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The Voice in the Garden.

By the Editor.

I have no doubt that the Song of Solomon is a rich poetic celebration of the excellency and beauty of our Immanuel. The name which was put upon our Lord at the Jordan—"This is my Beloved Son," is the name which everywhere abounds in this Oriental poem. The Bride—the Church of Christ—is pouring out perpetual tributes of affection upon him: "My Beloved is mine and I am his"—just as Jesus said a thousand years later when speaking of his Church, "All mine are thine, and thine are mine." "It is the voice of my Beloved that knocketh, saying open to me." How perfect an echo of what we hear in the Revelation: "Beloved, I stand at the door and knock, if any man will open unto me I will come in." My Beloved spake unto me and said, "Rise up, my fair one, and come away." Oh, how constantly since his departure to the Father has Christ been saying this. "Wherefore he saith, awake thou that sleepest and arise from the dead and Christ shall give thee light." The rich communion between Christ and his Church—the holy interchange of love and service where can we find it so glowingly exhibited as in this divine poem of the Bride and the Bridegroom?

"Thou that dwellest in the gardens; the companions hear thy voice." Is it not literally true of Christ that he dwelleth in the gardens?

I. First we meet him in the garden of temptation. When Jesus had finished his last discourse and prayer we are told that he "went forth with his disciples over the brook Kedron where was a garden," and came "unto a place called Gethsemane." Then we are told that "he prayed and was in such agony that he sweat as it were great drops of blood falling down to the ground." Now, "Gethsemane" means an "olive press." All summer long the olive fruit is ripening on the tree, the grape-cluster on the vine. Then in the autumn, they are cast into the press that the oil and wine may be forced out. Oh, good Samaritan! who will pour oil and wine into the wounds of our suffering race, thou hast come to the wine-press now. The weight of the world's iniquity is on thy heart, and as its awful pressure weighs thee down, thou dost bleed at every pore. Where are thy disciples now, of whom thou didst say a little while ago: "Ye are they that have continued with me in my temptations?" Yonder are Peter and James and John, sleeping in the midst of their Master's agony, while he cries out, "I have trodden the wine-press alone, and of the people there was none with me." The wine-press! "What is this pressure on the heart that forces blood from every pore? It is the struggle and shrinking of the human will. The inward crucifixion must precede the outward crucifixion. The hardest struggle is not under the surgeon's knife, but in bringing the will to submit to the operation.

And now is the hour and the power of darkness. As he entered into the world he said: "Lo, I come, I delight to do thy will, Oh God!" But now the dread of pain has seized him; now a shrinking and reluctant human nature faints; now the sensitive body draws back from the rude denizen that is about to be put upon it by wicked hands, and now the delicate nerves quiver before the sound of the hammer and the tearing of the heavy nails through the flesh, and he prays that if it be possible the cup may pass from him. "Thou that dwellest in the garden, thy companions hear thy voice." And what did you hear, oh, Simon, Son of Jonas, when you were in the garden with your Master? "Alas!" says Peter, "I heard him say, My soul is exceeding sorrowful even unto death: tarry ye here and watch. And I remember how he went forward a little way and then fell down as though crushed by a burden that was too heavy for him. And there he lay for nearly an hour on his face. I kept watch for some time, but being very tired I
finally fell asleep. I remember very distinctly, however, the words of his prayer and how he repeated it over and over again: 'Father, if it be possible let this cup pass from me; nevertheless not my will, but thine be done.' But, alas! I was very tired and heavy with sorrow. I never can forgive myself for it, that even while he was praying I fell asleep; and I remember how he came and touched me, not roughly, but gently, and softly said, 'Simon, sleepest thou, could'st thou not watch with me one hour?' And then he added: 'Watch and pray lest ye enter into temptation. The spirit truly is willing, but the flesh is weak.' And then he went away again and knelt down and prayed once more. Oh, sorrowful night, would that it were possible for me to live it over again, how differently I should do! But the opportunity is gone forever."

