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## OLD-TIME CONNECTICUT BOTANISTS AND THEIR HERBARIA,—II.

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JOSEPH BARRATT—Biographical information about Barratt is not altogether easy to come by. He died an old man, poor and with no near relatives within reach. His effects were mostly handed over to his landlord to satisfy a debt and were sold or destroyed as they appeared to have value or not. All that remains of his personal papers are a few odd slips on which he was accustomed to jot down accounts of any events which seemed to him of especial interest, and a small note-book into which he copied some of these slips, together with a table of dates. From these, from a series of his letters to Dr. Torrey during the years 1827 to 1846, now preserved at the New York Botanical Garden, from references to him in botanical works of his contemporaries and from the local newspapers of his time, it is possible to patch together some outline of his life and to gain some notion of what manner of man he was.

The figure which results has about it a certain air of failure. He had, one feels, an opportunity. He was a man of real learning, good natural powers of observation and large enthusiasm and industry and had the impulse and desire for original work. He gathered an excellent library, and was the acquaintance or correspondent of some of the best botanists of his time. He lived in a region of considerable botanical interest, then practically unexplored. He ought, it seems, to have been, if not a Muhlenberg or a Torrey, at least another Darlington or Bigelow. In geology, his chance was as good. Yet he is remembered today by the older residents of Middletown as a rather amusing eccentric who was wont to go clambering about the



Portland quarries with a pencil hung about his neck on a string and his hands full of great sheets of brown paper, on which he made strange drawings of marks in the stone. His memorials are an author-citation or two in current manuals, an occasional reference, not disrespectful, in works on special groups, a half-dozen little-known pamphlets—and a place in John Fiske's essay on "Some cranks and their foibles." His herbarium is probably his most solid and valuable achievement.

Various elements may have contributed to the meagerness of his accomplishment. One was his multiplicity of interests. By profession a physician and teacher, plants, insects and birds, chemistry, mineralogy and meteorology, local history, Indian antiquities and language, and finally geology, engaged his interest by turns and detracted one from another. Lack of money for publication and resultant discouragement may have had their effect. But, looking through what remains of his work, one seems to find a deeper reason—a certain inconclusiveness, a lack of selective and co-ordinating faculty. When he is not supported by the definite structure of a systematic botanical arrangement his articles have a way of trailing off vaguely at the end. He does not finish. That is the usual fate of a mind such as we may suppose his to have been—keen, but disorganized, better at observation than at correlating and interpreting its results.

Joseph Barratt was born at Little Hallam, Derbyshire, England, January 7, 1796.<sup>1</sup> His immediate family seems to have been large, for he mentions four brothers and a sister, and of ancient descent, since he records finding "particulars respecting his ancestors" in the Domesday Book. In 1810, he began the study of medicine at London and in 1816 was practising at Leicester. In 1819, for what reason he does not state, he left England for the United States, sailing from Liverpool on the ship *Remittance*, Capt. Silas Holmes.

The voyage to New York lasted seven weeks. Soon after his arrival, he went to Philipstown, N. Y., where he settled down to the practice of "physic" and the botanical exploration of the surrounding country. To the usefulness of the latter work Torrey pays special tribute in the preface to his *Flora of New York*; and he might

<sup>1</sup> This is the date given by Barratt himself in his fragmentary diary. The inscription on his tombstone gives 1797, and the printer of the *Catalogue of Connecticut Plants* has generously made it 1707.



have done as much for the former, since Barratt in his capacity as a physician brought him safely through a fever. Barratt had made his acquaintance in 1822 and for more than twenty years remained his correspondent and occasional visitor.

In July, 1824, Barratt went to Norwich, Vermont, to teach in the Academy, or, as he calls it, the "Scientific Institution" there. He promptly took advantage of his comparative nearness to the White Mountains to visit them and ascend Mt. Washington, September 18, 1824.<sup>1</sup> In September, 1825, he returned to Philipstown and resumed practice. That autumn he, in company with Torrey, visited Schweinitz at Bethlehem and, he records, first heard "that admired hymn, 'On Greenland's Icy Mountains.'"<sup>2</sup>

In May, 1826, Barratt became "professor of botany, chemistry and mineralogy in Capt. Alden Partridge's Military Academy" at Middletown, Connecticut. There, with occasional brief absences—one a visit to Niagara—he remained resident for the rest of his long life. At first he devoted himself wholly to teaching, but when the academy closed in 1828, again turned to medicine. For the next twenty-five years we get occasional glimpses of him as a successful physician, a well-liked man, a guest "eagerly sought for" and an active citizen,<sup>3</sup> interested in the history and such of the doings of the place as touched his tastes and abilities. He relates with some pride that he was among the first to be presented to Daniel Webster when that great man visited Middletown. We find him proposing a plan for re-stocking the Connecticut River with salmon; serving on a commission to investigate a boiler explosion; one of the jury of awards on gardens at the local agricultural society's annual fair; addressing the Farmers' Club on fertilizers, grasses, the cultivation of gooseberries and the like subjects; and inducing two of its members to try raising *Lolium perenne* as a forage grass.<sup>4</sup> He was a vigorous advocate of cheap postage. Toward 1845 he became interested in

<sup>1</sup> One incident of this journey Barratt related with gusto to Torrey in after years. "That coarse, long-legged fellow . . . Crawford," he wrote, "laughed at the idea of my enduring fatigue, but I gave him such a walk over the mountains, taking him about thirty miles in one day, that he will not soon forget. I tired him out and had to send a horse for him."

