

**www.e-rara.ch**

## **Nature studies in Berkshire**

**Adams, John Coleman**

**New York [etc.], 1899**

**ETH-Bibliothek Zürich**

Shelf Mark: Rar 2613

Persistent Link: <https://doi.org/10.3931/e-rara-16051>

The Berkshire river.

---

### **www.e-rara.ch**

Die Plattform e-rara.ch macht die in Schweizer Bibliotheken vorhandenen Drucke online verfügbar. Das Spektrum reicht von Büchern über Karten bis zu illustrierten Materialien – von den Anfängen des Buchdrucks bis ins 20. Jahrhundert.

e-rara.ch provides online access to rare books available in Swiss libraries. The holdings extend from books and maps to illustrated material – from the beginnings of printing to the 20th century.

e-rara.ch met en ligne des reproductions numériques d'imprimés conservés dans les bibliothèques de Suisse. L'éventail va des livres aux documents iconographiques en passant par les cartes – des débuts de l'imprimerie jusqu'au 20e siècle.

e-rara.ch mette a disposizione in rete le edizioni antiche conservate nelle biblioteche svizzere. La collezione comprende libri, carte geografiche e materiale illustrato che risalgono agli inizi della tipografia fino ad arrivare al XX secolo.

---

**Nutzungsbedingungen** Dieses Digitalisat kann kostenfrei heruntergeladen werden. Die Lizenzierungsart und die Nutzungsbedingungen sind individuell zu jedem Dokument in den Titelinformationen angegeben. Für weitere Informationen siehe auch [Link]

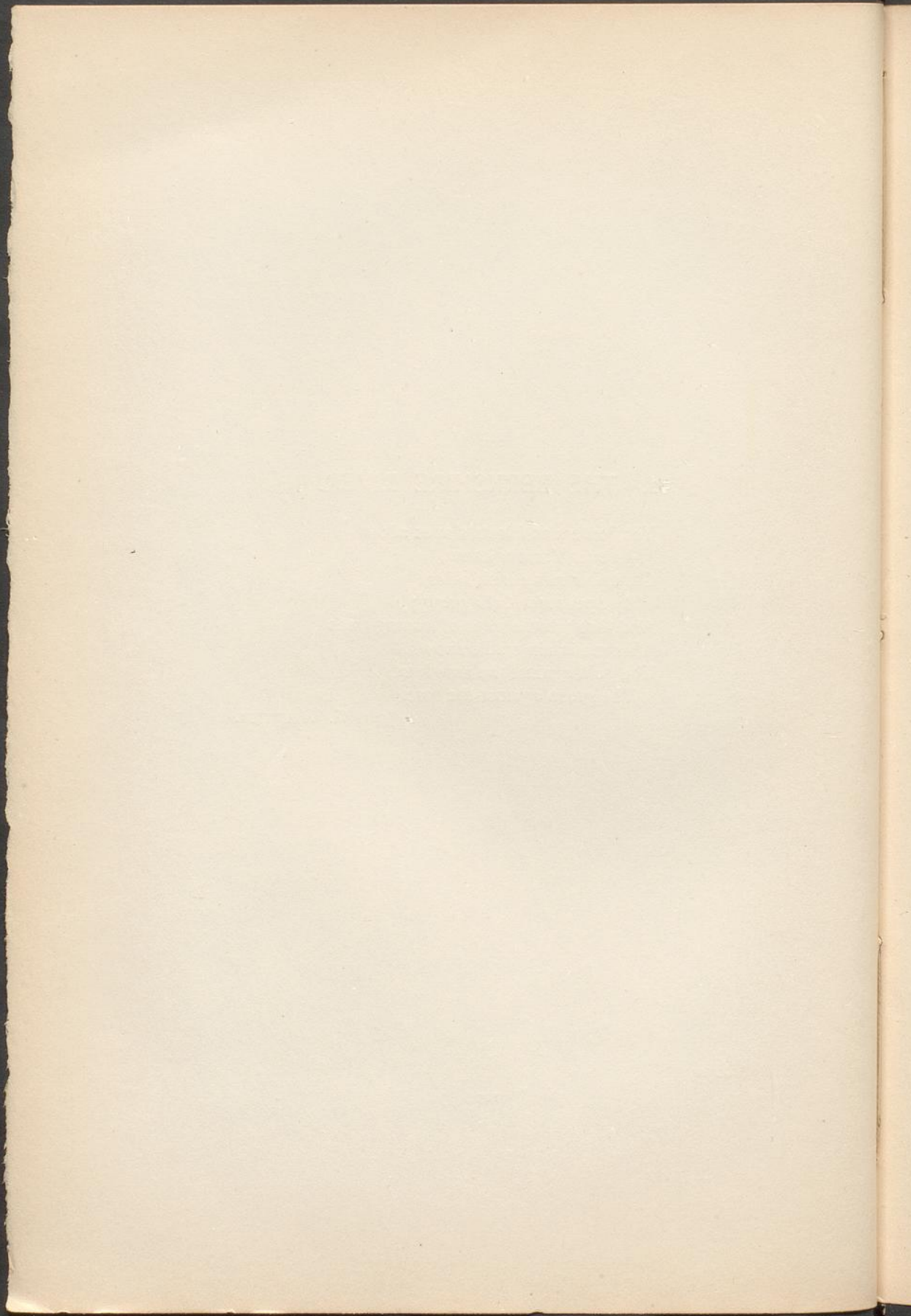
**Terms of Use** This digital copy can be downloaded free of charge. The type of licensing and the terms of use are indicated in the title information for each document individually. For further information please refer to the terms of use on [Link]

