**APOSTOLIC OPTIMISM AND OTHER SERMONS - SERMONS BY JOHN H. JOWETT**

**05. UNDER HIS WINGS by JOHN H. JOWETT**

*"He shall cover thee with His feathers, and under His wings shalt thou trust: His truth shall be thy shield and buckler. Thou shalt not be afraid for the terror by night, nor for the arrow that flieth by day, nor for the pestilence that walketh in darkness, nor for the destruction that wasteth at noonday."*

*Psalm 91:4-6*

"The terror by night!" "The arrow that flieth by day!" "The pestilence that walketh in darkness!" "The destruction that wasteth at noon-day!" What an appalling catalogue of foes! They are not peculiar to any one life; they haunt the precincts of all lives. They pervade all the changing hours and moods of the varied day. Every change in the day's march reveals a special and characteristic foe. If life is passing through a season of midnight blackness, it is exposed to the antagonism of the "terror by night." If life has emerged from the blackness, and is passing out into the sweet and broadening light, it becomes endangered by "the arrow that flieth by day." If life is luxuriating under the cloudless, glowing sky of a wealthy noontide, it is imperilled by "the destruction that wasteth at noon- day." If the shadows are gathering round again, and the light is fading from the sky, and life experiences the chill of the looming night, it may become the victim of "the pestilence that walketh in darkness." In one or other of these changing seasons we may probably all be found. There is an enemy about us in the noontide, and another in the midnight, and other foes inhabit the twilights of evening and dawn. Let us look a little while at these insidious enemies which beset the child of God.

"The terror by night." -- There are many things which become terrific and terrifying through the medium of the night. In the night-time faint sounds become laden with alarming significance. The creaking of the furniture in the room is almost suggestive of the opening of coffins. The stirring of the window by the moving night-air is suggestive of unfriendly approach. The scratching of a mouse at the wainscot becomes fraught with all manner of hostile invasion. As it is with the hearing, so is it with the sight. Vague outlines are filled out into portentous completeness. A bramble-bush represents itself as a crouching foe. A patch of snow in the corner of the field images itself as a sheeted ghost. "Things are not what they seem." In the night we are the victims of exaggeration. The commonplace becomes aggravated. The molehill becomes a mountain. Is not this equally true of the life of the Spirit? How everything rears itself into calamitous proportions when we are "down"! How the petty obstacles become enlarged and multiplied! We see things out of their proportions. We lose the calmness and clearness of our discernment. This is assuredly part of the enemy's forces, who is known as "the terror by night."

"The arrow that flieth by day" -- The night is past; the sweet fresh daylight is spread over the life; the terror born of exaggeration is forgotten. Is there no other foe? Enemies may be begotten of sunbeams as well as of darkness. The rays of light may become the arrows of death. How often it happens when men come into the clear happy light of favour, some better part of their being is slain! I wonder how many Sunday School teachers there are in the land with incomes of over £1000 a year! It is a most significant question. How is it that our Sunday Schools are staffed with comparatively poor men and women? You hear it said of one man, "Oh, he has lost interest in that now." Lost? That sounds like something slain. He has been pierced by "the arrow that flieth by day," and some holy sympathy has been destroyed. Or an arrow has transfixed his geniality, his spirit of good-fellowship, and the winsome thing lies dead. He may have been saved from the "terror by night"; he has become the victim of the "arrow that flieth by day."

"The destruction that wasteth at noonday" -- This only marks the emphasis of the dangers of the brightening day. It proclaims the perils of the cloudless noon. A frosty night can harden the land, and make it impervious to the ministry of the farmer, but the fierce sunshine can attain the same end. Winter can freeze the land until it is as hard as iron; a succession of June noontides can bake it quite as hard. Adversity can dry up a man's sympathies; prosperity can induce as severe a drought. When a man's life passes into the full blaze of a fierce prosperity, the bloom and beauty of his spirit may be easily wasted and destroyed. His leaf may wither. His reverence may be destroyed. His aspirations may be dried up. Pride may supplant the grace of lowliness, and cocksureness may jostle out the spirit of "a quiet walk with God."

