

STORY OF MOSES.

One of the Grandest Characters of All History.

Lawgiver, Poet and Warrior—A Career from Which Rev. Dr. Talmage Extracts Some Practical Lessons for His Hearers.

The following sermon by the popular Washington preacher contains much that is inspiring for all classes of people. The text chosen as a basis for his remarks is Exodus: 3: 1: "Now Moses kept the flock of Jethro, his father-in-law, the priest of Midian."

In the southeastern part of Arabia a man is sitting by a well. It is an arid country, and water is scarce, so that a well is of great value, and flocks and herds are driven vast distances to have their thirst slaked. Jethro, a Midianite sheik and priest, was so fortunate as to have seven daughters; and they are practical girls, and yonder they come driving the sheep and cattle and camels of their father to the watering. They lower the buckets and then pull them up, the water splashing on the stones and chilling their feet, and the troughs are filled. Who is that man out there sitting unconcerned and looking on? Why does he not come and help the women in this hard work of drawing water? But no sooner have the dry lips and panting nostrils of the flocks begun to cool a little in the brimming trough than some rough Bedouin shepherds break in upon the scene, and with clubs and shouts drive back the animals that were drinking, and affright these girls until they fly in retreat, and the flocks of these ill-mannered shepherds are driven to the trough, taking the places of the other flocks. Now that man sitting by the well begins to color up, and his eyes flashes with indignation, and all the gallantry of his nature is aroused. It is Moses, who naturally had a quick temper anyhow, as he demonstrated on one occasion when he saw an Egyptian oppressing an Israelite and gave the Egyptian a sudden clip and buried him in the sand, and as he showed afterward when he broke all the ten commandments at once by shattering the two granite slabs on which the law was written. But the injustice of the treatment of the seven girls sets him on fire with wrath, and he takes this shepherd by the throat, and pushes back another shepherd till he falls over the trough, and aims a stunning blow between the eyes of another as he cries: "Begone, you villains!" and he hoots and roars at the sheep and cattle and camels of these invaders and drives them back; and having cleared the place of the desperado he told the seven girls of this Midianite sheik to gather their flocks together and bring them again to the watering.

O, you ought to see a fight between the shepherds at a well in the orient as I saw it in December, 1890. There were here a group of rough men who had driven the cattle many miles, and here another group who had driven their cattle as many miles. Who should have precedence? Such clashing of buckets! Such hooking of horns! Such kicking of hoofs! Such vehemence in a language I fortunately could not understand! Now the sheep with a peculiar mark across their woolly backs were at the trough, and now the sheep of another mark. It was one of the most exciting scenes I ever witnessed.

One of these girls, Zipporah, her name meaning "little bird," was fascinated by this heroic behavior of Moses; for however timid woman herself may be, she always admires courage in a man. Zipporah became the bride of Moses, one of the mightiest men of all the centuries. Zipporah little thought that that morning as she helped drive her father's flock to the well, she was splendidly deciding her own destiny. Had she stayed in the tent or house while the other six daughters of the sheik tended to their herds, her life would probably have been a tame and uneventful life in the solitudes. But her industry, her fidelity to her father's interest, her spirit of helpfulness brought her into league with one of the grandest characters of all history. They met at that famous well, and while she admired the courage of Moses, he admired the filial behavior of Zipporah.

The fact that it took the seven daughters to drive the flocks to the well implies that they were immense flocks, and that her father was a man of wealth. What was the use of Zipporah's bemoaning herself with work when she might have reclined on the hillside near her father's tent and plucked buttercups, and dreamed out romances, and sighed idly to the winds, and wept over imaginary songs to the brooks? No, she knew that work was honorable, and that every girl ought to have something to do, and so she starts with the bleating and lowing and bellowing and neighing droves to the well for the watering.

Around every home there are flocks and droves of cares and anxieties, and every daughter of the family, though there be seven, ought to be doing her part to take care of the flocks. In many households, not only is Zipporah, but all her sisters, without practical and useful employments. Many of them are waiting for fortunate and prosperous matrimonial alliance, but some longer like themselves will come along, and after counting the large number of father Jethro's sheep and camels will make proposal that will be accepted; and neither of them having done anything more practical than to chew chocolate caramels, the two nothings will start on the road of life together, every step more and more a failure. That daughter of the Midianite sheik will never find her Moses. Girls of America! Imitate Zipporah. Do something practical. Do something helpful. Do something well. Many have fathers with great flocks of absorbing duties, and such a father needs help in home, or office, or field. Go out and help him with the flocks. The reason that so

many men now condemn themselves to unaffiliated and solitary life is because they cannot support the modern young woman, who rises at half-past 10 in the morning and retires after midnight, one of the trashiest of novels in her hands most of the time between the late rising and the late retirement—a thousand of them not worth one Zipporah.

