

NEW LIFE OF DAVID

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NEW LIFE OF DAVID.

IN compiling a biographical account of any ancient personage, impediments often arise from the uncertainty, party bias, and prejudiced coloring of the various traditions out of which, the biography is collected. Here no such obstacle is met with, no such bias can be imagined, for, in giving the life of David, we extract it from an all-wise God's perfect and infallible revelation to man, and thus are enabled to present it to our readers free from any doubt, uncertainty, or difficulty. There is perhaps the fear that the manner of this brief sketch may be adjudged to be within the operation of such common law as wisely protects the career of the saints from mere sinful common-sense criticism; but as the matter is derived from the authorised version for which England is indebted to James, of royal and pious memory, this new life of David may be safely left to the impartial judgment of Mr. Justice North, aided by the charitable and pious counsel of Sir Hardinge Giffard. The latter, who has had more than one criminal client for whom he has most ably pleaded, might be relied on to make out a strong, if not a good, case for punishing any one who is unfair to the man after God's own heart. Mr. Justice Stephen has furnished me with some slight guide in his notice of Voltaire's play called "David:" —

"It constitutes, perhaps, the bitterest attack on David's character ever devised by the wit of man, but the effect is produced al-most exclusively by the juxtaposition, with hardly any alteration, of a number of texts from different parts of David's history. It would be a practical impossibility to charge a jury in such a case, so as to embody Lord Coleridge's view of the law. The judge would have to say: 'It is lawful to say that David was a murderer, an adulterer, a treacherous tyrant who passed his last moments in giving directions for assassinations; but you must observe the decencies of controversy. You must not arrange your facts in such a way as to mix ridicule with indignation, or to convey too striking a contrast between the solemn character of the documents from which the extracts are made, and the nature of the extracts themselves, and of the facts to which they relate.'"

It is in the spirit of this paragraph that I have penned the present life.

The father of David was Jesse, an Ephrathite of Bethlehem Judah, who had either eight sons, (1 Samuel xvi, 10-11, and xvii, 12), or only seven (1 Chronicles, ii, 13-15), and David was either the eighth son or the seventh. Some may think this a difficulty, but such persons will only be those who rely on their own intellectual faculties, or who have been misled by arithmetic. If you are in any doubt, consult some qualified divine, and he will explain to you that there is really no difference between eight and seven when rightly understood with prayer and faith, by the help of the spirit. Arithmetic is an utterly infidel acquirement, and one which all true

believers should eschew. The proposition that three times one are one is a fundamental article of the Christian faith. When young, David tended his father's sheep, and apparently while so doing he gained a character for being cunning in playing a mighty valiant man, a man of war and prudent in matters. He obtained his reputation as a soldier early and wonderfully, for he was "but a youth;" and God's most holy word asserts that when going to fight with Goliath, he tried to walk in armor and could not, because he was not accustomed to it (1 Samuel xvii, 39 *c.f.* Douay version). Samuel shortly prior to this anointed David, who, while yet a lad, had been selected by the Lord to be King of the Jews in place and stead of Saul, who had wickedly disobeyed the commands of the Lord, who in his infinite love and mercy had said (1 Sam. xv, 3): "Now go and smite Amalek, and utterly destroy all that they have, and spare them not; but slay both man and woman, infant and suckling, ox and sheep, camel and ass." Saul, however, behaved unrighteously, for he "spared Agag, and the best of the sheep, and of the oxen, and of the fatlings, and the lambs, and all that was good, and would not utterly destroy them." This not unnaturally irritated and annoyed the Lord. "Then came the word of the Lord unto Samuel, saying, It repenteth me that I have set up Saul to be King: for he is turned back from following me, and hath not performed my commandments," and the Lord bid Samuel fill a "horn with oil," and sent Samuel, who anointed David the son of Jesse in the midst of his brethren, and the spirit of the Lord came upon David from that day forward. If a man takes to spirits his life will probably be one of vice, misery, and misfortune; and if spirits take to him, the result in the end is nearly the same. Every evil deed which the Bible records as having been done by David was after the spirit of the Lord had so come upon him. Saul being King of Israel, an evil spirit from the Lord troubled him. The devil has, it is said, no love for music, and Saul was recommended to have David to play on a harp, in order that harmony might drive this evil spirit back to the Lord who sent it. The Jew's harp was played successfully, and Saul was often relieved from the evil spirit by David's ministrations. There is nothing miraculous in this; at the People's Concerts many a working man has been relieved from the "blue devils" by a stirring chorus, a merry song, or patriotic anthem; and on the contrary many evil spirits have been aroused by the most unmusical performances of the followers of General Booth. David was appointed armor-bearer to the King; but curiously enough, this office does not appear to have interfered with his duties as a shepherd; indeed, the care of his father's sheep took precedence over the care of the king's armor, and in the time of war he "went and returned to feed his father's sheep." Perhaps his "prudence in matters" induced him thus to take care of himself.

