

ART. VI.—KING SOLOMON AND THE SONG OF SONGS.

THAT King Solomon disguised himself was the opinion of a learned and judicious writer, who has admirably summarized the great king's reign: "The graphic picture of the life of the robbers and prostitutes of an Eastern city" (in Solomon's introduction to his proverbs) "could hardly have been drawn but by one who, like Haroun Alraschid and other Oriental kings, at times laid aside the trappings of royalty, and plunged into the other extreme of social life." In Ecclesiastes¹ the king himself confesses that whilst "acquainting himself with wisdom he laid hold on folly," and sat with wine-bibbers. There was purpose in thus mixing with evil-doers. He was seeking an intimate and extensive knowledge of mankind for an important ultimate end. Disguise would be necessary in this peculiar pursuit of wisdom to avoid exposing himself to danger, dishonour, or serious inconvenience; but it was also needful for political security. His kingdom, though at peace, was liable to disturbance from various quarters. Absalom's sudden revolution was recent; his rebellion was followed by another. The smothered jealousy between Judah and Ephraim broke out immediately after Solomon's death; then, also, the rapid elevation of the people to wealth and power might tempt ambition and treachery. Finally, many surrounding nations who had been conquered were naturally impatient to throw off the yoke at the earliest favourable moment. Encompassed with so many great perils, it behoved Solomon not to rely too confidently on the information of careless and deceived, or possibly self-interested and designing, counsellors. It was wise to be on the watch, become a private individual for a time, see affairs with his own eyes, and thus take effectual measures to guard both himself and the kingdom. Disguise was no novelty in Israel. It had been the expedient of Joseph in Egypt, Saul in the witch's cave, David before the Philistine Achish, of the wise woman pleading for Absalom. It was employed by Jeroboam's queen, by the prophet sent to Ahab, by Ahab himself in battle, and by King Josiah fighting with Pharaoh Necho. The sagacious Solomon, we may be sure, would not be slow to avail himself of its advantages. One point more. The first royal offshoot of David was in some respects a type of David's far greater Son. Now, certainly Christ the King of kings did veil Himself for the highest, most important purposes. He laid aside His glory, and was found on earth as a

¹ ii. 3.

man. He was in the world, and the world was made by Him, and the world knew Him not. Should we deem incredible a discovery that the type has foreshadowed this singular and distinguishing characteristic of the great Antitype?

The possibility—say rather the probability—of Solomon's disguise, then, may be admitted. But it is more than a bare possibility; there is evidence almost amounting to demonstration. It is a fact established by coherence with other facts, and one which has striking consequences.

About the middle of his reign the king had affairs which frequently required him to be in Lebanon, and a particularly important business specially needed concealment. Whilst passing to and fro under a feigned name, he found, sincerely loved, and finally married, a fair Lebanon maiden. At intervals he was obliged to leave her, though only for a few weeks. But in the mountain-home to which she was conducted as bride she was without her husband several months. When at last he would fain have brought her to Jerusalem, and, though he did not assert the existence of another wife or wives, threw out hints which seemed to imply it, her distress and alarm were poignant. The idea was insupportable. She could not bear it. It would be misery, and destroy all her happiness. "Love," she told him, "is strong as death; jealousy," she added, "is cruel as the grave."

The situation was most singular and strange: A wife wholly unconscious that her husband was the king; a royal husband who loved this pure, affectionate, unselfish woman beyond all others, but dreaded the effect of an inevitable discovery. It might be fatal, and bring her to a hopeless, melancholy grave. He strove by a skilfully-devised plan to avert such calamity. His celebrated Song of Songs was part of the plan, and sufficiently implies the other part, though untold and unrecorded. But though Jews and Christians mainly agree as to the spiritual meaning of the song, and unanimously interpret the bridegroom and bride as representative of Messiah and the Church, a deep perplexing obscurity has concealed the beauty of the natural sense.

