

# SAMUEL THE PROPHET

by

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## CHAPTER SIXTEEN

### “TWO PUTTING TEN THOUSAND TO FLIGHT”

(I Samuel 14)

“Oh! I have seen the day,  
When, with a single word,  
God helping me to say  
My trust is in the Lord!  
My soul hath quelled a thousand foes,  
Fearless of all that could oppose.”

- Cowper

JUST two young men, with the glow of patriotism in their hearts, and trust in God as their guiding-star, what may they not effect?

Jonathan was a true knight of God, who anticipated some of the noblest traits of Christian chivalry. We may almost say of him that he was the Hebrew Bayard, a soldier without fear and without reproach. He lived pure, spoke true, righted wrong, was faithful to the high claims of human love, and followed the Christ, though as yet he knew Him not. His character serves as a bright background on which that of his father is but a sorry contrast.

From the Jordan bank, a noble valley, twelve miles in length, leads up into the hill-country of Central Palestine, and so to the sea-board of the Mediterranean. Two miles from the head of this defile, and about eight miles due north of Jerusalem, the cliffs on either side become very precipitous, and approach each other almost to touching.

Conceive of a very narrow pass, protected on either side by steep walls of chalky formation, on which only the wild goats could find a footing, and almost unscalable by man. The ridge on the north, which rises above an almost perpendicular crag into three knolls, was called Bozez, or “*shining*,” because it reflects all day the full light of the Eastern sun; whilst that on the south, a few yards distant, was known as Seneh, “*the acacia*,” being as constantly in the shade.

Michmash crowned the former, and there the Philistines were encamped; whilst the little village of Geba lay above the latter, and thither Saul had removed his army, such as it was, withdrawing from the plains of the Jordan to watch the movements of the hostile force.

How long the armies watched each other we have no means of knowing, nor can we guess what the result might have been, had it not been for the heroic episode which we are to recount.

## I. JONATHAN ENTERED INTO THE DIVINE PURPOSE

Jonathan chafed at the inaction and the disgrace which the whole situation attached to his countrymen. He was animated also by a profound faith in God, and was prompted by the Divine Spirit to an act which issued in a glorious victory and deliverance.

It seemed to him impossible to suppose that God had forsaken the people of his choice, or withdrawn from his ancient covenant. Had He promised, and could He not perform? Was not Israel his chosen heritage? Surely the purpose of the Almighty was in conflict with the invasion of the land by these Philistine hordes, and only waited for some believing soul to enter into full communion with its mighty current, and deliverance would be secured.

Saul, on the other hand, had no perception of these things. The great past failed to speak to him. Discouraged by what met his eye and ear from morning to night, he had no power to rouse himself to lay hold on the Divine promise of deliverance. The sentence of deposition, which Samuel had pronounced, like a stone on the mouth of a tomb, seemed to shut him up to despair.

It is of the utmost importance in this mortal life, when heart and flesh fail before the giant wrongs that assert themselves against the well-being of mankind such as the drink-traffic, the mania for betting and gambling, impurity, and the insensate absorption in pleasure, which are the Philistines of our time to look away to the Divine purpose, as disclosed in the redemption achieved on the Cross by the Blood of the world's Redeemer. Surely that cannot have been shed in vain.

The power and potency of the Divine might are pledged to realize and accomplish that full deliverance of which the Cross was the prophecy. The Son of Man has been manifested that He might destroy the works of the devil; and He will not fail nor be discouraged until that purpose has been realized. Happy are they who, like Jonathan, raise themselves above the depression of the moment into living fellowship with these eternal facts, and ally their weakness with the march of God, as He is ever going forth to establish righteousness and judgment in the earth, which has been redeemed by precious Blood.

## II. HE YIELDED HIMSELF AS AN INSTRUMENT

God always works through human means. He calls us into fellowship with Himself, so that the Divine tides shall flow through human channels. God is ever on the outlook for believing souls, who will receive his power and grace on the one hand, and transmit them on the other. He chooses them, that by them He should make his mighty power known. Happy are they who are not insensible to the Divine impulse, nor disobedient to the heavenly vision.

Jonathan was one of those blessed souls who are as sensitive to God as the retina of the eye to light, or the healthy muscle to the nerve; and **“it fell upon a day that he said unto the young man that bore his armour, Come, let us go over to the Philistines garrison, that is on the other side.”**

With a beautiful modesty “**he told not his father**”; and in all probability the two slipped away silently in the grey dawn whilst their comrades were still wrapped in slumber. The intimation of a Divine purpose thrilled the ardent spirit of the young prince, of which he gave some clue in the words, “**It may be that the Lord will work for us, for there is no restraint to the Lord to save by many or by few.**”

*Notice where Jonathan laid the emphasis.*

He had the smallest possible faith in himself, and the greatest faith in God. His soul waited for the Lord; in Him was centered all his hope, and from his gracious help he expected great things. All that he aspired to was to be the humble vehicle through which the delivering grace of God might work.

This is what God wants:

- Not our strength, but our weakness, which in absolute despair turns to Him;
- Not our armies but two or three elect souls, who expect great things and dare them.

It is false to say that the Almighty is on the side of great battalions. All history goes to show that the movements which have transformed the face of the world have been achieved by the going forth of God through individuals, who have not been specially distinguished by out-standing talents, but have been led to surrender themselves absolutely to the Divine impulse. What shall I more say? for time would fail to tell of Carey, and Wilberforce, and Livingstone, and George Müller, and hundreds more.

