GOD AMONG THE BIRDS

DR. TALMAGE DRAWS MANY LESSONS FROM THE FOWLS.

Surprising Frequency of Allusions to Birds in the Scriptures and Always to Teach an Important Lesson—Ornithology Is Surely a Divine Science.

BROOKLYN, Jan. 8.—Dr. Talmage this morning continued the course of sermons begun a few Sabbaths ago. Having preached about the "Astronomy of the Bible; or, God Among the Stars," and the "Chronology of the Bible; or, God Among the Centuries," this morning he discoursed on the "Ornithology of the Bible; or, God Among the Birds." The text was Matthew vi. 26, "Behold the fowls of the air!"

There is silence now in all our January forests, except as the winds whistle through the bare branches. Our northern woods are deserted concert halls. The organ lofts in the temples of nature are lumberless. Trees which were full of coo and chirp and chant are now waiting for the coming back of rich plumes and warbling voices, solos, duets, quartets, cantatas and Te Deums. But the Bible is full of birds at all seasons, and prophets and patriarchs and apostles and evangelists and Christ himself employ them for moral and religious purposes. My text is an extract from the sermon on the mount, and perhaps it was at a moment when a flock of birds flew past that Christ waved his hand toward them and said, "Behold the fowls of the air!" And so, in this course of sermons on God everywhere, I preach to you this third sermon concerning the Ornithology of the Bible; or, God Among the Birds.

ORNITHOLOGY IS DIVINE.

Most of the other sciences you may study or not study as you please. Use your own judgment; exercise your own taste. But about this science of ornithology we have no option. The divine command is positive when it says in my text, "Behold the fowls of the air!" That is, study their habits. Examine their colors. Notice their speed. See the hand of God in their construction. It is easy for me to obey the command of the text, for I was brought up among this race of wings and from boyhood heard their matins at sunrise and their vespers at sunset.

Their nests have been to me a fascination, and my satisfaction is that I never robbed one of them, any more than I would steal a child from a cradle, for a bird is a child of the sky, and its nest is the cradle. They are almost human, for they have their loves and hates, affinities and antipathies, understand joy and grief, have conjugal and maternal instinct, wage wars and entertain jealousies, have a language of their own and powers of association. Thank God for birds and skies full of them. It is useless to expect to understand the Bible unless we study natural history.

Five hundred and ninety-three times does the Bible allude to the facts of natural history, and I do not wonder that it makes so many allusions ornithological. The skies and the caverns of Palestine are friendly to the winged creatures, and so many fly and roost and nest and hatch in that region that inspired writers do not have far to go to get ornithological illustration of divine truth. There are over forty species of birds recognized in the Scriptures. Oh, what a variety of wings in Palestine!

The dove, the robin, the eagle, the cormorant, or plunging bird, hurling itself from sky to wave and with long beak clutching its prey; the thrush, which especially dislikes a crowd; the partridge; the hawk, bold and ruthless, hovering head to windward while watching for prey; the swan, at home among the marshes and with feet so constructed it can walk on the leaves of water plants; the raven, the lapwing, malodorous, and in the Bible denounced as indible, though it has extraordinary headdress; the stork, the ossifrage, that always had a habit of dropping on a [illegible] turtle it had lifted and so killing [illegible] and on one occasion mistook the bald head of Æschylus, the Greek poet, for a white stone and dropped a turtle upon it, killing the famous Greek; the cuckoo, with crested head and crimson throat and wings snow tipped, but too lazy to build its own nest and so having the habit of depositing its eggs in nests belonging to other birds; the blue jay, the grouse, the plover, the magpie, the kingfisher; the pelican, which is the caricature of all the feathered creation; the owl, the goldfinch, the bittern, the harrier, the bulbul, the osprey; the vulture, that king of scavengers, with neck covered with repulsive down instead of attractive feathers; the queen bee, the swallow, the swallow, flying a mile a minute and sometimes ten hours in succession; the heron, the quail, the peacock, the ostrich, the lark, the crow, the kite, the bat, the blackbird and many others, with all colors, all sounds, all styles of flight, all habits, all architecture of nests, leaving nothing wanting in suggestiveness. They were at the creation placed all around on the rocks and in the trees and on the ground to serenade Adam's arrival. They took their places on Friday, as the first man was made on Saturday. Whatever else he had or did not have, he should have music. The first sound that struck the human ear was a bird's voice.

