

Theology on the Web.org.uk

Making Biblical Scholarship Accessible

This document was supplied for free educational purposes. Unless it is in the public domain, it may not be sold for profit or hosted on a webserver without the permission of the copyright holder.

If you find it of help to you and would like to support the ministry of Theology on the Web, please consider using the links below:



Buy me a coffee

<https://www.buymeacoffee.com/theology>



PATREON

<https://patreon.com/theologyontheweb>

[PayPal](#)

<https://paypal.me/robbradshaw>

A table of contents for *Bibliotheca Sacra* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_bib-sacra_01.php

ARTICLE III.

DOES A LITERAL INTERPRETATION OF THE
SONG OF SONGS REMOVE ITS CHAR-
ACTER AS SCRIPTURE?

BY PROFESSOR SAMUEL IVES CURTISS, D.D.

WE raise this question because the modern critics insist on a literal interpretation of this exquisite poem, which is perhaps now more neglected by the church than any other portion of the Old Testament. While some of the most saintly characters have used its glowing language as a medium of expressing their love and devotion to Christ, the ordinary reader cannot easily adopt the current traditional interpretation; hence finds no aid to devotion in the book. But does every book of the Bible subserve a devotional purpose? Is the character of a biblical writing as an aid to devotion to be a test of its claim to be received as Scripture? This is evidently not the standard set in 2 Tim. iii. 16, 17. According to this passage, anything in the Old Testament which is profitable for building up a noble character and which tends to righteousness of life may lay claim to scriptural authority.

Let us now turn to examine the object which the writer had in mind in the production of this book. The solution of this problem depends on the interpretation that is given to it. The interpretations that have been proposed are allegorical, typical, and literal.

1. The allegorical has been dominant from the time that

the Song was finally received into the canon of the Hebrew Scriptures.¹ Indeed, the persuasion that it was to be interpreted allegorically overcame the opposition of those Jewish scholars who thought it should be relegated to the apocrypha on account of its erotic tone. The Jewish allegorical interpretation may be found in the Targum, which discerns in it a history of God's dealings with Israel.² God is represented as the bridegroom, and the Jewish congregation as the bride. This interpretation has no connection with the text except in the conceit of the interpreter. This is evident from the following example, when a translation of the Song (v. 1, 2) is compared with the Targum upon it.

¹ There seems to be pretty good evidence that the Song was not universally regarded as canonical until the second century A.D., if we are to judge from the fact that it is not quoted by New Testament writers, and from the expressions of Talmudists. The heat, as Wildeboer suggests (*The Origin of the Canon of the Old Testament*, p. 75), with which Rabbi Akiba (A.D. 110-135) denies that any one in Israel had ever doubted the sacredness of the Song, and with which he affirms that it is the most holy book of the Hagiographa, is a sufficient confirmation of another statement, that "in the beginning there were those who were saying that Proverbs and Solomon's Song and Ecclesiastes should be withdrawn [from public use] because they contain only worldly poetry, and hence could not belong to the Hagiographa; they therefore remained apocryphal until the men of the great Synagogue came and explained them." See Fürst, *Der Kanon des Alten Testaments* (Leipzig, 1868), pp. 83, 84.

² See Walton's *Polyglot in loco*. A hint of the allegorical interpretation is found in the title given to it in the Peshitto, which is well rendered *Sapientia Sapientiarum*. Another specimen of the allegorical interpretation is found in the Midrash, translated by Wünsche (Leipzig, 1880). The following is the explanation given of viii. 5: "'Under the apple-tree I awakened thee': Sinai is compared with an apple-tree because it yields its fruit in the month of Sivan, in which also the law was given. Why was the mountain not compared with a nut-tree, or with some other kind of tree? Every other tree produces first its leaves and then its fruit, but the apple-tree produces first its fruit and then its leaves. In like manner the Israelites said, 'We will do, and then we will learn'" (*Ex. xxiv. 7*).

“I have come to my garden, my sister, my bride;
 I have gathered my myrrh with my balsam;
 I have eaten my honeycomb with my honey;
 I have drunk my wine with my milk.
 Eat, friends; drink and be merry, beloved.

“I sleep, but my mind is awake:
 Hark, my beloved is knocking.
 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.”

Targum: “The holy and blessed One said to his people, the house of Israel: I have gone to the house of my sanctuary which thou, my sister, the congregation of Israel, hast built for me, which art compared with a chaste bride. And I have made my Shekinah to dwell in thy midst, I have received the incense of thy spices which thou hast prepared for my name. I have sent fire from heaven, and it consumed the burnt offerings and the holy sacrifices: the libation of red wine has been received with favor before me and of white wine which the priests have poured out upon my altar, but now come, ye priests who love my precepts, eat what is left of the oblation, and delight yourselves in the good things which are prepared for you.

“After all these things the people, the house of Israel, sinned, and he delivered them into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, and he led them into captivity, and they were in captivity like men sleeping, who are not able to awake from their sleep, and the voice of the Holy Spirit was admonishing them by the prophets and was awakening them from the sleep of their hearts. The Lord of all worlds answered, and thus he said, Turn in penitence, open thy mouth and exult and praise me, my sister, my beloved, the congregation of Israel, which art compared with a dove in the perfection of thy work, because the hairs of my head are full of thy tears, as a man whose head is wet with the dew of heaven, and the hair of my

locks is filled with the drops of thine eyes, as a man the hair of whose locks is full of the drops of rain which fall in the night."

We all recognize the charm of the dialogue in the Song. It is the language of two loving hearts. But the Jewish interpretation buries up the true meaning in a mass of theological pedantry. It is clear that, following this method, there may be as many allegories as there are writers.

The Christian allegorical method maintains that the bridegroom is Christ, and the bride is the church. The New Testament does indeed employ this figure in representing the relation between Christ and the church (Eph. v. 22-33). Many a beautiful and edifying interpretation has been drawn from the Song, but no rules can be established to regulate such interpretation, or determine what it is to be, aside from the most general outlines. Ordinarily there is some indication when an allegory is intended in the Old Testament; e.g., Hosea clearly states that his unfaithful wife represents Israel (i. 2-iii.), and Ezekiel, that the two harlots whom he calls Ohola and Oholibah represent respectively Israel and Judah (Ezek. xxiii. 4; cf. xvi.). But there is no hint in the Song, which does not even use the name of God once directly, that any such allegorical interpretation was intended. It was certainly farthest from the thought of the writer.¹

¹ Professor W. H. Green of Princeton, in his translation of Zoeckler's Commentary in Lange's series (New York, 1871), in a long addition to the introduction, condemning the allegorical method, uses the following language, p. 21: "As Adam Clarke justly says, he could make anything out of this Song he was disposed to make, if he were allowed equal liberty: he could find Arminianism in it or any type of doctrine he chose. The pious use made of the language of the book cannot redeem it from the charge of mal-interpretation. It is not exposition, but substituting human fancies for the true meaning and intent of the divine Word. The pious senses inserted, the edifying reflections and devout meditations, do not sanctify a mode of dealing with the book of God so utterly unwarrantable." Thrupp's Commentary on the Song of Songs (London, 1862) furnishes a good modern example of the allegorical method. "Let him

2. The modern orthodox interpretation is the typical. According to this, Solomon, on one of his excursions, met a beautiful peasant girl with whom he fell in love and whom he sought to win in the guise of a shepherd. It was not until later that this pleasing illusion was dissipated, and he appeared as the monarch of all Israel. Delitzsch conjectures that he owed some of his best impulses and experiences to his union with this noble girl.

