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Sparrow - Soldier - Sailor

Not One Shall Fall Without Your Father

(Matthew X:29)

By Rev. Wm. C. Robinson, D.D.*

A boy drew a careful bead on the bird, the rifle cracked — nothing more than a twig dropped. "Dad", said the boy, "he jumped just as I fired." In Jesus' day sparrows were so plentiful and meat so scarce that it was supplemented with sparrows. The huckster sold them two for a farthing, but if one bought two "farthing-worth" he threw in an extra sparrow to close the deal . . . five for two farthings. Looking out over this tremendous slaughter of sparrows, our Lord declared that not one of them shall fall to the ground without your Father. Even that extra sparrow that the dealer throws in for good measure is not forgotten in the sight of God.

God's Care For The Sparrow

Birds have many dangers to meet: boys and squirrels and cats and dogs and wind and rain and freeze and other birds. They sow not neither do they reap, yet your heavenly Father feedeth them. They are the cheapest meat in the Palestinian market, but not one of them falls without your Father. God has given them many means of protection: wings and plumage and singing voices. Sometimes he puts it in the hearts of people to investigate the bird life, organize Audubon societies, shoot them with cameras rather than with rifles, discover their usefulness to the farmer, write books for little boys about Reddy the Woodpecker, or articles for the Readers' Digest on God's Tiny Poultry. Sometimes God opens His own sanctuary to them.

Yea, the sparrow hath found her 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.

It may be that the fire power of our shot guns are as tremendous to a bird as the block-busters are to a man. And then our heavy artillery is as deadly to birds as it is to soldiers. On one of the monuments at Gettysburg is a tree, its limbs torn by shot and shrapnel, but nestled against its trunk the sculptor has carved a nest with a mother bird nestling her fledglings under her wing. The men of that regiment remembered just this scene and had it carved upon their memorial. God, our Father, does care for His birds of the heaven and not one is forgotten by Him.

"Mighty God while angels bless Thee,
May a mortal lisp Thy Name?"

For Thy providence, that governs
Thro' Thine empire's wide domain,
Wings an angel, guides a sparrow,
Blessed be Thy gentle reign."

Tennyson wished to know the flower in the craned wall, root and all, and all in all. Our Lord was wiser. He saw that complete knowledge was the prerogative of God alone, but that such knowledge as we had of flowers might be very useful to us. If God clothe the lilly of the field

which today is and tomorrow is cast into the oven, shall He not much more clothe you? When God takes such pains with the dainty but fragile flower, shall He not number the very hairs of our dear boys' heads?

There's not a plant or flower below
But makes Thy glories known;
And clouds arise, and tempests blow,
By orders from Thy throne.
Creatures as numerous as they be
Are subject to Thy care.

In a state guard manoeuver, an army truck was moving a unit of troops over a dirt road. In making a sharp curve the wheels were caught in the sand and the truck overturned. All honor to the steady hands of the army driver who kept the truck in the road. But as Lieutenant Jim Whittaker confessed "other hands than mine" bent the oars in the last hard pull to the island, so the Georgia guardsmen confess God's hand over man's in keeping that truck from careening into the ditch and crushing many occupants.

An anxious family circle were talking over the illness which seemed about to terminate in the death of one of our most loved ministers. Perhaps, this thing ought to have been done differently, perhaps that would have saved him. In the end the conversation came back to Him whose eye is on the sparrow. We realized anew that the Father who feedeth the sparrows does not forget His children. Our beloved fellow minister may pass to be with that Christ whom he has preached for fifty years now, but not without our Father. He that numbers the stars and watches the sparrows has not forgotten His servant.

His Eye Is On The Sparrow And He Values Each Boy More Than Many Sparrows

Each of the four Gospel references to God's care of the birds draws the inference that we are of more value than many sparrows. Indeed, this lesson is on the face of the practice of selling sparrows to feed men. God allowed men to eat animal food following the flood. Jesus did not rebuke the selling of sparrows. There in Palestine in that day, as in many famine stricken parts of Eurasia in our day, the meat of tiny sparrows was keeping soul and body together for starving people. The sea-swallow that perched on Rickenbacker's hat in answer to prayer was the first food those seven Americans had after the last orange was gone. Following the sea bird, God sent a school of little fish and rain from heaven. His hands were outstretched in mercy and He brought them safely through those three gruelling weeks — yes and by His hand of mercy led at least some of them to repentance and salvation.

Many sparrows fall that man may live, yet not one of them falls without your Father. Many of our finest lads are falling today that liberty may last and slavery be broken. They have gone forth at the call of the Chief Magistrate as ministers of God to execute wrath upon those that

do evil. They are so much more precious than many sparrows that the very hairs of their heads are numbered. Not one of them falls without our Father. Let us not fool ourselves as to the dangers or the probable casualty lists. On the other hand let us not exaggerate these probabilities. The large number of enemy troops surrendered in North Africa suggests that many do survive even the deadliest of modern weapons. For our loved lads let us take refuge anew under the shadow of His wings, for a mighty fortress is our God, a bulwark never failing.