THERE IS A CHRISTIAN GEOLOGY.

Yea, Christian geology—for you know there is a Christian geology as well as an infidel geology—Christian geology comes in and helps the Bible show what we owe to the bird creation. Before the human race came into this world the world was occupied by reptiles and by all styles of destructive monsters—millions of creatures loathsome and hideous. God sent huge birds to clear the earth of these creatures before Adam and Eve were created. The remains of these birds have been found imbedded in the rocks. The skeleton of one eagle has been found twenty feet in height and fifty feet from tip of wing to tip of wing. Many armies of beaks and claws were necessary to clear the earth of creatures that would have destroyed the human race with one clip. I like to find this harmony of revelation and science and to have demonstrated that the God who made the world made the Bible.

Moses, the greatest lawyer of all time and a great man for facts, had enough sentiment and poetry and musical taste to welcome the illustrious wings and the voices divinely drilled into the first chapter of Genesis. How should Noah, the old ship carpenter, 600 years of age, find out when the world was fit again for human residence after the universal freshet? A bird will tell, and nothing else can. No man can come down from the mountain to invite Noah and his family out to terra firma, for the mountains were submerged. As a bird first heralded the human race into the world, now a bird will help the human race back to the world that had shipped a sea that whelmed everything.

Noah stands on Sunday morning at the window of the ark, in his hand a cooing dove, so gentle, so innocent, so affectionate, and he said, "Now, my little dove, fly away over these waters, explore and come back and tell us whether it is safe to land." After a long flight it returned hungry and weary and wet, and by its looks and manners said to Noah and his family, "The world is not fit for you to disembark." Noah waited a week, and next Sunday morning he let the dove fly again for a second exploration, and Sunday evening it came back with a leaf that had the sign of just having been plucked from a living fruit tree, and the bird reported the world would do tolerably well for a bird to live in, but not yet sufficiently recovered for human residence.

Noah waited another week, and next Sunday morning he sent out the dove on the third exploration, but it returned not, for it found the world so attractive now it did not want to be caged again, and then the emigrants from the antediluvian world landed. It was a bird that told them when to take possession of the resuscitated planet. So the human race were saved by a bird's wing—for, attempting to land too soon, they would have perished.

ISAIAH ON THE DOVES.

Aye, here comes a whole flock of doves—rock doves, ring doves, stock doves—and they make Isaiah think of great revivals and great awakenings when souls fly for shelter like a flock of pigeons swooping to the openings of a pigeon coop, and cries out, "Who are these that fly as doves to their windows?" David, with Saul after him and flying from cavern to cavern, compares himself to a desert partridge, a bird which especially haunts rocky places, and boys and hunters to this day take aim at it with sticks, for the partridge runs rather than flies.

David, chased and clubbed and hewed of pursuers, says, "I am hunted as a partridge on the mountains." Speaking of his forlorn condition, he says, "I am like a pelican of the wilderness." Describing his loneliness, he says, "I am a sparrow alone on a housetop." Hezekiah, in the emaciation of his sickness, compares himself to a crane, thin and wasted. Job had so much trouble he could not sleep nights, and he describes his insomnia by saying, "I am a companion to owls." Isaiah compares the desolations of banished Israel to an owl and bittern and cormorant among a city's ruins.

Jeremiah, describing the cruelty of parents toward children, compares them to the ostrich, who leaves its eggs in the sand uncared for, crying, "The daughter of my people is become like the ostriches of the wilderness." Among the provisions piled on Solomon's beautiful table the Bible speaks of "fatted fowl." The Israelites in the desert got tired of manna and they had quails—quails for breakfast, quails for dinner, quails for supper, and they died of quails. The Bible refers to the migratory habits of the birds and says, "The stork knoweth her appointed time, and the turtle, and the crane, and the swallow the time of their going, but my people know not the judgments of the Lord."

