

The Tender Grapes

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DELIVERED BY C. H. SPURGEON,

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"The vines with the tender grape give a good smell." Song of Solomon 2:13.

THE vine is of all trees the most useless unless it bears fruit. You cannot make hardly anything of it. You would scarcely be able to cut enough wood out of a vine to hang a pot upon. You cannot turn it into furniture and barely could you use it in the least degree for building purposes. It must either bear fruit, or else it must be consumed in the fire. The branches of the vine that bear no fruit are necessarily cut off and they are used, as I have seen them used in the South of France many a time, in little twisted bundles for kindling the fire. They burn very rapidly, so there is soon an end of them and then they are gone.

The vine is constantly used, in Scripture, as a picture of the nominal Church of Christ, so, like the vine, we must either bring forth fruit or we shall be accounted as good for nothing. Dear Friends, we must serve God! We must bring forth, from our very soul, love to God and service to Him as the fruit of our renewed nature, or else we are useless, worthless, shall only abide our time and then we shall be cut down to be burned. Our end must be destruction if our life is not fruitful. This gives a very solemn importance to our lives and it should make each of us seriously ask, "Am I bringing forth fruit to God? Have I brought forth fruits meet for repentance? For if not, I must, by-and-by, feel the keen edge of the Vinedresser's knife and I shall be taken away from any sort of union that I now have with the Church which is Christ's vine—and be flung over the wall as a useless thing whose end is to be burned."

Beloved, you all know that there is no possibility of bringing forth any fruit unless we are in Christ and unless we abide in Christ. We must bear fruit, or we shall certainly perish—and we cannot have fruit unless we have Christ. We must be knit to Christ, vitally one with Him, just as a branch is really, after a living fashion, one with the stem! It would be no use to tie a branch to the stem of the vine—that would not cause it to bring forth fruit. It must be joined to it in a living union and so must you and I be livingly joined to Christ! Do you know, by experience, what that expression means? For, if you do not know it by experience, you do not know it at all! No man knows what life is but the one who is alive. And no man knows what union to Christ is but he who is united to Christ. We must become one with Christ by an act of faith. We must be inserted into Him as the graft is placed in the incision made in the tree into which it is to be grafted. Then there must be a knitting of the two together, a vital junction, a union of life and a flowing of the sap, or else there cannot

be any bearing of fruit. Again, I say, what a serious thing this makes our life to be! How earnest should be our questioning of ourselves! "For the divisions of Reuben there were great searchings of heart." And so may there be about this matter. Let each one of us ask, "Am I bearing fruit? I am not unless I am vitally united to Christ. I have openly professed that I am in Christ, but am I bringing forth fruit to His honor and glory?"

I think I hear someone say, "I hope I have begun to bring forth some fruit, but it is very little in quantity and it is of very poor quality. And I do not suppose that the Lord Jesus will hardly stoop to notice it." Well, now, listen to what the text says! It is the Heavenly Bridegroom, it is Christ, Himself, who, in this Song, speaks to His spouse and bids her come into the vineyard and look about her. For, says He, "The vines with the tender grape give a good smell." So, you see, there was some fruit, though it could only be spoken of as, "the tender grape." Some read the passage, "The vines in blossom give forth fragrance." Others think it refers to the grape just as it begins to form. It was a poor little thing, but the Lord of the vineyard was the first to spy it out and if there is any little fruit to God upon anyone here present, our

Lord Jesus Christ can see it! Though the berry is scarcely formed. Though it is only like a flower which has just begun to knit, He can see the fruit and He delights in that fruit.

I want, as the Holy Spirit shall help me, to speak about those early fruits—those tender grapes—that are being brought forth by some who have but lately come to know the Lord. And first we will enquire, what are these tender grapes? Secondly, what is the Lord's estimate of them? And thirdly, what is the danger to these tender grapes? You will learn what that is from the 15th verse—"Take us the foxes, the little foxes, that spoil the vines; for our vines have tender grapes."

