

THE SEVEN SONGS

THE FIRST SONG SONG OF BIRDS AND ENDLESS STARS

“THE SUN RISES AND THE SUN GOES DOWN AND HURRIES TO THE PLACE WHERE IT RISES” (1 V5)

“JUST AS YOU DO NOT KNOW HOW THE BREATH COMES TO THE BONES IN THE MOTHER’S WOMB SO YOU DO NOT KNOW THE WORK OF GOD WHO MAKES EVERYTHING” (ECCLESIASTES 1 1 V5)

The people called it ‘the environment’ and they were becoming deeply anxious about it. All that we imagined was normal was re-worked at dizzying speed. But the weather also was shifting rapidly.

The First Song was the Song of Wonder - the enlightened modern world had declared war against magic and against mystery. But amongst those who felt orphaned by that war and could not live in an un-enchanted world, there was a song to be sung. A garden, a landscape garden; a cosmos clothed with wonder, where the stars go on and on into the night and where the spaces between galaxies are filled with even more galaxies. In the water, the wind and a world that won't sit still, Tom had heard the song. In the enchanted wood, Tom heard the song.

1. Song of endless stars

On and On into the night.

The Universe: its boundaries are uncertain; its limits limitless. If there is an end, what would lie beyond that end? If one could sail to the furthest boundary of everything, what lies over the horizon? Have we reached the edge?

Some say that the universe is a giant sphere and to arrive is to have returned to the place from where the journey began. Others contend the universe is a hall of mirrors where the light is bent round and what we behold is a reflection of other galaxies in the silent expanse in which we dwell. Or that we are unknowing inhabitants of one universe amongst many.

In a voyage of the imagination, leave behind mysteries that dwell in the outer limits of everything. Go quickly past expanding galaxies and shrinking stars, past galaxies that are vast spiral nebulae and galaxies like catherine wheels in a firework display. Leave Galactic superclusters behind like lights along a motorway; each galaxy a metropolitan community of stars with many times more inhabitants than the largest cities on planet Earth. Flash past ten hundred thousand million suns spread out over oceans of empty space. Past beautiful Andromeda, the galaxy next door. Now we have arrived at the Milky Way. Star upon star rushes by. There is a spiral arm. Imperceptibly, we are being dragged round the heart of the galaxy on a journey that takes 250 million years. All human history could be comprehended within a tiny fraction of one turn on that stately circuit.

And here is a medium size yellow star with a small family of orbiting planets; balls of gas or rock spending a million life-times in a frenzied dash around it. The third globe is a blue and white island. Descending through layers of a thin air--cushion, the imagination glides gently down. On one of the continents a range of hills stood to attention above a throbbing city. As the Earth spun round, day had become night. It was a clear, crisp night during the Great Interruption.

On the hillside, Tom the Teacher was compelled to look up. Clouds were parting mysteriously as if giant hands had opened the curtains. Now he could see forever. The sight was irresistible. Garden lights strung across the emptiness of space. Layer after layer of star upon star as far as the eye could see. Tiny sparks of light, as fine as rain on a windscreen at night. Fiery worlds: a torch-lit procession of silent participants whose parade stretched into endless distance.

Stars seen with naked eyes had been vital to travellers. But telescopes opened up cosmic continents never beheld by human eyes. The cosmos had expanded by a thousand million and, if that wasn't enough, by another thousand million. What did it mean? What was the message of the stars?

Then an impression formed on his mind as if a thought had been stamped on a mould that yielded with pleasure. The Book spoke of another hillside, another man, another millennium. A shepherd gazes at the night--sky in awe, hearing within himself a voice that was not from himself.

And the voice said "write!" And David asked, "what shall I write?" And the voice said, "I will give you the words". And as David looked at the vast panorama on display above him illuminated by a full moon, inspiration began to flow like a clear river. By the light of the moon, he was able to channel that flow. 3000 years had now passed and though many had pondered the beauty and immensity of the world above them, no words ever captured so succinctly the startling position of humanity on a beautiful island in a frosty sea - or a lyrical sense of cosmic contrast.