**Conditions d'utilisation** Ce document numérique peut être téléchargé gratuitement. Son statut juridique et ses conditions d'utilisation sont précisés dans sa notice détaillée. Pour de plus amples informations, voir [Link]

**Condizioni di utilizzo** Questo documento può essere scaricato gratuitamente. Il tipo di licenza e le condizioni di utilizzo sono indicate nella notizia bibliografica del singolo documento. Per ulteriori informazioni vedi anche [Link]

## THE BERKSHIRE RIVER.

THERE are some rather critical souls, who object to Berkshire because, they say, it lacks water. Having in mind, perhaps, the many lakes of the Adirondacks, or the endless chains of Northern Maine, these hydromaniacs complain of a lack of that diversity which is afforded by this feature in the landscape. Sometimes, too, they add a remark,—which betrays the real animus of their criticism,—that there is very little good trout-fishing in this region. I have my opinion of a man who only values a brook or a pond for what he can get out of it. And the demurrers of fishermen are always to be received with suspicion by real nature-lovers. The man who loves nature *and* fish is not open to objection; but the man who cares for only so much nature as he can reach with a trout-pole and line is not a competent judge of her charms. Such people overlook the picturesque Reservoir in Cheshire, with its stump-fringed shores and sedgy shallows; and Pontoosuc, the Coney Island of Pittsfield, and its neighbour, Onota; and Stockbridge Bowl, which even the proximity of civilisation and architecture cannot quite spoil; and Lake Buel, and Lake Garfield, and Long Pond, and



## THE BERKSHIRE RIVER.

THERE are some rather critical souls, who object to Berkshire because, they say, it lacks water. Having in mind, perhaps, the many lakes of the Adirondacks, or the endless chains of Northern Maine, these hydromaniacs complain of a lack of that diversity which is afforded by this feature in the landscape. Sometimes, too, they add a remark,—which betrays the real animus of their criticism,—that there is very little good trout-fishing in this region. I have my opinion of a man who only values a brook or a pond for what he can get out of it. And the demurrers of fishermen are always to be received with suspicion by real nature-lovers. The man who loves nature *and* fish is not open to objection; but the man who cares for only so much nature as he can reach with a trout-pole and line is not a competent judge of her charms. Such people overlook the picturesque Reservoir in Cheshire, with its stump-fringed shores and sedgy shallows; and Pontoosuc, the Coney Island of Pittsfield, and its neighbour, Onota; and Stockbridge Bowl, which even the proximity of civilisation and architecture cannot quite spoil; and Lake Buel, and Lake Garfield, and Long Pond, and

