poor woman of Canaan would not have afforded so illustrious an instance of faith had the Lord Jesus given her an immediate answer to the first cry of her soul: and though Jesus is very frequently found of them that seek him not, and sometimes surprizeth his people with his goodness, yet, there shall be silence at the throne of grace again and again, when a child of God is going there with earnest importunity. But, as in the case of the church, when the Lord at length overwhelmed her with his visit of love, whenever the Redeemer comes, he comes with such a fulness of love, grace, and goodness, that the soul then holds him fast by faith, and dreads to let him go, lest darkness again should enter in upon the soul. And, Reader, will you allow me to ask, or will you put the very interesting enquiry yourself to your own heart; Are you coming up out of the wilderness like pillars of smoke, and perfumed with the sweet incense of Jesus's merits and righteousness? Have you found this life what it really is, and is graciously intended to be, to all the Lord's family, a thorny, dark, and intricate path? Have you met with fiery, flying serpents, and scorpions? A land of drought and barrenness, through which the faithful are sure to meet with persecution, and where none of them can find rest, or wish to make it their home? If so, is Jesus the merchant selling goodly pearls precious to you? Do you know, do you prize his myrrh and frankincense, the sufferings of his cross, the merits of his blood, and all the blessed graces of his holy Spirit? This is to be coming up out of the wilderness, leaning as the church did upon her beloved. Oh! precious Jesus, I would say both for myself and Reader, give to us to behold thee in thy chariot, and on thy bed of salvation, which is all thine own, and nothing of our dross mixed with it. Cause us to lie down upon this everlasting bottom, which is paved with love. And while, Lord, thou art sending forth thy ministering servants, as ministering to them who are the heirs of salvation; oh! do thou come and visit us thyself, and make all thy glory to pass before us. Yes! thou dear Lord! thou art the king in Zion, the sovereign in every heart, of thy church and people. Here, Lord, upon earth would we hail thee our lawful right monarch, both by purchase and by conquest; and in heaven, we hope ere long to join that happy multitude, who are casting their crowns at thy footstool, and saying with a loud voice; *Worthy is the Lamb that was slain, to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honor, and glory, and blessing.*

CHAP. IV.

CONTENTS.

We have here the Lord Jesus commending the beauties and graces of his Church. He invites her to a more close and intimate communion with him, and dwells again somewhat more fully upon her loveliness. The Church in return, as one overcome with the goodness of his love, very humbly ascribes all she hath to him, as the author and giver of it: and prays that she may be made meet for the presence and enjoyment of her Lord.

BEHOLD, thou *art* fair, my love; behold, thou *art* fair; thou *hast* doves' eyes within thy locks; thy hair *is* as a flock of goats, that appear from mount Gilead.

2 Thy teeth *are* like a flock of sheep that are even shorn, which came up from the washing; whereof every one bear twins, and none *is* barren among them.

3 Thy lips *are* like a thread of scarlet, and thy speech *is* comely: thy temples *are* like a piece of a pomegranate within thy locks.

4 Thy neck *is* like the tower of David builded for an armoury, whereon there hang a thousand bucklers, all shields of mighty men.

5 Thy two breasts *are* like two young roes that are twins, which feed among the lilies.

The general commendation which Christ hath here given in the opening of this Chapter, to the beauty of the Church, we have in part met with before in this Song. (See Chap. i. 15.) But here the Lord Jesus enters into a more particular relation of those beauties of his spouse, and with a special recommendation. It is probable from the several parts of the body here figuratively spoken of, that Jesus intended to set forth the several members of his mystical body, of which we are told by an Apostle, that *all the members of that one body being many, are one body in Christ.* 1 Cor. xii. 12. But at the same time there can be no question, but that Jesus is speaking of the beauty of the soul, *The hidden man of the heart*, as an Apostle calls it. For *the king's daughter is all glorious within.* Psm. xlv. 13. Probably by the eyes may be meant the ministers of the gospel, who are said, as instruments of the Lord, to be *eyes to the blind, as well as feet to the lame.* The hair may be supposed to imply both the number of Christ's people and their preciousness; which are all numbered, and not one can fall to the ground unnoticed and disregarded. *The teeth*, intimate the office in chewing the word, and probably to intimate the clean from the unclean, as in the old Jewish dispensation. In coming up from the washing and having no barrenness, implies the very great fruitfulness of Christ's fold, and their purity when washed in his blood. *The lips* are very expressive of the holiness of a believer's conversation. And as grace was poured into the lips of Jesus, and the Church entreateth her Lord to kiss her with the kisses of his mouth; so it carries with it this idea, that Jesus hath thereby communicated of his fulness and grace for grace. Psm. xlv. 2. Song, i. 2. John, i. 16. Song, iv. 11. *The temples* being part of the head, may probably be intended to convey the earnestness with which the soul of a believer is always supposed to be engaged, in the contemplation of her Lord. And the *neck* which connects the head with the body, and which is said to be as the tower

of David with armory, may be intended to set forth the uniting grace by which souls are formed in union with Christ, which are stronger than a thousand bucklers, or all the shields of the mighty. The *breasts* of the Church have been variously considered; some as referring to the two Testaments, others to the law and the gospel, others to the two great Commandments, the love of God and the love of our neighbour; and some would have them mean the two ordinances of the gospel, baptism and the Supper of the Lord. But whether these, or any of them are intended, seems to be accompanied with too much difficulty for modern Commentators to determine. One thing however is certain, the Lord Jesus is evidently speaking with delight of his Church; and it is blessed to be viewed by him in this manner, especially when all the beauty and loveliness of the Church is considered as wholly derived from him.

6 Until the day break, and the shadows flee away, I will get me to the mountain of myrrh, and to the hill of frankincense.

The Church once before had expressed herself in regard to the dispersion of the shades of night, by the break of day, see chap. ii. 17; and here she adds, that she will wait this much desired event, by retiring to meditation and prayer. By the mountain of myrrh, perhaps in allusion to him to whom was offered myrrh mingled with gall, may be supposed the mount of Calvary; and by the hill of frankincense may perhaps be implied the fragrant of that incense, which Jesus as the great High Priest of his people offered up in that one offering of himself, in his bloody vesture. Some have supposed however, that these are the words of Christ in continuance of what went before, as if Jesus, while waiting for the great day in which he will gather all things to himself, gets him away to watch over all the concerns of his Church and people.

7 Thou art all fair, my love; *there is no spot in thee.*

What a rich thought is contained in those words of Jesus concerning his Church. In his eye the Church is not only fair but spotless. So that, Reader, while, God's dear children are mourning over the innumerable errors they feel in themselves, and under which they daily groan being burthened: in the view of Jesus as washed in his blood, and clothed in his righteousness, they are without spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing. Jesus having presented them to himself as without blame before him in love. Ephes. v. 27. Reader! how blessed the thought that Jesus and his Church, Jesus and his people, in the sight of God the Father are one. And though the followers of the Lord feel the sad consequences daily of a fallen nature, and cry out under it through manifold, and as they sometimes think, increasing infirmities; yet it is in Jesus they are beheld, and their whole acceptance ariseth, not from what they are in themselves, but from what they are in the beloved.

8 ¶ Come with me from Lebanon, *my spouse,* with me from Lebanon: look from the top of Amana, from the top of Shenir and Hermon;

from the lions' dens, from the mountains of the leopards.

I would have the Reader observe in this verse how Jesus calls his church by a new name, not before made use of in the Song, namely, his *Spouse*: perhaps in allusion to what was said before, the day of his espousals. Chap. iii. 11. It is blessed to observe in this, as well as the several other tender names by which Jesus speaks to his church, how very dear she is to him: and no doubt can be entertained of it. He loved her from all eternity. And he so loved her as to give himself for her. And when we see how earnest Christ is that his people should be ever with him, can any thing more fully set forth the love of Jesus? Oh! that every poor, distressed, fearful soul, would think of this when calling in question, or doubting, his love. Isaiah, xlix. 14—16. The call of Jesus to come from *Lebanon*, the goodly mountain, as Moses called it, Deut. iii. 25, may be supposed to imply the necessity of leaving every thing, however apparently goodly in itself, for Jesus. Psalm, xlv. 10, 11. And *Amana*, *Shenir*, and *Hermon*, which some have thought the mountains about *Syria*, have certainly a spiritual sense like the former. Indeed what follows in the verse explains it. Lions and leopards could not be very numerous in those mountains, which were resorted to occasionally by travellers. But the sense is, Jesus calls his own, his spouse, his fair one, to leave all society, which in ungodly men is dangerous at the best, and for the most part hurtful, and to come with him in whom true joys alone are to be found. What can be more expressive of divine love! How exceedingly ought the faithful in Christ Jesus to delight in these views of the Lord.

9 Thou hast ravished my heart, my sister, my spouse; thou hast ravished my heart with one of thine eyes, with one chain of thy neck.

The Lord Jesus continues the same strain of affection in this verse as in the former, and here adds another title, that of *sister* to his beloved, to testify his relationship. Indeed the Lord Christ fills all. And he speaks of his endearments by reason of her beauty. Yea, his whole heart and soul seems to be going out in expressions of his love, as one perfectly overcome by his views of her. Perhaps the *one eye* Jesus here speaks of means the eye of faith, and love, and desire, with which redeemed souls are for ever looking unto Jesus. They have no eye to any other. And the *one chain of the neck*, by which believers are united to their glorious head, as plainly intimates the ornaments of the Spirit, by which their life and conversation is manifested. Solomon, speaking of these things, saith, *they shall be as an ornament of grace unto the head, and chains about the neck.* Prov. i. 9.

10 How fair is thy love, my sister, my spouse! how much better is thy love than wine! and the smell of thine ointments than all spices!

