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BATTLE & VICTORY.

No. v.

SERMON PREACHED BY

REV. A. J. MOWATT.

In St. Paul's Church, Fredericton, Sabbath Evening, March 11th.

"And when Abram heard that his brother was taken captive, he led forth his trained men, born in his house, three hundred and eighteen, and pursued as far as Dan. And he divided himself against them by night, he and his servants, and smote them, and rescued them into Hobah, which is on the left hand of Damascus. And he brought back all the goods, and also brought again his brother Lot, and his goods, and the women also and the people."—GEN. XIV. 14-16.

Our subject tonight is an old time battle, I suppose the first and last the father of the faithful ever fought. We must remember in our studies of Abraham where we are. We are back of ancient history, back of Egypt's glory and Babylon's greatness, back of the pyramids and palaces and temples we wonder at to-day, back at the very fountains-sources of the old tyrannies that have long since waxed and waned. Egypt and Babylon's greatness was at the time we speak of ungraced, and the pyramids of the one and the palaces of the other were as yet unquarried. A great tower whose top was to reach heaven had indeed been attempted some two hundred years before on the plains of Chaldea, but the ambitious project had fallen through, and not until after Abraham's day was anything great in architecture undertaken. Still that tower showed what it was in the heart of that early age to do in the way of building, and need we wonder that the descendants of the builders of the tower of Babel should later on build the pyramids of Egypt and the palaces of Babylon? But the building age had not as yet come. Abraham's was rather a day of emigration and colonization, a day when new lands were being taken up and settled, a day of home-making and city-building, a day when civilization in its ruder forms was being rough-hewn and when government was coming to be a necessity. His, we must keep in mind was a primitive age in every respect—the arts and sciences in their infancy, agriculture and architecture in their rude beginnings, even war carried on in a most primitive fashion. Already however war was known, and great leaders of men at the head of their troops were then over-running the then world, and pillaging settlements and burning cities. The sword has ever kept in advance of the plough.

First, Chedorlaomer and his conquests. Chedorlaomer, or as he is known on the monuments, Kludur-Lagnar, was king of Elam. Elam, according to Rawlinson whose opinion is authoritative, was on the east bank of the river Tigris opposite Babylonia, and lying between Babylonia and Persia proper. The country is known by different names. Sometimes it is called Susiana or Susis, from its capital Susa or Shushan; sometimes Kissia, from the name of a people who at one time took possession of it; and sometimes Elam or Elymais. It is one of the most ancient of countries. Over this rising monarchy east of the Tigris reigned in Abraham's day the mighty warrior-king Chedorlaomer. He must have been a real Napoleon in his time for all the Babylonian suzerainties were under his power, and it would appear that some years before Abraham had emigrated to Canaan, this great leader of men and fighter of battles had led his victorious troops to the very borders of Egypt, and had compelled the royal cities of the Jordan valley to yield to the might of his arms, and come under his yoke. This subjection had continued for twelve years, but in the thirteenth the five cities leagued together and rebelled. They refused, I suppose, to pay the yearly tribute imposed. Accordingly the next year, Chedorlaomer, with his confederates from the east, Anuraphal king of Shinar, Arioch king of Ellasar, and Tidal king of Gorim, marched to Canaan, conquering as he came. On the east of the Jordan valley, he conquered the giant Rephaim, the Zuzim, the Emim, and the Horites or cave-dwellers of Mount Seir, and pushed on as far as El-Paran on the borders of Egypt. Here at a great oak he called a halt. He then turned back and made a dash upon the south of

Canaan. Abraham at Hebron must have been aware of his ruinous march, and may have trembled lest he would come his way. But the invader held away towards the cities of the plain, and Abraham could track his course perhaps by the smoke of burning villages.

In the meanwhile the kings of the cities of the Plain under the leadership of the king of Sodom were preparing to resist the invader, and chose their own battle-ground. This was the vale of Siddim which was full of bitumen-pits. The ground was well chosen, and the battle a fierce and bloody affair; but Chedorlaomer and his veterans were too many for the dissolute men of the Plain. They were overpowered and their cities ravaged, and those who were not slain in battle were carried off as captives. The conquerors leave the cities smoking ruins, and cumbered with the immense booty they have gathered, turn their faces homeward up the Jordan valley, well satisfied with the results of the campaign.

Among the captives were Lot and his family and people. Poor Lot! he knows now what a mistake he has made in the choice of a place to reside in—knows it when it is too late. The man who chooses the world—its wealth, its pleasures, its friendships, must take his chance with the world, and accept its risks and responsibilities. How long Lot was in the plain before this calamitous war broke out we do not know, perhaps four or five years, and in those years he may have been growing rapidly rich, adding to his possessions and wealth in a way that was greatly satisfactory to his grasping worldliness. He may have grown richer than Abraham on the less fertile hills of Canaan. But alas! so soon all is swept away from him and himself with it. Let not the poor envy the rich, and let not the rich rejoice over the poor, for their affairs are perhaps more evenly balanced than they are aware of. If you are rich in gold and silver, O rich man, you may be poor in something else of very much greater importance—you may be poor in grace, in love, in faith, in the things that make for righteousness; and, on the other hand, O poor man, yours may be the riches that calamity cannot overtake and the invader cannot carry off.

