Synopsis of the Books of the Bible

Song of Solomon

John Nelson Darby (1800-1882)

Public domain edition

Summary

The subject of the book — the heart's affections

It is to be observed, that there is no question in this book of the purification of the conscience. That question is not touched upon. But it speaks of those affections of the heart which cannot be too ardent when the Lord is their object Consequently the faults, that manifest forgetfulness of Him and of His grace, serve only to produce such exercises of heart with respect to Him as recall all the attractions of His Person, and the consciousness of belonging entirely to Him — exercises that form the heart to a much deeper appreciation of Himself, because guilt before a judge is not the question, but a fault of the heart towards a friend — a fault which, meeting with a love too strong to be turned away from its object, only deepens her own affection, and infinitely exalts in her eyes the affection of her Beloved (thus forming her heart, by inward exercise, to the appreciation of His love, and to the capability of loving and estimating all that He is). It is all-important to form our heart in this portion of the christian life. It is thus that Christ is truly known; for, with respect to divine persons, he who loves not knows not. The heart indeed is imperfect; it cannot love as it ought; and therefore all these exercises are necessary. I do not say that faults are necessary. But, as has been said, it is love that causes the fault to be felt when it exists, and the strength of the love that exposes to the watchman's blows, whose business it is, not to measure love, but to maintain moral order. He takes away the veil — sad and painful discipline, which proves that, even while loving much, there was not love enough; or, at least, that this love was deposited in a weak vessel which, if listened to, is a traitor to itself.

The moral application of the book to the Church

I have said that in its interpretation this book does not apply to the assembly. Nevertheless I have spoken of ourselves and of our hearts, and with reason; because, although the interpretation of the book presents Israel as its object, it is the heart and the feelings that are in question; so that morally it can be applied to us. But, then, the modification already noticed must be introduced. We have the full knowledge of accomplished redemption, we know that we are sitting in the heavenly places in Christ. Our conscience is for ever purged. God will remember our sins and our iniquities no more. But the effect of this work is, that we are entirely His, according to the love that is shewn in the sacrifice that accomplished it. Morally therefore Christ is the all of our souls. It is evident that, if He loved us, if He gave Himself for us, when in us there was no good thing, it is in having absolutely done with ourselves that we have life, happiness, and the knowledge of God. It is in Him alone that we find the source, the strength, and the perfection of this. Now, as to justification, this truth makes our position perfect. In us there is no good thing. We are accepted in the Beloved — perfectly accepted in His acceptance, our sins being entirely put away by His death. But, then, as to life, Jesus becomes the one object, the all of our souls. In Him alone the heart finds that which can be its object — in Him who has so loved us and given Himself for us — in Him who is entire perfection for the heart. As to conscience, the question is settled in peace through His blood: we are righteous in Him before God, while exercised daily on that ground. But the heart needs to love such an object, and in principle will have none but Him, in whom all grace, devotedness to us, and every grace, according to God's own heart, is found. It is here that the

Christian is in unison with the Song of Songs.

The assembly — loved, redeemed, and belonging to Him — having by the Spirit understood His perfections, having known Him in the work of His love, does not yet possess Him as she knows Him. She sighs for the day when she will see Him as He is. Meanwhile He manifests Himself to her, awakens her affections, and seeks to possess her love, by testifying all His delight in her. She learns also that which is in herself — that slothfulness of heart which loses opportunities of communion with Him. But this teaches her to judge all that in herself which weakens the effect on her heart of the perfections of her Beloved. Thus she is morally prepared, and has capacity for the full enjoyment of communion with Him; when she shall see Him as He is, she will be like Him. It is not the effort to obtain Him; but we seek to apprehend that for which we have been apprehended by Christ. We have an object that we do not yet fully possess, which alone can satisfy all our desires — an object whose affection we need to realise in our hearts — an end which He in grace pursues, by the testimony of His perfect love towards us, thereby cultivating our love to Him, comforting us even by the sense of our weakness, and by the revelation of His own perfection, and thus shewing us all that in our own hearts prevents our enjoying it. He delivers us from it, in that we discover it in the presence of His love.