The love of Christ to his Church, and the love of the Church to Christ in return, are the whole subject of this song. And here the Lord Jesus declares how precious her love is in his sight. The Church

had said of the love of Jesus, in the former part of this song, that it was better than wine. Song, i. 2. And here the Lord condescends to make use of the same comparison in allusion to her's. Pause, Reader, and remark how gracious the Lord is? I would pause again and again over the passage, and ask, how is it possible that the love of a ~~poor~~ worthless worm, such as I am, can be at all graceful, much less so highly esteemed in Jesus's sight? Surely the whole must result from the love of Christ as it is in himself, and by a communication imparting a fragrantcy beyond that of spices.

11 Thy lips, O *my* spouse, drop as the honey-comb: honey and milk are under thy tongue; and the smell of thy garments is like the smell of Lebanon.

The dropping of the lips no doubt implies the conversation, which Jesus saith in sweetness surpasseth even the honey-comb; for both honey and milk are in it: meaning, the graceful, edifying conversation of a believer, and what drops from the mouth of a believer in prayer and praise at a mercy-seat. But how doth the honeycomb drop? Not by pressure, but free: not at a rate uncertain and little, but constant and unceasing. For no sooner hath the comb dropped one portion of its golden treasure, but another is immediately forming to follow. This is a most beautiful figure, by which the Lord represents his people. Honey and milk were the two great *temporal* blessings of the promised land. And, figuratively, such are the *spiritual* blessings of the gospel. For what so sweet or so nourishing as the divine doctrines of salvation! sweeter than honey, and more fragrant than the most spicy flowers of Lebanon.

12 A garden inclosed is my sister, *my* spouse; a spring shut up, a fountain sealed.

Jesus is still prosecuting the subject in the commendation of his love. And here he compares her by two or three very striking similitudes. She is a *garden* distinguished from the world's wide wilderness; but she is *inclosed* also, set apart with special design for the owner. The people are said to *dwell alone*, and not reckoned among the nations. Numb. xxiii. 9. Moreover she is a *spring shut up*, and a *fountain sealed*; meaning, that from her union with Christ, and her interest in Christ, the water of life which her Lord hath given her to drink, is in her a well of water springing up into everlasting life. John, iv. 14. And how truly blessed is it to see and know that by the graces of the Holy Spirit planted in the souls of the redeemed, they have eternal life abiding in them. *Because I live*, (saith Jesus) *ye shall live also*.

13 Thy plants are an orchard of pomegranates, with pleasant fruits; camphire, with spikenard,

14 Spikenard and saffron; calamus and cinnamon, with all trees of frankincense; myrrh and aloes, with all the chief spices:

Jesus is not tired of the subject, for in both these verses he prosecutes the same theme, and here talks of the fruitfulness of his people. Under various similitudes he sets this forth. The several graces of the Spirit—their choice and divine qualities; with the blessed consequences, as they are brought forth to the joy of the church at large, and the delight of every individual of the church, are figuratively represented by the characters here chosen.

15 A fountain of gardens, a well of living waters, and streams from Lebanon.

Here it should seem the Church takes up the discourse, and having heard her Lord thus enlarging upon the graces, which she well knew if she enjoyed she had them all and every one from him, she breaks out in the highest commendation of her Lord. *A fountain of gardens: a well of living waters; and streams from Lebanon*, is my loved. It is as if she had said, Am I a garden; then, Lord, it is thou that hast made me so? Am I inclosed? Yes! thy distinguishing grace hath shut me in. Am I a spring? Yes, Lord! for thou art the fountain of all the gardens; a well of living waters, for I wholly live *by* thee and *in* thee: and all my refreshments are *from* thee, as the streams from Lebanon. Reader! it is blessed while we enjoy our mercies to enjoy yet more the author of them; and while we have all things *from* Christ, to feel the blessedness of all things *in* Christ. Jesus is indeed the fountain of all, the source of all, and the end of all. And like the well, and the well of living waters, in his Godhead, and in his mediatorial fulness, he is all in all. Oh! for grace to be able to comprehend, with all saints, what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height; and to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that we might be filled with all the fulness of God. Ephes. iii. 18, 19.

16 ¶ Awake, O north wind; and come, thou south; blow upon my garden, that the spices thereof may flow out. Let my beloved come into his garden, and eat his pleasant fruits.

It should seem, but I do not presume to determine, that the former part of this verse is the call of Jesus to the Holy Ghost to breathe with his divine influences upon his Church the garden; and then when this is done, and grace is in lively exercise, the Church in the latter part invites her beloved to come into his garden, which is his, and take the blessed fruits which his own Holy Spirit had begotten. The north wind of exciting, and the south wind of warming the affections, are both graciously made use of, and the effect is as might be supposed. The habit of soul in a believer, when one with Christ by regeneration, becomes an actual exercise of grace when the Spirit excites, in going forth in the devout frames of faith, and love, and joy, and delight, upon the Person and work of the Lord Jesus; and while prayers and praises go up, blessings and favours come down; and the Lord cometh into his garden, and causeth all his goodness to pass before his people. Oh! Lord! thus continually send the sweet influences of the north wind, and the south wind upon my soul, and then will my soul invite Jesus to come into his garden, and eat of his pleasant fruits.

REFLECTIONS.

AND doth my Lord indeed call me his fair one, his love, his sister, his spouse? Oh! how shall my soul contain itself, in the contemplation of such peerless grace amidst my conscious undeservings. Surely, blessed Jesus, whatever I am that can at all endear a poor sinner to my Lord, all I have, and all I am, and all I hope to have, the whole is in thee and from thee. Well may I take up the language of one of old, and say, *By the grace of God I am what I am.* And oh! Lord let it be said also as of him, so of me, that *the grace bestowed upon me was not in vain.*

And doth Jesus call me to go with him from Lebanon, and escape the lion's den, and the mountains of leopards? Yes, Lord Jesus, I would pray for grace to follow thee, whithersoever thou goest. Nothing shall separate my soul from the love of Christ. For thou hast bought me, redeemed me, and with a price no less dear than thine own most precious blood: therefore, Lord, I am thine by every endearment, and by every tie. Oh! Lord, give me grace here also, that as I am not my own, but bought with a price, *I may glorify thee both in my body and in my spirit which are thine.*

But, precious Lord Jesus, as without thee I can do nothing; I pray thee be to me, *A fountain of gardens, a well of living waters, and as streams from Lebanon.* Come, Holy Ghost, and be to me as the quickening source in leading to Jesus, and taking from Jesus, and shewing every thing to me in Jesus. And do thou, Lord, daily maintain, and support, and carry on, the life thy mercy first gave me in Jesus. Thou, Lord, art the only spiritual efficient agent in Christ's garden the Church, which by breathing thy gracious influences upon my heart, can prepare that poor heart for the visits of my Lord to his servant. I would, therefore, gracious Spirit of all truth, intreat thy mercy upon my poor soul, that by thy grace I may invite my Lord and be prepared for my Lord, that he may daily come into his garden: and my soul be so quickened to receive him, that he may eat of his pleasant fruits. Yea, Lord! do thou knock at the door of my heart, and open it thyself; and let my Lord come in, and let me sup with him and he with me.

CHAP. V.

CONTENTS.

There is an immediate connection between the first verse of this Chapter, and the last of the preceding: for no sooner hath the church invited her Lord to come into his garden, than he declares himself come. The church professeth herself to be in a sleepy state, but awaked by Jesus, she breaks out into a commendation of her Lord, which runs through the whole chapter.

I AM come into my garden, my sister, my spouse:
I have gathered my myrrh with my spice; I
have eaten my honey-comb with my honey; I

have drunk my wine with my milk : eat, O friends ; drink, yea, drink abundantly, O beloved.

Reader ! observe the instant answer, and the gracious answer of Jesus to the Church in these words. The moment she asked, her wishes are complied with ; yea, agreeably to that promise of Jesus, *Before his people calls, he will answer.* Isaiah, lxxv. 24. For as some read the words it is as if Jesus had said, I am come into my garden : that is, I am always with you. And surely if you considered aright you would know this, by the manifestations I am for ever making to you. For how else would you invite me, had I not first inclined your heart to it, by the sweet influences of my grace ? And do you not know of my presence with you, by the secret intimations I give you ? Are you not sensible when I answer your prayers, accept and follow up your petitions, and meet you with blessings in the refreshment you feel at, and after you have been to, a throne of grace. Is not this gathering my myrrh with my spice, eating of my honey and drinking of my wine ? For all the graces you are enabled to exercise on me are mine, both in my first giving and in my after calling forth into use. And when you feel a fullness of enjoyment at my house or my table ; in private, or in public worship ; from whence do these enjoyments arise, but from me ? Do you not hear my voice in all, calling upon you as my friends and beloved to eat and drink abundantly ? I do not detain the reader with many observations on the several things here spoken of, for this would lead into an endless subject. I fear indeed in every line I write that I am swelling this work, which at the first was begun with a view to compress within a very few pages, to a bulk by much too large. But I would trespass here, on this verse in one part of it, to offer a remark on the honey-comb, and the honey the Lord so delightfully speaks of eating. Honey is in the flower, before it is extracted and formed by the bee. So it may be said that the love and grace of Jehovah in redemption goodness was in his infinite mind and will towards us, before that it was brought forth from the Father, towards us and our nature by the Lord Jesus Christ. And as honey in the comb is there made and prepared by the bee ; so Jesus our adorable Redeemer, our Glory-man, made, and prepared, and wrought it all out by himself, for us and our nature. And as honey in the mouth is known and enjoyed by him that eateth it ; so when God the Holy Ghost takes of the things of Christ and shews to us, doth he not make us eat and drink abundantly, yea, as the Lord's beloved ? Yea, more. We not only eat the honey, but of the honey-comb. We not only take the sweet things of Jesus, but Jesus himself which is sweeter far. Not only his gifts and graces, his whole redemption, but himself. Oh ! precious Lord what beauties are in thy word, what endless subjects in this one verse ? And what then, thou dearest Lord Jesus, what beauties must be in thyself, to ravish the souls of thy people with joy unspeakable, and full of glory, to all eternity ?

