



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

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Scenes On The Brandywine.

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SCENES ON THE BRANDYWINE.

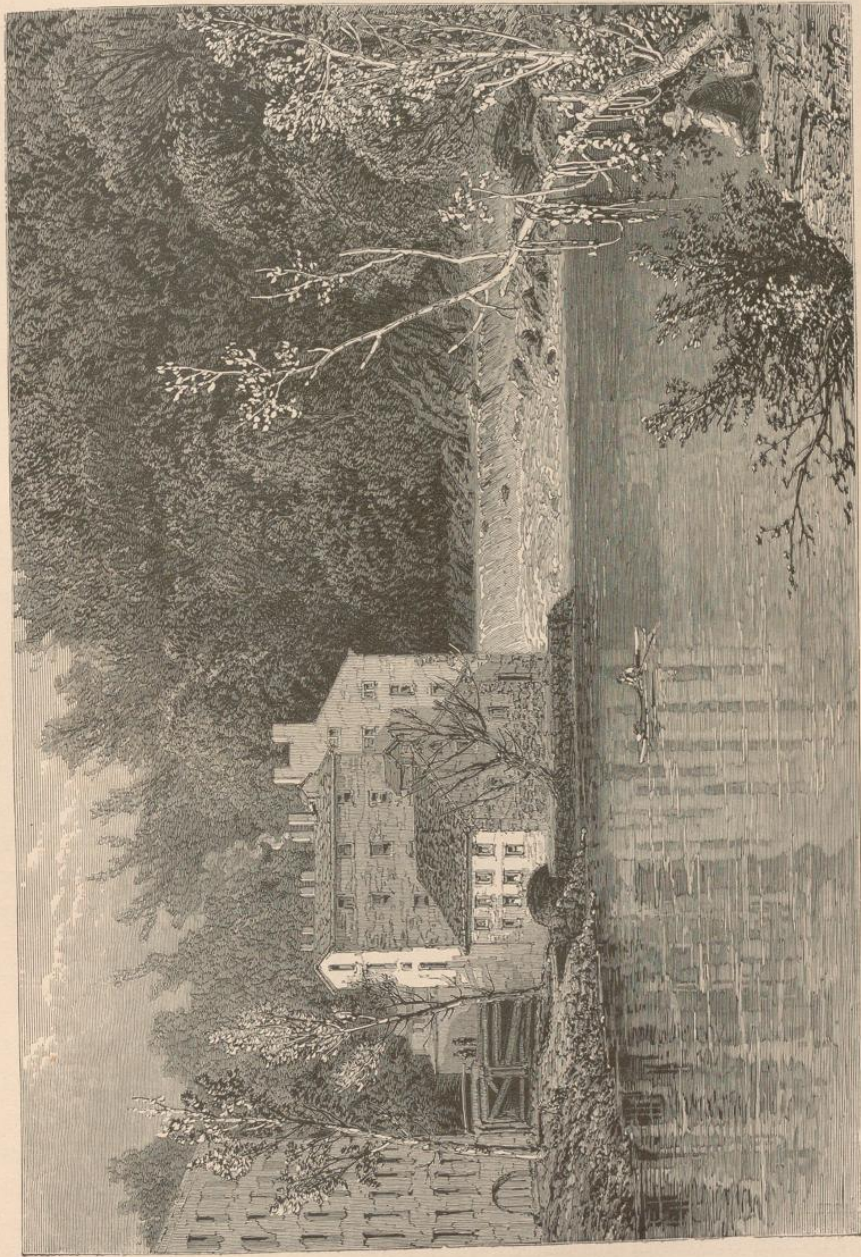
ILLUSTRATIONS BY GRANVILLE PERKINS.



