

“STIRRING UP THE NEST”—Deut. 32:11

(Discourse by F. H. Robison, Convention Nashville, Tenn. Dec. 26 to 30, 1908, starting on page 77.)

First of all, dear friends, let me disabuse your minds of any possible thought that this discourse is to be dramatic; it is not nearly so dramatic as the name suggests. I will read from the 32nd chapter of Deuteronomy, which you will recognize as being the familiar Psalm of Moses, the man of God, delivered at the close of his eventful career. “For the Lord’s portion is His people; Jacob is the lot of His inheritance. He found him in a desert land, and in the waste howling wilderness; He led him about, He instructed him, He kept him as the apple of His eye. *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.*” While this statement may be understood primarily to have applied to the Jewish people after the flesh, if we look carefully we will see a general method of God’s providential instructions expressed.

“He found him in a desert land.” This suggests to our minds the condition in which God’s people, here representatively spoken of as Jacob, are found. The term “desert land” brings before our mind’s eye a condition of estrangement or loneliness in respect to fellowship; so with God’s people before they are found, and with all the world; they are in a condition of estrangement from Jehovah—a condition of loneliness in respect to His favor and fellowship. And why are they in this condition? Ah! we know too well the sad story of sin and condemnation and death and sorrow and suffering. Now the whole world is a desert, the whole world lieth in the Wicked One, all come short of the glory, and hence the full fellowship with God the Father. Satan has “made the world a wilderness,” and not only is it a wilderness, but it is a howling, waste wilderness; so intense is the lack of Divine fellowship that thousands, yes, millions—all—are dying, doing the best they can to live by bread alone. But how our hearts rejoice when we learn of the glad message that this desert shall not always be, for it is the same desert from which the Prophet, in a burst of joyous anticipation, says that streams shall gush forth. The wilderness and the solitary place shall be glad then and the desert shall rejoice and blossom as the rose. No more shall mankind wander about famishing for want of the water of truth and the bread of life. But how about the present time? Do streams burst forth now, even where one of the Lord’s people is? Manifestly, no. At best they are only little oases in the great desert of the world, little green spots as it were in the great barren wilderness of hearts, with a tiny spring and some verdure—just enough to suggest how it will be when the Lord shall comfort Zion; He will comfort her waste places; He will make her wilderness like Eden, and her desert place like the garden of the Lord; joy and gladness shall be found therein, thanksgiving and the voice of melody.

The figure of the eagle is used in the Scriptures to represent the Heavenly quality of wisdom. So here, where we find the figure of an eagle used again, we would understand that the picture would suggest to us the method or processes of God's providential dealings, which are inspired and planned by His wisdom. For instance, in the 4th chapter of Revelation, in the symbolic picture of the Father's characteristics, we find that one of the four beasts is described as being "like a flying eagle." The wings emanate from the body of the eagle; so in our Christian experiences, wings of Divine wisdom (wings of the mother eagle) might mean God's providential sustenance exercised on our behalf during times of our weakness. The expression in the 12th verse, "so the Lord *alone* did lead him," suggests to our mind the uniqueness of God's method of instruction. Who else but the Heavenly Father himself would ever think of giving instruction in the same way in which He does! Certainly there is none like Him. His ways, His plans, His devices, are all unique and distinct; so different from man's plans and thoughts that the prophet Isaiah says that His thoughts are not man's thoughts, neither are His ways man's ways. For as the heavens are higher than the earth; so are His ways higher than man's ways and His thoughts than man's thoughts. Bearing this thought in mind we will better be able to appreciate the peculiarity of His leadings and better able to understand the uniqueness of His providences.

