

A fragment:

"an earnest examination ..."

The sun shines, the sky is blue, the sea sparkles and the sand is warm underfoot. A group of people are standing in the middle of the beach talking earnestly, while two children fidget around the edges. It is obvious from their voices that they are "upper-class" English and from their variegated clothes that they are eccentric intellectuals. In the middle of the group stands a man in an incongruous dark blue suit, complete with vest and gold watch chain, with a Panama hat on his white hair and spectacles on his sunburnt, peeling nose. He speaks in a sharp, clear voice and everybody seems to listen to him. They are discussing where to settle on the beach before they go in swimming.

"What about the rocks over by the cave?"

"No," says the man in the suit, "they will soon be in the shade and it will be too cold over there."

"Then on the other side, on the rocks you call the red staircase."

"The tide is coming in and we should soon have to move back."

"Then here in the middle?"

"It's too windy and there are no rocks to put our things on."

After a long and earnest examination of the state of the tide, the wind, the sun, the wetness of the sand, they choose a warm and sheltered corner which the tide will not reach before it is time for them to leave. The two children are stripped and off for the water at once, brown bodies splashing into the icy spray, voices shouting with shivery delight. The adults gradually get undressed, in their deliberate grown-up way, laying their clothes carefully on dry rocks, with pockets folded inwards, then walk down the slope of the sand towards the water.

Out beyond the beach, the Atlantic stretches blue and sparkling all the way to Nantucket. The ocean swell wrinkles its surface with a deceptively gentle movement, till it reaches the sand, where it gathers itself like a tiger and leaps upon the beach with a roar, sweeping up with its watery paws anything in its path. The bathers walk into the fan of foaming water, shivering a little, then they plunge through the surf and emerge again, floating like corks on the cool green water beyond the breakers. The man in the suit, now bare, swims solemnly up and down the beach, breast-stroke, his red face and white hair sticking up out of the water like a dignified walrus. Then he turns on his back and kicks up a great fountain of water to amuse the children. When he comes out of the sea, he puts on his shirt, which reaches to his knees, and his Panama hat, and begins to smoke his pipe. This man is my father, Bertrand Russell, on the beach in Cornwall with his family and his friends.

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