The typical interpreters find in the tender language of Solomon, the hero of the poem, and of Shulamith, its heroine, a type of Christ's love for the church, and of her communion with him. This theory, however, does not prove that the Song was originally designed to set forth such heavenly love. Such a typical use of the book can be made only through accommodation. Some of its loving and tender discourses may be made the medium of the soul's communion with Christ, although any consistent effort to use the entire book in this way must involve the writer in inextricable difficulties.

3. The third theory of the book is that it is what it purports to be—a song of true love. According to this theory, the book celebrates the victory of a simple Israelitish maiden over all the blandishments of Solomon, the most powerful, magnificent, and luxurious of Israel's kings; backed by all the arts of the women of his harem, who do all they can to inflame the lust of this pure maiden, whose heart is set on her shepherd lover, who is ever present to her fancy while separated from him, and with whom she holds many an imaginary dialogue.¹ The flatteries of the

kiss me," etc. (i. 2). "The church of Israel desires the very presence of her Saviour. She had, as the Greek fathers express it, been instructed and wooed through the messages of the prophets, as Moses and Samuel. She now desired that her promised Messiah should pour into her mouth words from his own mouth."

¹This theory has been worked out most forcefully and successfully by Ewald, to whom the writer is much indebted in connection with this study.

king and of his harem are all in vain before such devotion as she professes for her lover, to whom she says, when they are reunited :—

“Set me as a seal upon thy heart,
As a seal upon thy arm;
For love is strong as death;
Passion is as hard as sheol;
Its heat is the heat of fire,
Its flames are flames of Yah.
Many waters cannot quench love,
Nor rivers drown it:
If a man should give all the treasures of his house for love,
He would be utterly despised.”

Her answer to the women who seek to excite her passion for Solomon is contained in the recurring refrain :—

“I adjure you, daughters of Jerusalem,
By the gazelles,
Or by the hinds of the field,
That ye stir not up,
Nor awaken love,
Until it please.”

The object then of this poem is to glorify true love, the love of one man for one woman, to show that it is so holy that no treasures on earth can buy it, not even a throne can tempt it.¹ Such a lesson clearly comes, as we have seen, within the province of Scripture, as defined in 2 Tim. iii. 16, 17: “Every scripture inspired of God is also profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for instruction, which is in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, furnished completely unto every good work.”

Since Ewald, the theory dominant among the modern critics, including Delitzsch and Zoeckler, is that the liter-

¹ While Delitzsch accepts the typical mode of interpretation he confesses that the motive suggested here is sufficient for the adoption of the Song into the canon: “Wir sind uns keines Vorurtheils bewusst, welches uns unbefangene Würdigung der durch Umbreit und Ewald zur Herrschaft gebrachten Auffassung unmöglich machte. Sie erklärt ausreichend die Aufnahme des Buchs in den Kanon, denn es hat, so aufgefasst, ein sittliches Motiv und Ziel.”

any form of the book is that of a drama,—not that it is generally understood that it was acted among the Hebrews, although Ewald and some others hold this view, but because the divisions of the poem yield a dramatic arrangement. There are, however, serious difficulties in carrying out such an analysis, for there are no external signs of the *dramatis personæ*. While it is perfectly clear that there is at least some semblance of a plot, and of a dialogue between different persons, the marks of division are not sufficiently evident, so that the interpreters belonging to the modern critical school are certain as to the identity of the persons. At the same time they are much at one as to the motive and main analysis of the poem.

Professor Moulton of the University of Chicago rejects the theory that the poem is a drama.¹ He considers that the literary form is that of an idyl, which celebrates the love and marriage of Solomon and Shulamith. He says it is characteristic of the idyl that we are not to expect in it a logical development. The thread of the narrative, which admits of a dialogue, may begin with that which modern writers would make the end of the story, the marriage of Solomon and Shulamith, and then the details of courtship and marriage may be interspersed according to the fancy of the author. The theory of the idyl removes the occasion for Stickel's introduction of a shepherd and his bride.² But the limitation of the characters to Solomon and Shulamith does not explain the change of attitude which Shulamith expresses toward her admirer. She checks the passion of Solomon by her indignant looks, so that he is moved to exclaim:

¹ In his *Biblical Idyls*.

² Stickel, *Das Hohelied* (Berlin, 1888), pp. 111-116. He finds a shepherd and shepherdess, whom he distinguishes from Solomon, Shulamith and the beloved in i. 7, 8; i. 15-ii. 4; iv. 7-v. 1.

"Turn away thine eyes from me,
For they make me afraid."¹

His suit does not prosper. On the contrary, she is all aglow when she thinks of her absent lover. No speech is too tender, too unrestrained. Had he been present he would have been ravished by the oriental fervor with which she speaks to him and of him. Some may think that such transports of affection should have no place in the Old Testament, unless directed to God himself; but God made the heart not only to love him, but also to love the creatures whom he has made. The Song from this point of view dignifies earthly affections, and shows that chaste love has a place in the divine plan; that it is not something to be ashamed of, but rather something to be prized and exalted.

Jewish tradition has assumed that Solomon was the author of this book.² The callous master of sixty wives, eighty concubines, and of maidens without number (Cant. vi. 8)³ was the last person to draw such a picture of virtuous affection as we have here,—not to speak of the qualms which he must have felt in deserting such a lovely flower for the polygamous relations of his harem. And if the theory be true that we have in this poem the triumph of Shulamith over Solomon, it is most unlikely that he would perpetuate the story of his own confusion. We must ra-

¹The translators are not agreed with respect to the meaning of תַּרְחֵבֵנִי. Ewald, Stickel, Driver, and others adopt the signification of the causative (aph.) in the Syriac, "for they terrify me." The twelfth edition of Gesenius renders it, "for they captivate me"; Stade and Siegfried in their Lexicon translate, "for they inflame me." All these meanings make Solomon confess Shulamith's power. The first rendering seems to me psychologically most probable.

²This appears in the title, which Ewald translates, "The most beautiful Song of Solomon." Delitzsch assumes that the title was written by Solomon himself as the author of the Song.

³It is not necessary to suppose that 1 Kings xi. 3, which is assigned by critics to the Deuteronomist, represents a different tradition as to the number of women in Solomon's harem, since it can be conceived of as representing its extent at a later period.

ther assume some poet who not only understood a maiden's heart, but who was a lover of nature, whether as seen in the budding vine, or the gazelles of the field, and to whom they all alike had revealed their secrets.¹

There are two theories as to the date of this poem. One which makes it nearly contemporary with the time of Solomon, in the tenth century B.C., at least when the memories of him were fresh; the other that it is a post-exilic production. The main argument for a late age is the presence of some Aramaisms, but the same phenomena might appear in an antique poem of the tenth century B.C., written in the Northern Kingdom. Tirzah, which was the capital of the Northern Kingdom until the time of Omri, is spoken of as parallel with Jerusalem, the capital of the Southern Kingdom, as a paragon of beauty. It would hardly have been used as a means of comparison in this way, after it had ceased to be the capital in the early part of the ninth century.

Life, as delineated in the Song, is fresh, prosperous, and joyous. It is also in the main virtuous. It had not become permeated through the example of a corrupt court. Hence we infer that the Song was written during the life of King Solomon, or in the generation following his death. This is in general the view held by Ewald, Robertson Smith, Stickel, and others.