I. First, then, WHAT ARE THESE TENDER GRAPES? What are these first-fruits of the Spirit of God of which our text says, "The vines with the tender grape give a good smell"? While I am preaching, I shall be going over my own experience and the experience of many of God's people. And though I shall not be especially speaking to them, it will do them good to remember what they passed through in the early days of their Christian life.

One of the first tender grapes that we spy out on living branches of the True Vine is a secret mourning for sin and, very often, an openmourning, too. The man is no longer the mirthful, jovial, light-headed, dare-devil sort of fellow that he was. He has found out that his life has not been right in the sight of God. He has become conscious that he has done much that is altogether wrong and that he has left undone a thousand things which he ought to have done—and he feels heavy of heart and sad in spirit. His old companions notice that there is a change in him, but he does not tell them much because they would only laugh at him. But he has a wound somewhere within his heart—an arrow has pierced his conscience—and his soul bleeds inwardly. The pleasure which he once took in sin is all now gone and, what is more, he grieves to think that he ever could have taken any pleasure in it.

He hopes that God will forgive him, but he feels that he never will forgive himself. He strikes upon his breast and wishes he could strike so hard as to kill the sin which is there— but he discovers that when he would do good, evil is present with him—and that makes him cry, "O wretched man that I am! Who shall deliver me from the body of this death?"

He used to think that to believe in Christ was a very easy thing and that to be a Christian was almost as simple a matter as kissing his hand. But he finds it quite another thing, now. He has a heavy burden to carry and it is crushing him to the ground—he is fighting with himself and cannot get the victory. Whenever he sees his sin, it grieves him and he is grieved because he does not grieve more than he does. He wishes his heart would become softer and that by some means he could weep for sin more thoroughly, for he really does hate it with all his soul. Well now, this is one of the tender grapes and if any of you are brought into that condition, I thank God for it! This is a crop that will ripen and sweeten before long. Surely, there never was a truly gracious soul who did not put forth this as one of the first fruits of the Spirit—a secret mourning for sin.

Another tender grape is a humble faith in Jesus Christ. The man, perhaps, has got no farther than to say, "Lord, I believe, help my unbelief! I trust myself with You and You have said I am saved if I do that and, therefore, I conclude that I am saved, but, oh, that I had more faith! Oh, that I could trust You without a doubt! But, Lord, You know all things—You know that, humbly, tremblingly, I do accept You as my Savior and I am hopeful to be numbered among Your people, though meanest of them all. Though my faith is but as a grain of mustard seed, I bless You that I have even that grain! And I know that it will grow, for it has within it the life You did impart." That little trembling faith, like a freshly-lighted candle which is easily blown out, is, nevertheless, one of the tender grapes. It will grow, it will come to perfection in due time, for the least true faith has everlasting life in it! All the devils in Hell could not quench a single spark of God-given faith, for it is a living thing and it cannot be destroyed! This faith possesses immortality. It shall defy death, itself, yet, while it is so little, it is like the tender grape which gives a good smell.

Then there comes another tender grape and that is, a genuine change of life. The man has evidently turned right about—he is not looking the way he used to look and he is not living as he used to live. At first he fails and, perhaps, fails a good many times, like a child who is learning to walk and has many a tumble. But it will never walk if it does not tumble a bit. So, when men begin to live the new life, they have many slips. They thought that ugly temper of theirs would never rise again, but it does, and it grieves them very much. And some old habit, from which they thought they had clean escaped, entangles them unawares and they say, "Surely I cannot be a child of God if I do these things again!" And there is great sorrow, brokenness of spirit and soul-humbling. Well, that very soul-humbling is a tender grape! That effort to do better—not in your own strength, because you have none and you are sure to fail utterly if you attempt such a task alone—but the effort to do better in the

strength of God, yet with the full consciousness of your own weakness— all that indicates a real change!

