

SURREY TABERNACLE PULPIT.

THE INTENSITY OF LOVE.

A Sermon

PREACHED ON SUNDAY EVENING, NOVEMBER 8TH, 1863, BY

MR. JAMES WELLS,

AT THE SURREY TABERNACLE, BOROUGH ROAD.

"Thou art beautiful, O my love, as Tirzah, comely as Jerusalem, terrible as an army with banners."—Solomon's Song vi. 4.

THROUGH the fall of man, man hath ceased to see beauty where there is beauty; for never since the fall hath man seen any real beauty in holiness, or in righteousness, or in that which is Godlike. The language of the whole human race by nature is, towards God,—“Depart from us; we desire not the knowledge of thy ways.” The first, then, we have here is *the implied transition*, “Thou art beautiful as Tirzah.” Secondly, *the likeness of the citizens to the city*. And third, *the twofold respect in which the church is terrible as an army with banners*.

First, then, here is *an implied transition*. Tirzah was a region forming a part of northern Canaan, a very beautiful part of the land; so far so that you find that the kings of Israel sought to make their palace, their seat, and their dwelling there. It was a very beautiful part of the land, pleasant as to situation, and beautiful as to its productions. Tirzah signifies pleasantness, and therefore expressive of the state into which the soul is brought in its reconciliation to God. But in order to appreciate this, we must look in the first place at our worthlessness by nature. Hence it is said of us in our state by nature that as our hearts depart from the Lord we are like the heath in the wilderness, a very worthless sort of thing. And happy is that man that sees himself in this light, that he has not a particle of worth about him. Made sensible of your worthlessness, you cannot come before the Lord and plead anything but your worthlessness. Why, one under a sight and sense of his worthlessness compared himself to a leaf driven to and fro, to dry stubble. These are terms expressive of that worthlessness which the people of God are brought to see and feel that they are in, and of and from themselves. And am I this evening speaking to one who has been saying to himself, Well, of all the worthless creatures I think I am one; of all the poor, destitute creatures of anything that is good, I think I am one; of all the poor, helpless worms of the earth, I think I am one. I wonder if a real Christian feels like this; I wonder if a real child of God is thus sensible of his worthlessness. Truly I am thus as the heath of the wilderness. And it is said of such, that they “shall not see when good cometh,” but that does not mean those who are

sensible of and feel their worthlessness ; that means those who are content to remain in that state, they " shall not see when good cometh." Let me just remind you,—those of you who know something of your worthlessness—that when you were in a state of nature, the gospel came then to where you were, but you did not see the good of it, you did not feel your need of it, you did not desire the advantages of it. So that the good came, and some around you partook of that good ; but to you it was invisible, you could not see where the good was. But now the Lord hath opened your eyes, and now you see the Good Shepherd, and you see and understand the good tidings of the gospel, and you see the goodness of God, you see the mercy of God, and are drawn towards him in a way of hope, of interest therein. And then it is said of the heath in the wilderness,—of these who are like unto it,—they " shall inhabit the parched places." This is a very significant scripture—" the parched places," to denote that the wrath of the law of God will parch up, burn up every place we have on earth. And is it not so ? Is there any one earthly comfort you can name that the sentence of the law hath not already virtually burned up ? A parched place. Everything temporal is a parched place ; all human hope is a parched place. The law hath touched everything,—I had almost said, blackened everything, darkened everything ; there is a cloud over everything, so that it is a parched place. Ah, then, if sensible of this, thou wilt seek a country where there is a river that will never run dry ; thou wilt seek a state of things where there are springs that will never run dry, where there are no parched places, where pastures are ever green, and where the tree shall not cease from bearing fruit. And it is said of these—that is, continuing in that state of ignorance of their worthlessness, that they " shall inhabit a salt land, and not inhabited ;" that is, not inhabited by the saints of God ; they shall be cast out. Oh, my hearer, I cannot but just say a word here in relation to the sinner that lives and dies careless of his state, not born of God, and not having been subjected to that change essential to his salvation. What a solitary state yours will be ! You will die alone ; there will be nothing to accompany you but your sins, and you will go to judgment in all the solitude of your sins, and be banished from the presence of God, and the glory of his power, in all the solitude of your sins ; and you will have to live over every sin again when you are in hell, in the misery thereof ; not a sin you have been the subject of during a guilty life, the misery of which you will not have to range over, and over, and over again ; so that you must be then as miserable as you are sinful now. What must hell be ? And yet this is the destiny of all that live and die, and that know not God, and obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. It is not, therefore, in this our fallen state that the Lord pronounceth us beautiful ; no, it is when brought out of this state into reconciliation with God. The Old Testament prophets were wont to dwell much upon this very way which our text contains of expressing that transition from our worthless and awful state by nature into a state of grace. Isaiah speaketh of it beautifully ; he looketh at us in our state by nature as being fitted for nothing but the fire of the wrath of Almighty God, and then looks at the transition, and sees what a

