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Our Pulpit.

Abraham the Friend of God.

The Death of Sarah.

SERMON PREACHED BY

REV. A. J. MOWATT.

In St. Paul's Church Fredericton, April 22nd

"And Sarah died in Kirjath-Arba."—
GEN. XXIII. 2.

Trials, it has been said, seldom come singly. At all events, we find Abraham again sorely tried. He is taken out of one crucible only to be thrown into another. We saw how he had to give up Isaac, and what an ordeal to his faith it must have been to do it. But he did it, and, so far as we know, with unquestioning confidence in the Divine wisdom that ordered it, and with un murmuring resignation to the will of God. He laid him on the Lord's altar with his own hands, and was ready to offer him as a victim. But this he was spared. Now again there is a new trial for him. This time it is Sarah he must give up.

He had removed from Beersheba back to Hebron. Perhaps Sarah's failing health may have had something to do with it. She may have thought that it would do her good to be back again to the oak-grove of Mamre, and to drink in once more the invigorating freshness of the mountain breezes. So she had requested to be taken back to lovely Machpelah, if not to live, at least to die. And they took her back. And for a time she may have felt better, and she seemed to revive. They told her perhaps that she was renewing her youth. But it was only for a time. There is no cure for old age, and at last she has to bow to the inevitable. It becomes clear Sarah must die. Her husband and son are at her bedside ministering such comfort as they can, and mutely suffering a grief they have no words to express. She is calm, trustful, hopeful, happy. Death has no fears for her. When the closing scene comes, she affectionately takes leave of them, and committing her soul to God, she goes to sleep like a tired child. She dies as she had lived—in peace, having reached the age of 127 years.

First, Machpelah in Mourning. Machpelah is the name given to Abraham's place of residence near the town of Hebron. The old name of Hebron was Kirjath-Arba, and it was known by that name in Abraham's time. Names like fashions change with the passing years. They lose their meaning and are dropped and new names are substituted.

Death was a comparatively rare occurrence at Machpelah. I would not wonder, if Sarah's death had been the first that had taken place since Abraham had started out to do for himself, the first at all events of any importance. If so, we can well understand what a gloom it would cast over the encampment.

And then Sarah filled so large a place in all the affairs of the encampment. She was a central figure in all that was being done and going on. She was within what Abraham was without, and her thought and energy, her love and life, told with a tender mighty influence everywhere. If Abraham was the head of the establishment, she was the heart of it, and the heart is almost as much to an establishment such as that of Machpelah as the head. Thus, do you wonder that Machpelah is in mourning?

As you thread your way through among the tents of the people, you cannot but note that a deep large grief has fallen upon the encampment. You meet with signs of sorrow at every step. Labor rests to weep. Joy is in sack cloth. The streets keep Sabbath. Around the doorways of the tents the children are not at play. Apart, in little groups, with bated breath and red eyes, the people gossip.

You come to Sarah's tent, and there, amid thrift and neatness, and the gathered results of busy patient years, wrapped in a snowy winding-sheet, she rests, calm, solemn, happy. You look into her face, and you see that she is but the wreck of her former self. The years have worn her, withered her beauty, wrinkled up the face once so fair; and yet, there in death, she is beautiful still, a princess still. You seek the aged patriarch, and you find him calm and dignified in his grief. He has little to say, for his grief is deeper than words. But how great his loss! How empty his home and heart, empty with an emptiness that can never be filled.

Sarah has been so much to him and

done so much for him. They have been long together, how long we do not know, but when, at the call of God, 62 years before, he set out from Haran to Canaan, and indeed from Ur to Haran, she was there to accompany him, and share with him the perils and promises of the great undertaking; and through all the eventful and uneventful years of the Canaan life, the wanderings from place to place, and the ups and downs of his checkered career, she stood by him with her womanly devotion a true helpmeet, second only to himself in faith and fervor. But the end has come. Sarah's work is done. She is dead. The long decades of years rolled along so quietly, so unbrokenly, so full of domestic bliss, that it would seem as if they must go on forever. But the longest lane has a turn, and the longest life an end. And let the end come when it may, late or early, slowly or suddenly, we never seem to be quite ready for it, and we are never quite reconciled to it.

Thus Machpelah mourns—mourns the loss of a good wife, a good mother, a good mistress, a true woman, a real princess, and such mourning is fitting. There are many women, but the Sarahs are few. Let the tears flow, for the loss sustained is irreparable. Machpelah will never see her like again.

Secondly, Sarah's Character. It was in her own home Sarah shone. There you saw her at her best, and there a true woman is ever seen at her best.

