

# FOR OUR LIFE'S BATTLE

GOD'S DISTURBING HAND AWAKENS OUR LATENT POWERS.

## THE LESSON TO BE LEARNED

We Must Learn to Depend Upon Ourselves, So Far As Human Beings May Depend Upon Themselves—Whom the Lord Loveth He Chasteneth—How the Elements of a Strong Character Are Acquired.

Entered according to Act of Parliament of Canada, in the year 1904, by William Bailey, of Toronto, at the Dept. of Agriculture, Ottawa.

Los Angeles, Cal., June 12.—In this sermon the loving care of God in dealing with his children and the way in which he fits them for the battle of life are graphically described under the simile of the eagle and its young. The text is Deuteronomy xxxiii. 11. "As the eagle stirreth up her nest."

The war goddess has crowned the eagle "monarch of the air." His throne is the inaccessible cliff, his diadem the neonite sun, his footstool the morning clouds, his playground the vast expanse of infinite space. His keenness of eye, boldness of flight, sharpness of claw, merciless destructiveness of beak, cause him to be dreaded in mountainous lands, as the huge jaws and powerful claws of the lion cause him to be dreaded in the African forests.

But, though the eagle has been called the monarch of the air, as the lion has been called the monarch of the fields, yet the eagle, like the lion, never had royal pedigree. By that word "royal" I mean a noble, brave and fearless ancestry. The eagle is not of heroic mould. He is a cringing, fawning, contemptible coward. Though he is a rapacious bird and loves to banquet off the quivering flesh of a newly slain carcass, the blood which flows through his own arteries is pumped from a craven heart. In terror this mighty winged fier will flee before the little king bird, hardly larger than a bearded English sparrow. Confined in a cage with a small barnyard fowl, the domestic bird has been known to make the eagle beg for mercy as a school-yard bully will whine before an outraged youth half his size.

"Many reputations are undeserved altogether," once wrote an observant naturalist. "Let us not in this connection trouble now about statesmen, poets or authors, but take from natural history a familiar illustration, that of the eagle. The great strength of the eagle enables it to prey upon creatures that have no power of defending themselves from his terrible swoop, but we must not allow ourselves on this account, as our fathers did, to magnify him into a type of magnanimity and courage. In true courage he is not superior to most of the smaller hawks, and certainly inferior to the falcons, which will drive away this so-called 'monarch of the air' when he approaches too near their nests. So that, really, when we remember what a fame the eagle has always had for magnanimity and for courage, it is obvious in view of the facts, that he, like many other birds and men, has obtained a reputation which is undeserved."

But, though the eagle is a cowardly bird in reference to his own life, no sooner does he become a parent than he is transformed into a daring, valiant protector of his young. No sooner are the dull white colored eggs deposited in the nest which the twin have builded upon the tops of the dizzy heights, or upon the ledge of a precipice, than the parent birds are ready to protect these nests at any cost.

Yes, yes; parental affection transforms the craven bird into a fierce, rapid champion, capable of sublime self-sacrifice in defence of its offspring. Yet in our text we find him, in spite of that tender affection, disturbing the young birds and turning them out of their home. What does the Bible mean by comparing this strange conduct with God's providential dealing? Why does God, as a loving Father, treat his children in this seemingly rough way as the eagle bird pushes her offspring? For you must remember that we do not have to go entirely to this figure of the eagle bird to be taught the lessons that God's hand sometimes

smites a loving blow, as well as gives a loving caress. In the epistle to the Hebrews we are taught that chastisement is one of the proofs God gives us of his affection. "Whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth."

First, God, like the parental eagle, stirs up our nests in order that we may learn how to depend upon ourselves, as well as upon Him. He plunges us into the abyss of trouble in order that we, as fledglings, may learn to fly on and up. He tumbles us down so that we may soar higher than the cliffs upon which we are born, higher than the mountains whose bald heads are frozen amid perpetual snows, and higher than even the morning clouds that have hovered over us in many benedictions. He treats us just as a true parent should always treat his child. Some few weeks ago I was visiting upon the ranch of a wealthy man in California. He turned and said to me: "No young man ever amounts to anything unless he is compelled to work for his own mental and physical and spiritual development. So firmly do I believe it is the mountain upon the man and not the man upon the mountain that brings man to the highest development for which God intended him that I have compelled my boys to work for every cent they have received, even when they were little children. I never give them anything without a return. If they want spending money they must earn it by painting the fences or cutting the wood or gathering the walnuts. If they want a gun or a riding horse they must buy it with their own money which they have earned. I have not told them that each year they have an \$8,000 income, which was left them by a dead relative, and that at twenty-one years of age they will be independent. I know that knowledge would ruin them. I make them work for every cent they spend. In their working I am developing two of the finest boys in all this part of the country."

