



Some introductory observations on this beautiful lesson of a great Eagle: God uses the Eagle often in Scripture to illustrate the nature of the Elect of His choosing. He speaks of the eagle's great speed and unsurpassed vision; of its ability to fly directly toward the sun to avoid the archers aim; of its making its nest on the mountain Rock; of its stirring up its nest to make the young Eagles who are grown strong to leave the nest and flex their wings; and He speaks of the Eagle renewing its strength in middle age. The Eagle mates for life and, when one dies, the other mourns the loss until he, too, departs from his post as Sovereign of the Skies.

I love the creatures with which God has graced the earth, both wild and tame. He put life into them, and they value their lives just as much as we value ours.

The below story is one which I read as a child in elementary school. It had a profound effect upon my young soul. It is touching, happy, and sad – all at once. I cannot imagine any adverse effects whatsoever that such stories as this, and others in our grammar school readers, could have had on the character of youth. Yet, you will not find such stories any longer in those textbooks of early childhood. That which was considered Constitutional by the very writers of the US Constitution, and was taught in public schools for two hundred years, have suddenly been found by revisionist and wicked judges to be UNCONSTITUTIONAL. Please read and enjoy this story taken from my childhood textbook entitled *THE CHILD'S WORLD* Fifth Grade Reader:

Hatteras Joe

I

On the island of Hatteras, off the North Carolina coast, there once lived a bald eagle, the fame of which still lingers among the men who sail the waters of Pamlico Sound or draw nets on the ocean beach when the blue-fish run in the spring. Morning after morning the great bird would be seen hanging, on the wing above the sand-dunes, as it watched for a heedless rabbit or sailed along the shore in quest of fish cast up by the breakers.

Alas, for his own safety! he was not always content with such food, but on occasions would drop from the sky like a thunderbolt into the scrub palmettos and quickly rise with one of the farmer's choicest lambs in his talons.

Then in the big reverie in the top of the great pine tree, a hundred feet tall, there would be merry times, for the two eaglets were always hungry. Here the great bird of prey would sit looking up at the sound at the sails of the fishing-boats beating home from Kennekeet, or turning his head to gaze out over the tumbling Waters of the Atlantic. A mile away Cape Hatteras lighthouse towered two hundred feet in air. Beyond, it the eagle might see the endless white-caps racing over the treacherous Diamond Shoal, while far in the offing the faint smoke of steamers along the coast was visible. Although at times the fierce gales that swept in from the ocean set the pine tree swinging and swaying, yet on the whole the nest was a pleasant home for the eagle family.

One day, however, Meekins, the farmer, arose in his wrath, shouting a vow to the four winds of heaven that the old eagle should no longer live to rob him of his lambs. He took his gun and made his way through the woods, bent on slaughter; and as I happened to be a visitor on the island at the time, I received an invitation to accompany him. The birds were nowhere in sight when we reached the tall pine, which stood on a slight elevation in the thickest and wildest part of the forest.

Concealing ourselves in the thicket, we sat down to wait. At the end of an hour the farmer had gained his revenge; the female bird lay dead and the old feathered monarch of the island had fallen wounded to the ground.

Taking off my coat, I ran to the flapping bird, threw it over him, and with much difficulty, securely tied his feet with a handkerchief. Then I begged for his life.

Meekins objected strenuously for some time but yielded in the end, and I carried the great bird on my head three miles to the farm-house. Then I untied his feet, put him on a stump in the back yard and withdrew. He instantly attempted to fly, but his efforts were in vain; finding them so, at last he settled down on the stump. We named him "Hatteras Joe," in memory of a negro hero who had once lived at the Cape. After offering the eagle meat, we left him to himself.

For two days the eagle refused all food, and with ruffled feathers and neck drawn in, sat the picture of dejection and outraged pride. The third day we took him a large fish, at sight of which he seemed to forget his anger, and with outstretched head called eagerly for it. From that moment there was no trouble about his appetite; the only difficulty was 'to find food enough to satisfy it.

One morning two weeks later I waved Hatteras Joe good-by, and climbing into a Kennekeet shad-boat, set sail for the mainland forty miles away.

More than a year passed, in which time I heard nothing of the fallen king of the Hatteras bird world. Then one evening just as the sun was sinking and the curlews passed

in long ranks to their roost in the outer shoals, I again landed on the island and made my way to Farmer Meekins' house.

After supper, as we sat in the moonlight before the door, I inquired for Hatteras Joe. It was an odd tale that Meekins told me that evening while the mocking-birds sang in the holly trees and the dull boom of the breakers over on the ocean beach came down the wind.

It seemed that the wound in the eagle's wing did not prove serious, and in about a month he was able to fly again.

"But the bird did not leave," Meekins continued. "No, sir; he had grown so accustomed to that stump in the back yard that he came to look on it as his home."

