

THE COLONY

The colony had existed since the beginning of time. This was not to say that it had been present in that dim era eons ago when the universe accreated from nothingness, or even since the first rains had condensed on the bleak rock that was the colony's home, but merely that in its own egocentric awareness it could remember no time when it was not, or had been different, and this, therefore, constituted an eternity. More strictly speaking, it had clung to the sea's stony coast for fourteen thousand years.

It had been a rather uneventful eternity. At the start the sea, mixed with the icy meltwater from the glaciers that rested a few miles away, had been cooler, but the gradual warming affected none. The sea's level, as the land-locked water of the icecaps returned, had also changed. Its effect on the landscape was startling. Vast plains were swallowed by the encroaching ocean. What once were river valleys, green with evergreens and grasses, now were inlets and bays, greened with floating masses of kelp. Mountains were slowly surrounded by the sea's tide, their valleys were the stretches of sea that separated the isles of a new archipeligo. It was utterly beautiful. Had anyone noticed it he would have been amazed. But the colony had no eyes.

Though others like itself had suffered misfortune by this flood, fortune had spared it. As the waves crept up the sides of the colony's mountain, it had followed. Not willingly, but the natural forces were such that as time took the older members, young were added to the upper edge. The colony had crawled three hundred yards now, and was still on the move. But this journey progressed at about a quarter inch a year, and the colony had not noticed it.

Since then, the colony had been threatened only twice. The first was when a volcano, errupting a thousand miles to the south, had covered it with a smothering layer of ash. The second, but half a century ago, occurred as a fire, starting in the mountains to the west, and carried onward by a hurricane wind, almost incinerated the colony. But each time it had been

saved by the waves, as the tide rose, as it did twice a day for the last five million days, to wash, cover, caress, and then nurish the colony's members.

The colony had few predators. The sea has few inhabitants that would attack the sharp, stony, plates that covered it, and when the tide had ebbed there were few creatures that would venture that close to the roaring waves. Despite the colony's small size - it was but half an inch high and covered but a fifth of a square foot in area - it did not fear the world. Actually it did not know that an outside world existed. The individuals that composed it spent their lives inside their well-fortified encasements, feeding by raking from the waters any unfortunates, albeit smaller, creatures that happened to drift by.

It was not an unusual day when the tide went out that afternoon. To the colony nothing seemed to have changed, and indeed, in the colony's point of view, nothing had. Actually a strange metamorphosis had, not only today, but during the past two hundred fifty years, crept over the land, beginning in several estuaries and river valleys to the south, spreading throughout the continent, and in the last twenty-five years reaching the colony's remote island. But the colony could not have known this, if indeed, the colony could be said to know anything. At any rate, the sun was shining softly on the colony as the three eelen travellers climbed down the hill's sloping face, to stand at the breaking surf.

They had been travelling since before dawn, nor was their journey finished. They had come to the island merely as a stop-over; a place to stay the night. One of them climbed to the top of a jagged boulder.

Another said,

"The wise man sat upon a rock

And laughed at what he did see"

"Why thank you for the title, Bill, but for a man to consider himself wise, when he, in reality, knows nothing, is to show that he is a fool."

"Socrates."

"And Milton. #

"Is this the open sea here? ^{Without islands} ~~the open sea~~, a straight pass to Spain?"

"Certainly is," he moves a few feet backwards, "how about a good old posed photograph? Here, look this way. That's good."

"Bill, did you bring the thermometer?"

The third, who was lying, stretched out on the ground, got up,

"I think I did, Vic."

"you did, Philip? Good."

"I wonder where I put it. I remember putting it somewhere, but.....; Ah no/I recall..... What time is it? What a fool thing! Why did I bring a thermometer and not ~~My~~ wristwatch?...."

"Bill, ~~q~~ those markers for a swimming area, or what?"

"Lobsterpots. This is a big lobster fishing area. That reminds me, when you walk on the rocks take care not to step on the green areas. They are very slippery, and if you were to fall in I wouldn't have the foggiest notion how to fish you out, or myself....for that matter."

The three continued to talk for a while and then climbed closer to the water's edge. They stopped to look at a few of the tidal pools.

"This looks like Enteromorpha intestinalis."

"Seaweed. How should I know, there are so many similar ~~the~~ types. Did you bring the book? I see you didn't, and stop with the latin."

"Quite a bit of granite here. I saw a vein of basalt back there. The area looks quite old, Pre-Cambrian do you think?"

"No, that's too old. Probably from one of the early mountain building eras."

"There was an Arcadian Orgeny."

"That's a good name, anyway. When was it?"

"I don't know. Perhaps early Cambrian. Perhaps not. Your guess is as good as mine....."


The three talked on for some time. What they said was quite irrelevant, as far as the colony was concerned. Actually, at some point during the conversation the colony, in the usual sense of the word, ceased to exist. On the rock where it once rested was a mound of broken shells and a frayed mass of flesh. At some

point one of our three travellers took a step backwards, and the colony died. ^{not one} ~~Neither~~ of the three noticed it.

"Bill, what time is it?"

"Must you always be so concerned with the time? Enjoy yourself. Relax for a while..... It is getting late, about time to eat."

The tide came up that night, and the snails finished off what was left of the little mound of barnacles. In the ~~the~~ morning the three travellers went on their ways quite unaware that the universe had ended.

 Bill Menke