

vation or exception. But in plain violation of his instructions, Saul spared King Agag and the best of the spoil. Some may think that he should be excused for this action, that he was really justified in shrinking from the full execution of the stern and awful work of extermination on which he was sent. But this view ignores the persistent malignity and heinousness of the conduct of Amalek, and the fact that, while God is infinite in goodness and mercy and ever ready to forgive, He is also righteous and just, and therefore inflicts condign punishment upon the obdurate impenitent.

2. *The efforts of Saul to justify his conduct.*

(a) He met Samuel with the bland and seemingly pious salutation, "Blessed be thou of the Lord; I have performed the commandment of the Lord," v. 13. What effrontery and shameless falsehood! Surely he was either blinded by self-conceit or was conscious of acting the part of an audacious hypocrite. Samuel at once exposed his base pretence by evidence, with which he was surrounded, v. 14. (b) The king's answer deepened his guilt. These animals, he alleged, were spared for a religious purpose—they were to be sacrificed to the Lord. The holy end thus contemplated would justify a departure from the letter of the divine command. He had merely showed clemency toward Agag. For this act he deemed himself deserving of commendation rather than censure. Besides, he was not to blame, but the people, v. 15. But why did he not restrain the people? Was he not invested with royal authority for this very purpose? It is vain for men in office to try to shift responsibility from themselves to others, and to give an appearance of religious service and zeal to palpable transgressions of God's commandments. The prophet was not hoodwinked by this shallow, jesuitical sophistry. He firmly stood for the word of the Lord, as we should always do, and said to the king, "Stay, and I will tell thee what the Lord hath said to me this night." He then recalled in pointed terms the steps by which Saul had brought himself to the present juncture, vs. 17-19. The Lord had taken him from obscurity, and elevated him to a position of great prominence and power,

and had sent him on a special mission; but he had proved utterly unworthy and disobeyed the voice of the Lord.

3. *The sentence pronounced upon him, and the manner in which it was received.* (a) He was deposed from the throne of Israel. The Lord rejected him from being king, v. 23. (b) Thereupon he confessed his sin, his transgression of the commandment of the Lord; but pleaded that he did so, "because he feared the people, and obeyed their voice," v. 24. Alas! this shallow penitence came too late. The prophet refused to change his attitude, and finally turned away in sorrow and "came no more to see Saul until the day of his death," v. 35.

For Teachers of the Boys and Girls

Perhaps there is no better way of dealing with the lesson than to follow the dialogue verse by verse:

Samuel's arrival, v. 13; sent by the Lord with a dreadful message, vs. 10, 11, grieved to the heart for Saul's wickedness, v. 11.

Saul's pious welcome, v. 13. He salutes Samuel in the name of the Lord, and declares he has obeyed God's commandment in destroying Amalek, v. 3. (For the dreadfulfulness of that command and the reason for it, see Exposition, and Analysis.) Sin takes away our wits. Only sin could have made Saul so simple as to suppose that he could so easily deceive God's prophet.

Samuel's sharp question, v. 14. The sheep and oxen declare the falsehood of Saul's words.

Saul's mean excuse, v. 15. He lays the fault on the people, instead of taking it on himself; and pretends it is God's service: "they were spared for sacrifice," he says.

Samuel's awful message from the Lord. V. 16 is dramatic in the highest degree. V. 17 reminds Saul of his obligation to the Lord. V. 19 contains, one would suppose, an unanswerable question. But sin makes men crooked. They will squirm rather than confess. And so we hear:

Saul's base defence, vs. 20, 21—"I have done right; if there is any wrong: the people are the guilty parties." It is but a repetition of v. 15, and shows that sin has greatly hardened Saul's heart. He stands up against