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

**26. THE DESTRUCTION AT NOONTIDE by JOHN H. JOWETT**

THERE is a peril in the garish day. There are destructive things that are only bred in the long-continued splendour. They awake and prowl about in the noon. In the deep shadows of the. deeper night they sleep in impotence. "It is the bright day that brings forth the adder." A. summer of unbroken sunshine is not the invincible guardian of the public health. It favours some forms of disease. It may generate a lassitude which gives disease its chance. The glare may become the ally of infirmity.

And now I can see the significance of the psalmist's words, "the destruction that wasteth at noonday." A secret consumption may make its home in the realm of the sunbeam. Our radiant successes may house our most awful foes. Our prosperity may be like some sun-drenched realm in the tropics--the hunting-ground of the plague. It may be we were safer in the grey, chill twilight of precariousness and uncertainty than we are in the steady brightness of a cloudless noon. We were, perhaps, more secure when a little fear was in our life than we are when the last shadow of care has melted away.

Now what perils are these which hide themselves in the brightness of noon? What enemies emerge in our prosperity? I think that one of the first perils of the noontide is the eclipse of the spiritual relations of life. The sunniest days are not the best for the discernment of far distances. There is a haze in the fierce light that veils the remote horizon. And when our life attains to its burning noon we are apt to lose the land that is very far off. The large relationships of things are eclipsed. Our eyes are lured from the further issues, life's ultimate goals. We become the prisoners of the immediate hour. The things of sense hem us round about, and the transient becomes our all. It is amazingly difficult to keep sight and hold of the eternal when the immediate hour is so brilliant. The very pomp of success seems big enough to satisfy, and we do not want the long vision of the things that endure. And thus we lose them. And yet we are so mesmerized by the present glare that we are not conscious of the loss. I have seen a child so fascinated by a glittering toy that its mother could leave the room and never be missed. That is a subtle peril of life's brilliant noon. We may become so absorbed as not to miss the God we have lost. The glitter of gold can make us forget the glory of God. Some earthly prize dazzles us, and "the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus" is blurred. And all this is "the destruction that wasteth at noonday."

Another great peril of our noontide is a narrowing of the sympathies. In the fierce glare of summer the rivers shrink in their beds. And in the sunny season of triumph and prosperity the streams of our sympathy are apt to grow scanty as in a time of drought. Cloudy, rainy days refresh the springs. Sorrows keep the emotions moist and fluent. Defeat makes us very sympathetic. The obituary columns have a new significance when our own family has written a record there. We look at a cripple with new eyes when one of our own is lame. But when no clouds have passed across our sky we are very prone to lose communion with the children of night. At any rate, that is our peril. When we are prosperous we become encased with pride, and pride is a non-conductor, and the vibrations that beat upon us from the gloomy house of sorrow are never perceived. We can become "past feeling," and lose our correspondence with our fellow-men. The noonday may be a minister of alienation between man and man.

And a third peril of the noonday is what George Adam Smith calls "the atheism of force." The successful man is prone to magnify might without reference to right; carnal power becomes the treasure to be desired. Success is life's end, and success is its own justification. Be like a cow! Trample down a thousand wild flowers and river grasses to get your drink, but get your drink! To get on is the aim. Never mind about getting up! And so life loses its ideals, its dignities, its elevations. It loses the vertical and becomes merely horizontal. It has ambitions, but no aspirations. It has push, but no worship. It has belief in expediencies, but it loses its belief in God. Instead of "worshipping the Lord, thy God, with all thy strength," it worships the strength of self. And this is one of the subtlest perils of the noonday of success. In our pride we raise our altar to our own right arm. "By the strength of our own hand we have done it."

There is only one security from these perils. It is "the secret place of the Most High." In that secret Presence we dwell under the cooling shadow of the Almighty! There will be no haze with our heat. No earth-born cloud will veil the Supreme. Our great God will be to us as "the shadow of a great rock," and we shall not be dizzied in the burning noon of our prosperity and triumph. We can be successful and yet be safe, but the secret is with God. "He shall not fear men when heat cometh." "The arrow that flieth by day" shall never reach his soul. In the noonday he shall be immune, for "the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it."

The strength of God's grace has been triumphantly manifest in men and women who have spent years in the sunshine. Prosperity has beamed upon them, but they have remained unspoiled. Success after success has poured its radiance around them, but the graces of their spirit do not fade. Some protective air seems to wrap them round about, a defence against the fierceness of the favouring beams. They are defended by the ministries of the Holy Spirit. They can have ease and not be wasted. They can even be wealthy and yet be in the kingdom of humility and peace. They can "pass through the fire and not be burned," for in the fire there is One with them "like unto the Son of Man," and they walk unscathed.