A Philistine, one Goliath of Gath (whose height was six cubits and a span, or about nine feet six inches, at a low computation) had defied the armies of Israel. This Goliath was (to use the vocabulary of a reverend sporting correspondent to a certain religious newspaper) a veritable champion of the heavy weights. He carried in all about two cwt. of offensive and defensive armor upon his person, and his challenge had great weight. None dared accept it amongst the soldiers of Saul until the arrival of David, who brought some food for his brethren. David volunteered to fight the giant, but Elias, David's brother, having mocked the presumption of the offer, and Saul objecting that the venturesome lad was not competent to take part in a conflict so dangerous, David related how he pursued a lion and a bear, how he caught him by his beard and slew him. Which animal it was that David thus bearded the text does not say. The Douay says it was "a lion or a bear." To those who have chased the king of the forests or studied the habits of bears, the whole story looks, on an attentive reading, "very like a whale." David was permitted to fight the giant; his equipment was simple, a sling and stones, and with these, from a distance, he slew the giant. Some suggest that the weapon Goliath fell under was the long bow. This suggestion is rendered probable by the book itself. One verse says that David slew the Philistine with a stone, another verse says that he slew him with the giant's own sword, while in 2 Samuel xxi, 19, we are told that Goliath the Gittite was slain by Elhanan. Our translators, who have great regard for our faith and more for their pulpits, have kindly inserted the words "the brother of" before Goliath. This emendation saves the true believer from the difficulty of understanding how Goliath of Gath could have been killed by different men at different times. David was previously well known to Saul, and was much loved and favored by that monarch. He was also seen by the king before he went forth to do battle with the gigantic Philistine. Yet (as if to verify the proverb that kings have short memories for their friends) Saul had forgotten his own armor-bearer and much-loved harpist, and was obliged to ask Abner who David was. Abner, captain of the king's host, familiar with the person of the armor-bearer to the king, of course knew David well; he therefore answered: "As thy soul liveth, O king, I cannot tell." David, having made known his parentage, was appointed to high command by Saul; but the Jewish women over-praised David, and thus displeased the king. One day the evil spirit from the Lord came upon Saul and he prophesied. Men often talk great nonsense under the influence of spirits, which they sometimes regret when sober. It is, however, an interesting fact in ancient spiritualism to know that Saul prophesied with a devil in him. Under the joint influence of the devil and prophecy, Saul tried to kill David with a javelin, and this was repeated, even after David had married the king's

daughter (whose wedding he had secured by the slaughter of two hundred men). Saul then asked his son and servants to kill David; but Jonathan, Saul's son, loved David, "And Saul hearkened unto the voice of Jonathan: and Saul sware, As the Lord liveth, he shall not be slain." It is interesting as showing the utility of oaths that after having thus sworn Saul was more determined than ever to kill David. To save his own life David fled to Naioth, and Saul sent there messengers to arrest David; but three sets of the king's messengers having in turn all become prophets, Saul went himself, and the spirit of the Lord came upon him also, and he stripped off his clothes and prophesied as hard as the rest, "laying down naked all that day and all that night."

David lived in exile for some time in godly company, having collected round him every one that was in distress, and every one that was in debt, and every one that was discontented. Saul made several fruitless attempts to effect his capture, with no better result than that he twice placed himself in the power of David, who twice showed the mercy to a cruel king which he never conceded to an unoffending people. David having obtruded himself upon Achish, King of Gath, doubtful of his safety, feigned madness to cover his retreat. He then lived a precarious life, sometimes levying a species of black mail upon defenceless farmers. Having applied to one farmer to make him some compensation for permitting the farm to go unrobbed, and his demand not having been complied with, David, who is a man after the heart of God of mercy, immediately determined to murder the farmer and all his household for their wicked reluctance in submitting to his extortions. The wife of farmer Nabal compromised the matter. David "*accepted her person*" and ten days after Nabal was found dead in his bed. David afterwards went with 600 men and lived under the protection of Achish, King of Gath, and while thus residing (being the anointed one of God who says, "Thou shalt not steal") he robbed the inhabitants of the surrounding places. Being also obedient to the statute, "Thou shalt do no murder," he slaughtered, and left neither man nor woman alive to report his robberies to King Achish; and as he "always walked in the ways" of a God to whom "lying lips are an abomination," he made false reports to Achish in relation to his actions. Of course this was all for the glory of God, whose ways are not as our ways. Soon the Philistines were engaged in another of the constantly recurring conflicts with the Israelites. Who offered them the help of himself and hand? Who offered to make war on his own countrymen? David, the man after God's own heart, who obeyed God's statutes and who walked in his ways, to do only that which was right in the sight of God. The Philistines rejected the traitor's aid, and prevented the consummation of this baseness. While David was making this unpatriotic proffer of his services to the Philistines, his

