

"A pleasant Land to see"

PART TWO

BY ORAL S. COAD

This is the concluding portion of an article of which the first half appeared in the Journal for June, 1962, and which offers a collection of passages by various authors describing New Jersey scenery. The material is arranged in a loose geographical progression from north to south. The section dealing with the Raritan in Part One is continued below.

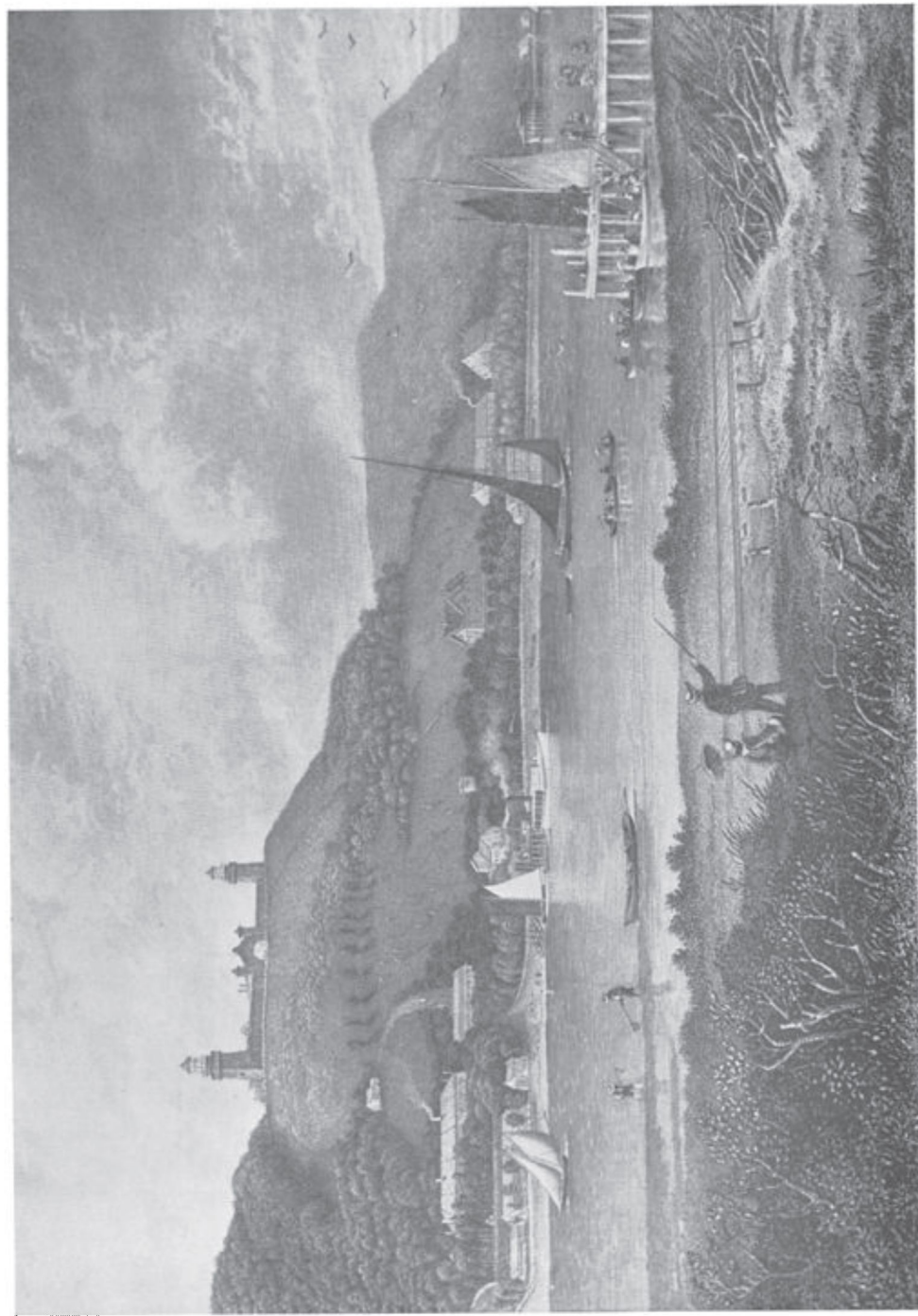
The Raritan River Valley

IN its upper reaches, too, the Raritan Valley has found favor with a few writers, who have discovered there a serene rural beauty that even yet has not been seriously defaced. An especially warm-hearted response to this region as seen in the Bedminster neighborhood is made by Andrew D. Mellick, Jr., in that modest but engaging New Jersey classic, *The Story of an Old Farm* (1889). Recreating in the "Introduction" a stage-wagon ride from Somerville to Peapack, Mellick gives us glimpses such as this:

The eye rambling south and west overlooks a charming prospect for miles away. The ebbing sunshine, flooding down wide streams of light, intensifies every shade of color in nature's mosaic of tillage and fallow, of level sweeps of pasture and waving fields of grain. On the other side of the road the hill-sides of the Old Farm fall away abruptly in great, grassy cascades till they blend with the meadows that stretch to a line of waving trees, marking where a winding silvery stream hastens to join the Raritan. . . . The face of the country is buoyant and rolls away in billowy undulations, now subsiding into quiet valleys, now gently ascending woodland slopes, the deep soil of the green fields lying in continuous, lawn-like surfaces, presenting between the eye and the horizon in every direction a panorama of symmetry and beauty.¹

Idealizing, which is the poet's privilege, is demonstrated in a poem entitled "May in the Raritan Valley" by Mrs. Merrill E. Gates, whose husband was President of Rutgers College from 1882 to 1890. If the writer's language is more florid than current taste might choose, it yet conveys the sincerity of her response to her theme:

¹ *The Story of an Old Farm* has been skilfully condensed and edited as *Lesser Crossroads* (1948) by Hubert G. Schmidt, Professor of History, Rutgers University. This passage appears in *Lesser Crossroads* on p. 14.



