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## “A pleasant Land to see”

PART ONE

BY ORAL S. COAD

DR. ORAL S. COAD, now Professor of English, Emeritus, Douglass College, has been a frequent contributor to the JOURNAL. He is presently at work on the general subject of New Jersey in literature. Since this current article is based entirely on books in the Rutgers libraries, some omissions have been occasioned by gaps in the University's holdings.

NEW JERSEY has the dubious fortune of being an area that for countless people stubbornly stands between the place where they are and the place where they want to be. In consequence this State is commonly thought of as a painful geographical necessity to be traversed by the quickest available route, which inevitably becomes the most crowded and ugly, and which provides the image of New Jersey that most visitors carry away with them. Strangers on being introduced to the lovely hill country of North Jersey have been known to insist that they must have been transported by some occult means to Pennsylvania.

Even the most ardent Jerseyman can find little to praise in the scenery provided by the Pennsylvania Railroad or Route 1 or the New Jersey Turnpike. As much as anybody, writers have uttered wails of anguish at the devastation there revealed. Mark Twain, as early as 1873, wrote concerning a character's trip: “Then came Jersey, everlasting Jersey, stupid, irritating Jersey.”<sup>1</sup> Thomas Wolfe

<sup>1</sup> *The Gilded Age*, II, 151 (Author's National Edition). Of course these could have been the words of his collaborator, Charles Dudley Warner, but they sound like Mark Twain to me.



PASSAIC FALLS in the STATE of NEW JERSEY

Aquatint of Passaic Falls by F. Jukes after Alexander Robertson.  
Published in London, January 1, 1802.

marked from the train window “the flat, formless and uncharactered earth of New Jersey whipping by like pickets on a fence,” and shrank from “the flat desolation of the Jersey meadows” with their smoldering dumps, bogs, and blackened factories.<sup>2</sup> For F. Scott Fitzgerald the “green Phoenix” of Princeton arose “out of the ugliest country in the world.”<sup>3</sup> And Edmund Wilson proclaims that in New Jersey nature’s dignity and charm have been “murdered” by the human beings “who insist upon infesting her.”<sup>4</sup>

Happily many writers have found the dignity and charm of nature even in New Jersey, indeed from one end of the State to the other, and have set down the experience with a freshness and sincerity that can engage the present-day reader—and perhaps open his eyes a bit.

So far as I know the first man to record his impression of the region was Robert Juet, an English sailor who accompanied Henry Hudson on the *Half-Moon* in 1609 and who wrote a narrative of the voyage. His approval of the area, probably the Navesink Highlands, is expressed in the frequently quoted words: “This is a very good Land to fall with, and a pleasant Land to see.” A little later Hudson and five others, having explored apparently what we know as Kill Van Kull, reported to the scribe that “The Lands . . . were as pleasant with Grasse and Flowers, and goodly Trees, as ever they had seene, and very sweet smells came from them.”<sup>5</sup>

Although that region has never gained much literary commendation for its flowers and trees and sweet smells, many sections of New Jersey have had their numerous eulogists, both early and late. The following pages, then, might be regarded as a sort of anthology, admittedly very incomplete, of passages in praise of selected scenic landmarks of the State, arranged in a loose order of geographical progression from north to south.

### *The Palisades*

Because of their picturesque appearance and their conspicuous location in the nation’s most populous area, it is easy to understand why

<sup>2</sup> Wolfe, *Of Time and the River* (1935), p. 407; *You Can’t Go Home Again* (1940), p. 55.

<sup>3</sup> “Princeton,” an essay in *Afternoon of an Author: A Selection of Uncollected Stories and Essays* by F. Scott Fitzgerald, ed. Arthur Mizener (1957), p. 71.

<sup>4</sup> Wilson, “New Jersey: The Slave of Two Cities,” in *These United States: A Symposium*, ed. Ernest Gruening (1923), p. 66.

<sup>5</sup> *Juet’s Journal*, ed. Robert M. Lunny (1959), pp. 27, 29.

the Palisades should have been mentioned as often as any natural feature of the State. Most of the references are merely cursory, to be sure, but a good many writers have tarried to admire and have expressed their admiration in carefully wrought descriptions.

Even allowing for serious oversights by the editor of this anthology, the reader need not be surprised to find herein only one comment on the Palisades, and very few on any other scenic feature, written before about the middle of the eighteenth century. Poets and other creative writers of the preceding hundred years or so spent very little time viewing the American landscape, and if they had encountered it before the onset of the Romantic Revival they would have been repelled by its rugged and untamed appearance. And European travelers who came to these shores were more interested in the social and economic than in the aesthetic aspects of the New World.

The first reference to the Palisades I have met that could be considered even an attempt at description is a very matter-of-fact statement quite devoid of awestruck adjectives, by Jasper Danckaerts, a Dutch traveler in New Netherlands, who wrote in 1679: “. . . when we were not far from the point of Spyt den Duyvel, we could see on our left hand the rocky cliffs of the main land on the other side of the North River, these cliffs standing straight up and down, with the grain, just as if they were antimony.”<sup>6</sup>

Our next observer, the Swedish scientist Peter Kalm, who visited the New World between 1749 and 1751, likewise employs very temperate language although he gazed long enough upon the Palisades to notice a few more details than did Danckaerts, perhaps because the unusual formation reminded him of his homeland:

About ten or twelve miles from New York, the western shore [of the Hudson] appears quite different from what it is further south; it consists of steep mountains with perpendicular sides toward the river, and they are exactly like the steep sides of the mountains of Hall and Hunnebärg in Västergötland, Sweden. Sometimes a rock projects out like the pointed angle of a bastion. The tops of these mountains are covered with oaks and other trees. A number of stones of all sizes lie along the shore, having rolled down from the mountains.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>6</sup> *Journal of Jasper Danckaerts, 1679-1680*, ed. Bartlett B. James and J. Franklin Jameson (1913), p. 67.

<sup>7</sup> Kalm, *The America of 1750: Peter Kalm's Travels in North America*, ed. Adolph B. Benson (1937), I, 326.

