

WINGS, AND THE WAY TO USE THEM.

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In all divine things, speculation is more familiar to us than practice; we often begin at the top to fall to the bottom, to work our way by God's grace, slowly but surely, to the top. Every step of the way, if we would be sure, must be by experience; wings, and a sudden flight will not do. There must be a patient waiting on the Lord, before the wings can be used: and the wings must grow out of our own souls by practical divine grace working first within; for God does not fasten the wings to our shoulders to give us the luxury of flying, but while we are waiting on God, the wings are growing, and become strong.—Every thing lasting is a labour, a work; and thus it becomes a habit, permanent and powerful. Our heavenly *habits* are wings; when they are well set, and thoroughly formed, then they bear us upwards; until that be the case, we have to bear *them*, and it may be hard work, as the formation of all good habits is at first in fallen natures. But it is an unspeakable blessedness in this law of habit, working heavenwards, that what at first was labour becomes infinite delight. The nearer we are borne towards heaven, the more elastic and spontaneous becomes the motion of our wings, till it is almost involuntary—just like the play of the lungs in a clear June atmosphere. An albatross, rising from the sea, has to run upon the waves at first, but once risen and soaring, there is hardly a perceptible motion in the broad, white pinions of the majestic bird. Such are the wings of habit, wrought out by divine grace, and winging the regenerated nature to the throne of God. “They that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; they shall walk, and not faint.”

Now, it is a sad mistake for men to have wings and not use them, not fly with them.—Why, if we have wings, are we not all soaring? The Christian life, in too many cases, is like a sea of agitated waves, along the surface of which the albatrosses are half-running, half flying, but never rising into the bright clear air. The pursuit of game keeps them on the surface. So the wings of too many Christians are only spread to keep them from drowning while pursuing the thing of earth, not to raise them towards heaven. Too many persons seem to use their religion as a diver does his bell, to venture down into the deep of worldliness with safety, and there grope for pearls, with just as much of heaven's air as to keep them from suffocating. Now, our air was

given us not for the purpose of diving for pearls, but for breathing freely, rising from the world, and soaring towards God and glory.—And wings are given us not for the purpose of enabling us to stay, fluttering on the surface of the water, till we have caught our prize, but to bear us upward—upward to the throne of God.

“Oh that I had wings like a dove! then would I fly away, and be at rest!” “But, my dear friend,” says the faithful prophet beside the Psalmist, and the gentle monitor within, “you *have* wings, and what you want is to use them freely, confidently, trusting in the Lord.” “Oh that I knew how to break forth from my prison,” says the Christian in Giant Despair's castle. “But, thou despairing soul,” says the same voice of faith and duty, “thou hast a joy of promise in thy bosom that will open every lock in Doubting Castle, kept by Giant Despair. Pluck it out and try!”

Certainly, it is not so much wings that we need, as the heart to use them aright, the willingness to bid adieu to earth, and fly away from earth with them. A dove could not fly if we tied her with a weight to her dove-cot. A lark could not soar if her feet were confined in the net of the fowler. But surely in vain is the snare laid in the sight of any bird. The very instinct of the little creature will not let it seek even its food where the net has been plainly laid over it. But the enemy of our souls may lay his snares right in our view, and yet we sometimes make directly at them, for the sake of the glittering prizes that seem to lie beneath them, and which we think we shall have skill enough, by the help of our wings and great watchfulness, to snatch away without getting entangled. But it is perilous work flying at snares; it is much safer, wiser, and better, to keep clear of them. And our wings were given us for this very purpose, and to bear us up to heaven.

“But we cannot always be soaring and swinging. Even the Psalmist has to confess this, when he says, *My soul cleaveth unto the dust*; and, *My soul melteth for heaviness*.” No! but you can always keep above the world by God's help, by watching unto prayer; just as the moment the Psalmist finds the glue upon his wings, and has to complain of dust and heaviness, he cries out on the instant, *Quicken thou me according to thy Word!*—And when he has done this a little while, then again the wings get free, and he is able to say, *As the hart panteth after the water-brooks, so panteth my soul after Thee, O God!*—And when he can say, *My soul followeth hard after Thee*, then he is able to say, *Thy right hand upholdeth me!*

So it is that fervent praying is itself soaring. The soul may seem, in the sad experi-