Let us turn now to the story on which the drama contained in the Song is founded. A beautiful girl, of the rarest attractions, had her home in Shulem, later known as Shunem, in Northern Palestine. As no mention is made of her father, but there is reference to her mother and her brothers, who tyrannize over her (i. 6), the inference is nat-

¹The high literary art and range of vision manifest in this poem are unfavorable to Dr. Terry's suggestion (*The Song of Songs*, p. 9) that the author is a woman. While the educated woman of the present century might produce such a poem, her uneducated Hebrew sister of that distant time lacked the training for such a literary composition.

ural that her father was dead. Although her early girlhood must have been a hard one, she was possessed of a happy and vivacious disposition. One day King Solomon with some of his court ladies visited Shulem. While passing a vineyard in their chariots they saw this beautiful girl dancing by herself in a nut garden. When she saw she was observed she sought to flee, but the court ladies called after her to dance again before them (vi. 11-13). The king, seeing in this brown beauty a candidate for his harem, had her carried to his pavilion. While perhaps not publicly betrothed, she had given her heart to a young man of whom she dreams, to whom she speaks, and whose voice in fancy she hears in reply, until she is permitted to return to him once more and avow her love for him before all the world. According to this theory all the dialogues with her lover are imaginary until she is restored to him: they are creations of her fancy. We shall treat the poem as a drama, although not with the understanding that it was a play that was acted.

The main characters are Shulamith, a native of Shulem, whose real name is not known to us; her lover, from whom she is separated until the last scene; King Solomon; ladies of the harem.

SCENE I.

SHULAMITH in the King's pavilion, reviving from a swoon into which she had fallen, as the result of her sudden capture by one of SOLOMON'S charioteers, and her imprisonment in the harem, while some of the ladies offer her wine to restore her. She speaks as one in a dream to her absent lover.

Shulamith. Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth,
 For thy love is better than wine,
 Thy ointments are good for perfume;
 Thy name is ointment poured forth,
 Therefore maidens love thee.
 Draw me after thee; let us run away;
 The king has brought me into his chambers.

Chorus of Harem ladies, interrupting, sing in praise of Solomon.

We will exult and rejoice in thee;
We will commemorate thy love more than wine;
Rightly they love thee.

Since Delitzsch, most interpreters have conceived of the first scene, being introduced by one of the ladies of the harem, who desires some of the kisses of Solomon, which he is so ready to give to all. Although a modern drama might begin in this way, it is more natural to hold, with Ewald, that Shulamith speaks here. She desires some of the kisses she has so often enjoyed from her lover. They would be more reviving to her than wine. The ladies perhaps offer her perfumes to restore her. She thinks of her lover's perfume; his dear name is as ointment, or perfume, poured forth. She remembers with pride that he is admired by others besides herself, which is evidence of his excellent qualities. Fully revived, she realizes her perilous situation. She says to her lover, as if present,

"Draw me after thee; let us run away."

Here the harem ladies who have been seeking to revive her sing of Solomon, who is feasting near by,

"We will exult and rejoice in thee,
We will commemorate thy love more than wine,"

and, taking up the same theme as Shulamith, they apply it to Solomon with reference to his sixty wives, eighty concubines, and maidens without number,

"Rightly they love thee."

All this, of course, is designed to have its effect on Shulamith in making her resigned to her fate.

SHULAMITH addresses the ladies of the harem.

I am dark, but lovely,
Daughters of Jerusalem,
As the tents of Kedar,
As the tent-cloths of Solomon.
Look not at me because I am dark,
Because the sun hath looked upon me,
The sons of my mother were angry at me,

They made me keeper of the vineyards;
My vineyard, my own, I have not kept.

Shulamith becomes aware that all eyes are riveted on her. The pale ladies of the harem, entranced by her beauty, cannot keep from gazing at her. Conscious of her rustic appearance, she does not appreciate the reason of these fixed looks. She thinks it is because she has been tanned by the sun; although, with the simplicity of a child, she adds, what her lover had often told her, "but lovely." She compares her beauty to the tents of the Arabs, she had so often seen; to the tent curtains of Solomon in which she is now a prisoner. She says the sons of her mother, i.e. her half-brothers, perhaps by the first marriage, have treated her harshly. They have made her keep the vineyards; but her own vineyard, consisting in her personal charms, she has not kept.

SHULAMITH addresses her absent lover.

Tell me, thou whom my soul loves,
Where thou feedest,
Where thou causest to lie down at noon?
For why should I be as one who veils herself
By the flocks of thy companions?

This is the language of true affection. Parted from her lover, she desires to know where he is, and what he is doing, that she may flee to him; for she feels she is exposed to the same kind of life in the harem as the dissolute woman who covers her face (Gen. xxxviii. 14, 15).

The ladies, scornful, answer.

If thou knowest not,
Fairest among women,
Go out by the footsteps of the flock,
And feed thy kids
Beside the shepherd's tents.

This reply, which flatters Shulamith, as the most beautiful among women, is designed to wean her from her shepherd lover and all his belongings. The shepherd's tents

may be contrasted with the royal tents of Solomon. The way is thus prepared for the next scene.

SCENE II.

SOLOMON *pays his first suit to SHULAMITH.*

Solomon. To my mare in the chariots of Pharaoh,
I have compared thee, my friend.
Beautiful are thy cheeks with ornaments,
Thy neck with strings of jewels.
We will make thee ornaments of gold
With chains of silver.

Shulamith. [*With sarcasm.*]
While the king was at his table,
My nard gave forth its perfume.

Shulamith. [*Aside.*]
A bundle of myrrh is my beloved to me,
Which rests between my breasts.
A cluster of cypress is my beloved to me,
In the vineyards of Engeddi.

Solomon. Behold thou art beautiful, my friend,
Behold thou art beautiful.
Thy eyes are doves.

Shulamith. [*Aside.*]
Behold thou art beautiful, my beloved;
Yea, delightful:
Yea, our bower is green,
The beams of our house are cedars,
Our lattice firs.

Solomon thinks to turn the head of a country girl by comparing her with his favorite mare, and by appealing to her love for finery; but in this he is greatly mistaken. Shulamith intimates that his compliments are anything but agreeable. So long as he was engaged at his table, her lover filled her thoughts, and his image was as fragrant to her as the nard or the bunch of henna flowers which she wore in her bosom night and day; and the memory of her beloved, whom she calls "*dodi*," my beloved or my darling, and whom she here introduces, is ever with her. But the king tries again:

“Behold thou art beautiful, my friend,
Behold thou art beautiful.
Thy eyes are doves.”

These are complimentary expressions, but there is no passion in them. “Thy eyes are doves” is equivalent to “Thy eyes are like doves.”

Shulamith, far from addressing Solomon, whose presence and flatteries are hateful, turns in fancy to her lover and says:—

“Behold thou art beautiful, my beloved; yea, delightful.”

He is both handsome and agreeable. She gives the king a broad hint that he is not agreeable. She thinks of the bower where they have so often sat, their seat of grass under some spreading tree. This bower she compares to a house. There is not necessarily a representation here of any bed, and so an intimation of marriage.

SHULAMITH *trying to end her meeting with SOLOMON.*

Shulamith. I am a crocus of Sharon,
A lily of the valleys.

Solomon. As a lily among thorns,
So is my friend among the daughters.

Shulamith. [*Aside.*]

As the apple-tree among the trees of the wood,
So is my beloved among the sons.
In his shadow I long to sit down,
While his fruit would be sweet to my taste.
He would bring me into the house of wine,
While his banner over me would be love.