Not surprisingly that ardent celebrator of the Hudson, Washington Irving, found a place in his *History of New York* (1809) for a reference to the great cliffs, which though brief contains much more extravagant and romanticizing phraseology than we have seen so far:

Now did they [Peter Stuyvesant and his crew] skirt the bases of the rocky heights of Jersey, which spring up like everlasting walls, reaching from the waves unto the heavens; and were fashioned, if tradition may be believed, in times long past, by the mighty spirit Manetho, to protect his favourite abodes from the unhallowed eyes of mortals.<sup>8</sup>

In a similarly mythological vein writes Irving's friend and one-time collaborator, James Kirk Paulding:

That noble ledge of rocks which is worthy to form the barrier of the noble river, and which extends for sixteen miles, shows itself in a succession of sublime bluffs, projecting out one after the other, looking like the fabled creations of the giants, or the Cyclops of old.<sup>9</sup>

Paulding adds a human touch by calling attention to the woodman pitching down billets from the very edge, the quarriers half way up working on the masses of fallen rock, and under "the dark impending cliff" the little cot with children at play.

As Irving and Paulding demonstrate, the so-called Knickerbocker Group of literary men responded almost as a matter of course to the Palisades, which lay practically within their daily purview. This response is borne out by three poets of this same New York school who were inspired to celebrate the Jersey bluffs in rhyme.

Fitz-Greene Halleck made a place in his satirical poem *Fanny* (1819), for a wholly serious apostrophe to the noble eminence on the west shore of the Hudson:

#### XCIV

Weehawken!—In thy mountain scenery yet,  
 All we adore of Nature, in her wild  
 And frolic hour of infancy, is met;  
 And never has a summer's morning smiled  
 Upon a lovelier scene, than the full eye  
 Of the enthusiast revels on—when high

<sup>8</sup> Irving, *History of New York*, ed. Stanley T. Williams and Tremain McDowell (1927), p. 317.

<sup>9</sup> Paulding, *The New Mirror for Travellers: and Guide to the Springs* (1828), p. 98.

## XCV

Amid thy forest solitudes, he climbs  
 O'er crags, that proudly tower above the deep,  
 And knows that sense of danger which sublimed  
 The breathless moment—when his daring step  
 Is on the verge of the cliff, and he can hear  
 The low dash of the wave with startled ear—

\* \* \* \* \*

## XCVII

In such an hour he turns, and on his view,  
 Ocean, and earth, and heaven, burst before him;  
 Clouds slumbering at his feet, and the clear blue  
 Of summer's sky in beauty bending o'er him—  
 The city bright below; and far away,  
 Sparkling in golden light, his own romantic bay.

## XCVIII

Tall spire, and glittering roof, and battlement,  
 And banners floating in the sunny air;  
 And white sails o'er the calm blue waters bent,  
 Green isle, and circling shore, are blended there  
 In wild reality. When life is old,  
 And many a scene forgot, the heart will hold

## XCIX

Its memory of this; nor lives there one  
 Whose infant breath was drawn, or boyhood's days  
 Of happiness were passed beneath that sun,  
 That in his manhood's prime can calmly gaze  
 Upon that bay, or on that mountain stand,  
 Nor feel the prouder of his native land.

Between 1828 and 1830 William Cullen Bryant and Robert C. Sands were associated in producing an annual miscellany called *The Talisman*, a type of publication then popular. Sands's home in Hoboken was a frequent meeting place of the associates and a starting point for walks along the Palisades. Two poems descriptive of the region, "A Scene on the Banks of the Hudson" by Bryant and "Weehawken" by Sands, appeared in *The Talisman*. Bryant's poem reads in part:

'Mid the dark rocks that watch his bed  
 Glitters the mighty Hudson spread,  
 Unrippled, save by drops that fall  
 From shrubs that fringe his mountain wall;

\* \* \* \* \*

All, save this little nook of land,  
 Circled with trees, on which I stand,  
 All, save that line of hills which lie  
 Suspended in the mimic sky—  
 Seems a blue void, above, below,  
 Through which the white clouds come and go,  
 And from the green world's farthest steep  
 I gaze into the airy deep.

These are the pertinent stanzas by Sands:

Eve o'er our path is stealing fast;  
 Yon quivering splendors are the last  
 The sun will fling, to tremble o'er  
 The waves that kiss the opposing shore;  
 His latest glories fringe the height  
 Behind us, with their golden light.

The mountain's mirrored outline fades  
 Amid the fast extending shades;  
 Its shaggy bulk, in sterner pride,  
 Towers, as the gloom steals o'er the tide;  
 For the great stream a bulwark meet  
 That laves its rock-encrusted feet.

In other lines he speaks of "Yon cliffs and fir-clad steeps" and "yon rough heights and moss-clad sod."<sup>10</sup>

Yet another New York writer of this period, and one more notable than any of the coterie strictly known as the Knickerbocker School, James Fenimore Cooper, made a few brief but approving allusions to the Palisades in his novels. Of these references the fullest is in *Home As Found* (1838), in which the Effingham family, like the Cooper family, returning from a long residence in Europe, finds its native land disappointing in many ways. But the Hudson earns praise for great variety within a short distance, and the Palisades receive this slightly patronizing pat on their uncouth sides: "Under

<sup>10</sup> Bryant's poem was published in *The Talisman* for 1828; Sands's appeared a year later.

such a sky, the Palisades in particular looked well; for though wanting in the terrific grandeur of an Alpine nature, and perhaps disproportioned to the scenery they adorned, they were bold and peculiar" (Mohawk Edition, p. 112).

John J. Haring, a North Jersey doctor who knew and loved the Palisades throughout his long life, in his latter years described in much detail "that marvellous rampart of rock twenty miles in length" as he had viewed it from various approaches both by land and by water. From one vantage point

the eye is greeted by a continuous line of foaming water, with here and there a perpendicular water-fall of from five to twenty-five feet, making a series of cascades through and down a narrow gorge coming in from the mountain top three hundred feet high. The rugged, rocky formation—on all sides overhung with primitive forest trees—makes of the whole a bit of scenery of wonderful beauty.

