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### Our Pulpit.

### Lessons from the Lilies.

SERMON PREACHED BY

**REV. A. J. MOWATT.**

In St. Paul's Church Fredericton, May 13th.

"Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow."—MAT. VI. 28.

We hail with gladness the return of spring with the songbirds and flowers. It inspires with hope, wakes up to new energy, teaches lessons of wisdom, preaches the gospel. We see how necessary a real revival is. O what a year that has no spring! And yet there are not churches and souls, that see no spring-season, that never burst into song nor bloom into beauty, and that enjoy no showers of blessing? The plough cleaving through the loam of the valley exhorts us to break up our fallow ground and prepare for the blessed seed-sowing of the truth. The sower sowing the seed tells us of the Good Sower sowing the seed of the Kingdom, and we are solemnly charged, that as we sow, so shall we reap.

But to-day we are to consider the lilies. The Master Himself exhorts us to do this. And a sweet theme it ought to be to us. He is out on the Galilean hills preaching to the thousands. It is springtime perhaps. The birds carol sweetly in the olive-groves, and the lilies bloom profusely at His feet. All nature is a picture-book to the Divine Teacher, and from its splendidly illustrated pages He calls whatever He wants to give point and beauty to His teachings. As He looks into the faces of the people, He sees how care is channelling them for the tears of sorrow to run in, and how over-anxiety is fretting men's lives away and embittering their hopes and happiness, and so He speaks to them in His own simple sublime way of the lilies, shewing how little reason there is for all this wretched care and fretfulness of ours. Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin, yet I say unto you that even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. But if God doth so clothe the grass of the field, which to-day is, and to-morrow is cast into the oven, shall not He much more clothe you, O ye of little faith? Be not therefore anxious, saying, What shall we eat? or, What shall we drink? or, Wherewithal shall we be clothed?

Now first, learn from the lilies how God cares for us, and more especially in the matter of clothing. He who clothes the lilies will clothe His people. So Christ teaches, and so we are to learn.

The lily is a well-known flower, and a universal favorite. There are many kinds of lilies. Many flowers, however, that are called lilies are not really lilies. There has been considerable difference of opinion among travellers and scholars as to the particular species of lily our Lord refers to here, some making it out to be the amaryllis lutea, a regal flower, others the liliun candidum or white lily. These favorites, however, have been giving way to the claims of the scarlet martagon, liliun chalcedonicum. Dr. Thomson, in his work, The Land and the Book, is satisfied that this is the lily referred to, and calls it the Huleh lily. I quote what he says about it. 'This Huleh lily is very large, and the three inner petals meet above, and form a gorgeous canopy, such as art never approached, and kin never sat under, even in his utmost glory. And when I met this incomparable flower, in all its loveliness, among the oak woods around the northern base of Tabor, and on the hills of Nazareth, where our Lord spent His youth, I felt assured it was to this he referred.' And in other respects it fulfils the allusions in the text and context, so that there is not much doubt but that the scarlet martagon is the lily spoken of.

We have not yet seen this regal flower on its native hills as it rises peerless in beauty among the rest of the flowers, but we have seen beautiful lilies, and we can form some idea of its wealth of scarlet, no velvet, nor silk nor satin, woven in human looms, and dyed with the dyer's skill, can at all come up to it. Take a microscope and examine a lily's petal, and it is perfect in beauty; but subject Solomon's raiment to the same test, and it looks like rags that a beggar would despise. Thus modern science demonstrates the forcefulness of our Lord's remark, 'that even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these.'

Now, the question of clothes is next in importance to the question of bread with men, and with many it is almost

more than the question of bread. It is a question we cannot ignore. We can no more dispense with clothes than we can dispense with bread. Our Maker has been pleased to make us, so that clothes, in the present state, are indispensable. They are indispensable alike for comfort and for moral purposes. The only two states of society in which clothes are of small account are the two extremes, perfect innocence and perfect savagery. Occupying as we do a middle ground clothes are much to us, perhaps too much, more certainly than their importance warrants, and I am disposed to attach no little importance to them.

At this season almost more than any other, the question of clothes is one that we have to take up and find an answer to. Just now it is being asked in every home, and all up and down our main business street: 'Wherewithal shall we be clothed?' And it is sometimes a perplexing question—perplexing to the tender conscience, but more so to the pocket. Some are asking, 'What ought I to wear?' 'What is right for me to wear?' but the most are asking, 'What can I afford to wear?' 'What will my small means allow?' Very few perhaps ask, 'What do the necessities of the case require?'

