

Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

LEANING ON OUR BELOVED.

A Sermon

DELIVERED ON SUNDAY MORNING, JUNE 20TH, 1869, BY

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AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

“Who is this that cometh up from the wilderness, leaning upon her beloved?”—
Solomon's Song viii. 5.

CAREFUL readers will have noticed that in the verses which precede my text, the spouse had been particularly anxious that her communion with her Lord might not be disturbed. Her language is intensely earnest, “I charge you, O daughters of Jerusalem, that ye stir not up, nor awake my love, until he please.” She valued much the fellowship with which her beloved solaced her; she was jealously alarmed lest she should endanger the continuance of it; lest any sin on her part or on the part of her companions should cause the Beloved to withdraw himself in anger. Now it is a very striking fact that immediately after we read a verse so full of solicitous care concerning the maintenance of communion, we immediately fall upon another verse in which the upward progress of that selfsame spouse is the theme of admiration; she who would not have her beloved disturbed is the selfsame bride who cometh up from the wilderness, leaning herself upon him; from which it is clear that there is a most intimate connection between communion with Christ and progress in grace, and therefore the more careful we are to maintain fellowship with our Lord, the more successful shall we be in going from strength to strength in all those holy graces which are landmarks on the road to glory. The well-head and fountain of growth in grace is well-sustained communion and manifest oneness with Christ; we may strive after moral virtue if we will, but we shall be like those foolish children who pluck flowers and thrust them into their little gardens without roots; but if we strive after increasing faith in Jesus, we shall be as wise men, who plant choice bulbs and living seeds, from which shall in due time arise the golden cups or the azure bells of lovely flowers, emblems of things that are lovely and of good repute. To live near to Christ is the one thing needful; to keep up that nearness, and never to suffer our fellowship to be interrupted, should be our one great business here below; and all other things, this being sought after in the first place, will be added to us. We shall come up from the wilderness, when we are anxious that our beloved's fellowship with us shall not be disturbed.

Nos. 877.

That preface strikes the key-note of this morning's discourse. Our real theme, whatever may be the form our meditation shall take, will be communion with Christ as the source of spiritual progress.

I. We shall, without further prefatory remarks, come at once to the consideration of the text, and we shall notice THE HEAVENLY PILGRIM AND HER DEAR COMPANION. "Who is this that cometh up from the wilderness, leaning upon her beloved"?

Every soul that journeys towards heaven has Christ for its associate. Jesus suffers no pilgrim to the New Jerusalem to travel unattended. He is with us in sympathy. He has trodden every step of the way before us; whatever our temptations, he has been so tempted; whatever our afflictions, he has been so afflicted. He is touched with the feeling of our infirmities, having been tempted in all points like as we are. Nor is Jesus near us in sympathy alone, he is with us to render practical assistance. When we least perceive him, he is often closest to us. When the howling tempest drowns his voice, and the darkness of the night hides his person, still he is there, and we need not be afraid. It is no fiction, no dream, no piece of imagination that Christ is really with his people. "Lo, I am with you *always*, even to the end of the world," is true of all his saints; and, "Fear thou not; for I am with thee: be not dismayed; for I am thy God," is no meaningless assertion, but to be understood as a certain verity and a practical truth. In every step of this pilgrimage, from the wicket-gate of repentance up to the pearly gate which admits the perfect into paradise, Jesus Christ in sympathy of heart, and in actual presence of help, is very near to his people. Be this the pilgrim's encouragement this morning. Dear friends, who among us would not undertake a journey in such company? If he were here to-day, and said, "My child, I call you to go on pilgrimage," perhaps you would start back with dark forebodings of the way; but if he added, "But I will be with thee whithersoever thou goest," we should each one reply, "Through floods, or flames, if thou dost lead, we will follow thee where thou goest. Lead the van, O Crucified, and we will follow thee. Let us but see thy footprints in the road, and whether the path winds up the hill of difficulty, or descends into the valley of humiliation, it shall be the best road that ever mortal footsteps trod if it be but marked with the tokens of thy most blessed presence." Courage, then, ye wayfarers who traverse the vale of tears; you come up from the wilderness in dear company, for one like unto the Son of God is at your side.