Let us review in our minds briefly the history of some of God's people which we find recorded in His word, and see whether or not our thought is corroborated. Take, for instance, Abraham. He was found in a desert land, in Ur of the Chaldees, which country then and even now is noted for its worldly wisdom and in some measure, at least, for its connection with the occult. Strange as it may seem, we find that those nations which seemed to have superior advantages as regards mental attainment or scientific research are in the more deplorable state, are in the more deplorable desert condition as regards knowledge concerning the Lord and fellowship with Him, than are some of the less cultured peoples. It will be remembered that Ur was situated somewhere in the vicinity of the subsequent city of Babylon, and that Babylon was noted for, and now stands for, worldly attainment and glory where spiritual development might properly be expected. Chaldea was not only separated from full fellowship with the Father, but was flagrantly so—"a howling, waste wilderness." This is the condition in which Abraham was found, and some distinctive feature attached itself to him so that he was singled out by the Lord to be a recipient of His favor and to be His friend. A little green spot of faith in the Chaldean desert. Notice now the further statement of the 10th verse, "He led him about," or, as the margin states, he "compassed him." God placed around him His protecting care, encompassed him with special arrangements and assistance, "He instructed him." How much is meant by this expression; how many experiences are comprehended by this statement through which Abraham was called to pass and by which he was fed and strengthened. "He kept him as the apple of His eye." The apple of the eye is carefully guarded, that nothing injurious may enter. Even if some object is approaching quickly toward the eye and is endangering the sight, almost involuntarily protection is afforded

by the closing of the lid. What a picture before our minds of the wonderful care which our Heavenly Father exercises on behalf of those who are His. Nothing can come too quick for His intervening power to temper or to turn aside. So with Abraham; all of his affairs were so guarded and guided and directed that nothing injurious to his highest interests could occur to him. Though removed from his kinfolk and from the country in which he was born, he was not removed from the providential care of his God, who is not limited by time or space. All of these primary experiences of Abraham's—his being called out of Chaldea, led from the desert country, halted at Haran, death of his father, entrance into Canaan, etc.—would have the purpose of enabling him to undergo the subsequent nest-stirring experiences. Sometimes these nest-stirring episodes are the stirring up of our preconceived notions or opinions which are not thoroughly in line with the Father's plan; then again it may mean the breaking up of ties, acquaintance or friendship ties, and the change of environment.

With Abraham it seems to have been a change in his opinions concerning the promised seed. His wings of faith were not sufficiently developed until his ideas upon which he had been placing dependence were very much shaken. No doubt Abraham thought it was necessary to help God out. For when God made the promise to Abraham, He intimated that he would have a seed and that in and through that seed all the families of the earth would be blessed. Doubtless this was the controlling thought, the illuminating feature of Abraham's experiences. But after waiting many years and no seed appearing, perhaps he argued that God was doing all He could in the matter and that it was time for him to take a hand; accordingly Ishmael was born. Then for several years no doubt Abraham looked for the fulfillment of the promise to come through Ishmael, and gathered around him glories and blessings which were intimated in Jehovah's covenant. But the nest must be stirred up; Abraham had not yet left the habits of thought which belong to fallen man and he must, under the Lord's providential instruction, learn the absolute power and ability of the "Mighty to save," so when the Lord got ready to carry out that feature of His promise which referred to the birth of the child by Sarah, God did not specially reprove or upbraid Abraham for what he had done, but just went on and did what He himself had planned to do, merely pushing aside and disregarding Abraham's opinion and untimely effort. The natural disposition would be to withdraw cooperation with God when He entirely disregarded our efforts, to feel hurt or slighted, to feel our pride or vanity wounded, and to say to the Lord in our actions if not in our words, "Lord, if you won't do like I want you to, I won't do anything." How childish such an attitude of mind in respect to the Maker of the universe and yet how apt are we to find the same thought in our own hearts. But if this thought ever occurred to Abraham it did not actuate him. He had been fed, nourished and cared for by the great Mother Eagle up to this time and he knew that there was no occasion for him doubting the Lord then. So he fell into hearty cooperation with this new feature of God's plan, whether it coincided with his previous thought or not. And notice the grand result by these stirring experiences; note the richness and fullness of faith which was developed in him within the next few years because of the birth of Isaac,

for instead of feeling a necessity of helping the Lord out, he was willing to offer in sacrifice his beloved son upon Mt. Moriah, without even a flinch or waver. Because of this wonderful faith he is counted as a father of the faithful and promised a special share in the glories of the Millennial Kingdom, when streams shall be bursting forth from the desert.