THE HIGHLANDS OF THE NEVERSINK—1872

May in the Raritan Valley is May in the fullness of beauty!
Generous and rich are these meadows, these verdurous broad-lying lowlands,
Deeply cleft in green halves by the steel-blue sword of the river.
Wide was the ancient flow of the stream, like an arm of the ocean;
Now, as wide, spread green banks, the river's illuminate border,
Fenc'd afar by the silvery mists of the shadowy forests,
And hillsides daintily covered with affluent, redolent blossoms,
Apple and pear and the delicate pink of the peachtree.²

The Raritan has found its most sensitive poet—although he wrote mostly in prose—in John C. Van Dyke, who was for many years a distinguished professor of art at Rutgers. In *The Meadows: Familiar Studies of the Commonplace* (1926) he has written with much grace and charm a dozen nature essays in which the art critic's keen eye for color and form gives to the Raritan Valley a quiet beauty and an individual personality that we may not have been aware of before. Even the industrial pollution of the river that most people have regarded as merely a repulsive blight, Professor Van Dyke has seen as adding its own beautifying touch:

Still, whatever its hue or consistency [he writes in the essay "Things Familiar"], the water surface always makes a wonderful mirror. That it is slightly opalescent or tawny rather helps than harms the picture. Trees and rock face, flag and flower, cloud and star seen in the colored water take on new and strange hues, become mysteriously harmonious. The little wave-crests upon terra-cotta water are not white, but cream-colored, the gold of the moon's track across the stream becomes a copper gold, and the stars, whether white or blue or orange, all glitter as points of gold. Dawn after dawn that jade water will flush with rose and scarlet, and evening after evening the shafts of the setting sun will gild the little waves, and edge the green flags, and splash the mud banks with a strange splendor (pp. 18-19).

His history of the Van Dyke family in the Valley, *The Raritan: Notes on a River and a Family* (1915), opens with a descriptive essay in which the beginning and the end of the river are especially depicted:

Far up the River, near the foot of the blue hills, there is a more abrupt and perhaps a more picturesque setting for the stream. It breaks through cloves and steep valleys, winds under abrupt cliffs, and falls down steps of shale in moderate little cascades. But it never is, at any time, a brawling mountain stream with a boulder bed and plunging, roaring falls. There is a sound of

² Gates, *Poems* (1908) pp. 73-74.

rapid running water, occasionally a little churning and gurgling; but usually only the plaintive soothing murmur of a stream that is quietly running away to the sea. The steep banks of shale with their mosses, lichens, flowers, stunted cedars and trailing vines are quite as picturesque as those found elsewhere. Moreover, the trees grow thick here in spaces and the meadows entirely disappear in favor of side hills and farm uplands. It is a wilder country than down below, more stimulating, less restful perhaps, but farther from the crowd, nearer to the pure fountain head of nature in the hills.

* * * * *

As the stream flattens down to meet the sea its meadows flatten, too, and turn into marshes waving with flag and rush and cat-tail. These, as the seasons come and go, turn green, turn yellow, turn sere and grey. The coot and the rail, with the red-winged blackbird, nest there, and in the autumn flocks of wild fowl dip down to its lakes and run-ways, and great droves of reed birds swarm like bees above the nodding rushes. Flat as the still sea the tops of the rushes stretch out for miles, glittering in the sun—a huge monotone not the less beautiful because despised and neglected by man. Very beautiful are the marshes to those who have lived beside them and, through many years, have known the charm of their repose (pp. 6-8).

Any who have found the Raritan hard to live with of recent years may feel that their impressions of the tarnished stream have not been altogether those of Professor Van Dyke. But they may be ready to accept a summary of its past and present appearance expressed in a brief sentence by Harry Emerson Wildes, whose *Twin Rivers* bears convincing testimony to his intimate knowledge of the river and its history:

Before ruthless exploitation ruined its beauty, the Raritan was magnificent. At New Brunswick today the stream recovers much of its ancient charm (p. 5).

The Highlands of Navesink

Immediately neighboring Raritan Bay lies one of the most prominent seamarks on the Atlantic coast. Not only for its prominence but also for its beauty and interest Navesink (or Neversink) has captured the attention of writers from early times down to the present. We have already indicated that the phrase, "a pleasant Land to see," written in 1609 by Hudson's scribe, Robert Juet, is believed to have been inspired by the sight of this bold headland.

Philip Freneau, whose home for most of his life was only a few miles from that point, knew and loved the Highlands well and cele-

brated their two-fold significance in what Lewis Leary has called one of his "fine pieces,"³ "Neversink" (1795). With the third and fourth stanzas omitted it reads:

These Hills, the pride of all the coast,
To mighty distance seen,
With aspect bold and rugged brow,
That shade the neighbouring main:
These heights, for solitude design'd,
This rude, resounding shore—
These vales impervious to the wind,
Tall oaks, that to the tempest bend,
Half Druid, I adore.

From distant lands, a thousand sails
Your hazy summits greet—
You saw the angry Briton come,
You saw him, last, retreat!
With towering crest, you first appear
The news of land to tell;
To him that comes, fresh joys impart,
To him that goes, a heavy heart,
The lover's long farewell.

* * * * *

Proud heights! with pain so often seen,
(With joy beheld once more)
On your firm base I take my stand,
Tenacious of the shore:—
Let those who pant for wealth or fame
Pursue the watery road;—
Soft sleep and ease, blest days and nights,
And health, attend these favourite heights,
Retirement's blest abode!

James Fenimore Cooper does well by the Highlands in *Home-ward Bound* (1838), in which a group of characters experience that seamark as countless voyagers must have done before and since. Paul points out to Eve "a hazy object at some elevation above the sea," which to Eve seems to be a cloud, "a dim, ill-defined, dark body of vapor." Paul assures her it is "the bluff-like termination of the celebrated highlands of Navesink." Eve eagerly points out the

³ Leary, *That Rascal Freneau* (1941), p. 327.

place to others, and they all watch it for nearly an hour, during which "the blue of this hazy object deepened; then its base became connected with the water, and it ceased to resemble a cloud at all. In twenty more minutes the faces and angles of the hills became visible, and trees started out of their sides. In the end a pair of twin lights were seen perched on the summit."⁴

Another distinguished mariner among American novelists also noted the strikingly deceptive appearance of which the promontory is capable. The hero of Herman Melville's partially autobiographical story, *Redburn* (1849), returning from his first voyage, reports: "Full before us quivered and danced, in the noon-day heat and mid-air, the green heights of New Jersey; and by an optical delusion the blue sea seemed to flow under them" (Standard Edn., p. 384).

