

THE CHURCH ... as she ought to be
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(SONG OF SOLOMON 6: 10)

The Song of Solomon presents a charming study of the virtues and problems of Abishag the Shulamite. Loved by her shepherd boy, and wooed by King Solomon, she was obliged to choose between her suitors. (See Bible Cameos, p. 75.) This fascinating story illustrates the greater truths of the New Testament, and it is not difficult to recognize a portrait of the Church-the Bride of the Good Shepherd. Solomon's description of the most charming woman in Israel is exceedingly picturesque. Many Bible teachers declare that God was supplying therein details concerning the fulfillment of His purposes in Christ. To say the least, readers will be stimulated by the royal description of the charms of the Shulamite. " Who is she that looketh forth as the morning, fair as the moon, clear as the sun, and terrible as an army with banners? "

The Church Rejoicing

" Who is she that looketh forth as the morning... ? " The picture of a fair woman standing on the threshold of her home to survey the glory of the rising sun, is most enchanting. The sunlight glistens on her hair, and her countenance is as fresh as the morning dew ; she smiles and hails the new day, for the darkness of the night has vanished. The sun has risen in splendour, and the gloom has disappeared. Her heart and lips re-echo the songs of the waking birds. We are reminded of Paul's injunction to the Church. He commanded them to rejoice " and make melody in their hearts " (Ephes. 5: 19). The darkness of the night of sin had ended. The tragedy of the cross had been eclipsed. The Church now heralded the dawn of a new day. Her soul vibrated ; her songs arose to the throne of God. It was morning ; the night had gone!

The Church Reflecting

" Who is she . . . fair as the moon. . . ? " The moon has no light of its own ; it is content to reflect the light of the sun. An arc of attractive beauty, it absorbs more and more of the sun's radiance until, filled with luminant charm, it reigns supreme in the night sky. Mariners look to it, and are glad ; travellers smile into its face, and feel less lonely. The moon shines resplendently because it catches the light of the sun and transmits it to a darkened world. There could hardly be a more suitable picture of the vocation and privilege of the Christian Church. We have no light of ourselves. We look to Him and are lightened. Then, having received light from the Light of the World, it is our duty to let our light shine before men, that they may see our good works and glorify our Father who is in heaven. The shining light of the Church has enabled mariners in all ages to set a course for the shelter of God's harbor.

The Church Radiant

" Who is she . . . clear as the sun. . . ? " The sun is an orb of unparalleled brilliance ; the giver of life and light to the world. Without its glorious ministry, men would linger in darkness. When the sun arises in eastern splendour, the birds begin to sing ; and when it sinks in western skies, they hush their songs and go to sleep. The world grows weary when the sun has gone, and hopes it will soon return to bring a fine day to-morrow. It is the sun which attracts moisture, and then allows it to fall in gentle showers upon a thirsty land. It is the sun which warms the earth, turning

THE CHURCH ... as she ought to be it into the caress of a mother-a mother who brings her children to birth, and then feeds them until they are ready to meet the demands of the waiting world. Radiance unlimited-service unending-story unprecedented. These are God's descriptions of Ms Church-as He meant her to be.

The Church Reclaiming

" Who is she ... terrible as an army with banners?" Even Solomon recognized the irresistible charm of this gracious woman. She was most desirable ; she was invincible, for against her winsomeness and beauty no man could stand. She captured the strongest ; she reduced her greatest critics to impotence ; she was an army marching to victory-an army whose waving banners struck fear to the breasts of opponents. Perhaps the New Testament authors had this picture in mind when they recorded the statements of the enemies of the Church who said, "They who have turned the world upside down are come here also." Reclaiming lost territory for Christ, the ransomed of the Lord went from strength to strength-terrible as an army with banners. We see God's portrait of the Church ; but let us pause a moment to consider. Surely something is wrong. Either God is a poor artist, or His model has changed. I wonder which it could be?

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