

H AS A NATURE LOVER

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ISIAH AS A NATURE LOVER



ISAIAH
AS A NATURE-LOVER

By Frederick John Lazell

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FOREWORD

AS Robertson Smith pointed out, the Bible, though a great nature-book, has no such word as "Nature" in its vocabulary. It reflects the arch of the sky and the curve of the earth, mountains and seas, rising and setting suns, birds and flowers, and the witchery of moonlight on the desert; but it never thinks of creation as something apart from the Creator. Not Wordsworth, but Coleridge, in his *Hymn before Sunrise in the Vale of Chamouni*, comes nearest, among modern poets, to the Bible music; and among prose writers no one has surpassed the Ruskin commentary on the 19th Psalm, in the concluding volume of *Modern Painters*, at the end of the chapter entitled "The Angel of the Sea."

The essay to follow is written by one

who is not content to read what John Burroughs calls "the fine print of Nature," but who would fain interpret here a line and there a verse of its God-illuminated text. He sees that because Isaiah was a poet, to whom the world was a song, he was thereby a greater prophet, to whom the world was a parable; and he has written of the nature scenery in those memorable prophetic pages with the insight and enthusiasm of one who loves the out-of-doors in the Bible, and the great Bible of the out-of-doors. }>

J. F. N.

ISAIAH AS A NATURE LOVER

IN the dream-like days that lie behind the doors which swing not back, the choir-boys in their stalls on either side of the chancel often fidgeted while the white-robed minister at the lectern, between the choir and the congregation, was reading the lessons for the day. Sometimes there were interminable genealogies — these were usually read by the curate. At other times there were unconscionably long sections from Leviticus or Deuteronomy. But when the good gray rector happened to read a chapter from Isaiah as the first lesson, there was general stillness; even the score of the new and carefully rehearsed anthem was allowed to lie unheeded on the stall. For his vibrant voice reading Isaiah sounded like the tones of the great organ in the

chancel; sometimes majestic, as in "Costa's March of the Israelites;" sometimes exultant and thrilling, as in Handel's "Hallelujah Chorus;" sometimes tender and pleading like the "Miserere." The rector had in his younger days been a chaplain on a warship. When he read Isaiah's "Ocean Symphony" you could hear the tossing waves come in and break against the rocks. In the pastoral passages the tones of the good old man were full of tenderness and pleading pathos; it seems now they were like the tear-starting strains of "The Dead March in Saul," that day the old rector lay dead.

Like some sweet sparkling stream the love of nature runs through all the sunlit fields of song and story. Nowhere in literature, ancient or modern, is it deeper or more beautiful than in the literature of the Old Testament — unless, indeed, it be in the recorded sayings of the Supreme Prophet of the New. In Isaiah it is manifest the moment one opens the book. It shines out in similes; it overflows in be-

wildering series of metaphors; it is the basis — next to Isaiah's ever-present feeling of the omnipresence and omnipotence of God — of all that is grandest and most sublime in that wonderful book.

Unlike David and Elisha, Micah and Amos, and several of the other Old Testament writers, who sprang from the soil, Isaiah was a child of the city, a dweller at the national capital, a prophet at the court. Possessing the shrewdness and the sagacity of a statesman, he was a privileged prophet, a favorite and a counselor of kings. Born in Jerusalem, he seems to have been schooled under the kindly eye of the wise and good Uzziah. After his lips had been touched by the mystic glowing coal he dared to halt the chariot of Ahaz and button-hole the monarch on the king's highway. He hob-nobbed with Hezekiah and doctored him with a fig-plaster when he was sick. Studying inductively his priceless legacy of prophetic literature, we picture him as a statesman with the ability of a Gladstone, a prophet with the fire and fervor

of a Savonarola, and a poet with a vision and mind of a Shakespeare, environed by kings and prelates, lords and ladies, comprehending in the vast reach of his genius all the life and learning of his times. His mind was stored with the sacred literature of his people. He was an orator filled with fire, a poet whose soul was steeped in sublimity and beauty. He had the seeing eye; nothing escaped his vision. No detail was so small as to pass unnoticed, no vision was so vast and grand that he could not comprehend it. Of all the prophets, he excels in the grandeur and sublimity of his imagery. He lifts us to lofty peaks of exaltation and splendor when we read and re-read his matchless words. Like Peter on the Mount of the Transfiguration, we fain would stay forever. His service to Palestine was like that of Goethe to Europe:

He read each wound, each weakness clear,
And struck his finger on the place
And said, "Thou ailest here, and here."

