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DESERT & SANCTUARY



DESERT SANCTUARY

James H. Foster



¶ We owe it to ourselves to seek sanctuary, now and then, in the quiet isolation of the desert.

¶ The solitude that beckons from out this silent land is not, as many suppose, a solitude that invites loneliness. For when we learn to *know* the desert, and are attuned to its unpredictable moods, we find no evidence of loneliness inherent in it.

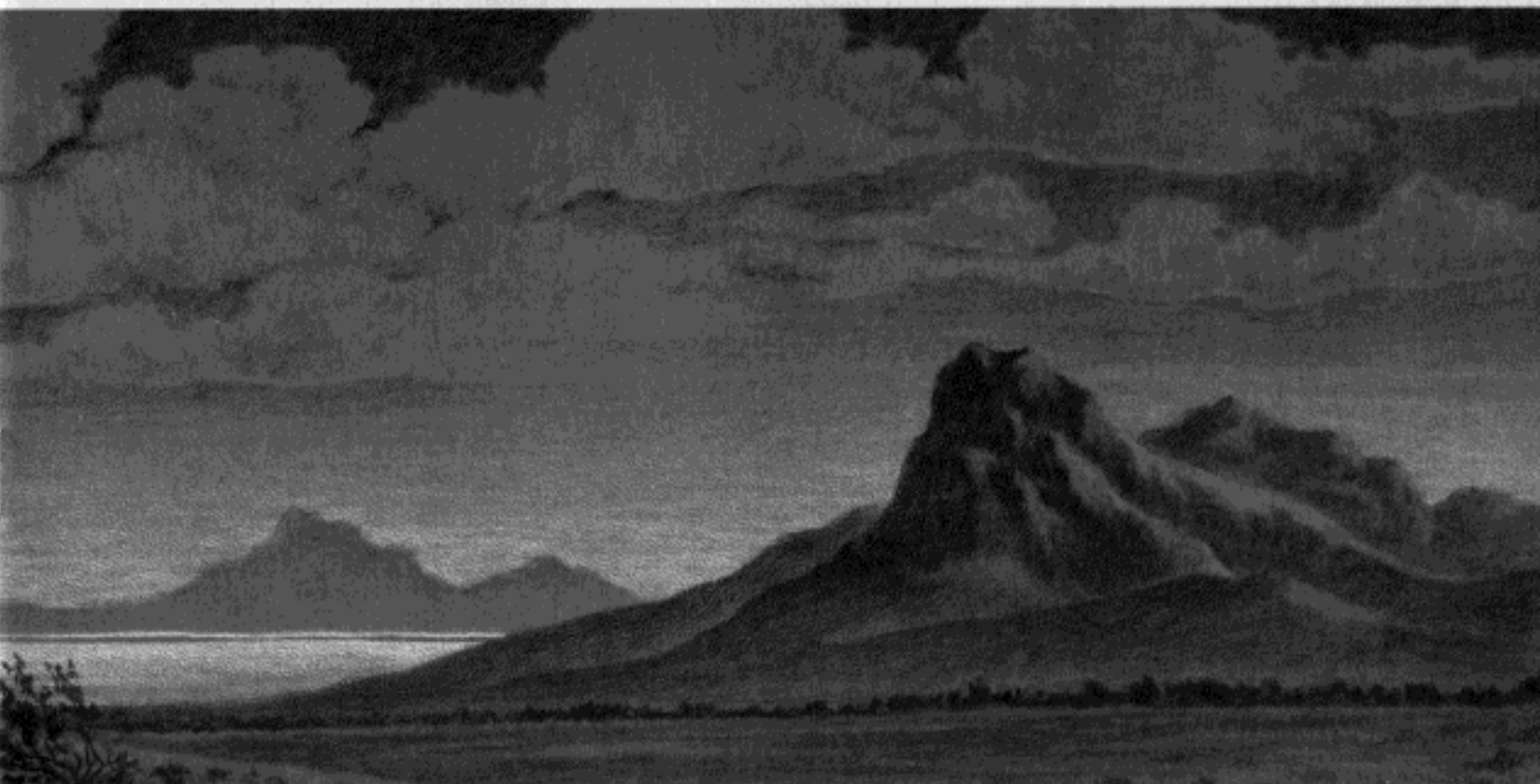


¶ And when we acquire the habit of complete relaxation, we never tire of the land that supplies it. For our enjoyment a million colors, ranging from calm pastels to a riot of brilliance, hang their superb canvases. Innumerable species of plant and animal life afford unending entertainment. Mountains and landscapes seem never the same in their majestic contours and in their delicate shadings. Sky and stars and rocks and



homes—and the people who live in these homes—all assemble their respective offerings for the enjoyment and the understanding of those who have learned responsiveness to their appeal.

§ Eventually we gain an awesome respect, even a profound admiration, for the peculiar character of the desert. It is a realistic land, a land that abhors any semblance of affectation. Every color, every creature and



shrub, abides content with its own native characteristics. The cholla offers no apology for its thorns; the tortoise seeks no excuse for its shell. The dreaded rattler chooses to invite death rather than assume a personality not its own. ¶ No springtime carpet of flowers, however lovely, is required to enhance the desert's beauty. Every tree and plant, with or without its blossoms, is sufficient unto itself and unto the desert



to which it belongs. Calm, pastoral shades claim equal splendor with the riotous colors of sunset. Smoke tree and creosote, mountain and valley, sand and rock, bird and animal—none of these seeks extraneous adornment. Each is content to abide by the purpose for which it was created. Each is vibrant with its own symphony of beauty; with its own perfect symmetry of design.



¶ When the Psalmist exclaims: "I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills, from whence cometh my strength," the inference is not that his strength stems altogether and in a universal sense from the hills. A more reasonable implication is that this strength derives from the sublime act of lifting up his eyes. "I will lift up mine eyes...whence cometh my strength."
¶ Out on the desert, we may—in actual fact—lift up *our eyes* and behold



the glorious wasteland spread itself into illimitable vastness, even unto the distant hills. If we thirst, we may drink freely of its waters. If we hunger, we may partake of its nourishment. If we see but dimly, we may gain new vision and behold the desert to blossom as the rose.

¶ Christ often turned to the desert when His tired body pleaded for rest, or when He recognized the need for a resurgence of His mental



and spiritual strength. And He urged others to follow His example: "Come ye yourselves apart into a desert place and rest awhile." For He knew, even as others have learned, that problems often lose substance when viewed in perspective against the tranquillity of the desert.

¶ As we approach the day commemorating our Saviour's birth, we sense a renewed urgency for strength to cope with the problems and sorrows



that crowd in upon us. May the spirit of Christmas remind us that only by quiet meditation and prayer can we hope to bring peace and good will to this troubled world, and mutual respect and understanding to the hearts of all men everywhere. This, also, was the burden of Christ's meditation and prayer when He chose to renew His strength by going apart into a desert place to rest awhile.



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