**THE SILVER LINING - MESSAGES OF HOPE AND CHEER BY JOHN H. JOWETT**

**13. THE REJOICING DESERT by JOHN H. JOWETT**

*"The desert shall rejoice and blossom as the rose."*

*Isaiah 35:1*

THERE is nothing more interesting and fascinating than to watch the transformation of the barren into the beautiful. Conversion is often more wonderful than creation. We gaze with extraordinary attention as some half-repellent thing passes through some mysterious process, and in the process becomes lovely. There is always something alluring about the transformation of the desert. In my schooldays I had a drawing-master who was a very pronounced expert in his profession, and he adorned the walls of the schoolroom with many of his own creations. I have almost completely forgotten those masterpieces, but I perfectly well remember the transformation of one of my own drawings into a thing of comparative beauty. The drawing itself, as I had left it, was fearfully imperfect, and I looked upon it almost with feelings of loathing; but the master touched it and retouched it, and the half-ugly thing became a passable representation of an ancient arch. "The desert was made to rejoice and blossom as the rose." I know two places in Newcastle-on-Tyne, Jesmond Dene and Brandling Park. Jesmond Dene was always beautiful, even before it became a public resort. A few pathways were cut through it, and it was made a little more hospitable to the crowd. But Brandling Park was once an eyesore to the city. It was the place of a common tip, where loads of rubbish were heaped together. And then the municipality determined to change this eyesore into a winsome thing, and they converted it into a beautiful park. Often, on my way to my church, have I rested amid its beautiful green and flowers, and I have rejoiced in the transformation of the repellent into the lovely. "The desert rejoiced and blossomed like the rose." The conversion of Brandling Park was even more wonderful than the original creation of Jesmond Dene.

It is not long since the first trees were planted in the great work of re-afforesting the Black Country. In all broad England there is no stretch of country more depressing than that which lies in dismal waste between Birmingham and Wolverhampton. And now the attempt is being made to transform it, and to redeem the Black Country from its well-deserved notoriety. Yes, it is transformation that arrests our attention. And here is a gracious promise from our God, offering a very miracle of transformation in human life. Just as the eyesore was turned into a park, just as the Black Country is being re-beautified, so the Lord will lay hold of the Black Country of the soul and convert it into His own garden. Let us take the great, mighty promise round about the circuit of our life, let us plant it like an inspiring banner over our deserts, that waving there it may proclaim our wonderful possibilities in the redeeming grace of Christ.

Our Lord will transform the desert of the soul and make it blossom as the rose. Who has not known the desert-soul? There is nothing gracious about it, nothing winsome and welcome. When people draw near they can find nothing satisfying in its presence. There is no fruit they can pluck, no water of inspiration they can drink, no grateful shade in which they may find refreshing rest. The whole being is hot and dry and feverish and fruitless. Men speak to one another of such a life and say, "You will get nothing out of him," which means they will not only be denied money, but denied things even more valuable than money they will be denied time and strength and service. Was not Scrooge in Dickens's "Christmas Carol" a desert-soul? No one drew near to him to pluck a flower or to taste a delicacy or to gather a single green blade. What can be done with a soul like this? Here comes in the uniqueness of the evangel of grace. "The desert shall rejoice and blossom as the rose." Now let us see what can be done.

"I will make the dry land springs of water." First of all, wells shall break out in the desert-soul. Kindly impulses shall be born. Generous emotions shall flow in plenteous abundance. Gracious feelings shall pervade the once dry and feverish soil. I do not quite know how the Lord will start these springs. He has many ministries, and they are all of them ministers of re-creation. I heard a farmer say a little while ago, "There is nothing like snow for feeding the springs!" And I have known men whose souls have been desert-like, who have been graciously blessed by the Lord under the snows of some chilling sorrow or disappointment. And most assuredly the genial springs have been born again. It is very frequently a seasonable moment, when you want help from anybody, to go after they have passed through some grave and serious affliction. The wells of sympathy are flowing, the first step has been taken in the transformation of the desert.

