

concluding His last and most solemn discourse in the temple.

Our study has thus, we think, made it apparent that the historic course of Christ's parables, as given in Matthew's Gospel, is one which fully

fits in with the normal development of the divine life in man, and that the parallel with these parables, which can be formed from those found in Luke, admirably serves to confirm and establish this.

## The Great Text Commentary.

### THE GREAT TEXTS OF DEUTERONOMY.

#### DEUTERONOMY XXII. 6.

**'If a bird's nest chance to be before thee in the way in any tree, or on the ground, with young ones, or eggs, and the dam sitting upon the young, or upon the eggs, thou shalt not take the dam with the young.'**

#### EXPOSITION.

**'If a bird's nest chance to be before thee in the way . . . thou shalt not take the dam with the young.'**—This law is peculiar to Deuteronomy. It is generally considered to rest upon a humanitarian motive (cf. 25<sup>4</sup>), and to direct regard to be paid to the parental relation in animals (cf. Lv 22<sup>27</sup>); but Fenton (*Early Hebrew Life*, p. 48) thinks it 'rests upon the idea that one may have "right of user" in the bird to the extent of sharing in its produce; but one may not claim entire possession of it.'—DRIVER.

THE Israelites were forbidden to take the mother bird with the young, perhaps because the mother at such times will not avail herself of her power of concealment and flight. The object of the law was to cultivate a merciful regard for the maternal instinct, not merely to preserve game.—G. E. Post in Hastings' *D.B.*

EVIDENTLY the ground of sympathy here is the existence and sacredness of the parental relationship. The mother bird is sacred as a mother; and length of days is promised (v. 7) to those who regard the sanctity of motherhood in this sphere, as it is promised to those who observe the Fifth Commandment of the Decalogue. Thus intimately the lower creation is drawn into the human sphere.—HARPER.

#### THE SERMON.

##### Birds' Nests.

*By the Rev. Joseph Parker, D.D.*

What a singular command to find in a Book which we should expect to be wholly occupied with spiritual revelation! What lessons has it for us?

i. It is a most powerful illustration of the minuteness of Divine government. If God is so careful of a bird's nest, surely He will be pro-

portionately careful of all things of higher quality—human hearts and human homes.

ii. It is not enough for us to keep the law in great aspects; we are called upon to pay attention to the most minute features of character. We are called upon to do this for no pedantic reason, but because the morality of the Bible goes down to every root and fibre of life. In the smallest act of daily life the moral element is present. Our life must not fray out in loose ends while we are content if the middle portion is fairly well connected. Our small acts are an index to our whole character. The man who can take care of a bird's nest because it is right to do so—not because of any pleasure which he has in a bird's nest—is a man who cannot be indifferent to the circumstances of his fellow-men.

iii. Our motive for being careful of little things must be the right one, or our carefulness is worse than useless. We all know the man who is careful of his horses and dogs, and careless of his children and servants. His feeling is pedantic, it is a mere expression of vanity. How then shall we distinguish between a right and a wrong consideration of small things? Christ Himself tells us. The right consideration of the lower becomes still tenderer kindness to the higher. He tells us how carefully a man looks after the life of his cattle, and then He adds, 'Are ye not much better than they?' In Old Testament times the hand was called into active requisition, and was made to do much in the way of moral industry, but He who called the hand into such service intended through it to find a way into the heart. But we live in New Testament times, and the morality of Christianity is intensely spiritual. If we pass by a bird's nest, and desire it, but do not take it simply because the law has forbidden it, we are in our

souls as if we had torn the little house to pieces. The hand may commit mistakes, but it is the heart that commits sin. Our prayers should continually be 'Create in me a clean heart, O God,' and then our life will be fashioned completely according to His will, and no loose ends will be left.

#### How to take a Bird's Nest.

By the Rev. Samuel Cox, D.D.

The Lord Jesus cared for birds. He said, 'Not one of them is forgotten before God.' But in the text we see that God cared for the birds long before Jesus came to teach us that He fed and clothed them, and gave them their sweet songs.

