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Our Pulpit.

The Eagle's Nest.

SERMON PREACHED BY

REV. A. J. MOWATT.

In St. Paul's Church, Sabbath evening, Fredericton, Aug 19th., 1888.

"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."—DEUT. XXXII. 11, 12.

I take you to the eagle's nest to-night to teach you the sweet lessons of the Lord's lovingkindness. The eagle referred to here is now known to be the griffon vulture, a huge bird, its wings measuring five and six feet across. Naturalists and others have questioned what Moses says here with regard to the habits of the bird in its treatment of its young, but it is found to be true to the letter of this particular species of eagle.

The mother-eagle has a nest of full-fledged eaglets high up on the very edge of a mountain-cliff, and her instinct tells her that it is time they were leaving the nest and taking to their wings. Perhaps she sees danger approaching in the shape of a daring hunter climbing his slow way up the face of the beetling crag towards her eyry. So with great tact she sets to work to teach them to fly. She, in her own way, coaxes them to make the attempt. She reasons with them, expostulates, threatens, tries to give them to understand that there is danger for them in the nest. But they do not heed her. They stretch out their necks, and look over the precipice, and tell their mother that they will be sure to fall and hurt themselves. But the wise mother-eagle has made up her mind that her great eaglets can fly and shall fly. And so she tears the nest to pieces around them. They make a great outcry about it, but she heeds not. She flutters them about as if she cared not for them, throwing them clear over the precipice and compelling them to take to flight. But then no sooner has she them on the wing than she darts after them, flying beneath them when they fly low and shew signs of fatigue, and bearing them upon her strong widespread wings, thus shewing her tender motherly interest in them, and teaching them this lesson, that it is because they are eagles, and because she wants them to be eagles, that she stirs up their nest, and forces them to flight.

And thus deals the wise Jehovah with His Israel. Moses says in the expressive words of the text which I quote from the Revised Version: "As an eagle that stirreth up her nest, that fluttereth over her young, He spread abroad His wings, He took them, He bare them on His pinions: the Lord alone did lead him."

Now, first, let me speak of the love that stirs up the nest.

And the reference here is to the Lord's dealings with His people in Egypt, Goshen was their nest there. There they grew up to a nation's size from being a family. They went down to Egypt in Joseph's time to be fed during a famine, but they liked it so well that they stayed there, stayed till they wore out their welcome. Like a full-grown eaglet in its nest, which has the size and look of an eagle, but whose talons have never been tested in battle; so Israel had grown in their Goshen-nest to the size of a nation, without the strength and energy, the bone and sinew, of a nation. They had not yet learned the hard lessons of experience, self-dependence and self-government, and the greatness and glory of liberty. They were so helplessly dependent, and so grovelling and base as a people, that they would rather be slaves in Egypt to their being a nation of freemen in the land of promise. They would rather be great fat eaglets in the nest, at the mercy of everyone who chose to ill-treat them, for the sake of the nest, and the comfort and ease to be had in it, than be eagles, soaring away on eagle-wings to the life and liberty of eagle existence, and asserting their rights in their own sun land with wings and beak and talon. But like the mother-vulture, the Lord was resolved that this nation-grown people of His should leave their Goshen-nest, and be eagles, not eaglets forever; be a nation, not only in size, but in strength, in everything that makes a nation. He was not going to let His people be forever the pampered parasites of Egypt's greatness, nor their slaves either. So He sent Moses to tell them of their noble destiny, to remind them that Canaan, not Egypt, was their country, to shew them that liberty, not slavery, was their national birth-right, and to rouse up in them the free brave

spirit of their fathers, loyalty to God and truth, faithfulness to their convictions of duty, and boldness to do it at any sacrifice.

But Moses, you remember, did not succeed. They were well content to be Egypt's slaves for the sake of Egypt's fare. The flesh-pots and garlic of Egypt, though enjoyed at the sacrifice of life and liberty and everything that ought to be dear to a people, had more attractions for this nation of slaves, than the milk and honey of the land of promise. No amount of coaxing or reasoning would make them stir out of their nest, or even wish to stir. Israel was quite as unwilling to leave Egypt as Egypt was to have them leave. So both of them must be made willing. They must be rudely torn apart. Gentle measures had failed; so other measures must be had recourse to that will not fail. Hence followed a series of sore trials and wasting judgments. The Lord tore their Egypt-nest to pieces. He made their bondage bitter to them. He stirred up the Egyptians to use them cruelly, to oppress them beyond endurance. Oh what a loud outcry to Moses and Aaron they made about it, and blamed them for it! But the nest-stirring and the rude fluttering went on, and grew worse and worse, until, at last, both Egypt and Israel were willing to part. The Lord so oppressed Israel, and so plagued Egypt, that Israel was glad to get away out of Egypt, and Egypt was glad to get them away.