The tyranny of fashion makes the question more perplexing than it need be. 'Better be out of the world,' it is said by way of a joke, but it is meant all the same, 'than to be out of the fashion.' Fashion arrogates to herself the right and authority to dictate to us what we shall wear on all occasions—what our morning dress shall be, our afternoon dress, and our evening dress. She dares tread where angels fear to, and so she appoints in her way of it, what a babe's christening robe must be, an adult's baptismal dress, a catechumen's confirmation attire, a bride's apparel, a widow's weeds, and even a preacher's garb. Indeed, with certain sects and some churches it has come to be religiously a great question, far too great a question: Wherewithal shall we be clothed? just as if we are to God as we are to men all the more because of the clothes we wear, the shape of our hat or bonnet, the cut of our coat or dress. Is a quaker, think you, more to God because He comes before Him in a broad-brim and dressed in sober gray? Is a bishop improved in any respect by a shovel hat and knee-breeches? Are men and women humbler and holier because they dress after General Booth's grotesque fashion code? No. If anything more than another is silly, weak, absurd, in the eyes of Heaven, it is, it seems to me, church fashions. Fashion is ordinarily absurd enough in her modes, but it is when she professes to be religious she is most absurd. And as a church and people we cannot say too much, for we have a little weakness in the same direction, and sometimes we find the little we have obtruding itself into our ecclesiastical courts, and it may yet cause trouble there.

One thing is clear, if we go to the lily to study out the question of how we should dress and what we should wear, God would have us well dressed. He can have no delight in slovenliness, rags and wretchedness, any more than in absurd fashions, and extravagances in clothes. The Apostle Peter counsels Christian women to dress modestly and not to give themselves up to the braiding of hair and the wearing of jewelry; not that he condemns these things out and out, but only the extravagant use of them. He refers us to the holy women of old. But while we cannot be sure that Sarah wore jewelry, we are sure that Rebekah did, and Abraham and Isaac sent them, and some of the ornaments may have been Sarah's.

The lily wears jewels. Go in the early morning and see her hanging with dewy pendants, glittering all over with sparkling diamonds and rubies, as much a queen among flowers as Solomon was a king among men. Jewels have their place. The father puts a ring on the finger of his prodigal-son when he returns from the far country of sin, and He clothes him with the best robe. It is not wrong, it is right and fitting to be becomingly, beautifully attired, and God cares for us in this matter as well as in other things. He has so made us that we need clothes, and clothes can do so much towards our making, and so He who clothes the lilies will clothe us, and clothe us well.

Again: Learn from the lilies how to be beautiful with our beauty as they are with theirs.

It is not by the cast-off fineries, the faded glories of other flowers stuck on, that the lily is beautiful. The lily's beauty is her own; she grows up to it. Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow. It has a plain uninteresting

tuberous root, a humble foundation to start from. And its first attempts at growth are by no means striking, promising. You have heard of the lily's beauty, the perfection of its loveliness, its glory putting Solomon's quite in the shade, and you go to see it for yourself on its native hills, and as you go you make up your mind that you are going to see something very fine. But you are too early in the season perhaps, and you find only a most commonplace and uninteresting flowerless plant, and you are disappointed, disgusted, and you go away and give the lily a bad name. You say, its peerless beauty does not exist, it is a fraud. But the fault is yours; you did not wait till the lily had grown. Let it grow; let its beauty develop, and the day will come when it will stand before you, jewelled with dew drops, the queen of flowers, and withal so modest.

Beauty cannot be put on. Gay apparel and fine jewelry have their place and purpose, but they cannot adorn a beauty that does not exist. There are men and women arrayed in gorgeous apparel, bejewelled and ribboned and gartered, crowned and sceptered and throned, and they are neither beautiful nor happy, and all that can be done for them cannot make them so. Fine clothes go a long way perhaps towards making men and women; but the men and women must be there, if fine clothes are ever to do much for them. Rather indeed it is the beautiful soul within that makes the clothes so fine very often. Put the same dress on two people as nearly alike in size and in every other respect as they can be, and one will be wanting in beauty and the other will have it.

Our Lord was but humbly attired when He was on earth. His clothing was the rough wearing apparel of the common people of the land. But there was a dignity about Him that made Him a king in working-clothes. Men went down on their knees before Him and did Him honor. And on the mount of transfiguration, when He let the glory hidden within Him shine forth, His raiment, worn and stained with long use, became beautifully white and lustrous. His beauty of soul made beautiful what would otherwise have been wanting of beauty.

You find among men, in the humble places of the world perhaps, amid poverty and toil, those whose lives shine with a strange beauty, and about whom there is something of heaven's loveliness. You wonder at them, and try to discover whence their spiritual beauty. You go back to a time in their history when they were commonplace and uninteresting enough, when they had no beauty about them, when they were deep-buried in the earth and its affairs, and when they were not better nor lovelier than others around them. But they grew, and by and by they opened up to the loveliness they have. There was no mystery about it. The lilies do not try to be beautiful. They do not toil and spin. They do not weave with patient skill their matchless scarlet. They simply grow, and drink into their being the showers and sunshine, and they come at last to their unrivalled splendor, and so with Christians who have come to be lovelier than others in their lives. Ask them how it is, and they cannot tell you. Like the lilies, they grow little by little to be what they have come to be, and many a time they were discouraged and felt like giving it up, but they kept on and at last they were lovely.