2 ¶ I sleep, but my heart waketh : *it is* the voice of my beloved that knocketh, *saying*, Open to me, my sister, my love, my dove, my undefiled : for my head is filled with dew, *and* my locks with the drops of the night.

We have here the description of the soul under a state of coldness and indifferency to her Lord. This is described under the image and figure of sleep; yet not a dead sleep of total insensibility; for she saith, *Her heart waketh*; and so as to hear and know the voice of her beloved, who is calling upon her and desiring admittance. But it is intended to represent that situation, which the people of God, every one of them by experience, know but too much of: at times a coldness to divine things, an indifferency to the cause of Jesus: and sometimes to the neglect of ordinances, and the means of grace; or if sitting under the word, a hearing as though they heard not. It is a sad state this, and sometimes the temptation to it is carried on to a length truly alarming. And as it ariseth from a body of sin of death they carry about with them, believers can never be too earnest with the Lord to be kept from it. Our indifferency under it becomes the worst symptom of it. And no doubt, it becomes also the greatest cause of the displeasure of the Lord. And did not his grace as much exceed our deserts, as his love is greater than ours, a recovery from it could never be expected.

Yea, perhaps many a child of God hath had his last days clouded in consequence of it, and gone out of life without that fulness of divine light, which the exercise of lively faith upon the person of Christ is sure to induce. Reader! pause over it. And while looking up with earnest prayer to be kept from it, learn to get more and more insight into that science which will tend to humble the soul, and exalt Jesus that teacheth us what a mass of sin, after all our attainments in grace, we virtually are. Truly did the Apostle say, and truly may all regenerated souls say the same, *I know that in me, that is in my flesh, dwelleth no good thing.* Rom. vii. 18. How blessed is it to observe the unchangeable love of Jesus, as set forth in this sweet verse of his word, Though the church was fallen asleep, and seemingly regardless of her Lord; yet Jesus was not regardless of her. Though we fail in duty, Jesus never fails in his love. His love-calls in this verse are most tender and gracious. He stands at the door and knocketh. Rev. iii. 20. And this by his word, by his servants the ministers of his gospel, by ordinances, by providences, by chastisements; in short, in numberless ways as shall best suit the blessed purposes of his grace. But in all and every one, see how tender his reproofs, how gentle his corrections. Sleepy and unworthy as his Church is, still is she *his sister, his love, his dove, his undefiled.* Oh! wonderful matchless grace! Oh! astonishingly gracious Saviour! We must not wholly pass over the several arguments the Lord Jesus makes use of, to enforce the Church to receive him. He saith, *His head is filled with dew, and his locks with the drops of the night.* By which perhaps may be understood, that he came with a fulness of grace, and would be himself as the dew unto Israel. Hosea, xiv. 6. Deut. xxxii. 2. And perhaps the drops of the night is intended to manifest to the Church the Redeemer's own personal sufferings, which he endured in order to bring blessings to her. The garden of Gethsemane, and the mount of Olives may well and fully explain. Psm. xxii. and Psm. lxxix. compared with the Evangelists. Matt. xxvi. &c.

3 I have put off my coat; how shall I put it on?
I have washed my feet; how shall I defile them?

If this verse affords as that it doth indeed afford, an awful example to

what a degree of baseness and ingratitude our nature is capable of falling; it will serve at the same time to manifest the wonderful patience, and love, and forbearance of our Lord. What a beautiful representation of both is given by the Prophet. Hosea, xi. 7—9.

4 My beloved put in his hand by the hole of the door, and my bowels were moved for him.

See Reader! the sovereignty of grace, and behold at the same time the whole source of our mercies. All calls, all entreaties, are lost upon our poor unthinking hearts, until the Lord that calls makes willing also *in the day of his power*. But until the voice that ere long shall wake the dead, now wakes the sinner, dead in trespasses and sins; no heart will open to him, nor feet move towards him. How blessed to see the Church having her very inside turned towards Christ, when by his Almighty love he had opened her soul. The prophet describes a beautiful instance of this, in the case of Ephraim: Jerem. xxxi. 18—20. And the Evangelist another, in the case of the Prodigal. Luke, xv. 17—24.

5 I rose up to open to my beloved; and my hands dropped *with* myrrh, and my fingers *with* sweet smelling myrrh, upon the handles of the lock.

We have the Church here recovered from her sleep, and the sweet effects of grace moving in her heart towards Christ, are set forth in the charming figures of hands dropping, and fingers smelling with the fragrance of myrrh; by which we are to understand that faith and love were in lively exercise to receive Christ, and to manifest her sense of his goodness and her unworthiness. Myrrh in scripture is frequently made use of to resemble grace. Thus the grace of Jesus to his people is set forth: Song, i. 13. Psm. xlv. 8.

6 I opened to my beloved: but my beloved had withdrawn himself, *and* was gone; my soul failed when he spake: I sought him, but I could not find him; I called him, but he gave me no answer.

This is a very interesting verse, and full of divine matter. The departure of Jesus from his people doth not mean a total departure, or a loss of covenant interest in Christ's righteousness, or an union with his person. Neither his love nor his affection can be take away; for *having loved his own which are in the world he loveth them unto the end*. John, xiii. 1. And his betrothing his church unto himself is for ever. Hosea, ii. 19. But it means the hiding of his countenance, the suspension of the influences of the Holy Ghost. And if Jesus thus withdraws, the soul of a believer will feel what the Church felt, when she expressed herself as in this verse. Reader! pause over this subject. If you know the Lord you will know also, what a blessedness it is to live always under the visits of his love; and if at any time he remits those visits, to mourn after him. My soul can derive no joy, no comfort, from the consciousness that the Holy Ghost is with the Church always, if at the

same time he is not with my soul. I still go heavily all the day if I have nothing of his quickening, upholding, and communicating grace, leading me into the love of God and into the patient waiting for Christ. Hence the cry of the Psalmist, Psm. li. 11, and again Psm. cxliii. 7. The Church seeking Christ as expressed in the latter part of this verse, hath been observed upon, chap. iii. 2.

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

Some observations have been already made upon the watchmen finding the Church. Chap. iii. 3. So that on that part I need not enlarge. But by wounding her; and the keepers of the walls taking away her veil from her, it may be proper to add a little by way of explaining. If the watchmen here spoken of were intended to represent the Lord's faithful servants, perhaps by those expressions are intended to shew that they did not spare sharpness of speech, but admonished her of her improper conduct, and took away all the covering of excuse. Isaiah, lviii. 1, &c.

8 I charge you, O daughters of Jerusalem, if ye find my beloved, that ye tell him, that I *am* sick of love.

The Church had twice before in this Song given a charge to the daughters of Jerusalem. Chap. ii. 7. and chap. iii. 5. But here she adds a more earnest request. Tell my Lord, saith she, that I am sick of love: which is, as if she had said, oh let my Lord know how truly sorry I am for my late ungrateful conduct. Tell him I cannot rest until I know that I have his pardoning mercy and his renewing grace. Oh! tell my Lord, if he will but come unto me and draw my soul out after him, that my soul will revive as the spring. But while Jesus is absent I can find neither peace within, nor comfort without. Reader! do you know any thing of these soul-searching, soul-distressing feelings? Here is nothing of the cold lifeless form of prayer. This differs widely from that lukewarm frame of spirit, which the *Laodicean* Church had, and which the Redeemer declared himself so much displeased with, that he rejected it with abhorrence. Rev. iii. 15, 16.

9 ¶ What *is* thy beloved more than *another* beloved, O thou fairest among women? what *is* thy beloved more than *another* beloved, that thou dost so charge us?

We have in this verse a question put to the Church by the daughters of Jerusalem. They call her the fairest among women, and by twice asking what there is in her beloved more than in another, they express both their surprize and their earnestness to know who this is. It is a blessed consideration that the Church is a perfection of beauty. The human soul as it first came out of the hands of the Almighty Creator pure and undefiled, and as it is when again washed in the blood of Christ

after its defilements, is such an object of beauty as may well be called fair. Now the question seems to be put with much earnestness, What is there in Christ so superior to every other object of love, that it carries every thing before it? Various are the objects of desire among men. Some to the world,—the pride, rank, opulence, grandeur of the world. Others to human learning. Some to pleasure; some to money; some to title; some to natural alliances. But Christ is so fair, so lovely, so supremely the chief, the only good, that the Church hath set her affection upon him, to the total exclusion of them all.

10 My beloved is white and ruddy, the chiefest among ten thousand.

The Church in this verse begins her answer, and had she said no more than what she saith in the commendation of Jesus, this is a final reply to all. First, she describes his double nature, *He is white*; alluding, most probably, to his Godhead, spotless, pure and holy: next to his manhood; he is *ruddy* or red. Adam was so called, in allusion to the earth, which is red; and this feature intimates the Person of Christ in his human nature, when shedding his blood for the sins of his people. But some have supposed, and perhaps not without reason, that the human nature of Christ only is intended by the expression: the perfect obedience and purity of Christ indicated by the *whiteness*; and the bloody hue of his sacrifice and death setting forth by the *red*. But whether either or both of these, it is sufficient to shew the great sense the Church had of the glory of her Lord. But she adds also, that he is *the chiefest among ten thousand*. This is a delightful description of the Lord Jesus. He is the chiefest among ten thousand in the sight and choice of God the Father. For Jehovah saith, *I have exalted one chosen out of the people*. Psalm, lxxix. 20. He is so among all his people; for he is *fairer than the children of men*: and the language of every follower of Jesus is, *He shall choose our inheritance for us, the excellency of Jacob whom he loved*. Psm. xlvii. 4. Precious Lord! how lovely is it to see that thou art both the choice of Jehovah, and of thy people also.

