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INTERNATIONAL LESSON.

Third Quarter-Lesson XII Sept. 22.

DEATH OF SAUL AND HIS SONS.—I SAM. 31: 1-13.

GOLDEN TEXT.—*The face of the Lord is against them that do evil.*—Ps. 34: 16.

THE PHILISTINE INVASION. The great enemy of Israel on the east now made an excursion farther north than usual. Their object seems to have been (1) to plunder the rich country of the plain of Esdraelon, and the neighboring hills. (2) To obtain control of the great caravan route between Egypt and Damascus, and the East. (3) They made their invasion at this time because Saul seemed weak; the kingdom was neglected; the people were losing faith in their king. The Philistine army came up through the great plain of Esdraelon, and were encamped at Shunem, on the very spot where the Midianites had encamped when Gideon and his 300 routed them. Five miles to the south-east, upon the slopes of Mount Gilboa, Saul's army was located. The fertile plain of Jezreel lay between. The Israelites had no chariots. Both front and flank of the Israelites were exposed, and flight all but impossible, owing to the steepness of the mountain behind.

SAUL IN DESPAIR SEEKS HELP FROM THE WITCH OF ENDOR.—(1 Sam. 28.) Saul could see the armies of the Philistines, and he was cast down with discouragement at the great numbers of the enemy, and their warlike equipment. He was becoming old, at least sixty years, and worn him out beyond most of his age. He could get no answer to his inquiries from God, neither by dreams, nor by prophets, nor by Urim (light), the method of inquiry through the high priest. To those who pray only when in trouble, and disobey all the rest of the time, no answer comes in response to selfish prayers. (4) The silence of God awakened his conscience. He knew that God was against him. There is nothing so weakening as a bad conscience. He knew that David was with the Philistines, and imagined that he would take part with them. Had he taken the time and strength he had employed against David, in training his soldiers, strengthening his defences, and developing his kingdom, he could have resisted every invasion of enemies. Thus impiety works out its own evil destiny.

The Witch of Endor. Failing in other ways of learning what to do, Saul sought some one "with a familiar spirit," to give him advice. He had expelled all such from his kingdom, but he learned of one at Endor, about ten miles north from Gilboa. Saul had fasted all day in his efforts to obtain counsel from God, and now disguising himself he took the long and dangerous journey by night to enquire of the witch of Endor. The word translated, "having a familiar spirit," means a "skin bottle," and witches were so called because they were ventriloquists, and made the voice of reply seem to come from the mouth of the bottle, or "because of the stoutness of their bodies, by which they looked like bodies swelled with wine." There are two probable interpretations of this interview of Saul.

First, That Samuel really appeared to Saul, but contrary to the expectations of the witch, who was more surprised at his appearance than was Saul. In that case this was a real miracle, wrought by God, not by the witch, and the word was the word of God.

Second, That the whole scene was a deception on the part of the woman. She recognized Saul, and was glad of an opportunity to revenge upon him the evil he had done to her race. She acted astonished, and made Saul think he was Samuel. Then she put in the prophet's mouth only the doom which seemed probable, and "excepting the event of the approaching battle, the spirit said nothing which the living prophet did not say before repeatedly and publicly."

James Sime, and Milman, argue for this interpretation, because God, who refused to answer Saul by prophet or priest, would not be likely to answer him through the medium of a witch, "thus sanctioning and confirming the belief in necromancy, a capital crime in the law." This story proves the common belief among the people of a life beyond the grave.

THE GREAT DEFEAT.—Vers. 1, 2, 7. Saul returned the same night, weak from fasting, excitement, and want of sleep, and the next morning the battle began, and lasted all day. *And the men of Israel fled from be-*

fore the Philistines. The Philistines seem to have driven them in a state of panic up the heights. *Followed hard upon Saul and his sons:* the three sons who were with him in the battle. Saul had another son, Ishbosheth, who was not there. *Slew Jonathan.* Fighting bravely as of yore. No doubt it was better thus for himself and for the kingdom, and saved many difficulties and complications. From ver. 7 we learn that the Israelites were driven out of their towns in this region, and even the neighboring country across the Jordan, and the Philistines occupied the territory. "Gibeah, Saul's own city, was thrown into terror. The royal family fled for their lives. In their flight the nurse let fall Mephibosheth, the son of Jonathan, then a child of five years of age. "He was lamed for life." THE DEATH OF SAUL.—Vers. 3-10. *The battle went sore against Saul.* The whole weight of the battle was directed against Saul. *And the archers hit him, and he was sore wounded of the archers.* They pressed so close upon him that he saw no way of escape. He was in despair. His army was gone, his son slain, he himself was wounded and weak, and God was not with him. *Then said Saul unto his armorbearer, Draw thy sword.* Jewish tradition tells us that the faithful armorbearer was Doeg, the Edomite. *Let these uncircumcised (Philistines).... abuse me:* torture him. He must die anyway, and he would rather die by one thrust of the sword than by slow tortures at the hands of cruel enemies. *But his armorbearer would not; for he was sore afraid.* It would be worse than death to kill the man he was appointed to defend with his life. *Saul took a sword, and fell upon it.* Planting the hilt in the ground, he fell upon the point. *And... his armorbearer... fell likewise upon his sword, and died with him.* Being answerable for the king's life, he feared punishment. *So Saul died.* The young Amalekite, who brought the news to David, declared that he killed him, but evidently he lied in hopes of reward. *And all his men:* his personal staff, and all of his sons who were in the battle. *And they cut off his head:* to send as a trophy and proof of their victory. *Stripped off his armour, and sent into the land... to publish it in the house of their idols.* This was done to honor their idols as the author of the victory, and to seek the favor of their gods in future campaigns. *They fastened his body to the wall.* Together with the bodies of his sons. They were hung on the wall in the "open place" by the gate, that all passers by might join in exulting over the defeat and disgrace of Israel.

