

Unto the Hills

By THOMAS A. DAVIS



DAVID abode in the wilderness in strong holds, and remained in a mountain in the wilderness of Ziph. And Saul sought him every day, but God delivered him not into his hand."

David, as king of Israel, anointed by Samuel the prophet of God, had been forced to flee before the vengeful wrath of a jealous monarch. Around him had gathered a company of some four hundred men. The Bible, describing them, says that "every one that was in distress, and every one that was in debt, and every one that was discontented, gathered themselves unto him."

There in the strongholds of the rugged mountains of southern Judah, David and his growing outlaw band sought refuge from the pursuing armies of Saul. Probably more than once a lone watchman, high on some commanding crag, saw the forces of Saul approaching, and had to hurry to warn his comrades that it was time to leave their retreat and find another sanctuary.

And thus they lived, day by day, in the grip of a constant tension and anxiety as to what the next hour had in store for them.

Let us, in imagination, grasp the ponderous hands of the great clock of time and turn back the years and the centuries until we find ourselves unseen

beholders in a rocky vale where David and his men have taken uncertain refuge.

The red sun has just rolled over the rim of the western mountains, and the shadowy armies of night are gathering swiftly in the valley. Israel's future king emerges from the dimness of his cave and stands outlined against the heavens, gazing silently at the glory of the sunset, which is flooding Caanan's sky with gold and silver and amber. Then his eyes drop to the shadowed hills lying all around him, and as he contemplates the scene, the heart of the sweet singer of Israel is stirred by all the beauty and majesty. The sensitive strings of his soul vibrate at the loveliness, and into his mind wells the melody of words that since has stirred a hundred generations and lifted the hearts of millions upward to his God.

I will lift up my eyes to the hills.
From whence does my help come?
My help comes from the Lord,
who made heaven and earth.

He will not let your foot be moved,
he who keeps you will not slumber.
Behold, he who keeps Israel
will neither slumber nor sleep.

The Lord is your keeper;
the Lord is your shade
on your right hand.

The sun shall not smite you by day,
nor the moon by night.

The Lord will keep you from all evil;
he will keep your life.
The Lord will keep
your going out and your coming in
from this time forth and for ever-
more.

(R.S.V.)

"Is my refuge from Saul to be found in these rapidly darkening hills?" David muses. "No, my real help comes from God. Although the sentinel standing guard outside this cave may inadvertently sleep, yet the unsleeping God of Israel is ever watchful. He keeps His own, and through the long, silent hours of darkness He will His vigil keep, and He will keep it forever."

Down through the centuries the words of the 121st psalm have brought comfort to the afflicted children of God. How many times the Waldensian, in his mountain fastness, must have read them and been cheered by their calm, trusting courage. And we, princes of the heavenly Israel, when we are forced to flee to the mountains to escape from the powers of earth, will be able to gaze around on the craggy peaks, snow crowned, and remember and draw comfort from the words of the refugee heir apparent of long ago.