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SEEKING ASSES, FOUND KINGDOM

The International Sunday School Lesson for May 23rd is "Israel's First King."—1 Samuel 9:15, 10:24.

By William T. Ellis.

"Once upon a time" there was a young man in his late twenties or early thirties, who in physique stood head and shoulders above all his fellows. He was a Lincoln sort of youth, countrified, awkward, embarrassed by contact with the great, and dreaming no dream except that he should spend his life in rural pursuits, with a round of petty cares. He was a modest chap, of stout heart and no particular ambition. His family were not in any "Blue Book" or social register. In the course of his day's work he, with a servant-comrade, had to go off on a hunt for some stray asses. While searching for the missing donkeys, he found a kingdom! His chief concern, in his simplicity, had been because he had no suitable gift for the seer who might direct him to the straying herd. Little did this countryman, Saul, imagine that the Seer Samuel, had for him, a cruse of sacred oil to anoint him as the first king of Israel.

Around the next corner we turn there may await us destiny—or God! Unexpectedness is said to be the first quality of humor; certainly it is a joke that God delights to play upon the world. He seems fond of perpetuating surprises. There is more than appears in the word of Holy Writ that

"His mercies are fresh every morning and new every evening." Life is a continuous surprise party for the person who has committed his way unto the Lord. God's habit is to provide more than eye has seen or ear has heard, or than has entered into the heart of man. One thing is sure about the Lord's dealings with his children: He is certain to do for them more than they can ask or think. While their anticipations may not rise above the day's tasks, He has for them vast prizes of character and service and life. That truth is the first skimming of the cream of the Saul story. Unexpected kingdoms are bestowed while we diligently seek straying stock. There is set for daily living in the lesson.

Of another sort, and of equal potency to our own time, is the message that God usually calls His great ones from lowly circumstances. Whence came the men who are really potent in our turbulent world-to-day? How many of them were born to the purple or professionally trained for leadership? The war has deeply discredited all "ruling classes" and it needed only the publication of the petty and insane and grotesque letters of the kaiser, the ear and the czarina to cap the common conviction

that old-world aristocracy has not been maintained by any inherent greatness or nobility of its own. Like the arbutus, the lowliest lives are growing closest to the earth. In humble circumstances the highest qualities seem to thrive best. Tomorrow's Sauls are but farmers' boys today.

Following the Fashion. Dramatic and romantic and beautiful as is the story of the young Benjaminite who went in search of straying donkeys and found a crown instead, the background is less than lovely.

Israel had slumped from the clear consciousness of its own national destiny. It had crossed to see the privilege and power of being a peculiar people. It wanted to follow the fashion of the nations, and have a king at its head. That was the stubborn contentment of the elders when Samuel remonstrated with them, and showed them what it meant to withdraw the kingship of Israel from Jehovah Himself; they said they wanted to have a king, "like all the nations." Samuel set forth what a king would do to them; and as one reads his catalogue of kingly exactions and oppressions it seems clear whence Kipling got his poem, "Burrer not the old King." Nevertheless, Israel would rather be fashionable than right; nations and men go wrong to Mrs. Grundy's music of "Everybody's doing it!"

Before we rail too severely at old Israel departing from its high, strict standards of Theocracy, let us pause for an instant to ask about ourselves in this present time. Is our nation turning from or toward simple faith and godliness? Are we more keen on the quest after the newest fashions and luxuries than we are after sheer and simple righteousness? Are our faces or our backs toward God's leadership? Nations are in the valley of decision to-day: the case of Israel points a present moral. Europe has gone mad with the lust of empire; nations little and big are flinging aside their noblest ideals in pursuit of more territory, more prestige, more trade. Nor is our western world guiltless of the day's folly.

A Nation's Second Chance. Old Israel, like some newer nations, preferred a king to a prophet: power before principles. They would rather trust to organization and "efficiency" and to man might than to the ideals set forth by a seer of God. It was likewise to try to be good. Here comes a great truth from this lesson: God accepted the Israelites on their own level, since they would not come up to the higher plans He had designed for them. He gave them a second chance. It recalls the conversation beside the lake, after Jesus had risen, when the Disciple twice asked the much-professing Peter if he really loved Him divinely—"agapeed." Is the Greek word—the uncomprehending disciple insisted that he loved Him humanly—"phileed" Him. Then the third time Jesus asked, as if accepting His own terms, "Peter, do you really love Me as one man loves another?" So God takes less than He desires from us, less than our possibilities. He was eager, since Israel was bent on becoming a kingdom straightway to make it the best possible kingdom. The Lord

ever does His best with what we are willing to let Him have.

To that end a wonder was wrought, such a wonder as has been repeated many times since; Saul was essential to the success of the king project, so "God gave him another heart." After his meeting with Samuel, Saul underwent a great spiritual experience. He "got religion." He entered into a new sense of God such as is essential to all truly great leadership. That is why we pray every Sunday in our churches for our rulers; except they are led, they cannot lead. Recently I received a letter from a friend in a western city, expressing concern that in these times of shifting leadership and of quickened interest in politics, there is no man who stands unequivocally on a distinctly Christian platform, with zeal for New Testament righteousness as his plea. Why should not a public man come out openly with a statement that our times need most of all a return to God, and a fresh obedience to the divine will? A personal experience of religion, such as came to Saul, is the highest equipment for public service. "Seek ye first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you."