"When I consider your heavens, the works of your fingers, the moon, the stars which you have set in place, what is man that you are mindful of him?"

Tom walked home, pensive but seeing as if for the first time. Wonder had been conceived in him that night; wonder that would grow in the hiddenness of his soul to become the birth of a journey. Space had seemed uninviting before. But just as frost conveyed sharp beauty and was the stuff of dreams, the heavens, though inhospitable, shimmered with reflected power. Often, he sought to spurn the flat earth on which he dwelt and sing the song but had not known the words.

And the First Song began to play: cosmic music though previously unexpressed and unarticulated for him. It was the Song of Wonder, whispering to all who were awake to magic around them, gripped by a universe that is an astounding place to live. But where lay the keys? Tom did not question ways of knowing from science – only that there was no meaning beyond its outermost limits.

Like a guilty secret that he was clutching close to himself, for days, cosmic wonder filled the far horizons of his spirit. He spoke of it to a wise woman who had often shone the light of insight into a perplexing problem that arose to trouble him. It was not, she said, curious that seeing a universe blazing with wonder had come immediately after unexpected invitations had found their way to him. The invitations were to address gatherings where people were anxious to hear of the Creator's wisdom. He would be away for a while.

"You are going on a journey", said the old woman, a gentle soul, full of that wisdom. "You have heard the first of many songs you will hear. This awareness will grow stronger as your journey unfolds. But it will not be the only theme sounding amidst the hubbub of the world. Wherever the journey takes you, listen to the music".

"Remember!" she insisted, leaning forward on her chair, "listen to the music".

2. Stretched

The music was one that many others had heard also. The Book that was in his hand spoke to those who wanted to re-enchant their world. Without knowing the source, they were singing the First Song, the song of wonder. And the restoration of wonder was the first step towards the recovery of an understanding that had been lost.

"During the last 5000 orbits of the sun" Tom the Teacher said at his first gathering, "generations have wondered about the cosmos. Its vastness strips away human self-importance leaving us mute and speechless. However great the cosmos, its Maker is greater still".

So saying, Tom read from the Book of the Creator's wisdom. *"Who is my equal' says the Holy One. Lift up your eyes and look to the heavens. Who created all these? He who brings out the starry host one by one and calls them each by name. Because of His great power and mighty strength, not one of them is missing"*

"We look at distant worlds, still uncomprehending, then carry on our business. Now it is time to take their message in", he told them. "In the face of an immensity that is immeasurably beyond human understanding, the Book does not tell us to collapse but to praise. The secret is out. We dwell in a universe that once was stretched out and still it is growing."

And Tom read again from the Book of the Creator's wisdom. *"He stretches out the heavens like a canopy and spreads them out like a tent to live in"*.

"It was an insight reserved for our times", continued Tom. "No one had seen it before. It cannot" he said emphatically "all be for us. Most galaxies have only recently been introduced."

He looked up and around him. "Immensity," he said, "might reflect the age of the silent domain we inhabit. So old, so numbingly vast; uncountable galaxies flying in all directions into unknown night."

Tom spoke quietly and people were straining to hear.

"Or maybe immensity allows innumerable forms of life on any far-off planetary worlds now coming before our probing gaze. Life could have seeded anywhere. But of anyone peering at us we have neither seen nor heard. We cannot say the universe is for us or for them. So who is it for?"

And then his words flowed and glowed like liquid fire.

"Let the galaxies be a pageant of colour and sing praises. Let the endless forms and variety of stars join in witness with the artistry of life on Earth and proclaim the creativity of the Creator, the artist who loves to walk in the garden still amidst the colour and the variety of celestial objects!"

"Rubbish!" exclaimed someone. "We can conceive of a life without God. It's what we do every day. Clap for the cosmos: be attuned to wonder well enough without bringing back an expelled Creator!"

