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Our Pulpit.

The Story of Moses.

No. 2.

HIS BIRTH.

SERMON PREACHED BY

REV. A. J. MOWATT.

In St. Paul's Church, Fredericton Sunday evening Jan. 13th 1889.

"By faith Moses, when he was born, was hid three months by his parents, because they saw he was a goodly child; and they were not afraid of the king's commandment."—HEB. XI. 23.

I ask you tonight to go back with me thirty centuries, a breadth of years too vast for us easily to grasp. It is like an eternity to us. Those years—what they have done or undone for Egypt and the world! Egypt so low today was then the glory of kingdoms. Rameses the great was on her throne. Returned from his wars with a name that was the world's wonder and terror, he threw all his mighty energy into the development and upbuilding of his kingdom. Upper and Lower Egypt, once separate, united under him into one great Empire. Possessed as he was of almost exhaustless resources in the shape of captives and slaves and wealth, he undertook and pushed forward all sorts of public works. Nothing seemed too great for him to do. He built store-cities, developed agriculture, erected new temples and remodelled and beautified old ones, constructed walls and fortresses, and filled the land with the glory of his power.

Our story opens tonight with perhaps the sixth year of his own independent reign. He is said to have reigned 66 years in all, 36 conjointly with his father, and 36 alone. Memphis is his capital, a magnificent city on the west bank of the Nile, not far from where Cairo stands today. It was founded by Menes Egypt's first king, and so was quite an old city in the days of Rameses. But in his day it reached the zenith of its splendor. It was full of temples and palaces and splendid monuments. Here, Herodotus tells us, was the beautiful and spacious temple of Isis. Here was the temple of Serapis, in the western part of the city. Here was the temple of Ra or the sun. And here also was the temple of Pthah, the Egyptian Vulcan, the oldest and most famous temple of all. This was the pride and glory of the city. Founded by Menes, and therefore as old as the city, it consisted of a grand central edifice, surrounded by pillared courts, and adorned by colossal statues, pictured representations of the achievements of kings, sphinxes, inscriptions, tablets, obelisks, the work of many kings and many ages, telling a thrilling story of the past in its architecture and records. On the eastern edge of the city, washed by the waters of the Nile on one side, was the citadel, sometimes called the White Castle, a strong fortress girt about with a lofty rampart.

Memphis too was admirably situated for trade, and at the time we speak of, 3000 years ago, was a prosperous busy city. It was also a great city for learning. Here it was where the wisdom of the ancients had its home. What Memphis did not know was not worth knowing. Then it was a city of most salubrious climate, and beautiful for situation. From its walls north and south spread out rich green fields, covered with lotus flowers, and intersected with canals, a very paradise of loveliness.

To the west, standing out clear cut against the pale sky was its necropolis. Stretching twenty miles north and south, but with its populous center immediately behind Memphis, this strange City of the dead confronted the living city, attracting the eye by the sharp points of its sixty pyramids, and especially challenging attention by those huge monuments of kingly vanity, which have never elsewhere been equalled. Such, in brief, is some description of the city within which, or near to which, Moses was born, and as it was in his day.

But Memphis has passed away, its glory utterly perished. A grove of palm-trees grows today on the site where the ancient capital of Egypt once stood so proudly. And of all its splendor there is left but one monument, a monolith forty six feet in length, belonging, it is believed, to the temple Pthah, a splendid statue of the warrior-king, but now, fallen from its proud position, it lies face downward in a pool of dirty water, fit emblem of departed greatness. The fellahim call it Abu-el-Hawl, the father of terror, referring perhaps to the cruel tyranny of Rameses the great, whose image the prostrate pillar bears, and if so, illustrating the old adage: "The good a man does dies with him; the evil he does lives after him."

I. THE HOME OF MOSES.

In the straggling suburbs of Memphis, and close to the west bank of the reedy river, thirty centuries ago, might be seen a dwelling of the poorest sort, a mud hovel, in which one of the families of God's people finds a home. Once well-to-do in circumstances, rich and

respectable perhaps, oppression has ground them down to the deplorable state of wretchedness we find them in.

