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LOTS CHOICE.

SERMON PREACHED BY

REV. A. J. MOWATT.

In St. Paul's Church, Sabbath evening, Fred-ericton, Sept. 8th, 1888.

"Then Lot chose him all the plain of Jordan."—GEN. XIII. 11.

There is a pivotal point in every life-history, a sort of cross roads, where two ways meet, and then part, never to meet again; and just as we decide at that meeting-place, that turning-point, as to which of the two roads we will take, whether the left hand road or the right hand one, so will it be with us all through our course and forever. It seems to be a part of God's plan, in His method of dealing with men, to bring them into circumstances, at some period of their life, and mostly in the early part of it, when they are called upon to decide what they will do, what course they will take, and when they have once decided, they do not often reverse their decision.

Let me instance some striking cases in Bible story. The turning-point with Cain was when he and his brother built their altars and offered their sacrifices. From that hour Cain's life was tracked with bloodshed and wrong. Then, on the other hand, the turning-point in Abraham's history was his call to leave home and friends, kindred and country, and wander a stranger in Canaan. His yielding to that Divine call gave coloring and character to his whole subsequent career. Then again, the turning-point in Esau's history was the selling of his birth-right to his twin-brother Jacob for a mess of red pottage. From that most trifling, almost boyish, incident, resulted events, which gave a marked downwardness to his course. Then, the turning-point in Jacob's history was when he came to leave home, and was stopping for the night at Bethel where he dreamed his dream. That event did more than anything else to shape his destiny for him.

We will thus find, I think, in the history of almost every one of whom we have any lengthened account in the word of God, that some particular circumstance, or incident, or event, and not always what we would call important, stamped a character for good or evil upon their whole subsequent career. And if we would take the trouble to examine closely into our own life-history, or that of others around us, our neighbors and acquaintances, we will find probably, that some circumstance or event, some little thing, has determined, so far as we are able to judge, our destiny, given character and shape and bent to our whole subsequent life.

Now, the text gives the turning-point in the history of Lot. The choice he made here was his life-choice, and a sad one it proved to be. It was his ruin for time, and almost for eternity too, and it was the ruin for both time and eternity of some members of his family, that he chose all the plain of Sodom.

In further illustrating the text, consider first here the importance of looking beyond the surface of things in making a choice, and more especially in making what is likely to be a life choice. But we should be careful in making a choice at all, for we never know what is going to prove a life-choice, and every choice we make has at least more or less of an influence upon our whole life. When we come to where two ways open up before us, we should not be satisfied with mere appearances. We should not be content with seeing how they begin. We should find out also, if we can, how they end as well as begin, for a way should end well as well as begin well. We should not leap to the conclusion that the broad road just because it is broad and thronged must be better than the other road, the narrow road, for so few go there. We should look into the matter and find out for ourselves why it is so, and we need not be in the dark here, for we have a faithful Guide-Book. We should find out something about the characters of those who travel the two ways and the objects they have in view in travelling them. We should study the histories of those who have travelled both ways. If we allow ourselves to be led by appearances we will make a mistake and come to grief, for appearances are most deceptive.

It was here where Lot made a fatal mistake. God in His providence brought him into circumstances where he had to make a choice. It was in this way. He and his good uncle Abraham were living together in the

land of Canaan, and were prospering. But the time had come for them to separate. For peace' sake they must separate. Accordingly Abraham made a proposal which led to Lot's choice. They stood together on the top of an eminence with the land before them, much of which at the time was unsettled or but thinly settled, and he said to Lot, "Take your choice; go east or west, north or south, and let us be brothers still." And the worldly-minded, selfish Lot, instead of giving the preference to his noble-minded and generous-hearted uncle, chose for himself, and chose what he considered the best of the land. The plain of Jordan, with its beautiful winding river, and waving with the richest pasturage for his herds and flocks, lay invitingly before him, and he made choice of it as his future abode.

Now, passing by his selfishness and ingratitude in taking the first choice, for the probability is the result would have been the same, if Abraham, not Lot, had chosen, let us look at the choice he made considered in itself. And from the view point from which he made his choice, the plain of Jordan must have been inviting indeed. He had flocks and herds, and no place in the whole country was better adapted for flocks and herds than the well-watered and rich Jordan valley. But from the place whence he made his choice he could see only what was favorable and inviting. He could not see the dark side of the picture. He could not see the wickedness that abounded there. He could not see the doom of Heaven darkening down upon it. He could not see the storms of war that now and again swept the plain with fire and sword. He could not see the corrupting influence the society of Sodom would have upon his own family. He could not see the deluge of fire and brimstone that was coming years afterwards to inundate the plain. No; he did not see the drawbacks in his choice. He saw only the best side, the sunny side, and that is all Lot cared to see. He wanted to be rich, and the Jordan valley was just the place, he thought, to grow rich in, and he chose it. But looking at the way it turned out, who will say that his choice was a wise one?