When the son who had been her main stay on many occasions was winging his way over the Atlantic, whether by boat or by plane she knew not, a mother entered the sanctuary at the midday hour of praise and lifted her heart in this prayer:

Eternal Father! strong to save,
Whose arm doth bind the restless wave,
Who bidst the mighty ocean deep,
Its own appointed limits keep;
O hear us when we cry to Thee
For those in peril on the sea!

* * *

O Trinity of love and pow'er!
Our brethren shield in danger's hour;
From rock and tempest, fire and foe,
Protect them, wheresoe'er they go,
And ever let there rise to Thee
Glad hymns of praise from land and sea.

A few days later the wire came of this son's safe arrival in Britain.

God's Care Is A Call To Fear Him And Own His Christ

This is not merely the writer's inference, it is our Lord's own conclusion of the matter as given both in Matthew ten and in Luke twelve. We are not to give undue concern to our food or our raiment, God feeds the birds and clothes the flowers. We are not to fancy that by our forethought we can add one cubit unto the measure of our own or our boy's life. We are not to fear the earthly, visible foes that can only destroy the body and are unable to touch the soul. We are to fear Him who can destroy both body and soul in Hell. We are to fear Him who holds eternity as well as time in His grasp, who rules in the armies of heaven and among men, who kills and makes alive, whose hand none can stay or say unto Him, what doest Thou?

O but make trial of His love
Experience will decide
How blest are they, and only they,
Who in His truth confide
Fear Him ye saints, and you will then
Have nothing else to fear.
Make but His service your delight
Your wants will be His care.

Our human eyes can no longer watch over the lads who used to play in our yards. We can only trust them to Him that neither slumbers nor sleeps. In this matter of protecting our boys through the icy North, the shark infested South seas, or from bombs, shot and shell, we must walk by faith. We cannot walk by sight. We can only trust our brothers and sons to God and pray the Father to keep them and bring them back home again. And in a way this experience of trust is a parable of

that other experience that is coming to some during these heart-rending days and, in one form or another, comes to each home. Either they go on to be with the Lord, or we go on before. The young are dying and the old must die. In either case the ones left behind walk by faith, not by sight. They look forward, like that Christian mother who wrote MY SON and FAITH, to the Resurrection morn. Christ both died and rose again that He might be the Lord both of the dead and of the living. If we are left to wrestle with God while our loved ones have gone on before over the brook that we call death, we sorrow not as those that have no hope. Many of our boys shall come trooping home after the sad war is over. And those who sleep in Jesus will God bring with Him when He comes in His Resurrection Glory.

Since in this present experience of separation we must entrust our most precious ones to His keeping, and in that experience of death our souls are wholly dependent on His power and His grace, let us realize that God—God alone—is the one to fear. There is nothing awful save the wrath of God. And just because that is awful, God has bowed the heavens and come down in His mercy for us men and for our salvation. Christ took our human nature that in it he might bear our sins in His own body on the tree. By one draught He drank damnation dry. He was delivered up for our offenses and raised for our justification. There is one God and one Mediator between God and man, the Man Christ Jesus. When we appear before God clothed in His Righteousness we stand faultless before the Throne. If thou shalt believe in thine heart that God raised Him from the dead and confess the Lord Jesus with thy lips, thou shalt be saved. For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness and with the lips confession is made unto salvation.

In a small country church in Alabama a minister was preaching on that extra sparrow that the Jewish marketeer threw in to make the deal. The sparrow that the buyer demanded to seal the trade, that the seller didn't count was remembered by God. In the back of the auditorium was a tenant woman whose life had been soiled. She had become a mother without becoming a wife. She thought no one could care for her life. But if God remembers that extra sparrow, surely He thinks of me. And then like a great tidal wave the message of the Gospel of His love enveloped her soul with the revelation of just how much more valuable she was than many sparrows. For her God had not spared His only begotten Son, but had freely offered Him up for her salvation. And the Father's seeking, saving love made her a daughter of the King that day. Some weeks later when the call went out to raise funds to repair the Church, this woman came to a farmer and asked a job that she might earn her part for the Church. He replied that he had no job that he would ask a woman to do. She replied that she would take a man's job, and donning a pair of boots she cleaned out a barn. Later this farmer, as treasurer of the Church, received back the same dollar he had given her for the menial task.

She confessed Christ with her lips, with her labors, and with the gift of the widow's mite, and the Son of Man will confess her before the angels of God.

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