[*To the women.*]

Stay me with raisin cakes,
Comfort me with apples,
For I am sick because of love.
His left hand would be under my head,
While his right would embrace me.
I adjure you, daughters of Jerusalem,
By the gazelles,
Or by the hinds of the field,
That ye stir not up
Nor arouse love
Until it please.

Shulamith desires to be rid of her royal lover. Far from being like Solomon's pet mare in the chariots of Pharaoh, she is but a crocus of Sharon, a little anemone of the valleys, quickly lost to sight. But the king takes up the simile to make another compliment; if only an anemone, she is one among the thorns, to which, perhaps, he compares the ladies of his harem. Shulamith's mind is preoccupied by her absent lover. Solomon is not her *dodi*, beloved, but the invisible friend who is his rival. As the apple-tree among the trees of the wood, on account of its refreshing fruit, such is my beloved among the sons. It is most natural to translate the perfects in Hebrew of past experience, but she speaks of a present longing continued from the past.¹ "In his shadow I, a poor, forlorn girl, long to sit down, while his fruit would be sweet to my taste."² This refers to those endearments which she had experienced in the past. The following perfect, if we adopt the translation indicated, would be rendered, not he *brought* me, but he *would bring* me into the house of wine,—whatever may be meant by this, certainly a place of refreshment,—while his banner over me would be love. The memory and the thought of such bliss overcomes her; she is sick because of love for the absent one, not sick of love. And so she asks the ladies of the harem to refresh her with raisin cakes, and to comfort her with apples. But the theme of her thoughts recurs again :

"His left hand would be under my head,
And his right hand would embrace me."

And then occurs her adjuration to the court ladies, which we find again as a sort of refrain: "By the gazelles and hinds of the field," which know no master, but their own impulse, "not to stir up nor to arouse love until it please."

¹ Driver, *A Treatise on the Use of the Hebrew Tenses*. London, 1892, pp. 13, 14.

² This last clause is circumstantial. *Ibid.*, pp. 195-200.

SCENE III.

SHULAMITH's *vision of her beloved.*

Shulamith. Hark ! my beloved,
Lo, here he comes,
Leaping upon the mountains,
Springing upon the hills.
My beloved is like a gazelle,
Or like a young hart.
Lo, there he stands behind our wall,
He is looking through the windows,
He is peeping through the lattice.
My beloved sings and speaks to me:

Shulamith's lover.

Rise, my friend, my beauty, and come away,
For, lo, the winter is gone,
The heavy rain has entirely ceased;
The flowers appear in the land;
The time of song has come,
And the note of the turtle is heard in our land.
The fig-tree puts forth its figs,
The grapevines are in bloom,
They yield perfume.
Rise, my friend, my beauty, and come away.

[*With deep emotion.*]

My dove in the clefts of the rock,
In the secret place of the rocky steep,
Show me thy face;
Cause me to hear thy voice;
For thy voice is sweet,
And thy face is lovely.

SHULAMITH *sings to him a snatch of a familiar song.*

Take to us the foxes,
The little foxes,
That spoil the vineyards,
For our vineyards are in bloom.

SHULAMITH *resumes her monologue.*

My beloved is mine, and I am his.
He feeds among the lilies
Until the day cools
And the shadows flee.
My beloved be again
Like a gazelle or a young hart
Upon the mountains of Bether.

There can be no greater contrast than between the meeting of Solomon with Shulamith, and the meeting which she conjures up with her lover, or of which she perhaps gives a reminiscence. We are introduced into a new world. There is animation, enthusiasm, and tender entreaty. In imagination Shulamith hears her beloved; like a gazelle or a young hart he comes bounding over hill and mountain. There he stands at the wall, his bright eyes peering through the lattice, his sweet voice sounding like music, as in the most loving language he bids her come. We hear the music, and scent the fragrance of spring; the air is full of song, and is laden with perfume. Earth and sky, bird and blossom, sing the chorus to her lover's invitation. But she cannot join him. His heart is wrung with emotion as he says,

"My dove in the clefts of the rock,
In the secret place of the rocky steep,
Show me thy face;
Cause me to hear thy voice;
For thy voice is sweet,
And thy face is lovely."

This is the language of the heart. It speaks to the heart as the stilted praise of Solomon could not. So she sings to him a snatch of a ditty he had often heard:

"Take to us the foxes,
The little foxes,
That spoil the vineyards."

And then she professes her love for him after she has spurned Solomon:

"My beloved is mine, and I am his,
He feeds among the lilies."

That is, he pastures his flock among the lilies. When Shulamith in fancy calls upon her lover to be again like a gazelle or young hart on the mountains of Bether, it signifies her desire that in reality, as well as in vision, he may cross the mountains of separation (Bether), and be

at her side at evening, as he used to be when she was at home.

SCENE IV.

SHULAMITH *relates a dream to the ladies of the harem.*

Upon my bed by night,
 I sought him whom my soul loves,
 I sought him, but did not find him.
 [I said], I will arise now and go about in the city,
 In the streets and in the broadways,
 I will seek him whom my soul loves;
 I sought him, but did not find him.
 The watchmen who go about in the city found me.
 [I said], Have you seen him whom my soul loves?
 Only a little after I passed from them,
 I found him whom my soul loves:
 I seized him, and would not let him go,
 Until I brought him to the house of my mother
 And unto the chamber of her that bare me.
 I adjure you, daughters of Jerusalem,
 By the gazelles,
 Or the hinds of the field,
 That ye stir not up
 Nor arouse love
 Until it please.

It is clear, from the language used, that Shulamith does not here relate a real occurrence, but simply a dream. The expression, "upon my bed by night I sought him whom my soul loves," is equivalent to, "in a dream by night I sought him whom my soul loves."¹ By reason of her separation from her lover, and the peril in which she is placed,

¹ Krummacher's allegorical exposition of this passage is both spiritual and beautiful, although we must consider it a case of eisegesis. "I sought him on my bed. Whom then? Him whom my soul loves. Christ the fairest among men. Christ the heavenly bridegroom. . . . To have the Lord on one's bed, what else can that be but to rest with him and in him, to be conscious of his blessed nearness in the liveliest and tenderest manner, to taste his friendship, to be full of a warm, ardent feeling of tenderness toward him, and of pure delight and pleasure in the consideration of his person, his deeds, and his words. . . . This sweet and delightful condition, when one has the Lord on his bed, is generally characteristic of the first period of conversion."

Shulamith's waking thought becomes a vision of the night. She dreams that she rises from her bed, seeks him, but does not find him. So eager is she that she asks the watchmen of the city if they have seen her beloved. Some think that the reference to the city is an indication that she must have been transferred to the king's harem at Jerusalem, and that, with the *naïveté* of her limited experience, she thinks of course all the world, and so the watchmen of Jerusalem, must know such an important personage to her as her lover. But a smaller town gathered within walls for the protection of its inhabitants at night, who labored in the field by day, would bear the name of city. The place to which she alludes must have been of some size, for more than one watchman is mentioned. But they might know her as well as her lover. Be this as it may, she dreams that she finally finds him, and in an ecstasy of love, which banishes all maidenly reserve, seizes him and brings him to the house of her mother. In the presence of such a love she adjures the ladies of the harem not to stir up love until it please.

As Solomon has hitherto failed in his suit as a paramour, he now comes with all the magnificence and state of a bridegroom, to bear away Shulamith to Jerusalem.