Yield yourselves to God and I specially appeal to the young men who may read these words.

There are wrongs that God wants to right, tyrannies He is about to break, foes of human peace and happiness that He wants to quell; but He must have agents and instruments, clean and pure, true and faithful, delivered from the domination of the flesh, and absolutely resigned to his disposal. It matters not if they be high-born as Jonathan, or obscure as his armour-bearer; through them He will achieve a great deliverance.

*Saul, the chosen king, had no such vision and no such faith.*

He was not sensible to the Divine voice speaking in his soul, but had to depend on the interposition of the priest (vss. 19 and 36); he spoke and acted as though the victory depended wholly on the efforts that he and his men might put forth; and in forbidding the use of such simple refreshment as the wild honey of the woods might yield, he forfeited the full results of God's interposition. Could it be supposed that God's deliverance of his people would fall short because they put forth the ends of the rods that might be in their hands to convey the wild honey to their lips? Throughout the whole day, and especially in this senseless adjuration, which was meant to save time, but really hindered the full result, Saul showed himself oblivious of the one thought that animated the heart of his noble son that God was working through human instruments to inflict his own judgment on the invading hosts.

### III. JONATHAN RECKONED ON GOD, AND GOD DID NOT FAIL HIM

Faith is the indomitable power by which we call unto our help a whole range of laws and forces which are outside the lives of ordinary men. As we have said, they have two key-boards to their organ; we have three. They employ the physical and intellectual; whilst we, in addition, may call in the aid of the spiritual and eternal. Thus we are able to accomplish the same results, and better, by the assistance of energies which are as much greater than those ordinarily employed, as electricity is greater than horse-power or steam. This was the secret of Jonathan's success.

As they ascended the steep cliff-side, the young men agreed on the sign which should indicate that they were indeed in the line of the Divine will, and that God would not fail them. The heart of man in its first venture on the way of faith eagerly longs for some sign that it is not following a will-o-the-wisp, or being misled by wreckers lights. This was graciously granted in the mocking voices of the advanced outposts, which ridiculed the idea that the Hebrews were to be feared (ver. 11), even though they should succeed in scaling the crags.

**“Behold,”** they said, **“the Hebrews come forth out of the holes where they had hid themselves; and the men of the garrison answered Jonathan and his armour-bearer, and said, Come up to us, and we will show you a thing** (or we should like to make your acquaintance).”

This was the Heaven-given sign, and conveyed the assurance that the Lord had already delivered them into the hand of Israel (ver. 10).

By faith the soul appropriates the Divine answer. **“Whatsoever we ask, we receive of Him.”** But it is only as we fulfil the one all-important condition of successful prayer, which is so often overlooked, **“What things soever ye desire, when ye pray, believe that ye receive them, and ye shall have them”** (Mark 11:24).

*The soul that reckons on God cannot be ashamed.*

When they reached the top the two young Benjaminites used their slings with such precision that twenty men measured their length on the ground, and a trembling from God, a Heaven-sent panic, spread from them back on the main army behind, and to the bands of spoilers returning from their night raids. The Philistines could not know that the two who faced them were absolutely alone. It seemed as though they were precursors of a host of resolute and desperate men, and suddenly, in the panic, each man suspected his neighbour of being in league against him; **“every man's sword was against his fellow, so that there was a very great discomfiture.”**

Meanwhile, the Hebrews that had been allied to the Philistines, or silently acquiescent in their rule, even they also turned against them; and all who had hid themselves in the hill-country of Ephraim, when they heard that the Philistines fled, followed hard after them in battle.

From his outlook at Gibeah, Saul beheld the wild confusion, and how the multitude swayed to and fro, and melted away.

Without delay he hurled himself with his soldiers on the flying foe, who fled, in headlong precipitancy, down the long valley, past Beth-aven, past the Upper and then the Lower Beth-horon, in order to gain the Philistine frontier by the valley of Aijalon.

Every town through which the fugitives passed rose in their rear, and joined the pursuit, so that the flying host was greatly reduced, and thousands of warriors dyed the highways of the land, which they had so grievously oppressed, with their hearts blood. Thus did God deliver his people in answer to Jonathan's faith.

The unwise prohibition of the king against food had a terrible sequel:

- First, in the exhaustion of the troops, and,
- Secondly, in the famished eating of the spoils of the day, without the proper separation of the blood.

Still worse, when the day closed in, and Saul asked counsel of God, the Divine Oracle was dumb. Some sin had silenced it, and the monarch, already touched with the dark suspicions and fears in which his soul became afterwards so densely enveloped, realized that some sin was crying for discovery and expiation. He did not look for that sin, where he would have assuredly found it, in his own heart, but in the people that stood around him. Finally he and Jonathan stood before the people as the objects of the Divine displeasure, and Saul was prepared even to sacrifice his son in his moody wrath.

But the people saved him. They cried indignantly, "**Shall Jonathan die, who hath wrought this great salvation in Israel? God forbid! As the Lord liveth, there shall not one hair of his head fall to the ground, for he hath wrought with God this day.**"

Ah, the cause of discomfiture most surely lay between those two men; but it was not due to aught in Jonathan. Saul was alone to blame. He had not only missed the greatest opportunity of his life, but he was already enwrapping himself in the unbelief, the jealousy, the moroseness of temper, in which his sun was to be enshrouded while it was yet day.

~ end of chapter 16 ~

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