
 SONG 1: 1 The Song of songs, which is Solomon's. Beloved

The book before us is called in the Hebrew שִׁיר הַשִּׁירִים *Shir Hashshirim*, "The Song of Songs;" or, "An Ode of the Odes:" which might be understood, "An Ode taken or selected from others of a similar kind;" or, "An Ode the most excellent of all others;" this being an idiom common to the Hebrew language: e.g., the God of gods is the supreme God; the Lord of lords, the supreme Lord; the King of kings, the supreme King; the heaven of heavens, the supreme or highest heaven. It may therefore be designed to express "a song of the utmost perfection; one of the best that existed, or had ever been penned." Perhaps the title may have a reference to the other poetical compositions of Solomon, which were no less than one thousand and five; and this was considered the most excellent of the whole, and the only one that remains, unless we suppose Solomon, with some of the Jews, to be the author of Psalms 72 and Psa 127:1-5 : but this cannot be proved.

There have been some doubts concerning the author of this book. Some of the rabbins supposed it to be the work of the prophet Isaiah; but this sentiment never gained much credit. Most have, without hesitation, attributed it to Solomon, whose name it bears; and if the book of Ecclesiastes be his, this will follow in course, as the style is exactly the same, allowing for the difference of the subject. Both books seem to have been written about the same time, and to have had the same author.

This book, if written by Solomon, could not have been written in his old age, as some have supposed the book of Ecclesiastes to have been; which sentiment is, I think, sufficiently disproved; for we find that long before Solomon's old age he had three hundred wives, and seven hundred concubines; but at the time this Song was written, Solomon had only sixty wives and eighty concubines. And the Song most certainly celebrates a marriage; whether between Solomon and the daughter of Pharaoh, or between him and some Jewish princess, has not been fully agreed on among critics and commentators. It is most likely to have been a juvenile or comparatively juvenile production; and indeed the high and glowing colouring, and the strength of the images, are full proofs of this. Though Anacreon made amatory odes when he was bald-headed, yet neither he nor any one else, humanly speaking, could have made such odes as the Canticles when stricken in years.

But to what denomination of writing do the Canticles belong? Are they mere Odes, or Idyls, or Pastorals; or are they an Epithalamium? Let us define these terms, and examine the Song of Solomon by them.

1. The Ode is generally understood to be a species of poetry containing sublime and important matter, always sung, or accompanied by the harp, or some proper musical instrument.
2. The Idyl implies a short poem, containing some adventure.
3. The Pastoral contains what belongs to shepherds, and their occupations.
4. The Epithalamium is the congratulatory song, sung to a new married pair, wishing them abundant blessings, a numerous and happy offspring, etc.

Strictly speaking, the Book of Canticles falls under neither of these descriptions: it is rather a composition *sui generis*, and seems to partake more of the nature of what we call a Mask, than any thing else; an entertainment for the guests who attended the marriage ceremony, with a dramatic cast throughout the whole, though the persons who speak and act are not formally introduced.

There are so many touches in the form and manner of this Song like those in the Comus of Milton, that it leads me to doubt whether the English poet has not taken the idea of his mask from the Jewish.

As to the persons, chiefly concerned, it is generally believed that Solomon and Pharaoh's daughter are the bridegroom and bride; with their proper attendants, viz., companions of the bridegroom, and companions of the bride, with certain mutes, who only appear, or are mentioned by others, without taking any particular part in the transactions.

But it is much more easy to be satisfied on the species of composition to which this book belongs, than on the meaning of the book itself. Is it to be understood in the obvious manner in which it presents itself? And are Solomon and his bride, their friends and companions, to be considered as mere dramatis personae? Or are they typical or representative persons? Does this marriage represent a celestial union? Do the speeches of each contain Divine doctrines? Are the metaphors, taken from earthly things, to be understood of spiritual matters? In a word, does Solomon here represent Jesus Christ. Is the daughter of Pharaoh the Christian Church; or, according to some Roman Catholics, the Virgin Mary? Are watchmen, vineyard-keepers, shepherds, etc., the ministers of the Gospel? Wine and various fruits, the influences and graces of the Divine Spirit? etc., etc. How multitudinous and positive are the affirmative answers to these questions! And yet, though the many agree in the general principle, how various their expositions of the different parts of the piece! And where, all this time, is the proof that the principle is not misunderstood? As to conjectures, they are as uncertain as they are endless; and what one pious or learned man may think to be the meaning, is no proof to any other that he should make up his mind in the same way.

Let us for a moment consider the different opinions held on this book, without entering into the discussion of their propriety or impropriety. They are the following: -

- I. It is a plain epithalamium on the marriage of Solomon with the daughter of Pharaoh, king of Egypt; and is to be understood in no other way.
- II. It is an allegory relative to the conduct of God towards the Hebrews, in bringing them out of Egypt, through the wilderness to the Promised Land.
- III. It is intended to represent the incarnation of Jesus Christ, or his marriage with human nature, in reference to its redemption.
- IV. It represents Christ's love to the Church or elected souls, and their love to him.
- V. It is an allegorical poem on the glories of Jesus Christ and the Virgin Mary.
- VI. It is a collection of sacred idyls; the spiritual meaning of which is not agreed on.