That earthly parent is developing his children by work. Cannot we realize God is developing us spiritually, mentally and physically by work, and hard work? Why were the old Highlanders, born amid the Scottish heather, of heroic mold? We have read that in the chivalric times the Scottish crusaders were being driven back when an old Highlander chief took from his girdle the leather bag which encased the heart of the dead Bruce. He flung it far into the ranks of the enemy, as he cried: "Thou brave heart of a mighty Bruce, lead us on to victory. Lead us on! Lead us on!" Then the fleeing Highlanders turned and charged where the dead Bruce would have led them. Oh, how we thrill at the story of that mighty deed!

In the southern parts of Europe all that the inhabitants had to do for centuries was to till the soil and it would laugh with plenty. While among those northern snow-clad hills not only did the inhabitants have to fight human enemies, but climatic ones. Any man who wrested a harvest from the New Hampshire valleys or from the Scottish highlands had by necessity to be strong of brain and powerfully muscled of arm. It was the climatic obstacles which made the New Englanders and the Scottish clans the mighty men they were and are, and it is trouble, great trouble, which always develops men. The old parental eagle pushes her fledglings off the nest to teach her young how to fly. God pushes us one and all out into the abyss of fathomless trial to teach us how to take care of ourselves. God does not want to run a perpetual nursery. He wants to make us of man and women of fully developed powers. He disturbs us from our places of ease and comfort and thrusts us forth into scenes of conflict and difficulty in order that we may learn to use the spiritual powers with which we are endowed, and to teach us in dire extremity what infinite resources there are in Him for every one of his children who looks confidently up to him and cries, "Our Father."

God again stirs up our nests and pushes us off our eyries, as the eagle does its young, to show us our limitations as well as our possibilities. The eagle has to learn what it cannot do as well as what it can do. It must be taught in one sense how to depend upon itself; it must be taught in another sense how it must depend upon the parent bird. The Bible in the beautiful figure of my text pictures the old eagle, when the right time comes, stirring up the

nest and pushing her young off the cliff. Yes, that is beautiful, but the next statement of the verse is just as beautiful. When the young bird drops down and down and the fluttering wings grow weaker and weaker, then the fledgling gives a faint, frightened call for help. Then what happens? Why, the old bird at once starts to the rescue. Swifter than any sea gull ever dropped into the waters to clutch a fish, swifter than ever a hawk pounced upon a chicken in the barnyard, the old mother bird starts to save her young. How? She swoops down below the fluttering eaglet and, rising with outstretched wings, receives it on her shoulders and bears it aloft into safety. Is not this a beautiful symbol of God's care for his children? The psalmist says, "He walketh upon the wings of the wind." Yes; that is like the eagle. He pushes us off the nest, but he does not leave us to perish. He is near, and underneath us are the everlasting arms. When we are losing our strength and cry to him, he hears us up. Do you not see the beautiful teachings of my text? "As an eagle stirreth up her nest, fluttereth over her young, spreadeth abroad her wings, taketh them, heareth them on her wings."

The words of the text teach us that we must learn our limitations and how to trust God, and to depend upon God, as well as to learn how to depend upon ourselves. We must learn to trust God, to leave unshakenly Father's strength and care as the eagle trusts the mother bird. It is a lesson of dependence as well as of effort. As we must learn from the text the duty of depending upon ourselves, so we must also learn the duty of absolute dependence upon God.

Have you and I ever stopped to fully consider how Christ's earthly life was meant to be an object lesson for sinful men, as the flapping wings of the old eagles are meant to be visible object lessons to teach the young eagles how to fly? But there is still another great lesson from the figure of an old parent eagle stirring up her nest. After the young birds have once been pushed off the eyrie and learned their own limitations, and also learned to trust the parent, then they are ready to be taught by the parent birds by object lessons. When the eaglet once learns that if it does not obey the parent bird it will be punished, then it will not only willingly, but after awhile gladly, obey what the mother and father bird teach it to do. First comes fear, then trust, then the attempt to imitate and to do as the parent bird does.

It has never been my privilege to see an old eagle teaching her young how to fly, but Sir Humphry Davy, the great English chemist, once saw this interesting spectacle. He gives a full description of the scene. First, the eagles followed out exactly the picture of my text. The young birds, he said, were trembling, clinging to the rocks where they were hatched, but the old birds said to themselves, "This won't do; this won't do. These young birds must be taught to fly." So the parent birds first tried to coax the young to leave the nest. Then, when coaxing accomplished nothing, they struck right and smelt with their beaks. With their powerful talons they scattered the nest.