Tom thought for a while. "There are," he said at last, "other songs to sing that you must listen out to. The framework for the big picture you seek must take in both sunny days and starry nights. They are not for worship. But understand me well. Wonder is the door to praise and to see everything around us, in which we live and move and have our being, in relation to God is the beginning of wisdom."

3. Living with immensity

With strong magic, the Song of Wonder had defeated the routine upward glance to which Tom the Teacher had grown accustomed. He saw eight other planets proclaiming their Creator's glory in a dance that has gone on for as long as the Earth has been.

And at the centre of these nine diverse world spread across millions of miles of space was a vast yellow energy machine. Since the sun was switched on, a raging, unending nuclear conflagration has been eating, burning four million tons of hydrogen every second of its life. It was the source of heat and light for the inhabitants of Earth and every life cycle of every creature was sustained by this fiery furnace. On the beaches of the world, rows of sun worshippers were a familiar sight, presenting acres of flesh for roasting, after first basting themselves with max factor protection. "Don't they know whose this is?" wondered Tom the Teacher. "Who lit the fire at the centre of the sun?" But in cultures ancient and modern, the sun had been worshipped. Forget abstract metaphysics, here was a source of life to relate to! "*Praise Him sun and moon, praise Him all you shining stars*", echoed the Book of the Creator's wisdom.

For all this was but the beginning of the garden. What an astounding place to live in, an island set amidst stars. The stars! He tried to imagine a night-time ceiling without stars. Beacons in space.

Enormous fires constantly converting themselves into energy. Across a clear moonlit horizon, he could detect a hazy, silver--cloudy river. It was the Milky Way. And we were right in the river.

His imagination strode further and further out. Now he was walking amongst the stars, countless stars and still more fiery worlds that tossed and turned and rolled in the night. Stars that were millions of times larger than the sun; stars that were smaller than the earth. Star fields teeming, gleaming with blue flowers, red flowers, white dwarfs and yellow flowers like the sun. Stars burning the candle fiercely at both ends, with a strange destiny of burn--out; supernova where stars are going out in a blaze of glory.

In this lonely wilderness, the neighbours lived a long way off. Somewhere out there was our nearest companion, Proxima Centauri, only visible from the south of the world and with its own planetary system that was beginning to introduce itself. That evening, an especially bright--light shone from one of the neighbours, Sirius. A tablespoon of white--hot Sirius weighed a ton.

Stunning cosmic secrets were let out for the people of Earth to glimpse. Now they were detecting planets outside our system everywhere. He wondered whether there were other beings out there wondering about us (for uniqueness was the agenda driving the intriguing sport of planet hunting).

Around us, he knew and in every direction were inconceivably vast gas clouds of hydrogen, the maternity ward of stars. Was our sun born from such swirling clouds of dense gas and dust, debris of former stars that had played out their existence in former aeons?

This was the Milky Way; an average size galactic island. A hundred stars in the universe would be numbing enough. A thousand of these vast balls of fire would stretch human imagination far beyond itself. But we lived with 70 thousand million companions. And that was our galaxy alone. Perhaps the Book had it right all along and there were as many stars in the universe as there were grains of sand on the beaches of the world. It stupefied him to learn of these things, convinced he had mis-heard and that a cosmic joke was being pulled on him. But it was no joke.

For three centuries, astronomers had pondered those little luminous wisps between the stars. Were they Catherine Wheels of swirling gas? But maybe they were distant worlds, vast and incredibly far away and the sun is only one galaxy amongst many that sparkled in the cosmos. Everywhere now we looked, the cosmic garden was teeming with galaxies, primary inhabitants of the universe.

At first, it unsettled Tom profoundly to hear that we were not even parked near the centre of our own galaxy but instead near an average size yellow star of no particular significance. So what about

all the countless star fields filled with elliptical, spiral or disc-shaped clusters of galaxies; clouds of galaxies spilling out of the darkness? Could each really be host to untold twinkling camp fires?

