



In my good books

“ARABIAN SANDS”

BY WILFRED THESIGER

AMAZON.COM \$16

BY NEIL ELLIOT

“Life’s a beach,” so lie down and enjoy the summer. If it’s not quite “beachy” enough for you then delve into this book. The ten square feet of space you get on your local lakefront will expand into thousands of square miles of empty “sandscape,” the terrain of the “Arabian Sands.” For company you have camels. And the concession stand is nowhere to be found.

Thesiger takes us to a place and time we can hardly imagine, Arabia immediately after the Second World War. Oil was not yet the huge economic and social driver that it became in the 1950s. The world of the Arabian peninsula was effectively unchanged from that of hundreds, maybe thousands of years before. This is a document of a vanished tribal society, which can give us insights into the way many tribal societies worked.

But this is no earnest academic work on anthropology. Rather, it is a “boys



own” tale; an adventure in the grand old style. Thesiger uses his employment for the colonial government as an opportunity to explore the vast uncharted areas of Arabia. He has a yearning for the wilderness and the desert, which he is prepared to indulge, no matter what the cost to himself and his companions. His guides are members of various tribes



MARYWOOD RETREAT CENTRE
821 Westwood Drive
Cranbrook, BC V1C 6V1

Phone: 250-426-8117
Fax: 250-426-8127

Email: marywoodretreats@shaw.ca
Website: www.retreatsonline.net/marywood

DIRECTED RETREATS

JUNE 19-27

JULY 3-11 JULY 17-25 AUGUST 3-11

IF THE RETREAT IS NOT FULL, A PORTION MAY BE BOOKED.

whom he takes out of their own areas to explore ways of traversing the “empty quarter”. As he does so, we learn about travel in the desert and about those times.

Thesiger has a love for the desert and values the lessons it teaches. “All that is best in the Arabs has come to them from the desert: their deep religious instinct, which has found expression in Islam; their sense of fellowship, which binds them as members of one faith; their pride of race; their generosity and sense of hospitality; their dignity; their humour, their courage and

patience, the language they speak and their passionate love of poetry”

“Arabian Sands” illustrates all of these and provides an entertaining glimpse of life without all of those things that we take as necessities. Read this, and next time you’re hot and bothered and missing the air-conditioned luxury of home, you’ll think of Thesiger and his companions lying in the desert without food water or shelter expecting to die.

Happy Summer Holidays!

□



Music

All things bright and beautiful

BY NORENE MORROW

In spring, my attention always seems to turn to hymns with themes of nature and creation. There are so many lovely ones from which to choose, but probably the best known and loved is “All Things Bright and Beautiful.”

Mrs. Cecil Frances Alexander, a very popular English writer during the Victorian Era, penned this hymn in 1848. It was published in her book, “Hymns for Little Children,” one of the best-selling books of its time, and is one of about 400 poems/hymns written by her. Many of them were religious. They were nearly all designed for children in the Sunday schools where she taught, and were used to illustrate the basic doctrines of Christian faith, such as the Apostle’s Creed. In particular, this was

used to explain the creed’s opening words, “I believe in God, the Father Almighty, Creator of Heaven and Earth.” Other hymns written by her include, “Once in Royal David’s City,” “There is a Green Hill Far Away,” and “Jesus Calls Us O’er the Tumult.”

Today, “All Things Bright and Beautiful” is as popular a hymn as it ever was, due to its wonderful imagery and the bright melodies. If you grew up in Canada you most likely learned the tune, ROYAL OAK. However, with the emigration of large numbers of British people to this country during the early part of the last century, many prefer the English tune, W. H. MONK. In a clever move, the compilers of Common Praise have included both.

Regarding the text, all but one of Mrs. Alexander’s original verses remains. That verse was: *The rich man in his castle, The poor man at his gate, God made them high or lowly, And ordered their estate.*

This verse was definitely a product of its time, and some have interpreted it as meaning that social class distinctions are God-given. Mrs. Alexander’s defenders suggest, however, that what she meant to imply was the inclusiveness of God’s creative power, rather than God’s sanctioning of a social hierarchy. Happily, it is not in our hymn-books, so it is not an issue. On the other hand, a new verse has been added in Common Praise. When seeking copyright permission from the author’s heirs, permission was granted with the proviso that a verse be added, which was representative of our

country. As a result, the compilers of Common Praise came up with this distinctly Canadian verse:

*The rocky mountain splendour,
The loon’s wild haunting call,
The great lakes and the prairies,
And the forest in the fall.*

While a bright tune and a change of text can help a hymn’s longevity, the associations people have with it are probably the most powerful. I associate it with my days in Sunday school, while animal lovers may associate it with the books of Yorkshire veterinarian, James Herriot. He has kept it alive by using lines from the first stanza as titles for his popular books, “All Creatures Great and Small,” followed by “All Things Bright and Beautiful,” “All

Things Wise and Wonderful,” and “The Lord God Made Them All.” If you were a Methodist you might associate the hymn with weddings. In an article I read recently, it states that this hymn was the most popular choice for Methodist weddings in England in 2002. Finally, other composers have been inspired by these words, and one of the most beautiful renditions is John Rutter’s choral setting. It is available for choirs in two to four parts or can be sung as a solo. If you are a fan of YouTube on the Internet, you can see and hear moving performances of it by a boys’ choir called Libera or the young New Zealand singer, Hayley Westenra. Once you hear it, I guarantee that you will truly believe that all things are, indeed, bright and beautiful!

□