

A sermon preached by the late Mr. J.E. Hazelton on 21st November, 1909 from the 1st chapter of the Song of Solomon, verses 7 and 8. "Tell me, O thou whom my soul loveth, where Thou feedest, where Thou makest Thy flock to rest at noon: for why should I be as one that turneth aside by the flocks of thy companions? If thou know not, O thou fairest among women, go thy way forth by the footsteps of the flock, and feed thy kids beside the shepherd's tents."

The first part of our text is an earnest and intense prayer. It forms part of the words of the Bride to the Bridegroom, the words of the Shulamite to her heavenly Solomon, the words of the Church to the Lord Jesus Christ. When we speak of the Bride, the Shulamite, the Church, we mean the whole number of believers, the whole company of God's elect in all ages of the world regarded as a corporate body; but what is true of the body is true also of each individual, so this morning looking at these words as the cry of a human God-taught soul, as the cry of each one of the children of God, may we be able to trace our own spiritual features as revealed in this prayer, and recognise those pulsations which each living soul feels as the Lord is pleased to influence and to bless. What is prayer? It is the utterance of the life of God the Holy Ghost. Living souls must pray, troubled hearts must pray. Every member of this company designated collectively "the Shulamite" is full of wants, and knows it, full of needs, and feels them. Every living soul can be satisfied with no other than God himself, and therefore the burden of this blessed Song is a craving after the person of Him in whom all fulness dwells - after the Lord Himself.

What is the work of God the Holy Ghost in the covenant of grace? Our blessed Lord says that it is to take of the things of Christ and to show them unto His people. If we feel that only a living Christ will satisfy us, we are taught of God the Holy Ghost, for His work is to take of Christ, and the things of Christ, and to shew them unto His people.

This prayer then is the cry of a believer, of a seeker, and every seeker after Christ and salvation can today make use of it; it is also the cry of one who has lost fellowship and communion with Him that is loved, and who, with intensity of spirit, seeks its renewal. It is the cry of a child with home-love in the soul, yet experiencing distance from that home, the desire of a soul that "followeth hard" after Christ, who is upheld in that hard following by the right hand of Grace Divine. It is the picture of a believer whose mind is filled with memories of happier days, and who is enquiring,

"Where is the blessedness I knew
When first I knew the Lord?"

of one who realises deeply the fitfulness, waywardness, and fickleness of his heart, but who at the same time is divinely conscious - conscious through divine teaching - of the faithfulness, veracity, and immutability of Him who "having loved His own

which were in the world, loved them unto the end", - the veracity of our God who cannot lie, with Him is no variability neither the shadow of a turning, for He is "Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, and today and for ever." How beautifully the experience of our text is illustrated in regard to God's dear servant Peter! These words recall very vividly the intercourse of our blessed Lord with Peter, with Peter penitent and with Peter restored. By Galilee's shore the Lord looks at that returned wanderer, and says "Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou Me more than these?" "Lord, thou knowest all things, Thou knowest that I love Thee", and Peter's soul did love his Lord. "Lovest thou Me", the risen Bridegroom enquires, and did not that question include a retrospect like this? Simon, son of Jonas, thou wast the first to say to Me "thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God", and I told thee that flesh and blood had not revealed this unto thee, but My Father which is on heaven. Blessed art thou Simon Barjona Simon, didst thou not say to me, "Draw me, we will run after thee as in the earlier part of this Song, for did he not say, "Lord, if it be thou, bid me come unto Thee on the water." Peter, the savour of my Name was sweet unto thee, for thou wast brought into the chambers of the King and I manifested My love toward thee; then, in thine own strength going forth, the sun of fiery trial smote thee, thy comeliness was burned as an hearth, and thou sawest that thou wert black. Remember when in the palace of the high priest I turned and looked on thee in Love, thou didst utter no word, but "went out and wept bitterly." And what did those tears say? "Tell me, O thou whom my soul loveth, where Thou feedest; why should I be as one that turneth aside by the flocks of thy companions?" "Lovest thou Me more than these?" Peter, here and now I restore unto thee the joy of My salvation. There on Galilee's shore, in the presence of the other disciples, Peter knew what it was to be a happy and reconciled child, and again to go forth by the footsteps of the flock, conscious of the sweet and gracious influence of the love of his Lord.