Notice also the experiences of Israel as a whole, how that they were found in a desert land, how that they were encompassed by the Lord's special care at and before the death of Jacob. See how carefully the Divine arrangement was exercised on their behalf, how they were kept as the apple of His eye, freed from necessity; protected when Joseph was promoted to a position of authority in Egypt. Here in the Egyptian nest they had pleasant and unpleasant circumstances. There were feathers of favor and sticks of persecution. While here in this nest they grew and developed nationally to a marvelous degree. In fact, the Scriptures intimate that their multiplication in number was well nigh miraculous. By and by the time came for the great mother bird of Divine providence to stir up the nest that they might know that He is God, that entirely apart from environment, circumstances, position of birth or whatever, that He was to be adored, respected and loved—that the principles which He inaugurates and exemplifies are absolute and unchangeable. Israel was led out under Moses and as described in Exodus 19:4, "Ye have seen what I did unto the Egyptians, and how I bear you upon eagle's wings, and brought you unto myself." In the 106th Psalm we read that they derived only a temporary benefit from this: "He saved them from the hand of him that hated them and redeemed them from the hand of the enemy. And the waters covered their enemies; there was not one of them left; then believed they His words; they sung His praise. But they soon forgot His works, they waited not for His counsel." They did not profit so well from what the Lord had given them as father Abraham had done. They murmured, they said in figure: "We wish we were back in the nest; we are tired of hopping around from one crag and treetop to another, why did God bring us up here from that nice nest of sticks and feathers"? They leaned to their own understanding, they provoked God and, as the apostle Paul indicates in the third chapter of Hebrews, were an example of murmuring and profitless eaglets. What an opportunity was missed for gaining the very thing sought. How foolish of the young eagle to murmur because the time had come for it to assume the more extensive role and to participate in broader experiences. If a little eagle showed by its actions that it was discontent with the Divine arrangement it would soon be found unworthy of continued existence and would have the contempt and disregard of all. But the Lord's mercy was extended to His people so that when even for a short time, or when comparatively few of the nation were seeking for faith development and fellowship with Him, He was willing to bless them and so much so that they were blessed above all nations, in that unto them were committed the oracles of God. Time after time they were borne on eagles' wings, time after time Divine, protecting care was manifested on their side until they developed a full suit of feathers in the glory of the Davidic and Solomonic reigns. But the nation had more feathers than strength, more show than faith, so that

eventually they were found unworthy of continuance of instruction under the guidance of Heavenly wisdom.

Let us look again at the experiences of the early church and see whether or not they correspond to the figure of our text. Jerusalem and Judea and the Jewish customs constituted a nest in which the infant eagle was nurtured. How would the early church have been fed had it not been for the temporary preservation of the national conditions which had obtained previous to the hatching out of the house of sons? The egg had long been laid, the Divine plan had long been expressed and its incubation was in connection with the Jewish nest. Not too rudely was the eaglet church taken from its accustomed environments. The space of time from Pentecost to the overthrow of Jerusalem in A.D. 70 furnished a great opportunity for the bringing of the apostolic food that the church might have a grand start upon her experiences. There seems to have been no other special reason for the maintaining of the Jewish nation except for the assistance of the infant church, and when they, under the Lord's careful feeding had become sufficiently strong and developed to undergo the experiences, the nest was stirred up. Just as in the literal case the nest itself was not valuable. It was valuable only as related to its purpose, so after the Jewish nation had been cast off from Divine favor it had no special value for the time except for its ability to sustain and in a measure protect the little eagles of the Gospel Age. Had Jerusalem remained we may safely suppose that God's plan for the scattering of the Gospel and development of the church would have had to be fulfilled in some other way. When the nest was kicked to pieces then all were compelled to look more steadfastly to the Heavenly Father; truly it was a crisis.

But has the Gospel church lost because it was compelled to forget the nest? Neither history nor the suggestion of our text would indicate that they have. Where necessarily the Lord's providences have reached out and sustained His people, gradually through all their experiences they have developed thus more and more of the eagle characteristics. The early church, especially, profited so fully by the words and spiritual assistance of the apostles that soon they were enabled to have the full use of their wings and to soar far above the dark cloud of turmoil and strife and persecution which covered the earth, into the pure ether of "exceeding joy" (1 Pet. 1:8), like "an eagle in the air" (Prov. 30:19). Later on also under the trials and difficulties of the dark ages the church was enabled to grow in faith and absolute confidence and harmony with the Father. In the 14th chapter of Revelations we read concerning this period, "and to the woman were given wings of the great eagle that she might flee into the wilderness to her own place."

