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Our Pulpit.

The Story of Moses.

No. 5

THE SHEPHERD OF MIDIAN.
SERMON PREACHED BY
REV. A. J. MOWATT.

In St. Paul's Church, Fredericton, Sunday evening Feb. 3rd. 1889.

"But Moses fled from the face of Pharaoh, and dwelt in the land of Midian."—Exodus II, 15.

You will remember, we spoke, last Sunday night, of the great decision of Moses. We saw him turn his back on the pleasures and glories of Egypt's palace, and cast in his lot with the people of God. The step proved to be a pivotal one in his career; it changed the whole course of his life. For a long time it must have looked to himself and his friends as if he had made a great mistake—a mistake both for himself and the people in whose interests he had made the sacrifice. But, ultimately, as we shall see, it turned out to have been no mistake; it was his making and their salvation.

To-night we are to study Moses in a new role, as the shepherd of Midian. This introduces us to another and wholly different phase of his eventful life; we might call it, the antipodes of what he had been at the court of Pharaoh, a complete social somersault. In some respects it was a terrible come-down for him, but in other respects it was a phase of his life that did as much for his making as a man, and for his fitness as the leader of Israel, as his training as a prince in the court of Pharaoh. He could have no more done without the Midian portion of his life, the forty years or so he spent in the wilderness, than he could have done without his experience and training at the capital of Egypt. Both were as necessary as they could be to his future, and we see the wisdom and goodness of God strikingly displayed in the way he was led and dealt with all through the long years of his preparation for his life-work. But this will come out more manifestly as we go along.

I. HIS FLIGHT TO MIDIAN.

After leaving the palace he would make his way to his own old home and his mother's arms. Not likely was he wholly a stranger there. I am not sure that he had any well-defined ideas as to what he was going to do, but he wanted, in some way not yet clear to him, to reach out a helping hand to his oppressed countrymen. For this purpose he seems to have undertaken a tour of inspection. Some think this tour occurred before his final withdrawal from the palace, and led to it, but I have put it afterwards. He seems to have visited the different public works going on at the time where the Israelites were employed. He wanted to see with his own eyes, and know for himself, how it was with them. And then he wanted to let his people know that he was interested in them, and would do what he could to deliver them. But neither as yet did they understand him, nor he them.

Now, it was while he was on this tour of inspection that an untoward circumstance happened that cut it short. Crossing the fields one day he came upon an Egyptian ill-using a Hebrew. It was too much for his hot prince-blood to stand. Hastily glancing around to see if any one was in sight, he drew his sword and killed the oppressor. It was a rash act, utterly unjustifiable. It was not his as yet to strike the blow of freedom for Egypt's slaves. It shows us how poor an idea he had at this time what was to be done to save Israel. He and the Hebrew, then, scooped out in the sand a shallow grave, where they buried their victim, and Moses begged the Hebrew to keep his lips sealed. But it was too good to keep. So he blabbed it abroad.

Next day when Moses went out as usual, he found two Hebrews fighting, and he took upon himself to interfere, and exhorted them to stop their unnatural quarrel. Upon this the wrong doer insultingly asked him what business he had to intermeddle in their dispute, and ended what he had to say by casting up to him the rash act of the day before. "Who made thee a prince and judge over us? thinkest thou to kill me, as thou killedst the Egyptian?" This let Moses see the perilous position he was in, and learning that a warrant was already issued for his arrest, he at once fled.

The direction he took in his flight was by the way of the isthmus of Suez. It is not likely he knew where he was going when he set out. He simply fled from Egypt with justice at his heels, and he cared not much where he was going so long as he could make good his escape. If, as we have already intimated, Moses was engaged in the Hittite and other Asiatic wars, he would be familiar with the whole route. He would know where the wells were, and where he could obtain food and shelter, and he would know where the military

stations of Egypt were. These, of course, he would avoid.