Would the prophet illustrate the fate of the fraud, he points to a failure at incubation and says, "As a partridge sitteth on eggs and hatcheth them not, so he that getteth riches, and not by right, shall leave them in the midst of his days and at his end shall be a fool." The partridge, the most careless of all birds in choice of its place of nest, building it on the ground and often near a frequented road, or in a slight depression of ground, without reference to safety, and soon a hoof or a scythe or a cart wheel ends all. So says the prophet, a man who gathers under him dishonest dollars will hatch out of them no peace, no satisfaction, no happiness, no security.

What a vivid similitude! The quickest way to amass a fortune is by iniquity, but the trouble is about keeping it. Every hour of every day some such partridge is driven off the nest. Panics are only a flutter of partridges. It is too tedious work to become rich in the old fashioned way, and if a man can by one falsehood make as much as by ten years of hard labor, why not tell it? And if one counterfeit check will bring the dollars as easily as a genuine issue, why not make it? One year's fraud will be repaid to half a lifetime's sweat. Why not live solely by one's wits? A fortune thus built will be firm and everlasting. Will it? Ha! build your house on a volcano's crater; go to sleep on the bosom of an avalanche.

The volcano will blaze and the avalanche will thunder. There are estates which have been coming together from age to age. Many years ago that estate started in a husband's industry and a wife's economy. It grew from generation to generation by good habits and high minded enterprise. Old fashioned industry was the mine from which that gold was dug, and God will keep the deeds of such an estate in his buckler. Foreclose your mortgage, spring your snap judgments, plot with neatest intrigue against a family property like that, and you cannot do it a permanent damage. Better than warranty deed and better than fire insurance is the defense which God's own hand will give it.

THE EVIL WILL COME TO LIGHT.

But here is a man today as poor as Job after he was robbed by satan of everything but his boils, yet suddenly tomorrow he is a rich man. There is no accounting for his sudden affluence. He has not yet failed often enough to become wealthy. No one pretends to account for his princely wardrobe, or the chased silver, or the full curried steeds that rear and neigh like Bucephalus in the grasp of his coachman. Did he come to a sudden inheritance? No. Did he make a fortune on purchase and sale? No. Everybody asks, Where did that partridge hatch? The devil suddenly threw him up and the devil will suddenly let him come down. That hidden scheme God saw from the first conception of the plot. That partridge, swift disaster will shoot it down, and the higher it flies the harder it falls. The prophet saw, as you and I have often seen, the awful mistake of partridges.

But from the top of a Bible fir tree I hear the shrill cry of the stork. Job, Ezekiel, Jeremiah, speak of it. David cries out, "As for the stork, the fir tree is her house." This large white Bible bird is supposed without alighting sometimes to wing its way from the region of the Rhine to Africa. As winter comes all the storks fly to warmer climes, and the last one of their number that arrives at the spot to which they migrate is killed by them. What havoc it would make in our species if those men were killed who are always behind! In oriental cities the stork is domesticated, and walks about on the street and will follow its keeper.

In the city of Ephesus I saw a long row of pillars, on the top of each pillar a stork's nest. But the word "stork" ordinarily means mercy and affection, from the fact that this bird was distinguished for its great love for its parents, it never forsakes them, and even after they become feeble protects and provides for them. In migrating, the old storks lean their necks on the young storks, and when the old ones give out the young ones carry them on their back. God forbid that a dumb stork should have more heart than we. Blessed is that table at which an old father and mother sit; blessed that altar at which an old father and mother kneel.

What it is to have a mother they know best who have lost her. God only knows the agony she suffered for us, the times she wept over our cradle and the anxious sighs her bosom heaved as we lay upon it, the sick nights when she watched so long after every one was tired out but God and herself. Her lifeblood beats in our heart and her image lives in our face. That man is graceless as an cannibal who ill treats his parents, and he who begrudges them daily bread and clothes them but shabbily—may God have patience with him! I cannot. I heard a man once say, "I now have my old mother on my hands." Yes storks on your way with food to your aged parents, shame him!

