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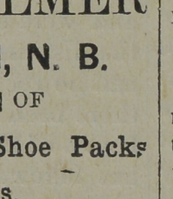

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Our Pulpit.

The Story of Moses.

No. 14

HIS DEATH.

SERMON PREACHED BY

REV. A. J. MOWATT.

In St. Paul's Church, Fredericton, Sunday evening April 14th. 1889.

"So Moses the servant of the Lord died there in the land of Moab, according to the word of the Lord."—DEUT. XXXIV. 5.

Every day has its sunset, but only once in a long while is there what may be called a remarkable sunset, a sunset that once seen can never be forgotten. You seem to see Heaven open, its gates of pearl and walls of jasper and streets of gold. Such a sunset seems to gather up all that is beautiful and brilliant in earth and sky, all the wealth of color, all that is rare and rich in tints and hues, all that is fantastic in light and shade, and blending them together, produces a result, a cloud-land scene, that gives one some idea of what Heaven's glory must be.

And every human life-day has its sunset, but only once in a long while, often after vast stretches of time, is it given to the world to behold a sunset of life that is a revealed glory, a translation, a sort of apctheosis.

Such was that of Moses. It was the brilliant close of a brilliant career. All along through the years of a long and eventful life he had been getting nearer and nearer Heaven, slowly rising step by step to the mountain-peaks of communion with God, growing gradually upward to the perfection of a noble christian manhood; and when he came to die, it was in a piece with the life he had lived, and worthy of it. It was hardly death at all. It was a stepping into Heaven, a mysterious entering within the veil, a going up to be forever with God.

Usually we do not like, and some cannot bear, to speak or hear of death. It is a gloomy theme. It makes us shudder, causes our flesh to creep, harrows our feelings, brings sometimes the cold clammy sweat to our brow, and a faintness to our heart. But the death of Moses is a glorious sunset, the opening of Heaven's gates, a vision of God. None of death's terrors yonder on Pisgah's sunlit peak! We never tire of gazing upon the wondrous scene, there is so much of Heaven in it, and as we gaze and wonder, we feel like saying in the words of one who himself had far away visions of glory, but who nevertheless died ignominiously: "Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like his."

I. THE CIRCUMSTANCES ATTENDING THE DEATH OF MOSES

It is not best nor wisest to look too much at the mere circumstances that attend death, for there may be less in them than there seem to be. Often have the circumstances been happy, so to speak, yea almost holy, to look at;—the deathbed one of down and curtained with the finest tapestry, the surroundings all that wealth and skill and love could do to make pleasant, every attendance, every comfort, and yet the death utterly wretched, a leap in the dark, a going out of the soul into night's horror and despair. And then, on the other hand, the circumstances have been, you and I would have said, far otherwise than happy;—the death amid poverty and pain, loathesome disease and unbefriended old age, and yet angels are there with their blessed ministries, and the opening of Heaven's gates, and the blessedness and rapture of peace with God, and the joy unspeakable, and the hope of glory.

Now, the circumstances attending the death of Moses are peculiar. He is not sick. He is old, 120 years old, but by no means worn out with age and disease. Every faculty of mind and body continues perfect. His eye still undimmed; his voice with more of eloquence in it than ever; his energy with all the vigor of youth in it; his wisdom rich with the experience of years, matured and mellowed by age. If you and I had seen him the morning of the day of his death, we would have said: "The old man is good for ten more years of hard work. See how straight he is! And his eagle eye pierces you through."

But the Lord had decreed otherwise. When his sun was high in the heavens seemingly, it must set. When he was so able for both work and warfare, he must die. He had come short, he had made a mistake, he had sinned, and where it was fatal for him to do so; and because of that mistake, that sin, he must resign the leadership of Israel, and go up the heights of Nebo to die.

He thinks it hard, and you and I think it hard. But perhaps there is far more of kindness in it to him than he or we think. Since we must die, it is almost better to die too soon than too late. Men have sometimes lived and lived, till they have outlived their usefulness. They have lived long enough to be a burden to themselves and their friends. They have lived long enough to become drivelling imbeciles. They have lived long enough to make the one mistake of their life, and so have cast a shadow clear back over all their brilliant career, and their sun, after a long day's clear and glorious shining, has set under a cloud.

You see David yonder in his extreme old age trying vainly to get a little heat, and getting it in a way that was almost wrecking to the kingdom he had built up with so much of wisdom and brilliant achievement.

You see Noah yonder, the patriarch of 600 years and more, lying beastly intoxicated, and while you can never forget the ark he built; still, you are sorry he lived long enough to disgrace himself for all time to come.

And the father of the faithful too, the great and good Abraham, outlived his usefulness. In his old age he married again—married one far beneath him in social rank and spiritual character, and for the last twenty years of his life or so he drops out of sight, and you are almost sorry that he lived so long.