11 His head is as the most fine gold, his locks are bushy, and black as a raven.

The Church now having given as before a *general* idea of her Lord, here begins to descend into *particulars*. And as Jesus in the preceding chapter had been commending the beauty of his Church, she now holds forth in the best manner she is able, the surpassing grace and loveliness of her Lord. And first, she describes his *head*: perhaps alluding to God the Father: for the Apostle saith, *that the head of Christ is God*. 1 Cor. xi. 3. And as Christ in his divine nature is one with the Father *over all, God blessed for ever*; perhaps also the expression might allude to the divine nature of Christ, and his headship over his Church and people. And in this sense the *locks* of Christ may refer, in relation to the numberless hairs of the head, to the multitude of believers.

12 His eyes are as the eyes of doves by the rivers of waters, washed with milk, and fitly set.

The Church now describes the *eyes* of her beloved. Blessed it is to know that Jesus's eye is upon all his people, and with the love and meek-

ness of the dove. Perhaps the influences of his Holy Spirit may be here intended by the allusion. And as the Holy Ghost is frequently set forth under the similitude of rivers and waters; so his gifts are said to be as by the rivers. Sweet thought here again suggested! Jesus never loseth sight of his people; and he will be to them as *a well of living water, and streams from Lebanon.*

13 His cheeks *are* as a bed of spices, as sweet flowers: his lips *like* lilies, dropping sweet smelling myrrh.

Two features of her beloved in description the Church joins together in this verse: the *cheeks* of Christ and his *lips*. Perhaps by the *former* may be meant the beauties of his Person; and by the *latter*, the blessedness of what he delivered. And to those who have seen the King in his beauty, and heard the gracious words which proceed out of his mouth, nothing can more strikingly set forth the Person and offices of the Lord Jesus.

14 His hands *are* as gold rings set with the beryl: his belly *is* as bright ivory overlaid *with* sapphires.

The Church again unites in one view two representations more of Jesus. The *hands*, which set forth his bounty, and the *belly*, which being the tenderest part of the body, represents his wonderful condescension to his people. And in both the Church aims to shew how gracious the Lord is.

15 His legs *are* as pilliars of marble, set upon sockets of fine gold: his countenance *is* as Lebanon, excellent as the cedars.

The Church still prosecutes the pleasing subject, and from the *legs* to the *countenance*, points to her beloved. Perhaps the strength of Christ by the *former*, and his mildness by the *latter*, are intended in these expressions.

16 His mouth *is* most sweet: yea, he is altogether lovely. This *is* my beloved, and this *is* my friend, O daughters of Jerusalem.

And having now so largely particularized, she here sums up in one the whole description: as if she had said, time would fail to enumerate all: but such is my beloved, and such my friend, that he is *altogether lovely*, there is nothing in him but what is so. In his person, in his offices, in every point of view, not only to me, but to all. Jehovah is unceasingly beholding him with divine complacency. Angels, and the spirits of just men made perfect in the Church above, centre their whole affections upon him. And the whole Church below look on no other for grace and salvation. If you therefore ask, who this is my soul loveth, and is everlastingly looking after: be it known unto you, oh! ye daughters of Jerusalem, that this is he. This is my beloved, and this is my friend. Pause, Reader! and ask your heart, whether such be your friend and your beloved also?

REFLECTIONS.

READER! let us not dismiss this beautiful chapter, until we have once more looked up to God the Holy Ghost, and entreated him to shew us our interest in what is here said of Jesus, and how far we can adopt a similar language concerning him. And first, let us never overlook the readiness of Jesus to comply with the wishes of his people in coming at their call. No sooner did the church invite her beloved to come into his garden, but we find Christ is come. And let us remark further, how gracious the Lord is in gathering his spices, his myrrh, and milk, and honey. Reader! be assured from hence, that every prayer of his people Jesus regards. Every sigh they utter comes up before him. As one of old said, so all may be assured: *He putteth our tears into his bottle: all these things are noted in his book.* And as Jesus comes in the midst of his churches and people to gather, so doth he give unto them largely to enjoy. His language is, *Eat, O friends; drink, yea, drink abundantly, O beloved!*

Reader! are you acquainted with that state of which the church in this part of the Song so greatly complains? Dost thou, by reason of a body of sin and death which thou carriest about with thee, groan, being burthened? Dost thou feel a heaviness not unlike the sorrow of soul which the disciples felt in the garden, and frequently dost thou feel that sad indisposition which disqualifies the soul for the sweet enjoyment of Jesus? And when at times under this dreadful deadness of affection, thou hearest the voice of Jesus in ordinances, in providences; by rebukes, by chastisements; oh! what a decisive proof is this, in every heart that feels it, of the impossibility of any natural goodness in a creature, who is the subject of such infirmities? Precious Jesus! do thou by me, do thou by the Reader, and by every child of thine, follow up thy gracious calls, by opening the door of our hearts; and do thou come in, Lord, and revive thy work with the droppings of thy grace, and the fragrance of thy Spirit's influences. And in those seasons, do not withdraw, thou dear Lord, neither be thou to us as the way-faring man that turneth in to tarry but for a night. Neither let thy servants, the watchmen of thy city, wound us; but oh! let them point our souls to thee, and lead us to Jesus that we may tell our Lord we are sick, waiting for the renewed views of his pardoning grace, and mercy, that our souls may *revive as the corn, and grow as the vine.*

Are there any that enquire after my beloved? Do you desire to know, O ye daughters of Jerusalem, who Jesus is; what he is; what he hath wrought; what he is doing, and can, and will do; and wherefore it is that he is my beloved, my only beloved, and why is it that I am so truly anxious for his love? Oh! for grace and power to tell you of his loveliness. Every thing in Christ is precious. He is precious in his Person. Every feature of him is lovely. He is precious in his offices, precious in his character, precious in his relations; yea, there is nothing in him but what is precious; for *he is altogether lovely, and the chiefest among ten thousand.* And what would be alarming and distressing in others, becomes lovely in him. His cross and reproaches for his sake, how trying and painful soever to flesh and blood, are on his account, not only endurable, but productive of holy joy. And Jesus is this in all that belongs to him, and in all circumstances connected with him, for as

he is in himself the first fair, the first beautiful, the first lovely; so he communicates loveliness to all that are united to him; neither is there any thing lovely or amiable but what is derived from him. Do you enquire, then, what there is in my beloved, more than in another beloved? I answer; All these things and a thousand more. And will you not love him with me, and delight in him also; oh that he that is my beloved, may be your beloved; and that you may at length say with me, *This is my friend, and this is my beloved, O ye daughters of Jerusalem.*

CHAP. VI.

CONTENTS.

The church appears, in the opening of this Chapter, to have called forth the serious enquiry of others to seek Jesus with her. And she seems delighted to give information concerning him. Christ then takes up the discourse, and sets forth the loveliness of his church, and his delight in her.

WHITHER is thy beloved gone, O thou fairest among women? whither is thy beloved turned aside? that we may seek him with thee.

This is a very interesting part of the Song, because it represents the serious and earnest enquiry of seeking souls after Christ. The persons here asking the question appear to be evidently under impressions of grace, and as the address is made to the church of Jesus, and she is called by them, *The fairest among women*; nothing can be more plain than that they considered the Lord Jesus the whole cause of her loveliness, and therefore desired to be made partakers of the same: It is one of the most delightful offices of faithful ministers of Jesus, when at any time the Lord bleaseth their ministry, to have questions concerning their Lord put to them, by those that are seeking him. I beg the Reader also to observe, before I dismiss the consideration of this verse, that the enquiry here made concerning Jesus; is not who Christ is; for that had been made before (chap. v. 9), and the answer appears to have been truly satisfactory. But having received conviction concerning the Person and work of Christ, the next enquiry of a truly awakened soul is, how shall I find him, and enjoy him to my soul's comfort?

2 My beloved is gone down into his garden, to the beds of spices, to feed in the gardens, and to gather lilies.

I detain the Reader, in the opening of this verse, to remark to him once more, if the remark be again necessary, that this answer of the church, to those that were seeking her Lord, carries with it the fullest and most undeniable testimony that the whole subject of this Song is truly spiritual, and of a divine nature. In the loves of carnal persons there is too much jealousy to direct others to the object of love; rather doth every one forbid, than lead to an acquaintance: so that if there was no other evidence than what this part of the song contains; this, in

itself, would be enough to prove to a demonstration, that it is not the love of Solomon and Pharaoh's daughter which forms the subject of this Song, but Christ and his church. It will not be very difficult to understand what is meant by Christ's garden and his beds of spices, after what hath been already observed on these subjects, (chap. iv. 16.) The expression, indeed, concerning Christ's garden, somewhat varies here; for the church describes her Lord as being gone *down* into his garden; by which it may be supposed is meant the garden Jesus hath in this lower world, by way of distinction to that which is above; but the whole, both above and below, is but one church; the gift of his Father, the purchase of his blood, and the conquest of his grace. And Jesus may be truly said to be gone down to the beds of spices, when he visits any particular souls of his with his grace; when he feeds them, or when he feeds (if it be allowed the expression) himself, receiving the fruits of grace, which he himself hath planted by his Holy Spirit in their hearts. He gathers the lilies also, whensoever he takes home precious souls he hath redeemed to himself in glory.

