



Picturesque America; or, the land we live in

a delineation by pen and pencil of the mountains, rivers, lakes, forests, water-falls, shores, cañons, valleys, cities, and other picturesque features of our country ; with illustrations on steel and wood, by eminent American artists

Bryant, William Cullen

New York, 1872

Neversink Highlands.

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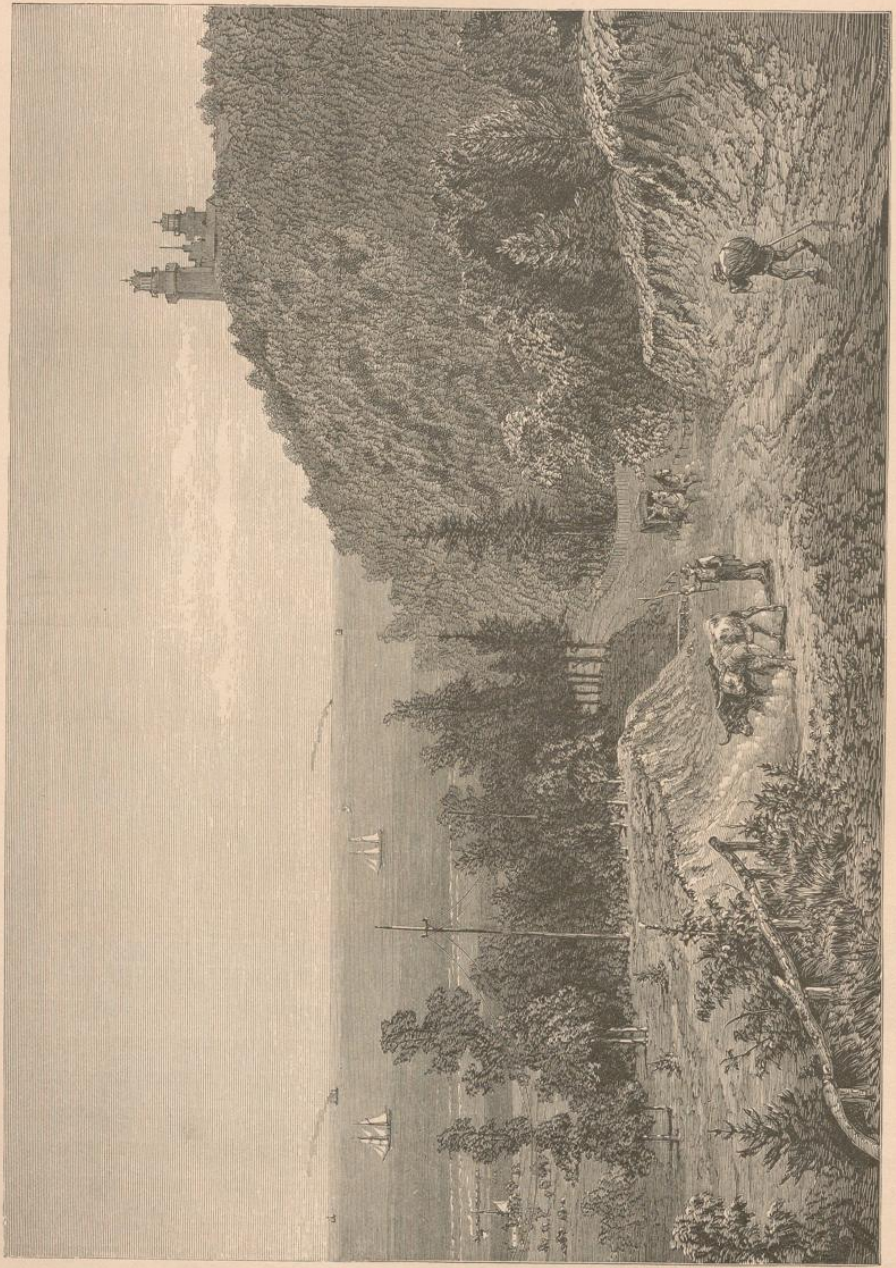
THE NEVERSINK HIGHLANDS.

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS BY GRANVILLE PERKINS.



Mouth of the Shrewsbury River.