Among the able contributors to *Picturesque America* (1872-1874), edited by William Cullen Bryant, was Oliver Bell Bunce, a New York editor and a playwright of some competence. His essay on this bit of American picturesqueness begins:

The Neversink Highlands have the post of honor among the American hills. They stand near the principal portal of the continent—the first land to greet the curious eyes of the stranger, and to cheer the heart of the returning wanderer. . . . The delight with which the wearied ocean-voyager greets the shores that first rise upon the horizon has often been described; but, when the shores have a rare sylvan beauty that opens hour by hour to view as the vessel draws near—when, instead of frowning rocks or barren sands, he beholds noble hills clothed to their brows with green forests, fields and meadows basking with summer beauty in the sun, cottages nestling amid shrubbery, and spires lifting above clustering tree-tops—the picture possesses a charm which only he who first beholds it can fully realize. It is such a green paradise that the Neversink Hills offer to the gaze of every ocean-wanderer who enters the harbor of New York (I, 173).

A somewhat effusive lady with the name of Miss F. E. Fryatt, who spent a vacation in the neighborhood, wrote an article on "The Navesink Highlands," which was published in *Harper's New Monthly Magazine* of September, 1879. But her effusiveness does not conceal the genuineness of her appreciation of the region as it was at that time. And it is gratifying to realize that these excerpts would not be wholly inapplicable today:

⁴ Cooper (Mohawk Edn.), *Homeward Bound*, p. 459.

This beautiful region . . . although known as early as 1609, settled more than two centuries ago, and almost within sound of Trinity bells, is to-day as primitively lovely as if it were a hundred years and a hundred miles away.

* * * * *

From a point a quarter of a mile below the boat-landing, the view of the Highlands is exquisite, especially by moonlight. Looking out over the river, one sees them rising, massive and darkly beautiful, from its waters, lifting one above another, sweeping west and northward, here and there a twinkle of cottage lamps on the nearer slopes, and higher beyond, like crosses of white fire, the twin lights of Navesink. So little has the hand of man interfered with their primal aspect, these beautiful hills present about the same picture that greeted Hendrick Hudson two hundred and seventy years ago when he moored the *Half-Moon* in Horseshoe Harbor (LIX, 541, 542-543).

John T. Cunningham has done as much as any living writer to convince Jerseyans that they have every right to be proud of their State. His several books on the various aspects of this theme accomplish their purpose in no small measure because they are written to be read with enjoyment. This is notably true of *The New Jersey Shore* (1958). Beginning his tour with the Navesink region, Mr. Cunningham sketches a picture of the Highlands, in which he expresses his own satisfaction that things have not changed much there:

The crouching hills of the Highlands are the best-known landfall on the Atlantic coast. Mount Mitchell in the Highlands, at 260 feet the highest point on the coast, has been the first glimpse of America for millions of immigrants—all the way back to the seventeenth century Dutch.

The rugged and thickly wooded Highlands are only moderately changed in appearance since that day in September, 1609, when Henry Hudson dropped the *Half-Moon's* anchor and sent his men ashore to seek water. Roads entwine the heights and houses spread discreetly over the slopes, yet, to one looking at the Highlands from Raritan Bay, most of these twentieth-century encroachments are masked by the tall hardwood forests.

Deep in those trees is the very same flow of clear, cool spring water from which Hudson's men refilled their casks (pp. 38-39).

Sandy Hook

Thus far this study has been concerned with the more northerly section of the State, in which the scenery is composed of a variety of sharply separated phenomena, such as the Palisades, the Passaic

Falls, the Delaware Water Gap, and the Navesink Highlands. These northerly features tend largely to a conspicuousness of size or beauty or both. From Navesink southward the landscape assumes a different character. The terrain is now prevailingly flat and relatively devoid of those spectacular views that entice the tourist and excite the conventional rhapsodist. Instead of the considerable diversity of scenery we have noticed up to this point, we now encounter two major aspects of the land: a long, flat, superficially monotonous coast line and a great, flat, superficially monotonous plain. With these our remaining authors are chiefly concerned. That they have found variety in sameness, impressiveness in the unspectacular, and beauty in the sombre and austere is evidence that they may have looked with more subtly discerning eyes than did some of the preceding writers, whose material in the main was of the more obviously description-worthy kind. Appropriately, then, the quotations that follow will stress topographical landmarks less, and trees and plants, color and atmosphere more, than did those in the foregoing subdivisions of this anthology.

Adjoining the Highlands of Navesink is a contrasting strip of shore that illustrates the general characteristics we have attributed to much of the landscape below that point. Sandy Hook is certainly flat and monotonous, and, to the casual observer, uninteresting. Yet it has been referred to almost as often as any natural feature of New Jersey, mainly because it has a meaning for every ship entering or leaving New York Harbor, but partly because some writers have discovered an impressiveness in its very monotony and unadorned bleakness—its very lack of those elements that make for obvious natural beauty.

A sensitive response to the primitive, almost fantastic, desolation of the Hook is expressed by Andrew D. Mellick, Jr., in *The Story of an Old Farm*, already referred to:

One of the unique spots on the American coast is that solitary outpost by the sounding sea which stands guard at the entrance to New York Harbor—that spinal curvature of sand, bristling with stunted trees, which forms what sailor and fisherfolk know as the Horseshoe Cove. On the one side spreads the sheen and sparkle of the glistening bay, whose low murmuring waves lap its yellow strand, while seaward its dunes and beaches offer the first barrier to Atlantic billows that have swept unchecked their imperious way

for nearly three thousand miles. Between are hummocks and swales of drifting sand, mostly covered with a maze and tangle of somber cedars and other evergreen trees, twisted, bent, and scarified by many a weary gale. With the exception of a few buildings clustering about the government station and the railroad terminus, it is an uninhabited waste of desolate solitude, where the winds sadly sigh through the dense undergrowth, and where the silence is otherwise unbroken save by the wailing of the surge, the cry of the sea-fowl, and the hum of the Jersey mosquito.⁵

A similar impression of Sandy Hook is recorded by Gustav Kobbé, who wrote several books on music and the theatre as well as *The New Jersey Coast and Pines* (1889), a guidebook. In a style not at all reminiscent of the typical guidebook he conveys with skill the sense of loneliness that still pervades much of Sandy Hook (as of February, 1962):

By far its greater portion preserves for us the aspect of this coast centuries ago. For it is a primeval wilderness—within a short sailing distance from New York—a dreary waste of sand, here heaped up in dunes, there scooped out into hollows by the wind, with storm-twisted cedars and coarse salt grasses, bidding defiance to 3,000 miles of ocean, which of a winter's storm hurls its water in crashing confusion against this solitary outpost of the mainland. An indescribable sense of desolation occasionally comes over one while tramping through this wilderness. Fantastic trees, hirsute with streaming mosses, and the thick, soft layer under foot, formed by centuries' shedding of needles and leaves, and deadening one's footsteps so that the muttering of the surf and the cries of hawks and gulls are heard with startling distinctness, give a touch of the weird to this remnant of our coast as it was in its savage state (p. 1).