THE TORMENTED BIRD.

But yonder in this Bible sky flies a bird that is speckled. The prophet describin the church cries out, "Mine heritage is unto me as a speckled bird; the birds round about are against her." So it was then; so it is now. Holiness picked at. Consecration picked at. Benevolence picked at. Usefulness picked at. A speckled bird is a peculiar bird, and that arouses the antipathy of all the birds of the forest. The church of God is a peculiar institution, and that is enough to evoke attack of the world, for it is a speckled bird to be picked at. The inconsistencies of Christians are a banquet on which multitudes get fat. They ascribe everything you do to wrong motives. Put a dollar in the poor box, and they will say that you dropped it there only that you might hear it ring. Invite them to Christ, and they will call you a fanatic.

Let there be contention among Christians, and they will say, "Hurrah! The church is in decadence." Christ intended that his church should always remain a speckled bird. Let birds of another feather pick at her, but they cannot rob her of a single plume. Like the albatross, she can sleep in the bosom of a tempest. She has gone through the fires of Nebuchadnezzar's furnace and not get burned, through the waters of the Red sea and not been drowned, through the shipwreck on the breakers of Melita and not been foundered. Let all earth and hell try to hunt down this speckled bird, but far above human scorn and infernal assault it shall sing over every mountain top and fly over every nation, and her triumphant song shall be: "The church of God! The pillar and ground of the truth. The gates of hell shall not prevail against her."

But we cannot stop here. From a tall clint, hanging over the sea, I hear the eagle calling into the tempest and flitting its wing to smite the whirlwind. Moses, Jeremiah, Hosea and Habakkuk at times in their writings take their pen from the eagle's wing. It is a bird with fierceness in its eye, its feet armed with claws of iron, and its head with a dreadful beak. Two or three of them can fill the heavens with clangor. But generally this monster of the air is alone and unaccompanied, for the reason that its habits are so predaceous it requires five or ten miles of aerial or earthly dominion all for itself.

The black brown of its back, and the white of its lower feathers, and the fire of its eye, and the long flap of its wing make one glimpse of it as it swings down into the valley to pick up a child, or a lamb, or a child and then swings back to its throne on the rock something never to be forgotten. Scattered about its eyrie of altitudinous solitude are the bones of its conquests. But while the beak and the claws of the eagle are the terror of all the travelers of the air, the mother eagle is most kind and gentle to her young.

God compares his treatment of his people to the eagle's care of the eaglets. Deuteronomy xxxii. 11, "As an eagle stirreth up her nest, fluttereth over her young, spreading abroad her wings, taketh them, beareth them on her wings, so the Lord alone did lead." The old eagle first shoves the young one out of the nest in order to make it fly, and then takes it on her back and flies with it, and shakes it off in the air, and if it seems like falling quickly flies under it and takes it on her wing again. So God does with us. Disaster, failure in business, disappointment, bereavement, is only God's way of shaking us out of our comfortable nests in order that we may learn how to fly.

You who are complaining that you have no faith or courage or Christian zeal have had it too easy. You never will learn to fly in that comfortable nest. Like an eagle, Christ has carried us on his back. At times we have been shaken off, and when we were about to fall he came under us again and brought us out of the gloomy valley to the sunny mountain. Never an eagle brooded with such love and care over her young as God's wings have been over us. Across what oceans of trouble we have gone in safety upon the Almighty wings! From what mountains of sin we have been carried and at times have been borne up far above the gunshot of the world and the arrow of the devil!

When our time on earth is closed, on these great wings of God we shall speed with infinite quickness from earth's mountains to heaven's hills, and as from the eagle's circuit under the sun men on the ground seem small and insignificant as lizards on a rock, so all earthly things shall dwindle into a speck, and the raging river of death so far beneath will seem smooth and glassy as a Swiss lake.

SOUNDING AS THE EAGLES.