Our text contains first a GRACIOUS ENQUIRY, and secondly a GRACIOUS ANSWER. An enquiry made by one deeply conscious of sin who says "I am black as the tents of Kedar"; black through original sin; black through the rays of the burning sun of conscience; black through the smoke of the tents and dust of the desert - temptations within and without - black through the inward rising of the corruptions of his own heart.

But it is also the enquiry of one who has some sight of his standing in a precious Christ, for though black as the tents of Kedar, he is comely as the curtains of Solomon. How striking the contrast between these two! The tents of Kedar, low, smoke-stained, dusty, ragged, pitched in the wilderness; and the curtains of Solomon hanging in His temple or palace beautiful and glorious. This is the contrast between what we are in ourselves by nature, and what we are as accepted in a precious and glorious Christ. It is the prayer of a humble, hungry and

sincere soul, for "the upright love Thee", and the answer comes from the lips of Him who is the Bridegroom, our Saviour, our Shepherd and our Friend. All the Lord's people, all those truly taught of God, are able to enter more or less deeply into the experience which is depicted in the Song of Solomon. Never was there a more gracious child of God, and one who lived nearer to Him than dear Samuel Rutherford; his letters are full with the very language of this Song, and whilst in one he cries out that he is as the tents of Kedar, in another he rejoices in the comeliness that is upon him through the righteousness of his Lord. Many of his sayings have been put into verse by Mrs. Cousins in that beautiful piece "The sands of time are sinking". This is one verse -

But flowers need night's cool darkness,
 The midnight and the dew,
 So Christ from one who loved it
 His shining oft withdrew,
 And then for cause of absence
 My troubled soul I scanned,
 But glory, shadeless dwelleth
 In Emmanuel's Land.

Let us speak first of all about this anxious enquiry, "Tell me O Thou whom my soul loveth". It is the enquiry of one who loves the Lord, and is it not marvellous, paradoxical and yet absolutely true, that Peter loved his Lord even when he denied Him with oaths and curses? "Tell me, O Thou whom my soul loveth". Love! What says the Holy Ghost by the Apostle? "If any man love not the Lord Jesus Christ let him be Anathema Maran-atha" (1 Thess 16.22). This is not love which is a surface affection. There was no love on the surface when Peter denied his Lord and Master; not a love in word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth; a love which is the reflection of God's first electing love to us; a love which is kindled in the soul first as a feeble spark by Him who loved us and gave Himself for us. Such love is never unrequited. One who can say in God's sight "I love the Lord", or "I desire" (if you cannot for the moment use the other) "I desire to love the Lord, I plead with him, I long for divine communications from Him to me", let him not vex and pain his soul with the thought that that prayer will remain unanswered. If that soul love the Lord, He has FIRST loved him; if he desire the Lord, He has FIRST desired him. If there is rising up in the heart the faintest flicker of a flame Godward, HE has kindled that flame. If any can go to God in Christ and say "Tell me, tell me, O Thou whom my soul loveth", God hath done great things for him. How many pine away because of unrequited human love! How many a maiden has pined away and died because of some love that has been unrequited! but if there is a spark of love in a heart towards Him who is the Shepherd and Bridegroom, it will not be unrequited. The Bridegroom of that soul shall come in His appointed hour and reveal Himself in love and in power. If there is love of Christ in any heart, the Person of Him towards whom this love goes out must

have been revealed in some measure to you. We cannot love any one we do not know, and, if we can use this word "O Thou whom my soul loveth", we know somewhat of the person of Him who has won our affections and bound our souls fast, and, if we know aught of the Person of our most blessed Lord, it is by the revelation of God the Holy Ghost. Joseph Hart speaks of that love which was kindled in his soul when in spirit he was led into the solemn precincts of Gethsemane's Garden, there to behold his Lord sweating great drops of blood for him. Is Gethsemane a sacred spot to you? Is the agonising Cross of Christ a sacred spot to you? Do you know and do you feel that there is none in Heaven or upon earth worthy to be compared with the Christ of God? "Whom have I in Heaven but Thee, and there is none upon earth that I desire beside thee." Oh, that prayer is pleasant in the ears of the Lord God of Sabaoth; those accents of the soul are delightful unto Him who hath first loved thee.