What would it be like, he wondered, to stand on the edge of the universe gazing into the unknown and the uncharted? With our telescopes, we had peered at the boundary fence and then a further expanse was detected that stretched into endless distance. The estate was never-ending.

"The whisper of the Creator", Tom thought.

"These are but the outer fringes of His works; how faint the whisper we hear of Him! Who then can understand the thunder of His power?"

Tom whistled softly. "Why be surprised at comings and goings that invite us to have our heads examined?" he remarked. "Did we have it all worked out?"

Now the most mysterious area of cosmology was the search an invisible halo, dark matter that is the setting for all that happens in the cosmos: a power unseen that locks stars and galaxies in place.

Tom pondered these things in amazement.

"Can it be that in the most exciting period of star gazing since the world began, we are ignorant of what nine tenths of the universe is made of? Or are we are encountering the One who holds the cosmos together?"

Were there any clues to the information he was trying to digest. Could we really maintain human significance in a universe that went on and on without end?

With what scales could we begin to weigh our little lives against inconceivable cosmic stretches?

4. Round and round

"Round and round, round and round! Our work, our labour and leisure. Same old repeats."

Netflix subscribers had soared, Zoom had soared; so had the birds- but you could now see them.

"Any new dramas?" asked Tom the Teacher in the first town he came to. In that place an open air play on the Green was a regular fair-weather event.

For many a long month, the players were unable to perform. We could not be near each other. The people must be kept apart. Any jostling spectator could be an unsuspected carrier, saboteurs of our health. Was it you? Me?

Some dramas could be staged outside; below the skies and under the sun.

“The world is a stage”, said Tom. “The people pass and vanish before our very eyes to make way for others. The stage scenery sees each generation out. The play just goes on and on forever with endless repeats. One generation rising, then another. Where shall we find what it means?”

“Look above us at the mighty sun, hastening across the day and then re-appearing from the place from which it arose. Feel the breeze, the wind that restlessly swirls this way and that. Regard that river, the river that runs into the sea which is never full up except that it returns in clouds and rain.

“Repetition?” Tom probed. “Recurring cycle continuing its circuit and nothing much changes? But consider: sun, restless water and wind that won’t sit still have powered the world and will again.”

Many of his hearers had grown bored with endless rounds. An interruption to end all interruptions had been earthquake to the old ways. Yet of the recovery of wonder there was little sign.

“How you see the world” said Tom, “has to peer beyond the confines of private dramas to the cosmic stage scenery that dwarfs them. It is how you see the endless unknown that also counts”.

5. The strange fabric

Tom’s journey had brought him to a village; a village that nestled in the embrace of surrounding hills and brought to life many hundreds of years before where a river flowed through. After he had spoken, Tom continued a conversation with a group of listeners. Their talk was of the world and how beauty and misery could be woven together in such a fabric.

As the evening wore on, and they ate and drank in the stillness of the night, they admired the peacefulness of that scene and how darkness temporarily threw a blanket over the surrounding hills. Soon only the outline was visible. They talked of their travels. Mountain peaks, rivers, lakes, waterfalls, deserts; how much the landscapes of Earth had shaped the stage scenery, the setting against which the drama of human life had been played. They looked up, wondering what it would be like looking down.

"Earth is an oasis in the night", said Tom the teacher. "A blue and white planet with a friendly face, concealing a ceaseless inferno so the world would be alive inside and the surfaced replenished. There are rocky worlds and giant balls of gas that adorn the night sky. But this was to be different".

"I hold the Book in my hands but the Creator holds the ceaseless motion of a planet. Rocks, weather and tides have a life of their own as do we. Though dumb they speak constantly. Mute witnesses endeavour to communicate and we pass them by".

"What do they say, these voices", the group asked him.

Tom thought for a moment.

