

THE REV. SAMUEL ROWE, M.A., VICAR OF
CREDITON, 1835-53.

BY J. BROOKING ROWE, F.S.A., F.L.S.

(Read at Crediton, July, 1882.)

SHERFORD BARTON is in the parish of Brixton, South Devon. The manors of East and West Sherford belonged to the Priory of Plympton, and this was the manor-house. In 1538 the Maynards were resident there, holding under a lease granted by the Priory. A renewal of this lease was sought by the family, and in 1538, 24th September, John How, the last Prior, in consideration of £40 paid by Thomas Maynard the elder, granted a new lease to Anne Maynard, wife of Thomas, of the reversion of the Dominical place and Barton called West Sherford for a term of eighty-nine years, determinable on her life and the lives of her three sons, John, Thomas, and Nicholas. The Maynards continued tenants until the expiration of the lease, when the Drake family took possession under a grant of the fee by Queen Elizabeth, dated 12th January, 1582, to Sir Francis Drake, Knight, and it has remained in the possession of the Drake family and their representatives ever since.

In 1793 the manor-house, although altered in some respects, remained much as it was in the times of the Maynards; and there, on the 11th November in that year, Samuel, the son of Benjamin and Mary Rowe, was born.

This branch of the Rowe family had been settled at Brixton for many generations. The pedigree shows that they were resident there as early as 10th Richard II., when John Rowe was at Winston, a hamlet in the parish. The fortunes of the Rowes appear to have been very variable—sometimes considerable landowners, and intermarrying into good families, sometimes low in the scale of society, sometimes with

moderate competences only,—they seem always to have maintained a good position among their contemporaries. The head of the family, and the father of the subject of our sketch, had inherited property from his father, which he had increased by his own industry, and he was at the time of the birth of his second son a yeoman of standing, possessed of more than one estate in his native parish, and held in much respect by his neighbours, and by all with whom he was brought into contact.

Connected with the family of Nicholas Rowe, the poet, and with the Rows of Staverton, the traditions of his family, and the associations connected with the place of his birth, could not fail to exercise an influence which pervaded the whole of the afterlife of the boy, who was growing up under the roof which once sheltered the priors of Plympton and their illustrious tenants. One of seven children, he received, first at home, afterwards at a small school at Plympton, and lastly at the Grammar School at Plympton—the foundation of Elize Hele—the education which, completed at Cambridge, stood him in such good stead throughout his life. At the Plympton Grammar School, then an important one and the first in the neighbourhood, he made many acquaintances, which matured into life-long friendships; and was a great favourite of the master, the Rev. S. Hayne. He left school in his sixteenth year, and after considerable hesitation, it was decided for him that he should become a bookseller, and he was apprenticed to a master at Kingsbridge. The selection of this calling was not the choice of the young man. His bent was literary, and perhaps scientific. Had not the opportunity now offered given him scope for following his favourite studies, it would not have been embraced by him. Later in life, when his course had been unalterably fixed, he used to say that if he had not taken orders he should have been a civil engineer. Little mechanical inventions and arrangements at Sherford, the amusement of his boyhood, showed his love for mechanics and his ingenuity in contriving; and, as we shall see, while loving architecture as such, and as one of the fine arts, he was also able to study and appreciate it in its works of construction.

In two years his apprenticeship abruptly terminated, in consequence of the insolvency of his master, and it says much for the ability of the boy of nineteen that Samuel Rowe's father considered him fit to enter upon life on his own account, and provided him with a large sum of money to enable him to do so. The goodwill and stock of an old-established

business in Plymouth, belonging to one Busvine, was offered for sale about this time, and it was purchased for the youth, who forthwith entered upon the cares and anxieties of life.

From the time Samuel Rowe commenced business, in 1813, he began a course of literary labour which, in some form or other, occupied his time and thoughts down to his death. Every moment that could be spared from business was spent over his books, and his surviving brother recollects with what surprise a customer discovered the young man in the shop at his desk reading Horace. As far as I can ascertain, his first literary production was in 1814, when he issued with his brother a *Directory of Plymouth*, the first ever published in the town. In the same year, assisted by that remarkable man, Thomas Byrth, whose abilities he was quick to discover, then about his own age, he projected the *Plymouth Literary Magazine*, which was published from June to December, 1814, and soon failed for want of support. It was a bold undertaking for these two young men, and the matter contained in the six numbers was from their pens alone. Byrth in his *Autobiography*, speaking of his acquaintance with Samuel Rowe (who, he says, from his better training was a better scholar than he was), writes :

“ We used to meet, whenever we could, for the purpose of reading Greek together, and we formed the determination of editing a literary periodical. This we actually effected ; and although the *Plymouth Magazine* lived but a few months, I have always regarded it as one of the indications of that buoyancy of spirit, and decision of character, which enabled me to overcome obstacles under which many minds must have sunk. It stands now upon my shelves, among hosts of the mighty dead ; and I have never heard one of them express contempt of its companionship.”

