From
Upland Pasture
file

The State of Maine possesses one of the unique sea coasts of the United States. Although it lacks the awe-full grandeur of southern Alaska or the mighty, linear promontories of California and Oregon, it has a rugged magnificance all its own. The sea and land meet here in an intricate, intimate association not found elsewhere. They have been partners for a long time as the sea has advanced and retreated molding the adamantine rocks and leaving behind on high wave-cut benches collections of rounded and smoothed pebbles to mark its farthest extentions. The numerous islands, bays, and estuaries give one the impression of a land not long deserted by the glaciers. And in truth but a few thousand years ago the ice sheet melted back from the New England coast. The islands are still bedecked with spruce and pointed fir - the first hardy vegetation to re-occupy the land, following closely the retreating edge of ice. What little soil the trees require they manufacture from pulverized rock and their own detritus. From the point of view of men with their persistent search for resources to exploit the land is poor and stoney; to extract a living demanded inordinate labor. But the first settlers were not attracted by the land or the austere climate; they came to reap a harvest from the wealth of the sea, and settled on the islands because they were near this wealth and because the

highways of the sea needed no improvement.

Today all but the largest islands off the Maine coast are uninhabited. They are no longer farmed. The trees cut down generations ago for fire wood have been replaced by new growth, impenetrable as the primeval forest. But the gathering of the resources of the sea goes on, though the abundance of fish is declining. The days when one could collect in a day a hogshead of lobsters from the seaweed at low tide are gone for good. Flounders have disappeared during the past half century and herring are scarce. However, as compensation the price of lobsters continue to go up, and so lobster fishing continues. The lobster fisherman is without doubt the most independent, self-reliant, inflexible Yankee of all New England. He never has a good word for the weather, for lobstering, for the market, or for the future. Although his dour pessimism finds expression in invective against the larger enterprises that market his catch, or what he takes as interference by the government, or against the impersonal forces of nature driving him down, he rarely is discouraged to the point of throwing in the sponge. I have however never met a Maine seiner or lobsterman who admitted satisfaction with his operations; something was always going wrong. If lobsters or herring are scarce, the high prices they bring never makes up for the cost of catching them, and

when on rare occasions they happen to be plentiful, prices are too low for profitable fishing. Why do they keep on then one may well ask? I think the answer is to be found in the life they lead - their independence and freedom from the pressures of society. They are their own bosses, accountable to no other person. Self-reliance has its price in risk and uncertainty and danger, but it is a commodity not willingly disposed of, on which no value can be placed; no security counterbalances the independence of the man in the boat far from shore, rocking on the swell, hauling and re-setting his traps in the foam and surge around a ledge. The value is written on the man's unshaven, weatherbeaten face, his calloused hands, and in the knowledge and experience of the sea, of fog and storms, of reefs and rocky islands with their sea birds and recorded in his mind.

Perhaps it is possible to forecast that the entrepreneurial lobsterman with his boat and traps, an anachromism in a world of rampant technology, is doomed to displacement by more sophisticated methods of under water exploitation; or if he does not succumb to more efficient techniques, that the less hardy generation which succeeds him, preoccupied with sports cars and electronic entertainment, will renounce his profession. But if this does happen the wildness of the Maine coast will still

remain, a resource of growing importance for increasing thousands of residents, and visitors from the south, who sail and cruise among the islands from Portland Harbor to Eastport each summer.