Here then is a prayer from one who, though feeling black as the tents of Kedar, though feeling at a distance from God, cries "Draw me" in her inmost soul, loving Him notwithstanding ignorance, distance, and a sense of blackness and of sin.

"Tell me" !. What do those words mean? "Tell me". Speak to my heart with power. Here is that which constitutes a dividing line in every congregation addressed by a Minister of the Gospel. Some go and come just content with what they call the Service, or come just to hear the sermon, but there are other who are numbered among those of whom our Lord speaks when He says "The kingdom of Heaven suffereth violence and the violent take it by force". In other words there are sinners who are in earnest about salvation, who cannot be content with a surface religion, in whose hearts the Spirit of the living God is working. What do these say? "Tell me", speak, O Lord, to my poor heart WITH POWER. Drop Thy word into my conscience; cause it to abide in my spirit; Thou by Thy Spirit canst alone do this work. Isaac Watts very beautifully expresses this in two of his sweet lines

"Fain would I feed among Thy sheep,
Among them rest, among them sleep".

In such desires there is deep feeling; the heart is engaged in religion like this, for there is a stirring of the affections by God the Holy Ghost. May the Lord shed abroad more of it, that souls may not be content with a surface religion but that men's cry may be "Tell me! Tell me, O Thou whom my soul loveth".

Next, it is not only the prayer of one who loves the Lord, but it is the cry of one who in experience is at a distance from Him, hence the previous petition in the 4th verse, "Draw me" That is the cry of one who felt to be at a distance. "Draw me, we will run after Thee." But notice right through this delightful Song of Songs, that though the Lord is often, in the exper-

ience of the Bride, at a distance from her, He is nevertheless always very near. He hears every word she says, and if He hears every word He cannot be far off, although she sees Him not He knows, too, that she is feeling at a distance from Him. A misty veil separates between the petitioner and the Lord, but it is only a very very thin veil that hides a longing heart from a living and a loving Saviour! There on the one side is the longing heart, - "Tell me, tell me O Thou whom my soul loveth; and on the other side is a living and loving Saviour who immediately replies. He is within hearing if not within sight. That feeble enquirer is one upon whom the Lord looked with love and mercy. Job had a similar experience where in the 23rd chapter he says, "I go forward but He is not there; and backward but I cannot perceive Him; on the left hand where He doth work, but I cannot behold Him; He hideth Himself on the right hand that I cannot see Him". But he goes on to say - "But He knoweth the way that I take: when He hath tried me, I shall come forth as gold".

The Lord whom thou seekest
Will not tarry long,
And to Him the weakest
Is dear as the strong.

"Tell me, O Thou whom my soul loveth where Thou feedest" - that is, where Thou feedest Thy flock; and tell me also where Thou dost cause them to rest at noon. What is the desire of a living soul when feeling at a distance from the Lord? By grace it is, "Tell me, O Thou whom my soul loveth, where Thou feedest Thy flock"; tell me those truths that feed the souls of Thy people, those truths which the special condition of my soul needs at this moment. Give unto me the precious and reviving food that is the meat and the drink of Thy flock of slaughter. The memories of green pastures in which such a soul has fed are very pleasant, but we cannot feed on memories; we want the Shepherd to lead us into the wide green pastures of God's Word when opened up to us. The cry is "Tell me" O precious Christ, by the ministry of Thy Spirit in my soul, "where Thou feedest Thy flock" for there I want to be. We want the sweet, succulent pastures of God's Word, but do we not want, or at least need, the bitter things? We want something more than continual sweetness. The oriental shepherd over a wide tract of country leads his flock; it will not do for him to feed his sheep always in one pasture, hence he will lead them from one place to another; he will put them in a spot where the herbage is more scanty because it is good for them. "Tell me where Thou feedest Thy flock", and if necessary let me be fed in the place where the bitter herbage of repentance is to be partaken of, in the place where godly sorrow grows; in places that often are less pleasant than those in which I delight, but where it is for my good. I want to grow in grace, I want to feed upon the bitter herbs that were round the Passover lamb, and so whether in Thy love and mercy Thou art pleased to lead me in pleasant or bitter pastures, "Tell me, O Thou whom my soul loveth, where Thou feedest Thy flock".

