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

**33. THE DIVINE MINISTRY OF DISPLACEMENT by JOHN H. JOWET**

*"Instead of the thorn shall come up the fir tree, and instead of the brier shall come up the myrtle tree."*

*Isaiah 55:13*

These words unveil one of the great ways of our God. He displaces one thing by another. The fir comes up in strength and fills the place that was occupied by the thorn. The myrtle appears in vigour and makes its home in the bed of the brier. And so it is in the soul of man. God crowds out one thing by another and the first thing withers away. He imparts His own spirit, and the new spirit excludes the old temper. He gives a vision and some prejudice dies. He plants a royal virtue and some miserable vice disappears. This is how the Lord makes His gardens. It is the wonderful process described in Dr. Chalmers' famous and familiar phrase, "The expulsive power of a new affection.''

And so it becomes clear what a harrowingly disappointing way it is to try to create a garden in the spirit by merely pulling up the weeds. I read this counsel in a book of devotion: "Pull up one fault a week, and what a clearance there will be in the course of the year!" It is disastrous advice, and there will be no end of heartache at the close of the year. In the first place, who knows what his faults and vices really are? There are some which the Bible describes as "presumptuous." Anybody can see them because they are so glaring. But there are others which the Bible describes as "secret" and their hiding-place is as intricate as a rabbit warren. "Who can discern his errors?'' Who can tell just what they are?

And, as a second difficulty in the way of this counsel, who is to determine the order in which the vices are to be removed? Which is the more deadly, drunkenness or false-hood, and which shall go out first? Which is the more insidious influence, pride or envy? Which does the more harm, jealousy or censoriousness? What shall we first lay hold of in the work of uprooting? Shall we seize a presumptuous sin or seek for something more secret? A furtive cancer is more serious than an external rash.

And there is still another question. How may we know that a vice is really uprooted, and that the last delicate fibre of its most secret rootlet has been removed? How may we be quite sure that there is nothing left to form the beginning of a new growth? Who is to say when the soil is clean and when every bit of thorn and brier has been cast out? It is surely very bad counsel to urge us to clean our hearts by weeding.

There is nothing for it but to hand over the thorny, briery desert to the Lord. "Here is the wilderness of my life! I surrender it to Thee, most holy and gracious Lord!" And the good Lord accepts the surrendered desert. The first thing He does is to renew the soil by the mighty enriching energies of His grace. And then He plants His new growths. He plants the vigorous word of His truth, and the thorns and briers of falsity are smothered in its presence. He imparts His own peace, and there is an end of the thorns of feverish distraction, and there is an end of the briers of ill-temper and discord. And He gives His own joy, and the thorns of discontent cannot live beside it, and the briers of moroseness and bitterness pass away. That is the great secret of the transformed wilderness. It is our part to abide in the great Gardener, and He will make His own garden.