Now each of these opinions has its powerful supporters, and each of these has reasons to offer for the support of the opinion which is espoused; and nothing but a direct revelation from God can show us which of these opinions is the correct one, or whether any of them are correct.

The antiquity of an opinion, if that be not founded on a revelation from God, is no evidence of its truth; for there are many ungodly opinions which are more than a thousand years old. And as to great men and great names, we find them enrolled and arranged on each side of all controversies. It may be asked, What do Christ and his apostles say of it?

1. If Jesus Christ or any of his apostles had referred to it as an allegory, and told us the subject which it pointed out, the matter would have been plain: we should then have had data, and had only to proceed in the way of elucidation. But we find nothing of this in the New Testament.
2. If they had referred to it as an allegory, without intimating the meaning, then we should be justified in searching everywhere for that meaning; and conjecture itself would have been legal, till we had arrived at some self-testifying issue.
3. If they had referred to it at all, in connection with spiritual subjects, then we should have at once seen that it was to be spiritually understood; and, comparing spiritual things with spiritual, we must have humbly sought for its spiritual interpretation.
4. Had the Supreme Being been introduced, or referred to in any of his essential attributes, or by any of the names which he has been pleased to assume in his revelations to men, we should have then seen that the writer was a spiritual man, and wrote probably in reference to a spiritual end; and, that we should pass by or through his letter, in order to get to the spirit concealed under it.

But none of these things appear in this book: the name of God is not found in it; nor is it quoted in the New Testament. As to certain references which its allegorical expositors suppose are made to it, either in the Gospels, Epistles, or Apocalypse, they are not express, and do not, by any thing in or connected with them, appear unequivocally to point out this book. And after all that has been said, I am fully of opinion it is not once referred to in the New Testament. But this is no proof of its not being canonical, as there are other books, on which there is no doubt, that are in the same predicament. But still, if it refer so distinctly to Christ and his Church, as some suppose, it certainly would not have been passed over by both evangelists and apostles without pointed and especial notice; and particularly if it points out the love of Christ to his Church, and the whole economy of God's working in reference to the salvation of the souls of men.

From all this it will appear to the intelligent reader, that the spiritual meaning of this book cannot easily be made out:

1. Because we do not know that it is an allegory.
2. If one, the principles on which such allegory is to be explained do nowhere appear.

Whom then are we to follow in the interpretation of this very singular book? The Targumist, who applies it to God and the Hebrews, in their journeyings from Egypt to the promised land? Origen, who made it a Christian allegory? Apponius, who spiritualized it? Gregory the Great, who in the main copied them? The good man, who in 1717, at Paris, so illustrated it as "to induce men to devote themselves to Jesus Christ and the Virgin Mary?" Mr. Durham, Mr. Robotham, Mr. Ainsworth, Mr. Romaine, and Dr. Gill, who endeavored to prove that it concerns Christ and the elect? Or Mr. Harmer and others who acknowledge it to be an inimitable composition, and to be understood only of Solomon and Pharaoh's daughter? Or, finally, Dr. Mason Good, who considers it a collection of sacred idyls, the spiritual interpretation of which is not agreed on?

I had for a long time hesitated whether I should say any thing on this book; not because I did not think I understood its chief design and general meaning, for of this I really have no doubt, but because I did not understand it as a spiritual allegory, representing the loves off Christ and his Church. I must own I see no indubitable ground for this opinion. And is it of no moment whether the doctrines drawn from it, by those who allegorize and spiritualize it, be indubitably founded on it or not? The doctrines may be true in themselves, (which is indeed more than can be said of those of most of its interpreters), but is it not a very solemn, and indeed awful thing to say, This is the voice

of Christ to his Church, This is the voice of the Church to Christ, etc., etc., when there is no proof from God, nor from any other portion of his word, that these things are so?

It is much better, therefore, if explained or illustrated at all, to take it in its literal meaning, and explain it in its general sense. I say general sense, because there are many passages in it which should not be explained, if taken literally, the references being too delicate; and Eastern phraseology on such subjects is too vivid for European imaginations. Let any sensible and pious medical man read over this book, and, if at all acquainted with Asiatic phraseology, say whether it would be proper, even in medical language, to explain all the descriptions and allusions in this poem.

After what I have said on the difficulty of interpreting this book in a spiritual way it would not be fair to withhold from the reader the general arguments on which the theory of its allegorical meaning is founded. The principal part of the commentators on this book, especially those who have made it their separate study, have in general taken it for granted that their mode of interpretation is incontrovertible; and have proceeded to spiritualize every figure and every verse as if they had a Divine warrant for all they have said. Their conduct is dangerous; and the result of their well-intentioned labors has been of very little service to the cause of Christianity in general, or to the interests of true morality in particular. By their mode of interpretation an undignified, not to say mean and carnal, language has been propagated among many well-meaning religious people, that has associated itself too much with selfish and animal affections, and created feelings that accorded little with the dignified spirituality of the religion of the Lord Jesus. I speak not from report; I speak from observation and experience, and observation not hastily made. The conviction on my mind and the conclusion to which I have conscientiously arrived, are the result of frequent examination, careful reading, and close thinking, at intervals, for nearly fifty years; and however I may be blamed by some, and pitied by others, I must say, and I say it as fearlessly as I do conscientiously, that in this inimitably fine elegant Hebrew ode I see nothing of Christ and his Church, and nothing that appears to have been intended to be thus understood; and nothing, if applied in this way, that, per se, can promote the interests of vital godliness, or cause the simple and sincere not to "know Christ after the flesh." Here I conscientiously stand. May God help me!