There is an infinite variety in the Word of the living God. We may want to stay in one particular pasture where our soul has been specially blessed, always to sit there and feed there but "He putteth forth His sheep", and the sheep do not always like that. He putteth forth and leadeth them into the pastures on which love and mercy design they shall feed. His flock shall not starve. "Tell me...where Thou feedest Thy flock". Sometimes He feeds His flock with His presence, which "fills an aching void"; again He is pleased to feed His flock with His promises, and there is no state that the precious promises do not meet; at times He is pleased to feed His people with His flesh and blood - in other words discovering to their souls a sense of His dying love and enabling them to live thereon. Feed us O blessed Pastor, blessed Shepherd, Thou hast said, "I will give My Spirit and He shall guide you into all truth". Just guide us, Lord, into all truth, the truth convenient for us, the truth that our souls need, sometimes in the rich green pastures that we love, and at other times upon the bleak mountain side where the blades of grass are to be taken from among the rocks in which they grow.

Once more, it is the prayer not only of one at a distance, not only of one who is hungry, but of one who wants rest - rest for the weary - rest. "Tell me where Thou makest Thy flock to rest at noon". Hunger had made her want food; weariness had caused her to need rest. Where can that be found? In your home? Thank God for comfortable homes, and for all the amenities and blessings of domestic life, but can one really always, fully, satisfactorily find rest in home, in the Church, or oneself? Self is poor shifting sand; there is no holding ground there. God rests where? He rests in His love, in the Person of His dear Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. But this speaks of "rest at noon". In the East, the noonday is not the pleasant season of the day that it is in our sweet early English summers, but is the time when the sun in the zenith beats piteously down upon the rocks; the rays of the sun beat down upon the barren shifting sands of the desert and every creature is thankful to find rest and shade. Therefore the noon that is described here may be taken as the day of temptation, when that hot sun beats upon the head; in the hour of business trial which seems to scorch up everything that is good within; in the blazing day of publicity, show me where Thou makest Thy flock to rest. Some people are always striving after publicity, but while it is a duty in some cases to accept it as ordained of God, it is unwise to desire publicity, for it brings temptations and often barrenness of soul. "Tell me ... where Thou makest Thy flock to rest at noon", the noon day of temptation, of family trial, of business difficulty, the noon day of those sorrows that are too numerous to be described. There is a place, Lord, where Thou makest Thy flock to rest at noon, oh show me that place, bring me to sit in all my weariness and longing for rest "under Thy shadow with great delight, and find Thy fruit to be sweet unto my taste".

The Cross, Christ and Him crucified! What a place is that when we are brought to rest there from the heat of the noonday! The faithfulness of our God in Christ. Oh, what a resting place that is! The refuge and the rock of a Saviour's sympathy of our Brother, our Shepherd, and our Friend! "Tell me - by dropping a promise into my heart, by an application of Thy word-where Thy flock is resting. Bring me to that resting place, so that I may be refreshed and quiet among Thy flock. Christ, I only want Thee!

Rest of the weary, joy of the glad,
 Hope of the dreary, light of the sad,
 Home of the stranger, sight to the blind,
 Refuge from danger, O Shepherd and Friend.

