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

**25. STRIFE AND VAIN GLORY by JOHN H. JOWETT**

*"Let nothing be done through strife or vain-glory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves."*

*Philippians 2:3*

"Let nothing be done through strife or vain-glory." Whom is the Apostle addressing? His words seem applicable to some violent political party, or to some ambitious and selfish state. They appear to be descriptive of the ways of the world, and yet they are pointed at a Christian Church. "Let nothing be done through strife and vain-glory." Is the counsel irrelevant? Is the danger imaginary? Do not "Church" and "Strife" appear quite incongruous? I should have thought that when the fire-brand of strife sought introduction into the temple of the Lord, it would have been extinguished at the very threshold. And yet the Apostle suggests that even in the Church it may find sympathetic material. There is so much of the world still in the Church, that worldly fires have to be watched. Outside the Church, in the days of the Apostle, men were clamorous and proud. They lusted for authority. They stretched out both hands for power. Mastery was the only recognised human dignity. Humility was not yet canonised as a grace. Jesus of Nazareth had laid the hand of consecration upon the servile virtues, and had pronounced the beauty of humility and the beauty of sacrifice and patience and poverty of spirit, but in the loud ambitious streets of the world these were still only the badges of the slave. Men coveted command. They thirsted for personal triumph. The high head and the stiff neck were the physical types of an unbendingness which most men craved. The slave was at the bottom of the social grades, and all that was characteristic of the slave belonged to the same plane. Humility was degradation; to be servant of all was to be an outcast. That was the spirit of the world in the Apostle's time, as it is the spirit of the world to-day. Now this spirit steals into the Church. The fog that fills the streets of the city, obtrudes in the sanctuary. The lust of power burns in the Christian worker. Ambition for personal victory possesses the heart of the professed soldier of the Cross. The spirit of strife enters into the messenger of peace. Men do Christian work because impelled by strife. Men persist in Christian service because impelled by vain-glory. Strife and vain-glory, the powers of the world, become motive powers in the Kingdom of God. That is the pity of it, and the tragedy of it, that a kingdom purposed for the destruction of self can be used for the fattening of self; a kingdom established for the annihilation of worldliness used for its enthronement. The gist of the whole matter is this. It is possible to make a worldly convenience of the Christ, to regard Him as an agent in the attainment of mere party ends, and to use Him with a single eye for our own glory. It is against this insidious and imminent peril that the Apostle warns us when he counsels us, in all the varied work of the Church, to "let nothing be done through strife or vain-glory."

What we have before us is a warning against the obtrusion of self in Christian service. Now the Apostle says that this obtrusion may reveal itself in one of two shapes, in strife or vain-glory. I think it will be well, in the place of both these words to substitute more modern equivalents, which will enable us to catch the Apostle's thought. What did the Apostle mean by strife? Party-spirit. What did he mean by vain-glory? Personal vanity. "Let nothing be done through party-spirit or personal vanity." Party-spirit! Personal vanity! Those are the two guises in which self is apt to intrude into Church life and crowd out the Christ. "Let nothing be done through party-spirit." What is party-spirit? I don't think we need pause to inquire as to the peculiar character of the party-spirit which broke out in the apostolic Church. It admits of a sufficiently precise definition, which has relevancy to all time. Party-spirit is that which seeks the luxury of a majority more than the enthronement of a truth. It aims at winning a contest rather than at advancing a cause. It works for sectarian triumph more than for spiritual growth. We are all agreed that this prevails in the warfare of the world. Political contests are often struggles in which the passion for numerical victory obscures the interests of truth. The declaration of the poll is for many men the announcement of the goal. Their interest centered in the figures, and their gladsome shout is the symbol of gratified strife. That is the very genius of a pernicious party-spirit--struggle above which there is no high sky, and before which there is no distant and beckoning horizon; struggle for the petty triumphs of a passing day. There must be parties, but it is possible to have parties without a pernicious party-spirit. There may be many parties, and yet all be for the State; the party-life dominated by a larger life, the sectional victory sought for in the interests of righteousness and truth. It is even so in the Church of the living God. Party-spirit is in the Church when the Christian fights harder for a sectarian triumph, than for the reign of the Lord. There are some members of the Christian Church who are never to be found in the battle-field, except when the struggle is an unfortunate contest between the Christian sects. They revel in sectarian strife. A fight stirs them to the depths. Some election will find them on the field, but the declaration of the poll marks the movement of their retirement, and they are not to be found in the ranks when the immediate contest is the incessant fight with all the powers of ill. I say that is the party-spirit the Apostle deplores, the spirit which enlists for a sect, but not for the Lord, which works feverishly for a sectarian victory, and is inclined to forget the august interests of our God. Sects there must be! Let us preserve them from this injurious party-spirit Parties there may be; our spirit need not be partial. We can serve a party in the spirit of wholeness, in the spirit of holiness, a spirit which seeks the exaltation of all truth and beauty, by the enthronement of our Lord. "Let nothing be done through party-spirit."