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 beauty of these wooded heights, the charming villas that stud their sides, the grace of their undulating lines, give to the traveller prompt assurance that the country he visits is not only blessed with rare natural beauty, but that art and culture have suitably adorned it. The delight with which the wearied ocean-voyager greets the shores that first rise upon the horizon has often been described; but, when these 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 para-



BEACON HILL, NEVERSINK HIGHLANDS.

dise that the Neversink Hills offer to the gaze of every ocean-wanderer who enters the harbor of New York.

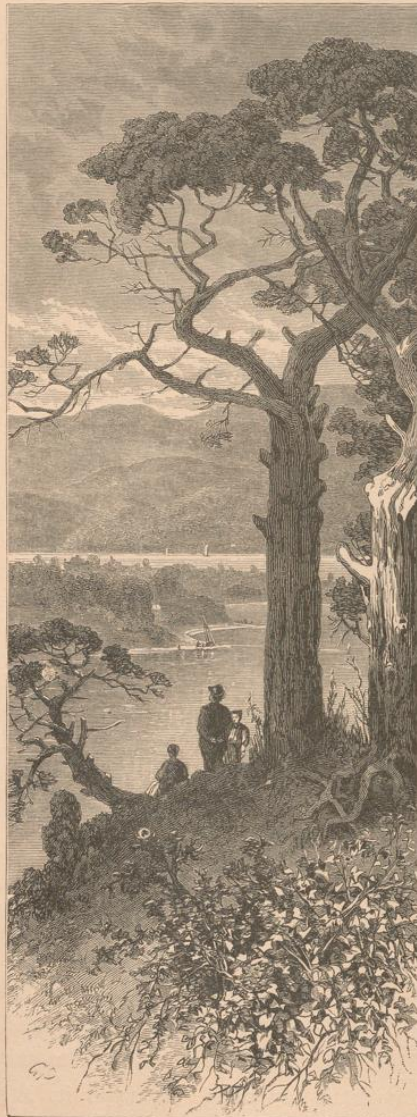
These highlands are situated in New Jersey, extending several miles along the coast in a southerly direction. At their feet flows the Shrewsbury River; beyond the river stretches a narrow strip of sand, upon which the surf of the Atlantic ceaselessly beats. This strip or tongue of sand extends northerly into the sea, somewhat beyond the reach of the hills, which, suddenly trending westward, form, in connection with the Hook, what is known as Sandy-Hook Bay. The ship entering from the sea stretches past this point



View from the Highlands.

of sand, leaving the hills to the left; but from their receding forms the voyager soon turns to greet the rising shores of Staten Island. There are two distinct bays to the harbor of New York. Staten Island and Long Island approach each other closely, and between them runs a small strait, known as the Narrows, which affords entrance to the inner bay; the outer bay, or Lower Bay, as it is commonly called, has upon its left the low, sandy shores of Long Island, upon its right a deep estuary, between the New-Jersey and Staten-Island shores, known as Raritan Bay. Shrewsbury River, which is probably more an estuary than a river, enters the sea between Raritan Bay and the Hook. Travellers proceeding by the Southern Railroad of New Jersey, or the