3 *I am my beloved's, and my beloved is mine :
he feedeth among the lilies.*

I need not detain the Reader over this verse, having already noticed it, chap. ii. 16. to which I refer; unless it be to remark once more, the delight the church takes in the conscious property she hath in Jesus, and Jesus in her. Here, indeed, the form of expression varies from the former; for in that she first calls Christ hers, and then she is his. But here she inverts the order, and declares herself first to be his, and then Christ is hers: but the alteration only serves to point out yet more strongly the mutual property in both.

4 ¶ *Thou art beautiful, O my love, as Tirzah,
comely as Jerusalem, terrible as an army with banners.*

Here Jesus takes up the discourse, and which he doth in the most gracious manner, in commendations of his love. He saith that she is beautiful as *Tirzah*. There was a city in the tribe of Manasseh called *Tirzah*; Joshua, xii. 6. 24. And as Judea is said to have been *the glory of all lands*, no doubt that *Tirzah* was a pleasant place. But some have thought that it is not the name of a place intended by the expression, but that she is lovely in his eyes, comely from the comeliness he had put upon her. And if this be the sense of it, how delightful ought it to be to a child of God, to consider, however poor, and low, and despised we are in our own eyes, and in the eyes of the world, yet, Jesus declares his people beautiful as *Tirzah*. But Christ doth not rest here. The church is also comely as Jerusalem. This city, is said in scripture, to be *the joy of the whole earth*. Psalm, xlviii. 2. And if the church of Jesus be thus lovely upon earth, amidst all the spots and infirmities of its inhabitants; what must it be in the Jerusalem which is above? Read the beloved Apostle's description of it; and while reading, connect with it, in recollection that every individual child of God forms a part in it. Rev. xxi. 2—4. There is another description Christ gives of his church in this verse, and that is, that she is *terrible as an army with banners*. And is it not so? How often hath it been known that vice hath been

put out of countenance by the singular zeal of some faithful servant of the Lord? How often have the constancy and firmness of the saints made tyrants tremble? Acts, xxiv. 25. Heb. xi. 33—35. And yet more and much more important, how often have the faithful overcome the Lord himself by the prevalency of faith and prayer? See Gen. xxxii. 24—28. Exod. xxxii. 11—14. Joshua, vii. 6—9.

5 Turn away thine eyes from me, for they have overcome me : thy hair is as a flock of goats that appear from Gilead.

Some have translated these words, *Turn thine eyes to me*, and they say it means the call of Jesus to his church to be always looking to him. Isaiah, xlv. 22. And, indeed, there is but too much reason for the perpetual call of Jesus to the church to this effect : but the more general opinion is that Christ expresseth himself as is here said, intimating that such is his love of his church, that when her faith is in lively actings, it compels him to comply with her request. Thus in the case of Lot : *Haste thee ; escape thither ; for I cannot do any thing till thou be come thither.* Gen. xix. 21, 22. xxxii. 26. And in the case of the woman of Canaan, Matt. xv. 28.

6 Thy teeth are as a flock of sheep, which go up from the washing, whereof every one beareth twins, and there is not one barren among them.

7 As a piece of a pomegranate are thy temples within thy locks.

These verses, as well as the latter part of the former verse, have been already noticed ; chap. iv. 1—3. I only add to what was there offered, what a blessed view it gives us of the Lord Jesus, that he should not only condescend to describe his church by such similitudes, but also to find pleasure in repeating them.

8 There are threescore queens, and fourscore concubines, and virgins without number.

9 My dove, my undefiled is *but one* ; she is the *only* one of her mother, she *is* the *choice one* of her that bare her. The daughters saw her, and blessed her ; yea, the queens and the concubines, and they praised her.

In these verses we have still further proof of Christ's love to his church, and the distinguishing nature of it. It is, as if the Lord had said, Though there be among men, and the great ones of the earth, those who have concubines and wives without number ; yet, my beloved is but one, and the only one of my love ; and so fair, so lovely, so undefiled, that even those who know not me, shall be obliged at length to confess that she is blessed. Reader ! at the great day of God we are told that this shall take place. They shall see and confess ; and, although in this life, who so despised, and set at nought as the followers of Jesus ; yet, at the

final audit, *every eye shall see him, and all nations shall wail because of him.* Rev. i. 7.

10 ¶ Who is she *that* looketh forth as the morning, fair as the moon, clear as the sun, and terrible as *an army* with banners?

It should seem that this verse is introduced here in accommodation of the church of Christ, by some looker-on; perhaps the daughters of Jerusalem; and the description is uncommonly striking and beautiful. If we consider the church in the day-dawn of revelation, amidst the darkness of the whole world around, it might be called *the looking forth as the morning*. And if, from the days of the Patriarchs, to the giving of the law; and if through that whole dispensation, to the coming of the gospel, it only resembled the pale borrowed light of the moon. And in this view of the subject, the glorious gospel of the ever-blessed God, will then correspond to what is said of the church being *clear as the sun*, when Jesus, the Sun of righteousness, arose with healing in his wings. But if we consider the verse as referring to the church under the full manifestations of grace by the Lord Jesus Christ, then, in the instance of every individual believer, their experience in divine things is *as the path of the just, which shineth more and more unto the perfect day*.

11 I went down into the garden of nuts to see the fruits of the valley, *and* to see whether the vine flourished, *and* the pomegranates budded.

Some refer these words to the church in seeking after Christ; but there seems a more orderly agreement with all that is before to accept them as the words of Jesus. It is his gracious office to notice the state of grace in the souls of his people. And by the frequent account the Lord gives of himself doing so in this Song, it may be intended to remind his people how very constant his eye is upon them. *How sweet a sense of this.* Gen. xvi. 13, 14.

12 O ever I was aware, my soul made me *like* the chariots of Ammi-nadib.

~~And I should seem~~ that the church thus conscious of the presence of her Lord, visiting his garden, felt that blessed but sudden effect that her soul ~~was~~ *as* the chariots of Amminadib, perhaps the swiftest ~~ever known~~. But some have rendered the passage as the words of Jesus. That God is overcome by the earnest cries of his people; and, indeed, speaking after the manner of men, this is evident, from passages in scripture already quoted in this chapter. And, in addition to these, the Reader will find a beautiful illustration to the same amount; Hosea, xi. 8, 9. And also another in Jeremiah, xxxi. 20. The chariots here spoken of, if the words be accepted in this latter sense, will be the chariots of my willing people; that is, their faith, love, and all the other graces implanted by Jesus in the soul, and thus called forth by him into exercise. *Ammi*, meaning my people, and *Nadib*, implying their willingness.

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

The church is in this verse called upon, most probably by the daughters of Jerusalem, to return. But it doth not so immediately appear what the church is called upon to return to; some, therefore, have accepted the call as the words of Christ; and in this sense the words are certainly much more plain and obvious; for then the object of the return, that we may look upon thee, will be that all the Persons of the God-head, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, may behold the fair beauty of the church, robed in the apparel of her Husband. I do not presume to determine the exact sense of the passage, or to which they refer. But, when the church is called *Shulamite*, it should seem it means a woman of Salem, or Jerusalem; for the word is the same. And as the bride of Jesus, she is the *Shulamite* indeed. *Solomon*, as the name of a man, is precisely the same as *Shulamite* for a woman. Now as the Lord Jesus, in one scripture, is called the Lord our righteousness, and in another passage of the same prophet, the church is so called, all this seems to throw a light upon the subject, in explaining why the church is called *Shulamite*. Jerem. xxiii. 6. chap. xxxiii. 16. The answer of the church is a most beautiful proof of grace, and her humbleness of soul. What will ye see, saith the church, but as a company of two armies, or as the margin of the Bible hath it, of Mahanaim, *two hosts*, such as the patriarch Jacob noticed, Gen. xxxii. 1, 2. The conflict between grace and nature is very aptly represented by two armies, and in a warfare that ends not but with death. Blessed Jesus, it is well that it ends then; and everlasting praises be to thy name the victory is not doubtful; for *thy saints are more than conquerors, through thy grace making them so.* Rom. viii. 37--39.

REFLECTIONS.

HERE, Reader, let us pause; and before we close the chapter, take into our view, so one at least of the many blessed things contained in it for our instruction. Are we earnest in our enquiries for Jesus? Do we now seek after him, from a knowledge of him, and a conviction of our need of him, and our utter ruin without him? Then let us learn from hence, where we are to seek Christ, and the earnestness with which we should enquire after him. There is a generation that seek the Lord, and of whom he saith, he will not be sought in vain. And very blessed it is to have this assurance from the Lord himself; while in a day of much heresy the cry is, *Lo! here is Christ, or lo, he is there!* Reader! let us not be discouraged with these things. A real love for Christ, and the going forth of real desires after Christ; both are of Jesus's own giving; and the grace he gives, he will perfect. And if, as the church speaks, Jesus is gone down into his garden, his church; let us in ordinances, and in all the several means of grace there, seek him, where his name is as ointment poured forth, and where his glory and his salvation are the chief and only object regarded; and we shall find that, ere we

are aware, our souls will be made like the chariot of Amminadib. And oh! for grace, like the church, to arrive at that blessedness of assurance founded in the Father's love, the Redeemer's grace, and the Spirit's fellowship, that each may say for himself as the church: *I am my beloved's, and my beloved is mine.*

Precious Jesus! is thy church indeed lovely and beautiful as *Tirzah*? Is she comely as *Jerusalem*; and in thy strength terrible as *an army with banners*? Surely then, blessed Lord, the whole is derived from thee! What grace, what endowment, what ornament can our poor polluted nature have but in, and from thee. In thy light, Lord, we shall see light; and in thy strength we are strong: but without thee we are nothing. Cause thy redeemed to come up *as a flock of sheep from the washing, and let there be not one barren among them.*

I praise thee, my blessed Lord and Saviour, for this account of thy church, that she is but one and undefiled; and the choice one of her that bare her; and oh! for grace to bear about with me this precious mark of unity. One, Lord, with thee, and one with thy people: one faith, one hope, one baptism; and all thy redeemed shall be found in one spirit, even as *we are called in one hope of our calling.* And although, thou glorious Head of thy body the church, all thy redeemed here below are like the *Shulamite*, always in the conflict as of two armies; yet already in thy strength we have overcome. *Thanks be to God who giveth us the victory, through our Lord Jesus Christ!* And therefore now we would begin the Song, until in the full assembly of the church above we come to sing with a louder, fuller, sweeter strain: *Unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood, and hath made us kings and priests unto God and his Father, to him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen.*

CHAP. VII.

