

THE SUNDAY SCHOOL.

AUGUST 24.

THE PLAGUE STAYED.

2 SAM. 24: 15-25.

1.—David had sinned in numbering the people. There are various opinions as to what constituted the sin of the action. Josephus imagines a breach of the law of Moses which prescribed that, when the people were numbered, a tax of half a shekel a head should be paid by every man above twenty. Geikie, in "Hours with the Bible," says, "The probability is, that the proposal was a step towards the formal enrolment of the whole male population for stricter military service than they had hitherto rendered. . . . The new census may have been intended to furnish the king with a muster-roll of the population, which he might use to aggrandize the power of the throne. Regarded thus, as a first step towards despotism, it was not only a breach of the divinely established constitution, but provoked great opposition from the people at large."

David's conscience smote him. His sin was further pressed home by Gad the seer. It was the good fortune of David to have faithful servants of God who faithfully reproved him. In those days the voice of the divine messengers was not hushed by the rank of the sinner. When in after days, the prophets spoke to please earthly kings rather than God, the power of the monarchy declined. David had already been reproved by Nathan for the great sin of his life; and had wisely acknowledged the authority of Nathan and repented of his sin. We do not know much about Gad. We know that he wrote a book of the Acts of David (1 Chron. 29: 29) and that he assisted in the musical arrangements of the house of the Lord, with David and Nathan (2 Chron. 29: 25). Gad gave to David the choice of one of three punishments (2 Sam. 24: 12). David chose the pestilence. It appeared to him that in the pestilence he was more directly in "the hand of the Lord," than he would be if he chose famine or war. The pestilence, however, affected not only David, but also all the people. Sin affects in its results the innocent as well as the guilty. So in the case of Adam's sin. His posterity suffered through him. The ground was cursed for his sake. David does not seem to have been struck by the pestilence, but he had the intense grief of seeing his own people suffer through his sin. This, to a man of generous spirit, would be a far heavier burden than the disease and pain in his body. This gives intensity to the appeal to God: "Lo, I have sinned, and I have done wickedly; but these Thy sheep, what have they done? Let Thine hand I pray Thee, be against me and against my father's house." (2 Sam. 24: 17.)

2.—The repentance of David was expressed in prayer and sacrifice. Upon the spot where the vision of the destroying angel appeared was the threshing-place of Araunah the Jebusite. In our translation Araunah appears as "Ornan," in the account contained in 1 Chron. 21: 18-30. These two are the same name under varied forms. Araunah was a Jebusite. Jebus was the ancient name for Jerusalem. The Jebusites are mentioned in the report of the spies (Numbers 13: 29). They went up with others against Joshua (Josh. 11: 3). Many attacks were made upon them, but they continued to dwell in the land (Judges 1: 21; 19: 11). It was only when David fixed upon Jebus as the seat of government, and attacked it with a mighty host, that it fell (2 Sam. 5: 6, 7). Verse 23 of our Lesson reads, "All these things did Araunah, as a king, give unto the king; better, 'all these things did Araunah the king,' etc. From this it is inferred that he was at least of the royal race, possibly the former king of Jerusalem." By Josephus (Ant. vii. 13, sec. 9.) Araunah is said to have been one of David's chief friends, and to have been expressly spared by him when the city was taken. If there is any truth in this, David no doubt made his friendship, acquired that of Uriah the Hittite, Abimelech, Sibbechai and others of his associates, who belonged to the old nation.—"Smith's Bible Dictionary," vol. 1, p. 988, Note.

David, following the directions of Gad, purchased the threshing floor of Araunah. Araunah would have given it without payment, but David would not offer that which cost him nothing. David reared the altar, used the threshing instruments of Araunah for the wood, his oxen for burnt offerings, and his wheat for the peace offering. The burnt offering was especially the form of the expression of repentance and devotion to God. God was well pleased with this sacrifice. God is sometimes represented as not delighting in sacrifice. David himself in Psalm 51, cries, "Thou delightest not in burnt offerings. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit: a broken and a contrite heart, O God. Thou wilt not despise" (Psalm 51: 16, 17). The solution of the apparent contradiction is that God was pleased with sacrifice only when it was the expression of penitence and of love; and that he valued the reality far above the form by which the reality was represented.

3.—"So the Lord was intreated for the land, and the plague was stayed from Israel." It would seem that before the sacrifice was offered, and whilst the work of destruction was still going on, "the Lord repented

Him of the evil, and said to the angel that destroyed the people, it is enough stay now thine hand." God gave David the assurance that He had pardoned him. He gave this assurance in two ways. First, "He answered him from heaven by fire upon the altar of burnt offering." The other sign of forgiveness was the cessation of the plague. When God, through Christ, accepts our penitence, and answers our prayers for forgiveness, He assures us of salvation. He gives to us by the Holy Spirit, the consciousness of His favor, and He shows that He has accepted the offering of our souls and bodies by giving us power to do His will.—Condensed from W. M. S. S. Mag.

CHANGING THE BEARING YEAR.

