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Our Pulpit.

The Story of Moses.

No. 7

STRUGGLES FOR LIBERTY.

SERMON PREACHED BY

REV. A. J. MOWATT.

In St. Paul's Church, Fredericton, Sunday evening, Feb. 17th, 1889.

"And the Lord said unto Moses, now shall thou see what I will do to Pharaoh; for by a strong hand shall he let them go, and by a strong hand shall he drive them out of his land."—Exodus vi. 1.

A captive prince had said to Rameses the Great, as he was one day indulging in the cruel sport of harnessing him and others to his chariot, and compelling them to drag him along the streets of Memphis, that, as the chariot wheel turned round, so it would be with the conqueror and his vassals. They were down and he was up, but the day would come, when the remorseless wheel of destiny would turn round, and they would be up, and he would be down.

And already the day is dawning upon Egypt. Rameses is down in the grave, and Menephtah his son is on his throne, a son who arrogates his father's pride but lacks his father's power. When God wants to humble a nation, He sets upon their throne a weak, proud, self-willed prince, and the thing is done. For four hundred years and more Egypt has known only prosperity, and she has come to be lifted up above herself with pride, and has grown cruelly intolerant towards the poor of the people, her slaves and captives. But at last the cry of their cruel oppressions has reached the ears of a just God, and He stretches forth His hand to their help and deliverance. He raises up in the humble shepherd of Midian a deliverer for Egypt's down-trodden slaves, and an instrument of vengeance for the proud and heartless nation, and already he and his brother are on their way to fulfil their mission.

I think if Egypt had been told, that two men were coming to her, leaning upon their staffs as they trudged on foot across the wastes of sand, who were to humble her power, and wrest from her cruel grasp two millions of her slaves, she would have sneered at the idea as utterly incredible and preposterous. And yet, as we shall see, out of such an insignificant beginning grew a living spiritual force, a sort of revolutionary and revival movement, that even Egypt with all the greatness of her might was unable to cope with or crush. Oh! let tyrants tremble. Let evil-doers be afraid, for although they may be safe, as they think, amid the munitions of rocks, strong in their self-security, yet a hand that seems puny will hurl them from their high place, and make them bite the dust. Thus it was in Egypt thirty centuries ago, and thus it will be today.

I. THE MEETING OF THE ELDERS.

On their arrival in Egypt, Moses and Aaron summoned a meeting of the elders of Israel. This meeting was held at some convenient spot in the land of Goshen probably, some retired spot, and seems to have been well attended and thoroughly representative in its character. The heads and fathers of the people were present. It was a gathering of the experience and wisdom of the nation. Only grey-beards were allowed at this meeting. You see them coming, those old men, each leaning on his staff for age, and they wonder what it can mean. No such gathering had ever been seen in Egypt, or, for that matter, anywhere, before. A strange solemn earnestness is in those wrinkled faces and bowed forms. They have seen hard service in the brick-kilns and canals of Egypt, and they sigh and cry for deliverance.

The meeting is called to order by the appointment of some venerable father to preside. Moses and Aaron then explain their mission, and present their credentials. They tell the story of their call, and repeat in detail all that the Lord commanded them to say, and they work the miracles they were instructed to work as proofs that the Lord had indeed spoken to them and sent them. The fathers listen, and their wonder grows as they listen, and it is felt that the cause is of God. They believe, and bow down with one accord and worship. They bless the Lord that He has looked upon their bondage-state, and that He is raising up among them a deliverer.

It must have greatly encouraged Moses and Aaron, and strengthened their faith, for it was weak enough, to see with what a readiness and heartiness the elders took hold of the enterprise as soon as it was laid before them. Of course they would not be able to see how it was to be carried through, but they fell in with it, because it was of God, and they were willing to be taught and led. I suppose there would be discussion. And it would be strange indeed if some aged father did not feel that he was called upon in duty to himself and the nation to oppose it with all the

might of his influence and eloquence. He would show from his standpoint how reckless and fool-hardy it was. He would argue that, since God brought them down into Egypt He meant them to stay there and bear on. He would argue further that it was wrong to take a step that was fraught with rebellion against constituted authority. And he would wind up with predicting all sorts of calamities to the movement, and his counsel would be to remain as they were. Bad as they now were they might be worse.

