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

**48. THE SOUND SLEEP OF THE COWARD by JOHN H. JOWET**

*"He lay and was fast asleep."*

*Jonah 1:5*

"He was fast asleep,'' And yet that man was in flight from a duty which had been laid upon him by the Lord. He was travelling in the way of rebellion. He had shaken himself free from life's sanctities and he had turned his back upon the great white throne. And yet he could sleep, and his sleep was like infants' slumbers, soft and light. And he could do this while a tempest was shrieking across the deep. One might have expected that he would never sleep a wink. Surely his conscience would be thundering in his soul, and his agitated being would give his body no rest. Does not the Divine Nemesis chase a deserter, and does it not prevent him from pitching his tent in quiet places and lying down in innocent sleep "Can bad men sleep while dutiful men are awake at hazardous posts? Yes, that seems to be the significance of the narrative. Jonah was a rebel, and yet he slept soundly in the unhallowed way of desertion.

Our great dramatists have usually troubled the sleep of their villains. The ill deeds of the villains march with them into their tent and chamber and goad them into fearful dreams. It was so with the Duke of Clarence : "Oh, I have passed a miserable night!" It was so with Richard III: "I did but dream! O coward conscience, how thou dost afflict me!'' It was so with Lady Macbeth: "Here's the smell of the blood still!'' And so it was with all Shakespeare's villains. Their sleep is troubled: the sword of judgment gleams through their dreams. They have followed evil ways of their own devising, and they have lost the precious gift of restful sleep.

And yet I think it is a worse penalty when we have sinned and retained the power of sleep, when we can lie down in undisturbed rest as though we had just returned from a healthy walk in paths of righteousness. There is something terrible in the judgment which rests upon a man when he can sin and not be troubled, when be can leave his appointed post and go to sleep like one who has spent a noble day in splendid vigilance. Jonah was a coward, and be slept soundly while better men were awake.

The most appalling judgment of sin bas been inflicted when we become "past feeling.'' Every sin works like a drug, and continued sin tends to stupefaction. The more we sin, the less we care. It is the subtlety of sin to create delusive conditions, and a very fatal part of the delusion is a deadly sense of contentment. We can lie and be comfortable. We can desert and sit happily at the feast. But it is the comfort of the opium-eater, it is the sleep of the benumbed, it is the restfulness of death. Let us clearly understand the possibility that lies in our bands; we can live wickedly into a debased contentment; we can drug ourselves into apathy. But bow wretched is the contentment! How tragically small is our world! Our comfort is drowsiness mistaken for happiness: it is the foetid air of a tiny room mistaken for the vital air of the mountains. "Thou sayest, I am rich, and knowest not that thou art wretched and miserable and poor and blind!''

There is no rest to compare with the rest that is found in the Lord. There is no peace like unto the peace of the Lord which passeth all understanding. There is no comfort which is fit to be named beside the consolations of the Spirit. There is no sleep like the sleep which God giveth to His beloved.