Note the title that is given to the companion of the spouse. "*Her beloved.*" Indeed, he of whom the song here speaks is beloved above all others. He was the Beloved of his Father or ever the earth was; he was declared to be the Lord's Beloved, in the waters of Jordan, and at other times, when out of the excellent glory there came the voice, "This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased." Beloved of his Father now, our Jesus sits for ever glorious at God's right hand. Jesus is the Beloved of every angel, and of all the bright seraphic spirits that crowd around the throne of his august majesty, casting their crowns before his feet, and lifting up their ceaseless hymns. They are not merely servants who obey because they must, but reverent admirers who serve because they love. He is the Beloved of every

being of pure heart and holy mind. The hosts triumphant, who have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb, sing that word "Beloved" with an emphasis which our colder hearts as yet have failed to reach, but still is he Beloved of the militant band this side the Jordan. Yes, Lord, with all that we have to confess of hardness and indifference, we do love thee, and thou knowest it.

"Would not our heart pour forth its blood,
In honour of thy name,
And challenge the cold hand of death
To quench the immortal flame?"

The adamant is softer than our hearts by nature, and yet the love we bear thee, O divine Redeemer, stimulated by the love which thou hast manifested to us, has made our soul to melt in thy presence

"Yes, we love thee, and adore;
O for grace to love thee more."

Note well that the sweetest word of the name is, "leaning on *her* beloved." That Jesus is beloved is most true, but is he my beloved? Ah, if this be true, there is a heaven wrapped up in it. Say thou who art listening to the word this morning, is Jesus *thy* beloved? Dost thou love him? Canst thou put forth the finger of thy timid faith and touch the hem of his garment, and receive the virtue which goeth out of him? Dost thou dare to say, "He is all my salvation and all my desire. Other refuge have I none, my soul hangs in her utter helplessness entirely upon him"? Then is he thy beloved; and the more thou canst foster the well-grounded belief that Jesus is thine, the more thou canst roll that truth under thy tongue as a sweet morsel, the happier and holier wilt thou be. Realise the fact that Jesus is as actually and truly thine as thy husband, thy wife, thy child, thy mother, or thine own self, then will peace and love reign within thy spirit. The spouse could not have leaned on Jesus as *the* Beloved, she could only find rest in him as *her* beloved. Till you get a sense of his being yours you do not dare to lean, but when you come to know that Christ is yours by an act of appropriating faith, then comes the after-result of faith in the consecrated repose which the soul feels in the power and love of him on whom she relies.

Thus, O pilgrim to the skies, thou art reminded that thou hast with thee a companion whose name to thee is "my beloved." Pause thou awhile and look about thee! Dost thou not see him? Canst thou not perceive the marks of his presence? Then rejoice that thou art found in such company, and take care to enjoy the honours and privileges which such society secures thee.

II. We now pass on to something deeper. We have said that the pilgrim has a dear companion, but that much of the blessedness of the text lies in *HER POSTURE TOWARDS HIM*.

"Who is this that cometh up from the wilderness *leaning upon her* beloved?" Her posture then is that of "leaning." His relation to her is that of a divine supporter. What does this leaning mean?

Why, first of all, there can be no leaning on another unless we believe in that other's presence and nearness. A man does not lean on a staff which is not in his hand, nor on a friend of whose presence he is not aware. The instincts which lead us to preserve our uprightness

would not permit us to lean on a shadow or on a nothing. It behoves thee then, Christian, if thou wouldst be like this wondrous woman in the text, to seek to be conscious of the presence of Christ. It is true thy senses cannot perceive him, but thy senses are less to be relied upon than thy faith, for senses may be mistaken, but the faith of God's elect errs not. God makes that which faith depends upon to be more real than anything which the senses can perceive. Christ Jesus is with thee; though thou hearest not his voice, and seest not his face, he is with thee. Try to grasp that truth, and to realise it clearly, for thou wilt never lean until thou dost.

