

## THE HEART OF MERRIE ENGLAND.\*

**I**T would not be difficult to point out faults of method and construction in Dr. Stone's book, but they are easily overlooked in view of the excellence of its materials and the geniality of its mood. It is essentially a book of rambles, and of rambles not only in England geographical, but in historical and antiquarian England. Now, rambles we do not expect to be orderly. The Rambler

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\*The Heart of Merrie England. By the Rev. James S. Stone, D.D. Porter & Coates. \$1.50.

goes as he chooses. He dwells on this and skips that. Now he is over the fence and away in a field, and again he is lying down under a tree in a doze and a dream, or hobnobbing with a carrier in a village inn. If he likes the village he will stay in it a week; if he doesn't he will be out of it in an hour. He has little to do with railroads—the rambler; his preference is for turnpikes and foot-paths; he lingers by the rustic, the picturesque, and the antiquated; he has a love for an old church which amounts to a passion; the stile is his trysting-place with nature; and everybody is his company.

Our present rambler in "the Heart of Merrie England" is an Episcopal clergyman of Philadelphia, who is an Englishman by boot, and who has become a Philadelphian by way of Canada. This book seems to have grown out of a recent visit to the "old home," which vividly recalled the scenes and associations of his youth. To his foot the soil of England is like moist moss, every step making it to stream with memory and tradition. There can be no better guide through England than an Englishman, especially if he be an educated, cultivated, warm-hearted Englishman like Dr. Stone, who can cite history, wax eloquent over a cathedral, and tell a good story with equal ease. Topographically "the Heart of England" into which he takes the reader is the meeting-point of the counties of Worcester, Oxford, and Warwick; but there is a diversion into Kent for the purpose of a visit to Canterbury, and there is an introductory chapter on London. But a deeper "heart of England" is touched in these pages than any that can be traced upon the map; much is recounted concerning some of the lines of history that have made England what it is, and there is a constant looking below the surface for what is curious and strange as belonging to bygone days. Old England is peered into at the same time that modern England is described.

After leaving London Dr. Stone first makes for Shipston-on-Stour, a secluded and almost forgotten pre-Norman town in the extreme eastern point of Worcestershire, a few miles southward of Stratford-on-Avon. To this isolated spot and its surroundings two chapters are devoted. The town is off the railway, on the highway between Birmingham and Oxford. It is full of old buildings, old people, and old fashions, and is productive of good stories, as witness the following:

Some years ago a man and his wife belonging to a village close by Shipston resolved to go to America; but when at Liverpool they saw the great sea, the good fellow exclaimed, "Let's go back, Betty, till the flood's gone down." This was the contrary of the impression which was made upon another man when he took his sweetheart to spend a day at the seaside, and arrived just in time for the ebb tide. "Wy, Ann, danged if they bain't a' lettin' t' water off!" One of the sayings in the country is, "If you only wait, you may carry water in a sieve."—"How long?" you ask.—"Till it freezes," is the triumphant

reply. Some one told us of a woman who had six children, the eldest only seven years old. She was very careful about the Saturday-night scrub, in accordance with the custom of this neighborhood, and we asked if she put them all in a big tub together. "Oh no," was the reply, "she washes them as she can catch them."

The chapter which follows, on "Love in y<sup>e</sup> Olden Time," is one of the antiquarian interludes which diversify the book, not without interest, but inferior in that respect to the descriptive portions.

The two next chapters are given to Oxford and its connections, geographical and historical, which the author knows "like a book;" and thence we are taken by pleasant walks through the lovely English landscape in turn to quaint Watlington, a town in the Chiltern Hills, and to Thame, another ancient and interesting town full of the flavor of England's past. Here are the house where John Hampden died and a noble and historic church which has escaped "restoration." The next two chapters make the pilgrimage to Canterbury, to the music of Chaucer's Tales, and visit with loving enthusiasm the cathedral and Beckett's shrine. There is a rich and eloquent passage here on the function of the cathedral in worship and the religious life, and the grand edifice of Canterbury and its services are described anew in detail. Then back we go to Stratford and to Shakespeare, reaching the town by carrier's stage over a delightful road from Oxford through pleasant villages and a fertile country:

To some of the travelers it was evidently a thirsty day and as the temperance movement has not to any great extent affected this part of the world, huge potions of bright foaming ale were consumed at every stopping place. The driver was happy and obliging, ready at all times to have a chat or to give information; three or four of the passengers were merry, and enlivened the journey with odd rhymes, humorous stories, and witty repartee. One old fellow, full of fun and beer, puzzled a boy who went riding awkwardly by on a horse by asking him "if he would not be safer riding inside." . . . The sun was high toward noon when we entered the remarkably clean and pretty town on the Avon.

Visits in similar mood to Edgehill, the famous scene of the battle of October, 1642, to the little old-fashioned town of Kineton, all alive with its annual flower show, and to Kenilworth, with a tucked-in chapter of romance, complete the book. It has the advantage of having been written by one "to the manner born;" is affectionately familiar with all that is best and most characteristic in English scenery and life; and while, as we intimated in beginning, somewhat discursive and disconnected, is always entertaining and sometimes amusing in a refined way, and is thoroughly penetrated with the charm of its subject.