I see the fugitive, with a little bag of meal across his shoulder, and a skin-bottle with some water to quench his thirst, making his way with hurrying steps across the desert. The journey is a long and weary one. He would keep to the general route, avoiding the military stations. He would round the Gulf of Suez, and then it would seem he struck away into the Sinaitic peninsula. We are not informed how long he was in making the journey, or what incidents happened to him by the way. He may have been hotly pursued, and had some thrilling hair-breadth escapes. But perhaps he had only the monotony and weariness of the desert to contend with, and they would be hard enough on one who had been so recently a prince. And it would come to him, and he would not know what to say, that this was the outcome of his trying to do his duty, and of his sacrificing himself for the good of others, and he would be perplexed.

O my hearer, did you ever set out to live a new life, to do your duty, to walk with God, to help others, and found that others did not want your help, and that your trying to do good only led you into mistakes, and was all against you? That is so often the way it turns out with men, and they do not know what to make of it, or how to regard it. But fear not, it will yet issue grandly. Moses found that, and you will find it too. The Lord was leading him, making even his mistakes work together for his good. But perhaps he did not realize it. So often men are led, and they do not know it till years afterwards; and sometimes again they are sure they are led, and they are not led. The way they are taking is of their own choosing, and right in the teeth of what the Lord wants them to do and of the way He wants them to walk in, and so they fail. But though Moses seemed to himself like a wandering sheep stumbling its way among the mountains, and across the weary wastes of burning sand, the good Shepherd had His eye upon him, and so he was led and kept.

II. AN ASYLUM FOR THE FUGITIVE.

After a wearisome journey Moses found himself at a well in the southeastern portion of the Sinaitic Peninsula. Here he stopped to rest and refresh himself. He was now in the land of Midian.

The Midianites were for the most part nomads. They wandered about from place to place, dwelling in tents, and leading their flocks and herds wherever they could find good pasturage for them. A few of them came to have villages and towns, but, as a rule, they preferred the free wild life of the desert to that of towns, and their country was where they were, and that might be in one place today, and somewhere else to-morrow.

While Moses was resting himself at the well, the daughters of the sheikh, seven in number, came with their flocks to water them. Moses seems to have kept at a respectable distance, waiting to be noticed, rather than to thrust himself upon the attention of the shepherdesses of Midian. But they paid no heed to the stranger; they went on with the work of watering their flocks. In the meantime, however, a number of shepherds, who seem to have been of a different tribe, came forward with their flocks, and they attempted to take forcible possession of the well, and drove away the maidens. Moses could not stand by and see this sort of tyranny go on before his eyes. It might be serious for himself as it had been in Egypt, but he could not help it. He was one, and they were perhaps half a dozen, but he will try. So he came forward, and without a word almost let those rude shepherds feel that it was best for them to withdraw. He then assisted the shepherdesses to water their flocks, and this task, with such gallant help as Moses was able to render, was speedily done.

Their father's name was Reuel or Raguel. He seems to have been quite an old man at this time. He was both the sheikh and priest of his tribe, and was a God-fearing man, maintaining the true faith in his household and tribe. Josephus makes him out to have been a descendant of Abraham by Keturah. But it was not uncommon, in those early times, to find, here and there, heads of tribes and peoples, who held to the truth, and worshipped the one living and true God. Melchizedek was such in the days of Abraham, and Raguel was another such in the days of Moses. His name, *friend of God*, bears testimony to his piety, and the interest he took in Moses shows us that they were of like faith. How pleasing it is to find, where you would hardly think of looking for it, at the gnarled roots of Sinai, in the days of old, the gold of the ancient church. But there Moses found it, and through him it came to be gathered into the treasury of the Lord, and it proved a real gain, a source of wealth.

But I am getting in advance of my story. When the good Midian sheikh's daughters came home earlier than usual with their flocks, he wanted to know how it was, for the trouble with the

shepherds had been continued for some time, and had been growing. And they told their father, how that an Egyptian stranger had stood up for their rights, and what he had done to help them. He asked them to call him, so that he might entertain him as his guest. Thus was Moses introduced to Raguel, and that little circumstance, so unimportant in itself, grew to be so much in the life of the exile. There he found a home for the next forty years, which proved both to his advantage and theirs, in more ways than we wot of.