| All facts were sheaves for the harvest

of his eye. Beneath his accusing gaze, the sinners of both sexes must have shrank like the criminals in the presence of Victor Hugo's Javert! How Ahaz must have squirmed in his gilded chariot that day on the Joppa road, lest the penetrating eye of the prophet should detect his secret determination to call in the aid of Assyria! How the stretched-out necks of the daughters of Zion must have drooped as the prophet's quizzical glance wandered from the gold ornaments in their sweet-scented hair down to the gaudy girdles around their waists and thence to their tethered ankles and tinkling feet. In his splendid series of terse word pictures, Isaiah paints for us all the details of life in the city. Crowded on his canvas are not only the lines of camels and dromedaries taking treasure from the Holy City down into Egypt, and the ranks on ranks of chariots and horses moving swiftly towards the sacred hill; we see also ogling women in luxurious raiment, weak and wicked rulers, apostate priests in idolatrous temples, the squalor

and misery, the splendor and the wealth and the sin, which made up the city life of that day.

But he loved the out-of-doors. He was a poet as well as a prophet, and he had the poet's perception and enjoyment of all that is sublime and inspiring in earth and sea and sky. Living near the glamor and the glitter of the court, like Theocritus, Chaucer, and Shakespeare, he loved, like them, to taste the freshness and the joy of the open air. And he gets the out-of-doors flavor into his sentences as some painters get it into their pictures. Some prophets there have been, standing like grim gray rocks on the headlands of history, unsoftened and unsweetened by nature's ministry of beauty. But Isaiah was not one of these. He had a first-hand knowledge of the fields and woods, an intimate acquaintance with the wild creatures living in them, a delight in the beauty of growing grain and in the ever-varying play of sunlight and shadow on the slopes of the wooded hills. He

preached from no pulpit, but beneath the open sky. He may have studied the sacred rolls in the seclusion of his home; but his greater study was the book of nature as he saw it from the hills and valleys of Judea. To him this out-door world was the handiwork of an All-powerful, but a most merciful and loving Creator.

So we picture him, still studying inductively those marvelous pen pictures which show us how keen was his eye, how vast and accurate his knowledge of the out-of-doors, how specific and intimate his acquaintance with the forms and the habits of the fauna and the flora of his time. Nature was the harvest field of his imagery, the vineyard of his inspiration.

Isaiah knew the physical as well as the political history and geography of his native land. In his marvelous mind were mirrored the changing aspects of many a forest-crowned hill and fruitful plain. He loved the mountains, the lightning, and the tempest. The grander aspects

of nature seemed to have a special appeal to him. He saw in them the glory and the grandeur of God. His soul reached out for the beauty of the universe; he gathered up beauty as some men gather gold. Scenes of pastoral peace and plenty filled him with a quiet joy. He promised such pleasures as rewards for the righteous remnant of his race, as if he knew that sweet serenity dwells beneath the trees and that depth of life is best attained beneath the far and silent sky. From flower and cloud, from stream and star, from the buoyant light of the morning and the gentle death of the day he caught visions of glory and messages of promise, and sent them on in winged words from his high Hermon of thought across the hills and the valleys of the years.

In the country, as in the city, nothing escapes his keen and studious eye. All the activities of the folk of field and vineyard, all the changing glory of the pageant of the year are pleasing and full of

meaning to those bright windows through which his mind looks out.

In terse sentences, like quick, suggestive strokes of an artist's brush, we are shown the cedars of Lebanon that are "high and lifted up" on the lofty range of Libanus. Here and there the cedar forests have been cleared, the valuable timber hauled down to the coast and rafted down to Joppa for use in temple and palaces. In the clearings from which the loose bits of limestone have been removed choice vines have been planted. In successive terraces the vineyards rise, each with its high tower, its huge winepress, and its stone walls.

Over yonder the cedars hang over the white limestone cliffs and far below are the dancing blue waters of the Mediterranean where the merchant fleet of Tarshish with gilded prows and purple sails make a "pleasing picture" in the brilliant morning sunlight, streaming over the promontory and throwing the shadow of the great rocks far out towards the ships.

Or, the day is far spent and a storm is rising with the coming of the night. If one "looks towards the land, the light is darkened in the heavens thereof," and at the base of the cliffs is heard the multitudinous roar of the sea. How strikingly the music of the sea is imitated and reproduced in that marvelous bit of tone-painting which tells us that "the nations shall rush like the rushing of mighty waters!" How clearly the roar and the reverberation of the sea is in that ocean symphony! It reads like a stanza from Swinburne at his best. It is delightful to listen to Isaiah when he speaks of the sea.

One day he stands near the shore of the Dead Sea and notes the black masses of asphaltum cast up from the ancient "slime-pits" beneath its waters. "The wicked," he tells us, "are like the troubled sea, when it cannot rest, casting up mire and dirt."