The Modest King-Elect. A profound sense of personal unworthiness comes to the really true man in the presence of every high experience. What worthy lover has not wondered why his betrothed should be willing to accept him? Queen Victoria's prayer, according to the familiar story, when she heard that she was to succeed to the throne, was "God help me to be good." The Drinkwater Lincoln play shows the lanky Illinois lawyer falling upon his

knees in prayer, when the nomination to the presidency was offered to him. It was a natural and creditable thing for Saul, knowing of his own anointing at the hands of Samuel, to flee from the decision when the nation assembled at Mizpah to cast lots for its first king. So when the choice had fallen, lo, Saul was found hidden among the baggage! Then was first heard the shout, echoed countless of times since, "Long live the King!"

There was a dissenting minority who did not endorse the election of the huge and bashful son of Kish. The latter showed qualities of statesmanship by retiring into seclusion until the people should come to agreement. Then one of the tribes became threatened by an enemy, and the tidings ran throughout Israel. When Saul heard the news he proved his kingship by his can-ship: never was he more regal than in that hour. For he had that essential quality of greatness, a capacity for indignation. Like the veriform appendix, this characteristic becomes trophied in some politicians. But of Israel's first king we read, when he had heard of the shameful proposal of the Ammonites to the men of Jabesh, "The Spirit of God came mightily upon Saul when he heard these words, and his anger was kindled greatly."

Would that the Spirit might descend upon the church to-day in the same way, and make too-tolerant Christian red-hot with anger against injustice and oppression and evil of every sort. A victory like unto Saul's is sure whenever good men get fighting mad!

COMPLETE ANARCHY THREATENS IRELAND

The Archbishop of Dublin Says Never Was Outlook So Obscure.

Dublin, May 20.—Speaking at the General Synod of the Church of Ireland, Dr. D'Arcy, Protestant archbishop of Dublin, said as far as the conditions of the country were concerned there never was a time when the issues were so confused, the outlook so obscure, and when it was so difficult to see a way out. They had been horrified with the deeds of bloodshed which had, in the past few months, stained the records of their country. They could not fail to realize they were threatened with complete anarchy. There has been too little realization, he said, of the exceeding hardness of the task of those who were endeavoring to grasp the terrible severities which marked the policy of other times, and of other lands in similar circumstances. In Ireland, it was their custom to blame the Government when everything went wrong, but the fault was much more on the people themselves. The feeling of a great number of moderate men who formed the bulk of the population in Ireland never became fully articulate. There were always threatening influences which tempted them into silence. When would Irishmen come to realize that unless they become true democrats, using the power of public opinion to check excesses, there would be no political stability.

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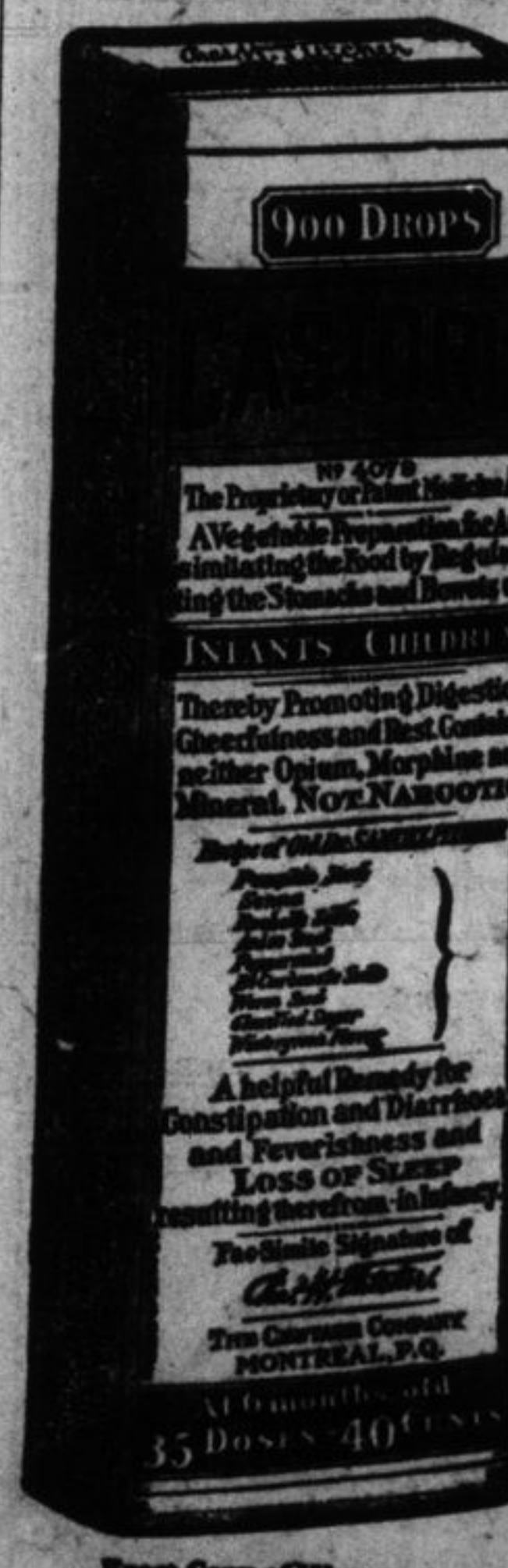
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