"The Creator chiselled the valleys, carved mountain peaks, and decreed boundaries for the seas. To Him belong the forests and jungles and grasslands and deserts. Lakes tell of His refreshing. Rivers proclaim His faithfulness, water--falls grandeur and the gentle hills sing His pastoral care. He is the landlord of the world; we are but tenants".

"We do not live in a landscape garden. We are surrounded by forces" they insisted.

"If you come to hear natural processes resonating with the mind of the Creator, will you still praise Him for the beauty of the mountains-or will the mountains become ordinary once more" pleaded Tom as he turned to its pages.

"Who has measured the waters in the hollow of his hand or with the breadth of his hand, marked off the heavens? Who has held the dust of the earth in a basket, or weighed the mountains on the scales and the hills in a balance?"

"We will try," they said. So he told them of the echo of the Creator in the wind, the water and a world that wouldn't sit still.

6. Listen to the wind.....

Now he was hearing the First Song everywhere. Sometimes it whispered, often it howled. On a morning that had already boiled over, Tom spoke to the people. And his subject was the wind. He told them of two men talking. As they spoke, they had heard the night-rustle of the wind stirring in the trees.

"The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So is everyone who is born of the Spirit".

It would come to those who unfurled the sails so their inner being were re-born. A mysterious, action, unstoppable, unable to be bottled or trapped. If caught, it would be wind no longer.

"Smells and waste would overwhelm us were it not for the refreshing wind" he said. "Air is the Creator's gift to everyman. If it were divided among the people of the world for an inheritance, the legacy would last each of us a thousand lifetimes. The envelope of air is addressed to us but rarely acknowledged. Imagine a world without wind. How dry and airless it would be, a world without moisture, no soil, no life".

That night, the wind did blow mysteriously, gently. Where it stopped or ended no one could tell. A patient atmosphere absorbed all the fumes and smells disgorged into it, receiving everything and preparing to restore freshness to the world in exchange.

He was hearing the First Song more fully than ever, a complete song that reached to the incompleteness of his being. The creation was dressed with wonder.

7. Expulsion

But all too quickly, the realisation of an astounding garden was marred. At the next gathering, Tom the Teacher told of a tragic story. The deliberate emphasis in his voice could not mask the anguish behind his words. "I tell you", he said, "we expelled the Creator from His Creation".

"When did we do this", protested the people. "Such talk is foolish".

"This is not the Creator's place. "It is our world," said someone. "Or so we thought until our eyes were opened to see what we should have seen- that we are embedded within the world, sharing its wonder with all life".

"We are immersed in the life-system," said one, "not separate from it".

"Yes" said Tom. "To be over nature is to be against it and against our nature. This is their world, your world, our world but also the Creator's world. For all life is a gift. Though we knew it, we held this knowledge down until drowned in the sea of unconsciousness. With proud heads held high, we heaved and expelled the Creator from the garden".

"He expelled us from His garden first", someone interjected. "Small wonder that truculence is an attitude we have worn ever since. At heart, it is revenge".

"No, tell us", some said indignantly, "when did we banish the Creator?"

And so he told them of the time when the Creator was exiled from the Earth as the people had replaced a purposeful creation with a blind, accidental cosmos devoid of meaning. "We could gaze at

the colour and variety of life and draw a family tree that told a story. It is the story you tell; the script you give the play that makes it what it is".

And he urged that seeing, they should come with unclouded vision to the source of their life so the people could sing the song of wonder and acknowledge the author.

8. Anything for a view

"Not far from here", said Tom the Teacher, "is an enchanted world. In that enchanted world, the pageant of life parades in an enchanted wood. It was a garden but not a carved and decorated estate; rather a garden of contrasts. Sometimes raw, rugged, wild woods and ferocious forest; sometimes banks of softness, sometimes a blaze of colour waving gently in the wind.