blessedness there is in the transition, and he words it thus: "Instead of the thorn shall come up the fir tree, and instead of the brier shall come up the myrtle tree; and it shall be to the Lord for a name, for an everlasting sign that shall not be cut off." Here, then, my hearer, if thou knowest this thy worthlessness, and art led to receive Christ in his atonement, and to receive him in his righteousness, and to receive him in his truth, you must receive him in his truth, you must receive him in predestination, for he was verily fore-ordained, and those who are saved, have "obtained in him an inheritance, being predestinated according to the purpose of him who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will." And you must receive him in eternal election, for Christ was chosen, and the people are chosen in him; and you must receive him in a sworn covenant, a covenant ordered in all things, and sure; and you must receive him in everlasting love; and you must receive him in the certainty of his truth. Now, if thou thus puttest on Jesus Christ in his mediation, and thy soul be arrayed in the garments of faith, and thou receivest his truth, then thy covering is the covering of his Spirit, then thy robe is the robe of his righteousness, then thou art decked with all that maketh thee beautiful in the sight of the Lord, and when the Lord cometh to thee, it is like coming to a pleasant country. How beautifully this is expressed when it is said—and I do trust we can say the same; I do trust many of us—most of us, I hope—can say the same; why, it is like the Lord coming to a pleasant country, everything smiling; and so, "Then"—why, it is a wonderful scripture, and yet it is just what all the people of God shall be led sooner or later to realize—"Then were the disciples glad, when they saw the Lord." And he knew they were glad. When I come into this pulpit of a Sunday, or any other time, and you come into your pew, the Lord looks down, and says, There is a poor creature, a servant of mine; how glad he will be to see me if I go there! and there is a poor creature sitting there,—there is one there, another there, another there, and how glad they will be to see me if I go! I know very well, if my Holy Spirit as the north wind just awake, and the south wind just blow upon their souls, to indicate mine approach, why, I shall go into the garden of their souls, and I shall gather my myrrh with mine honey, and I shall gather my fruits! "Eat, O friends; drink, yea, drink abundantly, O beloved." How glad they will be to see me! And if any of them are absent, the one that is there will go away and say to the one that is absent, We have seen the Lord, we have seen the Lord; the Lord is risen indeed; he is higher than ever, he is higher, and higher, and higher, and we have seen the Lord. Well, and how did you feel? Well, we felt glad. And how did you feel, Thomas? Why, I really felt so happy, I could not say anything great enough; so I thought I would grasp it all in few words, having felt swallowed up in his infinity and his eternity, and I said, "My Lord and my God!" Here it is, then, "Thou art beautiful, O my love, as Tirzah;" like going into a pleasant country, where everything is prosperous, everything to welcome the comer thereto. Bless the Lord, and so it is. Oh, happy, happy the soul that can respond to the Saviour's declaration, "Behold, I come quickly," "Even so, come, Lord Jesus. Even so, come, Lord Jesus." Lord, we do not wish thee to be absent long, for thy visitations preserve our spirits; thy Spirit reneweth the face of the earth; it is thy shinings, when thou comest down like rain upon the grass, and as showers upon the mown grass, when they descend upon our souls, it is then the spices flow, oh, it is then we are happy, it is then our souls are as a watered garden. And so the soul, thus brought into this acquaintance with the Lord, is beautiful in the Lord's estimation.

