

Pastor and People.

GOD'S MUSIC.

Since ever the world was fashioned,
Water, and air, and sod,
A music of divers meaning
Has flowed from the hand of God

In valley, and gorge, and upland,
Of a stormy mountain height,
He makes him a harp of the forest,
He sweeps the chords with might.

He puts forth his hand to the ocean,
He speaks and the waters flow—
Now in a chorus of thunder,
Now in a cadence low.

He touches the waving flower bells,
He plays on the woodland streams—
A tender song, like a mother
Sings to her child in dreams.

But the music divinest and dearest,
Since ever the world began,
Is the manifold, passionate music
He draws from the heart of man.

Written for THE CANADA PRESBYTERIAN.

THE RELIGIOUS USE OF FLOWERS.

BY THE REV. C. A. DOUDIFF.

"Consider the lilies of the field. . . . Even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these."

Our Lord's own words! And yet here and there are found men, Christian men—even ministers of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, Presbyterian ministers besides—who would make it a sin to decorate a church with flowers, a grievous sin to turn the house of the Lord, as one of them lately wrote, "into a flower garden at a communion season." "It is enough," this writer adds, "to display there Him who is the Rose of Sharon and the Lily of the Valley." And with singular logic he draws this conclusion: "If it be quite fit and proper for us to deck our churches with flowers, we should use flags, or pieces of cloth of different colors. Why should we not?" We might simply answer: Because our Lord said, "Consider the lilies of the field," never flags or pieces of colored cloth, and such an answer, although brief, would be considered quite sufficient by many Christians.

But it may not be inappropriate to examine this subject a little more particularly. What is the use of flowers? Could we not have dispensed with them and scarcely felt the loss? There are plants, with colorless, scentless, almost invisible flowers, but without a flower of some kind the plants would perish. They are essential to their reproduction, as every botanist knows. This being so, does not God's kindness appear in having given such an infinite variety of brightly colored, exquisitely shaped, perfumed blossoms, to gladden the heart of men? Flowers have been called "God's thoughts of beauty, taking form to gladden mortal gaze." True, we may discover some mortals who will not be gladdened by the sweetest roses which ever bloomed, especially if these roses are put on or about the pulpit of a church. Well! we pity them, that is all. To us, flowers are "visible music, living poetry, earth's ornaments, relics of Eden, the garden of God. They are nature's jewelry, parables for the eyes, commentaries on 'passing away,' emblems of our bright resurrection."

One must be singularly constituted, if having read the Bible for years and years, he has not yet discovered that it is full of flowers. The history of our redemption begins among flowers, and is completed in the midst of them, for as Matthew Henry quaintly wrote, "It was in a garden that Death and the grave first received their power; and in a garden that they were conquered, disarmed and triumphed over. In a garden Christ began His passion, and from a garden He would rise and begin His exaltation." The Lord God Himself "planted a garden" eastward in Eden and there He put the man whom He had formed. And out of the ground made the Lord God to grow every tree that is pleasant to the sight and "good for food." Mark the words:

"pleasant to the sight;" as important a use in the mind of God as the other, "good for food."

But the critic will say, "A garden is not a church, everything in its proper place, the flowers in the garden and—what in the church?" The bare walls, for the greater glory of God? Absurd! The church itself is a garden. "A garden inclosed is my sister, my spouse, let my beloved come into his garden and eat his pleasant fruits." Do not throw the flowers out, when Christ, the Beloved presides at the feast, partaken of by those who have met together in His name. From the communion table Jesus says to each loving believer: "I am come into My garden, My sister, My spouse, and the bride—the Church—answers in a heart-whisper, 'I am my Beloved's and my Beloved is mine, he feedeth among the lilies.'"

All figurative language! an objector may say, and nothing to the point. We differ from such an one, but let it pass. Here are some plain Divine commands with neither poetry nor figures about them: "Thou shalt make a candlestick of pure gold. . . . Six branches shall come out of the sides of it, each branch with a knop and flower." If golden flowers of man's manufacture pleased God, surely the flowers He made Himself—so much superior—cannot displease Him. And when Solomon built his glorious temple, open flowers and pomegranates, lilies and foliage, were carved on frieze and pillars. Did God disapprove? The Lord said unto him, "I have hallowed the house which thou hast built, to put My name there forever, and mine eyes and mine heart shall be there perpetually." What is the use of flowers, in churches and out of churches? Why! they are revelations of God, and object lessons to men. They are, as Wilberforce wrote, "The smiles of God's goodness." Does any one say, "The Bible is revelation enough for me! I want no other." Such a man is blind to a large half of God's witness to men. Has he not read that "The invisible things of God, from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead." It is not only by prophets and apostles, not only by His Son, that God speaks to men. The thousand voices of nature proclaim Him, good, wise, loving and holy. There are "sermons in stones," parables in flowers, the word Eternity in the skies above.