"Or vain-glory," personal vanity! A man can be a sect to himself; he can be a party of one. He can seek his own triumphs, his own majorities. Such a man begins counting everything from himself, but the tragedy is that a man who begins by counting himself as "number one," never gets as far as "number two;" with "number one" the numeration ends. "Personal vanity," a life swollen with pride. The eyes are so "enclosed in fat" that "number two" is never seen. "Personal vanity," that is the obtrusion we have to fear and beware. Now the Apostle declares that this spirit of personal vanity may obtrude into the Church. Nay, he declares that men and women will come into the Church in order to feed it. They will use the holy ministries of the Church to fatten self. We can bow our heads to pray through sheer personal vanity. We can engage in services of philanthropy through sheer personal vanity. We can preach Christ crucified through sheer personal vanity. That is stern, hard and horrible, not as fiction but as fact, and we shall do well to face it. I can be in the Church of Christ like a huge sponge, a mere agent of suction, gathering and retaining solely to increase the weight of self. Now, Christian folk are not intended to be sponges. They are purposed to be channels, not prisons of possession, but agents of transmission; not bolstering up a personal vanity, but distributing a glory over all the fellowships of the redeemed. Our prayers must not be personal sponges, nor our spirit, nor our services, nor any of the manifold ministries of the Church's life. Our energies must be otherwise and other-born, not prompted either by strife or vain-glory, by party-spirit or by personal vanity, but for the good of our fellows and the glory of our God.

The warning against self-obtrusion is followed by a declaration as to how the obtrusive self may be suppressed. Here is transition from egotism to altruism. "But in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves." It is the lowly spirit which discerns things in their true proportion and order. The lowly spirit sets me in the right attitude, and makes it possible for me to obtain accuracy of vision. People who are high-minded, in the sense of being supercilious, "look down" upon others. People who are lowly-minded "look up" to others, and discover their wealth and grace. It is the lowly place that gives us the point of vision for the spacious out-look. That may appear to be a contradiction, but it is one of the common experiences of the spiritual life. There is much food for meditation in the familiar phrase "The Valley of Vision." I could have readily understood it had it been "The Mount of Vision," but to have visions in valleys, to have panoramas breaking upon one's gaze in the place of humility, excites doubt and surprise. But the Scriptures abound in the suggestion. "Blessed are the poor in spirit," those who are furthest removed from pride, who are conscious of their poverty, who are more impressed by their sense of spiritual want than with their spiritual possessions; "for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven." Whole countries of spiritual benedictions become their inheritance. They pass from discovery to discovery in the realm of knowledge and grace. Not least among the discoveries which are made are the discoveries of our fellows. The proud man cannot know his fellow-man. It is when we are lowly that we discover his worth. We esteem him, we give him priority over ourselves, we are willing and desirous that he should take the first place.

There is no way by which we can obtain this gracious disposition except by holding intimate companionship with Christ. In His presence "the mountains and hills are made low." In the light and warmth of His presence the ice of false pride melts away.