In pleasing contrast to this is the vivid beauty of the picture which must have

been seen by the prophet from the sandy and stony shore where the river Jordan enters the sea of Galilee. The peaceful river moves slowly down the channel into the lake, and its path far into the inland sea is shown by the broad belt of smoother water. Beside it and beyond it, far as the eye can reach, the white-capped waves of Gennesareth are dancing in the sunlight, a lovely expanse of blue water and white foam. The memory of that picture must have been vivid in the poet's mind when he said, in that strain of tender pathos: "Oh, that thou hadst hearkened unto my commandments! Then had thy peace been as a river and thy righteousness as the waves of the sea. Thy seed also had been as the sand and thy off-spring as the gravel thereof."

Supplementing the landscape view of the terraced vineyards on Lebanon, there are loving, detailed sketches of individual vineyards. One of these forms the theme of an exquisite allegory. We see the vineyard on the fruitful hill. The stones have been carefully taken from the soil

and piled in the fence which faces the vineyard, collecting and retaining the soil brought down from above by the rains. The vineyard is planted with the choicest vines; they should grow clusters weighing ten or twelve pounds and grapes as large as prunes. Or some of them may be the famous white grapes, the celebrated "vine of Sorek." In the midst of the vineyard is the stone watch-tower, fifteen or twenty-five feet high, where the keeper of the vineyard is stationed to protect the fruit from small boys and other thieves. Hewn out of the solid rock is the wine-press, into which the black and red grapes are thrown by the gatherers. Their hands and their linen garments are dyed red with the blood of the grapes. There is singing in the vineyard and shouts of rejoicing as the treaders tread out the wine in the press. Flowing in a crimson stream, the blood of the grapes is caught in huge stone vessels and carried away for sale or for storage.

Would we see the fields and the farm

operations of Palestine? In the picture galleries of Isaiah are shown all the seasonal landscapes. Here is a stubblefield, thick with the straw of last year's crop. Now the fire and smoke sweep across the stubble as the farmer burns it to add to the fertility of the lands. Here is the next picture — a farmer plowing with a yoke of oxen. They tire and slacken their pace; he urges them forward with a scourge. Behind him are men with hoes to break the clods. When the ground becomes level and fit the farmer sows the "ketzakh," or rape seed, grown for its oil. In the best places he puts in his wheat and his barley. In still another place he casts the aromatic cummin. Along the edges of the field he scatters the spelt. The season advances, and in June the yellow fields of grain, separated by green patches of herbs and dotted with olive trees and umbrageous oaks, make a varied and lovely landscape. The harvest comes and the farmer and his men are in the grain fields with their reaping hooks; they encompass the

standing grain with the hollow of their left arms and cut off the bearded heads. They drink and are refreshed and the gleaners drink with them.

We see the grain on the threshing floor. The rape-seed, or fennel-flower, is beaten out lightly with a staff. The cummin, which is to be used by the cooks for condiment, is threshed out with a flail. Now bring on the wheat and the barley. Round and round go the unmuzzled oxen, pulling the corn-drag which jostles and beats the plump kernels from the straw. When the process has been carried on long enough — not too long lest the grain be bruised — the winnowers come on. With short shovels and fans they toss the grain in the air to cleanse it from the chaff. Then the horses and the carts carry the grain away. Every detail of this process gives the prophet great delight. “This also,” he says, “cometh forth from the Lord.” Walt Whitman or John Millais was not more interested in the men of the field and their work.

Travelers tell us that the downs of Bethlehem in early February, after the abundant rains of winter and early spring, are one spangled carpet of brilliant flowers; but before the end of May all traces of verdure have disappeared. In the valley of the Jordan about the time of the "latter rains" in March there is a deep, solid growth of clovers and grasses, all aglow with daisies, lilies, lupins, and especially ablaze with scarlet flowers such as tulips and poppies. Then the latter rains cease, the period of drouth begins, lasting from the end of March until the "early rains" come in the autumn. By the middle of June the valley of the Jordan is baked brown; a hard, gaping, famishing plain, where there is no green thing.

These annual scenes the Psalmist had in mind when he said that the ungodly should consume away like "the splendor of the meadows" — not "the fat of lambs" as the translator has rendered it.

These same scenes give Isaiah the thought: "All flesh is grass and the

goodliness thereof as the flower of the field. The grass withereth and the flower fadeth, but the word of our God shall stand forever.”