But if there was any opposition, it had no weight in the meeting. It was silenced. The elders were unanimous in accepting Moses and Aaron as their leaders, and they commissioned them to go before Pharaoh, and petition on their behalf, that he grant permission to Israel to go a three-days' journey into the wilderness with a view to keep a sacred festival. The request was not unreasonable, and it would listen to anything he would listen to such a moderate request as that. And so with a solemn pledge to stand by their leaders and one another, the meeting broke up. Thus, at least one step has been taken. Moses and Aaron have the people with them, and that is a great thing.

II. MOSES AND AARON BEFORE PHARAOH.

In due time, and with the usual court formalities, Moses and his coadjutor repaired to the palace at Memphis to present themselves before Pharaoh with the petition of their people. Moses was quite familiar with the formalities of the Egyptian Court and no doubt it was very much in his favor. He could talk to the king in his own language, and without the aid of an interpreter or court official to coach him as to what to say and how to do.

What memories must have come up as Moses entered the grounds and made his way to the door of the palace! He would find much as it was forty years before, and yet there would be changes. Here he played when a boy. There he walked or sat when he was grown up, and thought or read. So much comes back to him as he walks up the grand stairways and along the sculptured and pillared halls. But everywhere are strange faces. Not the same officials attend him now, and usher him into the royal presence, who were in power forty years before. Not even the same servants and slaves. With a new king had come into power new men, new court-officials, new ministers of state, new attendants, new slaves. And then death had been at work in those years. Where is the good and noble princess who had done so much for him, made him all he is, we might say? Ah! her work in the interests of the church is done, and she drops out of sight. But to himself, and to us, and to the ages to come, her memory must ever be fresh and fragrant.

The resigning Pharaoh is Menephtah, Son of Rameses II, a weak prince who has all the excessive vanity of his illustrious father without either his greatness or goodness; for, let it not be forgotten, that, bad as the Pharaoh of the oppression was, great a tyrant as he was, he was not without his grand qualities. But Menephtah is as weak as his father was strong, and such is the vanity of this king, that he flatters himself he has not his equal on earth or even in Heaven, for he claims to be a god. Sitting on the throne of Horus, he gives life to mankind, watches over the interests of mortals. He is called: "The Living, Giver of life, Gracious Lord, Good God, Son of the Sun, Horus rejoicing in truth." Such is the Pharaoh before whom Moses and Aaron present themselves in the interests of their people.

It is with no little risk to themselves they undertake such a mission. Their life is in the king's hands, and he cannot be trusted. But they are not afraid, for God sends them, and He will take care of them. They are ushered into the august presence with all due formality, and they beg permission to make their request. An audience is granted. We have not, of course, a full account of the interview, but the gist is, they ask leave for the Hebrews to go a three-days' journey into the wilderness with a view to keep a religious feast in honor of Jehovah.

At once the king rudely rejects their request. With a sneer he asks who Jehovah is that he should obey Him. He is none of the gods of Egypt, and he positively refuses to grant their request, to accede to their wish.

The deputation ventures to plead on. They argue the matter, and attempt to bring the king to reason. They try to tell him that Jehovah lays it upon them to make this request. But the king grows violent, and orders them to go about their business. He tells them that it would bring to a stand still so many public works, if such a request as they made should be acceded to, and he hints that even Moses and Aaron should be at work instead of being where they are. "Get you unto your burdens."

They retire respectfully. The affair has issued as they had been led to look for. The Lord told Moses that the king would be unyielding. And indeed it was just as might be expected of such

a king as Menephtah was. But it was the right way to go about the business, the only constitutional way. Egypt had broken faith with Israel in reducing them to slavery, but Israel must resort only to constitutional measures to regain their liberty. There is a right way to take such a step, and the right way was to approach the throne by a humble petition to secure a certain privilege, and that privilege was, to worship their God in the way He enjoins upon them. It was such a privilege as even slaves have a right to. It meant, of course, their deliverance ultimately, for no man, nor people, can wake up to their privileges as God's children, without at last rising to the grandeur of liberty.

