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*My
Favorite
Town—*



Isle of Hope, Georgia

by Arthur Gordon

paintings by William Halsey



I had a book to write, and not much money. So we needed a place where expenses would stay low, and optimism high. We wanted sunshine, salt water, a neighbor or two, some birds to watch, and growing things to whisper in the

wind. We've found all these and more in Isle of Hope, Georgia.

Isle of Hope is nine miles out of Savannah, where the road seems to end in empty space. Ahead of you a river sparkles in the sun. Then you see the road again. It meanders along a high bluff, twists among trees whose gnarled trunks are as big as cot-

DeSoto was at Isle of Hope 400 years ago looking for gold. He didn't succeed, but subsequent visitors have found a satisfactory substitute. Arthur Gordon, seeking a place where the optimism was high and the rent low, was one of them. There are sun and solitude, huge shrimps and crabs, tennis all year and time enough to spend a decade raising a turtle to the size of a cantaloupe — which takes care of the optimism. As for the rent, the landlord worries about charging too much.

tages. On one side the docks jut blackly into the river. On the other, the houses sit with placid, satisfied expressions, behind oleanders and camellias, and sometimes a feathery screen of bamboo.

Unconsciously you ease up on the accelerator, and just drift along. There's no pressure here, no hurry. Maybe that's why, long ago, somebody named it Isle of Hope.

Along the bluff there are some magnificent colonial houses, complete with ante-bellum galleries, balconies, and Gone-with-the-Wind columns. We do not live

in one of these. We found a little house on a creek behind the main river. In New York we had a six-room apartment furnished by ourselves. Here, for half the rent, we have a furnished house, home freezer, garage, laundry, and a landlord who worries that he is charging too much!

But it isn't these tangible advantages which count. In the last analysis, it's the people. We haven't gone out of our way to make friends. We'd had our fill of hectic social life. But some people have chosen to make us *their* friends, which is better. Not spec-

tacular people—just people. And that is better, too.

There's Mrs. Cramer, who baby-sits for us sometimes, and hates to be paid for her work. Once, when she inadvertently locked herself and our small daughter out of the house, she climbed up on a washtub, and second-storied herself through a window. Her age? Oh, sixty-odd!

Down the road a piece lives a



colored family named Griffin. Albert Griffin is a fisherman, a gentle, benign man who looks like a deacon. His wife, much younger than he, raises a whole tribe of shy brown babies in their ramshackle house where the chickens and Muscovy ducks wander in and out of the back door.

I made friends with Albert one day when he was trying to catch one of his ducks. It looked to me

like a two-man job, and between us we cornered the duck, and fell into talk about tides, and how the winter trout were biting, and where the shrimp went in cold weather. Gentle, friendly people . . .

This week I have a date to go trout fishing with Albert, and sometime he's going to let me borrow his shrimp net.

Isle of Hope has no post office—it's that small. But it has some unique professions. Take Mr. Barbee, for instance. His chief source of income is turtles—diamond backed terrapins. He raises them in what amounts to his own back yard.

Turtle farming is a profession which seems to require more patience than skill. It takes eight or ten years to raise one to the size of a big cantaloupe. But there's plenty of time in Isle of Hope. We asked Mr. Barbee what his turtles ate.

"Well," he said, "most of 'em go months without eating anything."

My wife shook her head admiringly. "Could they teach my family how to do it?" she asked.

Money doesn't seem very important in Isle of Hope, even when someone does a job which richly deserves it. Which reminds me of Mr. Cory and the mouse . . .

Mr. Cory is a well digger and a plumber, which makes him a useful neighbor. One night, soon after we arrived, we smelled something remarkably dead.

Probably a mouse, we thought, in the wall behind the sink. Anyway, very dead.

It was quite late, but Mr. Cory came over. He and his assistant tore up the sink. They tore up the wall. They looked, they sniffed. No mouse, no nothing.

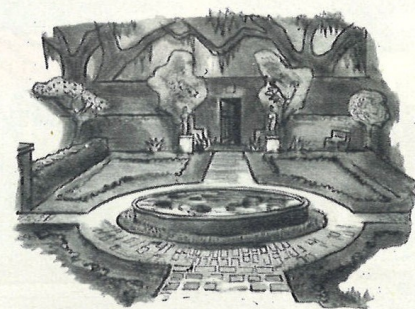
After a couple of hours, they gave up, and rebuilt what they had torn down. The smell mysteriously disappeared, and has never come back. We tried to pay Mr. Cory. He refused. We insisted. He still refused.

"No mouse," he said, "no pay."

We have made other friends. Mrs. Barrow is a brisk and aristocratic lady living across the creek on a magnificent, 800-acre plantation which has been held by her family for over 200 years. The plantation is called Wormsloe. Its camellia gardens are legendary. Its trees do something to your soul.

Mrs. Barrow lives there quite alone, except for old Frank, the colored butler who has worked at Wormsloe for 51 years. Frank celebrated his Golden Anniversary of service last year. He had a fine party which was duly reported on the radio.

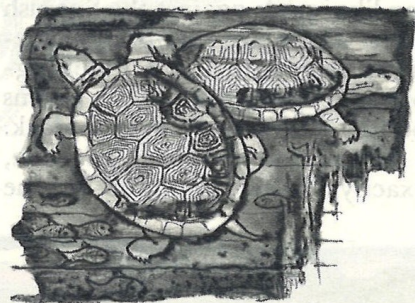
Colonel Pat Strong and his wife, Mary, live on another river not far away. On Sundays they like to take their boat and run down to the sea. There, along the deserted islands with such Indian names as Ossabaw and Little Tybee, the magnificent beaches run for miles, as wild as when



De Soto struggled up from Florida 400 years ago in search of gold and the Fountain of Youth.

No gold is there, unless some pirate buried it. But there are sun and solitude, gulls and sea shells, and on moonlit nights in spring the great sea turtles lumber out of the surf to lay their parchment-shell eggs in the warm sand.

Sometimes we go with the Strongs, some afternoons we fish, sometimes we coax crabs out of





the creeks, sometimes we play tennis—a year round sport in this climate.

There are a few ducks in the marshes. We have not disturbed them. We'd rather watch them. Cardinals and redbirds are fairly common. You can see them glowing like jewels against the Spanish moss. There are robins and blue-jays, sweet-throated mockingbirds, and sometimes white herons posing statuesquely on the dock.

It's not a terrestrial paradise, exactly. There are ticks in the

woods that plague the dogs, and sometimes, when the wind is in a certain quarter, you can smell the sulphide from the pulp mill.

But for peace and picturesqueness, you could go farther and fare worse. Much worse. And if somehow the spirit of quiet optimism that pervades Isle of Hope could expand and spread, till it covered the whole earth, making this worried planet of ours a larger island of hope . . .

Well, that would be an improvement, wouldn't it? ■



"I still like the old fashioned Christmas with the tree on the fenders."