SCENE V.

SOLOMON approaching in royal state as a bridegroom, surrounded by his bodyguard, while columns of incense rise before him. An eunuch bids the ladies of the harem go out to him.

Ladies of the harem to Shulamith.

Who is this ascending from the wilderness
 Like pillars of smoke,
 Perfumed with myrrh and frankincense,
 With all the powders of the merchant?
 Behold his litter which is Solomon's,
 Sixty heroes are round about it,
 Of the heroes of Israel.
 All of them bear swords,

They are trained in war;
 Each has his sword on his thigh,
 For fear in the night.
 King Solomon made him a palanquin,
 From the wood of Lebanon,
 Its pillars he made of silver,
 Its railing of gold,
 Its seat was of purple,
 Its midst was cushioned with love
 By the daughters of Jerusalem.

Eunuch. Go out now and see, daughters of Jerusalem, King Solomon,
 In the crown with which his mother crowned him,
 On the day of his marriage,
 And on the day of his gladness of heart.

Shulamith has not yet been taken to Jerusalem; but now Solomon resolves to take her, and to elevate her to the rank of a wife. With this end in view he seeks to make an impression upon this country beauty by the magnificence of his state, which the court ladies are at pains to point out to her item by item. Down in the wilderness, clouds of incense are seen rising, sure precursor of the advance of the grand monarch of Israel. There he is on his royal couch, surrounded by sixty trained guardsmen, the finest of Israel's soldiers, fully armed, who always guard the bed of Solomon; and, there is the gorgeous palanquin, which has done service at the many nuptials of the polygamous king, a work of art, composed of the wood of Lebanon, of gold, silver, and purple, and each time paved with the love of that daughter of Jerusalem who was designed to be the latest accession to the wives of Solomon, now, as he hopes, to be cushioned once more with the loveliest object his eyes have seen. As the ladies of the harem have called the attention of Shulamith to all these points, an eunuch bids them go forth to meet the monarch. The fact they are called daughters of Zion does not indicate that they were in Jerusalem, but simply that they are women who hailed from Jerusalem.

SCENE VI.

SOLOMON *pays his second suit to SHULAMITH.*

Behold thou art beautiful, my friend;
 Behold thou art beautiful;
 Thine eyes are doves behind thy veil;
 Thy hair is like a flock of goats
 That streams forth from Mount Gilead;
 Thy teeth are as a flock of sheep that are shorn,
 Which go up from the washing.
 All of them bear twins,
 And there is not a barren one among them.
 As a thread of scarlet are thy lips,
 And thy speech is pleasant;
 Like a piece of pomegranate are thy temples
 Behind thy veil;
 As the tower of David is thy neck,
 Built for defense.
 A thousand bucklers are hung upon it,
 All shields of the heroes.
 Thy two breasts are like two fawns,
 Twin gazelles,
 Which feed among the lilies.
 Until the day cools,
 And the shadows flee,
 I will go unto the mountain of myrrh,
 And unto the hill of frankincense.
 Thou art altogether beautiful, my friend,
 And there is no spot in thee.

Solomon has doubtless found the sex susceptible to flattery; hence he begins his second suit by setting forth an inventory of Shulamith's charms in well-turned phrases. The description is about as cold as that of a marble statue. It is not without poetic beauty, but there is no evidence that the heart of the king is yet moved. The king proposes to withdraw until evening, when he hopes that he may receive a favorable answer.

SCENE VII.

The imaginary message of the true lover as reported by SHULAMITH to the ladies of the harem.

[My beloved said to me]

With me from Lebanon, bride,
 With me from Lebanon, come.
 Look from the top of Amana,
 From the top of Shenir and Hermon,
 From the lions' dens,
 From the mountains of the leopards,
 Thou hast bewitched me, my sister, bride,
 Thou hast bewitched me with one of thy eyes,
 With one chain of thy neck.
 How beautiful is thy love
 My sister, bride.
 How much better is thy love than wine,
 And the fragrance of thy ointments than all perfumes.
 Thy lips drop honeycomb, O my bride;
 Honey and milk are under thy tongue;
 And the fragrance of thy garments
 Like the fragrance of Lebanon.
 A garden closed is my sister, bride;
 A spring closed, a fountain sealed.
 Thy shoots are a park of pomegranates
 With delightful fruits,
 Henna with nard,
 Nard with saffron,
 Calamus and cinnamon,
 With all trees of frankincense,
 Myrrh and aloes,
 With all chief spices,
 A fountain of gardens,
 A well of living waters,
 And streams from Lebanon.

Shulamith to her lover.

Awake, O North wind,
 And come, O South,
 Blow upon my garden,
 That its spices may flow.
 Let my beloved come to his garden,
 And eat his delightful fruit.

Her lover's reply.

I come to my garden,
 My sister, bride,
 I gather my myrrh with my spice,
 I eat my honeycomb with my honey;
 I drink my wine with my milk.
 Eat, friends.
 Drink and be merry, beloved.

The speaker to Shulamith is evidently not Solomon, although some interpreters consider him so. It is some one who speaks to the heart of Shulamith in impassioned language. Some have supposed that Solomon had removed Shulamith to a summer palace in the vicinity of Lebanon, and that her lover appears seeking to rescue her. But we may rather suppose that, after the sham suitor is gone, Shulamith in fancy reproduces the language of the real suitor. He seeks to allure her from every mountain they must pass to reach her home, and from the den of the wild beasts. He then tells her how she has ravished his heart. There is no cold enumeration of her charms, but the passionate language of the heart flows like a mountain torrent. He tells of her fascination. And yet in her virgin purity she is like a garden closed, a fountain closed, but whose fragrance cannot be locked up. These words bring forth a ravishing invitation, which can only be understood as the words of one who, for the time being in thought, although not in reality, takes the place of a bride:

"Awake, O North wind,
And come, O South,
Blow upon my garden,
That its spices may flow."

What invitation could be sweeter to a bridegroom?

"Let my beloved come to his garden,
And eat his delightful fruit."

In imagination she hears his words of rapture:

"I come into my garden,
My sister, bride,
I gather my myrrh with my spice,
I eat my honeycomb with my honey."

And then, addressing the guests at the marriage feast, he says,

"Eat, O friends;
Drink and be merry, beloved."

This is chaste language, although it veils sensuous thoughts and feelings. We must all recognize Shulamith's

exquisite modesty, and admire the glowing affection of both bridegroom and bride, whose union is still a day dream of Shulamith, into which she is able to fall at almost any moment. Hardly anything could be greater than the contrast between such a lover and Solomon.

SCENE VIII.

SHULAMITH *recounts her second dream to the ladies of the harem.*

I sleep, but my mind is awake.
Hark ! my beloved is knocking.

The lover.

Open to me, my sister, my friend,
My dove, my undefiled,
For my head is filled with dew,
My locks with the drops of the night.

Shulamith.

I have put off my dress,
How shall I put it on ?
I have washed my feet,
How shall I defile them ?

My beloved put in his hand from the window,
And my heart was moved for him.
I arose to open for my beloved,
While my hands dropped myrrh
And my fingers liquid myrrh
Upon the handles of the lock.
I opened to my beloved,
My beloved had turned away, had vanished.
My soul went out when he spoke.
I sought him, but did not find him.
I called him, but he did not answer me.
The watchmen found me,
Who surround the city.
They smote me, they wounded me,
They carried off my mantle,
The guardians of the walls.
I adjure you, daughters of Jerusalem,
If ye find my beloved—
“What shall ye tell him ?”
That I am sick because of love.