Home! sweet home! there is no place like home! sang a homeless wanderer so sweetly, and in all lands his words have been caught up, as if they were inspired words, and they are wept and sung as no words have ever been. And yet, what is it that makes a home? Not four walls. Not simply a house, whether grand or humble. Not an inhabited house even, for such a house may be a boarding-house, and a boarding-house is not a home, however good it may be as a boarding-house. Not a house with one man in it, or a score. But put into a house, almost any kind of a house, a wife, a mother, one true good woman as its mistress, a Sarah, and then you have a home.

It is thus, in a very important sense, woman, her love and labor, herself, that makes a true home. You may have what you call a home without any Sarah to make it such for you; but this I am very sure of, no one else will call it a home, and no one will ever be home sick, when away from it, to get back to it. It will be a poor mean home, one utterly wanting of all that makes home sweet and attractive—of all indeed that goes to make a home a home.

It was only a tent Abraham had all the long years of his married life, and he pitched it here, and he pitched it there, just as suited him best. But with Sarah to share it with him, to fill it with the light of her presence, to make it, as she knew so well how, all a home may be and ought to be, he was never without a home.

Sarah is held up to us in the Word of God as a model woman, a wife whose example is to be followed, a house-keeper than whom there has never been a better. The Apostle Peter, who was himself a married man, and who therefore knew from his own experience what a wife is, and can do in a home and for a man, in the few words he addresses to wives, commends unto them Sarah—'Even as Sarah obeyed Abraham, calling him lord; whose daughters ye are, as long as ye do well, and are not afraid with any amazement.'

Sarah was a woman of singular beauty, the most beautiful woman of her time. She was fair and queenly, tall, graceful. Still she was not given to dress. She was not a slave to the follies and fashions of gay society. She lived before the days of bangs and frills, and so she did not fritter away her life in braiding her hair fantastically after the manner of the heathen women around her, and in getting up elaborate street costumes. She dressed simply, plainly, neatly, and yet she was always dressed, and always looked well. Dress is something to a woman, more to a woman than a man perhaps, but it never can make a woman. Tell me not what a woman wears; tell me what she is.

Another thing about Sarah, she knew all about house-keeping, home-making. She was a princess, a real one, and her husband was one of the wealthiest men of his day, and she had many domestics to wait on her, but she was neither ashamed nor afraid to take hold with her own hands and help in the work. When three distinguished visitors called one day, angels in disguise, she herself baked the bread they ate. There are women who today undertake the duties and responsibilities of home-making, and they do not know how to bake a decent

loaf of bread—a loaf of bread fit to be eaten, much less set before an angel. There were no doubt some things that are regarded as a lady's accomplishments today that she did not know. But she knew how to keep house, to make a home, and that is the best accomplishment. She knew how to manage with grace and dignity her household, and she was the mistress of a large establishment. She knew how to fill her high station as Abraham's wife and Isaac's mother. She lived for her family devoted herself with a woman's devotion to her husband's interests, looked after things indoors as he did things outdoors and was true and good. She was not perfect. She had her failings. She made mistakes, most serious ones. She was overbearing sometimes, harsh, hard. But upon the whole she was a good woman; not many better.

And just because she was so good, because she was so much to the home she was over, she was all the more missed when she was called away. There was no one to take her place, and never could be any one to take her place. Abraham missed her. With her by his side he was a strong man. How much she did for him we can never know. But this we know, as we shall see, when she was taken from him he seemed to forget himself, to turn his back on the brilliant past, and sink down to the most common place sort of old age. Thus, how great a loss to Abraham was the death of Sarah. It broke up his home, emptied it of all that was sweet, and made his last years far otherwise than his best years.

And so often is it still. When the wife, the mother, the mistress, is taken from a home, so much is taken. The middle pillar, at least the inner pillar, is broken down, and without it, a house is weak. The husband and father feels sometimes as if there is nothing more to live for. The children wander from him. The servants are careless and wasteful. Old friends withdraw. Thus the demolition of the home goes on, and it is known what a loss a Sarah is. All this gives us to have a high appreciation of Sarah's worth and character as a true woman.

Thirdly, Sarah's Burial. Abraham wakes up from the stupor of his grief to consider what he is to do with his dead. Something of course must be done, and done soon, with the poor remains. So he goes to the children of Heth, the people among whom he dwells, and with whom he has been for many years, almost since his arrival in the land, on the most friendly terms, and he negotiates with them for a burying-lot. His words are tender and touching. "And Abraham rose up from before his dead, and spake unto the children of Heth, saying, I am a stranger and a sojourner with you; give me a possession of a burying place with you, that I may bury my dead out of my sight."

