

SHATTERING THE NEST

"As an eagle stirreth up her nest, fluttereth over her young, spreadeth abroad her wings, taketh them, beareth them on her wings: So the Lord alone did lead him, and there was no strange god with him". Deut. 32:11-12.

These words are taken from the swan song of Moses. Near the close of his heroic career, he recounted the great things which God had done for Israel. In these verses he sets forth the strength and the tenderness with which God dealt with His chosen people. He portrays the goodness and the faithfulness of God, and then chronicles the wickedness and unfaithfulness of His people. This simple and sublime passage is a grand theme for the naturalist and for the Christian. In a remarkable way it foreshadows and illustrates the process by which God educates His won in the Christian life. If we are to get the full benefit of this brief and beautiful parable, we must look first at its literal facts, and then at its spiritual teachings.

Because an eagle soars to greater heights than any other bird, it is called "the monarch of the skies." This magnificent bird is noted for its superb strength, especially of beak and claw, its wonderful keenness of vision, its remarkable power of rapid, long and unwearied flight, and its marvelous sweep of pinion. The eagle has more admirable qualities than any other fowl. It represents all that is graceful and powerful in the bird creation. Its outstretched wings often measure more than six feet from tip to tip, and there is tremendous strength in them. These wings enable the eagle to fly into the teeth of a gale, to soar to untold heights, and to go out on long flights. The eagle has strength to mount above all, swiftness to outstrip all, an eye that penetrates the very fountain of light, and a sagacity that is almost human when it comes to instructing and disciplining its young.

The eagle selects the lofty height, far above the reach of beast or man, as the place for her nest. She sometimes builds her nest a yard square. Into its structure go many twigs and boughs of wood, bunches of grass, and quantities of mountain heather. She takes the trouble to cover all of the pieces of wood with downy lining, so as to make it soft for the young eaglets that are there to be fledged and nourished.

Not among the reeds and grass does the eagle build; not even among the tree-tops, but far up on the crags of the mountain-peaks does she construct her nest. The nest is made of billets of wood, and inlaid with rushes and mountain heather.

Up in this airy home, surrounded by desolate solitudes and far above the noise and smoke of human habitation, the mother eagle rears her young. She is remarkable in her care of them. She is capable of the tenderest affection and the most loving solicitude for them. That fierce beak, those piercing eyes, and those powerful pinions do not strike terror to the hearts of the fledglings, for to them they are the means by which their needs are satisfied and their safety from harm is assured. She has a peculiar affection for her young, and manifests it in a most unusual manner. She knows full well when the time arrives that they should learn to fly. She understands that they were not made to remain always in their soft and comfortable nest, and that their wings were not made merely to fold in weakness and laziness. If they remained in their cozy nest, they would never develop, but would remain weaklings. She knows that if they are to reach the full exercise of their powers, they must be shaken from the complacency that at present holds them in its grip. She knows that if they shall answer their destiny, and cleave the skies with their wings, they must set away from the old nest to which they are so strongly attached. In this condition their powers of flight will never be developed.

The mother eagle cannot see her brood despise their noble heritage. An eagle unable to fly is unworthy its name. She does not leave them to the ignoble ease they would perhaps prefer. She is determined that they shall leave their nest, cleave the air with mighty wing, and rise above storm and cloud with brave heart and undimmed eye. They must learn to fly.

In various ways the mother eagle tries to get her young on the wing. She tries to arouse in them the ambition which will lead them to skirt the lofty crags and to fly serenely and sublimely in the high places. She tries to induct them into a life of grander scope, and make them actually the great, free and competent creatures they were meant to be. She will not allow her brood to beguile and themselves with a false ease or a fancied security. When the time arrives that their welfare is dependent on their disturbance in their cozy home, she flutters over her offspring in order to show them what they ought to do. She attempts to influence them to imitate her, and take their flight. She seeks to inspire them with confidence and to get them to follow her example. She swoops round and round, backwards and forwards, to encourage them to attempt to fly, and to show them how to do it.

When they refuse to come out of the nest and attempt to fly, she resorts to more effectual means. She, therefore, begins to make the nest uncomfortable for her young. She first removes its soft and warm lining in order that the sharp thorns may stick them. But still the eaglets are unwilling to attempt to fly. They look out from the side of the nest into the yawning abyss below, and then shrink back into the nest with a natural terror.

Knowing that they are strong enough for flight, she puts her claws deep into the nest, shakes it up, turns the inside out, and makes it very uncomfortable for them. When she begins to tear the framework of the nest, the eaglets huddle together in the parts of the nest yet undisturbed. After reversing the well adjusted materials, she breaks her nest in pieces in order to compel her young to take their flight. They are thrust out to try their wings, for without practice they never can fly. When they are shaken out of the secure and comfortable way of life in which they had been nurtured and sustained, the eaglets flutter in their alarm and express their fears by screaming out their distress.