Shulamith dreams again of her lover; as he is the constant theme of her thoughts by day, she is still with him

in the visions of the night; for we are not dealing with an actual occurrence, as some maintain. While it gives a beautiful meaning to translate, "I was sleeping, but my heart was waking," it is not the heart as the seat of the affections that she means, but rather as the seat of the intellect, so far as it may be conceived of as active in sleep; for the bowels in Hebrew correspond to the heart in English. In her dream she hears her lover knocking, and his hurried words:

"Open, my sister, my friend,
My dove, my undefiled,
For my head is filled with dew,
And my locks with the drops of the night.

If she had been awake, and her lover had really visited her in her imprisonment in the king's harem, she could have never answered as she did:

"I have put off my dress,
How shall I put it on?
I have washed my feet,
How shall I defile them?"

Her hesitation was only for a moment, for her heart was swept with the tenderest love. While she delayed he put his hand in at the window to undo the door, and then perhaps, piqued by her answer, he suddenly and silently withdrew. She had dipped her fingers into the fragrant myrrh so that she might be sweet to him; but as she looked out into the night he had gone. Her heart had already flown after him as he spoke, and now in dreamland her body follows it; out she goes, careless of fear or danger, thinking only of her lover; seeks him, but does not find him: calls to him:

"My beloved, come back to me."

There is no answer. Now she is running through the narrow lanes, perfectly oblivious of all propriety, as one would be in a dream, or one who had but a single thought to find her lover. The watchmen find her, they think her some

girl of bad repute, they beat her, they wound her, and carry off her mantle which she had thrown on in her haste.

The narrative of this dream is but a pretext for her adjuration to the ladies. She cannot go out, but they can. If they see her lover she bids them tell him, in effect, that she is still true to him, that she is sick with desire for the comfort of his love.

Ladies of the harem to SHULAMITH.

What is thy beloved more than another beloved?
 What is thy beloved more than another beloved,
 Fairest among women,
 That thou dost adjure us so?

Shulamith. My beloved is white and ruddy.
 He is the chiefest of ten thousand.
 His head is the finest gold,
 His locks are bushy,
 Black as a raven's;
 His eyes are like doves,
 By the channels of water,
 Washing in milk,
 Sitting by full streams;
 His cheeks are as beds of spices,
 As banks of sweet herbs;
 His lips are lilies,
 Dropping liquid myrrh;
 His hands are golden cylinders,
 Set with Tarshish stones;
 His belly plates of ivory,
 Covered with sapphires;
 His legs pillars of white marble,
 Set upon sockets of fine gold;
 His appearance like Lebanon,
 Excellent as the cedars;
 His mouth is most sweet,
 And he is altogether lovely.
 This is my beloved,
 And this is my friend,
 Daughters of Jerusalem.

The curiosity of the ladies of the harem is aroused by such constancy and devotion. They desire to know wherein Shulamith's beloved excels any other beloved. What

follows is no well-studied enumeration of charms. We feel that there is a glowing enthusiasm which is the flame of love. Shulamith chooses the most precious things in the mineral and vegetable world to describe her beloved. His complexion is the finest, for he is white and ruddy. There is none like him, for he is the chiefest among ten thousand. His head is the finest gold, his raven locks are bushy. His great, liquid eyes beam with love. His cheeks are like beds of aromatic herbs, his lips drop like myrrh. His hands are like golden cylinders set with Tarshish stone. There is no clay in Shulamith's image. It is of the finest materials. Withal his appearance is like Lebanon. His mouth is most sweet, and he is altogether lovely, or all of him lovely. And then with a touch of maidenly pride she says :

"This is my beloved,
And this is my friend,
Daughters of Jerusalem."

Ladies of the harem to SHULAMITH.

Whither has thy beloved gone,
Fairest among women?
Whither has thy beloved turned aside?
That we may seek him with thee.

Shulamith. My beloved has gone down to his garden,
To the beds of spices,
To feed in the gardens,
And to gather lilies.
I am my beloved's,
And my beloved is mine.
He feeds among the lilies.

The ladies of the harem are at last moved, not merely by curiosity, but also by sympathy. Shulamith's enthusiasm is contagious, and they ask where this chiefest among the ten thousand has gone. Shulamith replies that he has gone down to his garden to gather lilies, and to feed among them, that is, to pasture his cattle among them.

Shulamith, to remove all doubt as to where her affections lie, declares :

"I am my beloved's, and my beloved is mine."

This indicates a union of heart where one is on the same basis as another.

SCENE IX.

SOLOMON pays his third suit to SHULAMITH.

Thou art fair, my friend, as Tirzah,
 Pleasant as Jerusalem,
 Terrible as an army with banners.
 Turn away thine eyes from me,
 For they terrify me.
 Thy hair is a flock of goats
 Which streams from Gilead;
 Thy teeth as a flock of ewes
 Which go up from the washing:
 They are all of them twins,
 And there is not a barren one among them.
 Thy temples are as a piece of pomegranate,
 Behind thy veil.
 There are sixty queens,
 And eighty concubines,
 And girls without number.
 My dove, my undefiled, is one;
 She is the only one of her mother;
 She is the darling of her that bare her;
 The daughters saw her and blessed her,
 The queens and concubines, and they praised her.
 "Who is this that looks forth like the dawn,
 Beautiful as the moon,
 Pure as the sun,
 Terrible as an army with banners?"

Solomon now pays suit for the third time. He tries flattery once more, comparing Shulamith to T'irzah, the capital of the Northern Kingdom, before Omri designated Samaria for that purpose, or to Jerusalem. Then he names over her charms in some of the same particulars as before, after the manner of ancient writers. In an instant her face changes. Her eyes blaze with indignation. Hence he begs her to turn them away from him, for they terrify him.

Solomon pays Shulamith a higher compliment than he has before. He says there are sixty queens, eighty concu-

bines, and girls without number, but she is the choicest of all and praised of all. He really rises to a strain of enthusiasm in some measure worthy of the one whom he is seeking to win. The lines, "Who is this that looks forth like the dawn, etc.," may be considered as a quotation from those used by the ladies of the harem in praise of Shulamith's beauty.

SCENE X.

SHULAMITH, *the court ladies, and SOLOMON.* SHULAMITH *relates how she was taken.*

Into the garden of nuts I went down,
To see the fruits of the valley,
To see whether the vine blossomed,
Whether the pomegranates were in bloom.
I did not know that my desire would set me
In the chariots of my princely people.

This passage, as has already been indicated, furnishes an important key for understanding the poem, since Shulamith's visit to the nut garden was the occasion of her capture. She says expressly that she was not previously aware of the approach of the royal cavalcade. She did not know that her desire to see the blossoming vine and the blooming pomegranate would bring her into the very midst of the king's chariots, and expose her to capture.

The ladies of the harem invite SHULAMITH to dance before them.

Turn about, turn about, O Shulamite,
Turn about, turn about,
That we may behold thee.

Shulamith. What would ye behold in the Shulamite?

Ladies. As in the dance of Mahanaim.

Shulamith's allusion to the moment of her capture recalls to the ladies of the harem their first sight of her as she was dancing in the nut garden. They therefore call upon her to turn about in the dance of Mahanaim. This designation probably indicates some particular kind of dance well known at that time.

SHULAMITH dances before the ladies of the harem. They comment upon her.