NO minor stream in our country enjoys a wider reputation than the Brandywine. Its identification with our early history renders its queer title familiar to students in all parts of the land, while its rare beauties have been delineated by painters, praised by poets, and described by tourists, until few of us have not some pleasant recollection or anticipation connected with its wooded shores. It possesses attractions for the lover of the picturesque that are distinctively its own. Other streams are perhaps as beautiful as the Brandywine, but no other unites the beauty of wooded heights and tumbling water-falls with structures of art that give rare charm and even quaintness to the picture. What is there in an old mill by a brook that fascinates so quickly the eye of an artist and the heart of a poet? Long before Rogers told us of his earnest wish—

“Mine be a cot beside the hill;
A beehive's hum shall soothe my ear;
A willow brook that turns a mill,
With many a fall, shall linger near”—

all lovers of the picturesque delighted in brook-side mills. Probably no object in Na-



COTTON-MILLS, RIDELE'S BANK.

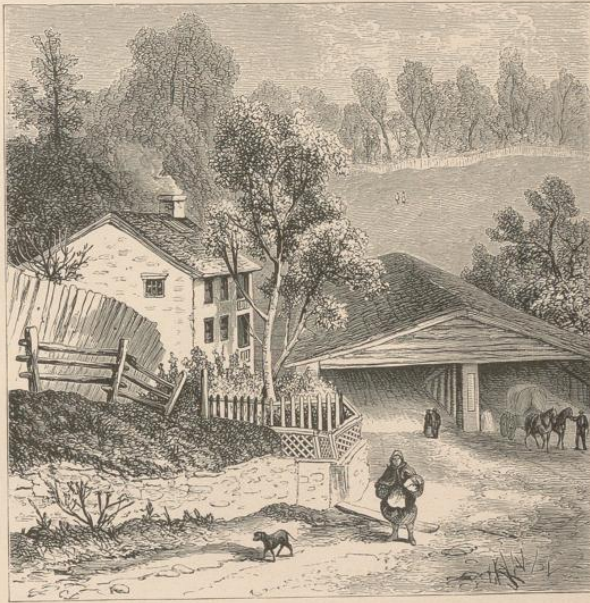
ture or art has been so often drawn and painted. And yet, familiar*as we are with old mills nestling quaintly amid summer foliage, we always discover a fresh fascination in each new example. Was there ever an artist who could resist the desire to add a new sketch of a subject of this kind to his portfolio? Whether the mill be one quaint and fantastic by virtue of its decay and ruin, or one that lifts its walls from the river-edge in large pretension, there is always a strange pleasure in this combination of the beautiful and the useful. The brook-side mill affords us almost the only instance of labor that is graceful, picturesque, and seductive. We can imagine a life of labor under the sweet and inspiring conditions of musical water-falls, shadowy forests, soft airs laden with the perfume of wild-flowers, that would possess a certain rich and munificent poetic calm. Too often labor mars the landscape it enters, but the mill seems to partake of the spirit of its surroundings, to gain a charm from woods and waters, and to give one. This is peculiarly true of the factories along the Brandywine. They are of sufficient age to have mellowness and tone; glaring red brick does not enter into their composition; and they greatly vary and brighten the beauty of each woodland picture.

The Brandywine was called by the first settlers, who were Swedes, "Fish-kiln," a prosaic designation that fortunately did not cling to it. Its present title, while euphonious and distinctive, is somewhat difficult to explain. It is ascribed by tradition to the loss of a Dutch vessel laden with brandy, or *brand-wijn*. The wreck occurred in 1665, in the river just above its junction with the Christiana, and the shattered remains lay long in the waters, serving as a memento to keep alive in the heart of the community ceaseless regret for the loss of such good liquor, until the mourning Dutch sought to soothe their sorrow by naming the stream *in memoriam*, hoping, like Dogberry, to draw comfort from their losses. Many a greater river has been named for a smaller cause, as is sadly witnessed by the Big Horns and Little Horns, the Snakes and the Otter-tails; and the alleged reason may well be accepted; yet a few dissatisfied historians have sought to ascribe the name to the supposition that a slough on the East Branch, above the present borough of Downingtown, formerly discharged into the current a muddy stream that tinted it into the color of brandy-and-water. Such a libel upon the clear complexion of the creek must be instantly disavowed.

