**THE EAGLE LIFE - STUDIES IN THE OLD TESTAMENT BY JOHN H. JOWETT**

**10. CLEAN FIGHTERS by JOHN H. JOWET**

*"When thou goest forth in camp against thine enemies, then thou shalt keep thee from every evil thing."*

*Deuteronomy 23:9*

There is something more than conscience in this, something more than the imperious demands of rectitude. The fighting powers in life are concerned, the strength which is at our disposal when we go out to meet the foe. Every form of sin is hostile to my strength. I cannot harbour an unclean thing and preserve my fighting forces unimpaired. My sin is always on the side of my adversary, because it lessens my power of defence and aggression. It may sometimes seem as if an unclean thing really added to my resources. A little bit of trickery may appear to fill a perilous gap and complete a circle of defences which would otherwise be broken. Falsehood may sometimes seem to bring another regiment to my support, and with my loins girded about with untruth I march out to meet the foe.

All these appearances are delusive. The unclean thing is really robbing me even when it wears the guise of a benefactor. The devil can appear as an angel of light when his inward ministry is one of destructive fire. Sin is always a thief, and it is the sinner who is despoiled. Sin cometh not but for to steal, and to kill, and to destroy. Its deceptions are tragically pathetic. It is like the jerry-builder who seeks to ensnare my interest in electric bells and a little greenhouse while all the time the drains are leaking and the walls of the house are not able to keep out the rain. That is the way of sin. It gives me a plaything and assails my life. Always and everywhere sin robs me of my strength. "My strength faileth because of my iniquity."

So do I say that the evil thing in my ranks is really fighting on the side of my foe. That is true of the Church of Christ. When the Church of Christ marshals her forces against some national wrong her power is honey-combed by her own sin. During the great war we were able to reject men who were physically inefficient, but we had no means of discerning the morally inefficient, the men of foul heart and defiled conscience, whose corruptions were eating away their central strength. And the church is immeasurably weakened by the sin which makes her one with the sins she assails. In everything in which she shares the nature of the enemy she so far offers him the victory. When the Church is like the world she loses the power to attack the world. Her kinship deprives her of her kingship. It is always her unlikeness which ensures her triumph. When she is pure she is overwhelming. It is the unclean things which throw her into sickness, and weakness, and sleep, and disaster. It is when she is fair as the moon, and clear as the sun, that she is terrible as an army with banners.

And so the first necessity of a strong and happy warrior is that he has a clean heart. There must be nothing unlawful in our tents if we would be the victorious soldiers of the Lord. There must be nothing disloyal, no lurking treachery. A secret sin can ruin an otherwise noble campaign. The secret sin may appear to be comparatively innocent, but that is part of the grim deception. We all know that a little bit of seemingly pardonable forgetfulness -- say some carelessness in neglecting the pointing of a house -- can be the precursor of a terrible disease. Blessed are the pure in heart! "Thou shalt keep thee from every evil thing."