At the head of the valley, where the soil is thinner, the withering of the grass and the fading of the flowers are first apparent. Farther down the valley there are still verdure and beauty. So Samaria, besieged and about to be sacked by Sargon, “the glorious beauty which is on the head of the fat valley” is likened to “a fading flower” and as “the hasty fruit before the summer; which when he that looketh upon it seeth, while it is yet in his hand, he eateth it up.”

In the great picture gallery of Isaiah the two chief canvasses face each other, like panoramas contrasted as a study for all the generations to come. One side might be entitled “Wickedness, War, and Famine;” the other, “Righteousness, Peace, and Plenty.” One shows the land overridden by its enemies and stricken with a drouth; the other invites us to

behold the nation at peace and the climate at its best.

In the first huge panorama a procession of camels and dromedaries winds slowly down towards Egypt. At the hump of each of the camels is a package of treasure as an offering to Egypt. It is in vain. Egypt sitteth still. Whirling into the choicest valleys of the chosen land come the war chariots of Assyria. The horses have hoofs like flints — Shakespeare, also, was quick to note the points of a horse. None is weary; none stumbles. The warriors lay waste the cities, despoil the vineyards, pillage the farms, drive off the herds. They fire the forests and the smoke of the burning thickets rolls up towards the sky. Lebanon is filled with flame and smoke. Its mightiest trees are destroyed.

Famine follows. The rivers languish and fail, sand-bars and rocks make islands in their beds. The anglers lament because their pastime is no more, and the fishermen with their nets are dismayed because their means of livelihood is taken

away. The fish die as the waters are dried up and their decay pollutes the air. The streams in the volcanic valleys cease to flow; their bituminous beds are turned to pitch. The bits of brimstone lying around the Dead Sea are changed by the concentrated heat into a sulphurous, choking dust. The pelican screams from the shore, the bittern booms from the withering reeds and flags by Jordan and Gennesareth, but there is no human ear to hear them.

Where proud palaces once stood, nettles and briars grow amid the heaps of ruins. Here the wildest beasts have their lairs, the ruined forts and towers are their dens. So remote from all human intrusion is the place that it is a "joy" for the keen-scented wild asses, always quick to scent the approach of man and to flee from him. The plaintive note of the mourning dove is heard, as if the bird were sore distressed. The birds of darkness and desolation, the great owl, the screech owl, the vulture, the raven, make their nests, they lay their eggs and

hatch them; there is none to disturb them, none cometh to build up the ruined cities. The fences of the vineyards are broken down, the vines are trampled, the vineyard is overgrown with briars. Utter solitude prevails where once the grapes were gathered amid shouts and song.

In the fields the hay withereth, the grass faileth, the corn is blasted before it is grown up, there is no green thing. Sharon is a wilderness, Lebanon is hewn down and ashamed. The poor and needy seek water and there is none; their tongues are parched and swollen, they cannot talk. The leaves wither and fall from the trees, the fruits shrivel and drop before their time on the browned and burning earth.

There is no traffic along the highways. They are choked with the thickets of thorn-trees, tangles of branches, thistles, and deadly night-shade. In these tangles hide ravenous beasts. In the maritime plain the garden is dead and desolate; it is like Swinburne's "ghost of a garden which fronts the sea." From the

hot sand leaps the poisonous little viper — the “fiery flying serpent” — and the yellow-streaked serpent is one of the horrors of the night.

Turn to the other great panoramic picture. How beautiful it is, at the first glance! The rains have fallen, the parched ground has become a pool. Green reeds and rushes rise from the place where the lion had his lair. They bend and wave over the sweet water, they are thick and lush with greenness. How refreshing is the cool green after the arid brown! The trees are decked with new beauty. The planted ash is nourished by the rain, the leaves of the oak wave and flutter in the breeze, as if the trees were clapping their hands for joy. In the desert the box tree springs up, the myrtle and the acacia are blooming again. The verdure and the flowers have come once more, the desert rejoices and blossoms as the rose. Isaiah thinks it must be as beautiful as “Eden” and “The Garden of the Lord.”

No one is thirsty. Springs of water are flowing from the rocks, fountains are opened in the midst of the valleys. The gardens are re-planted and to them are brought streams of water from the rivers and the hills. In large pastures the cattle are feeding and in the unmolested sheepfolds the shepherd is tenderly caring for his sheep. Again there is glory on Lebanon and "excellency" on Carmel and in Sharon.

The wild beasts have gone, the husbandman is sowing beside all waters, and sending forth thither the feet of the oxen. When they return from their labor there is clean and winnowed provender for them, for plenty has returned to the land. The corn grows so fast and fine that the fields look like a young forest.