The most rational view of the subject that I have seen is that taken by Mr. Harmer, who has indeed detailed and strengthened the arguments of his predecessors who have declared for the spiritual meaning. In his "Outlines of a Comment upon Solomon's Song," he supposes that the Song refers to Solomon's marriage with the daughter of Pharaoh; and that he had a Jewish queen, who is frequently referred to in the work; and that, unless this be allowed, there are several important passages in the book that cannot be understood; and indeed it is on this principle that he finds his chief ground for a spiritual and allegorical interpretation. "Whatever was the intention of God," says he, "in bringing about this marriage, and in causing it to be celebrated in such an extraordinary manner, by songs that were directed to be placed among the sacred writings, it is certain there never was any resemblance more striking between the circumstances and transactions of any of the remarkable personages of the Old Testament and those of Messiah, than the likeness we may observe between Solomon marrying a Gentile princess, and making her equal in honor and privileges with his former Jewish queen, and in her being frequently mentioned afterwards in history, while the other is passed over in total silence, and the conduct of the Messiah towards the Gentile and Jewish Churches. "The two remarkable things in the conduct of the Messiah towards the two Churches are the making the Gentiles fellow heirs of the same body and partakers of the promises, without and difference; and the giving up to neglect the Jewish Church, while that of the Gentiles has long flourished in great honor, and been the subject of many a history. St. Paul takes notice of both these circumstances with particular solemnity; of the first, in the third chapter of Ephesians,

and elsewhere; of the other, in the eleventh chapter of Romans. They are points, then, that deserve great attention. "They are both called mysteries, (Rom 11:25; Eph 3:3), that is, things that had been concealed aforesaid; but it by no means follows that there were no shadowy representations of these events in the preceding ages, only that they were not clearly and expressly revealed.

"Kingdoms and cities are frequently spoken of in holy writ as women. Sacred as well as secular bodies of men are represented under that image. The universal Church is spoken of under the notion of a bride, and the Messiah as her husband, Ephesians 5: The two Churches of Jews and Gentiles, or the Church under the Mosaic dispensation and the Church freed from those ceremonies, are represented as two women - the one formerly treated as the principal wife; and the second, as having been for a long time neglected, but afterwards producing a much more numerous issue than the first-by the prophet Isaiah in his fifty-fourth chapter, according to the explanation St. Paul has given of that passage in Galatians 4: Particular Churches are mentioned after the same manner. So, concerning the Church at Corinth, St. Paul says, "I have espoused you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ;" 2Cor 11:2. "Since then it is common for the Scriptures to represent the Church of God under the notion of a woman, and the Messiah under that of a husband; since the two bodies of men - that which worshipped God according to the Mosaic rites, and that which observed them not - are compared to two women; and since the circumstances of these two Churches are such as I have given an account of from St. Paul, it must be acknowledged that there is a lively resemblance between Solomon's espousing the Egyptian princess and the Messiah's admitting the Gentiles to equal privileges with the Jews, whether it was or was not designed by God as an emblem and type of it celebrated by his prophets for this cause, in holy songs; and those songs preserved with care to this day among writings of the most sacred kind on that account."

This is the whole of Mr. Harmer's argument; see his Outlines, pages 74-77. And what is proved by it? Nothing, in reference to this book. We know that the Jewish people, not the Church exclusively, are represented under the notion of a woman addicted, and a wife unfaithful, divorced, and forsaken, etc.; and that the Corinthians were represented under the notion of a chaste virgin espoused to Christ. And we know that all this was done to show, that as the marriage union was the closest, strictest, and most sacred among men, the union of the soul to God, and its connection with him, might be most fitly represented by that union, and unfaithfulness to him by infidelity in the other case. But what has this to do with the Song of Solomon? Where is the intimation that Solomon represents Christ; Pharaoh's daughter, the Church of the Gentiles; and the Jewish queen, the Church of the Israelites? Nowhere. Why then assume the thing that should be proved; and then build doctrines on it, and draw inferences from it, as if the assumption had been demonstrated?

Were this mode of interpretation to be applied to the Scriptures in general, (and why not, if legitimate here?) in what a state would religion soon be! Who could see any thing certain, determinate, and fixed in the meaning of the Divine oracles, when fancy and imagination must be the standard interpreters? God has not left his word to man's will in this way.

Every attempt, however well-intentioned, to revive this thriftless, not to say dangerous, Origenian method of seducing the Scriptures to particular creeds and purposes, should be regarded with jealousy; and nothing received as the doctrine of the Lord but what may be derived from those plain words of the Most High which lie most on a level with the capacities of mankind. Allegory, metaphor, and figures in general, where the design is clearly indicated, which is the case with all those employed by the sacred writers, may come in to illustrate and more forcibly to apply Divine truth; but to extort celestial meanings from a whole book, where no such indication is given, is most

certainly not the way to arrive at the knowledge of the true God, and of Jesus Christ whom he has sent.