Soon after this Samuel Rowe was joined in partnership by his younger brother, who had been with him for some little time before, and the business became an extensive one, and flourished for nearly half a century, publishing many works, and absorbing other important concerns, among which may be mentioned that of Rees and Curtis, the publishers of Prince, Risdon, and Carew.

In 1817 he was elected a member of the Plymouth Institution, and became a member of the Council of the Society soon after ; and in December, 1819, delivered his first lecture, “ On the English Drama.” This year must have been a busy one ; for in it was published in London his romance, *Iskander ; or The Hero of Epirus*, in three volumes. In 1821 he was

elected Secretary of the Society which then was the centre of all literary, scientific, and artistic life in the South of Devon—the Plymouth Institution. It is interesting to observe that Samuel Rowe's fourth lecture at the Athenæum was on "Damnonian Antiquities," showing that the subject which occupied so much of his thoughts subsequently was then present to his mind. The investigations thus begun resulted in the writing and publishing of a work which drew immediate attention to so remarkable a place as Dartmoor, then much more difficult of access and much less known than at present.

In 1822 the course for which he had long been preparing was, by the aid of his brother and partner, adopted. He gave up his business, went to Cambridge, matriculated, and entered at Jesus College. After taking his degree, he was ordained deacon at Gloucester in 1824 upon letters from the Bishop of Exeter, as curate of St. Andrew's, Plymouth, where, by-the-bye, he had formerly been churchwarden, and priest in 1826. On the death of the Rev. Whitlocke Gandy, minister at St. Budeaux, the vicar of St. Andrew, the Rev. John Hatchard, presented him with the incumbency. In 1829 he married, and shortly received from Mr. Hatchard the appointment as first minister of a new church—St. Paul's, at Stonehouse. St. George's, the older church of Stonehouse, speedily became vacant, and to this he was transferred, the gift, like the others, being with Mr. Hatchard. Here he stayed until 1835, when, out of seventy candidates, he was elected vicar of Crediton. Here the rest of his days were spent, and no doubt some present may be able to recollect the vicar who was taken from them thirty years ago, and can say more of his eighteen years' work in this parish than he who now addresses them, and whose remembrance of his relative is little more than a memory.

In writing this short paper I wished simply to record the main facts of a life interesting in many ways, and to present a record of his literary work in a list of his books and lectures. The volume by which Samuel Rowe is best known, and upon which his reputation will rest, is no doubt the *Perambulation of Dartmoor*, of which I need say nothing; but that his fame should rest upon this is but an accident. Had time and opportunity offered, he had the capacity for much similar or better work. A classical scholar, a student of ritual and archæology, and extensively read in English literature, he had rich stores of learning at his command.

I well recollect hearing him lecture on some subject connected with architecture, the exact title of which I do not

remember, at the Plymouth Mechanics' Institute. Such a topic was not likely to interest a boy of twelve or thirteen, but I remember how bright his language was, and how apt his illustrations. One part of his paper referred to towers and their pinnacles, and the description of the more elaborate examples with their finials and crocketings, fretted and clustered, down to the plainest, like a small four-legged kitchen table turned upside down, took my fancy; and perhaps at that time I imbibed a little of the spirit of the talented lecturer.

I may be wrong, but, judging at this distance of time, I fancy that in selecting the life of a clergyman Samuel Rowe did not find his vocation. All that his hand found to do he did with all his might; but his knowledge was too great, his learning too extensive, his sympathies too far-reaching, to render his life altogether a happy one in the narrow groove which a clergyman of the Church of England was compelled to walk in at the time he lived. Had his lot been cast in these latter days, I have no doubt but that the position he would have occupied, either in the Church or otherwise, would have been a very different one, and the influence which he would have exerted greater.

His life was not a long one. He had in the years 1852 and 1853, while engaged as a deputation for the Church Missionary Society, met with accidents, which had caused severe shocks to the system. Towards the end of August, 1853, serious symptoms developed themselves; and on Thursday, September 15th, he entered into his rest.

I present this brief memoir to-day with a double object—one, as I have said, to record the main facts of an interesting life; and secondly, with a view of setting an example to others who may have the knowledge necessary, and the opportunity of furnishing, similar short memoirs, and so preserving the memory of some of the worthy sons of Devon.

LIST OF BOOKS WRITTEN BY REV. S. ROWE.

A Directory of Plymouth. 12mo. Plymouth, March, 1814.

The Plymouth Literary Magazine. 8vo. Plymouth, 1814.

Iskander; or, The Hero of Epirus. By Arthur Spenser. 3 vols. 8vo. London, 1819.

