

tears off. *The Lord hath rent.* The prophet sees a text: "A rending! Yes, that is exactly what has happened". *Rent the kingdom . . . from thee . . . given it to a neighbor . . . better;* but it was years before Saul's "neighbor" became king.

Vs. 29-35 tell of the slaughter of King Agag by Samuel, and repeat the Lord's rejection of Saul as king of Israel.

Light from the East

AMALEKITES—A people inhabiting the country between Idumea and Egypt, to the east of the Dead Sea. They were a tribe of marauding Arabs, living partly by pastoral methods, and partly by the sword, like the Bedouins of to-day. From the fact that two of their kings are called Agag, it is possible that it was a common title, like that of Pharaoh in Egypt. They appear to have been an especially cruel and treacherous people, and hence the fierce reprisals

of Israel upon them.

WITCHCRAFT—Is a general term including soothsaying and divination by the study of the stars, the flight of birds, the reading of magic cups; incantations, which secured the service of evil spirits; the use of charms and spells; and necromancy, pretended trafficking with the dead to profit by their superior knowledge. From very early times there were persons who pretended to have intercourse with the spirit realm, and thus to be able to foretell the future and to disclose secrets unknown to others. As it was chiefly a system of deception, accomplished by ventriloquism, sleight of hand, or a superior knowledge of chemistry, it was forbidden by the law of Moses, Ex. 22: 18. Eastern people are still easily imposed upon by charms, amulets, and supernatural pretensions in fortune tellers, serpent charmers, and thief detectors, and some of these are astonishingly clever.

APPLICATION

To sacrifice, v. 15. God's commands are to be improved upon, are they? We knew a young man, reciting Scott's Lady of the Lake, in school, who forgot, and tried to improvise a few lines. The result was laughable. No schoolboy can be a poet impromptu. And no one can venture, except in folly, to be wiser than God. The whole story of the history of mankind, with all its blunders, crimes, defeats and tragedies, is a record of disastrous attempts to be wiser than God. Caiaphas tried it, and the medieval Popes, and Charles V. of Spain. Many of us are trying it ourselves, saying, "We cannot obey Christ and do business", and such like. But God knows best. He made the universe and ordained its laws. And, as surely as day follows night, or an apple let go from the hand falls to the ground, so surely will obedience to those laws lead, in the long run, to true prosperity and happiness. Where His finger points the way, it is safe for us to go, when His arm bars the path, it is madness for us to force an entrance.

The people took . . . to sacrifice, v. 21. Saul acted like a general who should leave a strongly fortified city, and dispose his army

in some sand-pit outside, thinking to hold this against the attacking foe.

City
or Sand-Pit

"Brought them . . . to sacrifice." This was his first line of defence, and down it tumbles, like a house of cards before the battery of God's plain command, "Go and utterly destroy". The second line was, "The people took", and it fared no better. "Wast thou not made the head of . . . Israel?" It was Saul's business to rule, not to be ruled, to give orders, not to receive them. The only position which we can defend against all comers is within the immovable walls of implicit obedience to God's commands. When we forsake that safe standing ground, no excuse, however plausible, will shelter us from condemnation and shame.

To obey is better than sacrifice, v. 22. If a locomotive could not pull a train, but played a tune on its whistle; if a dog would not hunt, but sat up on his hind legs and begged; if a man refused to pay his taxes, but sent the corporation treasurer a box of candies; we should have illustrations of the sort of ornamental uselessness we attempt when we offer God worship, but decline to do His

Ornamental
Uselessness