God the Father cared so much that He made a law which forbade the Jews to take 'the dam,' that is, the *dame*, or mother bird, with her young. The Rabbis called this 'the least among the commandments of Moses.' But can a commandment be small which contains so large a blessing—that he who obeys it shall have long life and prosperity?

This commandment has at least three great meanings in it.

1. *It sets a limit to the natural greed of men.* The first impulse of a Jew who found the nest of a quail or a partridge would be to take all—the mother bird along with the young ones or the eggs. But this would be poor thrift and poor morality. In destroying the parent bird the man might be helping to destroy a whole breed of valuable birds. He would get a dinner for *to-day*, but he would be lessening his chance of finding one *to-morrow*. He would be helping *himself*, but he might be injuring *his neighbour*. The Jews depended largely on hunting and fowling for their food. So God's law taught them forethought and charity. The first lesson then is '*Don't be greedy.*' Nothing is pleasanter than to see boys or girls restraining their appetites and passions, and thinking of others before themselves.

2. Another lesson taught by this law about a bird's nest is this: *It brings the law of God into the little things of life.* We are apt to forget this. The law that told men how to take a bird's nest, taught them that there was a right and a wrong way of doing even such a little thing. It meant that nothing was too small to be done unto Him; that

the children in their walks and play did not leave God behind them; that they might show their reverence for His will in the handling of a bird's nest. And what could make them happier than to know that the great Father in heaven is with them even when playing in the fields?

3. This rule about birds-nesting teaches us that *all love is sacred*—the most beautiful lesson of all. It is because the mother bird loves her nestlings, and stays with them to defend them, that she allows herself to be caught. If she cared only for herself she would fly away. Therefore the Law of God steps in and forbids her to be touched. If you can take her at other times, when there is no brood in the nest, you may. If the love of a bird is sacred, how much more sacred is the love of a boy or a girl, of a woman or a man! It is wicked to take advantage of love for selfish ends. Some children do this. Knowing that their parents are fond of them, they cry and scowl and worry till they get what they want, though their fond, foolish father and mother know that they are spoiling them. This is a mean thing to do—to requite love with selfishness, instead of with love. Love puts them in your power, but, if you take advantage of it, you will be scorned by all good people; and what will you say when you stand before the God of all love?

Who loves best of all? Is it not the heavenly Father who has given you the trees and the birds, your homes and friends; and has He not sent His Son to die for you that He might give you life? Do not abuse His love. Love Him, and it will be well with you, and you shall prolong your days beyond the days of time.

#### ILLUSTRATIONS.

THE celebrated Russian novelist, Turgenieff, tells a touching incident from his own life, which awakened in him sentiments that have coloured all his writings.

When he was a boy of ten, his father took him out bird-shooting one day. As they tramped across the brown stubble, a golden pheasant rose with a low whirr from the ground at his feet, and, with the joy of a sportsman, he raised his gun and fired, wild with excitement, when the creature fell fluttering at his side. Life was ebbing fast, but the instinct of the mother was stronger than death itself, and with a feeble flutter of her wings the mother bird reached the nest where her young brood were huddled, unconscious of danger.

Then, with such a look of pleading and reproach that his heart stood still at the ruin he had wrought (and never to his dying day did he forget the feeling of guilt that came to

him at that moment), the little brown head toppled over, and only the dead body of the mother shielded her nestlings.

'Father, father!' he cried, 'what have I done?' as he turned his horror-stricken face to his father.

But not to his father's eye had this little tragedy been enacted, and he said: 'Well done, my son; that was well done for your first shot. You will soon be a fine sportsman.'

'Never, father; never again shall I destroy any living creature. If that is sport, I will have none of it. Life is more beautiful to me than death, and since I cannot give life I will not take it.'—Rev. LEON ARPER, Richwood, Ohio.