The Brandywine finds its head in the brooks issuing from the eastern declivity of the line of hills that form part of the boundary between the counties of Chester and Lancaster, in Pennsylvania. These hills are fairly entitled to their name of the Welsh Mountain, as their height makes them the water-shed from which streamlets tend eastward to the Schuylkill, and westward to the Susquehanna. The summit, possessing all the characteristics of a true mountain-top in its stunted growths and cool breezes, reveals an extended view of the adjacent country, while the range marks the climatic limit which makes Chester County display the green banners of approaching summer in advance of her fertile but more tardy sister of Lancaster.

Although rising in close proximity, the two branches of the Brandywine immediately diverge—the East Branch to flow eastwardly and then south; the West Branch to flow south and then east, until they meet again, after a very winding course of about twenty miles. Thence, as the Brandywine proper, the creek flows in a southeasterly direction through Chester County, forming part of the line of division between it and Delaware County, in Pennsylvania, and afterward passing through the State of Delaware until it unites with Christiana Creek, a little above its entrance into the Delaware River.

An endless series of pictures marks the course of the stream, and all its affluent brooklets partake of the same romantic grace as they flow among the verdant hills



Bridge over the Brandywine.

through the flower-decked plains and rocky dells that distinguish the region which it irrigates. Rock, woods, and water, mingle in scores of scenes of varied beauty, which, although differing in the lavish prodigality of Nature's handiwork, yet resemble in general characteristics the scenery shown in our initial illustration.

The channel is frequently narrowed by rocky and precipitous banks until the creek—as the Brandywine is often ignominiously termed—becomes a rippling rapid, and its force and value are proved by the innumerable mills that are built upon it. The rapid descent of the stream for a few miles above its mouth furnishes the power to the mills for which the city of Wilmington is so famous, and the multitude of smaller ones erected

on the upper waters of the creek bear witness to the fertility of Chester County, to which William Penn gave a plough as an armorial bearing.

Yet, to those familiar with its wandering course, the Brandywine must ever seem in memory—

“A silver thread with sunsets strung upon it thick, like pearls.”

Despite its services in the gigantic flouring-mills, or even its dark deeds in the manufacture of gunpowder, it is throughout a great part of its course a peaceful woodland-rivulet, softly washing verdant banks, or lapsing gently around mossy rocks. Being



“Rising Sun.”

navigable for only a short distance above the mouth, its very uselessness to the voyager has screened it from many of the injuries of “improvements,” and the great rocks stand untouched, while fern and laurel nestle about them, softening their ruggedness into beauty; and mosses, the growth of centuries, steal the echo from intrusive feet. Even the tributary streams that wander through the more open valleys are usually fringed with foliage, and the green, waving plumes of the cultivated weeping-willow and the silvery-gray wands of the water-willow mingle in the wind with the white, feathery branches of the blossoming chestnut-trees, which grow to such rare beauty in this region.

Having its source in high lands, the creek is remarkably subject to changes, the



POWDER-MILLS.

water sometimes creeping sluggishly as a narrowing thread amid exposed rocks, and anon with terrifying rapidity rising eight, ten, or even twenty feet above its usual height. Green meadows, embroidered with the delicate, faint blossoms of the Quaker-lady, the lovely wind-flower, and the sweet violet, and laced with a broad band of silvery water rippling gently over the stones, will be changed in a few hours into a tempest-tossed



Upper Powder-Works.