Well, now, I must put you to the test a little. Just look at me, now. Suppose I was going to do what I shall not do this evening; suppose I was before the church now, and going to tell you my experience, what my soul-trouble was, and how I realized mercy, and how I came into this

acquaintance with the perfection that is in Christ, and how Jesus Christ in his person, and work, and characters, and how the eternal Three became glorious in mine eyes, and dear to mine heart; now, suppose I were to do so, why, those of you that are spiritual, you would see a beauty in it, and some of you half-sulky Christians, that hardly know what to make of that Wells, why, if I were to tell them my experience in that way, they would say, Dear me! his experience is like mine, after all. Why, if I am a good man, he is a good man; if I am taught of God, he has been too. Really, after all, it is the same Jesus Christ, it is the same hope, it is the same grace, it is the same Spirit, it is the same; depend upon it, it is. So it is. I have in my time twice had the privilege of telling a little of my experience to two different persons in the country, travelling, and they did not know who it was. Mind, they were very much prejudiced against that James Wells; and after I had told them a little of my experience, they said, "Bless the Lord! the Lord has done great things for you." "Oh, but," said I, "my name is James Wells." "Dear me! Is it indeed? Well, I cannot undo it now it is done, and there it is." So it just shows how it is when we can act a little craftily sometimes, and get hold of people so that they cannot get away. After they have acknowledged you, tell them your name afterwards, and then they are obliged to hold you fast. And so it is, if you belong to this happy number, you will see a beauty in the work of God in the soul. I am sure some of my happiest seasons—and I hope I shall have many more yet—have been in our church meetings, when we have had testimony after testimony of what the Lord hath done. Ah! I say it was a beautiful meeting. And one poor creature knocked about, and kicked about, and cuffed about, and tried tremendously; and, do you know, we were cruel enough to like him all the better. Something like the myrrh, the more they are bruised the more fragrant they become; they have felt their way along, and at last have found out the liberty of the gospel and the preciousness of Jesus Christ. Really it diffuses a savour around such. We see a beauty, feel an affection; as saith the Saviour, "He that receiveth such little ones in my name receiveth me."

Thus, then, friends, I think the first thing here intended is this transition from a state of nature, from a state of worthlessness, into that fellowship with Jesus Christ by which the soul becomes arrayed in his righteousness, by which the soul is brought into sweet harmony with the Eternal Three; and the Lord is glad to see such, and they are glad to see him. He is never weary of looking to them, and they shall never be weary of looking to him; he is never weary of thinking of them, and they shall never be weary of thinking of him. There never was, and never will be,—no, not even between God and angels,—such a mutuality of interest as there is between the Lamb and his bride, between the saved soul and salvation, between the man born of God and God himself. Thus, then the church becomes a beautiful land, a delightsome land, a heavenly land, a fertile land. Flowers appear on the land, and the voice of the turtle is heard in this land; a land of sweetness, a land of security, a land of glory,—

"— a land of pure delight,
Where saints immortal reign."

But, second, "comely as Jerusalem." Now here they are compared to the city to which they belong. We must be ultimately like that in which we die. If I die a sinner—that is, if I am not a Christian—I must, as I have already hinted, ultimately be a guilty, miserable worm, cast into hell. If I die in the first Adam, have no fellowship with Christ, then I must have the first Adam portion—eternal privation; if I die under the law, I must be like the law,—not like the law in its legislative character, but like the law in its penal character. What is the law in its penal character? The law in its penal character is a fiery law; and if I die under it, I must