Henry Charlton Beck, author of many delightful books on odd and out-of-the-way Jersey places and people, finds Sandy Hook not at all out of the way but for that very reason odd in that it is still so largely unspoiled. It is to be hoped that, when Sandy Hook becomes the public park we are promised, Mr. Beck will not find it necessary to rewrite this passage from *Fare to Midlands* (1939):

However, despite the army supervision or perhaps because of its protection, Sandy Hook today is little different from the Hook of long ago. The low trees and shrubs, the red cedar and wild cherry trees have grown, untroubled, to unbelievable proportion and profusion. As for holly, here within ten miles of New York where a spit of sand looks across to Coney Island, Brooklyn

⁵ Hubert G. Schmidt, *op. cit.*, pp. 261-262.

and Manhattan, there is a stand of lovely trees, virtually a forest more than two miles long and at least a century old, almost without equal anywhere (p. 350).

Manasquan

Following down the coast, which in its natural state must have been somewhat a repetition of Sandy Hook, we pause at Manasquan, the next point of interest to nature describers, so far as I have discovered. For many years this neighborhood was the summer home of Rebecca Harding Davis, the mother of Richard Harding Davis and a novelist in her own right. Her novel, *Dallas Galbraith* (1868), begins and ends in Manasquan, whose scenery Mrs. Davis presents vividly and with emphasis on the lonely austerity we have already remarked:

The water [of Manasquan River], curdled with the rising tide, stretched up between the rolling dark hills on either side, a sheet of glittering steely blue.

. . . . The hills and defiles on either side of the broad water up which he floated were silent and untenanted as a shore in Hades. Almost as spectral and beautiful, also: the moon, a pale, thin bow, rising low in the sea horizon, threw timorous, dim lights up into this far-inland valley, where the tide crept and bosomed itself for a transient rest. Along the shore the knobs and peaks of hills grouped themselves in fantastic forms, bare, save for the cover of short, soft grass, sinking back into dusky, wooded slopes behind. Here and there one of these bald summits lifted a dead tree in relief against the sky, on whose topmost limb a fish-hawk sat flapping its wings and keeping a tireless watch over its nest (pp. 25-26).

At the head of the inlet, or where it breaks squarely against a hill . . . the water forms a shallow, umber-colored bed for numberless flat, marshy islands, covered with reedy, salt grass of every shade of brown and saffron. Between these flats Dallas poled his boat slowly, closely scanning the banks and slopes of the hills, afraid to call aloud lest he might wake the loud, resonant echoes which wait, ready and angry, along these shores, as though impatient of the continual, heavy silence (p. 26).

Barnegat

The Barnegat area, with its bay, its long strips of beach, its surf, its marshes, and, of course, its lighthouse, is one of the more picturesque points along the coast, and not surprisingly its natural features have been written about more often, probably, than any other

section between Navesink and Cape May. Again the first admirer who saw fit to make use of his pen was Robert Juet of Hudson's *Half-Moon* crew, already twice mentioned. In his *Journal* of 1609 he recorded that

we came to a great Lake of water, as wee could judge it to bee, being drowned Land, which made it to rise like Ilands, which was in length ten leagues. The mouth of that Lake hath many shoalds, and the Sea breaketh on them as it is cast out of the mouth of it. And from that Lake or Bay, the Land lyeth North by East, and wee had a great streame out of the Bay. . . .⁶

This region has been used as the setting for a considerable quantity of fiction, its assorted aspects providing a varied background for romantic adventure. For example, the more or less mythical wreckers figure in *Barnegat Pirates* (1897) by Howard D. Van Sant, who has some pleasantly realistic pictures of the Barnegat region.

The scene as they glided down the [Toms] river was one of peculiar enchantment for the Jersey shores. On the left was the undulating hills and gradually sloping mainland, interspersed with the cleared fields of the early settlers, or still covered by stately oak and pine trees, while the south bank of the stream was a succession of curving pebbly beaches, with rising woodland in the background, fringed for the most part with a regular growth of bright green cedars, holly, oak and pine, affording a most picturesque view, much in contrast to the usual low meadow lands of the middle and lower Jersey shores (p. 156).

A better piece of fiction than Van Sant's is F. Hopkinson Smith's *The Tides of Barnegat* (1906), although it is scarcely one of his best novels. A rather highly colored picture is sketched in these sentences:

. . . the radiant sunshine had turned the ribbon of a road that ran from Warehouse village to Barnegat Light and the sea to satin, the wide marshes to velvet, and the belts of stunted pines to bands of purple. . . .

To the left of where she stood curved the coast, glistening like a scimitar, and the strip of yellow beach which divided the narrow bay from the open sea; to the right, thrust out into the sheen of silver, lay the spit of sand narrowing the inlet, its edges scalloped with lace foam, its extreme point dominated by the grim tower of Barnegat Light; aloft, high into the blue, soared the gulls, flashing like jewels as they lifted their breasts to the sun, while away and beyond, the sails of the fishing-boats, gray or silver in their shifting tacks, crawled over the wrinkled sea (pp. 3-4).

⁶ *Juet's Journal* (1959), ed. Robert M. Lunney, p. 27.

A. P. Richardson's *Barnegat Ways* (1931) is a pleasant collection of character sketches and episodes, together with some agreeable description of local scenery:

[In Barnegat language sedges are] far-stretched flat meadows little above the level of the bay in the time of neap tides and often submerged by flood tides.

