

Thoughts for Young People. Good Soldiers of Jesus Christ.

The battlefield is not a sequestered nook to which we may or may not resort. It stretches from sky to sky. Everyone born into the world must enter the arena—not as an idle spectator, but to engage in a lifelong and a life-and-death conflict. We must range ourselves either with the forces of God or evil. Christ's is the winning side. Under his banner and leadership, and with his weapons and allies, we may fight a good fight.

1. *Note what it is to be a soldier of Christ.* We are not born soldiers nor compelled to serve. When we volunteer Christ enrolls us and sends us forth to fight against his enemies and ours. His soldiers are well provided for. From his wardrobe we are clothed, out of his armory equipped, at his table fed, and from his treasury paid. Regiments have to be worn, marches endured, and battles fought.

2. *Study the qualifications of a good soldier.* Some are idle, they only swell the numbers and count on pay-day and at reviews. Far different are those who do not fight for pay, but whose joy it is to serve. Obedience is one trait. When the boiling lava swept through Pompeii the Roman sentinels perished at their posts.

"Theirs not to make reply,
Theirs not to reason why,
Theirs but to do or die."

Courage is an essential. It is not one battle and then rest. The foes are many, subtle, and fierce. We shall have to stand against customs that our conscience condemns. The thought of our Commander's smile will help us to "dare to be a Daniel." Just as the common soldier said to David, "Thou art worth ten thousand of us" (2 Sam. 18. 3), so each one of us, drawing upon the forces of heaven, may be a host in himself.

Orientalisms of the Lesson.

The entire war which is narrated in this chapter was precipitated by an indignity which can only be felt in its force by those familiar with the oriental reverence for the beard as a sign of manly dignity and as man's finest ornament. The king Hanun had been bereft of his father by death, and, as was not unusual, David sent an embassy of condolence. Hanun's attachés induced him to believe that David's motive was to acquaint himself under this cover with Hanun's resources, and he was led to treat the embassy insultingly, shaving off half their beard and removing one half their clothing to the waist. No greater indignity could have been shown.

Many orientals would rather lose their lives than lose their beards. The Turks used to regard beard-

less Europeans as runaway slaves. Only in seasons of sorrow and great calamity would orientals neglect their beards. In deep affliction they would cut off or tear out their beards, or cover them up. Moses forbade their even rounding the corners of the beard (Lev. 19. 27). Arabians had almost an idolatrous reverence for the beard.

Among men in the East only the nearest relatives were permitted to touch one's beard. Children and other near kinsfolk might gently touch it as a sign of love; a fugitive might raise his hand to it while praying for succor; and he who put his hand on his own beard and swore by it bound himself by the most solemn of oaths, to violate which would render him infamous. At present in Palestine the Jews strictly conform to their law, and allow the beard its natural growth. After reaching manhood it is a great reproach to shave off the beard. The younger men shave chin and face, allowing the hair of the upper lip to grow, and in some districts it is allowable to do this till a man reaches the age of forty. Lepers were required to remove the beard as a part of their ceremonial treatment (Lev. 14. 9).

Verses 16. Hadadezer, or, better, as in 2 Sam. 8. 3, Hadadezer, was the name of the Syrian and Assyrian sun-god, to this captain bore his name. Thus far, therefore, the contest between Jehovah worship and idol devotion comes into the foreground, and the triumph was for Jehovah. The peculiarities of the attributes of the sun-god add force to the triumph. This god was Shanas, the "establisher of heaven and earth," "the warrior of the world," "the regent of all things," "the supreme ruler who casts an eye on expeditions," "the vanquisher of the king's enemies," "the breaker-up of opposition," with special influence which caused monarchs "to assemble their chariots and their warriors;" he "goes forth with their armies," and chases their enemies before them, and brings them back to their own country with victory. But, on the contrary, this warrior bearing his name is thoroughly routed, though he was the chief warrior of a nation the males of whom were all trained to war, and though he had seven hundred chariots, a great host among those small nations, whatever the numbers may mean, in a time when numeration was imperfect and unreliable.

Verses 19. When all the kings who were his servants or vassals went over in their allegiance to David, it will be remembered that David dedicated to Jehovah a thousand shields. In 2 Sam. 5. 3, we saw that David made a "league" with the elders of Israel. He now makes a "league" with all those who had been vassals of Hadadezer. This government by "leagues" was of a very loose sort, often meaning that Asiatic tribes expected more of the king than they should render him, and the tribes were ready to turn to a new sovereign on the slightest cause. Russia, far more than any power

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