be like it; my soul must be filled with its fire; my bosom must be agonized by its fires; I must lift up mine eyes in hell, tormented in the flame of God's eternal and infallible law; if I die under that law, I must be filled with almighty wrath; I must be conformed to the wrath of that law; that law is fiery, that law will dwell in me, that law will reign in me, and I for ever and ever must agonize in the lake that burneth with fire and brimstone. But the people of God, viewed as being comely as Jerusalem, present quite another scene. Let me just remind you of a fourfold likeness between the citizens and the city. The new Jerusalem is called a holy city. Here is a man washed in atoning blood, purified by the truth of God, purified by the Spirit of God, sanctified by the Holy Ghost, purified by the indwelling of the Father in his electing grace, sanctified of God the Father. Jerusalem is holy, and the people are holy, bless the Lord for ever! Sin is indeed put away, blotted out, forgiven, forgotten, and they shall be like unto the Jerusalem to which they belong; they shall have to bless the Lord for this. What a scripture that is! Jesus Christ is our sanctification. What a difference between a Pharisee's heaven and a Christian's heaven! I do not mind saying that I read, a little time ago, an extract from a sermon of a man that once bid fair to be a man of truth, but, alas! alas! how is the fine gold become dim, and the most fine gold changed! He gives a sermon upon heaven, and he assures the people it is a holy place, a place of righteousness, a place of light, and a place of praise; but, he says, some do not like holiness, and some do not like righteousness, and some do not like the light, and some do not like praise. Why, such a heaven as that is a Pharisee's heaven. Why so? say you. Why, because, with all this holiness, and light, and righteousness, and praise, there is no Jesus Christ in it. Jesus Christ is my holy heaven; Jesus Christ is my righteous heaven, and Jesus Christ is my heaven of light, Jesus Christ is my heaven of praise. The heaven I am going to is where Christ is all in all, where God is all in all. The Christian's heaven is Christ; the Christian's heaven is that heaven where we receive all the holiness, and light, and righteousness, and glory, by which we are constituted acceptable in the sight of God, by Christ Jesus the Lord. Heaven is that holy, happy place; Christ is that holy, happy place. "I go," saith Jesus,—honour to his dear name! mark the language,—"I go—I go that I might prepare a place for you." I will be your holiness there; I will be your righteousness there; I will be your light there,—

"Himself my heaven, himself my joy."

God himself is to be our portion and our exceeding joy. But then that would not please the Pharisee. No: they look at us, and say, Ah, you are very dangerous. And do you know who puts that into their mouths? Why, the devil, because he knows that to sweep away all their Pharisaiism, and put Christ into the place thereof, is the way to undeceive men, is the way to bring souls to Christ, the way to bring them into that liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free. Comely as Jerusalem in holiness, because Christ is the sanctification. Second, Jerusalem descended from God, we are told, and so the religion of the true believer is not home-made, is not of home manufacture, not of his own doing; it descends from heaven. We are his workmanship, and a comely piece of work it is to take that ugly piece of clay. Why, say some, do you mean me? Yes, if you like,—such an ugly piece of clay as you are, and turn you into one of the finest and most splendid vessels of mercy that ever was. Why, it makes you very comely and beautiful. And so the Lord thus shows the exceeding riches of his mercy in constituting us vessels of mercy. Our life is from on high, our light from on high, our salvation from on high. Yea, all these things are of God, who hath reconciled us to himself by Jesus Christ. If your religion consists in reformation, and

only reformation; if your religion consists in rigid morality, and only morality; if your religion consists in regularity of formality, and only formality; if your religion consists in something done by yourself, it will leave you where it found you—under sin, under the law, under Satan, and under the curse of heaven. No, my hearer; if any man be not born of God he cannot enter the kingdom of God. And so, comely as Jerusalem; first, because they stand holy by Christ Jesus, and, secondly, because a religion savours of God that came from God, savours of him; came from Christ, savours of him; came from the Holy Spirit, savours of him; came from Christ's perfection, savours of it. Third, the light of Jerusalem. "The glory of God did lighten it, and the Lamb is the light thereof." Here, then, is a soul holy, has its religion from God, and brought into the same light as that in which God dwells,—the light of the sacrificial perfection of Christ,—“the glory of God did lighten it.” Then comes the explanation,—“And the Lamb is the light thereof.” But one more word here as to this comeliness, and that is the word *immortality*. That is another characteristic of the heavenly Jerusalem. It is immortal, it is eternal, it is indestructible. And time and space would not admit, or else I could run through several verses here in connection with our text, and show that the one word, *immortality*, would explain a great many things. Hence, then, this city is eternal, immortal. So are the people. Its foundations are everlasting foundations, its walls are everlasting salvation, its sun will never go down, its river will never cease to flow, its tree of life will never cease to bear fruit, the Lord will never cease to reign; “they shall see his face, and reign for ever and ever.”