From another point of view

A gorge or two of unusual wildness, thickly shaded by primitive forest growth; a high promontory commanding a grand stretch of river view in both directions; immense columns of traprock detached from the mountain side, standing so isolated as to suggest the possibility, by a little mechanical ingenuity, of overturning them and hurling them headlong down the abyss with reverberating crash and roar; clefts, some wide, others narrow, leading down hundreds of feet riverward; large, gnarled old cedars overhanging the cliffs, and smaller ones with occasional climbing vines clinging to their perpendicular face—all combine to give special interest and impressiveness to this Palisade locality.<sup>11</sup>

Dr. Haring's little book has probably had few readers, but it presents an engaging picture not only of the Palisades but of farm life of about 1840 in the Northern Valley of New Jersey.

The coloring of the Palisades, a feature most describers seem to overlook, is especially stressed by Edgar Mayhew Bacon, once a resident and chronicler of Tarrytown:

Fascinating, if not beautiful in general outline, wonderful in detail and often exquisite in colour, the great mass of weather-beaten rock seems to rise out of the very bosom of the river. Deep at its base runs the swift current of the channel and in its crowning belt of trees the clouds drift.

<sup>11</sup> Haring, *Floating Chips* (1924), Chap. VIII. These chapters were written in 1892 and first appeared in "a local newspaper."

Here and there in the wall are deep rifts cut by little torrents that have been industriously mining their way for centuries past. Taking advantage of these ravines, companies of trees swarm up the slopes with flaunting banners of green that in the autumn change to royal hues of Tyrian splendour.

The Palisades are seen to best advantage when the sun strikes them in the morning or the long shadows clothe them with tender mysterious tints at nightfall.<sup>12</sup>

In Gertrude Atherton's *The Conqueror* (1902), its hero, Alexander Hamilton, is represented as being fond, during his student days at King's College, of sailing on the Hudson past the Palisades, which the novelist likens to the "walls of some Brobdingnagian fortress" (p. 125).

With noticeably similar phraseology Henry van Dyke, in "Hudson's Last Voyage,"<sup>13</sup> has the explorer remember, among many sights that have met him in the New World, the Palisades, a mass "Of naked rock where giants might have built/ Their fortress."

Probably no one has better set forth the combination of the fantastic and the gigantic with which the Palisades overpower the beholder than Paul Wilstach, playwright and social historian. His *Hudson River Landings* (1933) contains these arresting passages:

The columnar range of the lofty Palisades, from this point [Fort Lee] to their termination, twelve miles to the north of it, march on almost unbroken. They rise practically from the water's edge, perpendicularly except where erosions, made by man as well as by Nature, heap up at their base, to heights varying from three hundred to five hundred feet. In places the rocky wall has been riven by the torrents of the ages, but the scars of these narrow gorges have been healed by the ministering foliage of the forests. Its face, seen close up and in detail, is made fantastic by the peculiar hexagonal jointing of the rock, an unusual geological formation, which is known to exist in only two other important instances, the Giant's Causeway on the north coast of Ireland, and Fingal's Cave on the island of Staffa on the west coast of Scotland (p. 203).

\* \* \* \* \*

[The precipice] is sublimely elemental like the water at its feet and the sky above it. Here the shipping seems not to exist except as a decorative hem on this great fabric of stone. In places clusters of great trees rise up before its face, but the cliffs diminish them to the aspect of moss. Man has crept to the edge of this precipice and there has built for himself many beautiful habitations, but

<sup>12</sup> Bacon, *The Hudson from Ocean to Source* (1902), p. 197.

<sup>13</sup> In *The White Bees and Other Poems* (1909).

seen from the river the distance reduces them to mere points of color, mere decorative dots of yellow and white and pink and gray (p. 184).

*Greenwood Lake*

Greenwood Lake, which New Jersey generously shares with New York State, has never enjoyed the literary acclaim the Palisades have received, yet it has not been without its extollers. The most ardent of them has been Henry William Herbert, an English-born resident in the United States writing under the pen-name of Frank Forester, who expressed his love for that body of water with a lyrical intensity suggestive of James Fenimore Cooper's passion for Lake Otsego. Herbert's *The Warwick Woodlands* (1845) contains more than one eulogy of Greenwood Lake comparable to this one:

Never, in the whole course of my life, has it been my fortune to look upon more lovely scenery than I beheld that morning. The long narrow winding lake, lying as pure as crystal beneath the liquid skies, reflecting, with the correctness of the most perfect mirror, the abrupt and broken hills, which sank down so precipitously into it—clad as they were in foliage of every gorgeous dye, with which the autumn of America loves to enhance the beauties of her forest pictures . . . the slopes of the wood-covered knolls, here brown, or golden, and interspersed with the rich crimson of the faded maples, there verdant with the evergreen leaves of the pine and cedar—and the far azure summits of the most distant peaks, all steeped in the serene and glowing sunshine of an October morning.<sup>14</sup>

Herbert would probably have agreed with those who have called Greenwood Lake "the Windermere of America."<sup>15</sup>

One of the lake's admirers was Isaac McLellan, a friend of Herbert's and like him a sportsman; indeed he has been called "the sportsman's poet." The following lines are from his "Frank Forester Memorial Ode":

Gaze forth where Herbert lov'd to gaze,  
Far to the horizon's purple edge,  
Here swimming in a gauzy haze,  
There bright with splinter'd cliff and ledge.  
It is a vision beautiful—  
A dream of wonder and delight,

<sup>14</sup> Herbert, collected as *Frank Forester's Sporting Scenes and Characters* by F. E. Pond ("Will Wildwood") (1881), I, 69-70.

<sup>15</sup> W. F. Williams, "Scenes in Northern New Jersey," included in *Picturesque America; or, The Land We Live In*, ed. William Cullen Bryant, II (1874), 56.