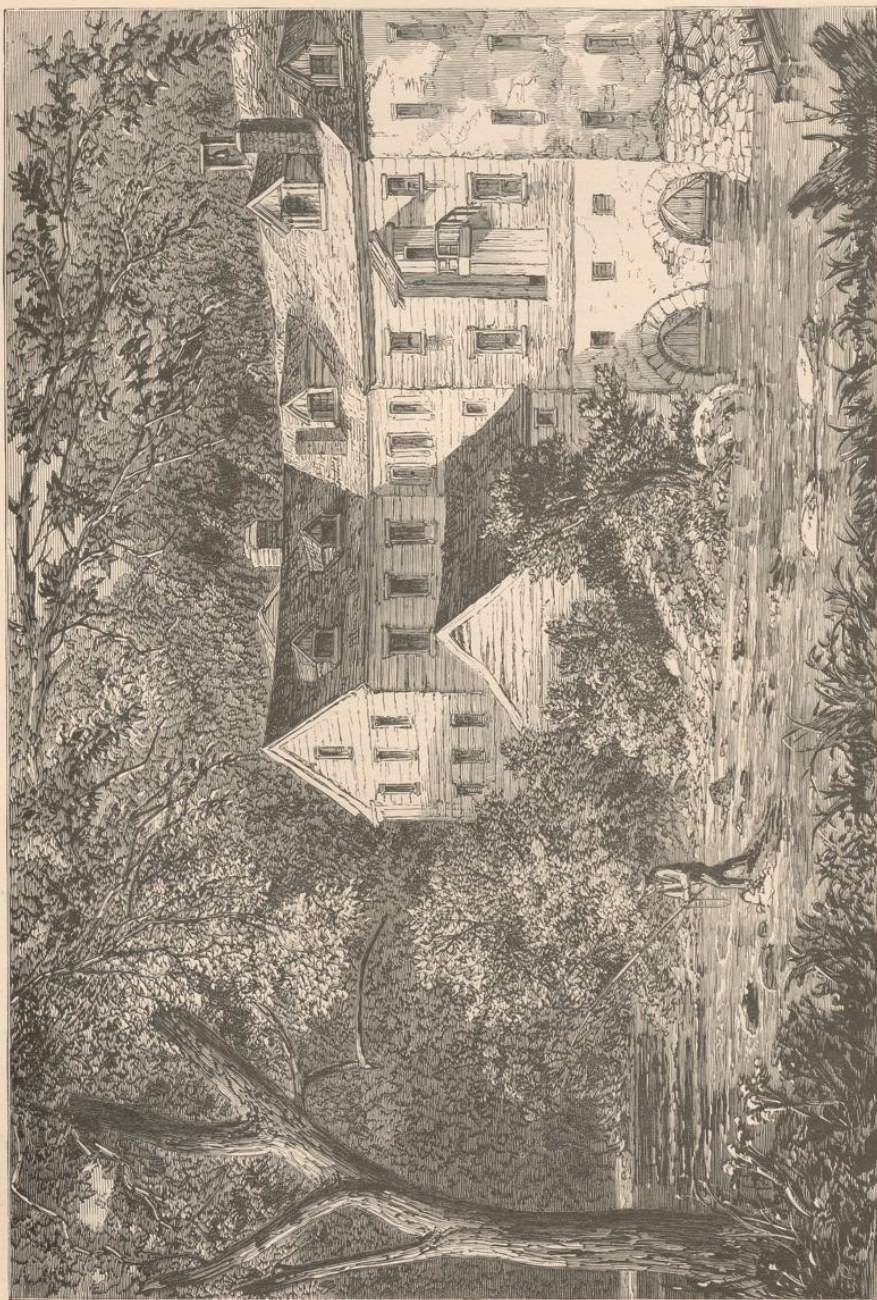
lake, upon which wrecked bridges and floating timbers are dashing frantically together, while the grunts of a protesting pig, pleading for rescue from an involuntary voyage, mingle with the clamor from an eddying hen-coop, whose clucking inmates are clinging to their own roof-tree in horror at the havoc.

The Brandywine, which, flowing through meadow and mead as it nears the Dela-

ware, forms, with the Christiana, two outstretched arms, between which lies the city of Wilmington, exhibits some of its greatest charms in the hill-region just behind the city. Its banks are a great natural park for the denizens of the busy town, who are never tired of resorting to them for rest and recreation. The shores are steep on either side; the trees are of splendid growth, often interlocking above the stream in fraternal embrace, letting the sunshine in upon the swift current in shimmers of glancing light. There is a superb drive along the stream, dense with shadow at the very height of noon, and affording, through the ever-fresh verdure, delightful glimpses of the river. But the charms of the stream are best appreciated by the foot-path along the edge of the water, over which the lofty trees hang superbly, while the swift current now flashes and gurgles over a shallow bed, now deepens and widens into calm and lovely lakes, now leaps, a miniature Niagara, over a rocky declivity. Pedestrians clamber the precipitous rocks, under rich forest-shades, to pluck fern, sweet-brier, and honeysuckle; while the romance of the adventure is heightened by the proximity of powder-mills, built expressly to burst out upon the water.

