

THE BIRDS ... which were wiser than men
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(Psalm 84: 3)

I was once taken by the Baptist minister of Wellington, New South Wales, Australia, to speak at a small country church in the village of Seatonville. I had prepared well for the address to be given that afternoon, but the moment I entered the church I knew my preparation had been in vain. Since the days of my childhood, birds have been irresistible, and the beautiful nest cleverly built into the oil lamp hanging above the pulpit completely captivated my interest. The swallows had found a broken window, and had taken possession of the building. Just how they managed to weave their compact nest into the wire fittings of the lamp, I cannot tell-for that matter, can anyone tell how these things are done? The fact that services were held only occasionally in the building helped to attract the birds, and their young had been hatched amid the quiet of the sanctuary. The floor of the church was stained with evidence of their habitation, but no one seemed to care. The congregation smiled when they saw the birds, and smiled even more when the twittering friends apparently accompanied the organ music during the first hymn. I abandoned my prepared sermon, and thought of other birds which were wiser than men.

A Place of Silence

During one of David's visits to the sanctuary, he noticed that the sparrows and the swallows had also developed a liking for the sacred house. He recognized that their nests had been allowed to remain close to the altar of God, and before he returned to his palace he paused to watch them. Perhaps his own commands had something to do with the undisturbed rest enjoyed by these creatures. During the mating season the birds had flown into the sanctuary, and had perched on a beam to study their surroundings. The movements of the priests were dignified, and sound was hushed. Was not this the house of prayer? The little birds made their decision, and began to build their homes as near to the altar of God as discretion would allow. Amid the restful atmosphere the eggs were laid, and undisturbed, the birds awaited the consummation of their union. When the young first looked out of the nest they saw the altar, and quickly realized that noise was an offense in this place of peace.

A Place of Safety

They were probably frightened when the priests looked into the nest, but the custodians of the house merely smiled and walked away. Slowly but surely, fear disappeared from the minds of the feathered family. They were safe. There were no hooligans seeking to destroy or rob the nest. There were no merciless owls waiting to pounce on the young. There were no snakes creeping silently toward the defenseless family. Dangers were rare; the altar had cast a mantle of peaceful protection over the entire place. Eventually the young birds sat on the edge of their home to survey the people who drew near to the altar of God. Perhaps they even wondered why these people went away again, for surely the burning sunshine was far less comforting than the soothing shade of God's house. And so the youngsters sat and twittered among themselves ; they were near to the altar ; they were content.

A Place of Song

As they became older the youngsters became stronger, and

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their twittering developed into something more resonant.
When the Levites sang the praises of God, the birds cocked
their heads and appeared to listen. Eventually their songs
mingled with the anthems of praise arising from other thank-
ful hearts. King David listened to all this, and afterwards
wrote, " How amiable are thy tabernacles, O Lord of hosts!
My soul longeth, yea, even fainteth for the courts of the Lord
... Yea, the sparrow hath found an 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. Blessed are
they that dwell in thine house: they will be still praising thee."
There is another altar which offers sanctuary. It is a place
of quiet rest ; a safe place, where joy abounds in the hearts
of the people of God. There, the dangers of life are offset
by God's promises ; the blasts of life's storms are minimized
by the warmth of His love; the quality of the songs is
deepened by the sense of the unfailing goodness of Christ.
It is a source of endless amazement that so many people
prefer to stay elsewhere. Even the birds must marvel at the
stupidity of human beings.

Said the sparrow to the swallow,
I should really like to know
Why these anxious human beings
Rush about and worry so.

Said the swallow to the sparrow,
I suppose that it must be
That they have no heavenly Father
Such as cares for you and me.

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