The tyrannical king, however, not only refuses the request made in a constitutional way, but he takes revenge upon their even presuming to make it, by greatly adding to their burdens. That very day he issues a decree to the effect, that the Hebrew slaves at work in the brickyards must thereafter provide their own straw. This to slaves already over-burdened was the last straw that breaks the camel's back. The outcry against this last act of intolerance was something terrible, and representations were made to the king by his own overseers to the effect, that it was too hard altogether, that it simply could not be carried out. But he would not mitigate the rigor of the new law one iota. Thus Israel was in an evil case indeed, and in their desperation they flew in the face of Moses and Aaron, and told them that it was all their fault, that they were reduced to such straits.

Poor Moses felt bad. He did not know what to do. He was almost sorry that he had ever returned to Egypt. He blamed himself for it all. It was because he had bungled the business in the presence of the king. If a more capable man had been sent, he would have succeeded better. But it was of the Lord. The Lord wanted to make his people sick of their bondage, and so He let the king lay it on heavier and heavier. Moses went to his knees with his perplexity, and he poured out his complaint into the ears of the Prayer-Hearer, and the Lord heard him and helped him. He instructed him how next to proceed, and revealed His mind in the matter.

III. THE PLAGUES.

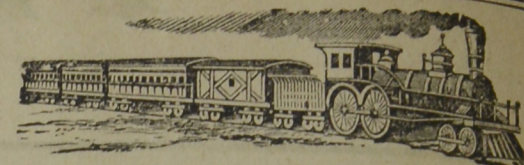
Gentle measures had failed, yea worse than failed. Henceforth it must be a struggle, the battle of Titans, the God of Israel and the gods of Egypt arrayed against one another in deadly combat, in a hand-to-hand de-or-die fight.

Moses and Aaron request permission according to the Lord's instructions, to appear before Pharaoh to shew him what their God can do. It had come to be noised abroad that Moses and Aaron could work wonders, and the king was curious to see for himself what they could do. So he and his servants receive them. Moses carries his shepherd's staff, a knotty thorn from the slopes of Sinai. He casts it down before the king, and instantly it is a serpent. But the king makes light of it. He is not frightened. He regards it as only a clever juggler's trick. He summons his own magicians. They are all ready for it was known what the wonder was to be. They march in, each carrying what seems to be a staff, but they are rigid serpents. At the king's request they throw them on the floor, and they wriggle around in a lively fashion. But Moses' serpent has more life than theirs, for he commences to devour them. And so the miracle fails to impress the king. Jugglery has won the day, and truth has been worsted in the fray. But truth is not going to be always thus fooled. There is a limit to jugglery, but truth is exhaustless in its resources.

1ST PLAGUE: THE NILE TURNED TO BLOOD. Next morning, according to the Lord's instructions, Moses and Aaron are down by the river, when the king, attended with his courtiers, comes to take his usual constitutional and bath. Moses has his wondrous rod in his hand. The Hebrew brothers thrust themselves in the way of the king, and in the name of their God and people, clamorously demand the privilege of worship, and solemnly warn him of the consequences to Egypt, if he refuse to accede to their just demand. They tell him the Nile will flow with blood for seven days, and it will corrupt, and the fish will all die. But he only scoffs.

Aaron then takes the rod of Moses out of his hand, and with it he goes down and splashes the waters in the sight of Pharaoh and his servants, and they become blood, a sluggish gory river. The Nile sometimes turns red in a natural way. But this that Moses does is a deathful plague, a terrible judgment upon Egypt because of the blood of the innocents the river has drunk. Pharaoh however is not convinced nor humbled. His magicians know how to convert the water into seeming blood, and he is only hardened. But his people are in terrible distress. They dig all along the river-side, and so are able to secure a small quantity of water, barely enough to quench the rage of their thirst. And

Continued on third page.



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12.50 P. M.—For Fredericton Junction, St. John and points east.

ARRIVE AT FREDERICTON

11.35 A. M.—From Fredericton Junction, St. John and points East.

3.10 P. M.—From Fredericton Junction, Vancoboro, Bangor, Portland, Boston, and points West, St. Andrew's, St. Stephen, Houlton Woodstock and points north.

6.30 P. M.—Express from St. John, and intermediate points.

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