

DAVID:

SHEPHERD, PSALMIST, KING

F. B. Meyer, B.A.

No Copyright

CHAPTER ONE

TAKEN FROM THE SHEEPCOTES

(I Samuel 16:1)

“We stride the river daily at its spring,
Nor in our childish thoughtlessness foresee
What myriad vassal streams shall tribute bring,
How like an equal it shall greet the sea.

“O small beginnings! Ye are great and strong,
Based on a faithful heart and weariless brain;
Ye build the future fair, ye conquer wrong,
Ye earn the crown, and wear it not in vain.”

- J. R. Lowell

THE story of David opens with a dramatic contrast between the fresh hope of his young life and the rejection of the self-willed king Saul, whose course was rapidly descending towards the fatal field of Gilboa.

Few have had a fairer chance than Saul. Choice in gifts, goodly in appearance, favored by nature and opportunity, he might have made one of the greatest names in history. His first exploit, the relief of Jabesh-gilead, justified the wildest anticipations of his friends. But the fair dawn was soon overcast. The hot impatience that persisted in offering the sacrifice before Samuel came; his needless oath and ruthless proposal to take Jonathan's life; his flagrant disobedience to the distinct charge respecting Amalek all proved that he was not fit to act as God's vice-regent, and that he must be set aside.

The final announcement of his deposition was made at Gilgal. At that spot, on entering Canaan, Israel, at Joshua's bidding, had rolled away the reproach of uncircumcision.

The place suggested the only condition on which God can use human instruments; but in Saul's case there had been no humbling of pride, no submission of self-will, no putting away of the wild energy of the flesh. He was called whilst seeking his father's straying asses, as David was whilst watching his father's sheep; and there was a good deal of the wild-ass nature about Saul, as about Ishmael, which neither of them sought to subdue. Saul, it is said, rejected the word of the Lord; and the Lord rejected him from being king.

From Gilgal Saul went up to his house at Gibeah, in the heights of Benjamin: while Samuel went to Ramah, a little to the south there was his house; there he had judged Israel for twenty years; and there he dwelt as father and priest among the people, known far and near as the man of God (7:17; 9:6, 10, 12).

There, too, he mourned for Saul. No bad man drifts down the rapids unwarned, unwept; but the Divine purpose cannot stay till such pitying tears are dried. Nor must we cling to the grave of the dead past, whence the Spirit of God has fled; but arise to follow, as He transfers the focus of his operation from the rocky heights of Benjamin to the breezy uplands of Bethlehem, and conducts us to the house of Jesse.

In the selection of every man for high office in the service of God and man, there are two sides the Divine and the human: the election of God, and its elaboration in history; the heavenly summons, and the earthly answer to its ringing notes. We must consider, therefore, I. The Root of David in God; II. The Stem of Jesse that is, the local circumstances that might account for what the boy was and III. The White Bud of a Noble Life.

I. THE ROOT OF DAVID.

Once in the prophecy by Isaiah, and twice in the Book of Revelation, our Lord is called the **“Root of David.”** **“The Lion of the Tribe of Judah, the Root of David, hath prevailed to open the Book and to loose the seven seals thereof.”** And still more emphatically, among the last words spoken by the Saviour, before the curtain of the Ages fell, **“I, Jesus . . . am the root and the offspring of David; and the Bright, the Morning Star.”**

The idea suggested is of an old root, deep hidden in the earth, which sends up its green scions and sturdy stems. David’s character may be considered as an emanation from the life of the Son of God before He took on Himself the nature of man, and an anticipation of what He was to be and do in the fulness of time. Jesus was the Son of David, yet in another sense He was his progenitor. Thus we return to the ancient puzzle, that Jesus of Nazareth is at once David’s Lord and Son (Mark 12:35-37).

There are four great words about the choice of David, the last of which strikes deeply into the heart of that great mystery.

“The Lord hath sought Him a man” (I Samuel 13:14).

No one can know the day or hour when God passes by, seeking for chosen vessels and goodly pearls.

When least expecting it, we are being scrutinized, watched, tested, in daily commonplaces, to see if we shall be faithful in more momentous issues. Let us be always on the alert, our loins girt, our lamps burning, our nets mended and cleansed.

“I have found David my servant” (Psalm 89:20).

There is ecstasy in the voice, like the thrice repeated found of Luke 15. David was found long before Samuel sent for him. Which was the moment of that blessed discovery? Was it one dawn, when in the first flicker of daylight the young shepherd led his flock from fold to pasture; or one morning, when, in an outburst of heroic faith, he rescued a trembling lamb from lion or bear; or one afternoon, when, as he sat and watched his charge, the first conception of the Shepherd Psalm stirred in his heart; or one night, when he heard the silent speech of the heavens declaring the glory of God?

And was there not some secret glad response to the Master's call, like that which the disciples gave, when Jesus found them at their nets, and said, "**Follow Me**"?

"He chose David to be his servant" (Psalm 78:70).

The people chose Saul; but God chose David. This made him strong. He was conscious that the purpose of God lay behind and beneath him; and when in after years Saul lay in its power, or Michal taunted him with his extravagant gestures, the thought that he was Divinely commissioned was his stand-by (II Samuel 7:21). We are immovable when we touch the bed-rock of God's choice, and hear Him say, "**He is a chosen vessel unto Me, to bear my name.**"

"The Lord hath commanded him to be captain over His People" (I Samuel 13:14).

Appointments are not solely due to human patronage, nor won by human industry; they are of God. He bringeth low and lifteth up. Saul might chafe and fret; but from amid the ruins of his waning power the authority of David emerged as a sun from a wrack of clouds, because God willed it. Fit yourself for God's service; be faithful: He will presently appoint thee; promotion comes neither from the east nor west, but from above.

