**THINGS THAT MATTER MOST - DEVOTIONAL PAPERS BY JOHN H. JOWETT**

**23. BLINDING THE MIND by JOHN H. JOWETT**

THERE is a phrase of the Apostle Paul which contains a warning peculiarly relevant to the times through which we are passing. It is this: "The god of this world hath blinded the minds." What is the significance of the phrase, "The god of this world"? Here is a certain evil influence personified. A certain immoral energy or contagion is conceived and presented as an active, aggressive, personal force, which deliberately seeks to dwarf, and bruise, and lame the richly-dowered souls of men. He is elsewhere depicted as of princely line, with imposing retinues and armies, moving stealthily amid human affairs, and inciting men to rebellion against the holy sovereignty of God. He is represented as "the prince of the powers of the air," subtle and persuasive as an atmosphere, insinuating himself into the most sacred privacies and invading even the most holy place. He is "the god of this world," receiving homage and worship, the god to whom countless thousands offer ceaseless sacrifice, while the holy Lord of grace and glory is neglected or defied. I am not now concerned with this personification, whether it be literalistic or merely figurative; but I am concerned with the reality of the power itself, whose seductive energy corrupts our holiest treasures, and blunts and spoils the finest perceptions of the soul.

Now, everybody is familiar with the characteristics of this destructive ministry. There is no need of abstruse or hair-splitting analysis. The issues are obtrusive; we have only to examine our own souls and their besetments, and the peril is revealed. We may have dropped the personification, but we recognize the energy which is personified. We may have abandoned the figure, but we are familiar with the thing. We may no longer speak of "the god of this world," but "worldliness" itself is palpable and rampant. This is our modern phraseology. We speak of "the worldly" and "the unworldly," but unfortunately the terms are very loosely and indefinitely used, or used with a quite perverse significance. The "unworldly "is too often identified with the "other-worldly," and is interpreted as an austere isolation from all festivity, and from the hard, hand-soiling concerns of practical life. And on the other hand, "worldliness" is too often identified with gaiety, or levity, or prodigality, with drink and pride, with theatrical glamour and vulgar sheen. But these interpretations do not touch the heart of the matter. What, then, is worldliness? Worldliness is life without ideals, life without moral vistas, life devoid of poetic vision. It is life without the halo, life without the mystic nimbus which invests it with venerable and awful sanctity. It is imprisonment within the material, no windows opening out upon ethereal, moral, or altruistic ends. It is the five senses without the moral sense. It is quickness to appetite and dulness to conscience. It is engrossment in sensations, it is heedlessness to God's "awful rose of dawn." It is rank materialism.

Now this powerful contagion operates in the deprivation of sight. Materialism and moral blindness stand in the relation of cause and effect. "The god of this world hath blinded the minds." That is to say, a practical materialism destroys the eyes of the soul. The materialistic life deadens the conscience, and in the long run puts it to death. The materialistic life stupefies the imagination, and in the long run makes it inoperative. The materialistic life defiles the affections, and converts their crystalline lens into a minister of darkness and night. The materialistic life coarsens the spiritual instincts, and renders them non-appreciative of things unseen. And so it is with all the vision-powers of life; a practical materialism plugs or scales them and makes the spirit blind.

But I will still further narrow the interpretation, and confine this article to that aspect of worldliness which is concerned with the bare pursuit of material gain. If "the god of this world" must be given a single name, let the name be Mammon, and let the love of money be the worship which is offered at his shrine. And does the god of money blind the mind? Let it get into the pulpit, and everybody knows the result. The spiritual heavens become opaque, and there is no awe-inspiring discernment of "things unseen." Everybody recognizes its destructiveness in the ministry, but everybody does not equally recognize the destructiveness in other lives and other professions. But the moral issues are one and the same; always and everywhere the god of money blinds the mind.

Let me give a Scriptural illustration of its nefarious work. A woman, who had been spiritually enfranchised by the Lord, and who had been led out of the dreary, wan land of sin into the fair, bright lily-land of God's eternal peace, brought an alabaster box of ointment, very precious, and anointed her Deliverer's feet. And there was one standing by, who looked upon it with uninspired and unillumined eyes, and said, "To what purpose is this waste?" ... "This he said ... because he was a thief, and carried the bag!" He was the victim of the god of money, and he was blind, and he could see no beauty or grace in this passionate love-offering of an, emancipated child of God. There was nothing winsome about the woman that he should commend her; and, more than that, when he looked upon the woman's Lord there was "no beauty" that he should desire Him! "What will ye give me, and I will deliver Him unto you? And they covenanted with him for thirty pieces of silver." And for that "thirty pieces of silver" he sold his Lord! May we not add, "the god of this world" had blinded his mind?