CONTENTS.

Here is the same subject prosecuted through the greater part of this chapter as the former, namely, the beauty of the church as in the eyes of her Husband. Towards the close of it, the church humbly professeth her hope and faith in Jesus.

HOW beautiful are thy feet with shoes, O prince's daughter! the joints of thy thighs are like jewels, the work of the hands of a cunning workman.

2 Thy navel *is like* a round goblet, which wanteth not liquor: thy belly *is like* an heap of wheat set about with lilies.

3 Thy two breasts *are like* two young roes that are twins.

4 Thy neck *is* as a tower of ivory; thine eyes

like the fishpools in Heshbon, by the gate of Beth-rabbim: thy nose *is* as the tower of Lebanon which looketh toward Damascus.

5 Thine head upon thee *is* like Carmel, and the hair of thine head like purple; the king *is* held in the galleries.

This chapter opens with an address of Christ to his Church, which is replete with the same warm expressions of love; for there is no change in Christ. *Having loved his own which are in the world, he loveth them to the end.* John, xiii. 1. Here is a new name, or title, by which the Lord is pleased to distinguish her, for he calls her, *O Prince's daughter*: perhaps in allusion to what scripture hath said of the church of Christ at large, and of all believers in particular. Thus in one of the Psalms the church is called *the King's daughter*. Psalm, xlv. 10—16. And moreover, the church, and every individual of the church, is such being children of God by adoption and by grace. John, i. 12, 13. And indeed, when Christ condescended to marry our nature, he made that nature royal. Isaiah, liv. 5. I will not detain the Reader with following up every description which Christ here gives his church, for it would lead into too extensive a subject. Some of the things here said in this, and the following verses concerning the Church's beauty, have been said before; see verse 3, compared with chap. iv. 5: but it is somewhat remarkable that the church should have commended Christ under *ten* several particulars, and that the Lord Jesus should have thought proper in celebrating the beauty of his church, to have taken exactly the same number of heads to dwell upon. Some of these features are very plain and expressive, and cannot be mistaken, if construed agreeably to the general analogy of scripture. By the *feet* of the church, no doubt, *is* intended the ministers of the gospel of Christ, whose feet on the mountains are said to be *beautiful in their publishing peace*. Isaiah, lii. 7. And the *head*, like Carmel, intimating how high, in consequence of the church's union with Christ, she is exalted. *He is the head of his body the church, the fulness of Him that filleth all in all.* Ephes. i. 23. By the King being held in the galleries, seems to imply how closely allied Jesus is to his church; and that when the church lays hold of Christ in the galleries of ordinances, or his promises; or, in short, in any of the covenant-engagements, the church may, and by his grace, by virtue of her interest in his blood and righteousness, will detain him. Gen. xxxii. 26.

6 How fair and how pleasant art thou, O love, for delights!

7 This thy stature is like to a palm tree, and thy breasts to clusters of grapes.

8 I said, I will go up to the palm tree, I will take hold of the boughs thereof: now also thy breasts shall be as clusters of the vine, and the smell of thy nose like apples;

9 And the roof of thy mouth like the best wine for my beloved, that goeth *down* sweetly; causing the lips of those that are asleep to speak.

We have in these verses the gracious Lord still taking delight in the beauties and graces of his church. Under several very interesting similitudes these things are said by him. And it is impossible to take into consideration these united views of Jesus's love, and the church's undeserving, without being struck with astonishment at the contemplation of the unsearchable riches of his grace! The prophet Zephaniah hath a beautiful passage much to the same amount, as is expressed in one of these verses, of Christ's resting in his love, and in his delights. Zeph. iii. 17. If what naturalists say of the palm-tree be correct, the figure Jesus useth of this tree in making a comparative statement to the church, is uncommonly beautiful and striking. And as the palm trees were very common in *Judea*, there should seem to be no doubt of the correctness of their account. It is said that the palm tree differs from other trees in this striking particularity; that it doth not live by its roots, but its head. Whether this be so, or not, I cannot determine: but certain it is, the church of Christ hath Christ for her head, as well as her root. In fruitfulness the church resembles the palm-tree, and in height, and verdure, for it is an ever-green. It is exceedingly prolific, and so is the church. And what so lofty, so exalted, as the church of Christ. Most elegantly, as well as true, doth the Psalmist speak of God's people in allusion to this tree, when it is said by him, *That the righteous shall flourish like the palm tree, he shall grow like the cedar in Lebanon.* Psm. xcii. 12. And sure I am that if it be true, as it is said, the palm-tree flourisheth the more it is trodden under; nothing can be more descriptive of Christ's church, for in all ages the more it hath been persecuted, the more glorious it hath risen. And hence, those now in glory; who have come out of great tribulation, are clothed with white robes, and have palms in their hands: Rev. vii. 9. I must not wholly overlook what the Redeemer hath said in these verses, of the blessed effects which he himself here setteth forth, of his granting the church his presence. He goeth with her—by his grace he taketh hold of her, and thereby causeth all his gifts and mercies to be received by her, that, like the best wine, it is swallowed with delight; so that it hath an infinite and divine effect; causing even the sleeping soul and the sinner, dead in trespasses and sins, to speak. Oh! how blessed is it to the church, and to every believer of the church, to know and enjoy Christ. Well might the church cry out, *Thy love is better than wine.* Song, i. 2.

10 ¶ I am my beloved's, and his desire is toward me.

Here we have, once again, the church rejoicing in the consciousness that she is the property of Jesus. And here she adds a delightful consideration to that consciousness, that the desire of her Lord is toward her. And indeed, of all subjects in redemption, this, which is one of the highest, is the plainest, and most evident. Had not Christ desired the church, never would he have given himself for her; had he not desired her, never would he have bought her with so vast a price; neither would he have endured the cross, and despised the shame, but for his ever-

lasting glory, and a zeal to his Father's honor in her salvation. And, indeed, in the gift of the Father of the church to Christ, we are told that Jehovah granted him *his heart's desire, and would not withhold the request of his lips*. Psm. xxi. 2. Reader! how blessed is it to see this, and to trace it in the history of the church at large! And oh! how blessed, when you and I can trace the same in the history of our own souls!

11 Come, my beloved, let us go forth into the field; let us lodge in the villages.

12 Let us get up early to the vineyards; let us see if the vine flourish, *whether* the tender grape appear, *and* the pomegranates bud forth: there will I give thee my loves.

The church is following up the sweet truth she had delivered in the foregoing verse, with putting forth in these an invitation to Christ. Jesus had before invited her to arise, and go with him. Song, ii. 10, &c. And the church now in return invites her Lord. By the *field*, some have supposed is meant the scriptures, concerning which, if so, the sense of the church's invitation of Christ to go forth in the study of the word with her, is, that without his gracious instruction by his Holy Spirit, she could not read them profitably. By lodging in *the villages*, hath been thought, is intended the inviting Christ to the private communion and fellowship of saints. And by getting up early to the vineyards, is meant the public congregation of the faithful. And the motives, or intentions, immediately expressed by the church, seem without difficulty to give countenance to this interpretation of the passage. The church saith, her wishes for Christ to accompany her into the fields, and to lodge in the villages, and get up early to the vineyards, is, to see how *the vine flourished*, and whether *the tender grape* did appear; meaning the state of Jesus's family, amidst the various ages, characters, and diversities the Lord had appointed among them. And there, in the word, in sweet private communion, and in public worship, will I hope (saith the church,) to tell my Lord how much and how greatly I love him. Reader, let you and I copy after the church in this most lovely employment. Wherever we are, however engaged, in the church or in the house, in the field or in the city, at home or abroad, let us invite the Lord Jesus to be ever with us. Oh! Lord, if thou wilt but condescend to make one in our midst, surely I may then promise as the church did: *There will I give thee my loves*.

13 The mandrakes give a smell, and at our gates *are* all manner of pleasant *fruits*, new and old, *which* I have laid up for thee, O my beloved.

The *mandrakes* we read of in the early ages of the church, it should seem was an highly desired fruit. With the present of some Leah purchased the company of her husband from Rachel: see Gen. xxx. 14, 15. But of what property or quality I stay not to enquire, but as

the church here professeth to her Lord, that they gave a smell, and that with these she had also laid up for him all manner of pleasant fruits, we may gather from the whole how ardently she longed for sweet communion with Jesus, and what blessedness she was hoping for, from his spiritual company. But what was, and is, and ever must be, during a life of grace, most pleasant to the Lord Jesus, are the fruits of his own most holy Spirit. These are the mandrakes, the lovely flowers of Jesus; for they are his, by original gift, and by his purchased redemption. He hath planted them by sovereign grace at our gates. Oh! Lord! how blessed is it to have them, even the fruits of faith and love, with all the graces of thy holy Spirit. Come then, Lord, I would say for myself and Reader, let us go forth, blessed Jesus; and do thou lodge with us, and grant us to lodge with thee. All, Lord, is thine, and of thine own do we give thee.