So now in the end of the Gospel Age it has been found necessary to undergo something similar to this nest-stirring episode. The church had got tired of soaring around in the air and had taken to roosting in the old nest again, in turning again to the law; it had been perching on the tree tops or crags and even walking boldly on the ground in sore danger

from the snare of the fowler. Again the true church is pushed out and assisted to develop their faith—strength of wings.

But, however aptly our text applies to God's whole dealings with His people, it seems to apply more particularly to our individual experiences. Every one of us has been found in this desert place, in the condemnation, separated by "wicked works," from full fellowship with the Father. But while in this desert condition, we were not in harmony with it; we were seeking for springs of water and for shelter from the burning sun of Divine condemnation in which we participated as members of Adam's race. But how did the Lord *find* us? If He is omniscient, why could He not always see us? The answer is that we were not always there, as one of *His people*. We were found like one might find a few grains of early, ripe wheat; we might pass through a field time after time and on one day find nothing, and on the next find two or three heads which in the meantime had turned. They were not there as ripe heads of wheat on the day before but because of their experiences and environment and influences to which they were subjected they were changed from the condition in which the whole field of wheat stood into a condition in which they were attractive to us. So the Lord looking over the earth may look one time where we are and see nothing that is desirable to Him, but on the next day or afterward He finds that by influences of birth or succession of experiences we have been brought to a condition in which we are desirable to Him, in which our hearts are in harmony with righteousness as far as we have been able to see it, a condition in which as the apostle says, "we are feeling after God if haply we might find Him." Then He encircles us, He encompasses us with special opportunities of blessing and favor. He extended the Gospel message to us. He first offers us the opportunity of justification, of being transferred in a legal sense from the desert condition, from being participators in the desert condition into a little oasis. In a literal desert, sometimes the sand is protected by a rock from the scorching rays of the sun so that the seed is dropped and some moisture preserved and a little vegetation springs up, and finally a considerable plot of verdure is established in the very heart of the desert. So we have been sheltered in the "shadow of the great rock in a weary land" (Isa. 32:2), so the little moisture of truth is fostered in us because of our relationship to this rock, Christ Jesus. In that moistened soil falls the seed from which the cheering and refreshing influences shall ultimately emanate both now and in the future. Oh, that we may do nothing to stunt the growth of these little refreshing spots! Oh that we may do everything to build one another up in the most holy faith, that we may not be found "springs without water" (2 Pet. 2:17). He has instructed us, He has kept us as the apple of His eye and even brought us up to some crucial experiences.

Scientists tell us that when the little eagles in the nest are large enough to learn to fly, the mother bird begins and stirs up the nest with her feet, tearing the sticks apart and making a great disturbance and even though the little ones cry and look pitifully at the mother, her heart apparently is of stone and she proceeds ruthlessly with the work of stirring up the nest. The little ones are forced out and of course begin to fall, not knowing how to

use their wings. But the mother bird swoops down and flies under them, bears them on her back to give them courage, then lets them go again, and soon they discover the use of their wings and are able to fly for themselves. So the Lord by His words and providences stirs up the nest of our old condition, our old habits, hopes, etc., and though we may look with agonizing hearts at Him and say in thought as the eaglets do in action: "Oh! You will be sure to hurt me; here is where I have been brought up, here is where I am acquainted; I do not want to leave these nice sticks and feathers. You can sing to me and feed me, but don't, don't stir up the nest." How little do the eaglets realize the scope of their future experiences! How little do they realize that the very purpose of all their feeding is that they might become able to undergo and experience this nest-stirring episode.