III. HIS MARRIAGE.

Marriage long ago among the nomads of the East was very much a business affair. Jacob, you remember, entered the service of Laban the Syrian, at Haran, and worked hard for seven years for the sheikh's daughter Rachel. And then he was cheated out of her, her elder sister Leah having been palmed off upon him, with a view, as it turned out, to inveigle him into another seven-year's service. We can easily understand how such marriages would often be anything but happy, little short of slavery for the young lady who was thus sold. But sometimes, as in the case of Jacob and Rachel, they were real love-affairs, and resulted in happy marriages.

Now, it would appear, that Raguel, in entering into a contract with Moses for his services as a shepherd, succeeded in disposing of one of his seven grown up daughters, probably the eldest, as part payment. And Moses was willing. Perhaps it was the best he could do;—that or worse. Raguel was a good man, but like many a good man then and now, he may have had no scruples whatever in making a hard bargain when it was in his power. And Moses was taking some of his first lessons in meekness, the meekness that he afterwards came to be so eminent for, and he let Raguel make the bargain for him, for he knew nothing about keeping sheep or herding cattle.

I grant, indeed, that I may be putting it unfairly, and I am willing to look at it in another light. Moses could have told us all about it, and if it had been so very sweet to him, he could hardly keep from telling us about it and dwelling upon it. But he does not. He seems to hurry away from it, as if it were not the pleasantest theme for him to narrate. Still, it is like him to have as little as possible to say about himself and his. There may have been, therefore, more romance about his marriage, and it may have been more of a love-affair, than I have represented it, and young people always like to think and talk of marriage as full of romance.

And certainly the first acquaintance of Moses with Zipporah, for that was his wife's name, was quite romantic. As an exile, a prince of Egypt in disguise, he comes to a well. Footsore and heart-sore, he stretches himself under the shade of a palm-grove, and perhaps sleeps. He is awakened by the hubbub occasioned by the coming of the shepherdesses and their flocks. They would be darker-skinned than he was, for, it is said, he was exceedingly fair, his hair of a reddish-brown, and his complexion ruddy. But they were fair compared with other daughters of Midian, and they would not be without beauty. He did not know them, and they did not know him, and both they and he were shy about seeking an acquaintance which might not prove pleasant to either. So they await results. And they have not long to wait. An opportunity soon arises for Moses to display his gallantry, and he is not slow to do it. Thus, the shepherdesses, who were as much princesses, in their way, as he was a prince, were accidentally, or providentially rather, made acquainted with him. And such a romantic introduction could hardly issue otherwise than in marriage.

How long he was in Midian before the marriage took place we do not know. Like Jacob he may have had to serve a number of years, perhaps twice seven years, or far longer, before Zipporah was his. It would seem so, at all events, for when he came to return to Egypt, after an exile of some thirty or forty years, it would seem that his two sons were but children, the youngest indeed an infant in his mother's arms.

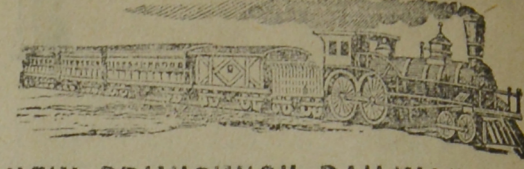
It was not, as at first we would take it to be, a hasty marriage. Their acquaintance with one another, and love-making, stretched over perhaps a quarter of a century—all of that; so that, there was ample time for their love to grow. And when at last they were married, we may be sure it would be a grand affair, a season of great joy in the encampment.

From this marriage, in due time, came two sons, and, so far as we know, only two. The firstborn Moses named Gershom, a *stranger there*, in memory of his exile, which, evidently, he felt very keenly. The second who was born about the time when he was called of God to deliver his people he named Eliezer, recalling God's merciful deliverance to him in saving him from the hand of Pharaoh, for it would seem as if the king of Egypt had followed him into his voluntary exile, and tried to kill him there.

IV. HIS SHEPHERD-LIFE.

To Moses, who was brought up to the stir and excitement of city-life, shepherd-

Continued on third page.



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

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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.

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