REFLECTIONS.

BLESSED and all-lovely Lord Jesus! is it possible that thy church can be so fair in thine eyes, as that her very feet are beautiful to her Lord? Surely, Lord, it is thou that must have made her so; for when thou camest from heaven to seek and save thy people, thou didst find the whole nature of man sunk and degraded by sin and uncleanness. But now thou hast washed thy church in thy blood and adorned her with thy spotless garment of righteousness, she is indeed *the king's daughter, all glorious within*. And seeing then, that it is in thee, and by thee, and from thee, that all the beauties and loveliness of thy church are derived; methinks I would hold thee in the galleries of thy grace, and plead and wrestle with my God and Saviour, with an earnestness not to be resisted by my Lord; but like the Father of the seed of Jacob, tell thee, *I will not let thee go, except thou bless me*.

And doth my Lord regard his supplication of his poor petitioner? Doth Jesus indeed say to me, as to the church of old, that he will go up to the palm-tree, and that he will take hold of the boughs thereof? Doth Jesus say, that he will give me the best wine, that shall go down sweetly, causing the lips of those that are asleep to speak. Oh! thou gracious condescending Lord! if thou wilt thus pour out of the sweet influences of thy Spirit, thy love will be better to me than wine, for by it my poor dead soul, under all her dying circumstances, will revive, and I shall go forth and speak of thy love, thy truth and righteousness. While Jesus is with me and blessing me, I shall feel such an enlargement of heart, that my mouth will spread abroad thy name, and make mention of thy righteousness, even thine only. And surely, Lord, I may hope this, I may look for these sweet visits of thy love, for thou hast taken me into the nearest covenant-connections with thee, for I am thine, and thy desire is towards me. Yes! precious, precious Lord! thy desire hath been towards thy people from everlasting. And what it was *from* everlasting so must it be *to* everlasting. Thou hast all along desired the salvation of all the Father hath given thee. Thou hast waited to be gracious. Thou hast longed for the hour of redemption appointed for every individual soul for whom thou hast died. Thou art now continually desiring to manifest thyself to them. And, Lord, I am fully persuaded that the desire of thy soul will not be fully satisfied, until thou hast brought all,

and every one of them unto thyself in glory. Oh! the unspeakable felicity of that day, when thou shalt have brought home thy whole church, that where thou art, there they shall be also.

Come, Lord, then I beseech thee, for thou art my beloved, come with me into the fields of thy holy word, and let us lodge together in the villages of the saints, and get up to the vineyards of thy churches; *for the vineyard of the Lord of hosts is the house of Israel, and the men of Judah is thy pleasant plant.* All must flourish in thee, O Lord, which are branches in thee; both grapes and pomegranates, young believers and old saints, will put forth their graces, when excited by thy quickening and reviving influence. There, Lord, doth my soul desire to tell thee how exceedingly I love thee, and how ardently I long after thee. O! that the *mandrakes* may be perfumed with the fragrant of thy incense, and all the fruits of the Spirit may be in such lively exercise in my soul, that I may shew forth thy praises, and manifest thy glory to all around.

CHAP. VIII.

CONTENTS.

This beautiful Song is now drawing to a close, and the Church repeats her earnest desires for increasing knowledge of, and communion with her Lord. In the body of this Chapter, it is hard to distinguish between the expressions of Christ and those of his Church, in which are contained the vehement pantings for fellowship. Towards the close, the Church puts up a request for the speedy call of the Gentiles, and finisheth the whole in earnest prayer for her Beloved to hasten his coming, and sum up his whole purposes of redemption in glory.

O THAT thou wert as my brother, that sucked the breasts of my mother! when I should find thee without, I would kiss thee; yea, I should not be despised.

The Church in this verse is still prosecuting the same pleasing subject, that she dwelt on in the former chapter; but, willing to enjoy Christ in every relationship, wherein he hath condescended to put himself, she here reminds him that he is her brother, as well as her husband. Reader! it is blessed to know and enjoy Jesus, in all his names, offices, characters, and relations; for he fills all. And as we are told that he is not ashamed to call his people brethren; surely every one should delight to make use of the relationship, and call him brother. Christ is the brother of his Church, from taking our nature upon him, in being the seed of the woman after the flesh; *for it behoved him in all things to be made like unto his brethren.* Gen. iii. 15. Heb. xi. 12. Matt. xii. 50. Perhaps by the wish which the Church expresseth in this verse, is meant to convey the longing of Old Testament saints for the incarnation of the Lord Jesus. O that thou wert as my brother; that is, *Oh! that the salvation were given unto Israel out of Zion!* And as Christ and his Church are one, so one mother, even Jerusalem is, as the Apostle saith,

the mother of us all. Gal. iv. 26. By *sucking the breasts*, very plainly means the enjoyment of the same ordinances. Hence Jesus, when on earth, graced the synagogue with his divine presence. Luke, iv. 16, &c. The *kisses*, mean the exercises of faith, love, repentance, and all those graces which Jesus, by his Holy Spirit, plants in the souls of his people, and which, by his influences, he again brings forth into action, upon his person, blood, and righteousness. Hence, therefore, saith the Church, when I humbly offer these things unto my brother, my Lord, I shall not be despised. No! Jesus despiseth not *the day of small things*. Zech. iv. 10. He doth not *break the bruised reed, nor quench the smoking flax*. Matt. xii. 20.

2 I would lead thee, *and* bring thee into my mother's house, *who* would instruct me: I will cause thee to drink of spiced wine of the juice of my pomegranate.

And then, saith the Church, (still following up the same subject of her address to her brother and her Lord,) I would assume the freedom wherewith the Lord makes his people free, and lead thee into my mother's house, and cause thee to drink of my poor offering. Reader, here is a beautiful verse, well worthy the closest attention. We meet in scripture with numberless passages of the Lord's leading his people, and very earnest prayers that he would fulfil his promises in doing so; but here it is the Church leading her Lord. See Deut. xxxii. 12. Psalm, xxxii. 8. Psalm, xliii. 3. But I humbly conceive that this scripture is designed to teach a believer in Jesus, what powerful effects are in faith, when the Lord gives out large supplies of this blessed principle. Remember the state the Church was now in. She was looking to Jesus as a brother. And what may we not hope to do with a brother such as Jesus; one purposely born for adversity, and that loveth at all times, and sticketh closer than a brother? Prov. xvii. 17. And, Reader, do not forget also what Jesus himself hath said; *If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will and it shall be done unto you.* John, xv. 17. Oh! the condescension of our adorable Lord! Then, blessed Lord, may a believer hope, that thus living in thee, and thou in him, a poor sinner may lead Jesus into his closet, into his retirement, and there pour out his soul before him, an offering more precious to Jesus than all the spiced wine of the juice of the pomegranate.

3 His left hand *should* be under my head, and his right hand should embrace me.

4 I charge you, O daughters of Jerusalem, that ye stir not up nor awake *my* love until he please.

These have been already noticed, therefore I refer to them. Chap. ii. 6, 7. Chap. iii. 5.

5 Who *is* this that cometh up from the wilderness, leaning upon her beloved? I raised thee up

under the apple-tree: there thy mother brought thee forth: there she brought thee forth *that* bare thee.

The former part of this verse also hath been noticed; Chap. iii. 6. But there is an addition here, of a most interesting nature, which saith, that while the Church is coming up out of the wilderness, she is *leaning upon her beloved*; meaning, that believing souls lay their whole stress of salvation upon Jesus. They have not an atom of their own, but hang upon him, cleave to him, rest upon him. And this is in perfect agreement to the whole doctrine of faith. See those scriptures; Isaiah, xxii. 24. Prov. iii. 5. Psalm, lxxi. 15, 16. Philip. iii. 8, 9. It should seem that Christ is the speaker of that after part of this verse, *I raised thee up under the apple tree*, and intimating the power of his blessed Spirit, in the conversion and new birth of the souls of his redeemed. But the words may be read as the words of the Church. For when by faith Jesus is raised up to a believer's view, and in the Church the soul of the redeemed beholds Christ in his incarnation, sufferings, and death: there is no impropriety of speech, as the language of faith, thus to speak of the Redeemer. John, iii. 14, 15.

6 ¶ Set me as a seal upon thine heart, as a seal upon thine arm: for love *is* strong as death; jealousy *is* cruel as the grave; the coals thereof *are* coals of fire, *which* hath a most vehement flame.