Now, you will take notice, that the intolerable bondage and misery which the Lord's people suffered in Egypt, was a most necessary and important part of His plan of grace and mercy in their behalf. It was His wise, kind love, although they could not see it at the time, that was stirring up their nest, and fluttering and flinging them out of it. It was His love that was heaping burden after burden on Israel's back, until they were glad enough to cry out for deliverance, and willing enough to accept it on any terms. And here we learn, that it is love that tears down the nest as well as builds it, eagle love you will tell me perhaps, but still love, a deep true love. Love flutters and flings out of the nest, and compels to flight, as well as bears, when weary, on wide-spread, soft wings.

And, my hearers, this love that stirs the nest is still at work, at work among us, and there is need of its being at work. The Lord's people to-day as well as in the long ago get themselves snugly nestled in some world-Egypt, some fat Goshen. Perhaps like Israel of old they went down to it in a famine, went down to it to make a living, but business prospering, and property accumulating, and riches gathering, they have grown to be more and more satisfied, until they have lost all desire for anything better, and anything beyond. Perhaps indeed so far has the world grown in upon them that it has made them its slaves. Instead of being, as they should be, its masters, making it serve them, they have to serve it, and there is no slavery much more galling and grinding than that of the world. You will find men so influenced and bound by the world that they cannot do anything without calculating first how it is going to affect their business interests. "Is it going to pay?" they are forever asking? and where it pays the best, there they vote, and there they worship. You are nestled, O my hearer, in your fine house, or on your fat farm, or in your lucrative business, or in your money-making pursuit; and out of that snug nest of yours to a noble life of self-denial and christian usefulness there is no getting you to move, perhaps. I lecture you in my poor way; I reason with you; I coax and scold you; but there you are, and there you are bound to stay. You look like eagles. You have the wings and plumage of eagles. You have the size and importance of eagles. But this you have not—you have not the free-born heaven-soaring spirit of eagles. I have seen eagles in cages, but how unlike eagles there, how mean and down-trodden! They lazily stretched out their great wings, and plumed their pinions, and gazed up at the sun, but their eagle-spirit seemed to be utterly broken. And so with so many of God's professing people. They are caged eagles. Their worldliness keeps them wing-clipped, so that they cannot soar.

But God's wise love knows how to set free the eagle spirit of His worldly people. If they are His people He will not let them sit moping away their days in the world-nest of useless inactivity and spiritual sloth. He will stir up their nest for them. He will tear down their fine house perhaps where they lounge away their days in ease and affluence, and send them abroad to the world houseless and homeless to feel the

keen blasts of adversity. He will give their fat farms to others, burn their shops, sink their ships, give eagle-wings to their money and angel-wings to themselves perhaps, and thus send them away to a destiny of glory and everlasting bliss. Many a once worldly spirit has rejoiced when emancipated from its mammon-slavery, and soared away like the eagle, singing like the lark, as it mounted upward to meet the sun, and found a joy in its spiritual freedom that mammon's treasures could never buy.

But men do not like this nest-stirring love of God very much. Even God's own children do not like it. When the Lord comes in among a family with sickness and death, and flutters the dear little ones over the edge of the grave, what an outcry there is made. We call it calamity; we talk and think of it as the worst thing that could happen us. Ah! parents do not like to have their home-nest torn down and plundered even by Divine love's hands. The rich christian does not like to see his riches develop wings, and then soar off from him. He knows perhaps that his money is retarding his growth in grace and standing in the way of his usefulness, and many a prayer he offers for strength to resist the world's temptations, for grace to keep him above the engrossing cares and anxieties of life, and for a purer love, and truer devotion, and higher and holier life-aims than money-making; still, when God in answer to his prayers stirs up his nest, and relieves him of his overburden of care, he is not always thankful for it, but looks upon it as a bitter providence. But sometimes nothing else and nothing less than the tearing down of their nest will set the young eagles soaring away to the freedom and rapture of eagle-life, and, sometimes nothing else and nothing less than the complete destruction of men's world-nests will do to free their souls from the enthrallments of the world and give them a heavenward impulse.

A few can be rich christians and eminently pious as well. They can have houses and lands and great possessions, and yet live lives of true devotion and christian self-sacrifice. Some christians are princes and rulers, the great and mighty of the earth, and at the same time they are the true and lowly followers of the lowly Jesus. But this does not seem to be so with all. Make some christians rich with worldly riches, and how poor and narrow-souled they become so soon. Abraham's great wealth and growing power and influence did not hurt his piety in the least. But how different with Lot, and Lot was a really good man, a child of God, as well as Abraham. Lot's wealth all but lost him his soul, and so in kindness to him, the Lord took it from him, and left him naked and bare. It may sound strange in the ears of some of you, but I venture to make the remark, that there are some of God's children who cannot be rich without spiritual poverty, some who cannot be high up in the world without spiritual degradation, and others who can hardly have worldly comforts without being more or less injured; and although it is no pleasure to God to be forever stirring up their nests, pulling away one twig of comfort after another, and fluttering them here and there, yet in mercy to themselves, in love for their souls, in tender regard for their highest and best interests, for both time and eternity, it has to be done. Some christians are so constituted, that if they have any chance at all, they will have a nest, and there they will sit moping away their precious life in ease and self-indulgence. Hence, the Lord finds it necessary to stir up their nest. He cannot give them a comfort without following it with more or less of discomfort to neutralize its bad effects upon them. He can hardly give them a day's health without following it with a day's sickness to purify them from the worldliness their day's health produced.