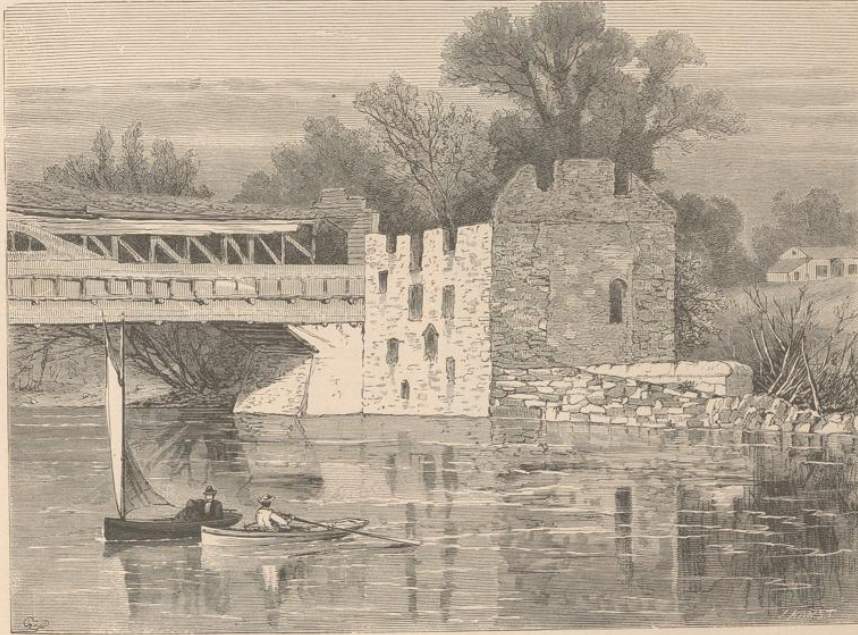
Some very old and picturesque flour-mills stand not far from the mouth of the river, where it is crossed by a bridge near the city, and close by is the ruin of a grist-mill, which, tradition declares, was in operation at the time of the Revolution, and rendered immediate service to the patriotic cause by grinding corn for the use of Washington's army when at Valley Forge. This is an object of no little interest, whether considered historically or with a view to the picturesque, and our artist has given a view of it. A very little way up the stream, in the heart of its sylvan beauties, at a location known as Ridele's bank, are cotton-mills of large extent and eminently picturesque setting. The scene here is delicious. One lingers in the dense shadows of the forest-covered bank with delight, and discovers, in the mingled sounds of rushing water and buzzing wheels, a strange charm. Repose and activity, the hush of shadowy woods, and the hum of labor, seem to blend in delicious harmony; while the gray walls of the buildings have no harsh contrast with the magnificent masses of verdure in which they are placed.

For miles the river continues, with unbroken beauties of forest, until a beautiful hamlet is reached, which rejoices in the queer name of "Rising Sun." We cross the river, just before reaching this village, by an ancient bridge, drive through the hamlet of low stone cottages, and presently come to the famous Dupont powder-yards, where the beauties of Nature and the toils and dangers of industry strangely mingle. Long avenues of greenest willow-shade, and turf, soft as velvet and spangled with flowers, give to this enclosure an almost park-like appearance. Here grow the bluest violets of the spring-time, and, from the opposite woody shore, Autumn's gay banners droop glowing to the water's edge. Ferns, rivalling the choicest pets of the conservatory, are found in the mossy ravines, and the scarlet flame of the cardinal-flower lights up many a shady retreat. But, as a suggestive contrast to the surrounding beauty,