True! all men cannot hear, all cannot understand. When a voice from heaven answered Christ's prayer that the Father's name be glorified, some of the people who stood by said that it thundered. But to holy men of old, the words came clear and distinct, "I have both glorified it, and will glorify it again." The Word of God tells of men that have eyes and cannot see, ears and cannot hear. Such men deserve pity more than blame. We do not insult the blind because they cannot see. Neither would we speak harshly of a Christian who sees no use in flowers as ornaments in the house of God. Job, David, Isaiah, Hosea in the Old Testament; Peter, James, and above all our Lord, have connected flowers with the religious side of human life. "Man comes up like a flower and is cut down—man's days are as the flower of the field, he flourisheth and the wind passeth over it and it is gone. . . . But the mercy of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting. The Lord will be as the dew unto Israel, He shall grow as the lily." Formalists of Isaiah's time are told that, "they shall be as a garden that has no water. Every plant in it dead, every blossom withered, moral Saharas." And yet multitudes of sacrifices were offered—new moons, Sabbaths, calling of assemblies, all that ceremony and ritual could invent to make God's service "impressive," was attended to. Everything was there except flowers, and all the thanks God gives that punctilious priesthood is to ask them, "Who hath required this at your hands to tread my courts?"

But when the Lord will comfort Zion

"He will comfort all her waste places, and will make her wilderness like Eden, and her desert like the garden of the Lord, joy and gladness shall be found therein, and the voice of melody." Flowers! flowers everywhere, planted by the Lord Himself. And shall we say that what God does to beautify the land of His chosen people, becomes a hateful thing in His sight, a sin, or even an uncalled-for thing, when in the dreary waste of a church building, without more adornment than its pews and pulpit, an abundant supply of God's own blossoms gladden the sight and speak to the heart?

Among the promises to the godly, of which Isaiah lviii. is full, we find this one, "Thou shalt be like a watered garden," a favorite figure in Eastern lands, also used by Jeremiah, "their soul shall be like a watered garden." Christ, our example, did not fail to use the same figure: "the kingdom of God is like a grain of mustard seed that a man cast into his garden." When Jesus longed for a quiet resting place, near Jerusalem, He sought the garden afterwards made memorable by His agony: "He went over the brook Cedron, where there was a garden." The flowers did not distract His attention when He prayed, neither were they hurtful to His disciples; had they been, He would have remained in the "upper room," or gone to some barren spot outside of Jerusalem. Then, as now, in Solomon's time as in our own day, the King and Head of the Church, the Beloved of the bride, "fed among the lilies," literally and figuratively. A communion season in memory of our absent Lord is not a more solemn occasion than the agony in Gethsemane, and there flowers were all around Him. An ordinary service in our churches is not holier than the one Christ held on the Mount, and not only were the lilies around Him there, but He called the people's attention to them, "Consider the lilies of the field." He praised their exuberant beauty, and drew the moral lesson all of us need, "If God so clothe the grass of the field, which to-day is, and to-morrow is cast into the oven, shall He not much more clothe you, oh, ye of little faith?"

So much for the use of flowers in worship. It seems unnecessary after the authorities quoted, to consider objections. Yet in all fairness to objectors let us see what they say, and try to answer them. We are charged with using floral decorations, because other religious bodies deck their churches at Easter and Christmas, and we "not to be a thousand years behind in this age of progress, must do the same."

The simple, "naive" way of assuming that our church could not learn anything profitable from the practice of other Christian communions, must provoke a smile. We are not aware that the Presbyterian Church is above learning, and so perfect as to need no improvements. There was a time when it would have been thought sinful in Puritan churches to have a place of worship warmed in winter. The women brought their footstoves with them, the men sat in their overcoats and shivered. Was it sinful for them to adopt the practice of other churches and introduce stoves and furnaces? Scarcely, we think. There was a time when our Presbyterian forefathers met for worship on the moors or mountain side. Should we imitate them and hold our assemblies in the open fields or in the woods, summer and winter?