I know that there are some men who have been so long steeped in evil that to get their old habits down is a very difficult task. "Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots? Then may you also do good, that are accustomed to do evil." Nothing but almighty power could get the blackness out of the Ethiopian's skin, or the spots out of the leopard. God can do it and He can reverse the whole current of our lives, but, nevertheless, while it is being done, there is often much painful contrition and brokenness of heart before Him. See what a change it is that the Lord works in a man when He converts him from the error of his ways! There is Niagara—see the mighty flood come roaring down—what a sight it is! But can that Niagara be made to flow up-hill? Yes, God can accomplish that marvelous feat, but while it is being done, think of the twists, twirls, whirlpools and sheets of spray that there will be! The vast mass of water has to stop and then to rush up again! What roaring of waves and shaking of rocks there will be even while God is performing this great operation! So is it when there is a change of heart in one who has long been steeped in evil—one who has been an open sinner. There is a great deal of distress of heart while the work is being done. Yet, if there is a radical change in the man, it is like the tender grape which is a sure sign of life in the vine which brings it forth.

Another very blessed fruit of spiritual life in the soul is secret devotion. The man never prayed before. He sometimes went to a place of worship, but he did not care much about it. Now you see that he tries to get alone for private prayer as often as he can. He may not have the privilege of a room to himself, but he climbs up into a hayloft, or goes down into a sawpit, or retires behind a hedge, or, in order to be quite alone, perhaps he walks the streets of London. It is very easy to be alone in a crowded street! In busy Cheapside there is many a man who is utterly lonely, for he does not know anybody in all the throng that rushes past him. It is a really awful loneliness that a man may have in the midst of a dense crowd— and his heart may then be talking with God as well as if he were shut up in some private room. A soul must get alone if it is really born again—it cannot live without private prayer. I also like to see the young beginners in the Divine Life carrying a pocket Testament, so that they may read a short portion whenever they can get a few spare moments—two or three verses to lie in their memory, like a lozenge under the tongue—to melt there and dissolve into their inmost being. It is a grand thing to keep a man right and it is one of the tender grapes on the vine when there is a love for the Word of God and a love for private prayer. I am sure that it is one of the tokens by which we are not very often deceived. "Behold, he prays," is an indication that God has renewed his heart!

Another of these tender grapes is an eager desire for more Grace, a longing for more of the good things of the Covenant. Why, those who are just brought to know the Lord would like us to preach seven sermons a day—and they would like to hear them all! I know that

when I was first brought to Christ, I was ravenous after the Gospel. I felt like the great beast mentioned in the Book of Job, that "drinks up a river, and trusts that he can draw up Jordan into his mouth," so thirsty did I seem to be after the river of the Water of Life! I do not think that the seats felt hard to me, then, or that standing in the aisle was too tiresome so long as it was but the Gospel that was preached to me, for there was an eager desire after it in my soul. If anyone can tell the poor seeking one who has just a little Light of God where he can get 10 times the Grace he has, I guarantee you that he will make the journey if he may but find it, that his feeble faith may grow to full assurance, that his repentance may be deeper, that his love to God may be more intense! If his whole soul is set on attaining this objective, it is manifest that these are the tender grapes that grow out of the life that is within the branches of the Vine.

There is also, in such persons, another very precious sign of Grace, and that is, a simple love to Jesus. The heart knows little, but it loves much. The understanding is not yet fully enlightened, but the affections are all on fire. "Your first love" is mentioned with special commendation in the Book of the Revelation and I think that some of us who have known the Lord for 30 years or more, can look back upon our first love with something of regret. I hope that we love Christ better, now, than we did then, but there was a vividness about our first love which we do not always realize in our more matured experience. It was then very much as it is when your servant lights a fire—at the first, the shavings, or the paper, or whatever it may be at the bottom of the kindling, makes a great deal more of a blaze than appears afterwards— and the fire is at its best when it all gets into one great steady ruby glow. It is to this state that the ardent love of Christians should come, but still, there is something very pleasing about that first blaze and I could almost wish that we always blazed away as we did in the fervor of our first love. That first flame was one of the sure tokens that the fire was there, just as the tender grapes prove that the life is in the Vine-branches. If, dear Friends, you are now full of love to Christ, do not let anybody quench it, or even dampen it, but may it burn more and more, like coals of juniper which have a most vehement flame! God grant that this love, and all the other tender grapes that I have mentioned, may be seen in everyone who has newly sought and found the Lord!