The love of Christ learned and known makes us know Him Himself

It is not my object to trace here in detail the working of these affections in the heart, because I am interpreting and not exhorting. But it was necessary to speak a little on the subject, that the Book may be understood. Moreover, it is impossible to exaggerate the importance of cultivating these holy affections which attach us to Christ, and cause us to know His love, and to know Himself. For, I repeat, when God is in question, and His dealings with respect to us, he who loves not knows not.

Only remark with what earnestness, with what tenderness, He tells His loved one of all her preciousness in His sight, and of the perfection which He beholds in her. If Jesus sees perfection in us, we need nothing more. He reassures her heart by speaking to her of this, when she had been justly rebuked and disciplined by the watchmen, and her heart compelled to seek relief by declaring to others, to her friends, all that He was to her. He reproaches her with nothing, but makes her feel that she is perfect in His eyes.

Practically, what deep perfection of love was in that look which the Lord gave Peter when he had denied Him! What a moment was that when, without reproach, although instructing him, He testified His confidence in Peter by committing to him, who had thus denied Him, the sheep and the lambs so dear to His heart, for whom He had just given His life!

Now this love of Christ's, in its superiority to evil — a superiority that proves it divine — reproduces itself as a new creation in the heart of every one who receives its testimony, uniting him to the Lord who has so loved him.

Is the Lord anything else than this for us? No, my brethren, we learn His love; we learn in these exercises of heart to know Him Himself.

Introduction

The affections of the remnant to the King and those of the assembly

This Book takes up the Jew, or at least the remnant, in quite another aspect. It tells of the affections that the King can create in their heart, and by which He draws them to Himself. However strong these affections may be. they are not developed according to the position in which christian affections, properly so called, are formed. They differ in this respect. They do not possess the profound repose and sweetness of an affection that flows from a relationship already formed, known, and fully appreciated, the bonds of which are formed and recognised, that counts upon the full and constant acknowledgment of the relationship, and that each party enjoys, as a certain thing, in the heart of the other. The desire of one who loves, and is seeking the affections of the beloved object, is not the sweet, entire, and established affection of the wife, with whom marriage has formed an indissoluble union. To the former the relationship is only in desire, the consequence of the state of heart; to the latter the state of heart is the consequence of the relationship. Now, although the marriage of the Lamb is not yet come, nevertheless, on account of the revelation which has been made to us, and of the accomplishment of our salvation, this latter character of affection is that which is proper to the assembly. Praise and glory be to God for it! We know whom we have believed. The strength and energy of desire is, however, still maintained, because glory and the marriage of the Lamb are yet future. What a position is that of the assembly! The entire confidence of the relationship on the one hand, the ardent expectation of the betrothed of the Lord on the other, whose love, however, is well known; an expectation that is linked with the glory in which He will come to receive her to Himself, to be for ever with Him.

This is not the position of the Jew. The point for him is to know that his Beloved is his. That is the question. That there is a principle in common is true. Christ loves His assembly, He loves His earthly people, He loves the soul that He draws to Himself. So that there is a moral application to ourselves which is very precious. Nevertheless it is important that we distinguish and do not apply to the assembly that which relates to Israel. Otherwise we shall not have the right character of affection, and shall fail in that which is due to Christ.

Christ for the remnant and the remnant for Christ

The Song of Songs gives then the re-establishment of the relations between Christ and the remnant, in order that by exercise of heart — necessary on account of their position — they may be confirmed in the assurance of His love, and in the knowledge that all is of grace, and a grace that can never fail. Then is He fully known as Solomon. His heart becomes like the chariot of His willing people (Ammi-nadib), which carries Him away.

Canticles 8:1 affords us a passage which may serve to express the state of mind treated in the book. "Oh that thou wert as my brother! when I should find thee without I would kiss thee!" Nevertheless, the Spirit of God desiring to assure the heart of the remnant of the Saviour's love, we see that the expression of the heart's desire to possess its Beloved does not cease until it has gained its object. The heart assures itself according to the operation of the Spirit of prophecy; for in fact Christ is for the

remnant, and the remnant is for Him. The whole is based on this. But the heart needs to be reassured, as in a similar case we observe in other passages.

Having thus given the general idea, we shall point out some features that are developed in the course of this book, and that possess a moral import of great interest to ourselves.