"In the wilderness shall waters break out, and streams in the desert." The kindly impulse shall become a steady inclination. A spring shall become a river. The emotion shall become a disposition. The soul shall be possessed by genial currents. It may be that the first sign of the gracious conversion will be the flow of tears. Who is there who has not been grateful when some heart, that has been dry and harsh as desert sand, has one day begun to weep? The penitence is the evidence of the wonder-working ministry of the great Restorer, and the life is becoming soft and gracious again.

"I will plant in the desert the cedar." He will not only make the springs to leap and the rivers to flow, He will continue the transformation by the culture of spiritual vegetation. He will plant the cedar, the symbol of strength. The effeminate shall become the masculine, and the soft and yielding shall become the durable and the persistent. There shall be nothing capricious about the life, nothing weak and rootless, but in the transformed desert there shall be virtuous habits with the strength of cedars. "I will set in the desert the fir-tree," the symbol to the Oriental of things sweet and musical. It provided the material out of which they made their harps, and it would suggest to them the end of the desert silence, and the outbreak of praise and song. Well, is not all this a wonderful transformation of the soul? In the desert of the life there are to come springs and rivers and strong and beautiful trees. And the promise is made to everybody, however dark and terrible may be their need, and however harsh and repellent may be their life. "The desert shall rejoice and blossom as the rose."

Sometimes our work appears to us like a desert. One of the great characteristics of the desert is its monotony, and we frequently go to its unchanging wastes for a figure to describe our monotonous toil. In the desert the progress is merely on and on! There is no turn of the road! There is no surprise! And so it is with much of our daily life and calling. There is a great deal of sameness in the work of every man. It is a little round, the well-known track. We trudge it daily, we know every stone in the pavement; and we have become so subdued by the monotony that we have begun to regard ourselves as the victims of drudgery. I think that is how a great many people regard their work. It is a desert and not a garden. I have sometimes spoken to men when they have finished their holiday and returned to their labour, and I have asked them how they have enjoyed it, and they very frequently reply that after such experiences it is very tame returning to the common work.

I stood a little while ago on the Great Orme's Head, on a wonderfully beautiful day, gazing upon the colours of that exquisite coast. There was a fine air blowing over the headland, and everything was fresh and sweet. One who was standing near me suddenly made this remark, "Fancy auctioneering after this!" He had thought of his work, and with the work immediately appeared the desert! His holiday provided the garden, and he was returning to the waste. Now, can the desert of our work be made to blossom like the rose? Most assuredly it can. I wonder how it was with Paul when he was making tents? I feel perfectly sure there was no suggestion of "desert" in the labour. And why did he not regard his work as a desert? Just because there was no desert in his soul. His own soul was a bit of Emmanuel's land, and therefore his work formed a part of the same inheritance. What we are in soul will determine what we see in our work. If our soul is "flat" then everything will drag. The light upon our work comes from our own eyes. If the sunshine is on our souls it will most assuredly beam out of our eyes and rest on our labour.

I knew a cobbler who used to sit at his work just where he could catch a glimpse of the green fields! I think that is suggestive of how we ought to sit at our work. So sit as to catch the glory-light Let the soul be posed toward the Lord, and the light of His countenance will shine upon it; and the light will beam out of the eyes and our work will appear transfigured. "The desert will rejoice and blossom as the rose."

And surely sometimes our sorrows appear as the desert. We pass into experiences that are dark and cold and lonely, and over which there blows a bitter wind. Surely sorrow is a Black Country to untold multitudes of souls! "Can God furnish a table in the wilderness?" Can He feed us in the season of a sorrow? Let us remember it was in the desert that the miracle of the loaves was wrought, and in the desert of our sorrow a harvest miracle may be wrought to-day. At His word our desert can abound with lilies and violets and heart's-ease and forget-me-nots. "He will also feed thee with the finest of the wheat." Your sorrow shall be turned into joy. Oh, thou troubled soul, turn to the great Wonder Worker, and thy desert shall blossom as the rose!