How beautiful are thy feet in sandals, prince's daughter!
 The arching of thy thighs is like necklaces,
 The work of the hands of an artist.
 Thy bowels are a round basin,
 Not wanting in mixed wine;
 Thy belly is a heap of wheat,
 Inclosed with lilies;
 Thy two breasts are like two fawns,
 That are twin gazelles;
 Thy neck is like a tower of ivory;
 Thine eyes are like the pools in Heshbon,
 By the gate of Beth-Rabbim;
 Thy nose is as the tower of Lebanon,
 That looks toward Damascus;
 Thy head upon thee is like Carmel,
 And the hair of thy head like purple;
 A king is enmeshed in its locks.

SOLOMON, *appearing, addresses her in lustful language.*

How beautiful and how pleasant art thou,
 Love in delights!
 This thy stature is like a palm-tree,
 And thy breasts are clusters.
 I said, I will go up into the palm-tree,
 I will seize hold of its fronds.
 Thy breasts shall be as clusters of grapes,
 And the smell of thy nose as apples,
 And thy mouth as good wine,—

Shulamith [interrupting]:

Going rightly for my beloved,
 Gliding over my lips and teeth,¹
 I am my beloved's,
 And unto me is his desire.

We are to suppose that Shulamith yields to the solicitation of the ladies of the harem to dance before them, and that as she does so they comment upon her appearance. The description is sensuous and perhaps, as Stickel suggests, in one particular obscene, although this element does

¹ In this I follow the reading suggested by the LXX: *χειλεσι μου και δονου*: חַיְלֵי מוֹ וְדוֹנֵי.

not appear to the general reader. It certainly prepares the way for Solomon's final attack in lustful speech upon Shulamith's virtue. The language of his women, as well as his, is designed to stir Shulamith's passions; so that she may fall a more easy victim to the king's lust. Solomon is described as enmeshed in her tresses. When his speech is on the point of becoming indecent for virtuous ears to hear, Shulamith interrupts him, and turns the conversation to her beloved. Her mouth, which is like the best wine, is not designed for Solomon, but for her shepherd lover. Again she declares that she belongs to her beloved, and that his desire is toward her. With these words she dismisses Solomon for good.

SHULAMITH speaks to her lover, as if present.

Come, my beloved, let us go into the field;
 Let us lodge in the villages;
 Let us rise early for the vineyards;
 Let us see whether the vine has budded,
 Whether the blossom of the vine has opened,
 Whether the pomegranates are in bloom.
 There I will give my love to thee.
 The mandrakes yield fragrance,
 And at our doors are all manner of pleasant fruits,
 New, also old,
 My beloved, I have laid up for thee.
 Oh that thou wert as a brother to me,
 That sucked the breasts of my mother!
 Whenever I should find thee in the street, I would kiss thee;
 Yea, they should not despise me.
 I would lead thee, I would bring thee,
 Unto the house of my mother

. 1

I would cause thee to drink spiced wine,
 Of the sweet wine of my pomegranates.
 His left hand would be under my head,
 And his right hand would embrace me.
 I adjure you, daughters of Jerusalem,
 Why do ye stir up and excite love,
 Until it please?

¹ It seems best to follow the text of the LXX which omits the enigmat-

We might well imagine that Shulamith is here reunited to her lover, and that we have a new scene. While she has not yet left the harem, she knows that she is to leave it. She has given Solomon the last repulse, and still remains pure in heart amidst the impure suggestions of Solomon and his women.

She longs for the freedom of the fields, like a caged bird. She is a true lover of nature, to whom the budding vine and the blooming pomegranate speak a mystic language. It is in such surroundings that she will give her love to him. She will lead him home, where her loving hands before her capture had made preparation, in the things which she had stored up for him. Then the thought occurs to her, that when she meets him, after leaving the harem, she will long to hold him in a fond embrace; but her maidenly modesty fears to do so before other eyes, and so she says:

“Oh that thou wert as a brother to me,
That sucked the breasts of my mother.
Whenever I should find thee in the street, I would kiss thee,
Yea, they should not despise me,”

as she thinks they might if they should see her flying into his arms in an ecstasy of love. The rapture of such a meeting is ever in her mind:

“His left hand would be under my head,
And his right hand would embrace me.”

ical and disturbing word תִּלְמַדְתִּי. Doubtless this word was not in the Hebrew from which the Greek translator made his version. It is not unlikely that it was first placed in the margin by a scribe who accepted the allegorical interpretation of the Song and afterwards became a constituent part of the text. The Midrash paraphrases it: “Thou shouldst teach me the duties and the good works”; the Targum, with the preceding two lines: “I would lead thee, King Messiah, and introduce thee to the house of thy sanctuary, and thou shouldst teach me to fear before the face of the Lord, and to walk in his ways.” Stickel’s suggestion that we must have here a word with some such signification as the Arabic *lamasa*, “to caress, to fondle,” would suit the connection, but is not supported by any version.

She is now ready to take her leave, and she asks the ladies of the harem for the last time, reproachfully :

“ I adjure you, daughters of Jerusalem,
Why do ye stir up and excite love,
Until it please ? ”

With this question the curtain falls on Shulamith's connection with Solomon's harem. She comes forth with her honor untarnished.

SCENE XI.

SHULAMITH *with her lover.*

Villagers. Who is this going up from the wilderness,
Leaning upon her lover ?

This is a question as to the most simple act in the world, of a maiden leaning on the arm of her lover, clinging to him with the utmost dependence and devotion. It is the old, old story, ever new, of the perfect union of one man with one woman ; whether, as described by Milton :

“ So hand in hand they passed, the loveliest pair,
That ever since in love's embraces met,”

or, as foreshadowed by Goethe in the person of Hermann and Dorothea :

“ Langsam schritt sie hinab auf seinen Schultern die Hände,
Sorglich stützte der Starke das Mädchen, das über ihm herhing,
Hielt empor die Geliebte: sie sank ihm bis auf die Schulter.”

“ Slowly she walked down, her hands upon his shoulders,
Firmly the strong one supported the girl that hung o'er him,
Held up the loved one who sank on his shoulders.”

Such unions have in them something of the element described by the poet :

“ Till at the last she set herself to man,
Like perfect music unto noble words.”

SHULAMITH *speaks to her lover.*

Under the apple-tree I awakened thee;
There thy mother brought thee forth,
There she that bare thee brought thee forth.¹

¹ Stickel assigns these three lines to Shulamith's lover, and the words that follow to Shulamith herself.

[*With deep emotion.*]

Set me as a seal upon thy heart,
 As a seal upon thy arm,
 For love is strong as death,
 Passion is as hard as sheol;
 Its heat is the heat of fire,
 Its flames are flames of Yah.¹
 Many waters cannot quench love,
 Nor rivers drown it.
 If a man should give all the treasures of his house for love,
 He would be utterly despised.

As they pass the place where they first met, or perhaps first became aware of their mutual love, Shulamith calls his attention to the apple-tree where their hearts leaped together. She calls it an awakening, not that there was purpose in it, but because she attracted him. This apple-tree is a place of delightful memory. Shulamith says in speaking of her beloved:

“As the apple-tree among the trees of the wood,
 So is my beloved among the sons.
 In his shadow I long to sit down,
 While his fruit is sweet to my taste.”

Under this tree she says his mother brought him forth, indicating that it was close to the house where he was born.