The sedges are at their best in August, when the vivid green of early summer has been changed here and there to a pattern of gold and brown, and their whole expanse is spangled closely with the native marsh-mallow and the large rose-mallow, which escaped years ago from some one's garden, it is said, and took up its residence beside its humbler cousin. Those wide, fragile blossoms, which perish as they are gathered, shine in the hot sun of late summer red and pink and pure white, and they crown our sedges with a glory which even the poppies and the great daisies of the western mountains cannot equal.

To all of us who live about the bay the sedges are always beautiful. Even when the snow covers them and only a stubborn reed or sprig of "ma'sh elder" pierces the white sheet, they have a charm which we do not attempt to explain or to define (p. 121).

The late Professor Cornelius Weygandt of the University of Pennsylvania, a lover of South Jersey from his boyhood vacation days, has given much proof of his keen observation of the region in *Down Jersey: Folks and Their Jobs, Pine Barrens, Salt Marshes and Sea Islands* (1940). His affectionate descriptions include the Barnegat area:

The very best of what is left of the sea islands of yesterday is the stretch south from Seaside Park. Man has encroached less on this tumbled dune-land than on any other part of the sea front of New Jersey. There still you may see the white sails of an occasional schooner standing off-shore, there are fish nets drying in the sun, there the beach plums break into bloom of stabbing white from black twigs and compose themselves with sure mastery against backgrounds of cedarnpurple and bronze and dark green. There is as true a heath as any you will find on Long Island, or Nantucket, or Cape Cod (p. 32).

The Pine Barrens

It might be in order now, for the sake of variety, to leave the shore for a time and strike west from Barnegat into the famed Pine Barrens. This vast tract, of indeterminate boundaries, has revealed to writers a greater diversity of aspect than a casual visit might dis-

close. The first description of the Pines (particularly of the swamps therein) that I have met, and perhaps the best, was written by the Scottish-born ornithologist, Alexander Wilson, and was published in his *American Ornithology*, which first appeared, with his remarkable illustrations, in nine volumes between 1808 and 1814:

In the lower parts of New Jersey, [the great herons] have also their favourite places for building; and rearing their young. These are generally in the gloomy solitudes of the tallest cedar swamps, where, if unmolested, they continue annually to breed for many years. These swamps are from half a mile to a mile in breadth, and sometimes five or six in length, and appear as if they occupied the former channel of some choked up river, stream, lake, or arm of the sea. The appearance they present to a stranger is singular. A front of tall and perfectly straight trunks, rising to the height of fifty or sixty feet without a limb, and crowded in every direction, their tops so closely woven together as to shut out the day, spreading the gloom of a perpetual twilight below. On a nearer approach, they are found to rise out of the water, which, from the impregnation of the fallen leaves and roots of the cedars, is of the color of brandy. Amidst this bottom of congregated springs, the ruins of the former forest lie piled in every state of confusion. The roots, prostrate logs, and, in many places, the water, are covered with green mantling moss, while an undergrowth of laurel, fifteen and twenty feet high, intersects every opening so completely as to render a passage through laborious and harassing beyond description; at every step, you either sink to the knees, clamber over fallen timber, squeeze yourself through between the stubborn laurels, or plunge to the middle in ponds made by the uprooting of large trees, which the green moss concealed from observation. In calm weather the silence of death reigns in these dreary regions; a few interrupted rays of light shoot across the gloom; and unless for the occasional hollow scream of the herons, and the melancholy chirping of one or two species of small birds, all is silence, solitude, and desolation. When a breeze rises, at first it sighs mournfully through the tops; but as the gale increases, the tall mast-like cedars wave like fishing poles, and rubbing against each other, produce a variety of singular noises, that, with the help of a little imagination, resemble shrieks, groans, growling of bears, wolves, and such like comfortable music.⁷

If Wilson experienced a kind of sinister fascination in the Barrens, our next writer found a more placid beauty in the part with which he chose to deal. Charles J. Peterson, founder and editor of *Peterson's Magazine*, a rival of *Godey's Lady's Book*, wrote an interesting novel of the Revolution, entitled *Kate Aylesford: A Story of*

⁷ Quoted from the 1832 edition of *American Ornithology*, III, 50-51.

the Refugees (1855). The tale, partially based on fact, has as its principal setting the actual village of Pleasant Mills (called Sweetwater in the novel) and its immediate environment, which Peterson says he knew as a boy and of which he provides these glimpses:

[The village of Sweetwater] is one of those quiet, solitary spots, nestled by lake and wood, which makes visitors from cities so passionately in love with the country. Situated about half way between the Delaware and the Atlantic, and surrounded for miles on miles by an almost unbroken forest, it is effectually shut out from the roar and tumult of the great world. The very atmosphere breathes of peace and happiness. . . .

The few dwellings which Sweetwater boasts . . . are ranged around one end of the pond, which forms the chief beauty of the location. An open space, something like a village green, lies between them and the water, only here, instead of being covered with sward, it is of the whitest and purest sand; and no one who has not visited it, can imagine the fine effect of this snowy bit of landscape, relieved on one side by the translucent lake, and on the other by the dark pine woods (p. 78).

Looking back from [the head of the lake], the scene is one of rare loveliness. Before you stretches the pond, still, glassy, quiet, dream-like. Half way down its eastern side the mansion rises amid its shrubbery, as if on a fairy island about to float off into the lake. On the other side the tall pines cast their sombre shadows into the water. In the distance whole fields of white water-lilies cover the surface of the pond. Still further off, and at the very extremity of the vista in that direction, two or three blasted trees raise their tall, bleached skeletons, like grim sentinels guarding the pathless swamp in their rear, where, if tradition errs not, more than one wayfarer has lost his path and perished (pp. 79-80).

Rebecca Harding Davis, in her above-mentioned novel, *Dallas Galbraith*, carries the reader into the Pines a few miles inland from Manasquan and points out, along with their opulence, that ominous atmosphere that so impressed Alexander Wilson:

. . . the woods through which he walked were silent and motionless. . . . It was the edge of a great and almost unbroken wilderness that he skirted, gigantic pines, with bare, hoary trunks, rising into a thick sheet of foliage above. There had been times . . . when he had thought this forest one of the places where Death himself hid, so monstrous were the elfish growths that matted every limb, of unnatural mosses, and lichens of diseased and feverish hues. The more dead the bough was, the more vivid and strong was the parasite that fed on it.