Once more, the closing word of the prayer is "For why should I be as one that turneth aside by the flocks of thy companions?". "The flocks of Thy companions" - those who are professors of religion, but who have nothing more. "Why should I turn aside by the flocks of Thy companions?" Christ, I want Thee, I want not shadows but substance; I want to mingle with thine own flock, Thy blood-bought people, and not with those who simply profess to be Thy companions. "Why should I turn aside? Do you say this? Can you say it? "Why should we turn aside?" "Alas! what numbers do" - turning aside from the beaten track; turning aside from the glorious Gospel of God's covenant love and truth; turning aside from those pastures in which all the saints of God who are now in Glory have fed, and where they find rest and satisfaction to the soul. Why should I be as one of those who turn aside from the discriminating truths of the everlasting Gospel and forsake those truths which fill my soul with fragrance and distil it in my heart. Lord Jesus, I am prone to wander Thou knowest, but Thou knowest all things; Thou knowest that I love Thee. Why should I be as those that turn aside. I would follow Thee, Lord, I pray for grace to follow Thee gratefully; to follow Thee with Thy little flock and to remain separate from the God dishonouring profession of the day. Oh my heart is grieved as I look on the right hand and on the left and see those who are turning aside from the pathway of God's own pure Truth; turning aside by those who are here described as the "companions" of the Lord.

A few words next about the Lord's gracious answer. Oh, it is so full of comfort. He was not only near, but see what He says and what His eyes saw. "I am black as the tents of Kedar" says the Bride. "O thou fairest among women!" was the Lord's reply. You are not black, said the Lord, in my Eyes, though you are so in your own. In gracious condescension He viewed her as espoused in the eternal councils - a spotless and unfallen Bride, as guilty, but washed in atoning blood and clothed in glorious righteousness, as sanctified and cleansed by regenerating grace. "Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect?"

And lest the shadow of a spot
 Shoul on my soul be found,
 He took the robe the Saviour wrought
 And cast it all around.

"Go thy way forth", enduring the offence of the Cross, counting the reproach of Christ greater riches than all the treasures of Egypt. "Go thy way forth". "Let us therefore go forth to Him without the camp bearing His reproach."

But lest there should be doubt as to the path our Lord describes it. "Go thy way forth by the footsteps of the flock" feed thy kids beside the shepherds' tents." "The footsteps of the flock" is the pathway of tribulation, for "it is through much tribulation that we must enter the kingdom." It is also the pathway of faith in a precious Saviour. The flocks have left their deep marks there and the prints of the good Shepherd's feet have gone before them. It is no new road we are traveling along, nor should we count it as though some strange thing had happened to us along the pathway of tribulation. "Go your way forth by the footsteps of the flock." There is only one way to Heaven - one Way, one Lord, one baptism. We travel along the road which has been trodden by those who have gone before.

"Feed your kids beside the shepherds' tents." Seek the means of God's grace, for the shepherds are those who are sent forth to minister in the Lord's name. There thou shalt feed, and beside those tents thou shalt feed thy flock.

What are those who are designated here "kids"? Inwardly and experimentally they are the tender graces of the heart which want special nurture. Dear George Herbert in the 16th century beautifully expressed this, where he says

My soul is a shepherd too,
 A flock it feeds of thoughts and words and deeds.

"Feed thy kids beside the chepherds' tents", means also bring your children to the House of God. A hundred years ago where were the children to be found? By the side of their godly parents in the House of God, and there God was pleased to work wondrously. It is neither necessary, nor desirable, for children to have special services, or parts of services apart from their godly parents, but Sunday schools under suitable teachers can lay a good foundation for Gospel truths. Bring the children to the House of God, and when there is no service in the House of God, let us, according to our ability and opportunity, seek to instruct the children, but as home life is deepened, as godly parents recognise what is due from them to their children, they will seek to have their loved ones by them in God's own House as long as they can. In the wilderness there are briars and thorns, but what a mercy to know the green

pastures, the shadow of a great Rock in a weary land through the tenderness and grace of Him who is our Shepherd, and our King,