The highways are restored and the exiles return over them with thanksgiving and singing. The vineyards are replanted and the righteous remnant of Judah are sitting beneath the vines, feasting on the fruit made plump by the timely rains and purpled by the kisses of the sun.

Such is the picture Isaiah paints as the best incentive and the greatest reward of righteousness. Not gold, not splendid cities and big armies. Pastoral peace and plenty are lovingly portrayed as the rich reward for the righteous remnant of Judah which is to be divinely used for the ultimate salvation of the world.

Little snapshot nature pictures abound in Isaiah's imagery. Here is one of a bunch of dogs, spoiled dogs, overfed, sleeping in the sun. One of them partly opens a drowsy eye at the stranger. But they are all fat, gorged, and lazy. They are dumb dogs; they cannot bark.

Here is another, a picture of a young lion among the sheep. Hastily called to help the owner, a multitude of shepherds are running towards the lion with sticks and stones, yelling to scare him away from the sheep beneath his paw. Under these circumstances a wary old lion would hasten to get back to his den. But this is a young lion, "roaring on his

prey," and he is "not afraid of their voice."

We expect to find pictures showing the land of Judah in the flood season; and Isaiah has them. Sweeping down the valley come the waters of the swollen Jordan. The channel is overfilled, the river overflows its banks and goes over into the valley; soon it is up to a man's neck. Rushing swiftly onward the broad expanse of water deals death and desolation. So, says the prophet, shall be the coming of the army of Assyria.

The little picture in xviii, 4, has an atmosphere like a Corot. Green clovers, spangled with flowers, are drenched with the morning dew; as in Omar Khayyam's time, "the tulip from her morning cup of heavenly vintage from the soil looks up." The "clear heat" of the rising sun makes mist of the dew and veils the distant landscape with purple loveliness.

Especially vivid is the picture of the olive tree, shaken by the owner of the grove. It is not a large tree; see, he

grasps the main stem and shakes the whole tree top! The olives rain down. Another shake and all of them are down save only two or three "in the top of the uppermost bough, four or five in the outmost fruitful branches."

Other little nature pictures which hang on the mental walls of him who has read Isaiah carefully are the lonely old booth in the deserted vineyard, and the sprawling, ramshackle old lodge made of oleander branches in the isolated garden of cucumbers. The shadow of the great rock in the weary land is more widely known. Full of beauty and depth of meaning, it is one of the great word-pictures of the world.

Isaiah must have been a lover of the trees, so many are the tree pictures he paints. Reading his reference to the oaks, one feels that he must have known and loved some handsome, majestic old oak, like that which was pointed out to Phillips Brooks at Mamre as "Abraham's Oak." Perhaps it was while sitting beneath such

a tree that there flashed into his mind that beautiful simile: "As the days of a tree are the days of my people." Every real lover of old trees has had a similar feeling. Oliver Wendell Holmes, who measured and loved all the big trees in his neighborhood, wrote:

There's nothing on earth that keeps its
youth

So far as I know, but a tree and truth.

And John Muir, describing the Sequoias of the Sierras, says: "As far as man is concerned they are the same yesterday, today and forever, emblems of permanence."

Towards the close of the drouthy summer we see the oak with the "fading leaf" and a little later when the strong winds bring the first driving rains of the autumn the leaves are falling. Soon the oak has cast its leaves and is bare. We note that the winter is unusually severe; for the teil tree (terebinth), usually an evergreen, also has cast its leaves. But the promise of the spring is in the winter buds, strung along their twigs. "The

substance is in them," says the prophet. He is quick to note the life and strength and beauty of the bare trees during the winter season and he uses it as one more illustration of the comfort and hope for the righteous "tenth," the remnant of Judah which finally is to return and be blessed. No one but an observer and a lover of the life out-of-doors could have so noted and used this winter phase in the life of the two trees.

Isaiah shows us the sloping sides of Lebanon with its vineyards and olive trees, its fir trees and its splendid old cedars. He makes us feel the national shame and the sacrilegious horror of it all as the chariots of Sennacherib climb spirally up the winding roads to the height of the mountain, up to the place where the very finest trees grow in order that he may boast of having cut them. The prophet seems to feel the loss as keenly as John Muir would if some triumphing Japanese general should cut the Big Trees on the slope of the Sierras. It is one of the first things he takes up

in his famous message to Hezekiah, prophesying the impending doom of the army of Sennacherib. The invader had boasted by his servants that he had gone into the extremest height of Lebanon, the forest of his park, and had there, with insolent boasting, cut down "the height of his cedars and the beauty of his cypresses." Dean Stanley has shown us that this was the very sanctuary of Lebanon, the park or garden of the sacred cedars, a "garden of God," located in a dip between the terraces of ancient glaciers and the snow-clad hills behind. From this sacred grove Sennacherib cut hundreds of patriarchal cedars, sending one of them home to Nineveh as a beam for his palace whereon he might inscribe the boastful record of what he had done. Other trees were used for bridges. Some were burned. They were left so few that a child could count them. About a dozen patriarchal trees are now standing in that sacred grove. Some apparently believe that these are the identical trees which were left by Sennacherib; but

probably they are not so old as that. These patriarchs now are veiled by the feathery branches of the younger trees which have sprung up during the centuries since the ruthless slaughter of the trees by order of Sennacherib.