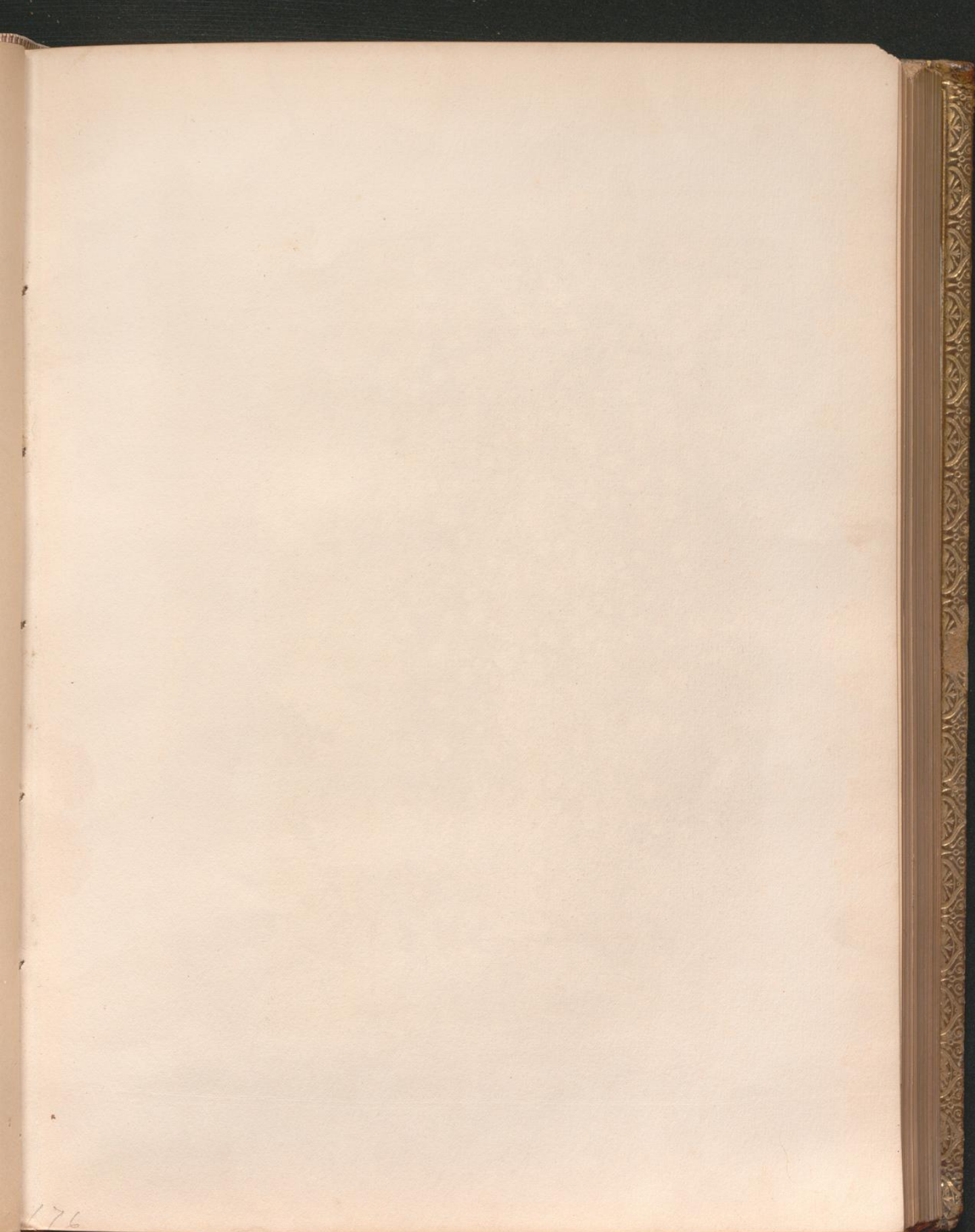
pleasure-party visiting the famous watering-place of Long Branch, land from the steamboat at Sandy Hook. The railroad runs along the narrow strip of sand, already men-