As Thoreau said quite some time ago men need the tonic of wildness, they need to feel the forces of nature at work upon them, to witness their limits transgressed. Few places remain on land in New England where we can escape the softening influences of civilization, where we can be away from other people, from their works and mess and clatter, and for a while feel the presence of the unexplorable with no protective shield of outward safety or inward security to insulate us. In the indefinable zone at the meeting of land and sea, whether observed from the shore or from the deck of a boat, the force of teeming life takes a grip on one, tugs at our conscience, our allegiance, for here more than a billion years ago it all began, we find our origins. Here in the intertidal zone, and on its borders, life attains its greatest richness and diversity. From the bare rocks splashed with orange lichens that face the sea below the edge of grass and trees, and the algae blackened band at the limit of the tides, through the drifts of barnacles and yellow-brown rockweed where the green crabs hide, periwinkles, limpets, red and green starfish, bristling seaurchins, clams in

muddy pockets and clam worms, beds of dark, purple mussels anchored to the rocks by clusters of byssal stays, down to the calcareous and pink coralline algea, tidal pools in which the greenish, chrysanthemum-headed sea anemones never close, out into deeper water where the black discs of sand dollars lie like polka dots neatly spaced in the sand, and on to the swirling beds of ribboned kelp off shore, the wealth of life is inestimable. Men need these sea shores more than the sea shores need men. They provide a never-ending source of information for ourselves and wonder for our children. To an understanding of the near infinite complexity of life, of the interrelationships of living things that crowd the edge of the sea, we are just beginning to acquire a few elementary facts. We haven't yet made an inventory of the stock, and are far from knowing whence it came, how it lives, and towards what horizons it is headed. Our knowledge, which we set so much store by, helps us mostly to further our exploitations, to extract from the environment what we value, and to destroy that which, in our present state of ignorance, seems to have no utility. Utility - the idol we worship - that is the criterion for everything we do to the environment. But even from the most arrogant anthopomorphic view, utility has a broader connotation than the satisfaction of immediate greed.

How far down the ladder of life do we calculate usefulness? Is the clam worm useful to clams? It might encourage larger clams, which are more useful to us. What useful purpose do barnacles serve for fish, or starfish for barnacles, or rockweed for either of them? We don't know and we dismiss the matter but ignorance is not an answer, and we had better be on guard against assuming that it doesn't concern us. Man has a way of jumping to conclusions and acting hastily, frequently to his chagrin. The exploiter will shrug off these objections as unrealistic in the name of progress; man has the right, he will say, because he is at the top of the heap, to do to nature what ever he wants for his advantage. Even if you accept this thesis, the question arises as to just what are his advantages. Monkeying with nature can have disasterous consequences. Littoral and raparian life, the richest in the world, is the source of all life on the land, and it still might provide the organisms in some evolutionary future to replace those lost through man's mismanagement. Maine has a full share of riparian life and would do well to cherish it, if not for life itself, then for future men.

It seems that men are driven by some inherent compulsion to cover the face of the earth with their works. It is not sufficient that establishments for the production and consumption of energy be clustered

for economy in centers of production, they must be scattered far and wide over the landscape so that each region, each sub-political unit supports its own independent factories and facilities in the name of industrialization. Consideration is not always given to efficiency, but to parochial attachments and loyalties within nationalities - mistakenly, frequently. On a wider basis national and racial divisions enter the picture. The human race is not a unity; it seems inevitably to separate into self-interested autonomous sub-units, even within the boundaries of one state, which experience considerable difficulty in sustaining cooperative endeavors. In this respect men have not surmounted their common inheritance with other animals. We are saved by a racial nostalgia from sacrificing for the mindless order of a termitary the freedom our fragmented society, founded on territoriality, guarantees. But we must beware of destroying the very things our inherited individuality tell us to value.

Only since the industrial revolution have men become conquerors of nature. Before, nature was always something to reckon with and to appease. But the incredible power which the harnessing of energy has put into men's hands has generated in them a dangerous over-confidence. Nature is far from submissive, and is still to be reckoned with. A more intelligent approach, than the

arrogance of conquest, is one that rests on understanding the significance of diversity and the non-obvious. People should accept the point of view that they might be wrong about some aspect of nature which appears simple. They ought to hesitate before leaping into a pool - a program for example which on the surface promises a benefit - to make sure that it contains water. There are so many examples of an opposite reckless approach, of shooting first and inquiring later. I believe the root cause of this kind of behavior is a fundamental ingrained fear of nature handed down to us from our distant ancestors.