"John, who leaned on his bosom at the Supper, you were one of those whom he took with him into his garden, what did you hear him say?" "Alas, I, too, slept! I heard his prayer and when it seemed as though he would die under his weight of agony, I saw an angel come and strengthened him, but I was so oppressed with sorrow that I fell asleep. And the thing which now smites me to the heart as I remember it, is to think how patient and tender he was with us. He did not chide us, but just when he needed our watchful care so much he came to us and said, 'Sleep on now and take your rest; behold the hour is at hand, and the Son of man is betrayed unto the hand of sinners.' " Thy companions hear thy voice, cause me to hear it!" Christ is still in Gethsemane; still in the person of his body which is his Church, is he 'exceeding sorrowful even unto death,' because of the sins of the world; else what means the injunction that we are "to fill up that which is behind of the suffering of Christ for his body's sake which is the Church?" And what is his command to us? "What I say unto one I say unto all: Watch." And again speaking by the Holy Ghost he says, "ye are not of the night nor of the darkness. Therefore, let us not sleep as do others, but let us watch and be sober." Oh, you whose eyes are heavy with sleep—soothing into guilty slumber by your ease and prosperity so that you no longer have any fellowship with the suffering of Christ! Behold what is passing! Souls are perishing in sin by the hundreds every day and you reposing in cushioned ease and luxury, not even dreaming that you have any responsibility for their loss. And may it be that the crisis is already past; that Jesus has given you up and said, "Sleep on now and take your rest?" Never did that sacred opportunity to watch with Christ return to his disciples. Lost then, it was lost forever. And if now when Jesus is still beholding the travail of his soul in the redemption of the world, if you fail to be with him watching for souls as they that must give account, remember that the opportunity will never return. "Watch therefore," says your Lord, "lest coming suddenly, he may find you sleeping."

II. Again we meet Jesus in the garden of his burial. John says, "Now in the place where he was crucified there was a garden; and in the garden a new tomb wherein was never man laid. There they laid Jesus, for the sepulchre was nigh at hand."

And now he sleeps there, wrapped in the winding sheet of burial—angels keeping guard about the tomb. His companions have come early to his sepulchre. Shall they ever hear his voice again? Oh for one touch of that gracious hand! Oh for one greeting from those holy lips. But alas! the sepulchre is empty! and there stands Mary Magdalene before its entrance, weeping. But hark! "Thou that dwellest in the gardens, thy companions hear thy voice." "Jesus saith unto her, Woman, why weepest thou?" Oh, mother, who hast followed thine only son to the grave, and there buried all thy dearest hopes! Oh
wife, widowed now who waste once unspeakably happy,—the strong staff and the beautiful rod on which thou didst once lean, broken!" "Why weepest thou?" "The Lord is risen and become the first fruits of them that slept." And only a little while, and he will come and open the grave of your beloved as he opened his own. Never shall I forget a scene which I witnessed in yonder cemetery. There was one solitary mourner bearing an only child to burial. I stood by his side and offered the last prayer, and then he shut the lid of the casket and locked it, and putting the key into his pocket turned away. Instantly I seemed to hear from the garden of God where Jesus is, the words "Why weepest thou?" "Fear not for I am he that liveth and was dead, and behold I am alive for evermore, and have the keys of death and the grave." That father could turn the key that shut in his child, but not the key that opened the door back to life. But Jesus has the key that openeth, and yet how slow of heart to believe! "Mary, supposing him to be the gardener, saith unto him: Sir, if thou have borne him hence, tell me where thou hast laid him and I will take him away. Jesus saith unto her, Mary!" The good Shepherd is calling his sheep by their names.

She turned herself and saith unto him, Rabboni which is to say Master. Jesus said, "touch me not for I am not yet ascended to my Father."

"Touch me not." Henceforth we are to know Christ no longer after the flesh. Not that he is any more remote from us than ever. He can still be "touched with the feeling of our infirmities." But now it is by faith and not by feeling. Now it is by our sins and sorrows that find healing in his wounds that we are to know him. "I ascend to my Father and to your Father, to my God and to your God." No longer does he say as he said in the garden, "My Father, let the cup pass from me." No longer does he say as on the cross, "My God, why hast thou forsaken me?" Now he has reconciled us with God, and put away all enmity. He has brought us into the same place in the Father's heart which he holds himself. So that now he can say, "My God and your God. My Father and your Father." Cause me to hear this day thy voice, oh beloved, and to know that now as "through him we both have access to the Father." And now while Mary Magdelene and that other Mary ran to bring the disciples word, behold, Jesus meets them, saying, "All hail." Once more his companions hear his voice, "And they came and held him by the feet and worshipped him." "How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him that bringeth good tidings, of good that publisheth salvation." They held him by the feet and in those wounds they clasped the token and pledges of their forgiveness.