As the young bird falls from the high cliff, fluttering and frightened, the mother eagle with one swoop goes under it, and permits it to light on her back until it has rested its untried wings. She holds it up, carries it on her back, soars aloft with it, then glides swiftly from beneath it, leaving it for the moment to its own resources. If, after a struggle, it is unable to bear itself up, she darts beneath it again with incredible swiftness and prevents its fall. She bears it upward in the air, shakes it off again, and compels it to use its own wings. If it is not able to fly, she swoops down and brings it back again to the rocky ledge whereon the nest was built. This procedure is continued until the eaglet can fly on its own. The mother eagle always gives help in extremity. She "taketh them, beareth them on her wings."

Then Moses tells us, "The way God has been treating you, my people, is as a mother eagle treats the little ones in her nest." What a striking and suggestive metaphor!

In like manner God drove Israel out of Egypt. God made their tasks extremely bitter in that land of wealth and beauty. The Egyptians transformed God's people into the slaves

of Pharaoh. Pharaoh made their tasks increasingly severe. God permitted them to multiply rapidly although they were oppressed greatly. God caused them to suffer when their nests were disturbed, and He led them to aspire after higher things.

When God delivered Israel, He designed to make of them a peculiar people. He was going to develop a civilization unlike any that the world had ever seen; and this was to be done in Egypt. He must get them away from the contact of that old, idolatrous nation, and train them by themselves. And so He dealt with them as the eagle deals with her young, when the time comes for them to learn to fly. He drove Israel out into the wilderness into a new and strange life; a life at which they now and then rebelled, and from which, in their worst moments, they looked longingly back to the animal comforts of the old slave nest in Egypt. But in the new and untried sphere God never left them. In their weakness and inexperience He was present with them and cared for them.

Now what did this unfamiliar metaphor mean to God's people assembled in the valley of Moab to hear the farewell message of their great leader? To them it meant that God is the eagle of the whole universe. He is above us, and His eyes are always upon us, and His wings are ever stretched out over us, and He protects us. As the eagle is quick to detect the needs, swift to meet the needs, and gloriously able to supply them, so God does with His children.

Just as the eagle is ever near the struggling eaglet, and is ready in a moment with effectual aid, so God has said to each of His children, "Fear thou not; for I am with thee: be not dismayed; for I am thy God: I will strengthen thee; yea, I will help thee; yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness." "I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee." "My grace is sufficient for thee." God is always with us to see, to hear, and to uphold.

God, like the eagle, stirs our nests. He does so in order that we may be brought to see our true condition, and to feel our need of Him. He mars our enjoyment of earthly things in order that He may whet our spiritual appetites for those enduring joys which the world cannot take away. He rouses His people to action by making their places uncomfortable for them. He leads us into higher experiences by making us uncomfortable. Men are not apt to seek wealth until they become dissatisfied with poverty. They will not seek knowledge until they are dissatisfied with ignorance. They will not seek larger attainments until they are dissatisfied with their present ones. God makes us uncomfortable where we are by the prickings of conscience, by a change of circumstances, and sometimes by disappointment or sorrow. In every blighted prospect of ambition, in every disappointed hope of success, in every visitation of sickness, in every stroke of bereavement, God is reminding us that we were born for higher enjoyments, and fitted for higher destinies. Moses teaches us that God is like an eagle in that when He finds sloth, lack of ambition, lack of initiative or lack of toil, He sees to it that the nest is shaken by accident, by misfortune, by adversity or by death. Blessed be the trials, however sharp, that keep us from nestling down into selfishness and sloth! Blessed be the discipline, however painful or severe, that stirs up our nests and teaches us to live as sons and daughters of the Almighty and heirs of an unfading crown!

What is the meaning of this stirring of the nest? It means that the goal of life cannot be defined in terms of physical ease. It also involves and enlargement of vision. It not only means that life is more than comfort; it means that life can never be abundant where vision is lacking. The nest must be stirred in order that latent powers and potential qualities may be developed. God is interested in our development as well as in our protection. He wants us to grow and develop and to use our powers in His service and for His glory. But everywhere the nest which has been laboriously and lovingly built must be stirred or shattered. It is the very nature of things. It involves the

the secret of life and progress. The possibilities of life cannot be realized unless the nest is stirred. Sometimes God has to tear up our nests. If, therefore, He destroys your plans which have been carefully and prayerfully made, He has better plans for you; and if he tears your nest to pieces, He is feathering a bigger and finer nest for you, and will one day carry you to it. As the young eaglet needed to trust its mother, so we need to trust God. We are safe if we will trust Him. There is not a duty in which He will fail to support us and to help us. He will not send a trial without giving strength to bear it. He is ever nigh them that need Him. His help is all-sufficient. He will meet our every need.