It was thought in ancient times that an eagle could not only molt its feathers in old age, but that after arriving at great age it would renew its strength and become entirely young again. To this Isaiah alludes when he says, "They that wait on the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings of eagles." Even so the Christian in old age will renew his spiritual strength. He shall be young in ardor and enthusiasm for Christ, and as the body fails the soul will grow in elasticity till at death it will spring up like a gladsome child into the bosom of God. Yea, in this ornithological study I see that Job says, "His days fly as an eagle that hasteth to its prey."

The speed of a hungry eagle when it saw its prey a score of miles distant was unimaginable. It went like a thunderbolt for speed and power. So fly our days. Sixty minutes, each worth a heaven, since we assembled in this place, have shot like lightning into eternity. The old earth is rent and cracked under the swift rush of days and months and years and ages. "Swift as an eagle that hasteth to its prey." Behold the fowls of the air! Have you considered that they have, as you and I have not, the power to change their eyes so that one minute they may be telescopic and the next microscopic? Now seeing something a mile away, and by telescopic eyesight, and then dropping to its perch on the ground, able to see it close by, and with microscopic eyesight.

But what a useless passage of Scripture that is until you know the fact, which says, "The sparrow hath found a house and the swallow a nest for herself, where she may lay her young, even thine altars, O Lord of hosts, my king and my God." What has the swallow to do with the altars of the temple at Jerusalem? Ah, you know that swallows are all the world over very tame, and in manner true used to fly into the windows and doors of the temple at Jerusalem and build a nest on the altar where the priests were offering sacrifices.

The sparrows brought straws and sticks and fashioned nests on the altars of the temple and hatched the young sparrows in these nests, and David had seen the young birds picking their way out of the shell while the old swallows watched, and no one in the temple was cruel enough to disturb either the old swallows or the young swallows, and David bursts out in rhapsody, saying, "The swallow hath found a nest for herself, where she may lay her young, even thine altars, O Lord of hosts, my king and my God."

Yes, in this ornithology of the Bible I find that God is determined to impress upon us the architecture of a bird's nest and the anatomy of a bird's wing. Twenty times does the Bible refer to a bird's nest: "Where the birds make their nest," "As a bird that wandereth from her nest"—"Though thou set the nest among the stars," "The birds of the air have their nests," and so on. Nests in the trees, nests on the rocks, nests on the altars. Why does God call us so frequently to consider the bird's nest? Because it is one of the most wonderous of all styles of architecture and a lesson of providential care, which is the most important lesson that Christ in my text conveys.

Why, just look at the bird's nest and see what is the prospect that God is going to take care of you. Here is the bluebird's nest under the eaves of the house. Here is the brown thrasher's nest in a bush. Here is the bluejay's nest in the orchard. Here is the grosbeak's nest on a tree branch hanging over the water, so as to be free from attack. Chickadee's nest in the stump of an old tree. Oh, the goodness of God in showing the birds how to build their nests!

What carpenters, what masons, what weavers, what spinners the birds are! Out of what small resources they make so exquisite a home, curved, pillared, wreathed. Out of mosses, out of sticks, out of lichens, out of horsehair, out of spiders' web, out of threads swept from the door by the housewife, out of the wool of the sheep in the pasture field. Upholstered by leaves actually sewed together by its own sharp bill. Cushioned with feathers from its own breast. Mortared together with the gum of trees and the saliva of its own tiny bill. Such symmetry, such adaptation, such convenience, such geometry of structure.

THE DIVINE PLAN IN NATURE.

Surely these nests were built by some plan. They did not just happen so. Who drafted the plan for the bird's nest? God! And do you not think that if he plans such a house for a chaffinch, for an oriole, for a bobolink, for a sparrow, he will see to it that you always have a home? "Ye are of more value than many sparrows." Whatever else surrounds you, you can have what the Bible calls "the feathers of the Almighty." Just think of a nest like that, the warmth of it, the softness of it, the safety of it—"the feathers of the Almighty."

No flamingo outflashing the tropical sunset ever had such brilliancy of pinion; no robin redbreast ever had plumage dashed with such crimson and purple and orange and gold—"the feathers of the Almighty." Do you not feel the touch of them now on forehead and cheek and spirit, and was there ever such tenderness of brooding—"the feathers of the Almighty?" So also in this ornithology of the Bible God keeps impressing us with the anatomy of a bird's wing.