II. Now I must try to answer our second question—WHAT IS THE LORD'S ESTIMATE OF THESE TENDER

GRAPES? What does He think of that sorrow for sin, that little faith, that humble trust in His atoning Sacrifice, that earnest attempt to live a changed life, that weariness of frivolity, that private prayer and study of the Scriptures, that eager desire for more Grace and that childlike love? What does the Lord think of all this?

Well, first, He thinks so much of it that He calls His Church to come and look at it Look at the verses that precede our text—"My Beloved spoke and said to me, Rise up, My love, My fair one and come away, for, lo, the winter is past, the rain is over and gone; the flowers

appear on the earth; the time of the singing of birds is come and the voice of the turtle is heard in our land; the fig tree puts forth her green figs, and the vines with the tender grape give a good smell." We do not usually call our friends to look at things which we do not, ourselves, admire. So here the Bridegroom calls His spouse to share in His joy in these tokens of the heavenly life of the Church of God! Be always on the lookout for the tender grapes. I think I know some Christians who do not appreciate these early fruits as they ought. When dear children are brought to know the Lord, we cannot expect that such little shoots as they are should, at first, bring forth anything but tender grapes.

There are some who do not take that view of the matter. "Ah," they say, "there is no flavor in those grapes." Did you expect that there would be? "Oh," they cry, "they are tart and sour." Of course they are! While they are tender grapes, they must be so. You cannot get the ripeness or the sweetness of maturity in that which is just beginning to grow! Our Lord would not have us find fault with the fruit of young converts, but rather go and look at it, and admire it, and bless God that there is at least some and that it is as good as it is. "Ah," says one, "that young man does not know much!" Does he know that one thing, whereas he was blind, now he can see? Then be thankful that he knows as much as that. "Oh," you exclaim, "but he has not much prudence!" No, my dear Friend, do you suppose that this young man is to have as much prudence as you have at your age—and you are perhaps 60 or seventy? I might possibly say with truth that you have not quite so much zeal as you might have to go with your prudence. "Oh, but," you say, "we need the young man to be more mature!" Give him time and he will get as mature as you are, but while the grapes are still tender, your Master and his calls you to look at them and to thank Him for them, for there is something very cheering in the sight of the first weak, faint tokens of the working of the Holy Spirit in the soul of a young Believer!

What is Christ's estimate of these tender grapes? Why, next, He calls them tender. He does not call them mature—He does not speak of them as ripe—He calls them, "tender." Do you know how He might have described them? He might have called them sour, but He does not. He calls them, "tender." He likes to use a sweet word, you see—the softest and best word that He can use! So, when you describe a young convert, my dear Brother, do not at once point out his immaturity, but call him, "tender." Do not speak about his lack of discretion, but call him, "tender." Do not say, "Oh, well, I question whether he can be a child of God or not!" He is one of God's little ones. A little child is just as much its mother's child as the biggest one in the family is! And no doubt that little one whose voice we heard just now is as much beloved of the mother as any of her older sons or daughters. So it should be with those who are the little children in God's great family of love. Therefore, imitate your Lord and call them, "tender."

Then He says something more—"The vines with the tender grape give a good smell." Of what do they smell?

