

THIS THING CALLED NATURE

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How differently are we mortals affected by our occasional brushes with nature, each according to his own innermost feelings, likes and dislikes, and mode of life! And what more suitable place to observe this phenomenon of individuality than a summer tourist lodge situated in one of the most desirable spots on the shores of Lake Huron. At the moment the lodge is apparently just coming to life, and although it is still very early in the morning there are a number of early birds stirring about and making their preparations for a full day to come. However, of the dozen or so occupants who are awake, we are interested in only three. These three individuals, representing three widely different walks of life, are J. Livingstone Avaro, vacationing businessman, who, unable to sleep any longer because of the very stillness of the country about, is gazing morosely out his window; Miss Helen Meek, librarian, sitting entranced at her window and absorbing the scenery in a manner indicating habitual early rising for just this purpose; and Mr. David Median, author, a man still young enough to have at once the viewpoints of the artist and the athlete, who is sitting at the window of his room, contemplating the great outdoors.

MR. AVARO GIVES HIS DESCRIPTION

Mr. Avaro, glaring out his window, was struck suddenly by the thought that this was supposed to be, to put it in the words of the travel folders, "nature at its finest". His succeeding thoughts ran accordingly, and he found himself framing in his mind a part of a letter to be written

to his brother who had been left in charge of the business:

"This is supposed to be the type of scenery which inspires the poets to great descriptive heights. It is well known that I am not a poet, but no one can deny that I have definite views concerning what is going on about me. Directly below my window I can see the short, smoothly clipped grass, evidently well tended. The bright green color is broken about fifteen feet to the left of my window by a winding stone walk which leads from the side door down to the gate which opens on to the beach. The beach, I might say, is separated from the grass by a white picket fence, very old fashioned looking. Already the sun is glaring down upon the white sand of the beach, which throws off a reflection bright enough to blind a person. About forty-five feet to the left down the beach a gray, wooden dock extends perhaps twenty-five feet out into the water. Fastened to the dock are two rowboats, one very new and the other quite dilapidated and ugly looking. Also tied to the dock is a powerful-looking speedboat of quite good length and having an expensive appearance. I have no idea where the rest of the boats are, but surely there must be more.

"The water is quite blue, and in the distance one can see where it meets the different shade of blue of the sky. Over to the right, a small sailboat moves slowly forward, the white sails reflecting the sun in the same glaring fashion as the beach of sand. A figure is visible at the tiller, but from the way the boat moves he is apparently in no hurry, just loafing along. Another sail can be seen in the distance,

evidently the sail of a much larger boat. It is moving faster, too. Just above it I perceive the sun shining brightly. How hot it looks! I'll bet this day is going to be a scorcher.

"There is some movement on the beach now. Evidently some early morning swimmers going out for a dip. They seem to be enjoying themselves, but the water looks too cold for that sort of thing. There are two men, a woman, and several children. However, the children are not going into the water. They are playing about on the sand."

This then, is the scene as viewed by him

MISS MEEK DESCRIBES THE SCENE

To even a casual spectator observing Miss Meek sitting in reverent awe before her window, the thought would probably have occurred that if he asked Miss Meek to describe the scene at which she was staring with such obvious ecstasy she would probably have done it thus:

"It is a wonderful, wonderful morning. All is quiet and serene. The sun is a bright ball of fire, throwing its rays down upon a welcoming world. The water is a clear, bright blue with white caps of foam appearing on the waves as they near the shore, and its broad expanse of blue beauty is marred only by the presence of a small sailboat in the foreground and another one in the background.

"There is a certain beauty about the morning. The breeze blows gently, and the morning air is so fresh. The only sound is a faint rustle as the breeze strikes the leaves of the trees at the front of the house. Several of these trees, a dark green in color, are visible to the right of my window. They are of immense height, veritable giants in comparison to the other trees about. There is a certain majesty

(1) *Byron, Childe Harold*

about it all. Nature seems so close at a time like this. It is as though she were trying to speak to us. Perhaps Byron's feelings were much the same as this when he wrote

'Are not the mountains, waves, and skies a part

Of me, of my Soul, as I of them?' (1)

"In a place like this it would be quite possible to feel oneself entirely alone and in quiet communion with nature were it not for the disheartening presence of the meagre work of man in the form of the two sailboats on the surface of the lake, the rowboats and motorboat tied to a small wooden dock, which is to my left, and the sudden and somewhat annoying appearance as out of nowhere of a half dozen people, evidently early swimmers, shouting and yelling as they make their way into the water.

