

CHAPTER II.

ORIGIN OF THE NAME – AREA OF THE TOWN – POPULATION – VALUATION – LOCATION AND BOUNDARIES – THE SOUHEGAN – GRANITE QUARRIES – HILLS AND INTERVALS – SCENERY – FOREST TREES – PRODUCTS OF THE SOIL.

Before the coming of the white man there were several ford-ways by which the Indians crossed the Souhegan on foot; one much used was located at the foot of the falls below the factory of Morse, Kaley & Co. Parties using this ford as they were traveling in a northeasterly direction entered the shallow water near what is now the western terminus of the foot bridge, and came out upon the river bank near the shop of the late S. D. Knowlton. The building of the stone dam of the Souhegan Manufacturing company has caused the water to flow back and cover the old shallow ford-way to such a degree that it is not now easy to conceive of this place as a passageway through which the red man for generations, and the white man afterwards, crossed the river whenever the water was not unusually high. After the building of Shepherd's mills upon these falls in 1741, this ford was known as the Mill ford by way of distinction. At the date of the incorporation of the town the settlement in the vicinity had been for half a century known as the Mill-Ford village. Hence the name of the town.

The town of Milford contains an area of about fifteen thousand, seven hundred and fifty acres. By the census of 1890, it has a population of 3,009, and by the town assessment of 1892, a valuation of \$1,771,943. It is distant fifty miles from Boston, thirty from Concord, and its southern limit is but five miles from the Massachusetts line. It is bounded on the north by Lyndeborough, Mont Vernon, and Amherst; on the east by Amherst and Hollis; on the south by Hollis and Brookline; on the west by Mason and Wilton.

There are extensive granite quarries in many parts of the town, and abundant evidence of the action of the elements in earlier geological periods. There are no natural ponds and no hills of any considerable height. The Souhegan river (called by the Indians Souheganack, or crooked) coursing through the town from west to east, divides it into two unequal parts, about one fourth of the territory being upon the north and three fourths upon the south. The Souhegan has its source in the town of Ashburnham, Mass., flows into the state in the town of New Ipswich, passing through Greenville and Wilton on its way to Milford, turning many wheels, and contributing much to the prosperity of the communities through which it passes. Four brooks of considerable size reinforce its waters within the limits of the town- two on the north and the same number upon the south. Upon these smaller streams, at twelve different places have been located saw and other mills; but now little is done in the business of manufacturing lumber or grinding grain; only two or three mills are now in use, the remainder are in ruins.

Upon either side of the river extensive and fertile tracts of intervale are found, which are annually overflowed and enriched by the muddy deposit which is left after the subsidence of the waters. The watershed is so abrupt and near that the valley is subject to sudden freshets, which would often be disastrous were it not for the existence of these extensive tracts of comparatively level land adjoining the banks of the river above the village. It has often happened that the river, after heavy rains and without any impediment of ice, has expanded to the width of three fourths of a mile. Several times during the past century the water has been two feet deep in the highway near the brick mansion house of the late Joseph Tucker.

Although there are no mountains or considerable hills in the town, the traveler, as he passes into the limits of Milford from the east and journeys westward upon the banks of our beautiful stream, enters upon a scene of unusual attractiveness. The valley itself, from the east line of the town to the west, furnishes a drive of six miles through a succession of farms only surpassed in New Hampshire by the valley of the

Connecticut, and all along the line the mountains of Temple, Peterborough, Lyndeborough, and Frankestown are in view, with the lesser hills of Mont Vernon to the east. At several points the lofty summit of grand Monadnock can be seen. Other sections of our state furnish grander views, but this one no too extensive to be appropriated, and lingers long in the memory of all lovers of natural scenery, whether the journey is made in June or December.

Most of the varieties of forest trees common in southern New Hampshire abound in Milford. The primeval growth was largely white pine, white oak, hemlock, chestnut, maple, birch, and beech. All these trees are still found, but those monarchs of the woods, white pines with trunks four feet in diameter—extending upward one hundred feet and more, which formerly graced the soil, have disappeared and the number of acres now supporting a heavy growth of wood and timber is not large.

In the early history of the town, land was cleared for tillage and pasturage, and more recently for the profit that came from the sale of lumber. Large tracts of land once under cultivation have been surrendered to the growth of wood and timber, and the number of acres in town now under the plow and in use for pasture is much less than it was fifty years ago. The flow of water in the Souhegan has gradually diminished as the trees and brush have been cut upon its banks. But from the present outlook the time will come when the earlier order of things will be in some part restored and we may expect the old-time amount of water in our beautiful Souheganack.

Indian corn (now an important crop,) oats, and rye were formerly raised in large quantities, and barley to a limited amount, but the cultivation of wheat has never prevailed to any considerable extent. At one time Milford was noted for the amount of hops raised within its borders, leading all towns in the state in this product. (Of this industry something will be said in another connection.)

Apples have always been produced in large quantities, a safe and profitable line of investment for the farmer. Of late the foreign demand had been large and prices well sustained. Half a century ago peaches were grown upon most farms to a limited extent, but now are rarely seen. Plums and the smaller fruits are found in abundance for home consumption. For the past thirty years our farmers have generally turned their attention to the production of milk for the Boston market. As pasturage had diminished in acreage and quality, the grass crop, always important, has become the great care of the farmer. The large amount of grain brought from the west and consumed upon our farms in additions to all produced at home, with some use of commercial fertilizers, had had a beneficial effect upon our soil, and Milford farmers to-day share the prosperity of the town in common with manufacturers, merchants, and professional men.