Isaiah regards Sennacherib's wanton destruction of the sacred cedars as a direct insult to God himself. He had previously likened Sennacherib to a great despoiler of birds' nests—the great bird-nester of the world, driving the daughters of Moab from their homes to the Fords of Arnon, like young birds scared from their nests but unable to fly and shift for themselves. He now likens him to a bull who is to have a ring put through his nose and to be jerked around and led back the same way that he came.

Everyone who has roamed the woods and noted the young saplings growing up around the place where a big ash or a linden had been cut down will appreciate the force and beauty of the figure which is in the first verse of the eleventh chapter of Isaiah. All these figures of

speech are so many tell-tale marks as to where Isaiah must have spent much of his time, and how he regarded the trees of the forests and the roadsides.

So, too, the remembrance of having seen a whole forest shaken by the wind, when the smaller trees were whipped hither and thither and even the patriarchs of the forest were swaying in the gale, springs instantly to the prophet's mind when Ahaz and his people are panic-stricken at the coming of Rezin and Pekah, the "two tails of a smoking fire-brand." The king's heart, we are told, and the hearts of his people were moved, "as the trees of the wood are moved with the wind."

Being a lover of the out-of-doors Isaiah has much to say about the wind. You may feel its freshness and its force in his words, see it playing through many of the most beautiful of his passages. Sometimes it is a light, sweet wind, merely bowing the heads of the bulrushes. Or it is a rough, east wind, sweeping down

from the mountains, sometimes a terrible blast that thunders and drives against the wall. Such a blast sends the water of the shallow river driving before it "in seven streams," and the dry land appears. In such a wind everyone seeks shelter. In a country where "the whirlwinds sweep up from the south" a shelter in the time of a great storm is precious; hence the figure of The Man who should be a shelter from the wind.

If Walt Whitman had written a categorical nature poem, summarizing what he saw in Isaiah, might it not have run something like this?

What do you see in the Nature-lore of Isaiah, Walt Whitman?

Take Isaiah's hand, follow him up and down the land, what does he show you?

I see a great round wonder rolling through space.

I see the moon and the stars, the flying cloud, the light and the shadow, the white mists that lie thick in the valleys and are

touched with ineffable splendor by the rising sun.

I see mountain-peaks, the hoary head of Hermon, the promontory of Carmel, the twin ridges of Libanus and anti-Libanus, Bashan and the beautiful oaks.

I see the storm and the lightning, the earth-quake, the mountain melted by volcanic fire and its waters boiling and steaming.

I see the springs gushing from the rocks, bubbling up in big fountains and flowing away to make rivers.

I see the stones of fair colors, the agates, the carbuncles, and the sapphires.

I see the oak, and the fir-trees and the cedars being planted where the sycamores were cut down.

I see the acacia and the myrtle blossoming in the desert, and near by the fir tree and the pine with their dark green needles.

The terebinth tree and the thorn tree, the cypress and the willows by the waters.

I see the box tree giving its wood and

the oleaster yielding its oil; the olive tree and the fig tree laden with their fruit.

I see the reeds and the flags, the sweet cane, the rushes and the grass and the green and ripened corn making a checkered landscape beautiful to behold.

I see the superior fruits and the inferior ones, the red grapes ready for the press, the tiny green grapes just growing from the flowers, the small wild grapes, the untimely figs and the hasty fruit before the summer.

I behold the animals of the olden time. I look over into the clear-sunn'd Mediterranean and see the leviathan.

I behold the unicorn and the satyr crying to his fellow.

I behold the camels and the dromedaries going down into Egypt laden with presents, the horses with them, and the asses.

In the wilderness I behold the lion, the wolf, the leopard, and the galloping wild asses.

I see the serpents in the thickets, and

on the rocks, the viper, the adder, the cockatrice and the asp.

I see the hart at the stream, the chased roe swiftly galloping.

I see the fish ponds and the sluices and the fish that are perishing in them as they dry up.

I see the bats flying in the twilight at evening and the mole excavating his cave-dwelling in the early hours of the morning.