Here, then, are sinners brought out of their loathsome state, and conformed to Christ Jesus; here are sinners brought out of their state by nature into the citizenship of heaven, and we may say of such, “Ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellow-citizens with the saints, and of the household of God.” And before I go to the last part, I may just again remind you of the emphatic way in which our text commences,—“Thou art beautiful, O my love.” Is not this the language of the Christian concerning Christ? I have been for many years now in such a state of experience, that preach what you may to me, if it is not Jesus Christ, I see no beauty in it. If you preach the Holy Spirit's work to me, apart from Christ, I see no beauty in it; if you preach the love and mercy of God, or the counsel of God, to me, apart from Christ, I see no beauty in it. I feel I cannot listen to anything else; I think I get worse and worse in that respect; I get more and more into the spirit of the sheep—“a stranger will they not follow; for they know not the voice of strangers:” they do know, but they won't know them; there is no one so ignorant as he that won't know. But they know the voice of the Shepherd. Yes, blessed Lord, that we do; for thou speakest as never man spake. Ah, when thou speakest, it is always a word in season, a word in power, a word of kindness, a word of mercy, a word of emancipation, a word of supply, a word of assurance. It is his voice, the glorious voice of the gospel, and we say of Jesus, How beautiful he is! the perfection of beauty; and, as the poet sings,—

“When our eyes behold his face,
Our hearts shall love him more.”

Here, then, is God delighted in the salvation of sinners, and they themselves delighted with the same.

But, lastly, “terrible as an army with banners.” Now, this must be taken two ways. And I shall find some difficulty, perhaps, in explaining the first respect in which the church is compared to an army with banners. I might as well confess, that both this, and the subject I had in the morning, are subjects that I could think about and meditate upon better than I can describe; but I will do as well as I can. Now, I think the idea here

intended is this,—that the Saviour is irresistibly enraptured with the church; that he could no more resist her when presented to him by the Father, that he could no more resist living for her, dying for her, going after her, abiding by her, putting her sins away, and bringing her up into all that God designed—that he could no more resist doing this than he could resist his very existence; he is enraptured—carried away with her. Why, say you, this is very strong language; I cannot believe it. Not believe it? Well, then, if you think I am going too far, let me bring the Lord's own word,—“Thou hast ravished my heart, my sister, my spouse, thou hast ravished my heart with one of thine eyes, with one chain of thy neck.” The dear Saviour's soul was wrapped up in the bride, his soul was wrapped in the church. He saw the will of God concerning her; he said, “I delight, O God, to do thy will.” And doth he not again and again, in this wonderful book, delight in the declaration, “Thou art all fair, my love; there is no spot in thee.” See how glorious the descriptions in detail, which I will give another day—for I should like to see some of these things, and the explanation, in print,—see how glowing his descriptions in detail of her are in this book. Thou art like an army with banners. I see thee in my Father's plan, I see thee in my Father's counsel. And I gather, while the words may be taken up by the believer, that primarily they belong to the Saviour, in this same book, when he says, “Or ever I was aware, my soul made me like the chariots of Amminadib.” Take the marginal reading there: “Ere I was aware, my soul set me upon the chariots of my willing people.” He comes to her in all the testimonies of everlasting love; he is charmed with her, delighted with her, satisfied with her, glorified with her, means to live with her; he has got the best house for her that the universe could produce, and the best robe, and the best food, and the best company, and the best usage, and the best employment, and the best prospect, and the best place, and the best name, and everything blessed, everything superior. That is his wife—the Lamb's bride. Jesus himself saith of her, “Many daughters have done virtuously, but thou excellest them all.” She bears the tremendous inscription, “This is the name wherewith *she* shall be called, Jehovah our righteousness.” Here, then, Jesus, enraptured with her, the Holy Spirit enraptured with her, God the Father enraptured with her, he in the midst of her is mighty to save, rests in his love, rejoices over the church with singing, and will, and that for ever. “I will rejoice in Jerusalem, and joy in my people.” Talk to me about religion being a poor, cold, if-you-will-it sort of thing; about religion being a kind of humble opinion sort of thing; about religion being a kind of mere right and wrong sort of thing; about religion being a kind of mechanical formality—there it begins and there it ends, and nobody laughs and nobody cries,—talk to me about religion being this! No, my hearers, religion is that that embodies the immutable love of the great God; religion is that that employs all the perfections of Deity; religion is that that brings out the deepest thoughts of the great God; religion is that that develops God's most wonderful counsels; religion is that that unites finitude and infinity; time and eternity are joined in our Immanuel's name. This I believe to be one of the meanings here—“terrible as an army with banners. It is a love phrase, it is an expression of Christ's love to the church, a kind of phrase after the manner of men; as though he should say, I was so taken with that people, that church, I would lay down a thousand lives for her, if one would not do. But, bless the Lord! one did do, and one does do, and one will do, and one must do. Honour to his mighty power, and to his dear name! “by his one offering”—there is a Saviour for you! there is a God! there is an Immanuel! there is a Mediator! that while untold millions of sacrifices on Jewish altars slain could not renew sin, the one offering, Jesus Christ, put it away—gone, and gone for ever. The Lord help us to understand how the Lord loves us; how he delights in us, and how he will take pleasure in us, and how his