Leaning also implies nearness. We cannot lean on that which is far off and unapproachable. Now, it is a delightful help to us in believing repose if we can understand that Christ is not only with us, but to an intense degree near us. I love that hymn we sang just now* concerning our Lord's coming nigh to us, and making his name a common word among us. The Christ of a great many professors is only fit to occupy a niche on the church wall, as a dead, inactive, but revered person. Jesus is not a real Christ to many, he is not a Christ who can really befriend them in the hour of grief; not a brother born for adversity, not a condescending companion. But the Christ of the well-taught Christian, is one that liveth and was dead and is alive for ever more, a sympathising, practical friend, who is actually near, entering into our sorrows, sharing in our crosses, and taking a part with us in all the battle of life. Come, child of God, see that it be thus with thee. Realise Christ first, and then believe that he is nearer to thee than friend or kinsman can be, for he pours his counsels right into thy heart; being so near that at times when thy secret trouble cannot be shared by any mortal, it is shared by him; so near that when thy heart's inmost recesses must necessarily be locked up to all other sympathy, those recesses are all open to his tenderness; so near to thee that thou livest in him, and he abides in thee, and thou abidest in him. A sacred unity exists between thee and him, so that thou dost drink of his cup, and art baptised with his baptism, and in all thy sorrows and thine afflictions he himself doth take his share.

These two things being attended unto, leaning now becomes easy. To lean implies the throwing of one's weight from one's self on to another, and this is the Christian's life. The first act that made him a Christian at all, was when the whole weight of his sin was laid on Christ. When by faith the sinner ceased to carry his own burden, but laid that burden on the great Substitute's shoulder, it was that leaning which made him a Christian. In proportion as he learns this lesson of casting all his burden upon his Lord, he will be more and more a Christian; and when he shall have completely unloaded himself, and cast all his matters upon his God, and shall live in the power and strength of God, and not in his own, then shall he have attained to the fulness of the stature of a perfect man in Christ Jesus. To lean, I say, is to throw your weight off from yourself on to another—being fatigued, to make another fatigued if he can be; being wearied, to make another take your

* No. 784, in *Our Own Hymn-Book*, published by Passmore and Alabaster, Paternoster Row.

weariness, and so yourself to proceed with your load transferred to a substitute. Yes, I repeat it, this is the true Christian life—to leave everything that troubles me with him who loves me better than I love myself; to leave all that depresses me with him whose wisdom and whose power are more than a match for all emergencies. Herein is wisdom, never to try to stand alone by my own strength, never to trust to creatures, for they will fail me if I rest upon them, but to make my ever blessed Lord Christ, in his manhood and in his Godhead, the leaning place of my whole soul, casting every burden upon him who is able to bear it. This is what I think is meant in the text by leaning.

One would imagine that there must have been of late years a society for the improvement of texts of Scripture; and if so I cannot congratulate that honourable company upon its success. This text has been a favourite object of the society's care, for I think I never heard it quoted correctly in my life. It is generally quoted, "Who is this that cometh up from the wilderness, leaning upon *the arm of* her beloved?" But it is not so in the text at all. Here is no distinct reference to an arm at all. There is an arm here undoubtedly, but there is a great deal more—there is a whole person; and the text speaks of leaning upon the whole person of "*her beloved.*" Observe, then, that the Christian leans upon Christ in his personality and completeness; not merely upon the arm of his strength, as that altered text would have it, but upon the whole Christ. The leaning place of a Christian is, first of all, Christ's person. We depend upon the Lord Jesus as God and as man. As God, he must be able to perform every promise, and to achieve every covenant engagement. We lean upon that divinity which bears up the pillars of the universe. Our dependence is upon the Almighty God, incarnate in human form, by whom all things were created, and by whom all things consist. We lean also upon Christ as man; we depend upon his generous human sympathies. Of a woman born, he is partaker of our flesh; he enters into our sicknesses and infirmities with a pitiful compassion, which he could not have felt if he had not been the Son of man. We depend upon the love of his humanity as well as upon the potency of his deity. We lean upon our beloved as God and man. Ah! I have known times when I have felt that none but a God could bear me up; there are other seasons when, under a sense of sin, I have started back from God, and felt that none but the Man Christ Jesus could minister peace to my anguished heart. Taking Christ in the double nature as God and man, he becomes thus a suitable leaning place for our spirit, whatever may happen to be the state in which our mind is found. Beloved, we lean upon Christ himself in all his offices. We lean upon him as priest; we expect our offerings, and our praises, and our prayers to be received, because they are presented through him. Our leaning for acceptance is on him. We lean upon him as our prophet. We do not profess to know or to be able to discover truth of ourselves, but we sit at his feet, and what he teaches that we receive as certainty. We lean upon him as our King. He shall fight our battles for us, and manage all the affairs of our heavenly citizenship. We have no hope of victory but in the strength of him who is the Son of David and the King of kings. We lean upon Christ in all his attributes. Sometimes it is his wisdom—in our dilemmas he directs us; at other times