The children of Heth were Hittites, one of the mightiest nations of antiquity. It is only recently attention by oriental students has been directed towards the Hittites, and important discoveries have been made, shewing how far advanced in civilization they were at a very early period in the history of nations, and what a great empire they once held. Now, it was to some of the founders of this people Abraham applied for the right of sepulture on the death of his wife, and they treated him with due respect. They said to him, and no doubt they meant it as respect; "Hear us, my Lord, thou art a mighty prince among us; in the choice of our sepulchres bury thy dead; none of us shall withhold from thee his sepulchre, but that thou mayest bury thy dead."

Abraham of course could not accept a gift of this kind; so he asked the privilege of purchase. Ephron the son of Zohar owned the cave of Machpelah, and he was anxious to possess himself of it with the field annexed. After no little chaffering on the part of the Hittites the bargain was at last struck. Abraham was to give, and did give, four hundred shekels of silver, current money, and so obtained the cave of Machpelah, and the field in which the cave was situated, and also the trees that grew in the field. Some sort of deed was drawn up, and duly certified, and the purchase was regarded as valid and respected down to the latest ages.

The burial of Sarah then took place with all the noisy circumstance of an Oriental funeral. Being the wife of a wealthy emir the funeral would be an elaborate affair, and the grief-stricken patriarch would have to submit to it with such grace as he could command. There would be hired female mourners who would tear their hair, and weep with a wild grief that would be ear-splitting, if not heart-rending. This

would last for days, perhaps weeks. Thus was Sarah laid to rest in the cave of Machpelah, where to-day her dust still lies.

Sarah's death and burial did this much for Abraham—they rooted him in the land of promise. Until her death he did not own one foot of land in Canaan, or perhaps anywhere. But now he has at least a grave, and it is something to own a grave. It may be more to a man than to own a farm. It gave Abraham a claim that could never be set aside.

But there is what is better than even a grave. To have a claim yonder beyond the sun and stars, to have an inheritance in the Canaan above—that is better. You have a child there perhaps. You have a mother there. Your wife is there. How it ought to lift a man up above the grovelling things of the world, the vanity of money-making, the pleasures of sin, to have a Sarah at God's right hand. There seems to come down to him a thread of gold, and, fastening itself to him, it holds him back from many a base indulgence. He cannot sin now, he cannot drink now, for Sarah is in Heaven. He looks up and longs to be with her. He prays to her God. He trusts in her Redeemer. He tries to live as she used to live. Thus to some their Sarah's death is life, hope, Heaven. It is not always loss.

Now, there are lessons for us to learn here. And learn at the bier of the dead Sarah to appreciate still more the value of those who preside in our homes, and let us do more than we are doing perhaps to sweeten their love-labors. Too often we never appreciate a thing till it is taken from us, and then it is too late. Our good patient christian wives and mothers care and fret, live and love and labor, for us, through the weary uninteresting years, and we never know what they are to us till they are gone.

Many a husband, when he comes to take the last look of the face that has so often looked into his when the world was cold and dark, and friends were few, and thus helped him to be brave and strong and true; when he comes to bid a long good-bye to her who has done so much to make him what he is and has, and who has given herself, as only a true wife can, to his interests, must feel that he never appreciated her worth, and was not all nor always to her he could have been and should have been. But the opportunity is passed for him. He did not want to be unkind perhaps, and did not know that he was. He had his own work and worry facing him out in the world, and so he thought not of her who was slowly wasting her life away for him in his home. But there beside her bier it comes to him, and he feels he has been selfish, unkind, unthinking.

And to young men, I would say, be kind to your mother. We never know what a mother is till we come to bury her. We weary her, worry her. We let her take many a step for us, that she need not have taken, that we should have taken for her, and we forget that every step she takes is that much on towards the grave.

A mother's love—what a precious thing it is! How many thoughts she thinks for us! What a yearning in her heart for us, deep and strong! What tears she weeps for us when we see not, nor know of! She lives for us, and she would die for us, if that could help us. And yet, where is our love for her? What are we doing to repay her care and affection?

Young man hearing me to-night, have you a mother, a christian mother? If you have, prize her worth, and keep her as long as you can. You can only have one mother, and no one on earth will ever love you as a mother loves. And that mother will die. Isaac's mother died, and yours will. And when she is dead, you will regret that you broke her heart with your waywardness, and wilfulness and made her weep when you should have made hersmile.

I can never forget the wintry night many years ago when my father came and woke me up to see my mother die. She had been ailing so long, but she was there, and to have her there, even though so ill, was something. But the bitter last hour had come. We hastily dressed—my brother and I—and were soon at the bedside. But she could not speak to us. Often had those lips spoken to us, but no more would they speak to us of Jesus and Heaven. The end was at hand, and soon we were motherless. We wept, but she did not weep. The world was cold, but there was no mother to sympathize with us. Ah! it makes a difference, a sad difference, to a boy, whether he has any mother. You can almost tell such a boy when you meet

Concluded on fourth page.