Where ridge on ridge of mountain peaks  
 Gleam out, then fade away from sight.  
 Beneath sleeps Greenwood's placid lake,  
 Woods, meadows, pasture, stream, and plain,  
 White villages like sea-bird wings,  
 Broad corn-fields and expanse of grain;  
 \* \* \* \* \*  
 "And ne'er in life," wrote Herbert's pen,  
 "Have I such lovely landscape view'd,"  
 The pure lake, cradled in the glen,  
 Reflecting the o'erhanging wood.<sup>16</sup>

*West Brook Valley and Winbeam*

A few miles southeast of Greenwood Lake in Passaic County on the west side of Wanaque Reservoir lies a mountainous region of still unspoiled beauty, through which flows West Brook and the heart of which is a mountain ridge some 1600 feet high called, at least locally, Winbeam. Though it has not been a theme for many writers, it has its prose laureate in Minnie May Monks, whose *Winbeam* (1930) is a loving description of the countryside and country life of the valley just before the Wanaque Dam was built. The book is sentimental no doubt, but it is heart-warming in its spontaneous affection for the trees, flowers, animals, streams, waterfalls, fields, mountains, and people of this small area. The intimacy of the author's acquaintance with Winbeam and its environs is demonstrated in these selections:

I follow the ridge of the mountain till I come out on the highest point. Here to the southeast, the view is far over hills and plains. To the north are countless mountain-chains, blue, with faraway blue of distant hills. . . . The west side of the mountain I love best. Here I look down into a wild wooded valley between steep mountains. I love the silence, the solitude, and the peace of it. The top of this mountain is a great bare clean rock bleached by centuries of rains and snows and suns (p.88).

\* \* \* \* \*

Winbeam is an isolated mountain ridge, more beautiful and individual in outline than any of our mountain ridges up here. It lies here at the door of our valley in the form and pose of a sleeping animal guarding us from an outside world.

Of all the mountains about I love *Winbeam* best. I have climbed this ridge in early spring when trailing arbutus bloomed on the cold north side. I have

<sup>16</sup> In McLellan, *Poems of the Rod and Gun* (1886).

climbed it in the heat of midsummer and eaten wild gooseberries from the mountainside. I have climbed it when it was robed in autumn glory; and *best of all* I have climbed it in midwinter when from the big top rock you can see every bare hill and mountain for miles about, clearly silhouetted against a cold winter sky, and trace every road and brook in the valley and up the hillsides (p. 110).<sup>17</sup>

*The Passaic and Its Falls*

There was a time when the principal New Jersey attraction for sight-seers and newly married couples was a natural phenomenon that today is unvisited and indeed scarcely visible during most of the year—the Falls of the Passaic River.

Jasper Danckaerts, visiting the Colony of New Jersey in 1680 and seeing the falls in their pristine state, seems to have been more impressed than by the Palisades, which he had beheld six months before. In fact the good Hollander was moved to the use of a bit of pious language, unlike most viewers of New Jersey:

After we had travelled good three hours over high hills, we came to a high rocky one, where we could hear the noise of the water, and clambering up to the top, saw the falls below us, a sight to be seen in order to observe the power and wonder of God. Behind this hill the land is much higher than on the other side, and continues so far as is known. A kill or river runs through this high land between the hills, formed by several branches coming down from still higher land. . . . The river finding [a] chasm pours all its water into it headlong from a height, according to guess, of about eighty feet; and all this pouring water must break upon the undermost piece of stone lying in the crevice, which causes a great roaring and foaming. . . . By reason of the breaking of the water, and the wind which the falling water carries with it, there is constantly spray ascending like smoke, which scatters itself like rain. In this spray, when the sun shines, the figure of a rainbow is constantly to be seen, trembling and shaking, and even appearing to move the rock.<sup>18</sup>

About a century later the well known Jersey poet, Philip Freneau, wrote a poem, "The Expedition of Timothy Taurus, Astrologer, To the Falls of the Passaic River, in New Jersey" (1775),<sup>19</sup> in which he satirizes the types of people who come to visit the falls, but for the river and the falls themselves he has only admiration. Astonishing to a modern reader is his line

<sup>17</sup> Having visited Winbeam last fall at the height of the autumn coloring, I am disposed to be almost as much in love with the region as is Miss Monks.

<sup>18</sup> Danckaerts, *op. cit.*, p. 176.

<sup>19</sup> *The Poems of Philip Freneau*, ed. Fred Lewis Pattee, I (1902), 123 ff.

That river of rivers, no rivers exceed,

but Danckaerts considered the Passaic River “the pleasantest we have yet seen,” and in 1846 Henry William Herbert characterized Paterson as “the filthiest town, situate on one of the loveliest rivers in the world.”<sup>20</sup> As for the falls, Freneau declares:

The rocks were amazing, and such was the height,  
They struck me at once with surprise and delight.

The waters rushed down with a terrible roar—  
What a pleasure it was to be lounging on shore!  
They now were as clear as old Helicon’s stream,  
Or as clear as the clearest in poetry’s dream.—  
These falls were stupendous, the fountains so clear,  
That another Narcissus might see himself here.

James McHenry, a Marylander who spent considerable time in New Jersey during the Revolution as secretary to Washington, saw the falls in 1778 and jotted down this vivid and detailed picture of them:

The Pasaic [*sic*] appears to be about 30 or 40 yards broad—but the water does not cover at the falls near this extent. There a smooth and gentle sheet tumbles down into a deep aperture or cleft of the rock, which crosses the channel, while, at the same time, several lesser portions seem to steal thro’ different openings, in their descent, till they arrive at the bottom where they all mix together. This conflict and the dashing of the water against the asperities and contrasted sides of the rock produces a fine spray that issuing from the cleft appears at a distance like a thin body of smoke. Near the bottom of the falls it exhibits a beautiful rainbow in miniature.