Winchell's Pond, and the Twin Lakes. But most of all do they neglect—and the oversight is unpardonable in a nature-lover—the stream which like a silver cord binds the scenes of Berkshire into one volume, the winding Housatonic. As long as this Berkshire river creeps through the meadows, and frets over the rocky shallows, and takes the shadows of overhanging cliffs, and plunges through mimic gorges and ravines, it will save the region it adorns from the charge of dulness and endear it to every open eye and ear. He who knows his Berkshire will never omit the praise of the Housatonic.

Great rivers do not lend themselves to personal affection ; and they are too distributive in their effect to create much of any impression. One could hardly give a comprehensible answer if asked to describe the effect upon his imagination of the Mississippi, or the Amazon, or the Ganges, or the Nile. And as for loving any of these mighty streams, as one loves the Connecticut or the Charles, as Englishmen love the Thames or the Dee, the thing is absurd. One might as well try to be fond of the Rocky-Andes system, or to claim the great wheat-plains of the West as his favourite corner for a summer-resort. Little rivers are the only ones with which one can be on intimate terms, toward which one can be fond and friendly. They admit of comprehensive views. They can be grasped, in a certain unity of impression. A river like the Housatonic is just large enough to be significant, just small enough to challenge friendship.

In choosing the Housatonic as the typical Berkshire river, no disrespect is meant or shown to the other streams whose life is begun and partly passed in the county—Hoosic, Green, and Westfield in the north, and Farmington in the south. None of them shares the natural life or contributes to the scenery of this region for so long or to such a degree as the Housatonic. Its rise is in the northern hills of the county, both the eastern and middle ranges; it flows through five-sixths of the width of Massachusetts; and it prolongs its run through that portion of Connecticut which is in fact a continuation of the Berkshire region to the south. For natural features refuse to be held by political boundaries, and state-lines are not often run by geologists or their kin. And from the time it gets its license in the shire-town of the county until it passes the rugged hills below the mouth of the Shepaug, the Housatonic is to all intents and purposes a Berkshire river.

In all its characteristics it is essentially like the region through which it runs. It is not a sensational river, and its easy course is marked by no extraordinary natural features, as though nature were straining for effect. For just that reason our river is most charming. Your true lover of nature is not very tolerant of excesses and of freaks. He likes best the dear familiar things which he sees everywhere and which come to have the attractiveness of the old habits and ways of a friend. Bradford Torrey, visiting the Natural Bridge in Virginia, did not find it charming

or that it "wore" well. And he confesses frankly to a preference for the common sights and scenes. "A wooded mountainside, a green valley, running water, a lake with islands, best of all perhaps (for me, that is, and taking the years together), a New England hillside pasture with boulders and red cedars, berry bushes and fern patches, the whole bounded by stone walls and bordered by grey birches and pitch-pines,—for sights to live with let me have these and things like them in preference to nature's more freakish work." This is the type of scenery through which the Housatonic runs.

The river brings to its final channel the waters of all three of the ranges of the north county—the Taconic, the Greylock, and the eastern hills; and as it flows, it gathers to itself the clear streams from scores of woody ravines and lower-lying meadows. Sackett and Ashley and Roaring Brooks out of the fastnesses of Washington, and Warner, and October Mountains; Hop Brook from the hills of Otis and the picturesque valley of Tyringham; these from the east, with the Agawam and Konkapot in Stockbridge, before the big ridges east of Barrington and Sheffield drive the streams of Monterey and New Marlboro around by way of Ashley Falls and Canaan, to find and join our river there. From the west come Yokun's River, and Williams, and Green, with Hubbard's Brook from the heights of Mount Washington township by a northerly route, and Schenob Brook, out of the same wild region by way of Sage's Ravine and the plunge at