own city of Ziklag was captured by the Amalekites, who were doubtless endeavoring to avenge some of the most unjustifiable robberies and murders perpetrated by David and his followers in their country. David's own friends evidently thought that this misfortune was a retribution for David's crimes, for they spoke of stoning him. The Amalekites had captured and carried off everything, but they do not seem to have maltreated or killed any of their enemies. David was less merciful. He pursued them, recaptured the spoil, and spared not a man of them, save 400 who escaped on camels. In consequence of the death of Saul, David was elevated to the throne of Judah, while Ishbosheth, a son of Saul, was made king of Israel. But Ishbosheth having been assassinated, David slew the assassins, when they, hoping for reward, brought him the news, and he reigned ultimately over Israel also.

As religious readers are doubtless aware, the Lord God of Israel, after the time of Moses, usually dwelt on the top of an ark or box, between two figures of gold; and on one occasion David made a journey with his followers to Baal, to bring thence the ark of God. They placed it on a new cart drawn by oxen. On the journey the oxen stumbled, and consequently shook the cart. One of the drivers, whose name was Uzzah, possibly fearing that God might be tumbled to the ground, took hold of the ark, apparently in order to steady it, and prevent it from overturning. God, who is a God of love, was much displeased that any one should presume to do any such act of kindness, and killed Uzzah on the spot as a punishment for his sin. This shows that if a man sees the Church of God tumbling down, he should never try to prop it up; if it be not strong enough to save itself, the sooner it falls the better for humankind — that is, if they keep away from it while it is falling. David was much displeased that the Lord had killed Uzzah; in fact, David seems to have wished for a monopoly of slaughter, and always manifested displeasure when any killing was done unauthorised by himself. Being displeased, David would not take the ark to Jerusalem, but left it in the house of Obed Edom; then, as the Lord proved more kind to Obed Edom than he had done to Uzzah, David determined to bring the ark away, and did so, dancing before the ark in a state of semi-nudity, for which he was reproached by Michal. Lord Campbell's Act is intended to hinder the publication of indecencies, but the pages of the Book which the law affirms to be God's most holy word do not come within the scope of the Act, and lovers of obscene language may therefore have legal gratification so long as the Bible shall exist. The God of Israel, who had been leading a wandering life for many years, and who had "walked in a tent and in a tabernacle," and "from tent to tent," and "from one tabernacle to another," and "who had not dwelt in any house" since the time that he

brought the Israelites out of Egypt, was offered “an house for him to dwell in,” but he declined to accept it during the lifetime of David, although he promised to permit the son of David to erect him such an abode. David being now a powerful monarch, and having many wives and concubines, saw one day the beautiful wife of one of his soldiers. To see with this licentious monarch was to crave for the gratification of his lust. The husband Uriah was fighting for the king, yet David was base enough to steal his wife’s virtue during Uriah’s absence in the field of battle. “Thou shalt not commit adultery” was one of the commandments, yet we are told by God of this David, that he was one “who kept my commandments, and who followed me with all his heart to do only that which was right in mine eyes” (1 Kings, xiv, 8). David having seduced the wife, sent for her husband, wishing to make him condone his wife’s dishonor. In modern England under a Stuart or a Brunswick, Uriah might have become a Marquis or a Baron. Some hold that virtue in rags is less worth than vice when coroneted. Uriah would not be thus tricked, and David, the pious David, coolly planned, and without mercy caused to be executed, the treacherous murder of Uriah. God is all-just; and David having committed adultery and murder, God punished and killed an innocent child, which had no part or share in David’s crime, and never chose that it should be born from the womb of Bathsheba. After this king David was even more cruel and merciless than before. Previously he had systematically slaughtered the inhabitants of Moab, now he sawed people with saws, cut them with harrows and axes, and made them pass through brick-kilns. Yet of this man, God said he “did that which was right in mine eyes.” So bad a king, so treacherous a man, a lover so inconstant, a husband so adulterous, was of course a bad father, having bad children. We are little surprised, therefore, to read that his son Amnon robbed of her virtue his own sister, David’s daughter Tamar, and that Amnon was afterwards slain by his own brother, David’s son Absalom, and we are scarcely astonished that Absalom himself, on the house-top, in the sight of all Israel, should complete his father’s shame by an act worthy a child of God’s select people. Yet these are God’s chosen race, and this is the family of the man “who walked in God’s ways all the days of his life.”