So all food and primary lessons with us are so we may be made strong enough to leave the old conditions of the world, leave the old environments and tendencies as respects our minds and glorify the Lord. Perhaps it was the nominal church nest that had to be stirred up, perhaps the Lord by His providences figuratively pushed us out. Let us hope that each one has been pushed out by the love of God, has been constrained by His wondrous kindness. Those who are not pushed out by His love will subsequently be pushed out by His power, but the time will then be too short for them to develop in time to be of the glorious company for which their experiences are designed to fit them. Perhaps the Lord had to push us out into the volunteer or colporteur work, perhaps He had to bring circumstances to our attention quite forcibly and in such a manner as the flesh desired not at all. The flesh no doubt registered vociferous objections and refused to appreciate the project. But the new eagle quality, the new mind, the new will, which is His will, submissively obeyed the arrangements of Divine wisdom. But if when the nest is stirred up and we do not know how to fly, at once, then the literal promises of the Lord's words come in under us and sustain us. Finally the strength of the Word, His spirit, permeates into our beings and our confidence grows stronger and stronger and we are not driven to despair by every wind of change that blows, but His spirit having gotten into our wings of faith, we are able to direct our course by His grace, even against the wind. Our wings are those sustaining qualities which emanate from the wisdom which He has given us and may refer to belief and trust, or faith and hope. How would we ever know the full truth of His promises; how would we ever know that underneath are the everlasting arms if we were still in the nest, in a hazy, dreamy, poetic state? We can say nothing derogatory of haze and dreams in their proper places, but they have very little place in the mind of a footstep follower of the Lord. Thank God, there are enough glorious facts to dim the haziest and dreamiest vagaries of the most untrammelled imagination. How can we ever "mount up on wings as eagles," how can we ever be delivered from the snare of the fowler, if we cannot fly? How can we be gathered together where the carcass is if this nest-stirring, wing-producing experience had not taken place; if the Lord had not some time or somehow pushed us out of the old ruts of thought or out of the old surroundings? The flesh has a tremendous tendency to put out roots or to establish itself in some certain circumstances and to cling to the earth, but the Lord in His providences stirs us up again.

We are like cement; if we are allowed to remain still and do not continue to progress, we begin to set; but if the Lord keeps adding the water of the truth and keeps working us, keeps us active in His service, we remain fresh and responsive in thought and in deed, then we remain meet for the Master's use. Otherwise, we, like set cement, would be useful for nothing, not even to be thrown out and to be trodden under foot of men.

As we review, therefore, in our minds, examples of God's providential leadings let us profit by these examples and learn by observation. Can we not even see and appreciate to some extent the wisdom of administering hardship as a factor in the development of character? As the eaglet would never learn to fly unless it were forced to do so, so we would never attain the fullness and richness and sweetness of character if left to the delineation and planning of our own experiences. Dear friends, we have all these noble examples before us and are assured by the apostle Peter that these things occurred for our instruction. Are we being instructed by them, or shall we be obliged to learn again by our own experiences what we might learn by humbly accepting the testimony which these examples bring before our minds? As Abraham was faithful and profited by his experiences, let us, who have so much more encouragement, be faithful also. Concerning the Jews we can entertain the future hope that, because they did many of those things in ignorance, they will have a full opportunity when the opportunities of the Millennial kingdom shall have been established. If they failed to profit by their opportunities, if they failed to learn to fly or to have full confidence in the Lord, let us hold them in mind as a warning example; "let us therefore fear lest a promise having been left us of entering into His rest [of attaining the same attitude of mind, the same eagle characteristics and abilities as the Heavenly Father] any of you should seem to come short of it." "Let us labor therefore to enter into that rest lest any man fall after the same example of unbelief."

Let us notice in closing the wonderful example of the apostle Paul. To what heights of sublime faith and trust he was enabled to, by his experiences, to soar, for he says, "who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or perils, or the sword? As it is written, for Thy sake we are killed all the day long, we are counted as sheep for the slaughter, nay in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him that loved us. For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other creature shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord." The apostle was high above his daily experiences so that, no matter what occurred to him, be it pleasant or unpleasant to the flesh, he still had the same measure of faith and hope, confidence and trust in the Lord. What a noble example for us! What, then, would we gather from all these examples? Manifestly this, that God expects us to be able to live under different circumstances as He sees best for us, to learn to adhere to the glorious principles to which He himself conforms, to be able to proceed and to be faithful irrespective of incidentals of every

character, to be fastened to nothing save that which is eternal until we shall throughout all the ages to come be able to show forth the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.

“Father, forgive the heart that clings,
Thus trembling, to the things of time;
And bid my soul, on soaring wings,
Ascend into a purer clime.”