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By C.H.J. Snider

Flouting the Devil on Friday the 13th

Antiquarians studying such lake hieroglyphics as they survive the alphabetic bombs of the 20th century a thousand years hence, may decide that this area was settled by devil worshippers. There is a Devil Island in Lake Huron and three in Lake Superior – the Wisconsin one being near the Apostles, our Ontario one near Thunder Cape, with a subsidiary Devil's Warehouse outside Gargantua Harbor. In Lake Ontario we have the Devil's Nose.

Where?

On his face, of course.

Not to be crude or corny, it is on the south shore, in New York State, 18 miles west of the piers of the Port of Rochester.

It's a "small bald knob," which nobody coasting can help seeing and nobody cares to examine closely. The Coast Pilot tells you to keep half a mile off shore for good water as there is a dirty spur almost a mile east of the Nose, with only seven feet on it and three eighths of a mile out. We have passed the Nose a dozen times before, and we found conditions right for examination and that had to be on Friday the 13th.

Direct approach would have brought our eight-foot draught atop of the long tongue, the old serpent sticking out under the lake's surface to cool his burning proboscis and lick up the careless who think the bitterness of death is past. That's the – ah, well, you know – of it.

We steered, for the sneer on the left side of his face and so got within easy rowing distance with still a fathom of water under the keel, before heaving to and putting our longboat overboard.

In The Lake's Mirror, Silence

The lake was as smooth as glass. It mirrored a hog's-back as high as the Highlands of Scarboro, crowned with crew-cut hardwood bush to the very brink. Above the oaks and maples lake eagles soared, watching us mortals and their own nest of dried sticks. The bank died down to the eastward in a long saurian snout, with a know on the end.

Isolated trees formed spiny bristles. The pits from which boulders had dropped (the makings of the reef) looked more like gouged eye pockets than nostrils or breath-holes. The tawny cliff face seemed ideal for bank swallows, but though no blasts of sulphur and brimstone wove wisps of blue and green and yellow about neither was there the glad flash of bird's wings nor the pretty pock-markings of the swallow's apartment houses to be seen, and no fish jumping nor was there a gnat to tempt them. Perhaps he is an eagle? Perhaps Auld Horny himself. The silence was sultry, not soothing.

We rowed through two parallel paths, delicate as flower borders, of white butterflies with wings spread wide in the water, millions of them drowned on their way to the everlasting bonfire, perchance blasted by the invisible flame which gives neither light nor heat.

There was a narrow fringe of beach, with small hard whitish stones, some big grey boulders and the trunks of trees with the bark still on and roots writhing, which seemed to have been pushed over the edge by the forest crowning 200 feet above. The cliff was dish-faced, as a claimable good word? as the Highlands. It seemed of harder texture than their clay, almost sandstone. Far overhead the thin depth of roots and topsoil fringed the face like misplaced eyebrows, dark, ragged and jagged, in irregular but continuous lines. On that majestic furrowed forehead Boreas had scribed with chisels of frost and needles of hail an inscription in characters not of this world, more fantastic than the frieze of the Toronto Stock Exchange.

What Was Written?

You could pick out the monstrous paws and claws and eyes and jaws, all dislocated and distorted like a brain in chaos, all serpentine and saurian, yet pleasanter to look upon than Epstein sculptures over descents to the pit or underground stations. Perhaps it was the winds' copy of:

“ALL HOPE ABANDON YE WHO ENTER HERE”

but it made one think of what an anonymous joke chalked on the shipyard gates where the schooner *Hibernia* was being launched:

“Ye Medes and Persians have no fear,
“No Papishers shall enter here”

— to which Capt. Pat McMahan retired with the amendment:

“Who wrote these lines has written well,
“Tis so upon the gates of hell.”