But not so with Moses. He is no burden to his friends. He has not to be watched, as a child has to be watched, lest he may do something very unwise. No. Never was he in better health than he was the morning of the day of his death. Never was he more capable to lead and counsel the people. He walks erect to his own grave. And never was he more popular with the people. There was a time when the people would have liked if he were dead, out of the way, they cared not much how. There was a time when they held in their hands the stones that were to beat out his great life, so much did they hate him. But that time has gone by. He has outlived all those bitter struggles in the wilderness. And now he is universally loved and honored. Indeed there is almost danger of his being too much loved and honored; there is some danger of his being worshipped as a god is worshipped, so popular is he with the people, so much of an idol is he with them.

Now, it is in those peculiarly happy circumstances when Moses must die, and perhaps he could not die in a better time both for himself and the people. They are about to break with the past, and enter upon a new era in their history. If he had died before, he would have died too soon, died before his work was done, died before he could have been done without. And, I cannot but think, if he had lived longer, he would have lived too long. He would have found himself in the way. A captain was wanted now, a man to lead the people into battle, and Moses was too old to do that. So the Lord, in mercy to himself, withdrew him from the scene of conflict, and gave him rest. There is no reason why he should live any longer. His work is done, and done well. His books are written, and their safekeeping provided for. His successor is appointed, a most capable man. The organization of the nation and army is complete. Everything is in a most prosperous state. And he has reached an age, when, in the nature of things, he could not live much longer. So, the Lord, in kindness and in wisdom, said to Moses: "Get thee up into this mountain of Abarim, unto Mount Nebo, which is in the land of Moab, that is over against Jericho; and behold the land of Canaan, which I give unto the children of Israel for a possession; and die in the Mount whither thou goest up, and be gathered unto thy people."

II. MOSES VIEWING THE LAND

Before his death there was to be granted to him the pleasure of viewing the land. Hence, the Lord told him to ascend to the summit of Pisgah. At this time the people of Israel were in the Jordan valley opposite Jericho, and the mountains of Abarim, with Mount Nebo, and its peak Pisgah, lay behind the camp some distance. He knows he is going up to die, and the people know it too, but they are not permitted to go with him. He utters a few farewell words, and then sets himself to climb the mount. You see him ascending from ridge to ridge, and from terrace to terrace, climbing slowly higher and higher, until at last he is lost to view on the summit.

Josephus gives this account of the ascent, but how true it may be we are unable to verify. He says: "The multitude fell into tears, insomuch that even the women, by beating their breasts, made manifest the deep concern they had when he was about to die. The children also lamented still more, as not able to contain their grief; and thereby declared that even at their age they were sensible of his virtue and mighty deeds, and truly there seemed to be a strife betwixt the young and the old, who should most grieve for him. The old grieved, because they knew what a careful protector they were to be deprived of, and so lamented their future state; but the young grieved, not only for that, but also because it so happened that they were to be left by him before they had well tasted of his virtue. Now one may make a guess at the excess of this sorrow and lamentation of the multitude, from what happened to the legislator himself; for although he was always persuaded that he ought not to be cast down at the approach of death, since the undergoing it was agreeable to the will of God and the law of nature, yet what the people did so over bore him that he wept himself. Now as he went thence to the place where he was to vanish out of their sight, they all followed after him weeping; but Moses beckoned with his hand to those that were remote from him, and bade them stay behind in quiet, while he exhorted those that were near to him that they would not render his departure so lamentable.

The elders, and Eleazar the high priest, and Joshua his successor, accompanied him up the mountain. At the top he dismissed the elders, and was on the point of embracing the high priest and Joshua, when a cloud snatched him away from them, and he vanished from their sight in a deep ravine.

On Pisgah's peak he had a view of the whole land. I quote Stanley's description. "Before him lay the tents of Israel ready for the march; and, over against them, distinctly visible in its grove of palm trees, the stately Jericho, key of the Land of Promise. Beyond was spread out the whole range of the mountains of Palestine, in its four-fold masses——all Gilead, with Hermon and Lebanon in the east and north; the hills of Galilee, overhanging the Lake of Gennesareth; the wide opening where lay the plain of Esdraelon, the future battlefield of the nations; the rounded summits of Ebal and Gerizim; immediately in front of him the hills of Judea, and amidst them, seen distinctly through the rents in their rocky walls, Bethlehem on its narrow ridge, and the invincible fortress of Jebus. To him, so far as we know, the charm of that view—pronounced by the few modern travellers who have seen it to be unequalled of its kind—lay in the assurance that this was the land promised to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, and to their seed, the inheritance—with all its varied features of rock, and pasture, and forest, and desert—for the sake of which he had borne so many years of toil and danger, in the midst of which the fortunes of his people would be unfolded worthily of that great beginning. To us, as we place ourselves by his side, the view swells into colossal proportions, as we think how the proud city of palm trees is to fall before the hosts of Israel; how the spear of Joshua is to be planted on height after height of those hostile mountains; what series of events, wonderful beyond any that had been witnessed in Egypt or in Sinai, would in after years be enacted on the narrow crest of Bethlehem, in the deep basin of the Galilean Lake, beneath the walls of Jebus, which is Jerusalem."