"I have provided Me a King" (I Samuel 16:1).

That answers everything. The Divine provision meets every need, silences every anxiety. Let us not yield to anxious forebodings for the future of the Church, or of our land. God has provided against all contingencies.

In some unlikely quarter, in a shepherd's hut, or in an artisan's cottage, God has His prepared and appointed instrument. As yet the shaft is hidden in His quiver, in the shadow of His hand; but at the precise moment at which it will tell with the greatest effect, it will be produced and launched on the air.

II. THE STEM OF JESSE

We turn for a moment to consider the formative influences of David's young life.

The family dwelt on the ancestral property to which Boaz, that mighty man of wealth, had brought the Rose of Moab. Perhaps it was somewhat decayed, through the exactions of the Philistine garrison, which seems to have been posted in the little town.

We read of the few sheep in the wilderness that composed the flock, and the present sent by Jesse to his soldier sons was meager in the extreme. The conditions under which he brought up his large family of eight sons and two daughters were probably hard enough to severely tax the endurance and industry of them all.

David says nothing of his father, but twice speaks of his mother as “**the handmaid of the Lord.**” From her he derived his poetic gift, his sensitive nature, his deeply religious character. To the father he was the lad that kept the sheep, whom it was not worthwhile to summon to the religious feast; to his mother he was David the beloved, and probably she first heard the psalms which have charmed and soothed the world. He honoured them both with dutiful care; and when it seemed possible that they might suffer serious hurt, on account of their relationship to himself, amid the pelting storm of Saul’s persecution, he removed them to the safe keeping of the king of Moab, the land of his ancestress.

The lad may have owed something to the schools of the prophets, established by Samuel’s wise prescience to maintain the knowledge of the law in Israel. They appear to have been richly endowed with the gracious power of the Holy Ghost, and to have been to Israel what Iona was to the wild tribes of the North in later times.

The sons of these institutions would doubtless visit Bethlehem, and find an eager response in the guileless nature of the young shepherd. From them he would learn to reduce his melodies to metrical order, and accompany them with the harp; from them, too, he learnt to know and prize the Divine Word.

But Nature was his nurse, his companion, his teacher. Bethlehem is situated six miles to the south of Jerusalem, by the main road leading to Hebron. Its site is two thousand feet above the level of the Mediterranean, on the north-east slope of a long grey ridge, with a deep valley on either side; these unite at some little distance to the east, and run down toward the Dead Sea. On the gentle slopes of the hills the fig, olive, and vine grow luxuriantly; and in the valleys are the rich cornfields, where Ruth once gleaned, and which gave the place its name, *the House of Bread*. The moorlands around Bethlehem, forming the greater part of the Judæan plateau, do not, however, present features of soft beauty; but are wild, gaunt, strong - character-breeding. There shepherds have always led and watched their flocks; and there David first imbibed that knowledge of natural scenery and of pastoral pursuits which colored all his after life and poetry, as the contents of the vat the dyer’s hand.

Such were the schools and schoolmasters of his youth. But pre-eminently his spirit lay open to the Spirit of God, which brooded over his young life, teaching, quickening, and ennobling him, opening to him the books of nature and revelation, and pervading his heart with such ingenuous trust as the dumb animals of his charge reposed in him. In the spiritual as in the physical realm he had every reason to say long after,

**“My substance was not hid from
Thee When I was made in secret,
And curiously wrought in the lowest parts of the earth . . .
And in Thy book all my members were written.”**

III. THE WHITE BUD OF A NOBLE LIFE

He had not the splendid physique of his brother Eliab, who so impressed the aged prophet. But he was strong and athletic. His feet were nimble as a gazelle's; he could leap a wall or outstrip a troop; a bow of steel could be easily broken by his young arms; and a stone sent from his sling would hit the mark with unerring precision. Too slight to wear a man's armour, and yet able to rend a lion or bear. His face glowing with health. The blue of his eyes and beauty of his fair complexion in strong contrast to the darker visages of his companions. The sensitiveness of the poet's soul, combined with daring, resource, and power to command. His dress, a coarse and simple tunic; his accoutrements, the wallet sling, the rod and staff.

His soul is reflected in the Psalms that must be attributed to this period of his life, because so free from the pressure of sorrow and anxiety, and the strife of tongues. Amongst them are the eighth, nineteenth, twenty-third, and twenty-ninth. So full of wonder that the Lord should care for man, and yet so sure that He was his shepherd; so deeply stirred by the aspect of the heavens, and yet convinced that the words of God were equally Divine; so afraid of secret faults and presumptuous sins; so anxious to join in the universal chorus of praise, ascending from the orchestra of nature, but yet so certain that there were yearnings and faculties within his soul, in which it could not participate, and which made him its high-priest and chorister. To these we will come again they are too radiant with a light that never shone on sea or shore, for us to pass them so lightly by.

Ah, guileless, blessed boy! thou little knowest that thou shalt die amid the blare of trumpets announcing the accession to the throne of thy son, the splendid Solomon; still less thou drest that thy unsullied nature shall one day be befouled by so sad a stain! Yet thy God loves thee, and thou shalt teach us many a lesson as we turn again the pages of thy wonderful career poet, minstrel, soldier, exile, king and read them in the light that streams from the face of thy greatest Son, who was born of the seed of David according to the flesh, but was declared to be the Son of God by the resurrection from the dead!

~ end of chapter 1 ~

<http://www.baptistbiblebelievers.com/>