it is his faithfulness—in our strong temptations he abides the same. At one time his power gleams out like a golden pillar, and we rest on it, and at another moment his tenderness becomes conspicuous, and we lean on that. There is not a trait of his character, there is not a mark of his person, whether human or divine, but what we feel it safe to lean upon, because he is as a whole Christ, perfection's own self, lovely and excellent beyond all description. We lean our entire weight upon HIM, not on his arm; not on any part of his person, but upon himself do we depend.

Beloved, there is no part of the pilgrimage of a saint in which he can afford to walk in any other way but in the way of leaning. He cometh up at the first, and he cometh up at the last, still leaning, still leaning upon Christ Jesus; ay, and leaning more and more heavily upon Christ the older he grows. The stronger the believer becomes, the more conscious he is of his personal weakness; and, therefore, the more fully does he cast himself upon his Lord and lean with greater force on him. Beloved, it is a blessed thing to keep to this posture in all we do. Oh, it is good preaching when you lean on the Beloved as you preach and feel, "he will help me, he will give me thoughts and words, he will bless the message, he will fill the hungry with good things, and make the Sabbath to be a delight to his people." Oh, it is blessed praying when you can lean on the Beloved; you feel then that you cannot be denied; you have come into the King's court, and brought your advocate with you, and you lay your prayer at the foot of the throne, the Prince himself putting his own sign manual and seal and stamp of love upon your desires. This is the sweet way to endure and suffer with content. Who would not suffer when Jesus makes the bed of our sickness, and stays us up and gives us tokens of his love? This is the divine method of working. Believe me, no sacred work can long be continued with energy except in this spirit, for flesh flags, and even the spirit languishes except there be the constant leaning upon the Beloved. As for you, men of business, you with your families and with your shops, and with your fields, and your enterprises, you will find it poor living unless you evermore lean on your beloved in all things. If you can bring your daily cares, your domestic troubles, your family sicknesses, your personal infirmities, your losses and your crosses, if you can bring all things to Jesus, it will be easy and happy living. Even the furnace itself, when the coals glow most, is cool and comfortable as a royal chamber spread for banqueting with the king, when the soul reclines on the bosom of divine love. O ye saints, strive after more of this. We are such lovers of caring for ourselves, we so want to set up on our own account; we pine to run alone while our legs are too weak; we aspire to stand alone when the only result can be a fall. Oh, to give up this wilfulness which is our weakness, and like a babe to lie in the mother's bosom, conscious that our strength is not in ourselves, but in that dear bosom which upbears us!

I would fain encourage the heir of heaven, who is in trouble, to lean. I can encourage you from experience. The Lord has laid on me many burdens in connection with much serving in his church, and I sometimes grow very weary; but whenever I bring myself, or rather the Holy Spirit brings me to this pass, that I am clear that I cannot do anything

of myself, and do not mean to try, but will just be God's obedient servant and ready instrument, and will leave every care with him, then it is that peace returns, thought becomes free and vigorous, and the soul once more having cast aside its burden, runs without weariness and walks without fainting. I am sure, my dear fellow servants, life will break you down, this London life especially, unless you learn the habit of leaning on Jesus. Be not afraid to lean too much. There was never yet a saint blamed for possessing too much faith; there was never such a thing known as a child of God who was scolded by the Divine Father for having placed too implicit reliance upon his promise. The Lord has said, "As thy day thy strength shall be." He has promised, "I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee." He has told you that the birds of the air neither sow nor reap, nor gather into barns, and yet are fed. He has assured you that the lilies of the field toil not, neither do they spin, and yet your heavenly Father makes them more beautiful than Solomon in all his glory. Why do you not cast your care on him who cares for ravens and for flowers of the field? Why are you not assured that he will also care for you?

Thus much upon the leaning. "Who is this that cometh up from the wilderness leaning upon her beloved?"