COLERIDGE in his *Ancient Mariner* gives awful emphasis to the punishment that overtakes the soul that is guilty of cruelty to the creatures of field, air, or sea. The mariner had shot his good friend the albatross, and the spirit that was capable of such a brutality reacted upon him, cutting him off from his fellows and embittering all his life. As he lay in a trance he heard 'two voices in the air.'

'Is it he?' quoth one, 'Is this the man?  
By Him' who died on cross,  
With his cruel bow he laid full low  
The harmless Albatross.'

The other was a softer voice,  
As soft as honey-dew:  
Quoth he, 'The man hath penance done,  
And penance more will do.'

The loneliness in which his cruelty resulted is keenly felt:

O Wedding Guest! this soul hath been  
Alone on a wide wide sea:  
So lonely 'twas, that God Himself  
Scarce seemed there to be.

And the moral of the weird story is summed up in the oft-quoted lines:

He prayeth best, who loveth best  
All things both great and small;  
For the dear God who loveth us,  
He made and loveth all.

THE text points to the wrongfulness of greed; the grasping nature clutching eagerly all that is within reach to-day, regardless of to-morrow's needs and supply. In Watt's picture of 'Orpheus and Eurydice' the truth is expressed. Dr. Hugh Macmillan, in his book on Watts, writes: 'The moral of the pathetic myth could not have been more strikingly taught—that we are so constructed that our loves and joys fall from us when we endeavour to make them too exclusively our own. Like some subtle illusive fragrance that powerfully affects us when we suddenly and unexpectedly catch it, and vanishes when we endeavour to get a firmer hold of it, so the essence of our dearest things eludes us when we come too close to them. . . . You gain wealth, but lose the power to enjoy. You can buy everything, but you can truly possess nothing. You obtain knowledge, but it kills the interest of things.'

PATTY was a little girl who lived in the country. One morning, in the harvest time, Patty was left by herself in the kitchen, and as she presently felt lonely, and could not make any one hear when she called, she thought she would go out into the cornfield where she knew her father was at work with the reapers. It was deliciously warm and bright, and when she got into the wheatfield she thought everything looked very lovely. The reaping-machine was going down one side of the field, the workmen following it, and gathering up the newly-cut corn, as they went, into bright yellow sheaves. They went very fast, and Patty could not catch them up; so, after a time, she sat down on a wheat-sheaf to rest. The uncut corn by her side was waving softly in the breeze; a beech-tree was close by, casting a cool, pleasant shade; and everything was very beautiful.

Presently a lark flew up out of the corn, and rose up high into the air, singing a glad sweet song. Patty clapped her hands with joy; and then began wondering whether it had got a nest 'in there'; and she made her way in among the standing corn to see.

Oh yes, there it was, sure enough! And three little birdies—the funniest, sweetest little babies that ever were seen! She sat down and took one of them into her lap, and laughed at its downy head, and big, wide-open mouth. 'What a delightful place for a nest!' thought Patty. The waving corn above her head was like a golden forest, and she wondered whether heaven itself could be more beautiful than this spot. She never thought of danger. She little dreamed that the reaping-machine, with its bright, sharp knives, was bearing down straight upon her, and that in another instant she was in danger of being cut to pieces!

What was it, do you suppose, that made the farmer stop his team all at once? Did he know of his little girl's danger? No! he fully thought she was safe at home with her mother. But he happened to be a man with a kind, noble heart, and he would not willingly hurt one of God's creatures; so he called out to the driver, 'Stop a minute, Tom. There is a lark's nest somewhere near the old tree, and I do not want it disturbed; so just drive round a bit, and I will see if I can find it, and you can mow round it afterwards.'

Ah, what a cry of surprise the father uttered when he found his darling Patty sitting there! How fast his heart beat when he thought of the danger she had been in, and how it thrilled and softened as he caught her up in his arms, covering her face with kisses, and saying, 'It was the birds that saved her!'