As the Jewish marriages were celebrated for seven days, it has been often observed that this Song divides itself into seven periods, and describes the transactions of each.

I. The First chapter represents the bridegroom and bride as a shepherd and shepherdess. The bride asks her spouse where he takes his flock at noon, to preserve them from the excessive heat, lest she, in seeking him, should go astray into some strange pastures. After this day, the first night succeeds, which is pointed out Sol 2:4-6. The bridegroom rises early in the morning, leaves the bride asleep, and goes hastily to the fields to his necessary occupations, Sol 2:7.

II. The Second night is pointed out Sol 2:8, Sol 2:9, etc. The bridegroom comes to the window of his spouse. She opens it, and he enters; and on the morrow, he returns to the fields to his flocks, Sol 2:17.

III. The Third night, the bridegroom having delayed his coming, the bride, being uneasy, arises from her bed, and goes out and inquires of the guards of the city, whether they had seen her beloved. She had not gone far from them till she met with him; she conducts him to her apartment, 3:14. Very early in the morning, he retires to the country, leaving the bride asleep, verse 5. Afterwards she arises, and goes also to the fields, verse 6. The Fourth chapter is an eulogium on the bride's beauty; and seems to be a conversation between the parties in the country. She invites the bridegroom to visit her, Sol 5:1. He leaves his friends, with whom he was feasting, and comes to the door of his spouse, Sol 5:2. She hesitating to let him in, he withdraws and goes to his garden. The bride follows; but, not knowing whither he had retired, asks the guards of the city, by whom she is maltreated; thence goes to the daughters of Jerusalem, and inquires of them, Sol 5:3, etc. At last she meets with him, Sol 6:1, etc., and having spent some time with him, returns.

IV. Sol 6:9, points out the Fourth night of the marriage.

V. The Fifth night is pointed out Sol 7:1, etc. The bridegroom gives his bride nearly the same praise and commendations which he had received from her in the preceding chapters; and early in the morning they go out together to the fields, Sol 7:11-13.

VI. The Sixth night they pass at a village in the country, at the house of a person who is termed the bride's mother, Sol 7:13; Sol 8:1-3. She invites her spouse thither, and promises to regale him with excellent fruits and choice wine; and early in the morning the bridegroom arises, leaves the bride asleep as formerly, and retires to the country, Sol 8:4.

VII. The Seventh night is passed in the gardens. From Sol 8:5, we have a series of dialogues between the bride and bridegroom. In the morning the bridegroom, having perceived that they were overheard, begs the bride to permit him to retire. She assents, Sol 8:13, Sol 8:14, and exhorts him "to make haste, and be like a roe or a young hart on the mountains of spices."

This is the division, which is in the main most followed, especially by the best critics. But, besides this, several others have been proposed; and the reader, who wishes to enter more particularly into the subject, may consult Bishop Bossuet, Calmet, and Bishop Lowth. For my own part I doubt the propriety of this technical arrangement, and do not think that any thing of the kind was intended by the author. The division is not obvious; and therefore, in my apprehension, not natural. Of Dr. Good's division I shall speak below.

The dramatis personae have been marked by some of the ancient interpreters, and the different portions of the whole Song appointed to several persons who are specified; and this division served for the basis of a commentary. The most regular division of this kind with which I have met is in a MS. of my own; the Bible which I have often quoted in my comment.

This, attributed by some to Wiclif, and by others to an older translator, I have carefully transcribed, with all the distinction of parts and speeches. The translation is very simple; and in many cases is much more faithful to the meaning of the Hebrew text, though in the main taken from the Vulgate, than our own version. It is a great curiosity, and certainly was never before printed; and is a fine specimen of our mother tongue as spoken in these countries in M.CCCLX., which may be about the date of this translation. On the common mode of interpretation I venture to assert that my readers will understand this Song ten times better from this translation and its rubrics, than they have ever done from all the forms in which it has been presented to them, to the present time. For this addition, I anticipate the thanks of every intelligent reader. The indications of the speakers, printed here in black letter, are all rubrick, in the beautiful original. I have added a short glossary on some of the more difficult or obsolete words, which will assist the less experienced reader, under whose notice such remote specimens of his own tongue seldom fall.

Between twenty and thirty years ago I received from India a part of the Gitagovinda, or Songs of Jayadeva. This poet, the finest lyric poet of India, flourished before the Christian era; and the poem above, which makes the tenth book of the Bhagavet, was written professedly to celebrate the loves of Christna and Radha, or the reciprocal attraction between the Divine goodness and the human soul. The author leaves us in no doubt concerning the design of this little pastoral drama; for in the conclusion he thus speaks: "Whatever is delightful in the modes of music, whatever is Divine in Meditations on Vishnu, whatever is exquisite in the sweet art of love, whatever is graceful in the fine strains of poetry; all that, let the happy and wise learn from the Songs of Jayadeva, whose soul is united with the foot of Narayan." Vishnu and Narayan are epithets of Christna, or the supreme incarnated god of the Hindoos. I found the general phraseology of this work, and its imagery as well as its subject, to correspond so much with those of the Song of Solomon, that in the short notes which I wrote on this book in 1798, I proposed the illustration of many of its passages from the Gitagovinda; and was pleased to find, several years after, that my view of the subject had been confirmed by that encyclopedia of learning and science, Dr. Mason Good, who in his translation of the Song of Songs, with critical notes, published 1803, 8vo., has illustrated many passages from the Gitagovinda.

