1 Samuel 17:10,26 (William John Hocking, Editor) 211624

The Believer's Monthly Magazine: Volume 3, Seizing the Lion's Beard. (17:10,26)

MY DEAR YOUNG FRIENDS, — The stripling David in the valley of Elah confronting the gigantic champion of the Philistines is an instance of the immeasurable superiority which faith in God gives a man above those who lack such faith. Masses of armed men covered the hill tops on each side of the valley—Israelite and Philistine respectively; but God was in the thoughts of neither the one nor the other. The invaders regarded their opponents with the utmost disdain and contempt; while the chosen people of God shivered with fear and dismay at the sight of their foes. The one trembled, the other vaunted, for the same reason: both forgot Jehovah of hosts.

But David did not forget Him. Indeed it was the insult to Jehovah's name implied in Goliath's defiance that roused the pious shepherd lad, and forced him out to stand in the breach. "Who is this uncircumcised Philistine that he should defy the armies of the living God?" This expressed David's view of the situation; for he was not at all misled by the words of the giant of Gath who stood and cried, "I defy the armies of Israel" (1 Sam. 17:10, 26). Nay, nay, whatever the enemy might allege as to the nation's weakness and degeneracy, the armies of Israel were still the armies of the living God. And upon the irrevocable promise and changeless purpose of Jehovah the man of faith took his courageous stand; what power could overthrow him?

Such a position, too, was the nobler in its strong contrast with thousands of his countrymen cowering in craven-hearted unbelief before the menaces of their foe.

But while we admire and long to emulate the faith of this dauntless youth, we ought to recollect that this faith had been exercised by him before. David had already proved for himself what it is to put faith in God. When he went down single-handed into the valley of Elah to encounter this Philistine colossus, he was fortified by the remembrance of his own past experience of Jehovah's delivering power.

The young man spoke of this experience to the incredulous Saul who doubted the result of the combat. He told the king that while he kept his father's sheep in the wild solitudes of the mountains of Judea, a lion came and took a lamb out of the flock. "And," he says, with all the artlessness of the truthteller, "I went out after him, and smote him, and delivered it out of his mouth; and when he arose against me, I caught him by his beard, and smote him, and slew him." And the faith that won the victory in the wilderness of Judea would not fail him in the valley of Elah. So David believed; and in the strength of his faith he went forth and conquered. The smooth stone from the brook sped unerringly to its mark in the defiant brow of Goliath. The giant toppled and fell prone to the earth; and with him fell the boastful hopes of the Philistine army. They fled; and the "ruddy" youth from Bethlehem-Judah was the victor that day.

The lesson lying upon the surface in this incident is an important one to lay hold of. Private victories must precede public ones. It is in the privacy of your own personal life and experience that you have to learn to overcome the wicked one through faith. Indeed one of the marks of having advanced from spiritual infancy to spiritual youth is the defeat of the foe. The apostle John describes the young men as those who are strong, having the word of God abiding in them and having overcome the wicked one (1 John 2:14).

But this conquest is first of all an unseen one. In the secrecy of your own heart the battle must be waged. There you must face the tempter when he seeks to rob you of what is committed to you. Seize him "boldly by the beard," and he will flee from you (James 4:7; 1 Peter 5:9). The victory then is yours, though no human eye behold it.

Observe that the occasion on which David so signally proved how sufficient Jehovah's power was to deliver him from the foe occurred in the ordinary performance of his humdrum duties as a shepherd lad. And we too, in our daily lives, must learn how to "resist the devil." You have the more need to be wary, because you have a traitor within you. Self always inclines to yield to the temptation. Faith only enables you to withstand in a courage which comes from above.

You seek to exhibit a spirit of kindness towards those around you, but your efforts are received with un-thankfulness and regarded with suspicion. Are you offended? You find yourself the butt of scorn and ridicule, the subject of biting sarcasm, the object of incessant leering and scoffing. On which side is the victory? You possess a propensity to fits of violent temper and sulkiness; you are self-willed and dislike to be interfered with by the advice and experience of others. Do you not see the paw of the lion? You are inclined to vanity; you have persuaded yourself that your personal appearance is highly prepossessing, or that your mental abilities are phenomenal for one of your years, and that consequently you are rapidly becoming the center of a wide circle of admirers. Do not be deceived; the robber is making a raid upon you—he who comes to kill and to destroy. Retire to your chamber; there seek the power of God. Pray for more vigilance, more resoluteness of purpose, more sense of the importance of keeping back the powers of evil that seek to invade your life, as well as of reckoning yourself "dead" to that which is within you. Seek earnestly to be conformed to Christ in all you do and are.

I am, Yours faithfully, "Yod."