

The Story of Samson.*

ONCE upon a time, as the story books say, there was a man by the name of Samson. Before he was born his mother had no son. This was a very serious matter among the Israelites, as they had a tradition that God was to send a messiah among them and he was to be born to some mother; if a woman had no son there was no possibility of the honor being conferred upon her. Women were of little consequence and daughters were hardly welcomed when born. Women were bought and sold like cattle even by the Biblical people who were God's chosen ones.

Finally an angel appeared to the woman and told her she was to become the mother of a son. He was to be a "Nazarite" all the days of his life. That is, he was not to touch liquor of any description, or grapes, or any fruit of the vine, or eat of any unclean thing. He was also denied the use of a razor, and his hair and beard must not be touched by any sharp tool. Such people were Nazarites, "sacred unto the Lord". (Num. vi.) This may explain why so many so-called "cranks" wear long hair and beard.

Samson's first appearance in a public character was when he went to visit Timnath. Previously he had been moved by the "spirit of the Lord" in the camp of Dan, but we are not told of any wonderful thing he did. He went down to Timnath and there was smitten with the charms of a woman of the Philistines. Shortly after, Samson and his father and mother again visited Timnath. While on his way down "a young lion roared against him". The spirit of the Lord came upon him and "he rent him as he would have rent a kid, and he had nothing in his hand". There is a great difference of opinion concerning this event. Biblical illustrators picture him with one of the lion's jaws in each hand, engaged in tearing them apart. With his jaws a lion can crack a large bone as easily as we can crack a peanut shell; the strength necessary to accomplish this feat can then be imagined. One blow from a lion's paw will kill the strongest man. What was this lion doing with his two front paws while this interesting conflict was going on? As Samson "told not his father or mother what he had done" (Judges 14:6), he must have fought his battle without tearing his clothes or flesh or getting any blood on himself. If his clothes had been torn or bloody or if he had been wounded, they would naturally have asked the cause. It would be most unreasonable to suppose that he could kill a lion with his bare hands

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without getting a scratch on them. In fact, it would not be reasonable to suppose a man could kill a lion with his bare hands.

After a time he returned and turned aside to look at the carcass of the lion. When he reached the place he found that bees had built a nest in it! What peculiar bees!

Men who handle bees claim that a strong odor on their clothes will cause the bees to get angry and sting them. If they sting a person who is not clean, how long would they stay in the putrefying carcass of a lion in a hot climate? I would prefer Samson and his father and mother had the honey from such a bee hive than myself.

Samson then gave the riddle to thirty young men and bet they could not solve it. They bet thirty changes of garments and thirty sheets (or shirts) they could. (Judges xiv. 12). Samson foolishly told his wife the answer to the riddle and she told the young men. "The spirit of the Lord came upon him" again and he went down to Ashkelon and killed thirty men, took their clothes and paid his bet with them. (Judges xiv. 19). Why did the people of Ashkelon permit this? What were the thirty whom he killed doing all the time he was killing them? Did they sit idly by waiting their turn?

"And Samson went and caught three hundred foxes, and took firebrands (margin, torches) and turned tail to tail, and put a firebrand in the midst between two tails.

"And when he had set the brands on fire, he let them go into the standing corn of the Philistines, and burnt up both shocks and also the standing corn, with the vineyards and olives." (Judges xv. 4-5).

What a task! Foxes are the slyest, most cunning animals known. It is almost impossible to catch them, as they avoid anything but the most deceitfully laid trap. They have been known to spring traps by schemes that would do credit to a human being.

An old recipe for cooking a hare reads: "First, catch your hare." Samson's first job would be to catch 300 foxes, and as dead foxes could not run, he must catch them alive. They are very ferocious and bite fiercely; imagine the time he must have had, after catching them, to care for them and tie their tails together. Then to fasten a firebrand between each two tails, and after getting the entire lot fastened, the difficulty of setting them afire! Remember that all this time he was in an enemy's country; he had to care for the foxes, keep them quiet while he was tying them together, and prevent the Philistines learning his object and taking steps to prevent its consummation. The job was almost equal to the conundrum that presented itself to Noah

when he attempted to put all the animals into the ark.