Chapter 1

Assurance of the full enjoyment of blessing

Chapter 1 presents in the most clear and simple manner the assurance of the full enjoyment of blessing; but still, though affection be there, all is more characterised by desire than by peace. And after this we find exercises of heart, that lead to a full understanding of the Beloved One's affection. There is progress in this intelligence, and that in spite of the faults and slothfulness of heart, which gives a fresh value to the affection that is in exercise. This mode of instruction is found in the Psalms, in which the first verses frequently give the thesis and the result, which is reached through circumstances that are afterwards detailed. Besides the peacefulness of the affection which subsists in a known relation, there is another sign of an affection in exercise when the relation is not formally established. The heart is occupied with the qualities, with the features, of the Beloved One. When, on the contrary, the object is possessed, it is with that object itself the heart is occupied. No doubt the qualities are a source of happiness; but while the position gives the enjoyment of these, it is the person who manifests them that is thought of. The grace, the kindness, or similar qualities, may attract the heart, and it is occupied with them. But, the relationship once formed, it is the person we think of, whose qualities are now, so to say, our own.

The qualities of the Beloved in perfect grace

The loved one speaks much here of the qualities of her Beloved; she loves to speak of them, and to others. It may be said that the Beloved does so yet more, although He knows the relation in which He stands to her. This is true; but, as she is not yet in it, He is fain to reassure her with respect to her value in His eyes. He therefore speaks constantly of it to herself. Moreover, this is suitable to the position of man and of woman, and so much the more as it is really Christ Himself in question. Christ, in a certain sense, suffices to Himself. He needs not to go and talk to others of that which is in His heart. His love is a love of grace. But it is infinitely precious to us — when, in our utter unworthiness, we might doubt the possibility of His affection, even because it is so inestimable — and very affecting, as well as precious, to see Him manifesting His sense of her value, that her beauty is perfect in His eyes, that He has observed all her features, that one look has ravished His heart, that His dove, His undefiled, is the only one, that there is no spot in her. There is perfect grace in this reassuring testimony of the Bridegroom's part. It is the chief subject of His discourse. It is that which her heart needed.

The exercises of the Bride's heart

There is much more variety in the exercises of her heart; there are even failures and sorrows arising from her faults. There is also an evident progress in her assurance. The song commences with the bride's declaration that her heart needs this testimony. She acknowledges that she is black, because of the scorching rays of the sun of affliction. She seeks shelter in the presence of her Beloved, who makes His flock to rest at noon. She would belong to Him only. She fears now to wander among the shepherds of Israel. But if the Spirit of the Lord reminds her of those former testimonies of the law and the prophets, her heart is not silent, and the heart of the Beloved overflows in the testimony of her value in His eyes. The suitability of all this to the remnant in the last days is evident. The rest of the chapter contains testimonies of affection, which present the idea that is the thesis of the book.

Chapter 2

The awakening of the affections and confidence in the remnant

The first six verses (omitting the second) of Canticles 2 appear to me to be the voice of the bride. They have been differently understood, but (I think) wrongly. Observe here that Christ is the apple-tree. This will help us afterwards. Moreover the bride speaks of herself. In theory she apprehends her relationship, and speaks chiefly of herself; but there is real affection. The Bridegroom will not allow her to be disturbed* when she rests with full confidence in His love. His own voice, the only one to which she now hearkens, shall waken her. He Himself tells her to arise, that the winter is past — the time of mourning and sorrow. He desires also to hear her voice. Thus her heart is re-assured: her Beloved is hers. How truly all this gives the awakening of divine affections and confidence in the remnant which had so long learned what it was to have Jehovah's face hidden, and how fully the inextinguishable love of Him who wept over Jerusalem is in the blessedest way in exercise to awaken this confidence and assure the heart of the afflicted people! It is to me singularly beautiful, not instruction as to circumstances nor in connection with responsibility, but grace — Christ's (Jehovah's) own relationship with Israel. {*Read "nor awaken love till it please."}

