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

**35. THE ALMOND TREE by JOHN H. JOWET**

*"Moreover, the word of the Lord came unto me, saying, 'Jeremiah, what seest thou?' And I said, 'I see the rod of an almond tree.' Then the Lord said unto me, 'Thou hast well seen, for I watch over my word to perform it.' "*

*Jeremiah 1:11,12*

The almond tree is the first tree to lift its blooms in mastery of winter. It is in flower when all other things are sleeping. It is like a wakeful, watchful sentinel when all the troops are locked in slumber. Or shall we rather say that the almond tree is always first upon the field? No other tree ever anticipates it or takes it by surprise. And so it is with our God. He is the wakeful Presence when all other beings are asleep. The merely clever man, the cunning man, discovers that the place is occupied which he designed to fill alone. God is before him! The enemies of the Lord are always too late. God watches over Israel: He that keepeth Israel shall neither slumber nor sleep.

Well, here is a young man named Jeremiah, who has been called to an unfamiliar and exacting office. He is fearful before the prospect; he trembles at the demand. He feels his lack of experience. He is miserably conscious of the poverty of his equipment. He shrinks from the task. It will be too much for him. His enemies are many, and they have the double advantage of years and ingenuity. In every emergency he will be outrun. In every crisis he will be outclassed and outdone. "Ah, Lord God, I cannot speak; for I am a child!"

And as he walks along the way, buried in this melancholy mood, the Spirit of God directs his eyes and mind to an almond tree as it unrolls its living banners over the wintry waste. "Jeremiah, what seest thou?" And as he gazes upon it the almond tree becomes sacramental, a vital symbol of still more significant things. It is awake, while everything else is sleeping. "And I,'' says the Lord, "watch over My word to perform it." The young prophet is not abandoned to the thin armour of scanty experience. He is not left to the mercy of more "knowing'' antagonists. His God anticipates all human devices. His servants do not follow a blind leadership. Neither do we walk in our sleep. Following God, we are children of the day, and we walk in the light even as He is in the light.

And thus it is that the servant of the Lord finds prepared ground at every step of the road. "The Lord, He it is that goeth before thee!'" God has a plan of campaign: there are no surprises in His warfare; every hostile attack is foreseen and provided for. We are not led by ignorance or by caprice which is confused a hundred times a day. Our God has eyes! He is Alpha and Omega, and He sees the end from the beginning. He is the first and the last on the field.

And, therefore, with such a leader, trembling fear should change into songful courage. It is not enemy's country through which we are marching, and where he alone is familiar with the ground. "We are marching through Emmanuel 's land!" And we are to step out with a steadfast assurance which is the parent of peace and quiet joy. We are to begin our difficult tasks in the blessed mood of finished achievement. We are to sing doxologies as we go forth to battle. We are to give thanks for the blessings "we are about to receive," and the thanksgiving must be a vital part of our fighting before even the real struggle begins. I mean that battles must be won in our hearts before they are fought in the open field. Jeremiah must slay his fears before he can subdue priests and kings. He must believe in their overthrow before they can be overthrown. He must expect it before it will happen. He must see victory on the way, and he must sing the songs of victory because he sees his God. That was the way of Jesus, and it must be our way. Our Lord Jesus gave thanks for miracles before they happened. "Father, I thank Thee that Thou hast heard Me!'' When that word was spoken Lazarus was still in the tomb, but with the grace and thanksgiving upon His lips He commanded grim death to loose its bonds, and Lazarus came forth! Jesus believed in the wakefulness of God, and He confidently assumed it at every turning of the way.