The Panorama of Plymouth; or, Tourists' Guide to the Principal Objects of Interest in the Towns of Plymouth Dock and Stonehouse. 12mo. Plymouth, 1821.

Ditto ditto. Second edition. 1825. (?)

A Description of the Breakwater in Plymouth Sound and the Naval Watering-place in Bovisand Bay. 12mo. 1824. (?)

An Historical Account of the Plymouth Breakwater, Naval Watering-place, Diving Bell, Eddystone Lighthouse, &c. Plates and Chart. 12mo. Plymouth, 1824. (?)

An Epitome of Paley's Principles of Moral and Political Philosophy. By a Member of the University, Cambridge. 8vo. London, 1824.

An Epitome of Paley's Evidences of Christianity. By a Member of the University of Cambridge. 8vo. London, 1823.

Ditto ditto. Second edition. London, 1828.

Antiquarian Investigations in the Forest of Dartmoor. 8vo. 1830.

The Little Liturgy for the Use of Sunday-schools. By a Clergyman. 18mo. London and Plymouth, 1830.

The Church Psalm Book. 12mo. Plymouth.

[Used in many churches at one time, and frequently reprinted.]

Dedication of the Sanctuaries of Religion. A Sermon. Plymouth. 8vo. 1833.

A Funeral Address Delivered in Stonehouse Parochial Chapel at the Burial of the Rev. Samuel Cox. 8vo. Plymouth, 1833.

Sanitary Institutions Characteristic of Christianity. A Sermon. 8vo. Plymouth, 1835.

A Reply to an Address Presented to the Rev. Samuel Rowe, M.A., by his Friends and Parishioners on the Occasion of his Removal from the Parish of East Stonehouse to that of Crediton. Broad-sheet. 1835.

An Appeal to the Rubric, in a Review of Several Clauses of the Ritual Code, with Suggestions for General Uniformity in the Services of the United Church of England and Ireland. 12mo. London, 1841.

Gothic Architecture: Its Decline and Revival. 8vo. London, 1844.

A Sermon Preached at Crediton on the Occasion of the National Fast, 24th March, 1847. 8vo. London, 1847.

A Perambulation of the Antient and Royal Forest of Dartmoor. Maps and Plates. Royal 8vo. Plymouth, 1848.

Ditto ditto. Second edition. 8vo. Plymouth, 1856.

LECTURES DELIVERED AT THE ATHENÆUM OF THE PLYMOUTH INSTITUTION.

1819. Dec. 16. English Drama.

1820. Oct. 12. Works of Taste.

Nov. 16. English Drama.

1821. Nov. 1. Damnonian Antiquities.

1822. Oct. 3. Antiquities.

1823. Jan. 9. Damnonian Antiquities.
 Jan. 30. Influence of the Liberal Arts on the Decline of Nations.
 Oct. 16. Ditto ditto.
1824. Jan. 27. Influence of Situation and Climate on the Intellect and Feeling.
 Oct. 28. Athens, 400 B.C.
 Dec. 23. Antient Architecture.
1825. Oct. 20. Influence of Commerce on the Imagination.
1826. Feb. 9. History of English Architecture.
 Oct. 26. Philosophical and Literary Institutions of the Present Day.
1827. Feb. 9. Antient Architecture of England.
 Mar. 8. Superstition.
 Oct. 4. Progress of the Plymouth Institution.
 Nov. 8. Monachism.
1828. Feb. 28. Antient Schools of Philosophy.
 Oct. 9. Antiquities.
 Nov. 20. Old English Language and Provincialisms.
1829. Mar. 19. Classical and Mathematical Learning.
 Oct. 8. Intellectual Perfectability.
1830. Oct. 14. Causes and Remedies of Pauperism.
 Oct. 21. Ditto.
 Dec. 16. Institutions of Athens and Sparta.
1831. Mar. 24. Causes and Remedies of Pauperism.
 Nov. 3. Rural Employment of the Poor.
1832. Feb. 16. Sumptuary Laws: Luxury.
 Oct. 4. On the Condition of the Poor.
1833. Mar. 7. On the Structure of the English Language.
 Nov. 21. The English Language.
1835. Oct. 29. Utilitarianism.
1836. Jan. 28. On the Literature and Language of the Anglo-Saxons.
1837. Mar. 16. The Credibility of Moral Evidence.
1838. Mar. 8. On the Influence of Railroads on National Character.
1839. Oct. 17. Colonists and Aborigines.
1844. Mar. 18. The Dark Ages.
1846. Mar. 19. Ditto.
 Oct. 1. Dartmoor Antiquities.
1847. Oct. 7. Retrospect and Prospects of the Institution.
1850. Oct. 17. History, Principles, and Characteristics of Christian Architecture.