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

**21. FEVERISHNESS by JOHN H. JOWETT**

*"Sick of a fever. And He touched her hand, and the fever left her."*

*Matthew 8:14*

I have no hesitation in interpreting this miracle as symbolic of a greater miracle which the Master works upon the soul. He has made it perfectly clear that such interpretation is not an illegitimate use of His healing ministry. "That ye may know that the Son of Man hath power on earth to forgive sins (then saith He to the sick of the palsy), Arise, take up thy bed." He performed a miracle upon the body that we might know He can perform an analogous miracle upon the soul. He released a paralysed body that we might know He is able to release a paralysed spirit. And so with the incident before us. By a touch He drove the fever from the body, that we may know He can drive the feverishness out of the soul. I want, therefore, to consider two or three of the fevers by which our spirits are afflicted, and to proclaim the Christ as the One by whom they can be destroyed.

**I. The Fever-Stricken.**

There is the fever of anxiety. We become "heated hot with burning fears." We are fearful about yesterday, fearful about the things we are doing to-day, fearful about the things which confront us on the morrow. We become feverish over "evils that never arrive." Now anxiety is a wasting power. Even from the point of view of economy it is a foolish expenditure. We could obtain better results with a smaller outlay. Temperate carefulness accomplishes more than a burning anxiety. I have noticed that with the incandescent lights, firm control of the gas results in more brilliant illumination. Turn the gas on to the full, and whilst you obtain a wasteful roar you get a poorer light. It is even so with anxiety. Its issues are more impoverished than those attained by calm and temperate thought. But the fever of anxiety is more than bad economy. It impairs and enervates the moral powers. Anxiety easily passes into fretfulness, and fretfulness is frequently creative of peevishness, and peevishness is easily conducive to a chronic evil temper. It is not without suggestiveness that the words "anxiety" and "anger" are vitally related, and spring from a common root. Anxiety consumes the moral defences, burns away the forces of self-control, and so makes the life an easy prey to the irritations which so plentifully beset us.

There is the fever of zealotry. I am conscious that the word I have chosen as descriptive of this fever is not altogether adequate. I use it in the sense of unillumined zeal. We require ardour in the religious life, and the demand for "fire" in our devotion and fellowship has become a commonplace. But ardour is not sufficient. We may have heat accompanied by a great deal of smoke. We need not only heat, but light. John the Baptist was a "burning and a shining light."

And so the New Testament has much to say about the necessity of "knowledge," "understanding," "discernment," and we are strongly warned against a religious life from which these elements are absent. "They have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge." They had abundance of passion, but little discretion. Now, zeal allied with knowledge creates a fruitful fervour. Zeal bereft of knowledge is a perilous fever. And here again there is a pregnant suggestion in the etymology of the words. Fervour is akin to fever, and it frequently happens that the one passes into the other. We are called upon to grow in knowledge. We are bidden to exercise our senses to more refined discernment. We are counselled to have a passion for souls, and also to be the light of the world.

There is the fever of superstition. Charles Kingsley has defined superstition as "an unreasoning fear of the unknown." I think we may perhaps express the same thought by saying that superstition arises from an unworthy conception of God. There are many of the superstitions which distress men, that would pass away like mist if only we lived in the light of God's countenance. Where superstition dwells, fever abides. The life is never calm and restful that is haunted by superstitions. I don't think this is altogether an irrelevant warning even for our own enlightened day. There are many apparently trifling superstitions which tend to disturb the sanity and quietude of the life. Take the superstition which gathers round about Friday as the unlucky day of the week. What an abhorrence there is of the suggestion that anyone should be married on a Friday! How few of the maids who go out to service will take a situation on a Friday! Such superstitions may appear to be harmless, but in reality they tend to consume the vitals of religion. There are other superstitions which gather round about charms, and ritual, and sacraments, all of which help to rob life of its calmness and coolness, and fill it with perilous heat.

There is the fever begotten of success. We might have thought that success would lead to a cool contentment. We should have assumed that when men had prospered their feverish craving would cease, and they would rest in calm satisfaction. But quite the opposite appears to be the prevalent issue. Success fosters feverishness and begets a clamant thirst. The more one succeeds the more he wants to succeed. The more he obtains the more he craves. The more you drink when you are heated, the more you want to drink. This seems to be the peril of the prosperous life. There is a quaint remark in Bacon's "Natural History," which I think has wide suggestion--"It hath been noted by the ancients that southern winds, blowing much, do cause a feverous disposition." I think this is a frequent result of the ministry of the south wind. When the soft, genial airs of prosperity breathe over a man, and he never feels the rawness of the east wind, or the biting nip of the north wind, he is apt to acquire a "feverous disposition" which consumes the wealthier elements of his soul.

**II. The Healing Touch.**

"He touched her hand, and the fever left her."

"He touched her hand." The fever-stricken came into contact with the Christ, and at the touch the fever fled as if afraid. That "touch," in the life of the spirit, expresses communion and fellowship. The feverishness of life, whatever guise the fever may take, is to be dispelled by union with the Spirit of the Lord. The Christ was never perturbed; He was always calm. The Christ was never distracted; He was always collected. The Christ was never feverish; He was always cool. When everybody else was feverish and panic stricken, He could speak about "my peace." Now it is the very secret of the Christian Gospel that the Spirit of the Master can be conveyed to His disciples. He can

"Breathe through the pulses of desire

His coolness and His balm."

By my union with Him, the ill-working heat of my life is reduced. I am delivered from panic, I am brought into a normal and healthy moral temperature. "He that is joined unto the Lord is one spirit."

But the cure effected by the great Healer is more than an expulsion of the fever. It is a defence against it when contagion is prowling about. It is the man with pronounced weaknesses who becomes the victim.

"Some low fever, ranging round to spy

The weakness of the people... . .found the girl,

And flung her down upon a couch of fire."

It is the spiritually weak who are liable to perilous spiritual fevers. Now union with the Christ turns our weakness into strength. Fellowship ripens into blessed intimacy. We delight in our companionship, and "the joy of the Lord is our strength." In that companionship we shall find that the word of the Psalmist is confirmed, only with an unspeakably richer meaning: "Thou shalt not be afraid for the pestilence that walketh in darkness"; "neither shall any plague come nigh thy dwelling." Perhaps we may sum up the cooling ministry in a word, which we may borrow from the Prophet Isaiah: "He that believeth shall not make haste." He shall not become feverish, or get into a panic. He shall remain calm and cool amid all the dangers of the common day.

**III. A Grateful Ministry.**

"She arose and ministered unto Him."

May we not with advantage accept the suggestion which is contained in these words? The fever-stricken woman was healed by the Saviour; and then, when she was delivered from her fever, "She arose and ministered unto Him." She had been lifted out of sickness into sanity, out of aches and pains into peace, out of feverishness into comfort, out of unrest into a healthy calm, and now she uses her restored strength to minister to her Saviour. It is ever the way of the healed and invincible life. We shall best preserve our health by serving our Lord. As to what that service shall be, He has given us a broad and spacious conception in His own Word. "I was an hungred, and ye gave Me meat." "Lord, when saw we Thee an hungred?" When did we minister unto Thee? "Inasmuch as ye did it unto one of the least of these, ye did it unto Me."

"Calm me, my God, and keep me calm,

While these hot breezes blow;

Be like the night-dew's cooling balm

Upon earth's fevered brow."