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

**47. DUNGEONED HEARTS by JOHN H. JOWET**

*"Is it nothing to you, all that ye pass by?"*

*Lamentations 1:12*

Great things were happening, but these folks seemed to know nothing about it. God was on the field in mighty movement, but these folks were indifferent. They seemed to be living in another world, and the other world was a self-created prison. There are dungeoned hearts. The dungeon is not built in a day, but every day we may add to the thickness of its walls and strengthen its power of imprisonment. The walls are built from the secretions of selfishness. A selfish soul creates its own bondage. I would say that it exudes a deposit which seals up its own sympathies and discernments. Its relationships are checked and contracted more and more, and its fine communions are destroyed. At last, all the active sensitive power of the life are shut up in a heart of stone; they have become petrified; they are numb. They have no more feeling than statues, they do not hear the clamant and pitiful cries of the streets.

Herbert Spencer devised a sort of stopping with which he filled his ears when he wished to shut himself away from a company and retire from any part in their conversation. His biography offers abundant evidence that he was equally successful in more costly forms of self-imprisonment. There was a strange contraction of his sympathies, and his relationship with the pathetic needs of man was more fretful and irritable than helpful. In some directions he acquired a perilous benumbment. But then this is a peril which besets us all. We can dungeon our hearts until the great cries of the world cannot reach us. Men can be "made to stumble" and we burn not. Indeed, we do not hear the wails of men. Many a cry may come from many a Macedonia, but they beat against a stony heart when they ought to be received on sensitive heart-strings which thrill with eager and sympathetic response.

In all such experiences the soul is suffering a deadly contraction. In dungeon lives the soul is like a shrivelling kernel, becoming smaller and smaller in its hard encasement. And yet the supreme purpose of life is to grow a great soul, and to help other souls to grow theirs. Souls with large communings are like spacious harbours, offering hospitable commerce to the laden liners which come from the near and distant parts of mankind. Our souls are purposed to have big relationships with God and man. Aye, with God! But the dungeoned heart ceases to have communion with God. It does not heed. It does not hear. "I stretched out my hands to you all the day long, and ye would not hear.'' We cannot selfishly build a wall of stone between us and our fellows and maintain a living communion with our God. Dying sympathies and vital devotions cannot dwell together in one heart. If our interest in humanity is shrinking, we cannot have a large and growing intimacy with God. The dungeoned heart shuts out both God and man. "If a man love not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen?''