There is no more faithful characterization of love in any language than that which follows. These lines, as we have seen, furnish the theme of the poem. While the pictures which have been presented are sensuous, Shulamith here presents love's true essence. She longs to be set as a seal upon his heart,—never to be absent from his embrace; as a seal on his arm,—never to be separated from his side, for the seal represents the sacredness and permanence of a document. It is not any passing fancy that she has in mind, any vows lightly spoken and soon forgotten. Her love is strong as death; to be parted from him would be

¹ I read with Olshausen, *Lehrbuch der Hebräischen Sprache* (Braunschweig, 1861, § 106 b.), $\text{יְשֻׁלָּמִיתִי יְשֻׁלָּבֶתִי יָהּ}$.

death to her. Passion is remorseless as Sheol. She says when once it has taken possession of the heart there is no discharge from it. Its heat is like that of fire; its flames like flames of Yah, that is, great flames,—not flames of men, but a flame of God himself, hence incomparable. This is the only place where the divine name is used in the Song. When once kindled this flame cannot be extinguished:

“Many waters cannot quench love,
Nor can the floods drown it.”

Such love cannot be purchased. Even Solomon himself has not riches enough to buy such a priceless jewel. In Shulamith's eyes Solomon has been utterly despised. She has taken the measure of a man well described by Tennyson:

“He will hold thee, when his passion shall have spent its novel force,
Something better than his dog, a little dearer than his horse.”

The lesson contained in the characterization of love by Shulamith is just as important now as it ever was, of the permanence, power, and unmercenary nature of true affection. With people of high sensibility, marriage on any other basis is intolerable. Young people who are to form these bonds,—the sweetest and most sacred that earth knows,—need to learn this lesson, which should be discreetly preached in every pulpit and taught in every home. For the best success and most complete happiness in life can only come from such a union as that described here. Nor can modern society present a higher, purer ideal than that set by this beautiful Shulamite maiden. It is a shocking perversion of marriage, that any other principle than that involved here should be its foundation; that money, family, social standing, or anything else should be regarded as its basis. True love, of course, cannot exist unless the contracting parties are mutually fitted for each other, and such fitness is likely to be found in suitable conditions;

but the danger of losing sight of the real thing in contracting the marriage bond is very great, and is really a foundation of immorality, divorce, and unhappiness. There is enough bitterness in life without having the sweetest well in this world turned into gall. Luther is reported as saying, that if husband and wife love each other the devil cannot harm them. Whether he is author of this saying, there is much truth in it.

SCENE XII.

SHULAMITH recalls her brothers' words when she was a little girl and exults over the triumph of her virtue.

Brothers. We have a little sister,
And she has no breasts.
What shall we do for our sister,
In the day when she shall be spoken for?
If she shall be a wall,
We will build upon her a crown of silver;
And if she shall be a door,
We will shut her in with a board of cedar.

Shulamith. I am a wall,
And my breast like towers.
Then I was in his eyes
As one finding peace.
Solomon has a vineyard in Baal-Hamon;
He gives the vineyard to keepers;
Each one is to bring for its fruit a thousand pieces of
silver.
My vineyard which is mine is before me,
The thousand is thine, Solomon,
And two hundred for those who keep its fruit.

At last Shulamith reaches home with her lover. Her brothers as well as her mother are doubtless there to greet her. These brothers who were angry at her, and burdened her with hard service in the care of the vineyards, are perhaps ready to insinuate that their sister, during her absence from home, has lost her virtue, of which they as her elder brothers consider themselves her special guardians. Her answer is introduced by a reminiscence of something

which they said before she was of marriageable age and which was burned into her memory as with a hot iron:

“ We have a little sister [i.e. Shulamith],
And she has no breasts [She is too young to be married].
What shall we do for our sister,
In the day when she shall be spoken for?”

The last line indicates a common custom as in the case of Rebekah, where she was spoken for by Abraham's servant, Eliezer, and disposed of by the family without having seen her future husband, or even had the chance to refuse (Gen. xxiv. 50, 51), although later, when the matter is virtually decided, she is asked whether she will go with Abraham's steward (ver. 58). This method of procedure is still common in the Orient. At the same time the Old Testament gives instances where the wishes of the contracting parties are regarded. Shulamith's brothers, like the brothers of Dinah (Gen. xxxiv. 31), feel that they are peculiarly responsible for the protection of her virtue, which, while she was physically undeveloped, and so not subject to temptation, was to be put to the test. If when she feels the sexual instinct she proves to be a wall to keep out all invaders who would destroy her virtue, then the brothers say they will build on that wall a crown of silver, perhaps as a reward of a stainless virginity, like the chaplet of flowers which only virgins can wear at their marriage in Germany. If, on the other hand, she shall develop licentious tendencies, so that, as an open door, she is in danger of losing her virtue and becoming a prostitute, they say they will barricade that door with a board of cedar; that is, they will guard her so closely that none shall have admission to her for illicit purposes. It is this harsh speech of these cruel brothers, who perhaps even now greet her reproachfully, that she calls to mind, for it had left its scars on her heart. The little sister with no breasts now stands before them in her physical perfection the most

beautiful specimen of her sex in Israel, capable of being swept with passion for her beloved; but as she proudly says:

"I am a wall,
And my breasts like towers.

She has proved perfectly impregnable to all the assaults of Solomon and his harem, although he threatened to storm the towers of which she speaks. After suffering such a humiliating defeat, Solomon might well have become her implacable enemy, but no, she says:

"Then I was in his eyes as one finding peace."

Now she relates her last experience with the great king:

"Solomon has a vineyard in Baal-Hamon," etc.

This undoubtedly indicates a place where Shulamith was taken captive. It was a noble vineyard from which Solomon derived an income of a thousand pieces of silver, and the keepers to whom he rented it two hundred. This vineyard Solomon proposes to give Shulamith as a parting gift as some restitution for his forcible detention of her in his harem (cf. Gen. xx. 16). Shulamith repeats her proud reply:

"My vineyard which is mine is before me.
Let the thousand be for thee, Solomon,
And two hundred for those who keep its fruit."

Shulamith means to say: The only vineyard I desire is in my own virtue, which I have kept; as for the vineyard you offer me, I do not care for it: keep it yourself, Solomon, and derive your income of a thousand pieces of silver, and let the keepers receive their net gain of two hundred from the fruit.

Thus Shulamith stands in her own beautiful personality, the proud possessor of herself, too rich for even the grand monarch of Israel to buy, free even from the domination of her own family, since she has already yielded her heart to her beloved.

SHULAMITH'S *lover asks her for a song.*

Oh thou who dwellest in the gardens,
The companions are listening for thy voice.
Let me hear it.

For the first time in reality we hear the voice of Shulamith's lover, although in fancy we have heard it many times. He addresses her as a dweller in the gardens, which was quite in harmony with her occupation as a vine-dresser. The companions whom she has mentioned before are now listening to hear her sing: "Let me hear thy voice he says."

SHULAMITH *sings.* Flee, my beloved,
And be like a gazelle,
Or a young hart,
Upon the mountains of spices.

This sounds as if she were sending him away. We may understand it as he doubtless did, by contraries, as a playful suggestion not to be very far away, for she no longer speaks of the mountains of Bether, or separation, but of the mountains of spices just at hand, by their home, whose perfume fills the air. With this reunion of a happy pair the scene closes.

When we reflect upon the crimes and sorrows with which men and women have been visited because of the perversion of love, it certainly does not seem strange that there should be one book in the Old Testament which shows its true nature, teaching that all the real peace and happiness of those who submit to it, is dependent upon mutual and worthy affection.