MILLS AT ROCKLAND.

throughout the length of this Eden run the iron lines of a horse-railroad, and here and there, crouching back against the hill-sides, like grim giants bracing themselves for a spring, stand structures of heaviest masonry—the powder-mills. These mills are erected close to the water's edge, and are scattered along the river-side for a distance of three miles. They are not so picturesque as the cotton- and grist-mills, but they obtrude very little upon the landscape; while the terrors of an explosion which they threaten add thrilling zest to the interest of the spectator. Scarcely a year passes that one of these mills does not startle the silent hills with the thunders of an explosion; but the grim



Old Grist-Mill of the Revolution.

horror thus imported by man into the scene is compensated for, so far as the attractions of the spot are considered, by animating pictures of the willow-peelers—the acid from willow-branches entering extensively into the manufacture of gunpowder. “The month of May,” writes one describing the scene, “is the harvest of the willows. Coming from all directions toward the powder-works, wagons may then be seen piled high with willow-branches, some in their natural green state, and tufted here and there with leaves; others peeled, and looking at a little distance like huge masses of yellowish ivory. There is scarcely a farmer for miles around but has a group of willows shading his spring-house, or a line of their green boughs fringing the brook in his meadow-pasture. Every

three or four years the faithful trees are deprived of their branches, and left standing, like dejected Samsons, shorn of their locks. But it is not for long. Before the wild-roses of



Moonlight on the Brandywine.

June have vanished from the hedges, the ugly scars of the hatchet are hidden by a growth of fresh young twigs, which, when another summer comes round, will be well on their way toward a second harvest. Few crops are more remunerative—six dollars per cord being the price given for green branches, or eight dollars if the bark is removed. The greater part of the peeling, however, is done in the immediate vicinity of the works. Here and there along the river-side, scattered about in the glad May sunshine, are seen busy groups—old men whose white locks float in the gentle breeze, brisk matrons, and deft-handed children. It makes a pretty picture, especially when the little ones, grown tired of the monotonous task, run away for a chase after butterflies or to gather the golden dandelions by the margin of the stream.

“Two dollars per cord is the price given for peeling. When the branches are large, this pays excellently, but a load of slender boughs is a sore vexation. The bark is also the property of the peeler, and, throughout the summer, this aromatic fuel keeps the pot boiling in many a cottage-home. In the evening, when the bright sunshine has vanished, and the songs of the birds are stilled, when the glow of a lantern hung upon a tree above each band of workers reveals their whereabouts, and adds

to the festal appearance, the force is largely increased. Young men from the powder-yards, maidens from the factories, and servants from the neighboring farms, gather there

then for pastime and company. It is their *casino*. When Kate brushes the lint of her loom from her dark curls, she ties a bright ribbon around them; and Molly, hurrying through her dairy-work, dons a fresh, white apron. For who knows whom they may meet among the willows?—

“ ‘Mony lads’ and lassies’ fates
Are there o’ nights decided.’

“It is now that popular peelers prosper. An old man with a large fund of anecdote, or a shrewd woman who will promise the young folks a party when the season is over, gains much help from these merry amateurs, and the lagging cords of glistening branches are soon piled high by their dexterous fingers. Until a late hour their laughter echoes over the quiet river, and the lonely night-hand, going to ‘change his mill’ far down the yard, is cheered by the gay songs borne to him along the water.”

Above the powder-yard stretch the same scenes of beauty. At Rockland are extensive paper-mills, which, like all other factories on the Brandywine, form a pleasing feature in the landscape, and stand, with their gray tints, in harmonious relief against the background of verdure.

There is danger that the beauties of the Brandywine, near Wilmington, may in time be sacrificed to the greed of “enterprising” citizens, unless measures are taken to permanently secure them, by the conversion of the shores into a public park. The people of Wilmington have the example of their sister city of Philadelphia, and the banks of the Brandywine, like those of the Wissahickon, should, by timely public interposition, be set apart as things of beauty and loveliness forever.