When it comes, however, to industrialization, to use of land in remote areas, to the view that every region is better off with industry than without it, the element of fear is not as controlling as a disparagement of obscure value. The point of view of the worthlessness of wilderness, of the primeval, is a hard one to combat, and if not so much fear, then perhaps a feeling of insecurity enters here. These places are unsafe, dangerous, hence the expression "Roaring Wilderness" and had better be tamed, and civilized, just in case one might find himself there by accident. The opposite point of view held by non-pragmatists is gaining acceptance as wildness disappears, and more value is attached to it on account of its rarity, that wilderness

deserves protection, even if not visited, as a security and resource or refuge in the event we destroy elsewhere by advertance or inadvertance elements of the biosphere subsequently discovered indispensable. The persistence of the former point of view is supported by its involvement of man's acquisitive instincts and his immediate economic interest. He may act unwisely for momentary gain, although wisdom is measured by the time into the future man is able to project his self-interest.

Various projects have been advanced under the philosophy of industrialization which could have grave consequences for the native and recreational uses of the Maine coast and for its biological welfare. One of the two most recent schemes for industrial development was put forward by an organization called Tepco Corporation. The organizers of Tepco propose to construct an atomic power plant on Sears Island at the head of Penobscot Bay, and in conjunction with it an aluminum processing plant, in order to use the large amount of power developed for which little market would be available in the vicinity. The scheme is wholly contrived for the profit of the promoters, there being no need for such a development, and on the contrary a very definite objection to it by the local residents. Tepco hopes to put over the project by excluding the

non-resident property owners from all decisions on its adoption and with good reason since many of them are well informed on the damaging effect it would have on the present native economy and on all life in and around Penobscot Bay from Camden or Deer Isle. The hazards of fluoride emission from aluminum refineries are not unknown and can injure plant and animal life over a wide area, and moreover the thermal pollution by the associated nuclear power plant would create important undesirable consequences for the fishing industry of the bay. To add to the already serious pollution by the pulp mill at Bucksport of Penobscot Bay could tip the scales in the direction of irrecoverable destruction of the bay's marine resources. It is certainly questionable whether the advantages to the entrepreneurs of this proposition would outweigh the disadvantages to quality of life and living standards of the present inhabitants. Apparently some communities think not, for several have turned down the establishment in their midst of similar industries.

Another proposal, which has received much recent publicity, potentially a great deal more injurious to the entire coast of Maine and adjacent states, is the freeport and oil refinery at Machiasport. Here again the major beneficiaries are not the people of Maine; they are the stockholders of Occidental Petroleum Company.

When analyzed the saving in lower prices of oil products to the household consumer of heating oil and automobile operator becomes trivial. The risk, however, of accidental spillage during the transfer of oil in port or from the wreck of an oil tanker is considerable. The rocky, fog-bound northeast coast of Maine, with its extreme tides and strong currents presages more serious disaster when the proposed 300,000 ton tankers, requiring four miles to come to a stop, is considered, than the English Channel foretold for tankers of half the tonnage. Yet the Torrey Canyon was split apart on a reef spreading oil on hundreds of miles of French beaches, and causing inestimable destruction of wild life. Disaster to one of these huge modern tankers could spread havoc along the entire Maine coast where the people, not the oil company, would be the losers. The poor of this New England Appalachia are not those who will stand to profit by the Machiasport project, but rather they will be the investors and the skilled laborers attracted to the region.

Maine sorely needs a state authority on the environment, to set standards of environmental quality and to adopt regulations for the prevention and control of pollution of land, air, water, estuaries, and coastal bays. To exercise its sovereignty over natural resources within the public domain in order to prevent their

improvident exploitation the authority should be granted the power to issue and revoke licenses wherever an industrial enterprise utilizes these resources.