Then they gave the young a big push, and off the fledglings went. Then the young were carried back to the nest by the mother wings of the parent bird. The mother and father bird seemed to stop awhile to have a little talk. They seemed to say: "Now, children, you must obey me, whether you will or no. And, as you must obey me I want you to do it willingly. I want you to follow my every movement. See how I raise my wings so? I beat them in the air just so. And now I begin to circle round and round. Come, boys; come, girls. That is right. Now, try again. Are you ready? Here we go, and up and up. See how easy it is."

Let me describe this object lesson in almost the same language with which Sir Humphry Davy described it when he saw the two old eagles by their actions, teaching their young how to fly above the crags of Ben Nevis. "The old birds had coaxed the eaglets off the eyrie, then made small circles, which the young eaglets tried to imitate. Then the parent birds made larger and larger circles in a gradually ascending spiral until the birds, old and young, were finally lost to view in the great heaven of blue." Ah, yes, the old eagles teach the young eagles to fly, first, by the sharp blow of the beak, and the pushing off the nest; second, by the rescue and the bringing back to the nest; third, by the object lessons, which say: "Come, children, do as I am doing now. Come, lift your wings as my wings flap, and go up and up." God teaches us how to fly by pushing us off into the great abyss of trouble. He rescues us by the infinite power of the atoning cross. He then teaches us how to go up and up and up by the object lessons of Christ's earthly life.

But there is still another lesson to be learned from the old eagle stirring up her nest. She pushes out her young in order to make room for the next batch of fledglings. If she did not do this there would be only one brood hatched in the nests. Thus the eagle's offspring would only consist of two or three or four young. But no sooner does the old eagle finish raising one family than she prepares to raise another batch of fledglings.

Have you ever considered how soon this old earth would be overcrowded and an unfit place in which to live if God did not push the generations on and up? This is an age of the slaughter of the innocents. Life is in mortal combat for life. The earth is soaked with blood. The grilling never stops its endless chop. Every lullaby has a corresponding death rattle. Every cradle implies a grave. So rapidly can shell life propagate that one tiny cell can reproduce itself one thousand million times in a month. A common codfish lays between eight and nine million eggs every year. But, though the human race does

not reproduce itself as rapidly as the insectile world, or even as the cattle, yet, if allowed to live on this earth uninterruptedly, it would soon be impossible for the growing members of the human family to exist.

New generations come, and room must be made for them. The infant leaves the cradle to a successor and becomes the youth, the youth passes on to manhood and on to old age, and the younger generations tread upon his heels at every step. And last he passes on into eternity. What then? The apostle says, "It doth not yet appear what we shall be," but we know enough of that life to be full of hope. To those who through Christ have made peace with God there is the promise of continued development. "They that wait on the Lord," says the prophet, "shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run and not be weary, and they shall walk and not faint." In that heavenly state there shall be neither hunger, nor pain, nor weariness, nor sickness, nor death. Even the eagle, long lived as it is, grows old and dies; but there we shall live forever. And the love of our Father in heaven is eternal. The eagle's affections are transferred from one brood to the next, but nothing can separate us from the love of God, whose heart is large enough for all his children.

Would you have such a future to anticipate? Then let that power which God promises to impart come even now into your life. The only thing that can blot out that prospect is sin. Dread sin as you would dread the bite of a serpent. Theodore L. Cuyler, the grand old man of the Brooklyn pulpit, graphically described a scene which I have carried in my memory for many years. A peasant living upon the mountain side was on his way home in the evening hour. Tired after a hard day's work, he turned to look down the valley which as a panorama stretched away at his feet. Suddenly he saw a mighty winged eagle begin to lift itself from a distant cliff. Higher and higher it rose, gorgeous amid the fires of the setting sun. Suddenly its movements became labored. It struggled and fought in midair and seemed to be gasping for breath. First one wing became helpless, then the second wing. Then the huge bird, like a stone, shot through the air and fell dead almost at the peasant's feet. The peasant could not understand the cause until he went to the side of the bird and picked up the still warm corpse. Then to his horror there wriggled from between his fingers a tiny serpent that had fastened itself under the bird's wing and sucked the life out of the "monarch of the air." So sin as a venomous, clinging serpent, tries to fasten itself upon us. The mightier winged we are the more anxious that satanic serpent is for our life's blood. But God will to-day not only save us, as the mother eagle does her young, but he does more. Christ has given us his life in order to overcome the power of the serpent. He has died in order that we might live. In this text of an eagle stirring up the nest of her young cannot you feel the touch of a saving Christ?

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