III. Our third point shall be, HER REASONS FOR THUS LEANING.

She was a pilgrim, and she leaned on her beloved; was she justified in such leaning? For every confidence is not wise. There be refuges of lies and helpers of no value. Ahithophels are a numerous race. He that eateth bread with us doth lift up his heel against us. Friends who seemed to be strong and faithful, turn out to be as broken reeds, or as sharp spears to pierce us to our hurt. Did she well, then, in leaning on her beloved? What were her reasons? She did well, and her reasons were some of them as follows. She leaned on her beloved because *she was weak*. Strength will not lean, conscious strength scorns dependence. My soul, dost thou know anything of thy weakness? It is a sorrowful lesson to learn; but oh! it is a blessed and profitable lesson, which not only must be learned, but which it were well for thee to pray to learn more and more, for there is no leaning upon Christ except in proportion as you feel you must. I do believe that as long as we have a grain of self-sufficiency, we never trust in the All-sufficient. While there is anything of self left we prefer to feed on it, and only when at last the mouldy bread becomes too sour for eating, and even the husks that the swine do eat are such as cannot fill our belly, it is only then that we humbly ask for the bread of heaven to satisfy us. My soul, learn to hate every thought of self-sufficiency. Brethren, do you not find yourselves tempted at times, especially if you have had a happy week, and have been free from trials, to think, "Now, really I am better than a great many. I think I am now growing to be an old experienced saint. I have now escaped the power of ordinary temptations, and have become so advanced in grace that there is no likelihood of my sinning in those directions wherein new converts show their weakness"? There is your weak point, brother. Set a double guard where you think you are strongest. Just when you are most afraid, and say to yourself, "O that I might be kept from such a sin—I know that

is my besetment, and I am afraid I shall be led into it," you are less likely to sin there than anywhere. Your weakness is your strength, your strength is your weakness. Be nothing, for only so can you be anything. Be poor in spirit, for only so can you be rich towards God. The spouse leaned because she was weak. Brother, sister, is not this good argument for thee? for me? are not we also weak? Come then, let us lean wholly upon him who is not weak, but to whom all power belongeth to bear all his people safely through.

She leaned, again, on her beloved, because *the way was long*. She had been going through the wilderness. It was a long journey, and she began to flag, and therefore she leaned; and the way is long with us, we have been converted to God now some of us these twenty years, others these forty, and there are some in this house who have known the Lord more than sixty years, and this is a long time in which to be tempted and tried, for sin is mighty and flesh is weak. If one good spurt would win the race, the most of us would strain every nerve; but to tug on at the weary oar year after year when the novelty has gone, and when there comes besides another sort of novelty, fresh temptations, new allurements which we knew not of before; O soul, to win the crown by pressing on, and on, and on, till we hear the Master's plaudit, this is no mean labour. If we can lean, we shall hold on, not else. Faith, casting herself upon the power of her Lord, never grows exhausted. She is like the eagle when it renews its youth. She drinks from the fountain head of all vitality, and her lost vigour comes back to her; such a soul would be strong evermore though she had to live the life of a Methuselah; myriads of years would not exhaust her, for she has learned to cast that which exhausts upon him who is inexhaustible, and therefore keeps on the even tenor of her way. She leaned because the road was long. Aged friends, here is good argument for you; and young men and maidens, who have lately set out on pilgrimage, since the way may be long to you, here also is good reason for your leaning at the beginning, and leaning on to the end.

She leaned again, because *the road was perilous*. Did you notice, she came up from the *wilderness*! The wilderness is not at all a safe place for a pilgrim. Here it is that the lion prowls, and the howl of the wolf is heard, but she leaned on her beloved, and she was safe. If the sheep fears the wolf, he had better keep close to the shepherd, for then the shepherd's rod and staff will drive the wolf away. There is no safety for us except in close communion with Christ. Every step you get away from Jesus your danger doubles; and when you have lost the sense of his sacred presence, your peril is at the maximum. Come back, come back, thou wanderer, and get close to thy Great Helper, and then thou mayst laugh to scorn the fiends of hell, the temptations of life, and even the pangs of death—for he is blessedly safe who