Secondly, Abraham in pursuit of the enemy, and battle and victory.

Some one who had an interest in Lot, perhaps one of his own herdsmen, escaped from the battle and made his way to Abraham at Hebron, and reported the sad news. The man of faith was instantly aroused, all the might that was in him, and he determined in the strength of his God, and simply because he felt it to be his duty, to pursue the conqueror, and, falling upon his rear, wrest his victory from him, and recover the spoil. He seemed to see that it could be done, and instantly he made his plans to do it. With 318 of his own men who had been under training in the use of arms for some time, and with such help as his friends and allies the Amorite brothers could render him, he set out to overtake and fight and conquer the greatest fighting-man of the age. It was a daring undertaking on his part, but duty impelled him, and he felt he could do and dare anything in so righteous a cause. Lot had not been all he should have been. He had been too ready to go off, and seek his own advantage. But he was his brother, and it was not for Abraham to sit still in his ease, and see or hear of a brother in distress without doing what he could to relieve him. It might have been easy for him to excuse himself on the ground that Lot was no longer a care, and that it was madness to fight with Chedorlaomer. But Abraham felt that Canaan was his, and it was not his to stand by with folded arms and see its cities burnt, and its peoples led away into captivity, by the invader. So with a handful of an army at his back he set out in pursuit.

With forced marches he came up with Chedorlaomer's army in the mountainous and rugged north of the country. He concealed his approach, and chose night as the best time to make the attack. The conqueror was off his guard. He did not expect an attack on his rear. His great army was asleep, or enjoying themselves in drunken revelry, when, upon three sides at once, they were suddenly fallen upon by a concealed foe. It does not appear they ever made a stand. A panic seized the Elamites and they fled leaving everything behind them. Abraham chased them, inflicting a terrible punishment, cutting up their rear in a bad way. At Hobah, not far from Damascus, he deemed it prudent to give up the pursuit and return, having been completely successful. He recovered all the captives and the spoil, and with his own little band he had

done, what the five kings of the cities of the Plain, with their combined forces, had not been able to do in the vale of Siddim. It was a grand achievement, a victory worthy of a great general. I suppose it was the first and last battle he was ever called upon to fight, and the way he fought it, as well as the motive, place him in the front rank of military leaders and heroes. He sprang like a lion upon his prey, and nothing could withstand the impetuosity of his night attack. And then it was not for that mean thing glory he fought, nor to add acres to his estate, nor to win a crown, it was to deliver captives, to save a brother, to strike a blow for liberty and against tyranny. And that battle, so far as we know, was the last of Chedorlaomer and the Elamite sway in Canaan.

Thirdly, after the battle. It has been said, that next to a great defeat for disastrous effects, is a great victory. Some can fight, and fight, and fight on, and be a hero in the fight, but let them conquer, and they cannot stand it. But not so with Abraham. He is as much a hero after the battle as he was in it; if possible, even more so.

His march home to Hebron, as we can well understand, was a triumphant one. He was hailed as the country's deliverer. He was received everywhere with honors worthy of one who had turned the invader's triumphs into a minims defeat, and the name of Abraham was great in the land. The King of Sodom himself had not been among the captives. He may have succeeded in escaping with some of his people from the fatal battle-field to the mountains. At all events we find him coming to meet the hero, and they met, it is said, at a place called from the incident the King's Dale. This was the first and last time perhaps of their meeting, for they were representatives of widely diverging interests and people;—the King, of a dying Paganism already beginning to topple to its ruin, and Abraham, of a living faith that was already giving such promise for the future, and was one day to fill the land with its glory.

The King of Sodom made a proposition to the hero to this effect, that he should keep the spoil and restore the persons. But Abraham has no mind to accede to any such proposition. He has set out on this campaign—for the most sacred of purposes; it was a real crusade; and now in the day of victory he was not going to desecrate it by a selfish worldly appropriation of the spoil he had recovered. So he rudely flung from him the proposition as an insult, a temptation of the devil. With something like a holy scorn he said to the king: "I have lift up my hand unto the Lord, God most high, possessor of Heaven and earth, that I will not take a thread nor a shoelatchet nor ought that is thine, lest thou shouldst say, I have made Abraham rich; save that only which the young men have eaten, and the portion of the men which went with me; Aner, Eshcol, and Mamre, let them take their portion."