\* \* \* \* \*

A little above the falls the water glides over some ledges of rock of about 3 or 4 feet perpendicular in a very pretty manner.<sup>21</sup>

The French politician, Moreau de Saint Méry, who took refuge in the United States in 1793, traveled extensively in New Jersey and other States and was duly impressed by the Passaic Falls. He noted the “leaf-like thinness” of the main fall, the “two rainbows [our other commentators note only one], one dimmer than the other, which is a pleasing sight,” and about “six hundred toises [fathoms] from

<sup>20</sup> Herbert, *The Warwick Woodlands in Frank Forester’s Sporting Scenes and Characters*, I, 91.

<sup>21</sup> Bernard C. Steiner, *The Life and Correspondence of James McHenry* (1907), p. 21.

the great waterfall . . . another even more beautiful, flowing over layers of rocks two to three feet perpendicular, which again beautifies the scenery."<sup>22</sup>

Such were the one-time wonders of the falls that they inspired that prose master, Washington Irving, to compose a rather bad poem. The spirit that ruled the woods, says Irving, found the mild and meandering Passaic lacking in the grandeur he loved. Accordingly

He rived the green hills, the wild woods he laid low;  
He taught the pure stream in rough channels to flow;  
He rent the rude rock, the steep precipice gave,  
And hurled down the chasm the thundering wave.

Since then the white man's axe "has lightened the shade,"

But the stranger still gazes with wondering eye,  
On the rocks rudely torn, and groves mounted on high;  
Still loves on the cliff's dizzy border to roam,  
Where the torrent leaps headlong, embosomed in foam.<sup>23</sup>

Unfortunately for lovers of scenic beauty, water for industrial purposes began to be diverted from the falls as early as the 1790's. Such was the progress of this exploitation that by 1828, according to James Kirk Paulding, nature "has lately resigned them [the falls]," though once her pride, "to her rival art and almost disowns them now."<sup>24</sup>

But apparently nature's resignation was not complete until years later, for W. F. Williams felt justified in reporting in 1874 that the water of the normally sluggish river, having been roused "into momentary and picturesque fury" by a preliminary fall, scarcely has time to collect itself for the struggle five miles beyond. But it does subside, and, assuming a tranquil air of unconsciousness, rolls smoothly to the verge, and then plunges boldly, in one unbroken column, over the precipice of the Great Falls, dropping, like a liquid thunder-bolt, sheer ninety feet into a deep and narrow chasm of less than sixty feet in width, through which it dashes and foams in short-lived madness.<sup>25</sup>

<sup>22</sup> Moreau, *American Journey, 1793-1798*, trans. Kenneth and Anna M. Roberts (1947), p. 116.

<sup>23</sup> Irving, "The Falls of the Passaic" (1806), in *Specimens of American Poetry*, ed. Samuel Kettell (1829), II. Also in *Poems of New Jersey*, ed. Eugene B. Musgrove (1923), 23.

<sup>24</sup> Paulding, *op. cit.*, p. 125.

<sup>25</sup> W. F. Williams, *op. cit.*, pp. 58, 60.

Maybe Williams was remembering past glories or had visited Paterson just after torrential rains. At any rate only five years later, in his once popular novel *Rudder Grange* (1879), Frank R. Stockton has a domestic servant visit the Passaic Falls on her wedding tour, only to discover that "they wasn't no good, after all, for there wasn't no water runnin' over 'em. There was rocks and precipicers, an' direful depths, and everything for a good falls, except water, and that was all bein' used at the mills" (p. 200).

Subsequent writers have commented mainly on other features of the Passaic and its falls than their beauty. William Carlos Williams has called the Paterson area "the origin today of the vilest swillhole in christendom, the Passaic River."<sup>26</sup> Harry Emerson Wildes in *Twin Rivers: The Raritan and the Passaic* (1943) remarks: "No one who knows the Passaic from the Paterson or Newark water front could possibly imagine that the stream was once a waterway of delight."

Yet Mr. Wildes goes on to point out that

even at the present day, it is the haunt of birds and deer and bear and beaver. Flowing like an ill-drawn question mark from its source in the Great Swamp, it wanders eighty-five miles to salt water, through marshland where over a hundred different varieties of birds may be seen. Bustling through a mile-long ravine at Millington it sweeps with swift, though shallow, current past meadowland and oak forest (pp. 5-6).

Even Dr. Williams, in *Paterson*, Book One (1946), sketches a picture of river and falls that is not without its bleakly poetic appeal:

From above, higher than the spires, higher  
even than the office towers, from oozy fields  
abandoned to grey beds of dead grass,  
black sumac, withered weed-stalks,  
mud and thickets cluttered with dead leaves—  
the river comes pouring in above the city  
and crashes from the edge of the gorge  
in a recoil of spray and rainbow mists—(I)

#### *The Meadows*

The Jersey meadows have had many spirited detractors besides Thomas Wolfe, but to some writers they have revealed a beauty,

<sup>26</sup> W. C. Williams, *In the American Grain* (1925), p. 195.

even in our day, that is lost on most of us. One of William Cullen Bryant's rare allusions to our State, and this a very slight one, is in his soberly humorous "To a Mosquito" (1825), in which he addresses the "fair insect" as a "stranger,"

for the town, I ween,  
Has not the honour of so proud a birth—  
Thou com'st from Jersey meadows, fresh and green.

