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## New Agricultural Improvement in Southern New Jersey.

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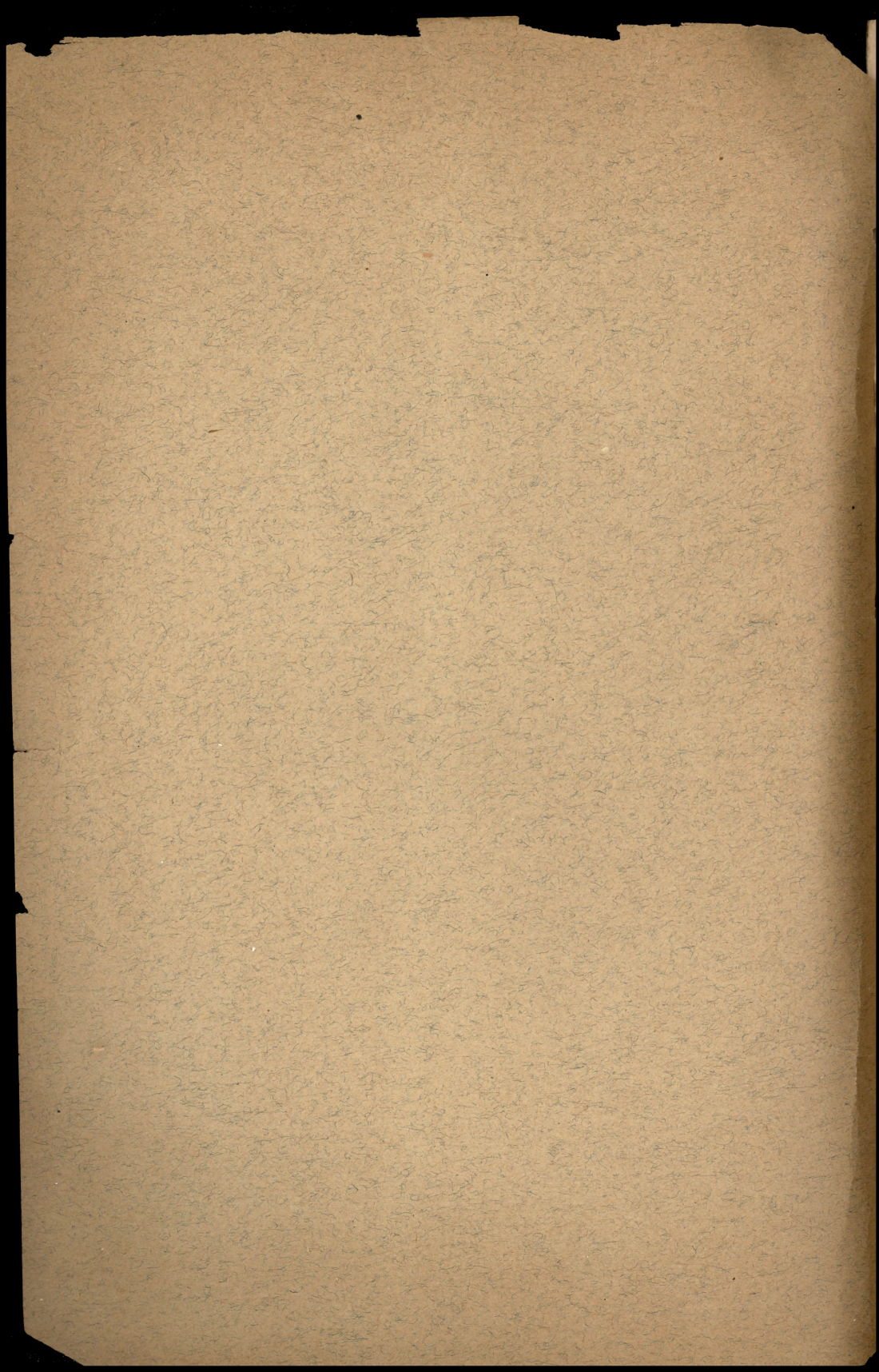
DELIVERED BY

**FRANCIS B. LEE,**

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## NEW AGRICULTURAL IMPROVEMENT IN SOUTHERN NEW JERSEY.

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ADDRESS BY FRANCIS B. LEE.