But what would two animals do if fastened together in this way? The person who thinks they would run is very much mistaken. Instead of running they would turn upon each other and fight until they killed each other, or loosed themselves. But Samson, or the one who wrote this story, knew but little of the habits of animals.

It has always been a source of wonder as to how these animals were fastened together. The old Scotch preacher decided that they had tails 300 feet long. He afterwards reduced it somewhat, but still left them exceedingly long. But, seriously, how could these foxes' tails be tied together? One man could not accomplish the feat, if his life depended upon it, especially in an enemy's country and for such a purpose.

After this occurrence, the Philistines investigated the matter and, in retaliation, burned Samson's wife and father-in-law. This angered him and he "smote them hip and thigh with great slaughter; and he went and dwelt in the top of the rock Etam." Again we ask, why did the Philistines permit him to do these things? They had a great army, held the children of Judah as a slave nation, yet they permitted one of these slaves to kill, rob, burn and pillage about as he pleased!

Evidently he did not get a scratch in these combats, as he was ready to hold off 3,000 men if they did not agree to his terms very soon after "smiting them with great slaughter."

When Samson went up into the rock, the Philistines followed him with an army. The children of Judah saw them coming and asked the reason. When told what Samson had done, 3,000 men of Judah went up into the rock to get him. Even with this force, Samson was able to dictate terms of surrender before he permitted himself to be bound. Think of 3,000 armed men permitting one man to dictate terms to them!

He finally permitted them to bind him and take him down to the Philistines. And when he reached them, "the spirit of the Lord" again came upon him, he broke the bands that bound him and took "the jaw bone of an ass and killed 1,000 men with it!" (Judges xv. 15-16).

What were these fighting men, who were numerous enough to scare 3,000 men of Judah, doing all the time Samson was killing 1,000 of their number? If he killed one a minute, it would have taken him 16 hours, 40 minutes to complete the job. But if he killed one man every five minutes, he would have beaten the records of warfare. To kill 1,000 men at this rate would have taken 3 days, 11

hours, 20 minutes steady work, without allowing one minute for rest, sleep, eating or drinking.

But why did they permit this? He was solitary and alone, with a large army against him; he had a very primitive weapon which could not have been over 18 or 20 inches long or weigh over two or three pounds, making a liberal estimate of its size, while those opposed to him were men of war, armed with bows and arrows, spears, javelins and other weapons with which they could inflict a death wound long before Samson could get within striking distance. Their country did not extend but a few miles in each direction, and in less than the time stated they could have gathered all of their men of war together. Their army was large enough to conquer and hold in subjection all the children of Judah including Samson.

Samson's next feat was to carry away the gates to the city of Gaza, gates, posts, bars and all, taking them to the top of a hill "that is before Hebron." As the gates of a city were supposed to be strong enough to prevent the entrance of a foe, and wide enough to permit the speedy entrance or exit of their own army, and Hebron was about 35 miles away, this was no easy job.

Samson had a great faculty of getting into trouble through women. All of his troubles were occasioned by this failing. But this may be the peculiarity of those who are "sacred unto the Lord," and may palliate the sexual crimes so frequently committed by the clergymen of today. But, like them, he kept at it until he got into trouble.

Again he loved a woman named Delilah and took her to be his wife. He was not always particular about marriage, as his trouble at Gaza was brought on by a visit to a "harlot." (Judges xvi. 1-3). Delilah attempted to learn the source of his strength, was told three untrue stories about it and each time she attempted to betray him to the Philistines. Not regarding his experiences, he finally told her how his strength might be cut off. It all lay in his hair. She was so unfaithful a wife that she cut off his hair, called in the Philistines and they bound him, put him in prison, put out his eyes, and finally bound him with fetters of brass.

After a time they held a feast to thank their god, Dagon, for delivering their enemy into their hands. While celebrating, in the exuberance of spirit, they called for Samson to be brought in to make sport for them. He was accordingly brought in and set between two pillars.

On the roof of the house were 3,000 men and women who watched while Samson made sport. Samson asked the "lad who was with