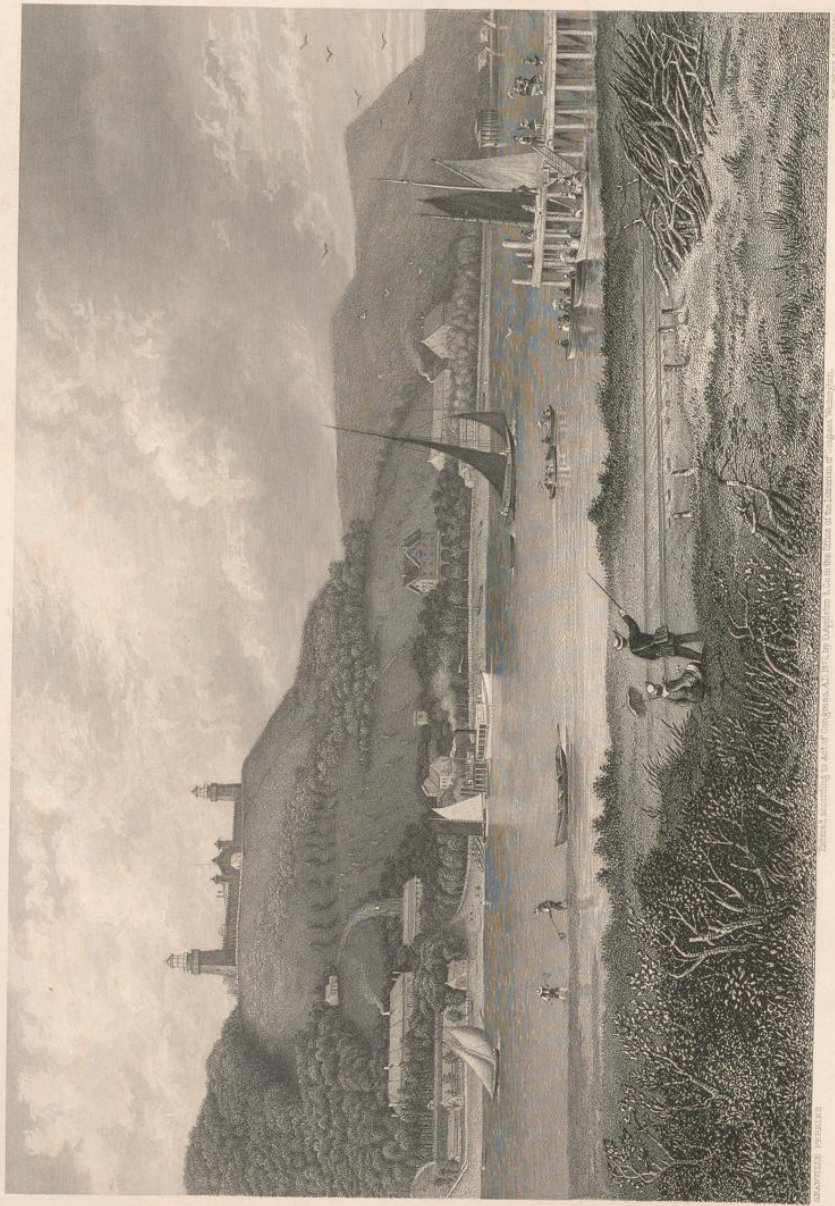
On the Highlands.

tioned, that separates the river from the ocean, giving the passengers charming views of the hills, such as that delineated in the steel-plate engraving accompanying this article. But the visitor who explores the river by boat enters its pleasant waters with beautiful, villa-adorned hills to the right, as illustrated in our initial engraving, and courses along at their feet, admiring the highlands as they lift above him on one side, and the superb stretch of sea on the other, the view of which the intervening strip of sand scarcely obstructs. Entering the river thus, we soon reach "Beacon Hill," crowned by a double-towered light-house furnished with "Fresnel" lights of remarkable capacity. The square tower has the most powerful light on the coast, the rays of which reach a distance of thirty-five miles, or as far as the altitude of the tower lifts the horizon. This light gives the mariner the first intimation of his nearness to our shores, just as the green slopes of the hill it surmounts greet him with the first show of land. This magnificent light is of French construction, was exhibited and secured the prize at the great French Exposition, and was purchased by our government at a cost of thirty thousand dollars. The light in the corresponding tower was manufactured in imitation of it, and, although upon the same principle, is scarcely so powerful. A visit to this light-house will repay us; the view from the tower is superb, and the magnificent lenses of the lamp are well worth our curious attention. The obliging light-house keeper will draw the curtain, and show, reflected upon the convex central crystal, an exquisite miniature of all the expanse

