

STORY OF "THE BOY DAVID"

Young David was the youngest of the eight sons of Jesse, a small farmer who traded in skins and wool in the village of Bethlehem some 3,000 years ago. Bethlehem itself was a collection of flat-roofed stone and mud dwellings built on a hillside and surrounded by a wall, below which lay the fields and grazing lands of the inhabitants.

Life was essentially simple in those days, if not primitive. David spent his days as herd boy to his father's flocks and at night returned to the communal room of his home. Here the male members of the family slept on skins around a central fire. Here too the cooking was done in one large pot while the dried produce and smoked haunches of mutton hung from the rafters.

Of the eight boys only five still lived at home. They had their trades of tanner, baker woodcutter and so on, and the eldest, Eliab, was actually a soldier of King Sauls whose camp lay some twelve miles out of Bethlehem and opposite to the Phillistine army. Eliab seriously considered himself a man of the world but even he found it obligatory to obey his mother. Women as such were not really considered in those days, but Jesse's wife, little and careworn though practical and vital dominated her sons at least to her own satisfaction. Her chief concern, among many, was young David. He seemed different and so innocent among these other rough brothers of his. Although she refused to be sentimental about him, nevertheless she remained worried about what was to become of him. He appeared so insignificant that it was commonly thought that Jesse had only seven sons, not eight.

One day however he burst into his home to announce to his brothers that he had killed not only a lion but a bear as well while guarding the sheep. Amid much raucous laughter and mock-ceremony his brothers agreed to believe him until he himself became so confused with their teasing that he could not truthfully recall what had really happened. Meanwhile

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his poor mother was greatly upset by this innocent deceit but of course the lad had to be punished and so was sent milkless and supperless to bed, while the next youngest youth, Shammah was sent out to take his place. But Shammah only came back to report that an ill-kempt wanderer was searching for their house. At that time King Saul was ridding the country of wanderers and beggars, so that it was in an atmosphere of suspicion and some foreboding that the great Samuel entered the house of Jesse in search of a boy. Though poorly dressed and ageing, Samuel was a striking and arresting figure and in consequence of this poise the family, though unaware of anything significant, remained nervous and uncomfortable. He told them his mission but acknowledged none of the brothers; he said he was waiting for a sign from his master, who to their amazement, he announced was in the room at the time. He caused a sensation in relating that he had seen by the wayside the dead bodies of a lion and a bear. David who had come in, in search of milk, heard this and was elated, not at the discomfiture of his brothers but by the fact that his own mind was now clear. And so it proved that this was the sign for which Samuel had been waiting. Alone, and in silence, Samuel annointed David, prostrating himself before him. He talked to him of God, that Other-one, his Master, who was always present. He then made himself known to David's mother warning her that if she spoke of this to anyone nothing stood before her boy - and death.

It was in some awe and certain respect that David's mother gave this son of hers his father's supper to eat. And it was in a strangely exalted mood that David later reproved his ~~father~~ angry father. But it was to the Other-one that he called, of whose presence Samuel had told him, to still his confusion, and in this way it came about that he received his instructions to take his harp and sling and his father's ass and go to Saul's camp to kill another lion.

3/ Saul

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Saul, at that time, was a man of about forty and was already given to spells of mental distress and depression that on occasions could only be cured by a harpist of his court. The main cause of this unbalance appeared to arise out of the conflict between his domination by Samuel who alone could pass on spiritual messages, and his wish to receive as King such messages himself, direct from the source. In fact he considered this his absolute right, but underneath it all remained the memory of his early years as the Lord's anointed. For forty days he had kept his army in idleness, waiting in vain for a message from Samuel to begin hostilities, and yet fretting against himself for being such a fool as to go on waiting. As his army grew restless so increased his venom against Samuel. At last however the silence was broken when an ascetic, rough and somewhat ungracious ~~young~~ priest was brought before him called Nathan. This young fanatic only increased Saul's anger by the content of the message and the way in which he delivered it. In effect, that the battle could be enjoined but it would not be Saul's privilege as hitherto to strike the first blow. Instead, a boy would come riding on an ass and to him would go this honour. And if this decree was opposed, a boy would be set up in Saul's office. Nathan barely escaped with his life, and it was decreed that Samuel be dismissed for evermore. ~~since the King~~ Then followed an increased blackening of Saul's moods; suspicion of his young son Jonathan, his relations, or anyone standing near the throne.