But there is no. need for us to go back to those remote days for illustration of the truth. Every succeeding century has abounded in confirmation of its truth. But let me confine myself to witnesses from modern history. I know of no more shameful page in the history of our country than the page which tells the story of our early demeanour in the American Civil War. The North was valorously intent upon lifting the tyranny of the South, and letting the bond-slave free. And vast multitudes of our people sympathized with the callous and slave-holding South, and ranged themselves in bitter antagonism to the chivalrous North. And what was the explanation? Just this, they were unable to see the interests of humanity because of their interests in cotton. They couldn't see the slave for the dollar, or they saw him only as a chattel to be despised. Henry Ward Beecher came over to expostulate with our countrymen, and to seek to open their eyes. He came here to plead for the slaves--those slaves unveiled to us in the bleeding pages of "Uncle Tom's Cabin." He came to Liverpool. Now listen to a contemporary document and you will think you are reading the Press of the past few weeks. "It would be impossible for tongue or pen adequately to describe the scenes at the meeting. The great hall was packed to the crushing point. The mob was out in force. The interruptions were incessant: cat-calls, groans, and hisses." And at what part of the meeting did the disorder culminate? It was when Beecher, bit by bit, got out these sentences and rammed them home: "When I was twelve years old, my father hired Charles Smith, a man as black as lamp-black, to work on his farm. I slept with him in the same room. (Oh! oh!) Ah, that don't suit you. (Uproar.) I ate with him at the same table; I sang with him out of the same hymn-book; I cried when he prayed over me at night; and if I had serious impressions of religion early in life, they were due to the fidelity and example of that poor, humble farm-labourer, black Charles Smith. (Tremendous uproar.)" What think you of the significance of that uproar? They saw no moral dignity in Charles Smith that they should desire him. That Liverpool mob could not see the slave because they were so intent upon the dollar.

Read the chivalrous history of the good Lord Shaftesbury. In his early manhood, when he began his noble crusade of emancipation, women and girls were employed in coal-mines, as beasts of burden. Their condition haunted him, and became a nightmare which possessed him day and night, and he set about to ameliorate their lot. He sought to prohibit their employment. With what result? The mine-owners were up and in arms. "It spells ruin to our trade!" They could not see the degradation for the gold. They feared a shrinking purse more than a shrunken womanhood. They could not see the woman for the bank. But Lord Ashley disregarded their cries, and at length he had the supreme happiness of putting a stop to this infamous sort of labour by an act which declared that, after a certain limited period, no woman or girl should ever again be employed in our collieries and mines.

When Queen Victoria came to the throne, a dispute with China was developing into a very ugly menace. Soon after it broke out into open war. And what did we fight about? We fought for the right of Great Britain to force a destructive trade upon a people who did not want it, in spite of the protestations of its government, and in spite of all such national opinion as could find a public expression. There was money in it for Britain, there was revenue in it for India, and therefore China had got to have it! It is China's burden, China's curse, China's appalling woe, and still we force it on her. And the explanation is clear. We cannot see the evil for the revenue. We cannot see the wasting victim for the swelling exchequer. Some day Britain will get the gold-dust out of her eyes, and then she will see--she will see the reeking opium dens, and the emaciated manhood, and the devastated families, and the blighted race, and in her shame she will wash her hands of the traffic, and decree the emancipation of a people. At present, money plugs the eyes.

And there is very great need that in our own day we deliver ourselves from the servitude of this mammon. In our day, when the Spirit of God is at work in our midst, inciting dissatisfaction and unrest, and creating a ferment among the peoples, our vision and our sympathy can be dulled and checked by the common love of money. The peril is insidious, and it invades even the most holy place. The spirit of greed dwells not alone among the wealthy and the well-to-do, it can make its home with people of slender means. What we need, above all things, is to have our eyes anointed with the eye-salve of grace, that so our vision may be single and simple, and we may have the mind of Christ. What we need is unscaled sight, and with unscaled sight there will come fresh and healthy sympathies, and an eager participation in every chivalrous crusade.