Thus you see how the love that stirs the nest is needed. We all need it more or less, but it is clear some need it more than others.

Then we have here, in the next place, another side of the Lord's wondrous love, the love that bears up as an eagle's wings.

The eagle stirs up her nest, and flutters over her young until she gets them to take to their wings, and then with motherly affection, spreading out her great wings, she bears them up on them while they are weak, and when they are weary, until like herself they are strong enough to soar away sunward, and desport themselves in the glad sunny empyrean.

And so with our Heavenly Father. See how He manifested His wing-bearing love to Israel. He tore up their Egypt-nest and fluttered them out of it; but then, no sooner were they out of it

than He took them up on His great wings of love, and carried them across the Red Sea, and over the howling wilderness, and through the Jordan, into the land of promise. And how wisely as well as lovingly He carried them! He found them a nation of slaves, their national spirit broken with slavery or undeveloped, and the vices of slaves engrained in their very nature; and therefore He so carried them that as a people they were made physically, intellectually, morally, spiritually stronger and better, and they were thus fitted when He brought them to Canaan for being a nation of freemen, and for fulfilling the high and holy destiny to which He had called them. He might have transported them in a moment by a wondrous miracle from Egypt to Canaan; but then, how could they have learned the lessons which hard experience taught them by the way they came, and which only hard experience can teach? He might have led them by the usual caravan route, and that would have been a shorter and pleasanter route than the roundabout way He led them; but then how could they have learned the lessons of faith in God and dependence upon His all-sufficiency which they so much needed to learn, and how could they have got inured to trials and difficulties, and want and weariness, and hardship and suffering, which none but that roundabout wilderness-way could so well inure them to? And then again, how could they, inexperienced as they were, without discipline and warlike powers, successfully contend against the enemies they must have met in the great public highway? Thus, the Lord wisely as well as lovingly led them by a way of His own choosing.

He had indeed other ends in view besides getting them forward to Canaan, and no other way was so well adapted as that roundabout way for effecting all His wise and beneficent ends respecting them as a people. Many a time they grumbled sorely against God's leading; but, when the end was reached, and they were able to look back from Canaan over all the wondrous way He had led them, they were able to testify to the goodness and love and wisdom of their Heavenly Father. Then they knew as they could not know before that it was Divine love that had stirred up their Egypt nest and had fluttered them out of it, and that it was Divine love that took them up in its great wings at Succoth on the borders of Egypt, and gently carried them all the way to the land of milk and honey.

And, my brethren, it is true still that Divine love has wings, soft, gentle, warm wings, to carry the weak, helpless, trusting Christian forward on his way to the Heavenly Canaan. Many a poor soul has said, when his world-nest had been torn to pieces around him and himself dragged out of it: "I am ruined, ruined, ruined!" How many have looked with weeping eyes and breaking hearts at their riches leaving them, the dear ones they were loving too fondly perhaps snatched away from their loving embraces, and the strong arms of flesh they leaned on and trusted in so confidently becoming paralysed and dead, and they have felt that all that was worth living for was gone. They saw nothing before them but the direst calamities. But no sooner were they helpless and hopeless, than Divine love took them up and carried them. When the soul can get anything at all to hold on to, even visionary hopes, empty dreams, airy shadows, it is so natural to it to trust to such rather than to God's love. So the Lord pulls away its supports until it has to fall helpless into His arms, and then when He has it there how tenderly and lovingly He presses the weak, trembling, terrified thing to His bosom, awakening its love and confidence in Him, and teaching it to feel that in His arms of love it is safe and will be well cared for. How men shriek out as if all was gone when the world and their friends are torn from them, but as they are fluttering and falling, as they think, over the precipice of ruin over which God's providences are thrusting them so rudely, they find that instead of falling, love's wide-spread wings are beneath them bearing them up, and not only that, but carrying them away up to higher joys.

Implicit trust in God's fatherly love and care is one of the hardest lessons that the soul has to learn, and hence God's dealings with it are, for the most part, to teach it this very lesson. He wants His people to learn to trust more and more. He wants them to let themselves be borne upon His strong wings. But we will flutter and flutter, like silly eaglets carried on their eagle-mother's wings, as if our fluttering was a help to the strong wings carrying us, whereas such fluttering is only wearying to our

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