After having made a selection from this ancient poet for the illustration of the Song of Solomon, I changed in some measure my purpose, and determined to give the whole work, and leave it to my readers to apply those passages which they might think best calculated to throw light upon a book which professedly has the wisest of men for its author, and according to the opinion of many, the most important doctrines of the Christian religion for its subject. I have now followed the metrical version which I received from India, but rather the prose translation of Sir William Jones; dividing it into parts and verses, after the model of the metrical version above mentioned; and adding verbal interpretations of the principal proper names and difficult terms which are contained in the work.

Having been long convinced that the Chaldee Targum is at once the oldest and most valuable comment upon this book, I have also added this. And here I might say that I have not only followed my own judgment, but that also of a very learned divine, Dr. John Gill, who, having preached one hundred and twenty-two sermons on the Song of Solomon, to the Baptist congregation at Horsleydown, near London, embodied them all in what he calls "An Exposition" of this book; to which he added a translation of the Targum, with short explanatory notes, folio, 1728. This was,

however, suppressed in all the later editions of this exposition; but why, I cannot tell. This piece I give to my readers, and for the same reasons alleged by this very learned and excellent man himself: - "At the end of this exposition I have given," says he, "a version of the Targum or Chaldee paraphrase upon the whole book, with some notes thereon, induced hereunto by the following reasons: "First, to gratify the curiosity of some who, observing frequent mention and use made of it in my exposition, might be desirous of perusing the whole. "Secondly, for the profitableness thereof. Our learned countryman, Mr. Broughton, says, this paraphrase is worth our study both for delight and profit. It expounds several passages of Scripture, and some in the New Testament, which I have directed to in my notes upon it; and I am persuaded that the writings of the Jews, the ancient Jews especially, would give us much light into the phraseology and sense of abundance of texts in the New Testament."

It is certain that this paraphrase does very often direct us, or at least confirm us, as to the persons speaking in this Song, to know which is of very great use in the explication of it. I shall add another reason: I believe the Song of Solomon refers more to the Jewish than to the Christian Church, and I think the Targumist has made a more rational use of it than any of his successors.

I have thus places within the reach of all my readers Three especial helps towards a good understanding of this book:

1. The ancient English translation, with its curious dramatis personae
2. The Gitagovinda, a most curious poem of the spiritual and allegorical kind.
3. The Chaldee Targam, the oldest comment on this Song. And I add my prayer, May God guide the reader into all truth, through Christ Jesus! Amen.

On this part of the subject it would be almost criminal not to mention, still more particularly, Dr. Mason Good's translation and notes on the Song of Songs. He has done much to elucidate its phraseology, and his notes are a treasury of critical learning. He considers the book to be a collection of Sacred Idyls, twelve in number; and his division is as follows:

Idyl I Royal Bride Sol 1:2, Sol 1:3, Sol 1:4 Attendant Virgins Part of the fourth verse, beginning, "We will exult." Royal Bride Sol 1:5, Sol 1:6, Sol 1:7 Attendant Virgins Sol 1:8 Idyl II King Solomon Sol 1:9, Sol 1:10, Sol 1:11 Royal Bride Sol 1:12, Sol 1:13, Sol 1:14 King Solomon Sol 1:15 Royal Bride Sol 1:16, Sol 1:17, Sol 2:1 King Solomon Sol 2:2 Royal Bride Sol 2:3, Sol 2:4, Sol 2:5, Sol 2:6, Sol 2:7 Idyl III Royal Bride Sol 2:8, Sol 2:9, Sol 2:10, Sol 2:11, Sol 2:12, Sol 2:13, Sol 2:14, Sol 2:15, Sol 2:16, Sol 2:17 Idyl IV Royal Bride Sol 3:1, Sol 3:2, Sol 3:3, Sol 3:4, Sol 3:5 Idyl V Scene, a Chiosk or Pavilion Attendant Virgins Sol 3:6 Other Virgins Sol 3:7, Sol 3:8, Sol 3:9, Sol 3:10 Royal Bride Sol 3:11 King Solomon Sol 4:1, Sol 4:2, Sol 4:3, Sol 4:4, Sol 4:5, Sol 4:6, Sol 4:7 Idyl VI King Solomon Sol 4:8, Sol 4:9, Sol 4:10, Sol 4:11, Sol 4:12, Sol 4:13, Sol 4:14, Sol 4:15 Royal Bride Sol 4:16 King Solomon Sol 5:1 Royal Bride Part of the first verse, beginning, "Eat, O my friends." Idyl VII Royal Bride Sol 5:2, Sol 5:3, Sol 5:4, Sol 5:5, Sol 5:6, Sol 5:7, Sol 5:8 Virgins Sol 5:9 Royal Bride Sol 5:10, Sol 5:11, Sol 5:12, Sol 5:13, Sol 5:14, Sol 5:15, Sol 5:16 Virgins Sol 6:1 Royal Bride Sol 6:2, Sol 6:3 King Solomon Sol 6:4, Sol 6:5, Sol 6:6, Sol 6:7, Sol 6:8, Sol 6:9, Sol 6:10 Idyl VIII Royal Bride Sol 6:11, Sol 6:12 Virgins Sol 6:13 Royal Bride Part of the thirteenth verse, beginning, "What do you expect?" Virgins Latter part of the thirteenth verse, beginning "Fortitude." Idyl IX Virgins Sol 7:1, Sol 7:2, Sol 7:3, Sol 7:4, Sol 7:5 King Solomon Sol 7:6, Sol 7:7, Sol 7:8, Sol 7:9 Idyl X Royal Bride Sol 7:10, Sol 7:11, Sol 7:12, Sol 7:13, Sol 8:1, Sol 8:2, Sol 8:3, Sol 8:4 Idyl XI Virgins Sol 8:5 King Solomon Part of the fifth verse, beginning, "I excited thee." Royal Bride Sol 8:6 King Solomon Sol 8:7 Idyl XII Royal Bride Sol 8:8 King Solomon Sol 8:9 Royal Bride Sol 8:10, Sol 8:11, Sol 8:12 King Solomon Sol 8:13 Royal Bride Sol 8:14 There have been various opinions on this