The head of the family, a little past the prime of life, toils as a field-hand, and day by day along with hundreds of others, slaves like himself, may be seen working the rude machinery by which the water is lifted up from the river to irrigate the fields of the tyrant king, or may-hap some of his underlings. He is almost naked, and the hot sun scorches him, and the hard monotonous drudgery gin-horse work wearies and wears him; but hardest of all are the gruff voice of the task-master and sometimes the lash of his sharp heavy whip across the bare shoulders of this free-born son of Israel. He feels it to be a bitter thing to be a slave. It is something he never can harden to. He submits, because he has to, but he dreams and hopes for the day to come, and he knows it will come, when he and his shall be free. At sunset he repairs to his humble abode, and there in the bosom of his family forgets for the time being that he is a slave, and comforts himself and them with the comforts wherewith the Lord comforts His own.

Amram, for that was the slave's name, belongs to the tribe of Levi, a tribe that afterwards enjoyed the distinction of being specially employed about the Lord's sanctuary and in the sacred services of religious worship, but at the time we speak of it had no pre-eminence above the rest of the tribes. The great crushing wheel of oppression rolled over all alike, and the highest were as low as the lowest. Those who had any prominence among the people were sure to be made the special objects of the tyrant's cruelty, and had the distinction of feeling the iron of oppression the keenest.

Some years before this, Amram had married, not only into his own tribe, but into his own house. He had married Jochebed his father's sister, his own aunt. It was not uncommon both among Egyptians and Israelites, at the time, to marry those near of kin to them, brothers to marry their sisters, and, among the Egyptians, it is said, fathers sometimes to marry their own daughters.

The first born of the Amram household had been a daughter, Miriam or Mary they had called her, the first of the Marys who are so dear to the church. Miriam is now a girl of twelve or fifteen, a gentle shrewd little woman who is such a comfort and help to her mother. All day long she fills the humble hut with the music of her sweet voice, for she can sing, and the still sweeter music of her filial devotion.

Some years later another had been added to the family whom they had named Aaron. He is not yet three, a bright chubby little fellow who means to make his mark in the world, and of whom we shall hear more.

About this time the black decree goes forth from the tyrant-king dooming the boy-infants of Israel to the waters of the Nile, and we can readily understand the anxiety and consternation it created in the Amram household. Its dark shadow seemed to crouch like a monster at the door of the little home, waiting for the new life to come. The beloved disciple, in a strange book he calls his Revelation, tells us, among many other weird and terrible things, of the woman's seed whose birth a red monster watched for with devouring jaws. But he was disappointed. The Lord knows how to save His own. So, long before, under the shadow of the pyramids, the birth of a son of man is watched for by the same cruel monster, and he whets his teeth in anticipation of the feast he is to have. But when he sleeps the child is born who is to do so much towards taking his power from him, breaking even his jaw-teeth, bruising the head that another's heel is to crush to utter death.

Seldom indeed is a child born in more adverse circumstances than those that attend the last-born of the Amram household. His father a poor slave, his home a clay hut, the cruel edict of a tyrant-king dooming his infant life, what can be much humbler-and-harder circumstance than such a birth? It reminds us of another birth, in later times, that was very similarly circumstanced, the birth of Jesus. Now, men would say in their wise way, better not be born at all than to be born as Moses was born, and as many another is born. To be born thus is to be born but to die, born to a sort of living death perhaps, born to a life that is a grim struggle for existence, born to be a slave, born to nakedness and hunger, born to be harassed like a mule to a wheel and whipped up by the task-master's lash to the fierce rigor of the drudgery-work. Oh better have a stone tied about one's neck the first hour of life, and flung far into the river than live to such a life! And perhaps Amram, when he came home, and found a new life, said, in the bitterness of his soul, "Better away with it at once, wife, than let it live to be what I am! It will have to die at last, and the sooner the better. To spare it is only adding to our misery, and we have enough of it now. It is the will of Heaven, and we can do nothing. Let the fated child die."

But the mother could not consent to that. She sees, or thinks she sees, in his face, a light that is to her a prophecy of what he is to be, and an earnest of the light that years afterwards shone so full upon him that men could not look, and she said to her husband, with a faith that triumphed over his weakness, that the child, she felt so sure, in spite of the king's commandment, would yet be the hope of their home, the help of their people, and he must not die. And drawing the unconscious babe to her bosom with a mother's tender yearning, and kissing him over and over again, and letting her tears baptize him, she said to him, as if he knew all she felt, that if a mother's love and faith could save him, he would be saved, he would not die.