Chapter 3

The Bride alone and in darkness: the Beloved sought for

In Canticles 3 we have another attitude, another state of heart. She is alone and in darkness. She seeks her Beloved, but finds Him not. There is affection, but no joy. She questions the watchmen in Jerusalem who go about the city. As soon as she passes from them, she finds Him. Again He will have her rest in His love. But all this is only prophetically and in testimony, for the comfort of those who have not yet found Him, by shewing them what He is for them. The Spirit of prophecy then exhibits the Bridegroom coming up out of the wilderness with His bride, where (like Moses) He had been with her in spirit. The chapter confirms the application to Israel. In her solitary state she seeks the Messiah, and, after inquiring of those who watched, soon found Him her soul loved, and brought Him into the place of Israel, for to Israel the Son was born,* though in a new relationship. There He maintains her rest, and

there, the other side of the picture, the true Solomon comes up out of the wilderness, crowned now in the day of His espousals, and in the day of the gladness of His heart, by the Israel that had rejected Him. {* So Naomi, and Revelation 12.}

Chapter 4

The Bridegroom declares all that the Bride is in His sight

And now, Canticles 4, He declares all that she is in His sight, although she has been in the lion's den. From thence He calls her, all fair and without spot in His eyes; His heart expressing His delight in her. It is, I judge, a fine moral perfectness of thought that the bride never speaks of the Bridegroom's perfections to Himself as if she was to approve Him; she speaks of Him fully as expressive of her own feelings and to others, but not to Him. He speaks freely and fully of her to herself as assuring her of His delight in her. When we think of Christ and our relation with Him, this is beautifully appropriate.

Chapter 5

The re-assured heart, exhibiting slothfulness, is disciplined

Canticles 5 gives us another experience. Intimacy was formed through the testimony of the Bridegroom's affection. The reassured heart, certain of His love, exhibits its slothfulness. Alas, what hearts are ours! We turn again to ourselves as soon as we are comforted by the testimony of the Lord's love. The Bridegroom's sensitive and righteous heart acts upon her word, and He retires from one who does not listen to His voice. She arises to learn her own folly, and the just delicacy, with respect to herself, of His ways whom she had slighted. How often, alas! do we act in the same manner with regard to the voice of His Spirit and the manifestations of His love! What a dreadful loss, but, through grace, what a lesson! She is chastised by those who watch for the peace of Jerusalem. What had she to do in the streets at night, she whom the Bridegroom had sought at home? And now her very affection exposes her to reproof, the expression of its energy placing her in a position that proved she had slighted her Beloved. If we are not in the peaceful enjoyment of the love of Christ, where He meets with us in grace, the very strength of our affection and our self-condemnation causes us to exhibit this affection out of its place, in a certain sense, and bring us into connection with those who judge our position. It was right discipline for a watchman to use towards a woman who was wandering without, whatever might be the cause. Testimonies of her affection to her Beloved at home, the love of her own heart, do not concern the watchman. Affection may exist; but he has to do with order and a becoming walk. Nevertheless her affection was real and led to an ardent expression of all that her Beloved was to her — an expression addressed to others, who ought to understand her; not to the watchman, but to her own companions. But if sloth had prevented her receiving Him in the visitations of His love, her heart, now disciplined by the watchman and turned again to her Beloved, overflowing with His praises, being taught of God, knows where to find Him.

Chapters 6, 7

The recognition that we "are not our own"

And this experience makes her understand through grace another aspect of her relationship, proving a real progress in the intelligence of grace and condition of heart. It is no longer the desire that seeks possession of the object for herself, it is the consciousness that she belongs to Him. "I am my Beloved's." This is a very important progress. The soul that seeks salvation, that seeks to satisfy newly-awakened affections, exclaims, as soon as it is assured of it, "My Beloved is mine." When there has been a deeper experience of self, it recognises itself as being His. Thus, with respect to ourselves, it is not "We have found him of whom the prophets did write"; but "We are not our own, for we are bought with a price." To belong in this manner to Christ, no longer thinking of self, is the happiness of the soul. It is not that we lose the sense of the blessedness of possessing the Saviour, but the other thought, the thought of being His, occupies the first place.