There were other things he should have considered besides his worldly interests in the choice he made. There was no harm in choosing the Jordan Valley, providing it had other good things to match. The richness of a place should be taken into account, but there are other things of still more account. He ought to have considered whether there were good laws and a good government in the plain, for where there is not something of that kind, he could have no security that his rights would be respected. Then he was bringing up a family, and it was his duty as a father to see to it that the society he was introducing them to was morally healthful. He ought to have enquired whether there was any fear of God in the valley, any Sabbath there, any sanctuary there, any good there. But these great life-questions did not enter into Lot's choice at all. He saw that the plain was rich and well-watered, another Eden in that respect, and he looked for no more. He was sure his future was made.

And here is a lesson for those who, like Lot, are starting out to do for themselves in the world. So many among us to-day look to the plains of the West as Lot looked to the plain of the Jordan as their future home. And I do not say they are doing wrong or making a mistake. It is sometimes a necessity for young people to go from home. A family cannot be always together. From the first, a separation, a breaking up, must be, and parents should contemplate it, and, giving their children their blessing, send them away. The homestead is too small for a family when grown up, and the birds have to fly, and ought to fly, Lot's mistake was not in separating from Abraham. That had come to be a necessity. His mistake was in removing to a certain locality from purely worldly motives. And I cannot but feel that so many in our day are committing Lot's mistake over again. They are doing fairly well at home. There is plenty room for them, and the prospects are bright. But they must go west to those rich prairies and mountains to gather gold. And they do not stop to ask what society out there is, whether there is any Sabbath out there, any House of God and means of grace out there, No; these things are of little account. Money, money, that is all they care for.

But money is not everything. It is not wrong to make it a consideration

but it should never be the grand consideration. There are other things of more real importance to us than money. We should never throw away our privileges for the sake of it. We should not go and live in a Godless community such as Sodom was for the sake of money alone. We should not risk our souls or the souls of our children for the sake of money. What is a man profited if he should gain the whole world, and lose his soul? This we may be sure of, that when the sum total of life comes to be added up, it will be found, that those who made Lot's choice have been, like himself, not gainers but losers in the transaction. Some of them did make money, and grow rich, but they did so at a tremendous sacrifice, the sacrifice of what was more to them than money, and the most of them did not even make money. There is no longer an Eden in the world, and if one place has some advantage over another, it has it by a loss in some other respect. The West has its drawbacks as well as the East, and when you come to strike the average, I think it likely, that in the most of cases, the advantage, where there is any, is rather where we are.

But there are many who remain at home, who still make Lot's choice. The young man who sets out upon life to gain the world, its wealth and its honors, and who is not very scrupulous as to how he does it, is making Lot's choice. In our own day, and right among us, money is so much, too much. The great question with parents in seeking a position for their children, a settlement for life, and the great question with young men and young women too, is where the money can be made. The plain of Jordan is where the Abrahams of our day advise the Lots to settle. Where is money to be made? Is it in catering to the lower wants of our being or to the higher, pandering to the grosser propensities or preaching the gospel, working out some scheme of worldly folly or of help to the down-trodden and needy of men? It matters little with so many, so long as there is money in it they will take hold of it. It is the surface of life they look at and are influenced by in their life-choice, not by the great verities. They lose sight of the grand end of living, and have low ideas of their responsibilities as those who have a destiny to make and a mission of good to the race to work out. And the end is, like Lot, they throw away their life; they ruin their usefulness, mar their happiness, and die without leaving a pure and noble history behind them, and without having a bright and hopeful and glorious future before them.

Secondly, the danger of a wrong choice. It is easy enough getting wrong, but it is not so easy getting right again. You will say perhaps the choice of a place to live in is not of much account. Lot can so easily drive his flocks and herds and pitch his tent elsewhere, if he is not satisfied with the Plain. And perhaps that thought may have come to him in making his choice. If it does not suit, why he can move away. Nothing is easier for such as he. His house is not stone or brick or wood; it is a tent, and in a few minutes he can up stakes and away. And then his property is not broad acres, waving grain fields, houses and shops, mines and quarries, factories and such like. No; it consists of flocks and herds, and they can be driven anywhere, and at short notice. The whole land is before him, his uncle had said, and down in the plain yonder it is still before him, and he is safe in making the choice, no matter how it turns out.