The eagle made flights all over the island, but always came back in the evening. One day the farmer saw Hatteras Joe standing in the great nest in the big pine, scanning earth, air and water as if searching for his lost companion. Eagles, it should be remembered, mate for life; and if one of a pair is killed, the survivor sometimes fails to mate again.

After the shooting season in the spring, old Joe would fly over the salt marshes bordering the sound, and he almost always captured some crippled wild duck or goose, left behind when the great flocks departed in the spring on their journey toward the pole.

II

That his wing was now as strong as ever and that he was again king of the air, he showed one day in striking fashion. A fish-hawk, which may have come over from the mainland for a few days' fishing at the Cape, suddenly dropped into the water near the boat-landing and arose, dripping, with a two pound trout in his clutch.

Holding the fish so that its head would point straight forward as he flew, he started toward the shore where a giant live oak stood. The topmost limb of this tree offered the osprey an excellent dining-room, on which he might stand and enjoy the fruit of his labor. It chanced, however, that another pair of eyes besides the farmer's had seen the bird secure the fish—the eyes of the big, brown, white-headed eagle which every body now knew as Hatteras Joe. He launched forth from his perch near the top of a pine, his great wings measuring almost seven feet from tip to tip.

The fish-hawk instantly saw his enemy and his cries of rage and alarm filled the air. He at once, changed his course, heading straight out over the sound. On came the eagle at a furious rate. Higher and higher mounted the osprey in an effort to keep above the eagle; but fast as he rose, the eagle rose faster. In three minutes he had caught up with the fish-hawk and was perhaps a hundred feet above him.

Then suddenly he dropped, and on half-shut wings shot downward. The osprey avoided the blow by dodging, and the eagle sank another fifty feet towards the water before his flight was checked. Once more he rose in a graceful curve, climbing the unseen stairway of the air to a point of vantage.

Twice he struck and twice the weaker bird dodged, still bearing his prey. At the third assault, however, the osprey was forced to let fall his fish in order to escape. Down, down it dropped, a mere speck in the air; and behind it, falling straight toward the dark blue waves, with all the combined force of gravitation and powerful wing beats, came Hatteras Joe. Thirty yards above the water a scaly yellow claw shot out and deftly seized the fish. Then deliberately and gracefully the eagle turned toward the land, heading for the top branch of the live oak where the osprey had hoped to make his dinner.

By this time no one any longer tried to shoot Joe, for people regarded him as almost a member of Farmer Meekins' family. Then, too, since he had ceased killing lambs, they looked on him as a kind of reformed robber, who was trying to lead a better life. Furthermore, in the late winter an incident had occurred which so endeared the old eagle to the dwellers in the Hatteras region that no one could have been induced to raise a hand against him.

The story goes that one time after a storm the lookout at the life-saving station saw a flock of gulls circling over Diamond Shoal, and striking down as if at some floating object. At the same moment Hatteras Joe came across the island, making straight for the screaming birds. He quickly scattered them, and all that afternoon sailed round and round in a certain place over the waves; he did not quit his station while light remained. In the morning fishermen found the body of a sailor washed up on the beach, and nearby, on some wreckage, sat Hatteras Joe as if on guard.

"Tomorrow, I must see this wonderful bird," I said, "and give him a fish in token of my regard."

"You cannot do that," the farmer sadly replied, "for the fine old fellow is gone. He lies buried at the foot of the big pine, which still holds his nest."

"Tell me the rest of the story," I urged. So Meekins, knocking the ashes from his pipe, told me before going to bed of the death of Hatteras Joe.

The thing happened at the time of the great August storm, which everybody along the coast remembers, for it wrought tremendous havoc and put many fine vessels on the beach. When it became apparent to the farmer that all the low part of the island would be flooded by the waves which came driving in from the Atlantic, he took his wife and children to the house of a neighbor, who lived on higher ground among the dunes.

For two days and nights the awful storm raged. At length the sun came out and the waters subsided, and Meekins went down to see what was left of his home. There, on the stump in the back yard, his talons sunk deep in the wood, lay the body of Hatteras Joe. Why the great bird did not spread his wings and fly to the mainland or soar above the clouds, no one could tell. But this is the answer I would give.

Every creature recognizes, more or less vaguely, perhaps, the existence of some higher power than himself, on which he calls in the hour of need. The bird cries out aloud in the hawk's claws; the rabbit screams for help as the dog seizes it. I once heard a man appeal to God as a falling tree crashed down on him.

Instinctively, we turn in moments of peril to the highest power we know. To Hatteras Joe, the eagle, the highest power was man, for man had laid him low. When the great storm came, the most terrific tempest the bird had ever known, with terror striking at his heart and throwing a veil across his reason, he had fled to man for safety — and had fled in vain!

T. Gilbert Pearson
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Post note: Though published in 1917, these textbooks were still in use in the impoverished school systems of the South at the time I attended school – thanks be to God.