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## Our Pulpit.

**Abraham the Friend of God.**

**A Bride for the Heir.**

SERMON PREACHED BY

**REV. A. J. MOWATT.**

In St. Pat's Church Fredericton, April 29th

"And Isaac brought her into his mother Sarah's tent, and took Rebekah, and she became his wife; and he loved her; and Isaac was comforted after his mother's death.—GEN. XXIV. 67.

A week ago it was my painful duty to introduce you to a sad scene, to take you to a deathbed and funeral—Sarah's; to-night it shall be my pleasant duty to introduce you to a happy scene, to take you to Isaac and Rebekah's marriage. Such is life. It is made up of the bitter and sweet, the sad and joyous, tears and smiles, April showers and sunshine. It is a web of hidden gray, with here and there a thread of gold.

Isaac and Rebekah's marriage was a most romantic affair, and yet true to life. The description Moses gives us of it is a prose-poem, a lovely idyl rich in all the gorgeous coloring of oriental scenery, and withal so simple and unadorned, nothing said or done for mere effect, but just as it was. It cannot be improved by any words of mine. All I want to do, and all I can hope to do, is to help you to a clearer understanding of oldtime oriental customs, and to gather up some of the precious life-lessons that drop from it as honey from the honey-comb.

And first, the setting out of the Caravan from Beer-sheba for distant Haran in quest of a Bride.

Sarah has been dead three years, and she is still mourned for by her husband and son, especially the latter. Isaac seems to have been bound up in his mother, and he cannot reconcile himself to her death. The child, as he was, of her old age, she doted upon him with all the wealth of her mother-love, and he loved her back with all the gentle feminine tenderness of his nature. When therefore his mother was gone, all that he cared and lived for was gone, and there was no little danger of his settling down to be a morose misanthrope, and losing the purpose of his life in useless melancholy. His father saw this, and began to be concerned about it. Isaac was now forty years of age, and ought to be doing for himself, if he was ever to be anything. But he was wanting of ambition, push, and seemed to be utterly careless as to what became of himself or the cause he represented in his precious person, a cause so linked with and necessary to the world's salvation. And then Abraham was now an old man, being seven score years, and he did not know when the day of his death might come, for he was feeling the infirmities of age telling upon him. It was therefore of the utmost importance that Isaac be married and settled at once. Accordingly the wise and energetic patriarch took the matter into his own hands, not, of course, without consultation with his son and his consent. Still, it was quite as much his interest as Isaac's that the marriage be consummated, and in a way that would be satisfactory to both, for all he had been living and laboring for through long years, in a very important sense, depended upon it.

So Abraham called his head steward, probably Dammasek Eliezer, a man who, for many years, had had full control of his master's vast wealth, and had managed the business so faithfully and successfully that he had every confidence in him. Indeed, he had thought, at one time, of making him his heir, so much did he esteem him. I suppose it was the steward's faithfulness and energy that contributed so much towards the patriarch's extraordinary success. He must have been well up in years at this time, somewhere about ninety, but he was still full of vigor, and was able to do his work, or any work that he might be called upon to do. Abraham made known to him the delicate and important mission he was about to send him on, and he asked him to bind himself with a solemn oath that he would faithfully do it. He wanted him to go to distant Haran, to his relatives there, and choose a wife for Isaac. The old steward saw there might be difficulties in the fulfilment of such a delicate mission, and hinted that the young lady might not care to come back with him. The patriarch told him he would, in that case, be free from the oath's obligations; but two things he would lay upon him:—first, not to take his son to Haran, and secondly, not to marry him to a

Canaanite. So the servant took the oath with all due formality, putting his hand under Abraham's thigh, a custom the force and origin of which are no longer known.

He then set a out making the necessary preparations for his long and important journey to that land between the rivers. Having carte blanche from his master with regard to those preparations, he determined to spare no expense, but put his best foot forward. He selected ten camels. These he loaded with such things as he needed for the journey both going and returning, and also with handsome presents for the fair one and her friends. Being a shrewd business-man, one well up in the ways of the world, he knew and felt how necessary it was to convey the idea without his needing to tell it, that his master was immensely wealthy. So he took ten camels, and servants to ride on them, and everything else in keeping; among other things a magnificent trosser for an oriental bride, consisting mainly of jewelry of all sorts—necklaces, bracelets, armlets, anklets, earrings, nose-jewels, and such like.

And now he is ready to set out. I see the long string of camels, gaily caparisoned and loaded, drawn up before Abraham's tent awaiting the signal to move on. Even Isaac has grown interested in the preparations, and sends perhaps a beautiful jewelled ring for the hand that is to be put into his. It is a lovely spring morning, and everything betokens a prosperous journey, birds carolling in the tamarisk-trees, and the air redolent with the sweet aroma of opening flowers. What a flutter of excitement in the pastoral village, for it is known what it means, and many are gathered to see the splendid cavalcade set out, that is to bring back another princess to fill the vacant throne in Sarah's tent. The signal is given, and amid clapping of hands and waving of handkerchiefs, and hearty happy send-offs and well-wishes, they swing away across the plain, and are soon lost to view among the low sand-hills of the north.