The enchanted wood is full of enormous stumps of wooden beauty, alive with sap, leaves and flower. Trees would be needed to provide food and cover for wildlife, timber and to be a source of oils, perfumes and medicines for the people of that other world. But the forest was not just intended to be filled with towering, woody creatures of root and greenery. Flowering plants decorate the forest floor and spring up wherever conditions bid them welcome but not just for decoration, like patterns on wallpaper. It was planned that they should provide the inhabitants of that world with shelter, clothing and medicines and food.

Imagine a place where there are only a few types of fruit or vegetables. That is not the enchanted wood. And there is a fitted green carpet that covers much of that world; a gift that brings restfulness to the eyes and breaks up the barrenness."

So said Tom the Teacher.

He would never forget the sheer-sided mountain. As he continued his journey, Tom paused before a luxurious landscape that yet again woke wonder from deep within him. He had stopped beneath falling water that disburdened her load into a lake. On one side of him, a green mountain was arraigned in layers. On the other side, mountains rose straight up above the lake in easy dominance. Woods crowded upon woods, hills surrounded hills and groves of trees were clothed with the sun. In the flush of a new day, life surged through meadows that carpeted the valley and was echoed in the wooded slopes of hill and mountain. Craggy peaks shone with the morning.

Below him, the river ran to the sea. Long ago, it cut a path of least resistance. Tom the Teacher could just make out where it fell with a sheer drop that dashed unsuspecting water to pieces. As he tuned his ears to the sound, it seemed to him as he could make out the water splashing as it had on the very first morning. There was a time when the Earth had just been born. An atmosphere was gathering. Giant taps poured water for days; water that laughed and played and splashed for the sheer joy of being alive. Salty oceans were formed, circling the globe. Somehow, evaporated water returned water to the Earth devoid of salt. Tom gave thanks for the desalination plant in the sky.

"We live" he exulted "in a world filled to overflowing with water, water; sparkling, flowing, roaring, water, alive with strength and speed, fury and joy!"

Here was no picture postcard of mass-produced scenery, but living mountains, trees that clapped and, to the right a lake that glistened with colour as the sun's shadow raced across the waters. It was a day when mystery and imagination might stir and wander abroad.

"A mountain is not just a mountain!" he exclaimed. "With giant wrapping, we clad a mountain with meaning. Congratulations meaning - makers for this feat. O how we climb, we capture on calendar markers of time; tourists of the spirit and landscape of the soul, how much for your view?"

He had been here before; memories that interpreted the raw material spread out before him and which added layers of meaning and significance. A sense of place had been fashioned. Tom wanted to jump into the picture. Every landscape begs to be noticed, to be enjoyed. For a while he could do no other than gaze on the mountains, the trees and the lake until they began to vanish from his thoughts, though still present to sight. Entranced in his reverie, the music within formed a song that slowly liberated itself into being like a touch of spring that fills the air or a child being born. Appreciation is a shared experience to enjoy. So today he invited the mountains to sing along.

And in that moment of praise--filled rapture, he understood that whoever has felt the inspiration of the mountains, the call of the wild place or the intrigue of the sea has touched an undisclosed sense of something that transcends the ordinary. Through a rich tapestry of memory that adds layers of meaning to the landscape, there was yet another layer without which its full significance dies unheard. A song assembled on his lips, leaping upwards.

"Let the sea resound and everything in it, the world and all who live in it. Let the rivers clap their hands, let the mountains sing together for joy".

And Tom rejoiced in the living water for thirsty people, once offered, never rescinded. In their holidays they craved a view or two. For a small piece of stage scenery, much money changed hands.

9. The humble feather

The enchanted world is a globe suffused with glory, a place teeming with wonder, walked and stalked by amazing creatures.

On this enchanted world, there are magical creatures that ride the winds and fill the skies. They swarm, wing and glide and sing their emancipated songs. Equipped with beaks and the feather, a marvellous device, unsurpassed as an aerofoil or an insulator, these flying creatures surpass any aeronautical display that aircraft in our world are capable of. How they navigate and find their way home are mysteries that have the people of the enchanted world baffled. With immense variety and beauty, the Lord of that world has painted their plumage and taught them songs to sing. This is artistry and music at its highest, mixed with design engineering to an exact specification.