I hear you complaining, my hearer, that there is no chance for you to be good and beautiful where you are. You are planted in a rocky soil, where thorns and thistles and wild-weeds luxuriate, where the wide boar of the woods wastes; and, planted there what chance have you to grow to be anything? You think if you were differently circumstanced, in happier and healthier moral and spiritual surroundings, it would be better with you than it is. But, my hearer, consider the lilies of the fields, how they grow." They are not planted in a conservatory; they are not grown into their peerless beauty in a well-kept garden. No. Some of the loveliest lilies, Dr. Thomson tells us, are found among the thorns. They bloom with a careless expenditure of loveliness amid rock-wastes and wood-lands, and no surroundings can make them otherwise than lovely. Their Maker has made them, so that with their nice affinities they are able to find in the hard rugged soil, and draw out of it, that which makes them what they are. Other plants in the same soil can only grow cruel spines and a hideous repulsiveness, but the lily is easily the lovely lily anywhere, and where the lily is its friends and admirers come to enjoy and gather it.

Ah! let us not blame our circum-

stances if we are not good. We can be good anywhere. We can live the beautiful christian life out on the bleak hillside of worldly society. We can exemplify in our daily walk and conversation the beauties of faith and love, joy and hope, grace and peace. God can keep us where we are, and bless us where we are, as well as in other and better circumstances. Let us do the good there is for us to do, and let us be cheerful and patient and lovely where it is not easy to be so, and thus be as the lily which is everywhere and always fair and fragrant.

"As a lily among thorns," Solomon says, "so is my love among the daughters." The Church is left in the world to bloom there. The christian is to be a christian where temptation lurks, business buys and sells, unhallowed pleasure riots, and sin sins.

It is said of the lily that it has about it a peculiar natural quality by which it is able to keep the dust and dirt around it from settling upon it and coating it all over. While other plants and flowers beside it, with their viscid stems and leaves, are buried up with dust-rubbish, the lily stands up in its spotless purity, untouched by anything that would mar its loveliness or poison its sweetness. But whether true or not of the lily, it is true, that there are lily souls and lives that the world's worldliness cannot corrupt, that the immoralities and abominable vices of society cannot stick on to. While others close by them, and in very much the same circumstances, are growing sordid and base and bad, their conscience becoming coated and callous, they, on the other hand, are able to keep themselves clean and pure and lovely. The unclear touch of society does not defile them; the handling of money does not make them avaricious and dishonest; exalted position does not make them proud or tyrannous; prosperity and power do not cause them to forget their duty and lure them away from the right. No; with the spirit of God dwelling in them, and the cleansing blood of Jesus to wash them, they are able to keep themselves unspotted from the world.

Again: Learn from the lilies how little there is in this life for us, even when, by the grace of God, we are able to make the very best of it.

In Palestine it is quite common for the people to cut down the gorgeous scarlet martagon, and convert its thick stems into fuel. Our Lord refers to that here when He says, "But if God doth so clothe the grass of the field which today is and tomorrow is cast into the oven, shall he not much more clothe you, O ye of little faith?" It does seem sad to see a splendid regal flower like the lily mowed down at last, after all its blooming and fragrance, and used to heat ovens with. And get such is lily life. Today it is the glory of the valley, the admiration of every beholder, the idol of the people; tomorrow its glory is faded and gone, and it is cut down and withered, and we find it serving the meanest of purposes.

And as with the lily, so with us. O great man distinguished for thy splendid abilities, brilliant attainments, moral worth, christian character; exalted to the proudest positions, and honored by all men for what thou art and can do; crowned and throned, worshipped and feted and followed;—O great man, think not, in the day of prosperity, that there is no tomorrow to all this pomp and power of thine. The wise Christ tells thee to consider the lilies of the field. They do not always bloom; their tomorrow finds them withered and dead despised and forsaken. And thy tomorrow will find thee, O great man, stripped off thy purple and gold, thy glory and power, and forgotten of the world. Men have found another popular idol to worship, another name than thine to shout and sing, and so they burn and bury thee, and perhaps not waiting till thou art dead.

O the evanescence of worldly honor! O the emptiness and fading character of our life! Today we are young and beautiful; tomorrow we are old and wrinkled. Today we are sought after and our praises sung; tomorrow we are forgotten and neglected. The lilies, the lilies of the hillsides, the lilies of society, the lilies of fashion and folly, the lilies of song and story, the lilies that were once so gay and fine;—where are they? what has become of them? Ah! they are not. If we could hush them up, we would find them doing mean drudgery work in their old age for a bare living, serving the meanest of purposes, their beauty gone, their cleverness a drivelling second-childhood, their glory forgotten in the grave's corruption, their few years of frivolity and splendid sin succeeded by an everlasting hell of wretchedness.

Concluded on fourth page.