Henry William Herbert found the meadows a good hunting ground for game birds in spite of the sloppy, marshy soil and the mud holes. To him the beauty was in the air rather than on the ground, for in "Tom Draw's Visit to Pine Brook," a part of *The Warwick Woodlands*, he describes a remarkable snipe ballet that he witnessed above the meadows on one of his hunting expeditions:

The two birds which had been flushed, mounted up! up! scaling the sky in short small circles, till they were quite as far from this dull earth, as the lark, when 'at heaven's gate he sings'—and then dropt plumb down, as it would seem, fifty feet in an instant, with a strange drumming sound, which might be heard for a mile or more. Then up they soared again, and again repeated their manoeuvre; while at each repetition of the sound another and another bird flew up from every part of the wide meadow, and joined those in mid ether; till there must have been, at the least reckoning, forty snipe soaring and drumming within the compass of a mile, rendering the whole air vocal with that strange quivering hum, . . . For above an hour did this wild work continue.<sup>27</sup>

In Edmund Clarence Stedman's long narrative poem, *Alice of Monmouth* (1864), the meadows, which figure to some extent as background, are given this pleasing depiction:

When April rains and the great spring-tide  
Cover the lowlands far and wide,  
And eastern winds blow somewhat harsh  
Over the salt and mildewed marsh,  
Then the grasses take deeper root,  
Sucking, athirst and resolute;  
And when the waters eddy away,  
Flowing in trenches to Newark Bay,  
The fibrous blades grow rank and tall,  
And from their tops the reed-birds call.  
Five miles in width the moor is spread;

<sup>27</sup> Herbert, *op.cit.*, I, 191.

Two broad rivers its borders thread;  
 The schooners which up their channels pass  
 Seem to be sailing in the grass,  
 Save as they rise with the moon-drawn sea,  
 Twice in the day, continuously. (Section XII)

Another poet, William Carlos Williams, has mentioned in his *Autobiography* (1948) an impressive feature of the meadows that he knew as a boy but that is now gone forever: "the dense cedar-swamps that flourished there in which blueberry pickers in the fall were often lost. . . . Large flocks of egrets had their nests there, and once in a while a stray deer would be tracked through the trees" (p. 283). Those swamps, which were so romantic yet so ominous to young William Carlos, have long since been destroyed by drainage and fires.

One of the most appreciative comments on the meadows that I have come upon is put into the mouth of a business man who is also a poet in "The Muse and Mr. Parkinson,"<sup>28</sup> a short story by James B. Gidney, who lived in New Jersey for several years.

These meadows [says Mr. Parkinson] present a spectacle of extraordinary beauty at night. . . . Even during the day, when their natural sweep and loveliness are disfigured by box-cars and other ungracious reminders of the presence of man, they are not without their attraction. I am continually baffled by people from the South and West who have made a brief trip through New Jersey and see fit to regard it as an eyesore for the rest of their lives. Aside from the extreme provincialism of their assumption that they have seen all of the state when they have crossed the meadows, I am perplexed by their failure to see the beauty of the meadows themselves. "Dull would he be of soul who could pass by a sight so touching in its majesty" (p. 68).

A recent treatment of the meadows is that by John Brooks, which appeared in *The New Yorker* of March, 1957.<sup>29</sup> This essay is chiefly an account of their geological formation, their ownership, and the efforts (mostly futile) which have been made to put them to some use. But Mr. Brooks also conveys a sense of the visual appeal of the meadows by his references to this "natural wilderness" with its numerous varieties of birds, its many kinds of plants that make for "floral lushness," and, "in certain lights, and particularly at sunset," its "tawny beauty." Perhaps related to this beauty is also "a sinister

<sup>28</sup> In *Prize Stories of 1948: The O. Henry Awards*, ed. Herschel Brickell. This story first appeared in *The Atlantic Monthly*.

<sup>29</sup> Reprinted in *A New Jersey Reader*, ed. Henry Charlton Beck (1961), pp. 3 ff.

quality, ever present and impossible wholly to define." Like Dr. Williams Mr. Brooks makes regretful mention of the "dense groves of Southern white cedars that once covered between a third and a half of the meadows."

### *The Orange Mountains*

Low mountains like those in New Jersey are often less impressive as spectacles in themselves than as vantage points for spectacular panoramas. Miss Monks's passages on Winbeam imply that the major appeal of that attractive ridge is of such a kind. This is even more true of the Orange Mountains, and the contrast between the views these two eminences afford is a striking one. Whereas Winbeam looks out over a largely natural landscape, the prospect seen from one of the higher Orange Mountains takes in the most heavily populated area of the State, which nevertheless composes itself, even today, into a memorable picture. Henry Cuyler Bunner, at one time a well known short story writer, in "The Nice People"<sup>80</sup> charmingly describes this scene as it was seventy years ago:

We looked off from the brow of the mountain over fifteen miles of billowing green, to where, far across a far stretch of pale blue lay a dim purple line that we knew was Staten Island. Towns and villages lay before us and under us; there were ridges and hills, uplands and lowlands, woods and plains, all massed and mingled in that great silent sea of sunlit green. For silent it was to us, standing in the silence of a high place—silent with a Sunday stillness that made us listen, without taking thought, for the sound of bells coming up from the spires that rose above the tree-tops—the tree-tops that lay as far beneath us as the light clouds were above us that dropped great shadows upon our heads and faint specks of shade upon the broad sweep of land at the mountain's foot (p. 132).

### *A Warren County Trout Spring*

The major nature writers of America have never made New Jersey a major theme; neither have they been wholly blind to its handsome features. John Burroughs, for example, repeatedly refers in passing to the State, and he has one Jersey set-piece in which he feelingly describes what he calls a "famous" trout spring:

I recently went many miles out of my way to see the famous trout spring in Warren County, New Jersey. This spring flows about one thousand gallons of

<sup>80</sup> A story in his collection, *Short Sixes* (1891).

water per minute, . . . It is near the Musconetcong Creek, which looks as if it were made up of similar springs. On the parched and sultry summer day upon which my visit fell, it was well worth walking many miles just to see such a volume of water issue from the ground. I felt with the boy Petrarch, when he first beheld a famous spring, that "were I master of such a fountain I would prefer it to the finest of cities." A large oak leans down over the spring and affords an abundance of shade. The water does not bubble up, but comes straight out with great speed, like a courier with important news, and as if its course underground had been a direct and an easy one for a long distance.<sup>31</sup>

### *The Delaware Water Gap*

Happily the Water Gap, the possession of which New Jersey proudly claims in partnership with Pennsylvania, has less potential industrial value than the Passaic Falls. Consequently sight-seers still come to enjoy it, and if those who wrote glowingly of it in the past were to revisit it today they would not be shocked.