The removal of this obscurity is full of interest. We can trace the natural meaning of the song, and the outlines of Solomon's plan in relation to it: a catastrophe which disturbed the execution of his plan; a pathetic story of real life and real love in the olden time; and the clearing up of dark spots in history. We can see also that discovery of the true natural sense will not injure, but illumine, the spiritual interpretation. And consider another acute remark of the same excellent writer who suggested that Solomon disguised himself. He pointed out that the number of talents—666—which

marked a special crisis in the history both of the king and his kingdom, was the same as the famous New Testament number. "Here is wisdom. Let him that hath understanding count the number of the beast; for it is the number of a man. And his number is six hundred three score and six." We quote Professor Plumptre's own words, but their full scope, and the important truths implied—truths relating apparently to our own critical era—cannot be adequately understood unless Solomon's secret be first explained. The history is the key to interpret prophecy. "666.—There is something startling in thus finding, in a simple historical statement, a number which has since become invested with such a mysterious and terrible significance (Rev. xiii. 18). The coincidence can hardly, it is believed, be looked on as casual." "The Seer of the Apocalypse," it has been well said, "lives entirely in Holy Scripture. On this territory, therefore, is the solution of the sacred riddle to be sought" (Hengstenberg, *Comm. in Rev. in loc.*). If, therefore, we find the number occurring in the Old Testament with any special significance, we may well think that that furnishes the starting-point of the enigma.

And there is such a significance here: 1. As the glory and the wisdom of Solomon were the representatives of all earthly wisdom and glory, so the wealth of Solomon would be the representative of all earthly wealth. 2. The purpose of the visions of St. John is to oppose the heavenly to the earthly Jerusalem; the true "offspring of David," "the lion of the tribe of Judah," to all counterfeits; the true riches to the false. 3. The worship of the beast is the worship of the world's mammon. It may seem to reproduce the glory and the wealth of the old Jerusalem in its golden days, but it is of evil, not of God; a Babylon, not a Jerusalem. 4. This reference does not, of course, exclude the mystical meaning of the number six, so well brought out by Hengstenberg (*l.c.*) and Mr. Maurice (on the Apocalypse).

The foregoing judicious observations set us in the right direction. History must be duly comprehended by those who would understand prophecy. By aid of the former a key is found to the secret of King Solomon and his bride. The same key is wanted to unlock St. John's mystery concerning a deadly enemy of Christ and the Heavenly Bride.

If these few remarks stimulate wholesome curiosity, they may induce thoughtful persons to study the subject independently for themselves. The larger work about to be published leaves ample room for more extended inquiries.

We live in shaking days of social and religious crises. Nature, or, rather, natural science, is arrayed against revela-

tion; as if the two did not proceed from the One, or as though the One were not, in all His ways, Oneness and Harmony.

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New yet Old Christianity."

Short Notices.

The Natural History of Immortality. By JOSEPH WILLIAM REYNOLDS, Prebendary of St. Paul's. Longmans, Green and Co. 1891.

THE author of "The Supernatural in Nature," "The Mystery of Miracles," "The Mystery of the Universe," and "The World to Come," is sure to have something important and suggestive to say on the latest subject that he has chosen. He has a fertile faculty of apprehending scientific truths and thoughts, and showing their inner spiritual meanings and analogies. The fact of breaks in nature prepares us for the break of death between life and immortality; the idea of indestructibility in force and matter suggests the permanence also of the higher force of spirit. Without such intelligent spiritual force there could be no physical development in creation. And the highest visible intelligent being, man, is always looking forward to some higher stage in the universal law of progress and development; an ideal age, an ideal man. Whatever may become of physical units, man, the intelligent unit, sharing the permanence of the divine, ought to pass on to some higher growth of life. In the third chapter the writer returns to show that mechanical force must fully interpret the power of the universe; mere mechanical displacements of a primal homogeneous mass would not change the quantity and quality; the eternal power is more than nature; and that higher rule we are compelled to acknowledge when we become acquainted with the phenomena of mental and moral power. Then, again, all nature suggests the possibility of perfection; and man cannot become perfect without the regulative ideas of God, the soul, and immortality; without these ideas he tends to degenerate. Of this principle of human life the whole life of Christ is the historical type and embodiment. In an interesting chapter the author insists, in opposition to an acquiescent agnosticism, on the intellectual duty of going beyond the merely visible. In coming to closer quarters with the subject, he appeals to the truthfulness of our faculties, and argues that both the present and the future give proof of a coming time. After mentioning some of the infinite marvels of the microscope, and reminding us that the trunk of a fly is of more ingenuity than that of an elephant, he proceeds: "Faith and knowledge thus awakened, our consciousness of life and power goes beyond phenomena, from the finite to the infinite, from the temporal to the eternal. Partaking of the infinite and the eternal, one joy crowning another, we