leans all on Christ. The careful are not safe, the fretful are not safe, the anxious are not safe; they are tossed to and fro in a frail bark, upon a sea whose waves are too strong for them; but those who leave their cares to the great caring One, those who cast their anxieties upon him who never forgets, these are always safe. "Trust in the Lord, and do good; so shalt thou dwell in the land, and verily thou shalt be fed." "The young lions do lack, and suffer hunger: but they that seek the Lord shall not want any good thing." There may come a famine, notwithstanding all your industry; you may rise up weary and set up late, and eat the bread of carefulness, and yet have no prosperity; you may keep the city, and the watchman may pass along the walls each hour of the night, and yet it may be taken by assault; but blessed is he that trusteth in the Lord, for neither shall his city be destroyed, nor shall famine come to his land; or, if so it be, in famine he shall be fed, and in the days of peril the angels shall keep watch and ward about him. Lean, then, upon the Beloved, because the way is perilous. This is good reasoning for all of us, for we are in danger; tempted on all sides—liable to sin for a thousand causes. O my brethren, in this age of temptation, lean on the Beloved, it is your only safety.

Again, she leaned on the Beloved because *her route was ascending*. Did you notice it? "Coming up." The Christian's way is up—never content with past attainments, but up; not satisfied with graces to which he has reached, but up. He is not good who does not desire to be better; he is not gracious who would not be more gracious. Thou knowest not the light if thou dost not desire more light. The heavenly way is upward, upward, upward, upward! This is the way to heaven. The tendency of man's nature is downward. How soon we descend, and how prone is our soul, from her most elevated condition to sink back into the dull dead level of her natural estate! If we are to go up, we must lean. Christ is higher than we are; if we lean, we shall rise the more readily to his elevation. He comes down to us that we, leaning upon him, may go up to him. The more we lean, the more truly we cast the weight of our spiritual wrestling, spiritual struggling, spiritual growth, upon him, the more surely shall we gain the wrestling, the struggling, and the growth. Depend as much for growth in grace upon Christ as for the pardon of sin. He is made of God unto you sanctification as well as redemption. Look for sanctification through the blood, for it is a purifier as well as a pardoner. The same blood which puts away the guilt of sin is by the Holy Ghost applied as a blood of sprinkling to put away from us the reigning power of sin. O that we knew more about this, this going up! But I am afraid we do not go up because we do not lean. If there be here this morning a poor child of God who cries, "I the chief of sinners am, and

my only hope is in my blessed Lord; I do not feel that I grow in the least. I sometimes think I get worse and worse; but one thing I do know, I trust him more than ever I did, and feel my need of him more." Dear heart, you are the very one who is going up. I know you are, for you are leaning. But if there be another who boasts, "I believe I have made distinct advances in the divine life, and I feel that I am growing strong and vigorous, and I believe that one of these days I shall have reached to perfection," I think it is very likely that this brother is going down; at any rate, I would recommend to him this prayer: "Hold thou me up, and I shall be safe;" and this caution, "Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall."

Yet I must detain you another moment, to observe that the spouse leaned on her beloved because *her walk was daily separating her more and more from the whole host of her other companions*. The church is in the wilderness, but this traveller was coming up from the wilderness. She was getting away from the band marching through the desert, getting more and more alone. It is so, and you will find it so; the nearer you get to Christ, the more lonely you must necessarily be in certain respects. The sinner is in the broad way, where thousands walk, the Christian is in the narrow way—there are fewer in this last; but if the believer keeps the centre of the narrow way, and if he presses on with vigour, he will find his companions to be fewer and fewer; I mean the companions of his own stature, those of his own size and his own attainments; and if he continues in rapid advances, he will at last get to such a position that he will see no man save Jesus only, and then he will be sure to lean more heavily than ever, since he will have discovered that all men are vanity, and all confidences in an arm of flesh are but lies and deceit.

The spouse leaned upon her beloved because *she felt sure that he was strong enough to bear her weight*. He upon whom she leaned was no other than God over all blessed for ever, who cannot fail, nor be discouraged. She leaned yet again, *because he was her beloved*. She would have felt it unwise to lean if he were not mighty; she would have been afraid to lean if he had not been dear to her. So is it, the more you love the more you trust, and the more you trust the more you love. These twin graces of faith and hope live and flourish together. In proportion as that dear crucified Saviour reigns in your soul, and his beauties ravish your heart, in that proportion you feel that all is safe because it is in his hands; and then, on the other hand, in proportion as you trust all to him, and have not a suspicion or a doubt, in that proportion your soul will be knit to him in affection.