There is a question that every father and mother ought to ask the daughter at breakfast or tea table, and that all the daughters of the wealthy sheik ought to ask each other: "What would you do if the family fortune should fail, if sickness should prostrate the breadwinner, if the flocks of Jethro should be destroyed by a sudden excursion of wolves and bears and hyenas from the mountain? What would you do for a living? Could you support yourself? Can you take care of an invalid mother or brother or sister—as well as yourself? Yea, bring it down to what any day might come to a prosperous family. "Can you cook a dinner if the servants should make a strike for higher wages and leave that morning?" Every minute of every hour of every day of every year there are families flung from prosperity into hardship, and, alas! if in such exigency the seven daughters of Jethro can do nothing but sit around and cry and wait for some one to come and hunt them up a situation for which they have no qualification. Get at something useful; get at it right away. Do not say: "If I were thrown upon my own resources I would become a music teacher." There are now more music teachers than could be supported if they were all Mozarts and Wagners and Handels. Do not say: "I will go to embroidering slippers." There are more slippers now than there are feet. Our hearts are every day wrung by the story of elegant women who were once affluent, but through catastrophe have fallen helpless, with no ability to take care of themselves.

And you will have to go down before you go up. From the pit into which his brothers threw him and the prison in which his enemies incarcerated him, Joseph rose to be Egyptian prime minister. Elijah, who was to be the greatest of all the ancient prophets, Elijah, who made King Ahab's knees knock together with the prophecy that the dogs would be his only undertakers; Elijah, whose one prayer brought more than three years of drought, and whose other prayer brought drenching showers; the man who wrapped up his cape of sheepskin into a roll and with it cut a path through raging Jordan, for just two to pass over; the man who with wheel of fire rode over death and escaped into the skies without mortality; disintegration; the man who, thousands of years after, was called out of the eternities to stand beside Jesus Christ on Mount Tabor when it was ablaze with the splendors of transfiguration—this man could look back to the time when voracious and filthy ravens were his only caterers.

See also in this call of Moses that God has a great memory. Four hundred years before he had promised the deliverance of the oppressed Israelites of Egypt. The clock of time has struck the hour, and now Moses is called to the work of rescue. Four hundred years is a very long time, but you see God can remember a promise 400 years as well as you can remember 400 minutes. Four hundred years includes all your ancestry that you know anything about and all he promises made to them, and we may expect fulfillment in our heart and life of all the blessings predicted to our Christian ancestry centuries ago. You have a dim remembrance, if any remembrance at all, of your great-grandfather, but God sees those who were on their knees in 1598 as well as those on their knees in 1898, and all the blessings he promised the former and their descendants have arrived, or will arrive. While piety is not hereditary, it is a grand thing to have had a pious ancestry. So God in this chapter calls up the pedigree of the people whom Moses was to deliver, and Moses is ordered to say to them, "The Lord God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob hath sent me unto you." If that thought be divinely accurate, let me ask, What are we doing by prayer and by a holy life for the redemption of the next 400 years? Our work is not only with the people of the latter part of the nineteenth century, but with those in the closing of the twentieth century, and the closing of the twenty-second century, and the closing of the twenty-third century. For 400 years, if the world continues to swing until that time, or if it drops, then notwithstanding the influence will go on in other latitudes and longitudes of God's universe.

No one realizes how great he is for good or for evil. There are branchings out and rebounds, and reverberations, and elaborations of influence that cannot be estimated. The fifty or one hundred years of our earthly stay is only a small part of our sphere. The flap of the wing of the destroying angel that smote the Egyptian oppressors, the wash of the Red sea over the heads of the drowned Egyptians, were all fulfillments of promises four centuries old. And things occur in your life and in mine that we cannot account for. They may be the echoes of what was promised in the sixteenth or seventeenth century. Oh, the prolongation of the divine memory.

Notice, also, that Moses was 80 years of age when he got this call to become the Israelite deliverer. Forty years he had lived in palaces as a prince; another 40 years he had lived in the wilderness of Arabia. I should not wonder if he had said: "Take a younger man for this work. Eighty winters have exposed my health; 80 summers have poured their heats upon my head. There are 40 years that I spent among the entrancing luxuries of a palace, and then followed the 40 years of wilderness hardship. I am too old. Let me off. Better call a man in the forties or fifties, and not one who has entered upon the eighties." Nevertheless, he undertook the work, and if we

want to know whether he succeeded, ask the abandoned brick-kilns of Egyptian taskmasters, and the splintered chariot wheels strewn on the beach of the Red Sea, and the timbrels which Miriam clapped for the Israelites passed over and the Egyptians gone under.