division; and many will still think that much remains yet to be done. Dr. Good considers it a spiritual allegory; but he does not attempt a spiritual application of any part of it. This perhaps is no mean proof of his good sense and judgment. I have acted in the same way, though not so convinced of its spirituality as Dr. Good appears to be. If I took it up in this way, I should explain it according to my own creed, as others have done according to theirs; and could I lay it down as a maxim, that it is to be spiritually interpreted in reference to the Christian Revelation, I might soon show my reader that it points out the infinite love of God to every human soul, in the incarnation of Christ; the means he uses to bring all mankind to an acquaintance with himself; the redemption of true believers from all unrighteousness, through the inspiration of God's Holy Spirit; their consequent holy life, and godly conversation; the calling of the Gentiles; the restoration of the Jews; and the final judgment! And my comment on this plan would have just as solid a foundation as those of my predecessors, from Origen to the present day.

To conclude: I advise all young ministers to avoid preaching on Solomon's Song. If they take a text out of it, to proclaim salvation to lost sinners, they must borrow their doctrines from other portions of Scripture, where all is plain and pointed. And why then leave such, and go out of their way to find allegorical meanings, taking a whole book by storm, and leaving the word of God to serve tables?

It is curious to see the manner in which many preachers and commentators attempt to expound this book. They first assume that the book refers to Christ and his Church; his union with human nature; his adoption of the Gentiles; and his everlasting love to elect souls, gathered out of both people; then take the words bride, bridegroom, spouse, love, watchmen, shepherds, tents, door, lock, etc., etc., and, finding some words either similar or parallel, in other parts of the sacred writings, which have there an allegorical meaning, contend that those here are to be similarly understood; and what is spoken of those apply to these; and thus, in fact, are explaining other passages of Scripture in their own way, while professing to explain the Song of Solomon! What eminent talents, precious time, great pains, and industry, have been wasted in this way! One eminent scholar preaches to his congregation one hundred and twenty-two sermons upon the Song of Solomon, while all this time the evangelists and apostles have been comparatively forgotten; except only as they are referred to in illustration of the particular creed which such writers and preachers found on this book. How can they account to God for so much time spent on a tract which requires all their ingenuity and skill to make edifying, even on their own plan; a text of which they are not permitted to allege, in controversy, to prove the truth of any disputed doctrine? This, however, is not the fault of any particular class of ministers exclusively; several of all classes, though of some more than of others, have been found, less or more, laboring at this thriftless craft. Some, having preached on it during the whole of their ministry, have carried it, in a certain way, beyond the grave. An aged minister once told me, in a very solemn manner, that as God had been exceedingly merciful to him in saving his soul, and putting him into the ministry, thus accounting him faithful, he hoped that, when called to the Church above, if any funeral sermon were preached for him, it should be from Song of Solomon, Sol 1:8 : "Go thy way forth by the footsteps of the flock, and feed thy kids beside the shepherds' tents." That he could have applied these words to his own state, and the use which should be made of his life and death, I have no doubt; but who, from this text, would have chosen to pronounce the funeral oration?

I repeat it, and I wish to be heard by young ministers in particular, take the plainest texts when you attempt to convince men of sin, and build up believers on their most holy faith; and thus show rather your love for their souls than your dexterity in finding out spiritual meanings for obscure passages, on the true signification of which few, either among the learned or pious, are agreed.

I now, according to my promise, lay before my readers a transcript from my own MS. Bible, which is most probably the first translation of this Song that was ever made into the English language. I have added, for the sake of reference, the figures for the present division into verses, in the margin: these are not in the MS. The dramatic personae, here in black letter, are in red in the MS. The orthography is scrupulously followed.

The bride's love to her spouse, Sol 1:1-5. She confesses her unworthiness; desires to be directed to the flock, Sol 1:6, Sol 1:7; and she is directed to the shepherds' tents, Sol 1:8. The bridegroom describes his bride, and shows how he will provide for her, and how comfortably they are accommodated, Sol 1:9-17.