How long Moses looked, and what he saw out of his wondrous eyes, we do not know, but it was a look that helped him to die. It reconciled him to the loss of not being permitted to enter and enjoy the good of the land. We cannot understand that wistful looking of Moses from the top of Pisgah. We ask in our way of it perhaps what a man has to do with grand scenery who is to die in an hour. We think he ought to have his thoughts and desires elsewhere. And yet the Lord let Moses look, perhaps stood by him as he looked, and pointed out the prominent objects in the landscape, and gave him to see far into the dim vistas of the coming centuries.

And in his last look, Moses is not singular. With glistening eye the emigrant watches the fading away from his view of his native land, and he take a long last look of its blue hills. As men die, they sometimes say to those who wait around their bed: "Lift me up, and let me see once more the green fields. Let me see the sun set once more. Let, me look out once more upon the thronging streets." It seems a foolish wish but they lift up the dying one, and carry him to the window, and let him have his last look. And how wistfully he looks, looks with a hungry look, looks with his soul as well as his eyes, and then he turns away satisfied, and dies all the happier for that last look of his.

Now, as looks the emigrant borne away from home and fatherland, and as looks the dying man on scenes familiar to him; so looked Moses from the top of Pisgah. For forty years he had been looking forward to Canaan, and there had grown up in his soul a strange yearning towards that land, and he felt as if he could not die without at least a good look at its romantic hill and vales. And the Lord let him have his look. And he looked with an eye undimmed as yet by age, looked with his great hungry soul, looked as one looks who is looking his last, looked with a look that sees so much and is so soul-satisfying.

My hearer, have you ever looked forward through the years to the time when it would be given you to look upon the grand scenery of some old historic land? You have listened perhaps, when a boy, to the fireside talk of those whose happy youth was spent amid its fairy scenes, and you have drunk into your soul their words, until you could hardly wait till you grew up, so hungry were you to see what they had seen. By and by the opportunity came, and over wide lands

Continued on third page.

INTERCOLONIAL RAILWAY.

88 Winter Arrangement '89

On and after MONDAY, Nov. 26th., 1888 the Trains of this Railway will run daily, (Sunday excepted,) as follows

TRAINS WILL LEAVE ST. JOHN

Day Express.....7.30 a. m

Accommodation.....11.20a. m

Express for Sussex.....16.35 p.m

Express for Halifax and Quebec....18.00 p. m.

A sleeping car runs daily on the 18.10 train Halifax.

On Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday a Sleeping Car for Montreal will be attached to the Quebec Express, and on Monday, Wednesday and Friday, a Sleeping Car will be attached at Moncton.

TRAINS WILL ARRIVE AT ST. JOHN.

Express from Halifax and Quebec....7.00 a m

Express from Sussex.....8.35 a. m

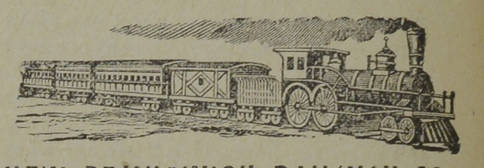
Accommodation.....13.30 p. m

Day Express.....19.20 p. m

☞All trains run by Eastern Standard time.

D POTTINGER,
Chief Superintendent

Railway Office
Moncton, N. B. Nov. 20th 1888.



NEW BRUNSWICK RAILWAY CO

ALL RAIL LINE

Arrangement of Trains

IN EFFECT JANUARY 7th, 1889.

LEAVE FREDERICTON.

EASTERN STANDARD TIME.

7.00 A. M.—Express for St. John, and intermediate points.

8.45, A. M.—Express for Fredericton Junction Vanceboro, Bangor, Portland, Boston and points West; St. Stephen, St. Andrew's Houlton, Woodstock, Presque Isle, Grand Falls, Edmundston and points north.

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

ARRIVE AT FREDERICTON

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. 30P. M.—Express from St. John, and intermediate points.

LEAVE GIBSON.

6.50, A M.—Mixed for Woodstock, and points north.

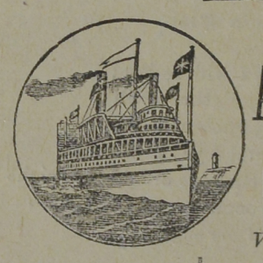
ARRIVE AT GIBSON.

4.45 P. M.—Mixed from Woodstock, and points north.

F. W. CRAM,
General Manager

A. J. HEATH, Gen. Pass. and Ticket Agent
St. John, N. B., March 29th, 1888.

INTERNATIONAL STEAMSHIP CO.



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Fredericton and St. John

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BOSTON

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From March 12 to April 29th, will leave St. John every TUESDAY and THURSDAY, at 8 a. m., local.

And Boston every MONDAY and THURSDAY, at 8.30 a. m., and Portland 5.30 p. m. same day, for Eastport and St. John.

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