

of other foreign powers had been severe and debasing, but when expelled, they retired to their own countries. The Philistines were the most dangerous, persistent and implacable foes to the people of Israel. They, at this time, occupied the frontier towns, and dictated terms to the subjugated tribes. There was no united action among the people, and it would have been difficult, if not impracticable, to raise an army of sufficient force and valor to resist the insolent and encroaching foe. So that if deliverance were to be granted them, it would seem to be attainable only by some valorous, stalwart, self-sacrificing hero; and such a man was raised up by God in the quiet, godly home of Manoah and his pious, spiritually-minded wife. He was their only son, a child of great promise and grand endowments. Owing probably to the obvious vigor of his bodily powers, even in infancy, his parents named him Samson, which signifies strength, and the issue proved the name to have been remarkably appropriate.

Samson is, in many respects, the most wonderful hero of history, sacred or profane. His life began in the supernatural and marvellous, was filled with incidents of the wildest and most thrilling romance, and ended in a most fearful and appalling tragedy. In his private life, in his public services, and in his strange, prodigious achievements, he is without a parallel. His exploits exceed even the mythic labors of the legendary Hercules, of whom he is supposed by many to have been the original type. "Every ancient nation which had writers who left monuments of their country's glory had a Hercules of its own, forged on the same plan. Varro reckons more than forty, and Cicero reckons six." "In fact, it appears that Samson, Judge of the Israelites, particularly mentioned in the Book of Judges, and by Josephus, is the original and essential Hercules of fable; and although the poets have united some particulars drawn from Moses and Joshua and have added their own inventions, yet the most capital and considerable belong to Samson; and are distinguished by characteristics so peculiar to him as render him easily discernible throughout the whole."

Endowed with superhuman strength, guided and sustained by the Spirit of God, under a divine commission, he performed great feats, accomplished the most astounding achievements, and obtained the most notable victories. Single-handed, and without any resources, he again and again discomfited the enemies of his nation, and brought deliverance to his people. Many of his startling and celebrated deeds of heroic valor are so connected with his personal passions and quarrels—are so marked by rollicking adventure, arrant foolhardiness and wanton wilfulness, as seriously to detract from the dignity and sacredness of his character as a man and a ruler. A sort of comic vein, indeed, runs through all the earlier adventures of this valiant, doughty, stout-hearted warrior, which suggests the idea of a sportive, puissant giant amusing himself with huge practical jokes. The fierce and fiery ebullitions of