

Goliath vs. David

By Robert Graves

Once an earlier David took
Smooth pebbles from the brook:
Out between the lines he went
To that one-sided tournament,
A shepherd boy who stood out fine
And young to fight a Philistine
Clad all in brazen mail. He swears
That he's killed lions, he's killed bears,
And those that scorn the God of Zion
Shall perish so like bear or lion.
But the historian of that fight
Had not the heart to tell it right.
Striding within javelin range
Goliath marvels at this strange
Goodly-faced boy so proud of strength.
David's clear eye measures the length;
With hand thrust back, he cramps one knee,
Poises a moment thoughtfully,
And hurls with a long vengeful swing.
The pebble, humming from the sling
Like a wild bee, flies a sure line
For the forehead of the Philistine,
Then... but there comes a brazen clink,
And quicker than a man can think
Goliath's shield parries each cast,
Clang! clang! and clang! was David's last.
Scorn blazes in the Giant's eye
Towering unhurt six cubits high.
Says foolish David, "Damn your shield,
And damn my sling, but I'll not yield."
He takes his staff of Mature oak,
A knotted shepherd-staff that's broke
The skull of many a wolf and fox
Come filching lambs from Jesse's flocks.
Loud laughs Goliath, and that laugh
Can scatter chariots like blown chaff
To rout: but David, calm and brave,
Holds his ground, for God will save.
Steel crosses wood, a flash, and oh!
Shame for Beauty's overthrow!
(God's eyes are dim, His ears are shut.)
One cruel backhand sabre cut -
"I'm hit, I'm killed," young David cries,
Throws blindly forward, chokes... and dies.
And look, spike-helmeted, grey, grim,
Goliath straddles over him.