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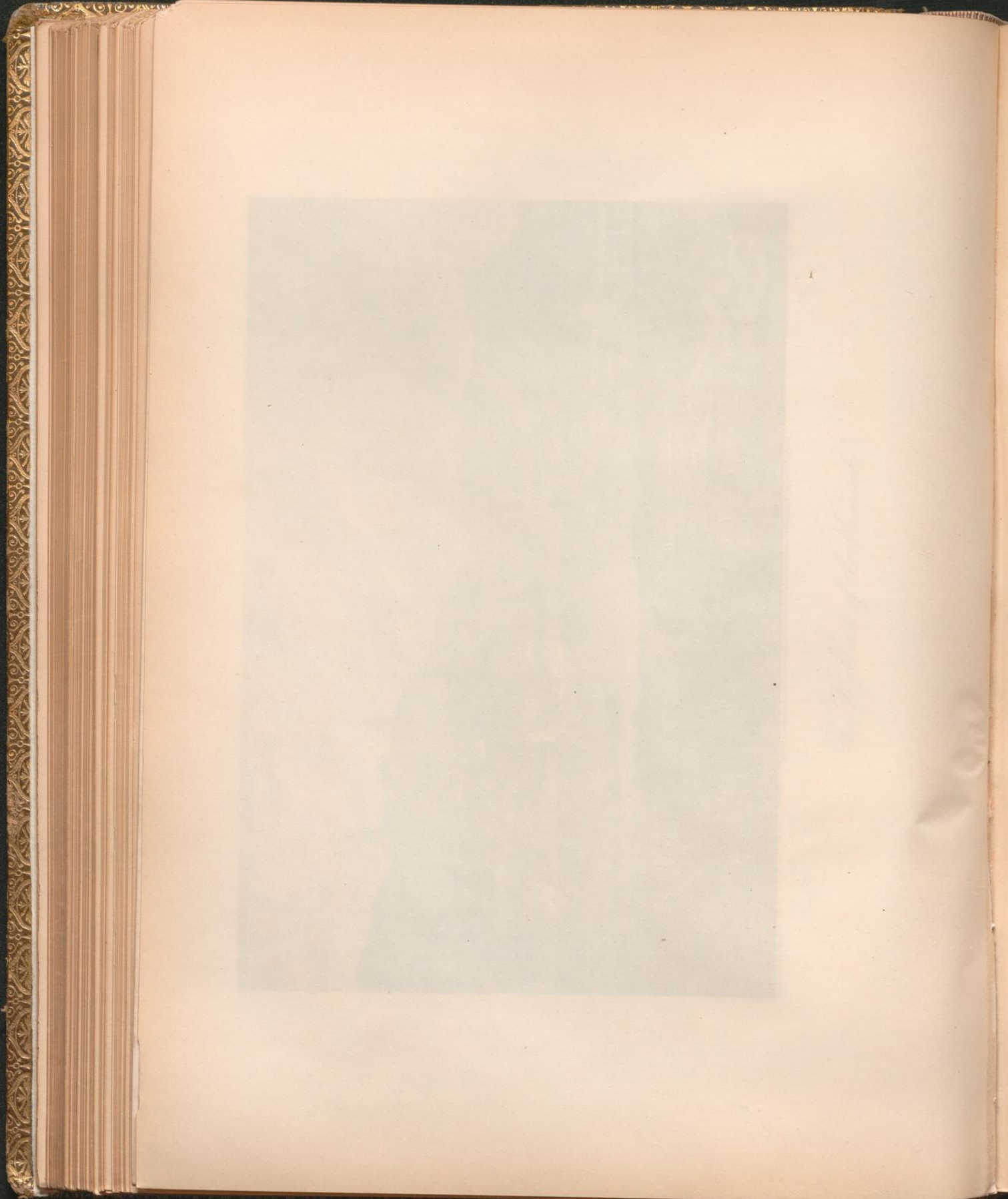


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The Highlands of the Netherlands

New York, D. Appleton & Co.





Boat-Landing.



Fairhaven.

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of land and sea and sky—such a landscape as the most gifted painter would despair of being able to imitate.

Just beyond Beacon Hill is the little town of Highlands, where the hotels most do congregate. Here there is every charm to seduce the town-lorn citizen from his weary streets. He may wander amid the leafy retreats of the hill, once peopled by deer and other creatures of the woods, and now such a forest as that of Arden could scarcely excel: or he may sail on the smooth waters of the river, and cast his line for the bass



Calking on the Neversink.

and the blue-fish; or, crossing to the sandy beach where the surf of the wide ocean rolls in upon him, plunge into the breakers until his heart and his muscles gather freshness and strength from the brief battle with Old Ocean. It is a delicious and sometimes a stirring picture that may be seen from these hills. One may sit, fanned by great trees, inhaling the odors of grass and woods, and watch the far expanse of sea, on the surface of which ships ceaselessly come and go; and then at times rises the storm, and the fierce breakers come tumbling in upon the beach with a wild roar, bursting high into

the air in spray, while the ships go rushing by with furl'd sails like great, frightened birds.