A VALIANT ACT OF GRATEFUL REMEMBRANCE.—Vers. 11-13. *And when the inhabitants of Jabesh-gilead heard.* The inhabitants remembered the splendid feat of arms by which King Saul at the beginning of his reign delivered them from the Ammonites. *All the valiant men.* It required brave and strong men to take the bodies of Saul and his sons from off the fortress under the very eyes of the victorious Philistines. *Went all night.* The city was ten miles distant, and the deed must be done while the soldiers were asleep. *And burnt them there.* The reason for their thus acting is clear. The mutilated trunks had been exposed for some days to the air, and the flesh was no doubt in a state of putrefaction. The bones were reverently and lovingly preserved. *And buried them under a tree at Jabesh.* The bones of Saul and Jonathan were subsequently removed, by David's order, to their ancestral sepulchre.

THE SONG OF THE BOW.—The battle of Gilboa was probably fought on the same day that David gained his great victory over the Amalekites, who ravaged his home at Ziklag. Three days after his return home the news of the disaster to Saul reached him. The story of its reception is recorded in 2 Sam. 1: 16. Then David wrote a noble clery, called "The Song of the Bow," which was taught to the children of Judah (2 Sam. 11: 8). The title of the elegy comes doubtless from the reference to Jonathan's skill with the bow, and a comparison of his lithe and powerful form to the bow, and the bow as a symbol of victory.

LESSONS FROM THE LIFE OF SAUL.—Favoring Circumstances and Possibilities of his Youth. His earlier life was spent in comparative quiet and seclusion, where he could be prepared for his greater work. (2) Saul as king was required to write out a copy of the law, thus becoming thoroughly acquainted with it, better than by almost any other means: and then he must "read

therein all the days of his life." (3) Saul received the special influences of the spirit fitting him for his great duties. (4) Victory was given him and a united kingdom. (5) Saul had the opportunity of becoming a noble, large-hearted useful man. (6) He had the ability to become, as warrior and statesman, a great benefactor of his nation, educating them in religion, defending them against enemies, building them up in prosperity and true success.

His Probation. In the earlier part of his reign Saul was subjected to two great tests, and failed in both cases. The first was early in his career, when he offered the sacrifices himself, instead of waiting for Samuel. The second was a few years afterwards, when he disobeyed God's direct command. Saul had long, and fair, and repeated trials, and rejected God in each of them. He was led several times to the verge of repentance, and the change was of the feelings only, not of the heart. He was warned again and again, but with no permanent results.

Working out his Destiny. When Saul forsook God, then God necessarily forsook him, and an evil spirit took the place in his heart of the Spirit of God. We see no signs of God's doing anything directly to hasten God's doom. He was left to work out the natural results of an evil heart, and a life guided by passion and selfishness, without the help and direction of God. He spent his time in hunting David, instead of overcoming his enemies. His kingdom was thus neglected, his people discontented, many of his best men abandoned him and went over to David, and all together were driven into the ranks of the enemy. His army lost courage. He spent his force in envy and passion, instead of in managing his kingdom. And in the last great battle he was weakened and worn by spending the night in consulting a witch, instead of preparation for his work. So that he perished miserably by suicide at last. "He ate of the fruit of his own way, and was filled with his own devices."

The Source of his Failure was his rejection of God as his King and Guide. It was the want of obedience and faith. If Saul's heart had been true to God, he would have been one of the grandest specimens of humanity; but, lacking this true obedience to God, he made his life an utter failure, and his character a moral wreck.

A Contrast. David was far from faultless. He was guilty of not a few breaches of morality. Except his rejection of God, no worse sins are recorded of Saul than of David. What then was the difference? It was that David's heart was right. He had many and splendid virtues; his failures were incidental, the weakness of humanity, for which he repented as in dust and ashes. Saul's heart was wrong. The basal principles of his life were evil, and of them he never sincerely repented; his good was incidental, growing out of circumstances. The whole tide of Saul's life flowed in the wrong direction, with eddies flowing right; while David's whole life flowed in the right direction, with occasional eddies in the wrong. Saul's life was a failure in the end. David's life, even with sufferings for his sins, was a glorious success.

Original Forest in New Jersey. There is not much really original or primeval forest left standing in New Jersey. That is, there are few, if any, large tracts of forest that have not been cut off at some time since the settlement of the State by white men. There is a small piece of white oak woods on the farm of Mr. Thomas Lawrence, near Hamburg, in Sussex County, which has never been cut. These trees cover a remarkable hill, or long, narrow ridge, which rises eighty or one hundred feet above the fertile valley of the Wallkill river, and one would have to travel far to find a more interesting or attractive grove. Though they stand very near to the busy haunts of men, the great trees are populous with gray squirrels, who appear to have learned to feel entirely comfortable and secure among them.

The Old German's Talisman. The Germans have a story which that home-loving people like to repeat. A father, when his daughter became a bride, gave her a golden casket with the injunction not to pass it into other hands, for it held a charm which, in her keeping, would be of inestimable value to her as the mistress of a house. Not only was she to have the entire care of it, but she was to take it every morning to the cellar, the kitchen, the dining-room, the library, the parlor, the bedroom, and to remain with it in each place for five minutes, looking carefully about. After a lapse of three years the father was to send the key, that the secret talisman might be revealed. The directions were followed. The key was sent. The casket was opened. It was found to contain an old parchment, on which was written these words: "The eyes of the mistress are worth one hundred pair of servants' hands." The wise father knew that a practice of inspection followed faithfully for three years would become a habit and be self-perpetuating—that the golden casket and the hidden charm would have accomplished their mission.—Folk-Lore.

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