

Analysis of "Seaside" by Robert Lynd

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"Seaside" an essay by Robert Lynd, one of the well-known essayists of the twentieth century, provides a befitting description of French Seal coast along with its setting of the Sea and of the people on the beach. This is a personal essay of the author who had been staying in a holiday resort near the French sea coast. The festivity and the mood of gala permit and pervade the entire atmosphere for the seaside. Not only the beauty of the sea side is minutely expressed but also that visitor's activities are minutely put into account.

The essay begins with the narrator observing "waves of butterflies" playing over the sandhills on the French seal coast. He continues to observe the varied natural flora of "white butterflies, foes of cabbages and of gardeners", The sandhills, however, are never free from butterflies. Brown, white, and dappled red, they wander all day among these barren heights and hollows, like creatures of the first world that rose and became dry above the waters. Bees, too, are here, black and red, getting a living among the blue flowers of the sea-holly, and the great drifts of sand are marked with the footprints of birds and rabbits and creatures as small as mice. How grasses find a place in which to root themselves, or the yellow hawkweed, or the dove's-foot geranium...". There "are banks of rest-harrow and of heartsease and fields of evening primroses — a thousand lamps at a time towards twilight — within a stone's throw of the sea. A lark rises and sings — a song that seems different from that of the English lark — as one sits on the crest of a dune and looks out over the waste of the sea or back over the waste of the sand-hills and breathes the peaceful air of these butterfly days."

As he observes nature's life on the beach, he witnesses similar diversity in human beings who have gathered at the coastal area for recreation. The narrator witnesses' similarities between the human beings and "pretty insects". He also finds their tents on the beach to be like "a horde of striped butterflies". All of these human beings belong to differing age groups, gender, profession and so their mode of recreation are also diverse from each other. The narrator states that even in the choice of recreation reflects the purpose of engagement. For example, in case of flying kites the younger boys do it just for pastime whereas older men who are engaged in it are doing it with much more sincerity and use technical knowledge behind a kite's flight. In his observation, the narrator tries to find deeper meaning in this difference of pursuit between the young and older kite flyer. While the narrator is making such observations, he also notices that a game of kite usually can be played by one single player or can have a singular companion. The companion however is usually left to function just as an audience. The game of flying kites is therefore found by the narrator to be the perfect for not only a solitary being but also for those who are introverts.

Next, he talks about different games which involve playing with balls. Although these games require suitable playground but people have made adjustments there. He finds that those who are more sociable in nature engage in such as games as they require more than one person. He names some of the games which use balls to play, namely, tennis, cricket, croquet, football, golf and observes that the players are involved in the game only for the sake of passing the time. Their minds remain idle but because of their activity together the narrator equates them with host of butterflies and bees who always remain busy and playful. He then puts across his views about a philosopher who in this case is the narrator himself. He points out that in this situation and in every other situation if there is anyone who can be indolent i.e. be lazy and enjoy inactivity it has to be a philosopher. The philosopher is happy being idle in physical activity as he would use that time to imagine, observe and

think. To a philosopher the tents are places of new activity and not a place to take rest. This is how the philosopher is different from anyone else.

Unlike the cricket players bat, the narrator has a walking stick which is his companion and sometimes as he strolls, he uses it as a bat. He plays the game when no-one is watching as no proper rule is followed to play it. Along with it he uses common day things and imagines them to be real components to a game of cricket. The satisfaction he draws from such games he equates with a serious game which he imagines to be played against Yorkshire team. As the narrator continues to describe games played with balls, he goes deep seeking much dense reading into the patterns and associations of the games.

The narrator notes another observation which he has been making while being at the beach. The focus is now on those whose profession is tied to ocean. He observes that there is difference between those who engage in catching shrimps as a recreation and as a profession. Those who catch shrimps as recreation do it casually with no burden to earn or feed anyone. Their catching of shrimps only teaches them about the wonders of ocean. For those who make a living out of it are melancholic i.e. carry a more serious and sadder demeanour when they are at work. The narrator paints the picture of women dressed in black with melancholy fighting against all the odds, against the adverse conditions at ocean pushing themselves hard to catch as many shrimps they can. Their joys of triumph are only attached to catching those shrimps and anything else caught on the nets are not appreciated.

The narrator now as a philosopher notes that an adult's monetary want attached to the ocean in a way compromises the joys of activities of learning like "shrimping, fishing, digging" that a person enjoys during their childhood as a first-time experience. After giving the example of the difference between an adult's and child's approach towards shrimping he goes on to speak about the children who dig up sand and "build castles and fortified towns, dig wells and channels". Along with the children are the father's and their pride over their children is observed. Even when observing the father figures on the beach, the narrator notes the difference in temperament of the fathers based on their age, age of their children and the game they are engaged in. For example, a person who has become father at an old age and has a curious baby has to adapt more patience. The narrator even gives his dictate that a child of two years age is at "the serious age".

Next, he notices women. "One lady motors down to the front in a bathing costume and trips across the sand under a seven-coloured parasol, with a maid and a can of water waiting to wash the sand off when she returns out of the sea to the bathing box."

An important role played at the beaches are by the sauveteurs or life guards who throughout the day look after the people at the beach and make sure that they are not in any danger. The narrator even observes how they look and how they have been working with seriousness throughout the day.

As the day comes to an end, the narrator observes life clearing out of that space. Along with this they also make sure that the music played at the beach has the current tempo. Here the narrator compares the work of the sauveteurs in managing people, especially children, with "members- of Captain Ahab's crew, looking out, harpoon in hand, for Moby Dick to rise out of the waters, they could not scrutinize the sea with more desperate anxiety. They are sterner than schoolmasters even with the oldest of us. They terrify us with their gestures and deafen us with their trumpets, so that all that some of us can do is to stand in a foot and a-half of water and stare at them spellbound."

The narrator who identifies himself as a philosopher again goes back to show the difference of his profession and personality from others. He tells that unlike those who dare the ocean he likes to just

sit in two feet water, observe and contemplate on the diversity of life. The philosopher in him can feel the enjoyment of bathing in the ocean without even swimming. He finds his peace in engaging in just observation and imagination.