Our course lies along under these hills, the river continuing narrow; but soon it widens, and presently we find two forks—one that keeps close along the sea, another that trends a little way inland. These forks are known locally as South and West Shrewsbury Rivers, but the geographies set down the southern fork as Shrewsbury River, and the western one as Neversink River. The latter is the most picturesque and



Mending Nets on the Neversink.

attractive, and it is the one our artist has followed. On both sides of the river we now have wooded shores, while the river broadens frequently into bays that are as handsome and nearly as wide as those of the Hudson. All along there are pleasant cottages, and on the distant, sloping hills cultivated farms. There are picturesque landings at little wharves thrust out from high, wooded banks; there are quaint little houses close to the river-shore, hiding away among trees; there is a club-house, with its array of boats; and presently we come to the busy centre of the great oyster-breeding region. The pleas-



AT RED BANK.

ant village of Fairhaven is an outgrowth of the oyster business. The river here is broad and shallow; the oyster-beds abound in great numbers, and at the proper season whole fleets of boats are engaged, at one time in planting, at another in gathering the wealth of the river-bed. The oysters planted here are mostly brought from Virginia; and, as the Virginia oysters are notoriously among the finest in the world, this fact may account for the favor which the Shrewsbury product—we never hear of Neversink oysters—enjoys in our market. Not only oystermen, but fishermen, are numerous here, for this estuary affords rare fishing-grounds; and everywhere are evidences that the river yields rich rewards to those who depend upon it. The houses, if rarely splendid, are in no instances poor or squalid, while the greater number are charming cottages surrounded by many evidences of thrift and taste. The shores here are interestingly varied by scenes of picturesque industry connected with the pursuits of the people; here may be seen a group of fishermen, mending their extended nets; there, a boat turned up on the beach, undergoing repairs; and these little insights into the occupations pursued amid these sylvan scenes are not without their charm.

We soon reach the most important town on the river. Red Bank lies at the head of navigation, and yet is situated on a water-course of wide expanse. It is probably the termination of the estuary, while the little stream that flows through narrow gorges and shadowy forests beyond, is all that may strictly be called a river. Red Bank is, in every sense, a pretty village, and, what perhaps is better, a thriving one. Without lifting so high as near the mouth of the river, the hills here are very charming, spreading away in flowing, undulating lines, and dipping to the water with many a sylvan grace. It is a town built up in the interests that pertain to a great metropolis, being a sort of entrepot for a large agricultural country, the products of which centre here for transportation to the city. In 1830, only two houses stood upon its present site; and now its avenues of cottages and villages extend for miles, while whole fleets of vessels are occupied in its commerce. It is a village without "slums," or unpleasant quarters; poverty would seem to be unknown within its borders. Its streets are shaded with arching trees, and lined with neat cottages; and all the prospects from the place are full of pleasantness. Handsome villas front the main avenues, the rear windows of which overlook the river and the green shores of its opposite boundary. Rarely do we find, in an American town, this union of thrift and beauty; for usually, where enterprise consents to inspire a people, its energy leaves rude gashes upon the landscape.

This section has little legendary or historical interest. It is included in Monmouth County, and hence it is near the scene of the famous battle of Monmouth, of the Revolution; and it was infested, during that momentous struggle, with predatory bands, who made general warfare upon the people. Its best legendary interest is derived from the pages of Fenimore Cooper's "Water Witch," many of the scenes of which were laid in Sandy-Hook Bay and upon the adjacent Neversink Hills. The reader of this delightful

romance—the most truly imaginative that came from the pen of Cooper—will recall the strangely-named villa “Lust in Rust,” built by the smuggling Dutch alderman upon one of these elevations, and the strange adventures of the Water-witch, guided by the mysterious sea-green lady, which glided in and out of a secret inlet then existing near the Hook, to the vast mystification of its pursuers. We learn that several times the sea has broken through the sandy stretch of land, making the Hook an island; such an inlet existed in 1798, which closed in 1800, and opened again in 1830.

In regard to the designation of these hills, there exists a fearful orthographical confusion. The word is sometimes spelled *Navasink*, sometimes *Navisink*, then again as *Nevisink*, and lastly as *Neversink*. The correct method can be determined only by a knowledge of its origin, and of this there appears to be some doubt. *Navasink* is supposed to be an Indian word, meaning “fishing-place,” and, of course, applied to the river; but others claim that this is simply a common instance of a natural desire to find an aboriginal root for our nomenclature, and that the term is really *Neversink*, having been bestowed by the sailors, as expressive of the long time which these hills remain in view to the outward voyager. There is more romance and originality in the Indian term, but, so far, the weight of authority does not appear to be in its favor.



Old Bridge near Red Bank.