'Summers joys are spoiled by us' (2)

"The grass below my window is clipped short and runs in a smooth blanket clear out to the picket fence which surrounds the lodge. A gate, reached by means of a winding walk made of stone, opens directly onto the swimming beach where the early swimmers are cavorting in most undignified fashion."

This is the scene as she saw it

MR. MEDIAN TAKES SOME NOTES

Mr. Median, sitting at his window and surveying the early morning scene, was debating in his mind the probability of using a description of the scene before him in some future literary work. Finally, coming to the decision that such a thing was quite possible, he took out a small, leather notebook which was constantly in his possession and began jotting down notes for future reference:

"The scene is one of lasting splendor, not easily forgotten. The clear, uncloud-

(2) *Keats, Fancy*

ed blue of the sky blends in the distance with the faintly deeper blue of the water in such a manner as to make the horizon only a vague, indefinite line. Nearer the shore the wide expanse of blue is marked here and there by the presence of white capped waves.

'The sun is warm, the sky is clear,
The waves are dancing fast and
bright.' (1)

Just above the horizon, the sun sheds its brilliance upon water and sand alike, and both throw back bright reflections as though they are attempting to outshine the sun itself. Below the sun and fleeing swiftly, as from its rays, is a large, well-trimmed sailboat, and in the foreground is another smaller boat, listing dangerously at the moment, the man at the tiller evidently enjoying the clean, fresh air and sweet morning breeze, free as yet from all irritating odors.

"About fifteen yards north of the lodge is a gray, wooden dock, somewhat the worse for wear, and riding the waves alongside it is a white, powerful-looking speedboat with exceptionally good lines. Also tied to the dock are two rowboats. The one at the left is clean and bright and has that newly-purchased look, but the other is a dull, dark green, a boat of somewhat dilapidated appearance, which has probably carried its owner to many interesting sights and possibly through many prodigious experiences, perhaps a boat with a history behind it.

"Adding somewhat to the blue and white color of the day is the velvet green of the grass which stretches from the gate leading to the beach up to the lodge itself. Over to the right of this picture is a group of trees, all with very dark green foliage, which contrasts remarkably with the lighter green of the grass and the light colored

(1) *Shelley, Stanzas Written in Dejection*

stone of the lodge. A walk of graying stone winds its circuitous way from the lodge door down to the gate, and at this moment there are several people passing out the gate, evidently bound for an early swim. They are interesting looking people and seem to be enjoying themselves immensely. The three children, none of them yet in their teens, are frisking about on the beach now, apparently in a game of tag, and the grown-ups, also numbering three, two men and a women, are already in the water and obviously enjoying it. For this is not only the kind of scenery which inspires in one the feelings of the poet, but it is also the type of day which causes one to feel the urge for physical exertion in order to appreciate the true possibilities of nature."

This is how he saw the scene

Avaro's head has sunk upon his clenched fist, Miss Meek's eyes have grown large and have taken on that far-away look characteristic of the dreamer, and Median, having put away his notebook, is resting his elbows comfortably upon the window sill, his long, slender hands supporting his head. The sun rises slowly higher in the sky, and the little sailboat, sails no longer dipping perilously close to the water, has come about gradually and is making for shore. A motorboat engine sputters and coughs, then dies, and the calls of the before-breakfast swimmers ring out across the beach. Downstairs, a gong rings, and the three day-dreamers are brought abruptly back to the world of the present, entirely unaware of having served us in our quick survey of the study of nature appreciation. They leave their window with varying emotions and prepare to descend the stairs to breakfast. The day has officially begun.