In the enchanted world, there are amazing creatures equipped to breathe on land and submerge under water. There are creatures called reptiles that lay eggs on land and have a special watertight skin that enables them to bask in the sun and use its heat.

Wonders of that place are not limited to sea or sky. There are insect-eating mammals, winged bats that fly by sonar and plant-eaters from mice to elephants. Cows, sheep and horses provide food, clothing and haulage services. Hidden in grassland and jungle are animals with stripes, animals with long-necks and animals that run like the wind. Some of these creatures swing from tree to tree or are content to be ground-dwellers. Others are hunters combining majesty and fierce, savage power. Barking dogs and purring cats offer companionship and warmth. There are mammals equipped for cold and water mammals with a heart the size of a car and a tongue the size of a hippotamus.

But the wonders of that enchanted world have scarcely begun to unfold. There are a million tiny things that crawl and swarm. They have highly accurate vision and navigation, an external skeleton and a unique job description. Insects offer cleaning services, break down organic matter and decompose waste back into the soil. Drawn by bright colours, they touch down from flower to flower, unknowing matchmakers of a new generation. Other forms of creatures live in the seas of the enchanted world. They crawl on sea-beds or stretch out miniscule arms to grasp some passing food. Architects of the ocean, they build intricate reefs you can see from the Moon.

Swimming creatures fill the oceans, seas and rivers with colour, variety and food. Fish have keen smell, sharp hearing and see in glorious technicolour. There are fish with vivid colouring, fish that move with the aid of electricity and fish that navigate to the river where they were hatched. And there are sharks, denizens of depth; essential to life under the waves: condemned to swim forever.

Then there were the virions, real inhabitants of land and seas, far outnumbering us.

Molluscs are everywhere, in immense variety, spreading into freshwater and on to dry land.

Spiralling ammonites were the most numerous and famous of fossils in cold chilly prisons. For the enchanted planet is full of previous inhabitants of former worlds, entombed for generations in rocks.

Generations come, generations go. New forms appear: new life grows in the shadow of mountains that rise with stealth and crumble with rain, wind and sun – or the upheaval of giants.

The ultimate artist: the artistry of multiplicity. Life on that enchanted world is a rich kaleidoscope: a demonstration of colour, an endless variety dwelling everywhere, a display of humour. What would it take to retrieve amazement and let it bloom into worship? *How many are your works, O Lord. In wisdom you made them all; the earth is full of your creatures. There is the sea, vast and spacious, teeming with creatures beyond number-- living things both great and small*".

All these things saw Tom the Teacher on his journey. And he grew sad; sad with wistfulness of an array of living things that were no longer there. The sky was thick with their names. Habitats were disappearing so human habitats could extend and eat. The plastic lives of people saw their reflection, not in mirrors of glass but bottles of plastic that had filled the earth and choked the seas.

"This generation", said Tom in anguish of spirit, "has a troubled relationship with what is around us".

"You yearn for green spaces, turquoise seas and blue skies. Yet we end with orange; the orange of forests on fire. You yearn for a small vista of what we call 'view'. The blue and the green will minister to our spirit and be the landscape of the soul.

"Come, all who do quite fit in, who do not quite belong to the world because we no longer live with its natural rhythm; let us learn again that we need not be estranged from our homeland.

So saying, Tom rested a while. To the birds he listened with ears and apps attuned and with an appreciative heart.

"During the Great Interruption", he said "we all heard the song more clearly. The skies were cleaner, clearer and the air fresher. All could hear the chatter of birds and see more clearly endless stars for it is the song of wonder to which all can respond. Whatever we consider is ultimate has to include the stunning nature of which we are part and to which we need to listen."

"Whoever pays attention will have their attention richly repaid.

But it was only the first song.