Another remarkable personage met Abraham at the same time, Melchizedek, king of Salem. There is a difference of opinion as to the location of Salem among authorities, but the weight of opinion has always been in favor of Jerusalem. The word Salem signifies peace and is the usual word employed for salvation. Melchizedek was therefore the Canaanite king of Jerusalem in Abraham's day. He was also priest as well as a king, a man of singular piety, and devoted to the worship of the one living and true God. His name means king of righteousness, and he was called so, because he was eminently good. This distinguished person came among others to do honor to the returning conqueror, and he brought bread and wine with which to refresh and bless him. He saw in Abraham the coming man, the world's hope, and Abraham saw in Melchizedek one in whom dwelt the spirit of the God he worshipped, and he honored him with devoting a tenth of the spoil for sacred purposes.

"It is thus," says a distinguished writer and preacher of the present day, "These steps upon the scene one of the most mysterious personages of Holy writ. Nothing which we have thus far been able to gather respecting the religious condition of Canaan in the age of Abraham has prepared us to find at the head of any of its tribes, not only a worshipper of the true God, but a man of such priestly sanctity, that beneath his hand the patriarch himself bows to receive the blessing of God, and through him the Patriarch prefers his grateful offerings to Jehovah. Even in the simple prose of Genesis, the incident reads as though it meant more than meets the ear. The brief and unexplained introduction, only

this once, of a person so eminent; his symbolical and lofty relation to Abraham; with the significance of his name and title, combining as these do the related ideas of righteousness and peace,—these things combine to invest him with an air of mystery, and must early have fastened on him a curious and reverential attention. . . . When the use of this man's name by later scripture is thus recalled, one can hardly be surprised to find theologians running wild in their conjectures regarding him. Some have imagined him to be an angel in disguise. Certain Jewish authorities took him for the patriarch Shem; certain Christian ones for the Son of God manifest before his incarnation. Others more daring still, supposed him to be the Holy Ghost. The sober historical spirit of the present day inclines to see in him no more than what Josephus saw, a local prince at the head of some tribe of immigrants; probably the chief of a party of Semites, who had come from the East to settle in Canaan as Abram himself had done, who therefore spoke the same tongue and preserved among them the same traditional knowledge of the one true God."

We see how greatly Abraham was honored in returning from the battle, and how meekly and magnanimously he bore himself. He laid the glory of it at Jehovah's feet whose it was, and he took none of it to himself. His part was that only of a weak and clumsy instrumentality. Oh let us, if we have been able to do something in the shape of service for our Country or the Church, feel as Abraham felt, that it was our simple duty we did, and that the best reward we can receive is the great consciousness that we tried to do, and did, in some measure, our duty!

And how beautiful it is to discover so incidentally so much genuine goodness! We find one in the backwoods of Canaan, and also away back in the dawn of the world's history too, whose face shone with the divine favor, a king-priest who was such in reality. The incident gives us to hope, that here and there, in every age and in every land, may be God's chosen ones, men who have somehow groped their way to the glad truth. They follow not with us perhaps. They lip not our creed shibboleths. But they have a goodness of life, a righteousness and peace we may well and worthily bow down before. We have our privileges to-day, and we should value them, but, more than we know, there are those who are groping their way to a purer faith and a higher christian life.

And Abraham, too, is a nobler man than we thought he was after what we saw of him a week ago in Egypt. We saw him acting so cowardly and selfishly, and despicably. But he was not himself, his mean carnal-minded self. But in the battle and victory yonder under the shadow of the snow-capped Hermon he is a hero, the man of great faith, and he spurns from him the honors of kings, the mean wages of the world's hired fighting-men.

This also comes out that giving to the Lord was not unknown, and good men felt that a tenth of all they had was a proper proportion to give. Whether Abraham before setting out had made a solemn vow as to what he would do if the Lord should prosper his way, we are not told, but it is quite in the spirit of that age if he should have done so, and now at the feet of the great and good king-priest Melchizedek, the type and prophecy of the greater and better King-priest still to be, the glorious Christ, he ratifies his vow, and devotes a tenth of the spoil. This tenth was given before any allotment of it was made to the Amorite brothers, thus teaching us, that the Lord's share should be first—the first fruits of the harvest-field, and the firstlings of the flock. But so often we give Him of what is left after all others have had their shares. We say, 'Let us be honest before we are generous!' forgetting that it is simple honesty to give the Lord His share, and His is the first. And it is no real loss thus to honor the Lord. The truth is, we cannot afford not to give. It pays to give. It paid Abraham, and it pays every man. Nothing else pays.

Thus returns the victorious patriarch to his tent home under the shade of the oaks of Mamre, to be what he had been, and was, a simple shepherd. His ambition was not aroused as some tiger natures are by the taste of blood. He laid up his sword never to take it again, and thenceforward, with his shepherd's crook, he gave himself to the plain life he was so fitted to live, and tended flocks instead of fought battles. And he was great in the fields of peace as others are in the fields of war.

Concluded on fourth page.