II. THE LITTLE ARK.

For three months the mother made out, without much difficulty seemingly, to hide the birth of her child from the king's lynx-eyed officials. Not every child can be thus hidden. They make themselves heard, and their presence felt, and all the neighborhood knows that there is a baby in the house. The mother would not be without her anxieties lest her watchful care would fail, and her child would betray itself and her. But the Lord was with her, and for three months she was able to defy the king's commandment.

The time was approaching, however, when it would not be possible for her to hide her child, and she saw it approaching with growing maternal anxiety. She always hoped that some way of deliverance would be opened up for her, and she would look up to God with a trust that could not be shaken, and with prayers and tears cry to Him for help. And He helped her. He opened up to her a wondrous way of grace and mercy for her doomed child. O the riches of God's grace! Let us trust Him, and He will help us today in our need, even as long ago He helped the mother of Moses in her need.

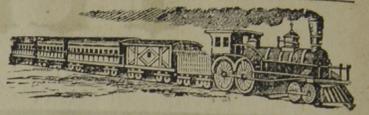
Not far from her hut were the royal watering-places, and almost every day she saw the king's daughter with her maids come down to bathe, and she was struck with the benevolence of her countenance and kindly beaming eye, and something seemed to say to her: "Trust your babe to her." At first she could not think of it, but day by day the thought came back to her, as she felt that something must be done, and the more her mind dwelt upon it, the more it seemed best, to throw her child upon the mercy of the fair Egyptian princess.

And with the purpose opened up to her gradually also a plan, by which it could be done in a way to appeal most strongly to the tender-heartedness of the king's daughter. She had often heard the story of Noah's ark, and the idea took shape in her thoughts to make a little ark for her child. So she sent Miriam to gather the papyrus that grew plentifully along the river's brink, and with her skilful fingers she wove them into a most ingenious sort of boat. Then to make it water-proof she used bitumen, and so her ark, that, like Noah's, was to do so much for the saving of her house, was built. It was a work too of faith and prayer, and cost her many a tear, for it might not be an ark, it might be a coffin.

And now comes the day when she must launch her frail craft with its precious freight. The night before would be an anxious sleepless night to her. She did not know how she was to do what she had planned to do, but on her knees before the God of her fathers she had found help where help is always to be found, and in the morning she was strangely calm and hopeful. She felt as if her plan was to be successful. So, taking up her child she washes and dresses him with scrupulous care and neatness. Then leaving Aaron in charge of a neighbor woman, she with the babe, and Miriam with the ark, go forth along the bank of the river to the place where the princess will be sure to come. When there, the mother nurses the child, and then tucks him into the ark as if into his own little crib. He is asleep, and looks so sweet dressed up, as lovely a child as ever queen or princess pressed to her bosom. The mother kisses the babe, perhaps for the last time, as gently as if an angel's lips had touched it, and then Miriam wades out and anchors the little ark securely among the thick tall papyrus plants. This done they retire, Miriam to conceal herself hard by, and the mother to linger within easy reach, and so with no little anxiety they await results. Perhaps they can see Pharaoh's daughter some distance away coming.

O mother, do you know what it is to give up your child to God? Sometimes in one way, and sometimes in another, but in some way. He comes to the mothers of Israel still, and He asks them to trust their little ones to Him. "Suffer the little children to come unto me," said Jesus to the mothers of Salem, "and forbid them not, for of such is the kingdom of Heaven." We may not always realize it perhaps, for we lose sight sometimes of the grand meaning of these sacred symbolic rites; but when, as parents, with our child in our arms, we stand before the sacred front, or mayhap

Continued on third page.



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45. A. M.—Express for Fredericton Junction, Vanceboro, Bangor, Portland, Boston and points West; St. Stephen, St. Andrew's Houlton, Woodstock, Presque Isle, Grand Falls, Edmundston and points north.

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, Vanceboro, 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.

LEAVE GIBSON.

6.50, A. M.—Mixed for Woodstock, and points north.

ARRIVE AT GIBSON.

4.45 P. M.—Mixed from Woodstock, and points north.

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