

The Beach

Marilyn Quillen

CLOSE your eyes and picture a lonely beach. Relax and allow your mind to wander, touching here and there for an instant, but not settling on a definite image. Think, to yourself, of utter peace, and your mind will begin, of its own accord, to assimilate more concrete ideas of this lonely, lovely place. In my own reverie this is more of a state of mind than an actual picture, yet, at the same time, it is a definite place.

Stretching before me for miles is nothing but sand, air, and sea. The land curves gently out to my left, out into the ocean. Somewhere there is a point, obscured by the ocean spray, which is the land's furthestmost penetration into the sea. I am walking slowly toward that point, with no sense of urgency, for I know that ultimately I will reach it. My approach disturbs the denizens of the air, causing them to wheel and dip with raucous cries, only to settle farther on down the beach. Unmeaningly I drive the gulls before me until the border of their particular part of beach is reached, and they double back over my head, far beyond my reach. The air is fresh with a tang of salt that is good, and the wind is the essence of this thing, this feeling of peace.

The beach almost assumes the identity of a person, so varied are her moods. In the early morning she basks in the sunlight as one lies abed upon first awakening, deliciously contemplating the forthcoming day. Then the beach is suffused in a sort of golden light, and pillars of clouds are mirrored in the still water. Her mood then is passive, awaiting the middle of the day when everything takes on an intensity. The water becomes restless as the tides come in; the air loses its golden tint and heat waves dance endlessly off into the distance. As noon passes into evening, everything seems refreshed. The breeze from the water comes alive once more, speeding the message of approaching twilight. On many such days the beach is a friendly place—indeed, a friend.

Everyone has a place in which his thoughts must be pondered, and the beach is such a place for me. Mundane things are brushed away as easily as grains of sand. There I am at peace.

"Teen-age"—The Term

J. C. Urlain

I WAS twelve and impressed—or rather, astonished. Turkey: my mind pictured it. Boys, my age, walking the streets with winsome harems and corpulent children—their own! An incredible spectacle.

My Sunday school teacher: my mind goes back to him. We met in winter, on a Sunday. My hand was hot and wet and limp; we shook hands. He said, "You are a man now. Shake like a man." But I was only twelve. "In Turkey they are married and have responsibilities by twelve. You are a man; and I will treat you like a man."

He did.

He was a dynamic man. He was a Carnegie man. As soon as someone would walk through a door, he would grab his arm and tell him how nice his tie looked—even if it was a drab olive and had noodle soup spilt over it. He had been a salesman: he sold Bibles. He would knock at someone's house and show the family where the Bible predicted the automobile. The people bought. He was a dynamic man.

His dynamics brainwashed me: to me Turkey had the right idea. I even considered giving up Little League. Too Juvenile. At twelve they were married in Turkey. I was astonished.

Now I am mature: I am eighteen years of age. I am not as susceptible to dynamics as I was at twelve; and my attitude has changed: let the fools get married at twelve and have responsibilities. I shall probably remain a bachelor; and people will whisper when I pass them on the street, "My, he is over thirty. I wonder why he never married. Does he drink?"

As you have probably guessed, I have never reached manhood, which fact speaks rather deprecatingly of the efforts of Sunday school teachers and Turkish precocity. I am what is termed a "teen-ager."

I have always abhorred the term "teen-ager." It reeks of middle-class dullness. It is a term that skips over the rough surfaces of individuality and glides complacently over the smooth facets of conformity. To think that everyone within a certain age group can be defined by one single term is abominable—at least to me. It is a term that ordinary people use when talking about ordinary "young people." "My daughter is a typical 'teen-ager'," a proud, dull housewife tells her neighbor. "Stop, you thievin' teen-ager," an irate grocery man yells after a figure retreating into an alley.

Just what do people mean when they use the term "teen-ager?" What connotation do the majority of people attach to the word? Before I give my conception of the present-day meaning of the term, I must first state that by "people" I mean those of the human race who have sufficiently accumulated enough adult responsibility to want to disparage the juvenility of younger thinking. This category does not include all adults, just as "teen-ager," as used today, does not include all of those in their teens.

Recently, I met a man, a grocer—or, more properly, a fruit salesman. He has an accent, which is nothing unusual for fruit salesmen. But I have trouble understanding a person with an accent

and am fortunate if I decipher one half of his speech. Put a cigar in his mouth and my ciphering score drops to one fourth.

My friend the grocer smoked cigars—big black ones; he was almost incomprehensible to me. So I let him do the talking while I smiled knowingly. After a while he stopped, took his cigar out of his mouth, and said: "You don't believe me, do ya? God, I wish I could take ya around and show ya some stuff. You don't know people. Son—God, I wish I could take ya around."

"God, I wish I could take you around." I was young. I was inexperienced. Mr. Cate, the fruit salesman, told me as much. Inexperienced. To be a "teen-ager," this is the first qualification—to be inexperienced. But one may say, I think that the teen-ager of today is too experienced. He has too much freedom and time to become experienced in. But what this person actually is saying is this: the modern teen-ager is one who, in his inexperience, is susceptible to temptation. This is the second qualification to be a "teen-ager"—to be susceptible to temptation.

While a youngster is in his pre-teens, he is often thought to be too young to fall prey to grave temptation. But as he enters his teens, Satan beckons. The odd fellow with the pitch fork becomes public enemy number one. And he has help: the automobile, the liquor, the pretty girl with the pony-tail. Life becomes a complexity of temptation for the teen-ager, and if he reaches twenty without mishap, he is one out of many.

Therefore, I think that when people speak of the "teen-ager," they mean a person between the ages of thirteen and nineteen who is so inexperienced that he is amenable to temptation—a person who is much more inexperienced and amenable than anyone in any other age group. This is what the "people" mean. "People" who speak of the "reckless teen-ager," "the impolite teen-ager," "the 'thankless' teen-ager." People who speak not of the bright teen-ager, but of the bright youth; not the promising teen-ager, but the promising youth; not the gentlemanly teen-ager, but the gentlemanly youth. The term "youth" seems to represent good qualities; the term "teen-ager," bad qualities.

I do not say that the above always holds true. I do say, however, that the above connotations are predominant ones for the terms. This should not be so. Since the term "teen-ager" is applied to a certain age group, and since it has the connotations of inexperience and temptation, all persons in this age group are thought to be inexperienced and temptable. The term has reached that stage of hypocrisy in which it can damn a group and still remain uncensored.

When people can judge a person's works and acts, not by the age at which their deviser accomplishes them but by their innate quality, they will have come a long way. I am waiting for the day when people cease to gasp at Grandma Moses.