To most people—with their minds strongly influenced by Alladin-like stories of Western progress, of town-building in the trans-Mississippi country, of Rocky Mountain gold fields, and of agricultural interests of the Pacific Slope—the question of development of lands along the Atlantic sea-board until very recently had become absolutely an idle dream. The tidal-wave of emigration, sweeping over the East, left many sections of the cis-Appalachian country in a status quite as primitive as that which once gave an abiding place to the colonial forefathers. Particularly true was this when one considers that portion of our State commonly called South Jersey—a somewhat indefinite term depending upon usage, but generally considered to embrace all that territory south of a line drawn from Trenton to the Amboys. As a matter of fact, large sections of this South Jersey had been developed in early times, more particularly in the valley of the lower Delaware and upon both banks of its various tributaries which enter the noble stream between Trenton and Cape May. Before the Revolution, fertile farms and plantations gave a distinctively agricultural character to the lesser valleys of the Crosswicks, Assiseunk, Rancocas, Big Timber, Old Man's, Salem, Cohansey, the Asveticons, or Maurice river, Dennis and other creeks, all of which served as means of communication with the outside world and played an important part as factors of food-supply to colonial farmers. Likewise upon the sea-coast, near the banks of the large, sluggish

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rivers and creeks between Cape May and Sandy Hook, were similar "clearings," which extended in irregular chains toward the interior. Therefore, so much of South Jersey as lies in the tide-water district is to be excepted from the general charge of being a "desert." However, there is left the "ridge," which separates the river tributaries from the ocean tributaries, and it is this long and irregularly-shaped tract of land, covered with pine and oak, that has remained until the present day largely unoccupied and untilled.

Making a particularly local application of the matter, one finds that this high land extends into Cape May county, in general forming an obtuse triangle, with the apex pointing to the end of the peninsula. In no place in the county is the elevation over one hundred feet, the average being about twenty-five feet above sea-level.

The soil is a sandy loam, much of it underlaid by a good clay and supporting a vigorous growth of oak and pine timber. To remove a popular fallacy, it may be said that in no sense is this portion of Cape May a "barren," for it has within itself the elements of great productiveness. Vineland—the wonder-town of South Jersey—the creation of the brain and energy of Charles K. Landis, who saw in similar soil the basis of a great agricultural enterprise, is a striking example of the fecundity of lower Jersey land when once properly cultivated.

The Cape May and Millville railroad, now a part of the West Jersey system, was opened in the early summer of 1863, and was designed to connect the two towns, giving Cape May a through route to Camden. Upon this road, fifty-six miles from Philadelphia and twenty-five miles from Cape May, was located the station of Woodbine, which consisted for nearly three decades of four or five houses. Woodbine was the center of stage routes to Tuckahoe and Dennisville, and beyond this no enterprise existed. At the first, William Smith Townsend, Jeremiah Van Rensselaer, who were very instrumental in projecting the enterprise, together with the builder of the railroad, Charles B. Dungan, endeavored to "push" the town and had laid out streets, but the property became involved in litigation, and Woodbine remained, after all their efforts, nothing more than a station in the woods.

## THE BARON DE HIRSCH SETTLEMENT.

The history of Semitic oppression extending over centuries in the Slav and Germanic countries, the various schemes for relief, the growth of the vast De Hirsch fortune, and the ultimate plan of Baron Maurico De Hirsch for colonizing his outcast brethren, would be a twice-told tale were it repeated here. Suffice to say, among the sites selected for colonies of refugees were certain points in New Jersey, and among them Woodbine. At that time, two years and a half ago, Woodbine was the property of John Moore, Esq., the owner of the large glass manufacturing plant at Clayton, N. J. Moreover, the Woodbine tract was of irregular shape, lying upon both sides of the railroad, and was the remnant of large holdings, years ago the property of the Ridgeway, Townsend, Ludlam, Leaming, Lawrence, Holmes, and other colonial families. In all, the tract consisted of fifty-three hundred acres. Negotiations resulted in the transfer of Mr. Moore's interest, the matter being under the control of the following gentlemen, who constitute the trustees of the De Hirsch fund in America :

Dr. Julius Goldman, New York, President ; Judge M. S. Isaacs, New York, Treasurer ; J. G. Huffman, New York, Secretary ; Henry Rice, New York ; Jacob Sheiff, New York ; Jesse Seligman, New York ; Oscar Strauss, New York ; Messrs. Huchenberger and Sulsberger, Philadelphia.

From this list of trustees the "Woodbine Land and Improvement Company" was formed, consisting of Dr. Julius Goldman, Judge M. S. Isaacs and J. G. Huffman. Upon the 28th day of August, 1891, the settlement was finally established.