God, who is all-wise and all-just, and who is not a man that he should repent, repented that he had made Saul king because Saul spared one man. In the reign of David the same good God sent a famine for three years on the descendants of Abraham, and upon being asked his reason for thus starving his chosen ones, the reply of the Deity was that he sent the famine on the subjects of David because Saul slew the Gibeonites. Satisfactory reason! — because Oliver Cromwell slew the Royalists, God will punish the subjects of Charles the Second. One reason is, to profane eyes, equivalent

to the other, but a bishop or even a rural dean would soon show how remarkably God's justice was manifested. David was not behindhand in justice. He had sworn to Saul that he would not cut off his seed — *i.e.*, that he would not destroy Saul's family. He therefore took two of Saul's sons, and five of Saul's grandsons, and gave them up to the Gibeonites, who hung them. Strangely wonderful are the ways of the Lord! Saul slew the Gibeonites, therefore years afterwards God starves Judah. The Gibeonites hang men who have nothing to do with the crime of Saul, except that they are his descendants, and then we are told "the Lord was intreated for the land." The anger of the Lord being kindled against Israel, he, wanting some excuse for punishing the descendants of Jacob, moved David to number his people. The Chronicles say that the tempter was Satan, and pious people may thus learn what there is of distinction between God and Devil. Philosophers would urge that both personifications are founded in the ignorance of the masses, and the continuance of the myth will cease with the credulousness of the people. David caused a census to be taken of the tribes of Israel and Judah. There is a trival disagreement of about 270,000 soldiers between Samuel and Chronicles, but readers must not allow so slight an inaccuracy as this to stand between them and heaven. What are 270,000 men when looked at prayerfully? That any doubt should arise is to a devout mind at the same time profane and preposterous. Statisticians suggest that 1,570,000 soldiers form a larger army than the Jews are likely to have possessed; but if God is omnipotent, there is no reason to limit his power of miraculously increasing or decreasing the armament of the Jewish nation. David, it seems, did wrong in numbering his people, but we are never told that he did wrong in robbing or murdering their neighbors, or in pillaging peaceful agriculturists. David said: "I have sinned," and for this an all-merciful God brought a pestilence on the people, and murdered 70,000 Israelites, for an offence which their ruler had committed. The angel who was engaged in this terrible slaughter stood somewhere between heaven and earth, and stretched forth his hand with a drawn sword to destroy Jerusalem itself; but even the bloodthirsty Deity of the Bible "repented him of the evil," and said to the angel: "It is enough." Many volumes might be written to answer the enquiries — where did the angel stand, and on what? Of what metal was the sword, and where was it made? As it was a drawn one, where was the scabbard? and did the angel wear a sword-belt? Examined in a pious frame of mind, much holy instruction may be derived from the attempt to solve these solemn problems.

David now grows old and weak, and at last his death-hour comes. Oh! for the dying words of the Psalmist! What pious instruction shall we derive from the death-bed scene of the man

after God's own heart! Listen to the last words of Judah's expiring monarch. You who have been content with the pious frauds and forgeries perpetrated with reference to the death-beds and dying words of the great, the generous, the witty Voltaire; the manly, the self-denying, the incorruptible Thomas Paine; the humane, simple, child-like man, yet mighty poet, Shelley — you who have turned away from these with unwarranted horror — come with me to the death-couch of the special favorite of God. Bathsheba's child stands by his side. Does any thought of the murdered Uriah rack old David's brain, or has a tardy repentance effaced the bloody stain from the pages of his memory? What does the dying David say? Does he talk of cherubs, angels and heavenly choirs? Nay, none of these things passes his lips. Does he make a confession of his crime-stained life, and beg his son to be a better king, a truer man, a more honest citizen, a wiser father? Nay, not so — no word of sorrow, no sign of regret, no expression of remorse or repentance escapes his lips. What does the dying David say? This foul monster whom God has made king; this red-handed robber, whose life has been guarded by "our Father which art in Heaven;" this perjured king, whose lying lips have found favor in the sight of God, and who, when he dies, is safe for Heaven. It is written: "There shall be more joy in heaven before God over one sinner that repenteth than over ninety and nine righteous men." Does David repent? Nay, like the ravenous wolf, which, tasting blood, is made more eager for the prey, he too yearns for blood; and with his dying breath begs his son to bring the grey hairs of two old men down to the grave with blood. And this is God's anointed king, the chief one of God's chosen people.

