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

**21. SILKEN STRINGS AND CART-ROPES by JOHN H. JOWET**

*"Woe unto them that draw iniquity with cords of vanity, and sin as it were with a cart-rope."*

*Isaiah 5:18*

That is always the order of moral degeneracy. We begin by toying with iniquity; we end by being bound by it. When a liner is nearing the dock a light cord is thrown across the gulf. A heavier line follows the light line, and then a heavier one still, until the mighty vessel is held in bonds. And that is how our communion with iniquity begins. It begins in a fellowship as light and flimsy as a gossamer thread. We say of the first frail thread, "I can break it whenever I like!" And, all unrecognised by us, the thin thread becomes a more complicated line until it becomes as a cart-rope which binds us in servitude.

Now, no man when he begins to fondle iniquity, ever purposes to be bound by it. If the cart-ropes were brought out at the beginning of our trespass we should all re-coil in fear, and turn hastily away. But the tempter does not begin with cables and chains; he begins with cords of vanity. In Tennyson's "Vision of Sin" the youth who is made captive is first of all ensnared by his vanity. "From the palace came a child of sin, And took him by the curls and led him in." That is to say, a little flattery was the first agent of servitude. A few compliments were passed, and the youth was on his way to ruin. But the poem ends with the gloomy spectacle of a wretched cynic dragged about by cart-ropes in the most tyrannical bonds.

No one ever intends to be a drunkard. The drunkard's degradation does not begin with cart-ropes, but with attractive cords of vanity. It begins in agreeableness, in light conviviality, in something done in the name of good fellowship. No one ever intends to be an inveterate gambler. Gambling begins as a mere condiment to the feast, adding a little spice to the game. And then the condiment begets a fierce appetite, and it becomes more important than all the rest of the feast. No one ever intends to become a confirmed liar. A liar begins his degradation in smooth words, in vain compliments, in unworthy flatteries. He indulges in easy expediencies, and in so-called white lies, which do not carry even a suggestion of a succeeding chain. All forms of iniquity begin their preliminary scouting with light threads, coloured threads, gay ribbons, but the baser, blacker servitude is on the way.

The great secret of moral and spiritual safety is to be able to discern the silken cords of vanity and not to touch them. We must exercise our imaginations, and we must always see the cart-rope at the end of the fragile line. If we play with the threads we are surely undone. We must know the evil one when he approaches us with fairy webs, and we must turn away in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. And there is no surer way of acquiring a healthy vigilance than by companying much with Jesus, and becoming one of His intimate friends. Communion creates likeness, and in the wisdom and strength of the Lord we can practise His resistance and share His glory.