## WOODBINE OF TO-DAY.

When the trustees of the De Hirsch fund purchased the Woodbine tract they found it wooded with a sturdy growth of pine and oak timber and underbrush, the lowlands or "spung" being covered with wild grass and bushes. Under the intelligent and energetic management of the local superintendent, H. L. Sabsovich, a graduate of the Polytechnic School, Zurich, Switzerland, and recently chemist in the experimental station of the University of Colorado, the fall and winter

were spent in land-clearing, the timber being sent to market as a source of revenue and the underbrush reserved for firewood. Temporary structures near the station accommodated the Hebrew workingmen until spring house-building time arrived. Surveys located the town as near as may be in the center of the tract, whilst the farms lay without. The town plot itself consists of fifteen hundred and thirty-six lots, each fifty by one hundred and fifty feet. Avenue De Hirsch, in the center of which is the West Jersey railroad, divides the town in two, giving thirty-two blocks on either side. The streets, which form perfect rectangles, are named for American presidents, poets and statesmen, chief among which, crossing De Hirsch avenue at the railroad station, is Washington. Around the town plot the tract is cut up into thirty-acre farms, and the outlying lowlands are to be reserved for pasturage, all of which reminds one strongly of the prevailing Germanic type of mediæval English village settlements, copied later in New England town sites; that is to say, the congested population in the center, the farm-land next, and the pasture lots on the outer rim. So actively has the work progressed that during the first year there have been cleared about six hundred and fifty acres of farm-lands, together with one hundred acres of farm roads, equal to about twelve miles of driveways. In town plots and streets one hundred and seventy acres have been wrested from nature. The houses which have been constructed were occupied during the fall, and numbered in the town about twenty-five. Of these there were four different styles erected by the company, costing from \$850 to \$1,300. The smallest have four rooms, the largest seven. Every attention has been paid to the ends so necessary to be secured in small houses for workingmen—artistic excellence, usefulness, standard materials, and cheapness. The best plaster, hard-wood finish, good plumbing, and scientific ventilation mark these structures. The same is true of the farm-houses, of which, on the first of last October, sixty-four had been completed. The farm-houses cost about \$600, and are not quite as elaborate but are as well built. During the present winter sixty more houses will adorn the tract, so that by the spring of '93 the Hebrews will probably have one hundred and fifty houses in Woodbine.

Furnishing means of employment is the cloak factory of Meyer Jonasson & Co., of New York, where 150 people are engaged. A clothing factory has already been built, whilst cutlery, knitting, and cigar manufactories are soon to add to the creditable evidences of

material progress. Anticipating the demands of transient travel a handsome new hotel, located in the center of the tract, has been built at a cost of \$7,300. The house is thoroughly equipped. An electric plant to furnish light and power has been instituted in what two years ago was a wilderness. In addition to this, the railroad company recognizing that Woodbine has become a notable point on the line to the shore, has built a station to accommodate the traffic and has established the latest improvements to keep in pace with the progressive spirit of the settlement.

Turning to the town, it is a relief to notice that the pleasing characteristic of foreign cities, the spirit of improvement upon a more æsthetic side, will not be lacking in Woodbine. The driveways are of sufficient width, whilst the sidewalks, magnificently broad, are lined with double rows of young poplars and maples, which give promise of future beauty. The main avenues are well graded and are 100 feet wide. In the early spring, grass will be sown and lime will be used to neutralize the acidity of the new soil. Upon the southeast side of the town, a park has been reserved and walks cut through the forests of oak and pine.

Architecturally, the public buildings of the town will also be worthy of attention. A synagogue is to be erected, and public schools are now being built. It is a project, warmly indorsed by the managers, that one of these educational institutions be of an industrial character together with an agricultural experimental station. A Russian bath-house for public use will be a wise innovation. Indeed, the plan and scope of the work may be estimated from the fact that a quarter of a million of Baron De Hirsch's money is already spent so successfully in Woodbine.