Do not retire too early. Like Moses, you may have your chief work to do after 80. It may not be in the high places of the field; it may not be where a strong arm and an athletic foot and a clear vision are required, but there is something for you yet to do. Perhaps it may be to round off the work you have already done; to demonstrate the patience you have been recommending all your lifetime; perhaps to stand a lighthouse at the mouth of the bay to light others into harbor; perhaps to show how glorious a sunset may come after a stormy day.

Still further, see in this call of Moses that if God has an especial work for you to do he will find you. There were Egypt and Arabia and Palestine with their crowded population, but the man the Lord wanted was at the southern point of the triangle of Arabia, and he picks him right out, the shepherd who kept the flock of Jethro, his father-in-law, the priest and sheik. So God will not find it hard to take you out from the 1,600,000,000 of the human race if he wants you for anything especial. There was only just one man qualified. Other men had courage like Moses, other men had some of the talents of Moses; other men had romance in their history, as had Moses; other men were impetuous, like Moses; but no other man had these different qualities in the exact proportion as had Moses; and God who makes no mistake, found the right man for the right place. Do not fear you will be overlooked, or that when you are wanted God cannot find you. He knows your name, your features, your temperament, and your characteristics, and in what land, or city, or ward, or neighborhood, or house you live. He will not have to send out scouts or explorers to find your residence or place of stopping, and when He wants you He will make it as plain that He means you as He made it plain that He needed Moses. He called his name twice, as afterward when He called the great apostle of the Gentiles He called twice, saying, "Saul, Saul," and when He called the troubled house-keeper He called her twice saying, "Martha, Martha," and when He called the prophet to his mission He called him twice, saying, "Samuel, Samuel," and now when He wants a deliverer He calls twice, saying, "Moses, Moses." Yes, if God has anything for us to do He will call us twice by name. At the first announcement of our name we may think it possible that we understand the sound; but after He calls us twice by name we know he means us as certainly as when He twice spoke the names of Saul, or Martha, or Samuel or Moses.

Oh, what a fascinating and inspiring character this Moses. How tame all other stories compared with the biography of Moses! From the lattice of her bathing house on the Nile, Thermutis, daughter of Pharaoh, sees him in the floating cradle of papyrus leaves made water-tight by bitumen; his infant cry is heard among the marble palaces and princesses hush him with their lullabies; workmen by the roadside drop their work to look on him when as a boy he passed, so beautiful was he; two bowls put before his infant eyes for choice to demonstrate his wisdom, the one bowl containing rubies and the other containing coals of fire. Sufficiently wise was he to take the gems, but, divinely directed, he took the coals and put them to his mouth, and his tongue was burnt, and he was left a stammerer all his days, so that he declared, in Exodus 10: "I am slow of speech and of slow tongue;" on and on until he set firm foot among the crumbling basalt, and his ear was not deafened by the thunderous "Thou shalt not" of Mount Sinai; the man who went to the relief of the Israelites who were scourged because without chopped straw they were required to make firm bricks, the story of their oppression found chiseled on the tomb of Roschere at Thebes; and when his armies were impeded by venomous serpents, sent crates of lilies, the snake destroying birds, to clear the way so that his host could march straight ahead, thus surprising the enemy, who thought they must take another route to avoid the reptiles; the whole sky an aquarium to drop quails for him and the hosts following; the only man in all ages whom Christ likens to himself; the man of whom it is written: "Jehovah spoke unto Moses face to face as a man speaketh to his friend;" the man who had the most wondrous funeral of all time, the Lord coming down out of Heaven to bury him. No human lips to read the service. No choir to chant a psalm. Nor organ to play a requiem. No angel alighting upon the scene, but God laying him out for the last sleep; God upturning the earth to receive the saint; God smoothing or banking the dust above the sacred form; God, with farewell and benediction, closing the sublime obsequies of lawgiver, poet and warrior. "And no man knoweth of his sepulcher unto this day." Get your eye on Him, instead of trying to imitate some smaller example.

A great snow storm came on a prairie in Minnesota, and a farmer in a sleigh was lost, but after a while struck the track of another sleigh and felt cheered to go on, since he had found the track of another traveler. He heard sleighbells preceding him, and hastening on, he caught up with his predecessor, who said: "Where are you going?" "I am following you," was the answer that came back. The fact is that they were both lost, and had gone round and round in a circle. Then they talked the matter over, and, looking up, saw the north star; and toward the north was their home, and they started straight for it. Oh, instead of imitating men like ourselves and circling round and round, let us look up and take some starry guide like Moses, and follow on until we join him amid the "daisie-bush mountains." You say you cannot reach his character. Oh, no. Neither can you reach the north star, but you can be guided by its heavenly pointing.

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