The learned and pious Puffendorf explains that David having only sworn not himself to kill Shimei (1 Kings, ii, 8) there was no perjury on the part of David in persuading Solomon to contrive the killing from which David had sworn to personally abstain.

David is alleged to have written several Psalms, but of this there is little evidence beyond pious assertion. In one of these the psalmist addresses God in pugilistic phraseology, praising Deity that he had smitten all his enemies on the cheek-bone, and broken the teeth of the ungodly. In these days when "muscular Christianity" is not without advocates, the metaphor which presents God as a sort of magnificent Benicia Boy may find many admirers. In the eighteenth Psalm, David describes God as with "smoke coming out of his nostrils and fire out of his mouth," by which "coals were kindled." He represents God as coming down from heaven, and says: "he rode upon a cherub." The learned Parkhurst gives a likeness of a one-legged, four-winged, four-faced animal, part lion, part bull, part eagle, part man, and if a cloven foot be any criterion, part devil also. This description, if correct, will give some idea to the faithful of the wonderful character of the

equestrian feats of Deity. In addition to a cherub, God has other means of conveyance at his disposal, if David be not in error when he says that the chariots of the Lord are 20,000.

In Psalm xxvi the writer adds hypocrisy in addition to his other vices. He has the impudence to tell God that he has been a man of integrity and truth, and that he has avoided evil-doers, although, if we are to believe Psalm xxxviii, the hypocrite must have already been subject to a loathsome disease — a penalty consequent on his licentiousness and criminality. In another Psalm, David the liar tells God that “he that telleth lies shall not tarry in my sight.” To understand David’s pious nature we must study his prayer to God against an enemy (Psalm cix, 6-14): “Set thou a wicked man over him; and let Satan stand at his right hand. When he shall be judged, let him be condemned: and let his prayer become sin. Let his days be few: and let another take his office. Let his children be fatherless, and his wife a widow. Let his children be continually vagabonds, and beg: let them seek their bread also out of their desolate places. Let the extortioner catch all that he hath; and let the strangers spoil his labor. Let there be none to extend mercy unto him: neither let there be any to favor his fatherless children. Let his posterity be cut off; and in the generation following let their name be blotted out. Let the iniquity of his fathers be remembered with the Lord; and let not the sin of his mother be blotted out.”

A full consideration of the life of David must give great help to the orthodox in promoting and sustaining faith. While spoken of by Deity as obeying all the statutes and keeping all the commandments, we are astonished to find that murder, theft, lying, adultery, licentiousness, and treachery are amongst the crimes which may be laid to his charge. David was a liar, God is a God of truth; David was merciless, God is merciful, and of long suffering; David was a thief, God says: “Thou shalt not steal;” David was a murderer, God says: “Thou shalt do no murder;” “David took the wife of Uriah, and “accepted” the wife of Nabal, God says: “Thou shalt not covet thy neighbor’s wife.” Yet, notwithstanding all these things, David was the man after God’s own heart!

Had this Jewish monarch any redeeming traits in his character? Was he a good citizen? If so, the Bible has carefully concealed every action which would entitle him to such an appellation. Was he a kind and constant husband? To whom? To which of his many wives and mistresses? Was he grateful to those who aided him in his hour of need? Rather, like the serpent which, half-frozen by the wayside, is warmed into new life in the traveller’s breast, and then treacherously stings his succorer with his poisoned fangs, so David robbed and murdered the friends and allies of the King of Gath, who afforded him protection against the pursuit of Saul. Does his patriotism outshine his many

vices? Does his love of country efface his many misdoings? Not even this. David was a heartless traitor who volunteered to serve against his own countrymen, and would have done so had not the Philistines rejected his treacherous help. Was he a good king? So say the priesthood now; but where is the evidence of his virtue? His crimes brought plague and pestilence on his subjects, and his reign is a continued succession of wars, revolts, and assassinations, plottings and counterplots.

The life of David is a dark blot on the page of human history, fit in companionship for the biographies of Constantine the Great and Henry VIII; but it is through David that the genealogies of Jesus are traced, and without David there would be no Christian faith.