From the fact that our knowledge of the Hebrew people, during mediæval and modern times, has been derived almost exclusively from the history of legislation against them in nearly all countries excepting our own, opinions concerning their capabilities are often biased, if not absolutely warped, by prejudice. It has been generally said and believed that the Hebrew cannot farm. Credence in this statement would receive a severe shock at Woodbine. Here are gathered people from lower Russia who have been farmers for generations, and finding a soil similar to that in the land of their nativity, they have met with phenomenal success. During the year, every farmer planted at least 250 fruit trees, one acre of grapes and one and

a half acres of small fruits. He was moreover supplied with garden and field seed sufficient to plant ten acres of his "clearing." On every farm, three or four acres have been limed. Ashes and high-grade fertilizers were also used. Results show, during the fall, that the standard plants thrived well, whilst the minimum loss of fruit trees was only 2 per cent., the maximum about 10 per cent. Cabbage, tomato, sweet potato and other plants which grow prolifically in the soil of Cape May, were raised by the management for distribution. During this trial year, many of the farmers studied the conditions of the locality and now know where to avail themselves of past experience. The satisfaction which they unhesitatingly express concerning their own ventures, is the best indication of their success.

#### THE PERSONAL QUALITIES OF THE SETTLERS.

It is very pertinent to inquire as to position occupied by the Hebrew in relation to the management. In the first place it cannot be too strongly emphasized that the De Hirsch fund is not of eleemosynary establishment; a sort of treasury with open doors for each one to take what he or she wants, and give nothing in return. It is indeed an insult to the munificent giver that one should suppose the fund was to be an endowed charity—a Hebrew poor-house—such as some ignorant, prejudiced minds have supposed. Rather than an evidence of such an economic fallacy, the fund is an illustration of a plan to confer the greatest good upon the greatest number. Optional work gives place to necessitated labor, and every able-bodied man or woman must work or leave. To that end the energies of the managers are always directed. "Work" is the motto of each colony, and the drones soon find themselves excluded and dismissed. To attain this end, a scheme of selection has been instituted which is as follows:

A certain number of deserving Hebrew families, say twenty-five, are picked from the mass of refugees in New York City, and comprise people from southern and southwestern Russia. The majority of these Hebrews have been in the United States, say two years, or long enough to become partially "Amercanized." They are then sent on trial to Woodbine and the best are simply retained—a clear case of evolutionary "survival of the fittest." As a result, on the first of October some 80 families, comprising 500 people with 170 school children, occupied the Woodbine tract.

Having arrived and desired to settle, the farm lots or town lots are offered to them at a stipulated price, according to location, the company taking a fifteen-year mortgage at 4 per cent. and giving the men employment, under contract, at local wages per acre. By clearing land and placing their wives and daughters in the factories, they thus have a personal interest in the growth of the settlement, and find a means of easily paying for their properties. As to their social characteristics, the Hebrews, by virtue of their political condition in nearly all lands, have by heredity a wonderful mental mobility and thus readily adapt themselves to new conditions. They recognize that they have forever left Russia and her institutions, and in the new land, to use the homely phrase, they will "make the best of it."

It seems to be their earnest purpose to adopt our institutions except the Christian religion, and even in this matter the younger ones observe Sunday. Ten per cent. of the older ones speak English, and nearly all the children are taught our language. Among themselves low German and Russian are generally spoken, although other tongues are employed, as the Hebrews are accomplished linguists. Professor Sabsovich is obliged to use several languages in conversing with his workingmen. In their homes, the Hebrews still follow their own peculiar customs; on the other hand, eagerly adopt an innovation which will be for their own good and not in derogation of their religious belief. They desire to meet Americans, to have them visit Woodbine, and to have them study the policy of the settlement. In fact, just so long as prejudice exists against these people, it would be well to remember that the simple issuing of naturalization papers may make a citizen in nothing more than name, and that the clause "Be it enacted" does not make an American of a foreigner.

Race characteristics last long, and only by association are the un-American features removed. As legislation does not always cure economic evils, whose roots strike even deeper than laws, so must one not expect a thorough *Americanizing* of a people who for centuries have been trained and driven in opposite lines. The Hebrews, however, are so versatile in their relations with Americans that, in spite of seeming exceptions, the results cannot be anything else than beneficent to both. The change is more or less gradual, and it can only be in future years, when after trials and failures and successes, that the prosperity of the Hebrew Woodbine will be its own proof of the wisdom of the project.

Mr. Blish—I move a vote of thanks to Mr. Lee for his valuable and interesting address.

Carried.

The Chair—A year or two ago I took occasion to lay before you my personal observations of the condition of these settlements in South Jersey. I was more than satisfied, more than gratified, with what I saw of the advancement of this portion of the State, and I am prepared to accept Mr. Lee's statements in their entirety.