When the first excitement with the men was over, and Patty had been carried safely home in her father's arms, and the men were going down the field again, leaving a wide, uncut space around the lark's nest, somebody—it was a great, rough-looking man—said, while the tears glistened in his eyes, and his voice grew husky, 'God bless the little birds!'—From *The King's Ferry Boat*, an American volume of Children's Sermons; quoted in *Pages from the Green Book*, by the Rev. J. Crofts, published by S.P.C.K.

**Little sins.**—In one of the West End arcades, where the stalls are crowded with pretty things, a little girl and her mother were quietly strolling, looking and admiring. Presently they met a lady friend, and, while the ladies were talking together, little Nellie's eyes were feasting on a

cluster of beautiful dolls. One charming little doll she took in her hands, kissed it, and put it back in its place. Then she took it up again, looked towards right and left, nobody was watching, and she slipped it into her muff and came sliding up to her mother's side blushing like a peony. The stall-keeper did not notice the theft. But Nellie's conscience was troubled. She was ill at ease, and could not rest until she slipped back to the counter and put the dear little doll once more in its place. Even then the child felt uncomfortable and miserable, and when evening came and she kneeled to say her prayers, she quite broke down and sobbed, 'Oh, mother dear, I have been so naughty! To-day, in the Arcade,

I cracked one of the commandments. I did not quite break it; but I'm sure I cracked it.'—A. A. RAMSEY, *Things that are Lovely*, p. 112.

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## The Pilgrim's Progress.

BY THE REV. JOHN KELMAN, M.A., D.D., EDINBURGH.

### The Delectable Mountains.

#### The Door into Hell.

THE Delectable Mountains certainly up to this point can hardly be said to justify their name. The succession of ghastly sights and suggestions is unbroken, until it culminates in this abominable door, which is but a flue for the infernal fire and smoke. This surely is bad art, to shatter the expectations raised by so finely named a mountain-range in this merciless fashion. Bunyan might have answered that very probably it *was* bad art, but he had found a good deal in real life that as art was equally bad. In that 'age of great revolutions' men were ever conscious of extreme contrasts; and even the fairest tracts of the world were honeycombed and tunnelled with passages to hell.

To John Bunyan hell was a frightful and crude reality. Its brimstone was ever in his nostrils. His imagination had been fed on such stories as that of the Salisbury blasphemer at the tavern of which he tells us, that 'hearing a hideous noise and smelling a stinking savour, the vintner ran into the chamber, and coming in he missed his guest, and found the window broken, the iron bars in it bowed, and all bloody, but the man was never heard of afterwards'—a tale which may have been in George Macdonald's mind when he wrote the legend of the devil-bridegroom in *Malcolm*. Such tales have ceased to impress the public mind. But Bunyan's work, like Dante's, remains impressive in spite of light-hearted dismissals. There is a note of reality in Bunyan's references to the

subject, that bears the authentic mark of experience. He, like Dante, was 'the man who had been in hell.'

This door, situated in the mountains of lofty spiritual experience, does not, however, mean that Bunyan believed that a man might fall from grace, as Spira had almost convinced him. Those for whom this door stands open are the hypocrites who from the first had been but pretended pilgrims. Look into that door, bend over, and down, far down, you may see them, as Dante saw them, pacing their dismal round under their leaden hoods. Hopeful, trembling for his own sincerity, asks some questions which ring with the personal note of self-distrust. His habitual unobtrusiveness is staggered into utterance at so very terrible a fact in life as this. Then the pilgrims join in the somewhat conventional exclamation, 'We have need to cry to the Strong for strength!' There is something not quite satisfactory about the exclamation. It is too much the sort of thing one is expected to say in the circumstances. It is curious how many people lapse at once into such commonplace and trite generality when confronted with mordant and apparently personal truth—'It's a mercy we're all spared,' 'Blessed is he that shall eat bread in the kingdom of God.' And just as Christ turned aside the latter platitude, and struck home to the conscience of the speaker, so the shepherds do here. Such conventionalities are really uttered as last refuges from personal conviction. The shepherds do not set much store by pious exclaima-