

Small Enough...

After an evening of talk, perhaps about the fringes of knowledge, or some new possibility of climbing into the minds and senses of animals, we would go out on the lawn, where we took turns at an amusing little astronomical rite. We searched until we found, with or without glasses, the faint, heavenly spot of light-mist beyond the lower left-hand corner of the Great Square of Pegasus, when one or the other of us would then recite:

“That is the Spiral Galaxy in Andromeda.

“It is as large as our Milky Way.

“It is one of a hundred million galaxies.

“It is 750,000 light-years away.

“It consists of one hundred billion suns,
each larger than our sun.”

After an interval, Colonel Roosevelt would grin at me and say: “Now I think we are small enough! Let’s go to bed.”

We must have repeated this salutary ceremony forty or fifty times in the course of years, and it never palled.

From *The Book of Naturalists* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1944, page 234); quoted in *The Interpreter’s Bible* (New York: Abingdon Press, 1956) volume V, page 436, in connection with Isaiah 40:12-17.

Isaiah 40:12-17

12. Who has measured the waters in the hollow of his hand,
and marked out the heavens with a span,
and enclosed the dust of the earth in a measure,
and weighed the mountains in scales, and the hills in a balance?
13. Who has directed the spirit of the Lord, or being His counselor, has taught Him?
14. With whom took He counsel, and who instructed Him,
and taught Him in the path of judgment, and taught Him knowledge,
and showed to Him the way of understanding?
15. Behold, the nations are as a drop of a bucket,
and are counted as the small dust of the balance;
behold, He takes up the islands as fine dust.
16. And Lebanon is not sufficient for fuel,
nor are its beasts sufficient for a burnt offering.
17. All nations before Him are as nothing;
and they are counted to Him less than nothing, and vanity....