

Great Stories of the Bible

III. David's Patriotism

1 Samuel, 17.

TOPIC FOR WEEK OF JULY 20.

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ALL the world loves a hero, especially the hero-patriot. That is the reason that the public never wearies of the stories of such men as Robert Bruce and Garibaldi; and that is why, most of all, the Bible-reading public loves the story of David and his fight with Goliath of Gath. It stirs the blood to read of the ruddy-faced stripling of eighteen or twenty who daringly faced the giant Philistine champion when seasoned warriors like Saul and Abner, or hero-souls like Jonathan, were evidently subdued by his six cubits and a span of height and his enormous spear with its staff like a weaver's beam.

But few of us have paused in our admiration of David and of his patriotic action in defence of Israel, to ask what the sources of his patriotism were. What

out after him, and delivered it out of his mouth . . . and smote him, and slew him." That explains a lot. If David had been frightened as some boys would have been under the circumstances, he would have left that lamb to the tender mercies of the wild beast, and run off to tell the tale to his father. But if he had done that, not only would there have been a lamb gone from his flock, but he would never have battled with nor slain Goliath of Gath: for he would have developed in himself the feeling that danger was a thing to be bitterly avoided, and that hard things should be left to others to do. David, however, went out after the lion or the bear with nothing probably but his bow and arrows and his short sword, and not only slew the marauding beast, but also incidentally built considerable

theless very effectively destroys all hope of heroism ever developing itself in the life, and it never, never breeds patriotism like that of David in this chapter.

But there is another source to David's patriotism. More than anything else it is true that the roots of this young stripling's heroic daring were in God. There is a manifest ring of piety in David's conversations with Saul and with Goliath. He cannot let this boastful champion go on with his boasting, for he has defied not only the armies of Israel, but he has "defied the armies of the living God." To the giant's vain boast of what he will do with the daring lad who has the temerity to face him, David answers in a way that shows he has clearly related the duty of the hour to God: "Thou comest to me with a sword and with a spear, and with a javelin" (i.e. with entirely human resources and dependencies), "but I come to thee in the name of the Lord of Hosts, the God of the armies of Israel which thou hast defied." The highest patriotism always has its deepest and largest roots thus in God.

But there was yet another source to David's patriotism beyond even his trust



A CHRISTIAN HOUSEHOLD IN JAPAN.

made young David go out so boldly and confidently to fight Goliath? Some cynically-inclined person might answer that David froned Goliath because he did not fully grasp the danger. He was only a boy in his teens, and boys, like the proverbial fools, rush in where angels and others might fear to tread. And there is more in that cynical explanation of David's courage than the cynic himself knows. David did go out to do battle with Goliath because he did not think of the danger; but there is a juster way of putting it. He faced Goliath with his sling and his few pebbles from the brook because he had already schooled himself in doing brave, courageous things, just because they were right and ought to be done, without allowing himself to think overmuch about the danger side of them. Verse 34 makes it quite clear that this was not the first time that David had taken his life in his hands for the sake of others and at the simple call of duty. To the doubting king who was disposed to contrast fearfully David's boyishness of stature with the vast bulk and military training of the Philistine champion, the young hero of Bethlehem replied, "Thy servant was keeping his father's sheep; and when there came a lion, or a bear, and took a lamb out of the flock, I went

manhood and heroism into his own being in the process.

So when he went up to visit his brothers at King Saul's camp and found everybody from the King down terrorized by the bulk and menace of the Philistine giant, he probably whispered to his soul, "This is another hard thing that needs very much to be done, and here goes for a try at it." It is something like this that he expresses in the words of verse 29, "Is there not a cause?" Let us note then that the heroism that makes real patriots or any other kind of heroism is not developed in a day; it grows with the years if the true seed be early sown. The young man who wants one day to do some notable and many things for his country had better get himself right early into the habit of doing that kind of thing.

"Work for the good that is highest;
Dream not of greatness afar.
That glory is ever the highest—
Which shines upon men as they are."

The boy who dreams his day-dreams of being a brave man must see to it that he is a brave boy, for "The boy is father of the man." To many young people the habit of stealing around difficulties seems in no way perilous, but it never-

in God as his defender and his large sense of duty. David trusted himself—trusted his own clear eye, and his own skilled hand. And well might he, for he had reached mastery in his sling-throwing. Our leaguers will notice how he refused to wear the usual coat of mail worn by soldiers. He knew that he had no training in ordinary modes of warfare. That would come with the years, and as we know, it did come. But he knew already that he could throw a pebble from his sling within a hair's breadth of his mark. He had practiced that until practice had brought its sure reward of perfection, and with the consciousness of mastery there, he found it easy to keep his soul calm and his hand steady when Goliath was making his first wild rush to have done with the combat. David teaches us no bigger lesson, perhaps, than the lesson of the wisdom of mastering what things our hands find to do—of mastering them so that our own consciousness of mastery becomes itself a positive asset in our life.

It was evidently David's habit to attain mastery in his varied lines of activity. Probably scores of shepherd boys on the Bethlehem sheep-cotes carried the harp with them to while away the monot-