Over fifty times does the old Book allude to the wing—"Wings of a dove," "Wings of the morning," "Wings of the wind," "Sun of righteousness with healing in his wings," "Wings of the Almighty," "All fowl of every wing." What does it all mean? It suggests uplifting. It tells you of flight upward. It means to remind that you yourself have wings. David cried out, "Oh, that I had wings like a dove that I might fly away and be at rest!" Thank God that you have better wings than any dove of longest or swiftest flight. Caged now in bars of flesh are those wings, but the day comes when they will be liberated. Get ready for ascension! Take the words of the old hymn and to the tune unto which that hymn is married sing:

Rise, my soul, and stretch thy wing;
Thy better portion trace.

Up out of these lowlands into the heavens of higher experience and wider prospect. But how shall we rise? Only as God's holy spirit gives us strength. But that is coming now. Not as a condor from a Chimborazo peak, swooping upon the affrightened valley, but as a dove like that which put its soft brown wings over the wet locks of Christ at the baptism in the Jordan. Dove of gentleness! Dove of peace!

Come, holy spirit, heavenly dove,
With all thy quickening powers;
Come shed abroad a Saviour's love,
And that shall kindle ours.

Repairing a Cable.

The cables of a suspension bridge are subjected to great strains, and are therefore firmly anchored at each shore end to heavy masses of masonry, generally by means of long bars of iron or steel having holes at each end by which they are bolted or pinned together. In examining the anchorage of one end of the smaller suspension bridge at Niagara one of these bars was found to be broken, and the problem of replacing it was quite difficult, since the wires attached to it had to have the same tension when it was in place as they had when the old bar was intact. The new bar was formed of a piece of steel 20 feet long, 6 inches wide and three-quarters of an inch thick, with a hole in one end and provided at the other with a band bolted to it.

This band was designed to pass around an iron bar in the abutment and resist the pull of the wires. When the band had been placed about this pin in the masonry and bolted to its bar the latter was carefully heated by a wooden fire in a trough below it until it had expanded sufficiently to allow the end of the wire cable to be connected with it. As it cooled down it contracted more and more until at the normal temperature the wires attached to it were strained to the same amount as the others, and in this way a difficult problem was easily and cheaply solved.—St. Louis Globe-Democrat.

Kipling as an Indian Journalist.

In The Idler Mr. Rudyard Kipling gives some amusing particulars of his early journalistic experiences. Mr. Kipling, as everybody knows, began his literary career in a humble way on the staff of an Indian paper. He tells how at this period he was painfully checked at the discovery that a subeditor was paid to subedit and not hired to write verses.

Later on, however, he became an editor and had a subeditor who was "saturated with Elia," and wrote very pretty essays in the manner of Charles Lamb, when he ought to have been subediting. Then it was that Mr. Kipling understood what his editor must have suffered on his account. Now, however, Mr. Kipling's verse was in demand—at least in one quarter.

Rukn-Din, the foreman "of our side," approved of them, we are told, immensely. He was a Moslem of culture. He would say, "Your poetry very good, sir; just coming proper length today. You giving more soon? One third column just proper. Always can take on third page." The poet was in very good company for, as he says, "there is always an undercurrent of song—a little bitter for the most part—running through the Indian papers."

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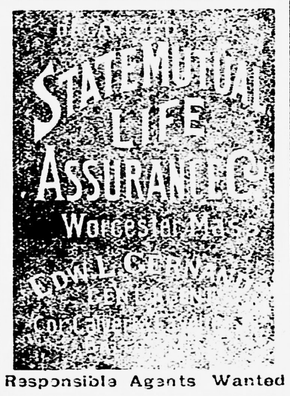

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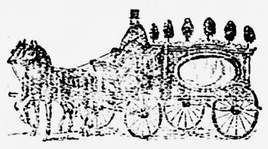

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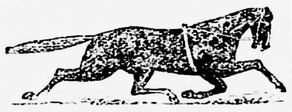

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