**BROOKS BY THE TRAVELLER'S WAY - ADDRESSES BY JOHN H. JOWETT**

**16. DESTRUCTION BY NEGLECT by JOHN H. JOWETT**

*"Make not provision for the flesh, to fulfil the lusts thereof."*

*Romans 13:14*

"Make not provision for the flesh." Let the evil thing die of famine. Let the ungodly suggestion perish for sheer lack of food. Let the presumptuous thought be destroyed by the withholding of appropriate support. Kill your spiritual enemies by starvation. Make no provision for them. This appears to be the principle advocated by the great Apostle for the culture of the spiritual life. Our enemies are to be conquered by neglect. It is a principle which prevails along purely material planes. Some two or three years ago, the Liverpool School of Tropical Science sent out a body of qualified experts to investigate the causes of the malarial fever which works immeasurable havoc in the lives of multitudes of our fellow citizens throughout the Empire. The investigations have resulted in the discovery of the malarial microbe, which is the germ of this awful and widespread destruction. A further discovery has been made of the nutriment by which the microbe is sustained, and now our scientists are seeking to discover the means by which the microbe and its sustenance may be divorced. Can we separate it from its nutriment? Can we isolate it from its means of maintenance? That is the problem, and there is every prospect of its being satisfactorily solved. Our experts propose fighting the malarial microbe by surrounding it with conditions of famine.

It is even so in the realm of the spirit. When the microbes of evil appear in the life, little baby germs, infantile suggestions of revolt, weaklings of unclean desire, the effective method of destroying them is by deliberate and studious neglect. We are to annihilate them by refusing proper maintenance. We are to see to it, that there is no food about the life on which they can thrive. We are to make no provision for them.

Now there is no method more absolutely efficient and assured in its working than the method of destruction by neglect. "Where no wood is, there the fire goeth out." Deny the fuel, you exhaust the flame. If the enemy in the spirit hunger, starve him. If we surround him with plentiful food, if he finds rich provision for the maintenance, he will speedily become full grown and tyrannical; but if we starve him, he will never be "fulfilled," he will pass away of sheer exhaustion.

I want to give this apostolic word "flesh" the apostolic content. We perilously impoverish its significance if we limit its comprehensions to the rise and sovereignty of carnal desire. It embraces dispositions and tendencies which appear to have no immediate relationship with carnality. The Apostle has broken up the surface of the word, and enabled us to see its varied and manifold significance. He has proclaimed that, in his conception of the term, there are involved such presences as "wrath," "strife," "sedition," "drunkenness," "uncleanness." But whichever of these manifold guises the flesh may assume, the Apostolic method works a sure destruction. We are to slay them by withholding congenial food. Let us apply the principle to two or three of the enemies which besiege the souls of men.

**I. "Wrath."**

How shall I deal with unholy anger, with anger whose only influence is self-destruction? How shall I contend with passion that boils over and scalds and destroys the sensitiveness of my spirit? The way to destroy it is to "make no provision for it." It must find no food on which to grow strong. It must find no fuel with which to feed its flame. Now the nutriment of wrath is thought. There can be no anger if there be no thought. Thought is the fuel by which the fire is fed. We recognise this in our everyday speech. Here is a man who is under the impression that he has been contemptuously treated by his fellow. His feelings are worked into a passion, and his speech becomes violent and threatening. What counsel do we give him? We say to him, "Don't think about it"; that is to say, we counsel him to withdraw his thought, and to occupy it with other things. We assume that if the thought be withheld, the passion will subside. To take away the food will emasculate the wrath. It is when we "dwell upon a thing" that our feelings are aroused. "As I mused the fire burned." It is a most vital principle in common life. We can control our passion by wisely directing our thought. Make no provision by thinking, and anger will languish and die.

