NOTES from FEE

July 1962

THE FOUNDATION FOR ECONOMIC EDUCATION, INC.

IRVINGTON-ON-HUDSON, NEW YORK

ISAIAH'S JOB

Albert J. Nock

ONE EVENING last autumn, I sat long hours with a European acquaintance while he expounded a politico-economic doctrine which seemed sound as a nut and in which I could find no defect. At the end, he said with great earnestness: "I have a mission to the masses. I feel that I am called to get the ear of the people. I shall devote the rest of my life to spreading my doctrine far and wide among the populace. What do you think?"

An embarrassing question in any case, and doubly so under the circumstances, because my acquaintance is a very learned man, one of the three or four really first-class minds that Europe produced in his generation; and naturally I, as one of the unlearned, was inclined to regard his lightest word with reverence amounting to awe. . . .

I referred him to the story of the prophet Isaiah. . . . I shall paraphrase the story in our common speech since it has to be pieced out from various sources. . . .

THE PROPHET'S career began at the end of King Uzziah's reign, say about 740 B.C. This reign was uncommonly long, almost half a century, and apparently prosperous. It was one of those prosperous reigns, however—like the reign of Marcus Aurelius at Rome, or the administration of Eubulus at Athens, or of Mr. Coolidge at Washington—where at the end the prosperity suddenly peters out and things go by the board with a resounding crash.

In the year of Uzziah's death, the Lord commissioned the prophet to go out and warn the people of the wrath to come. "Tell them what a worthless lot they are," He said. "Tell them what is wrong, and why, and what is going to happen unless they have a change of heart and straighten up. Don't mince matters. Make it clear that they are positively down to their last chance. Give it to them good and strong and keep on giving it to them. I suppose perhaps I ought to tell you," He added, "that it won't do any good. The official class and their intelligentsia will turn up their noses at you, and the masses will not even listen. They will all keep on in their own ways until they carry everything down to destruction, and you will probably be lucky if you get out with your life."

Isaiah had been very willing to take on the job—in fact, he had asked for it—but the prospect put a new face on the situation. It raised the obvious question: Why, if all that were so—if the enterprise were to be a failure from the start—was there any sense in starting it?

"Ah," the Lord said, "you do not get the point. There is a Remnant there that you know nothing about. They are obscure, unorganized, inarticulate, each one rubbing along as best he can. They need to be encouraged and braced up because when everything has gone completely to the dogs, they are the ones who will come back and build up a new society; and meanwhile, your preaching will reassure them and keep them hanging on. Your job is to take care of the Remnant, so be off now and set about it." . . .

WHAT DO WE mean by the masses, and what by the Remnant?

As the word *masses* is commonly used, it suggests agglomerations of poor and underprivileged people,

---

Albert Jay Nock (1870-1945) was Editor of the *Freeman* (1920-1924) and author of *Jefferson, Our Enemy The State*, and many other books and articles on the philosophy of government and human freedom. *Isaiah's Job* is extracted from Chapter 13 of his book, *Free Speech and Plain Language*, copyright 1937 by Albert Jay Nock. This book, now out of print, was published by William Morrow & Company, New York, and this extract is reprinted with their permission.