And yet we never find Lot pulling up his stakes and removing after his settlement there. He was not long in the Plain till war broke out, and he himself and his family and effects were carried off by the invaders, and had it not been for the promptitude and intrepidity of Abraham, that might have been the last of Lot in the Plain. Even that untoward event, however, did not move him out of the God-cursed land. He began to find out, I suppose, that there was more in the plain than plenty water and rich pasturage, more than he had calculated upon, but still he did not move. Indeed it would seem as if the war resulted only in his moving into the city. It rooted him more than ever in the land, instead of driving him from it.

Young men think it matters little where or how they make a start. They will try the rich Plain of Sodom with Lot. They can pack their effects into their valise, and start for a better field, if they do not like it. They can come back East, if the West does not suit them. They can go out of the bad business, if they find it demoralizing. But alas! it so often happens, that when a wrong

start is made, men keeps on in it just as Lot did. A bad beginning does not always result in a bad ending, but there is no little danger of its doing so. Young men, my counsel is, be sure you start right, and a right start will give you a moral strength not easily overcome, and God's blessing will be with you.

You will find men, like Lot, making choice of a home for their families where they think they can make money. They do not like the place. They find no Sabbath such as they have been brought up to. They find an amount of wickedness that is shuddering to the soul. Crime walks the streets. Piety is all but unknown. Religion is a byword. The laws are not enforced nor obeyed. But money is plenty, and it was for money they went there, and for money they stay there. By and by they get to like the ways of the place, even its wickedness. They find themselves held by business relations and social ties, and they stay, till God's judgments wreck them, or drive them out.

It does matter where one lives. The Plain was only a few miles distant from where Lot was living before, and he might as well be down there in the Plain as up on the hills. But up on the hills was Abraham's society, and Abraham's altar, and Abraham's God. And then, although the choice was one that had to do with this world simply, it was one that had to do with his soul, and very nearly lost him his soul.

Yes, my hearer, it does matter where one lives, and the calling one follows, and the company one keeps, and the society one moves in. There are places in the world where the curse of God is hanging black over, and Sodom was one of those places. There are callings, callings that men call money-making, that are ruinous to every one who has to do with them. There is a society that is blasting to virtue and purity and piety, and the christian should keep far away from it. If a man make his home in a godless community, the probability is he will soon be like his neighbors and perish with them. There are exceptions. Lot himself was an exception. He was in Sodom, but not of Sodom, and never was of it, and he did not perish with it. It is next to impossible to be a christian where there is no Sabbath, no sanctuary, no gospel, no praying, no christian, no God, and it cannot be a christian's duty to stay in such a place, unless God has sent him there. He is making an immense sacrifice when he sacrifices his spiritual privileges for the sake of worldly good.

The rule which Christ laid down for the guidance of His people in matters of this kind was to this effect: "Seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you." This rule He laid down not only for those in search of wealth but also for those who wanted to make an honest living. He was addressing at the time those who were anxious as to what they should eat and drink and wear. Hence, from that rule, it is clear, that the christian, in seeking a place to live in and a calling to live by, should make some such enquiries as these: "Is the Kingdom of God there? Is the gospel preached? Is religion respected? Can I be a pious consistent christian man?" And then the other things will come in all right. Lot was a good man, but he was too worldly-minded to attend to such a rule as that. That was too high a style of religion for him. He did not put the Kingdom of God and His righteousness first when he went to the Plain of Jordan to live. He put his own worldly interests first. And what was the result? Why, failure. It was not good for his pocket nor his soul to be there. He came out of it a much poorer man than he was when he went into it. And, if our Lord's teaching is sound, it must be clear, that unless a man's soul prospers with him, nothing else can prosper with him.

How different with Abraham. He, again, worked on Bible principles and carried out Bible rules. The kingdom of God and His righteousness were first with Abraham. He stayed in Canaan and prospered, prospered in everything he put his hand to, and his soul prospered. His faith grew. Men esteemed him, trusted him, honored him. Ah! God was with him.

And so it must be to-day with those who have faith and moral principle enough to follow out Bible rules. Men who seek the world and its wealth first may find what they seek. They may grow rich. I do not say but that they may. But granting that they may, what have they? Riches can do so little for men. There is neither happiness nor good in them, and many of the world's rich men are the most despicable of

[Continued on fourth page.]