A New Hampshire correspondent of the N. E. Farmer, writing in reference to the changing of the bearing year of the apple tree, says: "I believe it can be done by heavy pruning and heavy manuring in the even year, provided the tree be not allowed to bear fruit that year. Among my own recollections of the long ago past, is one of a man, who was a pioneer in fruit raising, standing by his overladen tree and whipping off the fruit. He asserted that in this way he was able to secure a fair crop of apples the next year. He always had fruit every year, I remember. A few years ago it so happened that I manured two apple trees rather heavily, in the even year; the next year they bore a heavy crop and have continued to do so every since. Another tree, that stood near the wall, was manured only on one side, and that side at once took to bearing on the odd year, while the other side continued its old-established habit of even year bearing. The trees all produce full fruit. It may not be so easy to change the habit of a Baldwin or other tree that matures its fruit later, but I have no doubt it could be done in a few years by this means."

HOW TO BECOME AN IDIOT.

The New York Herald in a recent article on the tobacco curse says that if we would encourage idioy in the United States, all we have to do is to continue the present consumption of tobacco. It adds: "What sight more common than half a dozen boys, lads and young men smoking cigarettes on the platform of a bob tail car? And what more trying to one's nerves than the filthy odors they puff into the car over the other passengers? Ten years of this almost universal habit have left their mark in the sunken eyes, the pallid face, the weak and the flabby muscles of these so-called men. That many of them find no real enjoyment in the practice is shown by their habit of spitting. Aside from the vulgarity and nastiness of this muscular exercise is the detriment it does the general system. No man—certainly no growing boy—can expectorate constantly without injuring himself. Bootblacks, messenger boys, school children, clerks, smoke and spit, as together in a great and multitudinous army they move along toward idioy and imbecility. What a cheerful prospect it is, to be sure!"

USEFUL HINTS

Try a cloth wrung out from cold water put about the neck for a sore throat.

Our Country Home says that rubbing clothes before boiling them is the very perfection of washing science.

In sharpening edge-tools, says the Popular Science News, "substitute common bar soap and water for oil on the hone."

When the stopper of a glass decanter is too tight, a cloth wet in hot water and applied to the neck will cause the glass to expand and the stopper may be removed.

Real profit does not come so much from the number of acres one goes over as from how much he gets off each acre. It costs about the same number of dollars to own, or rent, prepare seed, and work an acre for a small or large crop. The profit comes from the second quarter or half of a good crop.

Plough up the old cow yards, running the plough deep, and, says the Germantown Telegraph, as many loads of earth as you can remove so many loads of rich fertilizers you will have. We have read of an enterprising gentleman who manured ten acres of grass with earth from under an old barn, and had enormous growths for several years after.

Trees that were grafted this spring should be carefully gone over and all water sprouts cut away to allow all the sap to flow into the graft to push it vigorously. If you wish a stocky branched graft, nip the end of the young growth after it has grown six inches or more. It will then throw outside shoots and grow branched and stocky.

Delicious fig candy is made by boiling one pound of white sugar with one pint of water. When it hardens in cold water pour it over the figs which you have split and placed on buttered plates. Just before you take the candy from the fire add a small lump of butter and one table-spoonful of vinegar. If you prefer it, the figs may be chopped and mixed with the candy.

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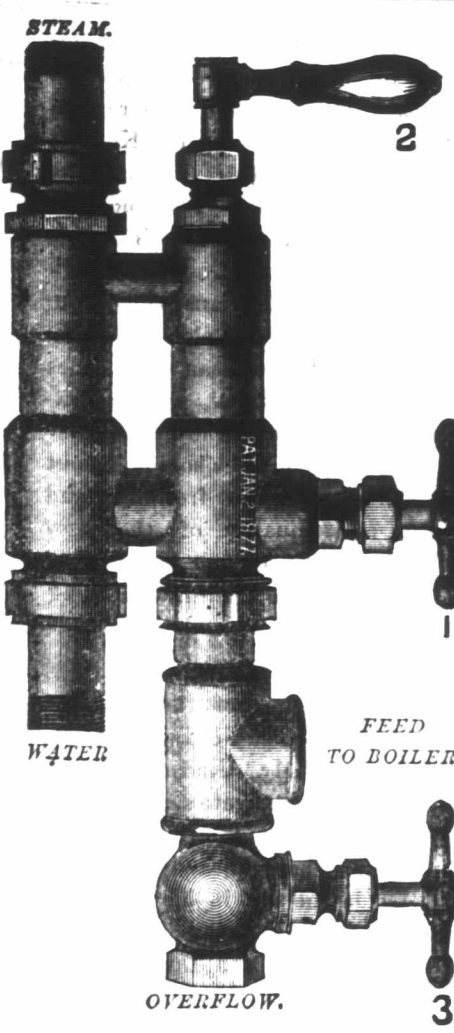
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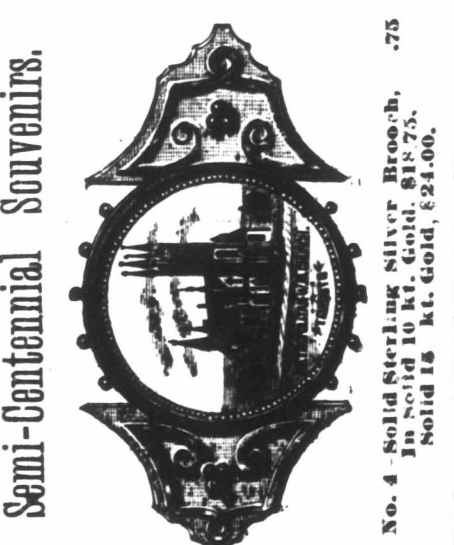
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