Secondly, the Arrival at the well of Nabor, and the Happy meeting with the Bride to be.

After a ten days or two weeks' journey the caravan arrives at the well of Nabor, just outside of the city, towards evening. It is a busy public place around that well, for there meet and halt the caravans from the far east and the far west, from north to south, and sometimes as many perhaps as a half dozen caravans would be all there together, for it was a famous meeting-place. And then, we must remember, oriental wells in the olden time were the places of public resort in the evenings for all classes. There men gathered to discuss matters of grave importance and public interest. There they interchanged opinions and heard the latest news. There lovers met to pour into one another's ears their honied words. There pleasure-seekers gathered to enjoy themselves. They were the watering-places of other days, the Saratoga springs and Newport of an early age.

You can understand, therefore, why Eliezer halted at the well instead of going into the city, and made his camels kneel down, for he was a little soon. As he waits with some impatience for the coming of the shepherds and shepherdesses to water their flocks, he feels no little anxiety as to how he may speed on his mission. Never was servant entrusted with a more delicate task, and fraught with so much of good or ill to future ages. He realizes how serious it would be were he to make a mistake and choose unwisely. And it is so easy to make a mistake here; and, when it is made, it cannot be rectified. You may make a mistake in the selection of a cow, or a horse, or a house, or a farm or a profession; but you can part with them, and choose again. But a wife, a husband, you have to take for better or worse, and there is no going back on the choice you have made. Do you wonder then that the steward is anxious? He is not choosing for himself, but for another, and that other his master's son, the heir, and the blame will be laid at his door, if a mistake is made. And how easy to make a mistake, to choose a pretty face and a graceful figure, but behind that fair outward appearance an ugliness as ugly as sin can make it. He thinks of all this as he waits, and he lets his heart go up to God in earnest humble prayer for direction.

Oh! if ever a young man should pray, it should be when he is choosing one to be with him as a life-companion. Everything depends upon a right choice here—his true making, his success in life, his happiness for both time and eternity; and yet perhaps so few pray at all in a

matter of this kind. They trifle, fool, with their destiny, and when it is too late, they wake up to find what a mistake they have made. O young people, go to God with love affairs as well as all the rest of your affairs, and He will direct you. Learn how to pray from the way the steward prayed. "O Lord, the God of my master Abraham, send me, I pray thee, good speed this day, and show kindness unto my master Abraham. Behold, I stand by the fountain of water, and the daughters of the men of the city come out to draw water; and let it come to pass, that the damsel to whom I shall say, Let down thy pitcher, I pray thee, that I may drink; and she shall say, Drink, and I will give thy camels drink also; let the same be she that thou hast appointed for thy servant Isaac; and thereby shall I know that thou hast showed kindness unto my master."

As he finished his prayer he saw approaching a young woman of striking beauty, bearing a pitcher upon her shoulder. She may have been accompanied with others, and probably was, but nothing is said about it, and she may have been alone, and it reads as though she were. She came down to the well, filled her water-pitcher, and was on the point of returning. Just then the servant made free to run to her with a request for a drink for himself, and she was glad to give him a drink, and not only that, but volunteered to draw water for his camels. And she did so, emptying the water as she drew it into the troughs standing around. It must have been quite an undertaking, but she went about it like one used to it, and there was so much of heart and energy in the way she did it, as well as beauty in her fair young face, that the steward was persuaded that she was the very woman he was in quest of as a bride for Isaac. So he took out of his saddle-bag a massive ring, and two bracelets weighing ten shekels, and he asked her whose daughter she was, and if there was room in her father's house for himself and those with him, at the same time putting the ring on her finger, Isaac's engagement ring, and the gold bracelets on her arms. And she stood and blushed, and let him wonder within herself what it could mean. She told him she was the daughter of Bethuel, son of Nabor and Milcah, and invited him to her father's. The steward was glad when he learned who she was, and he bowed down his head and reverently thanked the Lord for the way He had led him.

How beautiful and romantic all this is! It reads more like romance than reality, story than history, fiction than fact. And yet so often the facts of real life are more wonderful than the fictions of imagination. It shows us how the good and true are led in ways they know not, and yet so manifestly of God. Oh that we would trust God more, and depend less and less on our own shrewdness and mother-wit! We would make fewer mistakes, and attain the good we want to attain all the easier and sooner.

Thirdly, the Marriage-proposal and Rebekah's Prompt Decision.