Verse 1

The song of songs - A song of peculiar excellence. See the Introduction. The rabbins consider this superior to all songs. Ten songs, says the Tarpon, have been sung; but this excels them all.

1. The first was sung by Adam when his sin was pardoned.
2. The second was sung by Moses and the Israelites at the Red Sea.
3. The third was sung by the Israelites when they drank of the rock in the wilderness.
4. The fourth was sung by Moses when summoned to depart from this world.
5. The fifth was sung by Joshua when the sun and moon stood still.
6. The sixth was sung by Deborah and Barak after the defeat of Sisera.
7. The seventh was sung by Hannah when the Lord promised her a son.
8. The eighth was sung by David for all the mercies given him by God.
9. The ninth is the present, sung in the spirit of prophecy by Solomon.
10. The tenth is that which shall be sung by the children of Israel when restored from their captivities. See the Targum.

SONG 1: 2 Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth; for your love is better than wine.

Verse 2

Let him kiss me, etc. - She speaks of the bridegroom in the third person, to testify her own modesty, and to show him the greater respect.

Thy love is better than wine - The versions in general translate דודי dodeyca, thy breasts; and they are said to represent, spiritually, the Old and New Testaments.

SONG 1: 3 Your oils have a pleasing fragrance. Your name is oil poured out, therefore the virgins love you.

Verse 3

Thy name is as ointment poured forth - Ointments and perfumes were, and still are, in great request among the Asiatics. They occur constantly in their entertainments. Thy name is as refreshing to my heart, as the best perfumes diffused through a chamber are to the senses of the guests.

Therefore do the virgins love thee - She means herself; but uses this periphrasis through modesty.

SONG 1: 4 Take me away with you. Let us hurry. The king has brought me into his rooms. Friends. We will be glad and rejoice in you. We will praise your love more than wine! Beloved. They are right to love you.

Verse 4

Draw me - Let me have the full assurance of thy affection.

We will run after thee - Speaking in the plural through modesty, while still herself is meant.

The king hath brought me - My spouse is a potentate, a mighty king, no ordinary person.

Into his chambers - He has favored me with his utmost confidence.

The upright love thee - The most perfect and accomplished find thee worthy of their highest esteem.

SONG 1: 5 I am dark, but lovely, you daughters of Jerusalem, like Kedar's tents, like Solomon's curtains.

Verse 5

I am black, but comely - This is literally true of many of the Asiatic women; though black or brown, they are exquisitely beautiful. Many of the Egyptian women are still fine; but their complexion is much inferior to that of the Palestine females. Though black or swarthy in my complexion, yet am I comely - well proportioned in every part.

As the tents of Kedar - I am tawny, like the tents of the Arabians, and like the pavilions of Solomon, probably covered by a kind of tanned cloth. The daughters of Jerusalem are said to represent the synagogue; the bride, the Church of Christ. It is easy to find spiritual meanings: every creed will furnish them.

SONG 1: 6 Don't stare at me because I am dark, because the sun has scorched me. My mother's sons were angry with me. They made me keeper of the vineyards. I haven't kept my own vineyard.

Verse 6

Because the sun hath looked upon me - The bride gives here certain reasons why she was dark complexioned. "The sun hath looked upon me." I am sunburnt, tanned by the sun; being obliged, perhaps, through some domestic jealousy or uneasiness, to keep much without: "My mother's children were angry; they made me keeper of the vineyards." Here the brown complexion of the Egyptians is attributed to the influence of the sun or climate.

My mother's children were angry with me - Acted severely. The bringing of a foreigner to the throne would no doubt excite jealousy among the Jewish females; who, from their own superior complexion, national and religious advantages, might well suppose that Solomon should not have gone to Egypt for a wife and queen, while Judea could have furnished him with every kind of superior excellence.

SONG 1: 7 Tell me, you whom my soul loves, where you graze your flock, where you rest them at noon; For why should I be as one who is veiled beside the flocks of your companions? Lover.

Verse 7

Tell me - where thou feedest - This is spoken as if the parties were shepherds, or employed in the pastoral life. But how this would apply either to Solomon, or the princes of Egypt, is not easy to ascertain. Probably in the marriage festival there was something like our masks, in which persons of quality assumed rural characters and their employments. See that fine one composed by Milton, called Comus.

To rest at noon - In hot countries the shepherds and their flocks are obliged to retire to shelter during the burning heats of the noon-day sun. This is common in all countries, in the summer heats, where shelter can be had.

One that turneth aside - As a wanderer; one who, not knowing where to find her companions, wanders fruitlessly in seeking them. It was customary for shepherds to drive their flocks together for the purpose of conversing, playing on the pipe, or having trials of skill in poetry or music. So Virgil: -

Forte sub arguta considerat ilice Daphnis

Compulerantque greges Corydon et Thyrsis in unum:

Thyrsis oves, Corydon distentas lacte capellas;

Ambo florentes aetatibus, Arcades ambo,

Et cantare pares, et respondere parati. Ecc 7:1. "Beneath a holm repair'd two jolly swains:

Their sheep and goats together grazed the plains;

Both young Arcadians, both alike inspired

To sing and answer as the song required."

Dryden.