But today his unwholesome fancy was forgotten, and Galbraith . . . drew his breath with quick surprise and wonder at the infinite beauty over which

the sunshine flickered through the green, arching dome overhead. The delicate Southern moss hung in trailing webs of palest grayish green from every bough and bit of rough bark; the dead trees were massed with a filigree covering of purple, scarlet, of silver fretted with black; the wax-like leaves of the pipsissiwa starred the path; on every side the crimson fruit of the cactus opened its heated heart to the late warmth (pp. 20-21).

The almost frightening sense of aloneness that the silence of a great forest can impart is tellingly conveyed by Charles Conrad Abbott, archaeologist, ornithologist, and prolific nature writer, in *Travels in a Tree-Top* (1894):

I have often stood in "the pines" of Southern New Jersey and tried to detect some sound other than that of my own breathing, but in vain. Not a twig stirred. The dark waters of the pools were motionless; even the scattered clouds above were at rest. It was to be absolutely alone, as if the only living creature upon earth. But ere long a gentle breeze would spring up, there was a light and airy trembling of the pines, and the monotone of a whispered sigh filled the forest. Even this was a relief, and what a joy if some lonely bird passed by and even lisped of its presence (pp. 19-20)!

Henry van Dyke gained a quite different impression of the Barrens, partly because his canoe trip on Great Egg Harbor River was made in the society of four pleasant companions. His essay, "Between the Lupin and the Laurel," included in *Days Off* (1907), is a rhapsody of delight in flowing water and gorgeous blossoms:

How charming was the curve of that brown, foam-flecked stream, as it rushed swiftly down, from pool to pool, under the ancient, overhanging elms and willows and sycamores! We gave ourselves to the current, and darted swiftly past the row of weather-beaten houses on the left bank, into the heart of the woods again.

Here the forest was dense, lofty, overarching. The tall silver maple, the black ash, the river birch, the swamp white oak, the sweet gum and the sour gum, and a score of other trees closed around the course of the stream as it swept along with full, swirling waters. The air was full of a diffused, tranquil green light, subdued yet joyous, through which flakes and beams of golden sunshine flickered and sifted downward, as if they were falling into some strange, ethereal medium—something half liquid and half aerial, midway between an atmosphere and the still depths of a fairy sea (pp. 168-169).

[Dr. van Dyke writes that he has seen at their height the azaleas of Georgia, the rhododendrons on the Pennsylvania mountains, the Magnolia Gardens of Charleston, the tulip and hyacinth beds of Holland, the royal

gardens of Kew] but never have I seen an efflorescence more lovely, more satisfying to the eye, than that of the high laurel along the shores of the unknown little river in South Jersey.

Cool, pure, and virginal in their beauty, the innumerable clusters of pink and white blossoms thronged the avenues of the pine woods, and ranged themselves along the hillsides and sloping banks, and trooped down by cape and promontory to reflect their young loveliness in the flowing stream (pp. 174-175).

A startling section of the Pine Barrens variously estimated as between sixteen and forty square miles in extent, that is something of a puzzle to botanists, is known as "The Plains." This tract, according to James Lane Pennypacker in his essay, "The Plains of New Jersey,"⁸ consists of two nearly circular plots of land in Burlington and Ocean Counties between Chatsworth and Barnegat, separated from each other by cedar swamps and cranberry bogs. Mr. Pennypacker's essay contains an arresting description of this area, a visit to which can give one some grasp of Gulliver's sensations in Lilliput:

Upon the *Plains* is a thick tree-growth of dwarf pine trees and oak trees which, although perhaps forty or fifty years old, are only waist high; so that one may, from any standpoint, look out over them to the horizon. . . . Amid the trees, on the higher elevations (and there are elevations more than 200 feet above the sea) grow a variety of unusual and beautiful plants. In April one can scarcely move without stepping on the dainty "pyxie moss" or on the long streamers of bearberry with their delicate, pink-tipped, little cup-like blossoms. In the middle of May the masses of laurel bloom are of a deeper pink than those seen elsewhere. Along the edges of Cedar Swamps which lie between the Plains are sweet white magnolias, clethra, the spraying white cups of the staggerbush, the white sweet swamp azalea, cranberry vines, pitcher plants, golden club, checkerberry and a dozen other of the glories of nature in the wilds of New Jersey.

Cornelius Weygandt has been equally captivated by the strangeness and the beauty of the Plains, and in *Down Jersey*, from which we have previously quoted, he writes about them with unrestrained delight:

You come on "The Plains" suddenly as you follow the cart tracks that serve as a road from Woodmansie to Long Cripple. From the broken light of the open woods you emerge, as if by a fall from another world, into the

⁸ In Pennypacker, *Verse and Prose* (1936).

blinding light of the heath. That light, unrestrained by green boughs of pitch pine and by brown pyramids of white oak leaves, pours with infinite largess over the low whorls of stunted conifers and over the impoverished scrub oaks and black jacks. These dwarfed trees of pitch pine and oak and a scattering of laurel bushes are not set close enough to half obscure the expanse of the brilliantly white sand that rolls away from you upward and eastward. The low tufts of arbutus and sand heath and crowberry are but inconspicuous drifts of greyness here and there. . . . [In the spring] the wealth of bloom on their verge and the arbutus of the heath proper, tend to minimize the wildness and desolateness of "The Plains" by concentrating your attention on wonders that never lose their freshness and strangeness, their delicacy and daintiness. The pinkness and whiteness of arbutus and pixie and sand myrtle so fill all that is sentient of you that you forget for the nonce those white wastes of sand, that wind freighted with eeriness, those complaining oak leaves and pine needles (pp. 185-186).

On "The Plains" is all that is needed for wildness that strikes to the heart (p. 192).

Leaving the Plains, we join a pair of ardent canoeists, James and Margaret Cawley, who paddled down Great Egg Harbor River long after Henry van Dyke made his much-enjoyed trip. Their report in *Exploring the Little Rivers of New Jersey* (1942) indicates that the intervening years had wrought blessedly little change in the landscape of the Pines:

Five minutes after leaving the dam [at Penny Pot] the river became a wilderness; trees crowding the stream, in places actually shutting out all sunlight; the shores a profusion of lupine, holly and laurel. The pine trees and a combination of white sand and clay along the shores were in vivid contrast to the foliage overhead. The sixteen mile journey from Penny Pot to Weymouth was one of endless beauty, without a single sign of civilization along the way. It seems incredible that such wilderness may be found within thirty miles of Philadelphia. Such conditions are not unusual in the 750,000 acres known as the Pine Barrens (p. 9).

