

NOTES ON THE SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSON FOR AUGUST 2.

The King After God's Heart.

BY ALEXANDER MCLAREN, D.D.

The strained relations between Samuel and Saul after the latter's "rejection" were but too exact a forecast of those between prophet and king through all Israel's history. They are but too exact a type of those between God's messengers and the constituted authorities all through the centuries. They must have been irksome and dangerous. Samuel had broken off all intercourse with Saul, but mourned for him and for his own bitterly disappointed hopes in him, and had to move with circumspection in constant fear of his life. Saul was in the terrible position of knowing himself forsaken, or rather of knowing that he had shaken off the God who had set him on the throne, and of walking his unblest course in a horror of great darkness; and that consciousness lashed his gloomy resolution into fury, and ultimately into madness. No doubt, both men had many wistful memories of the days when they were in full accord, and vainly looked across the gulf now opened and ever-widening. No wonder, then, that Samuel shrank from the overt act of further assault on Saul's now phantom monarchy, to which he was called in anointing a successor. And no wonder that the "subterfuge," as critics who know more about books than about men and their affairs call it, of going to Bethlehem on the plea of sacrificing was commanded.

A very little imagination, which realizes the situation, is all that is needed in order to ease the very superfine and impracticable morality which takes offense at the "deception" of cloaking an act which it was necessary to do, and impossible to do without some screen. The elders of the little village among its pastures were alarmed by the coming of the aged prophet, just as today the appearance of a "Kaimakam" would terrify the fellaheen. They knew the weight of Samuel's hand, and recognized his authority as still God's prophet, and they probably remembered how heavily that hand had fallen on Saul.

He bids them sanctify themselves, and, for his part, goes straight to Jesse, and himself performs the needful lustrations. It is to be observed that both the elders and Jesse's household were invited to "come" to the sacrifice, and that the rejection of the stalwart sons, and the anointing of the unconsidered youth brought in haste from the pastures, took place "when they were come." It may be, then, that in the statement that it was translated "in the presence of his brethren," we are to take "brethren" in the wider sense of his tribesmen and neighbors. It may also be noted that the meaning of the anointing was not disclosed, so that perhaps, though the fact was known, its significance as a designation to kingship was not recognized.

The first great principle involved in the choice of David is that which

runs through all Scripture, because it runs through all Providence, that "the first shall be last, and the last first." Low valleys are blessed with broad rivers; the heights are barren and parched. God's gifts are given to the lowly in heart, and his judgments fall "upon all that is proud and haughty, and it shall be brought low,"—"and the Lord alone shall be exalted in that day." Not once nor twice in the world's history have its deliverers and guides sprung from the lower classes. "In vain is salvation hoped for from the hills." A miner's son in Thuringia remolds the church which a prince's son on the papal throne was corrupting still more; a brewer in Huntingdon fashions England "into another mold." And as regards individual salvation, it is the "meek and lowly in heart" who come to Jesus and find rest to their souls, while "the wise and prudent" have no eyes to see the Light of light.

The next point brought out by the choice of David is the true qualification for authority. Saul had been chosen because he met the popular ideal. His thews and sinews, his physical strength, which presumably carried with it courage, marked him out as a fighting king. That was what Israel wanted, and they got it, and found out that it was not what they needed. Samuel shared in the popular notion in so far that, when he saw Eliab, "his countenance" and "the height of his stature" attracted him, perhaps because they reminded him of Saul, and he said, "Surely Jehovah's anointed is before him." But another thought sprang up in his mind, which he discerned to be something sacred than its own answer to itself,—even God's voice correcting his hasty judgment. And when the ruddy lad, with his lovely eyes and gracious youthful beauty, stood modestly before him, flushed with haste and wondering why he had been summoned, the conviction was borne in on him, "this is he," and he knew that it was God who was saying so.

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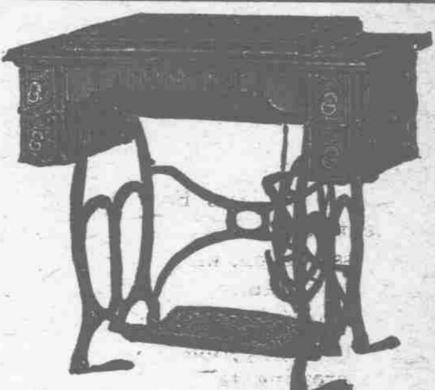
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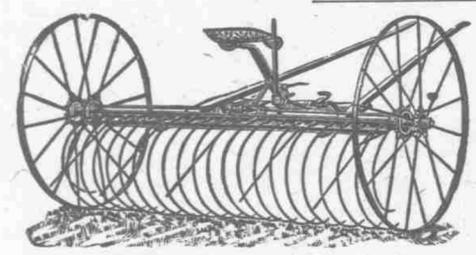
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