The remnant's consciousness of what the Bride is to the Beloved

Again the Beloved testifies to the preciousness of the bride in His eyes. But here also there is a difference. Before, when speaking of her, He added to the gentleness and beauty of her aspect all the graces which were seen in her, the honey that flowed from her lips, the pleasant fruits that were found in her, the sweet odours which He called on the breath of the Spirit to bring forth. He does not now repeat these things. He speaks of that which she is for Him. Having described her personal beauty, His heart dwells on what she is for Himself. "My dove, my undefiled, is but one." His affection can see no other: none can be compared with her. There are many others, but they are not the one whom He loves. The person of the Lord fills the heart that has been brought back to Him. The look and the graces of the bride are the subject of the Bridegroom's testimony. Moreover for Him there is no one but her, the only one of her mother. Thus will it be with the remnant of Israel in the last days, even as in spirit it is now with us.

The reception of Christ and His union with this remnant at Jerusalem are represented in a very striking manner in that which follows. It is no longer the Beloved coming up out of the wilderness — where He had associated His people with Himself — in glory and in love. It is the bride, fair as the moon and radiant with glory, who appears on the scene, like an army with banners displayed. The Beloved had come down to look upon the ripening fruits of the valley, and to see if His vine flourished. Before He is aware, His love makes Him like the chariots of His willing people (compare Ps. 110:3). He leads them in glory and triumph. He had sought the fruits of grace among them; but, having come down for this, He exalts them in glory. It is only when His people are fully established in grace that everything in them will be beauty and perfection, and that they will recognise that they belong entirely to Christ, and at the same time that they will entirely possess His affection.

This last thought is the rest of their heart. This is thus expressed in the third formulary of the experience of this divine song, if I may coldly so speak, and which gives the full happiness of the bride, "I am my Beloved's, and his desire is toward me" — the consciousness of belonging to Christ and that His

affections rest on us — the consciousness that we are the objects of His own affections and delight. This is most deep and perfect joy.

The reader will do well to weigh these three expressions of satisfaction of heart: the possessing Christ; our belonging to Him; and this last, with the unspeakable knowledge that His heart's delight is in us, however much — and it is surely then it will be felt — all is grace.

But (to return to the text) they can now go forth with Him to enjoy all the blessings of the earth in the certainty and the communion of His love. What fruits of gratitude, what peculiar feelings, will be those which the people of Israel have kept for the Lord alone, which they could never have for any other, and which, after all, none but themselves could have towards the Lord, viewed as come on earth.

Chapter 8

The prophetic announcement of the full heart-satisfaction of the remnant

Canticles 8 stands by itself, and appears to me to recapitulate the principles of the whole book. It returns to the foundation of that which gave rise to all these exercises. The full satisfaction of all the desires of the remnant is prophetically announced, and the path of their affections is marked out. But this picture is drawn for the encouragement of those who are not yet enjoying it, and expresses the desire for its accomplishment (giving thus the sanction of God to the ardent desire of the remnant to possess Christ, and to have full liberty of communion with Him). The reply teaches, with a clearness that is very precious, the manner of its accomplishment. The ardent affection of the loved one is manifested, and the Beloved desires that she may rest in His love, and enjoy it as long as she will without being disturbed. Afterwards she comes up out of the wilderness, leaning upon Him. And where did the Lord awaken her from her sleep? Under an apple-tree (see Cant. 2:3). From Christ alone she derives her life. Thus only can Israel give birth to this living remnant, which, at Jerusalem, shall become the earthly bride of the great King, which desires to be, and shall be, as a seal upon His heart, according to the power of a love that is strong as death — that spares nothing, and yields nothing.

The "little sister" appears to me to be Ephraim, which has never had the same development that Judah received through the manifestation of Christ, and through all that took place after the captivity of the ten tribes. For all the moral affections of Judah were formed on their relationship to Christ, on His rejection, and on the sentiments which this produced when the Spirit caused it to be felt (Isa. 50-53). Ephraim has gone through none of this, but will enter into the enjoyment of its results. Judah, when perfected, will enjoy the full favour of the Messiah; their affections having been formed for Him by all the exercises of heart which they have had with respect to Him.

Christ, in His Solomon character, the glorious King, the Son of David, and after the order of Melchisedec, has a vineyard as Lord of the nations or multitudes. He has intrusted it to others, who are to make Him a suitable return. The vineyard of the bride was at her own disposal, but all its proceeds shall be for Solomon; and there shall be a portion for those that kept its fruits — a touching expression of her relationship to the King. She will have all to be His; and then there are others who shall profit by

it also.

The last two verses express the bride's desire that the Bridegroom may come without delay.