In late May the entire river is a scene of beauty that is unsurpassed anywhere in the country. Miles of blossoming laurel with a background of stately pines unfold before the canoeist as he travels along. On a quiet day the entire scene is duplicated in shadow form beneath the canoe (p. 11).

One of the latest and one of the best descriptions of the Pine Barrens is that by Arthur D. Pierce in *Iron in the Pines* (1957). The similarity to the image created by Alexander Wilson a century and

a half ago is striking, and accordingly is even more comforting evidence than that provided by the Cawleys that a few rare parts of New Jersey have scarcely yet been visited by "progress."

Here indeed [near Quaker Bridge] is the heart of the Pine Barrens. On a calm day the stillness is amazing, broken only by an occasional calling of birds or by a vagrant breeze flipping the green branches far above. . . .

About two and a half miles beyond Quaker Bridge there is a significant bend in the road. With this turn, there comes a sense of awe, almost foreboding. Even on a brilliant day, barely past noon with the sun high and strong, there is a sense of nightfall, a feeling as if the road were headed for some strange chasm. The reason soon becomes apparent. This is the beginning of Penn Swamp—a thick and vast cedar swamp. . . . Although a high wind may be blowing outside, in here the air is deathly still. The road is a corridor between lofty cedars, innumerable and thickly grown in a tangle which seems quite impenetrable. A strange cry overhead suggests some odd and unfamiliar bird; it is caused by the towering trunks of dead cedars, abrading each other in the wind. Creaking and moaning, they sway in dizzy dignity. This is no place to linger at night (pp. 60-61).

Timber Creek

Having wandered well inland, let us push on to the Camden neighborhood. On first thought one might have trouble naming the natural wonders of Camden or its vicinity, but then one remembers that a few miles south of that city was a favorite resort of Walt Whitman's after his partial recovery from a paralytic stroke. Here on Timber Creek he loved to exercise by wrestling with the saplings, to bathe in the sun and the water, or just to sit and absorb what he has called nature's "immortal strong nutriment." In *Specimen Days* (1882) he included numerous notations recounting his experiences and observations along the creek, and for some reason they stimulated him to write some of his best and least mannered prose. If he had encountered the objection that his subject matter was commonplace, he might have grandly declared that nature's eternal verities are as convincingly revealed along unexciting Timber Creek in New Jersey as in the splendors of the Rocky Mountains or the Alps. The temptation is to quote at too great length, but these are representative bits:

A while since the croaking of the pond-frogs and the first white of the dog-wood blossoms. Now the golden dandelions in endless profusion, spotting

the ground everywhere. The white cherry and pear-blows—the wild violets, with their blue eyes looking up and saluting my feet, as I saunter the wood-edge—the rosy blush of budding apple-trees—the light-clear emerald hue of the wheat-fields—the darker green of the rye—a warm elasticity pervading the air—the cedar-bushes profusely deck'd with their little brown apples—the summer fully awakening—the convocation of black birds, garrulous flocks of them, gathering on some tree, and making the hour and place noisy as I sit near (*The Complete Poetry and Prose*, ed. Malcolm Cowley (1948), II, 81).

As I write, I am seated under a big wild-cherry tree—the warm day temper'd by partial clouds and a fresh breeze, neither too heavy nor too light—and here I sit long and long, envelop'd in the deep musical drone of these bees, flitting, balancing, darting to and fro about me by hundreds—big fellows with light yellow jackets, great glistening swelling bodies, stumpy heads and gauzy wings—humming their perpetual rich mellow boom. (Is there not a hint in it for a musical composition, of which it should be the back-ground? some bumble-bee symphony?) How it all nourishes, lulls me, in the way most needed; the open air, the rye-fields, the apple orchards (pp. 81-82).

But my great oak—sturdy, vital, green—five feet thick at the butt. I sit a great deal under or near him. Then the tulip tree near by—the Apollo of the woods—tall and graceful, yet robust and sinewy, inimitable in hang of foliage and throwing-out of limb; as if the beauteous, vital, creature could walk, if it only would (p. 108).

Great Egg Harbor

This locality—to get back to the shore—merits inclusion chiefly because the most famous of American naturalists, John James Audubon, spent some time there in 1829 and wrote a short essay about his sojourn, in which he set down the following all too brief details:

The first dawn of morn in the Jerseys in the month of June, is worthy of a better description than I can furnish, and therefore I shall only say that the moment the sunbeams blazed over the horizon, the loud and mellow notes of the Meadow Lark saluted our ears. On each side of the road were open woods, on the tallest trees of which I observed at intervals the nest of a Fish Hawk, far above which the white-breasted bird slowly winged its way, as it commenced its early journey to the sea, the odour of which filled me with delight.

* * * * *

To such naturalists as are qualified to observe many different objects at the same time, Great Egg Harbour would probably afford as ample a field as any part of our coast, excepting the Florida Keys. Birds of many kinds are

abundant, as are fishes and testaceous animals. The forests shelter many beautiful plants, and even on the driest sand-bar you may see insects of the most brilliant tints.⁹

Cape May County

The relative uniformity of the Jersey coast from end to end means that the descriptions of Cape May County will not differ markedly from those of points farther north. Nevertheless those writers who have dealt with the landscape of this southernmost county have at times given it a quality suggestive of southern luxuriance that does not quite belong to the upper reaches of the shore.

For example, a slight feel of southernness may be sensed in the opulence of S. Weir Mitchell's scenery near Cape May Court House in his Civil War novel, *Roland Blake* (1886), although in general it is fairly typical Jersey shore at its best:

At her feet was a broad salt-creek, and beyond it low marsh-lands,—to the view merely a level prairie flashing with the glitter of sharp, stiff grasses. Two miles away a line of pure white sand-dunes marked the summit of the ocean beach, and all between her and these were myriad creeks, water-ways, "vents," broader thoroughfares, and to the left and right narrow inlets through which the pent-up waters swept fiercely with the ebb and flood. Now and then a distant sail moved mysteriously through the grass. At Olivia's feet the muddy banks were populous with strange creatures,—scuttling crabs, queer worms, and lazy turtles (p. 219).