Bear Rock. From not less than twenty-five out of the thirty-two townships of Berkshire, the Housatonic gathers its life-currents. By this sign it holds its right and title to be called the Berkshire river. And wherever in its course the lover of Berkshire comes upon it, the river seems to bear to his soul a message from the very heart of the county, from its mountain heights, its greenwood shades, its broad vales and intervalles, its well-tilled fields, its vistas of enchanting scenery. Sometimes the river runs white and broken over its rocky channel like a reflection of Berkshire skies, flecked with fleecy clouds, driving before the crisp wind of the north-west. Sometimes it slips serenely along under overhanging thickets, or through grassy meadows, a reminder of the dreamy summer days when the August sun shimmers across the ripened rye. It is alive with the life of the hills.

Modern civilisation, which is hostile to all grand natural features, to forests and to mountains, to waterfalls and to shade-trees, seems to bear a special antipathy toward rivers. For it attacks them in every conceivable way, their resources, their utilities, their beauties. The hour in which the modern man settles beside a river is a bad one for the stream, for he begins at once to tax his powers to see how he can destroy the attractions and advantages which have drawn him to its banks. He tries to tire it out with work, to exhaust it with cruelties. He strangles it with dams, and poisons it with dye-

stuffs, and chokes it with sewage, and stifles it in steam-boilers. He tries to starve it to death by cutting off the forest on the mountains whence it feeds itself. He sedulously kills all the fish between its banks. And still the river forgives all and tries its best to keep up the struggle for existence and incidentally to bless the oppressor with uses and with graces. Here in our Housatonic, is a noble example of how hard a river dies. It keeps up a magnificent fight against the vandal powers of the human race, as they fetter it with dams and degrade it in sluiceways and mill-ponds. It yields the service demanded of it, albeit with many a passing fury, fretting itself into foam and broken water. And just as soon as it escapes from man's clutches it takes up its old life of beauty and of blessing. At Glendale, for example, after it has been corralled in a mill-pond and pitched over a dam, it recovers itself almost instantly, and before it is pulled into the traces again at Housatonic, it resumes its placid flow, and gathers shadows from the wooded banks, and sparkles in the sunlight as if it never had been forced to dirty work and never would be again. After passing Great Barrington, too, the stream which has been compelled to sweat and strain, and scour and scrub for the whole town, resumes its fair aspect and behaves precisely as if it never had drained a sewer or fed a boiler. In its gracious and serene flow through the broad meadows of Stockbridge there is no reminiscence whatsoever of its labours at the mill-wheels in

Lee. How can one help a species of admiration for the pluck and purpose of the resolute little river, and its unswerving effort not to be beaten, not to be other than it started to be up in the fields of Pittsfield, and the lanes of Lanesboro, and the fords of New Ashford. One rarely finds a river which so persistently keeps up its character for picturesqueness and rural beauty as the Housatonic, as long as it continues to be a Berkshire stream. Like a tidy housekeeper, as soon as it finishes with the day's tasks, the work that soils and roils, it straightway smooths itself out, and arrays itself afresh, and in clean garb and with placid demeanour, asserts its dignities and its superiority to the drudgeries of existence. It does not hold itself above the utilities; neither does it forget how to be beautiful.

The Housatonic ends its career, as so many noble rivers do, amid sordid and prosaic surroundings which plainly reveal its subjection to man and his hard mastership. Between banks of coarse sedges, and over mud-flats which reek with foul substances and fouler smells, its waters mingle with the salt tides from the Sound in a brackish blend which is teased by the keels of ignoble scows, and tugs, and dredges, and mud-craft of every sort. The railway, which has crossed and recrossed it eight times since it became a river at Pittsfield, once more mounts on trestle-stilts and goes over at Stratford for the ninth and last time. The caressing arms of the land reach out for one last embrace as its waters go sliding past

Stratford Point, and then its leaping waves catch sight of the low lighthouse by day and reflect its white beam at night as they lose themselves in the broad Sound and the Berkshire river is swallowed up in the sea.