Look to the wounds of Christ, oh sinner, look to the wounds of Christ for the evidence that your sins are put away. No wounds in your conscience will suffice; no wounds of deep and piercing penitence in your heart will do. "He was wounded for our transgressions—he was bruised for our iniquities." And now as he comes forth from the grave with the scars of his crucifixion upon him, his companions hear his voice, saying unto them "Peace," and when he had so said he showed them his hands and his side, and even unto this day those wounds in Jesus' glorified body are a sure token of our forgiveness than all the feeling or spiritual evidences that we can experience in a life time.

III. Once more we find our Lord in the garden of glory. Just before he yielded up his spirit on the cross he said to the dying thief, "This day shalt thou be with me in Paradise." Now paradise means a garden and into that place of eternal beauty the Lord has entered, and though it is "a land that is very far off," we still hear the voice of the Lord walking in the garden. Hear Jesus speaking from his ascended glory.
"To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the tree of life that is in the midst of the paradise of God." That eternal deathless life from which Adam was debarred by sin, Christ by his death has again made accessible. The flaming sword which guarded it from man’s approach has been bathed in the blood of Immanuel and now it can no longer shut us out of paradise. "Blessed," say our glorified Lord, "Blessed are they that wash their robes that they may have right to the tree of life." "Right!" Oh wondrous transformation! The sword of justice has actually been turned to our defense, so that instead of driving us from the tree of life it guards our approach there-to. "Gird thy sword upon thy thigh, Oh Immanuel, and in thy majesty ride forth prosperously, saying unto a world dead in trespasses and sins—"I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly." "I will meet thee again at Philippi," said the ghost of Julius Caesar to Brutus. "I will meet thee again at Calvary!" said the Prince of life to Satan when he had brought death to our first parents in Eden and he has met him; and when on the cross he yielded up his spirit, he inflicted a mortal wound on "him that hath the power of death, even the devil." And when he had paid the penalty of our transgressions, he said to justice who had been barring the way to life—"Put up thy sword into its place for I have found a ransom." And now in a paradise regained his companions hear his voice and the Lamb that is in the midst of the throne doth feed them and doth lead them unto living fountains of water. And what is he now saying in that garden above?—"Behold I come quickly." Oh that we may hear his voice and answer, "Even so, come, Lord Jesus." "Make haste, my beloved, and be thou like a roe or a young hart upon the mountains of spices." Is he the Bridegroom of the Church, and is it nothing to us that he be absent from us in the body though he be present in Spirit? The Lord himself has given us our true attitude, "Can the children of the bride chamber mourn so long as the bridegroom is with them? But the days will come when the Bridegroom shall be taken from them, and then shall they fast." And this is our condition now: Christ rejected; the whole world lying in the Wicked One; iniquity abounding and the love of many waxing cold. It is a time for fasting and not for feasting. There is a very beautiful piece of statuary which I have seen described, that of "The blind watcher." A young maiden has been betrothed; and her fiancée has gone over the sea on a voyage. Each day at evening she goes down to the sea-side and looks out for some sign of his return. Her father, who is opposed to her attachment chides her for her conduct and taunts her for her folly in thinking that he will ever come back for her; and being provoked by her constancy, in a fit of passion he one day strikes her in the face in such a way as to destroy her eyesight. But still she is there. And though she can see no longer, she yet goes out upon the beach to listen if she can catch some sound of his coming. Most true picture of the Church—the Bride of Christ! Blind she may be as to the times and the seasons which the Father hath put in his own power. But she is not deaf to the voice of her Beloved. She hears the sound of his voice in the Paradise of God, saying: "He that hath ears to hear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches." "Behold I come as a thief. Blessed is he that watcheth and keepeth his garments." And if we really love him, instead of joining with a scoffing world in the cry, "Where is the sign of his coming?" We shall respond with all the ardor and intensity of our souls—"Make haste, my Beloved, and be thou like a roe or a young hart upon the mountains of spices."