[Three of the characters were] between the sand-dunes and the restless sea. . . . [They] climbed a sand-hillock and sat down. To left and right the dunes stretched north and south. Landward rose a wood of oaks and maple touched with the faint gold and red of hastening autumn days. The trumpet-creeper was over them in arbored masses and swung swaying clusters in the fresh salt air. About them on the stunted cedars the fox grapes hung thick. Below were scant bushes,—honest yellow of golden-rod, and purple asters, with the sand-loving prickly pear and browning ferns.

. . . . Blake sat watching the green mounds of water crash into tumbled snow upon the sands below them . . . (p. 296).

[Near sunset the hero and heroine] turned off toward the sea, across the meadows. In the lowering light the great levels were beautiful with hazy breadths of modest colors hard to name. Fading sedges and autumnal ferns, rigid salt grasses and the broadening rings of salt-wort, with light of sun-touched pools, set about with cat-tails and reeds, lent each their hues to make

⁹ Audubon, *Delineations of American Scenery and Character* (1926), ed. Francis Hobart Herrick, pp. 347, 348.

one vast mottled mistiness of browns and reds and intense lake and yellows, of which only autumn knows the trick,—a confusion of blended tints like the strange splendor of a vast palette on which the great artist about to die had left the lavish wealth of unused colors (p. 339).

Perhaps no author has brought out the southern traits that can be found in the vegetation of Cape May County so much as Charles Conrad Abbott, who has already commented on the Pine Barrens. In his *Recent Rambles, or In Touch with Nature* (1892) he writes about a “sea-side forest” that he explored on Wildwood Beach, and his statement that there is a “semi-tropical appearance” about that bit of landscape would seem to be borne out by these quotations from his essay on the subject:

. . . now I had found a wild-wood in the fullest sense of that suggestive phrase. Here variety ruled, and only the choicest of Nature’s handiwork had foothold. Think of it! Century after century Nature had had full sway, and turned out a finished piece of work. Every sense is charmed; eye, ear, and nose are alike regaled; the sense of touch delighted. Perfect trees to look upon; the birds’ songs and the moaning of the sea to hear; the bloom of a thousand roses to smell; the carpeted sand to lie upon. Yet, where all was nearing perfection, there stood out one grand feature overtopping all else,—scores of magnificent hollies. . . . Elsewhere they occur in clumps of three or four, or perhaps a dozen, but here, on an island by the sea, there are hundreds. One that I measured was sixty-eight inches in circumference and forty feet high. The pale-gray trunk was well mottled with curious black lichen, and among the branches drooped long tresses of beard-like lichen. The pathless wood about it was a most fit surrounding, the abundant birds its appropriate comrades, the murmur of the sea the music to which its branches gently swayed (pp. 178-179).

The undergrowth, too, is everywhere equally luxuriant and gives a semi-tropical appearance to the landscape, this feature being emphasized by the vigor of vine growths that bind together the tallest trees and unite many an oak, cedar, and holly standing scores of feet apart (p. 186).

The privilege of bringing this informal and inchoate anthology to a close is herewith accorded to Witmer Stone, for many years curator and director of the Philadelphia Academy of Natural Sciences and a devoted lover of Cape May. His two-volume *Bird Studies of Old Cape May* (1937), which has been compared to Gilbert White’s classic, *The Natural History of Selborne*, is concerned not only with the birds themselves but also with the environment

in which they live; and in delineating the latter as he knew it about 1920 Dr. Stone has produced some memorable nature writing. These two paragraphs embody the appeal of Cape May, and indeed of much of the Jersey shore, of former days, and to some extent even of our own day:

There is a charm about the meadows at all seasons whether they are clad in the green of summer, with still blue waterways interspersed, or wrapped in the dull brown of midwinter, with channels and ponds ice-bound. It is in spring, however, that they especially appeal to me, when the mainland is bright with opening buds and everywhere tinted with green and crimson but the meadows apparently still in the grip of winter with scarcely a sign of spring vegetation. To offset this, however, they are all astir with the hosts of migrating shore birds and with flocks of gulls and terns *en route* to their breeding grounds. . . .

* * * * *

There are many clouds on the western horizon but the fiery red orb of the sun comes into view for a moment between their dark masses, and lights up all the water and land to the eastward while across its disc, as if traversing a field of fire, a couple of Crows pass by. Almost immediately it disappears again and sinks below the horizon, but for fully ten minutes the fleecy clouds overhead and to the eastward are all edged with crimson and pink, the color constantly spreading and changing, and all its varied tints are clearly reflected in the smooth glassy waters of the channel (I, 15-16).

And finally this about the southern tip of the State, Cape May Point, as it was forty years ago:

The Point is almost entirely wooded. As one approaches from the east along the old turnpike the green barrier of low woodland cuts straight across at right angles. First comes a dense scrub of bayberry bushes with low, round-topped pond pines interspersed, and along with these sassafras, persimmon and sumac, the last, as summer advances, showing its bright yellow clusters of pollen-laden blossoms and here and there a bright red leaf fore-runner of the brilliant masses of yellow and red which turn the whole place into a dazzling wealth of color in the crisp days of October. There are wild cherry trees raising their heads higher than the rest and in late July heavily laden with clusters of fruit. Wild plum bushes and early goldenrod form a low outer fringe. At other points oaks creep in and chicken and fox grapes cover the entire growth with their broad leaves, while trumpet creepers hang their festoons of scarlet tubes from convenient limbs. About these Humming-birds constantly dart, seeking food in the gaudy trumpets or chasing one another through the air (I, 23).

If some writers—Mark Twain and Thomas Wolfe among them—have looked with scant approval on the landscape of New Jersey, the two instalments of this paper bear witness that, early and late, a goodly number of authors with eyes for impressive scenery have found much in the State to capture their interest and have indeed given us a composite panorama of unexpected beauty and variety. Too often the subjects of their admiration have subsequently been marred or destroyed, but at least the word pictures remain, and in more instances than might be supposed the natural landmarks to which they have recalled our attention are still there. Taken as a whole, then, this collection of descriptive passages by sixty and more hands can scarcely do other than confirm Robert Juet's conviction expressed in 1609 that New Jersey is truly "a pleasant Land to see."