Well, first, they smell of sincerity. You say, "That young man does not know much, but he is very sincere." How many do I see, who come to make a confession of their faith in Christ, who do not know this doctrine, or have not had that experience, but they are very sincere! I can tell that they are genuine by the way they speak—they often make such dreadful blunders, theologically, that I know they have not learned it by rote, as they might get up a lesson. They talk straight out of their loving but ignorant hearts and I like that they should do so, for it shows how true they are in what they say! And our Lord Jesus always loves sincerity. There is no smell so hateful as the smell of hypocrisy—a religious experience that is made to order, religious talk such as some indulge in, which is all cant—is a stench in the nostrils of God! The Lord save us from it! But these vines with the tender grape give forth the sweet smell of sincerity.

Next, there is about these young Believers a sweet smell of heartiness. Oh, how hearty they generally are, how earnest, how lively! By-and-by, some of the older folks talk about the things of God as if they were worn threadbare and there was nothing of special interest in them. But it is not so with these new-born souls—everything is bright and fresh, they are lively and full of earnestness—and Jesus loves that kind of spirit. He said to the angel of the Church of the Laodiceans, "I would you were cold or hot." It is lukewarmness that He cannot bear! But He approves of warm, simple heartiness—it is to Him like the smell of the vines that bear the tender grapes.

There is sure to be, also, about these young Christians the sweet smell of zeal, whatever may be said against zeal, I will take up the clubs for it as long as I live! In the work of God we cannot do without fire! We Baptists like water because our Master has ordained the use of it, but we must also have fire, fire from Heaven, the fire of the Holy Spirit. When I see our young men and young women full of zeal for God's Glory, I say, "God bless them! Let them go ahead." Some of the old folk want to put a bit in the mouths of these fiery young steeds and to hold them in—but I trust that I shall always be on their side and say, "No, let them go as fast as they like. If they have zeal without knowledge, it is a deal better than having knowledge without zeal! Only wait a bit and they will get all the knowledge they need."

These young Believers have another sweet smell—they are teachable—ready to learn, willing to be taught from the Scriptures and from those whose instructions God blesses to their souls. There is also another delicious smell about them and that is they are generally very joyful. While they are singing, some dear old Brother who has known the Lord for 50 years, is groaning—what is the matter with the good man? I wish that he could catch the sweet contagion of the early joy of those who have just found the Savior! There is something delightful in all joy when it is joy in the Lord, but there is a special brightness about the delight of those who are newly-converted.

You see that Christ forms a correct, condescending, wise estimate of these vines with the tender grape. He calls His Church to look at them. He calls them tender. He says that they have a sweet smell and then He shows that He cares very much about them, for He says, "Take us the foxes, the little foxes, that spoil the vines: for our vines have tender grapes." He does not want even the tender grapes to be spoiled. Some people seem to think that none but advanced Christians are worth looking after, but our Lord is not of that opinion. "Oh, it was only a lot of girls that joined the Church," said somebody. "A lot of girls?" That is not the way that our Lord Jesus Christ speaks about His children! He calls them King's daughters—and let them be called so. "They were only a pack of boys and young men." Yes, but they are the material of which old men are made! And boys and young men, after all, are of much account in the Master's esteem. May we always have many such in this Church!

III. So I come to my third and closing question—WHAT IS THE DANGER TO THESE TENDER GRAPES? The 15th verse says that they are in danger from foxes and gives the command, "Take us the foxes, the little foxes, that spoil the vines: for our vines have tender grapes."

Dear young Friends who have lately found Christ, there are foxes about! We try all we can to stop the gaps in the hedge, that we may keep the foxes out, but they are very crafty and they manage to get in, sometimes. The foxes in the East are much smaller than ours and they seem to be even more cunning and more ferocious than those we have in this country—and they do much mischief to the vines.