Rebekah hastened on before to apprise her parents of the guests they were to have. She cannot take time to walk, she runs. I think she has forgotten her water-pot. And can you blame her? All in a flutter, for she is but a simple girl scarcely out of her teens, she comes to her mother and excitedly tells her the news. At once their eyes catch sight of the ring and bracelets, and Laban her brother, who is a keen man of the world, at once goes out to welcome the stranger, who respectfully waits without. He invites him in, and provides for his camels. The guests wash, and then supper is served. But the steward declines to eat until he has told his errand. Business before pleasure, yea before his own personal comfort, with him. So he goes into all the particulars of his being sent, and of his meeting with Rebekah at the well, and he winds up with a formal proposal of marriage on behalf of his master's son.

And the brother and father at once said, that the thing was so clearly of the Lord, that they could not do otherwise than accede to it. "The thing proceedeth from the Lord; we cannot speak unto thee bad or good. Behold, Rebekah is before thee, take her and go, and let her be thy master's son's wife, as the Lord hath spoken." This answer was so satisfactory, that the pious servant prostrated himself before the Lord in silent worship and thanksgiving. He then gave Rebekah the trousseau provided for her, which consisted of jewels of silver, and jewels of gold, and a wedding dress, and so on. He also gave Laban and the mother valuable presents.

Then they had a betrothal feast, and ate and drank together far into the night.

Early next morning the servant was astir, and requested permission to begin his return journey that day. The mother and brother objected to so sudden a departure, and wanted the steward to remain at least ten days. But he could not consent to that. And when the matter was referred to Rebekah herself, she was willing and ready to go at once. So, in a little while, all was in readiness for the return journey. They mounted Rebekah on a bridal throne, and with Deborah her old faithful nurse, and some female slaves, she turned her back on home and country, and went away to be the wife of a man she had never seen. What a beautiful simple faith! As the cavalcade moved away they sent after her their best wishes, "Our sister, be thou the mother of thousands of ten thousands, and let thy seed possess the gate of those which hate them." And so Rebekah, the belle of the watering-place at Nabor, the beautiful shepherdess of Haran, was won. They called her Rebekah *noosed cord*, man-catcher, the enchainer, because she had such a winning way with her, that no one could resist her charms. But she was no flirt that toyed with her victims, and then flung them from her. She was a true good woman who loved but once, and gave up all for him who was to be hers.

And there are Rebekahs still, simple true-hearted maidens, who leave home and country for those they love. When in Winnipeg last summer, I was at tea at the Rev. C. B. Pitblado's, and after tea there was a marriage in the manse parlor, and I was invited to take part in the ceremony. The young man had been in the country for some time, a year or two, and had a farm and a little cottage out on the prairie; and he had sent to the old country for his betrothed to come out to him. And she came—the simple Irish girl, fresh as a daisy, and they met at Winnipeg, and were wed, and seemed so happy as they left for their prairie home. I asked her if she was not afraid to take so long a journey alone—and she was so young too; but she only laughed, and said it was all over now. I felt she was a brave true girl, another Rebekah, one who was willing to sacrifice a good deal to make a new home, and I sometimes wonder how they are getting on—she and her young boy-like husband, and I have little doubt but that they are doing well. Oh that yonder rich prairie country were full of just such homes as they are making—brave true-hearted immigrants, who can love and trust and do, and are not afraid of a few difficulties and discomforts to start with!

Fourthly, the Meeting of Isaac and Rebekah, and their Happy Marriage.

Not one word is left on record of the long tedious journey Rebekah must have had, and how she liked it, and stood it. Of course she could hardly like it, but there is a way of making the best of any thing, and I have an idea that Rebekah was one of that kind. She was brave and cheerful, full of hope and energy, and the home-going was therefore as much like a picnic, as fording rivers, and traversing wastes of burning sands, and climbing mountains could be. And so they were nearing Beer-sheba.

Isaac had been of late giving more attention to business, and was just returned from a visit he had made to Beer-lai-Roi, or Hagar's well. He afterwards lived there. In the evening he took a walk to meditate—to brood perhaps over his mother's hallowed memory, and to think too of her he hoped would soon be with him to break the monotony of his dreary life. And he stopped to look, and he descried camels approaching at a distance, and there was a fluttering at his heart, a strange indescribable sort of feeling. I would not wonder, if he felt as he never felt before. He did not know what to do hardly, whether to run and hide, or hold his ground and look stupid. Perhaps his strange feelings may have so overcome him that he laughed and cried at turns, and both at once; and then he would be cross with himself for feeling so silly, and he would call himself a simpleton, a calf, a fool, and would exhort himself to behave like a man, not a child.

But they are drawing near, and he is seen, and pointed out to Rebekah, who of course is as interested in him, as he in her. Before coming close up to where he is, she veils her face, according to Eastern custom, and alighting from off her camel she walks towards him and he to her. The steward, then, introduces them, giving a brief, but particular account, of how he had been led, and how he had sped. And Isaac took her

Concluded on fourth page.