I see the swarms of flies and the bee-master hissing to his bees.

I see the yellow butter, and the thick honey.

I see the worm and the caterpillar, the spider, the locust and the grasshoppers, feeding on the green leaves, the moth and her larvæ subsisting on the garment.

I see the migrating bird, the ravenous bird from Egypt; the raven and the great owl, the screech owl and the vultures, the crane and the huge cormorant and the bittern by the pools.

I see the smaller birds also, the dove with her mournful notes, the twittering

swallow, the flying doves at the windows.

*Toward them all, small and great, and
to the great prophet who drew them and
loved them and gave me great lessons
from them,*

*To them and to him I raise high the
perpendicular hand, I salute them.*

*For he, too, was a full-grown poet who
took Nature and the soul of man each
by the hand and showed each to the
other that he might unite them and blend
them.*

They tell us that Tennyson used to prepare his similes with great care, writing them down in a book and selecting them as needed during his creative writing. It is probably only a bit of exaggerated literary gossip, containing the merest grain of truth, though it may explain such elaborate similes as that which describes the unhorsing of the bulky bandit in the idyll of Geraint and Enid. But the most of Tennyson's nature similes show of themselves that they sprang spontaneously from the mind of

a keen observer, a real nature lover. In this respect they are not unlike the similies and the metaphors of Isaiah. It is in some of these figures of the old prophet that we find the best evidence of his keen observation of the out-of-doors and his delight in all its phases. Many of them are worth careful thought:

For ye shall be as an oak whose leaf fadeth and as a garden that hath no water.

And the daughter of Zion is left as a booth in a vineyard, as a watchman's hut in a garden of cucumbers.

They shall spring up as among the grass, as willows by the water courses.

As the fire devoureth the stubble and the flame consumeth the chaff.

Their roaring shall be like a lion.

As a teil tree and as an oak, whose substance is in them when they cast their leaves, so the holy seed shall be the substance thereof.

And his heart was moved, and the hearts of his people, as the trees of the wood are moved with the wind.

And the earth shall be as a chased roe.

Strong cities shall be as a forsaken bough and as an uppermost branch.

The king of Assyria likened at first to a swollen river: then to a black vulture, spreading his huge wings over the land.

The people that walked in darkness have seen a great light.

Wickedness burneth as a forest fire.

The Lord shall lop the bough with terror.

And there shall come forth a rod out of the stem of Jesse and a branch shall grow out of his roots.

As a wandering bird (young bird) out of the nest, so shall the daughters of Moab be at the Fords of Arnon.

For thou hast been a shadow from the heat, a refuge from the storm.

For thy dew is as the dew of herbs.

Whose glorious beauty is a fading flower.

Thou shalt be visited of the Lord of hosts with thunder and with earthquake and with great noise; with storm and tempest and the flame of a devouring fire.

His breath, even as an overflowing

stream, shall reach to the midst of the neck.

As birds flying, so will the Lord of Hosts defend Jerusalem.

And a man shall be as an hiding place from the wind, as a covert from the tempest; as rivers of water in a dry place, as a shadow of a great rock in a weary land.

Your spoil shall be gathered like the gathering of the caterpillar; as the running to and fro of locusts shall he run upon them.

Lo, thou trustest in the staff of a broken reed.

They were as the grass of the field, as the grass on the housetops.

My life is removed from me as a shepherd's tent.

Like a crane or a swallow, so did I chatter, I did mourn as a dove.

All flesh is grass and the goodliness thereof as the flower of the field.

He shall feed his flock like a shepherd.

The inhabitants of the earth are as grasshoppers.

They that wait upon the Lord shall

renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles.

I have blotted out as a thick cloud, thy transgressions.

Then had thy peace been as a river, thy righteousness as the waves of the sea.

The moth shall eat them up.

He shall grow up before him as a tender plant.

All we, like sheep, have gone astray.

For, as the rain cometh down and the snow from heaven, and returneth not thither but watereth the earth and maketh it bring forth fruit and bud, that it may give seed to the sower and bread to the eater; so shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth.

The wicked are like the troubled sea when it cannot rest.

Is it to bow down the head as a bulrush?

Then shall thy light break forth as the morning.

The Lord shall satisfy thy soul in drought and thou shalt be like a watered garden.

We roar all like bears and mourn sore like doves.

Who are these that fly as a cloud and like doves to the windows?

Thy sun shall no more go down, neither shall thy moon withdraw itself.

For, as the earth bringeth forth her bud and the garden causeth the things that are sown in it to spring forth, so the Lord God will cause righteousness and peace to spring forth before nations.

That led him through the deep as an horse through a wilderness.