In the spiritual vineyard there are foxes of many kinds. There is, first, the hard censorer. He will spoil the vines if he can—and especially the vines that have the tender grapes. He finds fault with everything that he can see in you who are but young Believers. You know that you are simply depending upon Christ for salvation, but this censorer says, "You are no child of God, for you are far from being perfect." If God had no children but those who are perfect, He would have none under Heaven! These censorious people will find fault with this and that and the other in your life and character. And you know well enough that you have all too many imperfections, but if they look for them, they can soon spy them out. Then they say, "We do not believe that there is any Grace in you at all," though you know that by the Grace of God you are what you are! It may be that there is a fault in you which they have discovered. Perhaps you were taken by surprise and suddenly overcome. Possibly they even set a trap for you and lured you into it, provoking you to anger, and then turning upon you, saying, "You have made a profession, have you? That is your religion, is it?" and so on. May God deliver you from these cruel foxes! He will often do so by enabling you not to mind them. After all, this is only the way in which all Christians have been tried—there is nothing strange in your experience from these censorers! And they are not your judges—you will not be condemned because they condemn you. Go and do your best in the

service of your Lord! Trust in Christ and do not mind what they say—and you will be delivered from that kind of fox.

A worse fox even than that one, however, is the flatterer. He comes to you smiling and smirking and he begins to express his approval of your religion. And he very likely tells you what a fine fellow you are. Indeed, you are so good that he thinks you are rather too precise, you have gone a little over the line! He believes in religion, he says, fully, though if you watch his life, you will not think so. But he says that he does not want people to be too righteous—he knows that there is a line to be drawn and he draws it. I never could see where he drew it, but still, he says he does and he thinks that you draw the line a little too near the Cross. He says, "You might be a little more worldly—you cannot get through life in your way. If you get out of society, you may as well get out of the world! Why do you make yourself appear so singular?" I know what he is after—he wants to get you back among the ungodly. Satan misses you and he wants to have you again, so he is sending Mr. Flatterer to wheedle you back, if possible, into your former bondage to himself. Get away from that fox at once! The man who tells you that you are too precise ought to be precisely told that you do not need his company! There never lived a man, yet, who was too holy, and there never will live a man who will imitate Christ too closely, or avoid sin too rigidly! Whenever a man says that you are too Puritanical, you may always smell one of these foxes! It would be better if we were all more Puritanical and precise. Has not our Father said to us, "Be you holy; for I am holy"? Did not our Lord Jesus say to His disciples, "Be you, therefore, perfect, even as your Father which is in Heaven is perfect"?

Then there comes another foul fox, Mr. Worldly-Wiseman. He says, "You are a Christian, but do not be a fool! Carry your religion as far as you can make it pay, but if it comes to losing anything by it, well then, don't you do it. You see, this practice is the custom of the trade—it is not right, I know—but still, other people do it and you ought to do it. If you do not, you will never get on in business." Mr. Worldly-Wiseman further says, "Never mind if you tell a lie or two, make your advertisements say what is not true—everybody else does it as a matter of course—why shouldn't you? Then try whether you cannot get a slice out of your customer here and a slice there when he does not know it—it is the custom of the trade! It is the way other people do and, as it is the custom, of course you must do it." To all such talk I reply that there is another custom, a custom that God has, of turning all liars into Hell! Mind that you do not come under that Divine Rule and Law! There is another custom that God has, namely, that of cutting down as hypocrites those who do not walk honestly and uprightly towards their fellow men. The plea of custom will not stand for a moment at the Judgment Seat of Christ—and it ought to have no weight with us here. I know that there are many young people who, unless they are watchful and careful at the very beginning of their spiritual life, will get lamed and never walk as they ought to, because this fox has bitten them.

There is another ugly fox about and that is a doubting fox. He comes and says, "You seem very happy and very joyful, but is it true? You appear to have become quite a different person from what you used to be, but is there, after all, such a thing as conversion??" This fox begins nibbling at every doctrine! He even nibbles at your Bible and tries to steal from you this chapter and that verse. God save you young people from all these foxes!

