

RICH'S HISTORY OF TRURO.*

IT is pleasant to note the increasing frequency of town histories, and the advance they show in research and literary skill. In several respects this book is one of the best of these late ventures, and is worth owning. Mr. Rich has energy, industry, and enthusiasm, which, when allied with patience, never breed a mediocre work, but generally a very readable one. Not but that, from a high critical stand-point, adverse remarks may be fairly made upon it. Like most books of its kind, it sins against the laws of proportion, sometimes fails to distinguish between the integral and the adventitious, and makes long journeys into places and events remotely connected with the theme; while the author is a trifle overfond of quotation, and his treatment of the subject by topics occasionally blurs the lines of his chronology. Yet it is but just to say that the book is a positive addition to our town histories. He has made his book this, if we set it by the side of its predecessors, by first showing the intimate relations between the customs and manners and names of the English settlers at Truro, Cape Cod, and those of Cornwall and Truro, Old England, from whence some of these settlers undoubtedly came; next, by setting down in plain, vivid words, the "Land Marks and Sea Marks" of Truro people, as he has seen or heard them; and finally, by adhering to his evident opinion that a town history runs honestly into a world history, and that the supreme use of history is to beget in men a philosophy of life. Of course, all literary work has its limits, and to discriminate in praise and blame of a work like this, imperatively demands reference to its circumstances.

Mr. Rich, thanks to our advance in historic lore, has written a better book of its kind than any American could have written fifty years ago. Yet books like his will help posterity to write occasionally better ones. If Mr. Rich had spent his life on this book, doubtless he himself would have made it much better. There is more in him and in his theme than has gone into his book. With much humility we make

this suggestion to any one intending a town history: *viz.*, to read and re-read White's *History of Selborne*, and when he knows his town half as well as White knew his, to hold hard the reins over his tendencies, geological, botanical, or what not, and write his mind into a globe of history, though it be only of a town. Under Mr. Rich's ken Truro, for instance, teems with wonders and mysteries which he passes by on the other side. How about the Green Plover, and the Labrador birds afield in August among the Truro hollows, and the beach grass, and the red foxes, and, in short, all Nature, under her curious veil of the Cape? Mr. Rich lets the Norsemen go as though De Costa had not proved them to have been citizens of his own shores and creeks. As a matter of political economy, what about the influence of clam banks on the Cape civilization, especially among the poor whites? The model history of a New England town is not yet written, but it will be. Thoreau, more than most men, had the genius, if not the wisdom, for it.

Nevertheless, we gladly confess that Mr. Rich shows us a quaint, clean, heroic, Spartan town-life, of which all its offspring may well be proud: a life of warm blood under a cold and rustic surface often, but having in it such strains as make dominant and princely men. He tells us how the grass is greener over the ancient Indian heaps of sea-shells, and how these heaps were used for lime, and are forbidden to be sold out of town; how the Pilgrims in these parts mistook cranberries for strawberries; and laid the foundation for the maladies of their first fatal winter by out-door imprudences, such as wading the Cape creeks, and camping in the snow; how clams are named from "clamps" and the horseshoe crab's tail was used as an arrowhead; how the deacon carried the communion wine to meeting in a jug swung over his horse's back; and how old men remembered when they had played ball on the sand of George's Bank; these, and a hundred other rare, if not great, circumstances are chronicled with much brilliancy of coloring.

Truro is the high Alp of the Cape, and its moors have a glory quite their own. The town has helped to people America, and two of our great schools of learning owe their ability to the munificence of two Truro men. Geologically, Professor Shaler happily says that Cape Cod is a vast interrogation mark.

Two quotations from Mr. Rich's book may be in place. The one is an inscription on the market house at Truro, Old England:

Who seeks to find Eternal Treasure
Must use no guile in Weight or Measure.

The other is in memory of those lost at sea (p. 483), by Hiram Rich:

O fleet, that silent tarries
Along our listening land,
No night to come dismays thee,
No bar and tempest strand.

*Truro, Cape Cod; or, Land Marks and Sea Marks. By Shebnah Rich. Illustrated. D. Lothrop & Co. \$3.00.

O sails, that seek no shelter,
That need no beacon light,
In vain our harbors open,
In vain our hearts invite!

O watchers, all ye look for
Will come, or soon or late;
They cannot always tarry;
Ye cannot always wait.

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