As the days of a tree are the days of my people.

I will extend peace to her like a river and the glory of the gentiles like a flowing stream.

Many of these beautiful figures are household words. They have been selected for anthems and oratorios and for the texts of some of the world's greatest sermons. They give joy to the reader who loves his bible and also to him who loves the out-of-doors. The beauty and depth of meaning in them can scarcely be comprehended save by one who knows

and loves the out-of-doors, as Isaiah must have done.

Did you ever pause to look across an open landscape and note the little water-courses draining the fields and the pastures, with willows growing closely together on either shore of the streams? Or did you ever halt your boat some summer evening by the grassy shore of some willowed island which was once a sandbank in the middle of the river? It has been reclaimed by the willows and the foliage is so dense that the redwings and crow blackbirds are stringing towards it from up and down the river and settling down beneath the green blanket for their night's sleep. Then you will understand the fitness of Isaiah's figures: "Thy seed shall be as the sand and thine off-spring shall spring up among the grass, as willows by the water-courses."

Take your Isaiah some Sunday morning in August to your favorite seat at the base of the old oak on the breezy hillside where you have a view of three-fourths the circle of the horizon. From the

glossy green leaves at the ends of the twigs, all glorified by sunlight and shadow and swaying gently in the summer breeze, your gaze goes to the big background of blue sky, an ocean of blue sky with here and there an island of soft white cloud. You gaze into the azure depths, past the floating "isles of the blest," past the finest fibres of cirrus clouds, onward and upward into the violet blue heights and depths. Somewhere up there is Sirius, the dog star, blazing with fervent heat. Beyond Sirius are other worlds, myriads of them moving in accordance with a mystery divine, and beyond them all, perhaps, still stretches the eternal sea of space, for aught you know unvexed by atmospheres, unlit by suns and stars; it stretches on and on, in a cold and silent eternity until you can no longer touch it with your tensest thought. Then your mind comes back through the worlds of light and loveliness, the motions of the planets and the mystery of moving leaves and you open Chapter XL and read: "It is He that

sitteth upon the circle of the earth and the inhabitants thereof are as grasshoppers: that stretcheth out the heavens as a curtain and spreadeth them out as a tent to dwell in.”

Never mind if the higher critics tell us that Isaiah did not write Chapter XL. The higher critics have also told us that Shakespeare didn't write the song in Cymbeline; but we shall continue to think of the poet's words at the grave of a good man: “Nothing ill come near thee. Quiet consummation have, and renowned be thy grave,” and to think that Shakespeare wrote them. If Shakespeare didn't write that there must have been two Shakespeares. At least we shall think so until the higher critics prove that Shakespeare really didn't write anything worth while, but that Bacon wrote it all. And if Isaiah didn't write the chapters which the higher critics are now trying to take from him, then there must have been two Isaiahs, both of them gathering up the beauty of the out-of-doors as it existed in the Judea of

their day and treasuring it up for us in simile, metaphor and prophecy, making all the generations to come their everlasting debtors.

There remains to be considered the grandest and the most beautiful of all Isaiah's nature passages; those which set forth the majesty and the omnipotence of God and those which dwell upon His mercy and goodness. The former, for the most part, are drawn from Nature's greatest and grandest spectacles: the storm and the tempest, the forest consumed in the circling flames, the banner raised aloft on the mountain-tops for all the world to behold, the bee-master hissing unto the uttermost ends of the earth, the wonderful series of sublime metaphors in xxx, 27-33, the last three verses of Chapter II and the first three of LXIV. It would be easy to multiply examples. In every sublime spectacle of nature Isaiah beholds the majesty and the power of God.

And the loving-kindness, the goodness

and the tenderness of God are shown in a series of pastoral pictures, so vivid and so full of serenity and peace that we delight to read them over and over again. For examples, take the second and the sixth verse of Chapter IV, a large part of Chapter XI; XXX, 23-26; XXII, 15-20; XXXIII, 21; XXXV, 6-10; nearly all of XL; XLI, 17-20; XLIII, 20; XLIV, 3, 4; XLIX, 10; LI, 3; LII, 7; nearly all of LV; LX, 19-21; LXV, 9, 10, 21-25; LVI, 12.

Isaiah was a monotheist in an age and a world of polytheists. To his clear vision the philosophy of the natural world was plain. To him every aspect of the day and the night, each spectacle of storm, each loveliness of sunshine, was a manifestation of Divine Majesty, forbearance, forgiveness, and love. He had learned the highest lessons nature has to teach. He might have said with Linnæus, watching the unfolding of a flower, "I saw God in His glory passing near me and bowed my head in worship."

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