There are some foxes of evil doctrine and they generally try to spoil our young people. I do not think anybody ever attempts, now, to convert me from my beliefs. The other day, when a man was arguing with another, I asked him, "Why don't you try me?" "Oh," he said, "I have given you up as a bad case! There is no use trying to do anything with you!" It is so when we get to be thoroughly confirmed in our convictions of the Truth of God—they give us up and they generally say that we are such fools that we cannot learn their wisdom—which is quite correct! And so we intend to be as long as we live!

But with some of the younger folk, they manage it thus. They say, "Now, you are a person of considerable breadth of thought. You have an enlarged mind, you are a man of culture. It is a pity that you should cling to those old-fashioned beliefs which really are not consistent with modern progress." And the foolish young fellow thinks that he is a wonder and so is puffed up with conceit. When a man has to talk about his own culture and to glory in his own advancement, it is time that we suspected the truth about him! When a man can despise others who are doing vastly more good than he ever dreamed of doing and call such people antiquated and old-fashioned, it is time that he should get rebuked for his impudence, for that is what it really is! These clever men, as far as I know them, are simply veneered with a little learning, not a sixteen-thousandth of an inch thick! There is nothing in the most of them but mere pretence and bluster. But there are some who hold firmly to the old Gospel who have read as much as they are ever likely to do, and are fully their equals in learning, though they do not care to boast of their acquirements. Do not any of you young people be carried away with the notion that all the learned men are heretics—it is very largely the reverse—and it is your sham, shallow philosopher who goes running after heresy! Get out of the way of that fox, or else he will do much mischief to the tender grapes.

So, Brothers and Sisters, I close with this remark. If you have any sign of spiritual life. If you have any tender grapes upon your branches, the devil and his foxes will be sure to be at you. Therefore, endeavor to get as close as you can to two persons who are mentioned hard by my text, namely, the King and His spouse. First, keep close to Christ, for this is your life. And next, keep close to His Church, for this is your comfort. Get among elderly Christian people—seek to catch up with those who have long known the Lord, those who are farther on the heavenly road than you are. Pilgrims to Zion should go to Heaven in company and often, when they go in company, and they can get a Mr. Great-Heart to go before them, it saves them from many a Giant Slay-Good and many a Giant Grim—and they get a safe and happy journey to the Celestial City where otherwise they might have been buffeted and

worried. Keep close to God's people, whoever they may be—they are the best company for you, young Believers! Some Christians may, like Bunyan's pilgrim, start on the road to Heaven, alone, but they miss much comfort which they might have had with companions of a kindred spirit. As for Christiana and her children and especially the younger folk, they will do well to keep in company with some one of the Lord's champions, and with the rest of the army with banners who are marching towards the Celestial City! God bless and comfort all of you who know His name, henceforth and forever! Amen.

EXPOSITION BY C. H. SPURGEON: SOLOMON'S SONG 8:11-14; ISAIAH 5:1-7; LUKE 13:6-9. Song of Solomon 8:11, 12. Solomon had a vineyard at Baal Hamon. He leased the vineyard to keepers; everyone was to bring for the fruit thereof a thousand pieces of silver. My vineyard, which is mine, is before me. 'The great Husbandman has graciously leased His vineyard out to me, that I may keep it, and dress it. He has made it mine for the time being. I have some ground to till, some plants to tend, some vines to prune. It may not be a very large vineyard, but still, it is mine, and I am accountable for it and must look well to it. It is before me. I am thinking of it. I am caring for it, I am praying about it.'

12. You, O Solomon, must have a thousand, and those that keep the fruit thereof two hundred. This is our resolve—that our greater Solomon shall have the profits and proceeds of His own vineyard. It is ours on lease, but the freehold is His. He "must have a thousand," and we shall be well content with our share of the vintage—joyful and glad that we may have "two hundred."

