

## The Birds of the Sky

Matt. 6: 26, 27.

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The Lord appeals to the disciples, in view of the creature subjected to man, against personal anxiety. It is humbling but wholesome for them to draw lessons of dependence thence. And first, He points to the winged class, familiar everywhere to human eyes, as objects of divine care and dependent on His beneficent provision. How much more are not His own in their incomparably higher and nearer relationship to Him! and how powerless too is their anxiety to effect relief!

"Look at the birds of the heavens, that they sow not, nor reap, nor gather into barns; and your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are not ye of much more value than they? And which of you by being anxious can add one cubit to his stature?" (vers. 26, 27.)

The birds are of a large class and of immense variety; so much so that the famous Cuvier had to confess his dissent from all the scientific systems he had seen. Can any competent naturalist since deny that an adequately true arrangement still awaits its discoverer? He in his "Règne Animal" proposed six orders with far more numerous genera; Temminck, sixteen orders; Latreille, seven, with 252 genera. Though some few excellent observers as Willughby and Ray preceded and have followed since these distinguished French writers, there is no end as yet to that controversy.

But our Lord drew His invaluable lessons, not from the recondite secrets, still less from the uncertainties of the science, but from the patent and undeniable facts of God's creation and providence, which none but the perverse can cavil at even in this age when the whole creation groans together, but not without hope that deliverance shall come from on high. All disciples can therefore understand and feel what He meant, and they need. The birds neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns; yet your (not their) heavenly Father feeds them. They may share the consequences of a fallen world, as other animals, and man more than any, as being their head, a moral creature, and deeply to blame directly and indirectly. Nevertheless without means and without the least carking care, our heavenly Father feeds the birds, as the plain and beautiful and instructive rule.

Hence of old the Psalmist (104) celebrated Him that sent forth springs into the valleys, that run among the mountains, and not for man only, or for every beast of the field, and the wildest of them, but for the birds that utter their voices among the branches where a dead silence prevails, broken now and then by loud shrieks of anguish so different from their cheerful strains. The stately spreading cedars were planted not for man's use only, not for taste or pride, but for the birds also to make their nests, unless the taller firs suit some better still. Nor are the creatures of the sea great and wide overlooked. These all look unto Thee, that Thou mayest give them their food in its season: that Thou givest they gather. Thou openest Thy hand: they are filled with good. Thou hidest Thy face: they are troubled. Thou takest away their breath: they expire and return to their dust. Thou sendest forth Thy Spirit: they are created; and Thou renewest the face of the earth.

But here the Lord guards His own from anxious thoughts in their daily life. Sparrows, as He taught later, are cheap enough; yet as not one of them shall fall to the ground without our Father, so He preserves thorn and other birds great or small without foresight of their own.

If such creatures, the unclean as surely as the clean, are the habitual recipients of His beneficence,

how much must His sons be? It is an argument from the comparatively mean and distant to those whom grace deigns to bring into the nearest relationship with Himself. And the Lord's aim is to impress on His disciples, so favoured, the obligation of confiding in the love of their Father without a doubt or a fear, Why should they not, instead of yielding to the anxiety natural to such as either know not God at all like Gentiles, or own Him in an altogether lower way like the Jews?

It seems almost needless to say that the words afford not the least ground for those who alleged a discrepancy with Prov. 6: 6-8. For the latter impresses the common duty of industry, and therefore reproves the sluggard from the text of the laborious ant. The former calls the believer to cherish faith's reliance on the Father's care, without an anxious thought. The one is as true as the other; but the latter goes deeper and rises higher because of the revelation of the Father's name to those who believe on the Son.

Then again a strange set of fanatics, both in rather early and in later days of Christendom, made abstinence from labour a counsel of perfection. They claimed to be in a peculiar degree men of prayer, and were called Euchites by those who condemned them. Their boast was neither to sow nor reap; but they could not escape the reproach that they liked the barn and to have it well filled. The germ of this selfishness showed itself among the Thessalonian saints. But it did not fail to receive immediate discouragement and a heavy blow from the apostle, who could appeal to his own work with his hands where it made for the Lord's glory. But he also ruled such a claim as unworthy of Him, and a dishonour to such as were ensnared in cheat. "Now we enjoin you, brethren, in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, that ye withdraw from every brother [not rising to superior spirituality but] walking disorderly and not according to the tradition which he received from us. For yourselves know that ye ought to imitate us, because we were not disorderly among you, nor did we eat bread of any one for naught, but with labour and toil working night and day, that we might not burden any of you. Not because we have not authority, but that we might give ourselves an example to you, that ye should imitate us. For even when we were with you, this we enjoined you that, if anyone will not work, neither let him eat. For we hear of some walking among you disorderly, working not at all, but busy-bodies. Now such as those we enjoin and exhort in the Lord Jesus Christ that working quietly they eat their own bread" (2 Thess. 3: 6-12).

The question in ver. 27 exposes impressively the impotence of anxiety to add to our stature the familiar unit of measure. Yet many moderns incline to length of life, instead of "stature." But this is hardly the place to discuss such a question. The general sense at all events is clear to the simplest.