I appeal to any here who are the servants of Christ, but have fallen out of the habit of leaning, whether it would not be well to return to it! Was not it better with you when you did lean than it is now?

Before you set up for yourselves, were you not happier and better than now? Before you let that wicked pride of yours get the upper hand, you were wont to take every daily trouble and burden to your Lord, but at last you thought you were wise enough to manage for yourselves; I ask you, have you not from that very day met with many sorrows and defeats and down-castings? And there is this pang about all untrustful living, if a man getteth into any troubles, through his own wisdom, then he has to blame himself for it; but if any trial cometh upon us direct from God, then we feel we cannot blame ourselves, it belongs to our God to do as he wills; and since he cannot err, we expect that he will justify his own proceedings. It is better to trust in the Lord than to put confidence in man; it is better to trust in the Lord than to put confidence in princes. Wait ye only upon God, and let your expectations be from him, and he shall bring forth your judgment as the light, and your righteousness as the noonday; and in the day when the wicked shall be confounded, and they that trusted in themselves shall be melted away as the fat of rams, you shall shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of your Father.

IV. And now let us close. The last point is this—THE PERSON AND THE PEDIGREE of her who leaned upon her beloved.

The text says, "Who is this?" What made them enquire, "Who is this?" It was because they were so astonished to see her looking so happy and so little wearied. Nothing amazes worldlings more than genuine Christian joy. Holy peace in disturbing times is a puzzle to the ungodly. When they hear the righteous sing, "God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble; therefore will not we fear, though the earth be removed, and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea," they say one to another, "Where did these men learn that tune? They are men of like passions with ourselves, how is it they have learned thus to bear trial?" Therefore they enquire, "Who is this? Who is this?" How fine a thing it would be if we all so leaned upon Christ in all respects as to enjoy unbroken serenity, so that our kinsfolk and neighbours should be led to enquire, "Who is this?" for then might we have an opportunity of telling them concerning our Wellbeloved, who is the stay of our peace and the source of our comfort.

Who then is this that leans on her beloved? I will tell you. Her name was once called "outcast," whom no man seeketh after, but according to this old book her name is now Hephzibah, for the Lord delighteth in her. The name of the soul that trusts in God, and finds peace in so doing, was by nature a name of shame and sin. We were afar off from God even as others; and if any soul is brought to trust in Christ, it is not from any natural goodness in it, or any innate propensity towards such trusting; it is because grace has wrought a wondrous

transformation, and God the Holy Ghost has made those who were not a people to be called the people of God. Good news this for any of you who feel your guilt this morning. You have been hitherto serving Satan, but mercy can yet bring you to lean upon the Beloved; grace can bring you up from the wilderness instead of permitting you to go down into the pit. She who to-day joyously trusts in her God was once a weeping Hannah, a woman of a sorrowful spirit, but now her soul rejoiceth in the Lord, for he hath remembered her low estate. She was once a sinful Rahab, dwelling in a city doomed to destruction, but she has hung the scarlet line of faith in the precious blood in her window; and if all others perish, she shall be secure in the day of destruction. She who is here spoken of is a Ruth. She came from afar as an idolatress; she left the land of her nativity, and she hath entered into union with the Lord and his people. Her cry is, "Where thou dwellest I will dwell. Thy people shall be my people, thy God shall be my God." She was once a stranger, but she is now an Israelite indeed; she was once accursed, but she is now blessed; once foul, but now washed; once lost, but now found again. In a word, the soul that leans upon Christ habitually every day, and casts her care upon him, is one of a princely race; she has been begotten into the family of God; the blood imperial flows within her veins, and in the day when the crowns of princes and of emperors shall melt into the common dust to which they belong, the crown jewels and the diadems of these believing souls shall glitter with immortal splendour in the kingdom of God.

My dear hearer, dost thou trust Jesus? Does the Holy Spirit move thee to begin to trust him to-day? If so, though thy journey be in a wilderness of trouble, thou shalt come up out of it to a paradise of bliss, and thy peace and thy comfort shall all spring from leaning on the Wellbeloved.

The Lord bless us, and teach us that sacred art of dependence on the Beloved for Christ's sake. Amen.

PORTIONS OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—

Psalm lxiii. and John xv. 1—11.