This does not express the sense of the original: from the different pastures in which they had been accustomed to feed their flocks, they drove their sheep and goats together for the purpose

mentioned in the pastoral; and, in course, returned to their respective pasturages, when their business was over.

SONG 1: 8 If you don't know, most beautiful among women, follow the tracks of the sheep. Graze your young goats beside the shepherds' tents.

Verse 8

If thou know not - This appears to be the reply of the virgins.

They know not exactly; and therefore direct the bride to the shepherds, who would give information.

SONG 1: 9 I have compared you, my love, to a steed in Pharaoh's chariots.

Verse 9

I have compared thee - to a company of horses - This may be translated, more literally, "I have compared thee, to my mare, in the chariots or courses of Pharaoh;" and so the versions understood it. Mares, in preference to horses, were used both for riding and for chariots in the East. They are much swifter, endure more hardship. and will go longer without food, than either the stallion or the gelding.

There is perhaps no brute creature in the world so beautiful as a fine well-bred horse or mare; and the finest woman in the universe, Helen, has been compared to a horse in a Thessalian chariot, by Theocritus. Idyl. 18: ver. 28: - Ὦδε και ἄ χρυσεα Ἐλενα δ ι α φ α ι ν ε τ ' εν ἡμιν, Πιερη, μεγαλη, ἀτ' ανεδραμεν ογμος αρουρα, Η καπω κυπαρισσος, η ἄρματι Θεσσαλος ἵππος. "The golden Helen, tall and graceful, appears as distinguished among us as the furrow in the field, the cypress in the garden, or the Thessalian horse in the chariot."

This passage amply justifies the Hebrew bard, in the simile before us. See Jer 6:2.

SONG 1: 10 Your cheeks are beautiful with earrings, your neck with strings of jewels.

Verse 10

Thy cheeks are comely - D'Arvieux has remarked that "the Arabian ladies wear a great many pearls about their necks and caps. They have golds chains about their necks which hang down upon their bosoms with strings of coloured gauze; the gauze itself bordered with zechins and other pieces of gold coin, which hang upon their foreheads and both cheeks. The ordinary women wear small silver coins, with which they cover their forehead-piece like fish scales, as this is one of the principal ornaments of their faces." I have seen their essence bottles ornamented with festoons of aspers, and small pieces of silver pearls, beads, etc. One of these is now before me.

SONG 1: 11 We will make you earrings of gold, with studs of silver. Beloved.

Verse 11

Borders of gold - I have observed several of the handkerchiefs, shawls, and head attire of the Eastern women, curiously and expensively worked in the borders with gold and silver, and variously coloured silk, which has a splendid effect.

SONG 1: 12 While the king sat at his table, my perfume spread its fragrance.

Verse 12

While the king sitteth at his table - במסבו bimsibbo, in his circle, probably meaning the circle of his friends at the marriage festivals, or a round table.

SONG 1: 13 My beloved is to me a sachet of myrrh, that lies between my breasts.

Verse 13

He shall lie all night betwixt my breasts - Mr. Harmer contends that it is the bundle of myrrh which the bride says shall lie all night betwixt her breasts, to which she compares the bridegroom, his name being as pleasing and refreshing to her mind, as the myrrh or stacte was to her senses, by its continual fragrance.

SONG 1: 14 My beloved is to me a cluster of henna blossoms from the vineyards of En Gedi. Lover.

Verse 14

A cluster of camphire - Mr. Hasselquist supposes this to mean a bunch of the Cyprus grape; but this is supposed to mean a shrub so called, not any production of the isle of Cypress; the best kinds of which were found at En-gedi. This place belonged to the tribe of Judah.

Perhaps the poet alludes to the dark color of the hair, which by the Greeks was not unfrequently compared to the bunches of grapes; by no means an unfit similitude for thick black clustering curls. The following lines represent the same idea: - "The dark black locks that ornament her neck

Hang thick and clustering like the branchy palm."

SONG 1: 15 Behold, you are beautiful, my love. Behold, you are beautiful. Your eyes are doves. Beloved.

Verse 15

Thou hast doves' eyes - The large and beautiful dove of Syria is supposed to be here referred to, the eyes of which are remarkably fine.

SONG 1: 16 Behold, you are beautiful, my beloved, yes, pleasant; and our couch is verdant. Lover.

Verse 16

Also our bed is green - עֵרֶס eres, from its use in several places of the Hebrew Bible, generally signifies a mattress; and here probably a green bank is meant, on which they sat down, being now on a walk in the country. Or it may mean a bower in a garden, or the nuptial bed.

SONG 1: 17 The beams of our house are cedars. Our rafters are firs.

Verse 17

The beams of our house are cedar - Perhaps it was under a cedar tree whose vast limbs were interwoven with the בְּרוֹת beroth, a tree of the cypress kind, where they now sat. And this natural bower recommended itself to the poet's attention by its strength, loftiness, and its affording them a shady cover and cool retreat. How natural to break out into the praise of a bower, by whose branches and foliage we are shielded from the intense heat of the sun! Even the shelter of a great rock to a weary land is celebrated by the pen of the first of prophets and greatest of poets, Isa 32:2.

With this chapter the first day of the marriage ceremonies is supposed to end.