When David, however, did meet Saul, he mistook him for a shepherd. He saw in this lonely stranger the ideal of the man he wished to become, and Saul saw in the young boy all the happy and innocent years of his own childhood. In this way they became friends, and in token of which Saul gave to ~~him~~ the unsuspecting David a disc which would safely allow him to pass through the camp. In this way David was able to reach the last outpost of Israelite slingers before the Phillistine army.

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In this outpost there was a great deal of bitterness over the delay in fighting which the jeers of the Phillistines only increased. The final taunt was delivered through Goliath's armour bearer. He issued his master's challenge on a horn, urging the craven Israelites to find themselves a champion, and if their man failed, they together with their God would become the servants of the Phillistines. In the midst of all the noise an answering horn was heard, and young David appeared riding on his ass in search of a lion called Goliath of Gath. The slingers' exuberance changed to mocking derision when they saw the size of their champion, but David maintained his resolve and composure and on questioning showed the Captain his 'pass'. Ophir, the Captain, recognised this as belonging to Saul, and could only assume that Saul had his own plans and had recognised the boy as Samuel's choice, and was willing that he should meet his death in this fashion. He spoke to his soldiers who eventually agreed to allow the boy through in spite of the shame it might bring them, for was this not Samuel's choice and - as the Captain thought - would not the fall of David be also the Fall of Samuel. Let the blame then go to Samuel and not Saul. David meantime carefully saw to the welfare of his ass and then quietly selected a few pebbles for his sling. All the soldiers warned him to keep from challenging the great strength of Goliath, but in childlike fear he picked up his horn and with the words "Thus does David" blew the answering challenged to his opponent. Jonathan continued to insist on their fleeing before it was too late but David remained serene and poised on his rock, meeting Goliath's taunts and warning him that through this deed all the world would know there was a God in Israel.

When Goliath fell by the shot of a single pebble, great darkness and silence came down and through which David ran to the Phillistine camp. The slowly returning and bewildered Israelites could not at first believe what had happened. But the murmuring ended in a jubilant triumph on the words "David has slain Goliath!" and the outpost was

in an uproar of exhilaration as the battle started. David was also there, dragging Goliath's great spear behind him, for this was indeed his day. All went well for the Israelites and there was much rejoicing in the camps that night.

David had Goliath's tent pitched for him on the outskirts of the main camp and he and Jonathan greatly amused themselves playing with Goliath's armour and weapons like the boys that they were. So long as a light burned in the tent David was not afraid of the dark, although there remained several of the king's followers who were afraid for him but unable to voice their fears. It was thus that Saul found them and of course David was delighted to see his shepherd. It was only when Jonathan addressed him as father that David knew the truth and in some awe and ceremony prostrated himself before the king. In due course Jonathan had to return to the main camp and this loving half evil man was left with the innocent boy.

David showed him his trophies and wholeheartedly confided in him. He also told him that he could play the harp whereupon Saul, full of suspicion asked if Jonathan had told him of the evil spirits which troubled him and could only be quietened by music. David also spoke of the strange feeling that came to him on killing Goliath - of some other power - and when Saul questioned him on where he had learnt to prostrate, David told him of the meeting with Samuel and all that transpired, even to the fact that he had been warned not to tell anyone. Saul was most anxious to know how Samuel had killed Goliath, greatly to David's indignation since he had killed Goliath. However he did admit that it was the Other One who had helped, that same One of whom Samuel was a servant. And so at last Saul felt he was truly foresaken and the blackness of his mood told David that he was the one that had to be killed. In fear David drew back into the tent and started to play on his harp, but to no avail for Saul lifted the flap and with a plunge threw the javelin in, putting out the light and creating

a deathly stillness. In a moment of madness he was wild, inarticulate, triumphant and challenging only to be oppressed by a great fear of the significance of his deed. As a broken man he collapsed to the ground and it was here that David found him as he himself tried to creep away with only his original belongings clutched to him. It was love and pity which induced him to take up his harp once more for this stricken man and as his playing grew bolder Saul's tension fell away and he became as a normal man merely listening to music from a long way off.

