

The Lilies of the Field

Matt. 6: 28-30.

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From the birds of the sky in vers. 26, 27, the Lord turns to the lilies of the field in vers. 28-30: a lesson against anxiety, the former in eating and drinking; the latter in raiment. Notoriously they comprise the two branches of ordinary living which so test the masses, not of mankind only, but of disciples, to whom He addressed Himself throughout His teaching on the mount. His disciples ought not to forget or distrust their heavenly Father by such doubts of His loving care over their daily wants.

"And why be anxious about a garment? Consider the lilies of the field how they grow: they toil not nor spin; but I say to you that not even Solomon in all his glory was arrayed as one of these. But if God so clothe the herbage of the field, that is today, and tomorrow is cast into an oven, [shall he] not much more [clothe] you, O little of faith?

Here as He points, not to birds but to the flowers, He does not speak of sowing or reaping or storage, but of toiling and spinning: God cares for the birds without the one, and for the lilies without the other. Were not His children far more to their heavenly Father than either? Not only were they God's offspring as mankind universally are, but His children by grace through faith. It is not that sowing or reaping, toiling or spinning, might not be a duty, if they had to provide for themselves and their household, and could earn their supplies by these labours more readily than otherwise. Even in an unfallen world, Jehovah put Adam whom He had formed into the garden of Eden to till it and to guard it, when there was none to hire for the needful work, and he himself might happily employ his own hands,

Sin brought in sad change, not only for man's soul and body, but for the very ground on which he trod, as scripture plainly tells us. It was no longer easy and delightful work, but in toil or sorrow he must eat of it all the days of his life. And no wonder; since thorns also and thistles it should yield to him, only to be overcome by the sweat of his face in order to eat bread. If self will kick against the goad, it only aggravates the case; if the yoke (and it is not here grievous) be accepted, it is all the better for murmuring men. There is no deliverance from guilt and sin but through faith in Christ, to whom the Holy Spirit bears witness, and by whom He gives power to the believer. But for children as yet unconverted as well as adults in the same state, occupation is a merciful help, against the dangers of idleness and indulgence of lust and passion. Even for the faithful it is good, as declining to work where the person is without means is bad: so much so, that the apostle curtly lays it down, that if a man likes not to work, neither let him eat. This prescription, if duly administered, would in general prove a salutary medicine, and without fail.

Such idlers, apt to be busy-bodies too, are comparatively rare; but not so those who trouble themselves about their clothes. What! after being born of God, and now having redemption as well as life everlasting, and the Holy Spirit to take up our every need and difficulty, not only the Lord interceding for us, but the Father blessing who sent His only begotten Son to and for us when we had nothing but sins? And do souls so favoured distress themselves perhaps about clothes, and possibly fine clothes, beyond what becomes a Christian man, woman, or child?

What a rebuke from the herbage of the field, as our Lord interprets it! Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these lilies which, the more they are inspected and by the most powerful

means, only the more eclipse the splendour of Israel's richest king. Yet that lavish beauty of form and colour was but a carpet spread for the feet of the poorest Israelite on one day, and on another was fuel for an oven. And this end of its glory was far from being an offence to the Lord. He, who was above all jealous for His Father's honour in His work uses the double fact to judge nature's anxiety about earthly things (were they as the lilies ever so beautiful to the eye, yet utterly evanescent too), to banish doubts and distress and unworthy desires, and to establish the heart in confidence of His Father's present, perfect, and loving care.

It was not the least in His mind to occupy the disciples with the birds of the sky or the lilies of the field as objects of their care, though not a few may abuse His allusions. Nor did He mean by His calling their attention to them, that they should treat cynically what evinces His interest in all the works of God's hand and the creatures of His will. His aim is that the disciples, under His holy notice of the incomparable goodness of God toward that which is so little in His eyes, should rise up to the Father above them all, and be assured of the considerate and constant love He bears to His own. Are they not peculiar objects of His counsels before a world was founded, now of infinite grace in Himself who for them died and rose, and at His crowning of glory, above not only the mightiest potentates of earth but also the highest principalities in the heavens? Are we to share the anxiety of those who know not God? He that spared not His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all; how shall He not also with Him freely give us all things? No one was such a sufferer as Christ here below; yet who ever heard a complaint? and who can forget that, when rejected more and more where His mighty acts of goodness and His words of grace and truth still more wondrous were alike despised, and even He had to say, Woe, woe, at that season our Lord Jesus answering said, "I thank thee, Father," . . . and "even so, Father; for so it seemed good in thy sight"? So the prophetic Ps. 16 attributes to Him the confession, "The lines are fallen to me in pleasant places; yea I have a goodly heritage." And so the apostle, who had the fellowship of His sufferings, and knew afflictions, persecutions, and want of all things beyond any other, is the very one who rises superior to all circumstances, and declares that God affords us all things richly for enjoyment. May we follow, though alas! how distantly, in like faith!