ear will attend the softest call, and how he will never repent of his choice. "Behold," then, "the manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God."

One more respect in which the church is terrible as an army with banners, in an opposite sense, namely, to her foes. Ah, says sin, I am afraid of that church; her name is Jehovah, and what can I do with such a name as that? Ah, says Satan, I am afraid of that church, for God dwells in her midst, and she in God; what can I do? Ah, says death, I am afraid of that church, for her Husband swallowed me up in victory, threw me under his feet. I am afraid of her; she is terrible; the very naming of his bride reminds me of the mighty victory he has wrought. And therefore it is that hell shakes at his name, and all the heavens adore. And so by-and-bye the world shall tremble at the church. Ungodly men have trembled, before this, before humble representatives of the church. There stands Joseph; Pharaoh stands aghast at Joseph's interpretation of his dream. There is Nebuchadnezzar; he stands aghast at Daniel; Daniel stands there as the representative of the people of God, terrible to Nebuchadnezzar, in one sense, as an army with banners. Nebuchadnezzar goes and sees the three worthies. Ah, he says, what terrible men these are! Why, they have actually quenched the violence of fire! what terrible men these are! what wonderful men they are! Why, here is that David, he slew a Goliath with a stone and a sling. As for that Moses, why, he divided the sea, brought water out of the rock, manna from heaven. As for that Joshua, he divided the Jordan, and threw the walls of Jericho down without touching a brick with his finger, or a stone either. What terrible people these are! Why, go wherever they may, they seem to be triumphant; none can stand before them. Ananias and Sapphira, liars—a lesson for all liars. Why have ye agreed to lie unto the Holy Ghost, lie unto God? How terrible was this servant of God to them! They dropped dead in his presence; carried out and buried.

So, I say, in many instances the very presence of a servant of God has been terrible to the foe. But what shall I say? If I spoke till twelve o'clock to-night I should not be able to open up all the advantages that the Christian has in this twofold respect, these opposite respects, in which the church is terrible as an army with banners. First, embodying the idea of the Saviour's being enraptured with her; and then, secondly, she becomes terrible to her enemies, indicating the many victories which the Lord has given to his people, all centreing in the one great victory that was wrought at Calvary's cross. You stick to the truth, stand fast. Depend upon it, the Lord will fulfil his word. "There shall not any man be able to stand before thee all the days of thy life. As I was with Moses, so I will be with thee: I will not fail thee nor forsake thee. Be strong, and of a good courage,"—turn not aside to the right hand nor to the left, but abide by the truth as it is in Jesus, and thou wilt march boldly on; thou wilt march on from victory to victory, laugh at the attempts of mistaken friends, and of thy bitterest foes, and wilt stand at last, terrible as an army with banners, to all thine enemies, for "all thine enemies shall be found liars unto thee." Amen and amen.