"The pestilence that walketh in darkness" -- When the brightness of the afternoon begins to grow dim in the shadows of coming night, and a chill air touches the happy and comfortable spirit, there is great danger of the life becoming possessed by "the pestilence that walketh in darkness." It is not easy to keep a room sweet which is deprived of the sunlight. Fustiness begins to reign where the light is not a guest. We need the help of the Almighty to keep the life sweet when the sunshine is temporarily withdrawn. Everybody knows the ill plagues that stir about us when life comes into the shadows. There is the pestilence of fretfulness, and melancholy, and murmuring, and despair. The heart is sorely prone to open its gates to these types of pestilence when it first encounters the chilly shadows of an unexpected night.

Now let us turn away from the foes, and contemplate our resources. We have looked at the enemies; now let us look at our all-sufficient Friend. ''He shall cover thee with His feathers!" -- Against all possible types of enemies we may enjoy the protection of the great Mother-Bird, God. "He shall cover thee." The protection is to be perfectly complete. The wings would enfold us so that there is no possible opening for the dangerous approach of a foe. What may we not hope to gain in such a gracious refuge? We may expect to find healing. "The Sun of Righteousness shall arise with healing in His wings." If we have been wounded by the arrow, or affrighted by the terrors of the night, we shall be healed and comforted under the shadow of the Almighty. The troubled, frightened child, who has been startled m the darkness of the night, is hugged to its mother's breast, and speedily the panting, agitated little heart is comforted into rest again. And if we have been seeing things, and hearing things, out of their true shapes and proportions, the comforting breast of our God will restore us to quietness again. "Let not your heart be troubled." Let it not be agitated and alarmed. "Come unto Me, and I will give you rest." And if we may gain healing, we shall also surely gain security. In an old Puritan writer I have found the phrase, "Under His wings we have curing and securing." The quaint expression serves my purpose to-night. Under the wings of the Almighty our wounds are healed, and our alarms are stilled, and a joyful confidence pervades the soul. We may be in the night, but no terror will disturb us. We may be in the broadening light, but no arrow will wound us. We may be in the noontide, but no glare will consume us. We may be in the shadows, but no pestilence will corrupt us. "Under His wings will I take refuge."

"His truth shall be thy shield and buckler" -- The Psalmist is employing a variety of figures that he may make clear to us the amplitude of the protecting grace of God. He is not contented with the wealthy figure of the Mother-Bird; he adds another -- "Thy shield." And then, as if both figures were not sufficiently emphatic and effective, he adds a third -- "Thy buckler." The shield may appear to be only a partial defence, but the buckler is an all-surrounding coat of mail, covering the person on every side. There is no part left exposed to the enemy's attack. Before and behind, on the right hand and on the left, I am beset by the protective power of God. To what does the Psalmist attribute this mighty defence? "His truth." "His truth shall be thy Shield and Buckler." Perhaps we may express the pith of the Psalmist's meaning by using in place of the word "truth" the more personal word "truthfulness," or "trustworthiness." Mark, then, this: it is not our feelings which are to be our defence. Our feelings may be as changeable as a barometer, and building upon them we have no fixed, dependable resource. If I am to judge the defences of my religious life by the state and quality of my feelings, then I can clearly see that there are breaches in the wall every day, through which the evil one may make his attack. I turn from my feelings to the truthfulness of God. At once I pass from loose stones to compact rock. His truthfulness, the sure word of His promise, is to be my strong defence. "Hath He not said, and shall He not do it?" What hath He said about thy past? "Shall He not do it?" What hath He said about thy present? "Shall He not do it?" What hath He said concerning thy to-morrow? "Shall He not do it?" "His truth shall be thy shield and buckler."

"Thou shalt not be afraid" -- Hiding beneath His wings, and depending upon the sure word of His promise, "thou shalt not be afraid." Thy life shall be possessed by a fruitful quietness. Thou shalt reap "the harvest of a quiet eye." Every changing mood of the varied day shall bring thee good and not ill. The night-time shall bring its treasure. The morning shall be the minister of gracious dews. The noonday shall deposit its glory, "and at evening time it shall be light."