<sup>2</sup> The preposition suggests that the enunciation of singers, in those days as now, was not always perfect.

<sup>3</sup> He was naturalized in 1830 and made a voter in the following year.

<sup>4</sup> The experiment seems not to have been a great success; at least, ray grass has not displaced timothy in the hay-fields about Middletown.



the local history and the customs, and especially the language of the Indians. Two items on the brief list of his publications are devoted to this subject. Doubtless this interest led to his appointment as one of the committee in charge of the celebration of the bi-centennial anniversary of the settlement of Middletown in 1850.

But his scientific interests seem never to have been quite forgotten. In 1835 we hear of him as in charge of a class in botany at Wesleyan University, then recently started, and as one of the founders and the president of a college scientific society. In 1836 he wanted to give up practice and go as naturalist with the Wilkes exploring expedition and applied for the place in competition with Asa Gray. He kept meteorological records, investigated the dates of late and early frosts and the length of the growing season, and the effect of rain-fall at the flowering time of fruit trees on the subsequent crop. He made observations on the spring floods of the Connecticut River and suggested a method of measuring their height very similar to that now in use. He studied the rocks of the region and planned to compile a catalogue of minerals occurring in them. The local papers contain letters from him on all these subjects—as frequent, one suspects, as the editors would allow.

His final, and fatal, interest was in geology. He had the misfortune—for him—to live at the edge of the triassic sandstone of the Connecticut Valley and near quarries where, in the course of their work, tracks of animals and other fossils, in which these rocks are rich, were often uncovered. These things fired his imagination—over-stimulated it, indeed. He began to see in them what no one else could discern—vestiges of warm-blooded animals, ostriches kangaroos<sup>1</sup> and the like; the impression of a hairy belly where some quadruped had crouched; finally the foot-prints of man. It was a special kind of man with four toes only and Barratt christened him *Homo tetradactylos*. With little evidence but his own surmises to go upon, he concluded that these rocks were not Triassic but Eocene and that in that age, some millions of years earlier than other geologists would allow, man and warm-blooded animals had appeared together. From the seemingly insignificant circumstance that their tracks were contiguous, he argued that *Homo tetradactylos* had domesticated the monsters of his time and used them for his convenience.

<sup>1</sup> He remarks that large birds and kangaroos lived together then as now in Australia.



So important a period, he felt, should have a special name and he coined for it the resounding title of "Kalorimazoic." In his last publication, a little pamphlet issued in 1874, Barratt sets forth his conclusions and so anxious is he that his newly delimited age and its name shall have due emphasis that, whenever that name occurs in his discourse, he prints it in large capitals and on a line by itself.

It is said that as early as 1845 Barratt exhibited drawings of putative human foot-prints at a geologists' meeting at New Haven. As his theories developed and grew wilder, ridicule was the natural result. There was one grotesque incident when, refused a hearing at a convention of geologists, he somehow, at night, got into the hall where they were to meet and covered the face of the gallery with an impromptu frieze of his drawings, which were to greet the assemblage in the morning, mutely convince the sceptical and confound him whom he esteemed his chief rival, Edward Hitchcock.

Two brief quotations may serve to give some notion of the man in his later years. His geological interests, says the writer of an unsigned newspaper obituary, "became his one object in life. His business was neglected and his many friends, and his room became one grand museum, whose walls and tables were covered with drawings, specimens and relics of all kinds. Twenty years ago he interested and amused by turns any group that he could get to listen to him." John Fiske describes him as a courtly and lovable "gentleman of the old stripe." He lived, at this time, in rooms over a drug store in an old building which still stands on Main Street in Middletown. In them, says Fiske, there was such confusion as "has not been seen since this fair world weltered in primeval chaos—specimens of all kinds, chemical apparatus, books and papers sprawling and tumbled all about. . . . Never did he clear a chair for me without an apology, saying that he only awaited a leisure day to put all things in strictest order. . . . That day never came."

Toward the end, Barratt's mind gave way; he died in the hospital for the insane just outside of Middletown, January 25, 1882. He never married. He is buried in Indian Hill Cemetery in Middletown and over his grave has been placed an irregular block of his beloved Portland sandstone containing two bits of fossil tree-trunk—symbolic at once of his botanical and geological interests.

*(To be continued.)*



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