**II. "Strife."**

This is another of the carnal enemies described by the Apostle Paul. "Whereas there is strife among you, are ye not carnal?" Strife is the opposite of a fruitful and blessed peace. Now the germ of strife is usually found in a tiny misunderstanding. The misunderstanding in its earliest stages may be small and puny, but we may make provision for it until it grows into fierce and violent strife. There are two correlative ways in which strife is engendered and matured.

**(1)** We may make provision for strife by indiscreet conversation. To gossip about a misunderstanding will almost surely aggravate it. Misunderstandings grow by being talked about to others. To make them the topic of idle speech is to inflame and exaggerate them. It is a very device of the evil one that when we talk about a supposed injury, it assumes colossal proportions. The way to deal with a misunderstanding is to make no provision for it. Don't let us provide the food by which it nourishes itself into appalling bulk. If we talk about it at all, let it be in frank and sanctified speech with the one in whom the misunderstanding has occurred. Such conversation provides no food for evil germs. It rather checks their growth and causes them to perish.

**(2)** We may make provision for strife by indiscreet hearing. It is not only the speaker but the listener who may be making provision for the flesh. We may nurse the spirit of strife by being unwise and receptive hearers. There would be no talkers if there were no listeners. It is not unsuggestive that the same Lord who warned us against speaking idle words also uttered this equally fruitful warning, "Take heed what ye hear"; "take heed how ye hear." We are to be on our guard, lest by our receptive hearing we help a man to feed the ugly spirit of strife. Let us make no provision for it, and let us close our ears when deliberate deafness will help to annihilate evil.

**III. "Envyings."**

This is another of the off-springs of the flesh characterised by the Apostle Paul. It suggests an ill relationship to another which, if nourished, will grow into ill-will, and manifest itself in positive attempts at injury. Let me give two or three familiar examples of its work. A young girl in a business house is very popular in her circle. She has many attractions, many gifts, and much personal charm. She is admired and sought after, and lives in the light of ceaseless favour. Another girl in the same house enjoys no such popularity, and is little sought and not conspicuously admired. What space there may be here for the growth of envy, and if suitable provision is made, how speedily envy will mature into ill-will and grievous attempts to injure! A business man, by honourable means, passes from success to success. He appears to take leaps and bounds in the highway of prosperity. Another man only crawls, and large success never comes within his grasp. How tempted he is to think ill of the successful man, and to speak ill, and maybe to do ill! A missioner comes to conduct special evangelistic services in a town. There is nothing conspicuously great about his addresses. There is nothing extraordinary in his matter or manner; indeed he appears to be rather commonplace, and yet men and women are drawn into the Kingdom in crowds. And here is another minister of greater culture and apparently wealthier gifts, preaching the same Gospel, depending upon the same Lord, and yet only now and again has he the joy of drawing men and women into decided surrender to God. What an occasion there may be for the rising of envy! If we provide appropriate food how speedily envy may grow into unkindly criticism and disparagement, which will even throw aspersions upon the character of the missioner himself. Have any of us felt the birth of these baby-devils within us? Let us make no provision for them. If the ugly thing has just shown its head, let us kill it by starvation. And how shall we do it? By withdrawing the thought on which it feeds, and providing another kind of thought which will be as poison. There is only one way of doing it. We must pray for those we envy. We must tell God all about it, and in these conditions the evil thing will languish away and die. We must look at the enviable one in our Master's presence, and he will become to us the lovable one. Envy is asphyxiated in the atmosphere of prayer. In prayer no provision for the flesh.

So one might travel the entire round of the fleshly symptoms described by the Apostle, and to every species we might have applied the apostolic counsel. Let us learn this method of spiritual culture, the method of killing our enemies by neglect. The counsel emerges conspicuously in almost every book of the Bible. "Avoid it; pass not by it; turn from it and pass away." That is only the Old Testament setting of our New Testament injunction. Treat a thing with neglect and it will pine away and die. "Set your mind on things above," and the things below, the enemy that comes from beneath, will find no provision in our lives. He will find his cupboard empty, and he will sink away to faint and die.