One of the most effective descriptions of the Water Gap that I have encountered turns up in a volume with the unlikely title of *Historical Collections of the State of New Jersey* (1844) by John W. Barber and Henry Howe. This passage, it is explained by the editors, was written by Howe and was published "elsewhere" as "A Day at the Delaware Water Gap" in September, 1842. For our purpose it is of special interest because it stresses the Jersey side of the Gap, as these excerpts show:

On each side of the Gap the mountains are seen rising to the height of nearly one third of a mile, their sides clothed with the towering hemlock and other forest trees. In many places huge ledges of rock, hundreds of feet high, stand frowning forth; and on the Jersey or right side descend precipitously to the water's edge. In the distance the mountains appear lower, more graceful, and, curving around to the left, shut out a further prospect. From between, the Delaware comes winding down in all her majesty, like one vast sheet of liquid silver, and giving the finishing touch to a landscape of surpassing grandeur.

\* \* \* \* \*

After dark, I went into the Gap, . . . I shall never forget that moment. On the opposite side, high in air, in gloomy grandeur, arose the Jersey mountain; its rough, craggy precipices, and deep, fearful chasms, just discerned through the blackness of night, were reflected boldly on the surface of the river, which

<sup>31</sup> Burroughs, *Pepacton* (1881), p. 45. Professor Helgi Johnson, Chairman of the Geology Department at Rutgers, informs me that appropriately this trout spring is used today by the Hackettstown Fish Hatchery for the propagation of trout.

appeared dark and unfathomable as eternity. A few stars were twinkling far away above the mountain, and here and there, on the other bank, a light from some solitary dwelling cast rays across the blackened waters.

\* \* \* \* \*

[The next morning Howe climbed the Jersey mountain.] A vast expanse was spread out in the luxuriance of vegetation, diversified with hills, valleys, woodlands, cultivated fields, and here and there a dwelling. Through this lovely landscape gently wound the Delaware; the gurgling of its passing waters in the vale in soft murmurs reached the heights above. To the north, up the gorge, the scene was wild. On the left, the Pennsylvania mountain came abruptly down to the water's edge. To the right and front, the eminence we were on curved around, and enclosing the river in a basin, imparted to it the similitude of a lake, as it lay below, deep and sombre in the shadow of encircling hills (p. 509).

Less poetically vivid though in blank verse is Elizabeth Fries Ellet's "The Delaware Water Gap." Mrs. Ellet, one of the literary ladies who made up a part of Poe's uneasy circle, must have read Bryant to advantage and have caught something of the sober dignity of his blank verse while missing most of its appealing individuality. Here is the beginning of her 99-line poem:

Our western land can boast no lovelier spot.  
The hills which in their ancient grandeur stand  
Piled to the frowning clouds, the bulwark seem  
Of this wild scene, resolved that none but Heaven  
Shall look upon its beauty. Round their breast  
A curtained fringe depends, of golden mist,  
Touched by the slanting sunbeams; while below  
The silent river, with majestic sweep,  
Pursues his shadowed way—his glassy face  
Unbroken, save when stoops the lone wild swan  
To float in pride, or dip his ruffled wing.

The latter part of Mrs. Ellet's poem rehearses what she calls an Indian legend to the effect that the Gap was created by the Great Spirit, angry at the warriors' forsaking of peace for war.<sup>32</sup>

Whether Bryant influenced the contributors to *Picturesque America*, an elaborately illustrated work which he edited, or whether he even selected them may be doubted, but at any rate they seem, like him to have combined a love of nature and an aptitude for expression,

<sup>32</sup> Published in *The Female Poets of America*, ed. Rufus Wilmot Griswold (1848).

seen above in W. F. Williams's description of the Passaic Falls and again in these paragraphs on the Water Gap by R. E. Ringwalt:

The bold face of Tammany [the New Jersey mountain] exhibits vast, frowning masses of naked rock, while the densely-wooded Minsi [on the Pennsylvania side] displays a thicket of evergreen. . . . Mount Tammany defies ascent except by a vigorous climber, but the bold and distinct stratification shown in the great rocky mass called the Indian Ladder adds to the grand abruptness of the outlines, and from the narrow mountain-top is best beheld the wide, extended view of the magnificent scenery above the Gap.

\* \* \* \* \*

One of the loveliest aspects of the varied beauties of the Gap is under the early morning light, when . . . dense clouds of vapor break the contours of the peaks, causing uncertainty of vision, increasing or diminishing the apparent height, at times making the tops suddenly appear to bend forward as if threatening to fall, or as suddenly recede into vast distance, while softly-tinted masses of veiling vapor are wafted hither and thither by the wind at its own sweet will to catch the morning splendors, and wreath in many-colored scarfs around rock, and crag, and lofty pine.

\* \* \* \* \*

As one of the wonders of the Gap, must be counted the marvellous lake upon Tammany—a lake so singular that popular superstition has been tempted to add a final touch to its surpassing strangeness, and declare that it has no bottom. As if in quaint climax to her wild work, Nature, after riving the mountain to its very base, here places beside the rude chasm, on the very apex of the lofty peak, a peaceful lake. Masses of bare gray sandstone stand about its margin, and within the stern encirclement the pure water reflects alone the swift-darting birds or the slowly-moving clouds, for naught else comes between it and the sky.<sup>33</sup>

Like Ringwalt and Mrs. Ellet, Christopher Morley was impressed by the cloud effects with which the Water Gap area is provided and has depicted them in his essay "Clouds" in a rhapsodic outburst of language such as even Christopher Morley did not often equal:

We rode to-day down the Delaware Valley from Milford to Stroudsburg. That wonderful meadowland between the hills . . . converges in a huge V toward the Water Gap, drawing the foam of many a mountain creek down through that matchless passway. Over the hills which tumble steeply on either side soared the vast Andes of the clouds, hanging palpable in the sapphire of a summer sky. What height on height of craggy softness on those silver steeps!

<sup>33</sup> *Picturesque America*, ed. W. C. Bryant, I (1872), 96, 98, 100.