At the time of the Reformation in Germany, France, Switzerland and Scotland, Roman Catholic altars were, as we may see them now, loaded with decorations, tinsel and gilt, when solid silver and gold were not procurable. Artificial flowers surrounded the statues of the Virgin, the infant Jesus and the saints. Incense was burned, candles were kept burning, etc., etc. The spirituality of the Reformers swept all these things away, and rightly too, we think. But, as is generally the case in revolutions, the seceders went to the opposite extreme; they admitted no middle ground between a Gothic Cathedral and a barn, as most of the early Protest-

ant churches were. But as time passed, and passions calmed down, more reasonable ideas began to prevail. It was discovered that since God Himself had ordered an ornate place of worship, in the Tabernacle of the old Covenant, it could not be a sin to have a well ordered sanctuary under the new; that a hard, backless, bench was really not a necessity for spiritual worship; that a cold, badly ventilated, dingy and stuffy hall did not sanctify the worshippers there, nor made them more attentive to the preaching of the word.

Some Christian communions may have discovered this before we did. If we find that they were right in making their churches comfortable, we should not be above imitating them, for surely Presbyterians do not lay claims to infallibility or absolute perfection. Flowers, we are told, are the latest improvement. We thank God for it. We are on our way back to Eden, the garden of God when the air around us is fragrant with the perfume of God's own blossoms. We feel we are no longer considering the traditions of the elders, even if these elders had borne the names of Calvin or John Knox. We are, instead, considering the lilies of the field. And—we are open here to correction—we have searched carefully but so far found nothing in the works of either of these two great servants of God, to teach us that flowers, natural flowers, on the church platform, pulpit or communion table, would have been considered by them out of place—a desecration and a sin. But if they ever said so, we are sorry for them, that is all!

"The flowers look upward in every place
Through this beautiful world of ours,
And dear as the smile on an old friend's face,
Is the smile of the bright, bright flowers."
—N. P. Willis.

Flowers around the Lord's table are, it seems to us, marvellously appropriate decorations. We have already pointed out how the scenes of our redemption are intimately connected with gardens; but, apart from this, when Jesus rode triumphantly into Jerusalem the multitude cast branches of palm on the path, shouting Hosanna! the Lord did not reprove them. Flowers or palms, they took what was nearest at hand to honor the Messiah. And it is human nature to use flowers both on glad and sad occasions. It has been so in all places, at all times, in all countries. Flowers are worn at the wedding feast, they are tearfully laid on the breast of our loved and lost. The communion is both a marriage and a funeral ceremony, a symbol of union with Christ the Bridegroom, a showing forth of Christ's death "till He comes." It is also a triumph, for the Lord is risen indeed from the sepulchre in the garden. Let flowers adorn His triumph. The Lord's Supper having all the features which in daily life demand flowers at our hands, let us not refuse them. When we read that the "Christian Endeavor Society of a certain Presbyterian church in Canada, had their place of worship beautifully decorated with flowers when a deeply impressive service closed the year's work of the pastor," instead of sneering at the young people, and suggesting, as has been done, that Christian Endeavor in their case should stand for "church embellishment," it would have been better for the writer to have read over the Lord's answer to the cranky disciples who murmured at Mary's waste of ointment, "Let her alone; why trouble ye the woman for she hath wrought a good work upon Me."

We would be sorry indeed to needlessly wound the tender conscience of any Christian brother who is so weak in the faith as to take offence at the placing of flowers on pulpit or platform in the church. If a number of church members in a congregation seriously opposed it, we would dispense with it, and be sorry for them. We have found flowers as helpful to make services attractive as good music is to a trained ear in the service of praise. And as everything we are and we have must be held for the glory of God, we believe that a blessing rewards the action of those who, having only flowers to bring to God's house, give them rejoicing in their beauty and the love of the Father who made them grow.

"Everywhere around us flowers are glowing,
Some like stars to tell us spring is born.
Others their blue eyes with tears o'erflowing
Stand like Ruth amid the golden corn.
In all places then, and in all seasons,
Flowers expand their light and soul-like wings
Teaching us by most persuasive reasons
How akin they are to human things,
And with child-like, credulous affection
We behold their tender buds expand,
Emblems of our own great resurrection,
Emblems of the bright and better land."

—Longfellow.

Buckingham, P. Q.