13. You that dwells in the gardens, the companions hearken to Your voice: cause me to hear it. "For to hear that voice will be far better than the 'two hundred' which shall be my share of the fruit! If I may have You with me, O my Lord, I will be better pleased, though my portion of fruit should be very small, indeed, for in having You, my portion will be great, indeed! I hear, my Lord, that some of Your people live with You until they are called Your companions. There are some whom You call Your friends. There are disciples whom Jesus loves. These 'hearken to Your voice: cause me to hear it.' Unstop my deaf ears, give me a sensitive spirit, let my soul thrill and my heart throb, and my whole being delight to obey every syllable that falls from Your blessed lips. 'You that dwell in the gardens, the companions hearken to Your voice: cause me to hear it.'"

14. Make haste, my Beloved. "Do not let me have to wait long for You, O my Beloved! Even at the beginning of this service, cause me to realize Your presence." [The exposition was always the first part of the service.—EOD.]

14. And be like a roe or a young hart upon the mountains of spices.' 'Are there mountains that divide me from You? Come and leap over them, for You are swift of foot and sure of standing—'Be You like a roe or a young hart,' and when You come, the mountains of division shall change into mountains of spices, and all around me shall be sweet."

[Isaiah 5:1](#). Now will I sing to my Well-Beloved a song of my Beloved touching His vineyard. My Well-Beloved has a vineyard in a very fruitful hill. You and I, dear Friends, are placed in a position where we have very choice opportunities of glorifying our God. We are like "a vineyard in a very fruitful hill," most favorably placed for fruitfulness. The Well-Beloved had a vineyard in a very fruitful hill—

2. And He fenced it, and gathered out the stones thereof, and planted it with the choicest vine, and built a tower in the midst of it, and also made a winepress therein: and He expected that it should bring forth good grapes, but it brought forth wild grapes. Is that my case? Is it your case, dear Friend? Has even our religion been a false thing? Has it been like wild grapes or poisonous berries? Have we been, at times, right only by chance and have we never carefully and sedulously sought to serve our Lord, or to bring forth fruit to His praise? O Lord, You know!

3-6. And now, O inhabitants of Jerusalem, and men of Judah, judge, I pray you, betwixt Me and My vineyard. What could have been done more to My vineyard, that I have not done to it? Why, then, when I expected that it should bring forth good grapes, brought it forth wild grapes? And now please let Me tell you what I will do to My vineyard: I will take away the hedge thereof, and it shall be eaten up; and break down the wall thereof, and it shall be trodden down: and I will lay it waste. There is no destruction like that which comes when God destroys the fruitless vineyard! When a human enemy or the wild boar out of the forest lays it waste, it may be restored again, but if, in righteous wrath, the Divine Owner of the vineyard, Himself, lays it waste, what hope remains for it? "It shall be trodden down; and I will lay it waste"—

6, 7. It shall not be pruned, nor dug; but there shall come up briers and thorns: I will also command the clouds that they rain no rain upon it. For the vineyard of the LORD of Hosts is the house of Israel, and the men of Judah His pleasant plant: and He looked for justice, but behold, oppression; for righteousness, but behold a cry. This passage has a special reference to God's ancient people and one cannot read it without noting how literally this terrible threat has been fulfilled!

[Luke 12:6](#). He spoke also this parable, A certain man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard; and he came and sought fruit thereon, and found none. Let us, everyone, read this parable as if our Lord Jesus Christ were now speaking it for the first time to each of us. There is a lesson here which we shall do well to heed.

7-9. Then said he to the dresser of his vineyard, Behold, these three years I have come seeking fruit on this fig tree, and found none: cut it down; why cumberest thou the ground? And he answering said to him, Lord, let it alone this year, also, till I shall dig about it, and fertilize it: and if it bears fruit, well: and if not, then after that thou shalt cut it down. "In that case, I will plead for it no longer, for it will have had its full time of testing and every opportunity of bearing fruit— 'After that thou shalt cut it down.'" The parable is so simple that it needs no

explanation and, therefore, our Lord Jesus has not given any. May we all make a personal application of its solemn teaching! Amen.