When David once more returned to his family, life for him was as it had always been, only his mother was aware of his great deed and carried his sling secretly around her neck. But if she remained perplexed and ~~SECRET~~ quietly proud she ordered him around as usual and it was really only at night time, when David was afraid of the dark and had extraordinary visions of the future, that she allowed their common secret to come to the fore so that it might comfort the boy.

All the men of the family slept in the one large main room of the house. In those days they used a kind of mattress or skins for sleeping on and seldom removed their clothes, even occasionally putting on an extra garment over them.

As they settled in for the night Jesse remarked that his ass appeared to have changed, braying more haughtily than of old, he also threatened with his belt anyone who broke his rest that ~~with~~ night with their dreams. But David remained unconcerned for as the darkness and silence settled, his dream figures had already started to move, and he was among them already grown to manhood. It seemed that he was on a hillside stealthily moving toward the sleeping figure of Saul with a dagger in his hand. But he did not use the dagger, instead he took away Saul's bolster, cruse and javelin while the camp slept, and then returned to sound a horn and rouse the sleeping figures. In this way he signified that Saul's guard were of no use and he, the man whom they were all hunting could have killed them all with ease.

He challenged that they should

kill him then and there, but Saul recognising his loyalty accepted David back into his service.

This dream then changed to Saul's throne room, and once more he and his Captain of the Guard, Ophir plotted David's downfall. Evidently his success in the army could be endured no longer and it was planned that one of Saul's daughters should be given to him as a reward and a snare. When David did appear resplendent as a Captain he was wary but respectful and enchanted by this his first sight of the throne. He was not interested in the daughters, Merab who felt he was too great for her, and Michal who said she would look at nothing under a King, but what did catch his attention was the throne itself. Left to himself he sat on it in some elation only to find ~~him~~ that he was bewildered and sacrilegious.

David's third vision found Saul visiting the Witch of Endor, still of kingly bearing but desperate in his mind at the way in which things were moving. The Witch however was afraid of him, since she thought his coming but a trap to destroy her as he had destroyed all other seers. But he asked her to materialise Samuel for him, and as Samuel appeared out of the dark, Saul ^{told} ~~asked~~ him of his fears, how the Philistines were forever at war, and that he had no further contact with his Lord. He fearfully wanted to know how much longer he would live. And Samuel relentlessly told him that this was his punishment for disobedience. That his kingdom was being taken from him and that on the following day Saul, together with his son Jonathan would be killed.

There followed the one great victory of the Philistines over Israel wherein Saul and Jonathan were killed. David, in rags, found them on the hillside, knelt and then saluted them in the epic "How are the mighty fallen ! tell it not in Gath;.."

The last vision found Saul and Samuel together gossiping as villagers but not really acquainted with each other. The world was far away and although they remembered little incidents it all appeared very trivial. However Saul

did look to Samuel for guidance, and Samuel told him that the time had come when the ways of the Lord should be made clear to him.

In a half waking state young David wandered out into the night alternately calling for his shepherd, and for Saul, whom he could not find.

On coming into his room in the early morning his mother found his bed empty, and thoroughly alarmed remained undecided whether to waken the others or not. However, David walked in, unnaturally and as a sleepwalker and still in his dishevelled nightgown. He did not see his mother, who shrank from him, but passed to his bed where he fell exhausted. His mother, overcoming her fear, tended his cut knee and covered him with a shawl, but still he slept unconscious of her presence. And in the silence there came invisible voices to which she listened in awe and wonderment.. "Yea, I shall fear no evil, even in the shadow of death, They rod and They staff shall comfort me".