What rounded bosomy curves of golden vapour; what sharpened pinnacles of nothingness, spiring in ever-changing contour into the intangible blue! . . .

Mile on mile, those peaks of midsummer snow were marching the highways of the air. Fascinated, almost stupefied, we watched their miracles of form and unfathomable glory. It was as though the stockades of earth had fallen away. Palisaded, cliff on radiant cliff, the spires of the Unseeable lay bare. . . . Watch them as they shimmer down toward the Water Gap in every shade of silver and rose and opal; or delicately tinged with amber when they have caught some jewelled chain of lightning and are suffused with its lurid sparkle. Man has worshipped sticks and stones and stars: has he never bent a knee to the high gods of the clouds?

There they wander, the unfettered spirits of bliss or doom. Holding within their billowed masses the healing punishment of the rain, chalice beakers of golden flame, lightnings instant and unbearable as the face of God—dissolving into a crystal nothing, reborn from the viewless caverns of air—here let us erect one enraptured altar to the mountains of the sky.<sup>34</sup>

### *The Raritan River Valley*

Probably the majority of Jersey people take a somewhat patronizing or even disapproving attitude toward the Raritan River, regarding it as commendable for various small services, such as inspiring a famous Rutgers song, but finding it at its worst an offense to nostril and eye, and at its best uninteresting. Such citizens will be amazed to discover that an early visitor, Cornelis van Tienhoven, Secretary of New Netherlands, about 1650 characterized the Raritan Valley as “the handsomest and pleasantest country that man can behold,” and that Johann David Schoepf, a German visitor a century and a quarter later, wrote that from New Brunswick he went “down [actually up] the Rariton through an incomparable landscape.”<sup>35</sup>

However handsome and incomparable, the Raritan has fired no poets except very minor ones to hymn its praises. Minor but not without interest is James McHenry, already mentioned, an active figure in the public affairs of his time and an occasional poet, of whose manuscript poems a considerable collection is owned by the Rutgers University Library.<sup>36</sup> One of these, “On the River Rariton,” which bears

<sup>34</sup> Morley, *Shandygaff* (1918), pp. 296-298.

<sup>35</sup> Tienhoven, “Information Relative to Taking up Land in New Netherlands,” published in *The Documentary History of the State of New York*, IV (1851), 29. Schoepf, *Travels in the Confederation 1783-1784*, trans. Alfred Morrison (1911), p. 23.

<sup>36</sup> Sixteen of these poems were published in *The Journal of the Rutgers University Library*, June, 1945.

the date 1789, brings to the Raritan, perhaps appropriately, the tone of neo-classical tranquility that marks McHenry's verse in general. Since this mild pastoral poem has never been published, it may be in order to offer it here in full, with the explanation that its author came to know the river while stationed near Bound Brook with the American Army in 1778.

## 1

Here awhile let a wanderer stray  
 and kiss thy mild stream as it flows  
 now the horrors of war are away  
 he seeks with thy lambkins repose.

## 2

Now the hamlet looks gay on the green,  
 its shadow reclin'd on thy breast  
 while at distance the city is seen,\*  
 for cities are strangers to rest.

## 3

Long O here may thy shepherd unfold  
 the tale of his love without art,  
 and the nymph who prefers love to gold  
 resign without coyness her heart.

## 4

On thy banks may he slumber at noon  
 at eve may he carelessly roam  
 or return by the light of the moon  
 to Laura who waits him at home.

## 5

Such, O Rariton, sweet as the Dee  
 such loves be forever thy care  
 so thy stream shall glide to the Sea  
 and fishermen welcome you there.

\* New York (Mc Henry's note)

Another occasional poet of sorts, the English traveler John Davis, found superlatives in order when he wrote his "Ode to the Raritan River," published in 1806. Davis addresses our modest Raritan as "sacred stream," which raises "the thoughts to things divine." At the

end of the poem "Nature's child" invokes the guidance of the "spirit of the stream"

Till overhead the moon in view  
 Thro' heaven's blue fields the chariot drew  
 And showed him all thy wat'ry face,  
 Reflected with a purer grace,  
 Thy many turnings thro' the trees  
 Thy bitter journey to the seas;  
 While oft thy murmurs loud and long  
 Awaked his melancholy song;  
 Which thus in simple strain began,  
 "Thou Queen of Rivers, Raritan."<sup>37</sup>

Superlative praise no doubt, but lacking the weight of authority found in a remark attributed, at least, to no less a personage than George Washington. A rather entertaining story called "An Evening at Buccleuch Hall; or, the Grenadier's Ghost" appeared in *The Ladies Companion; A Monthly Magazine* for July, 1842. Its author, Joseph Holt Ingraham, a once popular writer of historical and religious romances who was also an Episcopal clergyman, obviously knew New Brunswick and its environs well, for he accurately describes Buccleuch Mansion and the Raritan flowing below it, which he characterizes as "the silver river [lying] between verdant and sleeping shores, 'till a graceful bend hid it from the eye amid overhanging woods. Beyond the woods, for miles, stretched a fine country of farm and forest, terminated in a skyey outline of a range of blue hills." Then he goes on to declare that once during the Revolution Washington drew rein on an elevation near Buccleuch and said: "This is the loveliest scene on earth! If rest and repose ever be my lot I should, next to Mount Vernon, choose this peaceful spot in which to pass my life."<sup>38</sup>

(Part Two will appear in a later issue.)

<sup>37</sup> Eugene R. Musgrove, *op. cit.*, p. 43. H. E. Wildes in *Twin Rivers* (p. 5) finds the adjective without meaning in the line, "Thy bitter journey to the seas." I suggest that this phrasing may be taken to imply, not unpoetically, that the journey ends in the bitterness of death for the river or that it ends by a mingling of the fresh water of the river with the salty, hence bitter, water of the ocean—or both.

<sup>38</sup> It seems that Washington may have said something like this. At least H. E. Wildes in *Twin Rivers* (p. 64) refers to a comparable though less effusive comment by him. The source of this information I have not yet discovered.