In whatever sense we accept the words of this most precious verse, the meditation on them cannot but be sweet, if God the Holy Ghost, who is the author of them, should open them and bring them home to the soul. For then we may say with the prophet, *Thy words were found, and I did eat them, and thy word was unto me the joy and rejoicing of my heart*. Jerem. xv. 16. Reader! let us first accept them as the words of the Church, which should seem to be the most probable of the two. Now when a soul, like the Church, desires to be set as a seal upon Christ's heart, what a delightful thought is it of being so near to Jesus; always, not only in his sight, and, as the High Priest, bearing the names of Israel on his breast-plate, she might be in a constant memorial before him; but still nearer than this, even in his heart, and upon his arm; to live always with him, and upon him, and never, never to be a moment separated from him. What an ardency of faith is this? And the reason she assigns is as beautiful as interesting. Her love is strong as death; yea, stronger; for death kills all, destroys all connections, all relations, all ties; but death cannot separate the Church from Jesus. Rom. viii. 38, 39. And her jealousy lest she should lose her Lord, like the grave, which for cruelty would destroy any thing, and every thing that arose in the way to oppose it: for the coals in her soul of love was burning with a flame that would consume all that came in its way. Reader! where shall we look, in the present day, for faith and love so ardent and so lively! And if we accept the passage in this verse as the words of Jesus, we are only lost in greater amazement still at the

love of Christ, which passeth knowledge! Set me, saith Christ, as a seal upon thine heart. Jesus desires the first place in the affections of his people. Indeed, unless this be given him we give him nothing. It is with all the heart, and all the soul, if we love him at all, that that love is to be manifested. And if Christ be formed in our heart, the hope of glory, there will be all the suitable correspondence. Hence the apostle Barnabas exhorted the believers at *Antioch*, *that with full purpose of heart they would cleave unto the Lord*. Acts xi. 23. And what that is, will not be far to gather. In the soul which is cleaving unto the Lord, and setting Jesus as the seal there, Christ will be uppermost in the affection. The soul will undertake nothing but in his strength, and design nothing but for his glory. And the most blessed testimonies, that the soul is really thus setting Jesus for a seal, will be found in the life and conversation, by the affections being weaned from all things here below, and a growing connection forming more and more, with those that are above. Reader! is it so with you? Precious Jesus! thy love hath been strong as death indeed, for the accomplishment of these purposes. And oh! that thy jealousy, for the suitable return of the affections of thy people, may provoke all the souls of thy redeemed to a holy jealousy for thine honour, that we may love thee, who hath so earnestly first loved us!

7 Many waters cannot quench love, neither can the floods drown it: if a man would give all the substance of his house for love, it would utterly be contemned.

Here is the same obscurity in this verse, as in the former, whether the words are principally applicable to Christ or to his Church. If we consider the Church as thus expressing her affection, every believer ought to be enabled to adopt the sentiment contained in them. For as some blessed martyrs in times past have waded not only through waters and floods under the persecutions of the ungodly, but through blood, to testify their love to Jesus; so ought believers in every age. Neither the malice of enemies, nor the slights of friends, the unkindness of relations, and the sneers of the world; the infidelity of men, nor the rage of devils; since none of these can separate from the love of Christ; surely none of them ought to have influence to lessen in our hearts that love. But as it is not to be bought with money, so ought every child of God to prize it above all things. They should despise every thing the world holds dear, in order to keep alive the immortal spark, not to be extinguished by the floods or waters of immortal hatred. But if we read the verse with an eye to Christ, the subject contained in it riseth in glory. Such indeed was the love of Christ to his Church, that neither the view of his Father's burning anger against sin, nor all the sufferings he had to sustain in his own sacred person, when doing away the evil of sin by the sacrifice of himself, could for one moment make his holy soul remit his love to his redeemed. Yea, if possible, more deeply wounding still to his tender heart, not all the baseness and ingratitude of his redeemed, could extinguish the holy flame of his love. Reader! pause over this subject, and contemplate well the wondrous contents of it, and then say, Is not the love of Christ in the heights and depths, in the breadths and lengths of it, a love of God, which passeth knowledge?

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

9 If she *be* a wall, we will build upon her a palace of silver: and if she *be* a door, we will inclose her with boards of cedar.

10 I *am* a wall, and my breasts like towers: then was I in his eyes as one that found favour.

It should seem that these verses are the wishes of the Jewish Church for the call of the Gentile. For the term *sister* implies as much. And as God the Father gave his dear Son, for a light to lighten the Gentiles, as well as to be the glory of his people Israel; so the faithful who saw as much of the mind of Jehovah in this particular, as to enter into the apprehension of the subject, might be supposed under the Holy Ghost, to be praying for its accomplishment. Isaiah, xlix. 6. lx. 1, 2, 3, &c.

11 Solomon had a vineyard at Baal-hamon: he let out the vineyard unto keepers; every one for the fruit thereof was to bring a thousand *pieces* of silver.

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

The best comment perhaps on this verse is what the Lord Jesus himself hath given, Matt. xxi. 33, &c. That the Church is Christ's vineyard, that he hath servants in all ages ministering, and working in its Patriarchs, Prophets, Apostles, and Pastors; that his is the revenue, and to him will be all the fruit of it; and that finally, he who hath now his eye constantly upon it, will come to make a reckoning: all these momentous concerns are read to us in every part of scripture.

13 Thou that dwellest in the gardens, the companions hearken to thy voice; cause me to hear *it*.

These are the words of Christ to his Church, in which he calls her the *inhabitant* of the gardens, his Churches; and it is a love-call of the Lord, that as she is heard by her companions, and is frequently speaking of him, and concerning him, he desires that she will speak to him also. Reader! it is blessed to speak of Christ, but infinitely more so to speak to Christ. Communion with the saints is like heaven below; but communion with the Lord of the saints is like heaven above! Reader! do not overlook the tenderness of Jesus in thus seeking fellowship with his people.

14 ¶ Make haste, my beloved, and be thou like to a roe or to a young hart upon the mountains of spices.

With these words the song is closed. Jesus finisheth his divine part, in the verse before, and here the Church echoes to her Lord in this affectionate answer. We had a similar request, chap. ii. 17; and the repetition here only serves to shew, with what ardency so blessed an event was desired. Such was the longing of Old Testament saints for the Lord's first coming, in substance of our flesh; and such should be the earnest desire of new Testament believers, that Jesus would hasten his second coming! And, Reader, if your views and mine of the Lord Jesus, in his glorious person, and in the infinite importance of his salvation, correspond to these sentiments of the Church, in all ages, then shall we find our souls going forth, in the same earnest cry of faith: *Make haste, my beloved, and be thou like to a roe, or to a young hart upon the mountains of spices.*

REFLECTIONS.

READER! here let us take to ourselves the sweet instruction the Church teacheth, in the opening of this Chapter, and while she is so passionately looking to her Lord, as her Brother, and desiring to kiss him without being ashamed or despised; let you and I delight to call him our Brother also, and to be convinced that, as a Brother, he feels interested in all that concerns our salvation. And oh! for grace and faith in such full actings upon his glorious Person, that we may constrain him to come with us to the Church our Mother, and there cause him to drink of our spiced wine, even the blessed fruits and effects of his own grace in our hearts. Surely Jesus will embrace us, and take us into his arms; neither shall any disturb the hallowed season of enjoyment with him, while he is pleased to impart the manifestations of his love. And, Reader, shall we not be among the happy number, that are coming up from the wilderness, leaning upon our Beloved, hanging upon him, and feasting our souls with beholding his beauty, and living upon his fulness? Yea, surely Jesus will raise us up from under the apple-tree of this world's good; will bring us out of all the deadness of nature, and the dead frames of the heart, and bring us into his Church, the Church of the living God.

Blessed Lord Jesus! dost thou really desire that such poor creatures as we are, should set thee as a seal upon our hearts, and upon our arm? And is thy love so ardent, and yet so condescending, that thou declarest it to be strong as death, and as jealous as the grave, and doth it burn towards us, as coals of fire? Oh Lord! for grace, ever to keep this desire of thine in remembrance, and to carry it about with us, whithersoever we go; delighting our souls with the very thought that our poor sealing to the love of Jesus is had in remembrance, and valued by our Lord. And do thou, oh thou most gracious and compassionate Redeemer, do thou set thy people as a signet on thy right hand, and wear our names, worthless as they are in themselves, but highly honourable as noticed and owned by thee, wear them in thine heart, and bear them in, as the High Priest of thy people, before the throne, that as thine, we may be sealed in the presence of our God, unto the day of redemption. Oh! for a heart to love thee, and to live to thee, and to praise thee,

that nothing could damp or abate thy love to thy people. Neither the agonies in the garden, nor the cross, neither the justice of divine wrath against sin, nor the powers of hell, no, nor the forsaking of thy disciples at thy death, nor the continued slights of all thy disciples through the whole of thy life, even until now, hath abated, or can abate thy love for one moment from thy redeemed; but, as thou hast from the beginning loved thy people, that are in the world, *thou lovest them unto the end.* Oh, that the Lord would add one mercy more to this unmerited mercy, and as no waters nor floods can quench thy love, so the Lord would not suffer any, or all, the torrents of sin and death to quench ours. Lord, we pray thee to keep our poor souls *in the love of God, and in the patient waiting for Jesus Christ.*

Hail! holy Lord! Father, Son, and eternal Spirit! we bend before thy throne with thanksgivings and praise for all the wonders of redemption by Jesus Christ! Hasten, almighty God, the call of thy people. Let the *little sister* of Christ's Church, even the Gentile Church, be filled with the breasts of consolation, and may our elder Brother, the Jewish Church, be called home by grace. Oh! for that glorious hour, when *the fulness of the Gentiles shall be completed, and all Israel shall be saved. When the Deliverer shall arise out of Zion, to turn away ungodliness from Jacob!* In the blessed hope of this assurance may thy people live from day to day, and may the cry of faith be continually going up for the accomplishment of it, from all the redeemed of the Lord. And while Jesus is calling upon his Church to hear his voice, and saying, *Surely I come quickly,* oh! may every faithful heart make sweet responses to their Lord, and send up the earnest prayer, *Even so! come, Lord Jesus. Amen.*

THE

PROPHET ISAI AH.

GENERAL OBSERVATIONS.

WE here enter on a part of the Word of God, very different in manner, from all that we have before gone over, through the sacred writings; though directed, in common with all the rest, to one and the same object; namely, *to make the Church of God wise unto salvation, through the faith that is in Christ Jesus.*

The scripture prophecies form a most important part in the oracles of divine truth. *Prophecy*, we are told, *came not in old time by the will of man; but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost.* And we may very safely conclude, that as they *spake* so they *wrote.* For he who gave a door of ut-